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EMPIRE, TWENTY YEARS ON

Twenty years ago, when our book *Empire* first appeared, the economic and cultural processes of globalization occupied centre stage: all could see that some kind of new world order was emerging. Today globalization is once again a central issue, but now commentators across the political spectrum are conducting its postmortem. Establishment political analysts, especially in Europe and North America, lament the decline of the liberal international order and the death of the Pax Americana. Newly dominant reactionary forces call for the return of national sovereignty, undermining trade pacts and presaging trade wars, denouncing supranational institutions and cosmopolitan elites, while stoking the flames of racism and violence against migrants. Even on the left, some herald a renewed national sovereignty to serve as a defensive weapon against the predations of neoliberalism, multinational corporations and global elites.

Despite such prognostications, both wishful and anguished, globalization is not dead or even in decline, but simply less easily legible. It is true that the global order and the accompanying structures of global command are everywhere in crisis, but today's various crises do not, paradoxically, prevent the continuing rule of the global structures. The emerging world order, like capital itself, functions through crisis and even feeds on it. It works, in many respects, by breaking down.[1] The fact that the processes of globalization are less legible today makes it all the more important to investigate the trends of the past twenty years in both the variegated constitution of global governance, which includes the powers of nation-states but extends well beyond them, and the global structures of capitalist production and reproduction.

Interpreting the primary structures of rule and exploitation in a global context is the key to recognizing and furthering the potential forces of revolt and liberation. The emerging global order and networks of capital undoubtedly constitute an offensive operation, against which we should support resistance efforts; but they should also be recognized as *responses* to the threats and demands forwarded by the long history of revolutionary internationalisms and liberation struggles. Just as today's Empire was formed in response to the insurgencies of the multitudes from below, so too, potentially, it could fall to them, as long as those multitudes can compose their forces into effective counter-powers, and chart the path towards an alternative form of social organization. Today's social and political movements are, in many respects, already pointing in this direction.

I. SPHERES OUT OF SYNC

Imagine the ongoing crises of Empire as taking place within two nested spheres—the planetary networks of social production and reproduction, and the constitution of global governance—that are increasingly out of sync. The inner sphere, the planetary domain of social production and reproduction, is constituted by ever-more complex and densely interconnected networks of communication, material and immaterial infrastructures, air, water and land transportation lines, transoceanic cables and satellite systems, social and financial networks, and multiple overlapping interactions among ecosystems, humans and other species. Traditional forms of localized economic production, such as agriculture and mining, persist within this planetary sphere; but they are progressively absorbed, dynamized and, in many cases, threatened by these intercontinental circuits. Labour, too, is drawn into and constrained by the planetary web of markets, infrastructures, laws and border regimes. The processes of valorization and exploitation are ruled by a highly variegated, but nonetheless integrated, global assembly line. Finally, institutions of social reproduction and circuits of ecological metabolism may remain local, but they too depend upon—and are often menaced by—increasingly large dynamic systems.

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[1] For Deleuze and Guattari the schizophrenic nature of the capitalist machine is in part *demonstrated* by the fact that it 'works by breaking down'. See *Anti-Oedipus*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen Lane, Minneapolis 1983, p. 31.

These planetary systems subsume, in both real and formal terms, diverse practices of social production and reproduction, across disparate spaces and temporalities. The fact that this sphere is so heterogeneous, composed of proliferating borders and hierarchies at various scales—within each metropolis, nation-state, region, continent—should not prevent us from recognizing it as a coherent, albeit highly variegated, whole: a single, dense, planetary ensemble.[2] This interconnectedness becomes clearest, perhaps, when we confront our shared vulnerability: in the face of nuclear devastation or catastrophic climate change, the entire web of living beings and technologies is threatened, leaving no one and nothing untouched.

Surrounding this sphere of social production and reproduction, encircling it, is a second sphere, composed of intertwined political and legal systems at different levels: national governments, international legal agreements, supranational institutions, corporate networks, special economic zones and more. This is not a global state. As pretensions to national sovereignty fade away, what increasingly emerges instead are transnational regimes of governance. These overlapping structures compose a mixed constitution, which we will analyse in more detail below. Across the surface of this sphere, the reins of rule are held primarily by the owners of the world below—captains of industry, financial barons, political elites and media tycoons.

As the neoliberal counterrevolution has advanced, the two spheres have come increasingly out of joint. They spin on separate axes and occasionally crash into one another. Whereas 20th-century reformist projects such as New Deal politics—or, at international level, the Bretton Woods system under US hegemony—sought an 'embedded liberalism' to stabilize relations between the two spheres, to foster capitalist development and maintain hierarchies at all levels of the global system, the neoliberal counterrevolution has created a governance sphere with no stable structural relation to the sphere of social production and reproduction.[3]

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[2] On the proliferations of divisions, hierarchies and boundaries throughout planetary space, see Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, *Border as Method, or, the Multiplication of Labor*, Durham NC 2013.

[3] On 'embedded liberalism', see John Gerard Ruggie, 'International Regimes, Transactions and Change: Embedded Liberalism in the Postwar Economic Order', *International Organization*, vol. 36, no. 2, 1982; see also David Singh Grewal's update, 'Three Theses on the Current Crisis of International Liberalism', *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies*, vol. 25, no. 2, 2018.

Neoliberal imperial governance seeks no such mediation and strives only to rule over and capture value from the inner sphere. The fact that the productive and reproductive circuits of the inner sphere are increasingly autonomous does not prevent the neoliberal governance sphere from exerting its command: it can measure the value produced there through monetary mechanisms and, by means of various instruments of finance and debt, extract from it the most value possible in the form of rent. Although this inevitably involves proliferating economic and financial crises, these are not signs of imminent collapse but, instead, mechanisms of rule.

The fortunes of US hegemony

The fact that the two spheres are increasingly out of joint, however, is only part of the story. We need to look more closely at the composition of each sphere, to gauge its powers and estimate its prospects. We begin by taking a step back to register how the structures of global order have changed in the last twenty years, with an eye to how potential avenues have opened there today for the multitudes that resist and challenge them.

At the beginning of the 1990s, after the collapse of the Soviet Union and as economic, political and cultural relations were extending in novel ways beyond the reach of national sovereign powers, the US President proclaimed the dawn of a new world order. At the time, most supporters and critics alike took for granted that the United States, having emerged 'victorious' from the Cold War as sole remaining superpower, would exert its unparalleled hard and soft power, shouldering ever-more responsibility while exercising increasingly unilateral control over global affairs. A decade later, as victorious US troops rolled into Baghdad, it appeared that the new world order announced by Bush Senior was being realized in concrete form by Bush Junior. American occupations in Iraq and Afghanistan promised to 'remake the Middle East' while creating pure neoliberal economies from the ashes of invasion. As neoconservatives flexed their muscles, critics denounced a new US imperialism.

From today's vantage point, it is obvious that unilateralist US power was already limited, and Washington's imperialist ambitions were in vain. US imperialism had been undermined not by the enlightened virtue of its leaders or the republican righteousness of its national spirit but simply by the insufficiencies of its economic, political and military strength.

The United States could topple the Taliban and Baathist regimes (and, indeed, wreak tragic destruction), but it could not achieve the stable hegemony required of a true imperialist power. Now, after decades of failure in Afghanistan and Iraq, waging the 'war on terror', few can muster much faith in the benefits of a US-led global system or its ability to create a stable order.[4] Since Trump's election there has been considerable hand-wringing by commentators about whether the liberal international order can survive. In truth, the Pax Americana, and the moment when the US could unilaterally anchor a global institutional order, passed long before Trump crashed onto the scene.[5]

This new situation pertains not only to the United States: no nation-state today is able to organize and command the global order unilaterally. Those who diagnose the waning of US global hegemony—Giovanni Arrighi was one of the first and most insightful—generally project another state as successor in that hegemonic role: just as the mantle of the global hegemon passed in the early 20th century from Britain to the US, they reason, so too today, as the star of the US wanes, that of another state must rise, with China the prime candidate.[6] In contrast, liberal institutional commentators cling to the belief that, despite the international disorder sown by Trump, the star of the United States still shines over the world, and talk of the relative decline of its military, economic and political powers is exaggerated. It remains, for them, the only contender for global hegemon.[7] There is some truth in these arguments; but the more important point is that the role of the US, as well as that of rising powers like China, must be understood not in terms of

[4] Edward Luce expresses what has become the almost universal commonsense: 'It is hard to overstate the damage the Iraq War did to America's soft power—and to the credibility of the West's democratic mission'. *The Retreat of Western Liberalism*, Boston 2017, p. 81.

[5] The pages of *Foreign Affairs* provide ample demonstration of the angst suffered by leading advocates of the liberal international order in the age of Trump. See, for example, Joseph Nye, 'Will the Liberal Order Survive? The History of an Idea', and Robin Niblett, 'Liberalism in Retreat: The Demise of a Dream', both in *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 96, no. 1, 2017; and John Ikenberry, 'The Plot Against American Foreign Policy: Can the Liberal Order Survive?', *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 96, no. 3, 2017.

[6] On the prospect of a passage of hegemony from the US to China, see Giovanni Arrighi, *Adam Smith in Beijing*, London and New York 2007.

[7] Jake Sullivan can stand in for the chorus: 'The United States is the only country with the sufficient reach and resolve, and something else as well: a historical willingness to trade short-term benefits for long-term influence.' See 'The World After Trump: How the System Can Endure', *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 97, no. 2, 2018, p. 19.

unipolar hegemony but instead as part of the intense jockeying among nation-states on the rungs of Empire's mixed constitution. The fact that no nation-state is able to fill the hegemonic role in the emerging global order is not a diagnosis of chaos and disorder, but rather reveals the emergence of a new global power structure—and, indeed, a new form of sovereignty.

2. Empire's mixed constitution

When Polybius set sail from Greece in the 2nd century BC, he found in the heartland of the Roman empire a novel structure of power. Earlier thinkers—Herodotus and Plato, in particular—maintained that there were three basic forms of government, defined geometrically: the rule of one, monarchy; the rule of the few, aristocracy; and the rule of the many, democracy (each also corresponds to a negative form: tyranny, oligarchy and ochlocracy). They analysed the relative virtues of each constitution, and understood political history in terms of the passage from one to the other. The novelty of Rome, according to Polybius, was its mixed constitution: not an alternation among the forms of government but a composition of all three.[8]

Twenty years ago, we named today's emerging order 'Empire' to indicate this mixed constitution of global governance. This Empire is not a global state, nor does it create a unified and centralized structure of rule.[9] Although the conventional schemas previously used to grasp global divisions—First and Third Worlds, centre and periphery, East and West, North and South—have lost much of their explanatory power, today's

[8] Polybius, *The Rise of the Roman Empire*, trans. Ian Scott-Kilvert, London 1979, pp. 302–52.

[9] Theorists have argued at different points over the past century that in order to guarantee the continued existence of capital and its global system, something like a global state is necessary. Karl Polanyi, for example, writing during the Second Word War, believed that the 'only alternative to this disastrous condition of affairs [resulting from the punishment and exclusion of the defeated countries after World War I] was the establishment of an international order endowed with an organized power which would transcend national sovereignty. Such a course, however, was entirely beyond the horizon of the time': *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time,* Boston 2001 [1944], p. 23. Polanyi and others making this argument are right that *some* global-governance structure is necessary, but they fail to recognize that new forms other than a state, such as Empire, can sustain the capitalist system.

globalization is not a simple process of homogenization; it implies, in equal measure, processes of homogenization and heterogenization. Rather than creating one smooth space, the emergence of Empire involves the proliferation of borders and hierarchies at every geographical scale, from the space of the single metropolis to that of great continents.

Here we can only sketch some of the most dramatic shifts in the imperial constitution over the past twenty years. On the monarchic level, the most striking development has been an emptying out of the centre. In the 1990s, although its star had waned, the United States still occupied central positions in key domains of power. The bomb, the dollar and the network—Washington, Wall Street and Hollywood/Silicon Valley—were able to wield monarchical force, and thus maintain in these domains something like the 'rule of one'. US superiority in the realms of hard and soft power continues today, but on increasingly shaky foundations and with tighter limits. First, the formidable US military arsenal—its nuclear munitions, drones, surveillance systems and sophisticated technological apparatuses, along with its military bases and standing armies—remains significantly superior to (and more expensive than) those of other nations. But the defeat of US forces in Vietnam and their failures in Afghanistan and Iraq have made clear that, despite its constantly increasing capacity for destruction, the monarchical capacities of the US military machine are today more tenuous.

Second, the monarchy of the dollar, the financial and monetary hegemony of the US, which appeared solid twenty years ago, has been progressively weakened. As with military power, in this domain too the throne was already on an unstable footing, dating back to at least the 1971 decoupling of the dollar from the gold standard. According to Timothy Geithner, since the 1990s, the US financial and monetary system has been 'defying gravity'.[10] These shaky foundations of US monetary and financial power were confirmed by the 2008 financial crisis, which again threw into question the ability of the US to fill a monarchical role.[11] Finally, the

[10] Timothy Geithner, *Stress Test: Reflections on Financial Crises*, New York 2014, p. 105.
[11] 'In the space of five years [from 2003 to 2008], both the foreign-policy and economic-policy elite of the United States, the most powerful state on earth, had suffered humiliating failure': Adam Tooze, *Crashed*, New York 2018, p. 3. Nonetheless, Tooze maintains it is too early to speak of a demise of the US world order because its two primary pillars, military might and financial control, still stand. What has ended is 'any claim on the part of American democracy to provide a political model': see 'Is This the End of the American Century?', LRB, 4 April 2019, p. 7.

monarchical position of the US has diminished in the domain of the culture industry and digital technology. US corporations still predominate in world markets, but this functions ever less as soft power wielded by the US for global hegemony. Although based in the United States, these corporations increasingly operate on a planetary scale and contribute only ambiguously to the country's global image. In all three domains, then, the United States still dominates with respect to other nation-states, and the pillars of its monarchical power still stand, but they are increasingly showing cracks. This is not to say that some pretender to the throne could claim its place; instead, a relative void is growing at the monarchical level.

The aristocratic level of Empire, in contrast, is seeing tumultuous challenges mounted by rising and falling powers. The 'rule of the few' over the global system is exerted across three primary terrains, by major corporations, dominant nation-states and supranational institutions. Intense competition characterizes the relations among actors within each of these terrains, and between them: corporations versus nation-states, for instance, or nation-states versus supranational institutions. Relative positions within the global hierarchies in each terrain have shifted over the past twenty years. Whereas the fortunes of China have soared, those of the other BRICS which seemed poised to follow have faltered, at least for the moment. At the pinnacle of stock-market valuations, General Motors and General Electric have been supplanted by Apple and Alibaba. These competitive trends are extremely important and deserve detailed analysis, but our primary concern here is to recognize that, despite the cacophony arising from their conflicts, the various aristocratic forces are really playing from the same score. Or, to shift metaphors, they are like knights who, despite the pitched battles between them, all live to serve a shared chivalric code and the social order to which it corresponds.

Most important at this aristocratic level of Empire is the extent to which, despite appearances, its general contours remain unchanged. From this perspective, the much-heralded return of the nation-state—along with nationalist rhetoric, threatened trade wars and protectionist policies—should be understood not as a fracturing of the global system, but rather as so many tactical manoeuvres in the competition among aristocratic powers. America first!, Prima l'Italia! and Brexit! are the plaintive cries of those who fear being displaced from their positions of privilege in the

global system. Like the conservative French peasants whom Marx portrayed as being mobilized by memories of lost Napoleonic glory (and who yearned to make France great again), today's reactionary nationalists aim not so much at separation from the global order as moving back up the rungs of the global hierarchy to their rightful position. In similar fashion, the conflicts between dominant nation-states and the supranational infrastructure—think of Trump railing against 'globalism' in his 2018 UN General Assembly address—entail a ploy for a more dominant position within, rather than an attack upon, the global system. The elites leading the dominant nation-states and supranational institutions are all driven by the dictates of a neoliberal ideology irrevocably dedicated to constructing and maintaining the capitalist global order.[12]

Finally, the third and broadest level of the mixed constitution, 'the rule of the many', necessarily the most chaotic and least legible, is composed of a vast array of forces. It includes the entire panoply of subordinated nation-states and capitalist firms, along with their accompanying infrastructures; broadcast and social media; nongovernmental organizations that support the projects of states and corporations, often repairing the damage they have done; religious associations that are themselves a political force; even militias that combat states, or claim to have established states of their own. This level of the mixed constitution can be called 'democratic' only in the most degraded sense of that term, for it does not include anti-systemic movements or forces that could pose a serious threat to the continued functioning of Empire. Instead, the immense range of forces we locate here, even when they resist and challenge the monarchical and aristocratic powers, ultimately serve to support the imperial constitution as a whole. Foucault was a master at recognizing how seemingly resistant or oppositional figures could ultimately serve to reinforce the dominant power, just as the figure of the delinquent fortifies the disciplinary regime.[13] We do not mean by this, of course, that all efforts at resistance are in vain and will inevitably be co-opted by Empire, leaving no hope for an alternative (Foucault meant nothing of the sort either), and we will soon turn our attention to the movements that verify this.

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[12] Quinn Slobodian, focusing on what he calls the Geneva School and its role in the formation of the World Trade Organization, emphasizes that neoliberal ideology and globalism are completely intertwined: *Globalists: The End of Empire and the Birth of Neoliberalism*, Cambridge MA 2018.

[13] See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, New York 1977.

Focusing on globalization from above, however, provides a distorted view, because it is at core a response to—and an attempt to contain—the forces of globalization from below. Revolutionary internationalism has been throughout modernity the prime mover of the forms and processes of capitalist globalization. Every modern revolution—from Port-au-Prince to Shanghai, Paris to Havana—was in a profound sense internationalist, as are the most inspiring streams of proletarian politics, anticolonial and feminist movements and all forms of liberation struggle. Reading from below in this way allowed authors such as Giovanni Arrighi and Fredric Jameson to recognize that the development of neoliberal globalization from the 1970s was really a response to the 1960s confluence or accumulation of worker rebellions, liberation struggles and revolutionary movements throughout the world.[14] Recognizing the structures of power as a response has not only an analytical function but also a political one. The most powerful forces to contest and move beyond the rule of Empire will necessarily take the form of further internationalisms. It is all the more important that we strive to identify and cultivate the new internationalisms emerging today.

One means of recognizing internationalism in action is by tracing the development of international cycles of struggle: although each struggle may be focused intensely on local and national conditions, as the flame passes from one locale to another, the movement gains a global significance. The 2010–11 insurrections born in Tunisia and Egypt initiated such a cycle, as activists—first in other countries of North Africa and the Middle East, next in Spain, Greece and the United States, then in Turkey, Brazil and Hong Kong—erected encampments in urban squares and translated the demands for democracy into their own political idiom. In similar fashion, NiUnaMenos, the feminist struggle against sexual violence and patriarchy that began in Argentina, resonating with Polish struggles over women's reproductive rights, was translated in innovative ways throughout the Americas and across the Atlantic to Italy and

[14] 'We can also see globalization', writes Jameson, 'or this third stage of capitalism, as the other side or face of that immense movement of decolonization and liberation which took place all over the world in the 1960s': 'The Aesthetics of Singularity', NLR 92, March–April 2015, p. 129.

Spain. A new feminist international is forming, based on novel forms of political strike.[15]

At a much vaster scale, but even less legible, migration constitutes a major force of internationalism and an ongoing insurrection against the border regimes of nation-states and the spatial hierarchies of the global system. The spectacular pilgrimages towards and across Europe in the summer of 2015, on foot, by train, by every means of transport possible, and now shifted to the treacherous crossing of the Mediterranean, have put the border regimes of Europe under threat. Similarly, the extraordinary caravans of Central American children and families passing through Mexico toward the US border in autumn 2018 served to publicize the ongoing crisis of the US border regime.[16] But these highly mediatized events are only the peaks of a variegated range of global migrations, not only from South to North, but in every direction: from Nigeria to South Africa, Bolivia to Argentina, Myanmar to Bangladesh, and rural to urban China. This is an unusual kind of internationalist insurrection, of course—close up, it is hardly recognizable as political at all. The vast majority of migrants may not be able to articulate the political nature of their flight, let alone understand their actions as part of an internationalist struggle; indeed, their journeys are highly individualized. Explicitly organizational structures like the caravans are rare even within one stream of migration, let alone among the various global movements. There is no central committee, no platform, no statement of principles. And yet, the migrants' lines of flight constitute an internationalist power.

Whether driven by officially sanctioned motives, such as fleeing war or persecution, or for reasons delegitimated by the authorities, such

[15] We analysed the 2011 cycle of struggle in *Declaration*, New York 2012. On the partial revival of Tricontinentalism, see Anne Garland Mahler, *From the Tricontinental to the Global South*, Durham NC 2018, p. 240. On NiUnaMenos initiating a new feminist internationalism, see Verónica Gago, 'La internacional feminista', *Página12*, 15 February 2019.

[16] See Martina Tazzioli, Glenda Garelli and Nicholas De Genova, eds, 'Rethinking Migration and Autonomy from Within the "Crises"', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 117, no. 2, April 2018, pp. 239–65. On the caravans travelling through Mexico as a form of rebellion against the border regimes, see Amarela Varela, 'No es una caravana de migrantes, sino un nuevo movimiento social qua camina por una vida vivible', *El Diario*, 4 November 2018.

as simply seeking adventure, migrants affirm the freedom of mobility, which can serve as the basis for all other freedoms.[17] You have to step back to make out the design of the mosaic, to appreciate the political significance of global migrations as an ongoing insurgency. Rest assured that the ruling authorities recognize the menace: the power of the insurgency is confirmed by the cruel and costly counterinsurgency strategies launched against migrants, from the EU-backed concentration camps in Libya to the barbaric policies at the US border. The migrant insurgency, simply by traversing them, threatens to make the various walls that segment the global system crack and crumble.

4. Global Capital and the Common

Analysis of the mixed constitution of global governance needs to be complemented by investigation of the other sphere, that of production and reproduction—because, even when out of sync, each sphere requires the other's support. Just as national capital needed the nation-state to guarantee its collective and long-term interests, so too global capital today requires a complex global-governance structure. The sphere of capitalist relations, like that of governance, is composed of an extraordinarily heterogeneous, conflictual and unstable set of elements which act on different scales: individual capitalist firms in competition with each other; national capitals, also often in conflict; various forms of waged, unwaged and precarious labour—as well as noncapitalist elements, which have always been part of capitalist societies. As with the other sphere, registering the heterogeneity of elements should not prevent us from recognizing the overall design.[18]

Here we briefly sketch some key directions in the development of capital by following some of the scholarly and militant critiques that have emerged in the last twenty years. (Indeed, the increasingly widespread

[17] See Sandro Mezzadra, 'The Right to Escape', *Ephemera*, vol. 4, no. 3, August 2004, pp. 267–75.

[18] Jamie Peck and Nik Theodore emphasize the heterogeneities within the global capitalist system, highlighting 'the necessarily variegated character of programmes and projects of neoliberalization, the uneven spatial development of which is constitutive and not a way station on a path to completeness'. 'Still Neoliberalism?', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 118, no. 2, April 2019, p. 246. See also Jamie Peck and Nik Theodore, 'Variegated Capitalism', *Progress in Human Geography*, vol. 31, no. 6, December 2007, pp. 731–72.

questioning of capitalist rule has been accompanied by a flourishing of Marxist and anticapitalist analyses.) In addition to revealing the new and, in many cases, more severe forms of capitalist domination and exploitation, a prime mandate of the critique of political economy involves seeking seeds of resistance and freedom within the circuits of capitalist production and reproduction. To accomplish this, we focus first on the ways in which movements against capitalist society and its disciplinary regime have functioned as motors driving capitalist development. This is a story of co-optation and capture, but also, and more importantly, an index of the potency of revolt: where there is the power to impel capital forward there is also the potential to overthrow it. We then examine the ways in which capital, by pursuing its own development, creates weapons that can eventually be wielded against it.[19]

What strikes us most strongly in analyses of recent capitalist developments is the central role played by *the common* in its various guises, from natural resource to cultural product, biometric data to social cooperation. The common is ever more central to capitalist social production and reproduction—the value that capital accumulates resides, increasingly, in the common—and yet it also designates a potential for social autonomy from capital, a potential for revolt. Let us briefly describe three key terrains emerging within active analyses of capital, in which the common plays this central and paradoxical role: the extractive, the biopolitical and the eco-systemic.

A wide range of recent analyses of capitalist production and reproduction cluster around the concept of *extraction*, understood in the broadest sense. They highlight not only the expansion of traditional extractivist practices—gas, oil, minerals, monocultural agriculture—in which value is in some sense pulled directly from the earth, but also modes

[19] Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello are often cited regarding the recuperation of 1960s revolts within the capitalist regime: *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Gregory Elliott, London and New York 2006. We are more indebted to Mario Tronti's proposition that working-class revolts precede and prefigure the developments of capital: see *Workers and Capital*, trans. David Broder, London and New York 2019. Marx repeatedly emphasized that the most powerful weapons for rebellion are provided by capitalist development itself. Revolution will come about not through a return to past social forms, he wrote, but 'on the basis of the achievements of the capitalist era: namely cooperation and the common possession of the earth and the means of production produced by labour itself': *Capital, Volume I*, trans. Ben Fowkes, London 1976, p. 929; translation modified.

of accumulation achieved by privatizing public wealth and infrastructures (transport and communications systems, cultural heritage) as well as new forms of extraction in which human and social values—including knowledge, data, care, the circuits of social cooperation—are appropriated and accumulated. 'It is not only when the operations of capital plunder the materiality of the Earth and biosphere', write Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, 'but also when they encounter and draw on forms and practices of human cooperation and sociality that are external to them, that we can say that extraction is at stake.'[20]

The metaphor of data-mining provides a helpful lens for seeing how traditional extractive operations have migrated to social domains. Accumulation by means of social-media platforms, for instance, can involve not only gathering and processing the data provided by users but creating algorithmic means to capitalize on the intelligence, knowledge and social relations they bring.[21] Platforms like Uber and Airbnb have similarly transformed practices of 'sharing' from offering a good to others for common use into a means of extracting value. Finance, too, functions through its own mode of extraction. In part, of course, financial instruments are tools of speculation and create merely 'fictional' values, but primarily finance and debt relations are means to extract values that are produced socially, outside of finance capital's direct management. Along with others, we identify this development within capitalist schemes of accumulation as the passage from profit to rent: whereas industrial capital creates profit largely by managing the production process and dictating forms of cooperation, finance extracts rents on wealth produced not under its direct management but through forms of productive cooperation external to it.[22]

These analyses of extraction resonate strongly with what David Harvey aptly calls accumulation by dispossession. Such processes operate chiefly

[20] Mezzadra and Neilson's *The Politics of Operations: Excavating Contemporary Capitalism*, Durham NC 2019, is the most complete analysis we know of the expanded notion of extraction, especially in relation to logistics and finance. See in particular pp. 133–67; quote p. 138.

[21] See, for example, Matteo Pasquinelli, 'Google's PageRank Algorithm: A Diagram of Cognitive Capitalism and the Rentier of the Common Intellect', in Konrad Becker and Felix Stalder, eds, *Deep Search: The Politics of Search Beyond Google*, New Jersey 2009, pp. 152–62.

[22] See, among others, Carlo Vercellone, 'Wages, Rent and Profit', available online at generationonline.org; and Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth*, Cambridge MA 2009.

through new enclosures of the commons and the extraction of wealth, which may reside in the earth or in public infrastructures.[23] Finally, while condemning the exploitation and social and ecological destruction which they wreak, we emphasize that every form of extraction draws upon values produced externally to its direct sphere of management. Extractivism preys on the various forms of the common—ecological, social and biopolitical.[24] This process of predation points towards a potential that resides within the common, to which we will return.[25]

A second set of analyses highlights the role of the common in biopolitical relations, covering cognitive forms of production and the generation of affects and care, which spans the productive and reproductive realms. Studies of cognitive capitalism generally analyse the role of knowledge, intelligence and science in contemporary production, emphasizing the extent to which the 'general intellect'—that is, the knowledges accumulated in society that have become in some sense common—has become directly productive of value.[26] Others focus on digital labour and the production of value through digital networks and platforms, which in some cases rely on the value generated by the attention of users.[27] Along with intelligence and attention, affects are also increasingly put to work in capitalist society, most often according to

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[23] See Chapter 4 of David Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, Oxford 2003, pp. 137–82.

[24] Silvia Federici, stressing the ways in which the common is at stake in processes of primitive accumulation, makes the important point that the violence of primitive accumulation has always included violence against women. 'Just as the Enclosures expropriated the peasantry from the communal land, so the witch-hunt expropriated women from their bodies, which were thus "liberated" from any impediment preventing them to function as machines for the production of labour. For the threat of the stake erected more formidable barriers around women's bodies than were ever erected by the fencing off of the commons': *Caliban and the Witch*, New York 2004, p. 184.

[25] These various extractivist relations might be conceived in terms of the formal subsumption of society under capital, in order to understand the extent to which society constitutes an 'outside' with respect to capital: the social relations and social cooperation that generate value are brought under the control of capitalist management but are nonetheless external to it, and thus subsumed only formally.

[26] See Carlo Vercellone, 'From Formal Subsumption to General Intellect: Elements for a Marxist Reading of the Thesis of Cognitive Capitalism', *Historical Materialism*, vol. 15, no. 1, January 2007, pp. 13–36.

[27] See Christian Fuchs, 'Dallas Smythe Today—The Audience Commodity, the Digial Labour Debate, Marxist Political Economy and Critical Theory', *TripleC*, vol. 10, no. 2, May 2012, pp. 692–740.

established gender hierarchies. Jobs that involve a large portion of affect production—nurses, home-care workers, administrative-support staff, waged domestic workers, primary-school teachers, food servers—are low paid, highly precarious and, accordingly, predominantly filled by women. The production of affects is also central to the unpaid realm of social reproduction, including domestic labour, which continues to be defined by a gender division of labour.[28]

In these analyses, we recognize new and intensified forms of exploitation and domination, along with new forms of biopolitical control, and the colonization and commodification of further realms of human existence. Today, as the studies show, biopolitical productive forces are enclosed within private-property relations, labouring for a wage, or subordinated and discounted while the value they produce is still expropriated and accumulated. But here too we recognize the social nature of the common, since intelligence, knowledge, attention, affect and care are all immediately social capacities, defined by collective actions and interdependence. Great biopolitical reservoirs of the common are constructed in these resources of shared knowledge, collective intelligence, decommodified relations of affect and care, and, ultimately, the circuits of social cooperation; these have the potential to become autonomous from capitalist control.

A third terrain of analysis addresses the common even more directly, by investigating the myriad ways in which the development of capital destroys the earth and its ecosystems. Analyses of climate change, in particular, demonstrate how intimately the history of capitalist development is tied to the extraction of fossil fuels. Many authors point out that saying human actions cause climate change or that we have entered an Anthropocene age, as if the species as a whole was equally responsible for the decisions that created our present predicament, masks the fact that a relatively small class of capitalists in the dominant countries are really responsible. As these studies make clear, a necessary precondition for any project to preserve the long-term health of the planet is challenging and overcoming the primacy of capitalist rule.[29] That the common is

[28] On gender divisions within wage labour and on social reproduction, see Kathi Weeks, *The Problem with Work*, Durham NC 2011.

[29] See Andreas Malm, *Fossil Capital*, London and New York 2016; Jason Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life*, London and New York 2015; Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything*, London 2014; John Bellamy Foster, Brett Clark and Richard York, *The Ecological Rift*, New York 2010.

at stake in this domain is immediately recognizable, as vital realms of life that were once shared—the earth, the seas, the atmosphere—are closed off or degraded. The poor will suffer most and first from the effects of climate change, but eventually all will succumb. The common is central not only to what we have lost, however, but also to the alternatives we might construct. Indigenous protests against capitalist destruction pose most clearly the need for humans to establish a new relationship with the earth, characterized by relations of interdependence and care—to make the earth common.[30]

What stands out in all these analyses of contemporary capital is the power of the common in all its forms, from earth and water to the metropolitan circuits of social cooperation, from shared knowledges and intelligence to affective relations and social reproduction. Capital has increasingly become an apparatus of capture that preys on the common, extracting the values produced there, and creating myriad forms of suffering and destruction in the process. But all these realms of the common, especially when mobilized and brought together in relations of interdependence, have the potential for autonomy—the potential to create social relations beyond capitalist rule.

5. CLASS–MULTITUDE–CLASS PRIME

Multiplicity is becoming the exclusive horizon of our political imagination. The most inspiring movements of the past decades, from Cochabamba to Standing Rock, Ferguson to Cape Town, Cairo to Madrid, have been animated by multitudes. Leaderlessness is the label often given to these uprisings, especially by the media: and indeed, they reject traditional forms of centralized leadership, attempting to create new democratic forms of expression. But rather than describing them as leaderless, it is more useful to understand them as multitude struggles—useful, in part, because it allows us to grasp both their virtues and the challenges they face. These movements have achieved important results; they have often alluded to an alternative, better world. But they have generally been short-lived and many have suffered defeat, with some witnessing their

[30] The 'water protectors' at the 2016 Standing Rock Dakota Access Pipeline protests expressed the need for such relations of interdependence. See Arthur Manuel and Grand Chief Ronald Derrickson, *The Reconciliation Manifesto,* North Carolina 2017; and Teresa Shewry, ed., 'Environmental Activism Across the Pacific', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 116, no. 1, January 2017.

gains brutally reversed. Something more is needed; and, as militants of various stripes will tell you, creative and original thinking about political organization is urgently required. We have no interest in lecturing these movements about the need to abandon their multiplicity and construct a unified political subject, be it a centralized leadership council, an electoral party or 'a people'. A return to traditional forms of organization is not likely to result in more lasting or effective movements; in any case, they have been explicitly repudiated by the democratic sensibilities of the activists themselves. Furthermore, we do not believe, to put it in abstract terms, that only 'the one' can decide. The most important question for us is: how can a multiplicity act politically, with the sustained power to bring about real social transformation?

It may be helpful here to step back twenty years and approach our contemporary situation from that vantage point. To explore the potential of today's movements, we trace two historical and theoretical passages: from class to multitude and from multitude to class. This may at first appear as a pendulum action, a simple round trip; but we intend it to mark a theoretical and political advance, since the 'class' at the departure is not the same as that at arrival: the passage through multitude transforms its meaning. The general formula of organization we propose, then, is C–M–C', class–multitude–class prime.[31] As in Marx's formula, the importance rests on the transformation undergone at the centre of the process. Class prime must be a multitudinous class, an intersectional class.

From class to multitude

The movement from class to multitude names, in part, the general recognition over the last several decades that the working class must be understood in terms of multiplicity, both within and outside its domain—a shift that corresponds to the emptying-out of claims to represent the working class by traditional parties and syndicalist institutions. As an empirical formation, of course, the working class has never ceased to exist. But since its internal composition has changed—with novel forms of work, new labouring conditions and wage relations—new investigations of class composition are required. In particular, these should explore the powers of social cooperation and the common. In addition,

[31] We are indebted to Joshua Clover's analysis of the historical progression riot–strike–riot prime in *Riot, Strike, Riot*, London and New York 2016, and intend this discussion as part of an ongoing dialogue.

the differences among labouring populations, which have always existed, now increasingly refuse unitary representation. Differences among sectors of labour—for instance, between waged and unwaged work, stable and precarious employment, documented and undocumented workers—along with differences of gender, race and nationality, which to some extent map on to those differences of work status, all demand expression. Any investigation of class composition at this point—and any proposition of class-political projects—has to be embedded in intersectional analysis. This is not a class, one might say, if by class one understands a subject that is internally unified, or can be represented as a unified whole; it is a multitude, an irreducible multiplicity.

At the same time, the passage from class to multitude means that the struggles of the working class, and anticapitalist struggles in general, must be cast together and on an equal basis with struggles against other axes of domination: feminist, antiracist, decolonial, queer, anti-ablist and others (theorists of multiplicity are not troubled by open sets and unending lists). In this sense, the concept of the multitude is closely allied with—and, indeed, profoundly indebted to—intersectional analysis and practice, which emerges from the theoretical practice of US black feminism. Intersectionality, at the most basic level, is a political theory of multiplicity. It aims to counter traditional single-axis frameworks of political analysis by recognizing the interlocking nature of race, class, sex, gender and national hierarchies. This means, first, that no one structure of domination is primary to (or reducible to) the others. Instead, they are relatively autonomous, have equal significance and are mutually constitutive. Second, just as structures of domination are characterized by multiplicity, so too are the subjectivities that stand in relation to them. This does not imply either a rejection of identity or a cumulative, additive conception of many identities; rather, it requires a rethinking of subjectivity in the key of multiplicity.[32] The call for intersectional multitudes is not merely an appeal for greater inclusion but rather, as Jennifer Nash says, 'an antisubordination project'—that is, a combative, revolutionary strategy on multiple fronts simultaneously.[33]

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[32] An enormous literature has developed as intersectionality has become a key concept in a variety of academic fields as well as policy discussions. See Kimberlé Crenshaw's foundational texts, 'Mapping the Margins', *Stanford Law Review*, vol. 43, no. 6, 1991, and 'Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex', *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, no. 140, 1989. On contemporary debates, see Jennifer Nash's insightful *Black Feminism Reimagined: After Intersectionality*, Durham NC 2019.

[33] Nash, *Black Feminism Reimagined*, p. 24.

It may be helpful at this point to consider the passage from class to multitude through the concept of precarity, in two senses. The first sense of precarity, mainly developed among European theorists and activists, is conceived primarily in terms of wage and labour relations.[34] Precarity in this sense marks a contrast to the stable employment contracts that served as a regulative ideal in the Fordist economy of the mid-20th century—a regulative ideal that existed as a reality only for a limited number of (generally male) industrial workers in the dominant countries. Guaranteed labour contracts and laws that protect workers' rights have been progressively eroded, and workers have been forced to accept informal, short-term labour contracts. These labour arrangements have always been raced and gendered, of course; but all sectors of the workforce are being affected by this trend, albeit in different ways and measures. This precaritization of labour is a powerful weapon in the grand arsenal of neoliberalism.

Another sense of precarity, more developed by US writers, provides a useful complement, and again serves as part of an interpretation of—and challenge to—neoliberalism, but from a much broader perspective. Precarity, writes Judith Butler, 'designates that politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support more than others, and become differentially exposed to injury, violence and death.'[35] Labour precarity is certainly part of the mix, but the notion of precarious life aims to grasp how legal, economic and governmental changes have increased the insecurity of a wide range of already subordinated populations—women, trans people, gay and lesbian populations, people of colour, migrants, the disabled and others. There is thus one notion of precarity that speaks the language of the working class and another that promotes an intersectional vision. Put them together and you have a good foundation for theorizing the multitude.

We do not pose this movement from class to multitude (or from the people to the multitude) as a political mandate. That is not necessary, because it is already an accomplished fact that has manifested itself over the past twenty years in different countries and social contexts. We

[34] See, for example, Patrick Cingolani, *Révolutions précaires*, Paris 2014.
[35] Judith Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*, Cambridge MA 2015, p. 33.

understand that many regard the historical shift from class to multitude as a decline and a loss, beginning with the diminished power and membership of institutional trade unions and working-class parties (and, indeed, not every multiplicity is politically progressive; crowds and mobs are just as likely to be reactionary). But we should also recognize all that has been gained in the process. At the level of analysis, it should be obvious that the multiplicity of mutually constituting structures of domination offers a superior lens for grasping our social reality, and this requires supplementing our brief investigation of capitalist rule with equal analyses of the institutional structures of race, gender and sexual hierarchies. But it is most crucial at the level of practice: there will be no successful and sustained project of class politics today that is not also feminist, antiracist and queer.

Rethinking class

Yet to theorize multiplicity, or even to recognize existing multiplicities, is not enough—especially if by multiplicity one means simply fracturing and separation. To be politically effective, organization is required. And when dealing with multiplicities, that pressure is even more intense. To respond to our initial question—how can a multiplicity decide and act politically?—simply by saying that it needs to organize, is not yet very helpful. The next step, then, requires a return to the concept of class—but class conceived differently now—in order to explore more fully what a multitude can become and how it can act politically. One obvious objection to the proposal of this second movement, from multitude to class, is that it unravels all the advantages achieved in the previous movement, from a unified political conception based on a single axis of domination, that determined by capital, to a multiplicity, which also engages patriarchy, white supremacy and other axes. Our intention, however, is to develop a conception of class that refers not only to the working class but is itself a multiplicity, a political formation that makes good on the gains of the multitude.

It may be helpful, first of all, simply to note authors who use the concept of class beyond reference to the working class, in order to address race, gender domination and struggle. Achille Mbembe, for instance, analyses the contemporary modes of control deployed against Africans migrating to Europe in terms of a 'racial class':

> Europe has decided not only to militarize its frontiers but to extend them into the far distance . . . [its borders] are now located all along the shifting routes and torturous paths trodden by the candidates for migration, relocating to keep on top of their trajectories . . . In reality, it is the body of the African, of every African taken individually, and of all Africans as a racial class that constitutes today the borders of Europe. This new type of human body is not only the skin-body and the abject body of epidermal racism, that of segregation. It is also the border-body, which traces the limit between those who are 'us' and those who are not, and whom one can maltreat with impunity.[36]

In the new global regime of mobility, Mbembe claims, Africans will be transformed into 'a stigmatized racial class'. For him, the concept of class here is not, or not only, a socio-economic category. It serves instead as a means to think collective racial difference that is not merely based on skin colour; this racial class is born in the racist structures and institutions of Europe.

Mbembe's references here echo 1970s feminists like Christine Delphy, who employed the concept 'sex class' to understand patriarchal domination and to designate a basis of feminist struggle. To other feminists who challenged her usage, Delphy responded that the concept of class could grasp better than any other how subordinate social subjects are created by relations of domination. From this perspective, Delphy writes, 'one cannot consider each group separate from the other because they are united by a relation of domination . . . The groups are not . . . constituted *before* they are put in relation. On the contrary, their relation is what constitutes them as such.'[37] Here, then, relations of domination are prior to and constitutive of social subjects. In Delphy's usage, again, class refers not exclusively to economic status, but instead involves an analytical procedure that can be deployed with respect to any axis of domination.

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[36] Achille Mbembe, 'Vu d'Europe, l'Afrique n'est qu'un grand Bantoustan', *Jeune Afrique*, no. 3024, December 2018, pp. 62–3 (translation ours).

[37] Christine Delphy, *L'ennemi principal*, vol. 1, Paris 1998, p. 29 (translation ours). Shulamith Firestone similarly analyses the sex class system, considering sex class as parallel to economic class but embedded deeper in social relations: 'just as to assure elimination of economic classes requires the revolt of the underclass (the proletariat) and, in the temporary dictatorship, their seizure of the means of *production*, so to assure the elimination of sexual classes requires the revolt of the underclass (women) and the seizure of control of *reproduction*': *The Dialectic of Sex*, New York 1970, p. 11.

Our interest in these analyses of Mbembe and Delphy is, first, to highlight this point—that the concept of class can be used to grasp the effects of subjection created by relations of domination, not only with respect to capital but also with respect to white supremacy and patriarchy, in the interests of not only the working class but also the racial class, the sex class and others. Second, it is important to stress that the concept of class is employed here not only as a descriptive claim but as a political call to those subjected to patriarchal or racial hierarchies to struggle together, as a class.[38] Finally, and this is the point most difficult to confront: to recognize a plurality of classes dominated and struggling in parallel fashion is a step forward, but is not enough. The notion of 'multitudinous class' or 'intersectional class' that we seek requires a further step: an internal articulation of these different subjectivities—working class, racial class, sex class—in struggle. Intersectional analyses commonly address the need for articulation between the subordinated subjectivities in terms of solidarity and coalition. Often this repeats an additive strategy: working-class plus feminist plus antiracist plus LGBTQ struggle, plus . . . In other words, even when intersectional analysis refuses additive notions of identity, an additive logic can still govern activist imaginaries. One weakness of this approach is that the bonds of solidarity are external. What is needed are *internal* bonds of solidarity—that is, a different mode of articulation, going beyond standard conceptions of coalition.

Let us illustrate this key condition—the internal relations of solidarity in this multitudinous class—with three theoretical examples. First, Rosa Luxemburg: after the failed 1905 insurrection in Russia, Luxemburg criticized the German proletariat and its party for their expressions of sympathy and support for their Russian cousins, whether tinged with condescension or admiration. Luxemburg was not, of course, advocating that German workers disengage from, or pay less attention to, the Russian struggles—exactly the opposite. The problem for her was that such expressions of 'international class solidarity' posed merely an

[38] Lisa Disch interprets Delphy's analysis of gender as a social class as not merely a description, but 'an interpretation, a hail or call. Delphy solicits those subjected by patriarchy to identify as "women", to take their oppression no less seriously than that of "workers", and to participate in the struggle against oppression on their own terms': 'Christine Delphy's Constructivist Materialism', *South Atlantic Quarterly,* vol. 114, no. 4, October 2015, p. 834.

external relation: German revolutionaries needed to recognize instead that the Russian events were their own affair and internal to their struggle, 'a chapter of their own social and political history'.[39]

A second theoretical example: Iris Young in the early 1980s challenged male socialists who profess solidarity with the feminist movement. 'By and large', she writes, 'socialists do not consider fighting women's oppression as a central aspect of the struggle against capitalism itself.'[40]Note that Young is not addressing the misogynist and anti-feminist male socialists, of whom there were many, but instead the supportive male comrades who offer solidarity to feminists, or who see feminist struggle as allied with but separate from their own. Like Luxemburg, Young charges that such solidarity is not enough. She exhorts male socialists, in effect, to recognize feminist struggle against patriarchy as a chapter of their own social and political history. You cannot really be anticapitalist without also being feminist because, since they are mutually constitutive, capital cannot be defeated without also defeating patriarchy.

A third example: Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor makes a parallel argument addressing antiracist activists in the US who do not also focus on class domination. Too often, she maintains, there is a kind of segregation of struggles, such that anticapitalist struggles are assumed to be the task of white people, while people of colour must conduct antiracist struggles. 'No serious socialist current in the last hundred years', Taylor writes, 'has ever demanded that Black or Latino/a workers put their struggles on the back burner while some other class struggle is waged first. This assumption rests on the mistaken idea that the working class is white and male, and therefore incapable of taking up issues of race, class and gender. In fact, the American working class is female, immigrant, Black, white, Latino/a and more. Immigrant issues, gender issues and antiracisms *are* working-class issues.'[41] This is not a matter of accepting the participation of allies or expressing solidarity; the struggle against white supremacy and that against capital must be understood as internal to one another.

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[39] Rosa Luxemburg, *The Mass Strike*, New York 1971, p. 74 (translation modified).

[40] Iris Young, 'Beyond the Unhappy Marriage: A Critique of the Dual Systems Theory', in Lydia Sargent, ed., *Women and Revolution: A Discussion of the Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism*, Boston 1981, pp. 43–69.

[41] Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation*, Chicago 2016, p. 216.

The objection at this point might be: yes, they all need to struggle together because they are all precarious in the two senses discussed earlier; but such a projection of sameness is not helpful, because the modes of precarity and domination are different. We need to maintain the conception of multiplicity—capitalist domination is not the same as gender or race domination, and one cannot be subsumed under another. Instead of a reduction to sameness, this argument requires an articulation among the subjectivities in struggle. This is why class—a multitudinous class—rather than coalition seems to us the appropriate concept. But this is a notion of class that is not only composed of a multiplicity, and grounded in forms of social cooperation and the common, but also articulated by *internal* bonds of solidarity and intersection among struggles, each recognizing that the others are 'a chapter of their own social and political history'. That is its mode of articulation, its mode of assembly. This is why we call this transformed notion 'class prime', so that instead of class–multitude–class, the entire movement we are trying to sketch is class–multitude–class prime: C–M–C'. This serves at least as an initial theoretical response to our earlier question: can a multiplicity act politically? Yes, it can do so as class prime, as an internally articulated multiplicity oriented equally in struggle against capital, patriarchy, white supremacy and other axes of domination. Granted, it is merely a formal, conceptual response, but perhaps it can offer a framework for thinking and pursuing that political project.

6. IN PRAISE OF ALTERGLOBALIZATION

On 1 January 1994, the day that NAFTA went into effect, the Zapatista Army of National Liberation launched an insurrection in Chiapas, Mexico; on 30 November 1999, protesters in Seattle blocked the meetings of the World Trade Organization; on 25 January 2001, the World Social Forum was inaugurated in Porto Alegre, Brazil, counterposing itself to the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland; and on 21 July 2001, multitudes flooded the streets of Genoa to protest the G8 summit. The international cycle of alterglobalization struggles that developed in the Americas and Europe had numerous defects: their nomadic nature and the practices of 'summit-hopping' in many cases eclipsed engagement with local, sustained organizing; they were frequently criticized, most strongly by activists within the movements themselves, for failing to develop sufficiently the intersectional characteristics we have just

outlined; and the season of struggles proved relatively short, due in part to their own organizational weaknesses. One should keep in mind, of course, that the movements were also closed down by the severe security regimes installed after September 11th; activists had to shift their focus from alterglobalization to anti-war movements.

The extraordinary virtue of these protests was their theoretical practice. They constructed a global critical vision and were able, through their orchestrated events, to render legible the political significance of the relatively obscure realm of the global economic institutions. Rather than a movement, then, they might be better understood as a vast collective co-research investigation into the nature of the emerging global order. Activists knew that the major corporations and dominant nation-states, the United States first among them, had enormous power; but they also had the intuition that the global order was something more—and that it was here, at the global level, that the contemporary structures of domination must be understood. Each event illuminated another node of the emerging network of the global power structure: the WTO, World Bank, IMF, G8, trade agreements and so forth. The cycle of alterglobalization movements was thus a massive pedagogical project for those who participated in them—and for anyone else who was willing to learn.

Since then, although the relative positions of the various powers within its mixed constitution have risen and fallen, the forces of domination and control of the global order have by no means lessened, despite the braying of the ideologues of national sovereignty. They have instead merely receded from view and become less legible, as if they had discovered an invisibility potion. We need today an international cycle of struggles with the intelligence to investigate the structures of the ruling global order. Sometimes, after all, the theoretical work done in social movements teaches us more than that written in libraries. Reversing their invisibility is the first step toward being able to challenge and eventually overthrow the structures of Empire.