Commonwealth: An Exchange

ANALYSIS: DAVID HARVEY

THERE HAVE BEEN TWO FOUNDATIONAL THEMES in Antonio Negri's work over the years. The first is an abiding faith in the capacities of the working class or the multitude (redefined as "the party of the poor" and therefore, according to Spinoza, the only "true subject of democracy") to use their immanent powers of laboring to construct an alternative to the world given by capital. They can do so, Negri believes, by way of autonomous and nonhierarchically organized self-management. The second theme arises out of a deeply held belief that Spinoza's philosophical works provide a framework of radical thought capable of illuminating not only how the world is but also how it ought to be and can be. Wedding the immanent powers of the multitude with a neo-Spinozan theoretical armature, Negri grounds a theory of revolution and a redefinition of what real communism might be about.

Unsurprisingly, these two themes are heavily on display in Commonwealth, the new joint effort of Michael Hardt and Negri to flesh out their ideas and to define an alternative globalization—or, as they prefer to put it, an "altermodernity"—for our times. In their previous works,

they went a long way to support, both intellectually and ideologically, those leftist movements that sought to change the world in radical ways without forming hierarchical political parties or engaging with what the authors saw as the futile quest to take state power. But they did so in a way that sought to define a different kind of communism, one that was grounded in seventeenthand eighteenth-century philosophy. This constituted a rupture with the post-Marx history of the communist movement but not, however, a wholesale abandonment of Marx's crucial insights. With the collapse or modification of actually existing communisms, particularly after 1989, not only was a different kind of world possible but a different kind of communism was also possible. In the effort to define what this might be, Hardt and Negri have been joined by several other key philosophical figures, such as Alain Badiou and Jacques Rancière.

This attempt to educe a different form of communism takes on renewed urgency today, given not only the appalling conditions under

which most of the people on planet Earth struggle to survive but also the gathering storms of irreversible environmental degradation and increasingly frequent short-term crises of self-destruction within the capitalist system. On the other hand, there is something odd about appealing to seventeenth- and eighteenth-century thinkers, with an early-seventeenth-century lens grinder from Amsterdam in the lead, in the search for answers. Be that as it may, one side result of Hardt and Negri's efforts has been a boom in Spinoza study groups in radical student circles and an increasing fascination with all those thinkers, such as Gilles Deleuze, who also appeal to Spinoza to ground their arguments.

Revolutionary thought, Hardt and Negri argue, must find a way to contest capitalism and "the republic of property." It "should not shun identity politics but instead must work through it and learn from it," because it is the "primary vehicle for struggle within and against the republic of property since identity itself is based on property and sovereignty." They work through the problem in three stages. "Making visible the subordinations" (gender, race, class, and so forth) "of identity as property implies, in a certain sense, reappropriating identity" and defending it as a possession and property. It is about saying, This is who I am, and these are the conditions under which I suffer and have my being. The "second task of identity politics . . . is to proceed from indignation" (a key concept from Spinoza) "to rebellion against the structures of domination using the subordinated identity as a weapon in the quest for freedom." But this second task, insofar as it still treats identity as a form of property, "can always be accommodated within the ruling structures of the republic of property." The danger is that identity can become an end (a form of ownership that one has a vested interest in perpetuating) rather than a means. It permits emancipation, "the freedom to be who you really are," but hinders liberation, "the freedom of self-determination and self-transformation, the freedom to determine what you can become." The third task is, therefore, to strive for the abolition of all forms of identity. This "self-abolition of identity is the key to understanding how revolutionary politics can begin with identity but not end up there." The "communist proposition" is that workers, for example, "aim to destroy not themselves but the identity that defines them as workers. The primary object of class struggle, in other words, is not to kill capitalists but to demolish the social structures and institutions that maintain their privilege and authority, abolishing too, thereby, the conditions of proletarian subordination." In this, the refusal of work, or what the authors elsewhere refer to as the strategy of "exodus," becomes the primary weapon. This is what liberation is all about. And revolution is about liberation, not emancipation.

Revolutionary feminism, queer theory, and race theory have analogous projects: All of them seek to abolish the identity that imprisons one in an existing structure. Revolution "is not for the faint of heart. It is for monsters," Hardt and Negri write, making much of the figure of Caliban. "You have to lose who you are to discover what you can become." The parallelism between the struggles over different forms of identity (and here they appeal directly to Spinoza's concept of multiplicity and parallelism) is not, however, homologous—"articulation and parallelism" between these struggles "are not automatic but have to be achieved." Whenever struggles around one form of identity block those around another, adjustments have to be made. Furthermore, "no one domain or social antagonism is prior to the others." The revolution has to move forward "like a centipede or, really, as a multitude. Only on the field of biopolitical struggles,"

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the authors conclude, "composed by parallelism and multiplicity, can a revolutionary struggle for the common be successfully pursued."

Inspiring though this model of revolution may be in many ways, there are a host of problems with it. To begin with, Hardt and Negri dismiss Slavoj Žižek's contention that there is something far more foundational about class than there is about all the other forms of identity in relation to the perpetuation of capitalism, and in this I think Žižek is right. No matter how important race, gender, and sexual identity may have been in the history of capitalism's development. and no matter how important the struggles waged in their name, it is possible to envisage the perpetuation of capitalism without them—something that is impossible in the case of class. Second, if all identities have to be abolished for the republic of property to be demolished, then the range of identities under consideration is far too conventionally defined. As usual, for example, geographic identifications with places and regions, as well as local loyalties (the special relation to the land claimed by indigenous populations), are left out of the picture (except in the case of nationalism, which is simply dismissed as corruption). Third, while revolution is quite properly opposed to prevailing notions of the republic of property, the presumption that the world's six and a half billion people can be fed, warmed, clothed, housed, and cleaned without any hierarchical form of governance and outside the reach of monetization and markets is dubious in the extreme. This question is far too huge to be left to the horizontal self-organization of autonomous beings. Capitalism, with its hierarchical forms, has made serious progress in feeding the world, albeit unevenly, so one must be careful not to demolish those structures too readily. The lack of specification of any revolutionary transformation in the material foundations of daily life to parallel the revolutionary transformation in class identities is a serious lacuna in the argument.

The turn to Spinoza, however interesting, does not help. Spinoza, as far as I know, was little concerned with such mundane things as how to organize the world market so that everyone could eat. In a way, with a global population of less than one billion and much of the world not yet colonized or turned into a global marketplace full of interdependencies, the historical geographic circumstances of the times would have rendered such problems moot. These issues began to take a stronger form with Adam Smith and led Kant (who puts in several important cameo appearances in Commonwealth) to propose cosmopolitan solutions, but it was really the theory of the global market and of globalization so succinctly laid out by Marx and Engels in the Communist

Manifesto that put these problems firmly on the map.

The suspicion lurks, and there is a lot of evidence in Commonwealth to support the point, that it is precisely because Spinoza did not have to be concerned with such mundane things that his formulations are so attractive. They permit Hardt and Negri to bypass consideration of the material basis of revolutionary endeavors in favor of abstract and, at the end of the day, somewhat idealist formulations. I hasten to add that this does not in any way render the present surge of interest in pre-Marxian communism irrelevant, but it does impose a somewhat utopian quality on the thinking. I happen to believe we cannot do without such utopism in these times, but it is very important in reading such exercises to understand that this is what we are looking at.

It is always interesting when considering any utopian schema to identify the connection between the actually existing material circumstances and the

idealistic response. In the same way that More's *Utopia* reflected the state of the world in the early sixteenth century, so Hardt and Negri's writings have a lot to say, both positive and negative, about the state of contemporary capitalism. There are also some startling absences.

It has been Hardt and Negri's view for some time, for example, that contemporary capitalism differs radically from its past incarnations. It has turned toward immaterial rather than material production. The immateriality appears in two guises. First, the symbolic, aesthetic, and social values of commodities come to the fore relative to material qualities. Second, if Marx generally depicted the reproduction of the social relation between capital and labor as mediated through the production of things (e.g., wage goods for the laborer, luxuries and new means of production for the capitalist), Hardt and Negri claim that much of contemporary capitalism is taken up instead with the direct production of subjectivities by way of "images, information, knowledge, affects, codes, and social relationships." "The object of production" is no longer a world of things but of subjects, defined, for example, "by a social relationship or a form of life." The political subjectivity of the subject becomes the object of production. If, for instance, we are all neoliberals now, that is because this is how our subjectivity has been produced. The terrain of critique, as well as of class struggle, therefore shifts from the mere production of things (the factory) to the production of subjectivity.

While I find this a progressive and illuminating move, it does raise the question of how relevant Marx's analysis might be in relation to it. In the first chapter of Capital (1867), Marx defines value as a social relation. As such, he says, value is immaterial but objective. This is so because it is impossible to measure a social relation directly. The power and significance of the social relation can be judged only in terms of its objective consequences. Marx is deeply concerned with how this social relation is reproduced. In the chapter of Capital titled

"Simple Reproduction," for example, he breezes past all the material and technical circumstances necessary for the physical reproduction of capitalism to concentrate on the reproduction of the class relation—the capitalist on one side and the worker on the other. Marx was, therefore, as deeply concerned with the production of political subjects as he was with the production of commodities.

All commodities are symbols of social labor, and the money commodity takes on many symbolic guises, as Marx repeatedly asserts. So the fact that the value congealed in commodities is symbolic, aesthetic, and social, as well as material, is not new at all. I find nothing particularly compelling about this first guise in which immateriality appears. The second guise is much more interesting. But here, too, while Hardt and Negri recognize Marx's definition of capital as a social relation, they make it seem like a belated discovery rather than a foundational proposition. To be sure, the Marxist tradition has not always acknowledged the immaterial but objective nature of value, and it is therefore vital to be reminded. But I would

have preferred that Hardt and Negri take Marx's formulation of "immaterial but objective" at its word and spend rather more time than they do on the "objective" moment. For Marx this objectification entails, among other things, reification, fetishism, and alienation, particularly through the production of the money form. But these key elements in Marxian theory unfortunately get short shrift in Hardt and Negri's presentation.

I would not pursue this seemingly nitpicking point were it not for the fact that Marx's conceptualization of value as immaterial but objective underpins his theory of fictitious-capital formation. This plays a vital role in processes of financialization. While Hardt and Negri occasionally mention financialization and concede its general importance in recent times, they have absolutely no theory of fictitious capital, no conjecture as to what it means for a market circulating six hundred trillion dollars' worth of derivatives of various kinds (and from which finance capitalists can extract vast personal wealth, like the three billion dollars George Soros gained in 2007) to be superimposed on a global economy that produces only fifty-six trillion dollars' worth of actual goods and services. This omission could be forgiven were it not for the brute fact that political subjectivities have been as deeply affected by fictitious-capital proliferation—everything from the credit-card culture to speculating on gains in housing value—as they have by any Foucauldian exercise of biopower (i.e., state power over life). Talk about immateriality! Until recently, the talk of the town not only in Manhattan but in Florida and the US Southwest was the magic rise in personal equity as property prices skyrocketed. But now look at the objective consequences of this fiction (foreclosed homes, unemployment, collapsing consumerism, failed banks, and so on).

Hardt and Negri ignore the category of fictitious capital in part, one suspects, because it does not fit with their preferred and ultimately exclusionary focus on biopower and biopolitics ("the power of life to resist") as the only

interesting terrain on which political subjectivity forms. The point here is not to say that they are wrong, rather that their analysis is far too partial to bear the burden of a satisfactory framework for understanding the current crisis and its underlying political dilemmas, including the problem of producing liberated political subjectivities.

Criticism that focuses on omissions is all too easy, of course, but I think it important to emphasize the limits of Hardt and Negri's thinking in order to better appreciate what they do contribute. This is not a book that sets out to understand the present economic crisis, but one that has a deeper and longer-term purpose. Its authors are unquestionably right, for instance, to insist that critical engagement with how subjects and subjectivities are produced is essential if we are to understand revolutionary possibilities and that this is something classical Marxism was not adept enough at doing. In this respect, Hardt and Negri approvingly cite Foucault, who wrote: "I do not agree with those who would understand this production of COMMENT OF PART 250

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man by man as being accomplished like the production of value, the production of wealth, or of an object of economic use; it is, on the contrary, destruction of what we are and the creation of something completely other, a total innovation." And they constructively take up Foucault's notion of dispositifs as "the material, social, affective, and cognitive mechanisms active in the production of subjectivity." Doing so, Hardt and Negri say, "allows us to conceive the collective production of the common as an intervention in the current relations of force aimed at subverting the dominant powers and reorienting forces in a and privatized. Premier zones for the exercise of biopower, such as education, determinate direction. The strategic production of knowledge in this sense implies immediately an alternative production of subjectivity." And this is where their theory of revolution comes from.

This move is crucial because, as their earlier considerations have shown, struggles against modernity have had the terrible habit of replicating the problems of that modernity. In the search for an altermodernity—something that is outside the dialectical opposition between modernity and antimodernity they need a means of escape. The choice between capitalism and socialism is, they suggest, all wrong. We need to identify something entirely different communism—working within a different set of dimensions. Foucault offers them that means. Subjectivity is shaped though the direct exercise of biopower. There is, of course, nothing particularly new about this. The bourgeois order has long been desperately concerned to shape political subjects directly. Foucault's theories of governmentality and of the turn to biopower, for example, refer even as far back as sixteenth-century Europe. And Marx certainly had much to say about how the ruling class produced ruling ideas. Struggles over the production of these ruling ideas have long been recognized as fundamental, as Hardt and Negri acknowledge when, toward the end of Commonwealth, they take up Antonio Gramsci's contributions in some detail.

So why this exclusive focus on immateriality and biopower? What has really changed? There is no question that the body is, as Donna Haraway once put it, "an accumulation strategy" and that, as such, we need to elucidate how capital works on it and through it. We cannot, however, afford to ignore the material side, the way in which "variable capital" (i.e., wages) circulates. Interestingly, consumerism has come to play a much larger role in capitalist economies over the past half century. About 70 percent of economic activity in the United States is now driven by consumers, compared with what was probably closer to 20 percent in Marx's time. The circulation of variable capital has swollen to a flood. Consumer sentiment is now, therefore, crucial, and finding ways to stimulate it, titillate it,

and sustain it has become central to sustained capital accumulation. Bodies have to be filled with desires that can never be satisfied. While once upon a time what might be called natural desires predominated, for much of the advanced capitalist world such desires have long been exceeded, and we find ourselves ensnared today in a consumerist politics of excess.

Biopower has to be mobilized as one of the means to fuel that process, but it is not the only force that needs to be considered. Fictitious capital and credit cards affect political subjectivities via the credit and money markets. I have also elsewhere argued strongly that political subjectivities in the United States after World War II were hugely impacted by the material practices of suburbanization (an interesting variant on the phenomena analyzed by Georg Simmel in his 1903 essay "The Metropolis and Mental Life").

What is certainly true, however, is that, as the market for things becomes saturated, capitalism switches

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to immaterial forms of production—because they are physically less limiting in a world that requires a compound rate of growth of 3 percent for the system to survive. If capitalism only made material things, our houses would not be able to hold them. Hence the turn to the commodification of affects, spectacle, information, images, experiential moments, and the like. Many state functions and noncapitalist institutions that used to operate to produce subjectivities directly (like the schoolroom and the church) have also been supplanted, commodified, health care, and even prison, have become vital fields for capital accumulation.

Hardt and Negri are right to emphasize the importance of these changes, though they do not probe very far into the political economy or materiality of it all. Two lines of inquiry then emerge. First, the authors observe, biopower operates on bodies directly. They accept (I am not entirely sure why) Foucault's view that this form of production is radically different from the production of things, that it operates according to quite different rules and principles. Insofar as it produces political subjects, biopower also sets up a terrain of struggle that Hardt and Negri (following Foucault) call biopolitics, a field of resistance and alterity located in bodies. "The ultimate core of biopolitical production," they argue, "is not the production of objects for subjects, as commodity production is often understood, but the production of subjectivity itself." This is the terrain from which their own "ethical and political project must set out." Their exclusive (and in my view far too limited) focus is on the "struggle over the control or autonomy of the production of subjectivity." The field of biopolitics is about "the creation of new subjectivities that are presented at once as resistance and de-subjectification" (refusal, exodus). Foucault's analyses of biopower "are aimed not merely at an empirical description of how power works for and through subjects but also at the potential for the production of alternative subjectivities, thus designating a distinction between qualitatively different forms of power." Or, as Foucault puts it, "at the very heart of the power relationship, and constantly provoking it, are the recalcitrance of the will and the intransigence of freedom." Altermodernity, they conclude, has to constitute "a dispositif for the production of subjectivity" and the pursuit of freedom.

This constitutes a compelling restatement and elaboration of their earlier theory of the role of biopower and biopolitics in the production of political subjectivities. It is an original contribution that must now be incorporated directly, as they correctly argue, into the production of revolutionary possibilities and into the redefinition of what a revitalized communist project—a true

altermodernity—might be about.

But where, then, do they take these fundamental insights? Here I find myself somewhat perplexed, because the nature of the world into which they project this crucial (though partial) argument on biopolitics is unrecognizable to me. Undoubtedly, my ignorance of Spinoza is here a serious problem, but then I am surely not alone in my unpreparedness in this regard. A political tract that demands a deep knowledge of Spinoza before anyone can understand it is doomed, it seems to me, to preach to a very small choir. And why should the rest of us presume that Spinoza has all the answers? In any case, Commonwealth did not send me running to join one of those Spinoza reading groups to search for deeper answers. Yet there are moments when brilliant flashes of unexpected relevance light up the analysis, even as they pose more questions than they answer. Let me take up two further features of Hardt and Negri's

argument—one that fails to convince me and one that I find constructive, at least in the questions it poses.

The concept of the individual with which we are all deeply familiar is unsatistactory, they say, because it founds the republic of property and is therefore foundational to what capitalism is about. They therefore prefer to speak of the singularities that constitute the multitude. Singularity (and this I do know) is a mathematical term that has applications in physics and relativity theory. (I have no idea whether Spinoza uses it.) It is a point in a function that is not well behaved, that can blow up to infinity, and that is in some sense unrepresentable. Exactly why individuals, persons, human beings, or whatever have to be reconceptualized as singularities within the multitude is unclear to me, except that, it would seem, the behavior of singularities is presumably not given or covered by the "event field" that constitutes the social order. I may have this all wrong, but obviously Hardt and Negri mean something significant by this term, and it would be good to know exactly what it is and on what grounds they find the term appropriate (and yet another lecture on Spinoza will not suffice, I'm afraid). The context suggests that while individuals, persons, etc. can and occasionally do surrender their sovereign powers in the face of social pressures or charismatic leadership, and even on occasion sacrifice themselves to the cause of nation or religion or whatever, this is something that singularities by definition cannot (or should not) ever do. Singularities can never be totally submissive to any amount of biopower and can expand to "infinity" at any moment. So what is being proposed here is a kind of human "species being" that has capacities so far unrecognized and, perhaps even more important, unrepresentable in human history. This unrepresentable singularity is the founding element within the multitude. My guess is that it is precisely this unrepresentability that makes the notion so important and attractive. There is something empowering about thinking of myself as unrepresentable and capable of erupting to infinity! But this unrepresentability renders the whole discussion vague, opaque, and frustratingly abstract. It is hard to have a sensible conversation about that which is unrepresentable.

This notion of singularity carries over into the revolutionary view that we can in fact strip ourselves of any and all signs of identity—racial, class-related, gender-based, sexual, ethnic, religious, and territorial—and somehow strip ourselves down to a state of pure being from which we can reconstruct ourselves according to entirely different principles. We literally have to forget who we are, where we were born, and how our sociality has been formed through geographically grounded life experiences. But this is where the problem of our identity as, for example, producers and consumers and as grounded geographic beings enters the picture. The problem is not that we may indeed give up our social identities based on class, race, gender, etc. more easily than we will give up our iPods and cell phones and identities associated with where and how we live, but that there is no way we can live without producing and consuming and there is no way we can live outside geography. These identities can never be given up in the way I can in principle give up my class identity (which is, of course, entirely different from saying that our consumption habits cannot change or that we cannot change locations).

Hardt and Negri could here have learned much by going back to Marx's theory of value as immaterial and therefore unrepresentable but also objective and, as such, representable in the money form. They seem to be proposing something of this sort when they reflect on the behavior of revolutionary subjects as singularities within the multitude. They appeal positively, for example, to the history of jacqueries. Is this meant as an example of how singularities might have an objective collective political presence? But this example is, then, worrying: Are all those screaming right-wingers interrupting the health-care reformers in the United States an instance of singularities in motion as a jacquerie?

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I have no idea how Hardt and Negri might respond to this particular example, but there is one way out that is deeply problematic. Whenever something appears on the horizon that is a possibility they do not like, they dismiss it as a "corruption." So the jacqueries they do not like could presumably be excluded as corrupt forms. This is how they handle the philosophical concept of love. They introduce the idea but then immediately distance themselves from any embrace of corrupt forms such as self-love and love of country. These corruptions even define something called evil! They write:

Our proposition for political anthropology is to conceive of evil as a derivative and distortion of love and the common. Evil is the corruption of love that creates an obstacle to love, or to say the same thing with a different focus, evil is the corruption of the common that blocks its production and productivity. Evil thus has no originary or primary existence but stands only in a secondary position to love. We spoke earlier of corruptions of love in racisms, nationalisms, populisms, and fascisms; and we similarly analyzed not only the destruction of the common through capitalist expropriation and privatization but also institutionalized corruptions of the common in the family, the corporation, and the nation. This double position of evil as corruption and obstacle presents us with some initial criteria for our investigation.

Or as Dick Cheney famously put it, "We don't negotiate with evil, we defeat it."

Let me now turn to what I consider one of the more positive contributions of this book: Its emphasis on the importance of the commons as a political focus of struggle. This is a political theme that is emerging these days from many perspectives, and this book will add substantively to the discussion.

The theme of enclosure and privatization of the commons as essential to the development of capitalism has been around for a long time, but consideration of it has, unfortunately, all too often been enveloped in a fog of nostalgia for a world that has been lost—for the struggles of the Diggers and the Levellers in seventeenth-century Britain, for example. Contemporary theorization has by extension tended to concentrate on further losses of the commons under neoliberalism, as water and other natural resources have been privatized, as more and more of the natural environment has been commodified, and as everything from cultural histories, ecological wonders, and musical inventiveness to patents on genetic materials has become big business.

But there has also been a growing recognition—and this is where Hardt and Negri have something important to say—that the commons is perpetually being produced. In Hardt and Negri's version, the turn to immaterial labor has radically increased the inadvertent but inevitable creation of an excess that is the commons. This commons is a field that the multitude is in a position to exploit, if only because it is impossible to exclude people from dwelling there. Capital has, in effect, lost control over the production of the common and has to rely on the multitude to produce it in order for capital itself to survive. The multitude is empowered in a way it has never been before. Hardt and Negri agree, therefore, with Rancière that "politics is the sphere of activity of a common that can only ever be contentious."

The concept of the common moves to the center of their world. "A democracy of the multitude is imaginable and possible only because we all share and participate in the common." We need, they say, a "political concept of love that recognizes it as centered on the production of the common and the production of social life." But this means that "love needs force to conquer the ruling powers and dismantle their corrupt institutions before it can create a new world of common wealth." It is the creation of this new world of common wealth that centers the politics of this book.

There are two notions of the common at work here, and for Hardt and Negri the second is by far the most important. The first concerns "the common wealth of the material world—the air, the water, the fruits of the soil, and all nature's bounty—which in classic European political texts is often claimed to be the inheritance of humanity as a whole, to be shared together." The long history of the enclosure of these commons and their appropriation for private benefit, along with all manner of complicated discussions on how these commons can best be managed within the republic of property, is well known. The political dilemmas that arise, signaled in the long debate that followed Garrett Hardin's restatement of the so-called tragedy of the commons in 1968, are also well known. (Indeed, I was surprised this debate got no mention here—which may be significant, as we shall see. Along with this go all the ways in which "exploitation takes the form of expropriation of the common," including those predatory practices I have dubbed accumulation by dispossession (e.g., housing foreclosures) that have emerged so strongly under neoliberalism. This amounts, most of us agree, to the continuation of the logic of primitive accumulation (as Marx called it but on a far broader and more intricate scale. It includes the wave of privatization of everything from hitherto nationalized industries to public utilities, social security, health care, education, transport systems, social and physical infrastructures, and even warfare (hail to Halliburton). It also includes bringing within the regime of private-property rights as much as possible of that grand common we call nature in order to extract rents.

"The second notion of the common," Hardt and Negri write, "is dynamic, involving both the product of labor and the means of future production. This common is not only the earth we share but also the languages we create, the social practices we establish, the modes of sociality that define our relationships, and so forth. This form of the common does not lend itself to a logic of scarcity as does the first." But it does suffer from a logic of debasement and banalization, which, as I shall argue, is just as significant to contemporary life as scarcity. The expropriation of this second form of the common—the artificial common or, really, the common that blurs the division between nature and culture—is," they go on to say, "the key to understanding the new forms of exploitation of biopolitical labor."

There is a great deal about the common in this text, and it deserves much attention—far more, indeed, than I am able to give it here. But there are a few points I want to touch on in conclusion. I was particularly gratified with Hardt and Negri's view of the metropolis as a "factory for the production of the com-

mon," for instance, and with their insistence that urbanization's benefits to capital are largely realized in the form of rent ta much-neglected category in Marxian theory). And while I think they take their argument too far when they anticipate the emergence of an exclusively biopolitical city, their excursus into how the common is being produced in the city is suggestive and profoundly important. They even go so far as to suggest that "the metropolis is to the multitude what the factory was to the industrial working class." To some degree, they fall back on recognizing that this common is largely produced by what economists refer to as externality effects (effects not costed through the market), which can have both negative and positive consequences (pollution and congestion being typical negatives and felicitous social encounters being a positive). But more broadly, there is no question that people through their daily activities create the social world of the city and in so doing create

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something common that all can enjoy. This creativity around the common has to be held open for all, and the attempts to enclose on this creativity have to be warded off (which makes it a little surprising that Hardt and Negri endorse the theories of Richard Florida with respect to the role of the so-called creative classes in fostering capitalist development and rising land rents). Struggles over the urban commons and the production of new urban political subjectivities therefore move to the forefront of their politics.

I welcome this move. For many years now, I and others have been arguing that the exclusive focus in Marxian political theory on the working classes in the factories made no sense. It was theoretically wrong because it ignored the production of urbanization, the production of space, and all the workers employed in such activities. It was historically inaccurate, given how many of the revolutionary movements in the history of capitalism have been focused as much on urban discontentment with the quality of daily life as on factory-based grievances (the Paris Commune, the Seattle general strike, the Tucumán uprising of 1969, the Shanghai Commune, and so on), and even when there were key movements in the factories (e.g., the United Auto Workers strike in Flint, Michigan, in the 1930s and the Turin factory councils of the 1920s), it always turned out that organized support in the neighborhoods (the women's support groups in Flint and the communal "houses of the people" in Turin) played a critical but uncelebrated role in the political action. The emphasis on the factory was also programmatically inept because struggles over what Henri Lefebvre dubbed "the right to the city" could have provided a far broader basis for a revolutionary conjoining of urban social movements and work-based politics. With the slogan of the right to the city now playing an important role as both "a cry and a demand" everywhere from Berlin to Zagreb, São Paulo to New York and Los Angeles, I was surprised to find no mention of such struggles in Commonwealth (and that Lefebvre's work on the right to the city and urban revolution was not explicitly invoked). But I welcome Hardt and Negri to the club of we leftists who view the urban as one of the critical sites for contemporary struggle, and I accept wholeheartedly their insistence on the importance of the production of a new urban commons as fundamental to the aims of a revolutionary communist urbanism.

"Accumulation of the common," they say, "means not so much that we have more ideas, more images, more affects, and so forth but, much more important, that our powers and senses increase: our powers to think, to feel, to see, to relate to one another, to love. In terms closer to those of economics, then, this growth involves both an increasing stock of the common accessible in society

and also an increased productive capacity based on the common." This is truly the shining city on a hill that we can all aspire to.

But there is one serious problem with all this. While this form of the common is not subject to the logic of scarcity, it is subject to a logic of debasement and enclosure. And it is hard to see how or why it is that the singularities that compose the multitude would by definition support rather than degrade, corrupt, and debase the common that is the city, the common that is the world of affects, signs, information, and codes. (Hardin's tragedy of the commons will not go away so easily.) After all, one of the most serious critiques of contemporary representations lies in the corruption of affects, signs, and codes, as well as of the qualities of information—and singularities, somewhere, are presumably responsible for this.

In this, there is a disturbing similarity to the greatest of all the commons that capitalism creates not by

fiat but through practices: money. Money, as Marx showed, is the objective particular that stands in for the universal common of value; it is the objective use value that is the measure of immaterial exchange value, and once it enters into circulation it never leaves it. Precisely for all these reasons, it is an objective form of immaterial social power objectively appropriable by private persons. It is also produced not by the state (though the state seeks to regulate it) but out of private commodity exchanges and credit relations between individuals. It is therefore always prone to the politics of excess (witness the world's central bankers printing money without restraint) and perpetually faces the danger of debasement (earlier on, of the coinage; now, through inflation). How the multitude made up of singularities will relate to this common remains unconsidered, even though it crucially affects the way the urban commons is shaped by political, economic, and social practices and the way fictitious capital works in relation to rental appropriations.

And this signals a general problem with Hardt and Negri's theorizations. Commonwealth's many abstractions sound fine, but concrete proposals are nowhere laid out. In fact, innumerable proposals lurk within Commonwealth, some of which run afoul of one another. It is somewhat surprising to find the revolutionary and incendiary imperatives ("defeating the ruling powers, destroying the ancien régime, smashing the state machine—even overthrowing capital, patriarchy, and white supremacy—is not enough") interwoven with specific demands on the world's governments to provide "a guaranteed income to all citizens," basic education for all, and training for everyone in "basic social and technical knowledges and skills," as well as to allow "everyone to become capable of participating in the constitution of society." I certainly understand why they might want to take both positions. Indeed, I take both all the time but then people expect it of revolutionaries like me who recognize the tactical and strategic importance of taking reformist positions at times; they don't expect it of Hardt and Negri. Is the state they wish to smash the one that provides universal health care in Scandinavia, France, Germany, and Britain? Do they side with the jacqueries against health-care reform in the United States? Perhaps they, too, are hedging their bets. Again, welcome to the club that sees reformism as a prelude to revolution.

Far too many of Hardt and Negri's proposals remain locked, however, in the realm of immaterial abstraction and, unfortunately, never acquire concrete form. The authors call, for example, for a new theory of value "based on the powers of economic, political, and social innovation that today are expressions of the multitude's desire." They further explain:

Value is created when resistance becomes overflowing, creative, and boundless and thus when human activity exceeds and determines a rupture in the balance of power. Value is created, consequently, when the relations between the constituent elements of the biopolitical process and the structure of biopower are thrown out of balance. When control over development, which the state and the collective organisms of capital assume to define their own legitimacy, is no longer able to hold back the resistance of the multitude, labor-power, and the whole set of social singularities, only then will there be value.

I can easily agree. The problem is, How will this new value be represented and objectified in daily practice? If the only way to measure it is money, then all these noble sentiments (like the intrinsic-value theories of the ecologists and the aesthetic values of the artists) will all too easily be reabsorbed into the dominant practices of the capitalist economy through the application of the monetary calculus. No matter how brilliant or revolutionary your art, if you can't sell it for money then you are in trouble (and don't tell me global bartering is feasible).

There are far too many incomplete sentiments of this sort in Commonwealth—which means there is plenty of work still to be done. We await Hardt and Negri's next volume with anticipation. I personally hope there will be less Spinoza and more Marx in it, less about relationalities and immaterialities (many of which are beautifully and sometime poetically evoked here) and more about the problems that arise around materialist issues of representation, objectification, and reification. Enough of relationalities and immaterialities! How about concrete proposals, actual political organization, and real actions?

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Last month, Artforum published two extended selections from Commonwealth (Harvard University Press, 2009), the third and final volume of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's Empire trilogy. Here, political theorist David Harvey offers a close reading of Hardt and Negri's argument; the authors' response to his critique follows.

RESPONSE: HARDT AND NEGRI

MARXISTS ARE RENOWNED for reserving their severest criticism for other Marxists, often proving their points by twisting their opponents' arguments or triumphantly pulling out as trump cards technical terms that those uninitiated in the arcana of Marxology find baffling. We are therefore all the more grateful to David Harvey, a fellow Marxist, for his attentive reading of, and praise for, our new book, Commonwealth. He makes clear that there are several areas of agreement between our perspectives, the most important of which is the emerging centrality of the theme of the common and the corresponding critique of property, which indeed constitute one pillar of our argument. Harvey also recognizes, rightly, that many aspects of our book are consistent with vital work he has done—on utopian thought, the increasingly immaterial nature of capitalist production, and the politics of the metropolis, for example. And in some areas in which, as a geographer, he has great expertise, such as the importance of place and questions of spatial differences across the globe, he points in directions our argument could be extended. These are indeed themes we will pursue in the future.

Harvey also highlights a number of intellectual and political differences between his project and ours, and it is worth taking the time to clarify how we view these differences and their political consequences. The first of these involves the relation of class to other lines of political struggle. After commenting favorably on our discussion of identity politics in relation to revolutionary thought and practice, in which we analyze how the struggles of various identity formations (including class) have in the past and can in the future take revolutionary forms, Harvey pulls back to reassert the primacy of class, explaining that, in agreement with Slavoj Žižek, he maintains that "there is something far more foundational about class than there is about all the other forms of identity in relation to the perpetuation of capitalism." This means, following Žižek, that, whereas class politics can be revolutionary, race, gender, and other identity struggles cannot be. One central difference here between our view and those of Harvey and Žižek is that we do not consider capital

to be the exclusive axis of domination. and, hence, overthrowing capitalist rule is not, in our view, the only mode of revolutionary activity. We seek throughout our book, in fact, to articulate the variety of axes of modern domination, of which capital is an important but not exclusive part. It seems to us a crucial shift in emphasis, then, when commenting on our discussion of the multiple forms of revolutionary struggle, that Harvey restricts the framework to their effect on "the perpetuation of capitalism." In an earlier part of the book, for example, we explore the forms of coloniality and racism that constitute modernity and continue in various modalities throughout the world today. How can we understand the radicality and innovation of the Haitian Revolution, for example, or of the contemporary indigenous political movements in the Andes, solely in relation to their effect on the perpetuation of capitalism? Capitalist domination certainly plays a role in creating and maintaining these hierarchies but by no means accounts for them adequately on its own, and thus the strategies of altermodernity

that we explore are not defined exclusively by their challenges to capitalist rule. The point is not to choose among these axes of domination or even to rank them in order of importance but rather to analyze how capital functions together with coloniality, racism, gender hierarchy, and other mechanisms of domination. Although these undoubtedly intersect in significant and complex ways, there is a relative autonomy to the different axes of domination and exploitation. This recognition points us toward the long history of revolutionary thought and practice in feminism and black radicalism, as well as in other race- and identity-based movements (from which the dominant stream of Marxism has a lot to learn).

We had hoped that the importance and specificity of each of these arenas of struggle would be by now an accepted basis for political discussion. What is to be gained by insisting that class has priority with respect to other identity domains and, moreover, that other forms of struggle, such as those based on gender, race, and sexuality, cannot be revolutionary? In reaction to similar claims by Marxists in the 1970s, often coupled with the notion that gender hierarchies would be addressed once the class revolution completed its work, some radical feminists insisted that patriarchy came before capital historically and is thus prior politically, making class struggle secondary to feminist struggle. Perhaps Harvey insists on the priority of class as a similar kind of compensatory move, feeling that class is neglected today with respect to other identity domains. We certainly agree that more attention to class is necessary, but insisting on its priority is not an adequate solution. It is necessary instead to understand that each of these axes of domination has its own specificity, as do the struggles that challenge them, and that there are nonetheless numerous possible points of intersection and communication.

We intend the concept of multitude as a means of approaching such problems in terms both of an analysis of the structures of power, and of the practical organization of political activity. Multitude in this sense is a mechanism or a dispositif for the organization of singularities that does not pose any one of them as central or exclusive. Specifically, in the section of Commonwealth on revolutionary thought and practice to which Harvey is responding, the challenge is to organize the intersections and encounters among class, race, gender, sexuality, and other struggles in a project of liberation.

A second difference between Harvey's perspective and ours would seem to center on the figure of Baruch Spinoza. We are flattered that he attributes to us a renaissance in Spinoza studies, but we cannot really take credit. The current widespread interest in Spinoza can be traced back to the 1960s—specifically, to the work of Louis Althusser, who illuminated the connection between Spinoza and Marx; and that of Gilles Deleuze, who posed Spinoza, along with Nietzsche, as a key figure in an alternative line of European philosophy. Harvey points out, quite rightly, that there is no reason to assume that Spinoza has all the answers—but neither is there any reason to assume that Marx or anyone

else has them, either. Harvey adds that if our argument relies on a deep knowledge of Spinoza, we will inevitably be understood only by a small readership, despite the boom in Spinoza study groups. (Harvey's response, in fact, made us curious enough to check the index of our book, where we found that the entry for Spinoza is indeed substantial, about as large as that for Michel Foucault, but not as large as that for Marx.) We recognize, in any case, that some readers will be irritated by references to thinkers they do not know well, while others will be inspired to learn more. The real point, though, which Harvey's comments help us focus on, is the clarity and utility of Spinoza's arguments.

One crucial aspect of Spinoza's thought that Harvey emphasizes is the concept of singularity. The idea of singularity, though, we should point out, is not limited to Spinoza but stretches back in the history of European philosophy at least to Duns Scotus, and it has been central to the thinking of many major contemporary philosophical figures, including Foucault, Deleuze, Alain Badiou, and Giorgio Agamben, each of whom gives it a somewhat different definition. Harvey assumes a mathematical notion of singularity, roughly in line with Badiou's thought, which differs significantly from ours. We instead define the concept of singularity, contrasting it to the figure of the individual on the one hand and forms of identity on the other, by focusing on three aspects of its relationship to multiplicity: Singularity refers externally to a multiplicity of others; is internally divided or multiple; and constitutes a multiplicity over time—that is, a process of becoming. (See, e.g., Commonwealth, pages 338-39.) In Spinoza, and more generally in an important stream of Enlightenment thought, conceiving of the human as a singularity serves to remove it from any metaphysical support, such as the soul, and to cast it instead as a historically defined multiplicity, constructed by the movements of passions and languages, according to logics of both desire and rationality. The Marxist tradition of historical materialism similarly maintains that the substantial individual defined by either religious or

transcendental theories is a mystification of the production of subjectivity. Such notions of the individual as foundation serve in capitalist ideology as the basis for possession and property, as the political theorist C. B. Macpherson has demonstrated, and as the heart of market ideology. Critique of the individual, however, does not imply a mass, homogeneous notion of class identity. The concept of singularity, instead, poses the constitution of the revolutionary subject as an event characterized by heterogeneous multiplicities. It seems to us well worth the effort, then, to struggle with the concept of singularity, along with the allied notion of multiplicity, even if that means engaging with Spinoza and other philosophers, because it provides a key to addressing some of our central analytic and practical political questions.

Harvey is, understandably, much more comfortable when our arguments stay close to Marx's, but he is nonetheless perplexed when we seem, in his view, not to have read Marx well enough or, really, when we diverge from the standard interpretations of the Marxist tradition. One example is our failure to deploy Marx's notion of fictitious capital as an explanation for the centrality of finance in the contemporary economy. Finance capital can be considered fictitious, in our view, only within the bounds of market relations and, in particular, in the competition among capitalists. From this standpoint, many conclude that the current crisis is due in large part to the separation between finance and real economic production, a view often accompanied by socialist rhetoric against the plutocracy and the parasitic agents of finance. When we focus not on individual capitalists but on collective capital, though, we see a different picture: Financialization is not an unproductive and/or parasitic deviation of growing rates of surplus value and collective savings but rather the central form of the accumulation of capital. Furthermore, whereas in the industrial framework the relationship between economic production and finance might have appeared as reality versus fiction, the economic forms emerging as central today cast this relationship in a new light. In fact, increasingly today the form of finance is symmetrical to the new processes of social and biopolitical production of value. The production of common goods we focus on in our book, such as the production of knowledge, codes, languages, images, services, affects, and social relations, has significant immaterial components but neither these immaterial goods nor finance are for that reason fictional. This analysis leads us to a different political position with regard to finance, both with respect to the current crisis and, more generally, in view of transforming the economy: Rather than castigate or dismiss finance as fictional, we aim to transform the property rights of common goods by reappropriating socially what finance now possesses.

In terms of political organization, too, Harvey at times considers us to be veering away from Marxist tradition, but at these moments we see ourselves, on the contrary, as very close to Marx's thought. Harvey, for instance, finds our analyses of jacqueries and various other forms of revolt problematic because, he maintains, citing the recent right-wing interruptions of health-care debates, there is nothing necessarily progressive about such explosions of political passion and indignation. We certainly agree that there are no guarantees that revolts will be politically progressive. Our method, though, rather than projecting what people should do and what they should want, is to start where people revolt, to start from people's political passions, and, from there, develop political projects. Marx's famous 1843 letter to Arnold Ruge comes to mind, in which he maintains that we must make actually existing struggles the starting point for our

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criticism, but this is a principle of political realism that he shares not only with Spinoza but also with Machiavelli. The first rule of political thought is that we must begin not from a version of people as we think they ought to be but from people as they are.

This stance of political realism is aimed at banishing all notions of vanguard politics or "ideologies of truth," an effort with which we imagine Harvey would agree. We are convinced that revolutionary action is only ever made from below and that its strength or weakness depends on the constituent power it expresses. Constituent power here refers to the internal dynamics of the struggles, their specific modes of organization, and the forms of program and leadership that they express. Here again the concept of multitude—or really a process of making the multitude, through which constituent power is expressed—becomes central for us.

Harvey finds agreement with us that the old political polemics between reform and revolution—such as those referring back to Eduard Bernstein and the early-twentieth-century politics of the Second International—no longer hold. We do not conceive the relationship exactly as Harvey does when he explains that reform is the prelude to revolution, but rather we tend to note how often the division between them breaks down. There is no single straight course to changing the world, but many circuitous paths through brambles, along which we must constantly try to find our way. We have nothing against taking state power, for example, as Harvey seems to suggest early in his essay. What matters is what happens next. That is why in this book and elsewhere we have followed with such intense interest the recent experiences of Left governments in Bolivia, Brazil, Venezuela, and other countries in Latin America.

We are also convinced, however, that winning power and managing it in a nation-state, in a solitary way, is today impossible. Moreover, the crisis of the nation-state and national sovereignty corresponds to a crisis of the modern theories of government. This situation is illustrated by the now-obvious failures of US attempts at unilateralism (proving the impossibility of unilateral dictation by any single nation-state) as a means of managing the global system and also, more generally, by the decline of all the "monarchical" techniques of rule, which in the past dominated foreign and domestic politics even in socalled democratic states. This passage is sometimes characterized as a shift from government to governance, to indicate, in part, the plural and often decentralized nature of the emerging forms of rule. We dedicate substantial discussion in the last part of our book to such forms of global governance, analyzing the new and at times severer and more violent forms of hierarchy and control it deploys. But we also maintain that the concepts and structures of this emerging governance provide the means for destabilizing and overthrowing those same global power structures and, in some respects, suggest the terms for future revolutionary organization.

In the final paragraphs of his essay, Harvey expresses frustration that our book does not arrive at "concrete proposals." Perhaps we have a different view as to what a book like ours should do. It is not, of course, the case that we have no interest in "actual political organization" and "real actions"; on the contrary, our own political histories are full of such engagements. Instead, we think a book like ours should strive to understand the present but also challenge and inspire its readers to invent the future. That is where we will gauge its success or failure. \square

-Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri