

**Journal Title:** *Wide Screen*

**Vol. 3, No.1, June 2011**

**ISSN: 1757-3920**

**URL: <http://widescreenjournal.org>**

**Published by Subaltern Media, 153 Sandringham Drive, Leeds LS17 8DQ, UK**

## **MILITANTS AND CINEMA: DIGITAL ATTEMPTS TO MAKE THE MULTITUDE IN *HUNGER, CHE, AND PUBLIC ENEMIES***

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**Abstract:** Recent films about militant figures reveal film rethinking the notion of resistance and the constitution of collectivity. These films share particular narrative and aesthetic effects. The militant in these films offers a figure for narrative agents engaged in the construction of collectivity, which appears both in the films' thematic use of biopolitical labor and embodied aesthetics. Militancy's reappearance in cultural production highlights how the asymmetries of economic and political power in the twenty-first century solicit militant action as the pluralist multitude's return of the repressed. Militants link individual, factions, and social totalities without consolidating them. I compare and contrast the use of militancy in contemporary cultural production with post-Marxist theories of the militant and multitude, paying particular attention to the work of Hardt and Negri in which the practice of the militant constructs multitude, the resistant non-unitary collective subject confronting global capital.

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Militancy is a problem and a promise that remains unresolved within contemporary experience. As the drive to realize social change, militancy highlights an impasse in the Left under neoliberalism between the failure of the Communist project and the rapprochement of anarchist tendencies with the anarcho-libertarianism of neoliberal economic policy.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, militancy plays a key role in the theorizations of subjectivity in the work of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri and that of Alain Badiou. In this essay, I will examine these conceptions of militancy against a number of fiction films about militants from 2008 and 2009, which register the uneasy relation of individuals, groups, and institutions in popular culture and post-Marxist theory. In part, film engages with these issues through the material and aesthetic shift in cinematic production from the filmic to the digital, which creates new visual effects and changes

the speed and nature of cinematic production. By focusing on the militant's construction of new social bodies as thematic content and aesthetic form, these films—even *Hunger*, which was not shot digitally but draws on an emerging sense of digital aesthetics—speak to problematic links in culture and critical theory between revolutionary drive, individualism, and anarchism's refusal of institutional power.

In effect, militancy in these films engages with the contemporary world of biopolitics, the imbrication of life, power, and politics detailed in the late work of Michel Foucault as “decreasingly the power of the right to take life, and increasingly the right to intervene to make live” (Foucault 2003, 248). The biopolitical link between militancy and the construction of the social body is not simply a reaction to contemporary experience but an attempt to engage with the construction of social bodies as potential utopian projects. Militancy acts as a process of confronting and remoulding the world, which binds its political engagement with the construction of art and narrative. Yet the interrelation of militancy and the remaking of the world, central to art in the era of biopolitics, generates difficulties for theorists. In *Archaeologies of the Future*, Fredric Jameson notes two contrasting tendencies in utopian works, the explication of daily life and the radical undertaking of large-scale collective projects, as poles “often (and too rapidly) assimilated to the difference between anarchism and Marxism” (213); instead, Jameson argues that utopian thought should “make of the antinomy itself the central structure and beating heart of Utopia as such” (214). Jameson describes this new Utopian discursive strategy as “disruptive,” but carefully explains in a lengthy footnote that such disruption “is not a code word for so-called terrorism” (231-32). Throughout my critical expositions, this disavowal of terrorism reappears as theorists approach the problem of subjective production along militant lines. The closest Jameson comes to the construction of militancy is his use of the faction as an actantial narrative category between the individual and the social totality. If the faction is the mediating term between the individual and social totality, then it is perhaps useful and disturbing to note Foucault's claim that the characteristic feature of the totalitarian state is “what could be called a governmentality of the party” (Foucault 2008, 191). Indeed, this tendency perhaps explains why Jameson, when confronting questions of war and representation, avoids both the faction and the militant to focus instead on “scene,” the production of a fragmented, non-narratable, asubjective field. Scene pits abstraction against sense-datum, an antagonism that becomes “in its fullest reality necessarily collective” (Jameson 2009, 1547). Except in a Sartrean

sense, this derealization of the agent into the non-narratable is less an example of collective experience than its negation, collectivity experienced through exclusion and singularization. Indeed, Jameson's reliance on exclusion and closure for totalization—a tendency that appears throughout his work—pushes the question of collectivity itself into a deconstructive and postmodern sense of collective experience as that of exteriority. In *The Geopolitical Aesthetic*, Jameson interrogates the appearance of the social totality in film by considering its varied narrative appearances—sensed from the outside, tracked like a crime, or conjoined by the Authorial gaze—as part of a process by which the medium of representation becomes roped in for some other representational form.<sup>ii</sup> However, Jameson's concise differentiation of actants and characters and his broad descriptions of representational disjunctions do not hit upon a method to describe collectivity but rather moves from individual to mass without hitting on the process of collective formation.

Militancy, by contrast, provides positive content to the constitution of the collective, and to the narrative category of faction that Jameson posits while undercutting the problem of the faction (or party). Militants link individual, factions, and social totalities without necessarily consolidating either factions or totalities. Indeed, competing contemporary theories turn to militancy for this very reason, whether the Wobblies in Hardt and Negri or Saint Paul in Alain Badiou. Hardt and Negri's work is of particular importance insofar as the practice of the militant constructs *multitude*, the resistant non-unitary collective subject confronting global capital, and questions how multitude can make political decisions. Militancy's reappearance in cultural production highlights how the asymmetries of economic and political power in the twenty-first century solicit militant action as the pluralist multitude's return of the repressed. In contemporary thought, militancy mines the antinomy between the quotidian and the grand collective project, which becomes in these films a narrative and aesthetic focus on the construction of social bodies. In these films, militancy provides a form for the disruption of established social orders and the construction of new social bodies, which the use of digital aesthetics in *Che* and *Public Enemies* highlights in utopian mediatory urges. Moreover, the use of history within the narrative of these films reverses the forward projection of utopian temporality. In place of Jameson's archaeologies of the future, militancy is embedded in its historical circumstance not simply to localize its past political valences but to reveal its work as a unique form of biopolitical production: the directly political production of new social life.

### **Militant Multitude**

The militant is central to the production of subjectivity in Hardt and Negri, and, in a contrasting manner, in Alain Badiou and Slavoj Žižek. The post-Marxism of Hardt and Negri is most at issue here for its attempt to hybridize Marxism with a postmodern anarcho-syndicalism, exemplified in their resistance to centralization, vanguardism, and the seizure of state power as well as in their emphasis on local struggles and interventions. By contrast, Badiou's militant insists upon the importance of the state to the production of subjectivity. While I will return to Badiou further on, it is the militant in Hardt and Negri most solicited by these contemporary films, not simply for the notion of subjective production without relation to state power but for the militant as an agent of multitude's production. As such, their work confronts in theoretical form the impasses that these films solicit thematically and aesthetically, the problem of the constitution of new social bodies qua *bodies*. In the following section, I illustrate the militant's role in multitude's production as well as in multitude's separation from capital, drawing from both Hardt and Negri's collaborative work and Negri's individual writings.

The closing section of *Empire* (2000) evokes the organizers of the International Workers of the World. Hardt and Negri declare: "the militant is the one who best expresses the life of the multitude" (411). This militant, however, is distinct from the classic Leninist-Marxist militant, the vanguard ascetic who acts from and attempts to instantiate a set of political ideals. Instead, the activity of this anti-Platonic militant must "not [be] representational, but constituent activity" (HN 2000, 413). Rather than representing the coming community's idealization, the militant foments an immanent revolution within social life as such. Such an approach to militancy is demanded by *Empire*'s premise: if global capital can no longer displace its contradictions into an exterior mode of production, then militants confront an immanent and connected social world that they must remake from the inside. Militants thus direct their revolutionary activity toward the intensification of biopolitical production, what they call "making the multitude" in *Commonwealth*. In effect, the militant's creative social activity produces the subjectivity of a shared social world.

In Hardt and Negri, love is the central mechanism of militancy's creative activity. The militant, as an agent of multitude, creates multitude through acts of love, which increases its power by multiplying social relations. Evil, by contrast, is love's corruption, the use of collective

forms to block the construction of other collective forms, e.g. when the so-called traditional family blocks the rights of other social units. In *Kairòs, Alma Venus, Multitudo* (2000), Negri provides further insight into the relation of militancy and love. Negri outlines here multitude's composition via three factors familiar to anyone conversant with Christianity: poverty, love, and militancy. Negri's use of these terms is at once different from what one might expect and yet altogether telling of a certain messianism. Poverty is the multitude's paradoxical body, love is the motive force that constructs the multitude, and militancy is the dual practices of poverty and love. The poor are at once included and excluded from global capital's biopolitical production: included within biopolitical production insofar as they cannot help but engage with the social production of language, signs, and affects in their very existence, yet excluded from capital's immediate production processes and forms of recompense. The poor confront capital as extraneous bodies that capitalist processes reduce ideologically to Giorgio Agamben's "bare life," unrecognized political subjects vulnerable to state power, while inextricable from capital's global processes. The poor are thus more than the contemporary industrial reserve labour force since their labour is not so much held in reserve as their everyday activities are parasitically instrumentalized. Poverty is thus, in Negri's terms, "naked power" (Casarino and Negri 2008, 91), and reveals multitude's power even when excluded from capital's command by constructing a common body irreducible to notions of property or sovereignty. This body is the body of the multitude, created by love, "the desire of the common," a force able to create social relations (Negri 2003, 196).

According to Negri, militancy connects poverty and love as a "practice" that takes up the task of "the interweaving of languages and of bodies with the meaning of the common" (Negri 2003, 206). Thus Negri argues that militancy's pivotal task is to create a point in which commonality can be recognized and transmitted through the body of the multitude: the "construction of a common name" (Negri 2003, 204). One might recognize in Negri's appeal to "a common name" what Jean-Jacques Lecercle has called an eschatological vision of language: the hope of constructing a space of clear communication between equal agents, the dream of language as a space of absolute democracy.<sup>iii</sup> Indeed, this contrast is revealing. Where Lecercle posits his linguistic eschatology as a project, Negri recasts it almost as the promise of a New Jerusalem: "in reality, we will only be able to construct a common name in a definitive manner once love, as technology of the common, has invested the entire political context, destroying and

replacing it” (Negri 2003, 208). The crucial impasse in multitude’s theorization is this seeming combination of eschatology and horizontal constitution, the immanent relation of poverty, love, and militancy, or more simply bodies, desire, and language.<sup>iv</sup> The militant, stripped of its vanguard status and made immanent to social production, can appear to be tasked with waiting for everyone to become a militant. For Negri, the artist as storyteller provides a way out of this deferral: navigating the Scylla and Charybdis of utopia and terrorism, the storyteller’s task is “to put us back in the situation of the person who is awaiting the event and [to] impose it upon himself to construct it” (Negri 2011, 74).

Steve McQueen’s *Hunger* (2008) takes up this narrative task by turning the militant’s deferral into the basis for action, in the process turning poverty and love into descriptors of the hunger and dirty strikes of IRA prisoners vying for political recognition. The film strives to convey a visceral experience of the dirty strike and Sands’ hunger strike. McQueen has said he wanted to make the film smell of “piss and shit.” However, in the process of constructing this affective connection to the audience, the film also reveals the difficulty of distinguishing the naked power of Negri’s militant from the mummified existence of Agamben’s bare life as viewers move between assertions of resistance at its most naked and life’s degradation to absolute bareness. The naked IRA prisoners resist their reduction to political refuse in the dirty protest by enacting it as a process, and the hunger strike presses this logic of naked power to an extreme. In each of its three acts, the film formally reiterates the body’s power by focusing on different cinematic experiences of the body. In the first act, largely dialogue-free, the prisoners refuse to wear uniforms, pass contraband messages from one orifice to another, and plaster the walls with faeces, which the film registers with the aesthetic gravity of paint on canvas (fig. 1). These processes are filmed as stationary shots with painstakingly arranged formal compositions. The second act consists of a twenty-three minute discussion between Bobby Sands and a priest on the ethics of hunger strikes, a sequence that consists of only a handful of shots and begins with a long shot and long take that emphasizes the viewer’s embodied physical experience. The third act follows Sands’s bodily degradation during his hunger strike, at times entering his subjective space to create memory images and hallucinations, before concluding with his dead body wheeled out of the jail. The result is a film less interested in multitude’s construction than the militant’s maintained singularity as he constructs it.



**Figure 1** *Hunger* aestheticizes bare life--or its waste--in this faeces-mural.

In its relentless focus on the arrangement and abjection of bodies in exquisite detail, from the static shot of urine moving in slow rivulets down the prison hall to Sands's wasting death, this aesthetic fascination with the body threatens to turn the film into an expression of the political subject's reduction to bare life. As a film, *Hunger* blurs the naked power of a militant collective form of life, the imprisoned members of the IRA, with bare life. McQueen's focus on individualized degradation as an affirmation of militancy's power reveals one of the key problems of contemporary thought: the film itself avoids collective engagement. It prefers the slow evocation of an individual's physical experience of imprisonment and suffering to the militant's ideals or the collective subjectivity that maintains the hunger strike. The film is all but without conversation except for the extended dialogue between Sands and the priest about the hunger strike, and even there, its two major shots insist on individualization rather than collectivity. The sequence begins with a medium shot of the initial conversation, which lasts seventeen minutes (fig. 2), but the remaining eight minutes consist of a brief insert of Sands silently lighting a cigarette, followed by a medium close-up of the same character (fig. 3), and concluding with a reaction shot of the priest. Such mediation insistently returns viewers to their own embodied and distanced relation to the dialogue, while heightening an individualized sense of importance, whether that of Sands or of the viewer. Moreover, the content of the dialogue focuses insistently on the role of the individual, most especially in Sands' near-parable on an injured foal. Sands tells the priest a story from his youth: he makes a trip into the wilderness with

a group of boys and they encounter an injured foal near a creek. All the boys stand watching its pain, unsure what to do, until a priest approaches. Realizing that everyone will be blamed for the foal's injury and death, Sands drowns it, ending its pain and taking the blame for everyone else. The story, told to the priest as justification for his hunger strike, makes clear the role of the individual here as decision-maker.



**Figure 2 &**

**Figure 3** In *Hunger's* only extended scene of dialogue, the actors speak only in these two framings

The film's aesthetic fascination with the body and its degradation turns Sands's hunger strike into an expression of the political subject's reduction to bare life rather than an expression of his naked power. While *Hunger's* focus on the politically excluded displaces militancy from violent action to subjectivization, the depiction of this constructed subjectivity displays a



recurrent tendency of biopolitics to become its opposite, thanatopolitics. Political exclusion becomes the base of collective militancy.<sup>v</sup> What we see here is a perverse version of Jean-Luc Nancy's "inoperative community," where individuals are connected only via their experience of death as the absolute limit of exteriority, in effect turning death itself into a resistant position of exteriority. Indeed, gesturing beyond his focus on practices and governmentality, Foucault makes a rare summative point in his 1976 seminar that as biopower increasingly expresses itself as "the right to intervene to make live [...] death becomes, insofar as it is the end of life, the term, the limit, or the end of power" (Foucault 2003, 248). This sense of death as beyond the grasp of power has led discussions of biopolitics—most especially deconstructive discussions—to raise the promise of the exterior into a positive vision of death. In "There Will Be No More Bobby Sands," Patrick Anderson describes the U.S. turn toward biopolitical intervention in life through the force-feeding of hunger-strikers at Guantanamo Bay. The performance of dying is thus denied to these hunger strikers. Anderson is correct that such strikes may produce "new, if harrowingly mortal, models of political subjectivity" (1731), but one should not premise the production of subjectivity on biopower's perceived limitations. This sense of death as beyond the grasp of power threatens to make death itself the resistant exterior position. If one cedes life to capital and the state, then death seems the only positive position.

*Hunger* stages this problem in one of its few scenes outside the prison. The sequence appears directly before the conversation that details the reasons behind the hunger strike. It doesn't follow the prisoners, but Ray, a guard, the focus of early scenes that illustrate his daily routine and stresses. Ray visits his comatose mother in a nursing home where an IRA assassin shoots him, and the film holds on an image of the guard slumped in the lap of his blood-soaked vegetative mother. The impassivity of their bodies, their openness to power and inability to speak, again leads us toward bare life and an impulse beyond (fig. 4).



**Figure 4** An assassinated prison guard dies in his mute mother's lap in *Hunger*.

This appears in another register during the film's conclusion. Cutting between a dying Sands and his vision of himself as a young man paused in the midst of a cross-country run, we see Sands's withered face release a single tear before returning to the young Sands as he continues his run. At this point, with his final breath emphasized on the soundtrack, Sands dies (fig. 5). Resistance is the willingness to push past the body, into death. This view of militancy turns the character's ascetic commitment into an aesthetic act of separation. Yet Sands's individualized and aestheticized death approaches this individuation as a series of subjective hallucinations, memories of wandering in the wilderness that turn his death into the image of a bird's flight, before cutting to his dead body.



**Figure 5 Framing highlights the individualization of Sands's death in *Hunger*.**

Biopolitics appears in the confrontation between power, e.g. capital and sovereignty, and autonomous social bodies. The chief difference between the biopolitics of Hardt and Negri and Giorgio Agamben lies in their points of emphasis. Agamben approaches biopolitics as life's openness to power while Hardt and Negri, drawing on the anarchist substrate of Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari, insist that life expresses its own powers. It is not a question of inside or outside that marks the question of political subjectivity in contemporary work but rather the problem of an immanent set of relations that continually opens out onto and yet also manages to include a gap or void. It is this point—that neither the world nor the subject is one—that informs contemporary critical theory and differentiates it from vitalism. Militancy provides a process for subjective formation within this fracture.

Without this sense of biopolitical production as immanent, positive, and opening onto the void, Foucault's passing remarks on death can lead to the perverse conclusion that militancy's proper mode of political struggle is a form of death drive rather than a questioning of the forms of life that power tries to construct. Imagine if Marx, confronted by political economy's labour power, had decided the only logical way to thwart capital was to destroy labour power itself. Revolution through mass suicide. At times, *Hunger* gestures toward the real basis of Sands' hunger strike, in contrast to its embodied aesthetic: Sands calls into question the form of life the British government uses to recognize IRA militants, not life as such. The strike is not an escape from British rule but rather, as Sands says in the film, an act meant to radicalize "a new

generation of men and women.” In order to think through the arrangement of bodies and language—now central to the contemporary biopolitical horizon—militancy must put into question the ideological positing of death as the political exterior. The problem militancy confronts is thus two-fold: one, immanence eliminates the notion of an exterior or pure form of resistance for militant social practice; two, militancy can seem to await the coming of a new community rather than its construction, or, in art, as Negri argues, it constructs the experience of waiting. Militancy’s potency in both theory and film derives from this unresolved tension, the need to construct new social bodies and the terror of undertaking such grand projects.

### **Financial Crisis, Guerrilla Warfare, and Militant Subjectivity**

The fear of grand projects, however, cannot stop the arrival of large-scale historical events. Indeed, part of the appeal of these films about militants was their appearance at the beginning of the current economic downturn. This flash of active response was quickly diluted by a deluge of apocalyptic films like *The Road*, *The Book of Eli*, *Zombieland*, and *Legion*, where the end of history blocks any utopian tendencies. The interest in militancy was an attempt to engage with the increasing sense that postmodern power relations are fundamentally asymmetrical, both in military and economic terms. Hence Michael Moore opened his film on the financial meltdown, *Capitalism: A Love Story* (2009), with a montage of bank robberies and closed with a mock robbery of Wall Street. The year 2008 revealed the asymmetry of economic power as the interests of workers and consumers were sacrificed to those of a massive financial industry, and as nations intervened to maintain asset-values, leaving the framework of global capital untouched. The world’s continued economic malaise reveals the emptiness of the pretence that the crisis was one of liquidity rather than solvency.

Militancy, however, bears more directly on the economic field as a descriptor of the postmodernity’s hegemonic form of labour. Where contemporary economists discuss “human capital”—i.e. the development of individual capacities through education and training—Hardt and Negri discuss “biopolitical labour.” Biopolitical labour is enmeshed in the problems of human capital, not simply in terms of self-development but as the production of social relations themselves. Biopolitical labour can thus be intellectual labour, engaged in the production or manipulation of language, codes, and signs, or service labour, engaged in the production of affect and attending to the body’s needs. By its very nature, biopolitical labour exceeds the boundaries

of the wage relation (as, to a degree, does human capital, since it remains within the hands of the worker). Hardt and Negri argue that this excessiveness is integral to the crisis of the contemporary mode of production as labour increasingly exceeds capital's capture and control. Financial mechanisms are central apparatuses in capturing, recoding, and redistributing the value created by this shift in labour.<sup>vi</sup>

Militancy appears within biopolitical labour's organization, and biopolitical labour itself resembles the guerrilla unit in its autonomy and its structure. Hardt and Negri note that the "small mobile units and flexible structures of post-Fordist production correspond to a certain degree to the polycentric guerrilla model" (HN 2004, 82). Moreover, the improvisatory aspects of post-Fordist labour identified by Paolo Virno appear in the guerrilla as well. The guerrilla's improvisatory abilities are central to Che Guevara's outline of the construction of a new Communist society in *Guerrilla Warfare*, where self-development will open autonomous spaces in which guerrillas and peasants can develop new forms of life. Such liberated zones operate in similar fashion not just to anarchistic mutualism but also to the autonomous zones of the Italian *autonomia* movement. Hardt and Negri, however, discuss these zones as *autonomia's* advance beyond guerrilla warfare rather than as a construction immanent to the guerrilla unit (or its predecessor in Proudhon). Although the militant remains a touchstone for Hardt and Negri, it becomes an increasingly submerged one, leading them to minimize two of the guerrilla's resonances with multitude's biopolitical production: sabotage, which Negri discussed at length in a pamphlet used in his Italian terrorism trial; and attack via retreat, which is an aggressive form of "exodus," the term they use for the multitude's peaceful attempts to subtract itself from external forms of control (HN 2004, 341). For Hardt and Negri, multitude is always in a process of exodus from capital and the state toward the diffusive exterior, which inheres paradoxically within the system. At this point, militancy's implications lead Hardt and Negri to disavow violence. While Jameson's "disruption" tends toward violent and indeterminate eruptions, Hardt and Negri's exodus turns upon a militant practice of love, which provides a distinction between the creative and destructive; hence all but defensive violence is disallowed since "violence cannot create anything but can only preserve what has already been created" (HN 2004, 344). In effect, exodus turns the guerrilla's retreat into a creeping general strike as the militant exits the world of production to grapple with other immanent forms of social production.

The similarity between the militant's construction of new social bodies and the guerrilla's

creation of new autonomous or liberated zones reveals one of multitude's central difficulties as a dispersive, horizontal, and multilateral set of singularities only consistent in its rejection of organization.<sup>vii</sup> In Mao and Guevara, the guerrilla was the vanguard of the war effort. "Triumph," Guevara wrote "will always be the product of a regular army, even though its origins are in a guerrilla army" (Guevara, 15). By contrast, everyone is called to militancy in Hardt and Negri's theory of multitude, which exists as a "*continuing plurality*" in struggle with the state (HN 2004, 82). This is multitude's compromise (schematically) between Marxism and anarchism: a collective subject that maintains the rights of individuals (and by extension, factions, parties, and other coalitions).

The difficulty, however, is that multitude's organization also combines Marxism and anarchism in another, more problematic fashion: the anarchist refusal to seize the state and the incremental reformist edge of social democracy. Nowhere is this clearer than in *Commonwealth*, which contrasts state apparatuses with institutions. On the one hand, they argue that "the multitude, as we have said, has no interest in taking control of the state apparatuses, not even in order to direct them to other ends—or, better, it wants to lay its hands on state apparatuses only to dismantle them" (HN 2009, 355). On the other hand, they argue "institutions [can] form a constituent rather than a constituted power" (HN 2009, 359). Their notion of the institution draws heavily from Spinoza, who viewed institutions as expansive entities able to include previously excluded political groups. In *Commonwealth*, the institution appears to be the multitude's vehicle to reach a rational form of absolute democracy, in effect re-energizing the institution via militant practice. The militant's engagement with the institution, Hardt and Negri argue, "does not negate the social rupture created by revolt but extends and develops it" (HN 2009, 357).

But what picture does this draw of the multitude if not one of an *imperium in imperio*, separate from the state yet engaged with institutions embedded in it? Spinoza's institution is far more a vehicle for the expansion of class hegemony than for power. In *Spinoza and Politics*, Etienne Balibar notes that Spinoza's theory of the institution is not a theory of democracy but rather "a *theory of democratisation*, which is valid for *every* regime" (Balibar 2008, 121). The institution stabilizes the state—an absolute form of government is its most stable form. Although Hardt and Negri favour absolute democracy, institutional expansion—democratisation—can also create absolute monarchies and absolute aristocracies. Yet precisely because the multitude

refuses to grapple with the construction of state power, its ability to create various (semi-) autonomous spaces becomes inseparable from the project of an already constituted power insofar as it constitutes its continued (partial) disruption. Not simply democracy, it is, as Balibar puts it, a theory of democratization.

The multitude's positive power is undercut by this emphasis on the state's deformation rather than reconstitution. The inherent conflict of this arrangement appears in *Commonwealth's* final chapter, where the authors argue "governments must provide everyone with the basic means of life" (HN 2009, 380). The demand for the infrastructure necessary to support and increase the multitude—a continuing lacuna in Hardt and Negri's work on the common, which is premised on technological infrastructure created by the state—is one of the very reasons that Communist guerrilla warfare once sought to seize state power. Now, however, theorists of collective subjectivity instead plead with the state to deliver the bases of multitude's own constitution. Not only is this at odds with their theorization of multitude as autonomous and productive; it also highlights the inability of their theory of multitude (based on non-state power) to rise to the challenges of collective production unless collective production is limited to a series of institutions for state critique. Hardt and Negri's closing lines about the "joy of destroying what does harm to a friend" seem little more than militant pieties to camouflage the lack of any plan for the construction of a more just world (HN 2009, 383). Instead, we are left with a platform of reformism and spontaneity that is less Marx and Engels than a straddling of Eduard Bernstein and Rosa Luxemburg.

Small wonder, then, that recent cinematic attempts to confront militancy often seem as stymied by questions of resistance and collective subjectivity as this theoretical work. "Wait" is the council of the day, make yourself a body without organs—or imagine death itself as an escape—and change will follow. The problem recalls a passage from Guevara's *Reminiscences of the Cuban Revolutionary War*:

During a friendly discussion, I once made an observation to a PSP [Popular Socialist Party] leader, which he later repeated to others as an accurate characterization of that period, "You are capable of creating cadres who can endure the most terrible tortures in jail, without uttering a word, but you can't create cadres who can take out a machine gun nest." As I saw it from my guerrilla vantage point, this was the consequence of a strategic conception: a determination to struggle

against imperialism and the abuses of the exploiting classes, together with an inability to envision the possibility of taking power.  
(Guevara 2006b, 209-10).

One should recognize in multitude's theorization this same insistent return to the struggle against oppression and a willingness to "endure the most terrible tortures in jail, without uttering a word" alongside a structural "inability to envision the possibility of taking power." Such positions return us to the situation of *Hunger*. Yet perhaps the film does not so much reveal the intersection of resistance, abjection, and death as class struggle's *memento mori* as the displacement of antagonism into the realm of existence. Negri himself states, "resistance is no longer a form of struggle but a figure of existence" (Casarino and Negri 2008, 214). Yet in *Hunger* it is precisely this aesthetic congelation that allows the isolated body of a starving Bobby Sands—a body disconnected from collective struggle—to become a metonymy for resistance and a figure of bare life.

### **Love and Hate**

Much like *Hunger*, Steven Soderbergh's four-hour *Che* (2008) focuses on an embodied cinematic experience of militancy, most especially its second part, *Guerrilla*. This is partly an effect of the film's use of digital photography, which Soderbergh nuances with contrasting lens choices to create a kind of cinematic dialectic between the Cuban revolution and the failed Bolivian insurrection. In an interview with *Sight and Sound*, Soderbergh described how he would use a widescreen 16mm anamorphic lens for the first part, *The Argentine*, because the revolution "needs a bit of Bruckheimer but scruffier." Soderbergh later recast this idea as an attempt to make the film "[resemble] a more classic Hollywood war film" (Alter). His description of *Guerrilla* highlights an appropriation of cinéma vérité and recasts the filming process as a kind of guerrilla warfare: "The second [part of *Che*] is in Super-16, 1.85:1. No dollies, no cranes, it's all either handheld or tripods. I want it to look nice but simple. We'll work with a very small group: basically me, the producer Gregory Jacobs and the unit production manager" ("Degraded").

For the spectator, the difference between the two halves of the film is not so much in the visual texture as in the pace, tone, and narrative. As a whole, the film tries to explain why Guevara went to and died in Bolivia. Part one, *The Argentine*, thus surveys the Cuban revolution



in order to explain that revolution as the precondition for the international struggle envisioned by Guevara. To tell that story, part one links different moments in time using montages of preparations, battles, and after-the-fact reflections, either intercut or in voice-over. Part two, by contrast, is the experience in Bolivia, told using parallel editing to cover the two guerrilla columns and the Bolivian government's response. *The Argentine's* plot follows the logic of a successful revolution, while *Guerrilla* uses Che's death to plot his episodic struggle in Bolivia creating a vanguard and cultivating connections with the peasantry. Without the intervention of parallel editing, *Guerrilla* could be mistaken for an art film about death in the jungle. Given the film's formless version of guerrilla warfare, Soderbergh's description of it as "a procedural about guerrilla warfare" (Olsen) is surprising, and perhaps even more so given the use of this description of the film as a procedural or process-focused piece as shorthand for the film's divergence from biopic conventions. The film reveals far less about the means of conducting guerrilla warfare than it does about the guerrilla's imagined subjective experience.<sup>viii</sup> This is largely an effect of a central conflict in the film's plotting and construction, which uses Guevara as the plot's focal point without creating or detailing his interior world. In a telling interview with *Timeout Chicago*, Soderbergh said, "You can't make a movie about a guy who has these hard-core sort of egalitarian socialist principles and then isolate him with close-ups" (Kenigsberg).

To create a filmic version of revolution's collective subjective experience in *Che*, Soderbergh plays with narrative strategies derived from Gillo Pontecorvo's *The Battle of Algiers* (1966).<sup>ix</sup> However, Pontecorvo's film detailed the organization and methods used by both the FLN and the French army while describing a collective—differentiated by facial types—experience of militancy. The film's narrative frame initially privileges Ali la Pointe but its plotting and aesthetic strategies quickly move from this apparent focus on an individual militant to a description of the collective as such. By contrast, *Che* maintains its focus on one man for a full four hours while avoiding the inclusion of any of the information about guerrilla warfare contained in Guevara's writings (for example, the creation of columns, the evolution of strategy, the construction of improvised explosive devices using captured munitions, or the construction of liberated zones). Instead, Soderbergh embeds events in their historical circumstances in a manner that resists attempts to abstract principles from details. In both films, supertitles give each event its historical specificity. In *The Argentine*, the Cuban revolution's historical scope is

reflected not by the use of a particular aspect ratio but by the film's attempt to capture key dates and battles; *Guerrilla* replaces the dates of Guevara's Bolivian diary with the number of days he has been in the country. This method of marking time denudes events of their historical placement to create a barometer of the group's—and audience's—growing physical fatigue. As the Bolivian insurrection's failure coincides with Guevara's deteriorating health, the film's lengthy imagined collective embodied experience becomes focused on decline.

*Che's* preference for historical density over strategy is part of its overall focus on the body, which effectively links Guevara's bodily travails to the construction and maintenance of revolutionary social bodies. The film enters the world of guerrilla warfare with Guevara wordlessly struggling with an asthma attack as he travels across the Sierra Maestra before cutting to a man contorting Guevara's body in an effort to relieve his suffering (fig. 6), a pose Guevara repeats in death at the end of *Guerrilla* (fig. 7).



**Figure 6** Che's asthma intimates his death in *The Argentine*, where a guerrilla tries to treat him by contorting his body.



**Figure 7** This pose is reiterated at the end of *Guerrilla*, where Che's body is loaded onto a helicopter. (*Guerrilla* was filmed prior to *The Argentine*.)

The only attempt to represent the construction of social relations in *Che* occurs in scenes where Guevara offers medical treatment to the peasantry, which follow Guevara's accounts and his advocacy for "revolutionary medicine." As the film's key representations of social construction, these scenes highlight a sense that the physical care of the body is critical to the multitude's construction. While this matches Guevara's calls for a revolutionary medicine and a guerrilla society, it barely addresses his ascetic conception of the guerrilla. In the film, even when he is relieved of his medical duty, he takes on the task of teaching his soldiers. Why? Historically, so they could take on bureaucratic tasks after the revolution. In the context of the film, though, this is but one more instance of the care and self-organization of multitude's body.

In the film, Guevara's speeches to his men capture the blurring of the ascetic guerrilla with the affective construction of multitude. Late in *Guerrilla*, Guevara deploys an ascetic construction adapted from his 8 August 1967 diary entry, telling his increasingly disenchanted Bolivian guerrillas: "This struggle gives us the opportunity to become true revolutionaries, the highest level of humanity. To become men in the purest sense of the word" (Guevara 2006a, 208).<sup>x</sup> Conversely, his dialogue with a guerrilla about to desert the troop is not contained in his

diary, although the situation is described in his 19 August entry. Here, Guevara's lines take the film's bodily focus—a focus on militancy as biopolitical labour—to arrive once more at death as the place of resistance that remains external to power: “To survive here, to win, you have to live as if you've already died.” While *Guerrilla* intermittently enters Guevara's subjective space, its plotting combines asceticism and biopolitics so that Guevara's asthmatic struggles foreshadow his eventual failure and death in a synoptic narrative at odds with Guevara's diary.<sup>xi</sup> This narrative structure provides closure with a final assertion of death against self-development in the film's embodied moment, Guevara's execution. The camera takes Guevara's point of view as a Bolivian soldier fires repeatedly at him, the camera tumbling to the ground as it pulls out of focus and the soundtrack becomes saturated with a high ringing tone. The film's concluding sequence—which cuts from the Bolivian army removing Guevara's body by helicopter to Guevara eating an orange on the deck of the *Granma* as they sail to Cuba—is overcoded by extra-diegetic music, which was heard as Che entered Bolivia, the ringing tone of his death apparent in the guitar's rests. The concluding sequence—which cuts from the Bolivian army removing Guevara's body by helicopter with Che eating an orange on the deck of the *Granma* as he sails to Cuba—implies the outward trajectory of the Che myth as the separation of body and image (fig. 8). In this sense, *Che*'s display of separation and resistance gestures toward the iconic status of its central character and militancy's construction of a common name.



**Figure 8** *Che's* final image reiterates, even after death, his voyage out.

Yet for all its emphasis on the revolutionary body, *Che* confronts an aspect of militancy missing from *Hunger*. The militant composes multitude not only through self-development but also through an antagonism of separation and destruction. In *Che*, such antagonism is not the opposite of the love of the revolutionary body but rather the basis of such love. In *The Argentine*, an interviewer asks Guevara to name the revolutionary's most important quality. The film dislocates Guevara's reply from its historically embodied moment—an interview in New York City—to inscribes his reply as the voice-over to a montage of guerrilla faces partially obscured by undergrowth. The quote, in various forms, is well known:

Let me tell you something at the risk of sounding ridiculous. A true revolutionary is guided by great feelings of love. Love of humanity, of justice and truth. It is impossible to think of an authentic revolutionary without this one quality.

The relation between the revolutionary and love here is far from simply constructive. In *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (2008), Slavoj Žižek intervenes in the continuing discussion of Walter Benjamin's "divine violence" and the notion of violence in general with a reading of this quote that will help elucidate the film's juxtaposition.<sup>xiii</sup> To diffuse the revulsion that accompanies critical discussion of violence, Žižek differentiates violence's subjective

experiences from its systemic enacting (e.g. the violence enacted daily to maintain capital), and its symbolic instantiation (e.g. the violence committed by language as a substitute for physical violence). Zizek argues that Guevara's words explicate divine violence, an emancipatory violence that attacks systemic and symbolic violence. Revolutionary love is thus bound to hatred, or in Zizek's words, the revolutionary must "*love with hatred*" (Zizek 2008, 204). For Zizek, divine violence occurs "when those outside the structured social field strike 'blindly,' demanding and enacting immediate justice/vengeance" (Zizek 2008, 202). In effect, divine violence inverts the separation of Agamben's *homo sacer*, the person who can be killed but not murdered or sacrificed, and the state, to strike at sovereignty's basis rather than founding it.

We can see in Zizek's reading the return of a resistant exterior. But is this an absolute exteriority or something else? Drawing on Alain Badiou, whose work represents the other contemporary theorization of militancy in critical theory, Zizek links Guevara's description of violence not to the realm of being but "to the order of the Event" (Zizek 2008, 203). The revolutionary's act of separation is a violent upsurge of being from the void, a movement perhaps better understood as an upsurge of the indeterminate or not-all in relation to the social structure rather than a positive exterior. For Badiou, evental sites mark such upsurges and form the point at which a world opens onto the void (or not-all) of being. As the upsurge of the void, the event is the radical point for subjectivity's production via a central subtraction or lack in the world. The world and the subject are both premised as not-one. The subject in Badiou maintains fidelity to an event in a process of subjectivation that perhaps most resembles the Sartrean project. In *The Critique of Dialectical Reason*, Sartre describes the project as oriented toward the future yet subject to a continuous process of totalization: "all the activities of a practical agent are to be understood *through the future* as a perpetual re-totalisation of the provisional totality" (Sartre 2004, 61). In Badiou, fidelity is this process of totalization, grounding subjective production in a prior event while projecting itself into the future. Zizek's use of Badiou here turns the underlying role of militancy in Badiou into an explicit link between fidelity, the event, and divine violence.

It becomes quite clear why Jameson felt it necessary to argue against a link between his notion of disruption and terrorism. With Badiou's model of the event, the event's recognition is contingent. Not only do competing responses to an event generate different subjects but the very recognition of an event is difficult. Hence one may believe that one is part of an event of divine

violence when in fact one is engaged in what Zizek calls “an impotent *passage a l’acte*, an acting out which [bears] witness to the failure to get rid of the past” (Zizek 2008, 209). This is the most perplexing aspects of terrorism for critical theorists, politicians, and citizens of the West in general, that terrorism and the commitment of terrorists can often seem, in Zizek’s words, “[to meet] the highest standard of the good” (Zizek 2008, 88). Zizek’s response tries to ground his answer in subjective production, arguing that terrorist acts try to destroy obstacles while divine violence produces subjectivity. Guevara described “hatred as an element of the struggle” in his “Message to the Tricontental,” and Soderbergh’s *Che*, clearly aware of Guevara’s use of violence in organizing political power after the Cuban revolution, finds itself in a similar conflicted position. Its view of militancy is torn between violence as revolutionary subjective production or destructive yet impotent urges.

Disruption, the event, divine violence: these terms imply some form of militancy in the social body’s reorganization. The difference between Badiou and Hardt and Negri is that of the subtractive and the separative: subtraction as the promise of an undetermined exterior, separation as the destructive fleeing from structure.<sup>xiii</sup> The event is key to their theories of subjectivation and a point of contention. In *Commonwealth*, Hardt and Negri argue against Badiou’s retrospective and subtractive event in favour of an immanent and innovative event, which they term the biopolitical event. Much as in Badiou, the event constitutes a historical rupture, but rather than opening onto the void, the biopolitical event is an “act of freedom” (HN 2009, 59) that illustrates the productive “link between freedom and power that Foucault emphasizes from within the event” (HN 2009, 60). In this act, militancy makes a subterranean return as the agent of the biopolitical event, the will to power as a will to separation, creating the possibility of revolutionizing institutions from within. Little surprise, then, that Hardt and Negri view Guevara’s career after the Cuban revolution as a return to subjective revolutionary production: his move is an escape from the “bureaucratic and economic straitjacket of the socialist state” since in “the new humanity he seeks to build, communism will never be found” (HN 2009, 94).

In *Domination and Sabotage*, a mid-1970s pamphlet, Negri focuses on the role of separation in militancy. Here, he explains one of the key insights of his early work, that worker resistance drives the history of capitalist development, using sabotage. The power of workers is thus not simply in tension with but in active revolt against capital as it asserts its autonomy. A passage cited at his 1979 trial links this logic of resistance and separation to militant action.

Negri's called this passage an example of "singularly bad writing" (Negri 2005, xvi), but it helps explain the importance of destruction and separation to his idea of the militant:

Nothing reveals the immense historical positivity of workers' self-valorization more completely than sabotage, this continual activity of the sniper, the saboteur, the absentee, the deviant, the criminal that I find myself living. I immediately feel the warmth of the workers' and proletarian community again every time I don the ski mask. This solitude of mine is creative, and this separateness of mine is the only real collectivity that I know. Nor does the happiness of the result escape me: every act of destruction and sabotage redounds upon me as a sign of class fellowship.

(Negri 2005, 259)

That is to say, separation—even as an act of destruction—is self-constitution as creative act and sign. Moreover, Negri's denial of the influence of Sorel and anarcho-syndicalism here is a denial of destruction's power as a mythic quality and a critique of Zizek's divine violence *avant la lettre*. The act is "a sign of class fellowship" even as it relies on creative separation. Separation, solitude, destruction: this is the underside of the multitude's composition as an inchoate, non-totalizable form in which resistance, sabotage, and criminality meld together and allow the realization of collectivity only through creative solitude. Militancy thus at once constructs social bodies while continually soliciting this logic of separation. It is this duality of militancy, the tension between the construction of social bodies and the militant body as an ascetic site, which *Hunger* and *Che* capture, albeit in different ways.

### **Militancy and the Event**

We can see the thematic of militancy even in recent films not focused on historical revolutionaries. In Michael Mann's *Public Enemies* (2009), militant criminality creates new collective units. The plot follows the construction, dissolution, and reconstruction of various collective forms: the initial jailbreak to reunite the gang, the woman who asks to join them, the love affair between John Dillinger and Bobby Flechette, and Dillinger's late attempts to create a new gang. His death is an effect of the dissolution of these units, the decomposition of the gang as it confronts two other collective entities.

Moreover, *Public Enemies* takes up militant separation by juxtaposing Dillinger's gang and two quasi-corporate organizations, the FBI and the National Crime Syndicate, which attack him from either side of legality. The film's opening sequence, in which Dillinger orchestrates a



prison break from Indiana State Prison, offers a matrix for the film as the passing of the elder Walter Dietrich metonymically reveals the passage of an older mode of criminal social organization. The scheme goes awry almost immediately when one of Dillinger's accomplices beats one guard to death and another guard panics. The ensuing gunshots and alarm leave two prisoners dead, including Dillinger's mentor, Walter Dietrich, who is shot as they run toward the getaway car and dies as he is dragged behind the car, clutching Dillinger's arm. The camera focuses on Dietrich's eyes as his gaze grows distant, creating a moment of affective recognition between the two men that authorizes Dillinger to release Dietrich's arm, letting him drop to the road. Dietrich's death severs the link between Dillinger and the world of the older outlaws—e.g. Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, with whom Dietrich had worked—which the creation of the Midwestern criminal syndicate and interstate criminal law will subsequently make impossible. Dillinger's nomadic guerrilla outfit at once threatens and is threatened by a world of nationally co-ordinated law and large-scale criminal networks. Far more than *Hunger* or *Che*, *Public Enemies* illustrates militancy and resistance as separate from the state and its institutions, and engaged in a continuous process of affective production. The film inserts Dillinger into both organizations to highlight this conflict, from his incognito stroll through the FBI division devoted to his capture, to his confrontation with one of the Syndicate's bosses, who explains that Dillinger's robberies are dwarfed by the "river of money" generated by a room of clerks and telephones (fig. 8). Dillinger here becomes a guerrilla engaged in the deformation of organized power yet he is absolutely unable to grasp such power or forever evade its scope.



**Figure 9 A "river of money": suits and telephones mark the criminal corporation in *Public Enemies*.**

Dillinger's exteriority to power and his nomadic existence have much to do with his contemporary resonance, which the film's visual aesthetic emphasizes under the guise of hyperrealism. Like *Che*, *Public Enemies* was shot digitally, and Dante Spinotti, the film's director of photography, explained the decision to use digital for "the way that digital dealt with shadows, really reading into shadows and darkness and doing it with extreme sharpness" as well as "the agility and elasticity of working with those cameras," which allowed them to create "an area that is almost hyperreal"; Mann himself described this aesthetic choice as a means to keep the audience from "looking at [the film] through some kind of nostalgic lens" (Goldman). The film's hyperrealism thus focuses on aspects of the image that have largely defined cinema's visual registers by their absence: analogue equipment compresses out of frame the details of shadow and physical texture rendered by digital equipment, while the weight and size of the camera have largely dictated the possibilities of camera mobility. This hyperrealism has two simultaneous yields: one, the detailed frames are open to colour manipulations that increase the diegetic world's texture while preserving its heightened reality as an aesthetic product; and two, these images can also create disorienting and specifically digital visual effects as colour manipulations can bring out noise in the frame. Visual distortions (see figs. 9, 10, 11) translate an attempt to examine subjective experience as a kind of embodiment. The tension between realism and distortion gestures toward a form of militant filmmaking torn between realist cinema and an experimental emphasis on texture and the camera's physicality to construct the affective experiences of multitude's body.



**Figure 10**



**Figure 11**



**Figure 12** High contrast lighting and whip panning image distortion throughout *Public Enemies*.

The tension between such digitized embodiment—which can enter into the subjective space or focalization of a militant—and realist aesthetics appears in the film’s approach to subjective construction and the event. The conclusion of *Public Enemies*, in which Dillinger watches *Manhattan Melodrama* (1931) before FBI agents gun him down, acts as a meditation on filmmaking’s recent material shift. The competition between the rough digital composition of *Public Enemies* and the classic Hollywood aesthetic of *Manhattan Melodrama* vampirically drains and remotivates the older film’s realism. The construction of affective attachments within the film, this time by plot rather than aesthetics, undermines this attempt to solidify a new realist project: *Manhattan Melodrama* does not act as an intertext but as a screen for Dillinger’s emotional projections while he absorbs and reflects on Clark Gable’s lines. The digital simultaneously increases its verisimilitude by direct comparison with film while reanimating filmic content within its own plotting. Dillinger’s response to the projected death in *Manhattan Melodrama* not only foreshadows the film’s end but also provides a figure for militancy’s displacement into death. Through repetition, the gangster’s death reinvigorates a moment of hope lost, deferred, or pushed into an infinite horizon of impossibility that paradoxically becomes the mark of its necessity for the plot and its audience, both within the diegesis and outside it.

Dillinger’s death provides the final torsion in which the digital aesthetic of hyperrealism, visual distortion, and affective production enter a more recognizably cinematic aesthetic. The sequence, which cuts between FBI agents grouping outside the movie theatre and Dillinger

inside, displays both the mobility and detailed darkness of digital photography. The image heaves and jerks as the FBI closes around Dillinger from the shadows. The sudden use of slow motion, however, acts as a cue to a more properly cinematic visual grammar by arresting the frame's emphatic mobility and detail for a blur of movement that gives the image a filmic quality. Dillinger's graphic death, which includes a bullet exiting his face (fig. 12), becomes part of a troubling visual aesthetic, heightened by the elimination of music and diegetic sound so that Dillinger merely mouths his final words (fig. 13). While the aggressive high-pitched ringing used in Guevara's death sequence implies a dying-with, the silence of Dillinger's death evokes a gap in audience identification that bears more in common with the removal of Guevara's body to extra-diegetic music in *Guerrilla's* final sequence.



Figure 13



**Figure 14** Filmed in slow motion, Dillinger's death evokes an older cinematic grammar while providing its gore in digital detail.

Alert viewers will have already noted an earlier use of slow motion as Dillinger watched *Manhattan Melodrama*, clearly identifying Myrna Loy's reactions to Clark Gable with those of his lost love, Billie Frechette. The film's love story is not extraneous but rather central to its engagement with militancy: love does not construct an identity in which the two become one, but rather produces the body and name of the common immediately, not just immanently as Negri notes. This is the film's characterization of Dillinger's impetuosity in love and his insistence on living only in the present. There is no deferral, no need to wait for everyone to become a militant for love to begin. Rather, love is the immediate revelation of a body split and unified by its antagonism. The film's closing scene, where an imprisoned Flechette receives Dillinger's last words from one of the police officers who shot him, reveals this ruptured world as both full and lost: "Tell Billie for me, 'Bye Bye Blackbird.'" The repetition of a line from *Manhattan Melodrama* is both the immanent redeployment of existing material and a lost gesture. An event of love and resistance that disjoined the world yet remains visible as a lost promise.

I would argue that this intersection of militancy and love reveals both a constructive and antagonistic force that brings together the two rather strange variations on love in Hardt and in Negri and Badiou. For Badiou, love is an event—or "encounter"—that declares "I love you" from the void of the situation and demands an interminable fidelity to this first naming. This event creates a world of radical disjunction that Badiou, rather counterintuitively, attaches to sex. Love's masculine and feminine experiences are difficult to parse in Badiou, but he argues that

this heterosexual view of love is generated by the event not physiology; in contrast, desire, for Badiou, is rooted in drives and aspires to an identity with its object. Love, as an event, sees the upsurge of the void and produces a world of disjunction. Badiou's problematically links this view of love and desire with sexuality, which implies a link to lived experience, even if he disavows it. While I am more interested in Badiou's notion that an event generates disjunction than in his problematic sexual politics, it is difficult to extricate one from the other. Clearly, Badiou's work here has a psychoanalytic yield insofar as it pushes Lacan's account of sexuation beyond the impasses and expostulated clichés of *Seminar XX: On Feminine Sexuality*. Contra Lacan, Badiou insists: "the experience of the loving subject, as the matter of love, does not constitute any *knowledge* of love" (Badiou 2008, 182). Rather, love's construction of a world of disjunction creates two modes of knowledge: one, the masculine, is recognizable as Lacan's phallic function of division and logic. The other, the feminine, "targets being as such" (Badiou 2008, 182) but it is more than the Not-All of Lacanian psychoanalysis. Rather, love's existence within the world endows the disjunct feminine position with the unique ability to convey retroactively the relationship between love and the construction of the human. It is the feminine knowledge of love that knots the different forms of the event together and reveals the possibility of universality. Negri's notions of love and the multitude bring out a similar knowledge of love in the construction of a common name. Immanence in this model, however, compacts Badiou's levels of being and subjectivity into one and eliminates the construction of a disjunct world. In fact, the queerness of the biopolitical event for Hardt and Negri can be explained by this conjunction of immanence and the construction of a common name (HN 2009, 62): Hardt and Negri's love takes Badiou's disjunctive love, which is not about bodies but the construction of subjects, and makes it coeval with an immanent and bodily desire.

Given the problems and inconsistencies of these two approaches, I would like to pose a question: what would it mean to the construction of new collective subjects if love were understood through militancy? Would love operate through construction and disjunction, building social bodies through militant acts of separation? Would this not maintain multitude's multilateral nature even as it includes a mode of productive antagonism? Moreover, is it not precisely this riven form of militancy that appears in all of the films examined thus far as the problematic relation between the character as a narrative agent and the construction of larger actantial units? Perhaps these are not so much indicative of collective utopian urges as necessary

utopian urges toward new forms of collectivity. These films, with their conjunctions of fiction, history, and digital aesthetics, do not so much overcome this block between the desire to construct collective subjects and their realization as attempt physical descriptions of it.

Perhaps this need to describe the subjective experience of blockage helps explain their focus on failure and death as their historically determined content struggles with a contemporary need for expression. Yet we also see films trying to reverse this trajectory by rewriting either history or nature. Guillermo Del Toro's films about the Spanish Civil War, *El espinazo del diablo* (*The Devil's Backbone* [2001]) and *El laberinto del fauno* (*Pan's Labyrinth* [2006]), both displace historical failure with supernatural redemption. In a similar vein, Quentin Tarantino's *Inglourious Basterds* (2009) does not so much point the way out of this impasse as reveal postmodern cinema's other, perhaps more expected, mode of response. Where the embodied narratives of *Hunger*, *Che*, and *Public Enemies* confront the past in history and death, *Inglourious Basterds* offers a fantasy of subjective fidelity untroubled by doubt or the body. In contrast to digital hyperrealism, Quentin Tarantino creates a heightened cinematic substitute that reaches for subjective rather than historical consistency while turning history's repetition into militant farce. Its characters—Shosanna Dreyfuss, Aldo Raine, the Basterds, and Nazi colonel Hans Landa—are resurrected genre clichés given over to a plot intent on little more than the display of a (cinematic) love with hatred: the face of Jewish vengeance. Hence the centrality of film to Shosanna's revenge and her proclamation "My name is Shosanna Dreyfus, and this is the face of Jewish Vengeance!" When the Nazis commandeer her theatre to premiere Goebbels' latest film to party leadership—including Hitler—Shosanna decides to lock the doors and burn the theatre to the ground, creating a film of herself—containing the proclamation above—to project as the theatre burns. Shosanna, however, does not escape the conflagration, but is instead killed by the oversexed lead of Goebbel's film moments after her lover has locked the theatre's doors. The projected film reanimates Shosanna as cinematic spectacle while the last of the Basterds machine-gun the crowd, party leadership, and Hitler. Shosanna's face, projected on the flames that engulf the screen, brings together the pre-cinematic phantasmagoria with visual cues from De Palma's *Carrie* (1976), affirming cinema's power in its clichés and apparatuses. As such, the indifference of *Inglourious Basterds* to the bodily and affective questions of the other films leads to a focus on cinema's formal role in subjective construction, though again as a product of militancy. *Inglourious Basterds'* focus on mediation, though, is certainly less



interesting: by displacing subjective production into the resurrection of cinematic clichés, it places its audience in the position of an observer who maintains the consistency and fidelity of the militant group. Such a triangular arrangement resembles Sartre's triadic account of group formation, in which the unification of a group depends upon a third party. This third observes the other two—who appear to be the primordial group—and lifts them out of seriality. By contrast, post-Marxism undermines this bifurcation of seriality and group. Hardt and Negri's multitude renders seriality and group formation indeterminate by theorizing collectivity as part of being. Badiou's theory of the subject and the event unites collectives around an event in a subjectivizing process of fidelity and love without a mediating third; rather, Badiou's event turns Sartre's third into the passage to infinity as the relation of subjects to an event, Badiou explains, follows a count of "One, Two, Infinity" (Badiou 2008, 189). Biopolitical production—cognitive and affective—itself demands moving beyond postmodernity's mediatory strategies and their attendant ideological concerns.

It is this need to think through the construction of collectivity in its physical and affective forms that militancy reveals in these films. *Hunger*, *Che*, and *Public Enemies* examine militancy in the era of biopolitics as both a form of love that produces subjects and a drive toward separation. Love provides a mechanism for the construction of collective social bodies and the deepening of antagonisms, and the building of collectivity in the process of social separation, but it is a love wielded by the militant. The narratives of these films are premised on shared affect, creating cinematic bodies that connect narrative agents and audience while telling of a resistance that pushes beyond death, releasing stories that help draw together disparate individuals into movements. With these cinematic militants, we discover a particular kind of agent—narrative and theoretical—that bridges the divide between subjects and social totalities as well as the divide within subjectivity as such. As the promise of a continuous revolution of subjectivity, personal and social, such reflections on militancy open the promise of new collectivities, aesthetic or otherwise.

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## Notes

<sup>i</sup> See Foucault 2008 and Hobsbawm 1973, 105.

<sup>ii</sup> Jameson calls this mediatory form the analagon, which he discusses in Jameson 1992b, 47-74 and Jameson 1991, 409-17.

<sup>iii</sup> Lecerclé offers this eschatological vision of language as an overturning of Habermas, whom Lecerclé criticizes for naively approaching existing language as an eschatological vision achieved.

<sup>iv</sup> For critiques of this impasse, see Laclau 2005, Žižek 2006, and Badiou 2009.

<sup>v</sup> While the opposition between bio- and thanatopolitics informs Giorgio Agamben's work, Esposito 2008 is likely the clearest exposition of their interrelation.

<sup>vi</sup> We'll leave to one side whether contemporary finance should be understood as parasitic or as, following Christian Marazzi, the entrance of capital valorization into the sphere of circulation. See Harvey 2010 and Marazzi 2011.

<sup>vii</sup> Guevara extrapolates from the important role of the Sierra Maestra as a liberated zone in the Cuban revolution to the construction of autonomous zones in general. See Guevara 2006b, 197-213.

<sup>viii</sup> Soderbergh reiterated the point at the New York Film Festival: "I knew that I wanted to create a different sensation for each part. I shot the first part in widescreen, so it resembles a more classic Hollywood war film, which is appropriate for the Cuba stuff. For the second film, I wanted it to feel less settled—the outcome wasn't clear from the beginning." See Alter 2008.

<sup>ix</sup> Soderbergh discusses this aspect of *The Battle of Algiers* in *Five Directors* (2004), a documentary included on the Criterion Collection's 2004 DVD release of Pontecorvo's film.

<sup>x</sup> The entry reads: "This is one of those moments when great decisions have to be made; this type of struggle gives us the opportunity to become revolutionaries, the highest form of the human species, and it also allows us to emerge fully as men".

<sup>xi</sup> *Guerrilla* draws heavily on Jon Lee Anderson's biography of Guevara in the film's tone, and Anderson was a consultant for the film. Note, for example, Anderson's interjection on reading late passages in Guevara's Bolivian diary: "one can't help but conclude that Che had become strangely detached from his own plight, an interested witness to his own inexorable march toward death" (730).

<sup>xii</sup> See Derrida 1990, LaCapra 1990, and Agamben 1998.

<sup>xiii</sup> Badiou critiqued Deleuze's construction of the event as the construction of a Spinozist immanent One-all in Badiou 1998, arguing that Deleuze constructs the event as a single massive Event, the event of life, a critique he extends to Hardt and Negri in Badiou 2009, noting that their conception of the event "turns the One-effect on bodies of the event's impact into the absorption of the event by the One of life" (387).

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