

## A new theoretical paradigm

Wolfgang Fritz Haug: *High-Tech-Kapitalismus. Analysen zu Produktionsweise, Arbeit, Sexualität, Krieg und Hegemonie*. Hamburg: Argument Verlag 2003, 320 Seiten

By Stefan Howald

Wolfgang Fritz Haug's German book *High-Tech-Kapitalismus* is a collection of articles, all of which, apart from one, have been written in the years between 2000 and 2003. All fourteen chapters are succinct pieces, sharp and precise in their argumentation. The subtitle of the book, *Analysis of the mode of production, of work, sexuality, war & hegemony*, characterises the wide-ranging nature of Haug's interest. Put together, the pieces try to outline a new theoretical paradigm which deals with the global society at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Haug starts with an early article from 1981. In it, he discusses critical attitudes towards computer and information technologies. Against a one-dimensional position, a discourse of impoverishment, he proposes a dialectical approach: A mode of high-tech-production will lead to a radical shift in our work pattern and everyday life, but this means not only job losses and de-qualification of certain skills and jobs, but offers on the other hand the chance to new forms of empowerment. This article is not presented because it has, nearly 25 years later, proven to be historically broadly right but because of its method: A critical Marxist thinking has to connect with a changing reality and to read the driving forces and determining motives of these changes.

To characterise the new global paradigm, Haug speaks tentatively of a *trans-national high-tech-capitalism*, with its "index fossils", the two core technologies of IT and bio-technologies. His concept is engaged in a critical debate with the ideas of, for instance, Michel Foucault or Tony Negri/Michael Hart, without an unbalanced emphasis of just one aspect of new developments. On the contrary, the strength of his, admittedly not very elegant, term and concept lies in the fact that it brings together different topical points without losing sight of the complexity of today's situation. And it insists on one point: a critique of today's society still has to start with a political economy, with the mode of production, but it has to respect the multi-layered reality and the relative autonomy of different social spheres. So, two articles in this book pose the basic question how today's capitalism creates value and wealth, and they

explode the myths of immaterial work and an information society. Especially chapter 3, *Towards a Critique of the New Economy*, has, as far as I can see, no equivalent in the English-speaking theoretical debate.

Another central topic in this book is the change of forms of subjection and sexuality. Since his book *Critique of Commodity Aesthetics* from 1971, Haug has been interested in the forming and modelling of sensuality/sexuality. The main question concerning subjection is how a subject is enabled to act and how it stays able to act. This is a necessity of survival but it is also a starting-point for a critique of the way the subject is integrated into society. Haug investigates the connection between the modelling of the social subject in today's transnational high-tech-capitalism with the modelling of sensuality/sexuality. Sexuality as a counter-power to rationality is nevertheless affected by social change. On the de-regulated market of desire and its images, the individuals choose their new sexual self; the manager of the Self becomes the manager of Sex as well, although there is still an element of surplus in unrestrained desire.

Four articles are concerned with the new situation after 9/11, under the heading *war & hegemony*. Using the Gramscian differentiation between hegemony and power, Haug tackles the complicated relationship between military means, politics, economy and culture, establishing a differentiated model of a hegemonic unilateralism as well as pointing to new elements of a potential anti-hegemony.

As a theoretician, Haug works with material from discourses, with official announcements, public statements and private opinions. He analyses the public debate, enticing hidden meanings from what is not quite in the open, as a contribution towards a "social memory". One or two of the chapters in this book (for instance no. 5 or 6) might be of limited interest to an English-speaking audience because they take their starting-point from specific German discussions and positions, but even in these articles one reads Haug's method of working through his material with much profit.

Haug is not a member of a school or a tendency. For 45 years he has edited the bimonthly magazine *Das Argument*; in 1990 he started the immense task of putting together a new *Historisch-Kritisches Wörterbuch des Marxismus* (*Historical-Critical Dictionary of*

*Marxism*). Both projects are truly international, presenting a global discussion, with contributors not only from numerous European countries but from other continents as well. In *Das Argument* as well as in the *Dictionary*, Haug introduced several English-speaking writers to the German debate, for instance Stuart Hall, Cynthia Cockburn, Fredric Jameson, Bob Jessop, Donna Haraway and Immanuel Wallerstein. So the English-speaking world should return the favour and get to know this book by one of the most original, persistent and clear-minded German thinkers and writers.

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