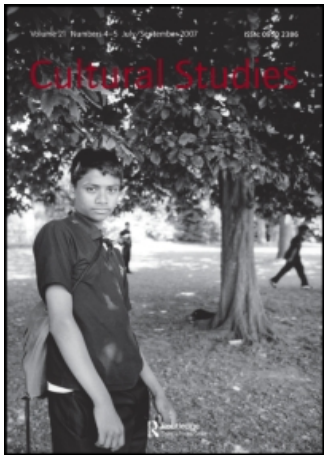

Cultural Studies
Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t713684873

WHAT IS THE MULTITUDE?

Nicholas Brown; Imre Szeman

Online Publication Date: 01 May 2005
To cite this Article: Brown, Nicholas and Szeman, Imre (2005) 'WHAT IS THE MULTITUDE?', Cultural Studies, 19:3, 372 - 387
To link to this article: DOI: 10.1080/09502380500146998
URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09502380500146998

Nicholas Brown & Imre Szeman

WHAT IS THE MULTITUDE?

Questions for Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri

Nicholas Brown and Imre Szeman continue their conversation with Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri. (See 'The Global Coliseum: On Empire*' in* Cultural Studies*, 16.2, (March 2002), p. 177–192). In this new interview they press the authors of* Empire *and* Multitude *on questions that have arisen both out of their own involvement with the theoretical issues generated by* Empire *and from new areas opened up by* Multitude*. Why is the multitude not a class? How can the unity of a political project be maintained in the multiplicity of the multitude? Is democracy still a project for the future? Can a political subject constitute itself outside the structure of sovereignty? In other words, what is the multitude?*

Keywords empire; imperialism; globalization; nation-state; resistance; sovereignty; mediation; class; democracy; multitude; Marx; Marxism; Deleuze; Hegel

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's *Empire*, one of the most influential and controversial academic books of our young century, ended with the great Utopian vision of the 'multitude against Empire': the constituent power of the desiring masses against the new form of global sovereignty being forged before our eyes. But certain questions were deliberately left unanswered: how is the multitude to constitute itself as a political subject? 'We do not have any models to offer for this event.'[1] As they put it in their interview with us in these pages (see 'The Global Coliseum: On *Empire*,' *Cultural Studies,* 16.2, [March 2002], p. 177–192): 'One of our major criticisms of our book is that the concept of the multitude remained too indefinite, too poetic. In part, that is due to our primary focus on Empire and the length required to address its nature and structures. In any case, the multitude is the focus of our current work and we hope to be able to develop the concept more fully in the future.' Their new book *Multitude* assumes the challenge of developing the other side of the 'multitude against empire,' taking the concept of the multitude 'from the poetry of the imagination to the prose of thought.'[2]

Cultural Studies Vol. 19, No. 3 May 2005, pp. 372–387
ISSN 0950-2386 print/ISSN 1466-4348 online
http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals DOI: 10.1080/09502380500146998

Like *Empire*, *Multitude* covers a tremendous amount of territory – from contemporary warfare to South African squatters' movements to the *Federalist Papers* – interleaved with lyrical passages that illuminate the main text in surprising ways, and longer excurses that frame the theoretical and practical issues raised by the book.[3] The admirable ambition in *Empire* to present new ideas to a wide audience is continued and even radicalized in *Multitude*, which attempts to theorize the concept of the multitude – which, like many intuitively simple concepts, turns out to be more complicated than it seems – in a jargon-free language that would be accessible to a non-academic audience. The concept of the multitude has been tremendously productive for both of us, and yet – around the edges of the concept, so to speak – it presented aspects which were either unclear to us or which we were hesitant to accept. The greater part of this interview asks, from the perspective of those hesitations and uncertainties, the question which *Multitude* itself is designed to answer: What is the multitude?

–Nicholas Brown and Imre Szeman

Nicholas Brown and Imre Szeman: Whatever people thought of it, *Empire* had a huge impact in intellectual circles around the globe. Are there specific things which surprised you about how the book was received – things that helped to shape *Multitude*? For instance, at the beginning of *Multitude* you say explicitly that it is not a book that is intended to answer the question 'what is to be done' or to set out a specific road map for some determinate form of political change, but that it is a book of philosophy. It also seems to us that even though the book engages with philosophy, formally it seems to be opening out to a larger, broader audience than *Empire* – an audience generally not known for being interested in philosophy!

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri: Maybe philosophy is the wrong term here since what we write probably has little relation to the contemporary discipline of philosophy. To the extent that we're doing philosophy in *Multitude*, it is certainly philosophy in a very large sense, that is, attempting to produce concepts adequate to our contemporary situation and investigate the values emerging in our world. But even while proposing values and alternatives, discovering new modes of life, one shouldn't forget the material dimensions of living, the forms of political and social organization, along with all their desires and suffering. Perhaps *Multitude* insists too much on searching for these material dimensions (which it only partially finds). That may be one of the more positive aspects of the book (and, at the same time, one of its limitations), but it is certainly the spirit that animates it.

This may also be a question of what one can and should expect from a political book like this. What can a political book do? We were certainly pleased when many people recognized and explored the political implications

of our argument in *Empire*, but we were also surprised how often people asked that the book do more, that it chart a practical political course or provide a concrete political program. It would be useless for us to invent such practical schemes and claim they ought to be followed if their potential didn't already exist in collective practice. In general, our work instead takes the existing political desires and practices as a basis for formulating potential alternatives to the present world order. That's part of what we're trying to indicate when we emphasize (perhaps wrongly) the philosophical nature of our book.

B&S: Allow us to ask, perhaps naively: why is this project necessary now? What is it that philosophy in this larger sense – what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari described as 'the art of forming, inventing, and fabricating concepts'[4] – can do for the political situations you describe throughout the book? In the wake of 9/11, any number of critics cautioned that what we need to do now is to pause and produce better theory (as opposed to abandoning philosophy for its supposed opposite, politics); this seems to find an echo in your insistence on fabricating concepts adequate to our historical juncture before the launch of any concrete political program. At the same time, we are reminded of Perry Anderson's critical assessment (in *Considerations on Western Marxism*) of the turn from political economy and revolution toward method and pessimism. In what way is *Multitude* a book of philosophy that pushes beyond philosophy as a symptom of stasis and the blockages of political energies?

H&N: Well, that might be the first time our work has been associated with pessimism! And more generally, this kind of philosophical work doesn't seem to us to involve pessimism – or optimism, for that matter. It certainly does involve facing without illusions the forms of power, exploitation, and oppression we face today, but it also involves creating concepts that can grasp the real potential of alternative developments and liberation.

You might think of what we're doing in both these books as beginning an encyclopedia for the twenty-first century. And of course we're not the only ones who have embarked on this project. It's a rather broad, collective effort to invent (and reinvent) concepts adequate to the needs of contemporary political thought. And also, of course, to demystify concepts that obscure reality from us. Try thinking of a list of them: biopolitics and biopower, the common, communication, communism, constituent power, democracy, difference, decision, economic dependency and interdependency, Empire, exodus, friend/enemy, governance, hybridity, migration, miscegenation, modernity-postmodernity-'other' modernities, representation, revolution, and the list could go on and on. Maybe when posed like this, our work really does belong to the philosophical tradition of the Enlightenment, waiting for a real movement that could link to this philosophical work, waiting for a new practice that would be wedded to this new lexicon.

But that's not really right either, and it brings us back to Perry Anderson's assessment that you cited. We certainly don't think that today there should be a move away from practice toward theory or away from political economy and revolution toward method. The investigation has to go forward in both fields at the same time. And it would be a mistake to assume a divide between theory and practice in this way. The movements today – against war, about labor conditions, immigration, the environment, gender inequality, and so many other concerns – are not simply dedicated to practice. There is a very high level of theorizing that goes on in the movements, and often working with the same or comparable concepts that we are exploring.

So finally, to come back to your initial question: this kind of philosophy is necessary today because we need a new vocabulary and new conceptual frameworks to understand our contemporary world and the possibilities it provides. And it seems to us that this kind of philosophical engagement or conceptual renovation is going on much more broadly than one might first expect.

B&S: You state directly that the primary task of *Multitude* is to reconceptualize the concept of democracy, and one of the most powerful aspects of your work has been the prominence it has given to the possibility of democracy on a global scale. You take up the question of democracy in light of the profound limits that have been imposed on the concept since its contemporary formulation in the late eighteenth century (when the possibilities present in the Greek *polis* were scaled up to that of the nation-state), but also in reference to what you see as the potential opening now available for the actualization of the 'real democracy of the rule of all by all based on relationships of equality and freedom' (67).

There are two conceptual and material limits in particular, that need to be surpassed before the rule of all by all can come into the existence: first, the association of democracy with representation, which has been as fundamental to various forms of republicanism as it has been to socialism; second, the concept of sovereignty, which restricts decision-making to a unity (however constituted), instead of the plurality of the multitude. Can you tell us about each of these limits and about the possibility of democracy that exists on their other side?

H&N: You're certainly right that representation and sovereignty today constitute the two central obstacles or points of conflict for any theoretical innovation or practical experimentation aimed at the renewal of democracy. In the case of sovereignty, the task is relatively clear: to destroy once and for all the transcendent element (or, worse, the mystical element) that supports the idea of the political in all its forms and the idea of government in all its articulations in the realm of mature capitalism. The concept of representation presents a

somewhat more complex challenge. Certainly, the predominant forms of representation operative today, especially the current electoral schemes, are extremely limited. But that should not lead us immediately to seek the abolition of all forms of representation – or even, in practical terms to demand that the existing representative schema live up to their promises. We might only move beyond representation, if that is indeed a feasible project, by putting pressure on the existing forms and experimenting in new forms of representation.

The relationship to history in this regard is twofold. There are ways in which the challenges and possibilities of our era are new, but we also have a lot to gain by recognizing certain continuities with the past. For example, don't be so quick to put republicanism as a whole on the side of sovereignty and representation. Thomas Jefferson, late in his life, after his terms as President, tried to clarify how the term should be used. In the early years of the United States, there were many, vague uses of the concept: 'we imagined everything republican which was not monarchy' (Jefferson, *Writings*, New York, Library of America, 1984, p. 1396). Here is Jefferson's attempt to give a more precise definition. 'Were I to assign to this term a precise and definitive idea, I would say, purely and simply, it means a government by its citizens in mass, acting directly and personally, according to rules established by the majority; and that every other government is more or less republican, in proportion as it has in its composition, more or less of this ingredient of the direct action of the citizens' (1392). Jefferson was trying to counter the distant, controlled forms of representation provided by the Constitution and the Federalists with some kind of direct participation and action of the citizens. We're not trying to say that we can find the answers in the past, of course, but recognizing our continuity with certain traditions can help set us on the right track.

The real answers, of course, will only come in practice. The generalized crisis of representation today puts at the center of the political agenda the experimentation with new forms of representation and non-representative forms of democratic organization. One aspect of our theoretical task is to track these experiments as they emerge.

B&S: In *Empire*, the agency responsible for these experiments, theorized as the 'multitude against Empire,' was, by your own reckoning, still conceptually vague. Certainly for us the concept of the multitude was both the great attraction of *Empire* and also its greatest problem, which is why we looked to *Multitude* with such great anticipation. In the very first pages of the preface, you foreground what we take to be the central contradiction of the concept of the multitude. On one hand, we can point to the 'project of the multitude,' the construction of a life in common, global democracy. On the other hand, 'the multitude can never be reduced to a unity.' But a project is necessarily such a unity! How is this contradiction resolved? We can think of several

unsatisfactory solutions, from the idea that the progressive desire of the multitude is a kind of statistical average of all contradictory desires, to the simple *a priori* positing of a universal will to democracy. Another solution seems more conceptually defensible: that the unity of a project must be, so to speak, 'imposed from within' the multitude itself. But who is to do the imposing if not a vanguard of intellectuals and activists? Yet vanguard politics is one of the things that you point to as an especially harmful and anachronistic holdover from the political past.

The issue is a version of the hoary old question of the 'unity of theory and practice' which has by now lost much of its meaning. But the problem that lies underneath it is real. We are thinking of an essay of György Lukács's, not often read today, which goes under the forbidding and rusty title 'Towards a Methodology of the Problem of Organization.' He argues there that a social project – let's say global democracy – is abstract to the point of meaninglessness without a social organization to mediate it. 'Visualize world peace' literally means nothing, but we can all agree on 'peace' here precisely because we don't know what it means. Any actual social mobilization that aims at getting us there both concretizes 'peace' and meets with all kinds of opposition. 'Democracy' is another such abstraction, and we had actually begun to give up on the idea that democracy as a political project could ever be rescued from its contemporary concretization in all the various coercive and seductive methods by which policies of laissez-faire privatization are established around the globe.

One of the most attractive aspects of *Multitude*, on the other hand, is that your conception of democracy is anchored solidly in the insistence upon an expansion of the commons. As we understand it, the multitude is meant to fulfill the function of a mediating social organization between that still-abstract concept (global democracy) and political practice. The mode of organization indigenous to the multitude is that of a distributed network: if we're not oversimplifying, the model is one of more or less spontaneous and temporary alliances coordinating different agendas without a central command. Certainly today, this mode of organization is effective, at least in mobilizing mass demonstrations against some of the worst abuses of the contemporary order. But what worries us is whether a mode of organization that characterizes 'the multitude against' would be adequate to the construction of a positive political project, 'the multitude for.' Because there are identifiable global actors responsible for, say, encouraging both the gutting of labor unionism and the hasty exploitation of natural resources in the third world, such diverse groups as indigenous rights organizations, labor unions, and environmentalists can organize together to protest the IMF. But this doesn't mean that their interests are really similar, that they could survive a series of divisive tactical concessions, or that they could agree on a concrete, positive political program towards global democracy.

H&N: Let's back up a minute and pose this question of unity somewhat differently. One aspect of the reinvention of democracy today is the need to destroy the separation between civil society and the state or, to say it in different terms, the separation between the social and the political. You recognize this, of course, as a long-standing project within the Marxist tradition, often expressed in Marx's own works. Today, however, it seems to us that the conditions finally exist to destroy such a separation. The conditions are given by the nature of the contemporary crisis. In fact, the passage to political postmodernity and the practical recognition of the role of biopower and biopolitics is key to going beyond the bourgeois separation between the social and the political. On the one hand, contemporary capital must pursue this process because in its form as biopower it needs to exploit the social directly through political power. And on the other hand, the process of the formation of the multitude itself is deeply involved with the destruction of this separation. But reducing this separation can take place in many different ways and it does not necessarily result in a unity. In fact, for the multitude it is essential that it does not result in a unity.

The multitude, after all, is fundamentally engaged in the production of differences, inventions, and modes of life, and thus must give rise to an explosion of singularities. These singularities are, of course, connected and coordinated according to a constitutive process that is always repeated and always open. It would be senseless to ask the multitude to become 'civil society' and it would be equally ridiculous, on the other side, to demand that it form a party or any fixed structure of organization. The multitude is the always open relationship that the singularities set in motion. Is that project really such an enormous abstraction? It doesn't seem to us that it is, at least to the extent that an imaginative schema of reason is not abstract when it responds to the crisis of the current regime of authority. Desire naturally goes where there is danger; the imagination naturally goes to the point of crisis. The imagination of the multitude predisposes the subjectivities toward a common action in the face of the crisis.

But the common here is not unity, neither when it involves the resistance against the enemy nor when it indicates the collective construction of a new terrain for the existence of the polis – in short, neither when it is 'multitude against' nor 'multitude for.' 'Multitude against' means resistance to the forces that do not want the common, that block and dissolve it, that separate and reappropriate it privately. 'Multitude for' instead means the affirmation of the common in all its diversity and each of its creative expressions. If we are going to call this a unity, we would have to pose it as a paradoxical unity composed only of differences. But such a formulation only tends to reduce and negate those differences. That's why we prefer concepts like multiplicity and singularity here.

What you say about unity imposed from within is closer to what we would say, but we're still convinced that unity is the wrong concept. Anyone who has experienced instances of political struggle and episodes of exodus, knows that the articulations between the 'against' and the 'for,' which are constitutively and ontologically real and positive, are created within the movement itself. Even the Leninist vanguard (or the one imagined by Lukács) were not something outside but rather constructed within the movement itself.

But why unity? You seem to think that the only way for forces of resistance to challenge the dominant powers today is to unite, even if that unification might run counter to our desires for democracy, freedom, and singularity. It is a concession, you seem to be saying, that we must regrettably accept, faced with the hard realities of power. We're not convinced. In fact, even if one were to accept for a moment only thinking in terms of effectiveness and suspend all political desires, we do not think that unity is even the key to effectiveness. Let's descend from the conceptual formulations we've been working with and think just in terms of the concrete, practical, political struggles of resistance today. Would they really be more effective if they were unified? Isn't the power of some of them directly linked to their internal diversities and their expressions of freedom? What the concept of multitude indicates instead, (and we see this emerging in movements everywhere today) is a social organization defined by the ability to act in common without unification.

B&S: What role does isomorphism – between, say, this capacity of the multitude to act in common without unification, and the 'mixed constitution' of Empire itself – play in *Multitude*? We are thinking, again, of the figure of the network, which is simultaneously a description of the material form of contemporary global power, the necessary form of counter-insurgencies opposed to this power, and a model for a common life formed among singularities. Another can be seen in the concept of the multitude itself, which finds an isomorphic parallel in the 'enormous powers of abstraction' of the world of finance (though you also add that the expression of social wealth in finance 'is distorted by the private ownership and control in the hands of the few' [310]). How should we relate these isomorphisms to, first, our understanding of the historical conditions of possibility for the expression of the democratic potential always already present in the multitude, and, second, to the framing of contemporary political strategy – actions intended to actualize the latent potential of the multitude?

H&N: You are right to emphasize the isomorphisms in our book. It might be helpful to think of them first in relation to the isomorphisms in Foucault's work, especially in his archeological phase. One thing that isomorphisms do for him is to help recognize the coherence and consistency across the different regions of

a specific era or social formation. The ruptures between periods are marked most clearly by the shift to a new isomorphic figure. What this analysis of isomorphic relations does not illuminate in Foucault, however, are the differences between the strategies of power and those of resistance. Looking strictly at these isomorphic relations, in other words, power and resistance both have the same form and can thus appear indistinguishable. And this is also true in our work, as you point out.

All of this analysis of isomorphisms, however, is really limited to a purely descriptive perspective. Isomorphisms are descriptive mechanisms in the sense that they relate to a certain 'mode of exposition.' This scene appears completely differently when we shift from a descriptive to an ontological standpoint. From an ontological point of view, each of these descriptive mechanisms are driven by a fundamental motor, which we could call, depending on the case, either the motor of living labor or that of the 'march of freedom.' When we adopt the standpoint of the dynamic of living labor, then, we can see how the network of struggles is prior to the figures of capitalist rule, from the technological transformations to changes in the working day, even to the forms of the world of finance – everywhere, in other words, that are constituted the collective figures of the management of capital. The construction of a democratic horizon of the multitude demands breaking the solidity and repeated affirmation or reconstruction of the general and abstract model of the productive and financial network of capital. This is, first of all, an ontological rupture, that is, a kind of flight, a moving going far away, an exodus, or really a decision that marks the non-recuperability from the standpoint of capital. This does not mean that one cannot or should not use the institutions of capital for revolutionary purposes. It is rather a matter of trying to find on the network all the privileged points of intervention and thus of rupture. When the multitude manages to act on these points, it is not simply posing some kind of inverted isomorphism (along the lines of negative dialectic) but rather exerts the force of immaterial, cognitive, and affective production, according to the design required by the construction of the common, which is implicit in this production.

B&S: Speaking of the dialectic, then: what's so wrong with it? We've asked you this question in different ways before. To us, many of your profoundest insights are profoundly dialectical – even classically so – and yet the dialectic is, both in *Multitude* and *Empire*, treated as anathema. Of course there is much in Hegel that needs to be discarded, as is true with every other philosopher who is still vital today. One does not swallow even Spinoza whole. And as with some other philosophers we can think of, there are embarrassing vulgar appropriations, even historically very powerful ones, that must be rigorously disavowed. But as you know, there is a consequent rethinking of Hegel today that regards much of the Hegelian stereotype – teleological, Eurocentric, panlogicist, the

usual suspects – as simply irrelevant to what is most important in Hegel. At one point you point to the Butler/Laclau/Žižek debate as evidence that even arguments around the dialectic are useless and boring. But Žižek – whatever the merits of his recent attempt to uncover a thoroughly Hegelian Deleuze – won that exchange hands down!

H&N: We don't disagree that Žižek won that exchange, as you say, but that doesn't make these arguments about the dialectic any more useful or interesting for us. It is worth repeating that if by dialectic you mean simply to emphasize the web of relatedness of material reality (à la Bertel Ollman), then we have no argument against it. But if you mean by dialectic instead, a teleological movement that can only recognize differences as contradictions and then recuperate every difference in a final unity – and this is how we understand Hegel – then we do have a problem. What might be most at stake here in the context of our present discussion is the concept of multiplicity itself, which we see as denied by the Hegelian dialectic.

You are right, however, that there is no need to remain fixed in our understanding of such historical figures. We should be both rigid in our opposition to the teleology, Eurocentrism, and other aspects you point to, and open to new interpretations of Hegel. (Perhaps what Žižek was trying, by the way, was not to discover a Hegelian Deleuze, but rather to bring out the Deleuzian aspects of Hegel, which could, of course, make us more sympathetic to the endeavor.)

B&S: As your chiasmus suggests, there is an interesting common ground here. But for now we'd like to suggest a Hegelian version of a moment we take to be central to your own work: the moment when the multitude 'appears as a subject and declares, 'another world is possible.'' Is what you are proposing not the explosive transition from a 'multitude in itself' to the 'multitude for itself'? The difficulty you pose is how such a transition is possible without the unity imposed by sovereign rule or something like it (say, party discipline). The analogy you make with neuroscience is compelling. The brain does not have a center of command; it makes 'decisions' without itself being a real unity. What looks and feels in our daily life like a subjective decision is in fact the outcome of innumerable parallel processes without any particular center. Consciousness is, in Tor Nørretranders's memorable phrase, no more than a 'user illusion,' a convenient heuristic.[5] This all seems reasonable and even obvious, but what it doesn't yet address is the 'reality of the appearance.' Yes, consciousness may be all appearance, a mere illusion of central command, but what hasn't been asked is what would happen if the illusion were taken away. It seems as though the illusion is itself a vital – and therefore real – part of the functioning of the real processes it masks.

Can we then read the analogy back again into political subjecthood? Is the illusion of transcendent unity essential to the functioning of a real immanent multiplicity? Is it possible that the structure of sovereignty (or something like it) is in fact necessary for the construction of a political subject, a fiction which is nonetheless essential to the real operation of constituent power?

H&N: Your question is very subtle and poses an interesting compromise between a theoretical recognition (of multiplicity) and a political necessity (of unity). We are not convinced, though, about the need for a unitary political subject. Maybe the becoming 'for itself' of the multitude is only a definitive explosion of the ontological unity that all the concepts of the political – the concepts of authority, sovereignty, and the subject – tried to express.

It seems to us that today rather than seeking the kind of guarantees that (even the appearance of) unity provides, we should emphasize the risks, uncertainty, and possibilities of our situation. In our current period of interregnum, poised as we are at the far edge of modernity, we might think again of the kinds of creativity that characterized Florentine Humanism in its birth. In the beginning, being was given (in a neoplatonic way) between nothingness and desire, and it emerged in the discovery of the new. It was a difficult path through a dark forest, not a well-lit highway. Once again the Foucauldian concepts seem adequate to this: genealogy and *dispositif*, episteme and production of the self are tools for working in this context of uncertainty. And what leads us through all this, it seems to us, is desire.

B&S: There are two related concepts introduced in *Empire* which play an important role in the discussion of war and democracy in *Multitude*: biopolitics and immaterial labor. You argue convincingly that immaterial (or affective) labor has become hegemonic—not because most people on earth are now paid to produce affects, but because like factory labor before it (which never eclipsed agricultural labor in terms of sheer numbers), it has now imposed a tendency on all other forms of labor. This tendency requires all forms of labor to 'informationalize, become intelligent, become communicative, become affective' (109). Since the term 'immaterial' suggests misleadingly that labor has lost its material character, you propose that we think of this new tendency as 'biopolitical labor... labor that creates not only material goods but also relationships and ultimately social life itself' (109). Couldn't we describe every form of labor as producing both relationships and social life? Would it be wrong to see labor – all forms of labor – as necessarily affective in significant ways that makes it difficult to draw such distinctions? Biopolitics names in part the blurring of the traditional distinctions between the economic, the political, the cultural, and the social. But isn't it the case that these distinctions were conceptual and that these fields were always blurred?

H&N: Yes, certainly, labor has always produced immaterial goods. If you read Petronius you can see how the slaves produced affective goods. And the Christian and Islamic medieval scribes were just as alienated in their copying as are the contemporary information and computer workers. Even the mass auto and steel workers who supported the coordinated organization of industrial labor created community both in the productive process and in their strikes: affects and productive intelligence went hand in hand with the daily toil of producing. What is different today, however, in the era of biopolitical production, is that intellectual and/or affective invention has become the primary source of value and wealth in society. Something that has always existed, in other words, has today gained the dominant position.

But what's interesting here is that you and we both are tending to recast history from our present standpoint – something like how Marx says in the Introduction to the *Grundrisse* that human anatomy contains the key to the anatomy of the ape. Precisely because of the dominance of immaterial production today we tend to see it more clearly than we did before throughout our past. Because this immaterial labor directly produces relationships and social life, in other words, we can see more clearly than ever that capital is really aimed at the production of social relations. The production of material commodities – such as refrigerators, automobiles, and soybeans – are really only the midpoints in the productive process. The real objects are the social relations that these material commodities create or facilitate. From the standpoint of an economy dominated by immaterial production we can see this more clearly than ever, and, looking retrospectively, reorient our history in line with this recognition.

B&S: One of the most surprising things for us about *Multitude* was the clear distinction between its relation to Marx and its relation to Marxism. In many ways your excursus on Marx's method is a defense of your own method against 'orthodox' Marxists – we might prefer to say those who, against the spirit of Marx's own analysis, refuse to historicize Marx. You point to several analogous procedures between your work and Marx's, each of which leads you to conclusions that are different from an 'orthodox' Marxian line but nonetheless already legible, more or less inchoately, in Marx's own writings.

One important parallel you don't mention is the coincidence in Marx of the hegemonic form of labor and the hegemonic form of exploitation. In the classical Marxian analysis, the proletariat both produces the industrial order and has the most to gain from moving beyond it. Now while immaterial labor is increasingly widespread and in some circumstances well-remunerated, you make the case that the poor – through migrations, linguistic invention, modes of sociability, traditional knowledges, and so on – produce much of our life in common. In fact, 'the poor embody the ontological condition . . . of productive life itself.' As in Marx, the hegemonic form of exploitation and the hegemonic

form of labor coincide. Why not follow a step farther and call the poor a revolutionary class? Why not say the problem is the formation of the propertyless masses, already a class in itself – Robert Kurz's 'monetary subjects without money,' people included in capitalism but absolutely without capital – into a class-for-itself? Why is the problem one of forming the multitude into a political subject instead of forming the poor ('and its allies,' as they used to say) into one?

H&N: First of all, the poor cannot constitute a class. Poverty is an ideal limit, even though the poor themselves are a material reality – even when they simply in a mass way demand alms, they participate in the collective of human activity and its modes of life. The poor help us understand the power of the common. One of our polemical points about the poor (and you seem to have accepted this) is that we should not really consider the poor as excluded, both because the activity of the poor is socially productive and because when the desire of the poor (or their indignation or hatred, as Spinoza would say) becomes concrete then it is included, constituting an object of collective desire. But none of that makes the poor a separate class.

More importantly, though, we do not accept the notion that an analytical recognition of the dominance of a form of labor in the economy should imply the dominance of that class in the political struggle. For that reason, when we say that immaterial labor has become dominant today over other forms of labor, this does not mean for us that immaterial producers should be granted a dominant role in political struggles. Think of all the tragedies this logic has led to in the past: posing the political priority of industrial workers over peasants, male wage workers over female domestic workers, and so forth. Our notions of the poor and the common lead us instead to an expansive and open conception of the proletariat.

B&S: We'd like to ask you a question we imagine you are tired of hearing, but perhaps we can ask it in a new way. Once again, we are wholly persuaded by your conclusions about the mixed constitution of Empire and the necessarily supranational basis for resistance to it. At the same time many of our colleagues in the global South insist that the central issue for the Left should be one of national self-determination. And they have a point. In many third world countries whose economies are determined in large part by other nations, by international institutions, and by large corporations and financial markets over which they have little control, the question of even a moderately progressive political program becomes intimately bound up with the question of national self-determination. Think of the South African government's shameful eviction of squatters in the name foreign capital's interest in the stability of property rights, or the currency markets' attempted blackmail of the Brazilian electorate. Of course the question of self-determination is easily diverted

into narrowly nationalistic goals, and of course the emerging global sovereignty of Empire cannot be successfully opposed by a reactionary insistence on national sovereignty. At the same time, in much of the world it seems like the national question is not only still important but remains, in fact, primary. So do you think that resistance to Empire can have both a national and a supranational basis? Or are these two perspectives ultimately incompatible or antagonistic? The former position is of course the more attractive one, but there are reasons to be skeptical about it.

H&N: This is an important question and we're not sure it can be answered in a general way. As you suggest, national and supranational political struggles are not necessarily mutually exclusive. We tried, for example, in the excursus on geopolitics to point toward ways that international efforts of subordinated nations can effectively block or counter some of the policies of global capital and its institutions. It is clear, in other words, that a single country, such as Argentina, cannot successfully challenge or transform the policies of the IMF or the WTO, but that together with a coalition of countries including perhaps Brazil, China, India, and South Africa such an operation could be successful, at least in a limited way. The break up of the Cancun WTO meetings is one such example. Maybe we should think of this as a shift from dependency theory (which could imply a strategy of national self-determination) to a theory of interdependency, relying on such coalitions of national powers.

We should keep in mind, of course, that all of these notions, of strategic alliances with what we call the aristocracies of Empire (including these subordinated national governments), are only provisory. It is important for the multitude to engage with them but important, too, never to concede its fate to them.

B&S: In *Multitude*, you again employ italicized 'inserts' and shaded sections that are described as excursuses. In *Empire*, the inserts were meant as homage to Spinoza's use of *scholie* in the *Ethics*, and were spaces that opened up different modes of interaction with the ideas of the book. Do the inserts in *Multitude* have the same formal function? And what of the three exercuses that deal with questions of method, organization and strategy?

H&N: The inserts in *Multitude* do have the same function, again like Spinoza's *scholie*, to break the discussion and approach the issue from a different perspective. Each insert accomplishes this in a different way. We thought for a while during the composition of *Multitude* of creating a more systematic function for the different inserts. One of our ideas (now with Marx in mind rather than Spinoza) was to have some inserts that would attack the 'holy families' – that is, common prejudices of thought – and others that would present 'Paris Communes' – that is, historical instances of innovations of revolutionary struggle. The insert on Huntington could have been an example of the former

and the inserts on Shays' Rebellion, Berlin, Seattle, and the White Overalls examples of the latter. But we never managed to work it out in such a systematic way.

The excursuses are different. We think of them as supplements that bring together and deepen the political discussion. It occurred to us too while we were writing that it would make sense to read simply the three excursuses together: method, organization, and geopolitics. They would give one view on the political project as a whole.

B&S: We admire the restraint that you have employed in drawing 9/11 and the current war in Iraq into your analysis of the challenges facing the constitution of a global democracy. While you don't shy away from talking about these events, they don't dominate your analysis: they are part of a much larger narrative about biopolitics and biopower – certainly part of the story of contemporary politics, but not the single dominant event or issue that must of necessity play a decisive role in political strategy or theory. Some of our colleagues have cited 9/11 and the flexing of US national power as proof positive against the account of the 'mixed constitution' of contemporary sovereignty that underlies *Empire*. This seems to us to clearly be a mistake – a kind of presentism that overrides what is of necessity a long-scale analysis. In composing *Multitude*, how much attention did you give to how you would address the problems raised by 9/11?

H&N: You're right that we have tried to analyze 9/11 and the Iraq War not as epochal ruptures but as the terrible, horrendous symptoms of an event that had already happened. As you say, it is much more useful to pose these in the context of a broader historical analysis. Already before September 2001 we had begun the chapter on global civil war and the question of violence. So for us, perhaps, all of that just reinforced what we were thinking.

B&S: We'd like to end in the same way as *Multitude*: with love. Love appears already in the interstices of *Empire* (in relation, for instance, to the different forms of love identified by Spinoza), and recently militant Pauline love has become a touchstone for a kind of officially atheist (we have our doubts about this) Left version of Christianity. What is the importance of love to the politics of the present – and the democracy that is to come?

H&N: This is an intuition we have that is not fully worked out yet. It should be possible to articulate a series of terrains that the theme of love can open in the field of political science: love as the free expression of bodies, as intelligence plus affect, as generation against corruption. But there is an enormous cultural weight that makes it difficult to develop such a political concept of love. We need to free the concept of love from the confines of the romantic couple and strip it of all its sentimentality. We need a completely materialist conception

of love, or really an ontological conception: love as power of the constitution of being.

Yes, as you suggest, Christianity (as well as Judaism and probably also the other religions) does present a political concept of love. We think of ours primarily as a Spinozian conception of love, but you know, of course, how deeply embedded he was in the Christian and Judaic traditions. Love for Spinoza is based on a double recognition: recognizing the other as different and recognizing that the relationship with that other increases our power. For Spinoza, then, love is the increase of our power accompanied by the recognition of an external cause. Note that this is not some notion of love in which all difference is lost in the embrace of a binding unity – a notion common to most Christian theologians. No, this is a love based on multiplicity. And this is exactly how we conceive the multitude: singularity plus cooperation, recognition of difference and of the benefit of a common relationship. It's in that sense that we say that the project of the multitude is a project of love.

Notes

1 Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 2000): 411.

2 G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on Fine Art*, Vol. I, trans. T.M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975): 89.

3 Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin, 2004). Page references in the body of the interview refer to this text.

4 Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia UP, 1994): 2.

5 Tor Nørretranders, *The User Illusion: Cutting Consciousness Down to Size* (New York: Viking, 1998).