Concluding *Multitude* Hardt and Negri (2004: 358) declare: “We can already recognise that today time is split between a present that is already dead and a future that is already living – and the yawning abyss between them is becoming enormous. In time, an event will thrust us like an arrow into that living future. This will be the real political act of love”. Here I will explore this declaration at the middle of Hardt and Negri’s *Empire* to *Commonwealth* trilogy and some of the ideas that pivot around it. As I unpack parts of Hardt and Negri’s toolbox I will be using their concept of the multitude, to try and grasp the political processes and projects of the contemporary proletariat. Hardt and Negri (2004: 103-104) describe the now expanded proletariat as the multitude. Explaining this new class concept, they state that “class is determined by class struggle” and that “class is and can only be a collectivity that struggles in common”. Although at times Hardt and Negri do not, I will use the terms ‘proletariat’ and ‘multitude’ interchangeably, to describe the class that struggles against capital and produces communism.

So let’s begin with the idea that today time is split and that the present is already dead. Marx (1977: 398) warned us that “the tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living”. And perhaps this is why Hardt and Negri are contradictory when it comes to the current health of capitalism. In *Empire* and *Multitude* they argue that imperialism is dead and in *Commonwealth* that neo-liberalism is dead. Yet
contemplating the diseases of contemporary capital they are unsure about whether euthanasia or treatments are required. Hardt and Negri (2004: 301-302) affirm that it is still possible to save capitalism and argue that capital will create “the conditions of the mode of production and society that will eventually succeed it”. However I am far from alone in preferring their fatal diagnosis and their alternative understandings of how our future is created.

Addressing the Copenhagen Climate Summit, Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez (in Janicke: 2009), who is strongly influenced by Negri and who Negri describes as a friend, told those assembled that “there was a 'silent and terrible ghost in the room' and that ghost was called capitalism”. Chavez continued “One could say there is a spectre at Copenhagen [and] almost no-one wants to mention it: the spectre of capitalism”. This spectre of capitalism is not just haunting Copenhagen, it is haunting the world. Chris Harman’s book, *Zombie Capitalism*, contains much I disagree with, but I appreciate his characterisation of capitalism.

Whereas Marx compared capital to a vampire, a form of living death that subsists by feeding on the life essence of living labour; Harman believes the zombie is more appropriate for contemporary capitalism; a mindless form of living death, capable only of sudden spurts of activity that causes destruction, suffering and more death. However, perhaps today we should combine these visions and consider capital as a ghost/vampire/zombie hybrid, a combination of Empire, imperialism, neo-liberalism and social democracy that continues to haunt, terrorise and suck the life out of all of us.
The social relations of capitalism are forms of living death. From the global wage and non-wage slaveries to the battle grounds of the Congo and Afghanistan; from the mainstream political debates to the lecture halls of our universities; from the backrooms of Copenhagen, to the oily blackness of the Gulf of Mexico. When economists outlined the impact of the Greek financial bailout, they explained that the Greeks faced a choice. They were damned if they did accept the bailout conditions and they were damned if they didn’t. These are the alternatives that the global financial markets now offer us; a smorgasbord of austerity, poverty, hunger, slavery, environmental destruction, nationalism, racism, terror, fascism and war. Hardt and Negri (2000: 345-346) describe how the power of capital is founded on the threat of nuclear destruction, genocide and torture, for Empire is “the absolute capacity for destruction”, the “ultimate form of biopower”; the power of death.

The callout for this conference referred to late capitalism and I like to think that we use this term, not just because capitalism is running out of time, but also for the reason that this is a term used for something that is deceased. Of course, it’s not enough for capitalism to be pronounced dead, as the grim reaper of capital continues to prowl amongst us, stealing our dreams, exploiting our desires, sucking our life essence, destroying, maiming and killing. Unlike Hardt and Negri I am not interested in saving capital. But I am interested in how they envisage the digging of capitalism’s grave. In Commonwealth (Hardt and Negri: 2004: 306) they return to the idea of “a reformist program for capital”, arguing that it is unlikely that capital will adopt reforms unless forced to. They posit a struggle for reforms as part of a transition from capitalism, driven by capitalism, stating that as “capital creates its own gravediggers: pursuing its own interests and trying to preserve its own survival, it must foster the increasing power and autonomy of the productive multitude. And when the accumulation of powers crosses a certain threshold, the multitude will emerge with the ability autonomously to rule common wealth” (Hardt and Negri: 2004: 311). This reiteration of Marx’s ‘gravedigger thesis’ emphasises the contemporary power of capital rather than the power of the multitude. For me this is a mistake, as it fails to recognise that it is not capital that creates its own gravediggers. It is the self-organised insubordinate ‘gravediggers’ that create themselves, organising and developing their grave digging abilities and forcing progress by fostering their own power, expanding their own autonomous abilities and creating new forms of life.

I do not wish to dwell over the grave of capitalism, the yawning abyss into which its drawn out death seeks to drag us. This is not because I am unconcerned about, or underestimate, the
threat to life that capital poses and it’s not because capital’s obituary has been written many
times before. I am very keen to help fill capital’s grave and bury it forever. But I refrain from
becoming fixated on its tomb and refuse to become transfixed on the nightmare scenarios of
the system’s death throes. Instead I wish to highlight and concentrate on the other side of our
spilt time; the future that is already living. It’s time to take off our death masks and escape
the nightmare of capitalism.

This conference is not about capitalism but communism. While a conference on
communism may give some in the academy a shock, we are more than the living dead and we
have organised this event as a small part of the future that already exists. Although many
people find Hardt and Negri’s revolutionary optimism challenging, I agree with Raymond
Williams (1982: 85) that a vital task is to make “hope practical, rather than despair
convincing”. Hardt and Negri’s work is part of what Negri (in Guattari and Negri: 1990: 7)
describes as rescuing communism from its own disrepute. They rely on the capacities and
potentials of the multitude, the power and promise of the proletariat’s praxes to dismantle
capitalism and to construct a classless society. For Hardt and Negri, like Marx and Engels
(1985: 56) communism is “not a state of affairs which is to be established” instead they call
communism “the real movement which abolishes the present state of things”. Explaining that
the communist revolution was already occurring, Marx (1970: 8) pointed out that by
announcing the termination of capitalism “the proletariat merely proclaims the secret of its
own existence, for it is the factual dissolution of that world order”. When Hardt and Negri
consider communism an active force in the present it’s not only a negation of the present that
is dead, but an affirmation of the future that is alive.

Communism will remain associated with many of the horrors of the last century. Yet the
term is still used and understood as a name for the continuing proletarian revolution. A
‘communist revival’ in the English speaking academy is indicated by the manifesto of
students who occupied the University of California last year and the thousand participants who recently paid to attend the ‘Idea of Communism’ conference at the University of London. My use of the word ‘communism’ is influenced and inspired by such actions. Of course, communism is often linked to previous or existing ‘communist states’ and ‘communist parties’. However, I agree with Hardt and Negri that these states and parties are generally manifestations of state capitalism rather than of communism. The errors and defeats of previous communist experiments and the dead hand of capitalist forms of praxes calling themselves communist continue to weigh heavily on the proletariat, making it difficult to speak of communism without ‘corpses in our mouths’.

Reclaiming and speaking of communism in a positive sense recognises the genuine communist heritage, which opposes authoritarianism, repression, war and terror, and illuminates its praxes of freedom, democracy, peace and love. Communism has been the enemy common to many neo-liberal, social democratic, fascist and socialist regimes and those identified as communists have been targeted and murdered in their millions during the global class war to break proletarian power. Today these communist victims and the victims of so called ‘communism’ also haunt the world. But unlike capitalism, communism is not a ghost, not even ‘a positive ghost’. Rather communism is a movement, or movement of movements, and is very much alive. It is this living movement that continues to threaten, challenge and go beyond capital.
When we look around the world we can see that for many, communism is understood as authoritarian and bureaucratic. However the communist movements of the multitude that Hardt and Negri have in mind are usually not those that describe themselves as communist. Hardt & Negri point favourably to the Zapatistas, the alter-globalisation movement and the global peace movement. In Commonwealth they highlight Bolivia, where the Morales government and some important social movements, are strongly influenced by their ideas, as an example of how the multitude has coordinated and managed the multiplicity of subjectivities engaged in common revolutionary struggle. However, Hardt and Negri are far from clear about the relative power of capital and the proletariat, or on whether revolution is an event or a process. At times they suggest that revolution is a moment or an event, with a beginning and an end. In the quote that I am exploring today they anticipate “an event [that] will thrust us like an arrow into [an “already living”] future”. In Empire (2000: 411) they similarly await the “real event”, “the founding moment” of “the insurgence, of a powerful political organisation”.

In Commonwealth Hardt and Negri (2009: 242) argue that the revolution has not begun. This is because the autonomy of proletarian production is only partial, “since it is still directed and constrained under the command of capital”. For Hardt and Negri (2009: 364-365) the autonomous capacities of the multitude “rest latent, potential” and their realisation “would mean carrying forward parallel revolutionary struggles . . . to an institutional process”. However, they also state that “revolution is no longer imaginable as an event separated from us in the future but has to live in the present, an ‘exceeding’ present that in some sense already contains the future within it” (Hardt and Negri: 2009: 242). The revolutionary institutional process that Hardt and Negri at times await is in fact already occurring, although this process is often difficult to recognise or measure. Their investigation of the multitude’s struggles in Bolivia demonstrates for Hardt and Negri (2009: 108-112) that recent “mass mobilisations” are not spontaneous but grew out of “already existing networks and well-established practices of self-government”. Exploring various notions of revolution, they (Hardt and Negri: 2009: 60-61) clarify that in fact “insurrectional activity . . . must strive within the historical process to create revolutionary events”. They also point out that these events “reside in the creative acts . . . that wells up from within the multitude every day” (Hardt and Negri: 2009: 176). In Commonwealth (2009: 360) they discuss revolution as an institutional process and “a new form of government [that] holds off the past and opens toward the future”. Grappling with the problem of transition and government here they
outline revolution as “a long and sustained process of transformation, creating a new humanity” (Hardt and Negri: 2009: 361). They consider that the multitude can and does develop alternative institutions which “consolidate collective habits, practices, and capacities”, managing revolution as a “training in love” (Hardt and Negri: 2009: 357-358).

The notion of revolution as an event or a moment clouds Hardt and Negri’s analysis of the multitude’s movement of movements. Their tendency to place the revolutionary event in the future, fails to acknowledge adequately the already maturing, long and sustained revolutionary praxes of the multitude. The rupture of capitalist power is not a moment but a revolutionary process that deposes the social relations of capital through a multitude of temporalities. At their best, Hardt and Negri illuminate the source of revolutionary agency and how revolution is not a future event, but the construction of communism in the past, the present and the future. Revolution is “not an end product, an end-point to be reached . . . but the massive accumulation of a set of subjective processes” (emphasis in original; Negri: 2008a: 36). Revolution is the product of the multitude as a coherent and lasting project, a fluid multitudinous movement of revolutionary thought and action, an incessant revolution of changing social relations, of organising and instituting love.
Focussing again on the quote from Multitude I now want to ask the question, do revolutionary events thrust us like an arrow? We can see how the revolutionary process propels us into the future. However, I think we should question whether this process moves like an arrow, speeding ahead in a straight line, irreversible and onward rushing, or whether it is in fact a cycle of struggles; struggles that ebb and flow. Or perhaps, rather than a line of flight moving like an arrow, we need to consider a series of paths along which we move at various speeds, in different types of movement and direction, as has been suggested by the Zapatistas, amongst others. Also, I think it’s important to avoid any macho academic thrusting. Negri especially needs to be careful that he does not deploy any phallic tools, or fire a violently offensive arrow into the future.

Explaining the “real political act of love”, Negri (2008a: 140) argues that insurrection “pulls together the various forms of resistance into a single knot, homologises them, arranges them like an arrow which, in an original manner, succeeds in crossing the limit of the given social organisation, of constituted power”. Here Negri argues that insurrection demolishes, bypasses and escapes from the power of capital and its state forms, unleashing revolutionary power, as the ability of the multitude to organise love. My current writing is concerned with a reinvention of love, as an expansive social concept involving struggles for community, cooperation and mutual support. Rather than there being a clear definition of love, love struggles toward definition. Today there is a renewed interest in love amongst anti-capitalists
and an upsurge of experiments to unleash our positive desires for connection, for more constructive and profound relationships. Explaining the power of love in Commonwealth, Hardt and Negri (2009: 195) explore love’s “powers of association and rebellion, [loves] constitution of the common and its combat against corruption” which “function together . . . in making the multitude”. The power of the multitude is enhanced by the self-organisation of love, as love helps to re/create the multitude.

Even though Negri’s arrow of love is a “single knot”, for Hardt and Negri love does not unify people and there can be no love where people become one, as suggested by romanticism, marriage, and the love of a god. Rather love is a desire for collective development and fulfilment, a social process that satisfies the need for love at the same time as satisfying the desire to love. For Negri (2008b: 84) “communitarian elements . . . push us toward cohesion”. However, this cohesion involves rejecting identitarian conceptions of love, constructing instead a love that is not aimed at erasing differences, that is not based just on proximity and similarity, that is not narcissistic, loving only those like oneself. For Negri (2008a: 120) love involves the recognition of the multiplicities within oneself and within others, that it’s important to understand that “every body is a multitude” (emphasis in the original), and the “multitude is outside and inside us” (Negri in Wardle: 2002). So, rather than a “political act of love”, it is much more accurate to recognise that there are many political acts of love.

Hardt and Negri explain that political forms of love are not spontaneous, they require organisation and training. Love is a gift produced for shared use through a variety of organisational forms that coordinate, organise and plan this sharing. Many movements have understood and articulated their struggles as forms of love and learning to love has connected them to others involved in struggle. Hardt and Negri are keen to develop political conceptions of love that assist in the clarification of our class power and how it flows from the strength of our social relationships opposing and negating capitalism. Love is crucial for powerful class struggle, generating the solidarity, support, connections and the common activity that builds proletarian power. These loving social relations make our lives worth living despite, against and beyond capitalism.
When we recognise that capitalism is dead we stop trying to revive it. We stop breathing our life into it. That the system of death now threatens life on earth is a fairly common understanding. Our split time offers us a choice between necrophilia or biophilia; the love of death or the love of all life. Hardt and Negri (2009: 171) advocate an “ecology of the common - an ecology focussed equally on humans and the nonhuman world in a dynamic of interdependence, care, and mutual transformation”. Humanity’s survival hinges on the preservation and extension of loving relationships that nurture the biosphere, people, flora, fauna, land, water, air, life. The multitude has learnt to survive collectively, through mutual aid, the sharing of knowledge, skills and resources, constantly recomposing the network of social connections that constitute the proletariat. Our desires can be, and are being, addressed by the enormous social productivity and common wealth that is external to and exceeds capital. A communal culture of sharing and caring can rebuild disintegrating communities, habitats and environments, weaving supportive networks and movements. These networks and movements are produced out of recognition that the widespread hunger and search for love, for meaningful connections to our selves, to each other, to life; cannot be met by capital and its state forms. Today, in the face of a dead system, we can see that revolutionary events organised by the multitude are already creating the living future, producing non-capitalist society, as acts of love.


