

Whose Empire? Which Multitude?

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Introduction

In *Empire* (2000) and *Multitude* (2004) Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri argue for a re-ordering of the current global capitalist paradigm (*Empire*).¹ Their approach is Neo-Marxian: they provide an analysis of labour ('immaterial labour'), ascribe a revolutionary situation (global state of war) and point to a revolutionary subject created by the labour conditions (the 'multitude'). This overall picture is very well known: capitalism in its drive for production produces its own gravediggers. The novelty factor is the concept of 'immaterial labour' as opposed to industrial labour and the revolutionary subject of the 'multitude' instead of the working class. I argue that both of these central concepts are mistaken: 'immaterial labour' is a misnomer and the 'multitude' is not a viable political player.

1. Immaterial Labour

For Hardt and Negri post-industrial labour is particularly characterised by, what they call, 'immaterial labour' which now plays the new 'hegemonic role' (*M*, p.107f.), as opposed to the industrial labour during Marx's time. 'Immaterial labour' is described as

- 1) 'informationalised industrial production processes',²
- 2) the engagement with 'analytical and symbolic tasks',
- 3) the 'production and manipulation of affects which requires virtual or actual human contact and proximity'.³

¹ Hereafter *Empire* (2000) will be referred to as *E*, *Multitude* (2004) as *M*.

² Hardt (1999, pp.97, 98) and Hardt and Negri (*E*, pp.289-294). See also Lazzarato (*Immaterial Labour* <http://www.generation-online.org/c/fc/immateriallabour3.htm>). Hardt and Negri have already been, rightly, criticised for type 1 (e.g. Sayers, 2007). The fact that the production of material goods today often involves modern computer- and communication technologies does not change the fact that what is produced is nevertheless a material thing. Thus, production, although informationalised, remains nevertheless material.

³ See Hart (1999, p.95f.) also for what he calls 'affective labour', which "is immaterial, even if it is corporeal and affective, in the sense that its products are intangible: a feeling of ease, well-being, satisfaction, excitement, passion – even a sense of connectedness or community. [...] what is essential to it,

The clearest and most succinct formulation is the following:

Since the production of services results in no material and durable good, we might define the labor involved in this production as *immaterial labour*-that is, labor that produces an immaterial good, such as a service, knowledge, or communication. (Hardt, 1999, p.94)

The examples given are:

Health care	}	Hardt (1999), Hardt and Negri (<i>E</i> , p.285)
Education		
Finance		
Entertainment		
Advertising		
Fast food services		
Transportation		
Audiovisual production	}	Lazzarato (Immaterial Labour)
Fashion		
Software production		
Photography		
Cultural activities		

For Hardt and Negri these examples share the traits of ‘immaterial labour’. But what could they have in common? What is the connection between photography and transportation⁴, or fast food services and health care? To my mind, these activities hardly fit under *any* single descriptive term pertaining to their nature. As can be seen from the

its in-person aspect, is really the creation and manipulation of affects.” According to such a definition at some point *every* activity has *some* connection to an emotional response. Whether I bring my car to the garage because I am anxious for it to pass the next MOT, or I go to the doctor because I am worried about my health, it would be possible in both cases to say that it all comes down to affects of anxiety and worry. Such claims are not unfamiliar. The reduction of human activities, and sometimes life in general, to more or less particular affective states has its precursors: for Hobbes it was fear and egoistic gain, for Bentham it was happiness, for Nietzsche the will to power.

⁴ How is transportation immaterial? If it was then what is being transported?

quote, everything ‘immaterial’ (like entertainment, advertising, audiovisual production) is considered a service and only actual material objects are products. *The concept of ‘immaterial labour’ thereby negates the distinction between products and services.*⁵ This is inadequate and leads to several misconceptions.

i. Goods and services

The decisive feature, in economics as well as daily life, for the status of a product or a good is that it can be owned, *not* whether it is physical: materiality/immateriality is unimportant. Important is rather that ownership rights can be established and exchanged (which means that goods are tradable) and that they are distinct entities independently of their producers and owners: the production takes place separately in space and time, the finished product can be distributed, traded, and consumed long after production. *These features can apply to both material as well as immaterial products:* literature, music, theories, plans, designs, films, programs, etc. may be ‘immaterial products’ but they are nevertheless goods (like material products) because they are produced, are separate entities from their makers, they can be owned, traded, copied, used, etc. independently of their production which thus remains a separate process. Thus, contrary to the concept of ‘*immaterial labour*’, an immaterial good is nevertheless a good and *not* a service.

Services, by contrast, differ from both material *and* immaterial goods. They are *relations* (e.g. agreements) and therefore are *not separate production processes resulting in separate entities* independently of the people involved; thus, they *cannot be owned* and hence *not traded, distributed, or copied*. Services can only be *rendered*. Nor is it possible to distinguish a production-process from the ‘use’ or ‘consumption’ of a service, as you can in the case of goods. Thus, *products are made*, whereas *services are rendered*.⁶ Films, ideas, etc. may be immaterial but are *made* products, not *rendered* services. Hardt and Negri confuse these categories because they wrongly declare the physicality of something to decide over its status as a good or a service. But goods are not just physical objects (they also include non-physical ones), nor are all non-physical objects automatically services. Contrary to what Hardt and Negri suggest, the difference between material objects and non-material things is *not the same* as that between labour and service. Therefore, it is wrong to claim

⁵ Cf. Hill (1999) who uses ‘tangible’ and ‘intangible’ instead of ‘material’ and ‘immaterial’.

⁶ In neglecting this distinction between goods and services Hardt and Negri also neglect the *poiesis/praxis* distinction for which Marx has already been criticised (see Habermas, 1978).

that “the division between manufacturing and services is becoming blurred” (Hardt, 1999, p.92). Goods and services remain distinct.⁷

This has serious implications for the use of ‘immaterial labour’ in Hardt and Negri’s theory of revolution because of the social and political implications they draw from it. They claim that

in each of these forms of immaterial labor, cooperation is completely inherent in the labour itself. Immaterial labour immediately involves social interaction and cooperation. (*E*, p.294)⁸

This socialising function is crucial since Hardt and Negri conclude that “immaterial labour thus seems to provide the potential for a kind of spontaneous and elementary communism.” (*ibid.*)

But it is simply *not true* that what Hardt and Negri call ‘immaterial labour’ involves the social dimension that services do. Immaterial products are not necessarily collective and ‘immediately involve social interaction and cooperation’: an immaterial good can be produced and consumed alone – it is not a service.

Furthermore, there are *services*, which *are not collective in any strong sense either*: consider most maintenance services: apart from an initial agreement on what is to be done not much more contact is necessary. I do not have to be present when my car is being serviced, my house cleaned, or my TV fixed. The same holds for other examples of ‘immaterial labour’ that are advanced: advertising, fast food services, transportation, audiovisual

⁷ Although under the Toyota-model of production the service relation is established first, this does *not* mean that the *production-process* therefore adopts the characteristics of a service because production remains a separate process in space and time. ‘Service’ describes the producer-consumer relation, *not* the production. Furthermore, we can also distinguish service from production by realising that production has to feature some kind of new thing (whether material or immaterial) at the end of the process, whereas a service does not. Here it is often enough to *maintain* or re-create a particular state of affairs (like a clean house for example) instead of producing anything.

⁸ Cf. Lazzarato: “This immaterial labor constitutes itself in forms *that are immediately* collective, and we might say that it exists only in the form of networks and flows.” Morris (2004, p.130), likewise, summarises: “This labor indicates a unification of instrumental and communicative action in which “social networks, forms of community, biopower” (p. 293) are directly produced. Culture and production are more thoroughly integrated than they have ever been.” (the internal quote is from *Empire*, p.293.)

production, etc. I thus contend that *immaterial labour mostly does not imply the kind of social dimension that is asserted of it*. It is an over-generalisation and -simplification to say that ‘immaterial labour’ is ‘immediately collective’ (Lazzarato) or involves a level of ‘social interaction and cooperation’ that provides a basis ‘for a spontaneous and elementary communism’ (Hardt and Negri).

ii. What’s new?

‘Immaterial labour’ is supposed to be a new *kind* of labour with unprecedented features: namely that it follows demand and is more social. It is constantly claimed that these are *new* features of labour, something only the post-industrial world developed and which now affects labour practices globally. But that production follows demand (as in the Toyota model of production) is *not* new: even agricultural societies work in this way. Just because the reaction speed between demand and production has increased this does not turn the Toyota model into a new *kind* of production. *Secondly, in how far are the activities involved more social than those during Marx’s time?* Already he claimed that *all* labour practices were inherently social (see for example *The German Ideology*, *Capital*). I do not deny that today’s economy features more communication than 100 years ago, but this is merely a matter of degree, rather than a difference in kind.

Yet, it is claimed that ‘informatisation’ and ‘immaterial labour’ feature a social dimension supposedly *unlike* previous kinds of labour. Modern telecommunication and technology, particularly computers and the internet, are introduced as radically new media allowing for new ways of interaction. But this is a mistake: Hardt and Negri reduce earlier working conditions to a “non-interactive, non-communicative, and machine-like counter-image” after which other conditions must then appear as new: the computer as the “universal tool” is regarded as *introducing* cooperation, communication, and interaction, as if these features did not exist beforehand (Pfeiffer, 2004, p.22ff., translation U.M.).

This goes hand in hand with another mistake, namely that labour (due to the use of computers) homogenises in ‘abstract labour’ which supposedly distances the worker from his object.⁹ None of these claims holds true: there is no ‘homogenisation’ of labour,

⁹ “We should note that one consequence of the informatisation of production and the emergence of immaterial labour has been a real homogenisation of labouring processes. [...] With the computerization

nor does it necessarily become more 'abstract', nor is it 'distancing' (or alienating) the worker from his product.

The supposed homogenization of labour is by no means a new idea, particularly within the Marxist tradition.¹⁰ However, this 'homogenisation' claim has never been successful and it also fails here. *The computer is used in such differing ways that it is simply false to claim that it homogenises all of its applications into abstract, universal, symbolic, or interactive work* (cf. Pfeiffer, op.cit.). Whether you work in software design, consumer service, manufacturing control and/or supervision, graphic design, or simply text creation makes a vast difference as to how the computer (and which software) is being used. Thus the skills, knowledge, and experience involved vary drastically.

It is also wrong to think that the use of computers necessarily *distances* the worker from his object, i.e. that it makes labour more abstract. In fact, various simulation techniques, for example, can lead to the understanding and control of processes that were previously *inaccessible* to the worker (such as in the chemical industry, the manipulation of digital images, or music recording). Thus, Hardt and Negri's claim (see footnote 7) is simply false: labour does *not* necessarily become more abstract or distancing nor is there a noteworthy homogenisation.

I therefore conclude that 'immaterial labour', as characterised by Hardt, Negri, and Lazzarato, is a misnomer. The various examples given hardly have *any* unifying features and the reason is a confusion of immaterial products with services. The computer is mistakenly conceived

of production today, however, the heterogeneity of concrete labour has tended to be reduced, and the worker is increasingly further removed from the object of his or her labour. [...] Through the computerization of production, then, labour tends toward the position of abstract labour." (E, p.292). "This becoming common, which tends to reduce the qualitative divisions within labour, is the biopolitical condition of the multitude." (ibid, p.114)

See also Morris (2004, p.129): "[...] production is integrated far more with communicative interaction (the greatly increased interactivity between production and consumption characteristic of just-in-time production- Toyotism, for example). The second aspect of postmodernized production is the increasing centrality of the computer and the communications revolution. Both these developments have transformed productive labor. The computer is a unique tool because it is universal-every sector and productive activity is potentially subject to computerization. But as a result, all labor tends toward homogenization and immateriality: computerized tailoring and computerized weaving require basically the same skill sets of symbolic and informational manipulation. Labor becomes even more abstract and alienated."

¹⁰ Also Marx, and particularly Marcuse, thought that increasing industrialization would lead to an assimilation of all labour practices.

as a 'universal tool' leading to homogenisation as well as alienation. *Neither the production and transfer of information, nor of affects, nor the involvement of symbolic tasks applies equally; nor do these criteria share in any noteworthy increase in 'abstraction' or communication.* Yet these are the criteria that writers on 'immaterial labour' use in order to define it.

iii. Marx's inheritance – the unsolved labour-puzzle

Another problem of 'immaterial labour', which is a direct outcome of the application of Marx's thought, is its evaluation. Already among the primary writers we find two opposing sides: Hardt and Negri see 'immaterial labour' positively, Lazzarato purely negatively.

For Hardt and Negri 'immaterial labour' is crucial because it enables the formation of the 'multitude' and its resistance to global capitalism (*M*, p.66f). On the other hand, 'immaterial labour' is also a new stage in the exploitation of the worker, who is meant to be flexible, social, perform her tasks with a smile, communicate, etc. In other words, not only the worker's *body* is subordinated and directed but also her character, her identity and subjectivity (*M*, pp.65f.,111,113). For Lazzarato 'immaterial labour' therefore intrinsically embodies all the hallmarks of capitalist exploitation. *There is no sense here of immaterial labour as an enabling condition for a future communism.* Instead of enabling the 'multitude' it establishes capital relationships, its discourse is authoritarian, it takes hold of the workers' subjectivity and it is Taylorist. Whereas Hardt and Negri claim that "in immaterial production the *creation of cooperation* has become internal to labour and thus *external to capital*" (*M*, p.147, my emphasis) Lazzarato claims the direct opposite, *immaterial labour is the manifestation of "the capital relationship"*.

This ambiguity in the evaluation is indicative of the fact that Neo-Marxist writers inherit the flaws that are already present in Marx's own writings. Just as much as we find formulations concerning the relationship between freedom and labour in Marx that either *locate the one in the other* or *exclude one from the other* (and it is therefore ambiguous whether the communist society is one where everyone works to their full capabilities or only for a minimum amount of time), it is unclear concerning 'immaterial labour' whether it is what labour ought to be (namely communicative and 'immediately social') or whether it presents a new stage of capitalist exploitation and alienation. As far as I can

see, neither in Marx nor in the contemporary postmodern Neo-Marxist writings considered here, is there any scope to resolve this issue.

2. The Multitude

The ‘multitude’ is the corresponding idea to Marx’s industrial proletariat (*M*, p.103f.). But in contrast to the proletariat, the ‘multitude’ is a wider concept that is more apt to today’s conditions.¹¹ It is the group of all those ‘who labour and produce under the rule of capital’.¹² As explained above, Hardt and Negri take the modern labour conditions of ‘immaterial labour’ to be such that they involve a maximum of connectivity and interrelations between labourers.¹³

The increasingly dense network of trade and trade-relations in the global capitalist economy together with modern communication technology and labour practices put all of the subjects into closer contact with each other. ‘Immaterial labour’, we are told, features an intrinsic sociality and thus the enables the concerted action of ‘all those subject to capitalist production’ (*M*, p.106). This is the ‘multitude’ and its characteristics are the following:

- a) it consists of all those subject to Empire
- b) it is irreducibly different (i.e. many-faceted, multitudinous), it includes for example: workers, political activists, animal rights campaigners, homosexuals, rebellious groups like the Zapatistas, open source advocates, etc.
- c) it expresses the desire for a world of equality and freedom
- d) it demands an open and inclusive democratic global society

¹¹ The proletariat, for various reasons, does no longer constitute a revolutionary subject: a) Marx’s industrial proletariat is hard to find these days, b) in the past, as well as in the present, it hardly ever is the revolutionary subject that Marx envisaged, c) it is a too limited class, as well as concept, for our postmodern world. These ideas have been advanced ever since the 1970’s.

¹² “The multitude gives the concept of the proletariat its fullest definition as all those who labour and produce under the rule of capital.” (*M*, p.107)

¹³ ‘Immaterial labour’ therefore plays a ‘hegemonic role’, as they express it. “In the final decades of the twentieth century, industrial labour lost its hegemony and in its stead emerged “immaterial labour”, that is, labour that creates immaterial products, such as knowledge, information, communication, a relationship, or an emotional response.” (*ibid.*, p.107f.)

e) it provides the means for achieving c) and d) (*M*, p.xi)

Hardt and Negri deliberately make no distinction between political, social, and economic organisations or groups because for them it is part of the postmodern condition that the boundaries between these concepts are increasingly blurred. It all becomes ‘biopolitical’, i.e. it ‘engages life in its entirety’ (*M*, p.94). The ‘multitude’ is therefore the group of all groups, the one of which they are all parts but which does not reduce them in a way that undermines their differences (like other group concepts such as ‘people’, or ‘mass’).¹⁴ According to such a definition it will, firstly, be very difficult to find people who do *not* belong to the ‘multitude’. Secondly, and more importantly, the ‘multitude’ is, so to say, *a social universal set*.¹⁵ My claim is that *a universal set cannot be a political agent*.¹⁶

What gives this ‘multiplicity’ its commonality (one is afraid to say ‘unity’) are the shared grievances against Empire and Hardt and Negri help themselves to an analogy of social organisation which is meant to explain how the ‘multitude’, despite its innumerable internal differences, can act: the network analogy. This analogy, however, is mistaken and the ‘multitude’ is not a political player.

i. Networks

The communicative relations between people, which *Empire* itself brings about in modern production (‘immaterial labour’) requires relations, connections, and involves the worker’s subjectivity: it thereby establishes a network of communication.¹⁷ For Hardt and Negri, this network, like Empire, has no centre but consists of numerous autonomous cells linked only by communication.¹⁸ Because these networks deliberately have neither a

¹⁴ “The multitude is composed of innumerable internal differences that can never be reduced to a unity or a single identity – different cultures, races, ethnicities, genders, and sexual orientations; different forms of labour; different ways of living; different views of the world; and different desires. The multitude is a multiplicity of all these singular differences.” (*M*, p.xiv)

¹⁵ Or set of sets, as in set theory.

¹⁶ For further points against Hardt and Negri see Tilly (2002), Seth (2002), Clark (2005).

¹⁷ Cf. Richard Florida’s “creative class” which is very similar, if not identical, to Hardt and Negri’s ‘immaterial labourers’ (see Svendsen, 2008, p.39)

¹⁸ “Network organisation, by contrast, is based on the continuing plurality of its elements and its networks of communication in such a way that reduction to a centralised and unified command structure is impossible.” (*M*, p.82f.) From this perspective Hardt and Negri can also criticise the Cuban revolutionaries

centre nor an authoritative hierarchy they are therefore intrinsically democratic. This is the main reason why the postmodern world is, for the first time, in the position to bring about a global *radical* democracy. Only through the novelty of ‘immaterial labour’ can a global democratic counter-Empire be realised by the ‘multitude’.

However, Hardt and Negri’s appeal to network structures is oversimplified: they assume that networks are equally balanced throughout, without a hierarchy, preferential statuses or functions.¹⁹ This does *not* apply to all networks, crucially *it does not apply to social networks*; instead, recent research has revealed that such systems are *not* horizontally structured, as supposed. Social networks, contrary to the horizontal approach, are characterised by preferred connections, functional differentiation, key-positions and an unequal power distribution between people and groups of people.²⁰ I claim that such features are necessary for any kind of social organisation.

Contrary to what Hardt and Negri suggest, social networks: a) *are* structured, b) do *not* grow in an egalitarian manner but according preferential connections, i.e. according to the status of adjacent people or positions, c) as a consequence, if key-positions are damaged then the overall structure quickly disintegrates, contrary to Hardt and Negri’s claim that resistance simply reforms even if the network is attacked by Empire. *Without these features a network is simply not organised at all.*²¹ Structures, for whichever specific purpose, enable advancement through the order they establish. This order then allows progress in terms of social complexity, knowledge and information, economic

of the 1950’s for their rigid military organisation which undermined the democratic roots that they themselves wanted to bring to fruition.

¹⁹ So-called ‘Erdos-Renyi’ networks. For the following details on networks I am indebted to Peter Andras. Most data is taken from ‘Network analysis of complex systems’ (Peter Andras, 2009).

²⁰ So-called ‘Scale-free’ networks. In the neutral terminology of network studies people are referred to as nodes (positions or people) and clusters (people or groups of people).

²¹ It will not suffice to argue in response that with networks there is no need for big organisations or structures anymore, as Hardt and Negri (*M*, p.100) do when they claim that “The multitude, although it remains multiple and internally different, is able to act and rule itself. Rather than political body with one that commands and others that obey, the multitude is *living flesh* that rules itself.”

interchanges, approved or disapproved actions (i.e. law), etc.²² Any feasible social theory today has to include organisations, institutions and structures, because *it is the structural and functional differentiation of our societies which enable our current life in the first place*. To advocate the self-rule of the global working population (i.e. the ‘multitude’) is not progressive but, to use a Marxian term against Hardt and Negri, simply reactionary, particularly on the global scale.

Note that I am *not* arguing that the network idea *as such* is useless. Within limited confines horizontal network structures can have their use, for example in deliberation, awareness-raising or public debates (see Dryzeck, 2005, p.230; Kellner, 2002, p.295ff.). But for decision-making (law and policy for example) functionality requires organisation, that is, having particular offices/positions/roles/institutions with distinctive functions, such as we have, say, in the distinction between the legislative, judiciary and executive functions of the government.

ii. Political viability

‘Radically democratic’ networks such as the ‘multitude’ are, by definition, non-representable, which means that they cannot answer questions of legitimacy: How are we to determine who makes *legitimate* decisions regarding any particular issue and which decisions can be regarded as *representative* of the people concerned?

Although Hardt and Negri focus on how the public and its governance are to be construed for our post-national and global age, they are not giving a clear answer. Their model of self-governance in a global sphere is equal to having *no* governance because to govern oneself in a world without borders leaves one fighting for *oneself* instead of fighting *together with others*.²³ In a world without boundaries I cannot tell who is *legitimately* party to my concern-, who is ‘sitting in the same boat’-, who has a rightful claim to be included in the decision-making process - and who does not. Without boundaries of inclusion/exclusion, that define who is a rightful party to a decision and conditions

²² “[...] structures can be seen as a set of constraints on communications that constitute the organisation. [...] structures have a vital role in handling organisational faults, errors and failures, being able to limit their damaging effects within the organisation.” (Andras, 2005)

²³ The ‘borders’ I refer to here are those of an inside/outside of a particular public. It is often assumed that due to globalisation also the public sphere will become global.

concerning the legitimacy of political decisions we simply have no framework for any governance whatsoever (see Fraser, 2007, p.224-253).

Hardt and Negri suppose, like Marx, a global solidarity of the workers merely on the grounds of the supposed homogeneity of their labour. As I have shown, the claim to homogeneity is mistaken and this severely weakens a concept of solidarity that is based on it. Furthermore, it is by no means clear *that* the ‘multitude’ will be as collaborative as Hardt and Negri tell us (cf. Schmalz-Bruhns, 2007, p.271). If the unity of the ‘multitude’ results from its opposition to Empire, then what keeps it connected once Empire has ceased to exist?

If, as Hardt and Negri stress, the ‘multitude’ is, like Marx’s proletariat, a class-concept, then the same difficulty applies: ‘class’ is defined by opposition to another class (here it is *Empire*, rather than a social class). But once the opposing concept is gone what will happen to the supposed victors? For Marx this problem was solvable: insofar as he conceived of the proletariat as the class of the industrial labourers, the post-revolutionary situation is one in which the proletariat stops being a class and becomes a global labour force united by *the centrality of industrial labour*. Hardt and Negri cannot adopt this strategy so easily. Why? Because they explicitly insist that the ‘multitude’ is *irreducible* to a particular central activity. The ‘multitude’ is by definition a class of irreducible differences. But what will unite those irreducible differences once Empire, as the common enemy, has ceased to exist? What or who *ensures* collaboration and prevents faction-building? Without *some* kind of institution this will be impossible because the public misses an important element: namely a bearer of responsibility for whom it *is* a public in the first place.²⁴ Such a bearer of responsibility would have to draw boundaries for whom, and which issues, it is responsible and for whom and which it is not.

Self-determination is what Hardt and Negri have in mind when they claim that the ‘multitude’ can rule itself. But also ‘the concept of collective self-determination requires the distinction between members and non-members’ (Habermas, 1998, p.161, as quoted in Schmalz-Bruhns, *ibid.*, p.271, translation U.M.). That is, we have to define a *particular* public to which self-determination applies. For the vast majority of decisions this public *cannot be global* because most decisions are made locally, or regionally, perhaps nationally, and concern particular people or groups of people.²⁵ Thus, decisions are particular and

²⁴ Cf. Žižek <http://www.lacan.com/zizblow.htm>

²⁵ I do not claim that there are no global challenges facing us. Of course there are issues that concern all of those alive at a time (e.g. global warming), but there are few of these challenges and (for all

have limits concerning scope and applicability, i.e. a framework has to be established for whom a particular decision is relevant and for whom it is not. Only very few decisions apply globally. In other words, for decision-making we need the relevant publics which thus need to have boundary-conditions. The ‘multitude’, by Hardt and Negri’s own definition, has *no* boundary-conditions.

In summary, the ‘multitude’ does not constitute a political player. The network-analogy is mistaken, there are no discernible goals (apart from being against Empire), nor a structure to maintain any goals and ensure any *status quo* after Empire has been fought. In being non-representable and global the ‘multitude’ cannot make any decisions because important referents and conditions for decision-making, legitimacy and responsibility are missing. These are, however, essential parts for any democratic theory. Without them we are left with a patchwork which explicitly does *not* feature any preferential statuses, hierarchy, or authority, without which a network is simply not organised at all and thus incapable of legitimate *decision-making*. Yet particularly on the global scale, which Hardt and Negri target, decisions need to be made and adhered to, for otherwise we cannot speak of a global subject at all.

Note that *I do not claim that the actions of non-institutional subjects cannot be politically effective*. But one can be politically effective without being an identifiable political player. Al-Qaeda for example, which Hardt and Negri refer to since it is a group that exhibits a network structure, triggers definite political responses and changes, but it can hardly be seen as a political organisation.²⁶ If Al-Qaeda is indeed the network of *autonomous cells* it is assumed to be then it is non-representable (for who could claim to represent it?) and therefore it is not a group that can be included in debates or decision-making processes.²⁷ Yet, the latter

their importance) they do not suffice to account for the political challenges we face daily in the communities in which we live.

²⁶ Moreover, like Arendt (2006) I do not consider terrorism a form of politics. Violence is a contra-political phenomenon for if politics has something to do, as I think it does, with the fact that we are *speaking* beings, then violence is outside the realm of politics and even inhibits it, because by the time it comes to violence the power of words has clearly lost all appeal.

²⁷ Note that if an enticing reply seems to be Osama Bin Laden (as the leader of Al-Qaeda) then the network analogy crumbles since then there is a hierarchy within the group with a clear leadership at the top that decides who is in the group and who is not, and which acts actually do embody Al-Qaeda’s cause and which do not.

is needed in order for a group to be a political agent. The question of hierarchy may allow for some leeway²⁸ but *some* structure and identifiable goals and members have to be detectable, otherwise we may have a social movement but not a political agent.

This is, finally, what Hardt and Negri end up with: *the multitude may be a movement, particularly a protest movement, but it is not a political agent*. The switch from the former to the latter would, according to my argument, require a move away from Hardt and Negri's beloved network-analogy, or an acknowledgement that even networks are not as egalitarian as they claim. A patchwork of autonomous cells that continuously form, reform, and disband, as Hardt and Negri imagine it, is not a *political group*. The latter requires organisation and cannot be "[...] essentially elusive, ephemeral, perpetually in flight" (*M*, p.55). That is, it must itself be an organisation in order to act like one. In short, the 'multitude', the network of autonomous cells cannot represent anything successfully politically.

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²⁸ The Green Party in Germany, for example, which came out of the 1968 student protests, has no *one* party leader but a panel of leaders.

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