

Being Lonesome Amongst the Many

Of Bloom and Multitude

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“What tremendous happiness not to be me! But don't others feel the same way? What others? There are no others.” (Fernando Pessoa – What Happiness)

In this chapter I will argue for an experiment in political thinking which has an unusual accomplice at its core: the existentialist notion of a neglected existence by the name of Bloom. Being Bloom is being simultaneously lonesome amongst the many and stranger to oneself. It therefore poses a myriad of questions to the concept of the many as a singular subject: multitude. The tension created by these different formulations of subjectivity can be made productive and be of great importance in analyzing our current modes of production and existence.

By combining different standpoints of post-operaist and autonomist thought I will look at present forms of subjectivity from three angles that are alternately individual, overlapping, and diametrically opposed. All three texts were published within the first decade of the 21st century. Tiqqun published their *Theory of Bloom* in 2000, Paolo Virno gave his lecture on *A Grammar of the Multitude* in 2001 (2004), and Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri published their ideas on what they are calling *Commonwealth* at the end of the decade in 2009. From the early years of our century these authors describe subjectivity as unstable and ever changing. They agree on the fact that subjectivity is not a durable, constant, or given category but part of a process of production. To these authors subjectivity, especially in its different forms of being produced, is a term at the center of political thought. Hardt/Negri put it this way: “A key scene of political action today, [...] involves the struggle over the control or autonomy of the production of subjectivity” (2009: 11). Hardt/Negri and Virno describe the current form of subjectivity as the result and basis of a certain mode of production (Hardt/Negri 2009: 11; Virno 2004: 41). The form of subjectivity they encounter in the era of global, post-fordist capitalism is that of the mass, of the many as singularity, multitude. This term, rooted in Spinoza (1994) and Hobbes (1949/1987), is used by Hardt/Negri and Virno in both similar and divergent ways

(cf. Lotringer 2004). Rather than provide a stringent differentiation of the term in the respective works, I will examine the convergences and differences through the lens of Tiqqun.

Virno stresses in his lecture that multitude characterized by a preliminary sharing “is itself the base of today’s production” (2004: 41). Hardt/Negri note in their preface that “[t]he multitude makes itself by composing in the common the singular subjectivities” (2009: 11). I want to suggest that we can gain insights into the way the multitude is composed in the common; how subjectivity is simultaneously produced and neglected through a preliminary sharing by looking at it through the eyes of Tiqqun’s ‘Bloom’. For Tiqqun, Bloom is “like the sorry product of the times of multitudes”, “[l]ast man, man of the street, man of mobs, man of the masses, mass-man, is the One [...]” (2000: 15) As a product of the times of multitudes, as One, the figure of Bloom allows for a new critical analysis of the term of multitude; a critique that neither neglects nor renounces the term *per se* but aims at refocusing on the singular being rather than the always produced and continually reproduced multitude. Who do we encounter within the multitude? Bloom. This critique is formulated as a siding with an existentialist truth raised to the point of departure for a different political thought.

“And that truth is that we are the tenants of an existence that is exiled in a world that is a desert, into which we were thrown, without a mission to accomplish, without assigned place or recognizable filiation, in complete neglect. We are at the same time so little and ever too much.” (Tiqqun 2000: 16)

Therefore, the following will be an attempt to critique certain notions of the multitude by accepting me being Bloom to start my political thought from the realization that “[t]here is no social question of insecurity or marginalization, but this existential, inexorable reality that we are all alone, alone in rending it before death, that we are all, for all eternity, finished beings.” (Tiqqun 2000: 16)

This text is obviously not fit to provide a discussion on the entirety of the discourse. Therefore, I will focus on three aspects that I think are crucial to the debate I engage in. First, I am going to discuss the notion of the becoming of the multitude in contrast to Tiqqun’s idea of finished beings. My second focus will be how mass and individual as well as sociality and subjectivity relate to the social individual. Lastly, I will shed light on the relation of bio-politics and economy as it is precisely this relation that simultaneously produces and negates subjectivity.

Becoming and Finitude

Multitude is “the mode of being of the many” (Virno 2004: 22). This is the mode in which the many singular subjectivities come together to form the singularity of the subjectivity of the multitude. The concept of multitude does not oppose the idea of being ‘One’;

“rather, it redefines it. Even the many need a form of unity, of being a One. But here is the point: this unity is no longer the State; rather, it is language, intellect, the communal faculties of the human race. The One is no longer a *promise*, it is a *premise*.” (Ibid.: 25)

Being the premise of Virno’s thoughts, multitude becomes a starting point, “the base which authorizes differentiation” (ibid.). The multitude as a singular subjectivity is therefore nothing less than producer and product. Being itself a result of a certain mode of production, it is the starting point and authority of differentiation. It hence brings forth the singularities of which it is composed of as One. Multitude always already is, it is produced and it is producing.

Hardt/Negri rely on Gilles Deleuze when they describe their project as a reorientation of the ethical horizon “from identity to becoming.” (2009: 11) With Deleuze they stress that it “is not what we are but rather what we are in the process of becoming – that is the Other, our becoming-other.” (Deleuze 1992) Before investigating this Deleuzian concept, I will show how multitude is thought of in its mode of being: the becoming-other. Hardt/Negri are even more direct than Virno in their post-modern formulation of multitude: “The multitude makes itself by composing in the common the singular subjectivities that result from this process.” (2009: 11) Virno is afraid “to sing out-of-tune melodies in the post-modern style,” (Virno 2004: 25) yet here we are: Multitude is a post-modern subjectivity producing that of which it composes itself. Therefore, it is a mode of being, but only if being is a mode of becoming. Multitude is differentiation and the One from which differentiation is possible. Thus, multitude is clearly something incomplete, unfinished, and ever changing. I suspect this is why Virno decides to call on Simondon’s idea of metastability and individuation (Virno 2004: 78; Simondon 1989). By doing so he intends to show that individuation takes place

“within the collective endeavor to refine our singularity, to bring it to its climax. Only within the collective, certainly not within the isolated subject, can perception, language, and productive forces take on the shape of an individuated experience.” (Virno 2004: 79)

But Virno and Hardt/Negri – with Virno being less quick in his conclusions – seem to overlook or simply neglect the singular subject, that singular self amongst the many, the single part of the partiality of the multitude. In their attempt to stress

the possibilities of the many, the force that can be created through becoming multitude, they overlook the coexisting modes of being that are occupied by the singular subjectivities that produce multitude. Of course, one could argue that it is impossible to know every singular subjectivity and its mode of being. However, this automatically buys into the capitalist lie of individuality. In contrast, Tiqqun provide us with a description of a mode of being that is the great negator of difference and differentiation: Bloom. For Tiqqun, Bloom is anonymity and unifier at the same time. Bloom is unity in anonymity. Virno seems to have a similar notion when he describes Simondon's idea of the subject on which he rests his argument for the individuation of the multitude: "The subject is, rather, a composite: 'I', but also 'One,' unrepeatable uniqueness, but also anonymous universality." (Ibid.: 78) He continues: "Either an 'I' that no longer has a world or a world that no longer has an 'I': these are the two extremes of an oscillation which, though appearing in more contained forms, is never totally absent." (Ibid.) Virno seemingly forgets to reflect on this when describing the positive features of multitude – or he is not able to fit the notion into his argument.¹ But it is easy to connect these ideas with the "sorry product of the times of multitudes," (Tiqqun 2000: 15) with Bloom. For Bloom names a historical shift in the *Stimmung* in which we are, with which we are, and by which we conceive of the world and ourselves as: "that which corresponds with the moment of retreat of the subject from the world and the world from the subject." (Ibid.: 22) Being the product of multitude that is the product of differentiation which is always subjected to differentiation again and again, Bloom lives a life that "experiences itself negatively, in the indifference, the impersonality, the lack of quality." (Ibid.: 23) It is exactly for the lack of phenomenological stability that Bloom is thought of as somehow being closely connected to a mode of becoming: "Incompleteness is the mode of being of all who stay in contact with the power, the form of existence of all who are dedicated to becoming." (Ibid.: 33) The singular self of the times of multitudes is "the witness of its own desubjectification, of its interminable becoming-other." (Ibid.) The locus of differentiation will remain in itself indifferent. With this I return to Deleuze's quote stressing the need for our becoming-other that became the focal point for Hardt/Negri. For as we have seen by now, the description of a mode of being focused on becoming-other does not necessarily lead to becoming One as many, as multitude. It can just as well lead to witnessing your own desubjectification and incompleteness. Bloom is the singular, lonesome subjectivity within the coming multitudes of our time.

1 Virno describes the individuation of the multitude as a second degree individuation. Within the first degree individuation of the singular being within the many of the multitude there are a lot of different struggles between for example the pre-individual and the general intellect etc. But to Virno it is more important to stress the individuation of the multitude as many for it is therein, in the collective that individuation can actually take place. (Virno 2004: 77)

Bloom “is not alone in being alone, all men [sic!] have that solitude in common.” (Ibid.: 96) But how should there be familiarity in becoming other again and again? The ever-changing relation of Bloom to multitude, creating it and being produced by it, ensures that “[i]ts becoming is a becoming-stranger.” (Ibid.: 77)

To evade that strangeness, that perfect alienation, that indifference and counter the power impacting our bodies and lives that is closely connected to becoming – as it is only within a mode of becoming that bio-power can develop its impact – I want to suggest with Tiqqun that we step back from our analysis of becoming, relationality, and processes and go somewhere else.

Virno stressed that bio-power is closely related to the mere potentiality that is work-force (Virno 2004: 81). Speaking with Virno we could say bio-power is interested in controlling workforce because it is the potential to work. Bio-power is interested in controlling our becoming-workers, the future aspects of our ability to be productive, rather than our working bodies and minds as they are now. This notion brings the experiment mentioned at the very beginning of this text into play: Rather than focus on that which is controlled through the myriads of electrodes comprising the world-wide net of bio-power or interests in controlling and exploiting the commodity of our potential to work, I suggest to start by acknowledging that “[t]here is no social question of insecurity or marginalization, but this existential, inexorable reality that we are all alone, alone in rending it before death, that we are all, for all eternity, finished beings.” (Tiqqun 2000: 16) There are a lot of implications in this notion. But I want to stress the existentialist aspects:

“Insignificance and anonymity, separation and estrangement are not the poetic circumstances that the melancholic inclination of certain subjectivities tends to exaggerate: the impact of the existential situation thus characterized, the Bloom, is total, and above all political. Whomever is without community is sacer.” (Ibid.: 115)

Empty Multitudes

The topic of this short chapter is not one of a division of public and private property, for: “what is there left to own?” (Ibid.: 89)² I will rather concern myself with the question of poverty and misery and that of sacredness. In ‘Commonwealth’ Hardt/Negri claim that Multitude is the name of the poor (2009: 39). To them *the poor* does not address those who have very little or nothing. It tries to speak “to the

2 Hardt/Negri and Virno go into great detail to explain why this division is no longer needed (Hardt/Negri 2009: 3; Virno 2004: 40).

wide multiplicity of all those who are inserted in the mechanisms of social production regardless of social order or property.” (Ibid.: 40) They mark the conflict within their conception but stress that it is at the same time a political one. For it is the productivity of that conflict that “makes the multitude of the poor a real and effective menace.” (Ibid.) They surely have a point. Walter Benjamin already knew that

“[w]e have become impoverished. We have given up one portion of the human heritage after another, and have often left it at the pawnbroker’s for a hundredth of its true value, in exchange for the small change of ‘the contemporary.’” (1996: 735)

Benjamin also does not speak of financial poverty or lack of wealth. *The poor* in his case lack experience and human connection to others and to life. *The many* in his argument are those who have to adapt and begin anew again and again (ibid.). But are *the many* per se multitude? We could easily think of becoming poor as a process of singularization but not of the many as One but a singularization of each on their own. Poverty then is something common although not shared, just as property and wealth. If we understand poverty in this way, it becomes a metaphysical variable influencing the mode of being that is Bloom:

“Ultimately dispossessed, disqualified of everything, mutely estranged from its world, ignorant of itself as of that which surrounds it, the Bloom realizes at the heart of historical processes, and in its fullness, the absolutely metaphysical breadth of the concept of poverty.” (Tiqqun 2000: 79-81)

Making use of that concept in connection with the existentialist understanding of the mode of being of Bloom, they contrast poverty with the concept of misery. Poverty is described as the state of “[those] who can use everything, having nothing of [their] own” whereas misery is the state of those “who can use nothing, being that [they have] too much, lack time and [are] without community.” (Ibid.) With this Tiqqun argue that we actually encounter misery, not poverty, when looking at Bloom. Therefore, they encourage us to share poverty instead of the misery of the wealthy as that would mean ceasing to be *Bloom* since Bloom only understands the language of exchange value. (Ibid.) Sharing poverty would mean giving up on everything that denotes value to another thing, establishes rank or class, or creates a social heterogeneity that then creates a multitude and its political body and thus produces the differentiations that are at the end effects of misery. To me, this notion was crucial when thinking about the relation between singular subject and multitude as it is here that it becomes clear that multitude as a mode of production brings forth the crises of the singular subjectivity, the social individual. Multitude, as something that is becoming as it is produced and producing the singular subjectivities it is made up of, can be no more than a descriptive tool to uncover the

current mode of production of our being together as perfect strangers. Multitude as a place of a probable shared solidarity is something to be created by the finished beings that are Bloom through sharing their lack of experience in hoping to intensify life itself. Benjamin remained optimistic: "Let us hope that from time to time the individual will give a little humanity to the masses, who one day will repay him [sic!] with compound interest." (1999: 735)

But hope, just as becoming, is aimed at things to come. For now, it seems, the giving of humanity to the masses seldom occurs. Because Bloom is sacred. Bloom is without community or represents the many lacking the ability to form a self. Being of the masses, Bloom is produced by the mass Bloom produces. As pointed out before, this leads to an indifferent life. Bloom is always either mass or individual, with each one as the negation of the other. In being individual Bloom is the most generalized individual there is: Absolute interiority or absolute exteriority. As mass or multitude Bloom is perfectly indifferent to the mass itself. In this case Bloom is the many. Living up to the norm of production, Bloom as mass is a generalized being. According to Hannah Arendt this means a loss of the rights of Man, but not a loss of the virtues of humanity, whereby these beings "no longer belong to any community whatsoever. Their plight is not that they are not equal before the law, but that no law exists for them." (Arendt 1968: 175f) This generalization takes place in Bloom and in multitude. It is the paradoxical side of desubjectification that is not included in Hardt/Negri and Virno but takes place in Tiqqun's analysis of the relation between bio-power and spectacle. It is in this very moment that Bloom becomes sacer. (Agamben: 1998) There only is Bloom as product of the many and Bloom as singularities composing the many as singularity. But there never is both, there never is the one *and* the other. The existential situation of Bloom is one of schizophrenia. There is the subjectification of Bloom as multitude that produces generalization, and there is the desubjectification of the single non-subject that is Bloom as individual. Both are viable to be exploited in the convergences of bio-power and spectacle:

"Biopower is the benevolent power [...] the power that wants the salute of its subjects, the power that wants you to live. Held in the vice that is simultaneously all-encompassing [sic!] and individual, ripening in a double constraint that annihilated us in the same act as it brought us into existence, most of us adopt a sort of political and hopeless nature: to feign internal death [...]. In subtracting themselves from all positivity, these spectres steal from a productive power that very thing upon which it could be exerted: themselves. Their desire not to live is all that gives them strength to oppose a power that claims to make them live. In doing so, they remain in the Bloom, usually burying themselves therein." (Tiqqun 2000: 30)

Existentialist alienation

In this last part of my argument I will show the positive effects that the existentialist trick used by Tiqqun can have on our reflections on subjectivity. It is because of the notion of a somehow finite being that we can think of becoming within bio-power and spectacle as both subjectification and desubjectification, subtraction of self and becoming other – although, I admit this sounds strange at first. The subtraction of self is closely connected to the idea of a coexisting desubjectification and subjectification which are the becoming-other. For “THE OTHER IS THE ECONOMY IN US” (ibid.: 31). It “*possesses us*: it is this dissociated body, a simple peripheral artifact in the hands of” bio-power. (Ibid. emphasis Tiqqun) This understanding of the Other brings movement into the being that was described as finite, endlessly finished. It is not a motion of becoming as a social being, of becoming positively of the mass. The movement we are witnessing is that of a draining of the finished being. Becoming as negation: “The internal presence of the Other is established at all levels of our conscience: it is a minor and constant loss of being [...]” (Ibid.). I suggest that this is the condition Virno has in mind when talking of nihilism “put to work” (2004: 74). To counter this inner loss of being Bloom projects itself even more violently outside. One aspect of that is that Bloom needs to stick ever more rigidly to ideas of any kind of social identity. More interestingly for my thoughts on Bloom and multitude is Tiqqun’s idea that

“we *play* at being subjects. [...] The Bloom does not signify that we would be failing subjects in regards to the superb sufficiency of the classic subject; instead, it reveals that at the base of human existence there is a principle of incompleteness, a radical insufficiency. What we are is precisely that failure, which can, if it pleases, designate itself the mask of the subject.” (Tiqqun 2000.: 31-32; emphasis Tiqqun)

With this it appears we have created an inner contradiction. Bloom seems to be the existentialist truth of a finished being and the principle of human existence as incomplete and insufficient. Just as Hardt/Negri found the contradiction they encountered in their reading of poverty to be productive, I suggest we can gain a lot by taking the ideas of Tiqqun seriously. They allow us to reveal the workings of all the books and courses and coachings that promise to teach people how to find their selves, be themselves, or find their inner peace. The inner contradiction of Bloom is best described in this strange obligation of Bloom to be as self, that social pressure “to ‘be oneself’, that is to say, in a strict assignation of residence in one of the identities recognized by the autonomous Publicity.” (Ibid.: 99) Within this pressure to be oneself and the impossibility to be as self, the existentialist contradiction described above has found a materialistic realization. Multitude as the mode of production brings forth the being called Bloom that is always of the masses but forced to find an impossible existence as self. To be oneself is just as

much an imperative as it is imperative to be sociable. Bloom in becoming-other is becoming stranger to itself. Alienation is then not only a fact of socio-economic realities, it is also an existential reality of the sorry product of the times' of multitude. Multitude as the mode of production generates singular beings that are both subjectified as they make up the singular subject of multitude and desubjectified in their negation of self – which they are forced to counter on their journey to be oneself thus being productive themselves. Alienation has therefore become total. Being Bloom is being simultaneously lonesome amongst the many and stranger to oneself. The subjectification of the many as a singularity in multitude cannot exist without the desubjectification of the singular beings in their mode of existence as Bloom.

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