

Materialism and World Politics Conference, LSE, London, October 20-22 2012 (draft; please do not cite)

**The Revolution as Resonant Event:
The Affective Materiality of Insurrections**

Gastón Gordillo
University of British Columbia

What, exactly, is a revolution? What is the nature of the material forces unleashed by insurrections? The global insurrections of the past two years have brought to light the actuality of this question, but also the obsolescence of older approaches to materialism. It is not simply that the Leninist model of the vanguard-Party has crumbled amid the emergence of leaderless multitudes wary of institutional hierarchies. The salience of massive, intense, and sustained street protests in Egypt, Spain or the United States reveals something deeper, which remains largely under-theorized: the palpable acceleration and intensity of collective forms of effervescence which has defined all revolutions in history.

In philosophy and critical theory, many authors have long been aware of the emotional nature of revolutions, and have tried to name this phenomenon in different ways. Kant famously said that what defined the French Revolution was “enthusiasm” (Kant 1991 [1798]). Marx used this same concept, “enthusiasm,” to describe the political passions that transformed Paris during the Commune of 1871 (1988 [1871]:76). In the 1920s, when Marxist orthodoxy was decreeing that revolutions require “objective conditions” to come into being, Georg Lukács (1971 [1923]) counter-argued that revolutions are subjective events that can only happen through the materialization of a collective consciousness. Authors like Antonio Gramsci (1971 [1929-35]) and E. P. Thompson (1966 [1963]) have also emphasized the subjective dimensions of anti-

capitalist struggles. And more recently, Alain Badiou (2012:90) argued that insurrections involve “a general subjective intensification,” a “violent passion for the True,” and a state of “creative exaltation.” This is the “subjective intensification” noted by all media accounts of the revolts in North Africa, Europe, and North America, which have been described as defined by “effervescence,” “energy,” “passion,” or “indignation.”

In this paper, I argue that these are all partial, ultimately inadequate concepts that seek to name something tangible that nonetheless eludes them, and that they all dance around without fully grasping: the bodily, resonant materiality of insurrections. This demands redefining what Kant saw as “enthusiasm” through a more materialist, immanent, and affective lens that examines insurrections as resonant events: ruptures generated by multitudes intensely affected by the bodily encounters created on the streets in confrontations against the state.

Badiou is the most important philosopher who has examined insurrections as events, which he sees as moments of rupture that mark the appearance of what did not exist before and that, for this reason, constitute the most immanent domain of politics (Badiou 2005 [1988], 2010, 2012). Yet the very concept of event as *rupture* poses the question of the type of materiality that has the power to create such a break in the fabric of the state. In referring to the insurrections of North Africa, Badiou quoted approvingly a line in the book *The Coming Insurrection* that I analyze in detail below, which says that revolutions do not spread by contamination but by “resonance.”¹ Badiou wrote, “*Let us call this resonance an event.*” And he added, “The event is the abrupt creation not of a

¹ He attributes the line to Jean-Marie Gleize.

new reality, but of a myriad of new possibilities. None of them is the repetition of what is already known” (2012:109, my emphasis).

In this piece, I analyze the bodily generativity of the insurrection as a resonant event, by examining what Badiou does not get to conceptualize: the affective and material dimensions of the event of the insurrection. And whereas Badiou refers to this resonance only in passing, I explore the materiality of the resonances coalescing in the event of an insurrection through a re-reading of Spinoza in the light of philosophies of negativity. Drawing on Spinoza, I conceive of resonance as the bodily and affective thickness generated by multitudes of bodies affecting each other in their confrontation with the state on the streets. This means recoding Badiou’s “subjective intensification” as a resonant intensification whose force is the self-generating materiality of the event of the insurrection. Drawing on the Egyptian insurrection, the Occupy movement in North America, and other popular uprisings in world history, in this essay I examine the generative materiality of the resonant event, its form, its unstable temporality, and its power to change space as part of spatial and affective confrontations.

The Resonant Event as Generative Materiality

I first began thinking about the materiality of resonance when I was confronted with the dramatic images coming from Cairo in early February 2011, during the most intense and violent moments of the uprising that eventually toppled the Mubarak regime. Those images revealed an insurrection unfolding in its raw immanence: multitudes of bodies coming together on the streets, affecting each other through close contact and repetitive chants and bodily gestures, fighting for the control of space against the state,

temporarily dispersed by teargas and bullets, regrouping again, forming huge, mobile swarms that saturated Tahrir Square and myriad other places in Cairo and Egypt with a heightened state of effervescence. And amid the turbulence, the chaos, and the flux, I was struck by the resonant nature of that event: the fact that those multitudes were made up of bodies resonating together in the most physical, non-metaphorical sense of the term: sharing a common rhythm, made material and even more resonant in chants and slogans that made men and women vibrate and act together, while at the same time following a de-centered, rhizomatic, constellational bodily multiplicity.

This collective resonance seemed to take Spinoza's concept of affect into uncharted territory. The Egyptian insurrection was an event in which the act of being affected by other bodies, the kernel of Spinoza's notion of affect in *Ethics* (1982 [1677]), had reached explosive political dimensions: a generalized state of collective affectation that was much more than just "enthusiasm": it was a powerful material force that dramatically changed Cairo and had a profound impact on the Middle-East and the world, inspiring a few months later the rise of mass protests in North America. In the essay *Resonance and the Egyptian Revolution*, which I posted on my blog five days before Mubarak fell, I wrote, affected like millions by the intensity of the images coming from Cairo, "Resonance is what gives life to this human rhizome and the source of its power."²

My interest in the political dimensions of the concept of "resonance" had already been piqued by its presence in the book *The Coming Insurrection*, by The Invisible Committee (the same line cited by Badiou). Almost in passing, they write:

² Gordillo, Gastón, "Resonance and the Egyptian Revolution," on my blog *Space and Politics*, February 6, 2011.

“Revolutionary movements do not spread by contamination but by resonance. Something that is constituted here resonates with the shock wave emitted by something constituted over there.” Resonance, in other words, is for The Invisible Committee that which accounts for the spatial spread of revolutionary unrest. This is not linear spread, but convoluted, unpredictable dispersion. “A body that resonates does so according to its own mode. An insurrection is not like a plague or a forest fire – a linear process which spreads from place to place after an initial spark. It rather takes the shape of a music, whose focal points, though dispersed in time and space, succeed in imposing the rhythms of their own vibrations, always taking on more density” (Committee 2009:12-13). In this elaboration, resonance involves rhizomic, non-linear, vibrating patterns of dispersion resembling sound waves. It also involves the creation of a rhythm that gains momentum and density through the empowerment of dispersed nodes or focal points. These are provocative ideas that capture the overall spatial pulsations of resonance. Yet this analysis does not go further. As a reviewer noted, the reference to “resonance” by The Invisible Committee shows “little will to go beyond intuition.”³

In his book *Posthegemony*, Jon Beasley-Murray provides a more embodied, affective view of resonance that is of fundamental importance to understand its force. Whereas The Invisible Committee refers to resonance to name the non-linear and unpredictable dispersion that makes insurrections expand, Beasley-Murray draws on Spinoza and Deleuze to focus on the bodily and affective dimensions of resonance. More importantly, he sees resonance as constitutive of the multitude. The cohesive principle of

³ Robert Zwarg, “The Coming Insurrection: The Symptom of a Crisis.” <http://www.troubledkashmir.com/index.php/world-press-today/150-the-coming-insurrection-the-symptom-of-a-crisis-robert-zwarg-of-a-crisis->

collective subjectivities, he argues, “is resonance rather than identity, expansive inclusion rather than demarcated difference” (2010:188). Resonance, in this account, is the immanent, bodily, non-discursive, and expansive force that constitutes the multitude as open, non-hierarchical multiplicity. “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” (2010:228). Resonance, in short, is what makes the multitude. “The multitude is resonant” (2010:250). Beasley-Murray, in this regard, redefines Hardt and Negri’s concept of the multitude along the immanent lines proposed but not fully elaborated by the latter. And this resonance is produced by bodily encounters, for “the multitude’s immanent expansion proceeds by means of contiguity and contact, in resonances established through affective encounters” (2010:235).

Beasley-Murray’s account of the multitude as a *resonant* entity is groundbreaking, because it reveals that resonance is part of the multitude’s political ontology as immanent matter. I return to Beasley-Murray later on, in relation to something equally immanent that he, however, does not get to analyze: the multitude’s resonant materialization and temporally unstable, fraught fluctuations in space and in its transformation. Yet the fact that resonance is a concept in physics takes us to the question of the type of materiality that resonates and is produced by the event of the insurrection.

Exploring the materiality of the resonances produced in insurrections demands, following Diana Coole and Samantha Frost, “new ways of thinking about matter and processes of materialization” (2010:2). The type of vibrant, affective, shifting, elusive, and assertive materiality that coalesced on Tahrir Square in early 2011 is certainly different from mainstream and positivist understandings of matter as made up of passive,

dead objects. My attempt to think the materiality of resonance, in this regard, is inspired by Coole's work on generative materialities and, in particular, her call to articulate this "generative, self-transformative, and creative materiality without relying on any metaphysical invocation of mysterious, immaterial forces or agencies" (Coole 2010:93). Coole draws heavily on Maurice Merleau-Ponty's efforts to undermine the Cartesian view of matter as "sheer exteriority," as something "devoid of interiority or ontological depth." Merleau-Ponty, she shows, articulated a generative view of matter centered on his view of the body as "the pivot of the world." The resonances created on Tahrir Square certainly have their pivot "in the body," as myriad bodies come together in multitudes.

Yet as I suggested earlier, another key figure to understand the generative materiality produced in these multitudinous encounters is Spinoza. One of Spinoza's most groundbreaking contributions to an affective view of matter is his view of the body as an outward looking object entangled with constellations of other bodies. While Spinoza was strongly influenced by Newton's and Descartes' physics, he broke with their mechanical view of matter as dead extension. For Spinoza, the body is never an individual, detached object but striving, sensuous, sensitive matter continually affected by other bodies. In *Ethics*, he demonstrates that human emotions, often imagined as inner expressions of an enclosed self, are produced by the impact that other bodies have on that self's body. Love, fear, envy, jealousy, or anger are different ways in which bodies are affected by other bodies. Affects, in other words, have a material interiority but do not emerge from the inside out but are actually "incoming": the product of relations with other bodies. Affect for Spinoza is the action of being affected: a confirmation that bodies

only exist in constellations and that the human body is powerfully affected by these constellations.

The collective resonance produced in places like Tahrir Square is therefore an intensified affectation in which the experience of being affected by the multitude acquires high levels of emotional thickness. This intensified bodily process draws on, and empowers, what Spinoza called *conatus* or striving, the will to live and expand life shared by all living forms. The resonance created by insurrections has, indeed, a profoundly affirmative force, which strives for the creation of something new. But this is affirmation *against* the status quo and therefore simultaneously charged with negativity. And the fact that for Badiou the event of the insurrection is defined by rupture, by the negation of the repetition of the same, implies moving beyond Spinoza's affirmative vitalism.

I turn to the negativity of the resonant event, and therefore to its dissonance, below. But it is important to note that not all resonances are disruptive. Since bodies that come together in space are the main producers of resonance, there are many daily instances that create resonant encounters that are purely positive, devoid of negativity. Capitalism, in fact, celebrates positive manifestations of resonance, like the collective, often exuberant enthusiasm created in sports stadiums and in music concerts or the type of catchy, resonant rhythms propagated by the entertainment industry and corporate culture. Any advertising, after all, aims to make the viewer resonate with imagery, discourse, or sounds. And in New Age circles the idea of resonance as a healing force that works through inter-connectivity is particularly popular. Some groups even organize retreats in exclusive spas where, after paying a steep fee, you meet to resonate with others and with "the cosmos." These conservative codifications reduce resonance to a positive

affectation devoid of tension and critique. More importantly, these are more often than not transcendental, mystified views of resonance that reduce it to a universal substance. The celebration of positive forms of bodily resonance by capitalist popular culture expresses the type of conservative affirmation that Gilles Deleuze (1983:184) criticized as “the yes of the ass,” the bourgeois celebration of things as they are, which Theodor Adorno (1973 [1966]) identified as the main target of his negative dialectics.

The resonance that defines the event of an insurrection is of a qualitatively different nature because it is *dissonant*. Its negativity is disruptive of the positivity of state and corporate spaces as full and is, therefore, a source of tensions and fractures. This is how the state, the elites, and the media perceive insurrections and in general all riots: as sheer dissonance: a frightening, disruptive, uncoded vector that needs to be dealt with violence. And while riots can indeed be largely dissonant events (especially when they lack a positive public message and focus on the destruction of property), insurrections have at the same time a profoundly resonant and affirmative force because they *draw* myriad bodies together through expansive affectations created on the streets. The generative negativity of the resonant event lies precisely in its power to rupture the status quo and qualitatively change the nature of space. But this is a political generativity that operates on the plane of immanence, in and through resonant bodies taking over space.

The Appearance of the Multitude: Form, Plasticity, and Ambient Thickness

The materiality of the resonant event, needless to say, is not that of an arrested object but that of a highly dynamic, high-paced, unstable acceleration of bodily velocities and vectors. The materiality of this flux is, on the one hand, spatially expansive. If they

are powerful enough and the conditions are ripe, one of the most defining features of insurrections is that they expand outwardly through the so-called “domino effects,” precipitating waves of insurrections elsewhere, and along the nonlinear patterns of dispersion outlined by The Invisible Committee. This spatial expansiveness of resonant events has defined all the major waves of revolutionary unrest in modern history, as the cases of Europe in 1848, eastern Europe in 1989, and North Africa and the Middle-East in 2011 illustrate. Yet what interests me here is the acceleration of political temporalities generated by the event in the places it engulfs under its orbit, and the way in which this acceleration is actualized in the physical form of multitudes on the streets.

The concept of the multitude has gained popularity in the past decade through the work of Antonio Negri (1999), who later elaborated it through his collaboration with Michael Hardt in their books *Empire*, *Multitude*, and *Commonwealth* (Hardt and Negri 2000, 2006, 2009). Yet while claiming loyalty to the plane of immanence, Hardt and Negri tend to view the multitude as a transcendental and universal force: a primary, already-constituted ontological presence that is the locus of social creativity, political innovation, and historical movement and therefore exists even in moments of little unrest. For Hardt and Negri, in other words, the multitude exists ontologically even if there are no actual multitudes coalescing as a tangible presence on the streets.

Badiou, in particular, has criticized Negri for being unable to account for the rupture created by events, which for him mark the true immanence of politics. In a foreword to a new edition of Negri’s *Insurgencies*, Michael Hardt responded by arguing that Badiou’s view of rupture does not necessarily contradict the idea of the multitude and its constituent power as primary ontological presence. Events, Hardt writes, are not

isolated, rare instances “that arrive from the outside and have no roots in the immanent political terrain.” Rather, he says, “constituent power constitutes events, one might say, like electrical charges that accumulate in the atmosphere until the moment when their tension is so extreme that they crash down to earth in a lightning bolt” (Hardt 1999:xii).

It is certainly true that the event of an insurrection draws from pre-existing tensions and conditions, and is the product of those conditions. But I prefer to see the multitude only as the material actualization of that which appears on the streets and *did not exist before* as sensible matter: that is, as an assemblage of human bodies in which, as Elias Canetti (1984 [1960]) observed, individual bodies are no longer wary of touching the bodies of strangers and form a new ensemble marked by physical density and a certain rhythm. As sensible, breathing matter, the multitudes that coalesced on Tahrir Square or on Zuccotti Park were not pre-constituted objects; they came into being in the process of converging onto those places and turning them into nodes of resonance. Beasley-Murray anticipated this ontological condition when he argued that the multitude *is* resonant. This also means that without resonance created by bodies in the streets there is no actual multitude. Or, to put it differently, without its resonant materiality “the multitude” is a virtual entity, an always potential yet not fully actual materialization: millions of atomized bodies entangled at myriad ways and generating the wealth of imperial capitalism but unable to coalesce as a political force. E. P. Thompson’s (1966 [1963]) most decisive contribution to critical theory, it is worth remembering, is that classes are not pre-given objects but forces that only exist when they coalesce in struggle. It is in the event of the insurrection, in this regard, that the multitude becomes tangible as a physical-political force. And “the lightning bolt” evoked by Hardt is the resonant

discharge created by the event of the multitude coalescing in common spaces and creating a rupture in the positive texture of state power.

In *The Urban Revolution*, Lefebvre (2003) argued that the urban is a *form* that can be best appreciated from an airplane: a tangible material constellation that organizes and centralizes mobility around a core. Likewise, it could be argued that the material form of insurrections can be best appreciated by looking at places like Tahrir Square in early February 2011 from above, which reveals a loud, undifferentiated, mobile conglomerate made up of myriad bodies whose individuality is subsumed to the form of a swarm. The form of the Egyptian insurrection was clearly that of the huge crowds that saturated Tahrir Square and countless other streets, but as they were permanently shaped by their confrontations with state agents that also adopted swarming tactics. Like all swarms, the ones that gave physical shape to the Egyptian insurrection were elastic, mobile, and ever-shifting, permanently shooting off smaller groups and incorporating others through fusion, responding with elasticity to waves of state repression and quickly regrouping elsewhere. This plasticity means that the physics that regulates the generative materiality of insurrections has little in common with Newton's mechanical physics of bound objects that spin off each other like billiard balls. This generativity is profoundly affective and imbricated with a sensory navigation of the urban fabric.

Brian Massumi (2010:62) used the term "ambient thickness" to analyze the dense affective environment created in the United States by the attacks on September 11 2001 and the subsequent efforts by the state to modulate the collective fear of terrorism. The idea of ambient thickness is particularly apt to allude to the materiality of insurrections. In the revolutionary event, this thickness is created by an array of forces, chief among

them the bodily and emotional density created by resonant multitudes taking over public spaces and by the violence that the state unleashes on them. And if the form of this density is the ever-mobile swarm, its smell is usually that of teargas. Teargas is the most distinct smell of insurrections: the sign that the state has lost control of the streets and seeks to reclaim it through chemicals weapon of spatial saturation that seek to force the dispersal and atomization of crowds. And while this dispersion is more often than not only temporary, it changes the material and affective composition of urban space. “So intense have the tear-gas barrages been in the last few days that the chemicals have mixed with the city’s ubiquitous dust so that when the dust is kicked up, people start coughing and sneezing.”⁴ This is how *The New York Times* described the streets of Cairo in November 2011, after new and deadly rounds of clashes between the police and multitudes protesting the slow pace of reforms by the military. This chemical impregnation of the very material fabric of the city reveals that the event of the insurrection transforms the quality of public space at a tactile, sensory level. A colleague once told me that she was living in Paris during the uprising of May 1968 as a six-year old girl. I asked her what she remembered, and she responded, “The smell of teargas.” Teargas had become so inseparable from the spatial texture of Paris in those days that its sensory presence, its smell, subsumed in her memory all other features of the event.

And this is an ambient thickness that erodes the distinction between private and public spaces. In Bernardo Bertolucci’s 2003 film *The Dreamers*, three middle-class youths remain secluded in their bourgeois Parisian apartment in May 1968 for weeks on end, philosophizing and drinking, oblivious to the streets. The insurrection disrupts their

⁴ *The New York Times*, November 24, 2011

dreamlike isolation in the form of a teargas canister that shatters a window and wakes them up to the event. The canister is the invasion of the resonant event into the depoliticized, placid bourgeois space, which is now not only saturated with teargas but also with the resonant chants coming from the streets. And this irruption reveals that the ambient thickness of an insurrection is expansive and tends to engulf much of the urban space, eroding distinctions between private and public spaces and, in this case, making the three characters walk down the stairs and join the chanting multitudes.

The Resonant Event as Spatial-Affective Struggle

The insurrections of 2011 have brought to light that the collective occupation of space is central to the effectiveness of any political project against the state. But space is not involved in the event of the insurrection as passive, pre-constituted matter, as if it were the fixed matrix on which confrontations unfold. Space, rather, is a constitutive, dynamic element that is imbricated in the generative materiality of the protests and is therefore transformed by it. These spatial transformations involve the ambient thickness described earlier in the streets but also, particularly in Egypt and North America in 2011, the configuration of places that become the material and affective anchor of the uprising. What Tahrir Square and Zuccotti Park had in common was that the multitudes that took over them transformed them into qualitatively different places: *nodes of resonance* that radiated the generative materiality of the uprising outwardly.

In fact, as we know, Occupy Wall Street began when a few hundred activists inspired by what had happened on Tahrir Square occupied a small, manicured park in New York and radically transformed its materiality by creating a node of resonance: a place saturated with striving bodies affected by their mutual presence. The park became a

human assemblage of bodies that talked, debated, ate, sang, drummed, marched, slept, and dreamed in close proximity with each other and created a machine of resonance generation. This resonance was embodied in the human mic that made these bodies speak in unison and vibrate together. The node of resonance radiated its force in all directions largely through alternative media and shortly thereafter precipitated the emergence of a continental political movement whose form was the rhizome: a de-centered, horizontal, multi-sited assemblage of myriad other nodes interconnected with each other and recognizing no authority other than the collective power generated by the nodes.

The Occupy movement is certainly not reducible to its occupations of space. Yet in retrospect, it is also clear that its political salience was directly linked to its capacity to generate multiple nodes of resonance all over North America. The violent disarticulation of these nodes by the police in November and December 2011 substantially weakened the movement, which was indeed largely sustained by the intense face-to-face encounters generated in those spaces. The same way that in Egypt the multitudes were successful in toppling the Mubarak regime largely because they overwhelmed the police forces on the streets, in the United States the state was relatively successful in neutralizing the Occupy movement because of its capacity to overwhelm protesters on the streets through sheer physical force and thousands of arrests. In this regard, despite its undoubted political impact, the Occupy movement was never able to generate the type of critical mass that materialized in Egypt in early February 2011. While it is estimated that the night that Mubarak resigned there were eight million people in the streets of Egypt and a million on Tahrir Square, when the NYPD raided Zuccotti Park on November 14 there were about 2,000 people sleeping on the park. In short, while the power of insurrections is not

necessarily reducible to the number of bodies on the streets, the sheer size of the multitudes that took to the streets in Egypt was indeed part of their material power.

Yet these struggles over the control of space are not purely physical but also involve confrontations of an affective nature. The relative receptivity of the general population to be affected (or not) by the message of protesters has always been key to the potential growth of an uprising. In both the Middle-East and North America, the protests gained traction especially after the *affective shocks* created by the dissemination of images and news with high emotional impact. This was epitomized by the impact of the public immolation of a street vendor in a small town in Tunisia in December 2010. This was a seemingly local and insignificant event that nonetheless affected enough people to generate cataclysmic political turbulences first in Tunisia and subsequently in the rest of North Africa and the Middle-East. The rapid expansion of the anti-corporate resonances generated by the Occupy movement in September and October 2011 was also marked by the dissemination of images of police violence on unarmed, peaceful protesters.

This is why a crucial component of the generative materiality of insurrections is the sustained effort by the state to modulate and control how the general public is affected by the presence of multitudes on the streets. Conversely, any insurgent multitude seeks to affect wider publics, as well as the police and military forces sent to repress them. Deleuze and Guattari wrote, “Affects transpierce the body like arrows, they are weapons of war” (1987:356). This transformation of affects into “weapons of war” has been clear in the cases when insurgent multitudes were able to make regular troops resonate with them and break the military chain of command. The Paris Commune of 1871 and the Russian Revolution of 1917 only took place because myriad soldiers

disobeyed orders and joined the resonant body of the revolution. And this is why when the French state reassembled a new army to destroy the Commune in May 1871, it actively imposed on its troops a policy of affective desensitization: it recruited men from conservative rural areas and convinced them that the communards were brutal savages that ought to be exterminated. Many communards were killed when, trying to recreate the fraternizing with soldiers that led to the creation of the Commune two months earlier, they tried to talk to soldiers and affect them rather than shoot at them.

At the peak of the Occupy movement, protesters have also tried to affect police officers and make them resonate with the message that they are also part of the 99%. Yet as in France in May 1871, the NYPD was explicit in ordering its officers to repress being affected emotionally by the protesters. A flyer that NYPD officers were given before being deployed on the streets read: “A strong military appearance, with sharp and precise movements, is a force multiplier and a psychological advantage to us. Regardless of protesters’ message, *remain neutral and unbiased without personal emotions affecting your assignments*” (my emphasis). Officers were ordered to affect protesters and *not* to be affected by them. And this required covering their bodies with an affective crust, a bodily shield that ought to be as impenetrable to affects as their helmets, padding, and gear are designed to resist blows, rocks, or sticks. During the eviction of Occupy Boston in early December 2011, “when one female police officer began to cry, her male superiors yelled and berated her.”⁵ The officer’s affective shield had been pierced by an affective arrow, and she was reprimanded because she was affected.

⁵ <http://occupywallst.org/article/occupy-boston-we-might-have-been-evicted-we-shall-/>

Conclusions

Slavoj Žižek has argued that the “sublime revolutionary explosion” of the event of the insurrection should not make us forget “the sobering effect of the morning after”: that is, the moment of decreased intensity that follows revolutionary situations and that often leads to the reintroduction of “the universe of market calculations” (Žižek 2004:27). The post-revolutionary reality of Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya speaks volumes of the fact that resonant events, even when they manage to create ruptures, are followed by longer-term, more mundane and less intense collective experiences. The very concept of “the event” in Badiou implies a moment of political intensification that is temporarily delimited, marked by one or several peaks and followed by a gradual de-compression and deflation. And it is certainly in the immanent nature of the resonances created during the event that the latter cannot go on with the same intensity for a long time. Created by “the generativity of the flesh,” as Diana Coole would put it, the materiality of the event is subjected to the strength, resilience, and eventual exhaustion of living bodies. And this is also a generativity certainly constrained by the relative fragility of those bodies. Myriad insurrections in world history, after all, have come to an end when resonant multitudes were massacred by the state, as it happened in Paris in 1871 or in Beijing in 1989.

Yet it is also apparent that the material power of insurrections *is* the product of this generativity of the flesh: a resonance that dramatically expands the endurance of individual bodies and makes them do things that, only a few months earlier, would have been deemed unthinkable. Žižek (2004:31-32) is right in chastising Spinoza for his

vitalist rejection of negativity, which made him unable to see negativity as a positive force with generative qualities, a view of negativity also shared by Coole (2000). Yet reconceptualized through a lens sensitive to rupture, Spinoza's geometry of bodily affectations can help us view the material force created by insurrections under a new light. And the disruptive and creative power of this materiality lies, precisely, in its affective and resonant nature: its capacity, when conditions are ripe, to affect more and more bodies and immerse them within the "lightning bolt" of the insurrection.

References

- Adorno, Theodor
1973 [1966]. *Negative Dialectics*. New York: Continuum.
- Badiou, Alain
2005 [1988]. *Being and Event*. London: Continuum.
- 2010. *The Communist Hypothesis*. London ; New York: Verso.
- 2012. *The Rebirth of History: Times of Riots and Uprisings*. London: Verso.
- Beasley-Murray, Jon
2010. *Posthegemony: Political Theory and Latin America*. Milwaukee: University of Minnesota Press.
- Bosteels, Bruno
2011. *The Actuality of Communism*. New York: Verso.
- Canetti, Elias
1984 [1960]. *Crowds and Power*. New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux.
- Committee, the Invisible
2009. *The Coming Insurrection*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e).
- Coole, Diana
2000. *Negativity and Politics: Dionysus and Dialectics from Kant to Post-structuralism*. London: Routledge.
- 2010. "The Inertia of Matter and the Generativity of Flesh". In *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*, Diana Coole and Samantha Frost, ed. Pp. 92-115. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Coole, Diana and Samantha Frost
2010. "Introducing the New Materialisms". In *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*, Diana Coole and Samantha Frost, ed. Pp. 1-43. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Deleuze, Gilles
1983. *Nietzsche and Philosophy*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari

1987. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Gramsci, Antonio

1971 [1929-35]. *Selection from the Prison Notebooks*. New York: International Publishers.

Hardt, Michael

1999. "Foreword". In *Insurgencies: Constituent Power and the Modern State*, ed. Pp. vi-xiii. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Hardt, Michael and Antonio Negri

2000. *Empire*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

2006. *Multitude*. New York: Penguin.

2009. *Commonwealth*. Cambridge: The Belknap Press.

Kant, Immanuel

1991 [1798]. "The Contest of Faculties". In *Kant: Political Writings*, Hans Reiss, ed. Pp. 182-183. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lefebvre, Henri

2003. *The Urban Revolution*. Minneapolis-London University of Minnesota Press.

Lukács, Georg

1971 [1923]. *History and Class Consciousness*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Marx, Karl

1988 [1871]. *Civil War in France*. New York: International Publishers.

Massumi, Brian

2010. "The Future Birth of the Affective Fact: The Political Ontology of Threat". In *The Affect theory Reader*, Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth, ed. Pp. 52-70. Durham: Duke University Press.

Negri, Antonio

1999. *Insurgencies: Constituent Power and the Modern State*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Spinoza, Baruch

1982 [1677]. *The Ethics and Selected Letters*. Indianapolis: Hackett.

Thompson, Edward P.

1966 [1963]. *The Making of the English Working Class*. New York: Vintage.

Žižek, Slavoj

2004. *Organs without Bodies*. New York: Routledge.