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## **Empire: A Postmodern Theory of Revolution<sup>1</sup>**

**Michael Rustin**

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, Empire. Cambridge Mass and London: Harvard University Press. 2000.

At a time when globalisation has become an increasing focus for political movements of different kinds - effervescent demonstrations in the cities where congresses take place, and sustained campaigns for international agreements on debt or climate change - it is significant that a major treatise has appeared which attempts to give a coherent theoretical shape to global conflicts. Empire is a rare thing in the present age, a systematic treatise in political theory which sets out an argument for revolution. Much of its interest lies in its systematicity – whether or not one agrees with its philosophical presuppositions, or with its socio-historical analysis, it is invaluable to see such an argument being constructed from first principles. Just as liberal philosophers like Rawls or Nozick have set out systematic political philosophies from their foundational principles of individual rights and freedoms, so Hardt and Negri have sought to find systemic grounds for their utopian conception of revolution. For this they have looked to construct an ambitious post-Marxist synthesis of ideas whose most important single source is the work of Deleuze and Guattari, but which draws also on 'republican' political theory, Foucault, Spinoza, and Marx. Empire establishes a systematic and grounded argument for a transformative view of the present historical situation, from a revolutionary perspective, and one does not have to agree with its arguments to recognise it as a landmark in political theory.

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What is 'Empire'? This complex idea is Hardt's and Negri's summation of the present state of world historical development, in terms of its system of governance, its mode of production, its forms of socialisation and subjective identity, and its potentials for transformation. Hardt and Negri share with – indeed take from – Hegel and Marx a teleological theory of historical development, in which each new stage of evolution creates the potential for a fuller expression of human potential. They also share with Marx the idea that transitions from one stage of development to another are likely to be explosive, occasioned by crises and by sudden transformations in popular consciousness. Marx explained this process largely by reference to the development of the means of production, and the overcoming of scarcity that this made possible. The advance of capitalist forms of production across the globe was a transitional stage for Marx in the later emergence of socialist forms of life. Hardt's and Negri's analysis also gives priority to the global diffusion of capitalism, but they are less interested in its material than in its political, juridical, cultural, and subjective dimensions. Where for Marx the alienation and eventual reclamation of human productive powers were the principal issue, for Hardt and Negri the political and subjective dimensions of the appropriation of human powers is at least as important.

Hardt's and Negri's thinking has been shaped by Foucault and by Deleuze and Guattari as well as by Marxist political economy, and they give as much attention to changing forms of governmentality as to changing forms of production. 'The space of imperial sovereignty', they argue, 'is smooth'. What this means is that the various boundaries and barriers, not least those of national sovereignties, are being swept away by global capitalism. This creation of 'one world', with no 'outside', as they put it, creates a potentially unified space in which the liberation of 'the multitude' by its own action becomes possible. Hardt and Negri seem more anarchist than Marxist in their identification of governmental powers, not economic exploitation, as the main obstacles to human liberation. 'Empire' also signifies an emergent form of global governance, but we will consider this later.

They bring together in their analysis of Empire a number of different discourses.<sup>i</sup> From neo-Marxist political economy is brought an analysis of the post-Fordist, post-industrial revolution. The loss of hegemony of industrial production, and its partial supersession by an economy based on information and affect, is transforming, in the authors' view, the labour process, and creating a much greater potential for mass resistance, and for the reappropriation of their own labour power by citizens, than was possible within the previous industrial regime. The argument here is that the 'virtual' character of much modern production, and the importance of symbolic production, especially the media, invests power in active subjects, and thereby removes it from the owners and controllers of material resources. This transformation of the labour process, and the new emphasis within it on knowledge and affect (the latter arising from the increased weight of activities focused on health, education, social care in the post-modern economy), together with the lessening constraints of time and space central to globalisation, are creating, in Hardt's and Negri's view, 'a new proletariat,' 'the entire co-operating multitude.' (p.402)<sup>ii</sup>

A second strand of Hardt's and Negri's argument derives from their theory of the state. Although the authors insist that they are libertarian communists, and not anarchists (P. 350) their view of the state is recognisably an anarchist one. Most forms of state power, in their view, alienate the autonomy of subjects, and crush their creative power. They develop a historical argument which identifies radical and conservative poles in Enlightenment thinking, and explains how the radical end of this antithesis – 'revolutionary humanism' – was defeated, with dire consequences for collective self-determination. 'The revolution of European modernity ran into its Thermidor.' (P. 75). Enlightenment thus initiated not popular self-rule, but forms of sovereignty external to and 'other' than the subjects in whose name sovereign states claimed to govern. Doctrines of transcendence merely transferred authority from one displaced abstraction – God – to another – Man. The mind-body split instituted by Descartes defeated, in terms of influence, the immanentist doctrine of Spinoza, and this led to another damaging kind of alienation. The British empiricist tradition, with Hobbes at its centre, was

particularly lethal in its consequences for the idea of creative self-rule, since it posited the necessity for the delegation of human powers for the preservation of peace and security. Subsequent mitigations of the extremity of this position, in Lockean theories of constitutional government constrained by the natural rights of citizens, and later in the theory and practice of representative democracy, did not in Hardt's and Negri's view repair the fundamental flaws of this view of sovereignty, whose essence is that subjects are ruled and do not rule themselves.

Empire brings together with this philosophical critique of sovereignty a Foucauldian argument concerning the changes in the forms of power and control which have been exercised over society. Foucault is one of the most important influences on Hardt's and Negri's work – they cast much of their historical analysis in terms of a 'genealogy' of present formations. They take from Foucault in particular the idea of 'a historical, epochal passage in social forms from *disciplinary society* to the *society of control*.' (P.23). Disciplinary society is constructed through 'apparatuses that produce and regulate customs, habits and productive practices.' This work of control is accomplished through disciplinary institutions such as 'the prison, the factory, the asylum, the hospital, the university, the school and so forth.' They argue that this paradigm of power ruled throughout the first phase of capitalist accumulation. By contrast, the society of control is one 'which develops at the far edge of modernity and opens towards the postmodern,' and is one in which 'mechanisms of command become ever more "democratic," ever more immanent to the social field...' Social control becomes interiorised within subjects themselves. It is exercised directly on the minds and bodies of subjects, through information systems and welfare practices.<sup>iii</sup> It thus extends well outside 'the structured sites of social institutions,' into the fabric of everyday life. This amounts to a form of 'bio-power' that regulates life from the interior of subjects, a power which they 'embrace and reactivate' from their own accord. (P23-4).

There is a parallel – indeed a fusion – between the 'virtual' and 'immanent' properties of labour in the post-industrial economy, and the 'interiorised' forms

of control of the new kind of governmentality. Hardt and Negri are describing a destruction or compression of many previous differences and boundaries. Their description of this process is hardly precise – ‘the increasingly intense relationship of mutual implication of all social forces that capitalism has pursued throughout its development has now been fully realised.’ But whereas earlier Marxist writers such as those of the Frankfurt School equated this ‘real subsumption of labour under capital’ as a one-dimensional and potentially totalitarian process, Hardt and Negri, drawing on Foucault, take a contrary and more positive view of it. ‘Civil society is absorbed in the state, but the consequence of this is an explosion of the elements that were previously coordinated and mediated in civil society.’ Calling on Deleuze and Guattari, another important source for them, they argue that ‘resistances are no longer marginal but active in the centre of a society that opens up in networks; the individual points are singularised in a thousand plateaus.’<sup>iv</sup> (P. 25) The idea that the subjectivisation of power, and the virtualisation of production, creates the opportunity for new kinds of immanent resistance, connecting unpredictably and with immense potential through the ‘rhizomes’ of network society, is the essential basis of Hardt’s and Negri’s revolutionary optimism. If one puts their account in the framework of complexity theory,<sup>v</sup> they model a complex but inherently increasingly unstable system, which has the potential to tip suddenly from one alienated kind of equilibrium of control to a different potential for liberation.

Their synthesis of a theory of changing forms of governmentality and sovereignty, with their analysis of post-industrial capitalism, allows them to see Empire as both a new system of power-relations, and a highly vulnerable one. In the latter more apocalyptic sections of the book, Empire is described as a parasitic formation, whose supercession as a global regime only awaits the awakening of the multitude to recognition of their immanent powers. But in earlier chapters, the idea of Empire is elaborated in more positive terms, as an immanent, emergent concept of global governance.<sup>vi</sup> Empire was written, as its authors explain, after the Gulf War and before the Kosovo War. Its authors convinced themselves in that context that wars could now be waged only on behalf of some version of universal right, and that in this sense some

kind of global polity had already become fact.<sup>vii</sup> They distinguish their concept of 'Empire' as a universal polity, from the European colonial empires, and from those respects in which the current world, dominated by the United States of America, still resembles a conventional empire in some respects.<sup>viii</sup> The difference between 'Empire' in their new sense, and the European empires, is that the European empires defined themselves in relation to the 'other' and inferior peoples whom they subjugated, and were also of course in competition with one another. The emerging 'global' Empire has no 'other'.<sup>ix</sup> Just as capitalism as Marx predicted is now incorporating the entire globe into its systems, so the global polity is becoming similarly inclusive. In their own way, Hardt and Negri share the view of defenders of global capitalism such as Francis Fukuyama that 'the end of history' has now arrived, since in their view there is now nothing significant that lies outside the existing regimes of production and governance.

Just as with the internal order of states Hardt and Negri distinguish between alienating forms of sovereignty, and a revolutionary humanist order which presupposes government as a process of self-realisation, so they distinguish between two traditions of international governance. One - the order of sovereign nation states promulgated in the Treaty of Westphalia of 1648 – confines sovereignty within structured territorial domains. The other, the idea of 'perpetual peace' defined by Kant, imagines a universal order governed by common norms and entitlements, which morally override the claims of sovereign governments. They argue that this latter conception is beginning to become a reality as a consequence of a unified global economic order, and the weakening and mutual interdependence of individual nation-states, in face of problems which confront them all. Their position recalls the arguments of writers such as David Held,<sup>x</sup> who have drawn attention to the vast increase in inter-governmental organisations and treaties in recent years, and to the increased sway of international law, as evidence that a new era of global governance is dawning. Hardt and Negri attach considerable importance to the United States, flawed though it is, to the role of NGOs, and to the theory and practice of international jurists, in making this case.

They provide an unconvincingly rosy description of the uniqueness of the constitutional basis of the United States to justify the view that the hegemony of the United States today is different from that of earlier empires. Its constitution is expansive and inclusive, rather than restrictive and exclusive. Its idea of a balance of constitutional powers, which they compare with the model of constitutional balance which Polybius saw embodied in ancient Rome, leads them to advance the American Republic as a form of post-sovereign government, in which 'the multitude' expresses its powers through different contesting and complementary agencies, (the federal principle, and the famous separation of powers) and does not surrender or delegate them to some separate and other entity. This seems, as a description of current corrupted and plutocratic United States constitutional practice, quite preposterous.

Although there are some parallels between Hardt's and Negri's account of the emerging global order, and those of liberal internationalists such as Giddens and Held, they differentiate their own position from this more meliorist one. Whereas the liberal tradition looks forward to a regulated system of sovereignties, all subject to the sway of some universal juridical and ethical principles, Hardt and Negri hold the door open to a more total system-transformation, between what one might call actually-existing Empire and post-Empire. The global diffusion of information, and the repossession of powers by subjects within the new systems of non-material production and internalised regulation, creates the possibility for new kinds of resistance and indeed uprising. They draw a striking analogue between the transformation of the universal aspiration of the ancient Roman Empire to constitute all of the civilised world into the universalist and inclusive claims of Christianity for equality before God (of all believers, one should add) and what might now be possible in terms of mobilisation within the emergent order of global empire. To put this in an older terminology, the multitude which is being constituted by the global capitalist world order as a class in itself, can now seize the moment to assert itself as a class for itself. Hardt's and Negri's view that the erosion of traditional forms of mediation and boundary (those of state sovereignty for example) constitute opportunities for new forms of collective recognition and



mobilisation make them emphatically repudiate any form of radical politics that looks backwards historically, even to past moments of relative success. They reject any politics based on nostalgia for earlier compromises, for example those achieved within national welfare states. They share with the post-socialists of the Third Way the view that we now have to accept a new individualised, globalised, networked society as the only possible basis for future action, though the action they envisage is apocalyptic where the reformist post-socialists seek only to mitigate and regulate somewhat the turbulences of global capitalism, to which they envisage no conceivable alternative.<sup>xi</sup>

### **The Politics of Empire**

How should we assess this ambitious account of our situation, and what conclusions from it can we draw in regard to questions of agency?

Hardt's and Negri's description of the major trends of development of both the capitalist economy, and of its major forms of governance, is plainly in accord with much current analysis of globalisation. Shifts between economic sectors, the dominant role of the information economy, the 'subjectivisation' of life, not least through the salience of consumption, and the weakening of insulating and defensive boundaries of many kinds, including those provided by the nation state at its zenith, are well attested, and are now almost an orthodoxy in social theory. The contentious issue is not whether a transformation and hegemonisation of consumer capitalism has been taking place, but whether this justifies the political argument that Hardt and Negri draw from it, to the effect that the economic system has now generated a universal proletariat.

A similar question can be asked about the erosion of sovereignty, and the exposure of populations to the effects of more geographically distant forms of power, though markets of many kinds, the global flows of information, people, commodities, etc. Is this to be understood, as Hardt and Negri suggest, as a potentially liberating process, since it constitutes a potentially unified

multitude in place of discrete, non-communicating and often mutually hostile segments? Does the fact that more than ever before populations inhabit 'the same world' – that is to say the same complex open system – signify that they do or can acquire a common consciousness as universal citizens or labourers? Do Hardt and Negri successfully refute the alternative, more pessimistic view, which is that these homogenising factors have created not a creative and co-operative multitude, but an atomised 'mass society', vulnerable more than ever before to manipulation from above?

Although Hardt and Negri do pose the problematic of the transformation of Empire in somewhat traditional terms, in their evocations of a universal proletariat and 'common multitude', there is a contradiction between their post-Marxist but still in some ways traditional formulation of directional change, and the forms of social action to which their analysis actually points. Although they posit a potential unity of the subjugated, the examples of radical action which they cite are anything but unitary. Melville's Bartleby, Coetzee's Michael X, the International Workers of the World, myriad refugees and migrant labourers, St Francis of Assisi and St Augustine are figures who have little in common, except being instances of 'constituent' (or prefigurative) activity, in some instances the activity of resistance or bare survival. Hardt and Negri are hostile to all constituted limits to human action – to the principle of authority itself – and it follows that any political movement which began to constitute itself as a positive programme, with its own embryonic institutions, would become deeply self-contradictory in their eyes.

There is a kind of social action which does follow from this description of society. It is self-active, self-constituting, often negative, highly competitive, driven by the desire for free expression and power. The 22-year old graduate who sets up his own computer business in Silicon Valley may be as much as exemplar of this spirit as the NGO worker trying to alleviate a famine, though their ethics are different. Some change in the postmodern world is indeed transmitted by these 'rhizomatic' means, by networks, and the virus-like replication and mutation of kinds of actions outside the control of formal structures and hierarchies. This is the sociological truth of Hardt's and Negri's

account. The political appeal of their analysis, its natural constituency so to speak, is to those called by 'desire' in its various forms, and moved by hostility to restriction and restraint, not to the would-be builders of new systems and structures. Global capitalism has been the bringer of this condition of freedom. It is this which has created, against the opposition of sovereignties, the 'smooth space' in which fluidity and mobility become a general condition of life. Hardt and Negri are antagonistic to capitalism, but how could the boundary-free space which they celebrate survive without it?

### **The Question of Human Nature**

One issue in coming to conclusions about the consequences of the loss of boundaries is the contribution which the innate features of human nature make to social arrangements. Hardt and Negri take a postmodern view of this question, arguing that human nature is a legacy of modern 'dualisms' which postulated 'outsides' to human freedom in order to justify imposing limits to it.<sup>xii</sup> Although they may therefore regard the idea of human nature as outmoded, they make the assumption

that given freedom and creative possibility, human beings will construct a co-operative and expressive world. The fact that people have not always acted in this spirit is not to be explained by inherent ambivalence in the innate human inputs, but by defective, alienating, and exploitative social arrangements. 'Man is born free, but everywhere is in chains', would be one way of putting their underlying assumption.<sup>xiii</sup>

Consider in this connection Hardt's and Negri's challenging account of the Thermidorian defeat of revolutionary humanism in the early years of the Enlightenment. (This is one of the fertile avenues for thought opened up by this book, incidentally). Hardt and Negri seek to rescue the revolutionary tradition of republican self-determination, closely linked with Machiavelli, from neglect, and from its customary subordination to positivistic theories of law and sovereignty.<sup>xiv</sup> They do not however ask why this defeat took place, and why the arguments of the Hobbesian tradition (or of defences of the state in

other traditions, such as that of Hegel) have in fact proved so historically effective.

Marxism did offer one persuasive explanation of why these successive defeats of universal aspirations, embodied in the experience of successive emergent social classes, had taken place. His explanation focused on the effects of scarcity, in making unavoidable the appropriation of the means of production by the collective self-interest of classes, rather than by humanity as a whole. Thus, once scarcity had been overcome by the full development of the means of production, there was reason to believe that this usurpation of the general interest by sectional classes could be transcended. Although this argument does not explain as much as Marxists supposed, and although its use as a justification for political action has often been both reductionist and oppressive, it nevertheless retains considerable explanatory force. It is, for example, impossible to imagine any inclusive democratic world system being established whilst the differences in economic well-being between peoples remain as they are.

Hardt and Negri do not however deploy this long-established Marxian theorem. (Perhaps they take it as a given). Instead, they are more interested in what happens in the domain of desire, will, understanding and affect, and in what can be expected from transformations at this level. This element of their argument comes from a quite different tradition, via the work of Foucault and Deleuze and Guattari. Its earlier origins lie in writers such as Nietzsche and Bergson. What one might call its 'energetics' – the idea of a potential transformative force of will of the multitude – comes from this source, though it is transformed in Hardt and Negri's communist hands into a benign form which assumes that external obstacles removed, human beings could then flower, in all their potential differences, in co-operative harmony with one another.

Suppose, however, that this underlying view of human nature is flawed and partial? And not only partial but also internally contradictory, since the marriage that Hardt and Negri attempt to effect between what one might think

of as the 'right' and 'left' strands of their own theoretical formation (the Nietzschean and the Marxist) is given no explanation or justification. This is indeed a rather common contradiction in post-modern social theory, in which a radical leftist 'structure of feeling' has survived the demolition or abandonment of most of the beliefs (e.g. concerning human nature, determining structures, objective realities) on which transformative left politics originally depended, and perhaps must depend. We do indeed have to decide what we think human nature brings to the world before we can hope to understand what kind of world it can be.

Deleuze and Guattari, important sources for Hardt and Negri, conducted a brilliant and witty critique of Freud and Lacan, in their Anti-Oedipus, whose central argument was that psychoanalysis had wrongly endorsed the inevitability of repression in its account of human development, and had condensed into its model of a necessary Oedipal renunciation in each generation the wider system of social authority – the 'law of the father', in Lacanian terms. They sought to rewrite psychoanalysis as one might say from the perspective of the id, invoking 'desiring machines' as potential subjects. .

Freud, however, thought there was an inherent problem in the regulation and reconciliation of human desires, both between and within generations. His actual position was so not different from that of Hardt's and Negri's hero, Spinoza, in arguing that it was only understanding that could render such choices and renunciations tolerable both for individuals and for society. Melanie Klein clarified these issues further in her investigations of early life, and through her discovery of the dual drives or emotions of love and hate in the infant (she thought the balance of these was positively or negatively inflected by environment and nurture, but not solely an outcome of this), and the prevalence of anxiety as a basic human propensity. This Kleinian position, as I have tried to argue elsewhere, provides an essential foundation for political theory.<sup>xv</sup> It is necessary, that is to say, to take account of both the negative and destructive potentials of human nature, as well as of its positive and creative potentials, in considering the systems of social organisation that could bring about a better human existence.

The Hobbesian account of the state of nature, as a war of all against all, places its weight on the destructive side of this necessary dualism, and no 'progressive' social thinking can be based on that foundation. It is however as well to remember that Hobbes's account does address a part of reality – it describes what can happen if destructive forces are given full reign and no authority exists to contain them. It demonstrates that the minimum and necessary role of government is always to keep the peace and ensure security of life. One reason why the 'revolutionary humanist' tradition lost out to its Thermidorian rival is because this situation of fear and anxiety often obtained in reality, and sovereign authority had some effectiveness and won some consent in dealing with it.

The problem with Hardt and Negri's unrealistically positive view of human motivation is that such idealisation is unavoidably accompanied by what Kleinian psychoanalysts called a splitting of good and bad, love and hate, the destructive and the creative. In Hardt's and Negri's argument, this splitting involves the location of all destructive forces in external authorities and of all creative powers in subjugated individuals. Such demonisation of authority, and idealisation of its opponents, is a dangerous guide to political practice.

### **The Political Conjuncture of Empire**

This brings us to the political moment of Hardt's and Negri's book, which they explain to us 'was begun well after the end of the Persian Gulf War, and completed well before the beginning of the war in Kosovo.' (Preface, xvii). It was published in 2000 before the events of September 11 2001. I think this timing must now influence one's reading of their argument.

The success the United States may have had in the Gulf War crisis in presenting itself 'as the only power able to manage international justice *not as a function of its own national motives but in the name of global right.*'

(P.180) has not been repeated in the aftermath of September 11. Nor is it any longer obvious, as Hardt and Negri put it in discussing the Vietnam War that 'the Tet offensive.....marked the irreversible military defeat of the U.S. imperialist adventures.' The idea that the United States, unique among preponderant powers, depends on international consent and on universalist criteria to legitimate what it does, and is constrained by a new form of 'Empire' is at this point unconvincing. The present United States government seems rather to have interpreted September 11 as an opportunity to demonstrate that its Vietnam defeat was an aberration – mainly the result of its own inhibitions and miscalculations – and that in future its military power can and will be deployed effectively wherever it is necessary. The 'peace' that the present US administration seeks to enforce refers to the suppression or deterrence of its own supposed enemies, and seems to have no more general meaning than this. Its unilateralism is a direct repudiation of the universalist principles and practice that Hardt and Negri hailed as definitive of the governmental norms of 'Empire', in contrast to previous empires. At the very least, they have been premature in their welcoming of a new kind of world order.

One also needs to review the larger dynamics of September 11 and its aftermath in the light of Hardt's and Negri's analysis. Unfortunately, when one considers the kinds of political action that might be expected to take place in the 'smooth' interconnected spaces of Empire, by globalised, subjectively empowered, rhizomatic networks, Al Quaida seems to qualify for inclusion as well as NGO volunteers or journalists working in disaster areas.<sup>xvi</sup> Hardt and Negri say, evoking Nietzsche, that 'a new nomad horde, a new race of barbarians, will arise to invade or evacuate Empire'. (P. 213). They refer, quoting Walter Benjamin, to a 'positive barbarism', which, coming from a 'poverty of experience' has 'to begin anew, to begin from the new. .... What exists, he reduces to rubble, not for the sake of the rubble but for that of the way leading through it. The new barbarians destroy with affirmative violence, and trace new paths of life through their own material existence.' (P. 215). It is unfortunately clear how references to 'rubble' may be read at this time, long after they were written.

Hardt and Negri however make few useful distinctions between what kinds of interventions against Empire they are anticipating or inviting. In their concluding invocations of militancy (pp 411-3), they refer to the 'virtues of insurrectional action of two hundred years of experience,' to the organisers of the IWW, to St Francis of Assisi and 'his joyous life including all of being and nature,' and to the idea of turning 'rebellion into a project of love.' But there can be no serious political action which does not take such differences seriously. The interventions of NGO volunteers, investigative journalists, or jurists, in a crisis such as Ruanda or Kosovo, evoke responses of indignation, compassion and solidarity, which are supportive of the recognition and enforcement of global ethical norms. More violent interventions tend to generate paranoid and vengeful reactions among both peoples and their governments. Such reactions are now authorising possible military action by the United States against no less than seven nations. The problem with the open, unstructured, globalised universe which Hardt and Negri celebrate is that it is liable to generate many different kinds of 'insurrectionary' action, which may include the various modes of carnival, witness, reparation, and terror. Such actions may be visionary and prefigurative, or largely destructive. The unstable and volatile 'Empire' that Hardt and Negri describe may be capable of being transformed in different ways, in the direction of the benign global governance they describe in their early chapters, and in the direction of extreme violence and retribution. These are alternative possibilities that Hardt and Negri do not explore, though they have now been brought into high focus by the events of September 11.

### **The Psychosocial Consequences of Capitalism**

A third major problem in Hardt's and Negri's argument is its underestimation of the problems which capitalism poses to the possibility of the inclusive and generous society they wish to see. Probably because of their postmodern rejection of materialist explanation, they underestimate the dominating power of capital, deterritorialised or not (it is much less deterritorialised than the authors suggest), and of its role as a covert ruling power. If the power of



capital continues to constrain most forms of action across the globe, it matters little if it is now exercised in more abstract, spaceless, and invisible ways. The 'destructuration' and loss of boundaries brought about by global capital brings its dangers as well as liberatory possibilities. New 'transversal' syntheses, hybrids and mobilities of kinds are indeed a product of a more open and interpenetrated environment, and Hardt's and Negri's postmodern celebration of this diversity has its point. But what can follow from the weakness of containing structures – whether provided by nation states, firms, unions, governments, families, or territorial communities – is not a new sense of freedom, but intensified levels of anxiety, expressed as hostility towards foreigners, enemies, migrants, differences of all kinds. This feeling of vulnerability and exposure to danger explains both the current conformist mood of American public opinion in relation to its perceived enemies, and the xenophobic shift to the right which is taking place among voters across Europe. The idea that such states of uncertainty and fear are likely to lead to new global solidarities, and to support for Hardt's and Negri's 'transitional programme' <sup>xvii</sup> is improbable.

Capitalism is an engine which generates anxiety and fear as its normal concomitants. Its continuous invasion of limits and boundaries (which Hardt and Negri hail as a progressive, since it has already destroyed the European colonial empires and is now including the peoples of the entire globe in the 'new proletariat') exposes not only labourers and citizens but even capitalists themselves to continuous risk and danger. Individuals and groups may react to these threats in the universalist and solidaristic ways that Hardt and Negri hope for, but there are other possibilities and precedents. Further, aggression is an instinct necessary for survival in the capitalist market, and the more exposed the markets, the greater the pressures to be aggressive. The violence of which a nation such as the United States is capable, both towards its own deviants and its perceived external enemies, derives from its own dominant principle of existence. It has seemed surprising that the triumph of global capitalism over its communist rival in 1989 should have been followed by an intensification, rather than a diminution of fear and anxiety. We have never been in greater danger than now, President Bush has recently

said, which considering that the earlier danger was of massive nuclear attack is paradoxical.<sup>xviii</sup> It may even be that the more unfettered and triumphant capitalism is, the higher the levels of underlying anxiety and fear to which it gives rise. This may also explain why it is that U.S. administrations which have been most fundamentalist in their commitments to capitalism, and least influenced by countervailing values, have also been the most paranoid in their views of the world.

Hardt and Negri draw attention to an emergent state of de-structuration, as the Communist Manifesto's aphorism 'all that is solid melts into air' is nearer to becoming reality. They may however misjudge its most likely outcomes. Unstable, exposed and turbulent states more often lead to catastrophic than utopian outcomes. September 11 may yet prove to have been the triggering event of just such a destabilisation. An awakening and insurgency of the multitude is one possible consequence of such a situation, but it seems an unlikely one. Alternatively, the outcome of September 11 could yet prove to be a Third World War, arising perhaps from the kinds of serial blunderings that led to the Great War in 1914. There is little sign that these authors, admittedly at a more peaceful time of writing, had these darker possibilities of Empire in their minds.

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<sup>i</sup> Some of these have been set out in the writers' earlier works, e.g. A. Negri (1989) *The Politics of Subversion: a Manifesto for the Twenty-First Century*. Trans. J. Newall; Oxford: Polity Press; A. Negri (1991), *The Savage Anomaly*, trans. M Hardt, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press; M. Hardt and A. Negri (1994) *Labor of Dionysus*. Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press; P. Virno and M.Hardt (eds) (1996). *Radical Thought in Italy*. Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press.

<sup>ii</sup> A curious feature of their argument is that whereas Marx thought the road to class solidarity and revolution lay in the socialisation of the production process, Hardt and Negri derive this possibility from what is in many respects an individualisation of the labour process.

<sup>iii</sup> So far as those who work in these systems are concerned, the evidence is that these 'interiorised forms of control' are effective rather than otherwise. The training and compliance procedures now ubiquitous in their management - competency-based learning, quality-assurance and the like - impose tight control on these labour processes, and are inimical to free thinking.

<sup>iv</sup> This is a reference to Deleuze and Guattari's book of that title.

<sup>v</sup> See David Byrne, *Complexity Theory and the Social Sciences*.

<sup>vi</sup> The difference in tone and assumption between these sections is very striking, and suggests that it may derive from differences of approach between the two authors.

<sup>vii</sup> The importance of the Gulf War derives rather from the fact that it presented the United States as the only power able to manage international justice *not as a function of its own national motives but in the name of global right.*' (P. 180).

<sup>viii</sup> There are of course important differences between the forms of territorial domination effected by the United States, and by the European colonial empires. But at this point these

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seem to have more to do with strategic interests and forms of mediating power (capital, long distance weaponry, the purchase of governments, in contrast to trade and direct territorial occupation), than with the contrast Hardt and Negri seek to make between old imperial power and some new deterritorialised form of global order.

<sup>ix</sup> In fact it is has been constructing Islam as an other for itself, indicating that 'otherness' continues to have its uses.

<sup>x</sup> See Held D., McGrew A., Goldblatt, D., Perraton, J. Global Transformations Polity 1999

<sup>xi</sup> Hardt and Negri are not only hostile to defensive nationalisms, but also show no interest in the construction of new governmental frames like that of the European Union through which peoples might be defended from market risks and uncertainties. Within their framing of the issue, the most 'modern' society, whose members come nearest to constituting the new 'multitude', seems on the contrary to be that of the United States.

<sup>xii</sup> They quote (P. 187) Frederick Jameson. 'Postmodernism' is what you have when the modernisation process is complete and nature is gone for good.'

<sup>xiii</sup> They are however critical of Rousseau, regarding his concept of the 'general will' as a conservative, proto-nationalist idea.

<sup>xiv</sup> They follow Gramsci (The Modern Prince) in finding in Machiavelli the key source for a modern theory of consensual self-government.

<sup>xv</sup> See M.J. Rustin (1981) The Good Society and the Inner World. London: Verso; M.J. Rustin (2001) Reason and Unreason. London: Continuum.

<sup>xvi</sup> Manuel Castells, in the second volume of his Information Age trilogy, was prescient in recognising that social movements came in many varieties, progressive and reactionary.

<sup>xvii</sup> Its components are 'the right to global citizenship', 'the right to a social wage', and 'the right to reappropriation' (of the means of production). The right to education and information might usefully be added to this list.

<sup>xviii</sup> It is noteworthy that a concept of security based on mutual deterrence served to manage anxieties about the Soviet Union, within that rather highly structured contest, but is deemed irrelevant to the containment of so relatively weak a nation as Iraq.