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## Welcome to paper#3

Two years after 911 the global cup looks both half full and half empty. It's hard to be optimistic, yet there are plenty of reasons for it. With the Bush-Blair war machine running out of steam, the movement of movements shifts its attention to alternatives for the WTO, Security Council and similar post-democratic bodies. In the moral desert of the Iraq War the structuration of imaginary consent through the repetitive bombardment of the image began to show severe cracks in credibility. These discrepancies within the represented result in a heightened need for action. The Iraq war didn't fool any one and both sides are still reeling a little from the shock. While maintaining their anger, people moved on from protest to a collective search for that other, possible world. What might a global democracy look like? Would it be a system with representatives and 'rights,' or rather a dynamic set of events, without higher aims?

The focus of this publication digs into two concerns many artists, theorists and activists have had over the past decade: the fight for open architectures of modern communication tools and the support for refugees and migration to

## Geneva reloaded

Over the past months activists and artists with different backgrounds ranging from indymedia centers to the noborder-networks, from the free software movement to community media, from grassroots campaigns to hacker culture have been widely discussing how to intervene outside of, counter, or as alternatives to the agenda and organisation of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) from December 10 to 12 in Geneva, Switzerland. Geneva03 is an open, loose and temporary association of groups and individuals who are currently preparing a series of events around the WSIS. The common goal is to create autonomous spaces for tactical, grassroots, activist and community media of all kinds. Peer-to-peer technology, open source software and networked communications have become embedded, unalterable facts of a so-called information society. The actual challenge is to strengthen and extend these practices into a global culture of knowledge sharing, unfettered access and free communication. This means leaving the false dichotomy between "real" and "virtual" behind, and both shaping and subverting the technologies that are now

## Everyone is an expert 2.0

How is the shifting European border regime affecting the everyday life of people in the border regions? What kind of stories, experiences and desires do people have, who live on the one or the other side of one of the new borders of the official Europe? "Everyone is an expert 2.0" is crossing the borders from the real to the virtual Europe searching for something, so many are longing for: The possibility to move freely while being able to communicate freely. The categorical imperative of the projects is connectivity, no matter where and even if it is only temporary. "Everyone is an expert 2.0" is a mobile device that explores new forms of subjectivity on the margins of Europe with the means of mobile communication technology. "Everyone is an expert 2.0" consists of a white van equipped with audio and video editing units, mixers, soundsystem, two servers, antennas for wireless networking and a satellite dish for a bi-directional internet connection which can be established within a couple of minutes. In 2003 the van was touring from Barcelona, Geneva, Romania, Apulia, Croatia and Amsterdam. "Everyone is an expert" sets up ad-hoc networking for multiple purposes ranging from a roaming webcasting unit to a mobile online-library; from a wireless discotheque to an open-source job-market; from internet workshops on wheels to event-coverage in real-time. Logfiles are available at: <http://www.expertbase.net>

## Discordia

DISCORDIA is a new, collaborative weblog working at the intersections of art, dissent, theory, tech culture and politics. Discordia is an online discussion forum where YOU post and moderate and filter the content. Non-English threads are encouraged. Discordia is not a replacement for mailing lists. Its name is pronounced "Discordia 'R Us." Discordia has been developed by a diverse group of people distributed across six time zones working together exclusively online. The developers group is looking for editors who want to kick off this exciting webtool. Discordia is now ready to welcome participation from people in any time zone writing in any language. See you online. URL: <http://discordia.us>

## The Fourth World War

While our airwaves are crowded with talk of a new world war, narrated by generals and filmed from the noses of bombs, the human story of this global conflict remains untold. "The Fourth World War" is a new film that brings together the images and voices of the war on the ground. It is a story of a war without end from the front-lines of conflicts in Mexico, Argentina, South Africa, Palestine, Korea, 'the North' from Seattle to Genova, and the 'War on Terror' in New York, Afghanistan, and Iraq, and the story of men and women around the world who resist being annihilated in this war. The product of over two years of filming on the inside of movements on five continents, "The Fourth World War" is a film that would have been unimaginable at any other moment in history. Directed by the makers of "This Is What Democracy Looks Like" and "Zapatista", produced through a global network of independent media and activist groups, it is a truly global film from our global movement. <http://www.bignoisefilms.com>

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## Distribution

This free paper, a product of collaborative text filtering, appeared in a circulation of 5,000 and was produced to mobilize for the counter activities during the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in Geneva, December 2003. The makers used the fourth Next Five Minutes festival of tactical media makers in Amsterdam (September 11-14) as an ideal deadline and hub for distribution. The newspaper will also be available during the second European Social Forum in Paris, early November. Previous papers appeared during the Munich Make World festival (October 2001) and the first European Social Forum (November 2002).

## Location

<http://www.makeworlds.org>  
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abolish repressive border regimes. One may ask: why these two? There are so many other concerns, such as gender issues, global warming, poverty, fair trade. It is not at all arbitrary. We found out that the demand to combine the freedom of movement with the freedom of communication is social dynamite. To conceptualize free software in relation to the rights of migrant workers is a powerful, contemporary struggle that questions a variety of agendas.

How to break open the easy assumption of WSIS and NGOism in general that a mutual comprehensibility of concerns is always already a given point of departure? The assumption of a general communicability of concerns is perhaps one of the more problematic gestures of a world summit dedicated to issues of communication. Central to this trend is the spread of a homogenizing civil society discourse: one of the ways in which WSIS and similar events structure the 'grassroots' long before any actual encounter takes place.

While it would be easy to assume that all we need is a couple of open access/commons ideas from anglo-american media theory and stir it into an emerging dynamic of multitudinal self-organization to see the counter info-society in the interstices of the existing one, there might be the need, especially when the agenda is communication and information, for some constitutive openness.

This eclectic mix has no claim to representativeness and does not presume that there is already a shared common sense, even within our own circles, on what the conceptual elements of a counter-discourse are. We just tried to make some legitimate and illegitimate connections between discussions, debates and projects that we are involved in or concerned with. Feel free to use and re-use but don't

part of the everyday life of more and more people. It's about refusing and resisting both, war and info war, border management and digital rights management, exploitation of immaterial work and informalized labor. It's about freedom of movement and freedom of communication which we intend to bring into existence for every human being on this globe BY ANY MEANS NETWORKING: <http://www.geneva03.org>

## What is to be done again?

WASTUN.ORG is a quarterly Hybrid Media Journal which will be relaunched in December 2003. It has been developed from the web version of a television evening dedicated to new forms of political activism that was commissioned by the german-french broadcasting station arte. The projects aims to intervene in the stagnating debates around globalization by releasing an online-publication on a regular basis that contains up to date contributions in a global view. WASTUN.ORG is based on an interactive Streaming Media Platform, that has been started as a prototype for the digitization of the "arte" theme evening. The existing platform will be further developed as the kernel of a Hybrid Media Journal. The essential feature of WASTUN.ORG is its interactivity: Editors as well as registered users, guest authors as well as invited visitors, regular contributors as well as random visitors, they will all have access to the vast array of available materials that will be systematically extended to an archive of videos and stories from all over the world. In order to tell new stories, the users can mix and remix the clips of other contributors with their own material from their desktop, which they also can upload to the system. Old and new clips are constantly being interwoven and built by new contributions making different relations with those already uploaded. <http://www.wastun.org>



# Online generation

Arianna Bove and Erik Empson

They went to war, we responded ‘don’t do

it’. The war was yes/no - on/off - and bina-

ry citizenship hardly had a chance to con-

sider. And with this the democratic peoples

of the world tasted what is suffered day to

day by its majority; the blind indifference of

Power. As the military curtain fell, repre-

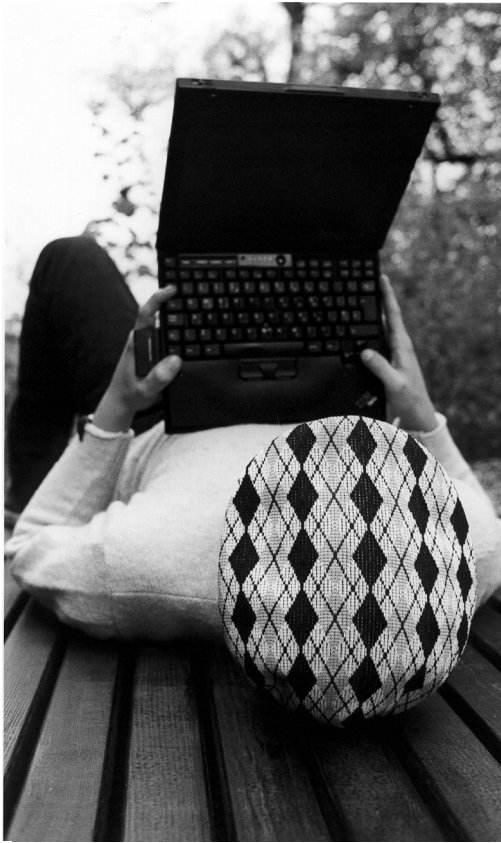
sentative democracy issued a sigh and

went to sleep.

Hypocrisy, for a long time the official business of politics is now its paymaster. And only with blind hypocrisy could we continue to satisfy our ‘will to do something’ by tacitly delegating it to the official apparatus that is now perpetrating war. The resulting moral lack informs all practice. The same injunction of the need to act informed the political spectrum from the US military to the Aid Agencies and from the embedded journalists to the Anti-War Coalitions. The large scale F15 protests seethed with an unnerving sense of loss of the old rituals of consent creation. Not a new political activism but nostalgia for the old contretemps between people and state. Enfranchised only by commerce and the fourth estate, only by protesting against it could people participate in such a ‘historic’ event and show their solidarity with its awesome post-S11 manufactured gravitas. There seems to be nothing distinctly political behind the urge to act, and without serious delusions we cannot accept the sovereign mythology that political decisions are the outcome of popular will. Kicked to the floor, our desire that has no single object divides into voluntarist enthusiasm or despair. What happens in the intervals between Power’s spectacular events and ‘historic moments’, when the daylight armies have retreated, when the indignation wanes and gradually resigns itself to reproducing the ridiculous and mundane present?

## Outside of Routine

In the diffuse spaces of the internet, in place of the vacuous vessel we are instructed to see as ‘politics’, this urge is continuously manifesting itself in a host of far more concrete, embracing and profound collaborative forms. Less and less an escape from day-to-day life these moments of communication outside of the routine are increasingly constitutive of the wider sociality of human life. The new user/ producers’ joy is not something that has disappeared whilst internet technologies and cultures have proliferated and matured. Rather, the mutual self-exposure allows for consciousness to operate within its own global milieu: not just the discovery of new things, but



uncovering of distant elements that whilst influential have never before been seen as tangible. In face of this, elements of the ‘political’ tend to recede from immediate relevance to daily life. In fact, the process of becoming- producer within this mode of production undermines the spatial, affective and political separation of the producer from his product. In order to be effective the political and legal apparatus have to respond to this new dimension of production to regulate the reproduction of social life.

They say knowledge is the new capital and information its currency. What types of combination does the networked society produce and how does the control over information determine the kinds of collectivities possible? It seems right that the satisfaction of immediate and alienated desires should have been the explosive use of the mass use of information networks.

## Flash mobs

But for us in its own spectacularly inane way, the online generation of the smart mob is emblematic of the growing recognition of the power to associate and combine, irrespective of any particular agenda or actual purpose. This online generation fascinated the print media expressing how acutely the establishment fears the potentially spilling over of freedom of information to spontaneous freedoms of association on the street. In the political imaginary the mob is the uncontrollable element, it is faceless and attacks power with an unreasonable energy and with no due regard for the game of war. Clearly the participants in the flash mob were not a mob in this sense at all, nor particularly spontaneous but following banal and premeditated instructions before predetermined dispersal. And yet, perhaps by the very fact that it carried the name ‘mob’ and appeared as if from nowhere this content-less form of activity seemed to show how in and of themselves urban movements successfully generated online would by necessity have a character that either disrespects or side steps the consecrated mechanisms of political assembly and representation. In its practice rather than its ideas, the flash mob carried with it a critique of the moral vacuity behind the phoney radicalism of proxy politics, the moribund apparatuses of speaking for but saying nothing. By operating in an empty space with an empty signifier, the impulsive moral lack that is conventionally disguised by political rhetoric, banners and slogans are sent up by issuing a purer form of their organisation of banality. In affect if not in intent, generated in the social space of whatever-ness, the flash mob is the practical critique of the politics of representation: making an autonomous spectacle out of oneself. It doesn’t represent anything but it expresses something quite unique: the power of combination in itself to produce affect.

## The Sociality of Consciousness

‘What is to be done’ is the perfect corollary to this desire without demands, the sense of loss of something never possessed and the impulsive drive to act. Unlike its vanguardist form the question does not conceal an answer: it is generated as much out of our voluntarist enthusiasm as our exasperation. Whilst the objects of our desire are transitory our desire isn’t. What do we make of the instruments at our disposal, with all this data, opportunity and the commons that past generations bequeathed? The problem of information is not simply one of bandwidth or its control. Crucial is the quality of information we exchange and what we make of it. As little as it matters today what soggy rag of someone else’s tabloid radicalism we in yesteryear touted on some barren street corner, as little does it matter today which oeuvre of any architect of established consciousness we ransack for ideas to toss out into the e-traffic. As it ever was, it’s the meeting of fellow travellers and at other times the enemy in the process that counts as the constitutive moment. However, like never before, ‘political strategy’ has come to inhibit the proliferation of the inter-subjective moment. In our small and partial way we have understood that answering the question ‘what is to be done’ involves an uneasy turn away from politics and from the acceptance of a necessary and given

position within a fixed order: the difficulty of participating within the dark fibre of social life without turning its projects into institutions and their spirit into codes of conduct.

The British affair of the Iraq dossier and the hapless David Kelly resonated around three astounding incredulities: that a government minister would sex up its propaganda, that its content was plagiarised from a student and, seemingly the most astonishing of all, that it was found on the internet. Is this all really so hard to believe? Knowledge and information are not individual production and ideas are not reducible to data. Partly knowing this drives our ambition to attain a social space for the production and dissemination of meaning that is worthy of the sociality of consciousness. Rather than autopoietic confidence, it were a sense of weakness and vulnerability under the saturation of the structuring of information into regimes of truth that created the shared need for projects like generation-online and the thousand other initiatives like it.

## Affective Communications

In the excitement of the last few years, there was a real possibility of the practice of defining the multitude of contributing something to the conscious fabric of what it might designate, of what it might become through communicating its idea and the honest interrogation of its practice. Through affective communication expanding our sense of possibility of creatively altering the actual. For those that took up this rare challenge it has continued to be a point of reference in practice. For others who squandered the opportunity by shit-shovelling prejudice, it was only ever going to be a nauseating negative moment. And yet how the concept multitude caught on in both senses is indicative of the state of the common and the extent to which the elements could identify in the mutual diffusion and with collective ethos. Despite all the resources having been made available a few clicks away, the texts and genealogies, debates and inquiries being free and available and despite the hundreds and thousands of committed individuals that saw themselves in it and part of a minor theoretical revolution, this participation and mutual creation was to remain officially unseen by the majoritarian sectors of the the production of meaning. Instead of engagement, the architects of established consciousness circulated only prejudice and practised only exclusion.

## Space of the Unrepresentable

Lacking any marketable spectacular properties, the production of meaning in networked society goes almost entirely unnoticed by the commercial media until it effects directly the property relations it universally upholds. But this exposes the disparities of the information war. We tried to analyse the words and concepts used in reflexive political discourse and social discourse, in order to get closer to what are the unwritten and unexpressed mechanisms of power. Maybe what we found in that space of the unrepresentable was two vulnerabilities of modern capitalist regimes: Being social, our words concepts and ideas can only be made private property through the intervention of an absented politics. Interiorising these property relations or allowing information to be structured by them is a process of atrophy, the cancellation of part of their social power and a restraint on production in general. Secondly that the becoming minoritarian that responds to this parcelisation of the intellect is an experience in subjectivity and collectivity. It need not be about forging a smug community but harnessing the same power to drift through the reflexive complexities of thought that is immersed in the freedom that the body demands for its desires. Collaborative exploration of the nature of politics in these times is part of its redefinition.



Obviously, reference to a quasi-institutional dynamic of self-organization that remains, cooperations notwithstanding, distinct from a broader transnational social movement grassroots by way of such blanket terms can never do justice to its internal heterogeneity. On the contrary, the popularity of terms like NGO and civil society might create a false sense of communicability and comparability, glossing over incommensurabilities that originate in differences in agenda as well as access to the very arenas through which this dynamic reproduces itself.

And yet, whatever their conceptual utility, terms like ‘non-state’, ‘non-governmental’, and ‘civil’ at least suggest that it is a mistake to approach this dynamic nexus without attention to the role of the state, the (violent) transformation of its institutional makeup (neoliberalism, supranationalism), and a corresponding transformation of its conceptual articulation (de- and reterritorialization of sovereignty) - not least because there would be no ‘information society’ without it. While not altogether arbitrary, the following is by no means comprehensive:

Non-State and Non-Market

Beyond the difficulty of assessing the consequences of a reliance on corporate support by NGOs of all stripes, an autonomous corporate grassroots (astro-turf) has emerged [1] whose complexity is little understood and requires, among other things, a meticulous detailing of ‘revolving doors’ between corporations, government, and the ‘non-profit’ sector.

NGOs as Geopolitical Instruments

Humanitarianism is often a harbinger of things to come for civil society actors in general, which is why I think that developments there deserve close attention. The dependence on support from development agencies and governments is not new, contemporary international civil society has its roots in post-WWII relief organization and remained, for better or worse, closely connected to shifting foreign policy agendas throughout the cold war. After the cold war, the quasi-subsumption of humanitarian civil society organizations to states-at-war has been actively encouraged by activists in support of the paradoxical politics of ‘humanitarian intervention’.

In Afghanistan and Iraq, this state-non-state nexus has both achieved a new quality and aggravated the constitutive crisis of legitimacy that (also) defines humanitarianism. The attack on the UN in Iraq has already been interpreted as a threshold event, as evidence that humanitarianism as such, less and less able to strike a credible balance between neutrality and security, is becoming the target of terrorism, and suggests that civil society organization will either have to ally its work even more with the geopolitics of security or, less likely, extricate itself from this nexus altogether. These developments are likely to be relevant to info-rights NGOs, for example, whose work on communication, transparency, etc. ties their efforts to the implementation of ‘good governance’ agendas.

The (Visual) Economy of Conflict

The famous media events associated with major international NGOs, often considered the hallmark of a media-savvy professionalism at the info-societal grassroots, also serve to sustain a general process of self-mediatization. Evidence of (short-term) NGO presence at sites of conflict and intervention, for example, is central to the political economy of fundraising and the costly maintenance of institutional infrastructures threatened by the vagaries of public commitment and empathy.

Media-Ecology of the Info-Society

Some suggest that the strength of NGO networks can best be understood in terms of a co-evolution of communications technologies and new organizational structures. Off-the-grid areas are often considered in terms of a techno-utopian not-yet of future incorporation into transnational ICT networks (‘digital divide’) rather than explored as possibly constitutive outsiders they may also be.

Civil Society as the Master Idiom

Related to the false sense of communicability fostered by a shared ICT infrastructure, the growing adoption of ‘civil society organization’ as a means of self-identification signals a convergence of organizational idioms whose implications have yet to be fully understood. In what I simply think is a sad example of this homogenization, an information-rights campaign called ‘speaking for ourselves’ employs a completely formulaic idiom. While it is one thing to employ such terms in project applications as a consequence of a next-to-inevitable standardization of donor criteria, it is another entirely to use them in the articulation of one’s agenda in general. The turn to a liberal interventionism suggested by the adoption of this idiom is facilitated, of course, by the focus on lobbying, expertism, and legal activism already inherent in the NGO approach.

Questions of Accountability

Contrary to popular assumption, the call for accountability and transparency is not (just) a ruse of corporate capitalism to divide and conquer an autonomous ‘third sector’ but comes from within the NGO community as well. Some consultants even interpret the accountability controversy in terms of a ‘paradigm shift’ central to the future of NGO work in general. The glorification of NGOs as champions of a politics of human rights - a role many of them undoubtedly play - homogenizes a contradictory dynamic of institutional self-organization and shields its image even from criticism from within. Often organized as dues- and donations-based membership organizations, many NGOs are nonetheless marked by a constitutive lack of accountability, slow to create their own mechanisms of accountability and therefore still vulnerable to criticism, however dubious the source of such ‘criticism’ may be.

Conservative challenges to ‘leftist’ civil society organization seem to seize the controversial issue of accountability to call into question the legitimacy of ‘civil society’ agendas in general. But questions of accountability and legitimacy are indeed intertwined. The chair of a new UN Panel on ‘Civil Society and UN Relationships’, ex-president of Brazil Fernando Henrique Cardoso, suggests that “[t]he legitimacy of civil society organizations derives from what they do and not from whom they represent or from any kind of external mandate”. Given the tremendous influence of many (northern) NGOs as de facto instruments of extended states, it strikes me as problematic to suggest that the question of ‘in whose name’ they work should not be a matter of concern. Somewhat paradoxically, Cardoso also notes that “contrary to an often idealized self-image, civil society is not the realm of ‘good values and intentions’ in contrast to the logic of power and interests ascribed to national states. Civic and community groups may also advocate for causes that are deeply controversial and, in some instances, incompatible with universally-accepted norms and principles” (ibid.). But beyond the generic idiom of human rights, what is a universally-accepted norm, and who is to decide?

In addition to legitimation from below, be it through an often mythologized ‘grassroots membership’ or support from the communities where the work actually occurs, the UN accreditation of NGOs constitutes an additional means of legitimation, complicating the economy and politics of recognition on which any ‘legitimation’ ultimately depends. The accreditation of corporate lobbying groups like the International Chamber of Commerce or subsidiaries of sects like the Moon-funded so-called World Association of NGOs (WANGO) raises complex questions about the standards of accreditation, but also indicates the limits of any call for accountability as well as the corresponding model of a politics of recognition: some of these organizations may have a perfect record of internal accountability and transparency, and it is perhaps no accident that the World Trade Organization (WTO) received rather high scores in a Global Accountability Report.

At summits, NGOs are given much more than the occasional seat at the table. They are also given an

opportunity to share whatever legitimacy they have - and many of them enjoy greater credibility than the ‘official’ institutions of liberal democracy, a phenomenon that should be interpreted less as evidence of faith in a somehow inherently democratic ‘third sector’ than as a dimension of the ‘state failure’ occurring even in liberal democracies - as a symbolic resource to compensate for crises of legitimacy elsewhere: quite often, ‘stakeholder dialogues’ organized by corporations and intergovernmental organizations, who often think of NGOs as de facto proxies for ‘civil society’ in general, also serve to substantiate whatever claims to legitimacy these actors make themselves. Part of a complex politics of recognition, summits redistribute symbolic resources, and it will be quite instructive to try and track these flows in the context of the WSIS as well.

These are some of the elements that provide the context for new rounds of ‘civil society’ and ‘stakeholder’ participation in inter-governmental events in general. The dynamic nexus of ‘international civil society’ is inextricably intertwined with geopolitics and a new politics of war that is simultaneously a political economy and a visual economy. Like almost everything else that can be said on the topic of NGOism, this is a banality, but rather than constituting the point of departure, it often comes as an afterthought, if at all. Contrary to the self-celebration of the growing autonomy of an expanding international civil society, these concerns can neither be easily dismissed nor answered, as they go to the heart of the institutional logic of what ‘NGOism’ and civil society organization are all about. The very autonomy of ‘civil society’ may, for example, come at the price of a neoliberal transformation of the state whose agenda is perfectly compatible with a ‘deterritorialization’ and ‘devolution’ of elements of its sovereignty. Similarly, the growing support for NGOs from the UN may well be a sign of its own crisis of legitimacy and lack of funding, deliberately cash-starved by some of its member organizations.

In a commentary on the accountability controversy, Simon Burall, director of the UK One World Trust that supports the Global Accountability Project, writes: “There are no direct channels for democratic representation to global decision-making forums such as the UN General Assembly and associated conferences, the Security Council, the World Bank, the WTO or any of the 300 other intergovernmental organisations affecting the lives of individuals and communities the world. Without direct channels, there is no way for competing interests to be balanced nor for a global political consensus around issues as pressing as poverty, the environment and global security to be built. For better or worse, NGOs are the only organisations currently able to bring the views of interest groups to the global level and hence start the process of building consensus”. I doubt that it is a great idea to grant ‘NGO’ and ‘civil society organization’ such a central role in whatever conceptual and organizational idioms we might create. But even if we do, it seems all the more important to reflect on their constitutive limitations as well as the way they may impoverish our ethico-political imagination.

Nexus on the eve

Soenke Zehle

To approach the dynamic of so-called civil

society organization in the context of the

World Summit on the Information Society

(WSIS), it might make sense to attempt to

identify some of the trends occurring across

what is often referred to as the ‘NGO com-

munity’ or ‘international civil society’ more

generally.

# Public Sphere Labour and Multitude

Antonio Negri

I am perplexed when faced with the issue

of the common. Every time I set out to fol-

low this theme it flees in all directions

because it is so pregnant with modern and

ancient ideological suggestions. In fact,

any attempt to distinguish the common

from the private, the state or the public in

the French sense is for me almost impossi-

ble. This is why I don't claim to provide a

conclusive definition and have reservations

when it comes to definitions of strategy.

The common escapes any Marxian positive definition of what is produced. For me, and I am and remain a Marxist, the common is abstract labour: i.e. that set of products and energies of labour that gets appropriated by capital and thus becomes common. Basically, it is the result of the law of value that capitalism that creates the common. In Marx there isn't a conception of the common as pre-capitalist phenomenon (yes, there are the commons, but they are not productive). If we want to reduce and consider the common from a modern conception we must accept this definition of the common as abstract, accumulated and consolidated labour. However, abstract, accumulated and consolidated labour is never merely an economic quantity; it is always a set of relations that are relations of exploitation: hierarchical relations, schemes of division of labour, organisation and social distribution of the functions of command, reproductive hypotheses, consumption capacities etc. etc. Evidently, we have to start conceiving of this as the commonality of exploitation. The question on the common -and here I start getting confused you see because it is always the same word that gets used- is how to take the common away from exploitation. So long as we speak of the common we always speak of the common of exploitation: we are all commonly exploited. The unexploited common has been proposed a thousand times by all utopias, for instance with respect to global goods such as air, water etc. But no! Air and water are not there anymore, there are air and water that are increasingly exploited, absorbed, colonised, made to produce and turned into profit! Only in this way they become common. The great capitalist expansion is that which sets out to get forests, to own air...this is globalisation: what makes common that rainforest that for me would have never been common.

## Investment of Life

How do we liberate the common from exploitation? First of all, we have to grant that capital has, through abstract labour, put us in this happy -so to speak, obviously- situation where we are able to speak about the common. There was no common before the history of capitalism imposed it. Then, we must go and analyse how this common works, and this common largely corresponds to public space and the history of public space, because there is a modern production of public space that is a disciplinary production, i.e. a production of public space organised by the capacity of exerting power over individuals, of commonly putting individuals to work, of imposing a common measure on their labour, a measure so common that all capital (Marx 's and capitalism in general) becomes based on an abstract temporal

measure that constitutes the common [comunanza] of labour. In post-modern production characterised by the investment of life by capital we see a mode of an extension of control not only simply on individuals but also on populations. When we talk of multitude, we do so in the face of this common colonisation of life.

## The Problem of the Common

Why do we start talking of the multitude and pose the problem of the common, at this point, I think, still confusingly? For instance, there was an experiment in the tradition of classical operaismo, of attempting a subjectification of abstract labour. Practically, one of the fundamental elements of this dynamics of the common - of the common exploitation of the common - had come to be the working class: the working class was this attempt to subjectify a series of common structures within capitalist abstraction and capitalist relations of exploitation. We used to call it the capitalist relation, the general relation that sees on the one hand the subjectivity of the capitalist, of the entrepreneur and of capital as such; whilst on the other hand the working class, that of which one did not recognise the concrete specificity, but only looked at its capacity of posing itself within a wage relation, i.e. a quantitative relation, a capacity to divide this productive common. The wage was the ability to take a portion of this common product. Evidently, all this maintained that conception of the common and the working class had as its fundamental goal that of 'managing' that common. Socialism was represented as the management of this common according to the needs of the working class, not very differently from how capital did it, which proposed that this common was used for the reproduction of the system.

I can't understand the public/private distinction from within this scheme, this situation, because I don't think that public or private can identify alternatives at this point to that capitalist common that is the only one we have. The concept of the multitude can only emerge when the key foundation of this process (i.e. the exploitation of labour and its maximal abstraction) becomes something else: when labour starts being regarded, by the subjects involved in this continuous exchange of exploitation, as something that can no longer enter the relation of exploitation. When labour starts being regarded as something that can no longer be directly exploited. What is this labour that is no longer directly exploited? Unexploited labour is creative labour, immaterial, concrete labour that is expressed as such. Of course exploitation is still there, but exploitation is of the ensemble of this creation, it is exploitation that has broken the com-

mon and no longer recognises the common as a substance that is divided, produced by abstract labour, and that is divided between capitalist and worker in structures of command and exploitation. Today capital can no longer exploit the worker; it can only exploit cooperation amongst workers, amongst labourers. Today capital has no longer that internal function for which it became the soul of common labour, which produced that abstraction within which progress was made. Today capital is parasitical because it is no longer inside; it is outside of the creative capacity of the multitude.

## Cooperation of Singularities.

Thus it goes war to perfect its control. War is a fundamental and destructive element that represents its parasitical nature. It is the element that wants to build the capitalist common, that wants to rebuild the body of capital, the people, the global people, the democratic people Bush tells us about, in this attempt to re-interiorise the common; whereas labour as activity constitutes the multitude, a multitude of singularities that is creative. As you can see, the common brings terrible confusion, as I cannot really define it. On the other hand, if I started talking about the common as basis, I would get somewhere. Undoubtedly it is almost impossible to define creative labour today without starting from the common activity of labour, i.e. the common that is construed by the cooperation of creative singularities. It is almost impossible to do it and it is evident that today all institutional economists keep saying: it is external economies, economies of transactions, all this accumulation of intelligence, cultural exchange that constitutes the basis of production of value. But this basis of the production of value is not there unless it goes through the capacity of singularities to make it live each time as provision of living labour. Cooperation itself is part of that creativity of singular labour. It is no longer something that is imposed from outside. We are no longer in that phase of capitalist accumulation that also functions in the construction of the workers' labour capacity to be put into production. Singularities of and in the multitude have assumed cooperation as quality of their labour. Cooperation -and the common- as activity are anterior to capitalist accumulation. Hence we have a common that is a foundation of the economy, only in so far as it is seen as this element of cohesion of the production of singularity within the multitude. Examples of this could be networks and all the consequences of a definition of the common as the phenomenology of the web.

# Makrolab

Marko Peljhan

Makrolab lab operations

gearing towards the end of phase 1,

focus shifting on network operations

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Makrolab, Isola di Campalto, Laguna di Venezia 05.9.03 14.00Z

The MAKROLAB project is an ongoing mobile laboratory setup built for the open and integral research and common work of artists, scientists and tactical media workers in the fields of telecommunications, migrations research, weather and climate. It was first set up in 1997, during the documenta X exhibition in Kassel, Germany, and was consequently operating in Western Australia (Rottnest Island), Slovenia (Veliki Kras) and in the Scottish Highlands (Atholl Estates). The final aim of the project is the establishment of an independent art and science based research station on the Antarctic continent in 2007. On June 13, 2003 the lab in the markllex architecture phase started operations on the island of Campalto (Isola di Campalto), in the Venice Lagoon as part of the Biennale di Venezia art exhibition and the PHARE CBC Interreg IIIA program, organised by Patagonia Art, r:tx and Projekt Atol.

Many discrete projects were and are carried out within the lab by the different crews that were present in it, ranging from the research of the local ecology, to

open source and free software development, telecommunications testing, bird counting and population analysis and water and solid waste recycling and desalinisation system tests. Among art/science projects carried out within the lab, one should point out the project using the SeaStar satellite SeaWiFS (Sea-viewing Wide Field-of-view Sensor) instrument datasets, projects dealing with the quantification and analysis of the life in the lab and a situationist analogue derive mapping project of the city of Venice. Among other things maps of the island were redrawn and remapped and the telecommunications spectrum on the 2.4GHz in Venice was mapped during a "war sailing" session in late August.

This is the list of crews and their projects/tasks within the lab in the past two months and a half:

## SETUP CREW 2003

The task of the setup expeditionary crew was to prepare the terrain for the positioning of the markllex structure on the Island of Campalto, the creation of the network architecture, establishment of the network links, the setup of the autonomous water supply and energy production systems and the setup of the communications console in the Individual Systems

section of the Venice Biennale at the Corderie.

The crew encountered may difficulties during the setup, from simple logistics to problems with bureaucratic delays and the general lack of support within the framework of the Biennale, but it succeeded to establish a network link between the island and Venice, but further delays in the laying of a simple 230V electrical cable, which had to be done by a technician appointed by the organisation delayed the primary network setup for another two weeks.

Labs primary systems came online on July 12 and members of the setup crew used the berths on July 13. The Individual Systems communications console was online and operating on July 12. The setup crew finished work on July 14, when members of the First Expedition Crew started working on the lab.

## EXPEDITION ONE CREW

The first expedition crew worked on the setup of the labs software and hardware sensorics, and was, because of the connectivity problems setting up a second, satellite based link, to complement the first one, that was not operational due to bureaucracy and a ship parked in front of the antennae. The



antennae would just have to be moved higher, but because of access and burocracy problems, this could not happen. The second, satellite based link had to be deployed on an emergency basis. After problems with the ground station in Germany (two terminals online with the same channel delay) and countless communications with the ground station operators (they claimed the problem was on the lab side, but we insisted it was on theirs...) the network finally became fully operational on July 15, a month after the official opening of the Biennale with a 450Kbit down/150Kbit up link. Tests of the water recycling and supply systems were carried out in this time, together with the full test of the lab energy suite, which had to be repaired due to a frequency inconsistency between two power buses.

The first expedition crew, consisting of the LJUDMILA (Ljubljana digital media lab) operators Freljh and Kranjec also continued work on the SLIX release of Knoppix, due to be finished and presented later this year. The first crew finished the work and prepared the lab for the first full crew (8+3), that had to start working for an intense three week period on July 13.

UCSB RESEARCH CREW 1

The UCSB research crew worked on many different concept outlines for future projects connected to the interests of the Makrolab. Two of the more interesting project that have tacmedia connections are the concept for the implementation of an autonomous self powered mesh sensor network, that can be deployed from remote carriers developed by Jungeol Chun and the pStruct network architecture/engine, developed by Ethan Kaplan.

The mesh sensor network architecture is based on an autonomous sensor package bus definition, that will have minimum power and maximum availability qualities. The data gathered by the sensor network can be transmitted, again remotely, by any of the nodes to the central carrier, which has to be located within the desiered and specified range. The project will be finished during late 2003, early 2004 and will be tested during the second phase of the Makrolab Territory 2003 in Campalto. The sensors will be multi-role and multi use, from environmental and chemical sensing, to visual and aural. The mesh architecture will enable the seamless transition of data transmitting capability and full network survivability also under the most difficult of conditions. The pStruct is a Java based framework/engine for the creation of a connectionist oriented website, with an engine that allows for autonomous nodes to exist within a world, reacting to their environment with neural-autonomy and connecting to each other to form an n-dimensional environment. On the foundation level, pStruct is a multithreaded application where every autonomous unit operates independently of each other as a self sustaining thread. The World forms the “blackboard” on which the agents/nodes are run, as well as the arena where protocols, factories and services are run. The main conceptual outline of the project is based on the possible implementation of this architecture on large user group websites, or collaborative online communities and an implementation is planned for the use in the Makrolab during operations in 2004 as the focus of the Network Centric Indentiy Research. Other projects carried out by this crew were projects dealing with the immigration situation in nothern Italy, a project of the remapping of the Campalto island and a project of quantification and analysis of life and work in the lab.

EXPEDITION CREW 2

The second expedition crew worked on the EMM (Electronic Media Monitoring), a mainstay of Makrolab related work since 1997, using the Makrolab Ku and L-band satellite transmissions receiving capabilities. Information and propaganda transmissions from middle eastern and western media were taped and compared and the current telecommunications map of the HF spectrum project was initiated. The EMM team monitored, documented and analysed transmissions and tv information from a variety of sources during the Liberia crisis and followed the “war on terror” and Iraq occupation cover-

age on such diverse TV stations as Al Arabiya, Al Manar, Fox News, BBC, CNN, Sahar, Irin, Irib, Al Jazeera, Syrian TV, Qatar, Kuwait and Saudi TV as well as on the L-band channels. The open source intelligence proceedings of the EMM work will be presented during the OPEN SKY project in Paris in October and on a new online shared resource archive on the Makrolab research webspace in 2004, when the work will be continued. This crew also analysed samples of the water from the labs water recycling system and the source lagoon water, noting extreme pollution levels in the northern part of the lagoon. The filters of the water recycling system, with a nominal life of 30 days in normal conditions, have to be changed every 6 hours for normal water production levels, thus the strain on the system is extreme and it caused many automatic shutdowns and pump system degradation.

DYNE CREW

The DYNE.ORG free software and open source programmers collective occupied the Makrolab for two weeks. A new release of the DYNEBOLIC bootable CD Linux distribution (dynebolic 1.06 makrolab) was finished, together with the porting of the release on a converted XBOX console. The other initiated but not finished project is the porting of the MOSIX cluster management system on the consoles, to create a cheap and affordable cluster computing capability for future general and lab use. DYNE.ORG members also used the lab facilities for the creation of performance situations and helped create the Makrolab online users manual, which is an ongoing effort to present the labs systems to future crews for safe and effective operations. On the mapping side, a “war sailing” operation was conducted from a boat into the city of Venice using three monitoring computers running Kismet. The details of the historical “war sailing” will be released by the DYNE crew in the near future. During the second part of the DYNE crew residency, the balloon in No Man’s land project collective, worked on the preparation and launch of two aerostatic meteorological observation balloons in conjunction and collaboration of the Italian Air Force - Reparto Sperimentazioni di Meteorologia Aeronautica. (ReSMA). At 6.20UTC, 8.20AM local time, a sounding balloon train, consisting of a 600g meteorological sounding ballon of the Italian Air Force Meteorology Service, a recovery parachute, a 2.4GHz imaging system of the balloon in No Man’s Land project and a radar reflector was succesfully launched by Nin Brudermann, the Makrolab team and the ReSMA team, consisting of the commander in charge of the operation, Cpt. Foti Francesco (GARN), Maresciallo II cl. Lavorgna Sandro (ATG Geofisico), Maresciallo II cl. Oliva Antonio (ATG elletronica), and with the logistical support by 51o Stormo Istrana, represented by Primo Maresciallo Randazzo Francesco (ATG Motorizzazione).

The balloon was launched from the position 45deg 27.662’ North and 27deg 19.093’ E, 15m SE from the markllex structure on Campalto Island, Venice Lagoon, and ascended at an approximate speed of 7m/s.

The imaging system operated nominally for approximately 30 minutes, to the estimated altitude of 12600m, then the LOS occurred. No visual observations of the balloon were reported by approaching or departing aircraft at nearby airports. ( a class 1, series B NOTAM, Number 4288 was issued in conjunction with the launch). The second launch from the same location was executed at 1805 UTC, 2005 local time, with a larger payload and a longer range transmission system developed by the artist and radio-amateurs from Germany and Austria. The launch was carried out during the start of a CB based storm, but was extremely successful in terms of imaging, with the transmission lasting 45 minutes, even though the balloon entered several lower and higher cloud layers in extreme temperatures. 0600 UTC and 1800 UTC are standard observation times for Global Upper Air Observation.

The Balloon in No Man’s land project by Nin Brudermann is an ongoing art/science project that

the artist is carrying out in conjunction with meteorology services and agencies of various countries. In September and October of this year she will be operating and launching from the Aurora Australis ship and the Australian Antarctic Station Casey.

UNIVERSITE TANGENTE

The Universite Tangente collective worked on the lab simultaneously with the second part of the DYNE residency, bringing the number of active residents of the lab to the record of 19 for one day. (the lab was markllex structure was designed to support 8 crew members...) The UT team is working in conjunction with the LOA Hacklab Milan on the developement and visualisation code for a complex multi field tactical media database online tool for mapping contemporary capital, power and social relations. The initial conceptualisation of the work was done during their week long residency with LOA Hacklab members, the presentation of the results will be done during N5M.

EXPEDITION CREW 3

Expedition crew 3 continued with the work on the telecommunications map of the HF spectrum, the EMM work and started preparing the lab systems for winterisation. During this time, ground work for the bird migration research project was initiated and meetings with local authorities on the continuation of the project on the Island of Campalto were held. In conjunction with the plans for the 2004 lab operations, first conceptual outlines for the UAV 802.11 MR (mesh relay) were laid out, with the plan of operating and controlling the first tacmedia UAV over the baltic airspace in the summer of 2004 from the lab. Makrolab territory 2003, Isola di Campalto is slated to continue with the operation of the markllex structure on the island into 2004 and the tactical media community is encouraged to contact the project for possible periods of residency during late 2003 and the first five months of 2004.

END OF REPORT

http://makrolab.ljudmila.org



# Digital Divide: Metastasis of a buzzword

Steve Cisler

The problems of the world are frequently

expressed in catch phrases that serve as

sort of a lazy shorthand for a complex and

flawed world view. “Iron Curtain,” “Jewish

Question,” “Washington Consensus,” and

“Third World” are but a few that have had

a big impact over the years. Within the

realm of telecommunications, the phrase

“digital divide” has caught on.

The phrase "digital divide" was coined in the mid-1990's to describe the split in a family where the husband was online and using computers a great deal, and the wife was not. The Clinton administration used it to describe the gap between those groups, societies, and later countries that had access and those that did not. Variations on the theme included “cyber-segregation” and “racial ravine” which emphasized the racial divisions in access to new technologies. The term spread in the late 1990's and soon found its way into United Nations documents, technology company donation programs, foundation goals, and legislation. During the Bush administration, the use in the United States declined but the Tsunami wave carrying the term continues to this day. Search on Google for “digital divide” and almost any country and there will be many hits. Some people are critical of the term but continue to use it. One author disliked it but his publisher insisted on using it in the book title. Grass roots activists know it is simplistic and yet they know it can be useful in fund raising. In a time when the attention span of decision-makers (and people who sign checks) is short, the temptation is great to use the term. What are the problems with the term?

### Binary world view

First, it posits a binary split in the world, based on connectivity. Early Internet maps showed connectivity by country. If you your country had a direct connection to the Internet, it was colored purple. This number grew through the 90's (Bhutan, one of the very last, hooked up in 1999) Many times these initial connections benefitted only a physics department at a university in the capital city or a government ministry. For this reason, the connectivity maps were misleading. Expressing the differences in connectivity, access to computers, training, and salient content as a “divide” that requires “bridging” is also a crude representation of a situation. The statistics we usually quote are from NUA in Ireland. As of September 2002, they estimated that more than 600 million people were online, most of whom were in Canada, United States, and Europe. As I write this article, the World POPClock estimates the current population at 6,313,900,075. So about 90% of the world is not online.

### Excessive rhetoric

Expressing this as a divide or a problem benefits those whose goal is spread networks. This includes many in the international development industry (where I'd place myself), technology companies, the International Telecommunications Union, numerous charities, foundations, and NGOs, some political activists, and hobbyists involved in techno-communitarian projects. One problem is exaggerating the consequences of being offline. The rhetoric is reminiscent of missionaries raising money for their overseas missions to convert the heathen and save them from Hell. In the same way, countries, businesses, small towns, youth, indigenous groups are all doomed if they don't get connected. Here is language from a USAID project in primary schools in Uganda. It dates from 2000: “A concerted effort must be made to get technology into the core of the Ugandan educational system, so that Uganda is not left behind in the coming technology revolution. It is also important for USAID to join this effort, focusing on bringing access to new information technology, so that development efforts across the board are not undermined by a future society of people, who will not have the computer literacy skills to participate in the new electronic global economy. “ The problems of a country, a people, a town, or an individual are stated as one of lack of access to networked computers. The technology drives so many of the projects that other issues are obscured, and trying to raise support for projects without a technology component iis difficult when digital divide projects receive the most publicity.

### Corporate agenda

Technology companies and associated consultants made a killing during the Year 2000 (Y2K) furor. Billions in services (upgrades, code patches, new networks) were sold prior to the end of 1999. When

almost nothing bad took place at the start of the new year, there were two reactions. An IBM executive told me that just showed all the prep work was done and that the IT departments were ready. He considered it a success. However, a technologist in Venezuela said they had done nothing because they always lived from crisis to crisis and they saw this as just another attempt to market services. When nothing happened, they felt vindicated. So, too, the efforts by high technology companies to “bridge the digital divide’ are seen as another case of creating new markets and generating enough FUD (fear, uncertainty, and doubt) that the United Nations, whole countries, and associated development agencies will buy into the “problem” in the same way they did before Y2K. HP (and other firms including the satellite firm I worked for) say they “want to do well by doing good.” This means that they want to expand markets to demographic groups and economic classes that have not participated in the so-called digital revolution. They want to help out and also contribute to the bottom line, but when the new economy goes bust and a telecommunications crash follows, the “doing good” part usually remains only on web sites and in archives of CEO speeches.

### Priorities in development

These programs that promote ICT (development speak for “information and communication technology/ies)” multiplied in the mid-1990's. Evaluations were generous about the results and the impact on those who came into contact with the training, the telecenter, or the computer labs. The projects multiplied because they fit the agenda of the donors and loan officers, and the recipients could not press for less sexy, more mundane projects such as pay for teachers, literacy instruction, or equipment that had little to do with computer networks. Many of the projects did not reflect the real needs and priorities of the local populations. The best project organizers were able to link ICT solutions to the expressed problems and needs of people who had no idea what the Internet was or how computers might be used. However, many “bridge the digital divide” projects did not consult the local people who were most affected. The organizers were driven by the technology, and this is still a problem even though the evidence is voluminous that better integration is needed. Although projects can be designed to make good use of the technology, there exists another problem. How do you set priorities? Bill Gates, after seeing the problems of a neighborhood in Soweto, South Africa said this to Bill Moyers\*: “Well we took a computer and we took it to this community center in Soweto . And generally there wasn't power in that community center. But they'd rigged up this thing where the cord went 200 yards to this place where there was a generator. You know powered by diesel. So this computer got turned on. And when the press was there it was all working just fine. And it was ludicrous, you know. It was clear to me that the priority issues for the people who lived there in that particular community were more related to health than they were to having that computer. And so there's certainly a role for getting computers out there. But when you look at the, say, the 2 billion of the 6 billion the planet who are living on the least income. You know they deserve a chance. And that chance can only be given by improving the health conditions. “ Mr. Gates has enough money that his foundation can support programs for both health and computers, but the school principal in Uganda may have to decide on paying for electricity, paper, and air conditioners for the donated computers instead of spending the money on something more basic like text books, more lecturers, or better food for the students. Usually this is expressed as, “You talk about the digital divide! What about the education divide, the health divide, the water divide” And housing, electricity, roads, food, and a dozen other expressions of gaps. Most of the efforts are hyped as “transformative” and for a small number of people they can be, but they are not going to radically change the health of a neighborhood or a country. I live in Silicon Valley where there is a very number of residents who are connected. Many more use public

libraries, schools, and community technology centers to stay connected. But the region has twice the unemployment of the country as a whole, and as companies seek to cut costs the mid-level high tech jobs are leaving the area. Forrester Research predicts that 3.3 million more jobs will leave the U.S. by 2015. High tech skills and connectivity do not assure the health of a region or security for individuals.

### Complex reasons for being offline

Another problem is that the definition of the divide is changed as more people are connected. This is expressed in two ways: speed of connection and amount of access. As most people gain access to dialup in a country, the problem is re-defined as access to cable, DSL, or high speed wireless access. If you are stuck with a modem, you are on the other side of the divide. If you don't own a computer, the emphasis is on how many are in households, rather than accessing the network in public places. In countries where the Internet has been available for a decade or more, there is a leveling off of new users, and many have dropped off for technical reasons or because of a bad experience online. In the United States the Pew Internet and America Life Project reports that 24% of Americans are not online and of those 56% have no intention of going online. Socially and physically they live close to the Internet but they won't use it. These people are generally older, rural, white, and retired. The point is that there are many reasons for people to be grouped on one side of a so-called digital divide, but the term obscures the many reasons for their lack of access.

### Why inequalities will continue

There are many structural and cultural reasons why large gaps will persist and increase. In the developing world they pay higher prices for everything except labor: transport, support, components, electricity, connectivity, supplies (paper, media, ink, technical pubs). Legal commercial software costs as much as someone in Holland or Canada pays. The interest rates on money are higher for small business loans. There are fewer choices of products, most of which are not produced locally, and the regulatory environment is not geared to encourage rapid deployment. While the curve of growth and deployment for ICT is creeping upward in poor countries, the rate of everything in our countries is progressing much faster, thus making the differences more pronounced. The gap increases. Technological products are developed in rich countries are based on our consumer culture's hierarchy of wants, whereas poor countries have more basic needs. Donor programs do not take into account the total cost of ownership for ICT projects. The true cost is hidden from the recipient and frequently the donors too. Preparation for continuing these projects does not start during the planning cycle but after the program has started. The complexity of technological projects is misunderestimated (to use President Bush's phrase). Few realize they are imposing a technological system (to use Thomas Hughes phrase) in places where only fragments are functioning efficiently.

### What is to be done?

What makes me optimistic are the grass-roots workers and activists and other technical experts in many of these countries who ignore some of the very barriers I have described and are able to cultivate small oases of innovation and inclusiveness in problematic environments. They need support from each other and from outsiders, and of course the communication networks have helped make this easier. Because the problems and solutions are glocal—a mix of local and global, the need to convene and network both locally, regionally, and internationally puts a big burden on organizations with little money for travel or time spent away from their local efforts. We have to make better use of face-to-face time together and learn how it can be effectively augmented with common online tools such as chat, content management systems,web logs, mailing lists, databases, and wikis. The fabled gap may not lessen, but the threads will increase and loose network connections will grow stronger.



**B**uoyed by its collaborations with Hollywood – which is riding high on an unprecedented wave of revenue from reality TV programming that now constitutes over half of the top 10 shows in the US – and increasingly information-savvy, the Pentagon now knows that stage-managed real life is where the action is at. It will no longer be accused, it thinks, of withholding or controlling information. It will give us real life on the front lines, truth behind the facades, Ted Koppel in a tank. However, like the overproduced reality television show that ends up squeezing out any sense of spontaneity, these images turned out to be as misleading as those of the first Gulf War. There were rules of engagement that all embedded journalists had sworn to abide by. The details of military actions could only be described in general terms and journalists were prohibited from writing about possible future missions, classified weapons, or sensitive information. There was a social code of conduct among personnel as to what can be said. The commander of an embedded journalists unit could block any reporter from filing stories via satellite connection at any time. Much of what appeared to be live was actually recorded hours earlier. And the whole thing got fed into the graphics-heavy, soundbyte-oriented news machine anyway, itself a primary interface to a media-driven market of investors who play the war and who trade based on news. Embedded reporting was itself embedded within a host of now-familiar conventions, accompanied by scrolling updates, computer-generated flyovers over Baghdad, animated EarthViewer satellite imagery, drum rolls, and links to websites that allowed us to fondle 3D animations of munitions. The war didnt end up looking like reality television so much as a carnivalesque media Olympics.

### Haunting images

Standing out prominently alongside these embedded images were the familiar echoes of the first Gulf War: those haunting images from camera-mounted bombs (or rather, bomb-mounted cameras) that explode upon impact and mask any repercussion at groundlevel. Those flying points of view to which we have only virtual access... One wonders, as always, what the real artillery is in this war – images or bullets. Perhaps the soldiers should be allowed to carry cameras, or the camera and gun should simply collapse into one another. For the military, the distance between has been narrowing for quite some time anyway. It has been narrowing in terms of what has been called the military-entertainment complex. It has been narrowing in terms of the windows between detection and engagement, sensor and shooter, intelligence-gathering and deployment – which in many ways drives military development and especially its aerial imaging. There are two modes to this collapse. We might call them the manned and the unmanned. A channel of re-embodiment opens up via reality media and its focus on unfiltered immediacy. At the same time, a channel of disembodiment opens up via automated vision and the unmanned. Think of two modes. One is the handheld camera, live and on the scene. We watch seemingly immediate, raw footage through it. The other is the disembodied gaze. We don't watch through it. It is the gaze that belongs to everyone and no one. The camera-riding bomb is only one example. There are many other examples that we can't see. In many senses, this gaze has moved into the status of a condition. That is, it has moved from something that we can represent to something that helps to structure representation itself, as if lurking behind the visual field.

### The Predator

So which is it? If we think of perception as being relocated – and in many ways warfare is about such relocation – can we say that it is becoming re-physicalized, or not? I want to consider both of these modes. In so doing, I want to also introduce another element – in a sense, outfitting these concepts with armaments. I want to suggest that the condition of this relocation of perception is its subsequent arming – its subsequent backing by an apparatus of conquest and defense. Can we think of perception as

becoming armed in this way? How could such an increasingly ephemeral and distributed capacity be simultaneously fortified, couched within an apparatus of warfare – dematerialized - yet weighted? The current star of the unmanned vehicles is the Predator, which had its major debut in 1995 in Bosnia. The Predator is a toy-like and windowless vehicle, originally built for reconnaissance missions, that is flown by both the military and the C.I.A. There is no pilot in its cockpit – there is an operator who sits hundreds or thousands of miles away at a console (most recently, in Nevada). The Predator was never conceived to be able to fire upon targets. It has on many occasions captured potential targets on video but was unable to do anything about it. In other words, it had got them in its sights but was unable to fully capture – i.e., shoot – as if it were impotent. For example, a Predator drone once captured a tall turban-wearing man on video in Afghanistan that many officials believe was bin Laden. But there was nothing to be done except to relay the information back to command posts, who may then channel it to other vehicles equipped for interception. There was no chance to eliminate that which appeared in the image, an act which seems to negate the very purpose of photography. Meanwhile, the target slipped from view. The impotence of the image led to the re-forging of the vehicle. In the new regimes of the image, there can be no possibility of escape. Vision must be outfitted, the body retooled, the apparatus armed. Institutional effect: The military has always sought to reduce the time from sensor to shooter to almost zero - to more closely integrate the apparatuses of detection and engagement. The growing urgency reached its culmination after September 11. Now Predators were being hastily equipped with Hellfire missiles and laser-targeting systems which can work in tandem. Missile and video camera sit side-by-side, pointed toward the ground, aimed to capture, mounted on the belly of a windowless airplane. Photography was once an accurate replica of the world, driven by the need to remove the human from direct physical contact with the site of experience. The human is placed on the other side of representation as a kind of shield from reality, physically protected but allowing a form of disembodied presence. The image and its technical support act as protector, as life-giver, yet they are bound up in a technical development that threatens the human with obsolescence. They provide a means for its extension, yet a means for its removal. Warfare: protection through the aid of the image, countered with the annihilation that the image also facilitates.

### Sedimentation in real-time

We have the narrowing of divisions between the technologies of detection and engagement, as well the blurring of the roles of intelligence-gathering and deployment. Think of the blurring of the roles and limits to the F.B.I. and the C.I.A. and the creation of the new intelligence unit within the Department of Homeland Security. From this consolidation erupts the technology itself. Or is it the other way round? Then there is the image, and the role of seeing. The image both tracks and aims, traces and targets, its framings operating as a new development of perspective. If we think of perspective as a way of locating relationships between objects in space and their representations, what is it, then, if we seek to collapse that space? Is this a perspective aimed at obliteration? A precise freezing in time and space, a precise sedimentation of image, referent, and projectile in real-time, in order to guide and mark an annihilation? *[ed.] Crandall details four instances of such use of the Predator drones in Afghanisaton, Yemen and Iraq between February 2002 and June 2003.* In each of these cases, in each of these strikes, I remember trying to picture the scene. One man – standing alone or in a group, or travelling by car – is suddenly fired at from the sky, as if zapped by a lightning bolt. He is singled out for destruction among the others standing nearby, as if by an act of God. To what remote hidden bunker was this image sent, whose hidden hand released its payload? In the New York Times, Walter Kirn wrote that, from the

perspective of his sofa, this latest incident had the quality of an immaculate destruction. It may well have been Thor doing the shooting, he wrote. Or me. He said that with no individual human being to take credit for the hit – no swaggering flying ace, no dead-eye tail gunner and no squinting rifleman – it felt like a pure projection of my will or continuing anger about terrorism.

### Fictions of instant command

One can immediately picture a peculiar kind of armed couch potato, caught somewhere between a videogame and the news. We hold our own remote devices that give us the fictions of instant command, and sitting in front of our television sets or computer screens, we are oddly enough about as close to the action as the actual pilots get – as well as those secret teams who have their fingers on the triggers. Part of a distributed mass with no fixed contours, with no one person to locate at the helm, the unmanned system is no ONE yet everyone. Its projectile: the extension of some inner combative state? A distributed, armed intent? One can think of the action of slamming the phone down as somehow getting back at the person on the other line, or of blasting the horn at a stupid driver who nearly caused an accident. We transfer anger through our devices. Through remotes of all kinds, we can picture the very common gesture of the point and shoot. None of these actions are anywhere near that of launching an actual missile, of course. But we can identify with the gesture, the response mechanism, the conditioning process, the interceptive goal. We can speak of mechanisms behind the decision to engage. One can speak metaphorically of pushing ones buttons, which means that someone is deliberately exploiting ones soft spots, inciting anger in a knee-jerk reaction. The device marks a loop between perception, technology, and the paces of the body. Eye, viewfinder, and trigger. A structure for orienting attention and facilitating differentiation or division. Subject/object, me/you, friend/enemy. We choose this over that. We locate ourselves to this side of image, to the safe side, against the enemy it protects us from. We draw lines in the sand; we say 'I stand here against you, defining ourselves by that which we oppose'. How far are we willing to go to defend it? What kind of technology backs us? The surprise attack on the Iraqi command bunker that launched Gulf War II was supposed to be the mother of all smart strikes. Think of all of the computational power and intelligence that went into the determination of that one precise moment. It was supposed to be the apex of the entire operation, the magnum opus, the punctum, the crowning glory of the American military machine. Imagine: to obliterate Saddam Hussein himself in one enormous zap, one precise blast from the sky, as if God himself had struck the man down. The blast over Baghdad that morning shook the city and the entire world. It has been said that there is so much reporting today, it often gets ahead of the news. Think of the swarms of reporters in Washington DC during the sniper attacks confronting the police force as if they were SWAT teams. In a cutthroat commercial news media world, timely information is artillery, and journalists are fighters. Virilio once said that it is now reality that has to keep up with media, rather than the other way round. It is easy to see how embedded journalism would arise in a culture of behind the scenes entertainment, immediacy, and rapid media technological advance, and impatient with the kind of secrecy such as the Pentagon has shown in the past. Truth is the best defense said Col. Jay DeFrank, the Pentagons director of press operations, as legions of Americans grabbed their popcorn. Camera and weapon, in the trenches together on the battlefield. Trigger click, camera click. With the Predator, the distance between was narrowed in the drive for capture in its most violent sense. That is, there could be no escape for the represented. It fuses with its image as it is obliterated. An image and a life are both taken as eye and projectile join. The distance for human error shrinks since it is a machine that coordinates. Here at ground-level, however, camera and weapon co-habit a space through the agency of a fallible human. The camera shakes.

# Unmanned

Jordan Crandall

During Gulf War II, around 600 journalists

were assigned positions alongside combat

and support troops – intended to give us

all front row seats to the war. Previously

trained by the Pentagon in week-long media

boot camps, these embedded journalists

were not allowed to carry guns but they

were allowed to carry cameras. If the first

Gulf War (where the reporters were con-

fined to hotels) was something like a war

game, this war would seem to be some-

thing more like reality television.

# A complicated affair

Herman Asselberghs and Pieter van Bogaert

In Jerusalem there is not a tourist in sight.

Except for the daily bustle in the Arab souks, the

economy in the old part of the city with its age-

old Jewish, Armenian, Christian and Muslim

places of interest is more or less at a standstill.

Indeed, nobody even thinks of travelling on the

West Bank, where everyday life is defined by cur-

fews and checkpoints. Unfortunately, because of

this they tend to miss much of the things that

never reach our media.

Its bearer's life is on the line. In the field between seeing and shooting a human is not removed but reintroduced. In a sense, it is the human that is deployed to serve a need within the workings of the apparatus.

## What is that need?

It is well known that, within the scrims of hyper-reality, a mode of witnessing has been lost. An indexical bond has been severed. Through a verite of the everyday, real life media arises to fill the gap. It purports to put us on the front lines. Media moves into the space of the audience by allowing its authentic participation. A sense of being un-scripted counters the polished quality of the media mise-en-scene and opens up an entry point. The deceptive character of the media is suspended for a moment, and one can project oneself inside. I do not abandon myself to the image, or live in the world of images. Rather, this realness allows a seamless interface between. A port of synchronization is opened up that allows a shuttling back and forth. Real feelings and real people are what code authenticity. We identify with the people on screen because they are somehow more like us, in situations and under conditions that are more like life. The distance that voyeurism relies on for its source of pleasure migrates into other geometries. These real-time image streams, life-like settings, real actors, and seemingly live actions and effects however could only have opened up a site of identification for a populace that had already been conditioned to see itself through media self-reflection. This could not have taken hold unless the media mise-en-scene had already arisen, as it has, to form the sole authenticating construct of our time – the cultural back-

Trying to lay your hands on a map of Ramallah is a time-consuming and fruitless enterprise. The only way to find your way around the administrative capital of the West Bank is to resort to a makeshift solution. In other words, you simply step into one of the many service-taxis and allow yourself to be transported along; the drivers have a reputation for localising an address on the basis of a surname. Edward Said had already pointed out the difficulties caused by this strange Palestinian custom many years ago. He saw the lack of well-documented maps as one of the main reasons for Arafat's lack of success at the Oslo negotiations in 1993. The Israelis on the other hand knew what they were talking about, and Arafat paid for his superficial negotiating position with a camouflaged defeat. The outcome was slightly more independence and far less freedom of movement. Indeed, ten years ago Oslo resulted in dozens of Israeli-controlled checkpoints being installed on the West Bank and in Gaza.

## In times of occupation

The Palestinians could probably have continued to survive without detailed maps of their country and their cities for centuries to come. However, what they have no longer been able to do without since Oslo is the identity card, of which there are more versions in existence here than in any other nation in the world. There are already four for the Arabs who live within the boundaries of the Palestinian areas: one for the 2 million inhabitants of the West Bank, another for the 1.5 million inhabitants of Gaza, one for the 250,000 Palestinians in Jerusalem and yet another for the 1 million Palestinians in Israel. Some mention the place of birth, others the place of residence, sometimes religion is specified, but never is there a question of nationality, of a Palestinian identity. In addition to this, we have the Jordanian, American and other passports of thousands of returnees as well as those of the millions of Palestinians living abroad in expectation of better times. Each identity card has its own specific regulations. The logic behind the innumerable rules is never explained by the occupying Israeli forces, who check constantly to ensure that they are upheld. Life in Palestine is a complicated affair, it is nevertheless a source of inspiration for the artists we met there. Art is only natural in times of war.

ground for awareness, identity, and representation, the background against which subjectivity and social relations are formed. Through embeddedness, I am put back in the place that photography had once purported to remove me, in order to protect me. I am (seemingly) reintroduced at the other side of the shield, dropped onto the battlefield of the Real and (seemingly) subject to all of its dangers. Embeddedness constitutes a language that signifies the real – a real that has been under siege in more ways than one – by helping to develop new coherencies and cohabitations against a violent other. It offers a form of indexical compensation. The seemingly spontaneous, handheld, grainy video mode has come to signify a mode of real presence – and here the staggered motion and artifacting brought about by limited transmission capacity serves as a kind of transmission verite. The real equals credibility via its sense of unfiltered immediacy. The reality of representation is substituted for the representation of reality. That is, authenticity arises less from the authenticity of reality per se than the authenticity of the means by which reality is portrayed. The compensation works linguistically as well... Margaret Morse has pointed out that through such mechanisms, which include stacks of hierarchically-arranged worlds, sartorial and acting codes, graphics, and other carefully ordered conventions, a cohesive world is constructed that contains its viewer in a comforting here-and-now. We see in such news constructs a public being taught its place according to the conventions of power and position in discourse. Through carefully arranged divides within the news, where, for example, newscasters can address the

It is the end of November 2002. Our visit to Ramallah takes place at precisely the right time. Although there is still a curfew in all the other cities on the West Bank, the 25,000 inhabitants of the administrative capital have been moving freely around the city for the last two weeks. For the first time in a year, life is gradually returning to normal. Shops, cafes, restaurants, cinemas and theatres have opened their doors once more and the inhabitants of Ramallah are clearly enjoying themselves. One of them is Emily Jacir, a Palestinian artist with an American passport. A few months previously she had launched the idea of the 'Palestine International Video Festival'. Taking the size of the city into account, her idea was to select video films and then have them passed on from home to home on VHS cassettes during the short periods that the Israelis lifted the curfew. Now, six months on, the festival has become reality in a relatively relaxed atmosphere, with the presentation of installations on location in Ramallah and at the nearby university of Birzeit, as well as the presentation of various productions in people's living rooms by way of the local Palestinian broadcasting channels. The broadcasting channels are very much in need of this 'content'. The main condition for being selected for the festival was that the productions did not relate to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in any way. After all, films dealing with this theme are for the rest of the world and of little use to the inhabitants of the West Bank. Palestinian film-makers today ask themselves what type of audience they wish to reach. Is it the local population, who want to see something different from the psychological or physical warfare they experience every day, or is it the international community which, more than ever, needs reliable information from this permanent conflict zone? There appear to be as many answers as there are film-makers in the area.

## In times of isolation

'A crazy country is a good place to experiment', says Raed Andoni, film producer and head of the small production company 'Star 2000'. His West bank passport places him at the bottom of the ladder with regard to freedom of movement, but at the top in the field of inventiveness. In his company car – a 4X4 disguised as a TV vehicle and with look-alike diplo-

viewer directly but the represented public cannot, positions are reinforced, battle-lines are drawn and power is maintained. If we see a process of differentiation actively at work, we can regard this as part of a machine of subjectivity. An arsenal, in effect, of producing an interior/exterior divide. Such mechanisms do not only represent the war. They are the war. In the heat of battle, one does not think too much. One acts. Especially in a crisis state (increasingly the norm), the military machine does my thinking for me. In civilian terms: The construct is couched within what Elaine Scarry would call a mimesis of deliberation – a simulation of deliberation that replaces ones own thinking. The media construct is such that it does its own thinking through mirroring ones own thought processes, seducing one into a direct interface, a mind-meld. Automated deliberation, seamlessly achieved. I am there on the front lines and I virtually witness what is shown on the screen, it is real. This occurs within a news construct that virtually does my thinking for me. The image that I see – the smart image of high technology weaponry or the smart image of the multi-format newscast with its text crawls and weblinks – is the image that thinks for itself, harboring cognition within its own confines. In some cases, as when image and ammunition coincide, it even destroys itself. The sightless gaze of the unmanned system tends to acquire exceptional power since its bearer cannot be pinned down. The reinforced gaze of the embedded eye acquires its power precisely because it can. Perhaps both that turn out to be equally unmanned – the latter being more insidious because it traffics in the guise of its opposite. Critic? Seducer? Victim?

matic number plates – he moves around the West Bank without having to pass through the checkpoints. As he cannot go to his hometown of Bethlehem at present because of the curfew there, the film producer has been camping in his Ramallah office for a few weeks. When the curfew is also in force in Ramallah, the same office serves as a hotel for the entire staff. Raed shows the daily harassment in films such as Challenge. In Andoni's view, despite everything, modern Palestine embodies the hope for a better future in the Middle East. Of course, the Intifada absorbs a great deal of energy which would otherwise be invested in creative activity. But this is compensated for by a solidarity and inventiveness that provides a very special perception of culture: Independence through isolation. Unlike many other Arab countries, the Palestinians have no government interference and therefore no censorship. Moreover, Palestine does not have a real tradition of film and therefore no straitjacket to restrict film-makers in what they do. Azza El-Hassan is a Palestinian with a Jordanian passport. She is one of the returnees who came back to her country in the nineties. She was a student at the London film school and made a number of documentaries for NGOs – humanitarian images showing the rest of the world what life is like under the occupation.

## In times of apartheid

News Time is her most recent film and is a reaction to this. In this personal documentary she aims to show her life in her own street in Ramallah during the first few days of the second Intifada. However, she cannot find anyone who is able to work together with her. Indeed, all her colleagues are working and filming and editing for the many foreign television stations in the city. In 'newsworthy times' like this producers of images profit from the war while the inhabitants simply try to get on with their lives as best they can. We meet Azza in the 'Stones' café, a bar with Palestinian beer and American R&B on the cassette player. Clearly, the mortification associated with the Ramadan, which is gradually drawing to a close, counts for little here. The last ten days of the fast create an undercurrent of tension: anyone who dies during this period is assured of immediate ascent to heaven and this idea can prove very tempting to



martyrs. As in most places in Ramallah, there are no extremists hiding at ‘Stones’. The managers are only too familiar with frontline scenes. During the first Intifada they earned money by filming for Reuters. The work was so dangerous that only Palestinians showed an interest in the substantial danger money offered to them by Western news agencies and news broadcasting stations. In their case, the proceeds have been well spent: when they found themselves without work at the end of the uprising, they decided to pool their resources and start the café with its striking name together. The soundman is the waiter and the cameraman is the cook. Since 2000 the two have frequently relinquished their place in catering: the second Intifada started out much more violent and once again spectacular news images and daring reporters were urgently wanted by CNN, Al-Jazeera and Co. Since Oslo, there have been great changes in the Palestinian population. Before then, the gallery owner Jack Persekian from Jerusalem could expect to welcome several visitors from Ramallah to his openings. He still remembers the time when cultural life mostly took place in the disputed Israeli-Palestinian capital. The Qalandia checkpoint on the perimeter of Jerusalem has made it difficult if not impossible for Palestinians to commute, so that in matters of art, theatre and film the centre has gradually been transferred to Ramallah. It is difficult for TV-viewers and newspaper readers to picture Qalandia; indeed, they ought to pay a worthwhile visit to see this place of infamy with their own eyes. For Palestinians, crossing the border is the real confrontation with the apartheid policy that the Israelis have been mounting since the start of the second Intifada. Anyone who cannot present the proper passport at the heavily-guarded and armed post is not permitted to enter or leave the site. At nine o’clock at night, the gates are closed to all. The teenage soldiers of the occupying forces check, order about and belittle. Jack has a Jerusalem passport (and an American passport) and this guarantees him the greatest freedom of movement; however, despite this privilege he is aware of a certain fatigue creeping into his system. Living and working in occupied Palestinian territory takes a lot of energy. He knows that this daily war of attrition is a recipe for the departure of the upper social classes and anyone else who can afford an outward ticket, including artists. Sharon, the Israeli prime minister, would like nothing better, and so Jack answers back with an exhibition of young Palestinian artists (such as Emily Jacir) who, like him, persist, and internationally famous artists (such as Mona Hatoum and Beat Streuli) whom he invited to come and learn about the problematic situation on the spot.

### In times of imprisonment

As we soon learn, getting to know the situation on the spot is no easy matter. Passenger travel on the West Bank is well-nigh impossible: since the last suicide attack on an Israeli target two weeks ago, a 24-hour curfew has been imposed in Bethlehem, Jenin, Nablus and other Palestinian cities. For the time being Ramallah is the exception to the rule. The only arterial road that will definitely get you to your destination is the road leading to Birzeit University (where it becomes a dead end). Here too there is a degrading checkpoint on the outskirts of the city. Surdah is more subtle than Qalandia however: a bend in the old tarred road between Ramallah and Birzeit has been reduced to a winding dirt track that extends for a distance of one kilometre and can only be covered on foot. Where each part of the road terminates and begins, there is a cacophony of taxis that transport tens of thousands of transients from the surrounding villages to and from this spot. In the middle of the crossing – boiling hot in the summer and a pool of mud in the winter – two armed soldiers stationed there select passers-by at random and proceed to check, order about and degrade them. There is no way through without the proper passport. Nor is anyone allowed to pass here after four o’clock in the afternoon. This is also sometimes the case during the day, when suddenly there is no through way, without prior notice or for no apparent reason. Students wishing to attend classes in Birzeit do well to set out two hours in advance, even though the dis-

tance is a mere fifteen kilometres. Some professors at the university refuse to subject themselves to this checkpoint on principle. For practical reasons certain lessons have been transferred to the centre of Ramallah, for at nightfall there is a real risk of getting shot at this ‘border-crossing’. Life in an open-air prison is complex. It is the end of November, four days later. Our stay in Ramallah takes place at exactly the wrong moment. CNN has proclaimed a ‘day of terror’ for the Israelis due to a bomb attack on a hotel in Mombasa, a failed attack on a flight from Kenya to Tel Aviv and a suicide squad in Jericho. That evening in the ‘Stones’ there is the sound of mobile phones ringing: everyone is passing on news of the curfew due to commence the following morning and continue for seventy-two hours. Our appointment with the choreographer Omar Barghouti will have to be cancelled, as will our visit to the film library and our reservation for the theatre performance of the Ashtar Company. We leave the city the following day. We pass Qalandia, no questions asked. We are carrying the proper passports and besides, the soldier guards are only too glad to see Nosy Parkers go.

### Filming the Invisible

‘Hidden hunger’ is the World Health Organisation’s term for Palestinian micro-nutritional deficiencies. This is the toll taken by two years of Intifada, with tightened checkpoints, restrictions and curfews. As a result of poor nutrition, the children in the Gaza Strip and on the West Bank of the Jordan are missing out on normal growth and development. Their cognitive faculties are often seriously and irreversibly harmed. Their immunity system is endangered. The mental and physical capacities of both adults and children are impaired. Sometimes this leads to blindness, sometimes to death. In most cases it remains unseen. Except in statistics that show that nowadays children are three centimetres shorter than before the Intifada. ‘3 centimetre less’ is the title of the latest film by Azza El-Hassan. Azza is one of the ‘returnees’, Palestinians who came back to their country after the Treaty of Oslo (1993). She was born in Jordan in 1971, and moved to the Lebanon with her family, where at the age of eleven she already worked as a hospital volunteer. In the eighties – when the Israelis invaded southern Lebanon – she returned to Amman in Jordan. After secondary school, Azza decided to become a film-maker and left on her own for the film school in London. Since 1996 Ramallah has been her new home and workplace. She retained a Jordanian passport, which gives her more freedom of movement than other Palestinians. This piece of paper and her film diploma also give her a certain responsibility towards her compatriots. Someone like Azza is expected to show to the world what goes on in this occupied country. In time of war artists are supposed to inform people. Azza has her own views on this matter. There has already been so much information about the Israel-Palestine conflict since the spectacular hijacks and attacks of the seventies. After Washington, Jerusalem has the greatest concentration of journalists in the world. Every Palestinian who has ever made sound or film recordings or is able to act as a guide or translator or interpreter can get a job with the foreign reporters. What information is there left to communicate? The essence of the 50-year occupation lies in small unspectacular things. Things that never reach the news but which do define the Palestinian reality and mentality. Azza knows this reality, she grew up with it. She knows what the Palestinians need. She helps her people by distancing herself and projecting images of their own recognisable environment. For her previous film News Time, which won several international prizes, she filmed the people in her street during the first few months of the second Intifada. She shows the effect the situation has on relationships that have existed for years. Relationships between lovers, relatives, neighbours and acquaintances. She watched the children in front of her door, and youngsters from the refugee camps trying to put up resistance. She looks at herself and how she deals with this reality and looks for support from the people around her – familiar and unfamiliar. The war situation is so overwhelming. The little moments of happiness and love in Azza’s films distances them

from the violence of a society used to spectacle. She develops her own survival strategy. She learns how to live with war and death – with the disappearance, the camouflage, the invisible.

### Images from the front line.

One TV picture that symbolised the horror of the second Intifada around Christmas 2000 remains engraved deep in the collective memory. It is the sequence in which the young Palestinian boy Muhammad al-Durra in vain seeks cover at his father’s side under heavy crossfire but then loses his life to Israeli bullets. The film-maker Nazir Hassan and his producer Raed Andoni were presented with these news pictures by a film festival, with the task of making a ‘visual statement’ about them. Instead of the umpteenth recycling of the same images, they made a short film about the difficulties of making films in Palestine. Challenge, or how does one make a film using shocking TV pictures that the whole world has already seen? How can one make a film when checkpoints and passport controls make cooperation impossible? How can one make a film at a time of war and occupation? Not easy, but not impossible. This is proven by Azza El-Hassan, Mai Masri, Elia Suleiman, Ali Nassar, Rashid Mashawari, Sobhi Zobaidi, Raed Al-Haellou, Ismael Al-Habbash - Palestinian film-makers cannot be counted on the fingers of one hand! Short films, feature films, TV films: there is a great variety but every production, including the fictional ones, has a documentary character. There is no escaping reality. Raed knows all about it. His ‘Star 2000’ production company often serves as a hotel during curfews. When he receives us at his office in Ramallah he has just finished clearing up the mess left after a week’s compulsory sojourn amongst colleagues, videocassettes and editing tables. His company car has for a long time been covered with garish TV and press insignia and a numberplate in the familiar diplomatic colours. These ‘camouflage’ tactics sometimes save him a lot of time when there are spot checks on back roads with no checkpoints: the Israeli soldiers are obliged to let him approach and once eye-contact has been established the usually young recruits find it hard to use their weapons. One can live with the customary intimidation and insults. ‘Life here is a film,’ says Raed, ‘And yet there is no film culture. During the first Intifada the cinemas in Ramallah were closed and with one exception they have all become indoor car parks. Television sticks to Jordanian soaps and Egyptian ‘Hollywood’ films. Independent Palestinian film-makers are burdened by years of isolation in both Israel and the Arab world. European film festivals and TV broadcasters offer an alternative in terms of finance and performance, but European coproducers bring European rules with them and the realisation that political motives inevitably play a part in showing or not showing Palestinian films has its consequences. In this sense, a screening in Palestine is the ultimate test, because here a Palestinian film-maker is just a film-maker, and a Palestinian film just a film.’ At ‘Star 2000’, ‘just a film’ does not necessarily mean an average film. This independent company has a strong reputation for original critical documentaries and has little interest in well-tried TV formats. In Live from Palestine, Rashid Mashawari reports on events at a radio station in Gaza. In A Number Zero, Saed Andoni reports from his favourite hairdressers in Bethlehem, which serves as a live news post during the umpteenth incursion by the army of occupation. In Challenge, Nazir Hassan examines the impact of the mass media on the image created of ‘the Palestinian cause’. Each and every one is a personal statement from the front line, powerful films full of vitality and cinematographic quality. Raed, the producer, persists, “One thing is certain: the future of Palestine is not yet settled and so Palestinian films offer as many possibilities as difficulties. The question is whether we can continue to sustain our energy. Trips abroad give us new input but at the same time the difference between the ‘holiday ’ and staying in this prison is becoming greater and harder to bear. It is not so much the news reports as the everyday details of life in Palestine that depress us. Life here is more complicated than making films.”

# State of Exception

Giorgio Agamben

In his Political Theology, Carl Schmitt

established the essential proximity between

the state of exception and sovereignty. But

although his famous definition of the sover-

eign as “the one who can proclaim a state

of exception” has been commented on

many times, we still lack a genuine theory

of the state of exception within public law.

For legal theorists as well as legal histori-

ans it seems as if the problem would be

more of a factual question than an authen-

tic legal question.

The very definition of the term is complex, since it is situated at the limit of law and of politics. According to a widespread conception, the state of exception would be situated at an “ambiguous and uncertain fringe at the intersection of the legal and the political,” and would constitute a “point of disequilibrium between public law and political fact.” The task of defining its limits is nevertheless nothing less than urgent. And, indeed, if the exceptional measures that characterize the state of exception are the result of periods of political crisis, and if they for this very reason must be understood through the terrain of politics rather than through the legal or constitutional terrain, they find themselves in the paradoxical position of legal measures that cannot be understood from a legal point of view, and the state of exception presents itself as the legal form of that which can have no legal form.

And, furthermore, if the sovereign exception is the original set-up through which law relates to life in order to include it in the very same gesture that suspends its own exercise, then a theory of the state of exception would be the preliminary condition for an understanding of the bond between the living being and law. To lift the veil that covers this uncertain terrain between, on the one hand, public law and political fact, and on the other, legal order and life, is to grasp the significance of this difference, or presumed difference, between the political and the legal; and between law and life. Among the elements that render a definition of the state of exception thorny, we find the relationship it has to civil war, insurrection and the right to resist. And, in fact, since civil war is the opposite of the normal state, it tends to coalesce with the state of exception, which becomes the immediate response of the State when faced with the gravest kind of internal conflict. In this way, the 20th century has produced a paradoxical phenomenon defined as “legal civil war.” Let us look at the case of Nazi Germany. Just after Hitler came to power (or, to be more precise, just after he was offered power) he proclaimed, on February 28, 1933, the Decree for the Protection of the People and the State. This decree suspends all the articles in the Weimar Constitution maintaining individual liberties. Since this decree was never revoked, we can say that the entire Third Reich from a legal point of view was a twelve year-long state of exception. And in this sense we can define modern totalitarianism as the institution, by way of a state of exception, of a legal civil war that permits the elimination not only of political adversaries, but whole categories of the population that resist being integrated into the political system. Thus the intentional creation of a permanent state of exception has become one of the most important measures of contemporary States, democracies included. And furthermore, it is not necessary that a state of exception be declared in the technical sense of the term.

## Global civil war

At least since Napoleon’s decree of December 24, 1811, French doctrine has opposed a “fictitious or political” state of siege in contradistinction to a military state of siege. In this context, English jurisprudence speaks of a “fancied exception”; Nazi legal theorists spoke unconditionally of an “intentional state of exception” in order to install the National Socialist State. During the world wars, the recourse to a state of exception was spread to all the belligerent States. Today, in the face of the continuous progression of something that could be defined as a “global civil war,” the state of exception tends more and more to present itself as the dominant paradigm of government in contemporary politics. Once the state of exception has become the rule, there is a danger that this transformation of a provisional and exceptional measure into a technique of government will entail the loss of the traditional distinction between different forms of Constitution.

The basic significance of the state of exception as an original structure through which law incorporates the living being - and, this, by suspending itself - has emerged with full clarity in the military order that the President of the United States issued on November

13, 2001. The issue was to subject non-citizens suspected of terrorist activities to special jurisdiction that would include “indefinite detention” and military tribunals. The U.S. Patriot Act of October 26, 2001, already authorized the Attorney General to detain every alien suspected of endangering national security. Nevertheless, within seven days, this alien had to either be expelled or accused of some crime. What was new in Bush’s order was that it radically eradicated the legal status of these individuals, and produced entities that could be neither named nor classified by the Law. Those Talibans captured in Afghanistan are not only excluded from the status as Prisoners of War defined by the Geneva Conventions, they do not correspond to any jurisdiction set by American law: neither prisoners nor accused, they are simply detainees, they are subjected to pure de facto sovereignty/to a detention that is indefinite not only in its temporal sense, but also in its nature, since it is outside of the law and of all forms of legal control. With the detainees at Guantamo Bay, naked life returns to its most extreme indetermination.

The most rigorous attempt to construct a theory of the state of exception can be found in the work of Carl Schmitt. The essentials of his theory can be found in Dictatorship, as well in Political Theology, published one year later. Because these two books, published in the early 1920s, set a paradigm that is not only contemporary, but may in fact find its true completion only today, it is necessary to give a resume of their fundamental theses.

## Doctrine of sovereignty

The objective of both these books is to inscribe the state of exception into a legal context. Schmitt knows perfectly well that the state of exception, in as far as it enacts a “suspension of the legal order in its totality,” seems to “escape every legal consideration”; but for him the issue is to ensure a relation, no matter of what type, between the state of exception and the legal order: “The state of exception is always distinguished from anarchy and chaos and, in the legal sense, there is still order in it, even though it is not a legal order.” This articulation is paradoxical, since, that which should be inscribed within the legal realm is essentially exterior to it, corresponding to nothing less than the suspension of the legal order itself. Whatever the nature of the operator of this inscription of the state of exception into the legal order, Schmitt needs to show that the suspension of law still derives from the legal domain, and not from simple anarchy. In this way, the state of exception introduces a zone of anomy into the law, which, according to Schmitt, renders possible an effective ordering of reality. Now we understand why the theory of the state of exception, in Political Theology, can be presented as a doctrine of sovereignty. The sovereign, who can proclaim a state of exception, is thereby ensured of remaining anchored in the legal order. But precisely because the decision here concerns the annulation of the norm, and consequently, because the state of exception represents the control of a space that is neither external nor internal, “the sovereign remains exterior to the normally valid legal order, and nevertheless belongs to it, since he is responsible for decision whether the Constitution can be suspended in toto.”

## Ecstasy-belonging

To be outside and yet belong: such is the topological structure of the state of exception, and since the being of the sovereign, who decides over the exception, is logically defined by this very structure, he may also be characterized by the oxymoron of an “ecstasy-belonging.”

1. In 1990, Jacques Derrida gave a lecture in New York entitled “Force de loi: le fondement mystique de l’authorite.” [“Force of Law: the Mystical Foundation of Authority”] The lecture, that in fact consisted of a reading of an essay by Walter Benjamin, “Towards a Critique of Violence,” provoked a big debate among philosophers and legal theorists. That no one had proposed an analysis of the seemingly enigmatic formula that gave the lecture its title is not only a sign of the profound chiasm separating philosophical and legal culture, but of the decadence of the latter. The

syntagm “Force de loi” refers back to a long tradition of Roman and Medieval Law where it signifies “efficacy, the capacity to oblige,” in a general sense. But it was only in the modern era, in the context of the French Revolution, that this expression began designating the supreme value of acts expressed by an assembly representative of the people. In article 6 from the Constitution of 1791, “force de loi” designates the indestructible character of the law, that the sovereign himself can neither abrogate nor modify. From a technical point of view, it is important to note that in modern as well as ancient doctrine, the syntagm “force de loi” refers not to the law itself, but to the decrees which have, as the expression goes, “force de loi” - decrees that the executive power in certain cases can be authorized to give, and most notably in the case of a state of exception. The concept of “force de loi,” as a technical legal term defines a separation between the efficacy of law and its formal essence, by which the decrees and measures that are not formally laws still acquire its force.

## Anomic space

This type of confusion between the acts by an executive power and those by a legislative power is a necessary characteristic of the state of exception. (The most extreme case being the Nazi regime, where, as Eichmann constantly repeated, “the words of the Fuhrer had the force of law.”) And in contemporary democracies, the creation of laws by governmental decrees that are subsequently ratified by Parliament has become a routine practice. Today/the Republic is not parliamentary. It is governmental. But from a technical point of view, what is specific for the state of exception is not so much the confusion of powers as it is the isolation of the force of law from the law itself. The state of exception defines a regime of the law within which the norm is valid but cannot be applied (since it has no force), and where acts that do not have the value of law acquire the force of law. This means, ultimately, that the force of law fluctuates as an indeterminate element that can be claimed both by the authority of the State or by a revolutionary organization. The state of exception is an anomic space in which what is at stake is a force of law without law. Such a force of law is indeed a mystical element, or rather a fiction by means of which the law attempts to make anomy a part of itself. But how should we understand such a mystical element, one by which the law survives its own effacement and acts as a pure force in the state of exception?

2. The specific quality of the state of exception appears clearly if we examine one measure in Roman Law that may be considered as its true archetype, the iustitium. When the Roman Senate was alerted to a situation that seemed to threaten or compromise the Republic, they pronounced a senatus consultum ultimum, whereby consuls (or their substitutes, and each citizen) were compelled to take all possible measures to assure the security of the State. The senatus consultum implied a decree by which one declared the tumultus, i.e., a state of exception caused by internal disorder or an insurrection whose consequence was the proclamation of a iustutium.

The term iustitium - construed precisely like solstitium— literally signifies “to arrest, suspend the ius, the legal order.” The Roman grammarians explained the term in the following way: “When the law marks a point of arrest, just as the sun in its solstice.” Consequently, the iustitium was not so much a suspension within the framework of the administration of justice, as a suspension of the law itself. If we would like to grasp the nature and structure of the state of exception, we first must comprehend the paradoxical status of this legal institution that simply consists in the production of a leg. void, the production of a space entirely deprived by ius. Consider the iustitium mentioned by Cicero in one of his Philippic Discourses. Anthony’s army is marching toward Rome, and the consul Cicero addresses the Senate in the following terms: “I judge it necessary to declare tumultus, to proclaim iustitium and to prepare for combat.” The usual translation of iustitium



as “legal vacancy” here seems quite pointless. On the contrary, faced with a dangerous situation, the issue is to abolish the restrictions imposed by the laws on action by the magistrate - i.e., essentially the interdiction against putting a citizen to death without having recourse to popular judgment. Faced with this anomic space that violently comes to coalesce with that of the City, both ancient and modern writers seem to oscillate between two contradictory conceptions: either to make iustitium correspond to the idea of a complete anomy within which all power and all legal structures are abolished, or to conceive of it as the very plentitude of law where it coincides with the totality of the real.

Un-executing the law

Whence the question: what is the nature of the acts committed during iustitium? From the moment they are carried out in a legal void they ought to be considered as pure facts with no legal connotation: The question is important, because we are here contemplating a sphere of action that implies above all the license to kill. Thus historians have asked the question of whether a magistrate who kills a citizen during a iustitium can be put on trial for homicide once the iustitium is over. Here we are faced with a type of action which appears to exceed the traditional legal distinction between legislation, execution, and transgression. The magistrate who acts during the iustitium is like an officer during the state of exception, who neither carries out the law, nor transgresses it, just as little as he is in the process of creating a new law. To use a paradoxical expression, we could say that he is in the process of “un-executing” the law. But what does it meant un-execute the law? How should we conceive of this particular class within the entire range of human actions?

Let us now attempt to develop the results of our genealogical investigation into the iustitium from the perspective of a general theory of the state of exception.

- The state of exception is not a dictatorship, but a space devoid of law. In the Roman Constitution, the dictator was a certain type of magistrate who received his power from a law voted on by the people The iustitium, on the contrary, just as the modern state of exception does not imply the creation of a new magistrate, only the creation of zone of anomy in which all legal determinations find themselves inactivated. In this way, and in spite of the common view, neither Mussolini nor Hitler can be technically defined as dictators. Hitler, in particular, was Chancellor of the Reich, legally appointed by the president What characterizes the Nazi regime, and makes it into such a dangerous model, is that it allowed the Weimar Constitution to exist, while doubling it with a secondary and legally non-formalized structure the could not exist alongside the first without the support of a generalize state of exception.

- For one reason or another this space devoid of law seems so essential to the legal order itself that the latter makes every possible attempt to assure a relation to the former, as if the law in order to guarantee its functioning would necessarily have to entertain a relation to an anomy.

Future violence

3. It is precisely in this perspective that we have to read the debate on the state of exception which pitted Walter Benjamin and Carl Schmitt against each other between 1928 and 1940. The starting point of the discussion is normally located in Benjamin’s reading of Political Theology in 1923, and in the many citations from Schmitt’s theory of sovereignty that appeared in The Origin of German Tragic Drama. Benjamin’s acknowledging of Schmitt’s influence on his own thought has always been considered scandalous. Without going into the details of this demonstration, I think it possible to inverse the charge of scandal, in suggesting that Schmitt’s theory of sovereignty can be read as the response to Benjamin’s critique of violence. What is the problem Benjamin poses in his “Critique of Violence”? For him, the question is how to establish the possibility of a future violence outside of, or beyond the law, a violence which could rupture the dialectic between the violence that poses and the one that conserves the

law. Benjamin calls this other violence “pure,” “divine,” or “revolutionary.” That which the law cannot stand, that which it resents as an intolerable menace, is the existence of a violence that would be exterior to it, and this not only because its finalities would be incompatible with the purpose of the legal order, but because of the “simple fact of its exteriority.”

Now we understand the sense in which Schmitt’s doctrine of sovereignty can be considered as a response to Benjamin’s critique. The state of exception is precisely that space in which Schmitt attempts to comprehend and incorporate into the thesis that there is a pure violence existing outside of the law. For Schmitt, there is no such thing as pure violence, there is no violence absolutely exterior to the nomos, because revolutionary violence, once the state of exception is established, it always finds itself included in the law. The state of exception is thus the means invented by Schmitt to respond to Benjamin’s thesis that there is a pure violence.

The decisive document in the Benjamin/Schmitt dossier is surely the 8th of the theses on the concept of history: “The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the ‘state of exception’ in which we live is not the exception but the rule. We must attain to a conception of history that is in keeping with this insight. Then we shall clearly realize that it is our task to bring about a real state of exception, and this will improve our position in the struggle against Fascism.”

Exception as a rule

That the state of exception since then has become the norm does not only signify that its undecidability has reached a point of culmination, but also that it is no longer capable of fulfilling the task assigned to it by Schmitt. According to him, the functioning of the legal order rests in the last instance on an arrangement, the state of exception, whose aim it is to make the norm applicable by a temporary suspension of its exercise. But if the exception becomes the rule, this arrangement can no longer function and Schmitt’s theory of the state of exception breaks down.

In this perspective, the distinction proposed by Benjamin between - an effective state of exception and a fictitious state of exception is essential, although little noticed. It can be found already in Schmitt, who borrowed it from French legal doctrine; but this latter, in line with his critique of the liberal idea of a state governed by law, deems any state of exception which professes to be governed by law to be fictitious.

Battle of the giants

Benjamin reformulates the opposition in order to turn it against Schmitt: once the possibility of a state of exception, in which the exception and the norm are temporally and spatially distinct, has fallen away, what becomes effective is the state of exception in which we are living, and where we can no longer distinguish the rule. In this case, all fiction of a bond between it and law disappears: there is only a zone of anomy dominated by pure violence with no legal cover.

Now we are in a position to better understand the debate between Schmitt and Benjamin. The dispute occurs in that anomic zone which for Schmitt must maintain its connection to law at all costs, whereas for Benjamin it has to be twisted free and liberated from this relation. What is at issue here is the relation between violence and law, i.e., the status of violence as a cipher for political action. The logomachia over anomy seems to be equally decisive for Western politics as the “battle of the giants around being” that has defined Western metaphysics. To pure being as the ultimate stake of metaphysics, corresponds pure violence as the ultimate stake of the political; to the onto-theological strategy that wants pure being within the net of logos, corresponds the strategy of exception that has to secure the relation between violence and law. It is as if law and logos would need an anomic or “a-logic” zone of suspension in order to found their relation to life.

4. The structural proximity between law and anomy, between pure violence and the state of exception also has, as is often the case, an inverted figure. Historians, ethnologists, and folklore specialists are well acquainted with anomic festivals, like the Roman Saturnalias, the charivari, and the Medieval carnival, that suspend and invert the legal and social relations defining normal order. Masters pass over into the service of servants, men dress up and behave like animals, bad habits and crimes that would normally be illegal are suddenly authorized. Karl Meuli was the first to emphasize the connection between these anomic festivals and the situations of suspended law that characterize certain archaic penal institutions. Here, as well as in the iustitium, it is possible to kill a man without going to trial, to destroy his house, and take his belongings. Far from reproducing a mythological past, the disorder of the carnival and the tumultuous destruction of the charivari re-actualize a real historical situation of anomy. The ambiguous connection between law and anomy is thus brought to light: the state of exception is transformed into an unrestrained festival where one displays pure violence in order to enjoy it in full freedom.

5. The Western political system thus seems to be a double apparatus, founded in a dialectic between two heterogeneous and, as it were, antithetical elements; nomos and anomy, legal right and pure violence, the law and the forms of life whose articulation is to be guaranteed by the state of exception. As long as these elements remain separated, their dialectic works, but when they tend toward a reciprocal indetermination and to a fusion into a unique power with two sides, when the state of exception becomes the rule, the political system transforms into an apparatus of death. We ask: why does nomos have a constitutive need for anomy? Why does the politics of the West have to measure up to this interior void? What, then, is the substance of the political, if it is essentially assigned to this legal vacuum? As long as we are not able to respond to these questions, we can no more respond to this other question



whose echo traverses all of Western political history: what does it mean to act politically?



# Neither here nor elsewhere

Brett Neilson interviews Sandro Mezzadra

The question of migration had become a central concern for the global movement in Italy. While the issue of migration had not been a primary concern at the first World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, it had emerged as a fundamental question in the lead-up to the Firenze meetings, particularly in the wake of the G8 protests in Genova.

Can you describe how migration became a central issue for the global movement, giving some detail about concurrent developments in border control at the European level?

If we look at the shape the global movement has taken since the first explosion in Seattle in late 1999, we see that the central platform of the movement has been the struggle against neoliberal capitalism, and in particular against the large agencies of transnational governance such as the World Bank and the World Trade Organization. Despite the analytical importance and mobilizing power of the concept of neoliberalism, its critics have tended to depict those who suffer the effects of globalisation in the global south as mere victims, denying them a position as protagonists or active social subjects in contemporary processes of global transformation. From this perspective, migration becomes just one in a long line of catastrophes occasioned by neoliberalism, whilst globalisation becomes something that is inevitable and thus immune to criticism from anything but a nostalgic point of view. In the first two World Social Forums held at Porto Alegre, this critique of neoliberalism took centre stage. One of the consequences was that there were no workshops devoted specifically to migration. Then, at the protests against the G8 summit in Genova in July 2001, there was a large rally organized by migrants that was a big success. In planning the workshops on migration at the European Social Forum, we insisted that it is necessary not only to build a critique of the Europe of Maastricht (that is, of the ‘neoliberal’ principles which in 1991-1992 were established by the Maastricht Treaty as foundations of the economic Europe) but also to build a critique of the Europe of Schengen (that is, of the new ‘border regime’ whose institution was promoted in 1985 by the Schengen Agreement on the free circulation of European citizens and then fulfilled in the 1990s). We argued that to conduct a struggle against the terms of European citizenship it is also necessary to question the borders that define that citizenship and approached this very much as a matter of principle. Looking at Europe through the lens of migration

word Lager is very prominent, whilst in Australia, the references have been to the penal colonies established by the English (the slogan ‘We are all boat people’ suggests a homology between convict transportees and present-day asylum seekers). Nonetheless, the thought of Giorgio Agamben, who privileges the example of the Lager, has been instructive in Australia for understanding the political structure of the camp. His concept of ‘bare life’ is not very present in your writing. Indeed, there are key thinkers of operaismo who have polemicalized against Agamben’s use of this concept, such as Luciano Ferrari Bravo in *Dal fordismo alla globalizzazione* (2001) or Antonio Negri in *Il desiderio del mostro* (2001). Is the concept of ‘bare life’ useful or not for understanding the political structure of the camp?

We need to be careful about the use of the term Lager in the context of the struggle against detention centres. The danger is that one might be seen to confuse current forms of global control with the forms of rule that dominated under European fascism in the early 20th-century. The term is not simply reducible to the camps that existed under European fascism or Nazism. In fact, the Lager has colonial origins in places such as Cuba and South Africa or indeed, as you point out, in Australia, which in a certain sense was one enormous Lager. So in using this term, we first want to point to the persistence of colonialism and colonial power relations within contemporary models of government and metropolitan societies. Next, we recognize that even the Nazi Lager cannot be immediately equated with the extermination camps at Auschwitz or Treblinka. Beginning in 1933, the Lager were administrative camps established throughout Germany for the internment of political opponents and of the so-called Asozialen (people like gypsies, the mentally ill, or homosexuals) and not immediately or only the Jews who would eventually be exterminated. So in identifying contemporary detention centres as Lager, we are not equating them with extermination camps. The Lager is an administrative space in which men and women who have not committed any crime are denied their right to mobility. In this sense, it is perfectly legitimate to identify present-day detention centres as Lager. It is also valid to point out that such spaces, associated with one of the blackest periods in European history, have not disappeared from our political scene, but have experienced a general diffusion throughout the so-called West (and also in other parts of the world). If one recalls Hannah Arendt’s *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), she recognizes the colonial origins of the Lager and traces the first appearance of such places in Europe to the concentration camps that appeared after the First World War. These were not extermination camps but places for the internment of men and women who, due to the changes to the map of Europe following the war, had no clear national citizenship (the so-called apatrides or Heimatlosen). In this sense, it is also appropriate to speak of contemporary detention centres as Lager, since they also serve to restrict the movement of people with no clear juridical connection to a particular nation-state or with the ‘wrong’ citizenship. On the question of ‘bare life,’ Agamben’s work provides a very powerful set of concepts with which to understand the political structure of the camp. Certainly, his arguments have proved fundamental for activists involved in protesting the existence of detention centres in Italy: especially his description of the peculiar dialectic of exclusion and inclusion which is put to work in the camps. A subject who is not at all recognized by the legal order (the ‘illegal alien’) is included in that order (through the ‘inclusion’ in the detention center) just to be excluded from the space to which the legal order itself applies! But Agamben risks emphasizing too much the exceptional character of the camp. But the logic of domination that functions in the camp also operates in other social spaces. This type of domination is really diffused throughout the comprehensive structure of society. Ferrari Bravo finds the concept of ‘bare life’ ambiguous because it excludes the question of labour from the sphere of theoretical observation. He asked if one should not look, besides Auschwitz, also at Ellis Island to understand the logic of the contemporary

camps. Another exponent of operaismo, Paolo Virno, points out polemically that the best example of what Agamben means by ‘bare life’ is labour power, as defined by Marx as a form of potentiality. This approach calls to attention the fundamental relation between contemporary detention centres and the comprehensive restructuring of the labour market under global capitalism. The detention centre is a kind of decompression chamber that diffuses tensions accumulated on the labour market. These places present the other face of capitalism’s new flexibility: they are concrete spaces of state oppression and a general metaphor of the despotic tendency to control labour’s mobility, which is a structural character of ‘historical capitalism’. It is more important to speak of the camps in this way than in terms of ‘bare life.’ Certainly, as Agamben argues, the camp performs a violent act of stripping. But this stripping should be understood in relation to the new forms of life that are produced in global capitalism. If global capitalism gives rise to new forms of flexibility, then the continuous movement of migrants shows the subjective face of this flexibility. At the same time, migratory movements are clearly exploited by global capitalism, and detention centres are crucial to this system of exploitation. This is one of things that becomes clear in the important book by Yann Moulier Boutang, *De l’esclavage au salariat* (1998). Taking a wide historical view of the capitalist world system, Moulier Boutang argues that forms of indentured and enslaved labour have always played and continue to play a fundamental role in capitalist accumulation. Far from being archaisms or transitory adjustments destined to be wiped out by modernization, these labour regimes are constituent of capitalist development and arise precisely from the attempt to control or limit the worker’s flight. In this perspective, the effort to control the migrant’s mobility becomes the motor of the capitalist system and the contemporary detention centre appears as one in a long line of administrative mechanisms that function to this end.

***In Diritto di fuga, you emphasize the importance of recent efforts to rethink the concept of citizenship for understanding migration in the contemporary world. In the wake of the Tampa incident of August 2001, however, some Australian thinkers began to tackle the questions of migration and detention more through the concept of sovereignty. To what extent has the issue of sovereignty been central for those involved in the struggle for migrant rights in Europe?***

In *Diritto di fuga* I tried to offer a radical rereading of T.H. Marshall’s (1949) classical text on citizenship and social class. This meant identifying two faces of citizenship: the first being citizenship in the formal institutional sense, and the second associated with social practices, that is with a combination of political and practical forces that challenge the formal institutions of citizenship. In this second sense, the question of citizenship raises that of subjectivity. And while I obviously value the Foucauldian criticism of the concept of citizenship, pointing out that this subjectivity is constructed by a number of disciplinary practices, I also stress that there is an autonomous space of subjective action that can force significant institutional transformations. For me, speaking of citizenship is above all a way of moving the question of subjectivity into political theory. Thinking about citizenship in this sense is a way of focusing the debate specifically on migrants, on people who are not recognized as formal citizens within a particular political space. Migratory movements are a practice of citizenship that, over the past ten years, has placed increasing pressure on the borders of formal citizenship. Citizenship is a concept that allows one to ask how these pressures bear upon classical political concepts such as sovereignty. The concept of citizenship also extends beyond the direct reference to migratory movements. One big theoretical challenge is to individuate the nexus that connects the specific demands for citizenship expressed through migratory movements to other social practices that don’t necessarily involve the demand for formal citizenship. I have tried to identify what is common to subjective social practices of migration and demands for citizen-

yields very different results than looking at Europe through the lens of some different concept or practice—e.g., neoliberalism. Throughout the 1990s, one of the characteristics of migration politics at the European Union level was a growing harmonization of nation-state policies and technologies of border control. But this has not rendered the borders of the EU equal to those of the modern nation-state. The question of European borders (and the confines of European citizenship) is extremely complex.

***An issue about the function of detention centres is maintaining and re-asserting national sovereignty in an era of increased migratory movements. In the Italian campaign against detention centres the***





ship expressed within the so-called West over the past few decades, particularly in the feminist and workers’ movements. The concept of diritto di fuga allows this nexus to come into view. I’m not trying to suggest some sort of levelling homology between migrant struggles and those of feminists and workers. To the contrary, the connection is absolutely formal and not immediately communicable. But there is a link as regards labour mobility. Yann Moulier Boutang’s also identifies the subjective practice of labour mobility as the connecting thread in the history of capitalism. Since the 1970s, in Italy there has been an intense discussion of the worker’s escape from the factory, the refusal of work in a concrete sense. In the recent book *Le nouvel esprit du capitalisme*, Luc Boltanski and Éve Chiapello (1999) show how ‘flexibility’, before becoming a keyword of corporate ideology, was recognized at the beginning of the 1970s as the chief problem of capitalist command, in the shape of labour’s mobility. Similarly feminism involves a refusal of domestic work and the patriarchal family, a demand for control over subjective decisions regarding labour mobility. The category of diritto di fuga links these subjective practices of mobility to the migrant’s demand for citizenship, to the migrant’s right to assert control over his/her own movements.

**Can you say something about how your emphasis on the subjective aspects of migration relates to multiculturalism as understood in the Italian or European context?**

In the theoretical sense, emphasizing the subjective aspect of migration means moving away from mainstream discourses that altogether exclude this dimension, talking only of push and pull, of demography, and so forth. In *Diritto di fuga*, I pointed to the need to highlight this subjective dimension to understand the decision to leave unfavourable or undesirable conditions in a particular place. This is an approach that dovetails with much of the ethnographic work done with migrants in Italy by people like Alessandro dal Lago (1999) and Ruba Salih (2003). Their work has delivered a much richer and more complex understanding of migration than found in mainstream discourses: it places migration in the context of a life story in which the subjective aspect becomes very clear, and allows a move away from stereotypical narratives by which the decision to migrate involves a search for liberty or emancipation. In emphasizing the subjective aspect of migration, I’m not trying to reinstate some mythical understanding of Cartesian subjectivity. Rather I’m speaking of processes of subjectivization in the Foucauldian sense, and while these may involve pain and poverty they can also involve enjoyment. Much of the work done in the name of solidarity with migrants in Italy has treated them as victims, as people in need of assistance, care, or protection. Doubtless this work has been inspired by noble motives, but it also has a certain ambiguity. By exploring the subjective aspect of migration, one is able to move beyond this paternalistic vision and to see migrants as the central protagonists of current processes of global transformation. As regards multiculturalism, it is safe to say that there has not been much practical experience of multicultural politics in Europe. Here the discourse of multiculturalism was imported from North America, and the public debate has always been narrowly linked to migration. As in Australia and North America, the debate has largely been driven by a certain white fundamentalism that sees multiculturalism has something to be fought. But even in a left-wing context, there are ambiguities surrounding the politics of multiculturalism. For instance, if you imagine a group of activists who are working with migrants to organize a festival, there will surely be somebody who asserts that each of the cultures involved ought to have a space to express itself. Not only are different cultures shunted into different spaces, but also culture and ethnicity are collapsed. The basic lesson of whiteness studies (that whiteness is a marked identity and not a neutral or universal position) has not penetrated the European left, and ethnic particularity still tends to be identified in contrast to the white European citizen. There is also a growing tendency in Europe to oppose issues of cultural recogni-

tion to those of economic or social well-being. Axel Honneth (1996) is only the most intelligent proponent of this argument. Such a tendency is particularly worrying in a period in which the welfare state is under attack. As in other parts of the world, multiculturalism has become overwhelmingly associated with the politics of identity. Under the hegemony of multiculturalism, all the diverse aspects and problems of migration are reduced to that of identity. In Europe identity is largely understood as a question of cultural belonging, as something contained by official geographical borders, as given rather than constructed. Perhaps this is why that strain of postcolonial studies that emphasizes the idea of hybridity, which is by now relatively mainstream in the English-speaking world, is still seen as quite cutting-edge in Italy.

**Could you say something about the role of civil disobedience in the struggle against the Lager and within the movement more generally?**

I would say that disobedience, which involves the spectacularization of politics and the production of exemplary actions, has been extremely important in the phase of maturation and growth of the global movement. It has been crucial for creating the impression of an emergence from marginality, for winning a space on the evening news, for occupying sound-bytes. This kind of action is absolutely valid in a social context that tends ever more toward symbolization and spectacularization and, for this reason, it must not be demonized. A problem emerges, however, when such spectacularization becomes an end in itself, when disobedience ceases to be one part in a combination of political actions. There is a danger that disobedience becomes nothing so much as a kind of self-promotion. Something like a logo, one could say. But this remains an open discussion, since even those who criticize the disobbedienti find it difficult to identify forms of political action that would be as exemplary as theirs but at the same time contribute to a deep structural change. This is a big problem that relates to the motivations of people involved in the movement. There is an important difference between actions that speak the language of ethics and actions that speak the language of politics. Perhaps the importance of ‘ethical’ motivations, not to be confused with ‘moralism,’ within the composition of the movement could be interpreted as the subversive side of a mode of production which tends to value the very subjectivity of the workers

The big dilemma facing the movement is how to harness and move beyond the utopian feeling that has been created during the unexpectedly large demonstrations. For while it is true that the movement has experienced amazing growth, one is left to ask in between the protest marches that attract hundreds of thousands of people on the base of these very general (ethical?) motivations: ‘Where is everyone, what are they doing?’ The challenge is to find concrete points of application for the movement. One possibility is within the universities, since despite the recent reforms, there is a new generation of student activists in Italy and real possibilities for it to emerge as a laboratory for experimenting with new political discourses and practices. There have also been some interesting experiments with connections between the movement and institutions, especially at the municipal level. I think it is important, however, to keep this experimentation with institutions at a distance from the project of winning constituted political power at the level of the nation-state.

**How can we understand the current climate of risk and repression? Should we understand it as a moment of regression or reaction?**

In general I try to avoid using the term reaction. What we are dealing with is more a question of reorganization. I know that Antonio Negri has referred to the current situation as a backlash. In my opinion, Hardt and Negri risk buying into a progressive, almost linear, model of historical change, when they argue that Empire makes a definite preferable advance over classical nation-state imperialism, referring back to Woodrow Wilsons project of instituting a world government of peace. One drawback of this approach is that it seems that the Empire they describe as

emerging in the Clinton years is the only Empire possible. For me, their theoretical model (particularly in the seminal chapter entitled *Mixed Constitution*) is much more complex. It can incorporate conflict and aggression. Rather than as a backlash or reaction, I understand the present situation as one in which elements of this mixed constitution are undergoing a process of redefinition and reorganization. The current conflicts are internal to Empire and do not attest a simple movement back into the period of economic and military nationalism. We are seeing a series of displacements and adjustments within a new form of constitutionalism that is a field of tensions and can pass through different phases of equilibrium and disequilibrium. This idea of mixed constitutionalism seems to me one of the strongest aspects of Hardt and Negris book, which works in counterpoint to the more metadiscursive narrative that sees counter-Empire emerging only to the extent that Empire succeeds the older system of nation-states in an entirely linear way. Certainly the books utopianism is one of its most appealing aspects and its opening of new political vistas has been altogether positive. But the more progressive aspects of Hardt and Negris argument are at odds with some of the other theoretical excurses they make, in particular the engagement with postcolonial theory. This is why I favour a moratorium on the use of words like regression and reaction.

**What is your opinion on the argument according to which Europe is the weak link within this new global constitution of Empire? This is a central theme in the volume *Europa Politica* edited by Heidrun Friese, Antonio Negri, and Peter Wagner to which you contributed a piece (with Alessandro dal Lago). Is there a danger that seeing Europe as the weak link obstructs the project of constructing alliances and channels of political communication with social movements outside of it?**

Certainly it is fair to say that the movement must begin to think of new ways to relate to social and political institutions. This is necessary to achieve concrete changes. One of the difficulties is that today there exists a heterogeneous movement of unparalleled numbers and strength in Italy, but we have been unable to change anything. For instance, we struggled against the Bossi-Fini legislation, but now it is part of Italian law. We need to draft a model that will allow us to reach concrete goals. This is not a matter of reform. Rather it is a question of thinking about new relations with institutions, of thinking of institutions themselves in a different way. Having said this, it is clear that the best chance for realizing a new way of relating to institutions is at the European level. The institutions of the EU are already quite well established. So when we begin to think about new relations with the institutional left, we are thinking about new ways to connect to (and reorganize) the space of European governance. In this respect, what I said earlier about migratory movements is extremely important. Thinking of Europe in terms of migratory movements allows us to imagine an entirely different version of Europe than the one that is presently being constructed at the institutional level. So the first task of the movement as it begins to experiment with institutions is to keep open the criticism of the borders of EU citizenship. In this regard, it is necessary to realize that European constitutionalism implies a very different model of borders than that characteristic of the nation-state. The material constitution of EU is complex, flexible, and multi-level. It continually integrates and reorganizes spaces and functions. And this definitely opens new opportunities for social movements. At this level, there are possibilities to use the contradictions that exist with the new constitutionalism, to occupy gaps formed by these flexible operations (even if only temporarily). To argue that this is the case simply because the EU operates at a supranational level is to presuppose a conflict between this new constitutionalism and nation-state governance. While this may have been the case in the 1960s or 1970s, the integration of Europe is now something that has been done. Clearly this integration has often served to strengthen the mechanisms of global capitalist command, but there are also spaces for alternatives.

# “I am not willing to return at this time”

Sabine Hess

Transmigration of Eastern European Women

Despite or rather against the risks of trans-

formation and the uncertainties of transmi-

gration there is still agency. As people have

to make sense and act in daily live there

are appropriations, tactics and thus new

constitutions.

I have a dream: I want to go to Germany and stay there for a while. There you can earn some money and learn German along the way. But no, the other girls stay here at Slavocovce and get their unemployment-benefits. And then a boy shows up and says ‘marry me’, and then the kids are coming. And that is what life is all about?” No, the 20 year old Nadja, who I met during my field work at Slovakia 1999, wants to have more from life than what seems to be possible at her small industrial home town. The paper production plant, the only work place around, did not close down but is working on a rationalized level. Whereas the older people still find work there, which – by the way - doesn’t mean to earn a living, the job-perspectives for the younger generation especially the graduates are gloomy. Nadja is looking out of her window over the muddy tracks linking the once fashionable blocks of flats and says: “I didn’t want to end up in that dump.” She is almost furious towards her friends that they don’t take any initiative: “They stay here?! But this life is not enough for me.” Nadja herself finished college one year ago. Since then she has been preparing her migration to Germany as Au Pair - which means baby-sitting and domestic-work in turn for living-in accommodation and a small pocket-money of 200 Euro. She is one of the thousands of eastern European women who try to struggle with the upheavals of the transformational processes by extending their action onto the transnational space. There are women who work as nurses for elderly people, as live-in caregivers or domestic workers for western families and as waitresses in bars, hotels, in animation and prostitution. They try to earn money as shopping tourists or suitcase. They tactically use the means of mobility and migration which are offered by the restrictive immigration policies of the receiving countries and which are informally negotiated or officially advertised in the countries of origin. Their informal migration-networks reach from the neighboring western European countries far to Turkey and South Asia. But not only their practices of mobility are quite often undocumented also their gendered work places in the lower service sector are usually hidden in the private sphere of families or the back-rooms of bars. This concealment makes the personal service sector such an important source of employment for migrant women. On the other hand it keeps its actors invisible. But also the main social science discourses on globalization and transformation of the western and eastern European societies are writing this female migration out of the master-narratives. In fact these female migrants are global players from below, who are filling important social gaps torn up by the globalization and transformation processes but they are rarely recognized as such and as actors of transformation. Their strategies of mobility question the classical anti-racist concepts of Fortress Europe which stresses the defence mechanism of the European Union and national migration policies. Their practices call for taking into consideration the aspects of autonomy of migration strategies and the actors subjectivities.

### New migration patterns: Au Pair

Nadja is now for the second time in Germany working without documents in a private household. With her first family she got in trouble quite soon as many of the young Au Pair-women do: too much domestic work. So she left very disappointed but with the promise to return: “What should I do back home?”, she was asking me and gave the answer herself: “nothing, there I will stay jobless. Studying? Yes, I would like to, but it’s very hard to get a place.”

After some months at home Nadja was informally referred to the new family by her old Au Pair friend in Germany. As Nadja phoned me that she was back in South Germany I was quite astonished about her courage to use such illegal means. “Yes and no”, she explained. She legally entered on the tourist visa for three months but without a work permit - floating between legal existence and illegalization. Many of the eastern European migrants manage to stay in Germany for a couple of years by moving back and forth using the legal tourist permission for three months and then returning home soon coming back again. Au Pair as one of the few legal means of migration to western Europe has become a main springboard for women to the West leading to such mobile irregular forms of extended stays. Recent studies on east-west migration have confirmed that permanent emigration from eastern countries has not really increased since 1989 but an irregular transnational mobility. Shuttle or circular migration has become the dominant feature of the new European migrational space.

Nadja is now quite content with her new family. She doesn’t know when she will finally return, but she doesn’t want to stay in Germany permanently either: “For a while I can do such maid-jobs but eventually I want to study to get a good job. And that I cannot do in Germany.” Some of the young women especially from countries further East who are excluded from the EU-tourist visa try to marry as the only means of permanent residency.

Certainly there are also the women who return home in time. They hope to get now a place at university or a good job which is quite often soon heavily disappointed. But over half of the women which I met during my two years of research tried to extend their migration taking up any possibility which opened up for them. They took the restricted means of mobility as a resource of which they tried to get the most out of.

### Transformation strategies

What at first sight seems to be a precarious and spontaneous practice reveals itself to be a strategy of young women well adapted to the challenges of the “transformation period”. Everyone I met linked their migration to the demands and difficulties of the transformation processes. All addressed the social and economic situation of the country, their families and themselves as “difficult”. Nearly all of the young women were jobless after high-school. The social security system still has little employment benefits to offer but it’s not enough to live for its own. Additionally they complained about the steadily rising prices which they connected to Slovakia’s recent political efforts to reach the EU admission requirements. So they were even more dependent on the family economy – most are, by the way, two earner-families. Also their attempts to study did not only fail because they did not pass the examinations but most parents could not afford to pay the education. In this sense the stipend of the Au Pair-job which is almost as big as a teacher’s income in Slovakia is an incentive for the young women to take on the domestic work abroad. They all longed for their own money to become self-reliant and to pay for their university –education themselves. However their step to transnationalize the social risk of unemployment and use the transnational space for generating income in order to go on with their education at home is soon heavily disappointed in Germany. There they have to realize that the stipend is really only pocket change for German conditions and that they can’t save a lot. So they try to find a second or third job and to extend their stay. But they were also very fast in adapting to the new situation, and enlarged their perspectives onto other things as enriching their western experiences. This relates to another common argumentational pattern why they took up the Au Pair-work: that of learning a foreign language. First I took it as a tactical move to meet the Au Pair requirements, because Au Pair is officially still seen as a cultural exchange. But all were going on saying: “Yes, if you can speak German very well, you will find a good job in Slovakia, then you get a good salary.” This believe in the cultural capital of knowing a foreign language also motivated parents to support the migration of their daughters. All the intellectuals with whom I spoke told me as well: “Western experiences are now important!” Then I had to understand that it was not the general economic risk of impoverishment but what really troubled the young women was the social experience of dequalification, career-breaks and hence declassification. All blamed their joblessness after high school on the devaluation of higher education.

Also they had already to experience that the parents were suddenly confronted with unemployment or were dequalified at their work-place. In the context of marketization, privatization and a rapidly westernizing economy traditional skills, qualifications and status-hierarchies become uncertain, devalued and the social strata are being newly mixed. New skills, strategies and capital-forms in a Bourdieuan sense seem to be needed. And practices, knowledge and lifestyles which are ascribed to the West are not only of high symbolic value. They apparently can be directly converted in the few expanding sectors like the service and private foreign capital sector.

A joke which I often heard in Slovakia confirmed this trend: Even advertisements for cleaning jobs would nowadays include: knowledge in German language is highly appreciated! The young women had understood this lesson and mobilized the resources they had left: education, creativity, mobility and a vision of their future. In the light of less economic or social

capital of their parents they rationally try to enhance their intercultural and knowledge capital not to lose out in the transformation. But in view of the deteriorating educational and social infrastructure they are forced to develop informal, transnational strategies which they creatively do.

The Au Pair migration is therefore to be seen as an individual and family based qualification strategy to enhance one’s own chances after the return. In regard of the other possibilities at hand it is a highly functional practice of young women to cope with the social risks of the transformations. Temporary migration is in this sense a transformation strategy.

### One foot at each country

But, as we already heard, in a lot of cases the one-year migration extended to more years of shuttling. Apart from other reasons one of the main criteria for staying or leaving were the developments at home and their comparison with Germany. For this the women had enough occasions when they communicated with friends or traveled home due to the visa requirements: “Back home I only would hang on the dole as many of my friends are and I can not just sit around”, said Vera after her last visit. Also some parents tried to persuade their daughters to extend their stay bridging longer the bad situation even when the women wanted to return. In view of this also the migrational strategy to shuttle over years between Slovakia and Germany appears in a different light. The apparently indecisive multi-local practices of the young women are to be understood in their own right as a mobile strategy well adapted to the transformations at home. It is a flexible and risk minimizing strategy of using the whole transnational space and to evaluate the chances and difficulties which each environment has to offer. With one foot in each country the women explore if their cultural and knowledge capital gained in the migration is enough to resettle with both feet at home. Or if they have to take the hard work as a domestic servant further upon themselves in order to improve their financial and cultural capital. So many keep both options open for themselves: while having a work-place at a German family they attempt to get to university or to find a job in Slovakia. Some migrant women live for several years a life which is functionally divided between both countries realizing their aims there where it is possible.

### Moving back and forth

Evading the difficulties and combining the opportunities of each context is itself filled with uncertainties of even sexual exploitation. The impression which the growing anthropological studies on transmigration tend to give of free floating people successfully constructing hybrid identities is in this respect rather another form of exotization. As the migrants are localizing themselves under specific conditions there are also the women who do not come to terms with smoothly integrating the two socially, culturally and emotionally different situations. They will eventually decide for one option. Either they can’t stand any longer their humiliating position as domestic workers and go back. Or they couldn’t keep up any longer with the social cultural pressures for purity and gave up. But also the women who return home don’t go back with the same visions and subject positions as they left. They transformed themselves during their migration. Most of these women voiced very strongly at the end of their stay a highly gendered discourse of newly found independence and developed self-determination. They unexpectedly described their family-bound living as narrow, controlled and critiqued the silent force of gendered normalization. And they proclaimed newly constructed orientations and non-material life-qualities which reminded me rather of post-modern perspectives.

So they rejected to work as hard for material gains as their parents do and rather wished to find a job for self-realization. They did not overtly question the hegemonic patterns of female biography but claimed to explore the world first, postponing marriage and motherhood. In the described environment of risk the young women were creating new subject-positions and fabricated biographical projects which transgress the cultural ascribed status-quo. Despite or rather against the risks of transformation and the uncertainties of transmigration there is still agency. As people have to make sense and act in daily live there are appropriations, tactics and thus new constitutions.



**D**uring a noborder camp in a small town in Romania a young guy passes by. He works for a corporation that manufactures hardware for brand-name electronics companies near the Hungarian-Serbian border. He tells the story of an unsuccessful attempt to unionise the workers of this factory. About 3500 Romanians are employed there for a wage of eight dollars for a twelve hour working day. Their dispute was not about salary. The workers' discontent grew out of despair – how were they to overcome the powerless position they were in as an outsourced post-industrial reserve army, fully exposed to the fluctuations of just-in-time production while forced to be graceful for the privilege of having a job in the first place? His story ended as it happens every day around the globe. Snared within the boundaries of the local, the struggle of the Romanian workers didn't have a chance to be recognized. Irrespective of whether the free lunch includes desert, a few extra dollars are thrown into the pay cheque, or health insurance is part of the salary package, management will not hesitate to fire all those who start a union within the factory. It's a vicious circle. Every attempt to self-organize leads to nothing but an affirmation of and increase in the power of a corporation that operates globally and constantly blackmails workers in Romania, Scotland or Singapore with threats to close down the factory site and move production to China or Mexico.

Such powerlessness is no matter of quantity: even the biggest union of the world, the German Metal Workers, failed in their half-hearted attempt to finally achieve equal wages in East and West Germany, almost 14 years after the fall of the Berlin wall. Their strike in summer 2003 turned out to be the greatest disaster in union history after World War II – and the reasons are not all that different from the situation in Romania. The post-Fordist organization of labour fragments workers in a way never seen before. The results come into effect at the level of subjectivity: The classical values of collectivism and solidarity turn out to be incredibly weak and practically useless as soon as a struggle leaves its one-dimensionality and enters the realm of distributed power within networks around the world.

Nonetheless, the power of workers in the global factories is potentially unlimited. Their mind-blowing virtual strength comes as no surprise. The Net still holds the capacity to articulate differently situated actors; in doing so, new socio-technical formations accumulate with unforeseen political force. Call this globalization from below, if you like. One could easily imagine how campaigns of culture jamming and image-pollution could support a tiny, anonymous wildcat strike in a maquiladora factory like the one in Romania. Precisely because of the dependency of global markets on just-in-time production, any deliberate and well-aligned refusal is very likely to create a considerable material threat. Activist campaign – from McLibel to Deportation Class, from Toywar to The Yesmen – have demonstrated how immaterial protest can short-circuit the incalculable and immeasurable layers of creative refusal in the most effective and cost-efficient way. A wide range of different conceptual technics are now ready to be further implemented, translated and abstracted in a variety of other contexts. What we now need to figure out is how to bypass the Cultural Divide without reducing or underestimating the complex antagonisms and incommensurabilities that define the plurality of cultures. In the age of networks, how can concepts transform and pop up in other social contexts?

### The Strategy of Questions

What is to be done in order to realize our potential, to liberate net activism from the art ghetto in which it was suspended during the nineties? What is to be done in order to overcome social boundaries and explore the power of the immaterial workers of the world, to render more precisely the new forms of subjectivity and connectivity that might constitute the next generation of global struggles? Hacktivist and net.art techniques can travel a long way. Why not use and reuse concepts that have been successfully

implemented in one context and integrate them into other contexts? Such operations are, after all, ones of translation and transformation rather than reproduction of the same. We've transcended the impasse of postmodernist identity politics and academe's game of culture wars, and can freely debate our political directions without the fear of a return to party doctrines. The current multiplicity of struggles, models and forms of organizations makes it possible and even necessary to repose a question, that has been taboo for a little while: What is to be done? There is one main difference to the old-style Leninist attitude. It will most likely generate no answer, only more questions.

What is to be done in order to envision a notion of the global that is not a synonym for the unavoidability of continuous pauperisation? Why not invent a conceptual technics of the global as a social potential, as the experience of enormous creativity of the multiplicity and diversity of all creative and productive practices? How can we leave the realm of the hypothetical and purely speculative and mobilize concepts into the ordinary everyday, yet resist a demise into banality? How do concepts leave the safe environment of art and activism and enter the realm of the popular? Is commercialisation of the avant-garde the only route open for a broader distribution of political concepts? In short: how do political and cultural concepts travel in a post-1989, post-911 world that is so deeply networked and so profoundly mediated? How do movements scale up and metamorphose into something much more powerful and imaginative?

We do not believe this is just an issue of branding and marketing, backed up by sufficient financial resources. That would be the answer of tired transnational NGO bureaucrats. There is something else going on that taps into the desire and discontents of millions. This makes the question what is to be done? even more open. There is no urgency to make 'decisions.' We do not need to make up a crisis – there is already plenty of it around. The end of history vanished long before September 11th, 2001. The creeping recession of the old powers and the new markets revealed new forms of political subjectivity that culminated in one slogan: "Another world is possible." Many fear this slogan remains an empty phrase. For us that's not a given deal. Beyond the old fashioned dialectics of revolution and reform, radicalism and opportunism, there is not only one alternative, but numerous (network) architectures to be invented – and probed.

Who dares to have the courage to write "we," provoking everyone by stating that there is something like a global strategy, a common debate of initiatives, movements and multitudes? The general intellect, the connected intelligence, the roaming intelligentsia that travels from one tribe to the next can only be fragrant lie. Deconstruction of general claims is an easy job. Yet we are so flagrant to believe that people can have certain strategies in common and debate them. We have to look at the next generation of networking, which will be based on a culture of mutual exchange and syndication, not just pointing and linking – no matter how material or immaterial, real or virtual.

### Beyond the Hyperlink

The hyperlink was once an adequate metaphor for a primitive version of global networking based purely on its potential. With its spamming, the dissemination of digital porn and open publishing, its hacker-culture and corporate firewalls, free software and the new economy, open access and wireless mobility, the Internet built and configured a fin de siècle that was stamped by all sorts of artificial euphoria and enthusiasm. Nineties networking was a culture of no commitment, spontaneous adventures and loose appointments; it was liberating from crusty bureaucracies and we liked it a lot. Net culture offered unexpected advantages in the fight against the ancient brood of corporate power and we succeeded many times; it gave a first taste of a new freedom, but we are no longer satisfied with it.

Critical Internet culture is ready for its next stage. The Net is no longer a parallel universe; it's the global

condition – the world we live in. After the loose ties of Usenet, lists and blogs it is now important to investigate how we can design tighter bonds of collaboration. As casual drug users we know: one would have to increase the application rate in order to repeat the 'rush' of the new. But that's too banal and cheap for us. Stop complaining about the decline of new media. That perhaps already happened in 1998. Let's dream up something else. It is important to 'materialize' net culture without making the same mistakes as the NGOs of the 80s and 90s. We don't need consolidation but dissemination and transformation. Let's jump to another level and take all these experimental ideas about interactive communication, interface culture and hypertext with us. Rather than a renaissance of what we have already experienced, we will start searching for radically new models of connectivity that indicate a forthcoming revolution. A revolution in the truest sense of the word.

Commonly, a revolution means the beginning of something very new, something that has never been there before. And that's what fuels the desire. But in its literal and even original notion the term revolution refers to a political activity that has nothing else in mind than the restoration of some allegedly old-fashioned rights and freedoms that were guaranteed once upon the time. It is precisely such contrariness that characterizes the current situation. The revolution of our age should come as no surprise. It has been announced for a long time. It is anticipated in the advantage of the open source idea over archaic terms of property. It is based on the steady decline of the traditional client-server architecture and the phenomenal rise of peer-to-peer-technologies. It is practised already on a daily basis: the overwhelming success of open standards, free software and file-sharing tools shows a glimpse of the triumph of a code that will transform knowledge-production into a world-writable mode. Today revolution means the wikification of the world; it means creating many different versions of worlds, which everyone can read, write, edit and execute. This revolution is very different from the depressing indictment that, historically, revolutions simply reinstated that which they sought to overthrow. Today's revolution is not one of expulsion followed by reincorporation; it is one of invention, transformation and connection. No one has any hope of capturing the emergent info-political formations; there's too many of them.

On a theoretical level this revolution has been discussed in many books and lectured on at many universities. Abstract knowledge and the general intellect are replacing parcelized and repetitive labour, the industrial division of labour and notions of ownership. The key content of production and wealth accumulation is no longer the exploitation of human labour: it must be allocated to the development of the social networker. The cyberpunk phrase, "the future is now," has come true. Planet earth has reached a stage of science fiction. We will not get distracted by Hollywood blockbusters where technology is a spectacle that refracts from 'real life.' It is time to transcend media (theory) and face the fact that technology (in)forms the lives of billions. On a conceptual level the tangible assets of an oddly bashful digital commune appear as the logical, quasi-natural consequence of technological progress. Even though this commune consists of much more than just propagandistic values, its full impact remains unfeasible under the despotic rule of an info-empire that seems to act without even the simulation of being capable of solving any of the problems of its own creation other than on the symbolic level of occasional interventionism.

### Open Source Imagination

'New media' are only one amongst many struggles. Having said that, today's network technology may as well be described as a rich metaphor machine, whose concepts penetrate a wide diversity of political, economic and cultural aspects of life. For decades the democratisation of media has been announced. But nothing seemed to happen. Instead, the babyboom generation has been whingeing for

# Reverse Engineering Freedom

**Geert Lovink and Florian Schneider**

**What is the problem of a global movement**

**that became stuck in the old patterns of**

**protest as usual? What's the sense of a**

**theory that is confined to the self-gratifying**

**boundaries of academic research? What**

**describes the tragedy of a labour movement**

**that persists with values and strategies**

**peculiar to the bygone era of organized**

**labour? What hinders the creative concepts**

**of digital activism from finally mixing with**

**other modalities of life? And what is 'life'**

**anyway in this late media age?**

decades about evil media conglomerates, portraying ordinary people as victims of media manipulation. It is about time to crack down on this passive, politically correct view and radically focus on networked empowerment. We are the media.

Technological innovation came along with new regimes that restricted the use of media and rebound their liberating potential to ever more advanced systems of command and control. Technological change has always been accompanied with great enthusiasm and new aesthetical paradigms that in the last instance reinvented the wheels to carry forward the same old industries. Nonetheless, we were amongst these enthusiasts. We are not so naive to believe that the ‘media question’ might be a matter of technology or aesthetics. It’s a matter of power. Still, the passion is there, time and again, to stretch the possibilities of software, experiment with new forms of narrative and dream up even better feedback loops for the users-producers. As post-situationists we well know that reality has been transformed into images. It was this reduction and abstraction, carried out by artistic avant-gardes, that finally destroyed the relation of an image with its authenticity, the relation of a cliché with its archetype, the relation of the signifier with its referent. Nonetheless our fascination with screen culture remains as strong as it ever was. If we want the media universe to proliferate, we have to push the question of intellectual property as far as it can go. To whom do all these images belong? To the one who is mapped or to the one who produced them? To those who draw copies from it or to everyone?

New films, radio stations and code produce new degrees of freedom. They do so by reassessing the mediatic heritage of previous generations; broadcasting the general intellect; empowering collective story telling; fast sharing of content, skills and resources; and enabling multiple connections between creative nodes and networks. Discipline is not the answer – neither to the corruption of the entertainment industry nor to the endless ennui of bourgeois individualism. Discontent in pop culture is on the rise. There is

authors and hysteric owners who claim to protect their property against free flows and mutual exchange are nothing but hypocrites. It reminds one of unionists who once pretended to protect employment but in fact long ago lost face with their position against ‘illegal immigrants’ by defaming them as ‘wage dumpers.’

### Celebrate Freedom

All too often we have encountered a ‘fear of freedom’ amongst radical activists. There is a deep desire to call for regulation and control that, in the past, the nation-state and its repressive apparatus had to enforce upon the out-of-control capitalism. As true techno-libertarians we have to state: the struggle is about nothing else other than freedom (Everyone is a Californian). There is a freedom of sharing, exchanging, multiplying and distributing resources, no matter how material or immaterial. So far, freedom has always been connected with equality, and therefore tied up with the possession of or alienation from property. Today this link is broken. It is exactly the complete farce of all sorts of management scenarios (from border management to digital rights management) which make evident that property is an absolutely inadequate juridico-political relation to handle the potential and the complexity of social relationships within the immaterial sphere of production and distribution. It is an essential and unalterable fact that ideas circulate online and people are free to move around offline. Content should not be restricted to the Internet or any one medium for that matter. For its own sake the multitudes will refuse to be handcuffed and fettered by the myths of a nation-state or some global government.

Freedom of movement means liberation par excellence: the emancipation from the forces that hinder one to decide for oneself where to go and where to stay. It is the power of negation and self-valorisation: everywhere is better than just here. Freedom of movement gives the guarantee that one can leave one’s place behind. We are no longer slaves of territory. Freedom of communication is the freedom par excellence: The autonomy of the social networkers to produce and to distribute the products of their living labour from peer to peer. Free communication is not only one of the most precious human rights, it is also the only one absolutely inalienable freedom. All obedience and command that undermines the possibility of collaborative, distributed knowledge is null and void. Theoretically as well as practically we insist on blending the autonomy of migration and communication. Universal citizenship and universal access are subjects of a new circle of struggles for freedom that may sound old-fashioned in the first instance, but certainly will shape the future of the digital multitudes.

### The Source Code of the Revolution

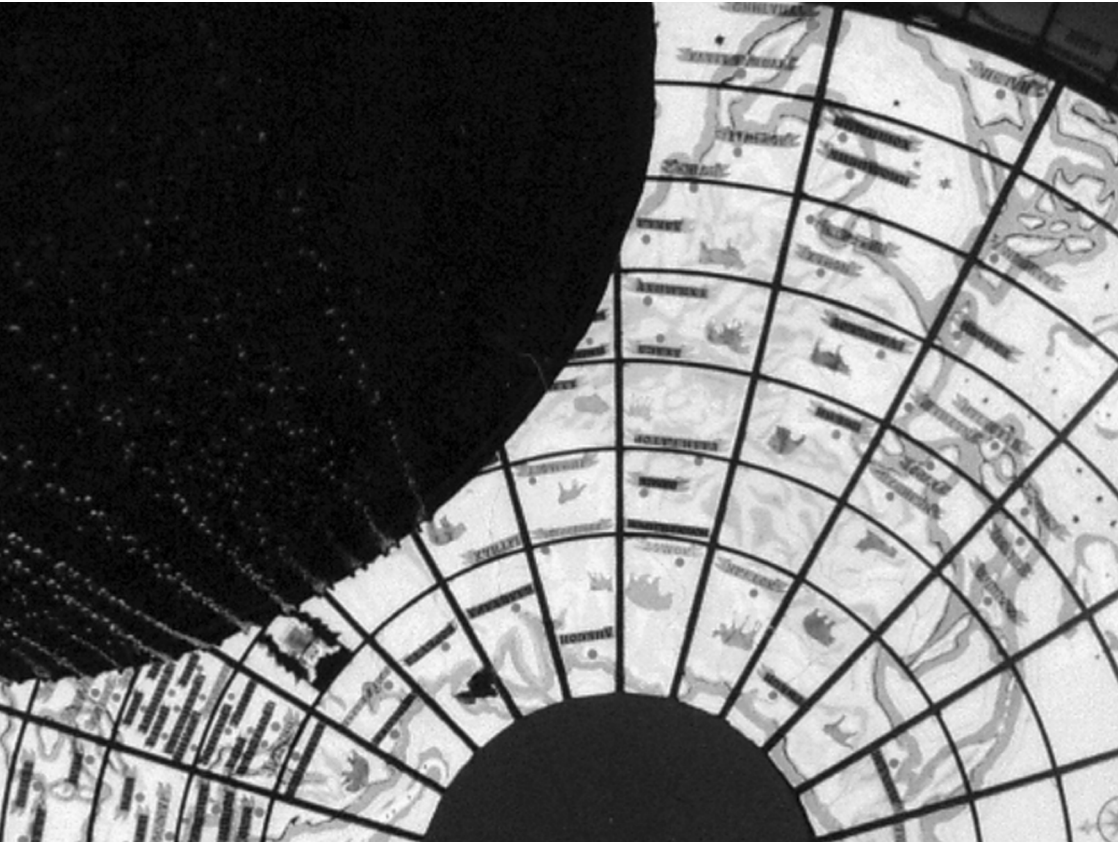
Reverse engineering consists of taking apart an object to see how it works in order to duplicate or enhance the object. It is a practice taken from older industries that is now frequently used on computer hardware and software. In the automobile industry, for example, a manufacturer may purchase a competitor’s vehicle, disassemble it, and examine the welds, seals, and other components of the vehicle for the purpose of enhancing their vehicles with similar components. Now is the time to begin with the reverse engineering of the proprietary libraries of freedom. Such a project has to be approached in a collaborative and organised fashion. We need a critical and empirical hybrid research project in the form of manifolded militant inquiries that are simultaneously globally distributed, exploring everyday forms of refusal and resistance beyond the monoculture of breaking protest news and the all-to-easy spectacle of semi-professional media activism.

We need to get to know in detail how the daily exercise of freedom of movement undermines the hierarchies of a global labour market and how it perforates the system of borders that operate as filters for over-exploitation. By enabling a worldwide circulation of social struggles and their experiences, the networks of migration act as a catalyst for a globalisation on

the ground. It would be an enormous waste to withhold the crucial experiences, skills and resources of the 90’s new media experiments from the next generation of social struggles. And it would be a fatal mistake not to bring the accumulated street-knowledge of political activism from previous decades into the evolving struggles around piracy and intellectual property. There is an abundance of know-how around, most especially in how to deal with repression. We need to strengthen and expand the everyday practice of freedom of communication as it attacks intellectual property, licenses and patents; as it undermines the global hierarchies of knowledge. This is the key factor for contemporary production: To question the logic of valuation and wage-slavery as a whole. Free associations of knowledge production have the potential to break up despotic borders and identities and to cause a true globalisation of struggles on an immaterial level. Since the cold war, the desire for freedom has been abused as the machine code of capitalism. It has been reduced to what is still labelled as freedom of trade, but appears only as an off limits license to kill, destroy and exploit. In turn, nothing and no-one will restrain the multitudes from re-appropriating the idea of freedom for the sole purpose of copying, duplicating and multiplying the beauty of free communications and a new commons based on unfettered and equal access to open sources and resources. That is the only way we will retrieve the source code of a revolution that will be immune against being televised, digitized, betrayed, corrupted or even directed. Avant-garde is being replaced by new ways of surging ahead. There must be at least a certain number of unknown files or strangers in your backpack or your shared folder. Going ahead means either tracking, trafficking or offering any other form of illegitimate linkage service, otherwise it will appear as totally ridiculous.

With a sense of irony we could say: Learning from the New Economy means learning to claim victory. Free your speculative energies from within! This means writing off our losses. It means learning how to file bankruptcy. Demand creative accounting for all. Dotcom entrepreneurs did not end up in jail – and neither should you and me. While the nineties were the great times of the speculative thinking and peaceful revolutions, identity politics and political correctness, what was an emerging culture of global networking and electronic resistance has now become submerged into endless virtual guerrilla wars: From the absurd spectacle of suing individual users of Linux or peer-to-peer services for copyright infringements to the constant battles around software patenting; from preventing the cheap manufacture of generic medicines to raids on flea markets, arresting and even executing trade-mark pirates. Rather than fooling around in white cubes or sandboxes, a constant political recalculation involving a precise evaluation of consequential charges as well as changing and moving and adding up and multiplying identity elements may increasingly become a matter of bare survival. This time their strategy of tension will not work. We will not go underground and insist on the absolute taboo of armed struggle. There is a lot to be learned from the failed transformations of the babyboomers’ movements. There are other ways to radicalise and integrate movements – just witness the power of the global demonstrations against the Iraq war on February 15, 2003.

Postmodernists have deconstructed the world; it is now up to us to change it. No one will do it for us. We do not believe that utopia will automatically arise out of the ashes of the Apocalypse. It is vital to constantly unveil power relationships, but this is no absolution from standing up to act. There is an irresistible drive towards freedom. It is essential for a movement of movements to claim and celebrate the freedom concept and to not give this strategic term away to neo-conservatives. Freedom is irreducible to the demand to consume and the rhetoric of economism, whatever its brand. Freedom consists of precisely that which escapes such structures in the simultaneous movements of refusal, invention and transformation.



only so much you can consume; boredom in shopping malls, on the streets, in classrooms and factories is becoming endemic. We don’t believe in the postmodern ‘death of the author’ or the techno-libertarian ‘giving-it-all-away for free.’ Still, there is a significant deprivation in the reappropriation of image production and distribution by the digital multitudes. The phrase ‘people have to somehow make a living’ is a truism going nowhere. The drive towards digitisation and free replication is simply too powerful. Politically it is of strategic importance that the movements back this idea and openly defend and practice piracy. The idea of a ‘fair’ intellectual property regime is an illusion. The luring idea of protectionism has to be exposed as a perfidious fraud. Narrow-minded