

no spoon

The Anomaly of Empire

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Is it just a misunderstanding? Or is it a question of an imprecise expression? Probably not. To talk about "empire" doesn't mean to deny the existence of states or state-power. Nor does it mean to put let's say an American Superstate in the place of the Westphalian Order.

We speak about Empire, following Hardt and Negri, to address a complex and immanent network of power-relations consisting of smaller and bigger knots, with chaotic effects and without fixed points. We want to make use of a possibility: right before our very eyes spaces that have been dominated by classical power monopolies do if not disappear at least breakup, overlap and shiver. "Empire" as a concept provides a different perspective, a point of view that is open for new possibilities. The politely staged misunderstanding rather is the overpronounced symptom of a strong political difference: namely the argument over the emancipatory project of the future.

We plead for a non-sovereignistic, one could say: a subpolitical project. We conceptualize politics differently and we fight for another mode of politics, both in analysis and practice. This may sound basic and (whoops!) idealistic, but it is not. The Hegelianism of Empire-Bashing is. Generally it is thought to be much easier to *think* of something new than to *do* it. But this is wrong. To think in other categories than those protected and hedged by the institutions of (global) society is pretty complicated. At least when anomalous conceptions do not remain marginal or are not revised over and over again until they fit again into the old patterns. Gramsci once said that the real forces of persistence were not to be found in the basis, but in the super-structure. He was right. The complex of institutionalized conceptions and imaginary institutions that provides plausibility to ideas is indeed a super-structure.

Whoever dares to think beyond superstructurally constricted categories, takes the risk of being declared imprecise, implausible, nuts or weird. Sure enough there are moments when the super-structure - the whole ensemble of old categories which only reproduce and repeat the ever same thing - are unhinged. One of these moments where the implausible has met a response, because what had been plausible thitherto wasn't plausible anymore, was the 11th of September. For one moment repetition stopped, the lively "praxis" separated itself from the super-structures. For a short moment neither the establishment nor the traditional left knew what to do or what to criticize. Therefore the events of the 9th of September have been appropriate to put back on the agenda an alternative version of emancipation, a version that tries to articulate the multiplication of desires in the superstructure. This change has been going on for 30 years now, underground and only articulated passively. And only the traditional left questions it as much as it is declining. It is the aim of our theses in *Interdependence Day* (www.copyriot.com/unefarce/no5/id.html) to bring this version of emancipation into discussion again. And is exactly why we refer to the concept of *Empire*. It wasn't about having a philological approach of postoperaism. We don't give a damn. What is so interesting about *Empire* is what its perspective makes possible, a concept of

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politics that breaks with sovereignism. *Therefore Empire* is just a centre of reference for a nonsovereignistic concept of politics, although it is a very up to date one. The track goes back to the Seventies, to France and Italy, to Foucault, Deleuze, Guattari, to Balibar, Lipietz and Latour and also to Negri. It was the time when disappointment about social-democrat reformism in the West and Real-Socialism in the East reached its peak -right up to the laboratories which vivisected the emancipatory project of socialism without remorse.

In this period less and less people believed that with the help of the sovereign (against the single interests, the evil fabricants, mighty multinationals, or for those who like it more abstract: against capital, bourgeoisie, imperative of accumulation) state that *at last* had to embody the common will – either democratically on the parliamentarian way, or revolutionary, or by sophisticated democratization of its procedures – things would turn out better. This disbelief sustainably delegitimated administration. This period has also been known as the “crisis of fordism”. This is crucial. The fordist compromise between labor and capital implicated that huge parts of the socialist concepts of politics (of the II. and III. Internationale) became inextricably part of the fordist institutions. Foremost the belief that there were (to be more precise: that there *had to be*) politics that would (con)front economical - and any other - relations of social power or force.

If the crisis of fordism has also been primarily a crisis of socialism, we don not have to wonder, if the masses in their disappointment about fordist socialdemocratism don't turn to a pure socialism, sobered from any compromise. It was and always has been a mistake to conclude from the criticism of fordism that fordism had never been socialist enough.

It's just the other way around, because fordism had been the reality of the socialist project, because it was etatistic as far as it can go, and wanted to plan every impulse of life and control it as an impulse of consumption, because it praised labour – as the only productive way of work - as the eye of the needle for emancipation, because fordism destroyed all autonomous forms of social cooperation to create “free” labor, because it had to direct all our desires to ever new commodities, products and services – not to mention the male, white, healthy realities of socialism – because of all this, did the socialist project reach its final crisis with the criticism of fordism, although the corpse, the nightmare of the dead generations is still not buried.

But Fordism is also essential for the question of politics in a second dimension, because with Fordism the meaning of state has changed deeply. Not only have workers become recognized explicitly as citizens and not only has the conflict between labor and capital been sanctified institutionally. More than that, fordist productivism went beyond the scope of the state. When 50 % of all money transfers go through state instances, then the state is far away from being outside of the economy – it is rather right in the centre of it. The neoliberals, who moaned so much about the government spending ratio in the developed states, have never been able to bring it down. When at the same time the amount of wage labor increases then economy is not standing beside life anymore, but it *is* life. This trend continues. Since the government Schröder/Fischer the number of workers in Germany increased by about 500.000. Anyway, planned or market economy are

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only different types of management/administration, the whole quarrel is a fake. The laterally reversed tendency can be regarded from different views. It shows itself in the bounteousness of commodities, in the discovery of labor as a mass-consumer. From food to consumer goods to ever new invented service-packages: the social division of labor is intermingling ever more often. It becomes apparent in the juridification of everyday life, in working pupils, in attended housing and in teleservices.

With the discovery of mass-consumerism (and later desires) as an inner colonial market the mutual dependence between freed labor and capital-accumulation increases. Any harsh change, any rupture threatens to turn into a catastrophe. For the free laborers especially in a very material sense. Especially in times and spaces that usually don't come into sight. To provide regularity, to avoid the roughest disruptions, makes the all-embracing competence of the state feasible, it is called responsibility but it only is incapacitation. Economization of life is parallel with its juridification. To stress it again: The expansion of state activity with fordist productivism is not only a quantitative matter. Nobody is outside of the state, because outside there is nothing. As well as there is nobody outside of the capitalist accumulation. Not even part-time. Least of all with the head. Therewith the former lever to emancipation turned into a complex field of power-relations, without fixed point, from which the world could be unhinged. Apparently it has been easier to experience this change practically than to deduct it theoretically or put it into words. Saying farewell to the traditional socialist project rather took place in those actions that have been inaccurately branded and marketed as New Social Movements by the Entrepreneurs-of-Thought. As a secular one, the socialist project lost more and more support. But the critique of state destroyed only one of the main elements that provided cohesion to the socialist project: the others were called gender-relations, racism, ecology, and many more...

Of course these circumstances did not mean that the socialist project – ineligible for the announced emancipation – disappeared into the museum. Far from it, who openly announced this argument, who wanted to unashamedly plumb the consequences that arise from the fundamental gutting of the socialist project, had a tough act to follow. And those who formulated different kinds of political projects following a different political perspective – basic income is one example – had an even harder time. The traditionalist scolded every critique of the socialist project as treason, petit-bourgeois, neoliberal or neoconservative. This was easy to handle since their pleading for a social-democrat normality or for the workers-and-peasants-republic disavowed itself.

The second group has been and still is more uncomfortable. They would cut all the ugly knobs and bends from the skinny rests of the socialist project in order to fit into it the anti-sovereignistic impulse and the feminist critique. They rephrase all the new ideas over and over again until they lead once more to the old blueprints of the conquest of power.

But the reconciliation of new ideas with the old project could only be successful within the theoretical framework – which leads directly to the third group, who appeared whenever the new project has been at risk of realization. The third group

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is persistently refusing to include its own position, the implications of their critique, into reflexion. They present themselves as strictly anti-statistic, but reject all alternative, new political projects, with the criteria taken from the construction kit of the old socialist project, the same that had been used by the first, traditionalist group.

To explain it the other way around: the group of critical critics criticize all attempts, to articulate the practical everyday-life changes of society in a politically emancipatory way, with the very same arguments that had been the framework of reference for the traditional socialist project – which is a project they resolutely reject at the same time. Their motto seems to be, if the socialist project disavowed itself there should not be new one. What remains, is not only the abdication of politics, not only the pleasure of having anticipated the repeated defeat. This may flatter the own political identity, or help with the individual mourning and ease the phantom pain. What is worse is the fact that this attitude prevents the invention of a new emancipatory project and prevents the breaking of the chain of defeats. The third group of the critical critics praises a self-fulfilling prophecy that the left can not be left, if it does not remain marginal.

The misunderstandings concerning *Empire*, the accusations of affirmation, derive from here: The only way by which they can criticize sovereignism is sovereignistic itself, because it is their strongest, their only argument. This is the reason for their decrial of sub-politics and molecular revolution, their contempt for everyday-practice. Because they believe, sovereignism can only be fought by countervailing sovereignism which can remain innocent only in theory. But how can the change in perspective that we fight for, succeed?

There is no constraining changeover on a theoretical level. This has become quite clear in the meantime. If the question “which kind of political project do we want right now und right here” does not play a crucial role in the analysis – because every analysis is political, since it makes specific concepts of politics plausible and is part of the field of relations that are to be analyzed – if thus analysis and analysts put themselves outside, they will never get to know why their abstract critique of power-relations only renews and reproduces the concrete ones.

It is easier to perform this break in practice, with the courage, to be nonsouverignistic right here and right now, by accepting the immanence of social relations as the reality of every practice. We saw this courage in different places, by the *tute bianchi* and the *zapatistas*, in the *Volksbad* declaration of Munich and by José Bové and by all the nameless that do not stop trying to associate their everyday-practice. It is necessary to strengthen and to articulate this courage. To defend it against those who want to transfer it into the well-known socialist party, as well as against those who sympathize from a distance, hoping, it will never become a project, since it would never achieve their measures of radicality.

If neoliberals are simply those, who do not support the traditional socialist project anymore, we would love to be neoliberals. Because this is precisely what is necessary: to articulate the changed practices of everyday politically, to encourage

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deviant behaviour, to support different modes of living, to assist local associations, also in a material way.

But if being neoliberal means – given the last years this is probably much more accurate - all the practices which prevent the changes of social life from being articulated in the super-structures, if neoliberalism foremost means to tie the social dynamic pushing to blow up the bonds of Fordism, back to the corset of Fordism and by doing so deprives the fordistic institutions from the last piece of emancipatory content, then we have to give back the accusation of being neoliberal. Give it back to the traditional left – sometimes updated as “New Left”.