

CHAPTER 8

Notes toward a Rethinking of the Militant

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Over a decade ago, Alain Badiou spoke of a “widespread search” for a new figure of the militant to replace “the one established by Lenin and the Bolsheviks.”¹ Barring two notable exceptions—in Badiou’s own work and Hardt and Negri’s²—the search does not appear to have gone very far. It certainly does not bode well that, more than a decade on, Badiou still speaks of the need to “create new symbolic forms for our collective action”³ or a “paradigm”⁴ with which to replace the militant of state communism, the soldier, and war, as models for the project of emancipation. More often than not, the militant, with its Bolshevik associations, is treated today with a dose of suspicion. Given the last century’s dismal record of defeats, betrayals, and disasters—on the part of communist parties and the labor movement as well as of the alternative modes of politics that were meant to replace them—it is no surprise that the militant should be another one of its casualties. Maybe, as Badiou himself already recognized, the search is primarily in the oxymoronic form of denying the possibility of its object.⁵

Questions of organization have returned to the top of the agenda since the mass movements that the world saw in 2011: how to prevent that degree of mobilization from dissipating? How to channel that powerful, if diffuse, desire for radical change into a struggle capable of rendering it effective? In this context, even ideas that seemed largely discredited have been put back on the table. For instance, Jodi Dean has argued for the need of “something like a party” as “an explicit assertion of collectivity, a structure of accountability, an acknowledgment of differential capacities, and a vehicle for solidarity.”⁶ Slavoj Žižek has once more insisted

that “to impose a reorganization of social life . . . one needs a strong body able to reach quick decisions and to implement them with all necessary harshness.”⁷ Even while they diverge on key issues—Badiou’s own preference is for a “politics *without party* . . . organized through the intellectual discipline of political processes, and not according to a form correlated with that of the State”⁸—these attempts to rekindle thinking about organization and militancy display clear points of overlap. The qualities that they advocate, such as discipline and the capacity to decide and act in a unified way (and hence some form of structure and a degree of centralization), allow us to discern between the lines what they reject in present forms of activism. For example, Badiou chides activists and theoretical adversaries for their disregard for, even hostility toward, “organization, perseverance, unity and discipline,”⁹ while Dean speaks of the need to overcome a “mistrust of collectivity” and “anxiety around hierarchy, non-transparency, leadership, delegation, institutionalization, and centralization.”¹⁰

Evidently, even the neutral talk of a *new* figure of the militant, or of “a new figure of organization, and hence of politics,”¹¹ belies a negative evaluation of what exists now. But posing the problem in terms of a model or paradigm invites several questions. Firstly, it is clear that the wane of the Leninist figure has not entailed the disappearance of political activism altogether. For instance, only two years after Badiou declared the search open, a cycle of global struggles arose comparable in intensity to the one begun in 2011. If a model is just an abstraction that identifies what is common to different practices, how could one say that no model(s) existed in this period? Or was there one, except it is exactly what is denied in the call for a new one? Can the work of producing “a reformulated ideological proposition, a strong Idea, a crucial hypothesis” be done without regard to existing practices and the conditions that produce them?¹² Secondly, to prove the feasibility and desirability of an organizational model in theory does not prove that it is feasible and desirable in practice. People do not join a party because the idea makes sense, but because *the party* makes sense; the Bolsheviks were not copied because their model was good, but because it had worked (and they actively exported it). Is the problem then not better posed as one of transition—the practical work of selecting and cultivating, among existing practices, those elements that can improve and transform them? In this case, it is no longer a matter of an externally created model, but of progressively transforming what is according to an idea, itself in progress, of what is needed.¹³

It is this path that I intend to take here. It will take us from a reappraisal of the left-wing critique of vanguardism to an examination of its incorporation into a lineage of attempts to conceptualize a nonvanguardist politics that would remain radical or revolutionary. This will allow us

to better appreciate the thrust of criticisms such as those raised by Badiou, Žižek, and Dean, identifying the exact point in which those alternative conceptions of radical systemic change flirt with a covert teleology that overlooks the subjective, partisan dimension of politics. Having done this, we will be in a position to return to the questions of the militant and of organization through an examination of networked politics, today's dominant organizational mode: what *is*. It is then that the problem of what is needed—finding elements for a redefinition of the militant—can be posed anew, via a preliminary question: can there be a nonvanguardist practice of the vanguard?

I

The neglect and anxieties that Badiou and Dean criticize are, of course, more than a manifestation of the atomization characteristic of neoliberal subjectivity, and are historically grounded. But it is good to remember that the critique of vanguardism from the Left encompassed more than the thematic, which typifies the critique from the Right, of revolutions inevitably resulting in authoritarian states; it also referred both to the conciliationist turn of many (former) communist parties and trade unions in the West, and to the growing isolation and irrelevance of organizations of the Far Left. Attention to this difference should prevent us from conflating it with the ideological binary erected by the rightist critique—either free market and liberal democracy or totalitarian socialism. The question would then be: Even if we identify discipline, unity and organizational consistency as values to be re-injected into existing practice, how to do so without losing sight of the critique of authoritarianism and bureaucratization? What organizational forms and ethos need to be fostered so that a reformulation of the militant can be based on more than the hope that “this time it will be different?” Or is it just a matter of, in Lacanian fashion, accepting the inexistence of the big Other and hoping that we can “*fail better* than a ‘normal’ bourgeois state,”¹⁴ better than (formerly) really existing socialism?

What, then, is the vanguardist militant according to the leftist critique? It is a figure defined by separation. First and foremost, that between means and ends, a separation that encapsulates the performative contradiction in which this militant figure is caught: it fights separation—of producers from their products, from the social nature of their production and from nature; of the people from power; of the masses from their fate—through means that reinforce it rather than eliminate it. Of course, the activist or militant always exists on the basis of objective separations—if not necessarily only those that characterize existing society (differentials in access to education and resources, gender, division of labor etc.), at the very least the one that constitutes the activist as activist: between the politically

active and the nonactive or not-yet-active. In this sense, any militant is always in the paradoxical position of existing in order to abolish himself or herself: a mediator whose aim is to end mediation.¹⁵ According to the left-wing critique, the problem with the vanguardist model is that it tends toward the (self)perpetuation of militants in the condition of mediators—"bureaucrats of the revolution," "functionaries of Truth,"¹⁶ and "specialists of power"¹⁷—and that this, in turn, results from the circular, narcissistic structure of (self-) identification that welds the militant to the revolutionary process via belonging to an organization or group.

The organization or group functions as a mediation that at once elevates the individual into a collective, historical dimension, and schematizes the abstraction of utopia into spatiotemporal coordinates: an organizational form, a sequence of tasks, steps, stages, and so on.¹⁸ What is characteristic of vanguardism is the way in which, through group belonging, the individual identifies himself or herself with a subjective excess (to be a member is to be in excess of existing conditions), and objectively identifies the group with the revolution. This is contained in the very notion of vanguard: for a group to identify itself as a vanguard means to see itself as the most advanced detachment in the revolutionary movement; the one with the best theoretical and practical grasp of the process, its direction and its requirements.¹⁹ The circularity is evident: if there are forward and backward elements in the process, it is because there is an objective knowledge that allows to discern them—and, by definition, nowhere can this objective knowledge be sharper than among the most advanced detachment. (One could ironically conclude that the vanguard is the group in possession of the knowledge that it is the vanguard.) From this follows that the organization itself can be identified with the revolution: the former's advances and retreats, defeats and victories, allies and enemies are automatically the latter's, and the future of the latter depends on the continued existence of the former. At the same time, for an individual to identify himself or herself with the group is to identify with those qualities that place it in excess of the situation, and thus with a subjective excess over the practico-inert that manifests itself in the possession of a perspective (an outlook uncompromised by the dominant modes of thinking, the correct line, a superior analysis), in practice (otherness to or exception from existing social relations and mores), and even in regard to one's own desires and interests (the readiness to pay any costs exacted by the revolution). The circle closes in on itself: if to be the vanguard of the revolution is to be in excess of the present situation, to be a member is to be in excess of the situation, that is, to be the vanguard of the revolution.

This double movement both justifies and disguises the reproduction of separation inside the organization and in its milieu—the entrenchment of hierarchies, the division of labor, the split between "the knowers . . . and the non-knowers,"²⁰ representatives and the represented, mediators and

mediated. Externally, the superposition between the group's goals and interests and those of the revolution validates manipulative and sectarian behavior, "continuously struggling to attain majority, 'possessing' in order to lay down the line . . . affirming ourselves as revolutionaries and not the class and its behaviours."²¹ Internally, the fact that one is "fighting the good fight" at once legitimizes the contradictions between ends and means in the organization's internal life²² and fosters a culture of sacrifice and self-denial with which militants steel themselves in the face of failure and "the cost to ourselves of what we are trying to do."²³ This confirms their subjective excess over existing society even while they engage in its reproduction; self-instrumentalization cements the separations within the group and legitimates the persecution of those who speak out (having doubts reveals insufficient commitment), and serving as a tool to persecute those who speak out.²⁴ In our times—whose terms of debate are still largely set by the failed experiences of the 20th century and the critique of vanguardism of the 1960s and 1970s—this is what the words "political discipline" probably suggests to most. Not "quite simply the discipline of processes" themselves, but an internalization of the "superego of the organisation"²⁵—which is the flipside of the vanguard militant's and the vanguard group's narcissistic investment in themselves as the real revolutionaries, the ones who make the revolution.²⁶

II

It must be remembered, however, that the left-wing critique of vanguardism was not just a mockery of the Left's "joyless ascetics,"²⁷ or an exposé of revolutionary organizations as a microcosm of the totalitarian societies they were predestined to create. It was also about how they had become, at best, innocuous, shut-off from "the real (contradictory and autonomous) processes of the masses"²⁸ and incapable of communicating with new struggles or changes in objective conditions and class composition²⁹; and, at worst, counterrevolutionary, "antagonistic to any expression of subjectivity on the part of . . . the subject groups spoken of by Marx,"³⁰ sabotaging what they could not control and stifling what they could, motivated only by the overriding imperative of party-building and organizational survival, perpetuating their position as mediators and representatives.

It was as an overcoming of the "the sad, ascetic agent of the Third International whose soul was deeply permeated by Soviet state reason"³¹ and the activist "who acts on the basis of duty and discipline, who pretends his or her actions are deduced from an ideal plan,"³² that Hardt and Negri proposed their own version of a "communist militant" for the "postmodern era."³³ Against the transcendence of vanguardism—of the vanguard over the masses, of the preestablished plan over the materiality of the

movement, of a knowledge already possessed over the political process, of a projected goal over the means to attain it, of the militant's position over existing relations and structures—this was the militant of an immanent communism that created itself in its very unfolding. Rather than a specialist in charge of directing workers in political struggle, this militant was to be “positive, constructive, and innovative,” immediately connecting “insurrectional action” and “the formation of cooperative apparatuses of production and community.”³⁴

Importantly, however, Hardt and Negri's was not a paradigm thrown out into the world, but a figure brought forth by the very neoliberal capitalist restructuring, which had, since the late 1970s, decimated the working-class organizations of the previous period. This shift represented the passage into a new, biopolitical age of capitalist production, in which capitalism had become productive of “*social life itself*,”³⁵ directly exploiting living labor's collaborative, communicative, affective, and creative capacities, which could now fully appear for what they always were: not only the foundation of production, but also its product and means. This new situation erased the distance between strategy and tactic and economic and political struggles³⁶ central to Lenin's conception of the party's role, and ultimately also that between communism as “the real movement which abolishes the present state of things”³⁷ and living labor in “the absolute movement of [its] becoming.”³⁸ Now, “[r]evolutionary political militancy” could “rediscover what has always been its proper form: not representational but constituent activity.”³⁹

If the conception of “party and organization as factory [was] adequate to the determinate level” of the Leninist project, “replicating the technico-political composition of the working class” of its time, the network was today's answer to the question of “what is the organizational need” arising from the “determinate composition” of the class.⁴⁰ If networks are “the form of organization of the cooperative and communicative relationships dictated by the immaterial paradigm of production,”⁴¹ and “in each era . . . the model of resistance that proves to be most effective turns out to have the same form as the dominant models of economic and social production,”⁴² they were not only the default organizational form in the present technical composition of labor, but also the most adequate to the struggles of the multitude. In the same way that biopolitical production rests directly on the multitude's self-activity, meaning that the latter's autonomy from capital is tendentially complete, networks both “directly produce new subjectivities and new forms of life”⁴³ and provide “the model for an absolutely democratic organization”⁴⁴ capable of materializing the “profound desire for . . . the rule of all by all based on relationships of equality and freedom” that “the great revolutions of modernity” had created but “never yet realized.”⁴⁵

One must note that, as with the critique of vanguardism, the focus here was not only democracy and autonomy (let alone individual

self-expression) but political effectiveness. The communicative possibilities created by the spread of the Internet and the circulation of struggles then taking place around the globe evoked the promise of a global political process that was both centerless and sufficiently strong to fight global capitalism. The enthusiasm was boosted by a dialogue with the sciences of complexity, which pointed both to networks' ubiquity in the natural and social worlds, and their capacity to give rise to effects greater than the sum of their parts: local movements networked on a global scale "could exhibit complex adaptive and emergent behaviour of their own, and would promote it for society as a whole out of their own local work."⁴⁶

If it is true that global capitalism and information society are attempting a re-structuring towards the network form, movements could be better off by building on this logic and getting ahead in the game. Movements have the advantage since, unable to really pursue a strategy of collective intelligence, capitalism will progressively lose out to an anti-globalisation movement which . . . will have learned to "think like a swarm."⁴⁷

Amid the technopolitical optimism of the times, however, many questions were overlooked: that movements of resistance do not constitute a system in exterior competition with capital, but are internal to it, and are not simply trying to adapt, but to change the system that is their environment; that systemic equilibrium does not necessarily overlap with our human notions of justice (ant colonies display a stratified division of labor, ecosystems include natural predators and prey, etc.); that if networks and self-organized behavior are ubiquitous, it is just as possible to describe capitalism as both networked and possessing admirable adaptive capacities; that even if it is possible that the emergent behavior of networked movements could progressively transform their surrounding system, it would quite possibly be in a longer timescale than the one needed by capitalism to collapse by undermining its own conditions of existence (and so ours). Of several possible outcomes—that capitalism neutralizes, instrumentalizes or destroys its antisystemic subsystem; that the latter dissipates; that capitalism collapses before it changes—it was often only the most positive that was picked for consideration. A selectiveness that, in the end, amounted to a covert reliance on teleology, even if not in an assertoric but only conditional mode: "*it may well be that, by doing what we are doing, we will attain what we want . . .*"

III

Our attempt to rethink the militant can be situated in the context of the criticisms raised by the likes of Žižek and Badiou against the politics and theory that they identified with the alter-globalist movement.⁴⁸ In

essence, they bear on three questions: effectiveness, continuity, and the one that ties the two together—the place of the political subject. To put it in shorthand: unless it is based on a subjective break, opposition to capitalism is—similarly to how the critique 1970s saw vanguardism—at best innocuous, and at worst continuous with it. For the most part, the charges of ineffectiveness and continuity intermingle. While Žižek acknowledges that “there are situations in which a minimal measure of social reform can have much stronger large-scale consequences than self-professed ‘radical’ changes,”⁴⁹ today he would probably lump even the more radical strains of alter-globalist activism in with the “frenetic humanitarian, Politically Correct etc. activity” that he calls “interpassivity”: scattershot, knee-jerk responses to the injunction to act that ultimately amount to “doing things not to achieve something, but to prevent something from really happening.”⁵⁰ Against the belief that “creative power will be ‘expressed’ in the free unfolding of the multitudes”⁵¹—which generates a neglect of questions of discipline and organization—their point is to remind us that the “task of emancipatory politics,” rather than “elaborating a proliferation of strategies of ‘resisting’ the dominant *dispositif* from marginal subjective positions,” should be “thinking about the modalities of a possible radical rupture in the dominant *dispositif* itself”⁵²—and hence also considering how to amass and concentrate the forces needed for that rupture.⁵³

Against the proliferation of local resistances, we have here an affirmation of the rarity of politics, which stems, precisely, from the rarity of subjective breaks encapsulated in an “event” (Badiou) or “act” (Žižek) that creates its own conditions and draws legitimacy from nothing but itself. Politics, in this sense, is the opposite of what usually goes by that name in its parliamentary form or in most activist expressions; it is the interruption and redefinition of ‘politics as usual’ through the irruption of the political, in the form of an act or an event. The subject’s relation to the existing order is thus one of subtraction, a distance from “the hegemonic ideological coordinates”⁵⁴ (a world’s transcendental, for Badiou) in which the subject is formed in the very process of transforming what is: “the political, when it exists, founds its own principle concerning the real, and it does not have any need for anything except for itself.”⁵⁵ Without this distance, “that which goes by the name ‘resistance’ . . . is only a component of the progress of power itself”; to miss “the importance of separation” is to espouse “a metaphysical politics, a politics of the One . . . in the precise sense that it excludes negativity, and thus, in the end, the domain of the subject.”⁵⁶ The very features that Hardt and Negri extol in contemporary activism for how they build on the contemporary technical composition of labor—network organization, spatial mobility, temporal flexibility⁵⁷—bear witness to an ideological continuity with contemporary capitalism. In their lack of “organization, perseverance, unity and

discipline," they fail the test of the highest militant virtue: courage as "endurance in the impossible."⁵⁸

One could argue that this judgment was vindicated by the subsequent dissipation of alter-globalism. But before we appreciate the thrust of this critique, let us once more draw a distinction between rightist and leftist variations of a same logic.

It was largely through the critique of real existing socialism, the conciliationism of party and union bureaucracies and the failed vanguards of the extraparliamentary Left that the idea of a minoritarian politics developed in the 1970s, in the works of Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, and Félix Guattari, among others, and in the activism of groups of women, people of color, gays and lesbians, prisoners, psychiatric patients, and so on. For most of those who took it, at least at the time, this turn did not signal the abandonment of the critique of capitalism, or of the idea of overcoming it. Again, it was motivated by questions of political effectiveness, and started precisely from the idea that the reason for the shortcomings of vanguardist politics lay in its deficient understanding of who or what the enemy was. Concepts of micro or molecular politics, or of a diffuse, centerless network of power relations coextensive with the social field, served to explain why "revolutionary movements [that] privileged the state apparatus as the target of struggle"⁵⁹ had come to reproduce the old society they had fought, or why "a group can be revolutionary from the point of view of class interest" and yet be "even fascistic and police-like from the point of view of its libidinal investments."⁶⁰ At the same time, they offered a view of what an alternative revolutionary politics could be. Against the idea that the struggle is (and has to be made) concentrated in the "most advanced sector of the class," resistance is to be found in the myriad places in which it manifests itself ("local responses, counterfire, active and sometimes preventive defensive measures"). The great political problem is how "to create lateral connections, a whole system of networks, of popular bases . . . transversal connections between these discontinuous active points, from a country to another and inside the same country" so as to make "the revolutionary process"⁶¹ a polycentric, wide-scale, systemic challenge.

It is true that this line of thinking was instrumentalized in the 1980s in order to rationalize the end of class politics (in effect, the end of the hitherto existing institutions of class politics) and an acceptance of capitalism as the only game in town. It is also true that this was done at times by some of the social subjects at the margin of (and marginalized by) traditional class politics who had been standard bearers for a minoritarian politics. Morphing into minority politics, the latter was largely assimilated into the market and governance mechanisms of the neoliberal regime, which successfully forged the libertarian 'artistic' critique of capitalism from the 1960s and 1970s into a "new spirit of capitalism."⁶² The celebration of easily

accommodated molecular transgressions often became no more than the flipside of resignation to moderate reformism. Yet not only should we not confuse minoritarian and minority—as Deleuze and Guattari⁶³ would remind us not to do—we should take minoritarian politics for what it once tried to be: not an investment in small “acts of resistance which only keep the system alive” but an attempt to think a non-vanguardist politics up to the task of radical change.⁶⁴

IV

It is not difficult to see how this conception of revolutionary change and its inherent desire to exorcise the ghosts of vanguardism’s past could result in a covert teleology; it suffices that one subtract the subjective dimension from the telos of radical social transformation. In other words, one makes what is a question asked from a subjective perspective (what do we need to connect struggles and create the conditions for systemic change?) into an objective process behind the backs of agents (if everyone keeps on doing what they are doing, these connections will emerge). There is an obvious appeal in this, to the extent that transferring the problem of strategy from a subjective to an objective dimension by definition eliminates the need for vanguards, and thus all the problems associated with vanguardism. A process that is absolutely, immediately spontaneous has no need for mediations, or mediators. And this is because the hidden hand of teleology intervenes at the precise point(s) that would require subjective intervention (hence strategy, organization, etc.): the passage from a quantitative proliferation (of struggles) to a qualitative (systemic) change.

Even if this idea is not explicitly held anywhere,⁶⁵ it is secretly operative behind different positions: in John Holloway, when the spillover of noncapitalistic doings or cracks becomes a qualitatively different arrangement that can “recover or, better, create the conscious and confident sociality of the flow of doing”⁶⁶; in Escobar, when he imagines the realization of utopia as a “phase transition . . . perhaps promoted by some sort of non-linear dynamics in the mechanisms of the world economy, ecology, ideology etc.”⁶⁷; in the “materialist teleology”⁶⁸ subtending the movement of the multitude as ever greater autonomy from capital, in Hardt and Negri; and even in much earlier Left communists Gilles Dauvé and François Martin:

The communist party is the *spontaneous* (i.e., *totally determined by social evolution*) organization of the revolutionary movement created by capitalism. The party is a spontaneous offspring . . . *It does not need to be created or not created: it is a mere historical product.* Therefore, revolutionaries have no need either to build it or fear to build it.⁶⁹

Because this is a *conditional* teleology, all of the above offer elements that compensate for it.⁷⁰ It is not that it is wrong, given that teleological judgments cannot in any case be disproven, as something not happening cannot prove that it might not. The problem does not lie either in the idea that radical change can only emerge through the interaction of struggles and their environment nor in the emphasis on uncertainty as a corrective to “old revolutionary certainty,”⁷¹ both of which are unavoidable. The issue is how this wager can function repressively, by replacing the uncertainty proper to every situated, subjective decision with a certainty of the process itself, which, left to its own devices, will spontaneously show the way. In this case, the affirmation of the process’ immanent capacities, and of the uncertainty of political action and the impossibility of its totalization by any single agent, reverts into its opposite: not only is the process ascribed teleological certainty (solutions will appear), it is made into something external to the agents that constitute it. Action is deemed immanent only to the extent that it ‘goes with the flow’ but is transcendent—tainted with the suspicion of harboring aspirations to certainty, leadership, and so on—every time it attempts to seize a moment to consciously influence the flow’s direction.⁷²

No objective knowledge could lay claim in advance to the effects of political decisions and only the process itself can produce its solutions—but how can solutions emerge if not by trial and error, that is, through concrete attempts at producing them? Is it not necessary that they exist as and are taken for the only thing they can be—partial, partisan, perspectival extrapolations on limited information, to be judged on the merits of what they include and leave out, what their biases are, how well or badly they appraise objective conditions (correlation of forces, points of leverage etc.), how realistic the tasks they set are, what their negative side-effects could be, how well or badly executed they are? It is true that one only acts one step at a time, but this does not mean that one should only *think* one step at a time—otherwise, the tendency will always be to do what comes naturally, when the obvious or easiest path is not necessarily the best. While it is important to bear in mind the Zapatista motto of “*caminar preguntando*” (usually translated as “walking, we ask questions”), it is good to remember that it is in the interest of finding answers that one asks questions.

Perhaps we can start to work on a nonvanguardist way of posing the question of subjective intervention in a process by looking at this passage:

experiencing the eventfulness and uniqueness of every situation [is] not necessarily about commanding movement, it’s about navigating movement. It’s about being immersed in an experience that is already underway . . . going with the flow. It’s more like surfing the situation, or tweaking it, than commanding or programming it. The

command paradigm approaches experience as if we were somehow outside it, looking in, like disembodied subjects handling an object. But . . . [w]e are our situations, we are our moving through them. We are our participation—not some abstract entity that is somehow outside looking in at it all.⁷³

The crucial issue here is the difference between surfing and tweaking. For a surfer, a wave is an external body of much greater mass and momentum; he or she does not control its direction or movement, and so can only navigate it, coordinating his or her own trajectory with that of the force that hauls them. Tweaking is a much more appropriate metaphor for being inside a process. The process still possesses much greater mass and momentum than any individual agents, but these agents are its constituent parts, thus having some, if only partial, control over it. It corrects the command paradigm idea of the party as an external agent bestowing form upon matter from the outside; but it does not go too far in the opposite direction, treating the process as if it were a whole existing apart from those who constitute it (again on the outside looking in), and as an agent in its own right rather than the contingent, emergent result of their (necessarily limited, necessarily uncertain) action. It eliminates the transcendence of agent over process proper to vanguardism, without instituting a transcendence of process over agent in which the denial of intentional, strategic initiative to the latter is the flipside of the former's surreptitious elevation to the position of a Lacanian subject supposed to know: what is imagined to be in charge when, and because, "there is no-one in charge."⁷⁴

V

So where does this leave us in regard to a rethinking of the militant? With questions of strategy and organization, it is always good to first ask the question "where are we," and only then "where do we want to go?" This is how we will proceed.

Our starting point is networked organization. However, even if we can speak of networked politics as today's movements' spontaneous organizational logic ("what comes naturally"), it must be understood in its materiality as an *organizational* logic. On the one hand, as Gramsci noted, "pure" spontaneity does not exist in history: it would coincide with "'pure' mechanicity."⁷⁵ The notion of a purely spontaneous, nonorganized political movement is nonsensical because for it to exist and be noticeable as such, it must have already somehow distinguished itself, subjectively and objectively, from the everyday spontaneous reproduction of order ("this group of workers, rather than go to work, decided to picket the gates . . ."). On the other, networks are not structureless and "formless"

and, in a certain sense, not even “multiform”⁷⁶; they possess forms and structures of their own, which emerge (spontaneously) regardless of whether individuals realize or will them.

The first thing to recognize, in this case, is that networked organization does not eliminate vanguards. The fact that political networks have a structure characterized by the presence of hubs (nodes with an anomalously high number of links and with links to nodes in more and more distant clusters) immediately puts paid to the idea that they are horizontal by nature. Leadership still exists in them, if in a noninstitutionalized mode, which has advantages (such as weaker tendencies toward the formation of hierarchies) and disadvantages (no defined structures of accountability, greater fluctuations in mobilizing capacity). It is recast as distributed leadership, which means that the isolated initiatives of individuals or relatively small groups, communicated across the overall network system, can trigger positive feedback loops that increase their impact exponentially. Emergent behavior is not spontaneous in the sense of miraculous but always induced by a germ of action; when one such germ spreads to nodes and hubs that respond to it and amplify its reach, large-scale effects such as the Arab Spring, 15M, and Occupy—mass movements without mass organizations—can happen. And once they do, even if the nodes that originated them are drowned out in the now enlarged, activated network-system (which is not necessarily the case), these movements themselves can still be described as vanguards: while they may be attempting to reach out to and speak on behalf of society-at-large, they differentiate themselves from it precisely to the extent that, whoever the participants may be, they are the ones taking part at that precise moment. Politics always inevitably involves synecdoche, that is, a part standing for the whole; in this sense, vanguards (and, in a sense, representation) are ineliminable.⁷⁷

Yet it is important to draw the distinction between the objective and teleological understanding of vanguard, whose sway over the Marxist tradition helped engender vanguardism, and what we could call the *vanguard-function*. The latter is best understood as what Deleuze and Guattari would call the “cutting edge of deterritorialization” of a situation—in this case, those people who, having started to ‘function’ in a different way, open a new direction, which, communicated along different networks, progressively becomes something that can be followed, tweaked, opposed, and so on. The vanguard-function is objective in the sense that, when it has spread, it can be identified as the anomalous cause behind a growing number of effects. Because it is objective, it need not be subjectively sensed at first as being in opposition to anything (e.g., the way in which an influx of migrants transforms an area); it is what people do when they start doing something other than “what people do.” Yet it is not objective in the old Marxist sense, rightly criticized by Badiou, of a

determinism or transitive determination between an objectively defined position (class, class sector, etc.) and the occurrence of a political, subjectivizing process. Where a process starts, which direction it takes, who steers or tweaks it, what is its course—these are objectively determinable retrospectively, but never in advance.⁷⁸

To speak of a vanguard-function is to say that something leads to the extent that it is followed: it works when it works, and when it does not, it does not, in ways that may even, as in the case of a group whose mistakes in steering a mass action have negative results, damage its power to work in the future.⁷⁹ This entails that, while networks are not the oft-fantasized medium of frictionless interaction and absolute horizontality, distributed leadership does not make them undemocratic either. While they are governed by preferential attachment (more connected nodes tend to attract more new links, and so nodes that have fulfilled a vanguard function will tend to be more connected), the degree of validation of a hub, and therefore its capacity to initiate successful actions, oscillates according to how much successful traffic it routes or starts—like a self-regulating, but evidently far from perfect, accountability mechanism.⁸⁰ The question then is: what makes an initiative more successful than another? Clearly, the large-scale effects seen in 2011 could happen because some initiatives struck the right informational, affective, and organizational notes to tap into a widely spread social malaise and give it form; how? Equally, there is plenty to be learnt from examining less successful initiatives in regard to their contents, affective components, to who initiated them, how they circulated, and what kinds of action they proposed, and so on.

What are the advantages of redescribing these phenomena with words like leadership, representation, vanguard? First of all, to demonstrate that they continue to exist, and do so independently from any agent's dark motivations; to show that their disavowal both prevents us from better understanding them so that we can better explore their potential, and blinds us to their risks, such as invisible hierarchies. The second advantage is to demystify them. If they exist by necessity, the question becomes less how to prevent them than how to use them in nonvanguardist ways; vanguardism, not vanguards, appears as the problem. Thirdly, to bring the subjective dimension back into the picture, by pinpointing the spot in which it is elicited by a nonvanguardist revolutionary politics: what do *we* need to do in order to further multitudinous, polycentric, open-ended processes in the direction of systemic change? Finally, to open the space for posing, in nonvanguardist ways, the strategic challenge suggested by Žižek: a collective, organized work of identifying the paths, leverages, potentials for "possible radical rupture[s] in the dominant *dispositif* itself."⁸¹

If a tweak is a matter of steering or nudging a process in a subjectively determined direction, even if one we can neither control nor predict fully, it still matters what amount of force one can apply on it; this is why we cannot ignore questions of discipline, organizational consistency, unified action, and so on. There is a difference between open, indeterminate calls (e.g., to demonstrate against the regime), and more complex, strategic initiatives. The greater the scope and complexity of the latter, the more consistency, commitment, structure will in all likelihood be required; here, it may be a good idea to invert the order of questions, and start from “what do we need to have in order to do what we think is necessary?” instead of “what can we do with what we have?” In fact, as I have argued elsewhere,⁸² even in the case of those indeterminate calls that set in motion processes like 15M and Occupy, the usual media picture of previously entirely unconnected, nonactive individuals suddenly coming together is misguided. Rather than spreading through an exclusive individual-to-individual basis, such processes are better understood as depending on an interplay between small formal or informal groups with stronger ties among members (which provide some kind of initial informational and logistical backbone) and a long tail of individuals with weaker ties (little or no previous connections to those groups, little or no previous political involvement), which tend to become stronger as the process develops. The point is that, as much as networked organization does not render issues such as discipline and consistency, superfluous, there are no one-size-fits-all answers: different things can be achieved through different means.

Clearly, mass membership and a centralized structure is no panacea—it suffices to see how mostly irrelevant parties and unions have been in recent decades. For several reasons (including endemic suspicion against parties and hierarchies, which will not disappear in the foreseeable future), rather than fixating on the idea of a single unified organization, a better way of working through questions of organization might be thinking in terms of what Italian autonomists used to call an ‘area’. This would consist of a long tail of supporters and individuals fluctuating among different networks, and an ecology of middle-sized groups with a greater degree of organizational consistency. Rather than competing with each other (over members, over leadership), as parties by definition do, these would be complementary, defined not by their group identities, but by the initiatives they carry out—not single-issue campaigns in the usual sense, but strategic interventions that explore the political potentials opened by the conjuncture. This may in fact be the emergent solution already advanced by the movements of 2011: at times when things hit an impasse, it was the distributed leadership performed by projects such as anteforeclosure campaigns and neighborhood assemblies that moved things forward.⁸³ With this in

mind, we could conclude that something like a care for the whole may be a virtue to retain in a redefinition of the militant: a capacity to think strategically in the context of a larger ecology of struggles and agents, as well as the overall systemic environment, so as to evaluate what are the most effective initiatives that stand the best chance of working, and how to make the most of them; when (and how) to tweak and when to surf; when and how to produce positive or negative feedbacks. In short, how to best employ existing (subjective, material, affective, organizational) conditions in order to ensure the greatest political impact, while thinking of the development of the political process as a whole, rather than of an individual organization or initiative.

VI

The attempt to pose the question of the militant has led us to reframe it in the terms of a preliminary one. The concept of vanguard-function sought to grasp the 'spontaneous' occurrence of nonvanguardist vanguards; regarding the militant, can there be an active, conscious nonvanguardist practice of the vanguard? I would suggest that this not only probably still exists but that it has existed many times; one example would be the *comunidades eclesiais de base* (ecclesial base communities) of Liberation Theology. It is to this experience that I turn for my conclusion.

A major strength of Liberation Theology was how it confronted, rather than disavowed, the performative contradiction that is constitutive of the militant: a heteronomous force for autonomy, a figure of separation against separation. Given the reality of their practice, which normally typically involved middle-class, educated popular agents moving to work with very poor communities, the problem could not be circumvented. They tackled this performative contradiction head on by treating it as a specific manifestation of the pedagogic relation in general—understood not as “another form of the mind-matter, leader-mass contradiction”⁸⁴ but in the terms set forth by Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. The strength of Freire’s egalitarianism lies precisely in assuming not that there is no difference between educator and educated, but rather that “[n]o-one educates anyone, no-one educates themselves, men educate each other, mediated by the world.”⁸⁵ As a Liberation Theology manual puts it:

flattening the difference between the educator and the people must be unmasked as a farce . . . The agent is an agent because she is different. This must be seen and acknowledged. . . . [O]nly an agent who does not understand her real position in the process of popular development could wish to lead the people, or to be exactly like them.⁸⁶

So while her position is constituted by a difference or separation not to be disavowed—“someone is or becomes an agent . . . because they have a particular contribution to give [to the people]”⁸⁷—the militant’s work consists in closing this gap by coming closer to the people (divesting herself of class biases, incorporating the people’s culture, departing from the problems they confront and how they deal with them, respecting their decisions) and bringing the people closer to her (sharing the knowledge she possesses, helping them reflect on the process, problematizing received opinions, questioning power relations and internalized oppressions). She foregoes any fusional fantasy and recognizes her position’s intrinsic contradiction, while knowing that the work’s success depends on establishing some degree of continuity between her and the community; the greater the discontinuity, the closer she would be to either becoming a leader or being rejected as a foreign body.

The point here is not to idealize a specific experience, or to advocate one kind of practice above others, but to draw out another virtue for a redefinition of the militant. There is a risk in recent attempts to correct the objectivist, teleological bias implicit in a certain way of thinking what a nonvanguardist militancy would be that they overcompensate by placing too much emphasis on the sovereignty of subjective separation.⁸⁸ Perhaps we should look instead for something like what Deleuze and Guattari call an “art of dosages”⁸⁹; an art to be applied, first and foremost, to the very constituent condition of the militant, that is, separation.

Consider the situation created by the movements of 2011. When upsurges of mass mobilization like these happen, a conundrum presents itself: their open, indeterminate nature, meaning all things to all people, can attract large numbers; but this selfsame openness makes concerted action difficult, because any decision will close things down, increase determinacy, define “who’s in” and “who’s out.” It is the case, then, that making anything happen will involve drawing divisions, creating new separations. Now consider the good popular agent of Liberation Theology: she does not disavow separation, but does not affirm it one-sidedly; she is attentive to the ways in which her action can end up reproducing the societal divisions that she fights against, and doses her separation by selecting when and how to tweak or surf. She knows that the thresholds that define the best action vary according to the situation and is sensitive to how much separation must go into each moment—taking it too far would simply sever her from the shared situation. She understands that the sovereign assertion of separation would be an illusion: she is always working with the material at hand, whatever it is. What defines her quality as a popular agent is the capacity to create divisions, but in such a way that she can meet people where they are, and take them with her. Would this gift for immanence without immediacy, mediation without transcendence, not be a virtue worth learning?

NOTES

1. Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul. La fondation de l'Universalisme* (Paris: PUF, 1997), 2.
2. Michael Hardt and Toni Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 411–413.
3. Alain Badiou, *La Relation Énigmatique entre Philosophie et Politique* (Paris: Germina, 2011), 64.
4. *Ibid.*, 57.
5. Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 2.
6. Jodi Dean, *The Communist Horizon* (London: Verso, 2011), 239.
7. Slavoj Žižek, "Shoplifters of the World Unite," *London Review of Books*, August 19, 2011. <http://www.lrb.co.uk/2011/08/19/slavoj-zizek/shoplifters-of-the-world-unite>.
8. Italics in the original. Alain Badiou, *Metapolitics*, trans. Jason Barker (London: Verso, 2005), 122.
9. Alain Badiou, "Beyond Formalisation," trans. Bruno Bosteels and Alberto Toscano. *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 8, no. 2 (2003): 126.
10. Dean, *The Communist Horizon*, 235.
11. Alain Badiou, *Le Réveil de l'Histoire* (Paris: Lignes, 2011a), 66.
12. *Ibid.* Badiou's talk of reinventing "the communist Idea" has already been criticized as a desire to reserve for philosophy the task of providing answers that can only be given by practice. See Bruno Bosteels, *The Actuality of Communism* (London: Verso, 2011), 30–34. If we consider that all the new models that he calls for (of the militant, of organization, of discipline) can be grouped under the heading of a new mode of the communist hypothesis to replace "the (19th-century) movement and the (20th-century) party," one can conclude that today's problem, as he sees it, is precisely that of finding a substitute for the party. See Alain Badiou, "The Communist Hypothesis," *New Left Review* 49 (2008): 37. Phrasing it as a search for an Idea, however, what Badiou seems to do is replace what were organizational solutions to organizational problems with a much more abstract problematic. This results in what often sounds more like abstract redefinitions of communism and organization according to his vocabulary than actual answers to the question of what can and is to be done today. See Badiou, *Le Réveil de l'Histoire*, 98–99, 105.
13. It is one of the strengths of Dean's argument that it is built on showing how practices that already exist among Occupy can form the basis of what she understands as party.
14. Italics in the original. Slavoj Žižek, *In Defence of Lost Causes* (London: Verso, 2008), 361.
15. As Lenin put it in his early polemic against Russian populists: "the role of the 'intelligentsia' is to make special leaders from among the intelligentsia unnecessary." V.I. Lenin, *Who the "Friends of the People" Are and How They Fight the Social-Democrats*, Marxists Internet Archive (2001). <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1894/friends/08.htm#v01zz99h-271-GUESS>. This evidently does not apply to the 'intelligentsia' only; it is in fact the same condition of the state in the dictatorship of the proletariat, as laid out in *State and Revolution*.
16. Michel Foucault, "Préface," *Dits et Écrits* Vol. 2, 134 (Paris: Gallimard, 2001).

17. Guy Debord et al., "Définition Minimum des Organisations Révolutionnaires," *Oeuvres* (Paris: Gallimard, 2006), 731.

18. In this sense, it is much like Badiou's communist Idea, "the subjectivation of an interplay between the singularity of a truth procedure and a representation of History," that is, a mediation between the individual's incorporation into a singular practice of collective emancipation, and the projection of this incorporation onto the past and future constructed by a historical narrative. See Alain Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis* (London: Verso, 2010), 239. Again, the Idea seems to be called upon to fill in the space left vacant by the party ("Lacking the Idea, the popular masses's confusion is inescapable"; *ibid.*, 258).

19. Although vanguardism is evidently historically tied with the notion of vanguard, it is just as easily observed in other forms of activism, as pointed out by Andrew X in regard direct action groups, drawing on Jacques Camatte's analysis of political organizations as gangs: "Activism as a whole has some of the characteristics of a gang. Activist gangs can often end up being cross-class alliances, including all sorts of liberal reformists because they too are activists. People think of themselves primarily as activists and their primary loyalty becomes to the community of activists and not to the struggle as such. The gang is [an] illusory community, distracting us from creating a wider community of resistance." Andrew X, "Give Up Activism," *Do or Die* 9 (2001): 160–166. <http://www.eco-action.org/dod/no9/activism.htm>

20. John Holloway, *Change the World without Taking Power* (London: Pluto, 2005), 144.

21. Emilio Constantino, "Agli Ex 'Militanti di Professione'," *Settantette. La Rivoluzione Chi Viene*, ed. Sergio Bianchi and Lanfranco Caminiti (Rome: DeriveApprodi, 2007), 248.

22. For Camatte "within the group, under the pretext of negating [existing society], an unbridled emulation is introduced that ends up in a hierarchization even more extreme than in society-at-large; especially as the interior-exterior opposition is reproduced internally in the division between the center of the gang and the mass of militants." Camatte, "On organization," Marxists Internet Archive (1969). <http://www.marxists.org/archive/camate/capcom/on-org.htm>. For Piercey: "[w]e are an exact microcosm of the society we oppose. Work . . . is mindlessly done by unappreciated-invisible workers, and the results, the profits in prestige and recognition, are taken away . . . The real basis is the largely unpaid, largely female labor force that does the daily work. Reflecting the values of the larger capitalist society, there is no prestige whatsoever attached to actually working." Marge Piercey, "The Grand Coolie Damn," *CWLU Archive*, 1969. <http://www.uic.edu/orgs/cwluherstory/CWLUArchive/damn.html>

23. Piercey, "The Grand Coolie Damn."

24. For example, see Piercey: "for a woman to think of herself is bourgeois subjectivity and inherently counterrevolutionary. Now dear, of course you find your work dull. What the Movement needs is more discipline and less middle-class concern with one's itty-bitty self!" *Ibid.*

25. Badiou, *Metapolitics*, 76.

26. On "the phenomena of 'superegoization,' narcissism and group hierarchy" characteristic of "preconsciously revolutionary" (i.e., not libidinally revolutionary) groups, see Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *L'Anti-Oedipe* (Paris: Minuit, 2006), 417.

27. Foucault, "Preface," 134.

28. Constantino, "Agli Ex," 248.

29. Paraphrasing Trotsky's mordant commentary on what he saw as a tendency for organizational preoccupations to eclipse tactical ones in Lenin's conception of the party, here the "materialist explanation of the world" took the back seat to "a centrally constructed 'plan,'" while the "immense but doctrinaire task" of understanding the organization's place "in the divine macrocosm" was transformed into tailoring the material world to fit the organization's "microcosm." This is the text, later disowned by the author and used by Stalin against him, famous for the lapidary condemnation of the Bolshevik model as leading to "the Party organization 'substituting' itself for the Party, the Central Committee substituting itself for the Party organization, and finally the dictator substituting himself for the Central Committee." Leon Trotsky, *Our Political Tasks*, trans. New Park Publication, Marxists Internet Archive (1999). <http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1904/tasks/index.htm>.

30. Félix Guattari, "The Group and the Person," in *Molecular Revolution*, trans. David Cooper and Rosemary Sheed (London: Penguin, 1984), 33.

31. Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 411.

32. *Ibid.*, 412.

33. *Ibid.*, 411.

34. *Ibid.*, 413.

35. Italics in the original. Toni Negri and Michael Hardt, *Multitude. War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin, 2004), 146

36. Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 63.

37. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1970), 56–57.

38. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse. Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (London: Penguin, 1993), 488.

39. Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 413.

40. Antonio Negri, *Trentatré Lezioni su Lenin* (Rome: Manifestolibri, 2004), 48–49. On the "party as factory" and how a disparaging use of the phrase "betrays the mentality of the bourgeois intellectual," see V.I. Lenin, *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back (the Crisis in Our Party)*, trans. Abraham Fineberg and Naomi Jochel, Marxists Internet Archive (1964). <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1904/onestep/index.htm>.

41. Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, 142.

42. *Ibid.*, 68.

43. *Ibid.*, 83.

44. *Ibid.*, 88.

45. *Ibid.*, 67.

46. Arturo Escobar, "Other Worlds Are Already Possible: Self-Organization, Complexity and Post-Capitalist Cultures," *World Social Forum: Challenging Empires*, ed. Jai Sen, Anita Anand, Arturo Escobar, and Peter Waterman (New Delhi: Viveka Foundation, 2004), 355.

47. *Ibid.*

48. On why speaking of a global moment is preferable so as not to reduce it to its more visible manifestations (the counter-summit movement), see Rodrigo Nunes, "The Global Moment," *Radical Philosophy* 159 (2010): 2–7.

49. Žižek, *In Defence of Lost Causes*, 390.

50. Slavoj Žižek, "Lenin's Choice," V.I. Lenin, *Revolution at the Gates: A Selection of Writings from February to October 1917*, ed. Slavoj Žižek (London: Verso, 2002), 170.

51. Badiou, "Beyond Formalisation," 126–127.

52. Slavoj Žižek, *The Year of Dreaming Dangerously* (London: Verso, 2012), 106–107.

53. While their critiques converge, one must note the differences between Badiou and Žižek: for the latter, the subject constitutes itself before, through, and in the consequences of the act; for the former, it appears in the wake of the evanescent event. Therefore, whereas for Žižek one must actively identify the "symptomal torsions" of the system (those points whose very invisibility are the condition for the system's functioning), politics for Badiou is by definition what extracts the consequences of a "symptomal torsion" having made itself visible (i.e., the event). Thus, while Žižek's version of the vanguard would be a more traditional, mediating one (as that which is responsible for producing the subjective and objective mediations between the present state and the political project), Badiou's event is immediate, and the question of mediation only comes afterwards—"[a]n eventual situation can be recognised at a glance . . . you are universally touched by this universality of its visibility. You *know* [it, and] no-one can publicly deny it." Badiou, *Le Réveil de l'Histoire*, 105. Like many, Žižek has taken Badiou to task on the subject's passivity in regard to the event, as well as on how his concept of (distance from the) state not only undermines the posing of questions of mediation, but results in a kind of reformism—"there are a certain number of questions regarding which we cannot posit the absolute exteriority of the state," and so politics becomes "a matter of requiring something from the state, of formulating . . . prescriptions or statements." Alain Badiou, "Politics and Philosophy," *Ethics*, trans. Peter Hallward (London: Verso, 2001), 98. Žižek draws attention to "a strange *non sequitur*: if the state is here to stay, if it is impossible to abolish the state (and capitalism), why act with a distance towards the state? Why not act *within the state*?" Žižek, *In Defence of Lost Causes*, 402.

54. Žižek, "Lenin's Choice," 170.

55. Alain Badiou, "One Divides into Two," *Lenin Reloaded. Toward a Politics of Truth*, ed. Sebastien Budgen, Stathis Kouvelakis, and Slavoj Žižek (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 14.

56. Badiou, "Beyond Formalisation," 125.

57. Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, 267.

58. Badiou, "The Communist Hypothesis," 42.

59. Michel Foucault, "Pouvoir et Corps," *Dits et écrits*, Vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 2001), 1625.

60. Deleuze and Guattari, *L'Anti-Oedipe*, 417.

61. Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze, "Les Intellectuels et le Pouvoir," Vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 2001), 180–1183.

62. Luc Boltanski and Éve Chiapello, *Le Nouvel Esprit du Capitalisme* (Paris: Gallimard, 1999).

63. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Mille Plateaux* (Paris: Minuit, 2003), 356–357.

64. This passage (in which he goes on to criticize bank bail-outs, a measure hardly advocated by any activists), as well as the one on interpassivity (in which

he refers to “*Medécins sans frontières*, Greenpeace, feminist and anti-racist campaigns” and cultural studies) illustrates Žižek’s tendency to conflate rather different political strains in his criticisms. Žižek, *The Year of Dreaming Dangerously*, 109.

65. “Back [in 1999] I naively believed that all we needed to do was work on [“coordination at a distance”]; [“a shared horizon”] would look after itself.” Phil McLeish, “From Horizontal to Diagonal,” *Turbulence* 5 (2009): 7.

66. Holloway, *Change the World without Taking Power*, 210.

67. Escobar, “Other worlds are already possible,” 357, n. 12.

68. Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 66.

69. My emphasis. Gilles Dauvé and François Martin, “Leninism and the Ultra-Left,” *Eclipse and Re-Emergence of the Communist Movement*, LibCom (1969), <http://libcom.org/library/3-leninism-ultra-left>.

70. Thus, Holloway warns that “[a]ny institutionalization of struggle is problematic” but begrudgingly recognizes the need for positivizing the movement of negation by creating institutions—and despite a staunch antivanguardism, acknowledges that “what is sometimes called a ‘vanguard’ probably cannot be avoided” to the extent that “[t]here are undoubtedly some who can walk better than others.” See John Holloway, *Crack Capitalism* (London: Pluto, 2010), 224; Holloway, *Change the World without Taking Power*, 242–243, 230. In turn, Escobar contemplates the necessity of “self-organization with some measure of leadership, structure, and regulation” (Escobar, “Other worlds are already possible,” 354), while Dauvé and Martin state that communists must not “refrain from intervening under the pretext that ‘the workers must decide for themselves,’” but instead “express the whole meaning of what is going on, and . . . make practical proposals.” Dauvé and Martin, “Leninism and the ultra-left.” Hardt and Negri have responded to the charge of teleologizing the multitude’s self-producing movement toward autonomy by acknowledging the problematic of transition explicitly as a transposition of “the Leninist Gramsci on[to] the biopolitical terrain.” Transition is necessary because “the formation of the multitude” is not yet fully achieved, and so “is not spontaneous,” but must be “governed” through the consolidation of “[t]he insurrectional event . . . in an institutional process that develops the multitude’s capacities for democratic decision making,” including the inscription of constituent power into constitutional frameworks. Michael Hardt and Toni Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap/Harvard University Press, 2009), 361, 363, 367.

71. Holloway, *Crack Capitalism*, 9.

72. See Lenin’s response to those who opposed *Iskra*’s plan for an all-Russian newspaper as a way of making isolated underground circles coalesce into a party: “Isn’t it demagoguery when you [incite people] against the author of the sketch for this reason alone . . . that he dared to propose a sketch of a plan?” Italics in the original. V.I. Lenin, *What Is to Be Done?*, *Lenin Rediscovered*. What Is to Be Done? in Context (Chicago: Haymarket, 2008), 815.

73. Brian Massumi, “Navigating movements,” in *Hope: New Philosophies for Change*, ed. Mary Zournazi (Annandale: Pluto, 2002), 219.

74. Dean refers to this as “the flipside of the suspicion towards leaders: the unconscious fantasy that ‘someone else is in charge,’ ‘a kind of delegation without delegation . . . or without representation.” Dean, *The Communist Horizon*, 236.

75. Antonio Gramsci. *Quaderni del Carcere*, Vol. 1 (Turin: Einaudi, 1977), 328.

76. Badiou, “The Communist Hypothesis,” 37.

77. As Dean pithily puts it: "Occupy Wall Street is not actually the movement of the 99 percent of the population of the United States (or the world) against the top 1 percent. It is a movement mobilizing itself around an occupied Wall Street in the name of the 99 percent." Dean, *The Communist Horizon*, 229. For Badiou, "however large a manifestation, it is always hyper-minoritarian [*archi-minoritaire*]," a "mass minority" in which "the situation is contracted into a sort of representation of itself, a metonymy of the overall situation." Italics in the original, Badiou, *Le Réveil de l'Histoire*, 90, 104, 134.

78. *Pace* Badiou's "metaphysical politics of the One" accusation, the difference between Deleuze and Guattari and him is not that the former allow no room for discontinuity or the subject, as they too establish a connection between a process of subjectivation and a "break with [linear] causality," that is, an event. Deleuze and Guattari, *L'Anti-Oedipe*, 453. The difference is that, for Badiou, the subject constitutes itself in response to the event as immediately sovereign—not over the real (in the confrontation with which it develops the consequences of fidelity) but over itself (as conscious, therefore separate, or conscious of the separation whose consequences it must follow; hence why its only options are to keep going or betray). For Deleuze and Guattari, in turn, the subject is coextensive with the eventual break, and constitutes itself as consciousness of this break progressively, in ways that may or may not be oppositional, but are never wholly sovereign.

79. In a similar vein, Dauvé and Martin write that communists must not refrain from making proposals because, "[i]f the expression is right and the proposal appropriate, they are parts of the struggle of the proletariat and contribute to build the 'party' of the communist revolution." Dauvé and Martin, "Leninism."

80. I develop this and other points discussed here in Rodrigo Nunes, "The Lessons of 2011: Three Theses on Organisation," *Mute* 2012, <http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/lessons-2011-three-theses-organisation>.

81. Ben Trott's work on "directional demands," reforms ultimately too radical for the system to bear that can function as focal points for diverse struggles, is a promising attempt to pose this problem. Ben Trott, "Walking in the Right Direction?," *Turbulence* 5 (2005): 14–15.

82. Nunes, "The Lessons of 2011."

83. In this sense, regardless of what merits its analysis and plan may or may not have, Rolling Jubilee strikes me as huge step in the right direction: it is defined not by a group identity, but by a concrete, ambitious strategic wager translated into a series of organizing measures. See <http://rollingjubilee.org/>. Another interesting recent development plays directly on the idea of a party is Spain's Partido X. See <http://partidox.org/en>.

84. Camatte, "On Organization."

85. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogia do oprimido* (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1981), 79.

86. Clodovis Boff, *Como Trabalhar com o Povo* (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1984), 23–24.

87. *Ibid.*, 24.

88. I have developed this point in relation to Badiou, arguing for a complementarity between him and Deleuze and Guattari, in Rodrigo Nunes, "Subjekt, Ereignis, Trennung. Über Politik bei Badiou und Deleuze/Guattari," *Treue zur Wahrheit. Die Begründung die Philosophie Alain Badiou's*, ed. Jens Knip and Frank Meier (Munich: Unrast, 2010).

89. Deleuze and Guattari, *Mille Plateaux*, 198.

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