
Editorial: The becoming common of bits and genes

Guido Ruivenkamp & Joost Jongerden

In their latest book "Multitude" Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt aim to identify the existing conditions for potential collective struggle and express them as a political proposition. The question they pose is not "What is the multitude" but rather "What can the multitude become"? Searching empirically for common conditions of those who can become the multitude, they emphasize that "common conditions do not mean sameness or unity but it requires that no differences of nature or kind divide the multitude. In other words, it means that innumerable specific types of labour, forms of life and geographical locations - which will always necessarily remain - do not prohibit communication and collaboration in a common political project" (Negri, Hardt 2004, 106)

In this volume of *Tailoring Biotechnologies* different authors are making an effort to describe the relation between new technologies, such as informatics and biotechnologies, and the creation of new conditions under which various types of labour communicate, collaborate and become common. All the authors describe different aspects of this process, emphasizing that this process towards communality contains contradictory developments and for analyzing it, a redefinition of crucial concepts is needed such as power, locality, common ownership and social-technical codes.

In the first article of this volume (*From Biopower to Biopolitics*) Maurizio Lazzarato argues - referring to Foucault's analysis - that new conditions enable to envisage power no longer as a system of repression carried out by a sovereign state but as a force, as a capacity for singularities to transform. Lazzarato refers to the historical development in which the grounding force of power can no longer be found on the side of the power of the sovereign state, executing a unilateral power relation, but is increasingly based on the dynamics of society, on the social relations between forces. Power is re-defined as the capacity to structure the field of action of the other; to intervene in the domain of the other's possible actions. In view of the multitude of forces that act and react amongst each other, a crucial issue becomes the development of biopolitics to assure a strategic coordination of these forces.

As Lazzarato indicates that power is increasingly constituted from below and seized life and living being as the objects of its exercise, Foucault and Lazzarato are interested in determining what there is in life that resists and, in resisting power, creates forms of subjectifications and forms of life that escape its control. The central question becomes: How do subjects become active? How the government of the self and others is open to subjectifications that are independent of the biological (biopolitical) art of government?

In the analysis of power perceived as an integration, coordination and determination of the relation between a multiplicity of forces, three different concepts are presented: Strategic relations, states of domination and techniques of government also called governmental technologies. Lazzarato indicates that through the exercise of governmental technologies the strategic relations of individuals, acting upon each other's actions in order to control each other's conduct, become both crystallized and fixed in asymmetric institutionalized relations (states of domination) or enable the creation of subjectivities that escape biopolitical power in fluid and reversible relations. At the domain of the governmental technologies, which either support these asymmetric relations or the open and fluid strategic relations, ethico-political struggles are carried out to manage the relations with the self and the others as well as to augment the social spaces of freedom by resisting the condensation of asymmetric relations and searching for new forms of life. According to Lazzarato it is crucial to explore further Foucault's thinking and to establish a conceptual and political distinction between biopower and biopolitics.

In the second article *Electronic Networks: Power and Democracy* Saskia Sassen describes that it has often been theorized that digital networks may be inherently power distributive. She argues that this assumption may be caused by an exclusive attention to the technical properties of the digital development, instead of paying attention to the embeddedness of digital innovations in their specific fields of application. By comparing electronic networks in finance with electronic activist networks, she argues that the same technical properties produced greater concentration of power in the case of the capital market and greater distribution of power in the activist network. These different social outcomes can no longer exclusively be explained by the technical properties of the digital development but rather by the emergence of complex socio-digital formations. Due to the different interrelations of digital and non-digital conditions within these formations, mechanisms - that may have little to do with the technology per se - may intervene in the re-shaping of the technology, while also the digital develop-

ments can act back on the social and engender specific capabilities which require new concepts of the social.

Saskia Sassen argues that the emerging socio-digital formations invites for a *re-conceptualization of the local and politics*. In her contribution Sassen identifies a new type of cross border politics which is deeply local, yet, intensely connected digitally. Although she recognizes that trans-boundary political practices have already a long history, the new issue is rather one of orders of magnitude, scope and simultaneity: the technologies, the institutions and the imaginaries that mark the current global digital context inscribe local political practice *with new meaning and new potentialities*. She refers to the multi-scalar politics of the local which has the potential for escaping the nested hierarchies of scales from the local, to the national, to the international and is on the contrary based on a multiplication of local struggles deeply embedded in people's struggles and activities. She refers to a potential transformation of actors which - without having to leave their work and roles in their communities - become also actors in global networks. The domestic activities and settings are transformed into micro-environments articulated within global circuits. "They do not have to become cosmopolitan in this process; they may well remain domestic and particularistic in their orientation and remain engaged with their households and local community struggles and yet they are participating in emergent global politics. A community of practice can emerge that creates multiple lateral, horizontal communications, collaborations, solidarities and supports".

Although the global-local distinction is vanishing and a new common is appearing, Saskia Sassen also describes that within these new multi-scalar politics still the possibility exists for powerful actors to use the existence of different jurisdictional scales to their advantages and avoid the reduction of nested hierarchies, as is experienced by new multi-scalar politics of the local.

In the third article *Common Genomes: Open Source in biotechnology and the return of common property*, Eric Deibel describes various initiatives to breakthrough these still dominant jurisdictional practices of patenting technological innovations and creating exclusive property relations. He explores efforts to link open source experiences to common property and increased common access to technological innovations. In his research the author emphasizes that "a return to common property" for parts of technological innovations may not be identified, yet, with the creation of the political perspective of communality. Although the author also makes clear that he is interested to explore in the near future whether and in which way this commonali-

ty can be realized. Through his critical survey of different open source initiatives Eric Deibel reduces the growing optimism about open source and argues that further research is needed for realizing commonality within the knowledge networks of genomics and biotechnologies. More investigations are needed to clarify under which conditions the multiplicity of knowledge networks may be able to go beyond their existing experiences of regulating common ownership and common access and realize the perspective of communality. Besides, it will be challenging to explore under which conditions the sovereign (public), private and common property perspective of genetic material increasingly contrast with a further development of biotechnologies and genomics and in which ways open source strategies may become a catalyst for creating a new communality.

In the fourth article *Agroecological technologies and opportunities for endogenous milk production in land-reform settlements in Rio Grande do Sul State in Brazil* Flora Bonazzi Piasentin and Guido Ruivenkamp reflect on the attempts of local knowledge networks working in collaboration with land-reform settlements to create a social space for the development of agroecological technologies, promoting endogenous milk production. The authors describe that due to the embeddedness of the technology development within the Landless Rural Workers Movement (*Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra-MST*) specific social objectives have been integrated, leading to technologies that generate greater levels of *local control* over agricultural activities. Nevertheless the analysis of technological developments within the land-reform settlements has also made clear that the push towards exogenous development model has more "force" to decide the conduct of others than the endogenous model of development. It is also mentioned that even settlers themselves and their organizations have internalized aspects of the productivity paradigm which also reduce their imagination to elaborate an endogenous milk production system. However, the description of some concrete experiences of reshaping technologies within the land-reform settlements illustrates their efforts and capabilities to challenge the predominance of the exogenous model and to implement technologies with an other social/technical codes.

The fourth Volume of the Journal concludes with presenting a research note and book review.

The research note on *The social construction of genetic identities* of Herman van Wietmarschen et al discusses a new research agenda related to the convergence of nanotechnologies, genomics, biotechnologies and biosciences and the production of genetic identities. The practice of diagnostic testing, pro-

ducing information about a persons genetic constitution, also discloses people as object of power. This raises questions about how normative genetic practices are imposed, but also how self-coping mechanisms (in the meaning of technologies of the self) are developed to resist the exposure to power.

The book review critically discusses John Dupré's book 'Darwin's Legacy'.

The aggregation of the above-summarized articles in this volume represents a differentiated but also collective effort to reflect critically on the possibilities for enclosing a common perspective (becoming common) within new social/technological formations. All the articles refer to important social/technical changes but also - in a certain sense - warn against too much optimism, emphasizing the contradictory developments in this process and all make a plea for further analysis and better understanding.

Lazzarato refers not only to the re-localization of power and its re-definition as a force of singularities to transform, but also to the emergence of biopower as the strategic coordination of the multiplicity of forces to regulate the conduct of others which may also hinder the opportunities of singularities to transform. Indeed, he makes a plea to elaborate further the conceptual and political differentiation between the institutionalized stable relations of biopower and the still open and fluid relations of biopolitics.

Saskia Sassen emphasizes that it has often too easily been assumed that digital technologies imply a power redistributive effect. Instead of such a technological optimism she pleads for paying more attention to the interrelationship of digital and non-digital variables and to analyze the emergence of new social-digital formations in which also new forms of politics may appear which challenge the traditional global-local distinctions based on geographical proximity and offers opportunities for cross cultural local/global politics.

The volume does not only criticizes too much optimism about re-localizations of power and technological developments, but also indicates that open source experiences are often too much loaded with optimistic expectations of realizing communality. Despite many interesting open source experiences Eric Deibel emphasizes that still further reflection is needed on going beyond common property of parts of technological innovations and on realizing the perspective of communality within new social-technological formations.

The analysis of the endogenous milk production shows that concrete experiences have been carried out within the land-reform settlements to change the social/technical codes of specific technologies but it has also been

emphasized that the unequal power relations still make the exogenous technology and development predominate.

Finally, the research note on genetic identities emphasized the perspective on how people can develop the conditions under which they become subjects of self-realization in a period in which life has increasingly become the object of biopower.