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Negri and Multitude

I am not going to die. I’m departing now, on this day full of volcanoes, for the multitude, for life. Here I’ve settled these matters . . . At last, I’m free within beings.

Amid beings, like live air, and from corralled solitude I set forth to the multitude of combats, free because my hand holds your hand, conquering indomitable happiness.

— Pablo Neruda, Canto General

The question of the multitude is a thorn in the side of Western political thought. . . . However, this anguish and malaise are also ours. Our answer to the questions posed by constituent power is neither peaceful nor optimistic.

— Antonio Negri, Insurgencies

The Multitude as Subject

Cultural studies and civil society theory purport to be progressive projects, liberatory alternatives to the dominant social order. Yet cultural studies’ notion of “counterhegemony” only reinforces all the populist assumptions upon which hegemony rests, leaving the state unquestioned. Likewise, for all its talk of “society against the state,” civil society theory also merely entrenches state power by excluding other logics that might unsettle sovereign claims to legitimacy and universality. In short, both of these influential intellectual traditions appeal to and uphold constituted power, instantiated
in and exercised through representation. Constituted power is the transcendent power of the sovereign subject, but it is a delegated power: it is the result of the prior articulation (in cultural studies’ terms), mediation (for civil society theory), or, better, capture of a force that both anticipates and escapes it. Constituted power draws its strength from an immanent constituent power that precedes it, and which it claims to represent. Hence the power that a political order exercises is always derivative, and that order is itself the creation of constituent power. In the words of French thinker and politician the Abbé Sieyès, who first formulated this distinction in the context of France’s 1789 Constituent Assembly, “in each of its parts a constitution is not the work of a constituted power but a constituent power. No type of delegated power can modify the conditions of its delegation.”

For Sieyès, the constituent assembly was to harmonize these two modalities of power: to ensure that government was well constituted. But the very notion of good constitution presupposes a distinction between the constituent and the constituted; it assumes that the two are not necessarily or normally in harmony. Indeed, the split between them is at the heart of the “paradox of constitutionality”: that the people, the presumed subject of power, are denied access to it; “the power they possess, it would appear, can only be exercised through constitutional forms already established or in the process of being established.”

Gilles Deleuze signals the discrepancy between constituent and constituted power in his examination of deterritorialized affect as an index of an immanent power that lies beyond hegemony. Affect precedes and resists the process of subjection that gives us stable emotions and bounded identities. The state’s representational claims are ungrounded by an exodus that flees from the demands of categorical order to construct and inhabit a plane of immanence for which transcendence would be no more than a dead letter. Something always escapes. But affect is ambivalent: increasingly the state itself is becoming affective, not only in its suicidal plunges into terror, but also in the everyday modulations of biopower. As habit, affect continually encodes structures of domination, even immanently. Pierre Bourdieu’s theorization of habitus outlines the mechanisms by which a practical, corporeal logic perpetuates an arbitrary social order “on the hither side of words and concepts” and so regardless of the presence or absence of ideological mechanisms. Assumptions and injunctions that go without saying can
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appear so engrained that Bourdieu tends toward functionalism. But history always intervenes, and crises reveal the asymmetry between habitus and field. For, like affect, habit in turn is ambivalent: it expresses a *conatus* that threatens to outstrip the structures that it constitutes. Affect and habit are both therefore components of a constituent power that escapes and exceeds constituted power; they hint at a subject that goes beyond the sovereign people posited by constitutionalism. Affect and habit are the first two concepts of a theory of posthegemony, but they lead on to a third: the multitude.

The multitude is a collective subject that gathers on affect’s line of flight, consolidates in habit, and expresses itself through constituent power. So the concept of the multitude reclaims subjectivity from its disrepute in much twentieth-century political theory. For Louis Althusser, for instance, history is “a process without a subject.” But by contrast Antonio Negri, in an analysis first presented on Althusser’s invitation, stresses subjectivity as a key element in his reinvigoration of Marxism, his “Marx beyond Marx.” In an implicit rebuke to Althusser and coauthor Etienne Balibar’s focus on “reading Capital,” Negri criticizes “the objectification of categories in Capital” and praises instead “the *Grundrisse* [as] a text dedicated to revolutionary subjectivity.” But the multitude is a subject of a very particular kind: it is not the traditional working class, whose identity derives from its place in the process of production and hence its relation to capital; nor is it either the rational individual beloved of the social sciences or one of the delimited identities of cultural studies’ multicultural alliance. The multitude is immanent, and it spills out of transcendent categories. As Paolo Virno notes in his discussion of “multitude as subjectivity,” this is “an amphibian subject” that is neither individual nor the site of individuality’s dissolution. Rather, the multitude is preindividual in that it is rooted in affect and habit, in “the sensory organs, motor skills apparatus, perception abilities”; but it also constitutes a dynamic “social individual” whose principle of commonality is “general intellect,” the virtuoso performance of communicative collaboration. The multitude forms as bodies come together through resonances established by good encounters, but it is always open to new encounters, and so to new transformations. In the multitude, “the ‘many’ persevere as ‘many’ without aspiring to the unity of the state.”
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The term “multitude” is taken from early modern political philosophy, and above all from Benedict de Spinoza. But the concept’s contemporary use is also rooted in the Italian workerist and autonomist traditions from which both Virno and Negri derive. Workerism stresses the independent agency of the working class. It argues that the dynamic of capitalist development is driven by proletarian subjectivity, which generates crises that threaten the process by which surplus value is appropriated. In response, capital reconfigures the labor process, introduces new technologies, provides circumscribed concessions to labor demands, and thereby transforms the composition of the working class. But this class recomposition allows for even more expansive expressions of insurgent subjectivity that go on to provoke deeper crises. In Michael Hardt’s words, “worker subjectivity, then, is determined in the specific mode of production and the composition of this subjectivity, in turn, provides the model for revolutionary organization.” From this perspective, the multitude is the culmination of a long history of struggle; it is the form of subjectivity that presses revolutionary demands on all fronts, presaging capitalism’s terminal crisis. Hardt and Negri argue that the multitude is the final stage in the sequence of struggles, that it is an insurgent subject with the capacity for full autonomy: “The multitude provides us with a social subject and a logic of social organization that makes possible today, for the very first time, the realization of democracy.” Hence Hardt describes Negri’s Marxism as “projective” rather than “critical.” It affirms the emergence of this new subject, the multitude.

The recourse to Spinoza, however, shows another side to the multitude’s subjectivity, one more in tune with critical Marxism and more agnostic about prospects for liberation today. For Spinoza’s theorization of the multitude comes from a very different context: the seventeenth-century bourgeois revolution and capitalism’s ascendance, rather than its demise. The multitude can therefore be seen as a historical subject: less the emergence of the new, the culmination of a process coming to its end, than the return of the same, the continuation of a cycle. The multitude, too, is ambivalent. Historically, constituent leads to constituted power. Though the multitude initiates revolution, all too soon something goes wrong. What begins as immanence and liberation, as innovation and creativity, ends up as transcendence and normalization, as the state form and its repressive apparatuses. Constituent power makes and
remakes society, but the fruit of its labors to date is the world we see around us, characterized by oppression and exploitation. In Negri's words, constituted power "feeds on" constituent power; "without this strength it could not exist." And though the multitude resists domination, "this resistance is dissolved in the dialectic, over and over again." Its status as subject, the subject of history, is consistently denied: "the multitude is always objectified. Its name is reduced to a curse: vulgus, or worse, Pöbel. Its strength is expropriated.... Modernity is therefore the negation of any possibility that the multitude may express itself as subjectivity." The multitude is like the proletarian: creator of the social world, but alienated within it. And why should we believe that the conditions are now ripe for autonomy, for a liberation of constituent power in and for itself? It would seem more likely that the multitude will simply call forth a new state form, perhaps all the more repressive and insidious than before. Indeed, is this not already happening with the rise of the decentered and diffuse sovereignty that Negri and Hardt term "Empire"? Moreover, even were it achievable, Negri's utopia of a self-realized multitude, "the most extreme deterritorialization" and "the revolution of the eternal," is perhaps too invested in a theological chiliasm whose vision of eternal life is scarcely distinguishable from eternal death. For if all objectivity and constituted power are abolished, history itself comes to an end.

The multitude runs like a red thread through the history of Latin America, but its ambivalence is visible at every turn. From the conquest, and even before, to the current so-called political "left turns," the multitude constitutes the particular "New World" that we call the Americas. Recovering this hidden history both shows the asymmetry between constituent and constituted power, the ways in which the multitude as subject always exceeds the object of its constitution, and also demonstrates the dangers that attend its insurgent subjectivity. What, for instance, could be more cataclysmic than the conquistadors' rampage through the region? The legacy of their wholesale destruction of indigenous civilizations and the impact of ethnocentric subalternization continue into the present. But it would be wrong to see the conquest simply as the imposition of colonial order from above, or to identify resistance solely with the natives' defense of their territories. Pre-Columbian states incarnated their own forms of
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constituted power, while at the heart of the imperial project was a rebellious subjectivity that constantly threatened to outstrip and destabilize the order that it itself constituted. From the attempted mutiny on Columbus’s first voyage to the bloody disorder that characterized the Spanish settlements on Hispaniola or in Peru, the energy that imperialism unleashed always rebounded against the regime that sponsored it. The tale of conquistador Lope de Aguirre is exemplary: sent down the Amazon in search of El Dorado, Aguirre overthrew his expedition leader and declared himself “the Wrath of God, Prince of Freedom . . . Lord of all South America.” But this great usurper felt that it was he who had been betrayed by the Spanish state. Aguirre was merely taking the logic of colonialism to its apocalyptic consequences, keeping faith with the insurgent impulses that drove its voracious expansion. He asserted the subjectivity of those whom the king regarded as subject to royal sovereignty, and so questioned the legitimacy of the Empire’s appropriation of constituent power. As his 1561 letter to King Philip II puts it: “You cannot rightfully draw any revenue from these lands, where you yourself have risked nothing, until those who have laboured here have been rewarded.”

Colonial and postcolonial states had to adapt and to recompose their constituted power in response to the various instantiations of multitudinous subjectivity. So, for instance, to regulate conquistador excesses the Spanish crown proposed the “New Laws of the Indies” (1542) and the Toledo Reforms (1569 to 1581). To ensure regular supply chains and guarantee trade contracts in the face of corruption, fraud, and piracy, it instituted the formidable imperial bureaucracy that was the Casa de Contratación. In the eighteenth century, creole dissatisfaction and indigenous rebellions prompted the Bourbon Reforms. Then the so-called liberators in turn struggled to arrest the forces they had set loose in the nineteenth-century wars of independence, a task whose futility was memorably encapsulated in liberator Simón Bolívar’s exasperated declaration that “those who serve a revolution plough the sea.” Subsequent founding fictions of the postcolonial nation-states, such as the Argentine Domingo Sarmiento’s *Facundo*, set to forging a nation in the face of the unruly energies of brigands and gauchos who roamed its territory. And so on into the twentieth century: state-sponsored indigenism in Mexico aimed to compensate for the failures of nineteenth-century technocracy; populism in the Southern Cone purported to order the seething mass of migrants who provoked new crises while apparently solving the old ones; national
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Liberation movements were torn between the twin impulses of liberation and nation formation; and neoliberalism arose as an antipolitical response to the profoundly political challenges posed by Guevarism, third worldism, and student radicalism in the 1960s and early 1970s. Finally, the turns to the left that usher in leaders such as Venezuela’s Hugo Chávez and Bolivia’s Evo Morales, Brazil’s Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and Argentina’s Néstor and Cristina Kirchner, are simply the latest response on the part of constituted power to the ever more expansive demands of the multitude as expressed for example in the São Paulo labor radicalism of the 1980s, the Caracazo of 1989, the Argentine rebellion of 2001, or the Bolivian gas protests of 2004. Throughout Latin American history, the multitude comes first. As Negri and coauthor Giuseppe Cocco put it, even “the so-called anti-modern elements found in the cultural histories and oppositional traditions of each of the great areas of underdevelopment... can be understood not as burdensome legacies of the past but rather as creative elements of another modernity, another modernization.” Hence “liberation takes place beforehand,” expressed in a “thousand forms of Exodus.”

This is the productive subjectivity that kick-starts development. Against dependency theory, Negri and Cocco argue that it is the state and its protectionist impulses that have blocked the region’s economic and social progress. At the same time, the state is the beneficiary of the multitude’s productivity. A history of the Latin American multitude is also therefore an account of the numerous attempts by state functionaries and social elites to construct the fiction of a pact that would bind culture to politics, and subordinate constituent to constituted power. Hence I am more cautious than Negri and Cocco about any “new pact” that results from the election of left-wing governments, such as in Brazil and Argentina, over the past few years. They claim that “this constituent New Deal organizes the strength of the subaltern classes such that they are presented, nationally and internationally, as multitudes — that is, no longer as objects of representation but as subjects.” I am skeptical about the radicalism of Lula or the Kirchners, or even Morales or Chávez. Indeed, the 2006 squabble between Néstor Kirchner and his Uruguayan counterpart, former Tupamaro Tabaré Vázquez, over a paper mill allegedly polluting the River Uruguay, which divides their two countries, showed that both were still happy to make populist moves in defense of national sovereignty. Likewise, and for all their internationalist gestures, the
governments of Brazil, Bolivia, and Venezuela are no less dedicated to upholding constituted power.

In this chapter, I return to my previous case studies: Peronism, Sendero Luminoso, Central American national liberation struggles, and new social movements in Chile. Previously I showed how the paradigms of cultural studies and civil society break down in the context of an examination of Latin American political and cultural history, and I argued for a focus on affect and habit. This final chapter sketches the physiognomy of the Latin American multitude and outlines how a theory of posthegemony reframes analysis of the region. I revisit these case studies to highlight the relationship of constituent to constituted power, and therefore the double inscription of power in posthegemony, as well as the points at which that constitution starts to dissolve. In the epilogue that follows, I add a final reflection on the situation in Venezuela: events there demonstrate both the failure of the contemporary state form and the urgent need for new theoretical tools to take us beyond impasses that are practical as much as they are conceptual. Twentieth- and twenty-first-century Latin America has been a cauldron of social and political experimentation and creativity, a veritable laboratory of rebellion, mobilization, and counterinsurgency. It is a spur and a challenge to political theory.

As the subject of constituent power, the multitude is productive. Hence its centrality and its ambivalence from the point of view of constituted power. The multitude is not only economically productive but also socially productive: indeed, the multitude produces everyday life itself; its activity is immediately biopolitical. Biopower's parasitical relationship to this productive power is like capital's relationship to labor, characterized both by indebtedness and by an anxiety that leads to denial. The multitude cannot be acknowledged directly but has to be misrepresented as a dependent subject in an inversion that posits the state as the sole source of power and civil and political society as the only arenas for its exercise. The state is fetishized, hegemony is substituted for any other conception of politics, and civil society is instituted as a steering mechanism for the efficient control of state power. All the errors of cultural studies and civil society follow on. The multitude is recast in identitarian terms: as people, as class, or as a set of discrete social identities. But these categories are unstable, and they break down as
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the nomad takes flight in exodus, while in the persistence of *conatus* the multitude constitutes a resonant community through quotidian encounters.

Insistently productive and self-organizing, the multitude is more than some mere subaltern remainder or excess. Like the multitude, the subaltern is beyond representation, an insurgent betrayal of constituted power. Moreover, as Alberto Moreiras puts it, “subaltern negation” is posthegemonic in that it is a “refusal to submit to hegemonic interpellation, an exodus from hegemony.” But the subaltern is a limit concept, “the absolute limit of the place where history is narrativized into logic,” in postcolonial theorist Gayatri Spivak’s words, whereas for Negri the multitude is both central and beyond limit. Subalternity is defined negatively: for Indian historian Ranajit Guha, it is the “demographic difference” or what is left when the elite are subtracted from the total population. The multitude, by contrast, is defined positively: it is “the ontological name of fullness against emptiness, of production against parasitical leftovers.” The subaltern is more abject than subject; indeed, Moreiras describes subalternity as “the non-subject of the political.” But despite these differences, subaltern excess is an index of the presence of the multitude, indicating the repeated failures of representation and so the asymmetry between constituent and constituted power. Subaltern remainder points to the surplus of constituent power, which can never be fully captured by the state. And so subaltern insurgency can be a gateway to the multitude, whose positive sense of commonality often starts as negation, as what Marxist theorist John Holloway calls “a scream of refusal.”

Subaltern studies splits subalternity off from hegemony, but this insistence on radical difference only reinforces the hegemonic project to establish a limit between inside and outside, between people and nonpeople, civilization and barbarism. The concept of the multitude offers a way out of such false dichotomies by leaving hegemony behind altogether. But how is the multitude’s subjectivity produced, and how does it organize (and care for) itself? In the rest of this chapter, I outline the principles of the multitude’s subjective constitution and self-organization that break decisively with hegemony and subalternity alike. I also show, however, that these principles introduce their own ambivalences. First, the multitude is radically *open*: it tends toward the absolute immanence of
what Spinoza terms Substance itself, and so undoes any distinc-
tion between social identity and otherness. As Hardt and Negri
comment, the multitude is at least “potentially all-inclusive.”23
Second, refusing the contractual demands of state claims to tran-
scendence, the multitude’s immanent expansion proceeds by means
of contiguity and contact, in resonances established through affective
encounter. It develops through what Negri calls a “physics of society,”
experimental conjunctions and aleatory events whose outcomes can never be fully predicted.24 Indeed, there can be no
guarantee that what results is not a bad multitude, a truly mon-
strous and corrupt figure of devastation and destruction. Third,
then, any analysis of the multitude has to attend to the play between
commonality and corruption. Hardt and Negri make polyvalent
commonality a defining feature of the multitude, and corruption the
key characteristic of what they term Empire. But it can be hard to
distinguish between corruption and commonality, especially in that
they both express a similar propensity to connection. For, fourth,
the multitude is also defined by the links and continuities that it
establishes. Whereas the state incarnates a series of discontinuous
forms, the multitude manifests itself in the crises that attend these
forms’ dissolution and reconstitution. Hardt and Negri argue that
the preconditions are now present for the multitude’s final liberation
from all state strictures, for the emergence of a pure subjectivity, “a
constituent power that no longer produces constitutions separate
from itself, but rather is itself constitution.”25 This is their political
project. An end to separation would call forth the Kingdom of
God on Earth, the actualization of a Spinozan paradise of blessed
communion between nature and divinity. Perhaps. But we might
hesitate before such a teleo-theological vision. Posthegemony theory
is poised in the tension between this project and its critique.

Open

The multitude is open and expansive. In Hardt and Negri’s defi-
nition, “the multitude is a multiplicity, a plane of singularities, an
open set of relations, which is not homogeneous or identical with
itself and bears an indistinct, inclusive relation to those outside of
it.” Hence it differs from “the people,” which by contrast “tends
toward identity and homogeneity internally while posing its differ-
eence from and excluding what remains outside of it. Whereas the
multitude is an inconclusive constituent relation, the people is a constituted synthesis that is prepared for sovereignty.”26 The multitude makes its presence felt with the rupture of social order that characterizes constituent power, “a force that bursts apart, breaks, interrupts, unhinges any preexisting equilibrium and any possible continuity.”27 Even when constituted power has closed off constituent power, to delimit the multitude and to convert it into a people, to establish an inside and an outside, the multitude presses against and transgresses those limits in its constant tendency toward exodus, deterritorialization, and flight. The multitude is the turbulence that forever threatens to destabilize popular identifications and loyalties. Thanks to this dynamic tendency, the multitude is never pregiven or preformed. It is a subject that continually creates and re-creates itself; its expansion is also a manifestation of care for the social self. But this recursiveness is far from solipsistic: indeed, the multitude’s radical openness means that it tends, Negri suggests, toward the absolute and so toward a democracy that Hardt and Negri claim will likewise be “full and absolute.”28

The multitude breaks with any contract or compact that would limit its expansiveness and close off constituent power. It therefore goes against the dominant tradition of modern political philosophy that for Negri is represented by Hobbes, Rousseau, and Hegel. Against these theorists of a contract mediated by transcendence, Negri turns to Spinoza’s “constitutive ontology” for “a theory of the political composition of subjectivity” whose only limit is “perfection” itself.29 In Virno’s words, the multitude’s reemergence opens an “old dispute” that had seemed lost: “It was the notion of the ‘people’ which prevailed. ‘Multitude’ is the losing term, the concept which got the worst of it.” But now “this once defeated notion” may well be “taking its dramatic revenge.”30 Posthegemony is more than what comes after hegemony’s patent demise; it is also a critical examination of the epoch in which hegemony apparently held sway. Negri argues that “the perspective of constituent power puts the contractualist position under attack and recognizes in it the inevitable deferral to transcendence, to constituted power and its apology.”31 In place of the contract’s enclosures, and its separation of people from power, subaltern from hegemon, the multitude opens up the immanent frontier that is kairós, the temporality of what is to come.
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The contract converts constituent into constituted power, multitude into people. This is modernity’s grand narrative: a series of defeats for constituent power. For looking around us we see that, reconfigured and recomposed, sovereignty appears to lie at the end of every road. Hence the classic paradox of political theory, most famously expressed in the first lines of eighteenth-century Enlightenment philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *The Social Contract*: “Man was born free, and everywhere he is in chains.... How has this change come about? I do not know.”32 The free subjectivity of the multitude is constantly superseded by the constituted power of the state. Openness and expansiveness are replaced by closure, interiority, and boundedness. Even the most revolutionary beginnings seem to go wrong, get bogged down, or transmute into totalitarianism. For every Constituent Assembly, there is a Terror and a Thermidor; for every Winter Palace stormed, a subsequent Purge. So revolution comes to appear impossible, naïve at best and dangerous at worst. And yet the fact that the impulse to liberation endlessly returns, that constituent power reemerges and constituted powerfrays at the edges, means that the question has to be posed again: What goes wrong? What happens to the moment of liberation that is so soon closed down? Liberalism’s answer to this question is the contract, presented as the happy and safely inviolate resolution at the origin of society itself.

In answer to his own question, Rousseau posits the “assumption” of an originary contract that is embedded within society and never up for renegotiation: “The slightest modification” of its clauses “would make them empty and ineffectual.” Indeed, the contract is never even discussed because it is “the same everywhere, and everywhere tacitly recognized and accepted”; it has become a matter of habit. In these first few pages of *The Social Contract*’s opening section, then, freedom quickly mutates from a birthright to something always already relinquished in “the complete transfer of each associate, with all his rights, to the whole community.”33 The contract explains and justifies the shift from freedom to total alienation, from constituent to constituted power. In and through the contract, individuals are assumed to have transferred their rights to a higher order. But paradoxically it is only through the contract that they become individuals, bearers of civil rights (as well as responsibilities). A sovereign power on the one hand and civil rights on the other are the twin pillars presumed by the contractualist tradition,
which stretches from Rousseau back to Thomas Hobbes in the seventeenth century, and forward to U.S. philosopher John Rawls in the twentieth. And Rawls argues that a “veil of ignorance” has to be drawn over the moment in which agreement to these fundamental principles is first secured. For contract theory, the basis of social order is an unquestionable consent to which we are now habituated.

The social contract separates at the same time that it unites. It marks off the civil from the natural. For those who are assumed to be party to it, the contract is envisaged as absolute and without remainder. Rousseau argues that “the transfer [of rights] being carried out unreservedly, the union between the associates is as perfect as can be, and none of them has any further requirements to add.” But the notion of a transfer of rights presupposes a sphere of nature that predated the institution of the contract: the “human race . . . change[s] its mode of existence” as through the contract it overcomes “the obstacles to men’s self-preservation in the state of nature.” So civil society and civil rights are defined negatively, in opposition to this state of nature that Hobbes famously portrays as a “warr . . . of every man against every man” in which the “life of man [is] solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short.” The contract marks off the social from the natural, and demarcates civilized community in its contrast to the “continuall feare, and danger of violent death” that preceded it. Only in the relative safety provided by the contract can industry, science, and the arts prosper. But the notion of an outside lingers, and the contract is legitimated by the fear of that fear that it purports to have banished. Civil society depends upon its outside, upon the affect that the outside is said to instill.

The limit established through the contract is spatial, and so geopolitical, as well as temporal, and so historical. In addition to a mythic narrative of origin, contract theory posits a distinction between coevals, or rather between peoples with history and peoples without. At the global periphery, the state of nature persists, and there is no better instance of this than the native peoples of the Americas: “For the savage people of America . . . have no government at all; and live today in that brutish manner.” As well as anchoring a fictional foundation for civil society, the contract also sets off a civilized interiority from a subaltern exterior in the present. Even Rousseau, theorist of the “noble savage,” agrees that only with the establishment of a “civil state” are man’s “faculties exercised
and improved, his ideas amplified, his feelings ennobled.” Within the terms of the social contract the citizen can be “an intelligent being and a man”; outside, he is a noncitizen, “a limited and stupid animal.” And just as the historical narrative tells of a transition that is absolute and without remainder, so for geopolitics there can strictly be no relation between civilized and savage save that the latter agrees to the total alienation of his (or her) natural right, in other words, gives up his (or her) savage “nature.” In a nutshell, this is the justification for the Spanish Requerimiento.

Within the social order that it defines, the contract effects a further double articulation of separation and unification: it establishes a state that rises transcendent over a people. Whereas the subaltern outside is abject and voiceless, the hegemonic inside is organized as a hierarchy that redistributes subjectivity in line with the principles of representation. A single institution, Hobbes’s Leviathan, stands in for the multitude that enters into the contract, and assumes the status of a transcendent subject. This is, for Hobbes, “the Essence of the Common-wealth,” that there be “One Person, of whose Acts a great Multitude, by mutuall Covenants one with another, have made themselves every one the Author, to the end he may use the strength and means of them all, as he shall think expedient, for their Peace and Common Defence.” And though this account seems to position the state as the beneficiary of the multitude’s constituent power, contract theory maintains that constituted power is in fact society’s great benefactor. We are all in debt to the state. For Hobbes, the best comparison is with the divine: the contract enables “the Generation of that great Leviathan, or rather (to speake more reverently) of that Mortall God, to which we owe under the Immortall God, our peace and defence.” A civil society is also a civic religion in which the product of the multitude’s contraction is fetishized as a benevolent deity.

To represent the multitude is also to eliminate it. In place of a fluid mass of variable singularities, the contract shapes a people composed of individual citizens. In principle equally subject to the law, citizens are, notionally at least, therefore equal in both rights and responsibilities. Differences in power and affect, the correlate of distinctions between singular bodies, are no longer relevant. All power has been transferred to the sovereign, and affect has been banished in the name of a rationality that deals in disembodied subjects rather than embodied subjectivity. What is more, citizens
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have no need to fear each other, and so are able to work together constructively and industriously. Hence the contract is also envisaged as marking the emergence of the people, a body of individuals united and homogenized by their common relation to the state, a collective identity that can thus be regarded as a single juridical individual. The multitude’s multiplicity is transformed into the unity that characterizes the people. Hobbes explains in *De Cive* (“On the Citizen”) how the establishment of a single transcendent power retrospectively constructs a unified people; how, in other words, the circuit of constituent and constituted power folds back on the multitude to eliminate it from civil society. For “if the . . . multitude do contract one with another, that the will of one man, or the agreeing wills of the major part of them, shall be received for the will of all; then it becomes one person.” As a result, “it is oftener called the people, than the multitude.” Insofar, therefore, as the multitude contracts, and is represented, it becomes the people. Yet all this leaves the multitude peculiarly dislocated: like the subaltern, it is outside civil society in that it preexists the contract that constitutes juridical persons; but it also stands on the threshold of civility in that the people arise from the multitude, or rather the dyad of people and state replaces an immanent multitude; moreover, it threatens to arise again within the polity, with every movement to reopen the constituent process. The multitude is inside and outside as well as at the border. It confounds the very distinctions that the contract is meant to institute, and yet it founds the contract itself. Contractualism both reacts to and depends upon the multitude, even as it tries to eliminate it.

The multitude is never fully banished from the social; the contract is never fully effective. However much contract theorists wish to expel the multitude to a subaltern exterior, Spinoza argues that natural rights are never entirely abandoned: “Every man retains some part of his right, in dependence on his own decision, and no one else’s.” This is Spinoza’s break with contract theory, his challenge to the purported absolutism of the state. Spinoza claims that there can be no absolute transfer of rights, that constituent power can never be fully alienated: “For men have never so far ceded their power as to cease to be an object of fear to the rulers who received such power and right.” Constituent power lurks behind any constitution and can always return to upset and undermine it. Hence in his *Political Treatise* Spinoza argues that aristocracy, any system in
which the few purport to rule over the many, is “in practice . . . not absolute [because] the multitude is a cause of fear to the rulers, and therefore succeeds in retaining for itself some liberty, which it asserts and holds as its own, if not by an express law, yet on a tacit understanding.” The multitude constantly disrupts and unsettles claims to sovereignty and to closure. The only absolute is absolute immanence: “If there be any absolute dominion, it is, in fact, that which is held by an entire multitude.” Constituent power is always in some measure retained by the multitude, which therefore resists becoming people and tends instead toward what Negri describes as “a general horizon of power” and “life, always open.”

The social contract cannot simply be assumed as originary and settled; it has continually to be made and remade in everyday life. The contract is not foundational. It is, rather, an effect of the state. The state declares the contract settled in order retrospectively to conjure up the people as the cornerstone of social organization. In Hardt and Negri’s words, “the modern conception of the people is in fact a product of the nation-state.” And the people are merely the multitude misrecognized, delimited, and so alienated from itself. Virno therefore describes the multitude as modernity’s “defining concept.” The multitude grounds the constitution of popular citizenship, but its constituent power has to be denied in the name of a community imagined in terms of lineage and enclosure rather than rupture and openness. The contract purports to establish a bounded social order, but the multitude always escapes: it “shuns political unity, is recalcitrant to obedience, never achieves the status of juridical personage, and is thus unable to make promises, to make pacts, or to acquire and transfer rights.” Society’s founding tension between constituent and constituted power translates into an opposition between multitude and people: “The citizens, when they rebel against the State, are ‘the Multitude against the People.’” But such rebellions are not confrontations between inside and outside: rather, the inside opens up to the outside; the people desert their role as people; the multitude escapes from the people. No promises, no pacts, and no consent: this is an uncertain world of treachery and deceit, of disarticulation and exodus. The multitude is essentially untrustworthy, an immeasurable force exercising what Spinoza sees as its unshakeable right “to act deceitfully, and to break . . . compacts.” Throughout modernity, the state’s aim has
been to convert the multitude into the people, to remind its citizens of their promises, and to establish consent to consent, the hegemony of hegemony. The apogee of this stratagem is populism, one of the most effective of state discourses. Populism posits the people as a homogenous mass bound to institutional authority by an affective relationship to some transcendent fetish. But a latent distrust still surrounds the concept of the popular, as though to acknowledge that behind the people lurks the multitude, and that the risk of appealing to popular forces is that the multitude may break out and overwhelm the state.

Peronism shows how populism’s invocation and suppression of the multitude runs the risk of disaster. In October 1950, at Peronism’s height, an article in the magazine Mundo Argentino entitled “The Multitude Is the People” rehearses the gesture that simultaneously appeals to the multitude and converts it into a people: “Until a short while ago,” it states, “we Argentines did not know what the multitude was. We would talk about the people, and others would talk about the people, without anyone having seen its face.” An unknown (indeed, unknowable) multitude has to be converted into the expected people. This slippage between multitude and people is resolved only by reference to some defining event, here the demonstration of October 17, 1945, that brought Peronism to power: “In October 1945 the multitude in the street took us by surprise — a multitude that was the people — and we saw its face. And a few months later, in February 1946, we saw it act in the elections.” The people, then, is constituted in a retroactive act of naming that puts the multitude in a relation with the state. The Peronist multitude can be equated with the people once it is identified with a leader, Perón, and reframed within a hegemonic process, here the 1946 elections. The multitude comes as if from nowhere, but its arrival is articulated as though it were long expected, predestined. Except that it is the people who have been expected, and the multitude is invoked only to provide evidence for popular will and agency, as the body to which the people will put a face. The multitude threatens personal identity: the article’s anonymous author writes, “I too forgot myself, confused among the multitude.” Memory returns only once identity can be recast in terms of the nation-state, forming a nexus of individualism, patriotism, and the popular, bound by the low-intensity affect of contentment: “At
nightfall I escaped back home, very content with myself, with my fatherland, and with its people.\textsuperscript{48}

Populism is a meditation upon constituent power: it identifies, appropriates, and then disavows the multitude in the name of the people, but remains anxiously aware that the multitude always returns. In Peronism’s case, this anxiety centers on the October 17 demonstration mentioned above, as though in recognition that the regime’s founding moment did not, in fact, accord with its own imaginary. Peronism’s primal scene was only gradually, retroactively, brought into line with Peronist self-representation by being reimagined and recast in the yearly anniversaries re-creating the 1945 events. Annual celebrations produced a succession of copies ever closer to the original as it was (and had to be) imagined by Peronism. But the effort of re-creation reveals the preoccupation that the initial demonstration, and thus Peronism itself, belonged less to the people than to the multitude. Peronism’s portrayal of October 17 and its subsequent anniversaries cast the multitude as unrepresentable, overwhelming, and fanatical, but by channeling these attributes through the figures of Perón and Evita attempted to represent, subsume, and pacify these energies as, now, belonging to a people celebrating what came to be called a “day of loyalty.” Hence Mundo Argentino’s account of the 1948 celebration invokes a “huge multitude” that the magazine’s photographic spread can only fail to represent, as its captions make clear: “The photograph shows only a partial aspect of the multitude” taking part in “scenes of indescribable enthusiasm.”\textsuperscript{49} Any attempt to convey the experience of the event is subsumed by sublime awe prompted by a power that could overwhelm the political and geographical landscape of the state: the multitude is everywhere, picnicking on the grass and stopping traffic, its waves of energy and affect lapping at the walls of the presidential palace. To prevent the multitude from swamping the state’s own position of enunciation, it has to be put into a determinable (representable, reproducible) relation with the state. Populism’s “balcony effect” insinuates a limit between multitude and state, substituting a social contract for the social contact that the multitude desires and threatens, and thus recomposes the multitude as the people.

Populism’s balcony effect consists in the classic cinematic device of shot and reverse shot applied to public spectacle: the multitude and the Peróns are not represented together; rather, a (partial, inadequate) vision of the multitude is followed by an image of the balcony
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from which Juan and Evita address them. The cut from multitude to balcony (and vice versa) presents each as in meaningful (logical rather than accidental) relation with the other. These are the classic images of Peronism: the medium shot view (from in front and slightly below) of Evita on the balcony, her arms raised in salute, coupled with a long shot from above of the crowds in the plaza. *Mundo Argentino* and other print publications of the time mimic this cinematic effect in photographic spreads juxtaposing these two perspectives, making the accompanying commentary almost redundant: the multitude is gathered “to listen attentively to what the president of the republic and his lady wife have to say”; Evita’s speech provokes “repeated demonstrations of warm enthusiasm.” Enthusiasm is given meaning (is now described and qualified, and so domesticated) by her discourse. What exactly she says goes unreported; it is enough that affect be subordinated to the word. Pairing the eminently representable Peróns with the otherwise unrepresentable multitude gives meaning and visibility to what had been unintelligible: the multitude becomes people. The cut established in the sequence taking us from the plaza to the balcony (and back again) both joins and separates: the multitude’s heterogeneity becomes homogeneity as its various partial aspects (all that can be represented conventionally) are joined in what Ernesto Laclau terms a “chain of equivalence,” dependent upon their relation with those on the balcony. So contemporary newsreel footage presents a narrative in which a demonstration gathers and builds from groups originating in the most diverse locations. These singular bodies emerge from the hidden recesses of the city and its suburbs and encounter each other en route, forming an increasingly monstrous throng. Once Evita and Perón step onto the stage, however, the balcony effect takes hold: shot, reverse shot; this multitude is represented (literally, presented again) as the people whose gathering is retroactively intelligible by reference to the balcony, and to the state. And as this relation is established and the multitude reduced to a homogenous (hegemonic) bloc, properties of the multitude can be transferred to the figures on high: the Peróns acquire their own sublimity as, larger than life, they now dominate the frame with a power borrowed from the thousands thronging the square who give their presence meaning.

When the balcony effect is derailed, populism threatens to collapse as the multitude reemerges as an open, insurrectionary presence. This is the risk populism takes, and it is nowhere more apparent than in
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the trauma of Evita Perón’s renunciation on August 22, 1951. At this tumultuous open meeting, in front of a crowd two million strong, Evita fended off demands that she stand for election as vice president. In his novel Santa Evita, Argentine author Tomás Eloy Martínez narrates this episode as a film script pieced together from newsreel depictions. Indeed, the demonstration’s staging was perhaps the most fully cinematic of all of Peronism’s set pieces. Scaffolding set up in the broad Avenida 9 de Julio held a platform flanked by two enormous photographs of Juan and Evita. Juan Schroeder’s documentary Evita (1974?) has footage of the events, and shows how newsreel cameras cut from this huge screen to the multitude frantically waving handkerchiefs below.  

Eloy Martínez describes “the ebb and flow of the multitude, dangerous surges to get closer to the idol”; in the newsreels, the balcony effect is maintained for some time, but the images become increasingly agitated, with fewer cuts and more pans as the camera darts from crowd to platform. Eloy Martinez writes that “Perón looks dwarfed,” but it is when Evita comes out, as daylight fades, that the spectacle truly disintegrates. The newsreels show Evita’s image compressed into one corner of the frame as the camera simultaneously tries to take in as much of the multitude as possible. Evita seems lost, about to disappear from the mise en scène. Peronism’s mechanisms of control fail as the crowds demand that Evita accept her nomination. Evita can only defer a decision, but her attempts to impose a contract on the multitude (asking them to wait four days, twenty-four hours, a few hours) are overwhelmed by their demands for immediacy and contact.

Through Evita, Peronism operates a particularly powerful conversion mechanism, framing multitude as people and thereby setting bounds and establishing transcendence, giving birth to the state in its double articulation. But Peronism enters into crisis at the very moment of its greatest success: populism promises immediacy and welcomes affective investment, but only so long as a line is drawn, a limit establishing the people as the body whose representability depends upon its distance from its leaders. Without this distance, populism finds its “own” people strictly incomprehensible. Alive, Evita fails finally to maintain that separation and has to renounce and be renounced: the balcony becomes “the altar on which she [is] sacrificed.” Dead, of course, Evita is another matter; dead, she helps to ensure Peronism’s continued meaningfulness. Echoing a similar declaration by the famed
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eighteenth-century indigenous rebel Túpac Amaru, the inscription on Evita’s tomb still promises, “I will return and be millions.”

The contract sets limits. It separates the civil from the subaltern; it establishes a hierarchy in which a unitary people are subject to and represented by a sovereign state; and it simultaneously invokes and displaces the multitude as the subjectivity that stands on the threshold of civility. All this is legitimated by the assumption of prior consent to sovereignty. Hence Negri argues that the contractualist tradition is “the inevitable deferral to transcendence, to constituted power, and its apology.”

By contrast, the multitude insists on immanence and materiality and on a constituent power that is “the utter limit of any politics,” or alternatively a vision of a “politics that survives the dissolution of governments, the disruption of legal systems, and the collapse of instituted powers.” The only limit to constituent power is the ever-shifting voyage into the future, or what Negri terms the “to-come.” This is kairos: “the moment of rupture and opening of temporality...the modality of time through which being opens itself, attracted by the void at the limit of time, and it thus decides to fill that void.” Open to the to-come, constituent power generates being itself: “In becoming power, the multitude generates...The generation of the multitude innovates being.”

Hence for Negri, following Spinoza, the multitude tends toward the absolute, absolute immanence, a true absolute rather than the pernicious and false absolutism of the contract. Its generation proceeds through the contiguity of singular encounters, the commonality of collective constitution, and the continuity of historical tendency. But at each stage, ambivalence abounds.

Contiguous

The multitude comprises a multiplicity of singular bodies organized in a nonhierarchical, open network in which each body is in touch with every other body. Its principle of organization is contiguity: contact rather than contract; affect rather than effect. Whereas a contract fixes discrete identities that are stable over time, whose relations are governed by an appeal to transcendent law, the multitude is fluid, its relations structured by immanent affect and habit. The multitude is always in generation: kairos, the temporality of
the event and of constitution, straddles past, present, and future. Its singular bodies are perpetually encountering and reencountering each other (and others), contingently and contiguously. But for all its fluidity and mutability, this generative process need not be chaotic; constituent power gains force according to principles of self-organization, care for the self. The contacts between the bodies that compose, or come to compose, the multitude follow an immanent ethics of the encounter. Spinoza’s account of such an ethics outlines a social physics in which there are both good and bad encounters: good encounters are associated with joy, expand the body’s power to affect and be affected, and construct and reveal the common; the bad, by contrast, are associated with sadness, cause a diminution of the body’s power, and lead to division and destruction. But Spinoza and Negri both subscribe to a teleology in which the multitude tends toward perfection. A more complex account would stress that there are good multitudes and bad: bodies that resonate and expand versus dissonant bodies or bodies whose resonance hits a peak that leads to collapse.

In the same way that the multitude undoes the spatial logic of hegemony, because it is inside, outside, and on the border at same time, so likewise it problematizes linear temporality. For the multitude is simultaneously historic presupposition, future goal, and present constitution. On the one hand, the multitude’s constituent power lies at the origin of all social order. Moreover, the historical multitude reappears at every point at which the constituent process is opened up, in all the revolutions and insurrections that pockmark modernity and give the lie to its narrative of linear progress. On the other hand, this multitude is evanescent, and its full actualization in history is still to come. Hardt and Negri argue that it is only with the contemporary prevalence of post-Fordist immaterial labor, the expansion of global communication networks, and the emergence of the “general intellect” (production through cooperation and communication) that the multitude can reveal itself empowered for the first time, to usher in the absolute democracy of the Communist project. In their words, then, the multitude has “a strange, double temporality: always-already and not-yet.” But as a result, the multitude is also always in-between: it is a becoming, a tendency. It inhabits the time of kairós, in which history, project, and event meet in what Negri describes as “the instant in which the ‘archer
looses the arrow." If the dynamic encounters that constitute the multitude were to cease, time itself would come to an end.

The time of the contract, by contrast, is the empty time of chronology, of an abstraction governed by transcendent categories. Contract law sets strict standards and limits to what can and cannot count as a binding contract. A contract refers to the future and requires what common-law codes describe as “adequate consideration”: an unconditional promise is unenforceable, hence each side must pledge something; and “past consideration is no consideration,” so a timetable for future action should be agreed in advance. The contract is an instant in time and space, and the precise limits of the before and the after, the moment of offer and acceptance, as well as the appropriate jurisdiction, all have to be meticulously determined. An acceptance by mail, for example, is valid from the moment it is posted; an acceptance by email or fax comes into force once it is read or received. Above all, a contract establishes particular relations between defined entities. Only certain legal subjects in given conditions can enter into a binding contract. Minors and the insane, for instance, cannot contract, nor can anyone incapacitated by drink or duress. A contract must also be public and invoke an intention to enter into legal relations: agreements within the family are not legally binding. So a contract presumes or (better) establishes distance and difference, and presents itself as the premeditated attempt to bring those differences together, to establish a “meeting of the minds.”

To put this another way: contracts (and contract law) establish the abstract time that enables the legal fictions of exchange, equivalence, and consent.

The empty time of the legal contract is, however, parasitical upon the intimacy of the contact that constitutes the multitude. Contact generates social ties immediately and affectively, rather than waiting for the deferred satisfaction promised by the contract. Contact is the moment of the encounter, the brush or grip of body upon body. Contact comes from contiguity and contingency, words sharing the same Latin root. It is not that there is no reciprocity or obligation inscribed within contact. A gift implies or calls forth an exchange; but there is no fixed timetable, only the sensuous feel or intuition for the right moment. Unlike the contract with all its predeterminations, contact is always somehow surprising, and therefore innovative. Where contract closes down, contact opens up. However much it is ritualized, contact is still unexpected.
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Every encounter is subtly different, involving new bodies, or new combinations of bodies, affectively charged in novel ways. Contact, in short, concerns affect; contract, effect. If the multitude’s expansiveness breaks down the boundary between inside and outside, its affective tactility also reconfigures the relations between its constituent elements.

Contracts formalize and encode affect. This is true as much of juridical contracts as of the social contract. They rely for their effectiveness on the fact that they are backed by the force of law. They obey a series of rules that determine which contracts are enforceable; or rather, which agreements are, by virtue of their legal enforceability, contracts, and which are not. With the threat of legal intervention should the promise they encode be unfulfilled, contracts abstract from the contact and affective investment that first motivate the contracting parties. Paradigmatically, marriage is a legal contract formalizing what is primarily an affective relation. It is true that marriage is often regarded as an exceptional type of contract, in that the contracting parties are legally prevented from dissolving their obligations of their own accord—a marriage can be dissolved only in a court of law. But the fact that the state is a “third party” to every marriage only reveals the way in which civil contracts always imply potential intervention by the state. Contracts capture contact by imposing conditions: if this, then that, or else. The state is poised like a sword of Damocles over every social relation. Difference becomes a distance that requires mediation, rather than a matter of social cohabitation in which we adjust our habits to others’. Yet juridical contracts depend upon the affective contact and habitual practices that they subsequently encode to produce social order. The handshake that traditionally seals an agreement (or the priest’s injunction that “you may now kiss the bride” in a marriage ceremony) indicates at least one way in which the contract is premised on the contact that it purports to supersede. Indeed, the very notion that a contract has to be sealed with the imprint of contact signals that contract can never fully escape its dependence on the tactile. At stake in the distinction between contract and contact are two forms of difference: an immanent and substantial difference, between singularities that encounter each other in affect and habit, versus the formal distinction between juridical equals mediated by a transcendent state. As well as converting multitude into people, a
bounded unity, the contract also represents the individuals that constitute the people as distinct and distant; they are distinguished from each other, even as they are imagined to be formally equal before the law. The people envelops formally distinct individuals whose relationship is maintained and mediated by the law; the multitude is a set of mobile singularities contingently aligned through immanent interaction.

The multitude is “a perpetual mass mobilization.” It is a *perpetuum mobile*, a “permanent in-between movement” that endlessly resists juridical formalization. It incarnates “a politics of permanent revolution . . . in which social stability must always be recreated through a constant reorganization of social life.” Yet it is not formless anarchy; its motion is not random, though it may be guided by (and affirm) the role of chance. Indeed, chance is the very principle of the life of the multitude, which is open to the contingent, the fortuitous, and the unexpected. In the encounter with what life places in one’s path, resisting the predestination of some originary contract, patterns emerge, and the multitude takes shape. Like the sea, the multitude forms sinuous waves: restless and apparently chaotic, but with their own logic and power. The immanent, guiding principle of the multitude’s self-constitution is fluidity and flux, but this is not a seething mass of atomized individuals; instead, mobility and motility maximize opportunities for contact and encourage the formation of habitual patterns shaped by affect rather than the force of law. The multitude is eminently sociable: as the subject of constituent power, it produces society itself. Rebellious but not anomic, the multitude combines and recombines, unfolding and enfolding, in increasingly complex instances of self-organization: sometimes these are unstable, transient, and delicate, but in each case they are driven by a *conatus* that expresses a striving to persevere; they also often benefit from the feedback loops that elicit order from chaos. The multitude comes into being at what scientists such as theoretical biologist Stuart Kauffman call “the poised edge between order and chaos.”

The multitude is resonant. What Negri terms Spinoza’s “physics of society” is, he says, “a mechanics of individual pressures and a dynamics of associative relationships, which characteristically are never closed in the absolute but, rather, proceed by ontological dislocations.” The universe is made up of an infinite number of bodies, each of which expresses some part of the whole (“God
or Nature,” in Spinoza’s famous formulation). These bodies are “distinguished from one another,” Spinoza tells us, “by reason of motion and rest, speed and slowness, and not by reason of substance.” They are predisposed to combine and to form “composite bodies” that, in turn, are distinguished by their own patterns of motion or rest, that is, by their capacity to affect and be affected. Simple bodies and compound bodies alike combine by establishing a mutual resonance through chance encounters, when they are “so constrained by other bodies that they lie upon one another, or if they so move, whether with the same degree or with different degrees of speed, that they communicate their motions to each other in a certain fixed manner.” Spinoza says that the resulting “bodies . . . united with one another . . . all together compose one body or individual, which is distinguished from the others by this union of bodies.”

Hence the “ontological dislocations”: everybody (every body) comprises a singular combination of simpler bodies that resonate to produce a new being, a body that is ever more open to new encounters, and so new transformations. This “dynamics of associative relationships” proceeds on the basis of the affect generated in these myriad encounters. The good encounters that lead to association and enhance a body’s power (producing a body with a greater power to affect and be affected) are marked by joy; bad encounters, which lead to disassociation and dissonance, are clouded by sadness. In Spinoza’s words, “joy is an affect by which the body’s power of acting is increased or aided. Sadness, on the other hand, is an affect by which the body’s power of acting is diminished or restrained.”

The multitude is a compound body made up of many diverse bodies (both compound and simple) whose common principle is immanent rather than transcendent. For Negri, this is the key to the Ethics: “The entire thematic of idealistic thought . . . is denied. The materialism of the mode is foundational.” However, the mode (the individual body) is merely the expression of divine or natural substance: the multitude is both virtual and actual. The universe has, for Spinoza (and by extension, Negri), an essential order toward which the multitude tends; the multitude expresses ever more fully the order of essences as it organizes itself in line with their fundamental harmony. Hence the multitude is both “always already” and perpetually “not yet.” As bodies combine and exercise their increasing power, they become more virtuous and tend toward “greater
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This empowerment is ensured socially, as opportunities for contiguity and contact multiply. For Negri and Hardt, contemporary global communications networks are both the result of the multitude's self-organization, which "produces cooperation, communication, forms of life, and social relationships," and also the long-awaited preconditions for its further expansion. Drawing parallels from cybernetics and open-source programming, they argue that democracy is "possible for the first time today" thanks to the contemporary importance of such networks, which actualize a rhizomatic form of organization in which, now in Deleuze and Guattari's words, "any point... can be connected to anything other, and must be." As the multitude constitutes society, it opens the ground for still further constitution. It generates the common: Spinoza charts a path from affective encounters (the joyful or sad passions generated as bodies associate or disassociate) through to what he terms "freedom," passing through the active affections that increase a body's power and enable the constitution of "common notions" rather than knowledge based merely on signs.

Ethics, for Spinoza, is grounded in everyday pragmatics: of how to maximize good encounters (and so pleasure) and minimize the bad (and so pain). But ethics soon becomes politics: "It is especially useful to men that they harness their habits together, to draw themselves close by those bonds most apt to make one individual of them." Common habits need no mediating transcendent instance, and therefore found a political principle that rejects anarchy (that is, unformed chaos), market principles (of rational actors), and state organization alike. Immanent positive feedback enables "a process that sees the human individuality construct itself as a collective entity." The multitude takes shape. It pervades modernity as a virtual presence, a potential inherent in the enhanced possibilities for contact and communication that the modern world provides. Again, there is a feedback loop: pressing for contact, the pleasure of good encounters, and further expansion, the multitude impels modernity on. It calls forth the modern. But can it escape modernity's presuppositions? After all, Spinoza and Negri both affirm a strikingly linear teleology. Spinoza believes in the ultimate perfectibility of humankind, "help[ing] himself," philosopher Jonathan Bennett argues, "to a teleological version of self-preservation." And Negri's affirmation of contiguity and contingency is premised
on the faith that the multitude is destined to constitute a Communist society. What he elsewhere terms “a veritable thermodynamics of society” takes surprisingly little account of the unpredictability stressed by contemporary theorists of complexity. Negri only rarely acknowledges the multitude’s ambivalence, as for instance when he recognizes that Spinoza’s materialist utopia conjures up “a terrible storm, now on the verge of explosion.”

Sendero Luminoso undoubtedly unleashed a storm in the Andes, and an almost entirely unexpected one at that: Carlos Iván Degregori describes its “vertiginous expansion” as over the course of only a couple of years it developed from a group of university professors and students to a force that almost entirely displaced the state in much of the Ayacucho countryside. Despite its significance and impact, however, Sendero remains, years after its downfall, surprisingly mysterious. Journalist Santiago Roncagliolo’s best-selling 2007 biography of leader Abimael Guzmán constantly reminds us that its account is necessarily incomplete, that Sendero somehow still evades representation. Moreover, Roncagliolo also reports that the very effort of writing about the group was profoundly disconcerting: “Over the course of this entire investigation, my state of mind itself has been at stake… What used to seem terrible but familiar now fills me with guilt and rage. I feel ashamed of who I am.” Roncagliolo is constantly driven, to the point of obsession, to return to the mystery of Sendero, as though to a primal trauma in which he hopes to find himself, if only by losing himself in the process. His earliest memory of Peru is the image of dead dogs hung on Lima lampposts at the outset of Sendero’s uprising; as a child, he and the other children of leftist exiles living in Mexico City would play games of “people’s war”; and yet, returning to Lima in order to write the book, despite this intimate history and his preparatory research, he tells us “I touch down in my city with the sensation that I’ve got myself into a scrape. For a start, really I know nothing.” Sendero continues to provoke bafflement and to infect those who write about it with unwelcome affects that disturb their sense of self. U.S. journalist Robin Kirk, writing about women militants, points to “something overwhelming, that confers on Sendero Luminoso a strange power, out of this world. Something beyond all understanding.” Kirk immediately adds “I, too, fail to understand it.” All her presumptions about progressive politics, social movements, and
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even her own identity as a woman and feminist, are put into question by a movement whose women members become “an alter ego, a photographic negative of the ideal woman imagined by contemporary feminists.” When she meets this other self, Kirk feels that she has reached the absolute limit of sisterhood while recognizing that something, strangely, has drawn these women to Sendero and away from her own conception of the political.

The study of (in Kirk’s words) “how Sendero came to form itself” has been hampered by the difficulty of gaining access to militants and by their reluctance to talk. Strikingly, Senderistas remain mute: unlike almost every other guerrilla movement in Latin America, there are hardly any Sendero testimonios. Guzmán famously gave what was touted as the “Interview of the Century” to a sympathetic journalist in 1988, but this only “added to the mystery and the mystique.” Perhaps the closest to a testimonio from a figure close to Sendero’s inner circle is rural sociologist Antonio Díaz Martínez’s Ayacucho: Hambre y esperanza. Díaz Martínez was a colleague of Guzmán’s at the University of Huamanga in the 1960s and 1970s, and by the time he died, in a prison massacre in 1986, was reputedly number three in the organization. His book on Ayacucho, first published in 1969, is for the most part a fairly dry account of the land tenure system in the Peruvian highlands, but it also shows clear frustration at a landowning class that preferred inefficient but profitable capital underinvestment, and superexploitation of the peasantry, to changing the habits of a colonial lifetime. Díaz Martínez offers technical advice but above all stresses the need to “get to know the native community, their social organization, to get close to them, work with them, distance yourself from the mistis [the rural elite] for as long as they remain distanced from the community.” Quoting the noted indigenist historian Luis Valcárcel, whose most famous book is Tempestad en los Andes (“Storm in the Andes”), he adds the reminder that Peru is “a country of ‘Indians,’ a fact that remains as pertinent as ever.” Yet anthropologist Orin Starn commends Díaz Martínez’s nuanced take on what Starn calls “Andeanism”: “He never lost a sense of mixture and movement”; he accurately reported the “fluidity and uncertain future” of indigenous communities and the “sense of interconnection” of a population that “was constantly on the move.” For the book’s second edition in 1985, however, by which time Díaz Martínez was a declared Senderista, imprisoned in Lurigancho jail and, as Starn notes, “clearly… a hardliner,” the author added a concluding essay. This updated ending
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shows little of the subtlety and attention to either mobility or affect manifested by the (now) fifteen-year-old text to which it is appended. Instead, it repeats almost verbatim Senderista slogans and an affirmation of faith in Guzmán, the Revolution’s “Presidente Gonzalo, mentor and guide to the Red Faction of the Communist Party of Peru who, by means of determined struggle against revisionism and rightward drift, managed to reconstitute the Party of the working class, a Revolutionary Party of a new type.” It is thanks to “the armed struggle directed by the Communist Party” that the peasant masses “will organize themselves, will overflow,” and “will arise like a tempest, a hurricane, a force so impetuous and violent that nothing can contain it,” so as to “bury all the imperialists, the military caudillos, the corrupt functionaries, the local despots, and the evil landlords.”

Something has transformed Díaz Martínez’s language: what was flexible has become rigid; what was fluid has reached boiling point.

Senderismo paradoxically manifests both extreme rigidity and extreme volatility. In a kind of reverse of gatopardismo, nothing changes and yet everything is different. Senderista militant Rosa Murinache’s Tiempos de guerra, discussed by cultural critic Victor Vich, manifests this paradox in heightened form. As Vich explains, Murinache’s text is “a clandestine book of poetry that circulated during the harshest years of Peru’s dirty war...[whose] aim is to expound upon the necessity for armed struggle and for a radically revolutionary change in the country’s social structure.” Against conventional notions of lyric voice, however, this particular poetry reveals little about its author. “The curious thing,” Vich continues, “is that Rosa is the author of the book but not of the poems, which are rather the product of an ‘editing’ operation performed on the political discourse of Abimael Guzmán.” Murinache has taken Guzmán’s pronouncements and presented them as poetry; she is at pains to point out that she has neither added nor subtracted a single word from his work. “All” she has done is rearrange it on the page, introducing line breaks, indentations, and stanza divisions. Murinache’s intervention, then, is purely formal. Its apparent minimalism, which changes nothing but transforms everything, both fascinates and frustrates Vich: it is superfluous; it means nothing; it is “a gesture at best, a simple movement, the useless attempt to arrange the words (of the Other) in some other way.” But Murinache has drawn out the formal properties of Guzmán’s political discourse. She challenges us to read Sendero ideology as form rather than content, as aesthetics or affect rather than politics or ideology.
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She has made his discourse sing, vibrate, and resonate; at least, she has tried to indicate how it sings for her. By recasting Guzmán as poet, Murinache warns against the interpretations, engrossed with content and signification, that have dominated and stymied most readings of Sendero, Vich’s included. She suggests that Guzmán’s followers were less interested in what their leader meant than in the ways in which Sendero allowed them to find form, to construct their own forms (their own habits) from the affective building blocks supplied by a discourse of blood and revolution, reorganization and (literally) reformation.

Analyses of Sendero that stress its ideological rigidity fail to explain its remarkable influence. Sociologist Gonzalo Portocarrero notes the group’s religious aspects, arguing that it was a moralistic sect dedicated to a hyperrational cult of violence. But most such sects remain tiny and insignificant. Portocarrero is closer to the mark when he further observes that Sendero also had “a cult of movement, an unlimited fascination for the capacity to act,” and when he quotes Guzmán’s paean to “perpetual activity” and “the intensity of the creative impulse.” Joining Sendero meant sacrificing individuality in the name of “an unconditional surrender to the collective,” but this was a chance to participate in an empowered subjectivity destined (its adherents believed) to constitute a “new power.” Degregori comments that in Sendero “power appeared in all its fearful splendor” and Senderistas felt that they were its direct agents: “We blew it up just to blow it up, nothing else,” as one of them reports. Moreover, the movement was remarkably open: for instance, as Kirk observes, a strikingly high proportion (up to 40 percent) of its militants were women, including the group’s early martyr, nineteen-year-old Edith Lagos, whose 1982 funeral filled Ayacucho’s main square with a “multitude” of over ten thousand, the largest such assembly the city had ever seen. Perhaps more importantly still, as Degregori documents, Sendero welcomed provincial students caught up in the explosion of secondary and higher education during the 1960s, who were otherwise in a “no man’s land” between the Andean customs they had left behind and the urban creole elites that discriminated against them for their supposed backwardness. Sendero latched on to this flow of young people whose desires so resonated with its promise that together, a disparate mass could become strong. Over the course of the 1970s, Sendero’s fortunes waxed and waned, but with each wave of mobilization and retrenchment the intensity of its organization and gravitational pull increased until it ended up, Degregori suggests,
“becoming a type of dwarf star, one of those in which matter is so compressed that there is hardly any space between its constituent atoms, such that it achieves an enormous weight, disproportionate to its size.”

It had taken contiguity to its limit.

The multitude has multiple points of equilibrium, some more stable than others; immanent processes can lead to transitions by which the multitude suddenly changes its aspect. There are combinations of bodies that prove singularly explosive, however much their internal operations correspond to the logic of the good encounter. A social thermodynamics should account for such nonlinearity. An ethics of the encounter should take note of the ever-present potential for dissolution as much as resonance. We need to distinguish between multitudes, between different expressions of constituent power. The multitude’s expansion can hit a limit, however contingent, and bring death rather than life, setting off a chain reaction. Not all pain can be attributed to the state. There are immanent processes that obey the logic of resonance until they hit a tipping point, at which they become precipitously dissonant. Dissonance is death: as Spinoza puts it, “I understand the body to die when its parts are so disposed that they acquire a different proportion of motion and rest to one another.” Such, surely, is the case with al-Qaida: an immanent, unrepresentable, and fluid network, it is a multitudinous movement that is also spectacularly destructive. The multitude, always monstrous from the point of view of constituted power, can threaten constituent power too; it can become a bad multitude. Sometimes the sea is whipped up into a hurricane, a frighteningly unstable equilibrium. Contiguity all too easily leads to corruption.

Common

The multitude is common. It is ordinary and everyday, and it is both the product and the producer of shared resources. It comprises what historians Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker term the “hewers of wood and drawers of water”: a “motley crew” of apparently disorganized labor. Though Negri sometimes flirts with an almost Leninist vanguardism, the multitude rebels against party organization or the privileging of so-called advanced sectors. The exercise
of constituent power is a matter of habit, not training, indoctrination, or even will. The multitude seeks connections based on what we already hold in common; its polyvalent powers of connection open up new bases for commonality. Negri and Hardt reverse the narrative that claims that capitalism has already destroyed the commons and that privatization is now rampant, especially after neoliberalism. They argue that we have more in common now than ever before and that the stage is set for the “common name” of a Communist liberty to come. The love of the common people is to ensure the transformation of what is now either private interest or public command into an immanent utopia. And yet it can be hard to distinguish the multitude from the actual dystopia of Empire. Hardt and Negri oppose the multitude’s commonality to Empire’s corruption, but their analysis of corruption is confused and contradictory. Indeed, the common and the corrupt often overlap: both are products of informal and unsupervised networks. Again, the multitude is ambivalent and the state has no monopoly on corruption. The principle of commonality suggests that there can be no categorical distinction between multitude and Empire: if constituted power is merely a particular (de)formation of the constituent, the point is rather to distinguish between such formations, to find a protocol by which to tell bad from good rather than to affirm the multitude at every turn. When it comes to the multitude, Negri’s projective Marxism too quickly renounces critique.

Naomi Klein notes that in recent years there has been “something of a rediscovery” of the commons, with increasing interest in and attention to “the public sphere, the public good, the non-corporate.”96 In part, this is a backlash against neoliberalism and the perceived excesses of Reaganism and Thatcherism in the 1980s; in part, it stems from specifically environmental concerns about global warming and diminishing natural resources; and in part, Klein argues, it comes from anxiety and sympathy after the attacks of September 11, 2001, symbolized in renewed appreciation for public workers such as the firefighters and police officers who died in the collapse of New York’s twin towers. In academia, too, the topic has prompted fresh interest: introducing the *International Journal of the Commons* in 2007, its editors Frank van Laerhoven and Elinor Ostrom argue that “the study of the commons has experienced substantial growth and development over the past decades.”97 At first sight such attention is counterintuitive. More standard accounts,
both popular and scholarly, lament a precipitous decline in common feeling and common holdings. Capitalism’s first move is always enclosure, by means of so-called primitive accumulation, to turn the common into private property. And as Marxist geographer David Harvey points out, the pace of what he terms “accumulation by dispossession” has if anything intensified, not slackened: he sees it as the heart of the “new imperialism” that led the United States to war in Afghanistan and Iraq. Philosopher George Caffentzis likewise identifies “new enclosures” not only in the Middle East but also in official responses to Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans. Moreover, primitive accumulation proceeds apace in the biopolitical terrain with, for instance, virus and gene patents. Even Klein is more reserved in her latest book, which focuses rather more on catastrophe than on commonality.

Hardt and Negri acknowledge the wave of privatizations, even in areas (such as genetics) that had previously been off-limits to capital. But they argue that such attempts to expand property rights are a reaction to “the rising biopolitical productivity of the multitude.” It is only in response to transformations in the productive process, as innovation and production increasingly take place in common, that capital takes stock in new ways, to reimagine its mechanisms of measure and attribution. Economic processes, they argue, are ever more characterized by their commonality: “immaterial labor,” by which they mean “labor that creates immaterial products, such as knowledge, information, communication, a relationship, or an emotional response,” depends upon the common relations already established. In turn, it “creates common relationships and common social forms in a way more pronounced than ever before”; the “production of the common” is now “central to every form of social production . . . and it is, in fact, the primary characteristic of the new dominant forms of labor today.” The same is true in other spheres, such as politics, where the common has taken on “a new intensity” as “the common antagonism and common wealth of the exploited and expropriated are translated into common conduct, habits, and performativity.” Resonance is established as habits tend to converge and as we are encouraged to perform in similar ways albeit in diverse circumstances. Behind management and educational buzzwords such as “transferable skills” are communicative and “problem-solving” practices that are increasingly demanded over a wide range of distinct fields. What emerges is a
“spiral, expansive relationship” as the multitude produces the common and the common enables the multitude to produce further: “The common is produced and it is also productive,” which is the “key to understanding all social and economic activity.” Capital’s new enclosures are no more than a symptom of the immense productivity that commonality is now starting to unlock; “becoming common . . . is the biopolitical condition of the multitude.”

Contrasting the common with both the public and the private, Hardt and Negri argue for communism as “the institution of the common as a social institution.”

Hardt and Negri’s stress on immaterial labor, and so on the production of knowledge and communication, can seem to privilege certain economic sectors, and so certain classes of workers, over others. They acknowledge that industrial labor remains important, and even quantitatively dominant, not least in large parts of the third world. Nonetheless, they identify a passage “from the domination of industry to that of services and information, a process of economic postmodernization, or better, informatization.” Many have criticized their analysis of immaterial labor, and their apparent focus on so-called “knowledge work.” Labor sociologist Paul Thompson, for example, points out that even in countries such as the United States and Great Britain, knowledge workers account for less than 15 percent of the working population. He goes on to argue that the “move from immaterial labour to the multitude” is achieved only “by sleight of hand” and concludes by lambasting Hardt and Negri for what he calls their “infantile vanguardism.”

As Caffentzis notes, moreover, their privileging of “computer programmers and their ilk” is, rather ironically, both “Leninist to the core” and surprisingly in sync with the much more pessimistic prognostications of a fairly mainstream economist such as Jeremy Rifkin, who warns against a “workerless world.”

If the multitude is common, it must be so also in the sense that it is demotic and everyday; it is “common or garden.” Linebaugh and Rediker provide a better account of this than does Negri, who is indeed prone to idealizing knowledge work and the service sector. Linebaugh and Rediker’s portrayal of the “revolutionary Atlantic” of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries likewise stresses communication and commonality, in the name of what they call a “plebeian commonism” resolutely opposed to slavery. Yet the people who gave sermons or smuggled pamphlets, who spread rumors or sang
songs of rebellion, and who generally fed the fires of resistance across the Atlantic world, were not the knowledge workers of their time but the lay preachers and stewards, the “sailors, pilots, felons, lovers, translators, musicians, mobile workers of all kinds [who] made new and unexpected connections, which variously appeared to be accidental, contingent, transient, even miraculous.” This was the “motley crew,” itself made up of “various crews and gangs that possessed their own motility and were often independent of leadership from above,” that formed the “urban mob and the revolutionary crowd.” This is the multitude as a many-headed hydra, a disparate and mobile collection of ordinary men and women who struggle in common over common grievances and common desires. There is nothing exceptional about the common; it is not some prelapsarian paradise or rare remnant of a long-lost fullness. It is merely a matter of habit: “Habit is the common in practice,” as Hardt and Negri argue; “habits are living practice, the site of creation and innovation.” There is also nothing, in this sense, special about the multitude, or about constituent power. Constituent power is not confined merely to the exceptional moments of rupture between constitutions; or rather, we are forever in-between, forever in a moment of exception or interregnum. The multitude is everywhere and anywhere, spilling out wherever and whenever you look around. The multitude is ordinary.

The common is “animated by love,” Negri claims: “Love is the constitutive praxis of the common”; it is the “desire of the common.” Love, defined by Spinoza as “joy, accompanied by the idea of an external cause,” provides the impetus for maximizing good encounters. To see constituent power in these terms may seem odd, as Hardt acknowledges, but he has said that he and Negri “would like to make love a properly political concept.” The “revolutionary time” of constituent power is, he argues, “the time of love.” Neither sentimental nor nostalgic, the love that Hardt and Negri celebrate is promiscuous and polyvalent; it is “the ultimate sign of exposure” to the other, to an unpredictable and perhaps hostile otherness. Love is the desire to encounter other bodies, to enfold them and create new bodies with them, to constitute the multitude. It is “the ethical cement of collective life.” Love is what holds connections together; it is what transforms the habitual recognition of commonality into an active project of resistance and constitution. Love is, Negri argues, “the ontological power that
constructs being.” Love, he seems to be saying, makes the world go round.

Money also makes the world go round. Indeed, there can be little to choose between love and money, as George Orwell’s parody of 1 Corinthians 13 reminds us: “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not money, I am become as a sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.” Money, too, is polyvalent and promiscuous. Money, too, is ubiquitous and common; moreover, as the universal equivalent, it also produces commonality, connecting discrete singularities. It is dispersed and nonhierarchical: “Capital,” Hardt and Negri argue, following Deleuze and Guattari, “operates on the plane of immanence... without reliance on a transcendent center of power.” Capital, too, is expansive and boundary-breaking. Capital, too, rebels against “the transcendence of modern sovereignty.” In the epoch of Empire, sovereign transcendence is undercut and constituted power gives way, but not to constituent power or the multitude. In Hardt and Negri’s words, with the arrival of postmodernity “the absoluteness of imperial power is the complementary term to its complete immanence to the ontological machine of production and reproduction.” This is Empire: a postmodern, neoliberal, globalized form of power that succeeds the nation-state and its associated imperialism. Empire responds to the multitude, giving in to some of its pressure and so taking us a step further toward the Communist society that Hardt and Negri claim the multitude demands; hence “we must push through Empire to come out the other side... We have to accelerate the process.” But the congruence between Empire and multitude means that it is hard to tell the two apart. As Alberto Moreiras asks, “what would keep us from suspecting that there is finally no difference between Empire and counter-Empire, once immanentization has run full course?”

It is always hard to distinguish between constituent and constituted power. At the best of times, the distinction is only formal: constituted power is a form of constituent power; it is constituent power folded back upon itself. As political theorist Jodi Dean comments, Empire and Insurgencies alike propose an “impossibly clean division” between the two. Dean even argues that the division “makes no sense. Constituted power is of course constituent, productive, performative, generating new arrangements of bodies.” In Empire, however, the distinction becomes ever more moot, as
what was once more clearly constituted power (the formal republican institutions of the modern nation-state) is transformed in favor of the fluidity and expansiveness typical of the constituent; as even the illusion of hegemony is replaced by posthegemony. And if Empire comes to approximate the multitude, in turn the multitude has taken on new and more disturbing forms, to become more destructive than ever. A test case for the distinction between the two, and for Hardt and Negri’s constant affirmation of the multitude, came with the September 11 attacks on New York and Washington D.C. In the wake of the fall of the twin towers, there was no shortage of critics who declared that Empire could be read as apology, or even inspiration, for the attacks. Sociologist Michael Rustin, for example, argues that it is now “unfortunately clear” how one might read the book’s praise for the “new barbarians” who “destroy with an affirmative violence” by reducing what exists to rubble. Moreover, the impact of such criticisms was exacerbated by Negri’s rather ambivalent reaction to the events: he commented to Le Monde, for instance, “I would have been a lot more pleased if, on 11th September, the Pentagon had been razed and they had not missed the White House.”

For Hardt and Negri, it is corruption that distinguishes Empire from the multitude. Corruption is the “simple negation” of the multitude’s “power of generation.” Corruption has “become generalized”; corruption triumphs.” In Empire,” they claim, “corruption is everywhere. It is the cornerstone and keystone of domination.” Indeed, “corruption itself,” they argue, “is the substance and totality of Empire.” It is “not an aberration of imperial sovereignty but its very essence and modus operandi.” Corruption and command have, as Machiavelli predicted, become synonymous. The only way in which Empire holds itself at arm’s length from the pressing insistence of the multitude is through myriad corrupt practices, in which the legal framework of the constitutional republic breaks down and “the weak form of governance make[s] it open season for the profit hunters.” But this, too, is a sign of instability, of the fact that Empire is merely an “interregnum,” a “passage from one regime to another.” With the expansion of the common, the emergence of the multitude in full force and actuality, and so the collapse of the law of value, or indeed any consistent system of legality, there is no longer any reason why constituent
power should depend upon constituted power; it is only corruption that keeps the multitude from its goal.

Given the concept’s key role in their work, it is surprising how laxly Hardt and Negri define corruption. Sometimes they use the word in a fairly ordinary sense, for instance in a discussion of the Enron scandal or in Negri’s comments on contemporary Italy, whose politicians are “all unimaginably corrupt” and where “corruption has become a form of government.”\(^{125}\) *Empire*, however, stretches the term’s meaning to the limit. First, corruption is something like egoism: “individual choice that is opposed to and violates the fundamental community and solidarity defined by biopolitical production.” Second, it is the extraction of surplus value, “or really exploitation. This includes the fact that the values that derive from the collective cooperation of labor are expropriated.” Third, ideological distortion is also corruption: “the perversion of the senses of linguistic communication.” Fourth, corruption is political and military, when “the threat of terror becomes a weapon to resolve limited or regional conflicts.” Later, corruption and command are practically conflated: “Corruption is the pure exercise of command, without proportion or adequate reference to the world of life.”\(^{126}\) When the concept is first introduced, however, it is more ambivalent: corruption is “omni-crisis”; it is a symptom of Empire’s hybridity and shows “that imperial rule functions by breaking down. (Here the Latin etymology is precise: *com-rumpere*, to break.)” Corruption is both the sign of an “ontological vacuum” and a process, “a reverse process of generation and composition, a moment of metamorphosis” that therefore “potentially frees spaces for change.”\(^{127}\) With all these iterations, no wonder that “the forms in which corruption appears are so numerous that trying to list them is like pouring the sea into a teacup.”\(^{128}\) Like the sea, corruption becomes fluid and escapes definition; the concept of corruption, in Hardt and Negri, itself becomes corrupted. Moreover, if corruption is like the sea, boundless and unrepresentable in the many shifting singular forms it adopts, could it be just another name for the multitude?

Latin American *testimonio* thrives on commonality. It promises to give the reader contact, more or less directly, with ordinary men and women whose voices and lives are not usually recorded. *Testimonio* has little ambition toward literary distinction. It rejects the notion
that its protagonists are exceptional; they are “notable only by their shared ordinariness.” Moreover, its readers prize a simple style; it is testimonio’s unaffectedness, in part, that makes it so affecting. Its ordinariness enables what cultural critic John Beverley terms “new forms of subject identification of the personal-in-the-collective.”

Testimonio stages an encounter between the testimonial subject, the editor who frames his or her words, and the reader. Beverley notes that the “trick” of testimonio is “finding a commonality in singularity,” although he then goes on to argue that such commonality should be “the basis for a new hegemonic bloc.” But on the face of it, this is a strange demand indeed, as hegemony and testimonio are, in fact, more often at odds. Whereas commonality preserves singularity and difference, hegemonic projects stress equivalence in the name of state-centered unity. The entire discourse of solidarity and hegemony, didacticism and the national–popular, flattens out testimonial literature by transforming commonality into identity. This then is the tension at the heart of testimonio: between multiplicity and unity, between the multitudinous production of the common and its capture by the monopolistic state. Perhaps this is why testimonio so often provokes a scandal: it is the site of a double corruption, as would-be hegemonic actors try to force it into the mold of national liberation, while its expansive and promiscuous tendencies always betray such pretensions, showing their ultimate hollowness.

Within Central American testimonio, an example of the tension between commonality and solidarity, the multitude and a would-be hegemon, can be found in Nicaraguan Omar Cabezas’s *Fire from the Mountain*. This documents Cabezas’s life as a guerrilla with the Sandinistas, though it stops short of describing the movement’s triumph, when in 1979 the rebel army finally overthrew the Somoza dictatorship, or Cabezas’s subsequent career within the revolutionary government. Indeed, turning from triumphalism, the book is strangely suffused with dissatisfaction. Cabezas stresses the disorientation and anxiety of what seems to be an interminable campaign: his original ideological certitude deserts him as, out in the countryside, he feels hungry, ill, and constantly lost; his girlfriend leaves him, and he feels his “world coming apart”; he loses his sense of self altogether, as well as his “sense of space, [his] equilibrium, all sense of gravity and inertia”; he feels a temporal disjunction as “the organic unity of [his] past and present” is “shattered”; finally, he comes to believe that “we were living in a society of the absurd and our life was the life of the
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But the day after this ultimate expression of the struggle’s meaninglessness, Cabezas encounters an aged campesino, Don Leandro, who, it transpires, had fought with Augusto Sandino forty years earlier. Listening to the old man’s story, Cabezas is suddenly able to construct a narrative of Nicaragua’s long search for freedom. He can imagine himself heir to this national history, with Don Leandro as hitherto absent father: “I felt I really was his son, the son of Sandino, the son of history. I understood my own past; I knew where I stood; I had a country, a historical identity.” Anomie is replaced by filiation, entitlement, and empowerment. At precisely this moment, however, the book abruptly ends: Cabezas’s own narrative proves insufficient. The implication is that the narrator’s voice has to be supplemented by that of the peasant informant, who would finally give sense to the struggle of the intellectual turned guerrilla. Cabezas therefore invokes another genre that would, he imagines, fully represent “the essence of Nicaragua.” As Don Leandro speaks, Cabezas exclaims: “How I wished I had a tape recorder right then, because what he was telling me was so wonderful.” The novel is cast as a poor substitute for testimonio, whose “recording and/or transcription and editing of an oral account by an interlocutor” can alone properly flesh out a fantasy of personal and national fulfillment.

When Cabezas’s narrator transforms himself into a would-be editor of a testimonio, the accidental encounter with the single individual (Don Leandro) who stands in for an entire people comes retrospectively to justify the hierarchical structures (intellectual versus peasant, city versus countryside, present versus past) that this narrative trick allegedly displaces. Appealing to the authenticity of its contact with bodies described in affective terms (“We took hold of the campesinos’ hands, broad, powerful, roughened hands”; the campesino has “a whole series of characteristic emotions…a very special sort of affection”), testimonio constructs the fiction of an organic link between historical tradition and political project, between everyday culture and nation-state. Though testimonio is presented as the cri de coeur of the oppressed, Cabezas shows how it becomes the means by which a committed intelligentsia seeks to resolve its own sense of isolation and affliction. Testimonio consolidates a revolutionary movement’s claim to legitimacy by appealing to the mediation of subaltern interlocution. It reinvents Latin American populism, constructing a people, and so also the effect of a state, not through mass mobilizations, but through dialogues with exemplary individual interlocutors; the tape recorder
replaces the balcony as the instrument by which transcendence is asserted. For the Salvadoran case, Roque Dalton’s Miguel Mármol corresponds most closely to Cabezas’s ideal type: leftist poet Dalton met the former Communist leader Mármol at a café in Czechoslovakia, and in the conversations that followed, written up as testimonio, he establishes a historical narrative linking Mármol’s attempted Communist rebellion of the 1930s with the organizing that would later become the FMLN. Or consider the subtitle of Alegría’s They Won’t Take Me Alive: “Salvadorean Women in Struggle for Liberation” suggests that the book’s subject, Comandante Eugenia, is an exemplary figure who can stand in for an entire national type. No wonder that Beverley links testimonio so closely to hegemony: the genre too often rehearses the articulatory strategies characteristic of classical populism but now by means of a narrative strategy founded on the chance encounter. Narrating the encounter is testimonio’s key trope. Venezuelan anthropologist Elisabeth Burgos-Debray, for instance, describes in detail her first meeting with Rigoberta Menchú: “I remember it being a particularly cold night. . . . The first thing that struck me about her was her open, almost childlike smile.” Even what is arguably the very first Latin American testimonio, Argentine journalist Rodolfo Walsh’s Operación masacre, opens with an extended account of a chance meeting in a café. Accidental contact paves the way for the invention of a people, and testimonio becomes univalent, flattened, fixated on the fantasy of a revolutionary state. Committed intellectuals corrupt the genre’s potential for difference and diversity, by single-mindedly channeling subaltern affect into projects for national unity. And they present this process as some kind of accident.

Still, however many hegemonic projects seek to capture testimonio and to make it a vehicle by which to convert multitude into people, testimonio itself always corrupts these efforts. The scandal over the most famous instance of the genre, I, Rigoberta Menchú, was not ultimately about the book’s referentiality: whatever her story’s inaccuracies, anthropologist David Stoll concedes that Menchú was “a legitimate Maya voice” and that her story was at least “poetically true”; but he criticizes the way in which she was presented as “a representative of the revolutionary movement,” and the melodramatic move by which the book “turned a nightmarish experience into a morality play.” At issue in Stoll’s account is how a story about a range of affective experiences common to “all poor Guatemalans” was hijacked by movements seeking hegemony, whether that be the guerrilla URNG
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in Guatemala, or leftist academics fighting culture wars in the United States. Stoll seeks to reinsert difference into the narrative, emphasizing for instance land conflicts between rural indigenous people as well as what he calls “the plasticity of stories about the Menchús.” It is this fluidity that allows both Rigoberta and her father, Vicente, to become mythic figures who are to “stand above internecine feuds”; but by the same token, this is what undermines and corrupts such hegemonic projects. Testimonio’s polyvalence is both the condition for attempts at hegemonic articulation and also what finally makes them unsustainable. Here, as elsewhere, something always escapes, not least the many secrets that Menchú herself continually proffers and withdraws, to construct what critic Doris Sommer terms a “flexible and fluid subject” that teaches us “the kind of love that takes care not to simply appropriate its object.”

The testimonial encounter has little to do with representation; it is a singular opening to the common. Testimonio does anything but lead to the national-popular; it touches directly on the global and its real impact has always been outside any national or even Latin American context. Testimonio was read more by North American undergraduates than by Central American campesinos. However much it was celebrated for fomenting national–popular rebellion within Latin America, in fact the genre was above all a point of contact for the construction of a transnational common. Understanding this opens up new modes of reading testimonio no longer within the straightjacket of the desire for organic tradition. Rather than reading testimonio as the authentic voice of a particular Latin American people, it is better to see how it connects with a much more disparate global network, with cultural effects that cannot so easily be mapped on to any individual state formation. In this sense, the genre actively resists the reductionism that hegemonic projects promote: it tends to proliferation rather than unity, as is suggested by the original Spanish title of the Salvadoran testimonio Rebel Radio, which translates as “The Thousand and One Stories of Radio Venceremos.” Rebel Radio’s editor writes that “these are chronicles of the thousand and one adventures lived by the compas [comrades] who made this radio station possible. Stories that aren’t intended to prove anything.” Like a radio transmission, testimonio propagates via waves that cross national borders with ease, resonating or meeting interference depending on the terrain or the other waves that cross its path. A territorializing desire for lineage such as Cabezas’s gives way to the
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self-consciously globalizing use of technology by a figure such as the Zapatistas’ Subcomandante Marcos, who welcomes identity loss and polyvalent flexibility. Asked about rumors of his homosexuality, Marcos replied that he was “gay in San Francisco,” following up with the declaration that he was also “a black person in South Africa” as well as “an indigenous person on the streets of San Cristóbal…an artist without a gallery or portfolio, a housewife in whatever neighbourhood in whatever city in whatever Mexico on a Saturday night…In short, Marcos is a whatever human being in this world.” The epitome of the “whatever,” everyday and indefinite, testimonio is singular (a myriad singularities) and universal at the same time. The genre can emerge from the shadow of hegemony, to become a vehicle for the multitude’s pursuit of good encounters.

Hardt and Negri exclaim “Long live movement! Long live carnival! Long live the common!” But there is a fine line between the common and the corrupt, and sometimes little to choose between the two. Both are complex networks that depend upon connections and contacts rather than contracts regulated by a higher power. Both are subterranean and immanent, resisting representation until their public exposure in either insurgency or scandal. Corruption sidesteps regulations and substitutes informal habitual arrangements for formal hierarchies and principles; it undermines the constitution and prompts other modes of self-organization. Of course, there are many different forms of corruption, but then the multitude also takes on various forms, not all of which can or should be uniformly affirmed. As the multitude expands or comes under particular pressure, it can reach critical points of instability that mark phase transitions (as when a liquid becomes a gas, water becomes steam) in which it becomes suddenly destructive or self-destructive. A line of flight can, as Deleuze and Guattari observe, take on “an odor of death and immolation, a state of war from which one returns broken.”

Or, to use another image, it may resonate with such intensity that it tears itself apart, like a suspension bridge swaying in the wind at a pitch that makes the entire structure oscillate with increasing amplitude until it collapses into the waters below. Negri suggests that the multitude can develop continuously until it achieves the absolute democracy of a Communist utopia. But we may question the possibility, and even the desirability, of that end.
Continuous

The multitude persists, continually extending its sphere of influence and contact as it opens up to the common. Expansive, tactile, and polyvalent, it provokes discontinuous responses and recompositions from constituted power. The multitude, in short, is active while the state is reactive. This insight is already implicit in the Italian workerist and autonomist theoretical traditions in which Negri won his spurs during the 1960s and 1970s. Theorists such as Mario Tronti argued that the working class was dominant within capitalism: labor struggles impel capitalist development and immediately impact the political order. In reply, capital and the state force class recomposition upon their revolutionary antagonist. But each struggle lost is also a struggle won, as a new and more expansive subject is forged in the fire of combat. The skilled worker, labor’s aristocracy, had by the late 1960s given way to the mass
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worker with Fordism and Taylorism. In the 1970s, autonomists claimed to see the emergence of a new social subject, the socialized worker. But despite Negri’s high hopes, it too was beaten back, as neoliberal globalization instituted a dramatic counterrevolution in the 1980s and 1990s, and the welfare state ceded to the warfare state. A parade of state formations reshapes space and time to ward off or contain the multitude. Yet Negri argues that we have reached a new stage: proletarian insurgency continues, and its common name is now the multitude. The multitude will bring history to a close; Negri’s fundamentalism envisages the Kingdom of God here on earth. For Negri, this leap of faith anchors his entire political project. But we might want to disarticulate this project from its associated critique, or at least inhabit the space in-between.

Constituent power is continuous and everyday. Appearances, however, are deceptive: in appearance, constituent power emerges only in moments of crisis, in the transition from one political order to another, soon thereafter to disappear. As Negri notes, “once the exceptional moment of innovation is over, constituent power seems to exhaust its effects.” The normative regulations of constituted power are more familiar to us than the uproarious intensity associated with constitutional assemblies, when constituent power is glimpsed in full force as it intervenes decisively on the political stage. But for Negri, this “appearance of exhaustion” is simply “mystification”; in fact, “the only limits on constituent power are the limits of the world of life.”

Constituent power “persists”: once a constitution is declared, it goes underground; unseen, it continues to expand until it erupts once more to interrupt constituted power, forcing drastic changes in social relations. Capital responds with a series of class recompositions that it presents as natural; the state reacts with periodic refoundations that it presents as simple renegotiations of some original social pact. At each stage, the multitude is beaten back, temporarily defeated, “absorbed into the mechanism of representation” and so misrecognized as class, people, mass, or some other docile political subject. But even such misrecognitions, Negri claims, signal an “ontological accumulation.” Being itself is transformed through the “continuous and unrestrainable practice” that is the multitude’s everyday, permanent revolution. A focus on constituent power, then, rather than on the different forms taken by constituted power, opens up “a new substratum” of history, “an
ontological level on which productive humanity anticipate[s] the concrete becoming, forcing it or being blocked by it.”

In the Italian workerist and autonomist traditions, with which Negri was associated in the 1960s and 1970s, this tension between continuity and discontinuity was theorized in terms of class recomposition, which analyst Steve Wright calls workerism’s “most novel and important” contribution to political theory and practice. Indeed, Wright notes that it came to “assume the role played within Italian Communist thought by hegemony.” Workerism’s insight is that the working class is active while capital is reactive: capitalist transformation is always a reaction to working-class demands or subversion. In workerist pioneer Mario Tronti’s words, “We have worked with a concept that puts capitalist development first, and workers second. This is a mistake. And now we have to put the problem on its head...and start again from the beginning.” The “true secret” of left-wing strategy is that workers have “the political ability to force capital into reformism, and then to blatantly make use of that reformism for the working class revolution.” In other words, capital retrofits and improves the production process only after labor strategies have made the existing regime untenable. In response, for instance, to demands for a shorter working day, which generate a political reaction in the form of factory legislation, capital introduces efficiencies by means of mechanization, so in fact increasing the rate of exploitation. Later, innovations such as Taylorism will also be capital’s forced response to worker militancy. Capital answers working-class demands with revolutionary change, but in a way that consolidates and broadens its own command. Yet this is a Pyrrhic victory for capital, in that as a result the sphere of struggle expands, communication and commonality become more important, and so the working class becomes stronger and more united. Class struggle is followed by class recomposition, which in turn is the basis for further struggle. The perhaps surprising conclusion is that “the capitalist class, from its birth, is in fact subordinate to the working class.” This realization, moreover, necessitates a new approach to history, a “working class history of capitalist society.”

Workerism stresses the centrality of working-class subjectivity. But it also points out how that subjectivity continually mutates, and its needs and demands change. As the cycle of struggle and recomposition develops, the insurgent subject expands and its demands
become increasingly political. Workerists were particularly interested in the shift from the “skilled” to the “mass” worker. Skilled (or professional) workers had been the backbone of the organized labor movement and had led nineteenth- and early twentieth-century labor struggles. In response, capital introduced the assembly line, Fordism, and Taylorism, which meant a thorough deskilling of the workforce as well as improved productivity and efficiency. But this engendered a new and more powerful threat in the resulting huge factories such as FIAT’s Mirafiori plant: the mass worker, an unpredictable and apparently disorganized subject that expressed itself not so much through unionism as through the everyday resistance of absenteeism, go-slows, and wildcat strikes. The mass worker comprised the “common” workers who became, as sociologist Emilio Reyneri puts it, “direct protagonists of struggle” in the unrest that shook Italian society in the late 1960s.

But no sooner had the mass worker emerged (in Italy’s relatively late industrialization of the 1950s and 1960s), than it too was defeated as the efflorescence of the 1960s turned into the mass unemployment, austerity, repression, and “years of lead” of the 1970s. Autonomism, however, with Negri as its leading theorist, picked up where workerism had left off and identified a still more expansive social subject forged in this apparent defeat: the “socialized” worker. With the factory system disassembled in response to the mass worker’s struggles, work was “diffused throughout the entire society” and the laboring subject became likewise immediately social. The struggles of the 1970s therefore brought together the unemployed, students, housewives, and others who had previously been at the margins of class antagonism: the socialized worker broke out of the factory walls to become “the producer of the social cooperation necessary for work” and even, Negri argued, “a kind of actualization of communism, its developed condition.”

The socialized worker did not, however, lead to communism. In fact, as Virno notes, the 1970s saw the start of a “counterrevolution” that continued on to the mid-1990s. Virno defines counterrevolution as “an impetuous innovation of modes of production, forms of life, and social relations that, however, consolidate and set again in motion capitalist command.” In short, it is another case of reactive development and class recomposition. The “movement of ’77,” the broad front of social movements that Negri identified with the “socialized worker,” refused factory discipline and the idea
of a job for life, demanding instead flexibility and the freedom to drop out or change jobs at will; but capital responded with layoffs and structural unemployment that led to “the rapid alternation of superexploitation and inactivity.” Where protesters valued “self-sufficiency . . . individual autonomy and experimentation,” this was “put to work” with the 1980s rise of microbusinesses and diffuse entrepreneurialism that coincided with “extremely high levels of self-exploitation.” So post-Fordism and neoliberalism were also a response to insurgent subjectivity. We might add that globalization, too, can be seen as a reaction to similar demands for transnational mobility and to an exodus not only from the factory but also from the nation-state. Moreover, as for politics, Virno notes that the social movements of the 1970s “removed themselves from the logic of political representation” and positioned themselves at best “at the edges of the political parties, considering them nothing more than the ventriloquists of cheap identities”; in response, however, those parties initiated “a tendential restriction of political participation,” finding in “the crisis of representation . . . the legitimation of an authoritarian reorganization of the state.” Hence the “new Right” (Virno specifically refers to Silvio Berlusconi’s Forza Italia, but we have seen similar developments elsewhere, and not merely in parties self-identified as right-wing) “recognizes, and temporarily makes its own, elements that would ultimately be worthy of our highest hopes: anti-Statism, collective practices that elude political representation, and the power of mass intellectual labor.” These ideals are distorted and reduced to an “evil caricature,” as constituted power folds back on the constituent, but they define the next stage of struggle. In Virno’s words, “That act is over — let the next begin!”

The various incarnations of what workerists termed working-class subjectivity, but which with the socialized worker and the movement of ’77 increasingly spilled out of traditional class categories, all had direct social and political effects. For Tronti, the state has to intervene in industrial and social disputes because labor is dominant within the process of production itself: out of “economic necessity,” capitalists resort to “force to make the working class abandon its proper social role as the dominant class . . . . In order to exist, the class of capitalists needs the mediation of a formal political level.” As Negri put it in the late 1960s, “the only
way to understand our present state-form is to highlight the dramatic impact of the working class on the structures of capitalism.” Negri argued that “the state-form has to register the impact of the working class on society” and showed how proletarian militancy led first to the rise of the “planning-based state” or “planner-state” of Keynesianism and the New Deal, and then to its crisis in the 1960s as “the state more openly asserts its monstrous role as the technical organ of domination.” In the 1970s, the planner-state gives way to the “crisis-state,” the welfare state to the “warfare state.” But the fact that the state is in crisis does not make it any the less functional: it means rather “a definitive point of rupture with any possible social contract for planned development”; any pretense to hegemony is replaced by simple command “ever more emptied of any rationale other than the reproduction of its own effectiveness.”

The history of the state is punctuated by spectacular ruptures, revolutions, and coups that force dramatic political reorganization. Every interruption prompts a fresh attempt to set limits to constituent power, to impose finality, and (in philosopher Peter Hallward’s metaphor) to “dam the flood.” Each incarnation of state power has its topography: the state is a spatial arrangement, rather than a temporal one, though it also overcodes time by trying to give it measure. Twentieth-century technologies of containment range from the cinematic scenography of populism to the televisural ubiquity of neoliberalism. At no point, however, is hegemony at issue: constituted power folds in on constituent power to (re)compose its characteristic structures of affect and habit; it establishes a holding pattern, an apparatus of capture, to produce the effect of transcendence and sovereignty. Negri points out that the concept of hegemony lacks the “materialist consistency” required to understand such efforts to reshape being itself. The concept grants too much dynamism and authority to the “petrified and illusory command” wielded by the state form. And hegemony passes over the mobility and flexibility of the multiple resistances that “escape the increasingly confining enclosures of misery and Power.” Above all, hegemony simply takes the state for granted, assuming that counterpower should seek to take over the state, to establish its own hegemony. By contrast, Negri argues for what he terms a “constituent Republic,” that is, “a Republic that comes before the State, that comes outside of the State.”
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would be a social form in which “the constituent process never closes, . . . the revolution does not come to an end.” The dams would be definitively breached; continuity would be all.

The multitude is both an extension of the lineage outlined by workerism and autonomism, and its precondition. It is an extension in that it refines and further develops the concept of the socialized worker. The multitude is the socialized worker now that the terrain of struggle has become global and biopolitical. It is the product of capital’s response to the socialized worker, a subject born (or still being born) out of neoliberalism and globalization. The baton of revolutionary subjectivity passes from the socialized worker to the multitude, which will only be fully incarnated once capitalism has been finally defeated. On the other hand, the multitude is the precondition of the entire sequence from skilled worker to mass and socialized worker inasmuch as it incarnates a virtual potential that is gradually actualized in history. The multitude is continuous variation: its constituent power is what is common to all the various struggles for liberation from union militancy to student unrest, as well as, for instance, colonial and postcolonial subaltern insurgency. Hence the multitude is past, present, and future at the same time. The multitude drives temporality, and constitutes time itself, a “liberated time” that is beyond all measure; “the love of time,” Negri argues, “is the soul of constituent power because this makes of the world of life a dynamic essence.” But the multitude will bring time to an end, as it prefigures the end of history, the imminence of a Communist utopia. Hardt and Negri insist that the choice is between life and death, between “a present that is already dead and a future that is already living.” Theirs is a quasi-religious call to the promised land; but what if that future brought its own form of death?

At first sight, recent Chilean history is pitted with discontinuities. The country seems to have lurched from center to left to right and back to center and then left again over the course of its successive regimes since the mid-1960s: Eduardo Frei Montalva’s progressive Christian Democracy (1964 to 1970); Salvador Allende’s socialist Unidad Popular (1970 to 1973); Augusto Pinochet’s dictatorship (1973 to 1990), and the Concertación (1990 to 2010). Even the Concertación presidencies have shown marked differences, from Patricio Aylwin
and Eduardo Frei Ruiz-Tagle’s Christian Democracy to the Socialists Ricardo Lagos and Michelle Bachelet. Indeed Bachelet’s 2006 victory is often counted among Latin America’s left turns, although it involved a handover between two presidents belonging to the same party in the same coalition that has been in power for over a quarter of a century. The fact that the electorate voted for a woman (a single mother, what is more) once tortured by the dictatorship was taken to be yet another shift in the country’s political sensibilities. Political scientist Lois Hecht Oppenheim highlights Chile’s “turbulent history as a social laboratory” and “the dramatic changes that have taken place over the past forty years”; she argues for “Chile’s exceptionalism,” in light of “the fact that it has served as the site for quite diverse political experiments over the course of its history.” That the country has nonetheless also won a reputation for stability, both economic and political, is due to the “compulsion to forget” that sociologist Tomás Moulián identifies at the heart of its post-Pinochet transition to democracy. But even this forced oblivion itself indicates another refoundation (the transition) that, as with any such new beginning, claims to be a self-realization for which all traces of the past can be erased. The “whitewash” that establishes the idea that Chile has had a “perfect transition” is engineered by a series of social transformations attendant on “a change in the state form.” Chile has moved, Moulián argues, from a welfare state to a “mercantile state,” from citizen rights to market liberty. But the new regime passes itself off as inevitable, as the product of a prior agreement that separates the natural from the social: “Society is thought to have taken on its definitive stage or state, lacking all historicity, the product of a type of ‘atavistic pact.’” For the Chilean transition and its interminable interregnum, actuality is all; its consensus is “the higher stage of forgetfulness.”

Dramatic changes in the Chilean state form conceal deeper historical continuities. Moulián, for instance, notes that “this new type of State, which we will call neoliberal, can take either democratic or authoritarian forms.” So there is a fundamental unity of purpose shared by the dictatorship and the democratic transition that followed it: the “primordial objective” of the contemporary state is “to ensure that the economic and social order created by authoritarianism can be reproduced.” The dictatorship succeeded in subordinating politics to economics, and in its constitutional phase, after promulgating a new constitution in 1980, legitimated these changes and finally managed “to absorb the opposition within the game of alternatives.
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defined by the regime itself.” For Moulián, the dictatorship effected a shift in the mode in which power was exercised, from a dependence on ideology to a postideological integration of atomized individuals into the marketplace. But in sum, in the transition from dictatorship to democracy, “those who wielded power changed, but society did not. This has accomplished the central principle of so-called gatopardismo: everything has to change, so that everything can stay the same.” This is the “counterrevolution” that aims to negate the legacy of the Unidad Popular. Or in philosopher Willy Thayer’s words, “It is not the passage from Dictatorship to democracy to which we should give the name ‘transition’; rather, the transition was the transformation effected by the Dictatorship itself, in displacing the State as national history’s subject and center, in favor of the ex-centric post-state market.” The most profound effect of the transition, for Thayer, is a “change in the mode of production of representation.” Even the word “transition” is misleading, in that it suggests “movement and transformation” when reality is “stationary and intransitive.” Transition is the “perfect host” in that anything and everything is welcome; but in transition, “nothing new happens.” It is “the very definition of boredom.”

To extend Thayer’s metaphor: it throws a party to which everyone is welcome, but which no one would want to attend.

For both Moulián and Thayer, the only definitive break in recent Chilean history is the 1973 coup. For Moulián, the left is complicit in the historical amnesia that has erased this most violent of state refoundations; his Conversación interrumpida con Allende is intended to bridge that void. For Thayer, the left has yet to take stock of the magnitude of the caesura; by failing to see that the coup did not simply take place within history, that it affected history itself, even the most radical of its critics become structurally complicit as they reiterate, in their very criticism, “the Dictatorship’s foundational state of exception that suspends the Constitution and then refounds the Constitution.” So Thayer also wants to rescue something from the previous epoch: a “purely destructive critique, which neither conserved nor founded rights,” that he finds in “the popular practices of Salvador Allende’s Government” and its “ansemic performance, disjunctive, mute, unjudgemental.” This anasemic or antisemantic performance “was activated without concern for its success, as a revolutionary general strike.” However, Allende’s government “inscribed the destruction of representation within the enclosures of Republican representation.” In the end, the general strike failed to destroy the republic; the republic was undone,
rather, by the “sovereign Coup that was Globalization’s ‘Big Bang.’” Thayer emphasizes the destructive aspects of the revolutionary general strike which, following German philosopher Walter Benjamin’s reading of French anarcho-syndicalist Georges Sorel, he distinguishes from the “political general strike,” whose aim is to strengthen state power. But surely the general strike is also affirmative: it is an instance of what Benjamin terms messianic or “divine” violence, that is, “pure power over all life for the sake of the living.” The performance (or pure performativity) to which Thayer points is constituent power, and it precedes, traverses, and outlasts the rise and fall of Allende’s Unidad Popular.

Instead of ruptures and discontinuities in Chilean history, sociologists Javier Martínez and Alvaro Díaz argue in *Chile: The Great Transformation* that the continuities are more striking, over a period that reaches back to the mid-1960s. They go beyond “the strictly episodic aspects of the Chilean experience,” tracking long-term processes that explain Pinochet’s success and the transition to neoliberalism that he ushered in. For instance, land in Chile (as indeed in much of Latin America) was traditionally concentrated very unequally in the hands of a small class of rural landholders. From the late 1950s, some large estates, known as *latifundios*, began to be divided. But still by the early 1960s, many believed that “the responsibility for all national ills — real or imaginary — could be laid at the door of the *latifundio*.” Under Frei’s Social Democratic government, therefore, and even more rapidly under Allende’s Unidad Popular, vast swathes of Chile’s farmland were nationalized and redistributed: “Between 1964 and 1973, more than 5,000 holdings were expropriated, covering 10 million hectares, equivalent to 60 percent of the country’s arable land.” This tendency continued under Pinochet: “Despite expectations, the military coup did not bring about a return of the *latifundio*.” Instead, the dictatorship gave “a new twist to the process”: it made land a fungible commodity, enabling sales, rentals, auctions, and private corporations. Ten years of social democracy and socialism had already broken the back of the rural oligarchy; Pinochet’s government took the opportunity to accelerate the pace of change, but in the name of the market rather than the state. More generally, Martínez and Díaz stress that the three successive administrations “were all revolutionary governments”; Social Democracy paved the way for the Unidad Popular, which in turn enabled the dictatorship to complete the tasks it left pending, always with a “twist.”
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“The neoliberal project’s radicalism,” Martínez and Díaz argue, “was possible because the attempts that had preceded it were also radical. Given the dimension of the changes that took place, it would seem appropriate to talk of a revolutionary epoch.” Or rather, the Pinochet counterrevolution continued (and even accelerated) revolutionary processes that were already in train, but it took them in a new direction. Under Frei and Allende, Chile underwent an “advanced socialization” in which new social movements “questioned the social order and modified the logic of programs for social change” while “the ruling classes saw their power gravely weakened.” Constituent power transformed the social order, forcing creative adjustment from the state.

The multitude is the key to Chile’s underlying continuities. Social democracy and the Unidad Popular, too, were responses to its constituent power. Martínez and Díaz’s narrative of social change obscures this fact because of their narrow focus on government. Regarding land reform, for instance, they pass over in silence the numerous land seizures or tomas de terreno through which peasants and urban migrants took matters into their own hands. Cathy Schneider points to the massive migration to Santiago over the 1950s and the consequent increasing numbers of homeless people in the capital city: “Before the end of the decade,” she reports, “they grew to about 150,000 people, or 8 percent of the population.” A series of seizures followed, notably the 1957 occupation of the land that would become the neighborhood of La Victoria: for two months, police besieged 3,000 illegal settlers, until the government gave in and awarded the squatters housing rights. This, however, was only the beginning, as “in the next few decades illegal land seizures would account for over 40 percent of Santiago’s growth.” In the countryside, meanwhile, political scientist Patricio Silva notes that the late 1960s saw an “explosive expansion of rural unionism... accompanied by a dramatic increase in the number of strikes and tomas (land seizures).” In 1964, only 1,800 peasants belonged to a union; in 1967, there were 54,418; and three years later, by the end of the Frei administration, the number had risen to 140,293, or “around a third of all Chilean agrarian workers.” Increased unionization resulted in part from government attempts to incorporate the peasantry with a 1967 “Law on Agrarian Unionization,” but it “produced a deep split between the ruling Christian Democrats and the right-wing parties,
making possible the victory of the Unidad Popular in the 1970 presidential elections.” Under Allende, peasant radicalization increased still further, union membership doubled yet again, and there was an “enormous increase in the number of strikes and land seizures.” The Unidad Popular was torn between its radical or messianic elements, which incarnated what Thayer terms the revolutionary general strike, and its lawmaking, constitutional tendencies. The so-called government of “popular unity” could not contain the multitude with and against which it moved; it was ultimately neither popular nor unified. In Moulián’s words, it was wracked by an internal conflict between revolution and counterrevolution, “licentiousness ‘festive’ and conspiratorial.” The dictatorship stepped in to quell the disorder and to install a new constitution; but it only continued the revolutionary process, albeit in cruel and bloody caricature. And no sooner had the constitution been declared, than the social movements of the 1980s erupted. These movements were demobilized and absorbed into the renewed pact forged by the postdictatorial Concertación. But as Bachelet discovered within weeks of assuming office in 2006, when students took to the streets to demand educational reform and free public transportation, and corruption scandals hit the heart of her administration, the multitude continues.

With the declaration that communism is imminent, analysis shades into project. Negri has repeatedly announced that we are on the verge of revolution, or even that the revolution has already taken place. In the 1970s, the socialized worker in post-Fordist Italy had achieved “a kind of actualization of communism.” In the 1980s, Negri heralded Parisian student protests as incarnating the “actuality of communism” and “the unfurled consciousness of the socialized worker.” In the 1990s, with Labor of Dionysus, Negri and Hardt declared that the “prerequisites of communism” were now present, part of an “irreversible” tendency. Indeed they argued that “we are living a revolution that is already developed and only a death threat stops it from being declared.” In their subsequent work, Hardt and Negri are more circumspect: Multitude cautions that “a philosophical book like this . . . is not the place for us to evaluate whether the time of revolutionary political decision is imminent. . . . There is no need for eschatology or utopianism here.” Yet the promise of revolution suffuses both Empire and Multitude. Critic Marcia Landy
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says of Negri’s earlier writings that “the conditions of possibility for revolution are uppermost.”184 This has not changed in the intervening years. Having identified the multitude as the subject of constituent power, Negri unabashedly celebrates and affirms its revolutionary potential. In his own terms, he is a militant, “posing against the misery of power the joy of being” in the name of “a revolution that no power will control.”185 Neither cultural studies nor civil society theory have any such pretensions to revolution. They cannot imagine life outside the contemporary social order (for both, exteriority is mute subalternity), still less that the barrier between inside and outside could break down, and with it the fiction of a social pact that passes through a transcendent center. Cultural studies merely calls for more hegemony: counterhegemony, working-class hegemony, national–popular hegemony. Hegemony upon hegemony! What kind of slogan is that? And civil society theory’s demands for good management and transparency are naïve at best, antipolitical technocracy at worst. Negri’s posthegemonic proclamation of multitudinous liberation is perhaps the sole remaining revolutionary project with any credence. And it depends fully on credence, on faith.

The promise of communism is necessary for Negri’s analysis: it motivates the call to pass through Empire to the other side. Without it, there would be no reason to go further into Empire, a form of rule more vicious and arbitrary (corrupt, Negri and Hardt tell us) than any before. If Empire has in fact no other side, then at best we can aim for reactive resistance, perhaps the establishment of what anarchist theorist Hakim Bey terms “temporary autonomous zones,” an exodus with no promised land in sight.186 At worst, we end up with mere redescription: new words (affect, habit, multitude) for old problems, but no solutions; in the case of theorist Manuel De Landa’s “new philosophy of society,” a similar redescription in terms of assemblages, intensities, and flows ends up legitimating the complexity of contemporary capitalism, encouraging a “positive, even joyful conception of reality.”187 For Hardt and Negri, by contrast, “joy” comes from “being communist” and from the belief that “Empire creates a greater potential for revolution” than did previous regimes of power, because it “presents us... [with] a multitude that is directly opposed to Empire, with no mediation between them.”188 Faced with this alternative, between the millenarianism of Negri’s multitudine fidelium and a cynicism that identifies what is with what ought to be, I prefer to hesitate, to remain agnostic,
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to affiliate myself however uneasily with Latin Americanist critic Gareth Williams’s “perhaps.” The multitude is already here and now; perhaps it is also to come. In the meantime (and these are indeed mean times), in a potentially interminable in-between, we can continue to seek good encounters, habits, and affects. In the meantime, we must strive to persist, guided by a conatus forever impatient with the current order.

Negri posits the multitude as a modern god. “The poor,” he and Hardt claim, “is god on earth.” In the best tradition of fundamentalism, he calls for the kingdom of God on earth to start here and now. Spinoza, too, cannot help but be a fundamentalist: what made Spinoza the great atheist was also what made him the great (if heretic) theist. For Spinoza, eliminating transcendence allows us to become immediately one with God: Deus sive Natura. He envisages a fully achieved immanence as the privilege of universal divinity, perfect and eternal. Sub specie aeternitatis, that is, from the perspective of eternity, every difference is resolved, and harmony and knowledge are all. The ultimate aim of Spinoza’s ethics is to achieve blessedness, what he terms the third kind of knowledge, which follows and completes the knowledge revealed through signs or representation and the knowledge revealed in the joyfulness of immanent commonality. Blessedness is communion with God in eternity; it is the end of history. “The wise man,” Spinoza declares at the conclusion to the Ethics, “is hardly troubled in spirit, but being, by a certain eternal necessity, conscious of himself, and of God, and of things, he never ceases to be, but always possesses true peace of mind.” This is what Negri terms “the revolution of the eternal.” But absolute immanence would not only end history; it would also end the play of encounter, the series of events that give rise to either pleasure or pain. All contingency and accident would be abolished in favor of absolute necessity, for Spinoza coterminous with absolute freedom. There would be no encounter because everything would be already in its place. What would endure would be pure intensity, outside of time or, better, of time (a time without measure) rather than in time. Should the multitude come into its own, unfettered by constituted power, and the state and transcendence disappear, there would be no objectivity, only the pure subjectivity of the divine presence and power. Heaven is a place where nothing ever happens. Future Perfect or perfectum est: It would be perfect, but it would be dead.
Notes to Chapter 4

130. Lane, *Bourdieu’s Politics*, 118.
137. For the “fusion of ‘art’ with ‘life,’” see Neustadt, *CADA día*, 35.
144. Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 252.
149. Ibid., 102, 103.

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6. Ibid., 76, 80, 66, 80.
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12. Minta, Aguirre, 155.
13. Quoted in Minta, Aguirre, 181.
15. Negri and Cocco, GlobAL, 52, 106.
16. Ibid., 226, 227.
27. Negri, Insurgencies, 11.
33. Ibid., 54, 55. The original French phrase here translated as “complete transfer” is “aliénation totale.”
34. Rawls, A Theory of Justice, 11.
37. Ibid., 187.
41. Spinoza, A Theologico-Political Treatise and A Political Treatise, 215, 214.
42. Ibid., 347.
44. Hardt and Negri, Empire, 102.
46. Spinoza, A Theologico-Political Treatise and a Political Treatise, 204.
47. “La multitud es el pueblo,” Mundo Argentino, October 25, 1950, 27.
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48. Ibid.

49. Mundo Argentino, October 27, 1948.

50. I thank Gabriela Nouzeilles for her comments on the imagery in this film.

51. Eloy Martínez, Santa Evita, 85 (translation modified), 87.

52. Ibid., 98.


56. Hardt and Negri, Multitude, 222.

57. Negri, Time for Revolution, 152.


59. Chen-Wishart, Contract Law, 88–89.


61. See Bourdieu, Outline of a Theory of Practice, 6.

62. Montag, Bodies, Masses, Power, 84–85.


64. Montag, Bodies, Masses, Power, 84.


67. Spinoza, Ethics, 41, 42.

68. Ibid., 138.


70. Spinoza, Ethics, 125.

71. Hardt and Negri, Multitude, 339.

72. Ibid., 340; Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus, 7.

73. Spinoza, Ethics, 160, 54–58.

74. Ibid., 156, translation modified. The original Latin is: “Hominibus apprime utile est, consuetudines iungere, seseque iis vinculis astringere, quibus aptius de se omnibus unum efficiant.”


76. Bennett, A Study of Spinoza’s “Ethics,” 245.

77. Negri, Time for Revolution, 50


80. Roncagliolo, La cuarta espada, 190, 22, 24.

81. Kirk, Grabado en piedra, 19, 10.

82. Ibid., 11.

83. Palmer, “The Revolutionary Terrorism of Peru’s Shining Path,” 278.
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86. Starn, “Missing the Revolution,” 73, 75, 84.
87. Díaz Martínez, Ayacucho, 199, 200.
88. Vich, El caníbal es el Otro, 13–14, 14, 35.
89. Portocarrero, Razones de sangre, 60, 61.
91. Kirk, Grabado en piedra, 14, 37.
92. Degregori, El surgimiento de Sendero Luminoso, 186.
94. Spinoza, Ethics, 137.
95. Linebaugh and Rediker, The Many-Headed Hydra, 40, 212.
100. Ibid., 108, 113, xv.
101. Ibid., 213, 212–13, 197, 114.
103. Hardt and Negri, Empire, 280.
104. Thompson, “Foundation and Empire,” 85, 90, 92.
109. Spinoza, Ethics, 139.
110. Hardt, with Smith and Minardi, “The Collaborator and the Multitude.”
112. Hardt and Negri, Empire, 78.
114. Orwell, Keep the Aspidistra Flying, 5.
115. Hardt and Negri, Empire, 326, 327.
116. Ibid., 41, 206.
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from Caroline Monnot and Nicolas Weill, “C’est la lutte des talibans du dollar contre les talibans du pétrole.”

125. Ibid., 178; Negri, *Negri on Negri*, 55, 56.
127. Ibid., 201, 202, 201.
128. Ibid., 390.
133. Ibid., 221, 218.
138. Ibid., 104, 105.
145. Ibid., 3, 334, 232.
150. Quoted in Wright, *Storming Heaven*, 120.
151. Negri, “From the Mass Worker to the Socialized Worker,” 77, 80, 81.
153. Ibid., 249, 250.
154. Ibid., 256, 259.