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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to establish the continuity of a key concept in the work of Antonio Negri, both individually, and in his co authored work with Michael Hardt. I will argue that although developed in a very specific practical and theoretical conjuncture, the concept of ‘self valorisation’ is critical for understanding Negri’s theory of revolutionary subjectivity, both then and now. Even the most rudimentary glance at Negri’s early and later work will confirm that the concept is used significantly less, and yet, I will demonstrate that through what I call the exploration of the common, the theory remains highly operative. Although wrested from its original context, then, self valorisation finds itself used in a way that attempts to bridge the gap between the technical and political aspects of the class composition of the multitude.
Introduction

Since the publication of *Empire* (2000) and *Multitude* (2004) the work of Antonio Negri has become increasingly prevalent in radical social theory. In one sense, at least, this was always likely to be the case, especially when one considers Negri’s own personal reputation as a militant scholar that in the 1970’s, found himself in serious trouble with the Italian authorities. On another level, however, the success of *Empire* was perhaps due to its seeming ability to cross and combine various academic disciplines. Academically the book generated numerous debates, and in general, both translations of Negri’s earlier and later writings (in English), alongside contemporary volumes dedicated to his work are becoming rapidly available. Yet it has always seemed to me that the foundation to many of the arguments in both *Empire* and *Multitude* could in fact be found much earlier, particularly in Negri’s collected lectures that came to comprise *Marx beyond Marx* (1982). Hence, the method of the ‘antagonistic tendency’, the notion of ‘real subsumption’, the embryonic multitude in the form of the ‘socialised worker’, the demands for a ‘social wage’, all very much at the heart of Negri’s most recent work, can be found directly in his early periods. For the purposes of my argument, the same phenomenon can and must also be applied to Negri’s theory of self valorisation. Negri’s theory of self valorisation, in other words, although developed in a very different context, remains very much at the heart of his theory of revolutionary subjectivity today. In the English speaking world, without a doubt the most significant attempt to take up this concept has been by Harry Cleaver (1982, 1992, 2003) Over the years the various materials on his personal website (including his highly useful reading guide to Marx’s *Capital*) have remained an excellent resource, and it is without a doubt he that has offered the most consistent and engaging appropriation of Negri’s concept. However,
to my knowledge at least, what Cleaver hasn’t done (as yet) is to situate the concept in Negri’s most recent thought, both individually and in his well known collaborative work with Michael Hardt. The aim of this essay is to contribution to that task. Structurally, the essay will follow a simple pattern. I will start by establishing the contours to the particular form of Marxist theory that developed in Italy during her period of post WW2 reconstruction. I will then move directly to assess the way Negri’s theory of self valorisation emerged as a way of radicalising the most basic elements to that theory. Finally, I will demonstrate where his theory sits today.


**Operaismo**

During the post WW2 years of Italian reconstruction, a group of young militant scholars gradually began to pull themselves away from the orthodox concerns of their respective institutional allegiances (Wright 2002, p15) In particular, they began to question their complicity in establishing the basis on which Italy’s ‘economic miracle’ would be built; the enforced docility of labour. In this sense perhaps the most pressing concern was rethinking the precise relationship between capital and labour. In this sense Tronti’s (1979a, 1979b) work would become decisive, and would lead to the development of a specifically Italian chapter in the history of Marxist theory. According to Tronti (1979a, p1) for too long had Marxist theory regarded the development of working class struggle as a mere ‘reactive’ phenomenon, based on and simply mirroring the development of capital. What was needed, according to him, was nothing less than a complete inversion; ‘to reverse the polarity, and start again from the beginning: and at the beginning is the class struggle of the working class’. Whether one regards this as a ‘theoretical regression’ (Lumley 1980, p129), a Copernican inversion’ (Moulier 2005, p 19) or for its ‘scandalous novelty’ (Wright 2002, p 63), its importance as a fundamental axiom for the development of Negri’s theory of self valorisation cannot be overstated. For Tronti, then, ‘At the level of socially developed capital, capitalist development becomes subordinated to working class struggles: it follows behind them, and they set the pace to which the political mechanisms of capital’s own development must be tuned’. Far from being the mere re-active objects of capitalist exploitation, through Tronti’s insistence we learn an entirely different story. It is, in fact, capital that is re-active, and it is the working class that ‘sets the pace’ to which it must find an adequate response. Even when reduced to a mere ‘factor of production’, (Tronti (1979b, p10, p18) would insist that
the working class still held the key commodity on which the whole edifice of bourgeois society was built – labour power. There is ‘no active life in capital’ without it. Hence, objectively the working class was the most powerful subjectivity that could confront capitalist hegemony. The ‘simplest of revolutionary truths’ thus becomes immediately clear; ‘capital can not destroy the working class: (but) the working class can destroy capital’. Tronti’s starting point, then, is simple enough. It is the power of living labour that is the dynamic element to capitalist society. For capital, this power must be harnessed in such a way to ensure it remains mere labour capacity, and doesn’t develop into a fully blown antagonistic subjectivity. The possibility remains, however, that the latter option might indeed occur. What, in other words, would be capital’s response if the working class set a pace to which it couldn’t follow?

It was Raniero Panzieri that was to provide the most significant answer. In his excellent ‘The Capitalist use of Machinery’ (1980) he argued strongly that Italian post war reconstruction was premised directly on the strategic use of machinery to break the power of the Italian working class, a power that had accumulated significantly during the resistance to Fascism. It is crucial to note the importance the re-reading of Marx during this period; especially the chapters in Capital that deal with the development of the division of labour and the consequent growth of machinery (Casarino & Negri 2008, p50) In this respect, the significance of the return to Marx was twofold. In chapter 14 of Capital, for instance, Marx (1990, p458) outlines clearly the way that the ‘specialised worker’ was to become the basis to a potentially much stronger subjectivity, as embodied in the ‘collective worker’. A chapter later, Marx (Ibid, p562, 563) adds that it was the development of machinery that was used selectively as a means of both deskilling the specialised worker, and disciplining the collective worker. Following Marx, then, against the complicit union
strategy of the time Panzieri (1980, p49) argued that far from being a mere ‘passing phase...a painful but necessary transition’, the capitalist use of machinery was used solely to both deepen its domination and offer ‘new possibilities for the consolidation of its power’. Panzieri’s work on the strategic employment of machinery to combat working class struggle was to be enriched by a series of ‘workers enquires’ in the factories of FIAT and Olivetti, under the foresight of Romano Alquati (Wright 2002, p 46). In what was to become Alquati’s most enduring legacy for the development of Operaismo (Wright 2007, p279), it was in and though these studies that the key theoretical concept of ‘class composition’ emerged. This theory would quickly become a perfect example of the ‘rigorously one sided class logic’ that was initially demanded by Tronti (1979a, p6) In Volume 1 of Capital Marx (1990, p762) referred to the ‘composition of capital’ primarily in relation to capitalist power, i.e. the relationship between constant and variable capital, and the way this would determine its ability to exploit the working class. Beyond this perspective, the analysis of class composition sought to understand the ways the working class could resist capitalist exploitation, and in so doing, find ways of developing its own composition. The theory of class composition involves an analysis of both the technical and political characteristics of productive subjectivity (Negri 2008b, p105). Technically, class composition is conditioned by the objective characteristics of labour itself, i.e. the way in which it is organised, the tools that it uses, the commodities that it produces etc. Politically, class composition is established by both a present and anticipated development of its subjective capacities, all of which would develop in line with its technical determinants, i.e. the needs, struggles, and organisational capacities of the working class. This theory was to lead to various historical studies, and in particular, the analysis of the various ‘cycles of struggle’ that were subsequently seen to characterise the history of capitalist development. For
instance, if the composition of the working class was able to ‘re compose’ itself to such an extent as to challenge capitalist domination, then capital would need to ‘re compose’ its own composition in order to ‘de compose’ the working classes’ (Cleaver 1992, p114, 115) This theory of class composition, as I will make clear shortly, would be an absolutely crucial element for Negri’s own work. According to him (1988, p209) any attempt to understand the constitution of proletarian subjectivity ‘must be framed in terms of this historical transformability’.

For the Operaisti the analysis of class composition during the 1960’s centred directly on what became known as the ‘Mass worker’. Technically, the mass worker was ‘massified, it performed simple labour, and it was located at the heart of the immediate process of production’ (Wright 2002, p 107) More specifically, the technical characteristics of the mass worker correlated with the Taylorist organisation of the labour process, and the Keynesian regulation of capitalist social relations (Negri 1988, p205) Combined with the more conventional wage pushes, politically the struggles of the mass worker assumed the form of a generalised ‘refusal of labour’, whether this would be the strike, factory occupations, or industrial sabotage. These struggles were also characterised by an ability and willingness to shun the officialdom of both the unions and parties, establishing autonomous forms of collective action outside and at times against their official sanction. The problem, however, at this point was the need for a new organisational form. As labour power the working class might be the objective basis to capitalist society, but this didn’t automatically lead to its subjective comprehension. On this point Tronti (1979a, p6) was insistent; organisational continuity might be a ‘rare’ thing, yet without one ‘the revolutionary process will not begin’. This issue would prove decisive, both for the unity of Operaismo itself, and Negri’s theory of self valorisation.
With the help of the students, the struggles of the mass worker reached their pinnacle towards the end of the 1960s. In order for capital to re-establish control its only option was to ‘de compose’ this composition. According to Negri (2005a, p143), the methods at hand included (amongst other things) the ‘socialisation, territorialisation, and flexibility’ of capitalist production, all which were designed to break the material basis on which the mass worker had become so powerful. Hence through the strategic use of machinery, targeted redundancies, and investment in tertiary sectors – the hegemonic role of the industrial workers gradually began to decline. Recruitment of labour power once regarded as marginal, was now to occupy a strategically central position in production on a whole. Negri’s contribution to (or for some, abandonment of) the theory of class composition would now take its most controversial turn; from the mass worker to the *socialized worker* (c.f. Wright 2002, p152). By his own admission (Negri 2008a, p52) during the 1960s both Negri’s academic and political writing was largely put on hold. The 1970s, however, would be a completely different story. During that decade, Negri’s attempt to understand the significance of these changes would begin to draw heavily on Marx’s *Grundrisse*, the culmination of which led to his *Marx beyond Marx*... (1984).
Self Valorisation

According to Negri’s (1984, p72) reading of the *Grundrisse* the fundamental cause of capitalist crisis is the struggle over the working day. For Marx (1990, p325) for the capitalist to make a profit he must ensure that the worker spends longer working for free (surplus labour) as opposed to securing the value of his labour power (necessary labour). According to Negri (2005c, p183; 1984, p71) the struggles of the mass worker had effectively *inverted* this relation, subordinating surplus labour to necessary labour, *valorising the needs of its own composition* over that of capitals’.

This ‘mature conception of class antagonism’ thus articulates a fundamental clash between different antagonistic *needs*. As Negri (1984, p71) explained, “there is a dynamic relation, and attempt by the working class to reaffirm the indispensible consistency and the necessity of its own composition, constant counterpart of that capitalist force which tries to undervalue the workers and their necessary labour…” (1984, p71) To readdress the balance, capital had no choice but to extend its domination outside the factory, into what became known more commonly as the ‘social factory’ i.e. society at large. The decomposition of the mass worker, then, was part and parcel of this very process, disseminating the technical basis from which it drew so much strength. According to Negri (1984, p112), however, this acted only to exasperate the fundamental crisis that capital had encountered in the production process. Drawing directly on Marx’s (1990, p1019-1025) distinction between the ‘formal’ and ‘real’ subsumption of labour to capital, Negri argued that this ‘transition’ represented a ‘condition for a leap’, not only in terms of the extent of capitals’ domination, but the modifications this would have on the class composition of the proletariat. Hence, ‘the working class subject must emerge, since capitalist subsumption does not efface its identity but just dominates its activity; this subject must emerge precisely at the level to which the collective social force of social capital
has led the process. *If capital is a subject on one side, on the other labour must be a subject as well* (Negri 1984, p123) A new quality of ‘socialised’ labour power would thus emerge, one capable not only of ‘producing but also *enjoying* the wealth produced’ (Negri 1984, p145) Hence for Negri et al (1988, p235) during the 1970s proletarian class composition changed quite significantly, and so too, in consequence, would the form of its struggle. The factory wage as a key contestation of struggle would be replaced by the ‘direct appropriation of socially produced wealth’ (Negri 2005b, 181)

For Negri (1984, p103), then, capitalist crisis, is, at heart, always a subjective one. Even the most apparent ‘objective’ explanations found in Marx (such as the tendency for the rate of profit to fall) can be whittled down to this underlying principle. ‘The objectivity of the laws shows’, he tells us, ‘once again, the subjectivity of their course, because *the relation between surplus labour and necessary labour is...the relation between the two classes*. Objectivity thus masks subjectivity, the clash between two *opposed subjectivities*, opposed wills and intellects, opposed processes of valorisation’ (Ibid, p93) If the basis to capitalist crisis is thus the struggle over the working day, for Negri this revealed an essential ‘rigidity’ to necessary labour, the fact that it is in no way a constant quantity that capital can rely on to be stable. Yet for him (Ibid, p101) the rigidity of necessary labour provided the basis to a much more intensive struggle, one that not only *refuses* capitalist exploitation, but ‘tends towards higher values and therefore tends to diminish – subjectively, actively – the surplus value that can be extorted’. The refusal of labour, *if radicalised*, offers the possibility of a ‘higher valorisation on the part of the class, for a *self valorisation of the working class and the proletariat*’ (Ibid) Behind the veil of the ‘wage’ thus lies the principle of Negri’s Marxism that without a doubt remains so central, even today;
'the power of living labour, the real key to the whole dynamic of production, is the motor that transforms nature into history’ (Ibid, p133) As Marx & Engels (1999, p49) were themselves to establish, in line with the socialised development of capital comes with it the socialisation of both needs and consciousness. Negri himself concurred completely; ‘The more work becomes abstract and socialised...the more the sphere of needs grows. Work creates its own needs and forces capital to satisfy them’ (Negri 1984, 133) Hence for Negri (Ibid, p188-190) the law of value had been well and truly ‘worn to shreds’, and so too had any dialectic that once connected class struggle and capitalist development. Proletarian struggle now operated purely through a ‘logic of separation’; a logic of self valorisation.

Theoretically, Negri develops his theory of self valorisation through his reading of the passages entitled ‘small scale circulation’ in the Grundrisse. It is within this ‘sphere’, according to him (Ibid, p134), that ‘one can see the theoretical possibility of proletarian independence within capital’. It is within this sphere, moreover, that ‘the value of necessary labour is reproduced and determined’, where the act of refusal begins to develop into something more positive, a ‘cycle, a movement, a growth’ (ibid, p135) Inverting the traditional reading of money as the power of capital, Negri argues for a specifically proletarian use of money, one that becomes ‘subordinated to self valorisation’ (Ibid, p138) On this level, then, proletarian self valorisation refers to an essential inversion, an active capacity to radically invert something that was once the power of capital; it is the strength to ‘withdraw from exchange value’ and enjoy life through the direct affirmation of use values (Negri 2005b, p241) Thus in relation to the law of value, self valorisation doesn’t simply block capitalist command, but in fact constitutes a completely different form of social wealth, a wealth of radical needs, based on both the affirmation of both ‘multilaterality and
difference’ (Negri 1984, p184) Negatively, this wealth can be measured by the extent to which ‘space’ and time becomes re-appropriated through the refusal of work. However, the refusal of work alone will not, in itself, lead to the constitution of something different. Hence the positive measure of self valorisation refers directly to how these spaces come to be developed; ‘every space left empty by the enemy is filled, occupied, (and) attacked’ (Negri 2005b, p260) This distinction between refusal and constitution is thus precisely what the theory of self valorisation seeks to understand, and yet, as Cleaver (2003, p48) has noted, in practice it can at times be hard to disentangle them. For Negri, then, any ‘transition’ to communism must be understood on the basis of the theory of self valorisation, the very process by which capitalism is traversed (Negri 1984, p181)

In sum, the theory of self valorisation acts in a way that radicalises the ‘strategy of the refusal’ outlined by Tronti (1979b) What Negri does – through his highly symptomatic reading of the Grundrisse – is find a theory that builds positively on the initial act of refusal, one that attempts to articulate the ways in which this refusal can be made into something not merely antagonistic, but constitutive. At perhaps his clearest, Negri thus states, ‘When we say self valorisation, we meant the alternative that the working class sets in motion on the terrain of production and reproduction, by appropriating power and wealth, in opposition to the capitalist mechanisms of accumulation and development’ (Negri 2005b, p255) This theory must thus be understood in the context of the demise of the working class subjectivity that animated much of the 1960s. Indeed it would seem that Negri’s theory of self valorisation is dependent precisely by the various transformations in capitalism that led to both the demise of the mass worker, and yet also the emergence of the ‘socialised’ worker.iii. The context to the theory of self valorisation seems absolutely
crucial, particularly bearing in mind the shift from the struggles over production (the factory wage) to those over consumption (the social wage/public spending). Yet, it is precisely at this point that the question of organisation returns to the fore. Must self valorisation be an organised process? Wouldn’t this risk imposing a unity on a practice that, at heart, was based on the affirmation of difference and autonomy? For Negri, some form of the ‘party’ was indeed necessary, for two reasons. Firstly, if we accept Negri’s interpretation of the class struggle at that time – which, incidentally, not every did\textsuperscript{ix} - there is the problem of how the various layers and demands of the socialised worker were to act in some form of unison, particularly when their material interests didn’t exactly coincide. The problem here, was with what one might call the last vestiges of the mass worker: industrial workers’ within the big factories that wouldn’t accept the struggle and needs of the new social composition of labour power (Negri 2005b, p251) In this respect, the ‘unity of social labour’ was directly at stake. The task of the party in this respect, was to ‘centralise the specificity of various proletarian sectors into a project of wage demands that lays out the basis for the struggle for a full reappropriation of expanding social productivity’ (Negri 2005b, p222) Secondly, according to Negri the various practices of self valorisation did not, in their most basic state, constitute a direct political threat to capitalist power. As he explained, ‘the simple demand for use value does not...by itself result in a solution, in something determinate...Use value, taken by itself, can resolve nothing...if it is not transformed into the dynamic of communism, it is only empty and dangerous’ (Negri 1984, p172, 173) The party in this sense, although thoroughly subordinated to the practices of self valorisation, must act to both ensure the consistency of, and at the same time ‘defend the frontiers of proletarian independence’ (Negri 2005b, 276, 277) The question of organisational form, then, is something that runs through all of Negri’s political pamphlets during the 1970s, and
as I have show earlier, it was a problem that he was to inherit from the Operaismo of the 1960s. In Negri’s work the problem is duly noted. However, the extent to which he would find some consistency on this issue is a different matter (See Wright 2005)
Ontology and Class Composition in the Age of Empire

By the time we reach Hardt & Negri’s *Empire* (2000) and *Multitude* (2004), Negri’s theory of revolutionary subjectivity appears modified, both through an analysis of what they regard as a new hegemonic class composition, and a deepening recourse to ontology to theorise the power of the subjectivity it brings with it. Contemporary capitalist rule, according them, must now be understood on the basis of a new form of international sovereignty, what they call *Empire*. The debates and issues raised by this part of their analysis are well versed, and do not warrant any repetition here. What is necessary, however, is to understand the way that this constitution has radically transformed the dominant ‘paradigm of rule’, and in consequence, ‘offers new possibilities to the forces of liberation’ (Hardt & Negri 2000, ppxv). Deepening the thesis of the ‘real subsumption’ that we found so prominent in Negri’s work of the late 1970s, Hardt & Negri (2004, p146) argue that contemporary production is now increasingly ‘bio political’ in the sense that human productive capacity not only produces the ‘means of life’ but ‘social life itself’. The forces of production, traditionally alienated from the proletariat, are now embodied directly in the collective ‘brain’ of co-operative labour.

In the era of bio political production, there is no ‘outside’ to depths of capitalist domination, and yet ‘the antagonism of living work is affirming itself and resistance is building’ (Negri 2008a, p25, 66). Crucially, according to Hardt & Negri (2004, p107) our era is rapidly dominated by a tendency for all forms of labour to adopt an increasingly ‘immaterial’ character. In any given social form there may exist a number of different forms of labour at one time, yet, they argue, there is always one that ‘serves as a vortex that gradually transforms other figures
to adopt its central qualities’. The manual labour associated with the ‘mass worker’ once played precisely this role, not only drawing other spheres of labour in line with its ‘mechanical practices’, but also to the ‘rhythms of life’ to which it becomes associated. Today, however, things are changing. The crucial emphasis on the tendential nature to these changes is thus retained. What Hardt & Negri are not saying is either that the global majority are immaterial workers, or that in quantitative terms the industrial working class is on the decline. As they explicitly state, ‘Immaterial labour constitutes a minority of global labour, and it is concentrated in (only) some of the dominant regions of the globe’ (Ibid, p109) For Hardt & Negri (Ibid, p115), then, their point is simple; there is a qualitative tendency at work, and this tendency is something that ‘no statistics can capture’.

Putting its specific characteristics aside, what is crucial about immaterial labour is its supposed immensurability. According to them (2000, p355; 2004, p144), although labour remains ‘the fundamental source of value’, this value assumes a different temporality to that which capital is capable of exploiting. Although they accept that the exploitation of labour remains ‘powerful and ubiquitous’ (200, p356), immaterial labour is still characterised by a productive excess, beyond what capital can successfully subsume. Their reasoning for this is simple; immaterial labour produces ‘social life’ and capital ‘can never capture’ all of it (2004, p146) Immaterial labour is also capable of another kind of autonomy, one that leaves behind the notion that someone must ‘put it to work’. The once progressive role of capital (i.e. overseeing and developing the co-operative powers of labour) is thus disbanded; immaterial labour is inherently perhaps the highest form of co-operative labour. As they point out (2004, p147), this labour ‘itself tends to produce the means of interaction, communication, and co-operation directly...the
creation of co-operation has become internal to labour and thus external to capital’. Hence the productive excess of immaterial labour is without a doubt it’s most significant characteristic. It is precisely within this common ‘space’ that a fundamentally different temporality of social life can be discovered, and as I will argue shortly, explored. As Negri (2008a, p43) puts it, ‘excess enables the constitution of spaces of self valorisation that capital cannot entirely absorb’. To be sure, the productive capacities of immaterial labour extend well beyond the mere immaterial nature of its products. What immaterial labour produces is thus a space – ‘the common’ - which technically provides the substrate from which a new immanently revolutionary subjectivity can emerge. The name for this subjectivity is the Multitude.

The concept of the multitude in understood in two ways, each of which refers to two different temporalities (2004, p221). It is here that ontology comes to play such a crucial role. From Spinoza, Negri would come to contrast two fundamental forms of power, ‘Potentia’ (or in his later (1999) conception, ‘constituent power’) and ‘Potestas’ (‘constituted power’). For Negri (1999) the history of modern revolution is nothing less than the consistent clash between these two powers. On the one side lies Potestas/constituent power - the source of all innovation and creativity, a ‘force that bursts apart, breaks, interrupts, unhinges any pre-existing equilibrium’. On the other, Potentia/constituted power, an essentially reactive force that draws its strength from the former, and must always act to constrain and institutionalise it (Negri 1999, p2.3) In this sense the multitude is primarily an ontological ‘presence’, one that has consistently ‘refused authority and command, expressed the irreducible difference of singularity, and sought freedom in innumerable revolts and revolutions’ (2004, p221) From the post structuralist
philosophy of Deleuze, Hardt & Negri (Ibid, p99) take the dual notions of singularity and difference. The multitudes’ composition, then, must be considered a ‘set of singularities’, each of which affirms its own difference over any pre-established unity. Hence their explicit hostility to the dual notions of both ‘identity’ and ‘the people’; the multitude is not a unity but ‘remains plural and multiple’, it is a social subjectivity ‘whose difference cannot be reduced to sameness’.

The usual objection here, Laclau (2005, 240) being a perfect example, is the extent to which such a plurality can establish some form of universality, affirming each singular difference but nevertheless coming to act in common. Hardt & Negri’s (2004, p199, 100) initial answer is to cite the universality of the common itself, although Negri’s (2008a, p101) more recent comments have attempted to approach this issue directly through a discussion of the notion of ‘decision’. The second (and one might argue the more significant) way in which the multitude is conceived is explicitly as a ‘class concept’. As such, they argue, class must be understood as an antagonistic process, one that reveals above all not merely a ‘catalogue of empirical differences’, but the tendential lines of its future development. Hence we return once again the Negri’s take on Marx’s method, as seen in his earlier work. The method of the ‘antagonistic tendency’ is thus equally significant as it was then, to how it is now. In this sense, this face of the multitude exists in a dual interrelated yet contradictory manner, or as they explain, ‘always already and not yet’ (2004, p221) Politically however, it is the multitude in the second sense of the term that is of crucial importance. It is the ‘becoming common’ offered by the hegemony of immaterial labour that is the ‘central condition for the emergence of the multitude’ – and yet – for this potential to be
realised, there needs ‘a political project to bring it into being’. Thus the only way in which the multitude can be said to exist is precisely as this very tendency, one that ‘in time’ will allow it to ‘move through Empire and come out the other side’ (Ibid, p101)

The exploration of the Common

On the technical side, it seems to me that one could argue that Hardt & Negri’s theory of both the ‘multitude’ and ‘the common’ can all too easily lead to an excessively organic conception of radical change. In other words, when they explain the productive excess of immaterial labour (as a means of explaining the production of the common) it appears as a sort of natural outgrowth, something inherent within that particular form of highly co-operative labour. It seems to me that on a technical level, this charge would appear well placed. It is thus ‘the common’ that today makes both economic and political self rule increasingly possible (2004, p340) The danger here is that an overemphasis on the material objective basis from which revolutionary subjectivity might arise (i.e. the technical aspect to the class composition of the multitude) can smuggle with it a form of teleology; it is only a matter of time before the Multitude ‘move(s) through the other side of Empire’ (Ibid, 101), due simply to the excessive nature of its labour. To counteract this, then, one must insist – as Hardt & Negri indeed do – on the fact that these tendencies need grasping politically through the construction of a constituent ‘project’. The gap between the technical and political aspects of the Multitudes’ class composition, somehow, needs to be bridged. The multitude must act, it must grasp and affirm the radical possibilities that its’ productive capacities offer it. Without this subjective intervention, there will be no revolutionary
change. *The revolutionary subjectification of the multitude is based directly on the theory of self valorisation.*

On the one hand, then, there must be the initial act of refusal. In the age of *Empire* the form of this refusal has clearly changed from the 1960s/1970s generalised ‘refusal of work’. Instead, they argue, today’s refusal takes the more oblique form of what they call ‘exodus’. The multitude must refuse the parasitical nature of imperial sovereignty, and configure its ‘exodus’ in such a way that it flees ‘the forces of oppression, servitude, and persecution in search of freedom’ (2004, p333). A frequent example cited by Hardt & Negri in this respect, is that of the movements (and the desires that govern them) of the international flow of migrants. It is, they tell us (2004, p134), their ‘desire for something more, their refusal to accept the way things are’. According to Negri (2008a, p101) the notion of exodus as ‘creative separation’ leads us directly to the twin notions of ‘decision’ and ‘organisation’. How is it, in other words, that the multitude can ‘transform into a political subjectivity and become powerful in the decision and the execution of command?’ (Ibid, p144) On one level the answer can be found once again in Negri’s early work; tactically the multitude can develop its commonality by struggling for a form of ‘global citizenship’, one that would work to overcome the mystification of the wage and unite the various layers that comprise global labour power (Negri 2008b, p212; Hardt & Negri 2000, p397). More generally, however, the basis to the multitude’s formation into a constituent power lies in the template that such a tactic would provide. Self valorisation today, then, must refer to the process by which the multitude builds on the act of refusal (exodus) and develops the capacity of ‘decision’ not only by *producing* the common, but by actively *exploring* it. The ‘political project of the multitude’ thus goes hand in hand with
its’ revolutionary subjectification, the basis of which remains the theory of self valorisation.
Conclusion

In conclusion, through tracing the concept of self valorisation what I hope to have established is that the theory of revolutionary subjectivity in Negri’s work, both individually and collaboratively, retains a distinct line of continuity. Self valorisation remains today, as it did in the past, an attempt to understand the subjective process that radicalises an initial act of refusal, a process that affirms the ‘power of creative affirmation, the power to constitute new practices’ (Cleaver 1992, p129) Yet, in a sense the theory today remains haunted by the problems of its past. Where, for instance, does the question of organisation sit today? What mechanism is there that can help the multitude establish a common political will, to become, in other words, a constituent power? In the early Negri we saw an explicit acceptance of the need for some form of centralisation, something that would gather, consolidate, and defend the various forms of self valorising activity. Today, however, Negri cannot offer anything as concrete. ‘When we speak of the organisation of the multitudes’, he states, ‘we mean the possibility of expressing a general point of view, integrated into local decisions, which, through them and for them, becomes a common name and a common decision’. Hence apart from retaining the earlier dictum that the correct organisational form must suit a determinate class composition, when Negri (2008a, p157) does approach the question or organisation his comments are somewhat vague. In sum, as he recently comments (2008b, p103), although the left has certainly witnessed a ‘depletion’ of the old organisational forms, it hasn’t, as yet, established a new one. Perhaps the answer to this problem lies precisely in the role self valorisation must play today; the multitude must explore and find its own organisational form,
leaving behind the models of the past and affirming the space to constitute another.

Finally, perhaps a more general problem with the theory of self valorisation lies in its excessively ‘process like’ manner. In other words, unlike the likes of Badiou, Laclau, and Žižek, for instance, for Hardt & Negri revolutionary subjectivity is something that develops immanently to that which its aim is to revolutionise. This immanent ‘Potentia’, although certainly prevalent in Marx, really gets its substance from Spinoza. In this sense perhaps one of the most trenchant critiques of Negri’s theory argues that Negri posits an excessively positive autonomy over the more cautious potential autonomy (Holloway 2002) The difference between Holloway’s (2002,p28) ‘power to’ and Negri’s ‘self valorisation’, although in practice incredibly slight, is in fact based completely on this very issue. There is thus a certain purity to the theory of self valorisation, one which I might add, could very well be located in the rather absolute distinction that Tronti made between labour and capital. In this sense perhaps Negri’s theory of revolutionary subjectivity would benefit from an analysis of how subjectivity that might initially have been revolutionary comes to sway from its course. Negri (2008a, p38) admits that ‘singularities and resistances remain exposed to the risk of possibility and failure’, but others integrate this aspect much better into their theory as a whole. Badiou (2009 Book 1) for instance, has always kept this problem very much at the heart of his own theory, arguing that revolutionary subjectivity (which in his terms corresponds to a ‘faithful subjectivity’) is more than likely to betray itself in the course of its fidelity to an event. Indeed as Toscano (2006, p339) has commented, the ‘unfortunate by product’ of the recent resurgence of theory into radical subjectivity ‘is a tendency to depict the subject in an exclusively militant or, at the
very least, ‘progressive’ light’. The consequence of ignoring otherwise, he adds, ‘runs the risk of producing political theories that differ little from plain wishful thinking or self satisfied sectarianism’.
Bibliography


(Verso: London)

ii See Negri, A (2008a, 2008b) and Casarino & Negri (2008)

iii These transformations, however, are in no way ‘objective’, abstracted from the social force that
generated them. Behind any supposed ‘objectivity’ lies the concentration of proletarian subjective
force.

iv See Bologna (2005) as a good early critique.

v Vatter (2007, p68) makes a similar point with respect to the binary between constituted and
constituent power.