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ALTERNATIVES WITHIN EMPIRE

Once embodied in the power of the workers’ councils, which must internationally supplant all other power, the proletarian movement becomes its own product, and this product is the producer itself. The producer is its own end. Only then is the spectacular negation of life negated in turn.

Guy Debord

Now is the time of furnaces, and only light should be seen.
José Martí

Flirting with Hegel, one could say that the construction of Empire is good in itself but not for itself.1 One of the most powerful operations of the modern imperialist power structures was to drive wedges among the masses of the globe, dividing them into opposing camps, or really a myriad of conflicting parties. Segments of the proletariat in the dominant countries were even led to believe that their interests were tied exclusively to their national identity and imperial destiny. The most significant instances of revolt and revolution against these modern power structures therefore were those that posed the struggle against exploitation together with the struggle against nationalism, colonialism, and imperialism. In these events humanity appeared for a magical moment to be united by a common desire for liberation, and we seemed to catch a glimpse of a future when the modern mechanisms of domination would once and for all be destroyed. The revolting masses, their desire for liberation, their experiments to construct alternatives, and their instances of constituent power have all at their best moments pointed toward the internationalization and globalization of relationships, beyond the divisions of national, colonial, and imperialist rule. In our time this desire that was set in motion by the multitude has been addressed (in a strange and perverted but nonetheless real way) by the construction of Empire. One might even say that the construction of Empire and its global networks is a response to the various struggles against the modern machines of power, and specifically to class struggle driven by the multitude’s desire for liberation. The multitude called Empire into being.

Saying that Empire is good in itself, however, does not mean that it is good for itself. Although Empire may have played a role in putting an end to colonialism and imperialism, it nonetheless constructs its own relationships of power based on exploitation that are in many respects more brutal than those it destroyed. The end of the dialectic of modernity has not resulted in the end of the dialectic of exploitation. Today nearly all of humanity is to some degree absorbed within or subordinated to the networks of capitalist exploitation. We see now an ever more extreme separation of a small minority that controls enormous wealth from multitudes that live in poverty at the limit of powerlessness. The geographical and racial lines of oppression and exploitation that were established during the era of colonialism and imperialism have in many respects not declined but instead increased exponentially.

Despite recognizing all this, we insist on asserting that the construction of Empire is a step forward in order to do away with any nostalgia for the power structures that preceded it and refuse any political strategy that involves returning to that old arrangement, such as trying to resurrect the nation-state to protect against global capital. We claim that Empire is better in the same way that Marx insists that capitalism is better than the forms of society and modes of production that came before it. Marx’s view is grounded on a healthy and lucid disgust for the parochial and rigid hierarchies that preceded capitalist society as well as on a recognition that the potential for liberation is increased in the new situation. In the
same way today we can see that Empire does away with the cruel regimes of modern power and also increases the potential for liberation.

We are well aware that in affirming this thesis we are swimming against the current of our friends and comrades on the Left. In the long decades of the current crisis of the communist, socialist, and liberal Left that has followed the 1960s, a large portion of critical thought, both in the dominant countries of capitalist development and in the subordinated ones, has sought to recompose sites of resistance that are founded on the identities of social subjects or national and regional groups, often grounding political analysis on the localization of struggles. Such arguments are sometimes constructed in terms of “place-based” movements or politics, in which the boundaries of place (conceived either as identity or as territory) are posed against the undifferentiated and homogeneous space of global networks. At other times such political arguments draw on the long tradition of Leftist nationalism in which (in the best cases) the nation is conceived as the primary mechanism of defense against the domination of foreign and/or global capital. Today the operative syllogism at the heart of the various forms of “local” Leftist strategy seems to be entirely reactive: If capitalist domination is becoming ever more global, then our resistances to it must defend the local and construct barriers to capital’s accelerating flows. From this perspective, the real globalization of capital and the constitution of Empire must be considered signs of dispossession and defeat.

We maintain, however, that today this localist position, although we admire and respect the spirit of some of its proponents, is both false and damaging. It is false first of all because the problem is poorly posed. In many characterizations the problem rests on a false dichotomy between the global and the local, assuming that the global entails homogenization and undifferentiated identity whereas the local preserves heterogeneity and difference. Often implicit in such arguments is the assumption that the differences of the local are in some sense natural, or at least that their origin remains beyond question. Local differences preexist the present scene and must be defended or protected against the intrusion of globalization. It should come as no surprise, given such assumptions, that many defenses of the local adopt the terminology of traditional ecology or even identify this “local” political project with the defense of nature and biodiversity. This view can easily devolve into a kind of primordialism that fixes and romanticizes social relations and identities. What needs to be addressed, instead, is precisely the production of locality, that is, the social machines that create and recreate the identities and differences that are understood as the local. The differences of locality are neither preexisting nor natural but rather effects of a regime of production. Globality similarly should not be understood in terms of cultural, political, or economic homogenization. Globalization, like localization, should be understood instead as a regime of the production of identity and difference, or really of homogenization and heterogenization. The better framework, then, to designate the distinction between the global and the local might refer to different networks of flows and obstacles in which the local moment or perspective gives priority to the reterritorializing barriers or boundaries and the global moment privileges the mobility of deterritorializing flows. It is false, in any case, to claim that we can (re)establish local identities that are in some sense outside and protected against the global flows of capital and Empire.

This Leftist strategy of resistance to globalization and defense of locality is also damaging because in many cases what appear as local identities are not autonomous or self-determining but actually feed into and support the development of the capitalist imperial machine. The globalization or deterritorialization operated by the imperial machine is not in fact opposed to localization or reterritorialization, but rather sets in play mobile and modulating circuits of differentiation and identification. The strategy of local resistance misidentifies and thus masks the enemy. We are by no means opposed to the globalization of relationships as such—in fact, as we said, the strongest forces of Leftist internationalism have effectively led this process. The enemy, rather, is a specific regime of
global relations that we call Empire. More important, this strategy of defending the local is damaging because it obscures and even negates the real alternatives and the potentials for liberation that exist within Empire. We should be done once and for all with the search for an outside, a standpoint that imagines a purity for our politics. It is better both theoretically and practically to enter the terrain of Empire and confront its homogenizing and heterogenizing flows in all their complexity, grounding our analysis in the power of the global multitude.

The Ontological Drama of the Res Gestae
The legacy of modernity is a legacy of fratricidal wars, devastating "development," cruel "civilization," and previously unimaginable violence. Erich Auerbach once wrote that tragedy is the only genre that can properly claim realism in Western literature, and perhaps this is true precisely because of the tragedy Western modernity has imposed on the world. Concentration camps, nuclear weapons, genocidal wars, slavery, apartheid: it is not difficult to enumerate the various scenes of the tragedy. By insisting on the tragic character of modernity, however, we certainly do not mean to follow the "tragic" philosophers of Europe, from Schopenhauer to Heidegger, who turn these real destructions into metaphysical narratives about the negativity of being, as if these actual tragedies were merely an illusion, or rather as if they were our ultimate destiny! Modern negativity is located not in any transcendent realm but in the hard reality before us: the fields of patriotic battles in the First and Second World Wars, from the killing fields at Verdun to the Nazi furnaces and the swift annihilation of thousands in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the carpet bombing of Vietnam and Cambodia, the massacres from Sétif and Soweto to Sabra and Shatila, and the list goes on and on.

There is no Job who can sustain such suffering! (And anyone who starts compiling such a list quickly realizes how inadequate it is to the quantity and quality of the tragedies.) Well, if that modernity has come to an end, and if the modern nation-state that served as the ineluctable condition for imperialist domination and innumerable wars is disappearing from the world scene, then good riddance!

We must cleanse ourselves of any misplaced nostalgia for the belle époque of that modernity.

We cannot be satisfied, however, with that political condemnation of modern power that relies on the historia rerum gestarum, the objective history we have inherited. We need to consider also the power of the res gestae, the power of the multitude to make history that continues and is reconfigured today within Empire. It is a question of transforming a necessity imposed on the multitude—a necessity that was to a certain extent solicited by the multitude itself throughout modernity as a line of flight from localized misery and exploitation—into a condition of possibility of liberation, a new possibility on this new terrain of humanity.

This is when the ontological drama begins, when the curtain goes up on a scene in which the development of Empire becomes its own critique and its process of construction becomes the process of its overturning. This drama is ontological in the sense that here, in these processes, being is produced and reproduced. This drama will have to be clarified and articulated much further as our study proceeds, but we should insist right from the outset that this is not simply another variant of dialectical enlightenment. We are not proposing the umpteenth version of the inevitable passage through purgatory (here in the guise of the new imperial machine) in order to offer a glimmer of hope for radiant futures. We are not repeating the schema of an ideal teleology that justifies any passage in the name of a promised end. On the contrary, our reasoning here is based on two methodological approaches that are intended to be nondialectical and absolutely immanent: the first is critical and deconstructive, aiming to subvert the hegemonic languages and social structures and thereby reveal an alternative ontological basis that resides in the creative and productive practices of the multitude; the second is constructive and ethico-political, seeking to lead the processes of the production of subjectivity toward the constitution of an effective social, political alternative, a new constituent power.

Our critical approach addresses the need for a real ideological and material deconstruction of the imperial order. In the postmodern world, the ruling spectacle of Empire is constructed through
variety of self-legitimizing discourses and structures. Long ago authors as diverse as Lenin, Horkheimer and Adorno, and Debord recognized this spectacle as the destiny of triumphant capitalism. Despite their important differences, such authors offer us real anticipations of the path of capitalist development. Our deconstruction of this spectacle cannot be textual alone, but must seek continually to focus its powers on the nature of events and the real determinations of the imperial processes in motion today. The critical approach is thus intended to bring to light the contradictions, cycles, and crises of the process because in each of these moments the imagined necessity of the historical development can open toward alternative possibilities. In other words, the deconstruction of the *historia rerum gestarum*, of the spectral reign of globalized capitalism, reveals the possibility of alternative social organizations. This is perhaps as far as we can go with the methodological scaffolding of a critical and materialist deconstruction—but this is already an enormous contribution.

This is where the first methodological approach has to pass the baton to the second, the constructive and ethico-political approach. Here we must delve into the ontological substrate of the concrete alternatives continually pushed forward by the *res gestae*, the subjective forces acting in the historical context. What appears here is not a new rationality but a new scenario of different rational acts—a horizon of activities, resistances, wills, and desires that refuse the hegemonic order, propose lines of flight, and forge alternative constitutive itineraries. This real substrate, open to critique, revised by the ethico-political approach, represents the real ontological referent of philosophy, or really the field proper to a philosophy of liberation. This approach breaks methodologically with every philosophy of history insofar as it refuses any deterministic conception of historical development and any “rational” celebration of the result. It demonstrates, on the contrary, how the historical event resides in potentiality. “It is not the two that recompose in one, but the one that opens into two,” according to the beautiful anti-Confucian (and anti-Platonic) formula of the Chinese revolutionaries. Philosophy is not the owl of Minerva that takes flight after history has been realized in order to celebrate its happy ending; rather, philosophy is subjective proposition, desire, and praxis that are applied to the event.

**Refrains of the “Internationale”**

There was a time, not so long ago, when internationalism was a key component of proletarian struggles and progressive politics in general. “The proletariat has no country,” or better, “the country of the proletariat is the entire world.” The “Internationale” was the hymn of revolutionaries, the song of utopian futures. We should note that the utopia expressed in these slogans is in fact not really internationalist, if by internationalist we understand a kind of consensus among the various national identities that preserves their differences but negotiates some limited agreement. Rather, proletarian internationalism was antinationalist, and hence supranational and global. Workers of the world unite!—not on the basis of national identities but directly through common needs and desires, without regard to borders and boundaries.

Internationalism was the will of an active mass subject that recognized that the nation-states were key agents of capitalist exploitation and that the multitude was continually drafted to fight their senseless wars—in short, that the nation-state was a political form whose contradictions could not be subsumed and sublimated but only destroyed. International solidarity was really a project for the destruction of the nation-state and the construction of a new global community. This proletarian program stood behind the often ambiguous tactical definitions that socialist and communist parties produced during the century of their hegemony over the proletariat. If the nation-state was a central link in the chain of domination and thus had to be destroyed, then the *national* proletariat had as a primary task destroying itself insofar as it was defined by the nation and thus bringing international solidarity out of the prison in which it had been trapped. International solidarity had to be recognized not as an act of charity or altruism for the good of others, a noble
sacrifice for another national working class, but rather as proper to and inseparable from each national proletariat's own desire and struggle for liberation. Proletarian internationalism constructed a paradoxical and powerful political machine that pushed continually beyond the boundaries and hierarchies of the nation-states and posed utopian futures only on the global terrain.

Today we should all clearly recognize that the time of such proletarian internationalism is over. That does not negate the fact, however, that the concept of internationalism really lived among the masses and deposited a kind of geological stratum of suffering and desire, a memory of victories and defeats, a residue of ideological tensions and needs. Furthermore, the proletariat does in fact find itself today not just international but (at least tendentially) global. One might be tempted to say that proletarian internationalism actually "won" in light of the fact that the powers of nation-states have declined in the recent passage toward globalization and Empire, but that would be a strange and ironic notion of victory. It is more accurate to say, following the William Morris quotation that serves as one of the epigraphs for this book, that what they fought for came about despite their defeat.

The practice of proletarian internationalism was expressed most clearly in the international cycles of struggles. In this framework the (national) general strike and insurrection against the (nation-) state were only really conceivable as elements of communication among struggles and processes of liberation on the internationalist terrain. From Berlin to Moscow, from Paris to New Delhi, from Algiers to Hanoi, from Shanghai to Jakarta, from Havana to New York, struggles resonated with one another throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. A cycle was constructed as news of a revolt was communicated and applied in each new context, just as in an earlier era merchant ships carried the news of slave revolt from island to island around the Caribbean, igniting a stubborn string of fires that could not be quenched. For a cycle to form, the recipients of the news must be able to "translate" the events into their own language, recognize the struggles as their own, and thus add a link to the chain. In some cases this "translation" is rather elaborate: how Chinese intellectuals at the turn of the twentieth century, for example, could hear of the anticolonial struggles in the Philippines and Cuba and translate them into the terms of their own revolutionary projects. In other cases it is much more direct: how the factory council movement in Turin, Italy, was immediately inspired by the news of the Bolshevik victory in Russia. Rather than thinking of the struggles as relating to one another like links in a chain, it might be better to conceive of them as communicating like a virus that modulates its form to find in each context an adequate host.

It would not be hard to map the periods of extreme intensity of these cycles. A first wave might be seen as beginning after 1848 with the political agitation of the First International, continuing in the 1880s and 1890s with the formation of socialist political and trade union organizations, and then rising to a peak after the Russian revolution of 1905 and the first international cycle of anti-imperialist struggles. A second wave arose after the Soviet revolution of 1917, which was followed by an international progression of struggles that could only be contained by fascisms on one side and reabsorbed by the New Deal and antifascist fronts on the other. And finally there was the wave of struggles that began with the Chinese revolution and proceeded through the African and Latin American liberation struggles to the explosions of the 1960s throughout the world.

These international cycles of struggles were the real motor that drove the development of the institutions of capital and that drove it in a process of reform and restructuring. Proletarian, anticolonial, and anti-imperialist internationalism, the struggle for communism, which lived in all the most powerful insurrectional events of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, anticipated and prefigured the processes of the globalization of capital and the formation of Empire. In this way the formation of Empire is a response to proletarian internationalism. There is nothing dialectical or teleological about this anticipation and prefiguration of capitalist development by the mass struggles. On the contrary, the struggles
The Mole and the Snake
We need to recognize that the very subject of labor and revolt has changed profoundly. The composition of the proletariat has transformed and thus our understanding of it must too. In conceptual terms we understand proletariat as a broad category that includes all those whose labor is directly or indirectly exploited by and subjected to capitalist norms of production and reproduction. In a previous era the category of the proletariat centered on and was at times effectively subsumed under the industrial working class, whose paradigmatic figure was the male mass factory worker. That industrial working class was often accorded the leading role over other figures of labor (such as peasant labor and reproductive labor) in both economic analyses and political movements. Today that working class has all but disappeared from view. It has not ceased to exist, but it has been displaced from its privileged position in the capitalist economy and its hegemonic position in the class composition of the proletariat. The proletariat is not what it used to be, but that does not mean it has vanished. It means, rather, that we are faced once again with the analytical task of understanding the new composition of the proletariat as a class.

The fact that under the category of proletariat we understand all those exploited by and subject to capitalist domination should not indicate that the proletariat is a homogeneous or undifferentiated unit. It is indeed cut through in various directions by differences and stratifications. Some labor is waged, some is not; some labor is restricted to within the factory walls, some is dispersed across the unbounded social terrain; some labor is limited to eight hours a day and forty hours a week, some expands to fill the entire time of life; some labor is accorded a minimal value, some is exalted to the pinnacle of the capitalist economy. We will argue (in Section 3.4) that among the various figures of production active today, the figure of immaterial labor power (involved in communication, cooperation, and the production and reproduction of affects) occupies an increasingly central position in both the schema of capitalist production and the composition of the proletariat. Our point here is that all of these diverse forms of labor are in some way subject to capitalist discipline and capitalist relations of production. This fact of being within capital and sustaining capital is what defines the proletariat as a class.

We need to look more concretely at the form of the struggles in which this new proletariat expresses its desires and needs. In the last half-century, and in particular in the two decades that stretched from 1968 to the fall of the Berlin Wall, the restructuring and global
expansion of capitalist production have been accompanied by a transformation of proletarian struggles. As we said, the figure of an international cycle of struggles based on the communication and translation of the common desires of labor in revolt seems no longer to exist. The fact that the cycle as the specific form of the assemblage of struggles has vanished, however, does not simply open up to an abyss. On the contrary, we can recognize powerful events on the world scene that reveal the trace of the multitude’s refusal of exploitation and that signal a new kind of proletarian solidarity and militancy.

Consider the most radical and powerful struggles of the final years of the twentieth century: the Tiananmen Square events in 1989, the Intifada against Israeli state authority, the May 1992 revolt in Los Angeles, the uprising in Chiapas that began in 1994, and the series of strikes that paralyzed France in December 1995, and those that crippled South Korea in 1996. Each of these struggles was specific and based on immediate regional concerns in such a way that they could in no respect be linked together as a globally expanding chain of revolt. None of these events inspired a cycle of struggles, because the desires and needs they expressed could not be translated into different contexts. In other words, (potential) revolutionaries in other parts of the world did not hear of the events in Beijing, Nablus, Los Angeles, Chiapas, Paris, or Seoul and immediately recognize them as their own struggles. Furthermore, these struggles not only fail to communicate to other contexts but also lack even a local communication, and thus often have a very brief duration where they are born, burning out in a flash. This is certainly one of the central and most urgent political paradoxes of our time: in our much celebrated age of communication, struggles have become all but incommunicable.

This paradox of incommunicability makes it extremely difficult to grasp and express the new power posed by the struggles that have emerged. We ought to be able to recognize that what the struggles have lost in extension, duration, and communicability they have gained in intensity. We ought to be able to recognize that although all of these struggles focused on their own local and immediate circumstances, they all nonetheless posed problems of supranational relevance, problems that are proper to the new figure of imperial capitalist regulation. In Los Angeles, for example, the riots were fueled by local racial antagonisms and patterns of social and economic exclusion that are in many respects particular to that (post-)urban territory, but the events were also immediately catapulted to a general level insofar as they expressed a refusal of the post-Fordist regime of social control. Like the Intifada in certain respects, the Los Angeles riots demonstrated how the decline of Fordist bargaining regimes and mechanisms of social mediation has made the management of racially and socially diverse metropolitan territories and populations so precarious. The looting of commodities and burning of property were not just metaphors but the real global condition of the mobility and volatility of post-Fordist social mediations. In Chiapas, too, the insurrection focused primarily on local concerns: problems of exclusion and lack of representation specific to Mexican society and the Mexican state, which have also to a limited degree long been common to the racial hierarchies throughout much of Latin America. The Zapatista rebellion, however, was also immediately a struggle against the social regime imposed by NAFTA and more generally the systematic exclusion and subordination in the regional construction of the world market. Finally, like those in Seoul, the massive strikes in Paris and throughout France in late 1995 were aimed at specific local and national labor issues (such as pensions, wages, and unemployment), but the struggle was also immediately recognized as a clear contestation of the new social and economic construction of Europe. The French strikes called above all for a new notion of the public, a new construction of public space against the neoliberal mechanisms of privatization that accompany more or less everywhere the project of capitalist globalization. Perhaps precisely because all these struggles are incommunicable and thus blocked from traveling horizontally in the form of a cycle, they are forced instead to leap vertically and touch immediately on the global level.
We ought to be able to recognize that this is not the appearance of a new cycle of internationalist struggles, but rather the emergence of a new quality of social movements. We ought to be able to recognize, in other words, the fundamentally new characteristics these struggles all present, despite their radical diversity. First, each struggle, though firmly rooted in local conditions, leaps immediately to the global level and attacks the imperial constitution in its generality. Second, all the struggles destroy the traditional distinction between economic and political struggles. The struggles are at once economic, political, and cultural—and hence they are biopolitical struggles, struggles over the form of life. They are constituent struggles, creating new public spaces and new forms of community.

We ought to be able to recognize all this, but it is not that easy. We must admit, in fact, that even when trying to individuate the real novelty of these situations, we are hampered by the nagging impression that these struggles are always already old, outdated, and anachronistic. The struggles at Tiananmen Square spoke a language of democracy that seemed long out of fashion; the guitars, headbands, tents, and slogans all looked like a weak echo of Berkeley in the 1960s. The Los Angeles riots, too, seemed like an aftershock of the earthquake of racial conflicts that shook the United States in the 1960s. The strikes in Paris and Seoul seemed to take us back to the era of the mass factory worker, as if they were the last gasp of a dying working class. All these struggles, which pose really new elements, appear from the beginning to be already old and outdated—precisely because they cannot communicate, because their languages cannot be translated. The struggles do not communicate despite their being hypermediatized, on television, the Internet, and every other imaginable medium. Once again we are confronted by the paradox of incomunicability.

We can certainly recognize real obstacles that block the communication of struggles. One such obstacle is the absence of a recognition of a common enemy against which the struggles are directed. Beijing, Los Angeles, Nablus, Chiapas, Paris, Seoul: the situations all seem utterly particular, but in fact they all directly attack the global order of Empire and seek a real alternative. Clarifying the nature of the common enemy is thus an essential political task. A second obstacle, which is really corollary to the first, is that there is no common language of struggles that could "translate" the particular language of each into a cosmopolitan language. Struggles in other parts of the world and even our own struggles seem to be written in an incomprehensible foreign language. This too points toward an important political task: to construct a new common language that facilitates communication, as the languages of anti-imperialism and proletarian internationalism did for the struggles of a previous era. Perhaps this needs to be a new type of communication that functions not on the basis of resemblances but on the basis of differences: a communication of singularities.

Recognizing a common enemy and inventing a common language of struggles are certainly important political tasks, and we will advance them as far as we can in this book, but our intuition tells us that this line of analysis finally fails to grasp the real potential presented by the new struggles. Our intuition tells us, in other words, that the model of the horizontal articulation of struggles in a cycle is no longer adequate for recognizing the way in which contemporary struggles achieve global significance. Such a model in fact blinds us to their real new potential.

Marx tried to understand the continuity of the cycle of proletarian struggles that were emerging in nineteenth-century Europe in terms of a mole and its subterranean tunnels. Marx’s mole would surface in times of open class conflict and then retreat underground—not to hibernate passively but to burrow its tunnels, moving along with the times, pushing forward with history so that when the time was right (1830, 1848, 1870), it would spring to the surface again. “Well grubbed old mole!” Well, we suspect that Marx’s old mole has finally died. It seems to us, in fact, that in the contemporary passage to Empire, the structured tunnels of the mole have been replaced by the infinite undulations of the snake. The depths of the modern world and its subterranean passageways have in postmodernity all become superficial. Today’s struggles slither si-
lently across these superficial, imperial landscapes. Perhaps the in-
communicability of struggles, the lack of well-structured, communicat-
ting tunnels, is in fact a strength rather than a weakness—a strength
because all of the movements are immediately subversive in them-
selves and do not wait on any sort of external aid or extension to
guarantee their effectiveness. Perhaps the more capital extends its
global networks of production and control, the more powerful any
singular point of revolt can be. Simply by focusing their own powers,
concentrating their energies in a tense and compact coil, these
serpentine struggles strike directly at the highest articulations of
imperial order. Empire presents a superficial world, the virtual center
of which can be accessed immediately from any point across the
surface. If these points were to constitute something like a new cycle
of struggles, it would be a cycle defined not by the communicative
extension of the struggles but rather by their singular emergence,
by the intensity that characterizes them one by one. In short, this
new phase is defined by the fact that these struggles do not link
horizontally, but each one leaps vertically, directly to the virtual
center of Empire.

From the point of view of the revolutionary tradition, one
might object that the tactical successes of revolutionary actions
in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were all characterized
precisely by the capacity to blast open the weakest link of the imperial-
ism chain, that is the ABC of revolutionary dialectics, and thus
it would seem today that the situation is not very promising. It is
certainly true that the serpentine struggles we are witnessing today
do not provide any clear revolutionary tactics, or maybe they are
completely incomprehensible from the point of view of tactics.
Faced as we are with a series of intense subversive social movements
that attack the highest levels of imperial organization, however, it
may be no longer useful to insist on the old distinction between
strategy and tactics. In the constitution of Empire there is no longer
an “outside” to power and thus no longer weak links—if by weak
link we mean an external point where the articulations of global
power are vulnerable. 19 To achieve significance, every struggle must
attack at the heart of Empire, at its strength. That fact, however,
does not give priority to any geographical regions, as if only social
movements in Washington, Geneva, or Tokyo could attack the
heart of Empire. On the contrary, the construction of Empire, and
the globalization of economic and cultural relationships, means that
the virtual center of Empire can be attacked from any point. The
tactical preoccupations of the old revolutionary school are thus
completely irrevocable; the only strategy available to the struggles
is that of a constituent counterpower that emerges from within
Empire.

Those who have difficulty accepting the novelty and revolu-
tionary potential of this situation from the perspective of the struggle
themselves might recognize it more easily from the perspective
of imperial power, which is constrained to react to the struggles.
Even when these struggles become sites effectively closed to com-
munication, they are at the same time the maniacal focus of the
critical attention of Empire. 20 They are educational lessons in the
classroom of administration and the chambers of government—
lessons that demand repressive instruments. The primary lesson is
that such events cannot be repeated if the processes of capitalist
globalization are to continue. These struggles, however, have their
own weight, their own specific intensity, and moreover they are
immanent to the procedures and developments of imperial power.
They invest and sustain the processes of globalization themselves.
Imperial power whispers the names of the struggles in order to
charm them into passivity, to construct a mystified image of them,
but most important to discover which processes of globalization
are possible and which are not. In this contradictory and paradoxical
way the imperial processes of globalization assume these events,
recognizing them as both limits and opportunities to recalibrate
Empire’s own instruments. The processes of globalization would
not exist or would come to a halt if they were not continually both
frustrated and driven by these explosions of the multitude that touch
immediately on the highest levels of imperial power.

Two-Headed Eagle
The emblem of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, an eagle with two
heads, might give an adequate initial representation of the contem-
porary condition of Empire
porary form of Empire. But whereas in the earlier emblem the two heads looked outward to designate the relative autonomy and peaceful coexistence of the respective territories, in our case the two heads would have to be turned inward, each attacking the other.

The first head of the imperial eagle is a juridical structure and a constituted power, constructed by the machine of biopolitical command. The juridical process and the imperial machine are always subject to contradictions and crises. Order and peace—the eminent values that Empire proposes—can never be achieved but are nonetheless continually reproposed. The juridical process of the constitution of Empire lives this constant crisis that is considered (at least by the most attentive theoreticians) the price of its own development. There is, however, always a surplus. Empire’s continual extension and constant pressure to adhere ever more closely to the complexity and depth of the biopolitical realm force the imperial machine when it seems to resolve one conflict continually to open others. It tries to make them commensurate with its project, but they emerge once again as incommensurable, with all the elements of the new terrain mobile in space and flexible in time.

The other head of the imperial eagle is the plural multitude of productive, creative subjectivities of globalization that have learned to sail on this enormous sea. They are in perpetual motion and they form constellations of singularities and events that impose continual global reconfigurations on the system. This perpetual motion can be geographical, but it can refer also to modulations of form and processes of mixture and hybridization. The relationship between “system” and “asystemic movements” cannot be flattened onto any logic of correspondence in this perpetually modulating atopia.21 Even the systemic elements produced by the new multitude are in fact global forces that cannot have a commensurate relationship, even an inverted one, with the system. Every insurrectional event that erupts within the order of the imperial system provokes a shock to the system in its entirety. From this perspective, the institutional frame in which we live is characterized by its radical contingency and precariousness, or really by the unforeseeability of the sequences of events—sequences that are always more brief or more compact temporally and thus ever less controllable.22 It becomes ever more difficult for Empire to intervene in the unforeseeable temporal sequences of events when they accelerate their temporality. The most relevant aspect that the struggles have demonstrated may be sudden accelerations, often cumulative, that can become virtually simultaneous, explosions that reveal a properly ontological power and unforeseeable attack on the most central equilibria of Empire.

Just as Empire in the spectacle of its force continually determines systemic recompositions, so too new figures of resistance are composed through the sequences of the events of struggle. This is another fundamental characteristic of the existence of the multitude today, within Empire and against Empire. New figures of struggle and new subjectivities are produced in the conjuncture of events, in the universal nomadism, in the general mixture and miscegenation of individuals and populations, and in the technological metamorphoses of the imperial biopolitical machine. These new figures and subjectivities are produced because, although the struggles are indeed antisystemic, they are not posed merely against the imperial system—they are not simply negative forces. They also express, nourish, and develop positively their own constituent projects; they work toward the liberation of living labor, creating constellations of powerful singularities. This constituent aspect of the movement of the multitude, in its myriad faces, is really the positive terrain of the historical construction of Empire. This is not a historicist positivity but, on the contrary, a positivity of the res gestae of the multitude, an antagonistic and creative positivity. The déterritorializing power of the multitude is the productive force that sustains Empire and at the same time the force that calls for and makes necessary its destruction.

At this point, however, we should recognize that our metaphor breaks down and that the two-headed eagle is not really an adequate representation of the relationship between Empire and the multitude, because it poses the two on the same level and thus does not
recognize the real hierarchies and discontinuities that define their relationship. From one perspective Empire stands clearly over the multitude and subjects it to the rule of its overarching machine, as a new Leviathan. At the same time, however, from the perspective of social productivity and creativity, from what we have been calling the ontological perspective, the hierarchy is reversed. The multitude is the real productive force of our social world, whereas Empire is a mere apparatus of capture that lives only off the vitality of the multitude—as Marx would say, a vampire regime of accumulated dead labor that survives only by sucking off the blood of the living.

Once we adopt this ontological standpoint, we can return to the juridical framework we investigated earlier and recognize the reasons for the real deficit that plagues the transition from international public law to the new public law of Empire, that is, the new conception of right that defines Empire. In other words, the frustration and the continual instability suffered by imperial right as it attempts to destroy the old values that served as reference points for international public law (the nation-states, the international order of Westphalia, the United Nations, and so forth) along with the so-called turbulence that accompanies this process are all symptoms of a properly ontological lack. As it constructs its supranational figure, power seems to be deprived of any real ground beneath it, or rather, it is lacking the motor that propels its movement. The rule of the biopolitical imperial context should thus be seen in the first instance as an empty machine, a spectacular machine, a parasitical machine.

A new sense of being is imposed on the constitution of Empire by the creative movement of the multitude, or really it is continually present in this process as an alternative paradigm. It is internal to Empire and pushes forward its constitution, not as a negative that constructs a positive or any such dialectical resolution. Rather it acts as an absolutely positive force that pushes the dominating power toward an abstract and empty unification, to which it appears as the distinct alternative. From this perspective, when the constituted power of Empire appears merely as privation of being and produc-

tion, as a simple abstract and empty trace of the constituent power of the multitude, then we will be able to recognize the real standpoint of our analysis. It is a standpoint that is both strategic and tactical, when the two are no longer different.

**Political Manifesto**

In an extraordinary text written during his period of seclusion, Louis Althusser reads Machiavelli and poses the quite reasonable question whether The Prince should be considered a revolutionary political manifesto. In order to address this question Althusser first tries to define the “manifesto form” as a specific genre of text by comparing the characteristics of The Prince with those of the paradigmatic political manifesto, Marx and Engels's Manifesto of the Communist Party. He finds between these two documents an undeniable structural resemblance. In both texts the form of the argument consists of “a completely specific apparatus [dispositif] that establishes particular relationships between the discourse and its ‘object’ and between the discourse and its ‘subject’” (p. 55). In each case the political discourse is born from the productive relationship between the subject and the object, from the fact that this relationship is itself the very point of view of the res gestae, a self-constituting collective action aimed at its objective. In short, clearly outside of the tradition of political science (either in its classical form, which was really the analysis of the forms of government, or in its contemporary form, which amounts to a science of management), the manifestos of Machiavelli and Marx-Engels define the political as the movement of the multitude and they define the goal as the self-production of the subject. Here we have a materialist teleology.

Despite that important similarity, Althusser continues, the differences between the two manifestos are significant. The primary difference consists in the fact that, whereas in the Marx-Engels text the subject that defines the standpoint of the text (the modern proletariat) and the object (the communist party and communism) are conceived as co-present in such a way that the growing organization of the former directly entails the creation of the latter, in the Machiavellian project there is an ineluctable distance between the subject (the multitude) and the object (the Prince and the free state). This distance leads Machiavelli in The Prince to search for a
democratic apparatus capable of linking subject to object. In other words, whereas the Marx-Engels manifesto traces a linear and necessary causality, the Machiavellian text poses rather a project and a utopia. Althusser recognizes finally that both texts effectively bring the theoretical proposal to the level of praxis; both assume the present as empty for the future, “vide pour le futur” (p. 62), and in this open space they establish an immanent act of the subject that constitutes a new position of being.

Is this choice of the field of immanence, however, enough to define a manifesto form that would be a mode of political discourse adequate to the insurgent subject of postmodernity? The postmodern situation is eminently paradoxical when it is considered from the biopolitical point of view—understood, that is, as an uninterrupted circuit of life, production, and politics, globally dominated by the capitalist mode of production. On the one hand, in this situation all the forces of society tend to be activated as productive forces; but on the other hand, these same forces are submitted to a global domination that is continually more abstract and thus blind to the sense of the apparatuses of the reproduction of life. In postmodernity, the “end of history” is effectively imposed, but in such a way that at the same time paradoxically all the powers of humanity are called on to contribute to the global reproduction of labor, society, and life. In this framework, politics (when this is understood as administration and management) loses all its transparency. Through its institutional processes of normalization, power hides rather than reveals and interprets the relationships that characterize its control over society and life.

How can a revolutionary political discourse be reactivated in this situation? How can it gain a new consistency and fill some eventual manifesto with a new materialist teleology? How can we construct an apparatus for bringing together the subject (the multitude) and the object (cosmopolitical liberation) within postmodernity? Clearly one cannot achieve this, even when assuming entirely the argument of the field of immanence, simply by following the indications offered by the Marx-Engels manifesto. In the cold placidness of postmodernity, what Marx and Engels saw as the co-presence of the productive subject and the process of liberation is utterly inconceivable. And yet, from our postmodern perspective the terms of the Machiavellian manifesto seem to acquire a new contemporaneity. Straining the analogy with Machiavelli a little, we could pose the problem in this way: How can productive labor dispersed in various networks find a center? How can the material and immaterial production of the brains and bodies of the many construct a common sense and direction, or rather, how can the endeavor to bridge the distance between the formation of the multitude as subject and the constitution of a democratic political apparatus find its prince?

This analogy, however, is finally insufficient. There remains in Machiavelli’s prince a utopian condition that distances the project from the subject and that, despite the radical immanence of the method, confides the political function to a higher plane. In contrast, any postmodern liberation must be achieved within this world, on the plane of immanence, with no possibility of any even utopian outside. The form in which the political should be expressed as subjectivity today is not at all clear. A solution to this problem would have to weave closer together the subject and the object of the project, pose them in a relationship of immanence still more profound than that achieved by Machiavelli or Marx-Engels, in other words, pose them in a process of self-production.

Perhaps we need to reinvent the notion of the materialist teleology that Spinoza proclaimed at the dawn of modernity when he claimed that the prophet produces its own people. Perhaps along with Spinoza we should recognize prophetic desire as irresistible, and all the more powerful the more it becomes identified with the multitude. It is not at all clear that this prophetic function can effectively address our political needs and sustain a potential manifesto of the postmodern revolution against Empire, but certain analogies and paradoxical coincidences do seem striking. For example, whereas Machiavelli proposes that the project of constructing a new society from below requires “arms” and “money” and insists that we must look for them outside, Spinoza responds: Don’t we already possess them? Don’t the necessary weapons reside precisely within the creative and prophetic power of the multitude? Perhaps we, too, locating ourselves within the revolutionary desire of postmodernity, can in turn respond: Don’t we already possess “arms” and “money”? The kind of money that Machiavelli insists is necessary may in fact reside in the productivity of the multitude, the immediate actor of biopolitical production and reproduction. The kind of arms in question may be contained in the potential of the multitude to
sabotage and destroy with its own productive force the parasitical order of postmodern command.

Today a manifesto, a political discourse, should aspire to fulfill a Spinozist prophetic function, the function of an immanent desire that organizes the multitude. There is not finally here any determinism or utopia: this is rather a radical counterpower, ontologically grounded not on any "vide pour le futur" but on the actual activity of the multitude, its creation, production, and power—a materialist teleology.

PART 2

PASSAGES OF SOVEREIGNTY
EMPIRE

Michael Hardt | Antonio Negri

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Every tool is a weapon if you hold it right.

Ani DiFranco

Men fight and lose the battle, and the thing that they fought for comes about in spite of their defeat, and then it turns out not to be what they meant, and other men have to fight for what they meant under another name.

William Morris