

DO ALGORITHMS DREAM OF SOCIAL STRIKE? REVIEW OF ANTONIO NEGRI AND MICHAEL HARDT'S *ASSEMBLY*

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Abstract: The essay is a review of Michael Hardt's and Antonio Negri's *Assembly* and it aims at a critical evaluation of its empirical relevance and political usefulness. It focuses on two issues. The first one is general and as such relates to the global context of struggles against capital: the notion of social factory and its implications for political action. The essay argues that the concept of social factory grasped an important development within twentieth century capitalism. It is, however, becoming more and more irrelevant as living labour is being systematically replaced by automation. Unlike the social media or other similar forms of "digital capitalism" analysed in *Assembly*, a very large part of automation does not depend on any kind of continuous, multitudinous human input. It rather aims at uploading the general intellect into the system of autonomous machines, making them independent from the human element. The second issue this essay examines is the recent populist-conservative turn and the situation of peripheral countries that had no part in the recent progressive cycle of struggles (Arab Spring, Occupy, Indignados). The essay points to a bias in the post-Operaist project – its focus on particular geographical and socio-cultural areas – that ignores the different social and political situations of some peripheral countries, especially those of Central-Eastern Europe.

Keywords: social factory, algorithmization, post-Operaism, populism, peripheries.

Difference and Repetition

Reviewing Antonio Negri's and Michael Hardt's *Assembly* is not an easy task. As *Assembly* presents the fifth instalment in the series initiated by *Empire* almost two decades ago, one cannot look at it other than from the perspective set up by that latter – truly outstanding – book. It is not a question of nostalgia, but rather one of the theoretical and political evolution that we have all been through over that period. A reference to *Empire* is also placed in one of the closing chapters of *Assembly* (Hardt and Negri 2017, 263–267), so it is not just my particular fixation that links these books in one thread. Hardt and Negri are right to point out to the ongoing relevance of their diagnosis. This is one of the things that make *Assembly* a great read and that seduced me almost two decades ago: much of what constitutes the over-hyped, mainstream, liberal delights over the intricate wonders of globalization and consumer society (from Daniel Bell to Thomas Friedman) finds a deeper and better formulation in the thinking of this Italian-American duet, proving that critical theory offers not just the ethically right diagnosis of contemporary capitalism, but also a pertinent insight into its inner workings. The same is true for such themes as innovation and cooperation, or even the “sharing economy”, a label used to describe the new exploitative techniques of capitalism a few years back, when companies such as Uber and Airbnb made headlines for different reasons than for their exploitation of immigrants and displacement of local residents from the historical city centres of their own cities.

What follows is not a typical review, but rather an essay inspired by the last book of this Italian-American duo. I will focus on two issues that have struck me as crucial in my reading, although they are not closely linked to one another. This doing, I will attempt only a partial and sketchy reconstruction of the thesis put forward in the book and I will take it only to the limit required by the clarity of my own argument. As a matter of fact, I do not think such a reconstruction is required at all. *Assembly* is not a book for a casual reader, but rather a highly specialized publication operating within a conceptual frame that is impossible to sketch in such a short text. For those who have not only been through all Negri's and Hardt's books since *Empire*, but have also followed parallel developments in post-Operaist theory made by Carlo Vercellone, Christian Marazzi, Mateo Pasquinelli, Gigi Roggero and others, *Assembly* brings with it little in the way of new ideas or analysis. Rather, it offers a recombination and actualization of the conceptual schemes and diagnoses made in the previous books – those pertaining to the social factory, exodus, the becoming-cognitive-of-labour, biopolitical production, the multitude, constituent power and radical democracy. These are – to stress it again – among the most interesting social and political concepts of our time. So the problem is not that they paint an irrelevant picture of the world we live in.

It is that this picture brings a lot of repetition and too little difference. There has been some new and interesting social, political and technical developments in the meantime that Hardt and Negri do not take it account or do so but not in a sufficiently comprehensive way. I'm thinking mostly about two issues and these are the ones I'd like to focus on in this essay. Firstly, the shift in political hegemony: neoliberalism seems to be in retreat and liberalism surely is; both have been replaced by a right-wing conservative-populist turn that is addressed in *Assembly*, however with too little attention and with virtually no implications for political analysis. The second issue is the recent developments in the domain of artificial intelligence – or, if you want a less lofty descriptor, in machine learning and big-data processing – developments that make some of the basic assumptions of *Assembly* quite problematic. Let me start with the latter.

Every tool is a weapon...

Hardt and Negri are great Marxists. This does not mean that they are orthodox in terms of sticking closely to Scripture. Being orthodox rather implies that one starts any political analysis from the given conjuncture of social and economic factors and always refers to the level of material production and reproduction of forms of life. As various Operaist and post-Operaist thinkers have meticulously shown, contemporary capitalism functions according to a different mode of production to the one that Marx dealt with 150 years ago. First and foremost, this change involves a modification of the basic division between productive and unproductive labour. Capitalism does not produce on the closed premises of a factory, but in a wide circuit of social interactions and cooperation that encompasses our daily existence. This diagnosis is mostly associated with Mario Tronti's notion of the "social factory" (Tronti 2016, Bologna 1976). However, it should be recalled that feminist thought has contributed greatly to this discovery, and if this contribution is taken seriously, it becomes clear that the division between what is productive and what is merely reproductive remains a fictional construction; caring labour has always been labour just like factory labour (Dalla Costa 1994, Federici 1975). Yet, it is also true that the development of capitalism has further undermined this division in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and has thus taken production to a new level of socialization. Hardt and Negri rightly point to social media and internet search algorithms as the best examples of this tendency (Hardt and Negri 2017, 118–119). As a matter of fact, the latter is an even bigger parasite than they claim, as Google's PageRank not only extracts value from the links that people put online, but evaluates their pertinence on the basis of the clicks that we make while browsing through the search results;

and pertinence is not the only “organic” component on the list of over 200 criteria that Google uses to rank the results. They also monitor how much time we spend on the page to which the search results take us.¹ So we are literally working in the Google’s factory every time we use its search engine.

Unlike “postindustrialism” or “lean manufacturing”, the notion of social factory is more than just an academic, descriptive concept. The organization of production remains closely intertwined with class struggles. This works in both ways: not only there are new strategies of resistance opening up within this new reality, but capitalism also mutates to accommodate the labour pressures as new forms of organization of production create new possibilities and platforms for the self-organization of labour and its struggles against capital. Hardt and Negri express it through the implication: “social factory => social unionism => social strike” (Hardt and Negri 2017, 147–150). Just as the social factory functions beyond the confines of industrial factory, so too does the social strike go beyond the tactics typical of the industrial, pre-Fordist and Fordist eras. Not being contained within factory, labour needs to organize beyond its walls, on the field of social life as such. Not only do the traditional unions focused on representing the full-time workers of a given branch of industry – or even individual factories – no longer fulfil their role, but they even hamper effective political action. The social factory demands a more multitudinous and social organization of struggles. Any successful resistance constructed within such frames cannot take the form of a traditional, industrial strike, as an important part of the contemporary labour force operates in precarious conditions and does not enjoy the benefits of a stable employment relationship (nor is it even employed, as is the case with those undertaking care work and reproductive labour in the household). Here is where the social strikes comes in; it is a truly post-Fordist means of carrying out class struggle. The authors argue that it is not only the most appropriate tool given the conditions of the social factory, but also the most effective. According to Hardt and Negri, the socialization of production and its becoming-cognitive entails a new advantage for workers: as labour becomes increasingly cognitive and socialized, it becomes – paradoxically, but in keeping with the “Marx beyond Marx” logic introduced by Antonio Negri some decades ago (Negri 1991) – a part of fixed capital. The fact that the production process relies on embodied knowledge and the social networks constituted by labourers independently of capital transubstantiates the workers themselves and their daily lives in the means of production (just think of Facebook as a big marketing factory, where you work every time you post a message or a comment). Hardt and Negri are not speaking metaphorically here, but giving us an actual account of contemporary capitalism. The social strike – very much like the exodus described in detail in *Commonwealth* (Hardt and Negri 2009,

¹ <https://backlinko.com/google-ranking-factors>

152–184) – is the idea that this new development must be used by turning it against the owner of capital: when society is a factory in which each moment of our existence is an element of (re)valorization, then it is also a counter-weapon that each and every one of us can use against capitalism. “Every tool is a weapon if you hold it right” – to quote the line from the song of Ani di Franc and used as the motto for *Empire*.

So much for the reconstruction of what Hardt and Negri have to say. Now let’s attempt a critical examination of their argument.

Uploading the general intellect

Linking the evolving organization of production with changing forms and strategies of class struggle is obviously a very good idea. There are some historically and geographically invariant traits of capitalism – like the urge to accumulate and the necessary exploitation implicated in the capitalist mode of production – but much of it has been constantly mutating. After all, “the bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society” (Marx and Engels 2008, 10). As both the reformist and revolutionary strength of labour directly stems from its ability to disrupt the process of capitalist production, struggles need to be attuned to the constantly changing ways in which capital extracts surplus value. That is the rationale behind linking the social factory and the social strike. There is also an obvious consequence: as the diagnosis justifies the recipe for struggle, a flawed diagnosis of what capitalism is and how it subsumes labour under its rule risks leading us to the wrong political conclusion. It’s here, I believe, that the biggest weakness of Hardt’s and Negri diagnosis lies.

The concept of the social factory is surely a neat and pertinent piece of critical theory. It catches in a germane way the new and original development of twentieth-century capitalism and describes an important part of the social, political and economic landscape in which we still live. One needs to remember, however, that this concept is almost half-a-century old; it is a twentieth-century concept that is slowly being made irrelevant by the latest tendencies in capitalist production. Hardt and Negri rightly illustrate their thesis with some recent advances in the field of communications technologies, such as social media and Internet search engines. However, the logic of the parasitic extraction of surplus value from autonomously organized social interactions – and thus its crucial dependence on the social – is far from unique or even dominant in the sphere of immaterial production. The essence of the revolution that in the most concise and simple way can be labeled as algorithmizing – or

in a slightly more complicated but also more pertinent way as an autonomization of algorithm – is completely different. Facebook or Google may need the input of the multitude to make their algorithms work, that is not, however, how chess playing programs or self-driving cars work. They are more and more dependent on their ability to autonomously and quickly process large amounts of data and extract from them what they need in order to achieve the goal set for their algorithms. In this respect, games playing software is becoming almost entirely independent from any human input or assistance – an autonomous computing system exists that can master the winning strategies of games it does not know by just playing them with itself. The self-driving car does not rely on any multitudinous input as Google and Facebook does – its ability to drive does not depend on any other person using any kind of vehicle. Of course, these machines still need a human element in order to operate. That is true and is going to remain so for a very long time. What is crucial for undermining the theoretical-political diagnosis of Hardt and Negri is the fact that it is not a multitudinous input from any kind of social factory. These machines need highly trained and specialized assistants – engineers and beta-testers. They do not need any kind of human multitude. Their design and processing power makes them something uncanny or even creepy – they are a multitude in themselves. The ultimate goal and the logical result of their development is by no means a subsumption of any kind of living labour under its rule, but rather *its complete elimination*. This will soon happen, for example, with the self-driving car, the most developed of these new disruptive technologies: human drivers will be systematically and thoroughly replaced with machinic ones up to the point that only marginal human input will be needed to keep the system running.

This is only a synecdoche of the forthcoming convulsion of our lives. The machines we are creating now are different from anything that has ever existed before. The division between manual and cognitive tasks is not important for assessing their capacities. The crucial division is routine *vs* non-routine tasks. For that reason, automations are going to devour many professions that demand cognitive abilities: lawyers, teachers, physicians. Of course, this will not happen at once and will take some time. However, if we are talking about the tendency at stake – and that is the logic Hardt's and Negri's analysis works on – what we are witnessing is the process of *becoming-cognitive-of-machines* and of *becoming-redundant-of-humans*. The time of biopolitics is slowly coming to its end. Welcome to the era of the technopolitical.

There is an interesting pattern in automation – known as Moravec's paradox (Moravec 1988) – that puts the question of the living labour in an intriguing yet also a troubling perspective: machines are very good at doing what we do badly and very bad at what we do well. All the tasks that require perceptive and motor skills are very difficult to automate. On the other hand, no human being can match machines in processing large amounts of data or making billions of calculations in a fraction of a second. So, if you want

to win a chess match, your best bet nowadays is to have a machine playing instead of you, but if you need to set up a chessboard for that match or to clean the table afterwards, then you will want a human. Now, the most interesting and troubling fact is that the difficulty of automating a given task is closely correlated with the evolutionary stage at which living organisms have acquired the ability to perform it. What is the easiest for machines to master are functions and faculties that only we, humans, have developed at quite recent stages of evolution: logical thinking, algebra and language. What is difficult are living matter's first achievements in epistemological conquest: tasks linked with perception, movement and even basic manipulation. Opening a door, the recent achievement of SpotMini – the new robot made by Boston Dynamics, a leading robotic company acquired by Google in 2013 – was hailed as a major success and its video has made a hit on the internet (Hern 2018), while there are literally tens of thousands of clips proving that a cat is able to perform a similar task (just google the phrase “cat opening door”).

All of the above, far from being solely a technical curiosity, has got some serious consequences for the conditions and possible strategies of struggle of the contemporary working class. We are very close to the moment described by Marx in his famous “The Fragment on Machines” from the *Grundrisse*, which should rather be titled “The Fragment on the Automatic System of Machinery”. As Marx writes:

(O)nce adopted into the production process of capital, the means of labour passes through different metamorphoses, whose culmination is the machine, or *rather, an automatic system of machinery* (system of machinery: the automatic one is merely its most complete, most adequate form, and alone transforms machinery into a system), set in motion by an automaton, a *moving power that moves itself*; this automaton consisting of numerous mechanical and intellectual organs, so that the *workers themselves are cast merely as its conscious linkages* [emphasis – JS] (Marx 1973, 692).

The same thought was expressed in a different, yet equally post-humanistic way by Guy Debord, when he described the spectacle – i.e. the contemporary incarnation of capital – as *mouvement autonome du non-vivant* – “an autonomous movement of the nonliving” (Debord 2005, 7).

The crucial assumption made by Hardt and Negri, namely that the development of the productive forces of capitalism – the becoming-cognitive-of-labour with all its consequences – turns variable capital into fixed capital in the process of embodying the means of production is fundamentally wrong. If anything, the opposite is true: we are experiencing a disembodiment of the general intellect and its uploading into the system of

autonomous machines. The position of living labour *vis-à-vis* capital does not seem to be getting better because of the (r)evolution in how capitalist production is being organized and conducted. It is rather getting more and more problematic, as living labour is not only being increasingly replaced by machinery, but also certain faculties adjudged uniquely human are being transferred to machines. Living labour may still remain a part of the system, but it is going to be less and less human labour in terms of being based on abilities that are uniquely and differentially human. In future, it may very well be that the last living labour in the history of the earth is not supplied by humans, but by some kind of augmented animals, like James, the half-dolphin-half-cyborg protagonist of William Gibson's *Neuromancer*. This will be the only kind of labour that capitalism needs once all cognitive tasks have become automated.

What is sure is that when it comes to the job market impact of automation, the situation of living labour is only going to get more and more difficult. The above-mentioned paradox that machines do well what we do badly and vice versa is going to eliminate, first, a lot of middle-tier jobs that require some cognitive skills, but not a lot of invention: routine medical advice, simple engineering, basic legal advice, secretarial jobs or most of what is still called journalism, even if as a matter of fact it is just cutting-and-pasting with a little bit of translating from foreign news outlets. As a result, a lot of middle-class, still relatively well-paid jobs are going to disappear and low-paying, low-skills job will proliferate: you will not be able to practice in a law firm, because junior legal advice will get automated. This will enable the owner of the law firm to become even wealthier, so instead he may buy a stable of expensive, luxury horses. As machines will perform rather poorly in looking after such particular animals, you will have a chance for that position.

Thus, the old question of skills and deskilling comes back to haunt us again. What Hardt and Negri seem to imply is that the working class, now being massively invested with cognitive capacities and organizing in a more and more autonomous way is getting not only more and more skilled (variable capital becoming fixed capital *via* embodiment of means of cognitive production), but also more and more autonomous in exercising their skills. It is difficult to see a lot of empirical relevance for this claim. If it was true, then Amazon's Mechanical Turk subcontractors were the avant-garde of working class and the forefront of class struggle. While some organization of gig economy workers is taking place, it looks like being a formidably difficult task, one much more complicated and less effective than traditional unions operating in the industrial factories (Kessler 2015). What is even more problematic is that a vast army of ex-workers is being pushed into the position of lumpen-proletariat or Hegel's rabble, to use a less lofty expression. They are no longer a dialectical class: not so much exploited by capital as rather simply neglected, left outside the system, similar to many industrial workers in the US Rust Belt or the English post-industrial north.

Maybe it helps to explain why they prefer to vote for anti-systemic populist parties and candidates and not for any kind of left, whether new or old? Let's now turn to this new phenomenon in the political landscape, which, in my humble opinion, deserves more attention than it was given in *Assembly*.

Talking about the counter-revolution

Hardt and Negri do deal with right-wing populism in their last book, however they do it in a limited and reluctant way. This is somehow troubling, as the conservative-populist turn is the most important social and political development since *Commonwealth* and *Declaration* were published. Hardt and Negri are right in depicting these movements as reactionary – and this epithet remains correct whether you read it in a Marxist way or in its everyday sense – however after the political defeats of Occupy and Indignados and the spectacular triumphs of right-wing populist from the US to the UK, including Poland, Hungary, Ukraine and the Philippines, it is difficult to take at face value the parts of *Assembly* that laud young people spontaneously organizing for progressive causes. There surely have been such movements, but they have been in an equally undeniable way out-numbered and outmanoeuvred by right-wingers: populists, conservatives and (neo)fascists. I have to admit that reading *Assembly* from the European semi-periphery, which has become the avant-garde of reaction, I found this book completely irrelevant to any direct social or political experience I've had in Poland in the last years. Neither we nor any other Central European country have had any kind of *Indignados*, Occupy or *Nuit débout* movements. On the other hand, our societies have been world pioneers in reaction, societies in which conservative populists have enjoyed considerable social and electoral support since the early 1990s. However great a read *Assembly* might be, I found in it no tools to enable me to better understand or deal with this troubling situation. Generally, to my great disappointment, I increasingly find Hardt's and Negri's theory to be centred on a particular political experience of the West (from the Italian autonomist Marxism of the 1960s to the American Occupy movement), with an important Latin/Southern bias (*Zapatistas*, Arab Spring etc.). This problem has always been there, but I've paid little attention to it, something I believe attests to my subjugated status as semi-peripheral intellectual and activist. We have always lived with the assumption that history – whether bourgeois, revolutionary or reactionary – is elsewhere, that it has been happening on the streets of Paris, Rome, New York or London. We have been supposed to catch up with these developments or – at best – to supplement them with some local particular variety.

One may think that the logic of peripheral resentment and striving for recognition is speaking through me here. Even if this is the case, there is much more to it. What we have seen over the last 30 years is a fundamental reversal of the global centre-periphery dynamics as conceptualized by various kinds of approaches to modernization, whether from the left or the right. The centre leads no longer, nor does it provide any kind of blueprint that is being realized elsewhere. Rather the opposite is true: the peripheries constitute a kind of disturbing, distorted and perverted avant-garde. The precarization of labour relations (diagnosed by Ulrich Beck in the 1990s as the “Latino-Americanization” of the labour market; Beck 2000, 21), the fall of secularism and the resurgence of bigotry, reactionary populisms and rampant nationalisms, failing social services (just think of what is happening with the British NHS), the degradation of cities and urban spaces (to the point of London being called “Lagos on the Thames”; Elliott and Atkinson 2012, 51) – all that happened first on the peripheries and has spread to the core of capitalist world-system.

The same holds true when we think about the recent developments within capitalism itself – namely the rise of neoliberalism. We tend to associate its genealogy with Reagan and Thatcher, neglecting the fact that the doctrine was very much shaped and tested in the peripheries: the first neoliberal state was Pinochet’s Chile and Jeffrey Sachs first introduced his thorough neoliberal overhaul of the state in Bolivia in the 1980s; neoliberalism constituted its global hegemony *via* and thanks to its rampant triumph in the former Soviet bloc (after all, it was precisely the victory of free-market capitalism and parliamentary democracy over central planning and party dictatorship that inspired Fukuyama (2007) to proclaim the end of history). Looking at what has been happening in the UK and the US since 2016 – Trump and Brexit – I am left with an uncanny feeling of a “Polonization” of the world politics: these are the kinds of people and situations that we have seen in Poland and elsewhere in the region since 1990 (Sowa 2018). To my big disappointment, the only attempt made by Hardt and Negri to deal with Central-Eastern Europe is a small passage on Mitteleuropa [sic!] (Hardt and Negri 2017, 134–138), a notion that had a lot of fortune with Polish liberal and conservative intellectuals in the 1990s, but seems to have little relevance for contemporary problems insofar as they are generated not by a region’s particular cultural or historical identity, but by the way it has been re-integrated within the capitalist world-system.

My attempt to turn attention to the developments in Central-Eastern Europe should not be confused with postcolonial cry for recognition. It is not that I’d like the region to be recognized for what it is. Rather the opposite: I’d like to see it stop being what it is. However, that will not happen if we do not see the particular formation it represents and do not explore its present social and political condition. What it illustrates is not entirely in line with Hardt’s and Negri’s optimism regarding the character of multitudinous mobilizations. It rather proves the point that Paolo Virno made in his *A Grammar of The Multitude* – that in some

circumstances there is a dark side to bottom-up, grassroots, multitudinous formation, that they do not always and not necessarily have a progressive nature (Virno 2004, 40–41). We surely “have not yet seen what is possible when the multitude assembles” (Hardt and Negri 2017, 295). But an important part of these possibilities include things that neither do we want to see. None of this negates the Spinozian optimism that *Assembly* is built on; it just creates an exigency to be more discriminating and to look into the actual content of multitudinous movements, not just their form. Hardt and Negri have a systematic tendency to emphasize the progressive and empowering element in every bottom-up social action and this blinds them to the sombre reality that is so difficult to overlook in Central-Eastern Europe: we are part of a movement that is to an important extent animated by cynical politicians, but is also a grass-roots, fascist mobilization that takes form of “leaderless counter-revolution”, to use the title of an inspiring book by Angela Nagle, who exposes the dark side of the internet culture of horizontality and the multitude (Nagle 2017). It is a complicated matter that requires a lot of subtle conceptual interventions and empirical research and I do not intend to deal with it here. However, I find that Hardt’s and Negri’s *Assembly* offers little or no help in this formidable endeavour.

What’s to be done?

However paradoxical it may sound, what I enjoyed the most in Hardt’s and Negri’s book is its last part, which deals first with the notions of revolution and reform, and then goes on to summarize the strategy of resistance. The kind of de-fetishization of the very concept of revolution that takes place there is an important step forward and makes a valuable contribution to a debate that we are actually not having but should be. It presents a far soberer and more practical approach to the question of the transition from capitalism to some kind of post-capitalist formation than the one offered by, for instance, Slavoj Žižek’s *Revolution at the Gates* (Žižek 2011). It is naïve and unrealistic to suppose that we will be only able to think about an alternative to the existing order once it is struck down by the first blow of revolutionary force. The experience of crumbling (neo)liberal hegemony that we have been witnessing in the last years shows that it will rather be those who already have a plan for a different world – in the present case the reactionary mix of populists, fascists and conservatives – that will create some kind of new order when the old one comes tumbling down. So we surely need to start to think, dream and plan now. An incredibly important political advantage of the way that Hardt and Negri have been approaching this issue resides precisely in the awakening of imagination that it offers.

The way that the imaginary form of revolution is constructed by much of the radical left is a fetishistic and romanticized copy of bourgeois revolutions, especially the French one. To some extent Marx himself fell victim to this romantic cliché. Obviously, not every passage from one formation to the following one needs to take the same dramaturgical form. Feudalism emerged from Antiquity in a different way than capitalism did from the Middle Ages. The same may very well be true for the communist or any other post-capitalist order. The idea of the new order emerging “in the shell of the old” offers an inspiring framework when it comes to struggling for a better world. “Fuck the revolutionary moment! Fight now whatever place you occupy in the social factory!” may be a good motto for this struggle. And actually, even if the notion of social factory itself may not grasp the realities of contemporary capitalism anymore, the political recipes that Hardt and Negri give at the end of their book seem to be very clever and relevant.

First, we need to terminate the endless discussions about the sense of social-democratic reformism. Of course, social-democracy is just a way of managing capitalism. There is no such thing as the “social-democratic mode of production” and all that social-democracy does is to tinker with modes of redistribution. However, far from hampering more radical struggles, social-democracy creates much more space for carrying them on. At least that is what the social and political history of the twentieth century attests to. As Hardt and Negri rightly point out, the crisis of Keynesism in the 1970s stemmed from social conquests and the growing expectations of the working class (Hardt and Negri 2017, 155–158). Neoliberalism rose to prominence as a reactionary formation that was supposed to contain that growing revolution. It is an empirical fact that the real increase in oppression and exploitation that this change of hegemony has entailed has not lead to any outburst of revolutionary struggles. Quite to the contrary: it has pushed reactionary politics to a new level unseen since the Second World War. (By the way, this was the lesson provided by the ex-Soviet bloc already in the 1990s, as this region went through an accelerated neoliberal reformatting early in that decade. In this respect, this region showed the future path of those countries still in the process of dismantling their welfare mechanisms.) So, looking from the standpoint of radical left-wing politics, we can safely assume that although social democracy is not our game, it does not put our cause under any important threat. It rather has the opposite effect: by providing everyone with basic social security and allowing them to live their lives in a relative stability (job protection, accessible healthcare, good quality education for all etc.), it reduces the level of fear and makes people more willing to engage in progressive actions. It also takes the steam out of the fascist whistle that always feeds on misery and suffering. The three golden decades of the welfare state between 1945 and 1975 confirm the truthfulness of this diagnosis: it was a period of intense progressive struggles when fascism was contained to a marginal underground.

Second – and as a consequence of the above – Hardt and Negri are right when they claim that we need to employ a range of resistance strategies: reforming institutions, changing the ideological hegemony at the level of state power and creating a network of independent, horizontal counter-power not only may, but also should function in a synergic rather than a competitive way (Hardt and Negri 2017, 274–280). We waste too much time and energy on internal fractional struggles within formations lying to the left of liberalism. We should rather aim at building a complementary coalition, and not engage in a winner-takes-all competition to eliminate one another. A time may come when we will have to confront social-democratic hegemony and challenge it in another struggle, but this time is not now. It does not mean we should all engage in realizing the social-democratic program. More radical causes have to be maintained and fought for, but this struggle should target the right-wing in both its liberal and conservative incarnations, not the social-democratic centre.

Third – and last – the emphasis that Hardt and Negri place on the importance of constructing a horizontal and multitudinous counter-power against the vertical and hierarchical apparatus of the state (Hardt and Negri 2017, 254–258) seems to be correct, even if in their own narration it is founded on questionable premises (the social factory thesis and their conviction that we are experiencing a growing autonomy of living labour). And, as a matter of fact, this strategy is by no means the invention of the authors of *Assembly*. Exactly the very same idea is praised by many anarcho-communist activists and theoreticians. That is precisely what Murray Bookchin endorses in his support for municipal confederalism (Bookchin 1992, 251–288) or David Graeber in his account of the 2011 Occupy movement (Graeber 2013). We need these horizontal structures of democracy, solidarity and autonomy not because we have unprecedented capacities to build them, but because the contrary is happening: with the general intellect being uploaded to the system of autonomous machines constructed along the lines of capitalist rationality we are being disposed of at levels never seen before in the history of humankind. Rhizomatic horizontality or – to refer to the Polish anarchist Edward Abramowski – mutual help is our last line of defence. The capitalist system of the autonomous non-living has got their machines, their politicians and their soldiers. We have ourselves. *Hic Rhodus, hic salta*.

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A Joy Forever: Political Economy of Social Creativity z tekstami m.in. Luca Boltanskiego, Massimiliano Tomby, Isabelle Graw i Gigiego Roggero.

TYTUŁ: Czy algorytmy śnią o strajku społecznym? Recenzja *Assembly* Michaela Hardta i Antonia Negriego

ABSTRAKT: Artykuł stanowi recenzję *Assembly* Michaela Hardta i Antonia Negriego, w której autor dokonuje krytycznego omówienia empirycznej adekwatności i politycznej użyteczności tej publikacji. Skupia się na dwóch kwestiach. Pierwsza jest ogólna i odnosi się do globalnego kontekstu walk przeciwko kapitałowi: do pojęcia fabryki społecznej i jego implikacji dla działania politycznego. W tekście postawiona zostaje teza, że koncepcja fabryki społecznej dobrze ujmowała ważny aspekt rozwoju dwudziestowiecznego kapitalizmu, ale obecnie staje się coraz bardziej nieadekwatna. Powodem jest systematyczne zastępowanie żywej pracy przez automatyzację. W odróżnieniu od mediów społecznościowych czy podobnych form „kapitalizmu cyfrowego” analizowanych w *Assembly*, znacząca część automatyzacji nie jest zależna od jakiegokolwiek ciągłego wkładu pracy wielości. Polega raczej na „wgraniu” intelektu powszechnego do system autonomicznych maszyn, przez co stają się one niezależne od ludzkiego czynnika. Druga kwestia analizowana w recenzji dotyczy niedawnego zwrotu populistyczno-konserwatywnego oraz sytuacji w krajach peryferyjnych, które nie uczestniczyły w ostatnim progresywnym cyklu walk (Arabska Wiosna, Occupy, Indignados). Autor wskazuje na pewną stronniczość postoperaistycznego projektu – jego skupienie na określonych geograficznych i społeczno-kulturowych obszarach – która sprawia, że ignorowane są inne społeczne i polityczne sytuacje w niektórych krajach peryferii, zwłaszcza w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: fabryka społeczna, algorytmizacja, postoperaizm, populizm, peryferie