



## THE POLITICAL ONTOLOGY OF MICHAEL HARDT AND ANTONIO NEGRI

### *Michael Hardt ve Antonio Negri'nin Siyasal Ontolojisi*

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#### ABSTRACT

The works titled *Empire* and *Multitude* that were co-authored by political theorists Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have created a considerable impact on human and social sciences. In these studies, the writers examine the main characteristics of the passage from modernity to postmodernity, industrial production to postindustrial immaterial production, modern notion of sovereignty to the global regime that they call Empire. Moreover, they maintain that the political agents that were active in modernity should be reconsidered within the context of a new postmodern political subjectivity which they call “the multitude.” This article argues that Hardt and Negri’s political theory cannot be grasped only with an empirical approach, it must also be read from the perspective of political ontology. Underlying this claim is the fact that Hardt and Negri depart from the dominant political theories and critical methods of modernity, and that they take Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s Spinozian ontology to the center of their analysis. Accordingly, this article discusses the sources—primarily the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari—that feed into concepts such as Empire, the multitude, desire, and immaterial labor introduced by Hardt and Negri, and it investigates the political ontology that constitutes the framework of their work.

#### ÖZ

Siyaset kuramcıları Michael Hardt ve Antonio Negri'nin birlikte kaleme aldıkları *İmparatorluk* ve *Çokluk* başlığını taşıyan eserler insan ve toplum bilimleri alanlarında hatırı sayılır bir etki yaratmıştır. Yazarlar bu çalışmalarında modernlikten postmodernliğe, sanayi üretiminden sanayi sonrası maddi olmayan üretime, modern egemenlik anlayışından İmparatorluk adını verdikleri küresel rejime geçişin temel özelliklerini ele almaktadır. Bunun yanında, modernlikte etkin olan siyasal faillerin postmodern durumda “çokluk” adını verdikleri yeni bir siyasal öznellik bağlamında tekrar değerlendirilmesi gerektiğini belirtmektedir. Bu makale Hardt ve Negri'nin siyaset kuramının sadece ampirik bir yaklaşımla kavranamayacağını, aynı zamanda siyaset ontolojisinin bakış açısıyla okunması gerektiğini öne sürmektedir. Bu iddianın temelinde Hardt ve Negri'nin modernliğe ait hâkim siyaset kuramlarından ve eleştiri yöntemlerinden ayrılarak Gilles Deleuze ve Félix Guattari'nin kullandığı Spinozacı ontolojiyi kendi çözümlemelerinin merkezine almaları yatmaktadır. Buna göre bu makalede Hardt ve Negri'nin ortaya attıkları İmparatorluk, çokluk, arzu ve maddi olmayan emek gibi kavramların başta Deleuze ve Guattari felsefesi olmak üzere hangi kaynaklardan beslendiği tartışılmakta, yazarların eserlerinin çerçevesini oluşturan siyasal ontoloji incelenmektedir.

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## 1. Introduction

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's collaborative work can briefly be described as an attempt to make sense of the paradigmatic shifts witnessed in the mode of production, formation of subjectivities, and the organization of power during the global passage from industrial to postindustrial capitalism, or from modernity to postmodernity. This article, in turn, is an attempt to inquire into both the political-philosophical sources and implications of certain concepts introduced by Hardt and Negri such as Empire, multitude, and immaterial labor, and the theoretical framework within which these concepts operate. This inquiry will consist of tracing primarily the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari as the most vital source of influence on the arguments put forward in *Empire* (2000) and *Multitude* (2004). It will rest on the fundamental assumption that the significance of Hardt and Negri's political theory cannot be fully assessed unless one approaches it from an ontological vantage point alongside an empirical one.

One of the remarkable achievements of Hardt and Negri in their discussion of the global imperial order is to demonstrate the effectiveness of Deleuzian philosophy in political analysis. But it should be noted at the outset that this philosophy is not so much applied to a situation as it fulfils a constituent role in the theoretical methodology through which Hardt and Negri view the history and politics of modernity and postmodernity. In other words, Deleuze and Guattari are not resorted to only when such older methods as the Marxist dialectical or historical materialism falls short of comprehending and giving adequate responses to postmodern condition, but they provide at an elemental level the theoretical coordinates of a political narrative within which these methods prove to fall short. *Empire*, Hardt and Negri's first book, thus, opens as already set on a particular key; there is a distinct plane upon which it premises itself, and this plane as well as the said narrative are thoroughly ontological. The dialectical ontology underlying the classical Marxist critique of capitalism is already put away in *Empire*, and this inaugural separation is deeply analogous in effect to the Spinozian gesture of Deleuze and Guattari in their intervention in the dominant current of Western philosophy and rejection of psychoanalysis as an oppressive mechanism imposed on the subject. Accordingly, this article also aims to illustrate how one of the core concepts of Marxism used in the formulation of political agency, namely the alienation of labor, loses its applicability in the theory of postindustrial, immaterial, and affective type of labor advanced by Hardt and Negri.

## 2. Empire and the Uncovering of the Plane of Immanence

*Empire* moves along this ontological key to which previous histories and philosophies of modernity are vigorously transposed, and it is through this very act that the narrative of modernity and its transformation into postmodernity is rewritten, and the analytical efficacy of older epistemologies is questioned. This operation is even more firmly grounded in the claim that the historical trajectory *Empire* outlines itself displays a shift necessitating a political-philosophical change of position. This change is expected to reflect the one Deleuze and Guattari take as a prerequisite for recognizing the ways of emancipation from various forms of political and subjective domination. According to that claim, "pure immanence" has now realized itself on a global level and it has become the absolute ontological ground of life in postmodernity. Hardt and Negri's rewriting of modernity and modern sovereignty, therefore, proceeds by tracking transcendence and immanence back into history with an eye to the moments in which energies and potentialities, such as those unleashed in the imperial order, were able to constitute human life in the broadest sense of the word.

It is possible to call this twofold movement of *Empire*'s historical narrative as synchronic and diachronic at the same time. On the one hand, *Empire* reads modernity and postmodernity as distinct historical moments and theorizes either one of them in line with a whole new set of concepts and prioritizations; on the other hand, it writes the genealogy of these concepts that are crucial to the analysis particularly of contemporary global system and the possibilities of political agency in it. The organizational principle, as it were, that keeps these two levels together is the immanentist inversion of previous histories that rest on a certain notion of transcendence either as a privileged perspective or as a place outside history that functions as the latter's negation or eruption. This move, once again, resonates both in intent and in substance with what Deleuze and Guattari did vis-à-vis Western philosophy and psychoanalysis, and one can well define this resonant project as the uncovering of the plane of radical potentiality as opposed to the apparatuses of capture that are integral not only to power but also to much of modern political theory working within the same logic of transcendence.

This movement is perhaps best illustrated in Hardt and Negri's characterization of the multitude. Being the productive power on economic, cultural, subjective, communicative, and affective levels in Empire, the multitude signifies an agency with full and inexhaustible potential of liberating activity completely immanent to the terrain of imperial regime, that is the entire life-space of postmodernity. However, being identical with the realm of immanence or coterminous with the immanent will to emancipation, the multitude also signifies a transhistorical movement under whose rubric are subsumed different political agencies coinciding with different periods—agents otherwise referred to as the revolutionary bourgeoisie, peasantry, or the proletariat depending on the historical conjuncture addressed, are redefined as the multitude. Their activities are similarly requalified as the activities of that new collective subjectivity. Hence, the multitude is the specified *agent* of liberation in postmodernity and the transhistorical *will* to liberation. It is, in this respect, self-sufficient and complete; it finds its *raison d'être* only in itself without having to be endowed with a telos from outside.

### 3. Desire and the Multitude

The complex conceptualization of the multitude that enables Hardt and Negri to desert the plane of transcendent subjectivity in favor of an immanent one is closely related to the Deleuzian notion of desire. For Deleuze and Guattari, desire has ontological primacy; it constantly creates and recreates itself as well as all aspects of human life through the connections of productive machines that it makes possible. Desire is always the desire to act and create assemblages; it is full potentiality and lacks nothing. Here, desire is redefined “as a process of continuous libidinal production rather than as a psychological condition of lack” (Ricciardi 2007: 1146). In that sense, it is pure affirmation in the mode of being the affirmation of its own will to produce and generate life by bringing into existence ever-new connections and flows. Desire, then, is both the agent and the will—it produces or connects flows as a desiring machine, and it is the very will to emancipation as a desiring power. When Deleuze and Guattari conceive of desire as ontologically primary, it also assumes a causal primacy in the relationship between power and resistance. Being a “deterritorializing” force, desire causes, or better still, compels power to wage a perpetual war of (re)territorialization against it (Boundas 1993: 136-40, 232-33). This formulation prioritizing desire is also relevant to the multitude and its relationship to Empire. At this point, it should be observed that the historical narrative particularly of *Empire* is based on the same displacement of the potential to cause to the new collective subjectivity it presents. The section titled “Two Europes, Two Modernities,” for instance, in which Hardt and Negri discuss the emergence of the modern notion of sovereignty in the sixteenth century, opens with not power but the very opening of the revolutionary plane of immanence and the multitude as its operative force. On various occasions in the book, Hardt and Negri emphasize the primacy of the revolutionary activity of the multitude as opposed to power, which is just reactionary in its interaction with this collective subject. As they argue, “the construction of Empire and its global networks is a *response* to the various struggles against the modern machines of power, and specifically to class struggle driven by the multitude's desire for liberation. The multitude called Empire into being (Hardt and Negri 2000: 43)”. Later, the writers explicate this argument:

*The formation of Empire is a response to proletarian internationalism. There is nothing dialectical or teleological about this anticipation and prefiguration of capitalist development by the mass struggles. On the contrary, the struggles themselves are demonstrations of the creativity of desire, utopias of lived experience, the workings of historicity as potentiality. (...) The struggles that preceded and prefigured globalization were expressions of the force of living labor, which sought to liberate itself from the rigid territorializing regimes imposed on it. (51-52)*

Mass struggles that took place throughout the history of modernity are revelations of the potentiality of the multitude. This is a potentiality that, by its nature, is limitless. Power imposes its own structures onto the creative activity of the multitude, thereby setting up new boundaries and strengthening the older ones to prevent the multitude's liberating desire from being realized. Empire is the most recent of these power structures.

Nevertheless, what makes Empire exceptional is the fact that the rule of imperial sovereignty and the multitude's production of life coexist within the same space. As a historical consequence of the revolutionary activity of the multitude, the transcendent and territorial powers of modernity were left with no other choice than to undermine themselves by adapting to the immanent production of life by the multitude. In this regard, the imperial sovereignty signifies an attempt to reterritorialize the productive flows and connections of the multitude on a global level; yet, quite paradoxically, it can do so only by constantly deterritorializing itself. At

this historical conjuncture, power and desire are deeply integral to each other due to the inflation and stretching out of all spaces that were previously constructed with the binary logic of inside-outside to cover the entire domain of postmodernity.

The creative desire of the multitude no longer exists on the margins or outside; on the contrary, it is now the only generative force, and the imperial regime provides it with more means of emancipation by trying to attune itself to the multitude's life-producing activities. Hardt and Negri write that "[w]hen one adopts the perspective of the activity of the multitude, its production of subjectivity and desire, one can recognize how globalization, insofar as it operates a real deterritorialization of the previous structures of exploitation and control, is really a condition of the liberation of the multitude" (2000: 52). This seems to be one of the reasons why, in Hardt and Negri's terms, the construction of Empire is good in itself but not for itself—good in itself as it overthrows the territorializing and transcendent structures of modernity, but not for itself because in doing so it enables the multitude to act more freely. And this should demonstrate why Alex Callinicos is partly right when he suggests that "central to Negri's ontology is not liberty, but Life" (2007: 169). Clearly, to the extent that subjectivity and the multitude are perceived as ontological principles, they become constitutive or generative of life itself.

#### 4. Body Without Organs, *Socius*, and Miraculation in Capitalism

In terms of the form they assume in postmodernity, that is, in terms of their structuration as networks of power and flows of capital, the imperial sovereignty and the space of Empire have an existence as the "body without organs" (Deleuze and Guattari 2000: 9-16). Just as the body without organs both attracts and repels the desiring machines, and just as it registers the movements and connections of desire on its surface, Empire registers in its unique structure the productive activities of the multitude, which produces and distributes affects, sociality, and culture through a network-type organization. In *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari argue that human history features three types of societies. In each one of these, a *socius* exists functioning as a body without organs in relation, and in some cases, in opposition to the desiring-machines. The *socius*, or the body without organs, is the full body of the earth in primitive societies, it becomes the full body of the despot in barbaric societies, and it is the full body of the money-capital in capitalist society. What characterizes the *socius* as the body without organs in all these societies is not only its particular but also the universal style of establishing relationships and ultimately falling back onto the desiring-machines (Deleuze and Guattari 2000: 140, 193, 223).

Roughly speaking, the relationship between the body without organs and the desiring-machines is set and continually reset through three component states. The first one of these is the paranoiac state in which the body without organs is full and in a rigid stasis—a situation which can be described only in such tautological terms as those used by the French poet Antonin Artaud: "The body is the body / it is all by itself / and has no need of organs / the body is never an organism / organisms are the enemies of the body" (quoted in Deleuze and Guattari 2000: 9). The body described in these lines and taken as a model by Deleuze and Guattari is without organs not only because it does not need them, but also "every coupling of machines, every production of a machine, every sound of a machine running, becomes unbearable to the body without organs" (2000: 9). Therefore, the body without organs resists the organ-machines by presenting "its smooth, slippery, taut surface as a barrier. In order to resist linked, connected, and interrupted flows, it sets up a counterflow of amorphous, undifferentiated fluid" (Deleuze and Guattari 2000: 8).

The *socius*, then, is both a surface shielding against the desiring-machines and an amorphous, undifferentiated fluid conflicting with the latter's multiple and potentially infinite set of connections, breakdowns, and reconnections. Since it has no productive machines or proper transmitters of flow, the body without organs in the paranoiac state is "the unproductive, the sterile, the unengendered, the unconsumable" (Deleuze and Guattari 2000: 8). Nevertheless, the very quality of being a surface makes it possible for the body without organs to record the desiring-machines that it is affected by. As Deleuze and Guattari write, "the *socius* as a full body forms a surface where all production is recorded, whereupon the entire process appears to emanate from this recording surface" (2000: 10). Whether it be the earth, the despot, or capital, in that second state, the *socius* registers on its surface the processes of production, thereby attracting the desiring-machines rather than repelling them. This attraction culminates in a reversal in the third state where the body without organs is illusively established as the generator of the desiring-machines themselves. Here, the full body of the earth, the despot, or capital "miraculates" and presents itself as the only precondition for all production (Deleuze and

Guattari 2000: 11).

Although it is unproductive and sterile as a paranoiac-machine in its rejection of the desiring-machines, the body without organs is in fact produced “at a place and a certain time in the connective synthesis, as the identity of producing and the product” (Deleuze and Guattari 2000: 8). Moreover, alongside its lack of productive organs or productivity, the body without organs also lacks the image of a body, “it has nothing whatsoever to do with the body itself, or with an image of the body. It is the body without an image” (Deleuze and Guattari 2000: 8). What is most important in the first statement above is that the production of capital as the *socius* occurs at a place and a certain time in the connective synthesis in Deleuze and Guattari’s terms, which, in our present context, refers to the schizophrenic processes of capitalism. The connective synthesis is an aspect of the schizophrenic condition in which the desiring-machines, libido, and labor connect to each other or flow through these connecting portals in an unrestrained fashion, moving in multiple directions. It is no wonder that the phase which is characterized by the ever-expanding and unfixed movement of the connective synthesis also displays the unleashing of the desiring-machines/libido and productive forces/labor, as well as the decoding of all established values and the deterritorialization of rigid social-political structures of subjectivity. It can be asserted that to Hardt and Negri, Empire is also the name of this schizophrenic condition of constant expansion and open-endedness; imperial terrain is the smooth surface of the body without organs inhabited and affected by the multitude, and it is the ever-changing assemblage of desiring-machines producing the immanent plane of life in postmodernity by virtue of the immaterial and affective labor they expend. We will return to immaterial labor and the schizoid character (in the sense this term has in *Anti-Oedipus*) of postindustrial production, but now we shall note briefly how, for Deleuze and Guattari, capital, the *socius* of capitalism, and Oedipus, the generator of the unconscious for psychoanalysis, are remarkably similar in their “miraculating” operations.

In a famous statement in the *Communist Manifesto*, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels refer to a host of radical transformations brought about by the rise of capitalism: “All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy profaned” (Marx and Engels 1949: 6). However, as they further assert, not everything remains airborne in capitalist society; modernity deterritorializes and decodes on the one hand, but on the other, it reterritorializes and recodes what it has unleashed or demolished: “[Capitalism] has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his ‘natural superiors,’” “drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervor, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism,” and it “has torn away from the family its sentimental veil.” Nevertheless, it has established “naked self-interest,” “callous ‘cash payment,’” “egotistical calculation,” and “money relation” as the only bond among humans (Marx and Engels 1949: 5-6). Then, with money, or with the exchange relations maintained through the medium of money, all social-productive relations are reterritorialized and recorded in “this imageless, organless body, the nonproductive, exist[ing] right there where it is produced” (Deleuze and Guattari 2000: 8). Put differently, at a certain point of the connective synthesis of capitalist decoding, money establishes itself as a body without organs by means of which the social-productive relations and labor with its multiple qualities are translated into one language and are ultimately captured and uniformed. It is possible to state that this is one of the recoding operations the capitalist *socius* effects—the circumstances equalizing every production/product and every social relation exclusively through money necessitates that everything first be equalized with money itself, thereby being registered on the surface of the *socius* and having no value or meaning whatsoever without the body without organs.

This, however, is not the only way capitalist *socius* registers or records production. The situation in which production/products and social relations appear to lose their meanings and values without the mediation of the body without organs is carried, in a more subtle way, to the level of miraculation, and now it occurs as if the desiring-machines are created by capital itself, whereas the opposite is the case. Deleuze and Guattari argue that capital

*produces surplus value, just as the body without organs reproduces itself (...). It makes the machines responsible for producing a relative surplus value, while embodying itself in the machine as fixed capital. Machines and agents cling so closely to capital that their very functioning appears to be miraculated by it. Everything seems objectively to be produced by capital as quasi cause.” (2000: 10-11)*

To Marx, the valorization of capital or the creation of surplus value, be it absolute or relative, is an operation

that is concealed within the production process itself, and to understand the nature of this process, one should abandon the viewpoint of exchange and adopt the perspective of commodity production. In this regard, what Deleuze and Guattari describe as the falling-back of the body without organs onto the desiring-production by establishing itself as the latter's quasi cause is expressed by Marx in *Capital* in the context of commodity fetishism and the reification occurring within exchange. Marx argues that in capitalism the commodity form "reflects the social characteristics of men's own labor as objective characteristics of the products of labor themselves, as the socio-natural properties of these things" (1990: 164-65). The commodity form objectifies and effaces the labor that goes into the product, and it creates the illusion that the commodity exists of its own accord; labor does not come prior to it but the commodity appears as already and naturally bearing in its objective being the value created by labor. Consequently, Marx adds, the products of human hand and brain (the aggregate of which is obviously capital) "appear as autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own, which enter into relations both with each other and with the human race," (1990: 165) whereby humans are rendered incapable of entering into relations with each other without the mediation of objects. This seems to be what Deleuze and Guattari emphasize when they write that "production is not recorded in the same way it is produced" as in this "perverted, bewitched world (...) capital plays the role of a recording surface that falls back (...) on all of production" (2000: 11).

### 5. Oedipus, the Non-Lapsarian Subject, and Postindustrial Capitalism

As a pattern conditioned by bourgeois society and eventually espoused by psychoanalysis to straitjacket the schizophrenic-machine, Oedipus carries all the qualities attributed to money-capital by Deleuze and Guattari—it recodes and falsely records, it miraculates and colonizes libido through the notions of castration and the unconscious. Parallel to capital the *socius*, Oedipus comes upon an essentially schizophrenic connective synthesis of the desiring-machines. The stage in which libido is able to produce multiple and infinite connections with other desiring-machines turns into an anti-productive state with the advent of Oedipus. Oedipus first registers and codes desire in the "papa-mama-me" pattern, and later it miraculates desire by presenting itself as the real record of libidinal flows; as something which is not produced and placed upon desire but producing the latter as its quasi cause (Deleuze and Guattari 2000: 51-6, 68-75). As a result, Oedipus takes over the mythical role of the commodity in the realm of desiring-production. It forcefully manipulates the schizophrenic working of desire to bring about a false recording or representation of libido privileging the territorialized and coded subject of modernity. Yet, Deleuze and Guattari ask whether "the recording of desire go[es] by various stages in the formation of the Oedipus complex[.] Disjunctions are the form that the genealogy of desire assumes; but is this genealogy Oedipal, is it recorded in the Oedipal triangulation?" (2000: 13) Their answer must be a negative one. In *Empire*, Hardt and Negri assume a similar position vis-à-vis the modernist histories of revolutionary struggles and the collective subjects that waged them. Their rewriting of the genealogy of those struggles through the concept of multitude presupposes that the transhistorical revolutionary desire and activity of this new political subject have been recorded or represented falsely by narratives using patterns that are not unlike the Oedipal triangulation in psychoanalysis. One may assert that this is one of the reasons why Hardt and Negri retain the historical materialist aspect of Marxism while rejecting the dialectical method, provided dialectics itself is understood in the triangular form of thesis-antithesis-synthesis.

Oedipus, like capital, is produced at a certain time and place within the connective process of "and...and" but is marked by the disjunctive mechanism of "either...or." Once it is established in opposition to libido and desire, it begins to exist as a body without organs, as a surface being exposed to the desiring-machines but at the same time recording and coding the desiring production in an anti-productive way. What follows is another version of commodity fetishism, or rather, of capitalist miraculation: Oedipus now falls back onto the desiring-production and claims to be the generator of the libidinal flows that have been recorded on its triangular surface. Suppose it is the false genealogy of surplus value coded on the capital-body that misrepresents the actual processes and forces of social production. In that case, it is the false genealogy of Oedipus and its familialism that subsume and misrepresent the actual characteristics of desiring-production.

What is strikingly common to the miraculating machines of Oedipus and money-capital, or to the theories of Oedipus complex and commodity fetishism together with the attendant reification of social relations of production is that they both operate as narratives of distinct separation and alienation from an original state,

from a more authentic and natural, as it were, relation to one's own self and labor. Even more striking, however, is the fact that this traumatic "lapse" into the separated and alienated condition that psychoanalysis and Marxism point to figures as the moment where the would-be subjects of the unconscious and revolutionary politics both step into the symbolic and economic-political order of society and become subjects *as such*. Subjectivity, accordingly, is inconceivable without this dual lapse—the unconscious as well as the conditions of class consciousness are shaped within this post-lapsarian order where the signifier and the commodity reign supreme through castration and alienation.

Such theories of individual and social being are clearly discredited in *Empire* and *Multitude*. In an attempt to better articulate Hardt and Negri's position, we would like to turn to Donna Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto," where she challenges psychoanalytic and political stories of fall from the viewpoint of a postindustrial mode of being that is quite in tune with the ontology of immanence established by Deleuze and Guattari, and espoused by Hardt and Negri as opposed to the dialectical notions of subjectivity and agency:

*An origin story in the "Western," humanist sense depends on the myth of original unity, fullness, bliss and terror, represented by the phallic mother from whom all humans must separate, the task of individual development and of history, the twin potent myths inscribed most powerfully for us in psychoanalysis and Marxism. Hilary Klein has argued that both Marxism and psychoanalysis, in their concepts of labor and of individuation and gender formation, depend on the plot of original unity out of which difference must be produced and enlisted in a drama of escalating domination of woman/nature. The cyborg skips the step of original unity, of identification with nature in the Western sense. (...) The cyborg does not dream of community on the model of the organic family, this time without the oedipal project. The cyborg would not recognize the Garden of Eden; it is not made of mud and cannot dream of returning to dust (Haraway 1999: 273).*

The cyborg that Haraway posits as the posthumanist subject of contemporary world is marked by the breakdown of three boundaries raised by modernity and maintained by theories analyzing or even critiquing it. These collapsed boundaries are the ones between human and animal, animal-human organism and machine, and physical and non-physical. Although it is difficult to claim that psychoanalysis, both in its Freudian and Lacanian forms, has ever regarded as possible a homecoming or reunification such as the one implied by Haraway, it might be claimed that the early writings of Marx and the works of several prominent Marxist thinkers seem to envision such a return. Marx, for instance, in his *Early Writings*, writes extensively about the species-being of humankind, which is suppressed, or rather, contaminated by capitalism: "Estranged labor (...) turns *man's species-being*—both nature and his intellectual species-powers—into a being *alien* to him and a *means* of his *individual existence*. It estranges man from his own body, from nature as it exists outside him, from his spiritual essence, his *human essence*" (1992: 329).

Likewise, in *History and Class Consciousness*, Georg Lukacs writes that the commodity becomes crucial "for the subjugation of men's consciousness to forms in which (...) reification finds expression and for their attempts to comprehend the process or to rebel against its disastrous effect and liberate themselves from the servitude to the 'second nature' so created" (1972: 86). Nevertheless, one might argue that this vision exists in Marx and Lukacs in the form of negation, which is to say that this vision does not define the qualities of a lost paradise, an Eden to be regained, but it points to the possibility of a radically different mode of existence that could be attained by acting through and ultimately transcending the conditions capitalist society presents. At any rate, Haraway contends that after the collapse of the boundaries set by industrial capitalism and modernity, these narratives of separation and alienation do not hold. Postindustrial production has created a new form of subjectivity and laboring activity due to which men and women are no longer faced with alien objects, and they are not alienated from the essence of their social being (or species-life) because of the commodification of their labor power. This new laboring activity is significantly close to the concept of immaterial production that Hardt and Negri describe in *Multitude*.

The historical process by which the multitude realizes its potential in accordance with its ontology is the global transition into postmodernity. Moreover, the fundamental aspect that distinguishes postmodernity from previous historical conditions is the replacement of Fordist production by post-Fordism, or material labor's losing its hegemonic position to immaterial labor. Hardt and Negri claim in *Multitude* that although industrial proletariat has not shrunk in number but rather expanded, it has nevertheless ceased to be the paradigmatic subject of social struggles. As the material production in the factory has become increasingly flexible, the labor

theory of value that Marx based on the measurable labor time has been invalidated along with the conventional definitions of working class and capitalist exploitation made on that basis. This is best observed in immaterial production: “[M]aterial production—the production, for example, of cars, televisions, clothing, and food—creates the *means of social life*. (...) Immaterial production, by contrast, including the production of ideas, images, knowledges, communication, cooperation, and affective relations, tends to create not the means of social life but *social life itself*” (Hardt and Negri 2004: 146). Consequently, this form of labor, which produces a value that is impossible to measure and fully appropriate, connects all human beings on a common plane of production. The multitude signifies this common life immanent to the life-space of postmodernity, and what makes it a political agent is that the exploitation it is subjected to but ultimately evades by virtue of the immateriality of its labor puts it against global capital. Whereas capital needs it for surplus extraction, the multitude has the power and ability to constitute life with all its dimensions autonomously from the former.

In his essay on immaterial labor, Maurizio Lazzarato discusses how this total production of social life by the multitude (although he does not use this term yet) has been made possible by post-Fordism. For Lazzarato, labor in the post-Fordist era reveals a much broader nexus between knowledge and production, and it displays a new technical and subjective-political composition among the workers. This novel aspect is the immateriality of labor that is qualified as “the labor that produces the informational and cultural content of the commodity” (Lazzarato 1996: 133). The production of the informational and cultural content of a commodity rather than the material commodity itself implies a class of producers that is formed neither on the basis of industrial labor time and value, nor through an antagonistic relationship to capital. It now becomes an ensemble, a social body composed of concrete subjects inserted in and interacting with concrete settings of life and production.

Lazzarato suggests that as production becomes something about information and cultural content, labor begins to rely on skills involving cybernetics and computers (like those proper to Haraway’s cyborgs) as well as activities concentrated on “defining and fixing cultural and artistic standards, fashions, tastes, consumer norms, and more strategically, public opinion” (1996: 133). The production of such immaterial commodities, which previously required the intellectual output of a group of experts, is now generalized among all producers and becomes part and parcel of what Lazzarato calls mass intellectuality. The production that is carried out by mass intellect is not only the creation of goods or commodities, but it also refers to the production of subjectivities and intersubjective relations through the milieu commodities create. Commodity production is now a compound process that involves all types of mass intellectuality and consumers’ desires. In that respect, it functions as a connecting machine where subjectivities become attached to each other. The creation of value thus depends precisely on the creation of intersubjectivity or social relationality that the integrated production-consumption process necessitates. Immaterial labor, as long as it fulfils this role, features as an interface: “The activation of both productive cooperation and the social relationship with the consumer is materialized within and by the process of communication” and the “particularity of the commodity produced through immaterial labor (...) consists in the fact that it is not destroyed by the act of consumption, but rather it enlarges, transforms, and creates the ‘ideological’ and cultural environment of the consumer,” which situation inevitably encompasses the producers who are consumers as well (Lazzarato 1996: 138). In his essay titled “Struggle, Event, Media,” Lazzarato discusses the shift from the factory to the corporation and argues that the latter, by utilizing immaterial labor, “does not generate the object (the commodity), but rather the world in which the object exists. Nor does it generate the subject (worker and consumer), but rather the world in which the subject exists” (Lazzarato 2003). After all, affects, information, signs, language, and images created by immaterial labor “do not represent something, but rather contribute to making it happen. Images, languages, and signs are constitutive of reality and not of its representation” (Lazzarato 2003).

## 6. Conclusion

In this article, we have tried mainly to focus on the philosophical and theoretical sources of several concepts Hardt and Negri use in their analysis of the milieu that has been referred to, among others, as postmodernity, postindustrial society, or the imperial regime. We would like to recapitulate this account, which is by no means exhaustive of the arguments raised in *Empire* and *Multitude*, by returning to a point that has been presented as our central subject of inquiry, namely the ontological character of Hardt and Negri’s political theory. Postmodernity for Hardt and Negri has a twofold quality that is also found in their conceptualization of the multitude. First, postmodernity appears with a new ontology of social being; it is a distinct historical moment



which eradicates the classical antagonism between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie in favor of a much more open and inclusive political subjectivity, and abolishes the long-established oppositions between inside and outside, immanence and transcendence, affirmation of desire and alienation, in favor of the first term of each binary. Second, this new mode of social being is turned by Hardt and Negri into an analytical tool with which to understand history as such; it becomes a transhistorical ontology of all political and social forms.

In this ontology, there is no place for the myth of lapse or separation from an original state; nor is there in postmodernity a place for Oedipus, commodity fetishism, and reification as it is a condition where all production is simultaneously the production (and consumption) of culture, affects, images, intersubjective relations; in short, of social life as a whole. In the terrain of Empire, there is no longer a negative subjectivity that experiences its access into and existence within the capitalism of Marx, the culture of Freud, and the symbolic order of Lacan as trauma and alienation. This world, on the contrary, is one of immediate connections and ever-expanding relations where all kinds of mediation are undone through the multitude's total and immanent production of life and of itself. As Negri notes elsewhere, all production can be seen as having "become linguistic; consequently, subjectivity now presents itself through language itself. The abstraction of communication becomes the body of singularities... Thus the multitude is born" (2007: 49). This linguistic and communicative aspect of the multitude leads it and "all the elements of life back to a poetic reconstruction" (Negri 2007: 54). And herein resides the biopolitical force that is not merely resistant to the capturing apparatuses of biopower but is constitutive of the life and creative projects of the multitude.

Perhaps one can best understand this new configuration by revisiting and slightly modifying Hardt and Negri's statement about the formation of Empire that "there is nothing dialectical or teleological" (2000: 51) in postmodernity and, in fact, in all history; there has always been only the "creativity of desire, utopias of lived experience, the workings of historicity as potentiality" (2000: 52). In this regard, the dialectical ontology of Marxism is nothing but a "teleology of sorts" that is "constructed only after the fact, *post festum*" (2000: 52). Hardt and Negri retain dialectics merely as a concept for relationality while they break with its *post factum* perspective. Their political theory thus powerfully asserts itself as one of immanence, the actuality of history, and of the will to life and liberation.

The notion of mediation is doubtless the core of dialectics and every theory of ideology in one way or another grapples with the question as to how one should theorize the ways in which a certain "essence" is mediated by its representation or reflection, by what it overdetermines or conditions—the long-debated theory of base and superstructure is a case in point. A discussion of the diverse responses given to this question is outside the scope of this article. Nevertheless, we would like to conclude by asking in connection with the concept of ideology whether Hardt and Negri's transhistorical and immanentist political ontology itself might be seen as overdetermined by the historical moment of transnational capital and be consequently read as one reflection of the ideologies of globalization, late capitalism, neo-liberalism, or consumerism. We maintain that how one chooses to answer this question is in itself a political decision as well.

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