

*EMPIRE AND NO LOGO IN DIALOGUE*  
AN ANTI-CAPITALIST *BILDUNGSROMAN*

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*Judith Williamson*

Naomi Klein, *No Logo*, London, HarperCollins, 2001, 490pp; £8.99 paperback.

In January 2000, *New Left Review* was relaunched with an elegiac essay by Perry Anderson, misleadingly titled 'Renewals'. Scanning the political landscape, Anderson lamented not only the 'virtually uncontested consolidation, and universal diffusion, of neo-liberalism' but what he saw as the complete collapse of any serious challenge to it. 'For the first time since the Reformation, there are no longer any significant oppositions - that is, systematic rival outlooks - within the thought-world of the West'. Evidently he wasn't looking in the same places as Naomi Klein. *No Logo*, published that same month, is announced as 'an attempt to capture an anti-corporate attitude I see emerging among many young activists'. Her goal, like Anderson's, is to tell it like it is, but while Anderson affirms his 'commitment to an accurate description of the world, *no matter what its bearing on morale may be*' [my italics] - implying that a cool, hard look at it will be profoundly depressing - Klein proclaims 'This book is hinged on a simple hypothesis: that as more people discover the brand-name secrets of the global logo web, their outrage will fuel the next big political movement, a vast wave of opposition squarely targeting transnational corporations ...'

The discrepancy between these two turn-of-millennium outlooks is, strikingly, emotional as much as intellectual, and to point to the generational nature of that discrepancy is not necessarily reductive. Each text openly draws attention to a specific historical experience and its political implications. Anderson's gloomy sense of closure can partly be attributed to the sense that, as he puts it, 'virtually the entire horizon of reference in which the generation of the sixties grew up has been wiped away', and 'Renewals' is, amongst other things, a *cri de coeur* from and on behalf of that generation, which now feels that the political efforts of its lifetime have done little or nothing to arrest the march of global capital. Klein speaks for and from a generation disappointed by *capitalism*, Anderson - having started with no expectations of the system - from a generation disappointed with itself.

But the gap between them is also one spanned by the Atlantic - which is perhaps relevant to the debates currently raging over Hardt and Negri's *Empire*. It is hard, somehow, to imagine either of these books coming out of British left culture at the moment, not because it no longer exists but for

other, more complex reasons which I was pondering all the time I was reading *No Logo*. I am introducing the book in this context because for the bulk of that time I felt profoundly aware of being an irritable, forty-something British Marxist, getting cross with it for reinventing numerous wheels, and for its relentless implication that everything capitalism is doing is new ('turning points' are constantly located in the nineties). Gradually, however, I grasped that *No Logo* is, at heart, a sort of *Bildungsroman* - the story of young North America's disillusion with capitalism, and its outrage at discovering the iniquities which fuel its own lifestyle. It would be underestimating Klein's achievement to see the book only in this light: she amasses a powerful barrage of material about corporate activity; connects it deftly in ways that vividly show how capitalism affects people making its products; and - perhaps her strongest point - catalogues the disparate resistance movements that developed in the late nineties, providing a history of recent political activism not found anywhere else. In taking us through this she speaks openly - passionately - for herself and her North American generation, and this is at once the source of the book's enormous strength, and of its limitations.

The *Bildungsroman* is built into the book's structure. Its first section, No Space, outlines the 'rise of the brand' and then, more extensively, the experience of living in a 'new branded world'. This experience is, specifically, young North Americans': of having their cool 'hunted' by marketing firms, being bombarded at school and college with advertisements, and finding their sporting and cultural activities fenced in by corporate sponsorship. The second section, No Choice, laments the rise of superstores and the subsequent 'loss' of choice for the Western consumer, as major corporations achieve a stranglehold on retail outlets and - which she particularly deplores - set the agenda for cultural and media products. Again, these are specifically youth market items: I personally don't care whether Prodigy's 'Smack My Bitch Up' is banned from K-Mart - an example of 'corporate censorship' - but maybe that's my age and puritanism showing. In No Jobs, the third section, Klein visits - literally - the Free Trade Zones (or one of them) where brand-name products are made: meeting the workers and lucidly describing the conditions that underpin our branded lives. Then we quickly segue back to generation X's experience of the fall-out from this shift of production to the third world, as graduates find themselves frothing cappuccinos or serving Big Macs, while even skilled media techies are kept on short-term contracts with little security.

The final section, No Logo, charts the growing rebellion and, as she frequently puts it, 'rage', of those of her generation who are now fighting back: through adbusting, 'zines', Reclaim The Streets parties and the more concerted - often successful - campaigns against, for example, college investment in companies with holdings in Burma. Throughout the book, Klein's accumulation of detail is both exhausting and impressive, but in this section it comes into its own: she documents a range of activities, campaigns and movements not - to my knowledge - brought together anywhere else.

The account is, as with all the book's information, highly selective: there is, for example, little on the GATT/WTO demonstrations and, more importantly, almost nothing on the activities and effects of the WTO or, indeed, the IMF. It took me - stupidly - a while to grasp why, out of global capitalism, it should be the Nikes and Tommy Hilfigers that are the main focus of her anti-corporatism (companies like Intel, Pfizer, the major banks, are much more powerful), but then I finally got the point: they don't make the products that furnish the symbolic world of Generation X.

Klein herself deals with this issue straightforwardly: 'As the target market for everything from Guess jeans to Nike soccer balls, young people are taking the sweatshop issue personally'. There is a sense of specifically generational solidarity between first and third worlds: she recounts how 'Tico Almeida, a senior at Duke University, explains that many students have a powerful reaction when they learn about the workers who produce their team clothing in free-trade zones. 'You have two groups of people, *roughly the same age* [my italics], who are getting such different experiences out of the same institutions,' he says. The combination of naivety and genuinely moving politicisation in this statement - albeit not one of her own - is characteristic of the entire journey documented in *No Logo*. It would be unfair to ascribe these qualities simply to Klein; it is rather that they are attributes of the phenomenon to which she bears witness.

And bearing witness seems to me a useful way of understanding this book; often described as a 'bible' ('the bible for anti-corporate militancy', declared one review), it is a Testament of Anti-Corporate Youth, and to see it as such is not belittling - it is how Klein presents the work. What she testifies to is not simply a political position: it is a series of emotional experiences leading up to that position. Describing how sponsors and merchandise took over Woodstock '94 (the 25th anniversary of the original 'free festival') she asks, poignantly, 'Never mind about the offence to hippies decades after the fact; how does it feel to have your culture 'sold out' now, as you are living it?' Moving on to discuss what she sees as the increasing vampirisation of youth culture by marketing in the early nineties, she says, 'Many of us who were young at the time saw ourselves as victims of a predatory marketing machine that co-opted our identities, our styles and our ideas ...' The full sense of injustice meted out to generation X is unleashed when she reaches the section on jobs, or rather, the lack of them: 'After pumping young people up with go-get-'em messages - the 'Just Do It' sneakers, 'No Fear' T-shirts and 'No Excuses' jeans - these companies have responded to job requests with a resounding, 'Who, me?'... *To add insult to injury* [my italics], this abandonment by brand-name corporations is occurring at the very moment when youth culture is being sought out for more aggressive branding than ever before ...'

This emotional - frequently autobiographical - story is an expression of betrayal and ensuing rage; it is also, as I have suggested, a tale of learning and growing, culminating, like all such tales, with the acquisition of a

conscience. The book's protagonist is an entire generation, and here lies its compelling power: this is the generation most recently 'failed' by capitalism, newly smarting from its felt injuries and freshly outraged by its perceived injustices.

Yet it is this same sense of newness and betrayal that underlies the book's limitations as a radical and historically-grounded analysis of capitalism. Betrayal implies an initial faith or bond; and in her expressions of disappointment Klein appears to accept capitalism's own 'betrayed' ideology of freedom and choice. She describes 'market trends ... combining to drastically undermine the traditional concepts of value and individual service that small business is known for ...' and talks in many more places of 'the assault on choice' - meaning restrictions both on the range of retail outlets, and on the range of cultural and other products available to the consumer. She seems particularly to have fallen for the modern myth of electronic communications: 'What is being betrayed is no less than the central promises of the information age: the promises of choice, interactivity and freedom'. She frequently invokes the 'right to be heard' and the 'right to know', and claims, 'When we lack the ability to talk back to entities that are culturally and politically powerful, the very foundations of free speech and democratic society are called into question'.

It could be argued that, as with her (much more thought-out) attack on logos, Klein is cleverly turning the values of liberal democracy back on themselves. However, it is evident throughout the book that they are actually her own values, and nowhere is this clearer than when she enters the realm where she is least sure of herself, the economic. She talks of 'the economy' in the same sense that bourgeois economists do: 'the fact is that the economy needs steady jobs that adults can live on'. But what is this 'economy'? The fact is that *capitalism* doesn't need steady jobs at all, it needs cheap labour, which, however, must constantly be balanced against the fact that some of the world's population must indeed be well-off enough actually to buy the goods so produced. It was once the Western working class who provided cheap labour: who lived in hovels and fell into machinery and had deformed babies. Today, that class is more valuable to capitalism as a machine for consuming than producing, and goods are made in the Third World 'zones' Klein so vividly describes. As she shows, every struggle to improve working conditions in those zones is important and valuable. But capitalism cannot fulfil its function of creating surplus value if everyone in the world earns a decent wage and is able to consume what they need. That is why it cannot, ultimately, be 'improved'.

And this is where, for a Marxist, Klein's book falls short. I once heard her speak at a conference on branding, where she claimed Marx had got his predictions wrong about commodity fetishism: 'Little did he know', she said, 'that it would one day be the brand, not the commodity, that dominated capitalism'. Ironically, her entire work is about commodity fetishism - about what she calls, in almost Marx's own language, 'the double life of our

branded goods'. These goods are things, whose production damages those who make them, yet they embody values - 'transcendent values', to use her own phrase - which seem autonomous of those conditions of production. *No Logo* is a Marxist book, but Naomi Klein is not a Marxist, and this makes for confusing reading, since she is unaware of the analytical framework which might give her findings shape. She talks of the gap between labour costs and purchase price, without knowing the concept of surplus value: her description of it is vivid and accurate, but she doesn't know its name.

Does that matter? No, not at all. But the lack of a wider analysis deprives her of a historical perspective, leaving the sense that capitalism in its present form was virtually created in the 1990s. It is true that the practice of brand-based companies contracting out productive labour, rather than hiring it directly, is a specifically recent phenomenon. But around her hard-edged description of capitalism's present day iniquities hovers the ghost of an earlier, better version: she talks nostalgically of 'the days when corporate employees took pride in their company's growth', and deplures 'a corporate culture so *damaged* [my italics] that workers must often be fired or shortchanged for the boss to get paid'. 'But that's what capitalism's always done!' I thought repeatedly - until I realised that this sense of the newness of its ills was in part, at least, the newness of her perception, projected onto them.

This brings me back to the book's strength: the clarity and force with which it takes us through those perceptions, not merely announcing them but making them felt anew. *No Logo* tells a powerful story - one that must be told and retold, no matter how many older Marxists get impatient at the reinvention of the revolutionary wheel. Much has been said about the paradoxes of Klein's enterprise. Her logo-ised book, a brand in itself, is published in America by the huge corporation Random House, and in Britain by the Murdoch-owned HarperCollins; its success depends on the very system it attacks. Yet those of us who oppose capitalism owe her a great debt for writing it. When another Naomi's book, Wolf's *The Beauty Myth*, was published over here, it was enthusiastically received by virtually everyone apart from a generation of feminists who felt that their territory was being 'discovered' all over again, their own earlier explorations of it unacknowledged. Many Marxists I have come across feel similarly aggrieved by *No Logo*: a bright-eyed and bushy-tailed North American marching onto the sacred ground! It is true that North Americans *know* themselves and their feelings and perceptions to be important. Just as young, white North America is so crucial for marketers of cool (the point Klein makes in her book), so when young, white North Americans discover injustice the world seems to sit up and listen. But maybe there is something about being in the world's dominant social group that creates the confidence to speak out: and we should be grateful to Naomi Klein that she has done so. As I write this, the Western response to 'Attack on America' is taking shape, and as the battle lines are drawn up over this assault on capitalism's heartland, it remains to be seen whether such voices will continue to protest and be heard.

# IN SEARCH OF THE VIRTUAL MULTITUDE

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*Tiziana Terranova*

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*, London and Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 2000, 496 pp; £23.95 hardback; £12.95 paperback.

*Empire* is ostensibly a book on globalisation, a relatively recent but dense area of debate that has lately burst out of the confines of academia. A red-hot political-conceptual knot of problems and tensions for twenty-first-century societies, globalisation has become a sign-space to wonder at and attempt to make sense of. It denotes the generation, at higher and higher orders of magnitude, of a plethora of dramatic events from which even the most isolationist of nation states cannot extricate itself. Hardt and Negri suggest that this recent acceleration of processes of globalisation is part of the formation of 'Empire', a term that defines 'a new notion of right, or rather, a new inscription of authority and a new design of the production of norms and legal instruments of coercion that guarantee contracts and resolve conflict' (p9).

In its juridical focus, *Empire* positions itself outside the perimeter of the 'postmodernist' debate on globalisation, which usually concentrates on the dialectic between the homogeneity of the global and the heterogeneity of the local - the latter a space which resists, subverts and hybridises the homogenising pull of the former. For Hardt and Negri, however, postmodernism is a belated, reactive assessment of the crises of the modern, and it cannot help but remain stuck in a deconstructive critique of modernity. What distinguishes *Empire* from other critiques of postmodernism is the fact that it does not imply that, therefore, we are still living in a modernity of which postmodernism is another symptom. On the contrary, for the authors, we are no longer in modernity in any simple sense; thus postmodernism, in its constitutive deconstructive relationship with the modern, observes the symptoms of the dissolution of the modern without itself being able to open up to the current reconstitution of power (*potestas*) and the forces which oppose it (*potentia*).

Hardt and Negri's argument on the emergence of a new notion of right supports their understanding of the current dissolution of the dialectic as the predominant psychic and economic mechanism for the systematisation and control of difference. Identifying the current historical stage with the processes of capitalist 'real subsumption of labor', they claim that Empire does not work through the dialectical negation of an Other, but through the progressive incorporation and modulation of difference within a new

constitutional regime. The current processes of globalisation are understood as a radically *integrationalist* process, relatively deterritorialised; a constitutional annexation that proceeds from an older imperial tradition, the Roman one - identified with the work of the Roman constitutionalist Polybius, present in the work of Machiavelli, and re-emerging in the constitution of the United States.

*Empire* is comprised of a succession of theses on the new imperial formation, many of which strike more than a few prophetic notes in this traumatic beginning of the twenty-first century: the replacement of conflict or competition among several imperialist powers 'by the idea of a single power that overdetermines them all, structures them in a unitary way, and treats them under one common notion of right that is decidedly post-colonial and post-imperialist' (p9); the constitution of a new notion of right conceived in terms of police action and the capacity of a global army/police to create and maintain order at an international level; the dissolution of the disciplinary and industrial regime into what Gilles Deleuze had already termed the society of control; the increasing centrality of immanent forms of control, which elude the dialectic of self and other in favour of a finer-meshed modulation of difference; the qualitative centrality of immaterial and affective labour; the emergence of forms of struggle which regain in intensity what they have lost in communicability, and that 'leap vertically and touch immediately' the virtual centres of Empire. The book's emphasis, however, lies in its attempt to understand the new forms of power and the new conditions of struggle that materialise in the passage to Empire.

*Empire* has thus been an extremely timely book, emerging almost out of nowhere, and boasting impressive references (the back cover of the book is graced with enthusiastic endorsements by, among others, Etienne Balibar, Fredric Jameson, Saskia Sassen and Slavoj Žižek), at the very moment of globalisation's rise to the status of household term. It almost fatally coincided with the first visible manifestation of new movements that, *within* globalisation, have invoked a different, non-capitalist model of it; and new catastrophic and nihilist forms of attack upon the centres of *Empire*. It is impossible not to acknowledge the important role this book has already played in the so-called 'no global' movement. Such a role has come to complement that of another no-global best-seller, *No Logo*, as a generator of key insights and keywords for the movement at large.

The boldness of *Empire*'s statements, the over-arching and yet refreshing assuredness with which the book throws its judgments at the reader, are also its weaknesses. It is possible to take issue with every one of the book's statements and find them to be either too reductive or lacking in other ways. What is more interesting about this book, however, is Hardt and Negri's theoretical framework, in particular their use of key concepts such as 'multitude', 'constituent power' and 'constitutive thought'. Such concepts, which recur as almost obsessive refrains throughout the book, seem to be its more productive entry points and also key to some of its fundamental

problems. They seem, that is, to constitute a less understood but powerful and consistent challenge to the conceptualisation of cultural politics, as present, for example, in the Anglo-American field of cultural studies - a placeholder for English-speaking academic attempts at dealing with the historicity of relations of power in relation to the self-production of culture at a collective, diffuse level.

The dissatisfying thing for a reader interested in grasping the core of Hardt and Negri's analysis in relation to the collective self-production of culture is the vagueness with which such key and reiterated themes are defined: multitude, constituent power, constitutive thought. Like a mantra, these terms recur throughout the book, midway between a conscious (and already successful) attempt to spread the signifiers by sheer repetition (a 'memetic' approach to political praxis), and a more tantalising promise of further disclosure that *Empire* never satisfies.

It is easy to blame *Empire* for its vagueness in defining its key terms, balanced by the concise and sudden definitions that pepper the book. The most famous, that of the 'multitude' as distinct from 'the people', has struck a sensitive nerve. Kevin Robins recently concluded a collection of essays on British cultural studies centred around the question of national identity with an extended excursion into Hardt and Negri's definition of multitude. The mailing lists of global Internet movements are seeing more and more references to the word 'multitude' and the book *Empire*. The sign 'multitude' has already started to envelop the collective entity for which terms like the 'mass' or the 'people' are becoming increasingly inadequate.

The concept of the multitude, then, provides the first obvious bridge between the Italian tradition of Autonomy that traverses the book and more established currents within the English-speaking field of cultural studies. Harry Cleaver, in *Reading Capital Politically*, has already pointed out a certain affinity between the writings of 'bottom-up' British Marxist historians such as E.P. Thompson and Christopher Hill, American-based writers such as C.L.R. James and Raya Dunayevskaya, and the Autonomist perspectives. What these very different strands have in common, for Cleaver, is an effort to theorise working-class activity by extending the concept of working class well beyond industrial labour.<sup>1</sup> This Marxist enterprise is recognisable and well-documented, as Cleaver himself explains. Its resonance with the contemporary moment lies in the primary importance given to working-class activity, in a situation where the working class is not necessarily identified with industrial labour, but with a self-valorising activity which is autonomous with regard to the recuperation exercised by Capital. What is striking about *Empire*, when compared to other contemporary Marxist or Marxist-influenced analyses, is its joyous affirmation of the power of the multitude's self-valorisation, which capitalism can only *attempt* to recuperate and systematise dialectically. However, what makes *Empire* more politically valuable than previous efforts by Hardt and Negri is its direct engagement with the current bio-political context, the re-organisation of

1. See Harry Cleaver, *Reading Capital Politically*, Leeds, Anti/Theses, 2000, p13.



Power (*potestas*) within which the antagonistic self-production of the multitude must take place.

The multitude, then, provides the first obvious bridge between the theoretical universe referred to in *Empire* and the established, almost ossified set of concerns that run through the study of popular culture in cultural studies. There are several places where the book engages with the concept of the multitude. The multitude, we are told, is not a *people* ('an organized particularity that defends established privileges and properties') but 'the universality of free and productive practices' (p316). It is 'a multiplicity, a plane of singularities, an open set of relations, which is not homogeneous or identical with itself and bears an indistinct, inclusive relation to those outside of it ... a constituent relation, [rather than] ... a constituted synthesis that is prepared for sovereignty' (p103). The multitude is not identical to itself, but is characterised by 'mobility, flexibility, and perpetual differentiation' (p344). It is endowed with *virtual* powers, that is 'the set of powers to act (being, loving, transforming, creating)' (p357), and it is the common place that holds 'labor, intelligence, passion, and affect' (p358).

To understand the conceptual origins of what would otherwise sound like a dangerously romantic idealisation of collective praxis, *Empire's* interested reader would have to work her way back through Negri's work. There are noticeable similarities, for example, between the multitude and the theory of class composition, a central tenet of the Italian Autonomia. The theory of class composition aimed at displacing the orthodox Marxist fixation with the industrial working class with a new awareness of the historical mutability of the proletariat as a class, and the futility of appeals to unity, where instead the problem was that of *recomposition* of 'a multiplicity of needs, and of liberty'.<sup>2</sup> In Negri's *Marx Beyond Marx*, the working class is not exclusively tied to specific types of labour (industrial or postindustrial) precisely *because of* its continual struggle with capital. This struggle 'has as a result on the one hand the development of capital and on the other *the intensification of the class composition*, the enlargement of its needs and of its pleasures, the elevation of the value of labor necessary for its reproduction'.<sup>3</sup>

The concept 'multitude', however, is the outcome of the crucial encounter between Negri and the work of the seventeenth-century Jewish Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza, an encounter that took place during Negri's first prison term in the late 1970s, and which produced one of the most substantial and rewarding of Negri's books, *Spinoza: The Savage Anomaly*. The book was translated into English by Michael Hardt and can be considered the first proper collaboration between the two authors. It is in *Spinoza: the Savage Anomaly* (even more than in the better known *Marx beyond Marx*) that the theoretical groundwork of *Empire* was laid. As Hardt remarked in his introduction to the earlier book, 'When Negri approaches Spinoza, his Marxist conception of power relations is greatly enriched'.<sup>4</sup>

As Hardt puts it, the Spinoza book moves beyond Negri's previous exclusive concentration on the working class in terms of autonomous use

2. Antonio Negri, *Marx Beyond Marx: Lessons on the Grundrisse*, Harry Cleaver, Michael Ryan and Maurizio Viano (trans), London, Pluto Press, 1991, p14.

3. *Ibid.*, p73.

4. Michael Hardt, 'Translator's Foreword: the Anatomy of Power' in Antonio Negri, *The Savage Anomaly: The Power of Spinoza's Metaphysics and Politics*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1991, pxiv.

value in its search for a better way to conceptualise the organisational aspect of power. For Hardt two concepts are crucial: *multitude* and *constitution*.

*Multitude* is the term Spinoza uses to describe the collective social subject that is unified inasmuch as it manifests common desires through common social behavior. Through the passion and intelligence of the multitude, power is constantly engaged in inventing new social relations. The multitude, the protagonist of Spinoza's democratic vision, creates a social authority through the process of constitution, a process whereby social norms and right are constructed through the logic of immediate, collective and associative relations. In the process of constitution the metaphysics of power becomes an ethics, an ethics of collective passions, of the imagination and desire of the multitude.<sup>5</sup>

5. *Ibid.*, pxx.

The multitude, then, is a political concept rooted in what Negri describes as the 'savage times' of the first political and cultural crisis of modernity: the seventeenth century. Faced with the first crisis of the rising capitalist system after the Renaissance utopia, bourgeois philosophers such as Hobbes ('the Marx of the bourgeoisie') chose to construct the political as a necessary mediation of the powers of the multitude within the transcendent horizon of the State. The idea of the constituent power of the multitude is thus 'absorbed in the notion of political representation, whereas it was supposed to legitimize this notion'. The multitude is thereby made to function as the legitimisation for a new (economic, sexual, political, and cultural) division of labour.<sup>6</sup> By contrast, Negri argues, Spinoza chooses a different trajectory, that of the radicalisation of the Renaissance utopia, beyond its residual neo-Platonism. Such radicalisation points to the state of nature, which for Hobbes was characterised by 'the war of all against all', as a plane of composition and decomposition between non-individualised bodies, traversed by passions and affects, which necessitates the active labour of imagination in its inextricable relationship with reason. The work of imagination and reason, Negri suggests, is *constitutive work*, that is, work that does not mediate between bodies but constructs new bodies and new relations on the basis of an ethical microphysics of an ever-expanding plane of needs and desires. Thus *Empire* can claim that labour as constitutive power is fundamental to the construction of community: 'on the one hand the singular powers of labor continuously create new common constructions, and, on the other hand, what is common becomes singularized. We can thus define the virtual power of labor as a power of self-valorisation that exceeds itself, flows over onto the other, and, through this investment, constitutes an expansive commonality. The common actions of labor, intelligence, passion, and affect configure a *constituent power*' (p360).

6. Antonio Negri, *Insurgencies: Constituent Power and the Modern State*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1999, p3.

*Empire*'s strong ontology of the constituent power of the multitude is a welcome displacement of the conflict between those studies that exclusively privilege the working of *potestas* (the capacity of Power to absorb and

neutralise opposition) and those that concentrate mainly on *potentia* (the capacity of subjects and cultures to produce themselves in opposition to Power). However, this strong ontology is also a limit of *Empire's* analysis. Where is the place *within* the constitutive power of the multitude of what Deleuze and Guattari called fascist desire or the desire for fascism? Can the desire for annihilation and control be exclusively identified with the Power of capitalism or the State? What is the state of the non-human or the inorganic within constituent power? What is the sexuality of the multitude? In spite of its jabs at the 'angelic' nature of immaterial work to be found in the Autonomists' analysis of postindustrial societies, 'constituent power', as understood in this book, remains strangely angelic itself. In terms of concrete political analysis, this has the potential to produce analyses of the social that 're-dialecticise' the multitude, as a productive angelic source of permanent revolution posed against the evil of an external capitalist-state machine. The 'de-angelification' of the multitude and constituent power thus emerges as a challenge for any attempt to *constitutively* (rather than simply *critically*) engage with the model for political and cultural analysis proposed by this book. Such 'de-angelification' would require an analysis of constituent power that takes into account the stratifications of history, the role of inorganic drives, and the libidinal investments that shape the constitution of the multitude as virtuality. *Empire* might not be the next *Manifesto*, but it will definitely be a book that opens up different ways of thinking about some of the most urgent issues of this new century. As such, the book has the potential to start a larger, collective effort to escape the postmodern impasse that, after the initial, productive euphoria, has paralysed so much conceptual and political praxis, confining it to the infinitely reproducible aporias between essentialism and constructivism, nature and culture, identity and difference, resistance and incorporation, representation and reality. Hopefully, it will also act as a catalyst for an international effort to address the current juridical situation of one of its authors, Antonio Negri (sentenced to thirteen years in jail by the Italian state, but currently on 'work release'). Although Italian intellectuals have a habit of producing their best work in jail, we would like it, for once, if this specific case of 'eternal return' were to stop.

# THE COLLECTIVE PROJECT FOR A GLOBAL COMMONS

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*Michael Hardt*

Comment on Naomi Klein's *No Logo*, by the co-author of *Empire*

*No Logo* and *Empire* are very different kinds of books, conceived for very different readers, but they share a basic political project: to critique the contemporary forms of capitalist globalisation and at the same time recognise the emerging signs of an alternative, democratic globalisation. This may explain in part why both books have found a certain popularity among the activists involved in the continuing actions against the WTO, the World Bank, the IMF, and other such organs of global power, because indeed these movements are not merely protests but rather experiments seeking new forms of global connection and community. What I admire most about Naomi Klein's book, in fact, is its search for constructive alternatives: she is not satisfied with exposing the evils of multinational corporations but analyses also all the forms in which we refuse corporate power and thereby open the space for political alternatives.

One interesting point of intersection of the two books is their analyses of the new forms of production that hold a hegemonic position atop the global capitalist economy. Naomi Klein develops the concept of 'branding' to explain how the material production of goods is being increasingly supplemented (and in some ways supplanted) by advertising campaigns and the production of images. The product that is sold is thus not merely nor even primarily the actual pair of CK jeans or Nike shoes but the notion or aura that is created by the brand itself. Negri and I analyse this phenomenon using the concept of 'immaterial labour' by which we mean labour which is itself both corporeal and intellectual but whose products are immaterial. Immaterial labour can thus refer to advertising concepts but also includes many other production processes such as symbolic and analytical tasks, the creation and management of information and communication, and various forms of affective labour. Affective labour may be the most interesting component of immaterial labour and indeed it plays a fascinating role in the process of branding. More than an image or even a concept, the power of the brand name lies primarily in the affect it creates. A brand creates a feeling, a sentiment, a relationship, even a way of life.

One should emphasise that the focus on immaterial production in *No Logo* and *Empire* should not be understood as a claim that material

production has ceased to exist or even that immaterial production has become predominant in quantitative terms, either in the world as a whole or in the most dominant countries. The claim rather is that immaterial production has become hegemonic and this fact casts all other forms of production in a new light. The production of material goods remains important but now within the context of an economy dominated by the immaterial. Naomi Klein makes this wonderfully clear by accompanying her analyses of the production and consumption of brands in the dominant countries with an investigation of the material production of those goods in subordinated regions of the world. It is tempting to compare the factories that produce brand name clothing or shoes outside Manila or Jakarta today with the sweatshops in North America at the beginning of the twentieth century, but really the comparison has limited use because contemporary sweatshops function within a global economy dominated by immaterial production.

The politics that springs from Naomi Klein's analyses is both enabled and limited by her focus on the major capitalist corporations. The scandalous activities of some of the corporations is useful for mobilising public (and particularly consumer) outrage, but Klein is quite aware that protesting against Nike's practices only to give its market share to Reebok is not an adequate political solution. The scandals of the major corporations are really only indicators and thus Klein proposes that we read individual corporations as a kind of map to guide us through the connections of the global capitalist economy. This is an excellent idea, but it still risks focussing too much on corporations and leading to a politics that is merely anti-corporate. We are not of course only against the major brand-name corporations (and for the other corporations), nor are we merely against the corporations (and for other forms of capitalist exploitation). Anti-corporate politics must thus be complemented by a more general critique of capital as a whole along with a critique of the institutional and governmental forms that support it. These are the kinds of more general tasks that I think Klein's project points towards.

*No Logo* and *Empire* coincide most clearly in their final calls for a democratic global future: calls, for example, to conceive of a new global form of citizenship and to construct a global commons. These two books - along with the various political movements that have emerged in recent years on the terrain of globalisation - may, in fact, be best conceived not as individual analyses but as initial symptoms of an emerging form of left politics, a politics of the world to come.

# EMPIRE AND THE MOVEMENT AGAINST CAPITALISM

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*Graeme Chesters*

Comment on Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's *Empire*, by a founding member of the Shifting Ground Cooperative.

Once upon a time, there were two times: one was called One Time, and the other was called Another Time. One Time and Another Time made up the At Times family, who lived and ate from time to time. There were two ruling empires, Always and Never, who for obvious reasons hated to death the At Times family - they couldn't tolerate their existence. They could never let One Time live in their kingdom, because Always would then cease to be, since if it's One Time now, then it can't be Always. Nor could they let Another Time show up even once in their kingdom because Never cannot live with One Time, and even less if that One Time is Another Time.

Subcommandante Insurgente Marcos, 12 September 1998<sup>1</sup>

The moral of this story is that one time is very difficult to tell from another, that 'always' and 'never' are competing discourses that vie with each other to control and subjugate the desire to be, and to be different. Consequently we might be a little reluctant to believe those who explain that one time has become another. But what does this have to do with *Empire*? Well it could be that it is fun to play mix and match with the signs, symbols and signifiers of anti-capitalism, now you see them now you don't. I admit it is tempting, because these two particular strands, the Zapatistas' masked war of the word, and the peculiarity of Italian social theory (*Empire* is uniquely Italian)<sup>2</sup> are animating much of the theory and practice of this thing which some call anti-capitalism.

Marcos's riddle is pertinent because if One Time has become Another (Empire?) then perhaps we are closer to the downfall of the kingdom (Capital?). *Empire* in part addresses this question, albeit in an abstract and opaque manner. This is perhaps one of the reasons why, despite the passions (fake) of the liberal press and numerous plaudits from academics, *Empire* is not flying off the shelves and into the hands of the activist community. Don't get me wrong, it's a deeply insightful and thought-provoking work which was urgent and overdue, and I recommend it strongly. However, there remains something elusive about it, something present in the rhythm and cadence of language which separates and alienates; it sometimes feels as disconnected to the lived and concrete reality of resistance as the forms

1. The selected writings of Subcommandante Marcos have been published as *Our Word is Our Weapon*, London, Serpent's Tail, 2001.

2. Michael Hardt has long been a dedicated exponent of Italian social theory; see for example Michael Hardt and Paolo Virno (eds), *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1996.

of imperial sovereignty that we are told rule above and through us by unitary command, from a no-place, the 'smooth space' of *Empire*.

And this is where it gets complicated. Because the central claim made by Negri and Hardt is that *Empire* consists of a virtual and de-territorialised exercise of power by interlocking juridical agencies implementing a biopolitical constitution, which has surpassed the capitalist state and most notably the United States as the *sine qua non* of world power. Recent events make this an increasingly questionable proposition, given the capacity of the US, when threatened, to evoke in imperial manner the power inscribed within these very same institutions and processes. This, of course doesn't mean such an analysis is redundant, it just requires us to ask for a little verification and remind us not to get too caught up in the sweeping and generalised prose style that characterises the book.

In many respects, the idea of *Empire* can be understood as a version of Guy Debord's 'integrated spectacle',<sup>3</sup> a sophisticated machinery of social re-production that Hardt and Negri describe as 'auto-poietic', 'self-validating' and 'systemic'. One cannot be outside either Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* or *Empire*, instead they must be transcended, which for Debord meant acts of negation, the realisation through a Hegelian dialectic of the limitless potential of everyday life. Debord required us, simply enough, to become the 'wreckers of civilisation'.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Hardt and Negri offer little in the way of concrete proposals for moving from theory through praxis; indeed they are honest enough to inform us that they are unclear about what practices might animate this political project (p400) - although they stress that these should invariably be addressed to the global, a domain that was until recently ceded to trans-national corporations and extra-national institutions by the complicity of the call to 'think global and act local'.

Their favoured historical agent of change is the 'multitude', a term that encompasses the *social worker* of the post-Fordist economy, the dispossessed economic migrant, and the nomadic *militant*, no doubt a card-carrying member of Tony Blair's beloved 'travelling anarchist road-show'. Although this partially resonates with the constituency mobilised in the streets of Genoa, for me there is something problematic about such representations, which celebrate the actions of a small cadre of largely western militants and eulogise the forced exodus from land and tradition caused by neo-liberal capitalism,<sup>5</sup> reworking such migrations as nomadic expressions of a revolutionary portent.<sup>6</sup> Ultimately then, *Empire* goes only so far; it informs us of a new circuitry of power and the form in which it has crystallised, yet gives little insight into the spaces and places we must invest, subvert, occupy and reclaim. In this sense it is both a help and a hindrance, because for every person who will hear its call to arms, another will wait in his or her

3. Debord's work, particularly *The Society of the Spectacle* (1968), is recognised by Hardt and Negri as extremely prescient to their analysis (pp188-189).

4. This is the way the Situationist International were described at the time of their founding meeting, in Cosio D'Arroscia, Italy in 1957.

5. 'Exodus' has a particular meaning within Italian social theory, see Paolo Virno 'Virtuosity and Revolution: The Political Theory of Exodus', in Hardt and Virno (eds), (op. cit.). Here, however I am using it to refer to the processes of displacement and migration most recently and vividly captured by the photographer Sebastio Salgado's work *Exodus*.

6. This concept of the revolutionary nomad also held a fascination for Debord.