



Book Reviews/Buchbesprechungen

Paolo Virno

Gramatika mnoštva
(The Grammar of the
Multitude)

Jesenski & Turk, Zagreb 2004.

Last year, finally appeared, in a Croatian translation, one book by Paolo Virno. This professor of philosophy on Calabrian University is for a long time one of most important, also most distinctive, most original personalities in world's theoretical scene. According to logics of particular »star-system« of it, he is the one of its most shining stars. Along with his Italian colleagues, Paolo Negri nad Giorgio Agamben, Virno gave some deciding impulses for re-thinking our globalized world. Although his point of departure, apart from the two mentioned above, is less dictated by an explicit social analysis in a view of direct emancipatory potentialities, Virno is an observer of contemporaneity, who's insights are lucidly clear and their elaboration has ontological depth.

His point of departure is a particular philosophy of language. The nature of language itself is the decisive social power able to change the world we live in. The title of one Virno's book, in a free translation »When Verb becomes Meat«, mainly describes his ontological position. The book, that has appeared on Croatian theoretical market, has a title *The Grammar of Multitude*. This »contribution to analysis of contemporary life forms« is a transcription of seminary Virno had held in January 2001 on Department for Sociology in Reggio Calabria University. The shape of a text in itself keeps the rhythm of a spoken word. That's why *Grammar of Multitude* gives the joy of reading, at the same time, without losing a particular seductiveness of oral presentation.

First, Virno slightly distantly and cautiously detects *Multitude* as the *demier cri* of social, political and philosophical theory. He begins

his reflection of a concept, but not at a place where it should be expected. Namely, not in Spinoza, but in the biggest theoretical enemy of a concept – in Hobbes. For the latter, as we know, the monopoly of political decision is embodied in the State.

In a book *De cive* Hobbes says: »The People are something which is *one*, which have *one/unite* will and to which *united* will may be ascribed.« Multitude (crowd, throng) is, on the other hand, »pouring out of overflowing natural state in civil society«. The People are personification of sovereignty which shapes itself in the State, while the Multitude is excluded from that legitimation cycle/discourse.

For liberal theory, that multitude is something which belongs to domain of private and is somehow deprived of participation in public sphere.

For democratic-socialist tradition, multitude is individual and cannot be placed side by side with historical array of oppositional, class and democratic struggles of then oppressed. Therefore, this concept is deprived of participation in both spiritual traditions of our civilization. According to Virno, Multitude re-determines the One (i.e. language, intellect, common arts of human kind). The one thus cease to be a Promise, like in universal history, but a Premise. Multitude appears as a particular individuation of the Universal.

Virno reflects on a key theoretical concept of contemporaneity from three standing points:

- 1) from the dialectics between fear and quest for safety, Multitude appears to be predominating mode of existence nowadays;
- 2) from the crisis of ancient division of human experience to Work, Thinking and Politics;
- 3) from specific subjectivity of Multitude (which is divided to Individuation, and to Heideggerian modes of in-authenticity of Here-Being (*Dasein*): chatting and curiosity).

Concerning the theme of »Fear and Refuge/Shelter«, Virno posits Kant's Moral Self

as a permanent Refuge/Shelter. *Fear*, as something concrete, is opposed to *anxiety* (Angst), which represents general, abstract uncertainty of existence. Fear may be overcome by including he/she in community, while anxiety is most often transcended in some religious experience. Fear and anxiety of contemporary existence unite themselves in *ominousness*. Ominousness is also *no-belonging* as a general mode of a versatile exposure to the world. One of the main characteristics of Multitude, is seen by Virno as the loss of dichotomies, particularly the ones between natural and social, public and private...

But, for overturning dialectics of relations in a world we live in, *the danger appears to be as some kind of asylum* – for *Multitude*.

Virno enters into further elaboration of the concept from linguistic perspective, i.e. from the viewpoint of language. Right from Aristotle, we have inherited so called »common/public/general places« – *topoi koinoi*; logical and linguistic forms of the most general value. These places are:

- I – relation more-less;
- II – opposition of contradictions;
- III – category of reciprocity (for example: if I am her brother, she is my Sister, etc).

Particular places are – *topoi idioi*. These are the ways of expressing that apply to some of the realms of common life, by which contemporary media and globalized world is marked.

Common places are *apothropeic* device of contemporary Multitude – *basic core* of Reasonable Life; Reasonable Life becomes the One, as something that is subordinated to the Multitude's way of existence.

General Intellect, i.e. Public Reason, for Virno, appears as materialistic version of *nous poietikos*. On the other hand, *bios xenikos* – therefore, state of strangeness and exclusion for the members of Multitude – becomes permanent state.

The experience of modern/contemporary life in megalopolis (already detected in the first half of last century by Benjamin) appears as some kind of »childish repetition«. Such condition of Multitude, if it can not be poured into another vessel of *public no-state sphere* – often results with bare destructive aggression. Nowadays, we are witnessing, according to Virno, to *partition* of linguistic-cognitive abilities *versus* traditional/historical *division of labour*. Negativity of that position is contented in personal addiction to hierarchical orders. Multitude does not converge into 'Rousseauist' notion of *volonté general* because it al-

ready has General Intellect. »Political thinking«, quite paradoxically, bursts out as a characteristic feature of Multitude in *postfordism*. All misunderstandings around the assertions about obsolescence of »working class« in contemporary world, emerge from that fact. For Virno, 'Working class' is a theoretical concept, and not a photo-souvenir! *Ergo*: The multitude is also the working-class!

Furthermore, in contemporaneity, »productional world« is not consisted just by economic configurations but of a complex cluster of *life forms* also.

Adding to this theoretical, but also practically founded assertion, Virno also refers to structural division in Aristotle, also used by Hannah Arendt (in *Vita active* for example).

Fusion of Politics and Work is a characteristic feature of Multitude; *poiesis* + *praxis* are joined together. Namely, political activity as superficial duplication of working experience is a reason for colloquial despise over politics today.

But the things does not have to be like that! Virtuosity of every activity in itself, is a distinctive feature of any real political activity. Along with this, we have to keep in mind Hegel's distinction between real (reale) and actually (wirklich) from his *Philosophy of Law*. There, we should notice two moments:

- A) today's covering up of a structural character of political activity; and
- B) the existing work with virtuosity; for Marx that was »wage labour, which simultaneously was not productive work«.

In »postfordism«, according to Virno, *work needs* »publicly organized space«.

Virno also investigates the phenomenon of language as such. That means: »without activity«, pure potentiality for something to be said. That potentiality of language is consisted just in that what De Saussure have called *parole* – there is also above mentioned virtuosity.

In »postmodern condition« (Lyotard), the former industrial civilization of work overturns into »cultural industry« → the structure of wage labour coincides with the structure of political activity.

Politics is no more science on good governing but on conquering and keeping the governance over society. That is why Virno criticizes Frankfurt School concerning their non-recognition of »spirituality« remainings in modernity's society of spectacle, which were the anticipation of future. For Debord, let us remember – spectacle was »general exposition of system's rationality«. Money and

spectacle appear to be real abstractions: of the one finalized (i.e. money) and of the one potential (i.e. spectacle). Postfordist world of today, for Virno, is an »industry of means for communication«. Linguistic-communicative tendency of »societal cooperation« is an *anthropogenesis* included in productive process.

We are witnessing the overall/general politicisation of work.

General Intellect, i.e. Common Rationality, is a partiture of postfordist Multitude.

Already Karl Marx has introduced the notion of 'public opinion' through the concept of »real abstraction« (i.e. reification of certain thought – money, for example). After that, we have had permeation of Work with Politics (and Intellect), and work itself became the area of virtuosity-communication, among other things, also for making *surplus value* (i.e. profit) in the imperial stage of capitalism. However, Marx takes no decisive steps following the consequences of his »theory of surplus value« and does not transgress machine system into »living labour« through linguistic cooperation.

For Virno, therefore, Intellect, as a capability of Reflection is – a pure *potentiality*.

»Hybridisation« of work, (political) activity and Intellect in postmodern condition, i.e. in postfordism, cause *hyperthrophic growth of administrative apparatus*, and is an inversion of positive effects of Intellect → we have *nationalization of intellect*.

Is it possible to re-connect the bond Intellect/Work to the one Intellect/political activity? Tendency towards »non-governmental public sphere« and a possibility of non-servile virtuosity, appears to be potentiality of the Multitude. Political virtuosity of society is embodied in a radical »citizen's/civil disobedience« and »exodus« – getaway from compromising *tertium datur* of the existent. Virno, following Bachelard, finds the one example of grammar subject in the quantum mechanics. Can Multitude follow the same pattern?

Grammar subject of multitude is being constituted on three levels:

- a) on the principle of individuation;
- b) on Foucault's »biopolitics«;
- c) on the so called »stimmungen« (opportunism and cynicism) whose modes were already mentioned above → chatting and curiosity.

Multitude, for Virno, is the *individual* which has the *Many*, as its point of departure. It is based on pre-individual reality, that precedes society and the principle of state and so-

vereignty. Transition from perceptual to linguistic is the *principle of individuation*: from certain *Langue* to *Parole*.

Cooperation in society between po(i)etical, political, cognitive and emotional relationships pours out into another vessel of General Intellect. Referring to French philosopher Gilbert Simondon, Virno speaks of two moments of individuation:

- 1) never finishing individuation;
- 2) more radical individuation through collective → i.e. the »collective« of multitude emerges as foundation for *non-representational democracy*.

That concept of »societal individual« connects, for example, Simondon with Marx.

The basis of »biopolitics«, advocated by Virno, as well as by Negri and Hardt, is Life as such, as mere biological process which becomes something subordinated to Authorities and political administration → power to produce (*dynamis*) = working power, and the latter is → the »sum of all physical and intellectual capabilities existing in body« (as Marx would say).

»Work as subjectivity« is a basis for biopolitics; as a commodity and as a means for the production of surplus value. Virno, philosophically, or more precise, ontologically, conceptually re-affirms the concept of 'working power'. Working power is a general noun, and is bodily determined also as a biopolitical fact.

Virno is also pleading for finding *neutral* core of emotions, which nowadays is most often marked with opportunism, cynicism, chatting and curiosity. In an analysis of contemporaneity terms, for Virno, *opportunism* consists in technological importance, in a professionalisation of equal opportunities.

Cynicism is, consequently, self-affirmation without equivalencies of modernity, without making *intersubjectivity* real or true.

Nondescript quality of »ES/IT« nourishes *CHATTING* and keeps unrestrained *curiosity* on move. But, chatting and curiosity are for Virno also the foundation for contemporary communicational production. *Chatting* is a basic material of postfordist virtuosity. *Curiosity* is, furthermore, epistemic »passion, for always something new« (from St. Augustine and Heidegger) → plebeian parody of *bios theoretikos*: voyeurism in the place of knowledge. Media, therefore, are practicing senses to watch the familiar as something unfamiliar (Benjamin), but also unfamiliar as something familiar. Curiosity and chatting, which were for Heidegger something

un/non-authentic, for Benjamin are existential future and possibility. This may apply also for Multitude!

That is why Virno, finally, opts for Benjamin as more constructive for explaining phenomena in contemporary world, while Heidegger remains obsolete and improper theoretical backing for the »analysis of contemporary life-forms«.

Foundational definition of the concept of Multitude is given in what follows: Multitude is *biologically fundamental configuration that becomes historically determined way of existence – the ontology which reveals itself phenomenologically*.

Finally, Virno concludes his *Grammar of Multitude* with ten theses on multitude and postfordist capitalism.

These theses are, as follows:

1. Postfordism (as well as Multitude together with it) has appeared in Italy in a context of social struggles we remember as »77 movement«.
2. Postfordism is an empiric realization of Marx's »Fragment on Machines« → *toolkit*, that is, theoretical tools for sociologists.
3. Multitude reflects crisis of working society; working time is existent, but not also a *true* measure unit. »*Verwindung* of working society is realized in subordination to the rules of wage labour«.
4. Postfordist multitude does not know qualitative difference between working and non-working time.
5. In postfordism, there exists permanent disproportion in the relation between »working time« and, more comprehensive, »productive time«.
6. Postfordism, on one hand, determines living-together of most different productive models, but on the other hand, it is, in essence homogenous, out of work socialization. It means that a specific »world exhibition of synchronic models of production and life« is at work here.
7. In postfordism, *general intellect* does not coincide with fixed capital, but is instead primarily represented by linguistic interaction of living labour. That is why Habermas' paradigm on separated instrumental and communicative action is obsolete. Virno is turning → towards Wittgenstein and De Saussure; *Heideggerian chatting replaces Hegelian lust der Vernunft (cunning Reason)*.
8. Even an assembly of most unqualified postfordist working power represents intellectual working power, »mass intelligence«.

Virno introduces a paradigm of speaker/orator, as most general example for the need to re-think things. General Intellect appears as »intelligence of masses«, that is of multitude.

9. Multitude rejects the »theory of proletarianization«; (because!) it is all about multitude, a not about people. Working process is cooperative and complex in postfordist condition.
10. Postfordism, for Virno, emerges as »communism of capital«, as an answer to »strangled« revolution of sixties and seventies (which had no socialist intentions). It was a peculiar overcoming of private property on the very ground of private property.

Virno says that postfordism is a new communism of capital.

I would say something completely different.

The Christianity in Multitude is the new communism today.

Communism inspired by original Christianity.

An utopia?

So much worse for the facts in a world we live in today!

Marijan Krivak

The KOAN

Texts and Contexts in

Zen Buddhism

Edited by Steven Heine & Dale

S. Wright, Oxford University Press

2003.

Having encountered the book *The Koan. Texts and Contexts in Zen Buddhism*, we are fully entitled to ask ourselves what new it can offer in understanding the Zen Buddhist contemplative tradition? From Suzuki and Alan Watts, we are witnesses of a deluge of literature on Zen Buddhism attempting to introduce us and deepen our conception of this contemplative world.

Moreover, there is also a wide range of Zen-Buddhist schools of meditation that most commonly publish their hand-books and in-

structions on mastering the Zen technique of obtaining enlightenment. Unfortunately, we must say that the profoundness of such hand-books is rather meagre, while instructions are nothing more than pieces of advice for calmer life-style in the hasty West, not intended to genuinely teach the philosophy of Zen.

The book *The Koan* includes texts written by eminent experts in which, by applying historiographical and hermeneutical methods, various essential issues about Zen are discussed, such as its history, interweaving with contemplative background of Chinese philosophy, the structure and origin of the Koan, the influence of the philosophy of Zen on art and Japanese culture, interweaving of the Koan with esoteric religious culture in Japan and so on. The interpretation and arguing with textual and contextual analyses is thereby on quite respectable level, undoubtedly filling the existing gap between practising the Zen methods of enlightenment and understanding their historical background, structure, genesis and interweaving with Japanese culture. This book furthermore poses many questions to which we will be paying attention, trying to clarify them in this essay.

With Zen-Buddhism, we are almost immediately combining two key notions, two elementary words that have become self-explanatory in terms of their usage although they cannot be easily explained or presented in any form of discourse.

Satori, as enlightenment and state of awareness, and the *koans* as a methodical way leading to enlightenment in principle oppose such form of thinking and distinguishing, and therefore should be avoided from the start.

The best way to reach *satori* and unravel the koan enigma is certainly abandoning any kind of conceptual thinking and distinguishing within rigid logical schemes where the entire deliberation is based on strictly demarcated notions and distinctively restricted concepts. Thereby, the irreducible existential quality of occurrences is defined, demarcated and classified into categories, glossaries and vocabularies, a whole bunch of ossified presentations frequently reducing particular occurrence to more general and abstract notions. That way the entire existential experience is being ossified into certain formulas and predictable constructions.

But how to abandon all our so far experience of deliberation and acting in the world? How to relinquish the world of equations itself in which the subject is nothing more than a mere observer or a person familiar with an

object that always remains recognized as an object, rather than within equation where one's own I equals the one who knows? The known, and the knowledge at the same time, drawn in the object of one's own knowledge, forming oneness with the familiar object.

How to abandon a world of well-established concepts and perception of a world entangled in the net of predictable conduct and handling objects, and immerse into new experience? How to conduct oneself with the self and the whole world surrounding us – the world of nature, created objects and a non-created, but nevertheless always creative being pulsing the mighty universe with its rhythm?

How to abandon the schematized subject-object relation, the observer and the observed that, instead of reaching the state of permeating oneness, always remain divided, separated, demarcated and schematized, without ever being able to cross and overpower the boundary of seeing and resolving? How to abandon a world of common thinking and perceiving experience and immerse into the other side, into the absolute, all-permeating, unique and undemarcated, into the state prior to any setting apart and dividing the relations concerning the I and Non I, being and non-being, the existence and non-existence?

How to, then, pass beyond boundaries constantly detaching us from the outer world, leaving us confronted with a barrier hard to surmount, with the observed world for itself on one side, in all its other-worldliness and uncognizance, while, on the other, unbridgeable and uncrossable side of the barrier, there is a world of consideration and perception, a world for us? How to overcome this barrier and perceive and become cognizant of the outer world to the fullest, at the same time getting to know and perceiving ourselves as well as forming oneness with the world surrounding us?

The logic of paradoxes, expressed in the Zen-koans, presents what is called the technique of obtaining *satori*. Thereby, the intention of solving the logical paradox by means of intellectual resolving has nothing to do with it; what is relevant is letting go everything learned so far in form of conceptual, notional way of thinking for it directly prevents us from spontaneous, intuitive, without being caused through any kind of mediation, insight into the essence of reality and life of one's own.

The Zen-koans are composed as an apparent possibility of choosing between two alternatives that at first glance seem to be equally

possible and justified, and equally impossible and unjustified. Each koan contains certain amount of absurdity by which a subject is faced with a dilemma about what choice to make, accepting one and rejecting another alternative.

However, by making such a choice we are actually confirming the absurdity, i.e. certain attitude that is inherently unjustifiable and senseless. Only by breaking the vicious circle of confirming and denying, accepting and rejecting, affirming and negating, can we reach the state of a purified mind. A mind that, like a Buddhist mirror that always has to stay clean and unsullied from any kind of reflection, is directly connected with the concrete and unreducible reality and its true nature. We are talking about liberating a direct insight from all accumulated tools of logical resolving, notions, conceptual thinking and learned schemes in which the whole intellectual contemplative effort is performed, and whose true nature is nothing more than obscuring directly given facts that in some contemplative attitude begin to lose all of their concreteness and obviousness. When all those ways of thinking are closed, even than »unpassable passage« to direct insight into the truth, reality and existence can be opened. Its obstacle lies in the senseless word »Mu« as an answer to questions already anticipating affirmation or negation. Once we get out of the tight circle of confirmation and denial, as well as all other subsequently added nets of resolving in this or that direction, we will be able to realize that the logical form of the Zen-koan paradox is in fact an expression referring to all paradoxality of existence in its non-stopping circulation and dynamic unreducibility. However, this may, like so popular stroke with magic wand in Zen-stories, lead to a shock shifting us to another level of insight, a new plan of getting insight incomparable with all so far way of resolving. Such state of a sudden, unexpected and momentary liberation of mind from all manacles of conceptual thinking is satori or momentary enlightenment.

In Zen, as Alan Watts put it, we are talking about

»... solution to all sorts of theorizings, instructions and inanimate formalizations; they are treated as mere symbols of wisdom, and Zen is firmly based on experience and an intimate, personal perception of reality, whereas the majority of religious and philosophical attitudes approach this reality as much as their intellectual or emotional description allows them...«

In Zen there are no verifiable or beforehand established schemes of relations, learned modes of existence, established direction signs

of approach and encounter in the relation between the one who realizes – the realized or the one who tries out – the tried out or the one who perceives and the perceived. We are, on the contrary, talking about overcoming the obstacles that are disabling a schematized subject, overpowering the gap of oppositions directly subverting categorially schematized mind, anathemizing uncognizable »fact-for-itself«.

In Zen, it is more about such kind of a mind focusing which occurs through deliberate settling in which a mind of a subject is recovered. However, a mind must first stop consider itself a ruler over the reality – it is yet to be recognized in the same reality through direct experiencing the essence of the existence. The point of Zen lies in being able to be intent upon reality itself, overpowering nothing more than mere intellectual and emotional reaction to reality. Reality is something ever-changing, ever-revolving and impossible to determine that makes the existence; it never stops, not even for a moment, not even for the sake of our rigid systems of classifications and ossified ideas.

Special attention should be then paid to the method of the Zen-koan or logical paradoxes that is the most valid in the context of »shattering« a schematized logical subject. As Alan Watts put it,

»... satori is a 'measure of Zen' for there would be no Zen at all if there weren't for satori. However, due to absurdity, the koan is a measure of satori, in that each satori draws a subject into some kind of a dilemma. Although there is basically a choice between two options, both of them are actually impossible. That way each koan reflects a giant koan of existence, since for Zen the central problem of the existence is going beyond the two alternatives of accepting and rejecting, with both of them obscuring the truth in the same way at the same time.«

When shades, reticence or unsolvableness of »absurdities« begin to occur, a Western reader will again be challenged by numerous questions about »crown peak«, including a doubt of whether he/she is once again dealing with some kind of »autohypnosis trick« leading to a state that isn't quite adequate for transcendence of a pure mind. Moreover, it presents (the illusion of) fact-for-itself. It is, however, certain that even these kind of questions, no matter how inappropriate they may seem, present one of the horizons of introduction into the philosophy of Zen.

Ksenija Premur