# Futurepublic: On Information Warfare, Bio-racism and Hegemony as Noopolitics

Tiziana Terranova

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# Futurepublic

## On Information Warfare, Bio-racism and Hegemony as Noopolitics

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Is it possible or even desirable to relegate the concept of cultural hegemony to the museum of cultural studies? Is Birmingham cultural studies about to undergo a paradigm shift and deliver itself from concepts such as ideology, hegemony, representation, identity, difference and signification into the arms of a new materialism, which would rather discuss ontology than epistemology? If that is the case, then new approaches that aim at displacing cultural hegemony must also productively address the process by which, in Stuart Hall's early formulation, a temporary alliance of dominant groups or historical bloc, 'strives and to a degree succeeds in *framing* all competing definitions of reality *within their range*, bringing all alternatives within their horizon of thought' (Hall, 1977: 333; see also Hall, 1996a). This article advances some considerations on the current production of hegemonic effects, starting with some problems posed by the work of one of the most influential writers in cultural studies – the American Palestinian critic Edward Said. In particular, it draws on his best-known text, *Orientalism* (1978), and on a minor text such as *Covering Islam* (1997), in order to reconstruct his reading of the production of hegemonic effects in relation to a specific figure of great centrality to the spectrum of communication today: the opposition between East and West, and specifically between Muslim and Western culture. The return of Orientalist motifs in media representations of Islam is related by Said not only to the displacement of European hegemony by a new US-dominated one, but also to a shift from the logico-discursive statements of modern Orientalism to the affective facts of live news and expert commentary. Said's commentary on the coverage of Islam in the US media in the late 1970s allows for some challenging considerations on how hegemonic strategies directed at the formation of publics and

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public opinion are increasingly integrated within a global *noopolitics* of communication, whose understanding of the public is not derived from the notion of civil society but from the biopolitical element of the population. As outlined in Michel Foucault's analysis of liberal and neoliberal governmentality in his lectures at the Collège de France (2005a, 2005b), such understanding of the public locates the latter straight within a new *dispositif* of power which is biopolitical and noopolitical at the same time, that is which addresses itself simultaneously to the biological, economic and spiritual life of the population – its ways of living, producing, consuming, thinking, feeling and acting. Such understanding involves a reconsideration of the constitution of publics and public opinion in times of netwars and information warfare, while it makes it possible to re-think the circulation of causes and effects between the cultural, the biological, the economic and the social in new ways.

## Orientalism and Neo-Orientalism

Published in 1978, Edward Said's *Orientalism* mobilized the theoretical tools of post-structuralist criticism to focus on the question of colonialism and its cultural and political legacies. For Said, Orientalism was not only an academic discipline that studied a real entity called the 'Orient', but something more significant; it was a colonial form of knowledge that aimed at turning something 'impossibly diffuse', heterogeneous and multiple, such as the territories and populations lying to the east of Europe, into an epistemological construct that was easy to grasp and dominate. In its largest sense, Orientalism is described as 'a political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, "us") and the strange (the Orient, the East, "them")' (Said, 1978: 43). For Said, such imagined opposition can be traced back to Ancient Greece, but it is with Napoleon's expedition to Egypt in 1798 – and the beginning of Western colonialism – that this epistemological construction acquires material power. It is around this time that Orientalism becomes a relation of knowledge/power between a dominant and a subaltern partner (Europe and the Orient). In this sense, and also in as much as it succeeded in affecting the identity and sense of Self of those people and cultures that it aimed to describe, Orientalism constitutes for Said the knowledge of the subalternization of the non-European, the expression of Western cultural and political hegemony over its empire(s), and ultimately what allows the West to think of itself as such. Thus *Orientalism* is not a study of the correspondence or lack thereof between Orientalism and Orient, but of the 'the internal consistency of Orientalism and its ideas about the Orient (the East as a career) despite or beyond any correspondence, or lack thereof, with a "real" Orient' (Said, 1978: 5).

As Bryan S. Turner suggested, what Said's work was calling for was nothing else than a 'de-colonization of thought', but one that held some troubling implications for its participation in a postmodern epistemology. If the opposition between Western and Oriental culture is the outcome of the

functioning of a hegemonic discourse, and if there is no alternative to discourse, there is no point in trying to improve Oriental discourse with an improved or correct analysis of the Orient. Furthermore, the Orient cannot represent itself because if it did, it would no longer be the Orient which is defined essentially by its falsely homogeneous and intrinsically subaltern position within colonial discourse. This accounts for a kind of unrepresentability of the subaltern, who cannot speak within the discourse that constitutes her as such (Spivak, 1988).

> This problem seems to be a particular difficulty for Said since he often appears to be merely recommending an improvement in our account of Islam. . . . Do we want a better description or an alternative description? Or is it the case that contemporary theories of epistemology would rule out such set of questions? (Turner, 2000: 371)

Said will answer such questions by adopting a position that is common to much cultural studies, especially to those parts of it that have assumed the challenge of what Stuart Hall called 'the politics of representation', laying out the practical strategies involved in the adoption of the theory of hegemony as a model of cultural struggle (Hall, 1996b). While for Foucault discourse strictly belonged to an epistemic field populated by statements which produced various objects and subject positions but was neither objective nor subjective, for Said Orientalism is also and undoubtedly an affection of the mind. Orientalism, thus, is not only a relation of power/knowledge but also, in terms reminiscent of Franz Fanon, the expression of a kind of colonial greed, 'a kind of Western projection and will to govern over the Orient' (Said, 1978: 95); 'a form of paranoia' (1978: 72) and a 'median category which allows one to see new things, things seen for the first time, as versions of a previously known thing' (1978: 59). This median category, which does not refer to any real thing but somehow participates in its construction is a *representation* – the form of expression of relations of power and its active agent. Representations such as those outlined in his readings of Western writings on the Orient play an active role in the constitution of epistemic categories that, in terms which have come to define the cultural studies' approach to hegemony, *mediate* the apprehension of the world. The job facing the organic intellectual is not to replace a bad representation with a good representation, but 'to show how all representations are constructed, for what purposes, by whom, and with what components' (Said, 1994: 280).

In this sense, what Said opposed to the misrepresentation of Orientalism were new situated epistemological maps that counteracted the imaginary division between opposed essences by insisting on the entanglement of populations and the overlapping of cultures in a process of dynamic, constitutive production of cultures. It demanded the dissolution of the Orient as an object of study (and hence of Western culture as a norm on the basis of which something called the Orient could be judged) and its

replacement with a multiplicity of specific and entangled cartographies (Chambers, forthcoming). It seems then, that the postmodern epistemology that Said (and cultural studies) partially participated in (by denying reality to the objects of representation) did not necessarily exclude an ontological affirmation of difference and processuality, of the impure, shifting compounds that constitute the only alternative to a logic of warring essences. The postcolonial critic must thus deconstruct such colonial discourse, mobilize a different kind of public or interpretive community and disseminate evidence of instances of cross-pollinations, creolizations and hybridizations that can counteract the power of the binary division. Said's engagement with the textual archive of colonialism was partially successful in affecting and problematizing the consensus in that field of studies (as a recent controversial probe by the US Congress into the impact of his work on 'Middle Eastern Studies' also demonstrated; see Kramer, 2003). *Orientalism*, which was translated into at least 36 languages, helped to crystallize the emergence of a large, multi-lingual and heterogeneous public, academic and non-academic, more or less receptive to his thesis, parts of which have undoubtedly engaged in a productive continuation of his project of decolonization of thinking.

If *Orientalism* addressed mainly the question of the production of the Orient as an object of institutionalized knowledge, while only suggesting implicitly the importance of Orientalism as an affection of the Western mind, a minor text by Said, *Covering Islam* (1997) seems to address such problem more directly. Rather than being a scholarly study addressing the large, stable archive of Western colonialism, *Covering Islam* is almost an *instant book*, a log, a passionate chronicle of Said's reactions to the irruption of Islam on American screens and front pages during the mid to late 1970s. This irruption was organized and woven through with what Said recognized as a new barrage of Orientalist statements: 'Arabs only understand force; brutality and violence are part of Arab civilization; Islam is an intolerant, segregationist, "medieval", fanatic, cruel, anti-woman religion' (Said, 1994: 357). Well before the tragedy of 9/11, Said had already recognized these statements as signs of the imminent communicative and informational re-Otherization of, not generally an Oriental but this time a specifically Muslim and Arab culture.

For Said, this post-Cold War neo-Orientalism is not only mainly a North American rather than European construction, but, more crucially, it also draws on what he calls 'tele-technologies', that is, technologies which act at a distance, and on different tactical uses of information, in order to induce specific corporeal and cognitive effects. The irruption of Islam into American consciousness in the 1970s expressed itself at first as what Said calls a *felt effect*, inducing a *sensation* of 'ominous interdependence' caused by the unexpected and sudden oil price rises in 1974. The challenge posed by the decision by OPEC countries to raise the price of oil was immediately presented to the American public as a very direct, quasi-biological threat to the American way of life. 'What the consumer of news and oil sensed . . .

was an unprecedented potential for loss and disruption with no face or visible identity to it' (1997: 39). Advertising campaigns broadcast by the main US television networks in 1980, paid for and sponsored by energy groups such as Consolidated Edison of New York, attributed these feelings to a visible cause – the Arabs.[1] The campaign consisted in a series of commercials which edited together images of Arab personalities (from Ghaddafi to Khomeini to Arafat) while a voice solemnly announced: 'These men control American sources of energy.' As Said remarks, it was easy to guess how, by the end of the campaign, 'it was enough for "these men" to appear as they have appeared in newspapers and on television for American viewers to feel a combination of anger, resentment and fear' (1997: 3).

In Said's account, the next event that introduced the image of Islam to the American consciousness was the elaborate, live news coverage of the attack on the American embassy in Tehran in November 1979 – when a group of Iranian students took hostage 52 American citizens for 444 days. Here again Said reports an article by the *Sunday Times*, which claimed that ex-president Jimmy Carter had 'advised the Department of State to "*focus* all public attention on building up a *wave of resentment* against the Iranians"'. It was around this time that 'Ayatollah Khomeini's image and presence took over the media' accompanied by caricatures of Muslims as 'bloodthirsty mobs' (1994: 6, 8). The codes of television did the rest by formatting the tale of the hostage-taking in Tehran into a 'freak show featuring self-flagellants and fist-wavers, or as a soap opera' (1997: lxiii). Out of the void of any real history of contact between the Middle East and the US public, the image of Islam had become suddenly self-evident. The passage from latent to manifest and virulent Orientalism in American public opinion is described as both sudden and imperceptible, with no real transition.

> Robed Arabs, fantastically monied and well armed, obtrusively appeared everywhere in the West. . . . the suddenness of their capacity to trouble the United States in the mid 1970s was a disturbing concomitant of how little of their past and identities was known. A large number of Islamic states, personalities and presences, thereby passed imperceptibly in the general consciousness from their status of barely acknowledged existence to the status as 'news': there was no real transition from one to the other. . . . As a result, the image of Islam, today, in every place that one encounters it, is an *unrestrained* and *immediate* one. (1997: 41)

As it reviews article after article published by the American press on the Iranian hostage crisis, or as it comments on television debates on the topic, the tone of *Covering Islam* is of rising frustration – a frustration that only grew more acute in the following years. All possibilities for sustained critique seemed here to Said to have been made impossible because of the decline of the narrative framework that allowed the critic to speak and be understood by an interpretive community. The deconstruction of cultural hegemony was becoming increasingly difficult, literally disorienting. What

was getting in the way – between the organic intellectual and a public that could understand him/her – was an active opinion-making *dispositif* that could give itself the aims and strategies of a war campaign. Paradoxically, it was a Middle Eastern government, Kuwait, which, in 1990, according to journalistic reports, channelled almost US $8 million into the world's largest PR firm, the US company Hill & Knowlton, in order to promote the first Gulf War to the American public. The media campaign typically relied on front groups (previously employed to perform a similar job against Nicaragua) who 'prepared and placed TV and newspaper ads, and kept a stable of fifty speakers available for pro-war rallies and publicity events' (Stauber and Rampton, 2004).

For Said, such appropriation of the perceptual field of public opinion, however, also operated by means of a *dispositif* that made it possible for 'anyone in fact to say anything at all' while at the same time sifting all statements 'either towards the dominant mainstream or out to the margins' (Said, 1997: 392). Indeed, Said's work could be easily made to appear not so much *critical* or *situated* (as some postmodern epistemologies would have it) as *marginal* and *one-sided* (hence irrelevant or in any case something that needs to be balanced by giving space to the *other side of the story*). What Said highlights in *Covering Islam* is a real mutation of the Orientalist discourse – a mutation introduced by what we might call new techniques of power (public relations, advertising, communication management, infotainment) to which corresponds another mode of conflict – a regime of information warfare. These techniques of power and regimes of warfare express an important mutation in the means by which the effect of cultural hegemony is accomplished.

Nearly 30 years after the US embassy siege in Iran, in another instant book, *Watching Babylon*, published in 2005, Nicholas Mirzoeff starts by literally logging his reactions to the breaking out of the second Gulf War. The book starts with a vivid account of the opposite reactions caused by images of the bombing of Baghdad – as seen on a large screen in a gym in Long Island, NY – on Mirzoeff (qualified as an academic, a European citizen living in the US and an opponent of the war) and his neighbour at the gym (described as 'a middle-aged white man pumping an elliptical trainer, wearing what I can only call a Military Metal T-Shirt and a brand-new army baseball cap worn backwards. . . . I realized that his clothes had been bought for watching the war' (Mirzoeff, 2005: 1)). The reactions are strikingly different, literally inverse: while his neighbour cheers and is clearly elated at each explosion lightening the night sky of Baghdad, Mirzoeff feels increasingly smashed and powerless. He reports of similar effects induced in other acquaintances of his who had also opposed the war in the fraught days leading up to it – all feeling pretty much like visual subjects, 'all but overwhelmed by visual materials that they cannot control but cannot refuse to watch' (2005: 17).

For Mirzoeff, the becoming-weapon of the image in the second Gulf War was facilitated by the new visual devices developed thanks also to high

levels of investment by the Department of Defense in imaging and neural technologies (Burston, 2003). According to Mirzoeff, this sponsorship has produced a 'militarized form of the image', which was activated in the course of the media coverage of the invasion of Iraq in 2003. 'Consequently, the images of the war were not indiscriminate explosions of visuality, but rather carefully and precisely targeted tools' (Mirzoeff, 2005: 73). On the other hand, the screens that had been designed to receive such images, 'the large screen, theatre TVs of American suburbia, recognized them, so to speak, as friendly' (2005: 74). In 2003 the Iraqi public would also experience in real time both the war and the media campaign to promote the invasion of Iraq on their illegal, but numerous satellite dishes, as would also other non-American publics such as Muslims living in Western, Arab and other nations (Pax, 2003; Riverbend, 2005).

> On these screens, they did no harm. But to the opponent of the war, whether in the Middle East or the United States, these images were designed to overwhelm any response. . . . Like the deadly videotape in *The Ring*, the weapon-image jumps out of the screen and annihilates its viewer. . . . Instead of a timed single attack coming one week after the first viewing of the tape, as happens in *The Ring*, the weapon-image overcomes its opponents by sheer relentless persistence.
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> The image becomes a weapon not just in the large established sense of propaganda, but as something hard, flat and opaque, designed itself to do psychic harm. . . . As the image becomes information, it loses the associations of remembrance and becomes nothing more than a tool of war. (Mirzoeff, 2005: 74)

In the 1970s, from his marginal position as a viewer (an Arab intellectual in the US), Said, then, had anticipated something that a larger public was to experience by the beginning of the new millennium: a form of hegemony that neither negotiates nor mediates but which rather aims at something akin to a military victory accomplished, as Paul Virilio (1989) put it, on the most ancient battlefield of all – the immaterial battlefield of perception. In a sense, then, the coverage of the Iranian Revolution was just a moment in a process of increasing integration of communication techniques in new modes of warfare, which continue and exceed the older tradition of war propaganda. Such new modes of warfare have been explicitly articulated by military theorists around the concepts of 'cyberwar' and 'netwar'.

In an important publication by the think-tank RAND on new forms of warfare, John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt argue that the remoulding of the spectrum of social conflict in the information age offers important reasons for new '*comprehensive* approaches to conflict based on the centrality of information' (1997: 6). Two terms such as 'cyberwar' and 'netwar' are taken into consideration in ways that completely displace the terrain of battle that hegemonic theory described as open to either 'wars of manoeuvre' or 'wars of position'. While 'cyberwar' is defined as a comprehensive, integrated,

communication, command and information approach to the conduct of high-intensity conflicts involving formal military forces pitted against each other, 'netwar' appears to pose what they describe as 'uncomfortable social dilemmas'.

> *Netwar* a comprehensive information-oriented approach to social conflict – will figure increasingly at the societal end of the spectrum, where the language is normally about low-intensity conflict (LIC), operations-other-than-war (OOTW), and other, mostly nonmilitary, modes of conflict and crime. . . . Both concepts are consistent with the views of analysts like Van Creveld who believe that a transformation of war is under way that will lead to its increasing 'irregularization'. (Arquilla and Ronfeldt, 1997: 6)

As Alvin and Heidi Toffler argue in their introduction to the book, this implies the configuration of a new relation between war and media. The tendency that they identify is that of a model whereby some parts of the media system no longer function as passive outlets for government propaganda but become instead active and equal members of a network of alliance (or deep coalition) that connects heterogeneous partners bound by a temporary commitment to a specific project of warfare. A de facto deep coalition, they explain, is no longer limited to nation-states, but can include a variety of actors such as:

> . . . three nation-states, fourteen civil society organizations, a narcotraficante here or there, a couple of private corporations with their own self-interests at stake, an individual speculator, and who knows what other components. The deep coalition involves players at many levels of the system. It is multi-dimensional, with all of these groups operating all the time, in continuous flow – multiplying, fissioning, then fusing into others, and so on. It is part of a nonequilibrial order in which there may be instability at one level and temporary stability at another. (Toffler and Toffler, 1997: xix)[2]

In the same anthology, John Rothrock (1997) explains how information warfare involves tactics that are geared towards the degradation of the adversaries' capacity for *understanding* their own circumstances, and their capacity to make any effective use of whatever *correct understandings* they might achieve.

In *Covering Islam* (1997), Said inventories some of the ways by which this degradation of understanding was performed during the Iranian hostage crisis of 1979. Media coverage of Islam during the hostage crisis and the Iranian Revolution covers by covering up ('covering Islam' makes the latter known, but not understandable); it produces a widespread sensation of immediacy and familiarity with distant events, facts and peoples that does not correspond to any substantial knowledge (see also Philo and Berry, 2004); it works with what he sees as an atomist conception of the mind that uses stereotypes and labels as basic blocks out of which understandings are constructed; it associates images and affects without mediations; it

penetrates and works on the 'subliminal' cultural consciousness of the public, which is its strategic target; it formats events which it disaggregates in parallel flows of images and comments; it constructs ideological interpretive frameworks which are full of defensive passions and prejudices; but it is also capable of objective and calm tones by mobilizing the knowledge of 'experts' formed by institutions which produce knowledge that is instrumental to a political project. This analysis of media tactics in times of warfare was to be repeated by Said in later texts, especially in relation to the first Gulf War, where he again commented on the totalizing logic of warring essences, and the epistemological homogenization of the Arab world carried out by the Western media – an entire world compressed into an image that 'compelled fascination and interest and yet withheld affection or enthusiastic and particular knowledge' (Said, 1994: 255).

It is almost as if, for Said, this new, coarser type of Orientalism produced discursive truths (the threat of Islam) by way of corporeal effects – the association between images of Arab celebrities and feelings of anger, fear, hostility and resentment in the majority of the American public. As one of the most radical postmodern epistemologists, Jean Baudrillard, stated, the mass media, then, seem to nullify those rules that produce the true and the false. And yet what Said confronts here seems very far from the cool universe of simulation described by the pataphysician who urged his contemporaries to 'forget Foucault'. As recorded by Said's inventory, the coverage of Islam in a post-Cold War political environment entails a modification of the relation between knowledge and power, which repeats all the statements of Orientalist discourse while deploying them differently. It is no longer an objective knowledge that can also be embodied in narratives and representations, but entails an active mobilization of the body's immaterial capacities to think, feel and understand. This neo-Orientalism treats the epistemic field of knowledge as the site of strategic intervention on a public consciousness which senses, feels and perceives *as it understands*. At times it almost sounds as if Said is describing something very similar to what Brian Massumi later terms the 'affective fact', involving the suspension of logico-discursive reasoning and narration and allowing for the consolidation of something that is taken for and functions as an empirical fact:

> According to one commentator on Bushspeak, the Bush administration argue 'mainly by repeating the charge, rather than revealing the proof.' Indeed, repetition of a warning, [or of a charge] or even its name, can be enough to effect the passage to empirical fact. (Massumi, 2005a: 10)

This seems a paradoxical mechanism for the production of cultural hegemony: a hegemony that does not primarily operate at the level of statements, that is not primarily logico-discursive, although it can take that form, but one that considers those statements as part of a primary assemblage that links together statements, images and passions in the duration of a body, whereby affect functions as a mechanism of passage between affective and

empirical facts. We would be dealing, then, with a *dispositif* of power that grasps knowledge not as the result of abstract logical games affecting the sphere of truth, but as the secondary result of a certain hold on the body. And yet, unlike Said, in his challenging study of the mechanisms by which the production of the affective fact attempts to materialize an eventual future, Massumi (2005b) is careful to state that the repetition that characterizes Bushspeak is not even meant, let alone expected, to produce a reproducible and uniform behavior.

The addressees of the televisual message, the public, is seen as the expression of a social environment which is admittedly too complex to warrant any idea that it would be possible to achieve:

> . . . [a] one-to-one correlation between official speech or image production and the form and content of response. The social and cultural diversity of the population, and the disengagement from government on the part of many of its segments, would ensure that any initiative relying on a linear cause–effect relation between proof, persuasion and argument on the one hand, and on the other the form of a resultant action – if in fact there was to be any – was bound to fail, or to succeed only in isolated cases. (Massumi, 2005b: 2)

There is no concession here, then, to those epistemologies that cultural studies has rightly opposed in over three decades of critique. No concessions, that is, to behaviorist models of cognition (according to which the public can be simply trained to believe and to act in a certain way through a set of appropriate stimuli); but also no concessions to reductionist, informatic models of the brain that liken memory to a storage device and cognition to a kind of software that can run independently of its hardware (the human body).[3] On the contrary, in the production of the affective fact, we are confronted by the indeterminacy and non-linearity of the corporeal and incorporeal effects involved in the activation of a *dispositif* of power that latches onto the 'central nervousness' of a segmented and often disaffected public. All in order to induce, rather than determine, 'its collective individuation to pass from one form of society to another' (Massumi, 2005b: 7).

The challenge of that public which is the target of the media *dispositif* outlined, in different ways, by Said and Massumi, is that it appears as something that is more and less than a subject. In a *dispositif* such as the alert system, for example, which colour-codes various degrees of states of danger, 'there is simply nothing to identify with or imitate. . . . The alerts presented no form, ideological or ideational and, remaining vague as to the source, nature, and location of the threat, bore precious little content. They were signals without signification' (Massumi, 2005b: 10). The qualification of the threat comes later, after the affective attunement and the somatic response (which necessarily varies from body to body) has been achieved. At the same time, the addressee of this mechanism is more than a subject because any public is, in principle, a part of something larger, that is, it is

composed of individuals who always partake of different publics and it is just a temporary segmentation of a larger, global public marked by different relations and degrees of access to the communication system. Such a global public does not simply exist in its relation with the media, but is also at the same time a global population, segmented according to different relations and degrees of exposure to the perils of that permanent preemptive warfare in which media networks are now thoroughly implicated. Ultimately, for Said as for Massumi, 'the outcome is anything but certain'. Confusingly, in Massumi's words, it is likely that the hegemony of the affective fact 'can only be fought on the same affective, ontogenetic ground upon which it itself operates' (2005b: 7). This ontogenetic ground, mobilized by the affective fact, is also a correlate to that collective mode of individuation which is a public and *also* a population.

**Bioracism and Noopolitics**

By linking images of Arab personalities to the threat of loss of vital energy sources, the advertising campaign run and sponsored by the energy corporations in the mid 1970s was giving expression to something that, following Foucault, we might call a new kind of biopolitical racism – or bioracism. As Foucault (2005a, 2005b) argued in his courses at the Collège de France, when the political rationality of government became biopolitical in the 19th century, it took upon itself the fundamental task of optimizing the state of life of the population. If one of the axes of the regulation of life is sexuality (which links the anatomo-politics of discipline to the biopolitics of population), the other is racism (which allows the deployment of the sovereign power to kill within a mechanism of power that concerns itself mainly with the powers to live).

As Foucault stated, it is not a matter of saying that racism was invented in the 19th century, which it wasn't, but of showing that biopolitics is what allows the inscription of racism within the mechanisms of power of modern states. Racism is that which introduces a certain fragmentation and unbalance between the groups which constitute a population, establishing a form of discrimination that selects those who can live from those who can or must die. In this sense, for Foucault, this bioracism assumes a statement derived from the relation of war ('If you want to live, your enemy must die') and redeploys it within a biological type of relation. The enemies are no longer political adversaries, but they become threats and dangers, internal and external, to the homeostatic processes that allow a population to live, grow and prosper (Foucault, 2003).

The biological threats to the life of a population as assessed by over a century of biopolitical governmentality have been various and multiform, and they keep changing: the threat of degeneracy to the stock of the race in early 20th century biopolitical governments (involving the physical confinement and eugenic elimination of the insane and the disabled, but also of various ethnic and political minorities) has been displaced by a larger inventory of threats: risks of epidemics triggered by viruses spreading from

distant countries; dangers posed by migrants to local jobs and ways of life; menaces to Western economies represented by booming ex-Third World countries; and, of course, the direct threat of sudden explosions and random deaths cast by the shadow of terrorism. Anything can thus become a sign of a threat to the life of the population, a life that stretches from its biological mechanisms to its economic prosperity to its cultural values: a garment such as a veil or a hooded top; an animal, human or computer virus; a drug; a religious movement; an inflow of imported goods; the outsourcing of jobs and services.

While assuming the task of defending the life of a normalized population – that is, a majority – governmental reason also recuperates within a biopolitical regime the sovereign power to kill, but this time in the name not of the power of the sovereign as such, but in the name of the life of the population – its health, longevity but also its ways of life and thought, that is, in the name of what Félix Guattari called 'its existential territories and its incorporeal universes of value' (1995: 16). It is in the name of life that one kills and lets die – sometimes actively and directly, at other times simply by neglect. Thus the binary opposition between Muslim and Western culture consolidates a larger proliferation of differential racisms defined by cost–benefit calculations, suffused by unmistakable relations of fear and degrees of menace, by the perils that different internal and external groups represent in relation to the life of a given population as stabilized around cultural, economic and biological norms.

In his later courses on biopolitics (*Security, Territory, Population* [2005a] and *The Birth of Biopolitics* [2005b]), Foucault expanded on the conditions of emergence of the life of the population as a central concern of liberal and neoliberal governmentality. The population emerges within the political rationality of liberalism (which for Foucault constitutes the condition of intelligibility of biopolitics) as an element that is beyond the reach of the traditional legal instruments of sovereign power. A population is not a collection of subjects of right – as constituted by the partial alienation of their natural rights to the sovereign – but a dynamic quasi-subject constituted by a great number of variables (natural and artificial, in as much as a population is one with the environmental milieus that constitute and affect it). A population is neither a subject nor an organism, thus it does not even have an immune system since it is not functionally differentiated and has no clear borders. It is, by definition, normalized but heterogeneous, internally fragmented and in a continuous state of drift – caught up in deterritorializing movements of migration, mutation, recombination and creolization.

For Foucault, after the emergence of the element constituted by the population, the nature of the phenomena to be taken into consideration by the calculus of power changes. The life of a population involves the consideration of collective phenomena, which, taken at the level of the individual, are aleatory and unpredictable, but which reveal probabilistic regularities once considered at the mass level. In fact, it can be said that

biopolitics turns to those aleatory events that are produced within a given population considered in its duration (Foucault, 2003). Indeed, the element of the population is intimately tied to the problem of the series: 'indefinite series of elements that move . . . indefinite series of things that happen . . . indefinite series of accumulating unities' (Foucault, 2005a: 29) that is, to open series which can only be controlled on the basis of a probabilistic calculus, unfolding in a space which is not so much a space as an environment supporting the circulation and mutual interaction of causes and effects.

A given population considered in its duration, then, cannot be transparent to the action of the sovereign and the relation population–sovereign is irreducible to a pure function of obedience or, on the contrary, of revolt.

> The variables on which it depends subtract it mostly from the direct and voluntary action of the sovereign as given in the form of the law. If one orders a population to do something, nothing proves that it will do it or that it will be capable of doing it. In the relation sovereign–subject the limit of the law is the disobedience of the subject, it is the 'no' opposed by the subject to the sovereign. But in the relation between government and population, the limit of the sovereign or governmental decision does not necessarily coincide with the refusal of the addressees of the decision. (Foucault, 2005a: 62, my translation)

To liberal governmentality, then, the population appears as a phenomenon of nature which cannot be changed by decree. However, this does not mean that the population is out of control, that it is inaccessible and impenetrable to power. 'The naturality of the population makes it continually accessible to agents and techniques of transformation on condition that these are enlightened, reasoned, led by analysis and calculus' (2005a: 62, my translation). One can, for example, affect the life and behavior of a population by manipulating the variables of the environment.

By retracing the genealogy of the population as an element within a technology of power, Foucault also outlines the ways in which the emergence of the population parallels that of the *market*, as object of discourse and technology of power, understood as a quasi-natural regulatory process tending towards indefinite growth, which alone can ensure the management of the life of a population, while also depending on it (Foucault, 2005b). In Brian Massumi's words, neoliberal governmentality considers everything that amplifies or dampens an individual productive power as an economic factor, while defining such economic factors as *vital* forces:

> The system runs on life capital, 'human capital.' This form of capital is unqualified. It is whatever-activity, measured not in labor-time but in lifetime. Productive powers shade into powers of existence. Production is no longer defined as 'work' in the nineteenth-century dynamics sense of a local motive force applied to an object. Productive powers are now growth factors, powers to be, becoming. (Massumi, 2005a: 2; see also Olma, 2006)

This indexing of the life of the individual within a population to the dynamics of economic growth is what exposes such life to the ill-defined threats that are always challenging the spontaneous, but uncertain and dynamic equilibrium of market forces, which, in its turn, the life of a population both supports and depends on.

> A dynamic equilibrium is a punctuated equilibrium, appearing uncertainly between periods of crisis and haunted by their spectre. The market as a self-regulating system is metastable: it achieves provisional equilibrium, within limits and between thresholds, dogged at each step by conflicts of interests, irrationalities, and deviances, little dangers that might suddenly combine weights and tip the system into chaos. Neoliberal governance goes hand in hand with a culture of risk. (Massumi, 2005a: 1)

Thus the first official response to 11 September 2001, as Massumi remarks, was to keep shopping:

> . . . before it was placeable in a geopolitical context, before it was categorized as an act of war (as opposed to a crime or an act of madness or protest) – it was reacted to as a generic threat of economic disruption. (2005a: 4)

The economic disruption was not threatened by the event as such, but by the affective response that the American public could have had to the event (as Brian Holmes [2006] reminds us, the technical term in financial discourse for market volatility is 'emotion'). The immaterial life of the public (its moods and feelings, its actions and reactions), the quasi-natural dynamic equilibrium of the market, and the biological life of the species are thus linked, as in a punctuated continuum which stretches the concept of the population, to paraphrase Foucault, from species to market to public – segmenting all across racialized and defensive modes of differentiation of the chances of life and death orbiting around the norm of Western culture and Western ways of life.[4]

By seeing the public as part of the continuum of the population, then, and linking both to the liberal market, Foucault was accomplishing a shift with direct implications for an understanding of the production of hegemonic effects. The public is both subject and object of knowledge: it is subject of a knowledge that we might term 'opinion' and object of a power of a different kind. For Foucault, the public, capital notion of the 18th century, is the population:

> . . . considered from the side of its opinions, its ways of doing, its behaviours, its habits, its fears, its prejudices, its needs, that is everything that lends itself to the work of education, campaigns of persuasion, etc. A population is thus that whole that is extended from the biological foundation of the species to the surface of intervention offered by the public. From the species to the public, a new field of reality is structured, in the sense that species and public represent to the new mechanisms of power, the relevant elements and space within which and towards which one must act. (Foucault, 2005a: 66, my translation)

Pointing to the constitution of the problem of public opinion as a problem of government, Foucault stresses how this biopolitics of the public is not a matter of lying to individuals or imposing on them a set of beliefs – but rather of making active use of their attitudes, their opinions and their ways of doing to achieve a number of effects (Foucault, 2005a: 202). As the controversial pioneer of the public relations industry, Edward L. Bernays, argued:

> . . . the public and any force that modifies public opinion interact. Action and interaction are continually going on between the forces projected out to the public and the public itself. The public relation counsel must understand this fact in its broadest and most detailed implications. He must understand not only what these various forces are, but he must be able to evaluate their relative powers with fair accuracy. (1923: 74)

Maurizio Lazzarato has also recently returned to the concept of the public in Gabriel Tarde – the French sociologist and contemporary of Durkheim. For Lazzarato, Tarde, who argued against authors such as Gustave Le Bon in saying that the 'public' not the 'mass' or the 'crowd', was the future political and cultural force to be reckoned with, offers an interesting model of what he calls an emergent 'noopolitics' – which supplements the biopolitics of the species described by Foucault. Tarde defined the public as a highly deterritorialized socius, a 'dispersed crowd' where a reciprocal spiritual influence unfolds through a kind of tele-action or action at a distance.

> At the end of the nineteenth century we enter, according to Tarde, the age of the public or the publics, where the fundamental problem is how to keep together whatever-subjectivities which act on one another at a distance and in an open space. The public is constituted through its presence in time, not in space. (Lazzarato, 2004: 44, my translation)

This subordination of space to time, for Tarde, defines spatio-temporal blocks which are embodied by transmission technologies and by the speed of contagion at a distance. Such publics are the expression of new subjectivities and forms of socialization which were unknown to disciplinary societies – and which coexist with disciplinary institutions and with biopolitical governmentality. They express a mobility of the socius that further deterritorializes the relation between individuals and collectivities. There is no relation of exclusive belonging or identity, in fact, between an individual and a public. The same individual cannot belong to two different classes, but can belong to two or more different publics.

> By substituting or overlapping with the older groups, the new social groups, increasingly more extended and massive, that we call publics, not only make us pass from the domain of custom to that of fashion, from tradition to innovation, but also replace persistent and definite divisions between

> multiple varieties of human associations with their endless conflicts, a variable segmentation, with undefined limits, in perpetual renewal. (Tarde in Lazzarato, 2004: 46, my translation)

In this sense, tele-technologies such as television or the Internet are fundamental mechanisms of capture and control of new segmented, undefined subjectivities operating as publics. A public, in fact, as Tarde remarked, is always the result of a certain kind of affective capture (a public can be generated by a film, a TV serial, a book, a speaker, a news event, an artwork, a cultural initiative, a blog), which can be one-directional but also reciprocal (it is not just that publics are the provisional result of a capture, but they can also capture and take control of novels, TV serials, radio programmes, blogs, speakers, etc.). Public opinion is thus, for Lazzarato, the first institution of control societies – as quantified and measured by opinion polls and surveys – but a public does not necessarily coincide with the institution of public opinion. Furthermore, tele-technologies are not simply means of distribution but they can also embody their own specific affective and cognitive effects, which produce very diverse, but coexisting publics.

Distributed networks and patchwork technologies such as the Internet, in their relation of relay and feedback with television and other mainstream media, have undoubtedly amplified the process of segmentation and micro-segmentation of publics – and the reciprocal dynamics of capture between the event that generates a public and the public response to the event. The graphs produced by network theory, for example, are often quoted as demonstrating that the Internet produces phenomena of massification which go against its supposedly distributed and egalitarian ethos. In the so-called power law effect, for example, the distribution of nodes and links, but also of access to webpages, seems to demonstrate that some sites exercise a disproportionate pull on net-publics, mobilizing a large number of users, while the great majority of web-pages (including blogs) witness a proliferation of minimal audiences – audiences of a few hundred or dozens or even fewer (Barabási, 2003). Rather than being a limit of the Internet, it could be argued that this dispersion allows for a process of further segmentation and proliferation of publics which could potentially operate as a site of further creolization of subjectivities – subjectivities whose relation to the whole does not involve the neutralization of a singularity into an identity or a norm. Publics constitute, then, what Jordan Crandall (2006) defines as patterns of forms and fields of forces, of perceiving bodies and resonating bodies.

Against the militarization of communication accomplished by new techniques of power, it is possible to think about the constitution of such publics as counter-weapons, which work by expressing, inventing and creating possible worlds where the moment of resistance (the 'no' by which one refuses to watch, listen or believe) is the starting point for an affirmative activity. In as much as a noopolitics affects what he calls a *second bios*,

the life of the brain, it involves a politics of attention and memory. Such a politics should be capable to give expression to the virtual power of immaterial events of subjectification which materialize in the bodies that actualize them – in the experiences and actions which they are capable of performing, in the lives that they live.

We still do not know what the global proliferation of publics around the coverage of terrorism and conflict in the Middle East, for example, is capable of producing – publics who double as populations unevenly exposed to the physical threats of war. These are cinema-going publics and downloading publics who watch documentaries and films that propose very diverse perspectives on the conflict; news publics that also double as book and radio publics; publics who, from distant corners of the world, read and comment on blogs written by Iraqi citizens living in Baghdad *and* US soldiers camping in it; publics who sometimes mobilize themselves in networks and carry out actions, who take sides or simply try to understand; publics whose activity is not confined to the mere repetition or more or less oppositional decodings of media messages and publics whose opinions, as such, offer no simple guarantee for any kind of progressive politics; finally publics who do not live glued to the TV or the Internet, but also necessarily talk and converse among each other, locally and globally, with wildly different degrees of freedom (for Tarde, 'advertising, information, the press, public opinions, images, signs and languages, would not be efficient without their being rooted in conversation. The latter represents the living environment, the collective assemblage within which desires and beliefs are formed, and as such constitutes the expressive condition of the formation of any value' [Lazzarato, 2004: 93, my translation]). Confusingly, again, we still do not fully know the implications of the kinds of subjectivities, the forms of cultural and spiritual life, the forces of collective individuation, and the kind of futures that these connections, these networks of events, are virtually capable of giving birth to.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the introduction of a biopolitical (or noopolitical) concept of the public affords a number of operations to be performed on the Gramscian concept of hegemony as it allows for a rethinking of the mechanisms of cultural domination. In the first place, it allows for a final exit from the Marxist metaphor of infrastructure and superstructure. The mechanisms of formation of publics and public opinion, in fact, cannot be considered at any level, even the most autonomous, as an expression of economic relations of exploitation, but must be considered as deterritorialized and heterogeneous assemblages which coexist with the dynamics of economic exploitation, the training of bodies in disciplinary institutions, the emergence of new forms of warfare and the biopolitical government of life. This coexistence allows for junctures, bridges and thresholds which make any given public also a site of passage for the circulation of causes and effects between the economic, the cultural, the biological and the social. Furthermore, it is clear

that the formation of a public is not something that can be reduced to a process of decoding, whose relationship to the media message is equal to that performed by a reader on a set of encoded messages. On the contrary, the formation of a public requires the unstable capture of segments of a population which entails the production of what Brian Holmes (2006) has called 'shared sensoria' – affective, perceptual and cognitive temporal and spatial blocks that allow for specific processes of individuation. At the same time, such publics are not easily understood in terms of the opening of new subject positions out of which it becomes possible to speak. In as much as such individuations are not based on exclusive relations of belonging and identity (such as East or West), the formation of a public is a provisional event that does not exhaust, but multiplies the chances for the re-invention of possible shared worlds. Beyond the binary and polarized publics that contemporary hegemonic tactics attempt to constitute, a public is always an occasion of potential singularization beyond all binary divisions between 'us' and 'them'. It seems important, then, to understand how the noopolitical formation of a public in its relation with the biopolitical vicissitudes of different populations can be made to become an active site of intervention for writers, artists, producers and activists who are drawn to the trans-disciplinary, unstable edge that makes up the peculiar ethos of cultural studies.

*Notes*

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1. This pattern of using media campaigns to mobilize support in order to start or join a war effort dates back at least to the propaganda campaign that aimed to gain popular support for US participation in the First World War. Edward L. Bernays, a pioneer of the public relations industry, was also actively involved in devising media campaigns aiming at mobilizing support for unpopular wars (such as that sponsored by United Fruits to destabilize Guatemala) (Tye, 1998).
2. For Thacker and Galloway:

> When Arquilla and Ronfeldt warn that the West must 'learn to swarm the enemy,' they mean that the massified power blocks of the West must cease being massified power blocks. . . . Arquilla and Ronfeldt urge the West to become network-oriented – flexible, distributed, agile, robust, disseminated, invisible – in order to grapple on equal footing with the cellular, distributed, networked architectures of the terrorists. Again, it is a question of networks fighting networks. (Galloway and Thacker, forthcoming)

Galloway and Thacker argue for new model of political action that would be more akin to hacking than to critique (centred around notion of exploit):

> . . . a structural flaw which is able successfully to resist, threaten, and ultimately desert the dominant political diagram. Examples include the suicide bomber (vs. the police), the Gnutella protocol (vs. the music conglomerates), guerrillas (vs. the army), netwar (vs. cyberwar), subcultures (vs. the family), and so on . . .

In order to be effective, political movements must discover a new exploit.

> A wholly new topology of resistance must be invented that is as asymmetrical in relationship to networks as the network was in relationship to power centers. Resistance is asymmetry. The new exploit will be an 'anti-network'. It will have to consider the radically nonhuman element of all networks. (Galloway and Thacker, forthcoming)

3. As Churchland reminds us:

> the great majority of philosophers working now are not reductionists, and are not remotely tempted by the hypothesis that understanding the brain is essential to understanding the mind. Such philosophers typically also see the details of neuroscience as *irrelevant* to understanding the nature of the mind. . . . the key idea is that the mind is analogous to software running on a computer. Like Adobe photoshop, the cognitive program can be run on computers with very different hardware configurations. . . . Known as functionalism, this view asserts that the nature of a given type of cognitive operation is wholly a matter of the role it plays in the cognitive economy of the person. . . . understanding the draw operation in Photoshop will not be helped by understanding the capacitors and transistors and circuits of one's computer. Likewise, understanding what it is for a person to want a banana or believe that cows fly will not be helped by understanding neurons, circuits or anything else about how the brain works. (2002: 25–6)

4. For Ash Sharma:

> . . . whiteness as a terroritializing governmentality of racial power and subjectification is compelled to secure its universalizing hegemony in the face of being confronted by multiplicities of global difference, such as the virtual Islamic *ummah* or a digital Asia. The precarious maintenance of this matrix of stratification, in the contemporary globalizing, hybrid condition of its *impossibility*, is producing 'terroristic' forms of racialized anxiety, paranoiac violence and death, in the production of 'normalizing' (white) life. (2006: n.p.)

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**Tiziana Terranova** currently has a MUR grant (Ministero dell'Università e della Ricerca) as a visiting research fellow at the Dipartimento di Studi Americani, Culturali e Linguistici, Università di Napoli 'L'Orientale', Italy. She is the author of *Network Culture: Politics for the Information Age* (London: Pluto Press, 2004).