

QUESTIONING THE PARADIGM OF RESISTANCE

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In the contemporary world we are witnessing today's growing contradictions and also various attempts to solve them. In the following years the situation will not improve, that is certain, especially because of the recent financial crisis; on the contrary, there is a high probability that we will witness a deepening of the crisis of democracy and a rise in populisms and extremisms of all kinds. If now it is clear to everybody that "the end of history" (Fukuyama) was just a dream, it seems that right now there is an opportunity and time to radically re-think our situation in a way that radically differs from previous attempts following appeals in the style of "something must be done right here, right now", which were on the contemporary agenda for many years. There are claims that the recent cycle of capitalist economy which lasted for over four decades was nothing but radical change incarnated. Within it one can find basically two major attempts to "radically" change, to "revolutionize" the contemporary situation without radically changing or revolutionizing it. The first of them was surely the neoliberal "revolution" lead by Reaganism and Thatcherism, which gained an additional infusion after the Fall of Berlin Wall and after September 11. But it was intertwined with the second attempt, which started in the 60s, usually we call it the events of May '68. If the first was accompanied in recent decades by semi-populist and extremist phenomena all over the world, the second influenced our world in the form of subversions, countercultures, and resistances of all kinds. Both these attempts were, and still are, in fact, "radical", yet not radical enough. By not radical enough, one can imagine many things, that is true. A recent theoretical attempt to account for this situation came from Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt. Their theoretical project, published in two books, *Empire*

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and *Multitude*,¹ presents a breakthrough in its open and unconditioned affirmation of Marxist and Communist thought. The success of these works has been enormous, and clearly shows that there exists massive support for and interest in radical (Left) thought. Since then many studies and critiques of their work have been published,² but perhaps one could address to them a critique concerning radicalism, in other words, a critique concerning the untheorized elements in their theoretical paradigm, which is nothing but a paradigm of resistance. This paradigm today presents a majority of the theory and practice on the Left, and there are many recent important theoretical contributions here, from David Couzens Hoy to Simon Critchley, etc. Here we will limit our critique to just one minor detail in the theories of Hardt and Negri.

Let us illustrate three basic problematical features of the paradigm of resistance with the help of three quite different theoreticians, Jacques Lacan, Fredric Jameson, and Brian Massumi. This resistance today is linked with a certain culture it gave rise to in the 60s, with many subcultures and with the specific understanding of counter-culture. One can only repeat the warnings of Lacan in his *Seminar XX* against untheorized elements in the paradigm of insurrection, resistance, and subversion:

What remains at the center is the fine routine that is such that the signified retains the same meaning in the final analysis. That meaning is provided by the sense each of us has of being part of his world, that is, of his little family and of everything that revolves around it. Each of you – I am speaking even of the leftists – you are more attached to it than you care to know and would do well to sound the depths of your attachment. A certain number of biases are your daily fare and limit the import of your insurrections to the shortest term, quite precisely, that gives you no discomfort – they certainly don't change your world view, for that remains perfectly spherical. The signified finds its center wherever you take it. An, unless things change radically, it is not analytic discourse – which is so difficult to sustain in its decentering and has

¹ See: Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, *Empire*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.) & London 2000; Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, Penguin Press, New York 2004.

² See: *Multitudes*, II, 9, Paris 2002; *Debating Empire*, edited by Gopal Balakrishnan, Verso, London & New York 2003; *Empire's New Clothes. Reading Hardt and Negri*, edited by Paul A. Passavant & Jodi Dean, Routledge, New York & London 2004; *Resistance in Practice. The Philosophy of Antonio Negri*, edited by Timothy S. Murphy and Abdul-Karim Mustapha, Pluto Press, London & Ann Arbor (MI) 2005.

not yet made its entrance into common consciousness – that can in any way subvert anything whatsoever.³

Lacan's point concerning routine is a very general one, one can think of it in terms of the leading ideology, traditions, and attachments of various kinds, but from a Marxist point of view the routine is nothing other than the economic relations of production, it concerns the very dynamic of capitalism. In what sense? In the sense of culture, which in the dynamic of "late capitalism", as Fredric Jameson called it following the Trotskyist analyst Ernest Mandel, occupied the center. Many recent studies⁴ have already shown the shifts and changes in the functioning of contemporary capitalism, but Jameson's initial diagnosis is still relevant today. Marx's demonstration, he writes, of the materialist dialectic, especially those passages in the *Manifesto*,

teach the hard lesson of some more genuinely dialectical way to think historical development and change. The topic of the lesson is, of course, the historical development of capitalism itself and the deployment of a specific bourgeois culture. In a well-known passage Marx powerfully urges us to do the impossible, namely, to think this development positively *and* negatively all at once; to achieve, in other words, a type of thinking that would be capable of grasping the demonstrably baleful features of capitalism along with its extraordinary dynamism simultaneously within a single thought, and without attenuating any of the force of either judgment. We are somehow to lift our mind to a point at which it is possible to understand that capitalism is at one and the same time the best thing that has ever happened to the human race, and the worst. The lapse from this austere dialectical imperative into the more comfortable stance of the taking of moral positions is inveterate and all too human: still, the urgency of the subject demands that we make at

³ Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX: Encore: On feminine sexuality, the limits of love and knowledge*, edited by Jacques-Alain Miller, translated by Bruce Fink, Norton, New York & London 1998, p. 42.

⁴ Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *New Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Gregory Elliott, Verso, London & New York 2006; Joseph Heath & Andrew Potter, *The Rebel-Sell: Why the Culture Can't Be Jammed*, Harper and Collins 2005 (known also as: *The Rebel Sell: How the Counterculture Became Consumer Culture*; US title: *Nation of Rebels: Why Counterculture Became Consumer Culture*); Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool. Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago & London 1997.

least some effort to think the cultural evolution of late capitalism dialectically, as catastrophe and progress all together.⁵

Capitalism in its recent or late state did not destroy culture as an autonomous sphere, but dissolved it in a kind of explosion in that we are witnessing a prodigious expansion of culture throughout the social realm. This explosion is so pervasive that everything in our contemporary life, from the field of economics to politics, state, power, and the psyche, has become “cultural” in an original and yet untheorized sense. It is exactly this untheorized sense of the pervasiveness of culture that interests us here in a way that we will try to show in the following lines. This pervasiveness of culture linked with the search of modern individualism for an authentic experience, for the meaning of life, was very well appropriated and captured by capitalism’s search for profit. And here we can add a third illustration from the Deleuzian point of view (and Deleuze is an important theoretical source for the paradigm of resistance, in spite of the severe critique he receives from Hardt and Negri). The problem or the dilemma, if one may say so, was recently clearly and distinctively described by Brian Massumi:

The more varied, and even erratic, the better. Normalcy starts to lose its hold. The regularities start to loosen. This loosening of normalcy is part of capitalism's dynamic. It's not a simple liberation. It's capitalism's own form of power. It's no longer disciplinary institutional power that defines everything; it's capitalism's power to produce variety – because markets get saturated. Produce variety and you produce a niche market. The oddest of affective tendencies are okay – as long as they pay. Capitalism starts intensifying or diversifying affect, but only in order to extract surplus-value. It hijacks affect in order to intensify the profit potential. It literary valorizes affect. The capitalist logic of surplus-value production starts to take over the relational field that is also the domain of political ecology, the ethical field of resistance to identity and predictable paths. It's very troubling and confusing, because it seems to me that there's been a certain kind of convergence between the dynamic of capitalist power and the dynamic of resistance.⁶

⁵ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Duke University Press, Verso, London & New York 1991, p. 47. One can only note that the theme of catastrophe and progress was recently elaborated by Naomi Klein in *The Shock Doctrine. The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, Penguin Books, London & New York 2007.

⁶ Brian Massumi, “Navigating Movements” in *Hope*, edited M. Zournazi, Routledge, New York 2003, p. 224.

This observation regarding the convergence between the dynamic of capitalist power and the dynamic of resistance is in a way crucial concerning the project of Negri and Hardt. Before we illustrate what the problem with it is, let us first present a very general presentation of what their project is all about.

We should first emphasize that the importance of the work *Empire* for us lies in its attempt to surpass the impasses of the contemporary theory and practice of the Left. Secondly, Hardt and Negri have succeeded to again put on the academic agenda the legitimacy of speaking from a communist point of view, from the point of view of radical politics, of talking again about class struggle. For them the main political enemy today is called Empire. Empire is a new, global form of sovereignty. It differs from the old imperialism in that it does not reinstate the territorial center of power. It is a decentralized or rather deterritorialized apparatus of power which constantly expands its borders and boundaries: it has no limits; it presents a passage within the capitalist mode of production. As is true in spatial terms, this order is also not limited in temporal terms, it fixes the present time as eternal. It is therefore an eternal order. Its second novelty compared with the old forms of imperialism is that it not only controls and administers the territory, but it also creates its own world. Its aim is totality, the social life as a whole. It presents a new form of power, bio-power. A further feature of this new paradigm of bio-power is that it is consecrated to peace, but is simultaneously always at war or in a struggle. "From the beginning, then, Empire sets in motion an ethico-political dynamic that lies at the heart of its juridical concept. This juridical concept involves two fundamental tendencies: first, the notion of right that is affirmed in the construction of a new order that envelops the entire space of what considers civilization a boundless, universal space; and, second, a notion of right that encompasses all time within its ethical foundation, Empire exhausts historical time, suspends history, and summons the past and future within its own ethical order. In other words, Empire presents its order as permanent, eternal, and necessary."⁷ On the other side of Empire stands multitude. What is the relationship between Empire and multitude? What is the relationship of multitude towards Empire? The answer is a very direct and also simple one: only multitude creates, produces, and gives. In other words, Empire only takes, it is nothing but an "empty, spectacular, parasitical machine". Multitude is the real productive force of our social world, whereas Empire is a mere apparatus of capture that lives only off the vitality of the

⁷ *Empire*, p. 11.

multitude”.⁸ But since the theory of the constitution of Empire is at the same time “a theory of its decline”,⁹ the most natural question that arises is – what then? What is the aim? The aim is to free the creative power of the multitude and to construct the counter-Empire. But what is the counter-Empire? Is it an alternative political organization of global currents and exchanges? Is there a social revolution under way, are its radical politics necessary or not? Is the counter-Empire a New (Socialist/Communist) International or even a new form of communism? Is then multitude a new name for a modern proletariat? What kind of social struggle do the authors have in mind? They actually mention “multitude’s refusal of exploitation”,¹⁰ and also new forms of social struggles which at the same time “destroy the traditional distinction between economic and political struggles. The struggles are at once economic, political, and cultural – and hence they are biopolitical struggles, struggles over the form of life”.¹¹ The only problem with these struggles for Hardt and Negri is that they are firmly rooted in local conditions. The reason for that lies in the “absence of a recognition of a common enemy against which the struggles are directed”. So, one has to find the enemy. And here it is: “The enemy, rather, is a specific regime of global relations that we call Empire”.¹² One might wonder why the enemy is Empire? Because it is nothing but corruption embodied, “corruption is the form of government in Empire”.¹³ In other words: “In Empire, corruption is everywhere. It is the cornerstone and keystone of domination. It resides in different forms in the supreme government of Empire and its vassal administrations, the most refined and the most rotten administrative police forces, the lobbies of the ruling classes, the mafias of rising social groups, the churches and sects, the perpetrators and persecutors of scandal, the great financial conglomerates, and everyday economic transactions. Through corruption, imperial power extends a smoke screen across the world, and command over the multitude is exercised in this putrid cloud, in the absence of light and truth.”¹⁴ So, on one side there are forces of corruption, decay, rotting, passive parasailing, putridity, and on the other forces of generation, production, creation, desire, love, joy. The forces of darkness against the forces of “light and truth”, then.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 370.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 45-46.

¹³ Antonio Negri, *Du retour. Abécédaire biopolitique*, Calmann-Lévy, Pariz 2002, p. 80.

¹⁴ *Empire*, p. 389.

There are many problematic theses here, many problematic features in the relationship between Empire and the multitude; as Jacques Rancière succinctly pointed out, we have here just another version of Marx's understanding of the relationship between productive forces and relations of production.¹⁵ There are many other theses which would deserve a detailed critique, but for our purposes here, the passage on corruption suffices. It announces in a way an understanding of the idea of "the will to be against", which is presented at a very important strategical place within the work *Empire* itself, just before the explanation of what the counter-Empire is. Let's quote quite a long passage, which we will examine further:

What does it mean to be republican today? We have already seen that the modern critical response of opening the dialectic between inside and outside is no longer possible. An effective notion of postmodern republicanism will have to be constructed *au milieu*, on the basis of the lived experience of the global multitude. One element we can put our finger on at the most basic and elemental level is *the will to be against*. In general, the will to be against does not seem to require much explanation. Disobedience to authority is one of the most natural and healthy acts. To us it seems completely obvious that those who are exploited will resist and – given the necessary conditions – rebel. Today, however, this may not be so obvious. A long tradition of political scientists had said the problem is not why people rebel but why they do not. Or rather, as Deleuze and Guattari say 'the fundamental problem of political philosophy is still precisely the one that Spinoza saw so clearly (and that Wilhelm Reich rediscovered): 'Why do men fight *for* their servitude as stubbornly as though it were their salvation?'' The first question of political philosophy today is not if or even why there will be resistance and rebellion, but rather how to determine the enemy against which to rebel. Indeed, often the inability to identify the enemy is what leads the will to resistance around in such paradoxical circles.¹⁶

So, if for Heidegger we are *beings-towards-death*, it seems that for Hardt and Negri we are *beings-against*. Everything we are – we, the humanity or the multitude? – is contained in this "against". But, against whom or what? Against the establishment? Authority, what kind of authority? The Law? Parents and teachers? Well, in exaggeration one could say that from this the-

¹⁵ See Jacques Rancière, "Peuple ou multitudes", in: *Multitudes*, II, 9, Paris 2002, pp. 95-100.

¹⁶ *Empire*, p. 210.

sis it follows that we are against everything and everybody that would limit or dare to pose any danger, limit, or restrictions on our freedom. Any outside determination of my will is suspicious as any adherent to the Spinozian motto *omnis determinatio est negation* might say. But no, is it really so difficult to understand the general idea? For Hardt and Negri there is no doubt whom or what we are against. We are *against* Empire, of course. But the above mentioned passage did not mention Empire. And the context is so loose, so undefined, that one could even go so far as to say that the “will to be against” can also mean something which is clearly not meant by Hardt and Negri, i.e. that everybody is against everybody, which would bring us back to today’s ruling ideology of the competitive market of *Alle gegen Alle* as Laibach and Hobbes would put it. The proximity to the liberalist credo of competition and rivalry is at least potential, as it is also proximity to the survivalist emphasis on “everyone for himself”.

But, seriously, if the ideology of neoliberalism tacitly presupposes Adam Smith’s *invisible hand*, which brings harmony to the chaos of the market, what would follow from Negri’s and Hardt’s conception of the “will to be against” for the theory of the social? Before we proceed, the reader is once again asked to pay attention to the presentation of the will to be against Negri and Hardt use: “One element we can put our finger on at the most basic and elemental level is *the will to be against*. In general, the will to be against does not seem to require much explanation. Disobedience to authority is one of the most natural and healthy acts.” It seems that will to be against is natural or self-explanatory and that no further explanation is needed. On that basis Negri and Hardt proceed further and link will to be against with many different political concepts or conceptions without further elaborating their differences. One thing is namely *rebellion*; *disobedience* to authority is something else, and again is not the same as *civil disobedience*. But to claim that “disobedience to authority is one of the most natural and healthy acts” might be a very problematical statement from any point of view. Which authority do the authors have in mind, authority *per se* or divine, political, parental, military, or collective authority? Any attempt to directly educate individuals so that their “will to be against” would strengthen, any program to educate pupils in the spirit of “disobedience to authority” would surely end in disaster, in the worst nightmare, which anybody who has ever participated in the educational process knows. The case and the experience of the Summerhill educational system might be quite a good example of such a result. In the educational process the aim is of course to raise an autonomous and critical individual, but the main paradox of this is that, if we set this goal as a direct goal, we do not achieve it. If we take as a goal of education to “produce” diso-

bedience to authority, this definitively leads to a society of individuals called by Christopher Lasch “the culture of narcissism”, the society of self-willed, self-sufficient, self-complacent individuals that we actually live in right now.

And yet, if Negri and Hardt are talking about “natural and healthy acts”, what for them is “natural”? What is nature? Is there today any part of nature that is not socially mediated? The same holds true for health. And finally, what is the authority that decides what health is and what is natural? If we take will to be against as disobedience to authority seriously, there is no authority which would be accepted except the authority of every individual, of every Ego. Any authority of others (universal truths included) is unacceptable, the paradox here is the same as in Kant’s *What is Enlightenment?* But on the other hand, the situation is rather quite different. One thing is namely the “use of reason” in its public and private sphere, with the public as the arbiter in the last analysis, quite another is resistance qua disobedience to authority. It has to be said that on this particular point Hardt and Negri are particularly vague. They talk about many things at the same time. One thing is “to be against”, “to oppose”, quite another is to resist and to rebel. But in the end *droit de résistance*, the right to resistance, is surely nothing natural, it is a political and juridical concept. If resistance is really a natural act, what about its social and historical conditions? There are many forms of resistance. There are many resistance movements in history, too. The word *résistance* namely comprises different historical examples: the most famous is the French Resistance during World War II, but there are also partisan resistances against Hitler’s army in the same period in Yugoslavia, Poland, the Soviet Union, etc. Each of these movements has its own history, its particularities and singularities. There are also many resistance movements today, one could mention an example which is not mentioned in *Empire*, the resistance movement against Milošević called *Otpor*, the Serbian word for resistance, and its famous logo of a fist is now part of the Russian democratic movement against Putin. The point is that many political movements today think of themselves in terms of resistance and that each of them has its own presuppositions and aims, too. That is why the very term resistance seems to be all-embracing and ubiquitous. In the final analysis, one could even comprehend (and why not?) Bush’s War on Terror in terms of resistance: this war is really nothing but resistance to anybody who threatens American freedom, the American way of life. And the same holds true also for the various fundamentalisms and populisms fighting the same fight, they are the other side of the same coin, with the difference that they are on the other side of the gunights...

But the vagueness and inoperativeness of resistance is not the only prob-

lematic feature of resistance. If we again take a closer look at the manner the concept of the will to be against is introduced in *Empire*, we see that it is something that “does not seem to require much explanation”, because it is “one of the most natural and healthy acts”. Healthy, natural, self-evident? What are these adjectives if not a concise definition of the adjectives that one can always find in any ideology? The main feature of every ideology, as Althusser emphasizes, is that ideology is something obvious, self-evident, something natural. But when we think about or take something as self-evident, for granted, as something which does not require any or much explanation, as natural – we are in the realm of ideology. But the will to be against *seems* to be just such a thing for Hardt and Negri, i.e. natural, healthy, self-evident. Even more. It is something “we can put our finger on”, it is something “at the most basic and elemental level”.

If we look around a society, what do we find? Individuals. But not just any individuals, not the autonomous and critical individuals the Enlightenment was praising and craving for, but mistrustful, disobedient, rebellious individuals. Individuals who have strong egos, narcissistic individuals. The only authority then is His Majesty the Ego, as Freud would put it. A society of egos is a society of conformists. This society of Egos, as the British Radicals understood it, is the society of Egos the *American Dream* and the *American Way of Life* are based upon. Only this Ego is what “we can put our finger on”. This kind of Ego as a self-made man is constantly creating and producing himself (note the proximity to one of the key concepts in late Foucault, the aesthetics of the self), disobeying every authority who tells him what is right and what is wrong. Who can tell the Ego what to think and what to do? This rebellious instance of Ego was put in its center by Ego-psychology with the presupposition that it is in fact the middle, harmonizing instance responsible for the equilibrium of the psyche. Already in 1932, but more profoundly later with his “Mirror stage”, Lacan showed that Ego is far from a harmonizing instance, far from being a source of stability, but a very problematic and ideological construction, a “bricolage” of various identifications. Ego for Lacan leads to paranoia, it is Ego which alienates the subject. This Ego is seen for Lacan as a “theology of free enterprise”. By describing will to be against as a natural and healthy instance, Negri and Hardt ended up in troubled waters, not very far from the conception that was criticized by Freud, Lacan, and Lasch.

Although Negri and Hardt say that to them “it seems completely obvious that those who are exploited will resist and – given the necessary conditions – rebel”, they stepped back in the very next sentence, claiming that “today, however, this may not be so obvious”. But the first part of their claim is more

than true today, rebellion and resistance today really are everywhere. One meets them on every corner of the world, one can find them from Marinetti's *Manifestos of Futurism*¹⁷ to rock and pop culture of various kinds. Today art is resistance and resistance is art. Jameson's thesis on the explosion of culture in "late capitalism" can be understood as an explosion of the culture of resistance. Resistance is today a way of life, a very profitable activity. As Massumi would say, pretend to be a part of the resistance (using one version of his expression) and you will "produce a niche market". For these reasons Hardt's and Negri's conviction that "the first question of political philosophy today is not if or even why there will be resistance and rebellion", but rather how to determine the enemy against which to rebel", is wrong. One has to explain why today resistance exists on every corner and yet nothing really changes. In other words, if resistance today is everywhere and economic, social relations remain the same, then one might ask *why* that is so. The answer lies in the fact that Hollywood, this factory of dreams, realized very early on that the image of the rebel is very salable, very profitable. There are many varieties and forms of it, from the legendary Charlie the tramp to Westerns, in short, in Hollywood rebels and those who resist are everywhere. The nickname of one of the first big Hollywood stars, James Cagney, is significant, they nicknamed him "The Professional Againstster". "Being against" was then this particular actor's profession, something that made a profit.

One recent book on this topic, *The Rebel-Sell*,¹⁸ does not mention Cagney, but it mentions one anecdote which is very symptomatic. During the protests against the WTO in Seattle in 1999 the protesters attacked the shops and display windows of famous global brands in order to show their disagreement and their protest against brands and their domination. One of the shops attacked was that of the firm Nike. After the protest and when all was said and done they reviewed the shots filmed by the security cameras. And one of them showed something very interesting and troubling at the same time. The leg of one of the protesters who was actually at that moment breaking down the glass, was wearing what? Nike sneakers. So, somebody was protesting against brands, but was at the same time vain enough to wear exactly the brand he had found guilty of all the misery in the world. If the era of post-feminism was marked by the movie *Kramer versus Kramer*, now the problem seems to be very straightforward. It is simply *Nike versus Nike*, i.e. the inner

¹⁷ See Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, "The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism", in: Apollonio Umbro (edited), *Futurist Manifestos* (New York: Viking Press, Documents of 20th Century Art, 1973), p. 21.

¹⁸ See *The Rebel-Sell* and Robert Kurz, *Die Welt als Wille und Design. Postmoderne, Lifestyle-Linke und die Aesthetisierung der Krise*, Edition Tiamat, Berlin 1999.

conflict of the consumer. This anecdote nicely illustrates the birth of a new consumer called by Heath and Potter, *rebellious consumer*, *consomateur rebelle*, and by the German author Robert Kurz *Konsument-Dissident*. But although these authors were describing the 90s, this consumer was already born in the 60s.¹⁹ No wonder that some (but not all, of course) of the ex-Maoists today have embraced neoliberalism.²⁰ The 60s were also the birthplace of a “new spirit of capitalism”.²¹ This new spirit was born in the 60s and resurged again in the 90s. Although it seems that this new spirit came from nowhere in the 90s, the truth is that was prefigured by the revolutionary events of the 60s and by the “revolutions” of Reaganism and Thatcherism in the 80s. The Fall of the Berlin Wall and other catastrophes in the 21st century only reinforced its breakthrough, and gave it another push.

For Boltanski and Chiapello, this new spirit of capitalism (called by Jameson “late capitalism”) presents the third stage of development in 20th Century capitalism. This development concerns different and various levels, one is the organization of production and of management, the other concerns advertising and selling strategies, which are all connected with the consumption and the figure of the consumer. Boltanski and Chiapello divide the organization of production into two bigger phases, in the beginning there was Fordism and Taylorism (now prevalent in the Third world and in special zones, usually on the border of developed countries). Fordistic production (immortalized in Chaplin’s *Modern Times*) uses analysis to divide the process into the smallest units, which can easily be learned and therefore does not need any skilled labor force. Fordism speeds up production, enables control over the whole process, and produces enormous quantities of mass produced products. The model is the assembly line. The products all look exactly alike and a mould is used to produce them. It is no coincidence that in modern philosophy (especially that of France, the most prominent representative here is Deleuze in his *Difference and Repetition* and *Logic of Sense*) the critique of Platonism, representation, and mould goes hand in hand with the rise of the new spirit of capitalism which is based on different principles. These new principles arose in the 60s more and more due to the initiatives of employees, with less emphasis on a hierarchical structure (we are all in the same boat; the superior is foremost our colleague, and only secondly our boss). With all that comes joint ownership, participation in management, even self-management. But this shift would be impossible without the preva-

¹⁹ See Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool*.

²⁰ Dominique Lecourt, *Les piètres penseurs*, Flammarion, Pariz 1999, p. 89 in *passim*.

²¹ See Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *op. cit.*

lence of a “cultural capitalism”, where the commodity is appreciated because it enables us to experience all kinds of authentic feelings and experiences. The commodity thus enables us to fulfill our life, to bring sense to it. The quest for authenticity and the fulfillment/growing of the Self was in the centre of the new spirit born in the 60s.

This shift reoccurred again in the 90s. We will leave out the complicated story and all details and try to illustrate the ideological climate of this reoccurrence with the help of a movie which is considered by many to be one of the best movies of the 90s (it nonetheless received many awards, among them also Academy and BAFTA awards). This movie, *American Beauty* from 1999, is important for our discussion because it clearly and nicely shows a growing nostalgia for the 60s, which was crucial for a kind of “repetition of the 60s” in the 90s. The film depicts a “perfect” American way of life and by means of black humor it shows us that this life is far from perfect. The main hero, Lester Burnham (an anagram of “Humbert Learns”), is 42 years old. He works for an advertising company and lives in a typical American suburban area. Work and life in such an environment takes its toll, in that one becomes a loser and a weakling. The very first shot of the movie shows us effectively what kind of world the main hero lives in. A shot from above gives us a clear picture of the suburban area: all the yards, trees, roads, and houses are the same. Everything is clean, nicely arranged in regular geometrical shapes. Nice, but boring as all hell! This effect is partially achieved through use of music played by keyboards with a kind of “hollow sound”. This sound is recorded with a reverb which is cut at the end. The technical term is “gated reverb”, a reverb that promises depth but just before the space opens up, it is suddenly closed, gated. In that way we can literally feel the frustration of the main hero even before the action and the events in the movie start. The lodestar of Lester’s life is a daily session of masturbation in the morning in the shower (he tells us this in an off-screen voice). His wife, Carolyn, is an executive and very success oriented. She despises him, they haven’t been intimate for a long time. Carolyn is a very boring and shallow person, but tries to control everybody. Their daughter Jane is an adolescent, who, like her mother, despises Lester, too. She’s very distant to him, especially after she discovers that he is interested in her female friend Angela Hayes, a beautiful girl, who dreams of becoming a model and rising in that way above the common people. Because Lester falls in love with Angela, he suddenly rediscovers his will to live. Backed by this enthusiasm and his newly restored self-esteem, Lester quits his job, but manages at the same time to blackmail his boss for one year of his wages. He begins to do what pleases him, smokes marihuana, wears casual clothes, and buys himself a Pontiac Firebird, the

car he has always wanted to have. Lester is now *cool*. The pot he smokes connects him to a strange boy from the neighborhood, Ricky, who is mistreated by his father, a retired member of the US Marines, and deeply affected by the decline of moral standards in society. Lester's daughter falls in love with Ricky and events take their course.

But if we leave the movie plot and a detailed analysis of the movie for some other occasion, what in this initial set strikes our eye first? Lester's depiction of his grey and dull life has only one bright spot ("the high point of my day", he says), his regular morning masturbation in the shower. So, even before Lester changes his life, he is already only focused on his enjoyment and on his body – masturbation is nothing but the enjoyment of an idiot, says Lacan in his Seminar XX, of somebody who does not want to know (i.e. a cynic). The departing point of the film is, therefore, not what the film itself tries to persuade us, the viewers, of, i.e. Lester's search for meaning in life, for the authenticity of his life in an alienated society. No, the point of departure is: there is Oneness. There is enjoyment and the only question is how to "color" it, how to enrich it, how to bring variety into it. From the very beginning the underlying premise of the movie that we have here a kind of "clash of civilizations", "a clash of cultures", is false. The film namely depicts two ways of life, or better, it presents us with a choice between them. One can choose between the dull, grey, hollow, uniform life of a businessmen/businesswomen, army officers, and a full life lived by the young or by the young at heart. As if we had on the one side the forces of the establishment, Law and Order, and on the other those who are different, who protest with their way of life against such an order. As if there was a clash between two spirits of capitalism, to speak à la Max Weber: between rigid, stereotyped, conformist and creative, witty, nonconformist, full. Control contra resistance, *square* contra *hip*. As if the 60s would comment on the Thatcherist and Reaganist 80s, inviting the 90s to become different and to join them.

In popular culture this has frequently been portrayed as a fight between hippies and yuppies, between hedonism and asceticism, but this fight is a purely imaginary one. It is, nonetheless a common theme from the 80s onward and plays an important role in many television series. In the 80s, in *Family Ties*, Michael J. Fox plays a teenager who is a Reaganist (i.e. interested only in money and business affairs), whereas his parents are committed to the values of the 60s and will forever stay hippies in their hearts. The same motif is presented twenty years later in the English series *My Family*, where the parents (he is a dull dentist, she is a lousy cook and control freak) are accompanied by their three children: daughter Jenny is a caricature of an ideal youth consumer, the oldest son Nick is a loser, whereas the youngest son is

a Tory-to-be-politician Michael J. Fox reappearance look-a-like. Why are we mentioning these series? Because in them the parents are always hippies, working hard for their children. The children are, while portrayed as ideal consumers, nothing but parasites (the same structure exists in the sitcom from the 80s and 90s *Married with Children*). Here too, one meets the same choice as before: it is as if we had a clash of two worlds, the rebels and idealists from the 60s against the consumers and materialists from the 90s. But what if this dilemma, this myth about the conflict of two worlds, is a blatant lie? What if both these sides are, as comrade Stalin would put it, worse?

This dilemma is found also in *American Beauty*, where the *proton pseudos*, the original and downright lie, is presented in the description of Lester's workplace ("My job consists of basically masking my contempt for the assholes in charge, and, at least once a day, retiring to the men's room so I can jerk off while I fantasize about a life that doesn't so closely resemble Hell."). Lester's firm is in the advertising business. The film therefore tries to persuade the viewer that not only the advertising business, but every business is dull and non-creative. This is utterly wrong, especially in the light of what historians, most notably Thomas Frank, have shown us in the field of advertising and management. From the early 50s on there has been an intensive quest going on regarding how to sell cool commodities. The capitalist reality from the 60s was very different from what we usually imagine. The change that was brought about by the 60s and the boom of the consumer society was possible because of the freeing of leisure time. So, the result of the political changes and fights was the loosening of rigid control over spare time, which had an effect on spending money and goods with regard to qualitatively enjoying it. Lester Burnham's motto *Carpe diem!* (in the 90s one finds this also in the film *The Dead Poet's Society*, with Robin Williams), has a pivotal role in the birth of a new consumer already in the 60s. In *American Beauty* we encounter this motto a number of times. The self-introduction or self-description of Lester gives us the first one: "My name is Lester Burnham. This is my neighborhood; this is my street; this is my life. I am 42 years old; in less than a year I will be dead. Of course I don't know that yet, and in a way, I am dead already." In other words, *Carpe diem!* Life should be lived with joy (one of the reproaches to his wife Carolyn later is: "When did you become so... joyless?") and gratitude (from the end of the movie: "I can't feel anything but gratitude for every single moment of my stupid little life... You have no idea what I'm talking about, I'm sure. But don't worry... you will someday."). Yes, life should be lived fully, because you never know when your last day will be. Later in the movie Lester says: "Remember those posters that said 'Today is

the first day of the rest of your life?’ Well, that’s true with every day except one: the day that you die.” Therefore, *Carpe diem!*

But to oppose this motto to business and especially advertising in the 60s and in the 90s, would, historically speaking, be inaccurate. Furthermore, to say that advertising and business in the era of Post-Fordism, “late capitalism”, are dull, uninventive, and uncreative, would be a lie. It’s also a myth, and movies combine it with another myth, that there are only conformists in the USA. As Daniel Bell (yes, the very same one that proclaimed the end of ideologies in the 60s!) said, no one today in the United States defends conformity, on the contrary, everyone is against it, and probably everyone always was! Today in America everybody is anticonformist and nonconformist. In other words, today everybody resists! And probably everyone always has!

Since the Second World War, starting in 1947 to be exact, American businessmen have sought solutions for (American) capitalism. They were wondering how to undertake the necessary transformations of both the ways capitalism operated and the way it imagined itself. Postwar American capitalism was hardly the unchanging and soulless machine imagined by the counterculture, it was a dynamic force in its own right. The solution capitalism sought lay in the values proclaimed later by the 60s: individuality, creativity, and authenticity. In the 50s one of the theoreticians of advertising, Ogilvy, said: “Our business needs massive transfusions of talent. And talent, I believe, is most likely to be found among nonconformists, dissenters, rebels.”²² This is the beginning of the revolution, not just in advertising, but in business and management as well. Its main guideline is resistance to conformism. Two examples, among many. In the 60s, the slogan of Young & Rubicam was “Resist the Usual!”, while one of its successful ads was simply: “I hate conformity!”²³ So, advertising played a prominent role in creating not only the new consumerist culture – Frank speaks of the rise of hip consumerism – but also of radical change in production itself. George Lois, one of the great theoreticians of this shift, recalled later that “safe, conventional work is a ticket to oblivion. Talented work is, *ipso facto*, unconventional”. In other words, “in order to breakthrough, advertising has to be fresh and different, it has to be surprising. And in order to do that, you need a talented art director and writer working together, who have some leeway and liberty to try to create advertising.” In the 80s he gave the following description of a good ad: “Advertising should stun momentarily. It should seem to be out-

²² Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool*, p. 54.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

rageous. In that swift interval between the initial shock and the realization that what you are showing is not as outrageous as it seems, you capture the audience."²⁴

This definition should be particularly striking to every reader of Deleuze and Guattari's book from 1991, *What is Philosophy?* Why? Because in the beginning of the book Deleuze and Guattari describe under what historical conditions philosophy arose. Philosophy is possible only within a circle of friends, and it always has rivals. Throughout history there have been many examples of them and now advertising is the rival of philosophy, they say. I don't think that Deleuze and Guattari really knew what they were exactly talking about, certainly they didn't know Lois's work, though it is possible that they actually did. But, nevertheless, their description of the concepts is very close to Lois's description of a good ad. A concept, too, is something which stuns, surprises, shocks; it is something outrageous and violent. The concept is untimely, ill-timed, it is as original as a new creation that has never been tried before. It has already been suggested that Deleuze's theory is divided into two different Deleuzes,²⁵ but this proximity of one of his main concepts brings into question his whole understanding of what thought is. For Deleuze and Guattari in *What is Philosophy?* the task of the philosopher is to create new concepts. The basic equation, then, is the following one: thought = creation = resistance. This is the same logic we can find in advertising; no wonder they were talking about advertising being the main rival of philosophy today. Regardless of their later critique of advertising Deleuze and Guattari are suspiciously close to procedure of advertising. They are also one of the main theoretical sources of Hardt and Negri's theoretical project. One of the key common concepts in both projects is the notion of resistance.

Though the proximity between the paradigm of resistance and the praxis of advertising is a troubling affair, the resistance is problematic from many other points of view as well. If the main task of advertising and a philosophical concept is to shock, to be outrageous, then one must ask how this permanent shocking is possible? One has to know the boundaries and standards that are dominant at the moment, and to play with them. In that case one must always keep track of the rules and laws that are currently governing the situation, in order for the shock to be efficient and recognized as such, i.e. as a shock. This activity is in fact perverse, it is nothing but another version of

²⁴ Quoted in Frank, p. 85.

²⁵ See Slavoj Žižek, *Organs without Bodies. On Deleuze and Consequences*, Routledge, New York & London 2004.

the Law. It is founded on Law, or as Lacan formulated decades ago following Saint Paul: desire and Law are one and the same thing. In Pauline terms: “If it had not been for the Law, I should not have known sin. I should not have known what it is to covet if the Law had not said you shall not covet”. Sin is that dimension of desire which finds its object beyond the prescription of the Law and after the prescription of the Law. In other words, advertising and the paradigm of resistance have a common presupposition, which is – transgression. Though Lacan himself chanted hymns to transgression in his Seminar VII, he later completely changed his views and in Seminar XVII, which followed the events of May ’68, called transgression pure and simple by its true name: obscenity. In that way he also expressed his critique of hippie culture, which was theoretically based on the notion of counterculture (note, by the way, the proximity of the use of this prefix with Negri and Hardt’s counter-Empire). Counterculture was founded in Theodor Roszak’s work *The Making of a Counter Culture* from 1968. Roszak says: “As with the counterculture, it is *transgression* itself, the never-ending race to violate norms, that is the key to resistance.” Transgression, resistance, the quest for authenticity, the violation of norms. If we compare this to Hardt and Negri’s concept of the will to be against, we can find many parallels: fidelity to oneself is will, transgression is disobedience to authority, rebellion and resistance are here, too, authenticity is to be found in the “most natural and healthy acts”. One can see that there are many parallels here, that Negri and Hardt’s conceptualization owes many of its concepts to the 60s and to the counterculture.

As Frank has shown, the counterculture was a very important part of capitalism’s dynamics already in the 60s and in the 90s, during which the book *Empire* was written, too. While we don’t have space for all the details here, let’s quote Kurz’s description of the new figure of the consumer, which he calls the consumer-dissident: “Airwalk sport shoes, Carhartt trousers, and Diesel shirts are propaganda for a better life; the wrong brand means the wrong life – on this point a raver is more dogmatic than a Stalinist would be.”²⁶ A better life means a fuller and pleasurable life; in the end, it means more enjoyment. Enjoyment, *jouissance*, sexual enjoyment especially, was highly regarded in the 60s – as it still is today for reason that it is something which is “against” by its very nature. Is there a greater way to disobey authority than to enjoy (oneself)? Enjoyment seems to have a special anarchical appeal also because it is seen as something chaotic, anarchistic, undisciplined, and undisciplinary, as something crazy. It is conceived as spontaneity, and as such, something subversive. This, by the way, is far from true and again it is

²⁶ Kurz, *Die Welt als Wille und Design*, p. 39.

Lacan who emphasizes that enjoyment is not free and spontaneous: “Nothing forces anyone to enjoy except the superego. The superego is the imperative of jouissance – Enjoy!”²⁷ If there is a genre and a niche market, one of the most profitable today where this is clearly visible is pornography. Pornography celebrates spontaneity, and yet just the use of the fast forward button on the remote control would persuade anybody that an obligatory change of sexual positions serves to fulfill a strange injunction (of the superego). In pornography we have a different quest for cool: capturing on film (or making-believe) this free spontaneity called enjoyment, which should convince the viewer that he is dealing here with authenticity, with something real. From here arises the obvious question of whether the actors and actresses are “feeling it” for real or are they “faking it”? This question often pops up on different occasions which are all nothing but the advertising of products and goods that are sold by that branch of business. Part of the advertising fuss is also the obligatory question of their preferred sexual positions and also the question of orgasm, too. On one such occasion two famous porn actresses and feminists, Ovidie and Coraline Trin Thi, discussed the question. Coralie finally claimed that she not only has real orgasms on the film set, but also that this is for her the greatest subversion.²⁸ Not only because the enjoyment or orgasm is by its nature something subversive, but also because you can in that way make a (political) statement, you can protest against the hypocritical society. One can say that we are witnessing here the birth of a new kind of worker or producer: producer-dissident, rebel-worker. This worker is the key element of contemporary Post-Fordism: a porn actress does not merely act that she is having an orgasm, she is not just faking it, her goal is to achieve it actually on the film set. In this activity she is creative and resisting at the same time: she is creating something new, something which is singular only to herself and to that particular time and place, this is her sacrifice (to the noble cause of resistance, one might say sarcastically), she fights with her own obstacles, prejudices, and her own feeling of shame (she is just following the motto of our perverse society: “Do not be ashamed to...!”), and yet she is working! Work, sacrifice, creation, business, will to be against – all in one.

For all above mentioned reasons the concept of the will to be against of Negri and Hardt and the paradigm of resistance as such are more than questionable in the light of the critique of capitalism.

²⁷ Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX*, p. 3.

²⁸ See Ovidie, *Porno Manifesto*, Flammarion, Paris 2002, chapter 7; *Films x: y jouer ou y être? Le corps acteur. Ovidie. Un entretien avec Michela Marzano*, Éditions Autrement, Paris 2005.

The concept of resistance is too vague, inoperative, and, above all, it is nothing radical. Culture and resistance are two vehicles of profit today. If the motto of the fight against capitalism is that another world is possible, one must say that another world was always already here, at least from the 60s onwards. The notion of counterculture or counter-Empire does not present any alternative to the dynamic of capitalism, it was long ago appropriated by it. In light of recent shifts in Negri's theory – in *Goodbye Mr. Socialism* he glorifies the new digital capitalism, its deterritorializing force and power, one not only has to remind him that Deleuze has already noted that deterritorialization goes hand in hand with reterritorialization (this is, after all, what Massumi emphasized in the citation we used at the beginning of this article with the words “produce variety and you produce a niche market”) – the proximity and overlapping of the paradigm of resistance and capitalism does really not seem so strange any more.

The paradigm of resistance must therefore today be abandoned. But all that does not mean that one has to abandon either culture or every form of resistance to power, disobedience to authority, or rebellion. We must move beyond the paradigm of counterculture. What today is needed, in order for all acts of subversion, resistance, and rebellion to succeed, is a reinvention of the politics of the universal, a redefinition of radical politics and the politics of emancipation – beyond the politics of resistance. This does not entail a glorification of globalization, the global market, or capitalism, neither their demonization, but a *critique*, based on a renewal of the Marxist critique of political economy.