TAMARA Interview with Michael Hardt

TAMARA: You seem to present two different and apparently opposed types or instances of technology: technology as a 'biopolitical tool' - meaning technology in the service of Empire; and technology as central in the self-constitution of the multitude. If I am right in this, when is a technology (or a technological practice) the latter and not the former? And how does this fit with your depiction of Empire as always in a state of reaction to the productive activity of the multitude?

Hardt: It seems to me that we have a not-uncommon view of technology as fundamentally ambivalent. In other words, that technology, various technologies, can be used both as means of oppression and as means of liberation. One instance that occurs to me is precisely Donna Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto," in which she talks about the developments of military and disciplinary technologies. I think she refers at the time to the military phrase "C3I." She starts really from the perspective of how new technologies and the blurring of the boundary between the human and the machine are new modes of oppression. And then she tries to reverse that logic and show how the cyborg can also be a means of liberation. So I think she too sees the ambivalent nature of technologies. That technologies aren't, in themselves, either libratory or oppressive but can be used in various ways.

TAMARA: Would you think there might be limit examples or limited counterexamples of this model? For instance, nuclear weapons being just purely destructive. This also raises also the issues of weapons of mass destruction and terrorism, as well as things like nanotechnology and the argument about technological relinquishment - that until we know the consequences of some of these things like, human cloning and certain genetic engineering or biotech that we relinquish the technologies.

Hardt: That seems absolutely right to me. What you're suggesting, I think, is that one shouldn't say that all technologies are necessarily ambivalent in this way.

TAMARA: They could be positively used; some are destructive.

Hardt: I imagine that even prior to the development of nuclear weapons, but already biological and chemical weapons at the beginning of the 20th century are already examples of that. It seems right to me that one should at least make distinction among technologies.

TAMARA: What about biotechnology and the debate about relinquishment? The argument that some things we just shouldn't implement, like cloning, human cloning, until we know what the consequences are.

Hardt: Right. I think that it's certainly true, and this isn't special or new to those technologies, that there should be social control of the uses of technologies based on social interests. And I guess also with other techniques, a society has to think in a prudent way about the effects of these. Yes, I certainly I agree with you. I mean, one doesn't just, and I think this has always been true, accept the application of all technological innovations without views to the consequences. There has to be social control of them.

TAMARA: About the depiction of empire as always in a state of reaction to the productive activity of the multitude, maybe you could ex-

plain what that is?

Hardt: Well, one way with regard to technology - I remember the example that Marx gives in Volume I of Capital, in the chapter about the factory and specifically about machines, where he says that, "One could write a whole history of technological developments since 50 years previously by simply following the strikes of workers". In other words, that workers' refusals of certain technological systems not only allowed but forced capital to implement new technology. So that, in a way, technological advance was based on the capital's reaction to workers making certain technological systems impractical. A more recent example of that would be in the 1970s, strikes of typesetters at many newspapers allowed newspapers, and really forced newspapers, to adopt computer typesetting. So instead of dealing with the striking typesetters, they just fired 'em all, got rid of the machines, got new technology. It's another instance, in a way, in which capital is reacting in the way technological development is reacting. One shouldn't - one shouldn't view this - this kind of dialectic too absolutely. I think it's not always true that the production technologies are directly the result of workers' initiatives. It's useful sometimes as a corrective because I think there's a tendency, an overwhelming tendency even, to see technological development as strictly the initiative of capital or even by-products of the military, and in doing that it is not recognized how social contestation or forms of social refusal have, in fact, themselves dictated technological development.

TAMARA: Or how people, themselves, can reconstruct technologies according to their own interest. Like the Internet, for instance …

Hardt: …yes, developed by the military in order to have a communication system in the case of nuclear war. And then they were using it just, as a scientific, government, technical communication form. And then people started getting involved in constructing alternative uses of Internet technology for, you know, more self-valorization. And that's an excellent example of the ambivalent nature of certain technologies, and how they're under contestation, how you can use them different ways and that capital may impose certain technologies, but they can be resisted and reconstructed, or at least in some cases.

TAMARA: In empire, many of your arguments as to the hybridization of human and machine in contemporary capitalism, and all that this entails for both ontology and contemporary politics, seem to have precedents in the cyborg theories of Donna Haraway. Could you elaborate some of the political consequences that seem to follow from any theory which assumes the artificiality of nature, including human nature?… And, especially in relation to the relative absence of any such recognition in mainstream global culture and politics?

Hardt: Here we're on a philosophical terrain. It's true that Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto" and her other work consists of this. Also, of course, earlier than that in France comes to mind, Deleuze and Guattari's work, which may of a lack of distinction, both between human and machine and between, and between human and animal. And then further back, it's really Baruch Spinoza in the middle of the 17th century that makes this claim. When Spinoza says, Humans are not an empire within an empire. In other words, that human nature is not different from nature as a whole. It all operates according to the same laws. And here, Spinoza's really himself, so I'm just going backwards, following a scholastic tradition that insists both on the productivity of being - this is their terms - and the productibility of being. So already, the links of the series of causes that is typical of much of medieval European philosophy has to do with this artificiality of nature, and artificiality of being itself.

TAMARA: But how far do you want to go with that? In other words, there's some ecological theory that would insist that nature is not just a construct; in other words, how we see it and use it may be a construct. But there are sort of natural laws embedded, in the cosmos, or the ecos or, nature, itself.

Hardt: There's one claim which I think is not really implicated here, which is that the human and the machine are not - do not operate on separate laws than nature. It doesn't deny that there are laws of nature, or that there are ways that ecosystems work. It's just that humans and machines are part of that. It's not a perspective that denies ecological thought, but it says that the ecology of the natural, meaning nonhuman or perhaps also non-animal, world is part of it. I think that's the only shift in perspective.

Now, I think that there are many streams in ecological thought that also try to think of the human as part of the ecosystem…

TAMARA: …and the technical, because our social and technical systems become part of nature…

Hardt: …and they, in fact, always have been. What it denies is an ecological notion which is, I think, a minority and really not very helpful view, which views nature as if it were something outside, pre-given, prior ontologically and normatively…

TAMARA: …right, like we're superior to something.

Hardt: So that what it insists on is the interrelatedness and co-evolution of the human, the technical, and the natural. There are a huge number of political consequences of that, it's sort of too large a question.

TAMARA: Well, let me just put it this way: Are there any political worries about going too far in imposing the artificiality of nature? In other words, a Bush kind of conservative market kind of person could say, Well, we're just part of the humans and technology of this mix, so we don't really have to worry about things like pollution or global warming or any of these ecological problems because that's just the way things are, it's just part of an artificial system. In other words, once you affirm the artificiality of nature, you lose a certain force of argument.

Hardt: It seems to me, though, that the argument one loses, which is a certain absolutist argument - it is that way, it has always been that way, and may necessarily always be that way - seems to be a good argument to lose. I recognize its force, but it's equally as destructive as it is helpful. Instead, recognizing the social nature of everything, nature included, forces us to make different arguments, but I think ones that much more in our interest.

TAMARA: If the reinvention of nature (Haraway's phrase) amounts to an ontological mutation (Hardt's phrase)…

Hardt: …and I agree…

TAMARA: …should we expect to see a parallel political mutation involving a politicization - what you refer to as the absolute democratization - of science and technology, and on what grounds?

Hardt: It seems to me that as Doug mentioned earlier, nature, science and technology, all three, are sites of trouble, so that if there is going to be a democratization of science, technology, the uses of nature, it will be as a result of political struggles. I don't think that that's terribly new. I think they've always been the sites of struggles. And they're perhaps indifferent forms or different contexts in each period.

TAMARA: I have some sort of lingering concerns about giving out sort of a richer ontological notion of nature. I recognize the benefits of seeing ecosystems as consisting of humans and technologies in cities and, having a constructed nature, and so on. But I'm wondering about things like preservation of wildlife and biodiversity and preservation of certain ecological sites or species, *et cetera*, that when you have nature as sort of a ground of argument, that that sort of strengthens one's political positions that we should preserve some wildlife, some species, because it gives us a richer environment to live in. I mean, you're appealing to some sort of ontological notion in nature, I think.

Hardt: If one were to say, "we need to preserve all the species because God made it that way", that could be a powerful argument. I just don't think it's a very good one for us. If we argue, rather, the way you just did, which is that we should care about biodiversity, we should preserve the variety of species because it's in our social interest, and also because we're part of the world; it's not only a human world. Once one recognizes the participation of humanity within the animal world and the natural world, for want of a better term, then one recognizes that it isn't a matter of superiority, it's a matter of participation.

TAMARA: Just one example. Here in New Mexico, we've got a project to bring back the Rio Grande, the ecosystem. So that means we have to take out trees that aren't native and go back and find the trees that were native and stop them from cutting off the river cycle each year. I think that fits with your argument, but it's suggesting that nature can be used normatively in certain political contacts, in a productive way. In other words, I think we don't want to completely throw out an ontological notion of nature, whereas we also want the position that Michael is taking about ecosystems as involving humans, natural processes, technology, cities, et cetera. But within that we still might want to maintain some sort of ontological notion of nature and biodiversity in species as well as human life. It's just part of your normative repertoire.

TAMARA: What and where are examples of the multitude struggle to appropriate the means of the production and communication of truth? How might this develop?

Hardt: Well, there are several examples, but a first example that occurs to me is "indymedia". My understanding of the history of indymedia goes like this. Maybe, one of you have a better recollection. I think indymedia more or less started in Seattle and was born in a full way with Seattle in 1999, and as a independent media, communicated through Internet sites, opened to submissions of articles, photos, even video, from a variety of sources and provided a kind of minimal screening for them; and in that way offered a media from the bottom, a production of truth about, partly at first, about the demonstrations, but then about all other events, which runs counter to the dominant media. Now we have indymedia centers not only all over the United States, but also in a large number of portions of the world: Our culture, Europe, Latin America, the Middle East, et cetera. And so the project - or the production indymedia's are involved in, is an appropriation of the means of the production and communication of truth. Production and communication of information, is what they are in a way struggling over, what's defined as true, and even what happens. You know, the New York Times takes very seriously, at least in certain areas of global events, its - its mandate to be the protector of civilization. And so the New York Times actually doesn't report on many things. If there's a protest, pro Israel, on the Upper East Side, they'll recount all the numbers of everyone involved. But if there's a protest in Washington against the war in Iraq, they'll underestimate both the significance and the numbers of such an event. So it's important for organizations like indymedia to rebut or contest that truth, to pose a different truth. And that seems to me one example of the means to appropriate. So in going along with this, that slogan of indymedia, which is "Don't hate the media, become the media".

TAMARA: Let me just add a historical footnote to this, and that is, there was a whole movement of public-access TV, of community radio, but also Internet activism that preceded indymedia. I mean, I think indymedia is probably the most dramatic example, since it was so cut up with Seattle and the anti-globalization movement, that it's sort of iconic of that present phase of resistance. But there were a few decades preceding that of attempts to do exactly that - seizing the means of production and communication for struggle - for progressive goals and, self-appropriation, et cetera.

You know, I was involved in a public-access show in Austin for about 18 years. There was

a big public-access TV movement, and a lot of it went into the Internet. And a lot of that is the basis for indymedia, both in terms of some of the people and some of the inspiration.

TAMARA: I can offer a third example: Here in Las Cruces, we created a Peace Aware Website, PeaceAware.com, and essentially, the media is not covering our weekly peace vigil where citizens of Las Cruces go in front of the federal building with our signs about peace and war. And we've had very little coverage. I think one of the three papers has done one story. And they always undercount what we do.

TAMARA: Your formulation of exploitation is the expropriation of cooperation. It's an important one because it seems to suggest that, through the new and politically creative ways of cooperating facilitated by global networks, we may transform and direct empire's power into joyful applications. For example, you mentioned a global social wage. There is, then, a problem of the organization and planning of such a transformative cooperation, and this has an echo of the issues the earlier Soviets faced. Your arguments for the possibilities inherent to communication and information networks appear to be based on the argument that these technological collectives disburse with the need to rely on state bureaucratic structures. Recent events demonstrate, though, that there is a real danger that such networks also facilitate authoritarian and totalitarian action. Are networks increasingly associated with terror? And do you see this as a threat to your argument that the exploitation of communication can be reversed?

Hardt: I guess I should start at the end. Like with the technological forms we were speaking about earlier, I think also social forms and here the network form as a model of social organization, is neither, in itself, libratory nor oppressive. It can't, though, be both. For instance - at least this is an argument that Negri and I make - while we talk about the libratory potentials of something we call the multitude, which would be social organizations and networks, or even if later, I or we or others talk about the network form of this movement of movements involved in the globalization struggles, it isn't because they're organized in networks that they're libratory, because, at least according to Negri, this Empire that we're talking about is, itself, a network structure. It is, itself, a form of network power that doesn't have a single center of power. It isn't organized by a kind of pyramid structure. Rather, it's a disbursal of various forms of power that are connected in a network form. Because what I'm trying to point out is that, at least according to our argument, the network can both be the form of the contemporary oppression, forces of oppression, and also the form of the struggles for liberation. It isn't the form, itself, that carries that evaluation. …On the issue of institutionalization and bureaucracy and hierarchy, let me push that in sort of a positive direction, then I want to do sort of a negative network/Empire direction. On a positive reading of the potential of networks - the networks as part of Empire that can be appropriated by people, and as we were discussing earlier, used for progressive purposes - let's look at the Internet and education as entailing, to some extent, the need for people to have access to technology, technological literacy and education which, to some extent, is a social wage. In other words, having free technology - like we have in the universities. At least free in the sense of access to the Internet and to be able to produce, use and appropriate all this material. That you could see as sort of a positive appropriation of these networks, along with the progressive political uses that we talked of earlier, with indymedia, anti-capitalist, anti-globalization movements, *et cetera*. That's the way to give this a positive spin.

But the negative one is that these same technologies, i.e., the Internet gives capital more power to some extent when they involve you in having to purchase and use computers. And they subject you to certain forms, like more advertising on the Internet. I don't know about your e-mail boxes, but I'm just getting "Spammed" and I'm having all these pop-up ads that just come floating across. And the

same thing if you go to the New York Times and the Washington Post, you're getting free information, but you're also having these ads pop up. So at the same time that it sort of empowers us and gives us a "decommodified," zone of information and struggle, it also gives capital more power to promote the commodity form and to insert its imperatives into our life. And that's just a contradiction. Another example of the ambivalent features of these developments. Also, it's exclusionary; 60 percent of the world doesn't have access to a computer? Something like that. But the technological imperative of a network society pushes those that are not connected to the network to become part of it; that, and that requires education and positive things. So I think there's a positive dialectic for the developing world with technology, as well as a negative one. I think the thing here is to avoid both technophobia and technophilia. To avoid either celebrating networks as the, earlier cyberculture did, or just trashing it as a lot of our comrades on the left did.

TAMARA: I think your book, Empire, is one of the break-through books on both globalization and technology that forces us to see things dialectically from different sides and to see both progressive and regressive, empowering and disempowering dynamics in this globalization and technology, and how they're interconnected. Which I think is important to see.

Let me first put this theoretically, and then I'll move to sort of political dimension to it. Under the impact of "Bushy" and militarism of new doctrines like pre-emptive strike, that I think is a cover for US hegemony, do you see the US as attempting to become a center of empire? And can this work in view of the complexity of the different military and political and economic dimensions of empiring the multitude the way you work it out?

Hardt: In Toni and mine's view, the Bush Administration since September 11th is attempting to create a new US imperialism. In a way to reverse certain trends that were happening through the first Bush Administration and the Clinton Administration. And to create itself as the center of global affairs. A hegemon.

TAMARA: Yeah, a hegemon in military, economic and political terms.

Hardt: Right. It would have to be to control and to maintain its position. It seems to me that that is a project that's doomed to failure, and that is, in fact, I'd say more strongly than that, that it runs counter to the interests of today's global elites. I can say just in two respects that seem quite obvious to me. One is that the creation of a US imperialism, rather than something like what we describe as Empire, is bad for business.

TAMARA: Right.

Hardt: It's bad - it doesn't provide a means to realize the potentials for profit in capitalist globalization. And I think, not surprisingly, therefore, there are many business leaders outside the U.S. who are very skeptical and reluctant about the current administration's unilateralism, let's say.

TAMARA: As are political elites all over the world.

Hardt: As are political leaders elsewhere. And in the second regard, I think that it gets the least interest in terms of security and, let's say, global order, that it will only exacerbate the global antagonism that exists and moreover, at the same time, put a big bull's-eye on the United States as the global forces of domination.

TAMARA: I agree with that analysis in the long term, but in the short term, I'm very disturbed that there hasn't been more opposition, both, domestically and globally, to Bush's hegemonic project that I see as completely out of control and destructive in its implications. And I'm thinking about the election where basically the Republicans got away with their agenda, both the economic and the military and the political one, without really being contested by the Democrats or the global media, which do represent corporate capital. I just didn't see a strong opposition. And then, during the

same period, in the UN, they were able to force through the Iraq deal. I just don't see global capital really standing up to him yet.

Hardt: Right. It's unclear what the mechanisms of that will be. But I think what we're agreeing about - I would put it this way - is that we're experience a period, I think, in which the global elites are - are incapable of acting in their own interests. And I think some of the worst human tragedies have been at periods when elites failed to act in their own interests.

TAMARA: Right.

Hardt: It might seem paradoxical, but in fact -it can lead to some of the worst disasters. So while I would, of course, advocate struggling against this decentered empire once it's formed, if the choice is simply a choice between a US imperialism and some more decentered form, I think that there's some ways in which this decentered form would be preferable.

TAMARA: Well, I think normatively that that's the case. But let me pose the question a little differently. Isn't this surprising and anomalous that there would be this attempt to sort of center Empire on US hegemony, in the light of your analysis of Empire that sees it as a more of a decentered and deterritorialized machine that is global in nature? In other words, I guess it's a question about what Empire is, and how could it allow this Bush hegemony? If it was a sort of a rational machine… But, it's a machine of capital, but also of culture and politics, et cetera that is pretty much self-reproducing, although it does have the multitude to contend with.

Hardt: Right. I would say just that these are struggles in the process of formation of a governing system and that it isn't necessarily, we'll say, linear in its process of development.

TAMARA: So there's contradictions and anomalies and regression as well as progression. it sounds very old-fashioned of me to say something like this, but I do, though, believe that there's a larger a movement, a necessary movement, at least in this regard; if it is seen as a choice between US imperialism and something like empire, a decentered global system, I think they, that the Empire cannot quite work out - precisely because of the forces of necessity which I guess I'm linking here as both the interests of global capital and the more general interests of .. of political and cultural elites.

TAMARA: And ask a follow-on in here. We have a theory, since we're near Texas, that this is the oil empire that - Bush and Cheney, since they come from a mind-set of oil - a background of oil, view the world situation through that lens and that the oil is gonna benefit from this war. Do you see it that way?

Hardt: I don't know how - how the war's gonna affect the oil industry. Maybe I should start there. It doesn't seem to be clear one way or the other - if it's gonna affect the oil industry. I don't think that it's that the war is in the interests of - in the interests of business more generally conceived.

TAMARA: Actually - this oil issue is very, very interesting from an ontological and sort of technological as well as political and economic dimension. And that is that the modern economy is sort of centered in oil. You know, that's the grease, as it were, that makes the whole system work, right?

Hardt: Right.

TAMARA: It's a necessary condition and it's a major industry. If you move to a renewable energy source, in other words, you came up with a nanotechnology or some sort of alternative solar technologies that could produce energy, then oil would just disappear as a factor. So this Bush-Cheney regime does seem sort of grounded in an older materiality of business, of political economy, of production.

…the oil and certain corporate centers, like military, industrial complex or GE, the old manufacturing industries. And so once they're superseded by new technologies you are going to be into more of an Empire world, in terms of networks and decentering and everything…

Hardt: This could also be an anomalous phenomena; it's the last gasp of the oil empire or the oil regime.

TAMARA: Absolutely. Yeah, we're running out of oil. Just a few statistics. There's the expected profits, if the US gains control of Iraq, it gains $1.1 trillion in contracts that are now with the French and the Soviets.

Hardt: It looks like a very old-style interim imperialist competition.

TAMARA: Right. And it is. There's big French, Russian, and US economic interest battling behind the scenes in Iraq, for this UN resolution and dividing up the oil if they decide to intervene militarily.

Hardt: And to some extent, we are back to an older geopolitical world, let's call it a Kissinger sort of view. That is a more centered world in terms that there are centers. And nation-states, and spheres and…

TAMARA: But, again, this could be leaving us behind as we move into a new "technodes" universe. Which brings up, I guess, the terrorism question. Of how we read, terrorism. I'd like your thoughts on the role of terrorism in the contemporary world. It seems to have become much more sort of prevalent and dangerous since you published Empire.

Hardt: Right.

TAMARA: And if you look at the news, it's almost like Bush versus, bin Laden and al-Qaeda, Islamic fundamentalism, versus militarism; militarism as the sort of dominant dynamic of what's going on. So is this being sort of exaggerated by the media? Or is this a major new dynamic that we're gonna have to deal with for the foreseeable future?

Hardt: Well, one thing is, it seems to me that one has to take a step back from many of the claims of combatants in these conflicts about what they represent to understand them better. To take a step back, there are some claims of the an all- encompassing nature of these conflicts, like Bush saying, "You're either with us or against us".

TAMARA: Right.

Hardt: There's one way in which this specific conflict between US government and al-Qaeda is something like a rebellion of the condottiere against the ruling lord. We could even think of them as aristocratic forces against the monarch, rebelling aristocrats. Because it's certainly not true - and this is something that al-Qaeda claims, that it's rich against poor. It's certainly not, as the Bush administration claims, that it's freedom against servitude.

TAMARA: Right. Right.

Hardt: It's something like a clash between various elements of the global hierarchy for relative position within it. Because, of course, I mean, it's important never to forget that al-Qaeda is generally from extremely wealthy parts of the Islamic world, of the art world, too; it's not arisen from poverty. I think that there has to be a rethinking - a different lens through which to see this myriad of conflicts across the world. It seems clearly inadequate - inadequate just to say it's legitimate violence versus terrorism. That's also true, I'd say, with the Russians versus the Chechnians.

TAMARA: Right. No, this is unfortunately the position that the Bush doctrine is taking, sort of manichean and dualist - that our terrorism is, actually the war against terror as opposed to being state terrorism.

Hardt: Right. Well, I think, one of the things that I, well, the reason I was hesitating at first is, it's very difficult to talk about these things and question the way they're formulated without at least someone - and certainly not you two, but I meant if this is published - someone misunderstanding and think it's in support of those who use violence against the present world order. One thing that I think, though, about the increase of the discourse about ter-

rorism in recent years should be linked to the decrease in the mechanisms for the "legitimation" of state violence. In a way, the one aspect of the declining sovereignty of nation-states is the decline in the mechanisms for the legitimation of violence which has been, traditionally, throughout the modern period, a monopoly of the nation-states.

TAMARA: Right.

Hardt: Think of, in a rather different context, the charges of crimes against humanity against Serbian leaders. The charges against Milosevic - in The Hague now - are not that he violated Yugoslav law. In fact, it's not a question of the right of a leader of a state to execute or direct violence based on the laws of the state. It's, in fact, regardless of national sovereignty, regardless of the traditional structures of legitimate violence. He's condemned because of a different power. What I would argue, in fact, is that there's a tendency now for all traditional mechanisms for legitimating violence to decrease. The anxiety over that has created an increased discourse about illegitimate violence, about the terrorism of others.

TAMARA: Right. But it's also, I think, expanded the scope of the state to legitimately use all kinds of violence, like CIA assassinations, preemptive bombing wherever and whenever, if it's in the name of going after terrorism. So, this is an ironic dialectic in response to…

Hardt: I don't think that - I think that one has to ask, if one were to accept what I said about decreasing legitimation, then one would have to say, "Well, how is it the US is exerting all this violence in the world?" It seems to me that it is not centrally based on law or morality.

TAMARA: Right.

Hardt: Michael Walter at Dissent is talking about just war, as if it were right and good that we're legitimating it. I think, rather, the US violence, military violence is legitimated strictly on the basis of its effectiveness. As long as US military operations reproduce global order and the present hierarchies, they will be legitimated. But as soon as they fail to think that they will lose their legitimation. So in a way, like you say, there seems to be an increase, a maniacal proliferation - along with the assumption that any kind of violence that the US exerts is now legitimate because it will bring order. But I think it's a very weak legitimation, a precarious one.

TAMARA: Right. I think you're right. Once they start failing - and I think they failed in Afghanistan… The fact that bin Laden seems to be alive and active - really shows that this kind of military striking at caves is not the way to really…

TAMARA: And can't even accomplish its own objectives.

Hardt: Right. Unilateralism and militarism just don't work. But I don't think the US public has begun to see this, and the Democrats, no one's pushing this.

TAMARA: No.

Hardt: Well, I'm no expert on electoral politics and such, but it's quite traditional in the US that when the US goes to war, there is, at least temporarily, a large bipartisanship consensus imposed with low levels of public dissent. Like I remember during the earlier Gulf War, of Bush senior, there were extremely large demonstrations right before the beginning of the ground war. But once the ground war started, there was an incredible drop. And the remaining demonstrations were severely repressed.

TAMARA: Right, right.

TAMARA: "They support our troops" kind of mentality.

TAMARA: Right.

Hardt: And I sort of see us as being in that. Then, little by little during the war, there can be a building of dissent and dissatisfaction.

TAMARA: And afterwards, one can contest the goals and the success. I mean, that's how Bush won then, got voted out; we basically said that after the Gulf War he basically made a mess of the whole region, left Hussein in power, who then suppressed the Kurds and the Shiites. And, you know, it didn't really gain much.

TAMARA: …and certainly wouldn't have a consensus of, the public and the multitude

Hardt: Right.

TAMARA: To go along with this, let me pose a somewhat different problem for your analysis with terrorism. And that is, at one point, you talk about the new barbarians…

Hardt: Uh-huh.

TAMARA: …in a sort of positive mode, in sort of a Deleuze and Guattarian, sort of countercultural mode, that those that are refusing the middle class are capitalist, will appear as barbarians, and in point of fact, they're just opposites and alternatives to the system. I mean, that seems pretty benign, and I think most of us would go along with this sort of countercultural appropriation. But in the view of the real barbarians, from a historical retrogression standpoint which is, al-Qaeda and terrorism and Bush and militarism, don't you become a little nervous about phrases like that? Or, how do you read them?

Hardt: Well, I don't know. I did an interview with a clever Swedish reporter who said that if they pose that old alternative to you, socialism or barbarism, you choose the barbarism.

TAMARA: Right! (Laughter.)

TAMARA: (Laughter.)

Hardt: I mean, it seems to me what would be at issue here is, either wilful or not, misunderstanding of the use of the term. It's not only referring to the way that countercultural people who refuse social norms are viewed by a kind of mainstream "normativity"…

TAMARA: Right, right.

Hardt: …they're barbarians, but it's also that for us, in the pleasures of our own historical imagination about these things, its about thinking about the Roman empire, and its fall. You know, what comes after it? Well, in part of the book, we play with early Christianity, in another part of the book, we play with barbarians.

TAMARA: Right.

Hardt: I mean, I don't worry in general about that sort of thing, although I do feel the sting sometimes of being misread, wilfully or not.

TAMARA: I think Alan Wolf, in a New Republic review sort of attacked you guys for…

Hardt: For all kinds of things.

TAMARA: providing legitimation for terrorism and Islamic radicalism, *et cetera*.

Hardt: Yeah.

TAMARA: Which actually does bring up the question of Islam that I wanted to pose to you. I mean, you do sort of take, it seems, a fairly benign position on Islamic radicalism in the book. On the other hand, you don't really engage, or you don't engage so much in a critique of religion the way the Marxist tradition has traditionally done it. You have sort of a more utopian/communitarian, positive reading of religion. And in view of the virulence of Islamic radicalism that we see today, I wonder if there's not a dialectic in Islam of negative/positive that you want to critique.

Hardt: Well, I'm not sure that Islam ought to be critiqued any more than Christianity. Or any religion, for that matter. There's a dialectic of religion that it gives rise to an extreme of fundamentalism that can lead to terrorism. And certainly historically, you have that in the Crusades.

TAMARA: Sure.

Hardt: Right? With Christianity and Islam. And also, obviously, Judaism. You know, look at Israel today.
TAMARA: And I take it you had more of a positive view of religion, in general, and Islam in particular, maybe I missed some passages?

Hardt: Well, Islam we only talk about in two pages, and the argument we make, I think, is not terribly original, I don't think it's bad, but it's not terribly original - which is that we say that Islamic fundamentalism shouldn't be understood as a return to some primitive state - but is, in fact, a reaction to contemporary events and contemporary global hierarchies.

TAMARA: Right.

Hardt: And in that sense, we thought, even though paradoxically their positions in some regards are opposite, certain postmodernist discourses are similar because they, too, are reacting to this contemporary order of events. But both of them, we argue, while they're in a way symptoms of this, are inadequate recognitions of how the world has changed. But that's a relatively benign reaction. It's not a condemnation, it's not either a support.

TAMARA: Right. But I guess I would suggest there's a more, sort of, dangerous dialectic in religion in general, that can give rise to these fundamentalisms and these extremisms that are threatening and dangerous.

Hardt: Right. And, I think it's a little bit of a problem because so much of our philosophical and political history is tied up with religious movements that it's very difficult to separate them from that.

TAMARA: All right. Obviously, a book like Empire that, is long and engages tremendous multituded themes cant do everything.

Hardt: Sometimes I think people want us to write more than 500 pages.

TAMARA: Right, right. It's just historical events after a book often throw things up that, require you to rethink some of the things in the book or to…
Hardt: Well, there's a little bit after September 11th. I mean, this isn't new at all, but I think there's a kind of post-September 11th opportunism, which tries to discredit all enemies by making them soft on Islamic fundamentalism, which is translating the old Cold War language into new terms for the war on terrorism.

TAMARA: Right. I think it's true that something like September 11th is, itself, contested and exploited by various positions.

TAMARA: Unfortunately, the most successful being Bush.

All: (Laughter.)

Hardt: But also bin Laden and his jihad. It was brilliantly exploited… I mean, these two live off each other, in a certain way.

TAMARA: I got a couple little questions. These are for both of you. First question: Every Wednesday, I go out and I engage in street theatre and protest in front of the federal building over the Iraq war that's coming, and I was noticing that last Wednesday, after the elections, I ran up and down the line and people were saying, How could this happen? How could so many people not be aware of this situation, the facts? In other words, how is it that the spectacle, to use Douglas Kellner's term, is able to camouflage what Empire is doing? Does that make sense?

Hardt: It does make sense. My first reaction is that this may be not just a matter of camouflage.

TAMARA: Well, I see basically a fundamental contradiction in terms of information and politics in the contemporary era. And that is that network television, corporate media, are basically a spectacle. And there is spectacle for capital in the dominant power that doesn't

have, the news and information that we need to be informed about what's really going on in the world and what the stakes are. Whereas, on the internet there's a surfeit of information; we don't have time to read all the good Websites and analyses and responses and, plus, there's all these alternative projects like indymedia that we talked about. So there's a large sector of the population that gets their information from the Internet that's totally informed, the informed generation you can imagine. And there's other people that are just, you know, living the spectacle, if you want to put it in those terms. And, you know, eventually one hopes that the failures and dangers of the Bush project will get into the media and the mainstream, the corporate media. It looked like they were, with the Enron scandal and all these corporate business scandals, as well as some of the Bush-Cheney business scandals and political scandals. But all that's disappeared, and we're just back now to Republican hegemony in the media. And I find it very disturbing.

TAMARA: We found it very disturbing on the line, on our little peace vigil each week. So some of the people suggested we should escalate, we should remain non-violent, but start breaking certain laws.

Hardt: That's very dangerous right now because of, you know, this terrorism prohibition. You'll just be labelled as terrorists.

TAMARA: But the frustration is the sense we're getting virtually no media coverage, and I assume this is going along across the nation, that…

Hardt: Right.

TAMARA: …there's lots of little communities that are Internet-savvy to the alternate media but feel their voices are not heard. So we're gonna do things like, before we break any laws, we're gonna have big puppets, big theatre, and attract more attention. So we're gonna be more carnival-esque, more circus-like. But a few of us have said, well, maybe we should get arrested, if that's what it takes to get media coverage.

Hardt: Right. And I think the anti-globalization or anti-capitalist globalization movement has been brilliant in some of its street theater. You know, some of these puppets and plays are pretty brilliant, culturally. There's a danger, though, that once you start terrorism tactics, one, you get hit hard by the police, and then, two, you look bad in the media.

TAMARA: Yeah, that's a problem. I spent the last six evenings making my big Bush head; it's about four feet, it's a big ol' puppet, and I'm painting, he's got big ears, Spock ears. It's carnival …

Hardt: Yeah, I did think that the carnivalesque and the making the protest fun not only for the participants, but other people around is one thing that's new and wonderful. I'm also not against breaking laws in any absolute way. I just think that it has to be it has to be thought out.

TAMARA: Right.

Hardt: I don't like getting arrested, myself, but would only do it if it had some purpose. Often, it just doesn't serve any purpose.

TAMARA: There's no question there's a history in the civil rights movement of nonviolent resistance; that's the way they get publicity.

Hardt: Well, even other things that are considered violent by some, breaking windows and such, I don't want to do it all the time; in fact, I don't think it's a good thing to do right now. But it's a matter of context, when it's gonna be effective and when it's when it's not. There's another thing that I don't know if the group there is already thinking about. There are times, it seems to me, when the mandate to get media coverage distorts other things about movements. And that sometimes moving away from that can be much more effective. Like even refusing to talk to the media when they want to can end up being a much more effective means

of furthering the organizing efforts.

TAMARA: I think this is totally right. Todd Gitlin wrote a book, The Whole World is Watching, that documented how the New Left went overboard during the Vietnam period in trying to produce demonstrations that got media attention that got more and more violent, and perhaps it was the less dramatic, day-to-day organizing, in schools or in communities or in churches or with Congress that helped develop a consensus against Vietnam. So you might consider other kinds of educational projects.

TAMARA: Yeah, we did a teach-in, 13 hours, - an all-day event; it was October 28th. And we turned out a pretty fair size, for our population here. It was about 600 during the day.

Hardt: That's fabulous.

TAMARA: I mean, this is what we did during Gulf War I in Austin; every day, the progressive faculty group had a teach-in, and we had it packed. We had rock music and punk music and speakers and a dance troop. It was very good, but…

TAMARA: That sounds like the way to go, really, and maybe this is the sort of thing we should do during this Iraq war, just have these campus activities on a daily basis. And the other thing we did was, this was 1991, so the Internet was just starting; PeaceNet was a source of alternative information. We would research every morning alternative stuff on the Gulf War. And then have sort of a news thing and Xerox some of the stuff and spread it out.

TAMARA: Yeah. We started a list serve, and we do some of that researching the alternative media. And we're in touch with each other. We're looking at the next things to do. We did the teach-in, now we're coming to Christmas.

TAMARA: Right. Well, you might consider daily teach-ins; it takes a certain commitment, but, you know, there was Harry Cleaver and myself and Mike Conroy, … There were about ten or so of us that were pretty active. And, we got our younger colleagues involved and, you know, it worked.

TAMARA: Yeah, I think we're ready to do another one as soon as there's the next initiatory event; we're ready. Yeah. But it's just a little frustrating because they reported us as only turning out 80.

Hardt: Right. See, I just don't think you should worry that much about how the mainstream presents it. I mean, it is encouraging when - like in Italy, I guess, last week - they have hundreds of thousands. I think in London, I saw some estimates up to 400,000. I mean, those are impressive.

TAMARA: Yeah, those are big numbers.

TAMARA: 2200 people in Santa Fe went up - or in Taos, New Mexico - that's north of here - went to Rumsfeld's house and protested. So there's activity like that all across America, but it's not very well reported.

TAMARA: Michael, is there much going on at Duke or down in your neck?

Hardt: There is, I mean, at Duke, we have sort of a strange student population. Even the students think of it as a conservative student population, but then there's a group of about 2 or 300 that are quite active. They've always been active for several years, in the sweatshop movement. But nothing like a daily thing. No, they've invited speakers and that sort of thing.