Multicultural Dynamics and the Ends of History

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The previous chapter was devoted to trying to show how Marx's speculative response to our question of where we are headed remains relevant. The telos of the free development of all can indeed be seen to be an ultimate direction or end that manifests itself at the heart of the basic struggle that animates the dynamics of social life. It is the demonstrated intimacy of the telos and the dynamics within Marx's understanding of, and engagement with, history that is, in my view, most significant. Marx shows how history reveals to us an unfolding world in which our individual commitments to making a life for ourselves, and the struggles that ensue, pit our common struggle to do so against structural forms of organization that prevent the free development of those forces, our own productive efforts, in order to appropriate them in the interests of a few. These are the dynamics of history. Because these dynamics engage all of us, Marx allows us at the same time to see, through that engagement, the end (the telos) of that engagement: the free development of our own productive forces in the interests of all. For Marx the dynamics and the telos of history are one and the same, the former viewed from within the context of our present, the latter viewed according to our anticipations, given that present as illuminated by our understanding of the past.

I doubt that many people will be persuaded by my claim that this reading of Marx does indeed tell us where we are headed. However, persuasion is not my goal. This is a philosophical investigation and is less concerned with persuading others of a truth that it possesses than with insisting on exploring a question that merits our consideration. If the reader has stayed with me this far I assume that it is because the consideration I have been giving to the question is not without
some resonance in his or her thinking. Rather than give a “persuasive” response to the question I have posed, my aim is to give more shape and substance to the “nagging feeling” I identified in the Introduction, which I translated into the form of our question: where are we headed?

However, I do not want to appear to be trying to make things easier for myself. If I mention the possibility of a lack of persuasion, it is because I do not think that Marx’s response to our question is sufficient. The test, of course, is the test that I have urged the reader to take whenever he or she deems it appropriate: to look up from the texts we are discussing and look at the world as it presents itself, to see if it makes any more sense, given consideration of those texts. That is not the same as putting the books aside and returning to what one was doing before opening them. We sometimes need to do that too, but it is not a test of them.

Obviously, for my part, I do think that the world makes more sense after having considered Marx’s response to our question, but also after considering the responses of Kant and Hegel as well—so much so that I have engaged in the writing of this accompanying text. However, as I also noted in the Introduction, along with this “nagging feeling” that we are headed somewhere that needs to be thought about, the world as it presents itself today also has a distinguishing feature that we should consider in responding to this “nagging feeling.” I identified this distinguishing feature as the fact that the world is becoming increasingly multicultural. To notice that the world is becoming increasingly multicultural is to notice that it is changing in a distinguishable way. The question about where we are headed is concerned with the direction of that change. Like Hegel and Kant before him, Marx has provided us a framework, not only for understanding our changing world, but for engaging it.

What I wish to do in this final chapter is show how Marx’s framework, suitably updated, can help us better make sense of the fact that the world is becoming increasingly multicultural, in a way that allows us to deepen the insights about where we are headed. I shall do so by discussing two co-authored texts published recently by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* and *Multitude*. (I should mention that much of this chapter takes up matters I discussed in my article “Moving Beyond Biopower,” published in 2005.)

Some have called Hardt and Negri a latter-day Marx and Engels, and hailed their work as a new *Communist Manifesto*. I shall be treating them in this way myself because I believe that they do indeed provide us with a contemporary version of the kind of “manifesto” that Marx and Engels intended, a document that would describe a shared reality and serve as a rallying cry to participation in the movement of that reality. More importantly for my own little “manifesto” here, Hardt and Negri allow us to make better sense of our multicultural world in terms of its present dynamics and telos.
Like the *Communist Manifesto*, the works of Hardt and Negri are meant to provide an alternative description of reality. They seek to counter both the positive ideal of “perpetual peace” and the negative ideal of a “clash of civilizations,” both of which shun the actual movement of history. Similarly, Marx and Engels in their own day wanted to counter what they called “nursery tales,” specifically (Marx, *Selected Writings*, p. 158) the nursery tale of “the Spectre of Communism.” How does one counter, or rather “meet,” such a nursery tale?

There is nothing inherently wrong with nursery tales. They rock us to sleep, and allow our minds to twirl pleasantly about and occasionally be thrilled. Crucially, however, such tales are told to us, they are not things we tell each other. To counter them, to “meet” them, is to speak to one another, rather than have some tell stories to others. This is important for understanding history and our engagement with history. Do we want history to tell us stories, or do we want history to be a way of speaking to one another? Indeed, the same goes for scientific research generally. Do we want some of us to tell others how things are in the world, or do we want to discover the workings of the world alongside one another? Thus, both the *Communist Manifesto*, on the one hand, and *Empire* and *Multitude*, on the other, are attempts to speak, and not attempts to tell a story. Both use stories that are told in order to speak, stories that are told as history, as opposed to history told as stories.

For Marx and Engels, as we have seen, “the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.” Sociology has for a long time been constituted around understanding the social world in terms of classificatory schema, with some sociologists seeking to show how social orders function, while others have more “dialectical” intentions, hoping to see in the divisions of the world a movement working itself out. Much seems to hang on whether the emphasis is placed on “classes,” with their particular barriers and determined sets of possibilities, or on the struggles that animate them. As we saw in the previous chapter, it is pretty clear from the *Communist Manifesto* that Marx and Engels’s focus is on the basic struggle that, because it is so basic, allows us to define once and for all the movement that will enable us to go beyond the appropriation of the fruits of that struggle by the few (*Selected Writings*, p. 159):

Our epoch, the epoch of the bourgeoisie, possesses, however, this distinctive feature: it has simplified the class antagonisms. Society is more and more [my emphasis] splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other: Bourgeoisie and Proletariat.
Our epoch may not have exactly the same shape as the epoch described by Marx and Engels, but it seems to me that much of what Hardt and Negri are doing in their two books amounts to reminding us that we too are living in an “epoch,” living in history, not as stories that some tell to others, but as a time with distinctive features, which we need to assume as our own. For Marx and Engels the distinctive feature was that “more and more,” a becoming (clearer), an animating force that they were attempting to put into words. The same is true of Hardt and Negri. A focus on this “more and more” will reveal the great face-to-face encounter between “Empire” and “the multitude,” for the two books that bear these terms as their titles are portraits, descriptions of these two faces that face each other, perhaps not yet looking each other in the eye, even when not seeing things eye to eye, still being evasive and uncertain. Hence the need to focus.

The confrontation between “Empire” and “multitude” is a reactualization of the confrontation between bourgeoisie and proletariat, but it is a reactualization in a different “epoch,” one whose movements have taken on different shapes and different dynamics. The core notion of a basic struggle defined by a basic confrontation remains, but for Hardt and Negri this confrontation is no longer to be understood “dialectically,” that is, as driven by contradiction, resolved through negation and reconstituting a “higher” unity or synthesis. What then is the remaining character of the basic confrontation?

For Marx the bourgeoisie represented a revolutionary movement within history that transformed society by appropriating the fruits of productive labour through its control and ownership of the means of production. The consolidation of that movement and the interests that it served was realized in a particular form of rule, typically articulated in the rule of law as institutionalized within and through the structures of what were understood as sovereign nation-states. What Hardt and Negri want to point out, especially in Empire, is that the deployment of the form of rule that accompanies and consolidates capitalist exploitation has taken on a form that explodes the consolidation of these earlier institutional forms. Capitalist exploitation of the productive forces of society continues, but the consolidation of that exploitation has taken on a different form, which they propose to name “Empire” given that it is an imperial rather than a “state” form of rule. Although it is an imperial form of rule, “Empire” is not imperialism (Empire, pp. xii–xiii):

Empire establishes no territorial center of power and does not rely on fixed boundaries or barriers. It is a decentralized and deterritorializing apparatus of rule that progressively incorporates the entire global realm within its open, expanding frontiers. . . . Empire manages hybrid identities, flexible hierarchies, and plural exchanges through modulating networks of command. The distinct national colours of the
imperialist map of the world have merged and blended in the imperial global rainbow.

This colourful style of writing is typical of both *Empire* and *Multitude*, as are the inserts within each text that cut up the narrative/argument by returning to certain themes by way of sometimes idiosyncratic allusions to various historical and literary figures. Such stylistic flourishes have apparently profoundly irritated Hardt and Negri's critics, and yet it seems to me that they are perfectly appropriate to their attempt to make sense of a world that is changing, in ways that are insufficiently recognized by standard modes of argument. Like Marx and Engels, Hardt and Negri are self-consciously involved and engaged in their writing, and not simply attempting to communicate some kind of timeless thought. Indeed, this attempt to grasp or rather to follow the movement of a changing world is precisely what Empire does as well, but in the mode of consolidating its power to rule and impose its order on this changing world.

This is a key feature of Empire: its strategy is to consolidate its rule by matching the movement of social productive forces while denying its own historicity. According to Hardt and Negri, from the point of view of the consolidation of a particular world order that preserves the hold that capitalist forms of exploitation have on the productive forces, a consolidation that they attempt to make sense of by means of what they call the "concept" of Empire, the shape of the world looks like this (*Empire*, pp. xiv–xv):

The concept of Empire is characterized fundamentally by a lack of boundaries: Empire's rule has no limits. First and foremost, the concept of Empire posits a regime that effectively encompasses the spatial totality, or really that rules over the entire "civilized" world. No territorial boundaries limit its reign. Second, the concept of Empire presents itself not as a historical regime originating in conquest, but rather as an order that effectively suspends history and thereby fixes the existing state of affairs for eternity. From the perspective of Empire, this is the way things will always be and the way they were always meant to be. In other words, Empire presents its rule not as a transitory moment in the movement of history, but as a regime with no temporal boundaries and in this sense outside of history or at the end of history. Third, the rule of Empire operates on all registers of the social order extending down to the depths of the social world. Empire not only manages a territory and a population, but also creates the very world it inhabits. It not only regulates human interactions, but also seeks directly to rule over human nature. The object of its rule is social life in its entirety, and thus Empire presents the paradigmatic form of biopower. Finally, although the practice of Empire is continually bathed in blood, the concept of Empire is always dedicated to peace—a perpetual and universal peace outside of history.
There are a couple of things that need to be noted here if we want to continue reading Hardt and Negri as in some sense updating and, I would claim, correcting Marx’s speculative philosophy of history, in which the movement of history generates its telos. First, though Hardt and Negri write of the “concept” of Empire, and are intent on “theorizing” our contemporary world by means of it, I think that it is a mistake to try to find a “theory” of Empire in their work. Rather than producing a “theory,” they are concerned with “theorizing” what they believe can be discerned as (Empire, p. xi) an emerging “global order, a new logic and structure of rule—in short, a new form of sovereignty.” Their theorizing efforts are concerned with making sense of a changing world in terms of the emergence of a “new logic and structure of rule,” which they call Empire, but which at the same time allows them to articulate the forces that are ruled in terms of something they call “the multitude.” Their object of concern is the dynamic interaction between the emergence of a particular form of rule and the forces that are ruled by it.

We would do well to conceive of Hardt and Negri’s effort to “theorize” the changing conditions of our contemporary world as an example of what Michael Oakeshott calls, in his On Human Conduct, the exploration of the “conditional platform of understanding” that expresses itself in what people are doing in a given time and place. Oakeshott reminds us (p. 1) that:

Understanding is not such that we either enjoy it or lack it altogether. To be human and to be aware is to encounter only what is in some manner understood. Thus, it may be said that understanding is an unsought condition; we inexorably inhabit a world of intelligibles. But understanding as an engagement is an exertion; it is the resolve to inhabit an ever more intelligible or an ever less mysterious world. This unconditional engagement of understanding I shall call “theorizing.” It is an engagement to abate mystery rather than to achieve definitive understanding.

The point I wish to draw from Oakeshott is his concern with intelligibility. Theorizing has an unconditional commitment to intelligibility. That is, it interrogates a world, which, as a world, is always a world of particular intelligibles, but whose intelligibility is unsatisfying to the intelligence that engages it. A particular intelligence can of course be too quickly satisfied with the intelligibility of the world that it inhabits, but, insofar as it is, that intelligence is not engaged in “theorizing.”

The world, then, for Hardt and Negri is most intelligible when it is understood as the “biopolitical” production of Empire/multitude. To use Oakeshott’s vocabulary one more time, this is the “theorem,” emerging from the enterprise of theorizing, that they propose. From their theorizing of the intelligible structures of “the world” emerges this theorem of Empire/multitude.
The particular characteristics of the theorizing effort of Hardt and Negri and the object of their world indicate that what they are involved in can best be described as speculative philosophy of history, because their primary concern is with the movement of our changing world as well as its direction. These are the traditional concerns of speculative philosophy of history. Given the particular characteristics of imperial rule, Hardt and Negri seem especially concerned with reactivating the sense of history that, they argue, is in fact occluded by the emerging world order. This reactivation of history as discernable and intelligible movement seems to be overlooked by many of their critics, such as Ian Angus, who argues (in his article "Empire, Borders, Place") that, for Hardt and Negri, there is no “outside” to Empire and thus no way of imagining a transcending of it. However, what Hardt and Negri are precisely trying to do by identifying the state of the world in terms of Empire is, as they explicitly assert (*Empire*, p. xvi), to provide “a general theoretical framework and a toolbox of concepts for theorizing and acting in and against Empire.”

I would like to suggest that we can get a better sense of what is of value and importance in what they are doing by following Foucault and treating Empire—or rather Empire/multitude, which better expresses the dynamic that animates this “concept”—as a “principle of intelligibility” (as discussed in Foucault’s *Sécurité, Territoire, Population*, pp. 294–295). What Foucault means when he invokes a “principle of intelligibility” is akin to Kant’s use of the notion of a “regulative idea,” that is, something that governs and structures the organization of thought. Of course, Foucault is not engaged in the same project as Kant is. His concern is not with establishing and articulating the conditions of objectivity *per se*, but rather with examining historically the ways in which things coalesce and make sense in the particular ways that they do—hence the appeal to the notion of intelligibility. The idea of a principle of intelligibility is meant to capture the movement of thought at a given time that gathers around and is structured around, or coalesces around, certain ways of making sense of privileged objects of concern. A principle of intelligibility describes the object, the goal, and the foundation of a particular exercise of reason or reasoning at a given time, arising out of specific conditions and responding to those conditions. One example Foucault develops is that of the state as this arose in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The movements of thought around conceptualizing the state at this time were, according to Foucault, as significant for understanding the development and transformation of “western rationality” as the activities that gave rise to the natural sciences. (I shall return to Foucault’s treatment of this notion later when we explore the use that Hardt and Negri make of Foucault’s linked conception of “biopower.”)

The salient feature of *Empire* as principle of intelligibility that I wish to focus on is found in the following passage (which I have already quoted above):
Empire presents itself not as a historical regime originating in conquest, but rather as an order that effectively suspends history [my emphasis] and thereby fixes the existing state of affairs for eternity. From the perspective of Empire, this is the way things will always be and the way they were always meant to be. In other words, Empire presents its rule not as a transient moment in the movement of history [my emphasis] but as a regime with no temporal boundaries, and in this sense outside of history or at the end of history.

What Hardt and Negri want us to see is that there is indeed in the world today something that can be intelligibly called “Empire,” whose purpose is to consolidate its form of rule as a “New World Order,” an order that is finally able to achieve the peace and prosperity that human beings have always wished for, and that today can only be envisaged on a global scale. However, by showing that Empire actually proceeds by a consolidated effort to establish such a form of rule, Hardt and Negri at the same time point to the forces that this form of rule intends effectively to rule. Like Marx and Engels, Hardt and Negri show that, at least as far as our world is presently organized, we need to distinguish between, on the one hand, the forms and structures of that organization, and who controls in the name of what, and, on the other hand, the forces that actually get organized in the particular ways that they do.

If we are to relate this general point to our individual lives as they unfold from day to day, it is the distinction between, on the one hand, what and how I do what I do every day, and, on the other hand, the fact that I am the one who does it. Whatever part I may have in deciding what and how I do what I do on a given day, which may be considerable or may be negligible, the point of the distinction is to remind us that it will not get done unless I do it, or someone else does it. It is important not to allow ourselves to downplay the fundamental, indeed, ontological point being made here by recognizing that it is not necessary that I do x or y, because if I do not do it, someone else will. If I do not do it, someone else must do it, if x or y is to get done. X or y will not be if it does not get done by the likes of you and me. I insist on these elementary points to compensate for the “cog in the machine” feeling that many of us, if not most of us, feel about the nature and extent of our contribution to the social forms that make up the world. The “forms” would not “function” if they were not made to function by the expenditure of our efforts to live out our lives in that world. The “forms” of the world depend on our physical, corporeal, breathing-in-and-out engagement in the world.

The means and forms of particular productive capacities of a given society depend on the productive forces of that society, and the productive forces of any society, the expenditures of energy they represent, are the animating movement of that society, the breathing-in-and-out, bodily displacements of
beings establishing and maintaining relations with each other. What Hardt and Negri want us to see is that the animating movement of social life today has taken on decidedly “immaterial” forms, in a way that allows us to see the dynamic of the basic struggle identified by Marx and Engels in a new light. Today, while most of us are still required to make a living—that is, to have most of our daily activities constrained by the obtaining and exchange of money for products we make use of, or consume—more and more of us make that living less by producing “material” objects or commodities than by producing “immaterial” ones, the examples that Hardt and Negri give being (Empire, p. 290) “a service, a cultural product, knowledge, or communication.” Specifically, they include increased engagement in what Hardt and Negri call (Multitude, p. 108) “affective labour,” that is, “labour that produces or manipulates affects, such as feelings of ease, well-being, satisfaction, excitement, or passion,” as, for instance, “in the work of legal assistants, flight attendants, and fast food workers (service with a smile).”

These observations allow us to see differently, and call upon us to theorize differently, the dynamic that animates social life. Hardt and Negri describe the difference in the following way (Multitude, p. 146):

Material production—the production, for example, of cars, televisions, clothing, and food—creates the means of social life. Modern forms of social life would not be possible without these commodities. Immaterial production, by contrast, including the production of ideas, images, knowledges, communication, cooperation, and affective relations, tends to create not the means of social life but social life itself. Immaterial production is biopolitical.

It is by means of the term “biopolitical” that Hardt and Negri seek to redescribe the dynamics at the heart of the basic struggle that animates contemporary social life. According to Hardt and Negri, if Marx was able to describe a basic struggle shaping itself into an opposition between the bourgeoisie’s ownership of the means of production and the productive forces of the proletariat itself, today that struggle needs to be understood less in terms of a dialectically tense confrontation than as animating a “collective biopolitical body,” which cannot be neatly divided into “base” and “superstructure.” What Hardt and Negri want us to notice (Empire, p. 30) is that this body becomes structure not by negating the originary productive force that animates it but by recognizing it; it becomes language (both scientific and social language) because it is a multitude of singular and determinate bodies that seek relation. It is thus both production and reproduction, structure and superstructure, because it is life in the fullest sense and politics in the proper sense. Our analysis has to descend
What Hardt and Negri propose to help us make our way through this "dense complex of experience" is a rearticulation of the terms of the struggle we are engaged in, a struggle against "biopower" in the name of the possibilities inherent in "biopolitical production."

The distinction between "biopower" and "biopolitics" that Hardt and Negri make use of tracks the distinction they make between Empire and multitude. If we understand these terms as "principles of intelligibility" that help us make sense of the movement that animates our changing world—principles that make use of, but also compete with, other notions, such as "globalization" or "postmodernity," which also contain an implicit sense of what I have been calling the "movement" of history—then the notion of "biopower" is meant to describe the different ways in which Empire consolidates its hold on the forces of production, which Hardt and Negri further distinguish in terms of "immaterial" production and "affective labour," or, more generally, "biopolitical" production. The productive forces within the "biopolitical" are theorized as generating a "biopolitics" that is meant to capture and make sense of the movement of the multitude, which, in its resistance to "biopower," gradually reveals itself as a "power-to" produce a "commonality" that challenges the reactionary rule of biopower. Stated more succinctly, "biopower" is what imperial sovereignty or Empire exercises as a "power-over" the forces of social production of the multitude, which itself is becoming increasingly "biopolitical" through the development of "immaterial labour."

A good way to keep these two forms of power distinct is to think of constituted power as "power-over" the forces exhibited by the constituting "power-to" of human energies and efforts. This "power-over" is accomplished through the structural organization of those energies and efforts. (We shall come back to this particular way of describing the distinction a little later.) As Hardt and Negri explain (Multitude, pp. 94–95):

In such immaterial labour, production spills over beyond the bounds of the economy traditionally conceived to engage culture, society, and politics directly. What is produced in this case is not just material goods but actual social relationships and forms of life. We will call this kind of production "biopolitical" to highlight how general its products are and how directly it engages in its entirety.
It is this engagement of life "in its entirety" that calls for the prefix "bio-" in both "biopower" and "biopolitics." But Hardt and Negri want to show that the engagements are quite different: "Biopower stands above society, transcendent, as a sovereign authority and imposes its order. Biopolitical production, in contrast, is immanent to society and creates social relationships and forms through collaborative forms of labour." Or, as they put the point in Empire (p. 62):

From one perspective Empire stands clearly over the multitude and subjects it to the rule of its overarching machine, as a new Leviathan. At the same time, however, from the perspective of social productivity and creativity, from what we have been calling the ontological perspective, the hierarchy is reversed. The multitude is the real productive force of our social world, whereas Empire is a mere apparatus of capture that lives only off the vitality of the multitude—as Marx would say, a vampire regime of accumulated dead labour that survives only by sucking off the blood of the living.

The key expression of the dynamics of the struggle between Empire and the multitude is captured in the way in which Hardt and Negri seek to demonstrate how, despite the basic contours of the struggle (Multitude, p. 225), "Empire and the multitude are not symmetrical: whereas Empire is constantly dependent on the multitude and its social productivity, the multitude is potentially autonomous [my emphasis] and has the capacity to create society on its own." It is precisely the "potential autonomy" of the movement of the multitude that will be the focus of the remainder of this chapter. It is here that I think we can best respond to the question of where we are headed, give more substance to the sense that the world is becoming increasingly multicultural, and show how these two matters that concern us are indeed connected, in a way that can renew our hope and confidence in the future.

When we note that the world is becoming increasingly multicultural we are noting that it is changing. A changing world is disconcerting for some, including, normally, those who are comfortable with the world as it is. Yet, if history teaches us anything, it teaches us that the world is always changing. The study of history tracks those changes by reconstructing the movement of historical change, the ways in which it has engendered and destroyed various developments as these have been manifested in the ways in which human beings relate to one another. When we place ourselves within history we are placing ourselves within these developmental movements. We can speak of history as a whole as movement, but that is a very general statement. When we look more closely at this general movement we discern any number of various
developments working themselves out. We can then try and make sense of the ways in which these developments are working themselves out, which of course is a particular way of participating in them.

If, then, we place ourselves within a changing world that shows itself as becoming increasingly multicultural, we are placing ourselves within particular developmental movements. One of the most obvious and most concrete ways of understanding the movements that render our world increasingly multicultural is to consider the migratory movements of people as they uproot and displace themselves in order to remake their lives elsewhere. Hardt and Negri allow us to theorize this movement, not from the perspective of the various destinations that receive “immigrants,” but from the movement itself, in the desire for better lives. As they write (Multitude, p. 133):

Part of the wealth of migrants is their desire for something more, their refusal to accept the way things are. Certainly, most migrations are driven by the need to escape conditions of violence, starvation, or deprivation, but together with that negative condition there is also the positive desire for wealth, peace, and freedom. This combined act of refusal and expression of desire is enormously powerful [my emphasis].

Indeed, I would like to argue that in an increasingly multicultural world—that is, one that understands that history is moving us in the direction of increasing interaction between people from different backgrounds—it is becoming clearer how our anticipations are best represented by this “combined act of refusal” to accept the world as it is presently organized and “expression of desire” for a better world, one that recognizes that a shared world is a world that combines the many possibilities of different worlds into a “common” world. Again, as Hardt and Negri point out (Multitude, p. 133): “Migrants may often travel empty-handed in conditions of extreme poverty, but even then they are full of knowledges, languages, skills, and creative capacities; each migrant brings with him or her an entire world.” An increasingly multicultural world increasingly recognizes the importance and wealth of what migrants carry within them. Of course, the focus is still too often on the “contribution” that can be made to some established order, for example, a receiving state as defined by its immigration policies. However, rather than focus on the “reception” of “immigrants” into the relative ordering of particular nation-states, if one focuses on the movement itself, which is propelled by both refusal and desire, one can discern a very different world, not a constituted world, but one that is being constituted through the affirmation of the differences of its singular capacities.

This is not to say that nation-states are obsolete within the new imperial order. On the contrary, according to Hardt and Negri (Empire, p. 310), they still
serve various functions: political mediation with respect to the transnational corporations, and redistribution of income according to biopolitical needs within their own limited territories. Nation-states are filters of the flow of global circulation and regulators of the articulation of global command; in other words, they capture and distribute the flows of wealth to and from the global power, and they discipline their own populations as much as this is still possible.

Nevertheless, tracking this movement is tracking the movement of what Hardt and Negri theorize as “the multitude,” a term that allows us to move away from the adjective “multicultural,” which too often constrains us merely to qualify an existing social order in terms of its always limited recognition of differences. What needs to be understood is that, in the current developing movement of history, it is the representatives of these different social orders that are constrained to respond to the affirmations of forces they cannot do without, forces that increasingly affirm themselves as singularities (Empire, p. 395):

> The multitude affirms its singularity by inverting the ideological illusion that all humans on the global surfaces of the world market are interchangeable. Stancing the ideology of the market on its feet, the multitude promotes through its labour the biopolitical singularizations of groups and sets of humanity, across each and every node of global interchange.

What Hardt and Negri are sketching, it seems to me, is a coherent way to make sense of what I discussed in the Introduction of this book, namely, how to think the fact that our increasingly multicultural world is both a multicultural world and one world. We can do so if we shift our focus from the interaction of different cultures to the formation of a mode of coming together through our desire to share our different capacities. Note that this coming together is not one that asks of the participants that they abandon their singularities. On the contrary, it is because we are all singularities that we seek one another out, in order to share what those singularities have to offer. “The multitude” is precisely meant to denote this active seeking out and sharing. “The multitude” describes the movement and formation of itself as a whole composed of what Hardt and Negri call (Multitude, p. 105) “singularities that act in common.”

This movement is perhaps best expressed in the unruly forces that resist and challenge the forms of rule that seek to consolidate privileged positions within the “New World Order,” the rule of imperial network power. It is these unruly forces that the concept of “multitude” is meant to express and ultimately to help construct as a counterimperial force. More than that, Hardt and Negri also
assert (Multitude, p. 219) that “the multitude provides us with a social subject and a logic of social organization that make possible today, for the very first time, the realization of democracy.”

What needs to be done, that is, what needs to be theorized, is not an alternative form of rule, but that which poses itself as the challenge to any form of rule as a “power-over” that finds its most complete expression in the rule of Empire. In other words, what needs to be theorized is the productive potential of the unruly forces themselves. Hence the project of articulating this potential through the concept of “multitude.”

One way of doing this is by distinguishing “the multitude” from “the masses” or “the mobs.” The latter display an unruliness as well, but it is one that does not belong to any project and consequently they are prone to manipulation. The unruliness of the multitude, on the other hand, is precisely one that can be theorized. This is done by appealing to the notion of singularities and defining “the multitude” as a set of singularities by which is designated (Multitude, p. 99) “a social subject whose difference cannot be reduced to sameness, a difference that remains different.” It is this dimension of social subjectivity that theoretically distinguishes the multitude from crowds, masses and mobs. As Hardt and Negri write (Multitude, p. 100):

Since the different individuals or groups that make up the crowd are incoherent and recognize no common shared elements, their collection of differences remains inert and can easily appear as one indifferent aggregate. The components of the masses, the mob, and the crowd are not singularities—and this is obvious from the fact that their differences so easily collapse into the indiffERENCE of the whole. Moreover, these social subjects are fundamentally passive, in the sense that they cannot act by themselves but rather must be led. The crowd or the mob or the rabble can have social effects—often horribly destructive effects—but cannot act of their own accord. That is why they are so susceptible to external manipulation. The multitude designates an active social subject, which acts on the basis of what the singularities share in common. The multitude is an internally different, multiple social subject, whose construction and action is based not on identity or unity (or, much less, indifference) but on what it has in common.

To get a sense of what Hardt and Negri are talking about, and attempting to theorize, one need only think of participation in a large protest march. A protest march is an activity of “the multitude,” something particularly manifest when it is large, filling city streets, describing a completely different circulating flow than the usual one even when it respects certain rules, such as marching the right way down a highway, while overriding others, by, for instance, not stopping at red lights. The march, although it gathers numerous people, is not
a crowd. Crowds gather around objects other than themselves, but a march gathers around itself. It thus makes sense to call it a "subject," but it is a multiple subject. The gathering that a protest march initiates is variously justified for the participants. Although it may have a focus or target, the commonalities that it expresses are not reduced or restricted to them. Although it has organizers, it is not a function of that organization. Indeed, it might be said that the reason why it has organizers is because it is a self-generating activity that, in that self-generation, calls for organization and thus organizers. A protest march is both movement and expression, usually culminating at a particular spot where various speeches are heard, although, interestingly, those speeches often prove to be anticlimactic, usually because the speakers try too hard to rally around particular conceptions and interests what has already been self-constituted through the march. The speeches continue that self-constitution when they are explicitly celebratory rather than moralistic.

Thus, as this example illustrates, the action of the multitude is real, but it is also ideal. As Foucault tells us, that is what we should expect from a principle of intelligibility, in the sense that a principle of intelligibility, while it regulates what is thought about the real, also, at the same time as it is formulated, increasingly prescribes an ideal. That is, the function of making sense of a given reality is supplemented by the task of giving sense or direction to the modes of thinking that it governs and regulates. If one treats Hardt and Negri's conception of Empire/multitude as a principle of intelligibility, that is, as something that is meant to allow us to make sense of features of the world that are not well-served by existing and established modes of thought, then I think it becomes an interesting attempt to capture the sense of movement within social life that many simply call "history."

One might propose as a definition of "history" precisely this sense of the movement of social life as the realities that it confronts struggle with the ideals that it espouses. One should note the profoundly historical dimension to Hardt and Negri's theorizing, the fact that they see themselves as participating in a wider process to which they wish to contribute in part by attempting to articulate the telos of this historical process, which they call (Empire, p. 395) the material affirmation of the liberation of the multitude. The affirmation is material, and therefore real, but its reality takes the form of an affirmation, and in that sense is ideal. As Hardt and Negri write (Empire, p. 296):

The teleology of the multitude is theurgical; it consists in the possibility of directing technologies and production toward its own joy and its own increase in power. The multitude has no reason to look outside its own history and its own present productive power for the means necessary to lead toward its constitution as a political subject.
It seems to me that when we look up from our texts, and consider and engage our increasingly multicultural world, we can in effect see ourselves as participating in this movement of history. That is, when we recognize that the world is increasingly becoming multicultural we are implicitly recognizing and acknowledging that, as Hardt and Negri put it (Multitude, p. 127), "we are a multiplicity of singular forms of life and at the same time share a common global existence." Such recognition and acknowledgement call upon us (Multitude, p. 126) to "think all cultural singularities not as anachronistic survivals of the past but as equal participants in our common present." This common present lived in contact—the function of the present within the past-present-future complex called history—leads us to articulate our shared anticipations of the future, anticipations shaped through the "cooperation, collaboration, and communication" that shapes what Hardt and Negri theorize as "the common." As they insist (Multitude, p. 128):

Once we recognize singularity, the common begins to emerge. Singularities do communicate, and they are able to do so because of the common they share. We share bodies with two eyes, ten fingers, ten toes; we share life on this Earth; we share capitalist regimes of production and exploitation; we share common dreams of a better future. Our communication, collaboration, and cooperation, furthermore, not only are based on the common that exists, but also in turn produce the common. We make and remake the common we share every day.

"The common we share every day" is the world we engage every day, not a theoretical world but a real/ideal world produced through our interaction with one another on a daily basis, at work, during our leisure activities, in our attempts to live better lives. It is this creation of the common that best describes our "living labour," which Hardt and Negri, following Marx, describe (Multitude, p. 146) as "the fundamental human faculty: the ability to engage the world actively and create social life." This common is increasingly created through our increasing engagement in forms of immaterial labour, which, even if they are still largely controlled by imperial rule through different processes of private appropriation, nevertheless points beyond the dictates of imperial rule. The continued exploitation of our immaterial labour is at the same time the exploitation of our continued ability to speak to one another, and this ability to speak to one another is precisely what enables us to create the common we share. As Hardt and Negri insist (Multitude, p. 201):

our power to speak is based in the common, that is, our shared language; every linguistic act creates the common; and the act of speech itself is conducted in
common, in dialogue, in communication. This triple relation to the common illustrated by language characterizes immaterial labour.

In an increasingly multicultural world our shared languages can no longer be conceived as a single language, as a mother tongue or a national language. Rather, language, like speech, needs to be understood in the mode of communication, of communicating with one another, which increasingly defines what we do anyway through our biopolitical productivity. The task at hand is to redirect that productivity away from the controlled interest of the few to the common interest, which (Multitude, p. 206) “is a general interest that is not made abstract in the control of the state, but rather reappropriated by the singularities that cooperate in social, biopolitical production; it is a public interest not in the hands of a bureaucracy, but managed democratically by the multitude.” Such democratic “management” itself needs to be modelled on the mode of communication (Multitude, p. 211):

In political organization as in narration, there is a constant dialogue among diverse, singular subjects, a polyphonic composition of them, and a general enrichment of each through this common constitution. The multitude in movement is a kind of narration that produces new subjectivities and new languages.

The appeal to democracy here can be seen as an appeal to Balibar’s “ideal universality,” the principle of “equaliberty” that describes both the movement or dynamics of history and its end or telos, which can no longer be denied. Evoking the universal appeal to some concept of democracy by various forms of rule, Hardt and Negri insist that (Multitude, p. 220):

Democracy can no longer be evaluated in the liberal manner, as a limit of equality, or in the socialist way, as a limit of freedom, but rather must be the radicalization without reserve of both freedom and equality. Perhaps some day soon we will have arrived at the point when we can look back with irony at the barbaric old times when in order to be free we had to keep our brothers and sisters slaves, or to be equal we were constrained to inhuman sacrifices of freedom. In our view, freedom and equality can be the motors of a revolutionary reinvention of democracy.

That revolutionary potential is to be found in “the multitude,” Hardt and Negri’s equivalent to Marx’s proletariat, given that, in their view (Empire, p. 237), “Having achieved the global level, capitalist development is faced directly with the multitude, without mediation.” The multitude, through the dynamics of its engagement in immaterial, communicative labour, is finally able to articulate the telos of its effort, which is that same immaterial, communicative working
together to develop our various capacities that moves us beyond the need to be ruled through fear, the hallmark of biopower, in order to celebrate the desire for life that animates the common world we share.