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The publication of Empire in 2000 created an intense level of discussion in left academic circles that even spilled over at times into the liberal press. This should please the authors, Antonio Negri, one of the main theoreticians of Italian 'autonomous Marxism,' and a previously obscure literature professor, Michael Hardt. It is clear that they see Empire as the start of a project comparable to Karl's Marx's 'Das Kapital'. The Marxist Slavoj Zizek has called Empire "The Communist Manifesto for our time".

Whether or not you think Empire will be as useful as Capital, it has certainly made an impact. The web is full of reviews of Empire from all angles of the political spectrum. Orthodox Marxists gnash their teeth at it, while right wing conspiracy theorists around Lyndon la Rouche see it as confirmation[1] of the existence of a plan for globalization that unites the 'left and right'. After S11 numerous

[1] See for instance "Toni Negri, Profile of A Terrorist Ideologue" in Executive Intelligence Review, August 2001.

US liberal and conservative reviews[2] made a big deal out of Negri's 'terrorist past' (he is under house arrest in Italy for being an ideological influence on the Red Brigades). They eagerly seize on Negri and Hardt's description of Islamic Fundamentalism as post-rather then pre-modern, and their claim that it is a form of resistance to Empire as if this description was intended as a justification for the attack.

Empire rapidly sold out after publication and the paperback edition I have (bought in October 2001) is the seventh printing. Empire doesn't mention the Seattle protests at all and one suspects that, like Naomi Klein, the authors have had the good fortune to write a book that would be seized on to 'explain' the new movement before the movement itself had come to the public's attention. To an extent Empire probably deserves this more than No Logo as Negri is one of the major 'historical' influences on the section of the movement around 'Ya Basta!'

Like Marx in Capital, Hardt and Negri admit that most of what they write is not original; indeed a lot of the book is taken up with a discussion of the philosophical sources that have led up to it. Like Capital, its strength is in bringing together into a unified whole theories and discussion from many different areas. As Hardt and Negri put it, their "argument aims to be equally philosophical and historical, cultural and economic, political and anthropological"[3]. It is also an attempt to make Marxism relevant once more to the revolutionary project, often by fundamental re-interpretation of areas of the writings of Marx and Lenin. A lot of this is also not original, anyone who has tried to read Negri's previous works in English, in particular Marx Beyond Marx, will be aware, one of his major projects is to rescue Marx from historical Marxism.

[2] The most seriously argued of these is "The Snake", by Alan Wolfe, written for The New Republic; a lot of the other ones just rip this review off, often without attribution!

[3] Preface XVI.

For instance, Negri spends part of a chapter explaining how although Lenin's Imperialism may appear wrong it is in fact right because Lenin "assumed as his own, the theoretical assumptions" of those he appears to be arguing against[4]. Now while this may be useful for those who have an almost religious attachment to the label of Marxism it is a big barrier for any anarchist reading the book. But thankfully, although this is part of Empire and indeed one of its major flaws, it is only part; Empire contains much else besides. Later I'll look specifically at what anarchists can gain from this book. But let us start by looking at what it actually argues.

A criticism that has to be made right from the start is that this is not an easy book to read; In fact large sections of it are almost unintelligible. Empire is written in an elitist academic style that is almost designed to be understood only by the qualified few. The subject matter and broad scope of the book would, in any case, make it difficult but the authors also delight in obscurity, a very simple example being the common use of Latin quotations without any adequate translation or explanation.

This is particularly off-putting because they are quite capable of writing in a clear fashion. Indeed, their strongest arguments seem to be by far the ones that are expressed in the clearest language. It is when they are on their weakest ground that it becomes increasingly difficult to unwind what is actually being said.

This elitist academic style is also part of the Italian autonomist tradition and illustrates how their use of the word "autonomy" does not carry the same meaning as that given to it by anarchists. We aim to build working class organizations that are autonomous from the state and political parties. They intended the working class to be autonomous only from capital. The worker will apparently still need be led by the intellectual elite who are the only ones, in the autonomists' eyes, capable of reading the changes in strategies needed in the battle against capitalism.

[4] page 229.

Even other Leninist commentators have attacked the "highly elitist version of the party that emerges"[5] although given the record of the organization concerned (British SWP) it is easy to suspect this is based more on jealousy of the influence of autonomous Marxism then anything else. But of course the autonomists views are quite consistent with Lenin's insistence in 1918 that "there are many... who are not enlightened socialists and cannot be such because they have to slave in the factories and they have neither the time nor the opportunity to become socialists"[6]. Autonomist Marxism is part of a rich history of 'left-communism' in Italy, which represented a break with the reformism of the Communist Parties but only partly or not at all with its authoritarian politics.

But enough of the background politics. What does Empire have to say? The opening paragraph gives a good sense of the overall argument. "Empire is materializing before our very eyes ... along with the global market and global circuits of production has emerged a global order, a new logic of structure and rule — in short a new form of sovereignty". Negri and Hardt are not presenting Empire as a future plan of the ruling class or a conspiracy of part of it. Instead they are insisting it has already come into being.

It's important right from the start to realize Negri and Hardt are not arguing that Empire is simply a new stage of imperialism. Imperialism, they say, was all about borders and the extension of the sovereignty of the imperialist country over specific parts of the globe. They also reject the idea that it is a process being controlled by the United States or that it is even centered there. Rather they argue that it is a "decentered and deterritoralizing apparatus of rule that progressively incorporates the entire global realm within its open expanding frontiers"[7]. The idea here is that there is no single institution, country, or place that is becoming the command cen-

[5] Jack Fuller, "The new workerism: the politics of the Italian autonomists", International Socialist, Spring 1980, reprinted at www.isj1text.fsnet.co.uk

[6] Lenin, Collected Works, Vol. 27 page 466.

[7] Preface XII.

in the 20th century this is the key question in constructing new 'utopian' visions of the future.

Is Empire worth reading? My answer to that question would really depend on who is asking. For anarchists, I would say that unless you have time on your hands or are already familiar with post-modern jargon, there is not much point in doing anything but dipping in here and there to satisfy your curiosity. Much that is said in Empire will already be familiar from various anarchist texts, quite often expressed in a way that are a lot easier to understand.

For those with limited time, just read the preface, intermezzo and the last chapter which will give you about 80% of the ideas in 12% of the pages! In general Empire at first appears to be stuffed full of new ideas, but then on reflection you get the idea that the 'Emperor has no clothes'. In the end, through, there are gems of insight buried amongst the mass of jargon. I suspect Empire's real usefulness will be as a respectable academic Marxist text that will be picked up by a lot of people who won't, for one reason or another, seriously read anarchist material. There is rather a lot of nonsense spoken by those active in the globalization movement, often based on Marxist orthodoxy. Empire, for all its flaws, is not at all orthodox and should have the effect of forcing such people to challenge a number of their basic assumptions. If this ends up with them coming over to one wing or another of the libertarian, anti-state, anti-capitalist camp this can only be a good thing.

ter of Empire. Rather all the various global bodies, from the ones with formal power like United Nations or those with less formal power like the World Economic Forum alongside the corporations, the military and, to a much lesser extent, the worlds people have interacted to create a global network distribution of power. This network has no center and is not based in any country but is rather spread globally.

The internet is an obvious analogy for this sort of power distribution. No one body controls it yet it obviously exists, decisions are made on its future and in reality control is exercised over it though national government, service providers and cyber-censor software. Schools restrict access to particular web sites, employers monitor the email of their workers and parents and sometimes libraries use cyber-censor software to prevent access to certain types of information.

There is, however, one point where Empire does give the US a privileged position. This is the constitutional process that is part of the formation of Empire. The opening chapters discuss how this operates both on the formal level of international law and the informal level of the discussion and lobbying around these bodies. Hardt and Negri see the US constitution as representing a historical precedent and model for this discussion. They claim for instance that Jefferson's contributions to the original constitution actually aimed for a network distribution of power.[8]

It is easy to make a counter argument that the UN and similar bodies are not really global but dominated by the old imperialist powers[9]. The top powers have a veto at the UN Security Council and without the Security Council the UN takes no effective action. Every World Bank president has been a US citizen and the US is the only country with a veto at the IMF. Hardt and Negri answer

[8] Preface XIV.

[9] See for instance the author's "Globalization: the end of the age of imperialism?", Workers Solidarity No 58, 1999, struggle.ws

this by saying that this very bias is what is driving the formation of Empire forward. "In the ambiguous experience of the UN, the juridical concept of Empire began to take shape"[10]. It is trivial to observe that the reaction of many on the left to the bias of the UN sanction's against Iraq for instance or the failure to take effective action over Israel is to call for a better (and more powerful) United Nations.

Central to Hardt and Negri's argument is the idea that interventions are no longer taking place along the lines of national imperialist interest but rather as global police actions legitimated by universal values[11]. They admit that intervention is "dictated unilaterally by the United States"[12] but insist that "The US world police acts not in imperialist interest but in imperial interest".[13] This, they insist, is a role imposed on the US and that "Even if it were reluctant, the US military would have to answer the call in the name of peace and order".[14] The idea here is that US military intervention is no longer simply taking place for 'US national interests' (i.e. the interests of US capital) but instead occurs in the interests of Empire. One problem with the book is it presents no empirical evidence for any of its claims, and here is one point where evidence is really needed. Much of Hardt and Negri's discussion is drawn from the 1991 Gulf War. Yet even a casual glance at that war shows that alongside the massive US military intervention went a political intervention designed to ensure that the profits of that war, in re-building contracts, military arms sales and oil field repair flowed to the US rather then to any of its 'allies'.

On the other hand, during the Rwandan genocide in 1994 there was no such compulsion on the US to intervene despite the horrific scale of the slaughter. What intervention occurred was of the old

[10] page 6.
[11] page 18.
[12] page 37.
[13] page 180.
[14] page 181.

but also free access to and control over knowledge, information and communication.

Of these three demands, it strikes me that the demand for global citizenship is the one that has already created an issue that is immediately global but also local. The right to free movement without border controls is being fiercely contested all over the globe. In Ireland, we are familiar with the struggles within the first world for papers for all and the struggles on the borders of Fortress Europe to gain entry. On almost every border across the world this struggle is re-created as capital tries to control and even profit from the migration of people. On the northern border of Mexico it is on the US side that migrants are intercepted but on the Southern border with Guatemala the patrols of the Mexican 'migration polices' are found on every back road.

In this closing 'what is to be done' section one can't help but notice that the book has not really addressed what shape this future society might take. Avoidance of this issue is part of the Marxist tradition, but, given the authors repeated calls for the construction of utopian visions and prophetic manifestos, it is a little odd here. This really is the same weakness as the one mentioned earlier, a complete absence of discussion around the existing movements of opposition.

I suspect the problem here is again the political tradition of Leninism from which Empire emerges and to which Negri wishes to hold onto. Lenin in power saw to it that the 'utopian experiments' of the Russian revolution were crushed in their infancy. Self-management in the factories was replaced by "unquestioning submission to a single will ...the revolution demands, in the interests of socialism, that the masses unquestioningly obey the single will of the leaders of the labor process."[37]. It is very hard to tell from Empire what the decision-making structures of a post-Empire society might look like. Yet after the failure of socialism

[37] Quoted in M. Brinton The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control, page 41

ate "a body that is incapable of adapting to family life, to factory discipline, to the regulations of a traditional sex life, and so forth"[35].

But other suggested methods bare further investigation. They point out that labor mobility has often been a weapon against capitalism[36]. They acknowledge that migration often means misery for those forced to move. Yet, they say in fleeing, for instance, low wages in one region, people are resisting capitalism. Global capitalism wants a global world where particular regions have low labor-costs, but if the people of that region flee then capitalism fails to get its cheap labor force.

This puts the current struggles for no immigration controls into a much clearer focus, or at least provides a useful alternative way of viewing them. Fortress Europe, for instance, then has the purpose of trying to keep workers trapped in conditions of low income and living conditions, a wall that is keeping people in rather then keeping them out.

Consider the one clear recent example where labor mobility had revolutionary implications. The process that brought down the Berlin wall (a barrier to labor mobility) and then the entire state-capitalist East was triggered by thousands of East German workers fleeing to Prague and either leaving for the West, or when the border was shut, occupying the various embassy grounds. Today Cuba also has tightly controls emigration for similar reasons. Empire comes up with three key demands for the construction for a new world. These are the right to global citizenship and "a social wage and guaranteed income for all". To this is added the right to re-approbation which first of all applies to the means of production

[35] Page 216.

[36] This was shown right from the start of capitalism in mirror image as the slave trade forcibly moved millions of people from Africa to the Americas with all sorts of legal and physical restrictions to retain them in place both during the passage but also at their destination. South Africa's pass laws also come to mind as a capitalist strategy designed to not only control black labor but also to keep labor costs down.

fashioned imperialist kind. When tens of thousands was already being killed on "April 9–10, 1994 France and Belgium send troops to rescue their citizens. American civilians are also airlifted out. No Rwandans are rescued, not even Rwandans employed by Western governments in their embassies, consulates, etc."[15]

Hardt and Negri cite Bosnia (where again one can point to political struggles between the US, Germany, France and Britain over their various 'national interests' in the region), but Rwanda passes without mention. Surely this makes nonsense of any argument that we moved towards a set of universal rights imposed/granted by Empire? The authors simply ignore this glaring contradiction with their model.

The initial reaction of many Empire fans to S11 was that this was an almost perfect example of the sort of struggle between an imperial police action and a decentered resistance to Empire. But the Afghan war turned almost instantly into a national war with the Afghan government (the Taliban) squarely in the bombsights rather than the 'de centered' Al Quaeda. At the time of writing that war it turning into yet another colonial style occupation using a local government heavily dependent on imperialist (rather then imperial) troops to maintain order. The treatment of the prisoners at Guatanamo Bay briefly raised a discussion of universal values (with regards to the treatment of prisoners). This was rapidly stamped on by George Bush Jr. and the US military, the very forces that we might expect from Empire to be imposing such values.

The wider political row between the European imperialist powers and the US over the planned attacks on Iraq, Iran and perhaps even North Korea on the one hand and on US support for Israel on the other again points to a pattern of intervention dictated by US 'national interests' alone. A non-military example is found in the unilateralist tearing up of the Kyoto greenhouse gas agreement by George Bush on his inauguration. In this case he quite openly

[15] PBS Online special on Rwanda, www.pbs.org

claimed US national interest as his justification stating "We will not do anything that harms our economy, because first things first are the people who live in America".[16]

All of this suggests that US policy, including military policy, is still determined by what is best for US capital rather than what is best for Empire. This is not quite to claim Empire's argument is useless, it does offer a convincing sketch of how a truly global capitalism might exist and perhaps even be coming into existence. But in assuming the existence of Empire now it leaves a lot to be explained.

Much of what I covered so far is summarized quite well in the preface of the book. Fortunately it's also the easiest part to understand. But Empire is not simply a description of the evolution of capitalism to a new form. It is far wider in its aim to be a post-modern 'grand narrative', providing an overarching view of how society (dis)functions and how it can be transformed. Now I make no claim whatsoever to expertise on post-modernism because my limited forays into it have been discouraged by the sheer weight of academic jargon one is required to try and digest. So treat the analysis that follows with caution!

The most obvious critique of post-modernism from an anarchist perspective is that in its rejection of revolutionary program, the centrality of the working class, the Enlightenment, Scientific truth etc, etc it left the revolutionary nothing to construct and nowhere to go. It may at times offer a powerful criticism both of life under capitalism and the traditional left but it leaves one with no alternative. Negri and Hardt are attempting to sketch just such an alternative in Empire.

And this is where things get tricky. As anyone who has tried to approach post-modern political writing will know that the very language it is written in makes the ideas very difficult to grasp. You are left with the strong suspicion that this impenetrable form

[16] Quoted at Financial Times Biz/Ed site in www.bized.ac.uk

legend of Saint Francis of Assisi "to illuminate the future life of communist militancy"[30] A successful windup as this quote is singled out again and again in left reviews!

A model that will sit happier with anarchists is the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). "The Wobbly constructed associations among working people from below, through continuous agitation, and while organizing them gave rise to utopian thought and revolutionary knowledge"[31]. Here again thought they show a real weakness in their grasp of libertarian history as they claim that while the IWW wanted to organize the whole world "in fact they only made in as far as Mexico"[32]. In fact the IWW also organized in several other countries including South Africa, Australia and Chile,[33] where they reached a size and influence comparable with that reached in the USA. And if the IWW is such a useful model, it's odd that they fail to discuss what it is doing today, perhaps they are unaware that it still exists in several countries and see only its historical past?

Hardt and Negri move on to identify the "will to be against"[34] as central in the struggle for counter-Empire. They reckon that resistance to Empire may be most effective by subtracting from it rather then confronting it head on. Central to this they identify "desertion, exodus and nomadism". If you hear an echo of Bob Black's, this is probably because some of his writings are also based on the refusal of work advocated by the autonomists in Italy at the end of the 1970s'.

Sections of their suggested methods of struggle are quite bizarre. For instance, apparently body-piercing represents the start of an important strategy which will become effective only when we cre-

[30] Page 413.

[31] Page 412.

[32] Page 208.

[33] On the history of the IWW in Chile, a Chilean anarchist recommends Peter De Shazo's "Urban Workers and Labor Unions in Chile 1903 to 1927" to me.

[34] Page 210.

correction from a couple of fellow academics then from those they seek to dismiss as 'window breakers' out to ruin 'our movement'.

Anarchists have generally rejected the anti-globalization label. My contribution to the S26 Prague counter summit demonstrates the line of the anarchist argument: "… the real forces of globalization are not gathering on Tuesday at the [Prague 2000] IMF/WB summit, rather they are gathering here today [at the counter summit] and on Tuesday will be blockading that summit. We are a global movement; we fight for the rights of people and not capital and to any sane person this should be far more fundamental. The very governments that are most pushing the idea of 'global free trade' are the same ones that are construct massive fences along their borders and employ tens of thousands of hired thugs to prevent the free movement of people." [29]

In dismissing a return to localization, what alternatives do they put forward? The initial starting point of their alternative is an unusual choice, St. Augustine and the early Christian church in Rome. They draw parallels with the way the early Christian church transformed rather then overthrew the Roman Empire. Hardt and Negri argue that, like the early church, we need a prophetic manifesto around which to organize the multitude[29]. Like Augustine, they say we need to talk of constructing a utopia, but our utopia is simply an immediate one on earth. They praise the early Christian project in the Roman Empire, clearly with intended lessons for today's Empire, when they write; "No limited community could succeed and provide an alternative to imperial rule; only a universal, catholic community bringing together all populations and all languages in a common journey could accomplish this".

One suspects they are chuckling at the fact that almost all the orthodox Marxist reviews will be apoplectic over the religious imagery. The last paragraph of the book contains what can only be intended as a deliberate provocation of the left in holding up the

[29] Page 61.

of expression is intended to disguise the fact that there is not much in the way of real ideas present. But let us try and have a peek.

The most obvious question that arises from the idea of decentered power is how will control over the working class will be maintained by capital? After all strong imperialist powers played an essential role in the development of capitalism from the conquest of the Americas and the slave trade to containing 'national liberation' struggles so that independence could be granted while guaranteeing capitalist stability.

Empire essentially turns to the ideas of Foucault to explain how this will be done. Foucault argued that we have moved from a "disciplinary society" where discipline was imposed in the school, army, factory or jail to a "society of control" where discipline exists everywhere, in all aspects of life, internalized by people[17]. He used the expression biopower which "is a form of power that regulates social life from within".

Actually the basic idea of the regulation of social life from within may be familiar to many libertarian communists. Maurice Brinton's The Politics of the Irrational (1970), which drew on the work of the German communist Willaim Reich, analyzed why some workers supported Fascism or Bolshevism and other authoritarian ideologies against their own objective interests. They attributed this to the fact that workers have internalized the authoritarian concept of discipline. We are controlled not just by the fascist or Bolshevik secret police but primarily from within by the ideas formed from everything we are exposed to.

Reich, as Foucault was later to do, placed sexual repression at the heart of this disciplining process writing "the goal of sexual repression is that of producing an individual who is adjusted to the authoritarian order and who will submit to it in spite of all misery and degradation… The result is fear of freedom, and a conservative, reactionary mentality. Sexual repression aids political reaction, not

[17] Page 23.

only through this process which makes the mass individual passive and unpolitical, but also by creating in his structure an interest in actively supporting the authoritarian order."[18]

The arguments in Empire also flow from the work of two other Focauldians, Deleuze and Guattari, whom Empire says "present us with a properly poststructuralist understanding of biopower that renews materialist though and grounds itself solidly in the question of production of social being"[19]. Hardt and Negri also argue that autonomous Marxists established the importance of production within the biopolitical process.

This is built on the theory of the 'social factory,' where the working class is not simply composed of the industrial workers of orthodox Marxism but also all those whose labor or potential labor creates and sustains the industrial city (or social factory). This includes housewives, students and the unemployed. Empire argues that what capitalism produces are not just commodities but also subjectivities. This idea is not all that original in itself; after all even Marx observed that the dominant ideas in any era were those of the ruling class. What Empire seeks to do is put some of the mechanisms which produce these subjectivities at the heart of the productive process of capitalism.

Because they put this production of subjectivity at the center of Empire they argue that the old center of the working class, that is industrial workers, have been replaced by "intellectual, immaterial and communicative labor power"[20]. This claim has been criticized by pointing out that even in the US there are more truck drivers then computer programmers[21] but Empire counters this criticism by pointing out that the industrial jobs that exist are now gov-

[18] W. Reich, The Mass Psychology of Fascism, Orgone Institute Press, New York, 1946, pp. 25–26.

[19] Page 28.

[20] Page 53.

[21] See Left Business Observer Feb 2001, review at www.leftbusinessobserver.com

the arguments of our movement. Perhaps this simply because anarchism neither sought nor achieved the academic stardom sought by so many Marxist professors. But for an anarchist reading Empire, these omissions can only be described as a constant source of annoyance.

More importantly, the example above suggests that like the early anarchists we can make much better 'educated guesses' at the future forms of struggle the Hardt and Negri claim. From the European and North American struggles against border controls to the Zapatistas of Mexico, there are certain clues that can be read. With the emergence of the globalization movement and its emphasis on militant action, direct democracy and diversity the probable methods of organization start to become clear. Empire may have been written before all this became very clear after Seattle, but even before Seattle numerous texts had been written on the forms new movements. In particular, the Zapatistas were taking. Given their political background, Hardt and Negri must have been aware of this discussion, it is curious they fail to mention it.

Leaving that aside, Empire's strongest point is that it rejects some of the so-called alternatives that are around, in particular any idea of anti-globalization or de-globalization for a return to old style national capitalism. At the moment of writing the reformist forces in the movement against corporate globalization have been arguing precisely for such a de globalization at the World Social Forum in Porte Alegre, Brazil. Instead Hardt and Negri argue we must "push through Empire to come out the other side"[28]

Here, despite the flaws, Empire may have a significant role to play in relation to the non-anarchist sections of the movement around globalization. Many of these sections are dependent on the theories of earlier generation of Marxists that seem to point to a solution in the nation state and a return to the era of protectionism. The academics pushing this idea may be more inclined to accept

[28] Page 206.

noting that Hardt and Negri recognize that their suggestions here are weak but see this as inevitable at this stage. They say any new and successful opposition will be required to define its own tactics. Returning once again to Marx they point out that "at a certain point in his thinking Marx needed the Paris Commune in order to make the leap and conceive communism in concrete terms as an effective alternative to capitalist society."[26] This is not a sufficient explanation for the weakness in their positive program. Even their historical comparison with Marx's writing before the commune is flawed. The Paris Commune (1871) did force Marx to reconsider his ideas of revolutionary organization and the state. But the early anarchist movement predicted the form it took.

In 1868 they wrote: "As regards organization of the Commune, there will be a federation of standing barricades and a Revolutionary Communal Council will operate on the basis of one or two delegates from each barricade, one per street or per district, these deputies being invested with binding mandates and accountable and revocable at all times.

An appeal will be issued to all provinces, communes and associations inviting them to follow the example set by the capital, to reorganize along revolutionary lines for a start and to then delegate deputies to an agreed place of assembly (all of these deputies invested with binding mandates and accountable and subject to recall), in order to found the federation of insurgent associations, communes and provinces in furtherance of the same principles and to organize a revolutionary force with the capability of defeating the reaction"[27].

This may seem like a side issue but it is striking when reading Empire how the history and writers of the anarchist movement are ignored even when the conclusions reached seem so relevant to

[26] Page 206.

[27] "Program and Object of the Secret Revolutionary Organization of the International Brotherhood" (1868) as published in "God and the State", No Gods, No Masters Vol 1, p. 155.

erned by information technology. The Detroit car factories may have moved to Mexico rather then simply vanishing but the Mexican based industry does not simply re-create that of 1960's Detroit. Rather in using the latest technology it creates a labor process that is dependant on information workers as well as those on the assembly line.

They go beyond this argument that the center of the working class has shifted. They essentially drop the category of 'working class' as outdated[22]. They see the proletariat as having grown but in their arguments shift to using the category of multitude. Although they never clearly define what they mean by multitude[23] it appears to mean something similar the way sections of even the Irish Trotskyist left now say 'working people' rather then working class. The need for this new term is an artifact of Marxism and in particular the way that Marx choose to define a working class separate from and hostile to the peasantry on the one hand and the lumpen-proletariat on the other. That industrial working class may now be bigger then it was when Marx wrote but it is also often only one of a number of sections of the proletariat in the vanguard of struggle.

This brings us back to one of the bigger flaws of the book. Many of the better conclusions it reaches, for instance that national liberation struggles offer no way forward, are conclusions anarchists reached 170 years ago. Similarly anarchists have no need to redefine the working class as 'multitude' precisely because we always argued for a working class that included those elements Marx sought to exclude. From the start anarchists addressed both the peasantry and what is called the 'lumpen-proletariat' as part of the working class, sometimes even as part of the vanguard of that class rather then something outside and hostile to it. Perhaps anarchism has now become the 'stopped clock that is right twice a day' but I'm

[22] Page 56.

[23] See page 103 for the closed approach to a definition.

more inclined to argue that this demonstrates that Marxism took a wrong turn when these arguments split the 1st International in the 1870s. In that case much of the convoluted argument is Empire is only necessary because the authors choose to stand within the Marxist tradition.

Many of the reviews actually call Hardt and Negri anarchists. They really only try to address this obvious similarity with anarchist arguments at one point, when they rejoice in the end of "big government" which "forced the state to produce concentration camps, gulags, ghettos and the like". Here, where there conclusions are so obviously close to anarchism, they fudge the argument saying "We would be anarchists if we not to speak (as did Thrasymacus and Callicles, Plato's immortal interlocutors) for the standpoint of a materiality constituted in the networks of productive cooperation, in other words, from the perspective of a humanity that is constructed productively, that is constituted through the "common name of freedom.[24]" This sentence is also a good illustration of how the arguments and language of the authors becomes more obscure the weaker their points are. Even leaving aside the reference to Greek philosophy, it's pretty hard to work out what Hardt and Negri are saying. They seem to be making the ludicrous suggestion that anarchists are not materialists, but it is hard to credit authors who go to extraordinary lengths to demonstrate their knowledge with such an ignorant position.

On the positive side one of the interesting and indeed most refreshing aspects of autonomous Marxism is that they turn the traditional left analysis of the relationship between capital and the working class on its head. In the autonomist tradition it is the success of working class struggle that forces changes on capital. On its own, they insist, capital contains almost no creative power. Although they often overstate their case, there is something quite encouraging in the overall picture of capital forced to modernize

[24] Page 350.

by working-class struggle as opposed to a working class always being the victim of capitalist modernization.

In this case Hardt and Negri argue that the development of Empire is something the working class has imposed on capital. They recognize that it is easy it fixate on ways the development of Empire makes traditional working-class organization weaker (e.g. removing the ability of unions to restrict capitalism on a national basis). But they claim what is more important is that by breaking down the barrier between first and third world so that both come to exist alongside each other everywhere capital has lost some of the most powerful weapons it had to divide the working class. Cecil Rhodes is quoted in relation to class relations in Britain "If you want to avoid civil war then you must become imperialists"[25]

So if Empire means the end of imperialism, it also means the end of capitalism's ability to use third-world labor to buy off sections of the first-world working class. As elsewhere, though this is an argument that you really need to able to back up with some empirical evidence. There is no denying that the third and first world increasingly exist yards from each other in the great cities. Washington DC is almost as famous for its homelessness and poverty as it is for being the capital of the richest state in the world. Anyone visiting Mexico City or a host of other 'third-world' cities is struck by the obvious wealth and the glass skyscrapers of the few that exist alongside the shanty towns and desperate poverty of the many. Yet wage differentials between workers in the west and elsewhere are still enormous.

The above is a brief survey of some of the more interesting areas of Empire. But as I've noted it is a very dense book. Hardt and Negri say at the start Empire is not necessarily intended to be read from start to finish, dipping in here and there is intended to carry its own rewards. Finally let us move onto the weakest area of Empire, the way it suggests we can move forwards. Let us start by

[25] Page 232.