

*Empire, Borders, Place:
A Critique of Hardt and Negri's Concept of Empire*

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It is now almost a commonplace to note that after the Seattle 1999 protests against the neo-liberal market-oriented version of globalization a new coalition against global market hegemony is struggling to emerge. While this emergence may seem to have been derailed by the more recent U.S. and British intervention in Iraq, it is more likely that it has entered into the global peace movement that sprang into existence simultaneously. New developments are bound to follow. This recent history has had the advantage of demonstrating the mutual relation between neo-liberal economics and the military and political imperatives of empire which has been popularly expressed in the slogan “No blood for oil!”. Theorizing these components and their relationship will clearly become important to the thinking of the new global opposition.

It is perhaps because of its appearance in the middle of these significant transformations (2000) that Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s book *Empire* has become a major point of reference for contemporary radical thought. Also, its attempt to synthesize a large number of developments previously called postmodernism, postcolonialism, autonomism, etc. and earlier radical theories such as Marxism, anarchism and syndicalism within a long historical narrative gives the book a scope that focusses many diverse and compelling issues. At times, the book appears to claim a status for contemporary struggles such as that occupied by *Capital* in the nineteenth century. Despite the merit of the book to have brought the concept of empire into international currency again, I will argue that its concept of empire is thoroughly misguided on both theoretical and political grounds.¹

The key theoretical nexus of *Empire* is the close relation between lack of boundaries and the production of subjectivities (or, as they are more often called nowadays, identities). Whereas one previously moved from one institution to another, “the production of subjectivity in imperial society tends not to be limited to any specific places. One is always

still in the family, always still in school, always still in prison, and so forth. ... The indefiniteness of the *place* of the production corresponds to the indeterminacy of the *form* of the subjectivities produced.”² The continuous overflowing of boundaries generates new subjectivities from which political opposition to empire can be expected. “Here is where the primary site of struggle seems to emerge, on the terrain of the production and regulation of subjectivities” (321).

This analysis is based on the use of two theoretical terms that function throughout the text. One, the distinction between inside and outside and, two, the notion of history as overcoming the regulation and stability required by empire. Hardt and Negri’s claim that contemporary empire “has no limits” (xiv) is buttressed by a historical argument that links capitalist expansion to the necessity to look outside itself because “the capitalist market is one machine that has always run counter to any division between inside and outside” (190). Postmodern capitalist production thus eliminates its outside such that contemporary empire is distinct from classical imperialism precisely because “the dialectic of sovereignty between the civil order and the natural order has come to an end” and “the modern dialectic of inside and outside has been replaced by a play of degrees and intensities, of hybridity and artificiality” (187-8). History is thus understood as this process of elimination of the outside that comes to an apogee in contemporary empire and which prepares the ground for overcoming the limits imposed upon subjectivity by imperial sovereignty. Empire is a “non-place” because power is “both everywhere and nowhere” even though it is “criss-crossed by so many fault lines that it only appears as a continuous, uniform space” (190). These fault lines are constituted by the “deterritorializing power of the multitude” which both “sustains Empire and at the same time [is] the force that calls for and makes necessary its destruction”

(61). Understood in this way, as a non-place that has annihilated its outside, it is no wonder that it does not matter to Hardt and Negri *from where* the critique of empire is articulated.

The inside-outside distinction and the related notion of history as the surpassing of limitations is the theoretical core of Hardt and Negri's account of contemporary empire. My critique will address both of these components from an appropriation of the more productive concept of empire in Canadian social and political thought.

1. The Epistemic Status of Dependency

The background of my critique of Hardt and Negri is the development and utilization of the concept of empire in Canadian social and political thought. Its origin in a dependent economy and nation has throughout its existence, even in conservative versions, contested the imperial assumptions of social and political thought in the United States and other imperial centres. This is not meant as special pleading nor as the adoption of a victim status. Moreover, it does not imply that Canada is in the same position as the most exploited nations of the world, for which reason it has sometimes been called a 'first-world dependency.' Rather, I want to suggest that Canada proposes to its social and political thinkers an epistemic issue which, when thoroughly taken up, requires a critique of central assumptions in international, or imperial, thought. This essay concerns itself specifically with the assumption about borders inherent in the concept of empire as proposed by Hardt and Negri that binds their concept of empire itself to imperial assumptions.

Nor do I want to suggest that this epistemic issue is unique to Canada as such. It is unique only in the history and theoretic form in which the issue is taken up. Mexican philosopher Leopoldo Zea explained it this way; "problems like the ones Latin American philosophy raises about its identity seem only parochial, that is regional, and because of that

limited to a relative point of view proper to a concrete man, and thus, alien to what is truly universal.”³ Issues in dependent regions, whose articulation must pass through the publication centres of empire, are treated as ‘cases,’ whereas issues of human universality can be treated directly if one resides at the centre, that is to say, shares the assumptions that underpin empire. These assumptions cannot be simply dropped at will but require a critical interrogation. It is with regard to this critical interrogation that dependency has a privileged epistemic status.

To this extent, the epistemic claim that I am making for Canada could also be redeemed in Latin America or other dependencies. The point is that a new global critical discourse must go through the particularities of place to forge a universalizing dialogue. Thus one can recognize in J. M. Coetzee’s forceful articulation that opposition to empire consists not in fulfilling history but in escaping from it a statement that can be brought productively into dialogue with other critiques that embrace their dependent position as an epistemic vantage for the critique of empire.

What has made it impossible to live in time like fish in water, like birds in air, like children? It is the fault of Empire! Empire has created the time of history. Empire has located its existence not in the smooth recurrent spinning time of the cycle of the seasons but in the jagged time of rise and fall, of beginning and end, of catastrophe. Empire dooms itself to live in history and plot against history. One thought alone preoccupies the submerged mind of Empire: how not to end, how not to die, how to prolong its era. By day it pursues its enemies. It is cunning and ruthless, it sends its bloodhounds everywhere. By night it feeds on images of disaster: the sack of

cities, the rape of populations, pyramids of bones, acres of desolation. A mad vision yet a virulent one ...⁴

We may begin to suspect that overcoming empire cannot be achieved through the fulfilment of history but rather through a rupture with history itself.

The epistemic issue is not a denial of universality in favour an assertion of the plurality of empirical contexts. Universal concepts and claims are unavoidable in any theoretical discourse. The point is that such unavoidable universal claims often render relations of dependency invisible when they are articulated from the centre and imported into different situations. The predominance of imperial centres in the propagation of ideas, even critical ideas, is central to this circumstance. An adequate critique of empire that can sustain an anti-hegemonic coalition against the neo-liberal market-oriented version of globalization requires a new concept of universalization that would not go directly from imperial instance to theoretical universality but from dependency, through empire, into dialogue with other dependencies, and toward a new universality. The epistemic status of dependency is in the implication of a critique of centrism. “A centrism consists in the subsumption of diverse experiences and contents under an explanatory scheme that is presupposed as universal although it incorporates elements that arose in a particular history. A return to concrete and particular experiences thus does not negate universality, but opens the possibility that a genuine universality might emerge through the displacement of centrisms.”⁵ Critique of empire without an acknowledgement of dependency—that is to say, a critique of the epistemological and political assumptions inherent in centrism—remains an imperial critique.

2. Canadian Social and Political Thought

Any quick characterization of Canadian social and political thought would be bound to be superficial. Nonetheless, if one focusses on what is specific and distinctive in that tradition, there is a suspicion of history articulated through an archaic encounter with wilderness, a defence of place articulated as a critique of imperial space, and a defence of particularity as that which is overlooked and sacrificed in the universal claims of the centre. Let us note some instances.

The focus on empire as history is a widely recognized element of Canadian social and political thought: it developed in thinking through the status of a colony of three successive empires: France, Britain and the U.S.A. In the influential conclusion to *The Fur Trade in Canada*, Harold Innis wrote that “the economic history of Canada has been dominated by the discrepancy between the centre and the margin of Western civilization. Energy has been directed toward the exploitation of staple products and the tendency has been cumulative. The raw material supplied to the mother country stimulated manufactures of the finished product and also of the products which were in demand in the colony ... The general tendencies in the industrial areas of western civilization, especially in the United States and Great Britain, have a pronounced effect on Canada’s export of staples.”⁶ Understanding Canada has thus meant understanding the structure of empire and their dependent colonial relations, which has required an emphasis on space, and therefore on transportation and communications. Thus when one reads in Hardt and Negri’s *Empire* that “the great industrial and financial powers thus produce not only commodities but also subjectivities ... Communication not only expresses but also organizes the movement of globalization” (32), one may perhaps be forgiven for reading on in the hope of hearing something new.

This political economy serves to explain the meditation, perhaps obsession, with identity and place that has pervaded Canadian literature and social and political thought. Northrop

Frye pointed out that the dominant question in Canadian literature was “Where is here?”⁷ In his marvellous public poem *Civil Elegies*, Dennis Lee put it this way:

To rail and flail at a dying civilization,
 To rage in imperial space, condemning
 Soviet bombers, american bombers—to go on saying
 No to history is good.⁸

A sense that historical progress is the stuff of empire and that place is the motive for critique binds Canadian social and political thought to a certain environmentalism which, on a global scale, has argued for a key significance for the concept of place. For example, one eminent American voice speaks of “place as an experience and propose[s] a model of what it meant to ‘live in place’ for most of human time, presenting it initially in terms of the steps that a child takes growing into a natural community. ... The heart of a place is the home, and the heart of the home is the hearth. Our place is part of who we are.”⁹ Being mindful of such a connection between the thought of a dependent colony and the environmental critique of industrial civilization, leads one to balk at a statement by Hardt and Negri such as “it is false ... to claim that we can (re)establish local identities that are in some sense *outside* and protected against the global flows of capital and Empire” (45). Who would imagine that any place is “protected” and outside in that sense? Who would imagine that that makes it entirely “inside” though? Nothing in Canada is “protected” from the American empire, but does that mean that we are totally inside and that there is nothing to “protect”? One might well begin to suspect that this dualistic vocabulary is simply too gross to capture what is at issue here.

A formulation that goes beyond such a simple alternative is in the classic words of George Grant, the Canadian philosopher of dependency. “In human life there must always

be place for love of the good and love of one's own. Love of the good is man's highest end, but it is of the nature of things that we come to know and to love what is good by first meeting it in that which is our own—this particular body, this family, these friends, this woman, this part of the world, this set of traditions, this civilization. At the simplest level of one's own body, it is clear that one has to love it yet pass beyond concentration on it.”¹⁰ It is not a question of *either* particularity *or* universality—which is the false choice that empire would thrust upon us—but of how/which/where particularity can *pass beyond* itself to a genuine universality. The dilemma imposed by empire is that our particularities, those in a dependent relation to the centre(s), is ruled out, cannot pass beyond itself, and thus we are pressed to renounce it. Those who rage against imperial space are prompted to search for a genuine universality at the same time as rejecting imperial claims to it. Of this, Hardt and Negri's simple inside/outside dilemma knows nothing.

3. Frontier versus Border

If it now seems at least provisionally credible to retract any credit that Hardt and Negri have received simply for recirculating the concept of empire, then a critical examination of what they mean by the concept and its limitations in theorizing the standpoint of the opposition is in order. *Empire* consists in two parallel narratives of political sovereignty and bio-production whose integrity would require an adequate synthesis of the two. My current argument pertains only to the narrative of political sovereignty. If valid, however, this argument would also pertain to the purported synthesis since “empire is the political subject that effectively regulates these global exchanges, the sovereign power that governs the world” (xi). I will focus on two aspects of the book. Under the heading of ‘borders’ I will consider the first set of phenomena which they refer to as “hybrid identities, flexible

hierarchies, and plural exchanges” (xii) that issue in the assumption, or prejudice, that every kind of a restriction of a flow is interpreted, or rather assumed, to be a repression. A second and related phenomenon is the rejection of any kind of a politics of place despite the recognition that such a politics has emerged in opposition to the new empire. These two themes, while apparently minor in their large text, seem to me to go to the heart of what is both politically and philosophically specific to the argument of the book and cannot be attributed to the new situation in which it has appeared and which the authors often get credit simply for noticing.

Let me begin with the narrative of sovereignty that argues that empire has emerged from the history of American constitutionalism but is no longer limited by the conditions of that emergence and pertains instead to a global network that has no centre and where sovereignty resides in the United Nations.

The contemporary idea of Empire is born through the global expansion of the internal U.S. constitutional project. ... International right always had to be a negotiated, contractual process among *external* parties Today right involves instead an internal and constitutive institutional process. The networks of agreements and associations, the channels of mediation and conflict resolution, and the coordination of the various dynamics of states are all institutionalized within Empire. We are experiencing a first phase of the transformation of the global frontier into an open space of imperial sovereignty (182).

Empire has a special relationship to the United States in two senses. Most critical attention to the book has concentrated on whether the empire really has no centre as Hardt and Negri argue or whether the empire is really old-style U.S. imperialism. The other special

relationship to the U.S., according to Hardt and Negri, is that the U.S. military is the “peace police” called for by “the supranational organizations of peace” (181). Thus, the global military role of the U.S. is, in their view, not enough to define the empire as American imperialism. Critics have suggested that this is not an adequate account of the U.S. role and Hardt has conceded that the 2003 war with Iraq seems to justify a return to more traditional accounts of U.S. imperialism.¹¹ I want to focus instead on their account of the genesis of the sovereignty of empire within U.S. constitutionalism.

Hardt and Negri claim that U.S. sovereignty is that of an “extensive empire” consisting of three aspects: immanent productivity, finitude, and a consequent “tendency toward an open, expansive project operating on an unbounded terrain” (165). Such sovereignty is based on the rejection of a transcendent power in favour of a constituent multitude (immanent productivity). Conflicts due to a plurality within the multitude, however, lead to a negation of constituent power and a dialectical return toward traditional transcendent sovereignty (finitude). This tension is not actually resolved as such, but remains as an internal tension that is postponed through an expansive tendency. In contrast to modern sovereignty, which resides at the limit of the nation-state, and which recreates this limit in its imperialist expansionism, U.S. sovereignty paradoxically combines its expansive tendency with continuous reterritorializations (167). In this way, Hardt and Negri reformulate the importance of the frontier to the U.S. state, a frontier which the classical account of Frederick Jackson Turner called “the meeting point of civilization and barbarism.”¹²

In their subsequent historical narrative, Hardt and Negri attempt to demonstrate that the United States was torn between a tendency toward returning to a classical European imperialism and an overcoming of itself toward a deterritorialized Empire. This came to a decision point in the early 20th century in the opposition between Roosevelt and Wilson.

Wilson's proposal of "the idea of peace as product of a new world network of powers" (175) extended the U.S. constitutional project beyond its borders and laid the foundation of the new Empire whose constitution resides in the United Nations. This decision-point was reached because, as they say, "the great open American spaces ran out," "open terrain was limited" (172), "the open terrain had been used up" (174), closing off the "boundless frontier of freedom" (406).

At this point I want to make my first observation about Hardt and Negri's argument, or narrative. At the climax of a politico-cultural discourse about the origin of the Empire's concept of sovereignty, they resort to an apparently unambiguous geographical closure. Not a geo-political or geo-cultural space, but a simply geographical space is the only one that can "run out" or be "used up" in this way. The politico-cultural discourse is brought to a decision-point because of an entirely non-political, non-cultural, geographical determinism. The open land just ran out. They do not consider that it might have been displaced—onto the space race as 'the final frontier,' for example—and still today be a constituent component of U.S. political culture. They do consider that this space was not actually open, but inhabited, though they discount this feature since "this contradiction may not properly be conceived as a crisis since Native Americans are so dramatically excluded from and external to the workings of the constitutional machine" (170). The frontier was, according to Hardt and Negri, "a frontier of liberty" because "across the great open spaces the constituent tendency wins out over the constitutional decree, the tendency of immanence over regulative reflection, and the initiative of the multitude over the centralization of power" (169). It is this expansive liberty that the Yankees have been so kind as to export.

One should notice here not only the theoretical incoherence of closing a politico-cultural discourse with a geographical determinism, but the inadequacy of the account of closing

itself. To say that the great open spaces ran out is to assume that it was somehow impossible for the expansive tendency to turn either north or south when it hit the Pacific Ocean. The Rio Grande and the 49th parallel are geographical markers, but they are not a geographical closure to the U.S. expansive tendency in a determinist sense. They are geo-political and geo-cultural borders. The account of the constitution of these borders as borders requires politico-cultural, including military, explanation. The lack of such explanation in Hardt and Negri's theoretical narrative is not a mere absence. It takes us to the core of the failure of their concept of empire.

4. Borders as Repressive

It is not that Hardt and Negri never recognize politico-cultural barriers to U.S. constitutionalism. "Black slavery, a practice inherited from the colonial powers, was an insurmountable barrier to the formation of a free people" (170) and women, they claim, "occupied a very similar position" (171) because "they could be neither completely included nor entirely excluded" (171). This contradiction, unlike the position of the Native Americans, "posed a crisis ... because it blocked the free circulation, mixing, and equality that animate its foundation" (171). "The enormous barriers between black and white, free and slave, blocked the imperial integration machine and deflated the ideological pretense to open spaces. ... What was in play was a redefinition of the *space* of the nation" (172). This space that they now describe is clearly politico-cultural. It is a space of inequality, restriction of movement, and thus crisis. It is on the same page, in the next paragraph, at the beginning of the next section, after the utilization of a politico-cultural conception of space with respect to this *restriction* of movement that they say, of the closure of the frontier of freedom, that the open spaces simply ran out! It seems that, when it is a matter of the restriction of

movement within the U.S. constitutional space, a politico-cultural concept of space is called for, but when it is a matter of the halting of the expansive tendency at the Rio Grande and the 49th parallel, a merely quantitative geographical determinism will do. It is this difference of theoretical deployment of concepts that renders the difference between the ‘internal’ restrictions of movement of African Americans and women and the ‘external’ ones of Mexico, Canada and also Native Americans. It is not, or at least not proven to be, the difference between the cases themselves. They avoid precisely this question of the difference between the cases by deploying a geographical conception of closure to make the one set of cases seem unproblematic. In this respect it is revealing that, despite their supposed anti-Hegelianism, Hardt and Negri share Hegel’s analysis of the U.S.A. in its fundamentals, that it is “constantly and widely open” and that “the North American Federation has no neighboring state.”¹³ Whereas a concept of a border requires that one theorize the constitution of an inside-outside relation within politico-cultural space, Hardt and Negri define externality through a geographical determinism and internality through politico-cultural space. This unaccountable divergence of registers means that they can never investigate the constitution of an inside-outside relation but resort to a continual rhetoric of ‘no outside’ that pervades the narrative but which cannot formulate the necessity of the outside to the constitution of the inside.

Restrictions to movement are assumed to be, and clearly marked as, repressive. The notion that a restriction of movement, such as an external border to the U.S. expansive tendency, might not be repressive, might be the opportunity for something else to exist, is unthinkable. This is characteristic Yankee ideology. It is for this reason that I have previously defined the United States not through the supposed empty (geographical) frontier but through the (politico-cultural) Munroe Doctrine. “The United States names itself ‘America’

since its outward rush is not self-limiting but would extend as far as the natural limit of the continent. The frontier thus continues itself in the Munroe Doctrine, in which Americans claim the right to interference in all the affairs of the continent.”¹⁴ The frontier is a politico-cultural project, as is its closure. The closure is demanded by the existence of other politico-cultural projects south of the Rio Grande, north of the 49th parallel, and among the Native Americans. It is unthinkable in Hardt and Negri’s theoretical narrative that this restriction of movement might be seen as enabling by these other political projects—that the outside might not be merely an outside but a limitation, a border, which lets difference appear. It is this which limits their theoretical perspective to one within U.S. expansionism; it never looks at such a politico-cultural project from the outside. In other words, the border is theorized from only one side, from which it appears as an unaccountable closure, an irrational limit to the expansion of freedom. From the other side, this border appears as a necessary halt to expansionism so that our different, particular politico-cultural project can appear in the world. Such a perspective is made unthinkable in Hardt and Negri’s account due to the unaccountable switch from a politico-cultural concept of space to a merely quantitative one. It thus constitutes an unexamined assumption within the theoretical narrative. This would cast in another light the often-remarked fact that what has been called ‘postmodernism’ has a particular relation to the United States.

5. The Irreversibility of Deterritorialization?

The so-called ‘freedom’ within U.S. sovereign space is predicated on the repression of other politico-cultural projects outside it that are either run over by the expansive tendency or are able to secure their existence by militarily or diplomatically inscribing a politico-cultural border at which the expansive tendency has to stop. It may well be that this politico-

cultural closure provokes an internal crisis for the U.S. constitution. They say that “an American place was territorialized in the name of a constitution of freedom and at the same time continually deterritorialized through the opening up of frontiers and exodus” (381). The analysis of deterritorialization and reterritorialization is derived from Deleuze who observed this phenomenon in American literature (471, n16) and was described theoretically by Deleuze and Guattari in the following way:

Unconscious representation therefore comprises essentially, by virtue of its own *law*, a represented that is displaced in relation to an agency in a constant state of displacement. ... displacement refers to very different movements: at times, the movement through which desiring-production is continually overcoming the limit, becoming deterritorialized, causing its flows to escape, going beyond the threshold of representation; at times, on the contrary, the movement through which the limit itself is displaced, and now passes into the interior of the representation that performs the artificial reterritorializations of desire.¹⁵

The consequence of this analysis is that “one can never go far enough in the direction of deterritorialization: you haven’t seen anything yet—an irreversible process.” The irreversibility of this process is what generates the observation of “a profoundly artificial nature in the perverted reterritorializations.”¹⁶ But one should ask whether reterritorializations are always perverted. It may not seem so at first, given their emphasis on the “proliferation” and “multiplication” of deterritorializations.¹⁷ But such proliferations are written upon the primary deterritorialization which they complicate and reproduce but never undo. The consequence of this phrasing is that all defences of space are understood in terms of reterritorialization and, being so understood, cannot destructure the primary

deterritorialization. Since “reterritorialization must not be confused with a return to a primitive or older territoriality; it necessarily implies a set of artifices by which one element, itself deterritorialized, serves as a new territoriality for another, which has lost its territoriality as well,”¹⁸ any politics of place is figured as attempting perversely to reverse a deterritorialization that it, in principle, cannot reverse. Continued attempts to defend and extend a prior border that inscribed a limit to expansion and proliferation so that a different politico-cultural project could emerge cannot be captured by this vocabulary. Thus, Deleuze and Guattari’s analysis leads them to cast all attempts at localizations within the deterritorialized system as artificial and perverted since they do not stand outside the system but are reactions generated by the process of deterritorialization itself.

Hardt and Negri reproduce this position of progressive history within their analysis, remarking as a mere aside that “against all moralisms and all positions of resentment and nostalgia, ... this new imperial terrain provides greater possibilities for creation and liberation” (218). It is this unquestioned acceptance of the progressive character of empire that produces the theoretical incoherence and historical inadequacy of the closure of the frontier. At every point that a politics of locality emerges, they argue instead for the “production of locality” by Empire and that “the local moment or perspective gives priority to the reterritorializing barriers or boundaries and the global moment privileges the mobility of deterritorializing flows” (45). They imagine that a politics of locality is dispensed with the notion that “we should be done once and for all with the search for an outside, a standpoint that imagines a purity for our politics” (46). On this ground they dismiss local autonomy (342), the politics of de-linking proposed by Samir Amin (283-4, 307),¹⁹ the nation-state (43, 335-6, 361-2), use value (209), and new social movements (275).²⁰ It’s hard to suspect that they have been watching contemporary environmental and other politics very closely when

they suppose that such groups operate with a conception of locality as separate from the global. But their analysis works hard to discredit such a politics when the rather obvious *connection* between local and global is taken as equivalent to the grandiose and unsubstantiated claim that locality is *entirely produced* by the global Empire and contains *nothing more* than a reactive reterritorialization. They suppose that the claim that there is ‘no outside’ to the Empire serves adequately to dismiss such a politics because it is imagined to be based on such a notion of a pure outside.

This, then, is my second point: It is a politics of location that provides the best political marker for opposition to neo-liberal globalization.²¹ Hardt and Negri, basing themselves on Deleuze and Guattari, interpret every politics of place as a perverse reterritorialization, and assert that emancipation consists in going further in the same direction of deterritorialization. “In its deterritorialized autonomy ... this biopolitical existence of the multitude has the potential to be transformed into an autonomous mass of intelligent productivity, into an absolute democratic power” (344). To the contrary, I am suggesting that there is a valid politics of place (which must be distinguished from fundamentalism) that goes neither forward nor back, that looks for a hole in the wall to construct a sideways exit. The forward-back metaphor assumes a linear and progressive model of history which Marx shared with modern progressivism. It undergirds the further assumption that there is a symmetry between problem and solution, that the analysis of the system points in the same direction as its overcoming. One would have thought that this element of Marxism was the least likely to survive the displacements of the last century. Walter Benjamin, among others, sought to displace this assumption.²² But Hardt and Negri here continue to follow Deleuze and Guattari who reproduce it without comment in their debt to Marx for an account of the double movement of capitalism.

On the one hand, capitalism can proceed only by continually developing the subjective essence of abstract wealth or production for the sake of production ... but on the other hand and at the same time, it can do so only in the framework of its own limited purpose ... Under the first aspect capitalism is continually surpassing its own limits, always deterritorializing further ... but under the second, strictly complementary, aspect, capitalism is continually confronting limits and barriers that are interior and immanent to itself and that, precisely because they are immanent, let themselves be overcome only provided they are reproduced on a wider scale (always more reterritorialization—local, world-wide, planetary).²³

The description of a double movement of abstraction and return to concreteness in which the concrete is always *nothing more* than the product of abstraction is what undergirds a conception of history as uni-directional and thus characterizes any doubts about this concept of time—such as articulated through the new anti-imperial politics of place—as regressive in the sense of denying the inevitability and force of the initial abstraction.

6. Place, Borders, Coalition

The two critical points that I have made converge on a central issue: how can one find a limit to the expansive tendency of empire? The inscription of a border and a politics of place both pertain to the construction of a limit to expansion and thus to “hybrid identities, flexible hierarchies, and plural exchanges” (xii). While deterritorialization cannot be exactly reversed, it is not true that this implies that emancipation must lie in further deterritorialization and that all reterritorializations are perverse, or fundamentalist. They are artificial—a matter of human artifice—to be sure. However, it can be argued that the most

profound and effective anti-neoliberal globalization politics in recent years has been inspired precisely by inventive reterritorializations, localizations that retrieve that which has been pushed aside by empire and preserved by borders. It is a politics of limit to empire so that a plurality of differences can occur—differences *from* empire, not the putative consumer differences that are equalized by exchanges. Leonard Cohen has pointed to the problem of empire in this fashion.

Things are going to slide in all directions.

Won't be nothing.

Nothing you can measure anymore.²⁴

How exactly to define limits, draw borders, to open a space where measure can be taken, will take a great deal of political debate and action in deciding. There is a lot more to be said and done about this, but I doubt whether the perspective put forward in *Empire* will be of much use in this important matter. Their concept of abstraction is too dualistic, their concept of border too one-sided, their concept of history too uni-linear, their concept of place too shallow, to have much long-term resonance in the anti-neoliberal globalization alliance. I would put my bets on the construction of borders that allow Others to flourish, a politics of place and a defence of communities against exchange value. This is a very different politics whose difference is perhaps now obscured by the common opposition to empire. But it is different enough that one may expect it to become generally visible before too long.

How, then, does this politics derived from the Canadian concept of empire differ from that offered by Hardt and Negri? In the first place, it understands empire, as they do, as a continuously expanding deterritorialization (the replacement of place by space). Second, while Hardt and Negri understand empire as restraining further history through regulation of exchanges, it understands the historical impetus as itself built on and continuing the imperial

adventure. Critique thus divorces itself from history and seeks a rupture, not with previous history, but with history itself—with the continuum of human experience forged by the original displacement (that they call deterritorialization). This unhistorical, archaic moment in critique is represented as nature or wilderness, not as an initial form to be subsumed into civilization but as a persisting archaic dimension to contemporary experience. Thus, the critique of empire is not as a direct unfolding of the repressed within empire but as the recovery and possible healing of the original displacement itself. Such a recovery of place, thrust out as an impossible reactionary fantasy of return by Hardt and Negri, is really a contemporary attempt to think within one's location and to found a place that seeks a certain solidarity with those who experienced the original displacement. This is indeed a different attitude to the past, not as that which has been necessarily overcome so that unprecedented possibilities may appear, but as the story of a tragedy which demands the recovery of hopes buried by imperial history. From this point of view, Hardt and Negri's *Empire* is merely a retelling of Marxist progressivism—along with its sneering at the 'rural idiocy' of peasants—in a situation which demands a deepening and refashioning of critique.

The past is not mere nostalgia, neither is a recovery of place. The unhelpful and simplistic binary oppositions through which Hardt and Negri characterize empire—inside-outside, deterritorialization-reterritorialization—express their unwillingness to drive critique not merely to the contemporary limitations of empire but all the way back to the original displacement from which it emerged. The notion that this displacement was a necessary moment for the history of liberation to begin shows the extent to which their concept of liberation is itself imbedded within imperial deterritorialization, displacement. It is an imperial critique of empire.

The Canadian analysis of empire suggests that the expansive tendency of empire must be halted at a border in order for a different, non-imperial politics to begin. This other politics is of course not unaffected by the imperial politics that always attempts to reach over the border to annihilate the different. Nor is it always benign. The point is that it is not entirely explained, nor organized, by empire. Thus the border separating Canada from the United States has allowed elements of a non-imperial politics to be articulated and survive. Examples: a universal medicare system, multiculturalism, gay marriage, a peace-keeping military, the separation of Nunavut, etc. Of course all of these are endangered by forces within Canada as well as from the empire. Still, none of them would be possible without the border. The border must be understood as enabling, not as simply a temporary limit which empire will overcome, but as itself the source of the alternative.

With this understanding of border as enabling difference one can analyze contemporary social movements in a manner entirely different from Hardt and Negri. First of all, the resources of the nation-state in protecting a space for an experimentation with alternatives should not be written off entirely (even given its reduced resources in the era of globalization). Nor regional and city movements. If one poses the question, not from the perspective of empire, but from that of the alternative, attempts by a coalition of critical social movements to capture spaces of opportunity necessarily lead them to address the continuing functions of such governments (which operate only because they contain a border which hampers direct imperial rule). But even more important, I think that the critical role of contemporary movements themselves in defending and redesigning self-reliant and diverse communities can be articulated through this concept of a border.²⁵ In short, it's all about geography—but as a politico-cultural space neither as a supposed bare determinism of 'the land just ran out' nor as a mathematical space. It's about how we will live *here*. That is

the critical moment when all the global exchanges of empire hover to see whether they will win *here*, whether we will be just another anywhere, or whether this will be our place. This project has been underway for some time. We have already begun to engage in the next step of a dialogue between places, the intersection between non-imperial locations, from which the anti-imperial coalition is being formed. Theory must catch up with these events and, in order to do this, must criticize the terms in which such events are rendered. I don't claim to have sustained a full alternative in this essay, but I do hope to have shown that the Hardt and Negri version, though much discussed, not only does not do the job, but muddies the key issues.

Footnotes:

¹ I will not address other general negative features of their analysis such as the slippage between the concepts of multitude and proletariat or the serious tendency to avoid conceptual analysis with narrative—for instance, in the development of the concept of biopower where Foucault is said to be surpassed by Deleuze, and then Italian autonomism is said to trump both of them: all of this without a single attempt at analyzing the conceptual structure of these theories in any detail.

² Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000) p. 195. Emphases in text. All further references to this book are by page number within the main text.

³ Leopoldo Zea, “Identity: A Latin American Philosophical Problem” in *Philosophical Forum*, No. 20, 1988-9, p. 33.

⁴ J. M. Coetzee, *Waiting for the Barbarians* (New York: Penguin, 1999) p. 131.

⁵ Ian Angus, *A Border Within: National Identity, Cultural Plurality and Wilderness* (Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's Press, 1997) p. 110.

⁶ Harold Innis, "Conclusion from *The Fur Trade in Canada*" in David Taras, Beverly Rasporich, and Eli Mandel (eds.) *A Passion for Identity* (Scarborough: Nelson Canada, 1993) pp. 18-9.

⁷ Northrop Frye, "Conclusion to *A Literary History of Canada*" in *The Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination* (Toronto: Anansi, 1971).

⁸ Dennis Lee, *Civil Elegies and other poems* (Toronto: Anansi, 1972) p. 56. To as not to mislead, or misuse, I must point out that these lines are followed by: And yet a man does well to leave that game behind, and go and find / some saner version of integrity, / although he will not reach it where he longs to, in the / vacant spaces of his mind—they are so / occupied.

Better however to try./ Here Lee expresses the need to pass beyond rage at imperial space toward some more encompassing position, the difficulty of this task, and yet the necessity to undertake it. In Canadian social and political thought this has usually taken the form of some experience of the sacred that underpins the critical attitude, held in difficult union with the inability to articulate this sacred because of the complicity of language in "imperial space." This and several subsequent quotations were written before awareness of 'gender inclusive language' was widespread. Naturally, I have not changed the quotes.

⁹ Gary Snyder, "The Place, the Region and the Commons" in *The Practice of the Wild* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1990) pp. 25-7.

¹⁰ George Grant, "Canadian Fate and Imperialism" in *Technology and Empire* (Toronto: Anansi, 1969) p. 73.

¹¹ Michael Hardt, “Global Elites Must Realise that U.S. Imperialism Isn’t in their Interest,” *The Guardian*, Wednesday, December 18, 2002.

¹² Frederick Jackson Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” in *Frontier and Section* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1961) p. 38.

¹³ G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (New York: Dover, 1956) p. 86.

¹⁴ Ian Angus, *A Border Within*, p. 128. The reference in this quotation to the “natural limit of the continent” does not make this argument a geographical determinism because its natural quality has been rendered politico-cultural by naming it ‘America.’ The natural limit is thus a marker of a political project.

¹⁵ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983) p. 313.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 321.

¹⁷ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: The Athlone Press, 1988) *passim*, eg. 183.

¹⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 174.

¹⁹ Deleuze and Guattari also reject Amin on this basis. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 239.

²⁰ For an argument that the resurgence of community requires limiting the regime of exchange, see Ian Angus, “Subsistence as a Social Right: A New Political Ideal for Socialism?” in *Studies in Political Economy*, No. 65, Summer 2001.

²¹ There is not space here to go into the distinction between place and locality that would theorize this development further. See Ian Angus, ““Place and Locality in Heidegger’s Late

Thought” *Symposium: Journal of the Canadian Society for Hermeneutics and Postmodern Thought*, Vol. V, No. 1, Spring 2001 and “Locality and Universalization: Where is Canadian Studies?” *Journal of Canadian Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 3, Fall 2000. Special issue on “Locating Canadian Cultures in the Twenty-First Century.” It is this distinction that can account for the difference between fundamentalism and a viable politics of location.

²² Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History” in Hannah Arendt (ed.) *Illuminations* (London: Fontana, 1973).

²³ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 259

²⁴ Leonard Cohen, “The Future” on the compact disk *The Future*.

²⁵ Since I cannot really sustain this claim here, I refer to two texts in which the analysis of social movements in these terms underlines the difference from Hardt and Negri. Ian Angus, *Emergent Publics: An Essay on Social Movements and Democracy* (Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring, 2001) and *Primal Scenes of Communication: Communication, Consumerism, Social Movements* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000).