Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s *Empire* is a powerful antidote to the gloom, suspicion and hostility that have characterised the predominant reaction of the radical Left to the advent of so-called globalisation. While excoriating its destructive aspects, Hardt and Negri welcome globalisation as the dawn of a new era full of promise for the realisation of the desires of the wretched of the earth. In the same way that Marx insisted on the progressive nature of capitalism in comparison with the forms of society it displaced, they now claim that Empire is a great improvement over the world of nation-states and competing imperialisms that preceded it.

Empire is the new logic and structure of rule that has emerged with the globalisation of economic and cultural exchanges. It is the sovereign power that effectively regulates these global exchanges and thereby governs the world. Unlike empires of pre-modern and modern times, the singular Empire of postmodern times has no territorial boundaries/frontiers or centre of power. It is a *decentred* and *deterritorialised* apparatus of rule that incorporates the entire global realm.
The establishment of this new logic and structure of rule has gone hand in hand with ‘the realization of the world market and the real subsumption of global society under capital’.\(^1\) The world of nation-states and competing imperialisms of modern times ‘served the needs and furthered the interests of capital in its phase of global conquest. At the same time, however, it created and reinforced rigid boundaries . . . that effectively blocked the free flow of capital, labor and goods – thus necessarily precluding the full realization of the world market’.\(^2\) As capital realises itself in the world market, it ‘tends toward a smooth space defined by uncoded flows, flexibility, continual modulation, and tendential equalization’.\(^3\)

The idea of Empire as a ‘smooth space’ is a central theme of the book. The smoothing does not just affect the division of the world into nation-states and their empires, merging and blending the distinct national colours ‘in the imperial global rainbow’.\(^4\) Most significant, it affects its division into First, Second and Third Worlds, North and South, core and periphery. While the Second World has disappeared, the Third World ‘enters into the First, establishes itself at the heart as the ghetto, shanty town, favela’.\(^5\) The First World, in turn, ‘is transferred to the Third in the form of stock exchanges and banks, transnational corporations and icy skyscrapers of money and command’.\(^6\) As a result, ‘center and periphery, North and South no longer define an international order but rather have moved closer to one another’.\(^7\)

As in most accounts of globalisation, Hardt and Negri trace its origins to the new power that the computer and information revolution has put in the hands of capital. By making it possible ‘to link together different groups of labor in real time across the world’, the revolution enabled capital ‘to weaken the structural resistances of labor power’ and ‘to impose both temporal flexibility and spatial mobility’.\(^8\) Speculative and financial capital strengthen the tendency by going ‘where the price of labor is lowest and

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1 Hardt and Negri 2000, p. 332.
2 Ibid.
3 Hardt and Negri 2000, p. 327.
4 Hardt and Negri 2000, p. xiii.
6 Ibid.
8 Hardt and Negri 2000, p. 337.