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The Myth of the Multitude

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In a work that mirrors the complexity and confusion of global life in (not entirely) condensed form, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri describe a world without borders; then they take sides. As they explain, their approach has two, distinct methodological strains: "The first is critical and deconstructive [...] the second is ethico-political."[1] In the critical mode, they map the rise of "Empire," a global form of sovereignty that subsumes all categories and distinctions in an encompassing relational network. In their "ethico-political" mode, they discern in this morass a struggle for liberation on the part of the "Multitude," a global revolutionary subject on the verge of radical self-authorization. This essay explores tensions in play between critical, polemical and messianic strains of Hardt and Negri's text, tracing similar arguments in earlier departures from orthodox historical materialism. Hardt and Negri's departure from a critical or "deconstructive" politics is highlighted in their critique of what they describe as a "postmodern" politics of difference. Instead of a plurality of local struggles over flexible discourses and technologies - too easily co-opted by equally efficient strategies of rule - they advocate a new universalism grounded not in discrete demands but the creative power of human desire and activity. Moreover, they suggest the Multitude, so understood, is on the verge of a properly global manifestation. Hardt's and Negri's analysis of the collapse of economic and discursive categories, as well as their commitment to spontaneous collective action, recall George Sorel's earlier anarchist departure from orthodox

Leninism. In particular, their depiction of the Multitude bears a strong resemblance to that of his "General Strike." Rather than a new utopia, the Multitude comprises what Sorel described as a political "myth." In light of this comparison, I question the value of such a myth for social movements implicated in the tangle of discursive, technological and economic forces proper to Empire.

The Deconstruction of Sovereignty and the Politics of the Multitude

Hardt and Negri's "deconstructive" critique of contemporary sovereignty rests on a materialist ontology that dispenses with the economic determinism formerly central to Marxist dialectics. In the place of a struggle between discrete economic classes, they describe a contest between the constitutive powers of the Multitude and the constituted mediations of Sovereignty (*potentia* and *potestas* in the terms Negri adopts from Spinoza) that traverses all levels of social and individual life. The notion of the Multitude, developed in Negri's prison writings on Spinoza, is not easy to pin down, which is very much to the point.[2] It denotes the "immanent" power of a material multiplicity that is not reducible to a given class or subject-position in the traditional (Marxist) sense. Rather, the Multitude is a generative locus of production, cooperation and "desire" that generates new subjectivities. Instead of a given organization or set of demands, the Multitude is identified with creative action and transformation. Indeed, as soon as it finds itself "mediated" as a subject or people, and articulated through formal procedures and apparatuses, the Multitude has effectively been captured by Sovereignty. The Multitude thus appears in their narrative as the engine of historical change, a dynamic force of "liberation" around which the powers of sovereignty reactively coalesce but which they never manage to arrest. In fact, they argue that Sovereignty itself provokes new crises even as it works to resolve others.[3]

Hardt and Negri's critical ontology serves as a lens through which they re-read an broad range of historical struggles, describing a series of escapes by the Multitude that provoke ever more expansive and nuanced mediations by Sovereignty. "Empire" denotes the culmination of these dynamics in a "de facto" global sovereignty, a tight web of market and governmental power that leaves no genre of human activity outside its purview. Empire is comprised of both constitutional forms and the "biopolitical" technologies of order that secure and condition them, taking the form of a de-centered network of juridical, governmental and military organs that respond to local crises in a rapid and continuous fashion. Along with the collapse of spatial boundaries, Empire is characterized by the interpenetration of different realms of human activity proper to post-industrial society, where new modes of affective and communicative production result in an unprecedented "convergence of base and superstructure."[4] Hence, all conflicts are effectively internalized; economic, political and cultural authorities are consolidated in the form of a global "police power" that arises to manage the tangle of market, labor and cultural forces proper to contemporary life. In the diffuse and encompassing networks Hardt and Negri describe, economic, technological and cultural processes are mutually implicated, leaving no "outside" to the global system, whether geographically or discursively.[5] Driven by the failure of modern welfare states to regulate global flows of capital and culture, Sovereignty has extended and intensified both its juridical and biopolitical powers, grafting itself to global flows and permeating all levels of social life. However, these institutions and technologies are essentially opportunistic and reactive. Moreover, they are invested in a bios that is fundamentally dynamic. "Desire," Hardt and Negri assure us, "has no limit."[6] In

seeking to invest itself in the bio-power of the Multitude, therefore, Sovereignty is always tending toward its limit at deeper thresholds of difference and instability.

As this last formulation indicates, a certain progressive logic is implied by Hardt and Negri's historical narrative. As Sovereignty extends ever deeper into the micro- or bio-political forces of the Multitude, the question arises whether there might be a point at which it reaches, in some sense, to the essence of production and desire. At times, their formulations recall classical Marxist narratives that subsumed various historical struggles in a series of developmental "stages," culminating in a decisive battle for self-authorization on the part of a global collective identified with the "base" level of forces of production. Hardt and Negri are sensitive to this comparison, and careful to insist on the unique conditions of different struggles. Rather than a linear model of historical development, they claim their study describes a "materialist teleology."[7]

The peculiarity of this last conjunction of terms indicates Hardt and Negri's ambiguous relation to Hegelian Marxism, an ambiguity at the center their distinction between critical and "ethico-political" approaches. In their "critical" mode, as noted, they trace the history of the Multitude and Sovereignty in a series of contingent, material struggles. Here, the point is precisely to break with teleological models of development. They write, "The critical approach is thus intended to bring to light the contradictions, cycles, and crises of the process because in each of these moments the imagined necessity of the historical development can open toward alternative possibilities. In other words, the deconstruction of the *historia rerum gestarum*, of the spectral reign of globalized capitalism, reveals the possibility of alternative social organizations."[8] By attending to the complex links in these struggles between diverse material processes, Hardt and Negri

effectively "deconstruct" both Marxist and neo-liberal teleologies, refusing the language of historical stages and unraveling the triumphal narrative of free markets and liberal values. In their place, they reveal contingent, reciprocal interactions of biology, technology, culture, language and violence. In turn, they document a host of social struggles that - despite being later subsumed by new mediations - are not presented as having foregone conclusions.[9] On the contrary, they emphasize the different potentials and surprising innovations in each crisis. In the critical approach, the Multitude serves as a common name for these potentials and struggles that give rise to, but also exceed every particular sovereign mediation. "The first [approach] is critical and deconstructive, aiming to subvert the hegemonic languages and social structures and thereby reveal an alternative ontological basis that resides in the creative and productive practices of the multitude."[10]

Hardt and Negri's shift from the critical to the "ethico-political" is less easy to characterize, not least because of a slippage in its initial formulation. On the one hand, they claim to be "seeking to lead the processes of the production of subjectivity toward the constitution of an effective social, political alternative, a new constituent power."(47) On the next page, however, they appear to reverse course: "Here we must delve into the ontological substrate of the concrete alternatives continually pushed forward by the *res gestae*, the subjective forces acting in the historical context."(48) Two rather different operations are thus described. In the first, the Multitude is first revealed as a substrate of potentiality beneath hegemonic languages and structures and then directed toward an actual ("social and political") alternative; in the second, we move in the other direction, from the dispersion of concrete alternatives to their basis in a common ontological substrate. In turn,

the ethico-political approach itself appears torn between leading and revealing, or programmatic speculation and metaphysical exegesis.

Clearly, Hardt and Negri would refuse this dichotomy. It is precisely the unification of potential and actual that characterizes the Multitude proper, as Negri argues extensively in his reading of Spinoza.[11] In turn, they reject the distinction between theory and practice, subsuming their metaphysics in the "general intellect" of the Multitude itself. However, from this perspective, the two approaches outlined above should also collapse, and the deconstructive approach should itself serve the "ethico-political" function they describe. The "ontological substrate" would itself be comprised of nothing more (or less) than a dispersion of innovations both revealed and practiced by their critical genealogy. It is here, in the space between the potential and the actual, or rather between instances of actuated potentials, that Hardt and Negri interject the teleological strain of their materialism. We have already glimpsed this operation in the historical narrative outlined above, in which a shift from critical to ethico-political formulations is identified with the historical emergence of the Multitude itself as a self-constituting ethico-political subject. We are on the cusp of such an emergence, Hardt and Negri suggest, heralded by the global linkages among bodies, affects, and ideas.[12] Hence, despite its apparently totalizing and invasive character, we should welcome the intensification and expansion of Sovereignty as the spur to this immanent and imminent realization.

Like all messianic formulations, this raises the question of the interim, that transitory state between fall and redemption in which we remain indefinitely suspended. What are we to do, what "ethico-political" program can hasten the next, or final revolution? Hardt and Negri's answer conforms to their historical logic: we can, and therefore must,

only move forward. They write, "Empire can be effectively contested only on its own level of generality and by pushing the processes that it offers past their present limitations. We have to accept that challenge and learn to think globally and act globally."[13] But what kind of thinking or action is properly "general" or "global"? According to their critical reading of Empire, after all, thinking and action is always-already global, there being no "outside" proper to the existing network. Furthermore, what are the "present limitations" of Empire, and what will result if they are tested or broken? In their deconstructive account of Sovereignty, the Multitude appears as a force at work within Empire, at once constitutive and de-stabilizing. The rupture of limits and boundaries are moments in an on-going process of escape and capture. It is by pushing processes "past their present limitations," after all, that the Multitude not only attacks, but also sustains Sovereignty.[14] Indeed, the emergence of the present Empire was itself a response to earlier forms of proletarian internationalism.[15] What could it mean, then, for the Multitude to, as they put it, "push through Empire and come out the other side"?[16]

Siding Against Difference

Hardt and Negri are quick to assure us that they cannot be precise regarding the nature and timing of the coming revolution. Nor can they offer a clear set of instructions for dismantling Empire. They are quite confident, however, in their rejection of obsolete approaches. In particular, they claim the discursive and cultural hybridity described by postmodern or post-colonial theory no longer poses any threat to the current order. "When they present their theories as part of a project of political liberation […] postmodernists are still waging battle against the shadows of old enemies."[17] Along these lines, Hardt and Negri endorse Frederic Jameson's and David Harvey's claims that "postmodernism"

(understood here as a set of practices characterized by differentiated and flexible strategies rather than hierarchical and centralized modes of command) is the logic of late capitalism.[18] It is not immediately clear, however, which postmodernists present their theories as "part of a project of political liberation," or just what the latter was supposed to have looked like. Foucault, often a central figure in attacks on postmodern theory, has been taken to task precisely for *failing* to present a set of instruction for "liberation," being content for the most part to describe changing forms and technologies of power. Lyotard, whom Hardt and Negri cite in this regard, describes postmodernity as a *condition* rather than some liberating project.[19] If anyone speaks of postmodern "liberation," it would seem to be Hardt and Negri themselves.[20] Indeed, this is the basis of Jameson's endorsement of their work, not its acute analysis of contemporary forms of power, but the "ethico-political" narrative that frames it. But in what sense is this narrative part of a project of liberation? Where in Hardt and Negri's text do we see such a project outlined, and how does it differ from what they take to be the "project" of postmodernism?

Hardt and Negri describe the aim of postmodernism as "a global politics of difference, a politics of deterritorialized flows across a smooth world, free of the rigid striation of state boundaries."[21] Hardt and Negri borrow the term "deterritorialization" from Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, whose work, along with that of Michel Foucault and Judith Butler, is a popular target for critics of "postmodern" politics. Yet, like other so-called postmodernists - including Foucault, Butler and Derrida - Deleuze and Guattari neither advocate, nor ascribe to contemporary political forms, the dissolution of all boundaries and distinctions. Impressions to the contrary often stem from selective and tendentious readings of key terms, such as Derrida's *differance*, or Deleuze and Guattari's

admittedly difficult notion of deterritorialization, a term they use in reference to a wide range of biological, social and material processes. As in the passage above, the term invites the obvious associations of "territory" with land, nation, etc., all of which seem to be dissolving. "Deterritorialization" would thus seem an apt description of processes of globalization and the erosion of national borders. The important point to grasp, however, is that for Deleuze every de-territorialization is accompanied by new forms of *re-territorialization*. He uses territory in the verbal, rather than nominative form; there is neither solid ground, so to speak, nor groundless creativity, but only dynamic compositions (assemblages, in his terms) and dislocations. Chastening promises of "unlimited" desire, Deleuze and Guattari remind us,

> Desire is never separable from complex assemblages that necessarily tie into molecular levels, from microformations already shaping postures, attitudes, perceptions, expectations, semiotic systems, etc. Desire is never an undifferentiated instinctual energy, but itself results from a highly developed, engineered setup rich in interactions: a whole supple segmentarity that processes molecular energies and potentially gives desire a fascist determination.[22]

Hardt and Negri are themselves well aware of these nuances. Deleuze's work is a primary source for their depiction of the transformations at work in Empire. In particular, their account of contemporary sovereign power closely follows a set of terms sketched in his short essay, "Postscript on the Societies of Control."[23] There, Deleuze argues that the disciplinary enclosures described by Foucault are giving way to flexible and continuous mechanisms of control that collapse any clear distinction between public and private, inside and outside. Put in other Deleuzian terms, the "striated" spaces of normalization and

exclusion have given way to a "smooth" space of perpetually modulated difference, from a rigid mold to a flexible cast. In *Empire*, Hardt and Negri flesh out these suggestive metaphors with empirical detail. They identify the basis of "postmodern" sovereignty in a "hybrid constitution" characterized by the increasing interpenetration of local and transnational governmental agencies, one the one hand, and the increasingly hybrid *spaces* of global cities on the other, where third and first world populations converge and public/private divisions collapse in enclosed walking malls and gated communities. As these examples indicate, the "rigid" territorial exclusions of national sovereignty have been replace by a global network of flexible controls based on modulated categories of membership and access. What results is not a "free" movement of images, bodies or technology across space, but changing modes of regulation and restriction at key points of exchange. Anyone who thinks contemporary sovereignty no longer operates through spatial restrictions should try to find a public toilet in Manhattan.[24]

Deleuze and Guattari's notion of re-territorialization, it should be added, while aptly applied to these cases, is not restricted to questions of physical geography. Indeed, as Benedict Anderson has argued, geography is itself "imagined" by way of diverse technologies, languages, and migrations. De- and re-territorialization can take a variety of forms, and typically operate on multiple registers simultaneously. Electronic media, for example, are radically de-territorializing at one level, allowing for the movement of images across the globe with little regard for national borders. But the geographical dislocation facilitated by digital reproduction and high-speed transmission is met by a corresponding mediation and distribution of gender, sexual, ethnic and racial types in the form of sit-coms characters, film genres and media enclaves. In the latter case, geographical de-

territorialization is met with demographic re-territorialization: Where it once contributed to shaping a national audience, television and radio programming is now often segregated according to "community standards" into "virtual enclaves" and niche markets that distinguish, among other things, "black entertainment."[25] At the same time, both content and technology is increasingly consolidated and managed by multinational media conglomerates. As a component of domestic architecture, furthermore, commercial television is a medium of capture *par excellence*, generating and sustaining a condition of bodily stasis and scripted distraction, individuating viewers and colonizing both physical and mental spaces of free association or, if you will, turning rhizomes into couch potatoes.[26]

In response to these re-territorializations, one finds a variety of resistances and de-territorializing innovations. Multiple struggles are underway on the part of consumers, artists, pirate broadcasters, religious groups, and computer hackers. In their attempts to create avenues of popular access and/or control, these groups may have occasion not only to resist, but also to use the resources of Empire, including the courts and commercially developed technologies. The internet is clearly a medium of de- and re-territorializing struggles over access and control, and itself an example of the dissemination of military technology for commercial and public use. Consider, for example, the dissemination of no-cost "Wi-fi" internet access (low output radio signal devices that are plugged into a wired network and allow computer users with the right antenna to link to the internet in a small radius). This technology has been made available to the public by individuals and groups who share bandwidth with anyone in range of their broadcast signal. In turn,

corporate ownership and control of these transmissions is being organized. Starbucks currently offers the service for a significant (20-cents/minute) fee in some stores.

At times, then, Hardt and Negri conflate the language of de- and re-territorialization with that of the Multitude and Sovereignty.[27] Yet it would seem that these terms, in their Deleuzean usage, describe just the sort of politics they elsewhere insist we have to supercede. A politics of "deterritorialized flows," so understood, would be an on-going series of flights and captures, a shifting plurality of local struggles at once empowered and menaced by the weapons they share with Sovereignty. On this point, to their credit, Hardt and Negri are ambivalent, shifting between an appreciation for the achievements and risks of various struggles and their promise of a pure or "universal" democratic liberation. Throughout the book, they champion many problematic struggles, including urban riots and post-colonial nationalisms. However, noting the hazards and failures of such struggles, they repeatedly circle back to a kind of "last instance," where finite and compromised struggles give way to an unmediated confrontation between the liberating power of the Multitude and the domination of Sovereignty. In their description of this cataclysm all doubts fall away, and we are promised a revolution characterized only by cooperation, love and joy.

It is in the latter mode that Hardt and Negri part ways with Deleuze and most other so-called "postmodern" thinkers. For Deleuze, de-territorialization is never opposed to re-territorialization; nor is it identified with liberation *per se* (as indicated by his reference to fascist "lines of flight"). One finds many cautions in his work against the polemical oppositions that run throughout Hardt and Negri's text. He and Guattari write,

> One can never posit a dualism or a dichotomy, even in the rudimentary form of the good and the bad. You may make a rupture, draw a line of flight, yet there is still a danger that you will reencounter organizations that restratify everything, formations that restore power to a signifier, attributions that reconstitute a subject - anything you like, from Oedipal resurgences to fascist concretions. Groups and individuals contain microfascisms just waiting to crystalize. . . . How could movements of deterritorialization and processes of reterritorialization not be relative, always connected, caught up in one another?[28]

More in keeping with Deleuzean terms, Hardt and Negri could have described the innovations of desire or the Multitude in terms of dynamic stabilities and resonant potentials in play between molar and molecular levels of order. On this reading, Empire contains within itself multiple sites of instability and potential points of emergence for new political forms. At the same time, every molar opposition is traversed by strains of numerous "micro-political" struggles, complicating all attempts to specify the terms of liberation. Indeed, this is precisely the implication, Hardt and Negri claim, of their "deconstructive" analysis. As they show, for example, the apparent oppositions of the cold war obscured common forms of oppression (such as the Taylorist organization of industrial labor). Properly deconstructed, the Multitude appears in a dispersion of singular events. The deconstructive approach, however, does not yield a political subject and a corresponding "enemy" in the way Hardt and Negri wish to. In accord with Marxist injunctions, they take it as their task to identify a central antagonism.[29] Yet the antagonism in question, and the "enemy" supposedly identified, has been rendered ethereal by their "deconstructive" analysis of Sovereignty. "The identification of the enemy [they

acknowledge] is no small task given that exploitation tends no longer to have a specific place and that we are immersed in a system of power so deep and complex that we can no longer determine specific difference or measure [...]" And yet, they insist, "One should not exaggerate these logical paradoxes. Even though on the new terrain of Empire exploitation and domination often cannot be defined in specific places, they nonetheless exist."[30]

In a curious way, this last quote sounds a lot like something we might hear from Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld in one of his jovial military press conferences, speaking not of exploitation, of course, but "terror" (though he is perfectly willing to conflate the two - citing the exploitation of women under Islamic law - in some of his more improbable attempts to rally support for bombings and extra-judicial incarcerations). Rumsfeld draws the following analogy between the current need to mobilize popular support for military vigilance and the successful mobilizations of the cold war,

> In country after country, leaders kind of rose to the top and persuaded and informed the American people so that they gained the support necessary to make investments, in a time of peace, to make investments that would enable us to defend, if necessary - but preferably deter - against a very serious, persistent, expansionist, powerful threat that was not visible, that wasn't there every minute, that people wanted to debate against as to whether it even existed, and the American people had the staying power. And they will this time. My hope is that they'll have it because of the fact that the need is there and that democratic people, free people, have a pretty good center of gravity. The other way they'll have it is if we're punctuated periodically with additional terrorist attacks that remind us that we do have an

obligation to ourselves and our system and our friends and allies around the world to behave responsibly.[31]

As Rumsfeld reminds us, the legitimation of sovereign power relies as much on rupture as it does on containment. Terrorist attacks add weight to the democratic center of gravity, keeping us "responsible" by reminding us we are never truly at peace. However, he is not content to wait for new strikes. Leaders must also inform and persuade. As he says, "Sometimes I like to stick a hole in a balloon. Twice."[32] Terrorist attacks, likewise, may puncture, but they do not necessarily deflate. Rather, they serve, in Rumsfeld's words, as "punctuations," the breaks that facilitate narrative tempo, creating avenues for fear and desire.[33]

The language of the "invisible" enemy, Hardt and Negri argue, is the hallmark of Empire, and the ideal object of sovereignty operating in a permanent "state of exception." A vague notion of ubiquitous danger allows for Empire's high degree of flexibility in identifying and responding to diverse crises. In the aftermath of the attacks on the World Trade Center, Hardt and Negri's seemingly dystopian account of Empire has become increasingly realistic. The subsequent war on terror has precipitated a rapid elimination of vestigial barriers to trans-national juridical authority and a remarkable intensification of "exceptional" police powers in the name of that "center of gravity" which keeps free people responsible. The United States and their former cold-war enemies are suddenly full partners, cooperating on "terrorism, arms control and international crisis management in a post-Sept. 11 world."[34] One might thus recommend Hardt and Negri's text to Secretary of State Colin Powell, who recently remarked (regarding the entry of Russia into NATO), "We don't yet quite have a cliché to capture this all."[35] Of course, Rumsfeld

had devoted himself to creating a more flexible, de-territorialized fighting force and de-centralizing command structures well before September 11th. Moreover, as he suggests, the justification of "peacetime" mobilization against a vaguely defined enemy is nothing new. In the cold war, as in the current "war on terror," one finds a conflation of multiple abstractions; the new conflict is alternately framed as a defense of "democracy" against "fundamentalism," a "crusade" against "evil," a fight against a "new totalitarianism," and so forth. However, the rhetorical shift from war to "policing," exemplified in references to "criminal terrorists" and even "criminal states," bears out Hardt and Negri's descriptions, situating the enemy within an encompassing global order.[36] Under the guise of this de-territorialized struggle, a variety of institutional, juridical and strategic reforms have enabled the Bush administration to designate an evolving set of friends and enemies in the fight against "terror," regardless of the apparent resemblance of the two (as in the use of torture and the deliberate or careless targeting of civilians by Russian troops in Chechnya, the Chinese campaigns against Uighur autonomy, or the Israeli army in the Palestinian territories).

Perhaps this is what it means to confront Empire "on its own level of generality?" Might Hardt and Negri's text provide a correspondingly de-territorialized language of struggle, allowing for the flexible authorization of a plurality of economic, racial, sexual and other struggles, no longer subjecting them to a classical Marxist hierarchy?[37] In Hardt and Negri's historical interludes, they manage to link a vast array of struggles - from African postcolonies to Berkeley - under the sign of the Multitude. Yet when it comes to the present they hesitate, vacillating between support for various finite, particular struggles and gestures toward highly abstract subject-forms, such as the "barbarian" and the "poor."[38]

Advocates of becoming, Hardt and Negri paradoxically discredit movements currently underway in favor of the genuine revolution that is yet to be. In a casual gesture that has since become notorious, they dismiss various global NGOs currently working for practical humanitarian concessions as so many attempts to manage crisis, rather than disrupt the system as a whole.[39]

Hardt has since identified the failure to find a plausible contemporary embodiment of the Multitude as the "most significant shortcoming" of their book.[40] Yet when pressed on this point he has been reluctant to identify a given instance of the Multitude, describing their work instead as an *anticipation* its emergence in new configurations of technology and practice.[41] In deferring to the creative power of Multitude, Hardt and Negri follow Rosa Luxembourg's model of revolutionary subjectivity, in which spontaneous collective praxis precedes and marks the way for theoretical supports. Hardt and Negri's deference to collective praxis, admittedly, does not prevent them from making a couple of concrete proposals towards the end of *Empire*; first, for global citizenship with open borders (and we were told the de-territorializing vision of postmodernism was a lost cause!), and second for a universal "social wage." Rather than follow the lead of theorists and activists working toward similar if not identical ends, however, they leave it to the immanent cooperation of the Multitude to find the way.

Hardt and Negri's disengagement from current movements seems at odds with both their theoretical premises and political aspirations; it closes off potential avenues of innovation currently underway and implicates them in a distinction between theory and practice precluded by their account of the collapse of base and superstructure and their subsumption of conceptual labor in the "general intellect" of the Multitude. It would seem

to exacerbate rather than resolve the tension between their critical and polemical tendencies. Rather than seek out and support new subjectivities at the volatile intersection of desire and mediation, they shift from a fatalistic reading of contemporary struggles to messianic gestures toward total revolution, where the mediations of Sovereignty will be transcended altogether. The Multitude will appear, they promise, once "virtualities accumulate and reach a threshold of realization adequate to their power."[42] Yet it is not clear, on their own terms, that any such "realization" would not amount to a paradox, since the power of the Multitude is not that of being but that of becoming. What would it mean for virtualities to be "realized" without mediation? A figure with such aspirations can only be mortified by finite, provisional appearances. This problem may explain Hardt and Negri's curious disavowal of their own attempts to theorize the Multitude. At one point, they go so far as to proclaim the demise of *all* attempts to describe an "ontology of the possible." Their predecessors' attempts at such an ontology - including Benjamin, Adorno, Wittgenstein, Foucault and Deleuze - they roundly declare, were all "pallid." "In fact, every metaphysical tradition is now completely worn out. If there is to be a solution to the problem, it cannot help being material and explosive."[43]

What then has become of the "ontological substrate" and the purportedly ethico-political aspirations of Hardt and Negri's text? How are we to understand their polemical departure from critical or deconstructive approaches, if that polemic works neither to direct, nor even describe the shape of Leftist struggle? Here and there, they hint at a political role for their textual practice. "Today a manifesto, a political discourse, should aspire to fulfill a Spinozist prophetic function, the function of an immanent desire that organizes the multitude. There is not finally here any determinism or any utopia [...]"[44]

Granted, if their metaphysics proposes no particular empirical course or conclusion, but how are we to understand a prophecy that neither predicts nor even describes a future? In what sense do such vague desires "organize" the Multitude?

Vague Language and Strong Desires: George Sorel on Myth and Utopia

In this vein, a more proper predecessor to Hardt and Negri than Deleuze or Foucault would be George Sorel, a writer whose ontology of the possible - the General Strike - can hardly be accused of being "pallid." In his very influential yet little-read text, 'On Violence,' Sorel outlines a theory of revolution that rejects both determinism and Utopian programs in favor of spontaneous, instinctual and affective forms of collective action. Sorel's departure from mechanistic versions of historical materialism derives from a reading of Bergson, who embeds human agency and experience in dynamic biological and material forces.

> We must abandon the idea that the soul can be compared to something moving, which, obeying a more or less mechanical law, is impelled in the direction of certain given motive forces. To say that we are acting, implies the we are creating an imaginary world placed ahead of the present world and composed of movements which depend entirely on us. In this way our freedom becomes perfectly intelligible [...] Edouard Le Roy, for example, says: "Our real body is the entire universe in as far as it is experienced by us. And what common sense strictly calls our body is only the region of least unconsciousness and greatest liberty in this greater body, the part which we most directly control and by means of which we are able to act on the rest." But we must not, as this subtle philosopher constantly does, confuse a passing state of our willing activity with the stable affirmations of science. These artificial worlds generally disappear from

> our minds without leaving any trace in our memory; but when the masses are deeply moved it then becomes possible to trace the outlines of the kind of representation which constitutes a social myth.[45]

On this account, human imagination and action inhabit a larger totality of forces in a relation of mutual determination. Understanding and bodily practice carve out an imaginary space of agency from within the larger totality that is partial and conditioned, but also effective on the rest. This conception of subjectivity precludes, we can see, the two sides of Marxism that had always lived in an uneasy relation; both the economic determinism that rendered consciousness an epiphenomenal manifestation of "forces and relations of production," and the Enlightenment-inspired promise of rational self-determination. Our motor-imaginary (or what Althusser called our "lived") relation to the world, on this account, while it cannot apprehend the totality within which it operates from an archimedian point, works on that totality and can at times be a locus of significant transformation. In the terms of Bergson that Hardt and Negri (following Deleuze, among others) also adopt, we could call this a theory of "virtual" freedom. It is also a theory of actual freedom, as for Bergson the two are not opposed. The virtual is not potential, in the sense of a force yet to be released, but *entelechial*, manifest in a dispersion of effects that indicates, but does not express underlying forces (in the sense that the former cannot be traced to the latter in a mechanical fashion). The virtual is always at play in more or less stable patterns of determination - just as thought and action participate in a larger set of causes and effects - but occasionally it "flashes up" in extraordinary experiences of liberation and disruption, re-shaping the larger environment in which it takes part.[46]

The paradigm for such a rupture at the level of politics, or what Sorel calls a "social myth," is the General Strike. Throughout On Violence, Sorel distinguishes the "Myth" of the general strike from "Utopian" political programs. A myth, he explains, is "not a description of things, but expressions of a determination to act." It is "unanalysable." "A Utopia is, on the contrary, an intellectual product [...] It is a combination of imaginary institutions having sufficient analogies to real institutions for the jurist to be able to reason about them; it is a construction which can be taken to pieces..."[47] Utopias, for Sorel, are inherently reactionary insofar as they offer a guide to the perfect society in the name of which popular forces can be subject to technocratic and authoritarian designs. The General Strike, on the other hand, manifests an affective and motor intensity purified of symbolic or institutional authority. The sole aim of the General Strike is to free the masses from the tutelage of all given institutions and authorities; it refuses all mediation, suspending instrumental calculations in the course of immediate action.

So understood, of course, the General Strike can only be passing moment. Just as the virtual is always at work in the actual, and only occasionally ruptures the surface of their continuous exchange, the distinction between utopia and myth, or reform and revolution, breaks down in political practice. In the French revolution, Sorel notes, myths of a radical break from authority and the installation of popular sovereignty gave way to institutions and legal experts that closely resembled those they replaced following the violent revolts. Moreover, Sorel argues that utopian designs and institutional reforms are themselves sustained by mythological abstractions.[48] He identifies a blending of myth and utopia in the parliamentary socialism for which he reserves much of his eloquent contempt. The demagoguery of socialist politicians, he writes, is "stopped by no contradiction,

experience having shown that it is possible in the course of an electoral campaign, to group together forces which, according to Marxian conceptions, should normally be antagonistic."[49] This rhetorical confusion of groupings is no trivial matter. The failure of Marxism as a predictive device, Sorel suggests, can be attributed to this corruption of class affiliations. The development of class antagonism crucial to revolutionary crisis, he suggests, may be derailed by the emergence of an "enlightened" middle-class willing to adjust its interests to accommodate workers' unrest, a regrettable development he traces in part to the "chatter of the preachers of ethics and sociology" (or what he calls the "*little sciences*"). Under such conditions, "An arbitrary and irrational element is introduced, and the future of the world becomes completely indeterminate."[50]

Rather than reconcile himself to the indeterminacy of parliamentary politics (or - as Habermas would later do - seek a form of compromise immanent in discursive forms), Sorel undertakes what he describes as an "empirical" search for a material solution that might set history back on its proper antagonistic track. The danger of indeterminacy and class compromise can be averted most effectively, he finds, when proletarian strikes take a violent form. Proletarian violence derails the class compromise that otherwise wards off capitalist crisis. Violence provokes the baser instincts of the middle-class, undermining their philanthropic sentiments and creating the reactionary orientation that in turn spurs further unrest on the part of the exploited. "Proletarian violence confines employers to their role as producers, and tends to restore the separation of the classes, just when they seemed on the point of intermingling in the democratic marsh. Proletarian violence not only makes the future revolution certain, but it seems also to be the only means by which the European nations - at present stupefied by humanitarianism - can recover their former energy."[51]

By blows, the future once again becomes "certain." But as Sorel understands, the proletariat can all too easily be pacified and co-opted by their political representatives. Violence may guarantee class struggle, but what guarantees violence? Indeed, what will prevent the violent energies of class struggle from being channeled for other means, namely patriotism, by the parliamentarists? The short answer would seem to be, nothing, since the "objective" economic basis of crisis is dissolved by rhetorical confusions. Yet, despite his account of the collapse of economic and discursive determination, Sorel retains the Marxist premise of a cataclysmic transformation leading to new social forms. While it may not proceed mechanically from economic processes, proletarian violence, and all that follows from it, is rescued from parliamentary mediations by the myth of the General Strike. Of the syndicalists, he writes: "They have been led to deny the idea of patriotism by one of those necessities which are met with at all times in the course of history, and which philosophers have sometimes great difficulty in explaining - because the choice is imposed by external conditions, and not freely made for reasons drawn from the nature of things. This character of historical necessity gives to the existing antipatriotic movement a strength with it would be useless to attempt to dissimulate by means of sophistries."[52] As he explains, "[the strikers] may be deceived about an infinite number of political, economical, or moral questions; but their testimony is decisive, sovereign, and irrefutable when it is a question of knowing what are the ideas which most powerfully move them and their comrades, which most appeal to them as being identical with their socialistic conceptions, and thanks to which their reason, their hopes, and their way of looking at particular facts seem to make but one indivisible unity."[53]

At one level, Sorel appears caught in the same paradoxes as Hardt and Negri, combining an ontological critique that qualifies both historical determination and human agency with a messianic promise of radical self-authorization. Historical necessity, it would seem, is here not so much expelled as displaced, shifted from objective antagonism to irrefutable myths. Furthermore, Sorel's conception of the General Strike as a radical rupture from all institutions and authorities, like the notion of an "adequate expression" of virtual energies, seems compromised by his account of the co-mingling of utopia and myth in political practice. Our perspective changes, however, if we treat Sorel's depiction of the General Strike as *itself* a form of imagination internal to a larger set of forces, in accord with the conception of myth outlined above. As Sorel explains in his letter to Daniel Halvey,

> "In the course of this study one thing has always been present in my mind, which seemed to me so evident that i did not think it worth while to lay much stress on it - that men who are participating in a great social movement always picture their coming action as a battle in which their cause is certain to triumph. These constructions, knowledge of which is so important for historians, I propose to call myths; the syndicalist "general strike" and Marx's catastrophic revolution are such myths."[54]

On the latter reading, the function of Sorel's account of the General Strike is not so much to comprehend or predict as to act on those forces. Indeed, Sorel treats Marx's theory of capitalist crisis as itself such a myth.

> The accuracy [of Marx's account of the development of capitalist crises] has been many times disputed . . . but this objection must not stop us, and it may be thrust

> on one side by means of the theory of myths. The different terms which Marx uses to describe the preparation for the decisive combat are not to be taken literally as statements of fact about a determined future; it is the description in its entirety which should engage our attention, and taken in this way it is perfectly clear: Marx wishes us to understand that the whole preparation of the proletariat depends solely on the organisation of a stubborn, increasing, and passionate resistance to the present order of things.[55]

The prophecy of capitalist crisis, in other words, becomes an instrument in its own realization. While the deconstructive and messianic strains in his argument are logically at odds, they might be said to achieve - adapting Habermas' popular locution - a performative consistency.[56]

It would appear that a programmatic or descriptive narrative can itself serve as a social myth, as long as it is not taken "literally." But how can we know when that will be the case? How, practically speaking, can we distinguish between a myth and a utopia? How can we know which rhetoric will serve authority and which anarchy?

> The attempt to construct hypotheses about the nature of the struggles of the future and the means of suppressing capitalism, on the model furnished by history, is a return to the old methods of the Utopists . . . And yet without leaving the present, without reasoning about this future, which seems for ever condemned to escape our reason, we should be unable to act at all. Experience shows that the framing of a future, in some indeterminate time, may, *when it is done in a certain way*, be very effective, and have very few inconveniences; this happens when the

anticipations of the future take the form of those myths, which enclose with them all the strongest inclinations of a people, of a party or of a class . . .[57]

We cannot help imagining a future on the basis of past experience. But our projections can take different forms, some more suited than others to creative action. When framed "in a certain way," the imagined future can have radical effects on the present. A myth, it would seem, differs from a utopia not so much in nature as in kind. The crucial difference for Sorel concerns the degree of specificity with which the future is imagined. "It must never be forgotten that the perfection of this method of representation would vanish in a moment if any attempt were made to resolve the general strike into a sum of historical details; the general strike must be taken as a whole and undivided, and the passage from capitalism to Socialism conceived as a catastrophe, the development of which baffles description."[58]

Sorel attributes the usefulness of Marx's account of capitalist crisis for the struggles of the syndicates to a similar absence of explicit utopian projections.[59] For Sorel, Marxist claims regarding the inevitability of crisis serve the "prophetic" role Hardt and Negri recommend for political manifestos, organizing passionate resistance to the existing order.[60] Prophecy here is not to be confused with prediction; it is to be judged not by the accuracy of its vision but the intensity of its effect. Likewise, the myth of the General Strike does not instruct; it inspires.[61] It helps to instill the heroic, sacrificial orientation without which, Sorel presumes, the strikes themselves -given the hardships they involve and their uncertain results - cannot proceed.[62] Sorel finds an exemplary precursor in messianic Protestantism, a movement characterized by a "will to deliverance" not prevented from exerting tremendous power by its failure to predict

Christ's return.[63] Indeed, would Christianity have survived so long had a date of arrival been fixed? For centuries, its messianic vision has thrived on a savior who is always "coming soon."

Despite his claims regarding the collapse of description and inspiration, Sorel hesitated to grant his work any significant place in the larger struggles he described. Rather than champion the work of intellectuals, he generally defers to the syndicates who work out their strategy in the street. Yet on this point as well he is hardly consistent. In his preface, he restricts the role of the Marxist intellectual to a critique of bourgeois rhetoric and a defense of the spontaneous ideology of the proletariat class.[64] However, he later allows that the proper role of socialists may be to "explain to the proletariat the greatness of the revolutionary part they are called upon to play."[65] Of course, in accord with his rejection of Utopian schemes, this will not be an "explanation," *per se*. "Use must be made of a body of images which, by intuition alone, and before any considered analyses are made, is capable of evoking as an undivided whole the mass of sentiments which corresponds to the different manifestations of the war undertaken by Socialism against modern society."[66]

Given the contingent material conditions on which the power of myth depends, as we have seen, it cannot be certain which images will have the power to move the masses. However, Sorel argues that the force of myth can still be an object of reasoning and calculation. His commitment to the General Strike, after all, is based on an empirical observation of its function in syndicalist politics. As such, he argues it is just as "scientific," and just as provisional, as any generalization from particulars destined to be rendered antiquated by further discoveries.

> Our situation resembles somewhat that of the physicists who work at huge calculations based on theories which are not destined to endure forever [...] To proceed scientifically means, first of all, to know what forces exist in the world, and then to take measures whereby we may utilise them, by reasoning from experience. That is why I say that, by accepting the idea of the general strike, although we know that it is a myth, we are proceeding exactly as a modern physicist does who has complete confidence in his science, although he knows that the future will look upon it as antiquated.[67]

Myth and violence, for Sorel, are not part of a final solution, but provisional tactics aimed to release destructive (and thus creative) potentials with uncertain results. His messianic rhetoric, in turn, is itself experimental, calculated, and thus "scientific."

For contemporary readers, of course, Sorel's text cannot help but raise the specter of the Fascist and Totalitarian movements that followed shortly on the heels of his pronouncements. His remarks concerning the recovery of European *nations* are particularly foreboding in this regard, as they point in the direction toward which anti-parliamentarism was shortly to turn in Germany. As Carl Schmitt would later argue, "Sorel's [...] examples of myth also prove that *when they occur in the modern period*, the stronger myth is national." [68] Sorel was cognizant of these dangers, having witnessed the exploitation of the syndicates by would-be dictators of the Left. Vague slogans and popular enthusiasm, he understood, can also serve authority. He hated the attempts by his contemporaries to harness the power of workers' struggles to political authorities, and wrote caustically of the "patriotic" movements of his day. True to his understanding of the contingent powers of imagination, however, he was reconciled to the indeterminate

effects of the General Strike. It is quite possible, he acknowledges, that "we should see the social revolution culminate in a wonderful system of slavery."[69]

Hardt and Negri bear a complex relation to these traditions, and diverge from Sorel in a number of important respects, including their global emphasis and their more radical departure from Marx's class categories. However, they share a dynamic materialist ontology that presumes the reciprocal determination of economic and discursive registers. Additionally, a variety of parallels support a reading of the Multitude as a myth akin to that of the General Strike. Hardt and Negri share Sorel's rejection of programmatic utopias and his preference for spontaneous collective action and loose coalitions over disciplined party structures. Furthermore, they also share an affinity for chiliastic Christianity, a movement that Hardt and Negri claim "offered an absolute alternative to the spirit of imperial right - a new ontological basis."[70] In accord with this model, they figure the coming emergence of the Multitude as a catastrophic or "explosive" development that exceeds all contemporary understanding. Along these lines, Hardt and Negri have since described the absence of programmatic specificity as a virtue of their own text. "Some lament in a more general way that Empire provides no clear program or guide for political action, but in our view this is not a shortcoming of the book but rather an indication of its prudence. Political practice is better suited than theory to answer certain questions. New forms of political organization are being developed today and theoretical projects should be sensitive to their powers of invention."[71]

In light of a comparison with Sorel, Hardt and Negri's shift from critical analysis to polemical, vague hortatory might appear to exhibit a peculiar kind of sensitivity and a questionable brand of prudence. At the same time, a reading of Sorel may clarify the

reasoning behind such an approach. The deconstructive analysis of Empire that subsumes language, affect, will and imagination in a larger totality, while it allows for the creative power of desire, may not be enough on its own to stimulate the enthusiasm Hardt and Negri require of the Multitude. How can militant action be undertaken in the name of ideals with avowedly contingent, uncertain consequences? By positing an imminent future in which the virtual freedom of human imagination can be realized without constraint, Hardt and Negri hope to inspire the faith and resolve required for a struggle against the overwhelming forces of capitalism sovereignty. The uncertain future of any such struggle, it might be argued, is precisely what demands a militancy capable of suspending critical analysis in favor of creative action.

As we have seen, Hardt and Negri stop short of describing the Multitude as a constitutive myth. Like Sorel, they are conflicted in their role as prophets, deferring to "political practice" when it comes to practical aims and tactics. Whereas Sorel's embrace of the General Strike as the social myth of his day was based on his familiarity with syndicalist strategies being tested in the streets, of course, Hardt and Negri's Multitude has no direct empirical source or referent. However, they have since aligned themselves with the "anti-globalization" protesters, a loose coalition of groups who have been taken to task precisely for failing to congeal into a discrete (utopian) program and set of demands.[72] In an editorial, Hardt and Negri have described the role of the protests at the 2001 meeting of the World Trade Organization in Genoa in precisely the terms they apply to their own manifestos. **"**Protest movements do not provide a practical blueprint for how to solve problems, and we should not expect that of them. They seek rather to transform the public agenda by creating political desires for a better future."[73]

It would seem we have come full circle, resolving the distinction between critical ontology and ethico-political action, or theory and practice, in practical (performative) as well as theoretical terms. But where does that leave us? What will come of these protests and polemical manifestos? No doubt, they can have important effects on reformist agendas even if their more vague demands cannot be realized as such.[74] But what prevents us from specifying a set of demands, even if the results will (also) be unpredictable? Hardt and Negri describe the protesters' aims not as "anti-globalization," but for alternative, more democratically accountable forms. This crucial distinction - though surprisingly ignored by some critics[75] - is hardly original. And what political agendas are not driven by vague desires for a better future? How are we to link these desires to popular criticism of legal, economic and military systems or prevent the rhetoric of democracy from becoming a "center of gravity" for reactionary territorial alternatives to global liberation?

Unlike Sorel or Deleuze, Hardt and Negri never allow that the liberating flights of the Multitude could give way to reactionary capture, much less harbor fascist tendencies. One might say Sorel is at once more daring and more pessimistic than they are. To call Sorel a pessimist, however, requires some clarification.

> Pessimism is quite a different thing from the charicatures of it which are usually presented to us; it is a philosophy of conduct rather than a theory of the world; it considers the *march towards deliverance* as narrowly conditioned, on the one hand, by the experimental knowledge that we have acquired from the obstacles which oppose themselves to the satisfaction of our imaginations (or, if we like, by the feeling of social determinism), and, on the other hand, by a profound conviction of our natural weakness. These two aspects of pessimism should never

be separated, although, as a rule, scarcely any attention is paid to their close connection.[76]

If anything, it is this experimental, scientific, active pessimism that is lacking in Hardt and Negri's "ethico-political" approach to the Multitude. It is similarly lacking, of course, in the ideology Sorel recommends for the Syndicalist strikers. In both cases, messianic optimism can only appear cynical or self-deceptive given their common view of material history. One can find similar tensions in a long history of Marxist critics struggling to reconcile their materialism with a desire for less constrained agency.[77] This is the sort of desire shared by critics such as Frederic Jameson, who champion Hardt and Negri's promises of liberation as a remedy for the "relativism" of postmodern thinkers. In a short piece on Empire, Jon Beasely-Murray has even commended Hardt and Negri for inverting Gramsci's famous slogan: "Their slogan is optimism of the intellect, pessimism of the will."[78]

Beasely-Murray equates "optimism of the will" with a passive faith in destiny rather than collective action taken in the absence of utopian expectations. His rejection of such optimism - and of the disciplines with which he associates such an attitude - is thus understandable. In turn, he argues, "Pessimism of the intellect . . . condemns in advance the project of revolutionary analysis as an exercise in bad faith."[79] We should by all means praise Hardt and Negri for articulating a materialism that refuses both of these alternatives. In their critical analysis of global sovereignty, Hardt and Negri contribute much to an appreciation of contemporary possibilities and challenges facing collective action and imagination without a corresponding forfeit of revolutionary aspirations. Their "ethico-political" polemic, however, evinces its own bad faith. Given the manifold contingencies within which contemporary forms of political imagination operate, what speaks for such

optimism? Are we not at present caught between perfectionist utopias and catastrophic myths, both of which are linked to terrible violence?

Given the fate of the movements Sorel described, Hardt and Negri's pessimism of the will might be understandable. But this has not prevented their optimism of the intellect from evoking deadly-serious fears in some quarters. One of the intriguing aspects of critical reviews of Empire - following the attacks on the World Trade Center - is their conflation of political threats to community, nationality and security with academic threats to discursive formalism and autonomy. As one author asserts, "Hardt and Negri make a dangerously opportunistic move: they simply reinterpret the tradition out of which they write to accommodate the new radicalism, as if Marxism can be moved this way or that way depending upon who happens to be protesting what on any particular day."[80] The danger of such opportunism, clearly, is that the key terms of Marxism, like any other discourse, can indeed be "moved this way or that," and their power harnessed to diverse practical ends. As another critic laments, "Unfortunately, preposterousness has never been a barrier to effectiveness. There are plenty of ideas that are fatuous, wrongheaded, or simply ridiculous that nevertheless have a great and baneful influence on the world. Books like *Empire* are a veritable repository of such ideas."[81]

While they rightly assign political import to discursive practice, these critics give *Empire* both too little and too much credit. Hardt and Negri's reinterpretation of the Marxist tradition, while creative, is hardly arbitrary. Moreover, their conflation of multiple rhetorics is hardly unique. The left holds no patent on contradictory rhetoric and effective absurdities, as Rumsfeld has demonstrated.[82] As Sorel reminds us, institutional authorities are themselves nourished by mythological abstractions. Might we detect in

these hyperbolic attacks on Hardt and Negri's opportunism a general anxiety surrounding the discursive and political dislocations the Hardt and Negri attribute to Empire, that is, an anxiety concerning the collapse of discursive, economic and political forces, as well as that of plural discursive categories? What terms could not be conflated and co-opted today? As we see in the election and subsequent acts of the current U.S. regime, the rhetoric of democratic rule is flexible indeed.

Given the dynamic contingencies in which human action and imagination are involved, might it not make more sense to adopt a tragic, rather than mythological view of political action? In opposing tragedy to myth, I follow J.P. Vernant distinction, according to which tragedy is an "imitation" of myth that invites a critical perspective. For a reading of Gramsci's slogan along tragic lines, we might turn to Walter Benjamin. Benjamin, like Sorel, explicitly distinguished a "pessimistic" approach to creative imagination from the "optimistic" utopias of bourgeois politicians.

> "To win the energies of intoxication for the revolution" - in other words, poetic politics? "We have tried that beverage. Anything, rather than that!" Well, it will interest you all the more how much an excursion into poetry clarifies things. For what is the program of the bourgeois parties? A bad poem on springtime, filled to bursting with metaphors . . . These are mere images. And the stock of imagery of these poets of the social democratic associations? […] Optimism.[83]

Hardt and Negri include Benjamin among those theorists whose ontology of the possible, along with their own, pales before the material transformations they anticipate. Like them, he was committed to post-humanist notions of collective liberation, and endorsed disruptive techniques rather than a direct seizure of sovereign power. The general strike

was an exemplary form of politics for him as well.[84] However, he also sought to democratize the experimental, active pessimism that thinkers such as Sorel and Hardt and Negri reserve for the critic. Following the methods of the surrealists, he combined reflexive criticism, technical innovation and conceptual complexity. "For to organize pessimism means nothing other than to expel moral metaphor from politics and to discover in political action a sphere reserved one hundred percent for images."[85]

If Hardt and Negri's contribution to contemporary struggles was restricted to a critique of hegemonic discourse, that would surely be enough to commend them. In practical terms, furthermore, their text has proved tremendously productive, stimulating critical engagements across an unusually broad spectrum of writers and activists. Their situation of theoretical discourse in dynamic global networks, however, highlights the need for further attention to the complex links between critical discourse and current struggles. As Arjun Appadurai has argued, the field of global imagination is "neither purely emancipatory nor entirely disciplined."[86] According to Hardt, he and Negri are already working on a theory of the Multitude that will mirror the practical detail and sophistication of their critique of Empire. This theory, he suggests, will combine two elements: "First, the various theorizations of the body particularly among feminist theorists and, second, the innovative forms of political organization that are emerging in the new social struggles around the world . . . It may involve finding a way to set up a dialogue between these theoretical problematics on the one axis and the practical experiments on the other."[87] As they draw these links, Hardt and Negri would do well to take more, rather than less, from Sorel and Benjamin. In short, they should be less moral and more pessimistic. As we have seen, this does not preclude a scientific approach to abstraction, myth, or enthusiasm, by

the terms of their own materialism. Like any working hypothesis caught up in the forces it purports to describe, a utopian science is itself to be understood as experimental, tactical and provisional.

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[1] Hardt, Michael and Antonio Negri. 2000. *Empire*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, p.47

[2] Cf. Negri, Antonio. 1991. *The Savage Anomaly*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. For further

[2] Cf. Negri, Antonio. 1991. *The Savage Anomaly*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. For further

elaboration on their use of the term in relation to political history, see Hardt and Negri's earlier work, *Labor of Dionysis: A Critique of the State Form*. 1994. *Theory out of Bounds*, Vol.4. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

[3] Empire, 60

[4] Empire, 385

5 Thus, affective labor, once a constitutive "outside" for the patriarchal wage earner, is brought under the logic of commercial exploitation in the service economy.

[6] Empire, 349

[7] Empire, 66

[8] Empire, 48

[9] While they criticize postcolonial nationalisms for miming the logic of European sovereignty, for example, they acknowledge the provisional value of these appropriations in particular instances.

[10] Empire, 47

[11] Cf. Empire, 369 "The *res gestae*, the singular virtualities that operate the connection between the possible and the real, are in the first passage outside measure and in the second beyond measure . . . The virtual and the possible are wedded as irreducible innovation and as a revolutionary machine."

[12] "We have reached the moment when the relationship of power that had dominated the hybridizations and machinic metaphorphoses can now be overturned ... This new terrain of production and life opens for labor a future of metapmorphoses that subjective cooperation can and must control ethically, politically, and productively." - Empire, 367

[13] Empire, 206-7 Local struggles, they explain, have become "incommunicable" insofar as the site of power they confront is not one of many similar centers but a moment in a larger, de-centered network.

[14] Cf. Empire, 61 "The deterritorializing power of the multitude is the productive force that sustains Empire and at the same time the force that calls for and makes necessary its destruction."

[15] Empire, 51

[16] Empire, 218

[17] Empire, 142 As Hardt puts it in his interview with Tom Dumm, "Empire rules precisely through a kind of politics of difference, managing hybrid identities in flexible hierarchies. From this perspective, then, a politics of hybridity may have been effective against the now defunct modern form of sovereignty but it is powerless against the current imperial form. Cf. Sovereignty, Multitudes, Absolute Democracy: A discussion between Michael Hardt and Thomas Dumm about Hardt and Negri's Empire. *Theory and Event*. 4.3, par.23

[18] Empire, 154

[19] Cf. Lyotard. *The Postmodern Condition*. 1984. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. Lyotard's conception of agonistics - the struggle of multiple discourses not mediated by an Overriding "meta-language" - emphasizes indefinite contest, rather than liberation. It is based on Wittgenstein's theory of language "games."

[20] Hardt and Negri describe their positive alternative to Empire as, among other things, a "postmodern republicanism" (Empire, 208). Given such claims as, "The means to get beyond the crisis is the ontological displacement of the subject" (Empire, 384) it is not surprising that, despite their disavowals of "postmodern" politics, they have been taken to task as examples of its worst excesses.

[21] Empire, 142

[22] Deleuze, Gilles and Felix Guattari. 1987. *A Thousand Plateaus*. Trans. Brian Massumi. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press. p.215 Deleuze describes fascism in terms of a "resonance" among various "cells," such as the gang, the neighborhood, etc. Arjun Appadurai uses similar concepts, describing the "focalization and transvaluation" of affective-discursive scripts. Cf. Appadurai, Arjun. 1996. *Modernity at Large*. University of Minnesota Press.

[23] Deleuze, Gilles. 1992. Postscript on the Societies of Control. *October* 59 (4)

[24] For a more serious consideration of the policing of urban space and multifarious controls Over access to various services, see Davis, Mike. *City of Quartz* 1992. New York: Vintage.

[25] The BET or "Black Entertainment Television" network, of course, is itself a response to the predominance of what might be called "white entertainment television." A particularly extreme racial segmentarity is evident, for example, in the award-winning sit-com "Friends," a show with an all-white cast set in an imaginary Manhattan almost entirely evacuated of people of color.

[26] For a discussion of this function of television, see Weber, Samuel. 1996. *Mass Mediaurus*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. For a discussion of the internet along similar lines, see Galloway, Alex. Protocol, or, How Control Exists after Decentralization. 2001. *Rethinking Marxism* 13 (3/4)

[27] Cf. Empire, 361 "Circulation must become freedom."

[28] Deleuze, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 9-10

[29] See Empire, 211

[30] Empire, 211

[31] Donald Rumsfeld "in his own words," Excerpts from Sept.3, 2002 Interview on the events following the September 11, 2001 Attacks. 2002. *New York Times*, 4 Sept, sec. A, p. 10.

[32] Ibid.

[33] On interruption and affective capture, see Brian Massumi's analysis of Ronald Reagan's successful incoherence in his rewarding essay The Autonomy of Affect in *Parables for the Virtual*. 2002. Durham, Duke University Press.

[34] Nato Strikes Deal To Accept Russia in a Partnership. 2002. *New York Times*, 15 May, sec. A, p.1.

[35] 2002. *New York Times*, 15 May, sec. A, p. 1.

[36] "The NATO secretary general, Lord Robertson, similarly urged allies to "think carefully about the role of this alliance in the future, not least in protecting our citizens from criminal terrorists and criminal states.'" Rumsfeld Urges NATO To Set Up Strike Force. *New York Times*. 25 Sept, sec. A, p. 6.

[37] This is the approach outlined by Laclau and Mouffe, who describe a counter-hegemonic hegemony. Cf. Laclau, Ernesto and Chantal Mouffe.1990. *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*. New York: Verso.

[38] See Empire, 214-15 on the "Barbarian." The poor, they claim, have "digested" the proletariat (a term also generalized by them to signify everyone caught up in the capitalist economy). See also pp. 52-3.

[39] Empire, 36 See also pp. 314-15

[40] Specifically, Hardt describes their failure to give a "sociological" account of the Multitude and promises this will be the basis of the next project. Cf. Hardt, Michael. 2001. Sovereignty, Multitudes, Absolute Democracy: A Discussion between Michael Hardt and Thomas Dumm. *Theory and Event* 4.3, paragraph 39 [online].

[41] Cf. Hardt, Michael and Antonio Negri. 2001. Adventures of the Multitude. *Rethinking Marxism* 13(3/4). p.238.

[42] Empire, 368

[43] Empire, 368

[44] Empire, 65-6

[45] Georges Sorel. 1941. *Reflections On Violence*. Trans. T.E. Hulme. New York: Peter Smith. p. 31

[46] We might in this context connect Bergson's theory of virtual freedom with Judith Butler's account of the role played by the "imaginary" in structuring and sustaining symbolic and institutional structures. Cf. Judith Butler. 1993. *Bodies that Matter*. New York: Routledge.

[47] On Violence, 32-3

[48] On Violence 36

[49] On Violence, 54-5. See also p.87 where he explains that there can be no "rule" for class compromise, he explains, insofar as it dissolves the economic objectivity of struggle. See also page 128 on vague slogans.

[50] On Violence, 87

[51] On Violence, 90 See also pp. 98, 82-3, and 88 on replying "by blows to the advances of the propagators of social peace."

[52] On Violence, 125

[53] On Violence, 137

[54] On Violence, 22

[55] On Violence, 148

[56] Indeed, *logical* consistency and discursive coherence are not ideals to which Sorel pretends. On the contrary, he equates these goals with the pretense of thinkers who would subsume politics and human experience to the laws of the physical sciences, and mocks their strained attempts to imitate the latter's deductive argumentation.

[57] On Violence, 133 Italics mine.

[58] On Violence, 164

[59] See On Violence, 152-3

[60] Cf. On Violence, 148

[61] It might be noted that the General Strike in Italy on April 16, 2002 (the first in 20 years) involved just such an abstraction from local or discrete interests and grievances.

[62] See On Violence, 152

[63] See On Violence, 133-4

[64] See On Violence, 38 "We may play a useful part if we limit ourselves to attacking middle-class thought in such a way as to put the proletariat on its guard against an invasion of ideas and customs from the hostile class."

[65] On Violence 85

[66] On Violence, 130-131

[67] On Violence 166-7

[68] In his now widely-read critique of parliamentary democracy, Carl Schmitt sketches a trajectory from Sorel's anarchism to authoritarian nationalism, grounding sovereignty in just the sort of capture of mythological energies Sorel was so concerned to avoid. Cf. Schmitt, Carl. 1988. *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*. trans. Ellen Kennedy. Cambridge: MIT press. I discuss Schmitt's appropriation of Sorel and his emphasis on affective capture in my *Sovereign Nations, Carnal States* (forthcoming, Cornell University Press).

[69] On Violence, 195

[70] Empire, 21

[71] *Adventures*, p.238

[72] Remarkably, at least some of these protesters have taken up the terms of Empire for their own struggles.

[73] Hardt, Michael and Antonio Negri. 2001. What the Protesters In Genoa Want. *New York Times*, 20 July [online]. One may safely presume they would similarly endorse the general strike that took place in Italy the following year.

[74] Protests, for example, can give the "insider" critics of the Washington Consensus a stronger bargaining position, just as the direct actions of the civil rights movement spurred legislative reforms.

[75] Francis Fukuyama, for example, draws a specious parallel between the military nationalism of Jesse Helms and what he presumes to be the protesters' territorial demands for democratic control over economic processes. Cf. Fukuyama, Francis. 2002. The West may be cracking. *International Herald Tribune*. 9 Aug, sec. A, p. 4.

[76] On Violence, 10

[77] In his fascinating book on Walter Benjamin, for example, Terry Eagleton - like Hardt and Negri - severs the link between critical and ideological Marxism, explicitly reserving "deconstructive" criticism for bourgeois ideology. Thus, while taking "the point" of Gramsci's slogan (taken up by Benjamin), "'Pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will,'" he prefers "'given the strength of the masses, how can we be defeated?'" Cf. Eagleton, Terry. 1981. *Walter Benjamin, Towards a Revolutionary Criticism.* London: Verso. p. 172

[78] Beasely-Murray, Jon. 2001. Lenin in America. *Rethinking Marxism*. p. 150

[79] Ibid.

[80] See also Wolf, Alan. 2001. The Snake. *New Republic*, 1 October [online].

[81] Kimball, Roger. 2001. The New Anti-Americanism. *New Criterion* 20 (1) [online].

[82] The point of drawing parallels to Donald Rumsfeld, it should be clear, is not to conflate Hardt and Negri's "radical republicanism" with the aims and strategies of Al Queda. However, if their own rhetoric were not equally fulminating, one could almost forgive conservative critics for drawing facile connections between Hardt and Negri's references to "explosive" solutions and those literally explosive subjects that some have taken to calling "homicide" bombers (attempting to erase all tragic connotations of "suicide" from the violent struggles of overmatched antagonists, and consigning the latter to the category of criminal, rather

than political foes). Kimball actually accuses Hardt and Negri of complicity with terror, a heavily freighted charge to say the least in today's political climate, and all the more so in light of Negri's incarceration on such charges. It is not unthinkable that foolish and/or destructive behavior could find justification in their text (though there is little sign that "terrorists" have taken up Empire as a new handbook). Is it not possible, as Sorel acknowledged regarding the General Strike, that contemporary struggles could give rise to new forms of slavery?

[83] Walter Benjamin. 1978. Surrealism. *Reflections*. Trans. Edmund Jephcott. New York: Schocken Books. p.190

[84] See Benjamin. 1978. Critique of Violence. *Reflections*.

[85] Surrealism, 191 Sorel himself speaks suggestively of revolutionary impulses acquired through educative processes of criticism. Cf. On Violence, 85-6. I will have to reserve for another time an extended discussion Benjamin's techniques and the difference implied between "images" and "mere images" in these two passages. I examine the former notion in my work, *Sovereign Nations, Carnal States* (Forthcoming, Cornell University Press).

[86] Appadurai, Arjun. 1996. *Modernity at Large*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. p.4

[87] Hardt, Michael. Sovereignty, Multitudes, Absolute Democracy: A Discussion between Michael Hardt and Thomas Dumm. *Theory and Event* 4.3 paragraph 39 [online].