Designing Commonspaces: Riffing with Michael Hardt on the Multitude and Collective Intelligence

Michael Hardt has made an indispensable contribution to current understanding of the impact of globalisation on social, economic and political practice, especially in his two books, *Empire* and *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*. In order to engage Hardt with many of the projects and ideas raised in this issue, guest-editors Christopher Hight and Chris Perry invited him to participate in a blog. The blog format enabled the resulting exchange between **Christopher Hight** and Hardt to be an open platform relating concepts like 'empire' and 'multitude' to contemporary design practice, and even raised challenges implicit in Hardt's own work. It also provided a productive alternative to the expropriation of a theorist's writings to legitimatise a particular design approach or methodology.

The blog tracked along three 'riffs' that emerged from an initial conference call between the editors and Michael Hardt. The general orientation of these three streams are: 1) the different topologies of space – geometrical, social and political – portended by both global capital and the multitude; 2) how design intelligence has become the paradigm of production; 3) the relationship of the first two to what used to be called 'the City', or a general notion of a 'metropolitan' condition.

RIFF 1: BIOPOLITICAL TOPOLOGIES OF SPACE

THE SIMULTANEOUS SEPARATION AND COLLAPSING OF THE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SPHERES

The dialectic between public and private is constitutive of the sorts of political space we have been familiar with since the 19th century. In *Multitude*, Hardt and Antonio Negri note that today the distinctions between public and private have been fundamentally transformed, with that which was once thought private becoming the target of techniques of control and biopower, while that which was once considered public has been removed into 'private' control. For them, the multitude offers an alternative model of democratic social space, one that evades the new forms of control that operate despotically on the dichotomies of public and private.

I would say there are two seemingly contradictory tendencies. On the one hand, there are many ways that, especially in the field of architecture, public and private are becoming ever more rigidly segregated. I am thinking specifically of the work by Rafi Segal and Eyal Weizman on the various walls of Israeli architecture, but one could also point to the generalised, international phenomena of the boundaries around private space becoming more rigid and impermeable – gated communities, for example – and public social

spaces becoming private – from common squares to shopping malls. So in some ways this involves a more radical separation of private from public and in others it means the destruction of public space altogether and a general privatisation.

On the other hand, however, there are other ways in which the borders have collapsed so that public and private are becoming indistinguishable. I remember being struck, for example, by a passage in a book by Lauren Berlant (The Queen of America Goes to Washington City) in which she argues that the feminist slogan 'the personal is political' has now returned distorted as a weapon against women in some of the public discussions in the US on abortion. No part of the woman's body is protected by privacy; rather it is totally open to social control. More generally, this is how the concept of biopower functions in many theoretical discourses today: to designate forms of power that reach down to the depths of the social field to engage and control all aspects of life. From this perspective there is no private space that is sheltered from public power, and hence no boundary between the public and the private.

So the first challenge for addressing the problem of the public and private – especially in the context of architectural design – is to think of these two apparently contradictory tendencies together: the increasingly rigid divisions between the two versus the collapse of all such boundaries; or, rather, the destruction of public space versus the elimination of the private realm. It is probably not as contradictory as I am posing it here, but it is a puzzle. After investigating this we might be in a better position to consider how the multitude might act differently and create forms of social space that evade these new forms of control.

THE FIELD OF ARCHITECTURE TRANSFORMED

Likewise, power no longer requires architecture as a figuring of institutional control in the way discipline did, epitomised in Foucault's famous example of the Panopticon. A pressing issue therefore becomes whether the architectural discipline

responds by fortifying the boundaries of 'architecture' as a discipline or reconfigures its space of knowledge into different practices of 'design', of which the normative objects of architectural practice become only a part.

I am intrigued by the relation you pose between architecture and design. This does seem to relate to the notion of a passage from a disciplinary society to a society of control, at least how I understand it.

One aspect that was important to me in how Foucault and Deleuze conceive this passage is that disciplinarity does not evaporate or even lessen, but rather broadens the site of its application and becomes generalised. In disciplinary society, in other words, each disciplinary logic had a determinate site in a specific institution: there was a carceral discipline proper to the prison, an educational discipline proper to the school, a military discipline in the barracks, and so forth. Society was like an archipelago of these disciplinary institutions and each of us might move from one to another in the course of a life. In this current passage to the society of control, then, these disciplinary logics remain but they are no longer confined to specific institutions, so we may get out of school but never escape educational discipline, get out of prison but still be ruled by carceral discipline. In the society of control the disciplines mix and modulate.

Now it seems that you see a parallel process in the transformation of the field of architecture. It is not that architectural discipline, which oversees the design of constructed social space, has declined. Rather, it is tending to overflow the walls of the institution of architecture and invest with the logics of design various kinds of social activity. That is interesting to me.

POST-FORDISM AND THE REORGANISATION OF PRACTICE

A related issue is the organisation of practice as a mode of production. As Kevin Kennon points out in this issue, the dominant corporate model divides its labour, and thus knowledge, pool in way that has stifled specificity and innovation in favour of a singular identity. Today, many architects are attempting to develop more mobile business models, the network or distributed practice being foremost, that can opportunise post-Fordist modes of production and flexible knowledge exchange to shift architecture from a 'service profession' focused upon problem solving to a research-based practice focused upon innovation. This has drastic implications for the nature of what it means to be professionally qualified.

I agree completely, at least with regard to labour and economic practices in general, that the passage from Fordist to post-Fordist regimes provides opportunities for innovation that we can seize on. One must keep in mind, of course, that the processes of making labour more 'flexible' and 'mobile' – the trademarks of the passage to post-Fordism – bring with them enormous suffering for workers. The pain for workers of the loss of long-term contracts and in general making employment more precarious is obvious and important. But it is crucial, too, not to romanticise the old Fordist factory arrangements and recognise in these current transformations the new

possibilities for the power of labour, through network arrangements, new forms of communication and cooperation, and other means. The workers might eventually be able to transform flexibility and mobility into their own weapons. The key for my work, in any case, is to confront the difficulties and forms of exploitation created by these transformations and yet, at the same time, recognise how they also provide enormous opportunities.

RIFF 2: DESIGN AS THE MODUS OPERANDI OF KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

In this issue Philippe Morel argues that the only production left for human agency is the production of concepts. Another way of saying this might be that every form of production becomes a problem of design, whether one is thinking of mainstream genetic engineering, the conveyance of information and interfaces, or more fanciful examples. This raises the relationship of design to dominant forms of power and how one can practise in a way that is projectively productive rather than 'critical' or simply complicit.

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I think that the ubiquity of design, which you point out, is linked to a general transformation of economic production occurring today that places more emphasis on what might be called its immaterial products. I do not just mean that the design of material commodities like automobiles and kitchen appliances is becoming a more important factor in the total value of those commodities, although this may be true. What I really mean is that the production of immaterial goods such as knowledge, images, code, communication circuits and even affective relationships is playing a more important role in the economy. Toni Negri and I claim, in fact, that industrial production no longer holds the hegemonic role it maintained for well over the last hundred years and that the tendency is for its place to be taken over by the production of such immaterial goods.

That claim requires an extensive argument, but for our purposes here consider the most dynamic debates in the field of property law – about copyrights, patents, the ownership of knowledges, genetic codes, music, images and so forth. All of these focus on immaterial goods. Looking backwards in the production process from this standpoint, then, we can see how the growing centrality of immaterial property today indicates the similar centrality of immaterial production.

Well, if you can accept this claim or hypothesis about the hegemonic position of immaterial production the ubiquity of design immediately becomes clear because design is really in many respects just a general name for the types of production we are talking about. Design often designates the production of the ideas or concepts or knowledges that inhere in a product. So from this perspective I would agree with Philippe Morel, even if I would say it in different terms. It is not so much that there is no other production left to accomplish, but rather that the economic position of design (or immaterial production) is becoming so hegemonic that there can be no production without it, at least in part. And that other forms of production tend increasingly to adopt the qualities of design.

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One thing this means for design occupations such as architecture, it seems to me, is that there is no imagining oneself free from, or outside, the mechanisms of social power, no pure standpoint of critique. If design is becoming central to the functioning of power – or, at least to economic production, as I have been saying – design practitioners such as architects are inevitably inside and in some sense complicit. This is nothing new, of course, since critical architects have always had to struggle with their engagements with economic and political power structures. But if we are right about the tendency of the increasingly central role of design, that struggle will become ever more intense. And being inside or even complicit in this way does not seem to me a debilitating problem. On the contrary, it marks a position of great potential. But it does indicate a certain kind of critique and struggle that can be waged from within.

RIFF 3: THE METROPOLIS OF THE MULTITUDE

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have suggested that perhaps the metropolis plays a similar role for the multitude as the factory did for the working class. Yet for many architects and urbanists, the metropolis as an object of knowledge is in crisis. For example, Jane Jacobs argued that the metropolis fuelled the de-territorialisations of modernity by producing a congested space where interactions between differentiated groups produced positive feedback loops, leading to further transformation, innovation and greater diversity. This

happened, she argued, at the micro scale of the street. One of the urban effects of information technology and so-called globalisation (or perhaps we could just say 'empire'), is a vertiginous jump from the individual and domestic to the macro/global system, bypassing the traditional public typologies of urbanism, such as the street. This is linked to the reconfiguring of public and private spaces discussed earlier. Given that, the question of where the multitude could reside perhaps requires alternative concepts of what constitutes the built environment.
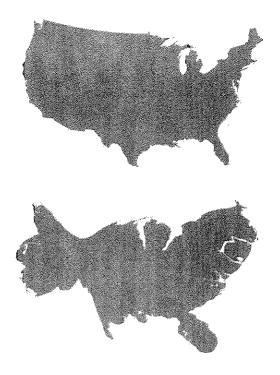
Let's step back to a philosophical level for a minute. What defines the metropolis for me is the production of, and access to, the common – common wealth in all its forms, including common knowledges, languages, habits. That is closely related to saying that the metropolis is defined by communication. When you think about it that way, then, it is clear that the old divisions between town and country, urban and rural no longer hold. Rural life is no longer isolated and incommunicative. Instead, metropolitan life, along with the common and the communication that characterise it, is extending today across all the globe. (This issue of a transformation of the urban/rural divide is a large topic, though, and needs to be worked out more fully and in more detail.)

In any case, what is essential here is the common (and its communication) because that's where the multitude resides. The common is a difficult concept, one that I don't think Toni and I have fully worked out yet. One can start from the early modern conception of the commons as open land, which was subsequently privatised by acts of enclosure. These commons were land available for use by the community. This is a good starting point, but the analogy is limited because the common I am referring to today is generally not something that is natural and pregiven, like the land, but rather something that is constantly created through social interactions. This is clear, for example, in the case of common knowledges and common languages.

It is also important to highlight the fact that the common can be both beneficial and detrimental. The common in this regard is close to what economists call externalities. A park near one's property, or even a neighbour's yard that is beautifully gardened, might be a positive externality and raise the value of one's property. Similarly, air pollution or traffic in a city might constitute a negative externality, lowering all property value in the area. With this notion of externalities economists are trying to grasp the value of the common, especially in a metropolitan context where the common predominates over all other factors.

So when I say that the multitude resides in the common that does not yet define a space. The common is a virtual location that is constantly being actualised

In that light, it is significant that World Trade Organization (WTO) protests and the like often occur in the streets, but they do not take these as *a priori* typologies of public space, but as contested fields that need to be created through the event itself and which open on to larger, nonmaterial, networks. *I suppose modern political action has always focused on the streets, but you are certainly right that there is an added emphasis on that today. Take, for example, 'Reclaim the Streets' (RTS) – a wonderfully*

Map and Cartogram of 2004 US presidential election by Michael Gastner, Cosma Shalizi and Mark Newman of the University of Michigan
These images reveal the heterogeneity and complex topographies of political space, urbanisation and geography at the dawn of the 21st century. The first image of the 2004 presidential election presents a typical contour of the US, but rather than relying on opposition between red and blue political affiliation it uses gradients of purple based on percentage of votes. The second map is a 'cartogram' produced with a small software application that distorts territory to accurately map not geographic area but population density. The authors of the software suggest it gives a more accurate image of election results. In addition, it reveals how, as Hardt suggests, normative geographic typologies such as urban and suburban or rural need to be supplanted by more sophisticated spatial understandings of the networks and commons produced via communication.

innovative organisation born in Britain that has now spread to North America and Australia. RTS generally acts by creating street parties and turning political action into carnival. You might say that such actions serve to turn back to the tendency of the privatisation of public spaces, opening them up once again to common access. Critical Mass is another group that comes to mind. They organise large groups of bicyclists to ride together on a street and thus effectively take it back from the automobiles.

These two activist groups are good examples because they show how the common must be created – or occupied – for the multitude to exist. But, as is always the case with such examples, these are just limited efforts involving relatively small numbers of people. They can serve as inspiration or suggest possibilities, but such ideas have to be integrated into social life in a much broader way to make real and significant the appropriation of the common.

A rather different example might be the way the Right has been able to mobilise the newly communicative rural common, as evidenced in the last two elections in the US, by coupling it with the design of social affiliations that are

replacing the organs of liberal civil society. Post-Fordist religion, or televisual megachurches, for example, produce a common space that, not unlike the examples you mentioned above, unlink community from proximity and instead produce propinquity via information and communication technology. These are also constructed common spaces, ones that transverse nationality, class and race, but not in a necessarily liberatory way.

There is nothing necessarily liberatory about the common. It should be thought of instead as a field of struggle, where the different political alternatives are worked out.

Perhaps, then, the metropolis of the multitude lies not in reviving historical forms of urbanism as dense cities but in mobilising, through design, the scales of intimacy into networks for collective production, using the enfolding of the intimate and the global common-places for democratic and productive ends, using as models P2P network's challenges to intellectual property, WTO protests organised via text messaging, or even your references in *Multitude* to Bakhtin's carnivalesque. Perhaps there is a potential in much of the work in this issue to create intelligent environments and responsive electronic interfaces: to create an extended but intensive cybernetic urbanism as a site for the multitude.

Yes, I certainly see this as an important and positive project for new architectures. And what interests me most, of course, is the design of democratic social relationships that architects participate in but extend beyond the limits of the architectural profession; that become a collective, social designing of space. Perhaps architects can be a model for others in this regard; and also, at the same time, architects can benefit from following the innovations of others, learning new ways to design social space and relationships from social movements and other creative social actors.

Attempting to locate the relationship of the multitude and metropolis is difficult because it would not be defined by any existing discipline. There is a need for a 'collective intelligence' that enfolds and opens the boundaries of knowledge about space and politics and design. We need to design this commons of knowledge exchange.

This certainly does involve a kind of collective intelligence, and it also focuses on the nature of the relationships that constitute that intelligence, insisting on democratic relationships defined by freedom and equality. It is hard to ask the question, as you say, and imagine such a multitude, but it is also true that we can recognise many social forces and desires pointing in that direction. This notion of the multitude is to me something that is at once strange and familiar, like something that you have dreamt about so many times that it seems already a reality.