

cult question: what kind of organisational form might mediate this analysis as part of political struggle? Despite his engagements, by the late 1970s Linhart cuts a rather lonely figure. Working as an academic and economist, he individually continued with investigation but was unmoored from a party-form that was supposed to be constructed through such praxis and occupy an obstetric or editorial role vis a vis the working class.

The work of American anthropologist Nancy Scheper-Hughes, who conducted fieldwork in Pernambuco throughout the 1980s, also raises this issue of organisation. Focusing on the everyday violence of rampant childhood mortality and the ‘death without weeping’ that came with it, Scheper-Hughes was forced to rethink her assumed neutrality in response to interlocutors’ outrage at her lack of participation and seeming indifference to their political struggles. In 1995 she called for a ‘politically committed and morally engaged’ ‘militant anthropology’, animated by the ‘primacy of the ethical’ through which individual ethnographers could act less like friends or colonial patrons, and more like comrades. If Linhart never shared this notion of anthropological or academic

neutrality and viewed the problem of the traditional intellectual within firmly communist terms, both figures are nevertheless united by a concern to act in fidelity to the struggles of their interlocutors and the vicissitudes of the encounter. Both likewise leave open the question of a possible third *organisational* accountability, one that could house their commitment and put their inquiries to use beyond either the academy or public culture.

*The Sugar and the Hunger* represents the fruits of a long, difficult and patient course, or what Linhart referred to as the often ‘circuitous path’ of inquiry. In our moment of techno hype and fascist spectacle, and when left theory all too easily reproduces capital’s own omnipotent self-image, this book is a timely methodological call to inquire into the concrete realities of working class experiences and struggles, as a political strategy. In an oblique way it also raises a question which can only be answered in practice: what organisational form might politically mediate and use such a method, and how might this form – of the party for instance – rescue a Marxism barely surviving in a now crumbling university system.

Jacob Seagrave

## Years of lead, years of hope

Michael Hardt, *The Subversive Seventies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023). 312pp., £21.99 hb., 978 0 19767 467 3

Michael Hardt’s latest book, *The Subversive Seventies*, is first and foremost an exercise in reclamation. ‘Many of the progressive and revolutionary projects of the seventies today remain relatively unknown’, he writes in the introduction, ‘obscured or discounted in relation to the conventional images of the 60s.’ Dominant interpretations of the decade tend to oscillate between the contention that nothing much happened, representing little more than the settling of the radical tides that crested in ‘68; or proffer a variation of what Hardt christens the ‘good sixties/bad seventies’ thesis, reflected in the titling of influential histories of the era, such as Todd Gitlin’s shift from the ‘years of hope’ to the ‘days of rage’. Whether ripped apart by the internal torsions of identity politics, crushed by overwhelming state repression, or trapped by the *cul-de-sac* of clandestine activity, such

accounts present the movements of the era as cautionary tales.

Hardt’s approach departs decisively from this *doxa*. Marshalling an impressive range of material with an emphatically internationalist orientation – from Angola and Nicaragua to South Korea and Germany – he renders a survey of the decade as a ‘history of the present’, positioning it as a ‘vantage point from which to see more clearly what liberation movements can be and do today.’ Licensing this is a contention that such movements are, fundamentally, our *contemporaries*, both in the theoretical questions their practices evoked – principally, how to coordinate across multiple struggles or axes of antagonism, and how to generate autonomous modes of organisation beyond the recuperative forces of parties and trade unions – and the context in which they did so. Unlike the

sixties, which figures in this narrative as the culmination of a prior regime of accumulation and attendant cycles of struggles (civil rights, anticolonialism, industrial organising), the global recomposition of labour set in train in the 1970s produced the political and social space in which we operate today. What Hardt terms the ‘end of mediation’ – in which the institutionalised means of interest aggregation characteristic of the post-war settlement gave way to intensified exploitation, state repression, and political cartelisation – establishes an integral continuity between the two conjunctures, a shared baseline from which to interpret the efficacy of the tactics and strategies inventoried across the text.

In doing so, *The Subversive Seventies* constitutes an implicit contribution to the burgeoning literature concerned with the problem of organisation following the failure of both the ‘horizontalist’ and ‘left-populist’ currents of the 2000s and 2010s (works like Vincent Bevins’ *If We Burn*, Jasper Bernes’ *The Future of Revolution* and Isabelle Garo’s *Communism and Strategy*). More specifically, there’s a sense Hardt’s restoration of the seventies is an attempt to interrupt what Rodrigo Nunes, in *Neither Horizontal Nor Vertical*, diagnosed as the double-melancholia of 1917 and 1968. Treating Wendy Brown and Jodi Dean’s earlier theorisations of ‘left-wing melancholia’ as symptomatic mirror-images, Nunes considers the mutual re-crimination between the pantomime roles of ‘Stalinist’ or ‘anarchist’ as prohibiting clear thinking about the limits of each organisational modality, with failure always externalised as the fault of the other’s insufficient fidelity to one’s preferred position. Hardt’s selection of case studies confound any such simplistic organisational disjunction: we learn, for instance, of what he calls the ‘double-organisation’ or ‘dual-strategy’ of the Black Panthers, Autonomia and Turkey’s Fatsa Commune, in which the centralising tendencies characteristic of quasi-militarised organs of self-defence existed alongside the democratic base-building of popular assemblies and community institutions. Such cases exemplify Nunes’ injunction to cease thinking about organisation as the search for a discrete *form* appropriate to every and all situations, but instead as a balance of relative *forces* – centralisation/dispersal, coordination/autonomy, coherence/plurality – appropriate to a variable set of relations and problems.

Key to this is Hardt’s adoption of an ecumenical ap-

proach, reflected in one of his central methodological principles, namely to ‘analyse and appreciate revolutionary movements ... relatively independently from the resulting outcomes’. This generosity is most visible in his reconstruction of the rationale behind the pivot to armed struggle and terrorism, from the Weather Underground in the US and the East Asian Anti-Japan Armed Front, to the notorious Red Army Faction and Red Brigades of Germany and Italy. While Hardt is under no illusions as to the limits of these tactics – beyond the obvious ethical objections, he is astute on the isolationism engendered by their fugitivity, divorcing underground units from the pulse of the mass movement, and the unwinnable arms race of counter-repression it provokes – he is nevertheless able to illuminate them as a response to ‘increased state and fascist violence in the late 1960s and early 1970s’, epitomised by the shocking ‘state massacres’ carried out with impunity as part of the Italian government’s ‘strategy of tension’ against the extra-parliamentary left.

Nevertheless, Hardt’s analytical demarcation of a movements’ potential from its resultant, and his correlative intention to distinguish (internal) failure from (external) defeat, sometimes truncates the discussions. This is evident in the chapters dedicated to encampments which sprung up against destructive infrastructural projects. For instance, opposition to the construction of Narita airport in Sanrizuka, Japan, provoked local residents into action; the arrival of student radicals and party militants shortly thereafter, intent on digging in for a long fight against ‘militarist expansion’, deepened their resistance and inaugurated a powerful alliance. It’s clear that Hardt sees in their collaboration an exemplar of a call made in his 2017 work *Assembly* (co-written with Antonio Negri) for an inversion of the usual distribution of strategy and tactics in a movement, which sees the former the preserve of a prudent leadership, the latter appropriate to the instinctiveness of the base. At Narita, on the contrary, the tactical inclination toward nonviolence on the part of the locals gradually gave way to the ‘students repertoire of confrontational practices’, their vanguard-function operating only to distribute the technical knowledges developed through prior collisions with the state, preferring to defer to the residents when it came to strategy. Such originality notwithstanding, Hardt notes soberly a few pages later that ‘the airport definitely opened in May 1978’, the protesters turfed out

by security forces. Thus the encampments failed to meet their goal, and failed in a predictable way, unable to extend beyond the immediate logic of defence and exceed their own half-life in a manner repeated by its descendents (the Standing Rock protests against the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline, steamrolled by a Trump executive order in 2017, are instructive). One wonders whether that aforementioned distinction between failure and defeat is so easy to uphold, not least because defeat is rarely intelligible outside of the internal dynamics of the project to which it pertains. The question of how to negotiate the asymmetrical coercive capacity of the state is, of course, one that animates the logic of the vanguard, of Party, of centralising and generalising modes of organisation, and we do not have to fetishise such forms in order to recognise their attentiveness to this problem. Strategies and tactics, in other words, are not formulated in a vacuum, but ought to involve an attempt to anticipate the types of obstacles or counterforces thrown up in the course of a specific confrontation, especially when such obstacles are intelligible as structural features of the terrain itself. By side-stepping such questions, Hardt's generosity can come hand-in-hand with equivocation.

Hardt analyses these movements through the concepts actualised in their practices, thereby advancing an implicit model of theoretical production that elides the conventional division of labour between intellectual and militant, theorist and mass, and renders it as a product of the complex metabolism of movements themselves. In a pivotal chapter concerning the crisis of governability in industrial production we find the 'other workers' movement, whose demands extended beyond that of conditions and wages 'to transform power relations within the factory and, at times, in society as a whole.' Disillusioned with the corruption of union bosses, itself derivative of their organisation's function in the reproduction of capital, a new generation of workers, horns sharpened by the struggles of the 60s, consistently challenged the corporatism of the established institutions, reacting against the discipline and hierarchisation which cohered the nexus of capital, state and union. Deprived of their ability to placate through conventional means, this political crisis precipitated capital's attempt to eliminate the workforce's structural leverage through 'the closure of factories, increased automation, the shift of industrial labor to subordinated parts of the world', and

so on. Hardt draws on Grégoire Chayamou's work to index the panicked awareness of labour indiscipline in the political and management literature of the time, whilst sidelining other potential drivers of the reconstruction ('impending economic crises', creative destruction, etc). His reliance on workerist premises here is self-evident – specifically Mario Tronti's Copernican turn, which denied capital its principal status as motor of antagonism in favour of labour – but never explicitly argued for; the effect being that those already unconvinced by the framework have little reason to change their mind.



Nevertheless, this is not always the case. Hardt is at his most incisive in analysing the instituent creativity of many of these movements, for whom an antagonism toward the established modalities of struggle was not tantamount to a rejection of organisation as such, but an imperative to generate new forms adequate to their horizons. Hardt tracks the prevalence of various participatory structures – for instance in Portugal's Carnation Revolution of 1974, whereby a latticework of direct-democratic residents, workers and peasants councils portended the arrival of a 'Lisbon Commune' large enough to seize power – capable of interlocking and scaling across spatial



or thematic differences; as well as the administration of counter-institutions, capable of fulfilling state-functions from welfare to education to housing. This implies an effective retort to the Italian philosopher Roberto Esposito's somewhat limp rendition of 'instituent praxis', often counterposed to Negri's work. For Esposito, the reduction of institutions to a static and dominatory function, rigid operators of sovereign command on the model of Hobbes or Hegel, effaces their potential dynamism and emancipatory generativity. But this correction comes wrapped in a post-Marxist social ontology derived from Claude Lefort and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, amongst others, which tends to divorce institutions from the antagonistic rhythm of class struggle and the conditions imposed by the problem of material reproduction. The inadequacy of this framework is clarified when pitched against that of Hardt's protagonists, for whom radical democratic institutional forms are almost always constructed as a means to address collective material needs during the convulsions of a determinate struggle, an improvisational project which rapidly becomes hitched to revolutionary horizons. In this respect Hardt's argument once again dovetails with his and Negri's earlier *Assembly*, in which the problem of constructing 'nonsovereign institutions' is integral to surpass the ephemerality of horizontalism. The gestural elision of the distinction between theory and practice enables Hardt to escape the reformist pull of Esposito's work, restoring to these debates a proximity to revolutionary movements.

The strength of *The Subversive Seventies* lies in this proximity. As the centre continues its death-spiral and the right consolidates hegemony over the articulation of various late capitalist dislocations, a pivot towards a previous era of political possibility, one whose basic structure overlaps with our own, is much-needed. The chapter on the liberation movements against Portuguese colonialism in Mozambique, Angola and Guinea-Bissau is exemplary here. In the absence of established mechanisms of mediation under the comparatively thin conditions of Portuguese domination, less able to establish effective incorporative structures and more willing to

rely upon sheer might, Amílcar Cabral and other revolutionary leaders confronted this institutional abyss as an opportunity. Hence the emergence of a theory of 'revolutionary democracy' and 'popular power' as leapfrogging 'European liberal democratic society', whose institutional expression took the form of participatory village action committees which expanded via delegation along both lateral and vertical axes. It is interesting to note here the importance of a vanguard-form to this process, in which revolutionary parties had to take the near universal 'poverty and illiteracy as its point of departure and build from there a capacity for self-government.'

Whatever the fate of these sequences (Hardt brackets a consideration of the regimes to which they gave rise), the basic problem they faced – how to institute forms of antagonistic collective life without the affordances of prior modalities – thus mirrors our own moment more accurately than, say, the analyses of autonomous workers movements at the acme of Fordism. Such forms had the luxury of a dialectical relation to constituted power; they were versed in traditions of association and habits of struggle on which they could draw, an inheritance preserved (and consequently reified) by the bureaucratised mass institutions against which they could launch. It was this context that forged many of these radical instituent experiments, as revolutions within the revolution; and as the process of disintermediation that Hardt narrates has intensified, the 'hollowing out' of representative institutions catalysed by the anti-social tendencies of communicative capital, we now have no choice but to circumvent this first stage, to massify from the bottom upwards in an attempt to maintain some semblance of the front-foot against the encirclement of reaction. If the political scientist Peter Mair once characterised the empty carapace of contemporary bourgeois democracy as 'ruling the void', it is perhaps in this that we find Hardt's enduring lesson: that the 'void here, in other words, implies potential autonomy and opportunity for invention', a space to 'transform the meaning of democracy, build it from the ground up, and give it a profoundly revolutionary direction.'

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