



**Benjamin Noys**

## Apocalypse, tendency, crisis

Marx's comment that history advances by the "bad side" has inspired an apocalyptic strand of anti-capitalism that supposes history is "on our side". Benjamin Noys takes issue with the "accelerationist" view that welcomes apocalypse as the decisive moment.

In a time of crisis apocalyptic desires and fantasies become pressing and real.<sup>1</sup> Norman Cohn's *In Pursuit of the Millennium* (1957) offers a secret history of the periodic emergence of a "revolutionary eschatology" in the Middle Ages in response to a collapsing social order, immiseration, disease and war. Responding to crisis these dreamers dared to imagine an apocalypse that would turn the world upside down, and create a new heaven on earth in which princes would bow to peasants. Of course the apocalypse that became real was often the apocalypse of repression. The repression in the wake of the Peasants' War in Germany (1524–26) led to the deaths of over 100,000 peasants, and the eventual execution of its leader Thomas Müntzer who, under torture, proclaimed *Omnia sunt communia* (All things are to be held in common). Cohn, an anti-communist liberal, regarded these millenarians as dangerous forerunners of the "totalitarian" movements of the 20th century and, in the 1970 edition, extended this to condemn '60s counter culture by linking these medieval proto-anarchists to Charles Manson's death cult. Of course, the Situationists would deliberately re-purpose Cohn, reclaiming these rebels from "the condescension of posterity", to use E. P. Thompson's famous phrase.<sup>2</sup> Apocalyptic desires are ambiguous, at once consolatory fantasies, deferred hopes and, potentially, spurs to radical re-orderings.



The cover of the second (and last) edition of BLAST by Wyndham Lewis, 1915.

We are living in a time of crisis and potential apocalypse, with the overlapping of the financial crisis, ecological crisis and the crisis of movements of resistance. The apocalyptic imagination feeds on this to produce dreams or nightmares of a world "cleansed" of humanity, from 2012 to the History Channel's *Life After People*. These fundamentally reactionary fantasies can only imagine redemption of our fallen world on the condition that humanity ceases to exist, or is reduced to the "right" number of the "saved". What concerns me here is thinking more closely the relation between

radical and revolutionary thought and an "apocalyptic tone" in our current context. The usual model of such a tone was proposed by Kant, when he argued that it was the result of the illegitimate extension of reason beyond its limits towards a transcendent "exalted vision" (*schwärmerische Vision*).<sup>3</sup>

Failing to recognise the limits of reality the apocalyptic dreamer was a fanatic (*Schwärmer*) trying to impose an abstract vision on reality.<sup>4</sup> I am more interested in another version of this apocalyptic tone, one which is generated by a claimed *immanence* of thought to reality.

In this case apocalypse is not generated by some external superior transcendent vision but by the immanent tendencies of the present. This is a tone which remains within, if often heretically, the ambit of Marxism. Marx famously

riposted to Proudhon that history advances by the "bad side", and, writing with Engels in *The Communist Manifesto*, that class struggle would each time end "either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes".<sup>5</sup> I'm not concerned with the old Cold War trope that Marxism is really a form of religion with its own eschatology. I am, however, critiquing the remnants of a religious model of providence, in which we suppose history is necessarily on our side. In particular I want to problematise the radicalisation of Marx's argument that suggests if history advances by the "bad side" then the worse things get, the better the potential results. In the context of the current crisis we can think of those who argue the need to radicalise and deepen the tendencies that led to the crisis, which includes Franco "Bifo" Berardi's contention that the current crisis is actually the demise of capitalism under the pressure "of the potency of productive forces (cognitive labour in the global network)"; the claim by Angela Mitropoulos and Melinda Cooper that the crisis is generated by "usury from below [...] that extended beyond the limits which were tolerable to capital"; and Antonio Negri's argument that "no New Deal is possible", and so we must go on to more radical demands.<sup>6</sup>

Of course all these thinkers are trying to call for a new inventiveness in the face of crisis and resisting, rightly I think, the usual calls for sacrifice and austerity — calls which usually fall on the victims of the crisis rather than those who caused it. That said they also imply that by a kind of radical or quasi-Marxist "cunning of reason" the very worst will produce the "good", or at least the moment of choice between "the revolutionary reconstitution of society at large" and "the common ruin of contending classes." What they also share is a remarkably traditional and teleological, if not providential, model of the dialectic between the forces and relations of production, in which, to cite Marx from the 1859 Preface,

the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production [and] from forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an era of social revolution.<sup>7</sup>

Transforming the "productive forces" into the powers of the multitude or the cognitariat carries the implication that the crisis will deliver its own radical solution, or, again to return to the 1859 Preface, that

Mankind thus inevitably sets itself only such tasks as it is able to solve, since closer examination will always show that the problem itself arises only when the material conditions for its solution are already present or at least in the course of formation.<sup>8</sup>

I want to problematise this "apocalyptic tone" by returning to the Marxist concept of the tendency, and by suggesting the need to complicate the model that the tendencies of the present will deliver the apocalyptic realisation of communism.

### **The method of the tendency**

The concept of the tendency makes a key appearance in volume three of *Capital*, with what Gopal Balakrishnan calls Marx's "notoriously unclear" reflections on "the tendency of the rate of profit to fall".<sup>9</sup> Here I do not want to consider the lengthy and vituperative debate on Marx's speculation, but rather

to attend to the way in which Marx's remarks on the "tendency" became re-worked into a method of analysis. Crucial here is Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness* (1923) and his argument, in the central essay on "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat", that the tendency is the key tool in allowing us to grasp the historical process by dissolving the reified appearance of capital: "This image of a frozen reality that nevertheless is caught up in an unremitting, ghostly movement at once becomes meaningful when this reality is dissolved into the process of which man is the driving force."<sup>10</sup> This dissolution of reified appearance means, as Lukács notes, "that the *developing tendencies of history constitute a higher reality than the empirical 'facts'*."<sup>11</sup>

The tendency or tendencies therefore have a particularly tricky form — a dialectical form in fact — in which "the objective forms of the objects are themselves transformed into a process, a flux."<sup>12</sup> This "flux" is no Bergsonian "duration" (*durée réelle*), which is merely "vacuous" according to Lukács, but a tracing of the "unbroken production and reproduction of [social] relations".<sup>13</sup> Of course the tension is that such a dissolution of the (reified) "facts" can easily be regarded as mere speculation detached from reality, which is often the way in which the dialectic has been taken by bourgeois thought and even by certain forms of Marxism. Lukács recognises that this is a "theory of reality which allots a higher place to the prevailing trends of the total development than to the facts of the empirical world".<sup>14</sup> It is the very *immediacy* of "facts" which is the sign of their reification, and instead the tendency returns reality to its mediation, to the complex totality that can only be truly registered, and so given "empirical" confirmation, from the standpoint of the proletariat. The method of the tendency is therefore constitutively ambiguous because, necessarily departing from the "facts", it can only be successful if confirmed in and by revolutionary practice. Considering Karl Popper's well-known criticism of Marxism as always self-confirming, we could argue that the method of the tendency is actually closer to the model he proposed for science of bold conjectures that can be tested by possible refutation.

Of course my brief overview of the contemporary apocalyptic tone would suggest that Lukács is not at all the key reference point. If the current financial crisis has its roots in the breakdown of the Fordist compact in the 1970s and the switch to financialisation to deal with dropping corporate profits, then it may not be surprising to find that the contemporary apocalyptic tone is also rooted in that moment. These examples of contemporary post-autonomist thought all take off from the fusion of the work of Negri with that of Deleuze and Guattari. In particular they draw on Negri and Deleuze and Guattari's re-imagining of the concept of the tendency in the early 1970s. I am not suggesting a simple isomorphism between capitalist base and theoretical superstructure, after all this re-tooling of the tendency was precisely an attempt to articulate a theoretical means to grasp the precise effects of the economic "base". I am, however, suggesting that we do not simply regard theory as an hermetically sealed realm that has no relation to economic, political and social forms. In fact, as will become clear, this is a moment of theoretical reaction and response to the crisis of Fordism.

In the case of Negri, his canonical statement of the method of the tendency is given in his 1971 work "Crisis of the Planner-State". At this point Negri remains within remarkably classical and dialectical terms, arguing that "the tendency gives us a determinate forecast, specified by the material dialectic that develops the factors comprising it."<sup>15</sup> In a way remarkably similar to Lukács, Negri correlated the tendency with the viewpoint of the workers, and

he also stressed that

the procedure of the tendency is far from being rigid or deterministic. Instead, it represents an adventure of reason as it comes to encounter the complexities of reality, an adventure of reason that is *prepared to accept risks*: in fact, the truth of the tendency lies in its verification.<sup>16</sup>

As in Lukács the tendency is here deliberately pitched between the necessity of departing from the "facts"; it is "an adventure of reason", but also returning to a newly re-ordered world through the mechanism of revolutionary verification.

Negri's practising of this method in the 1970s was predicated on accepting and radicalising the crisis of the Fordist social compact to license a thinking of the imminent, and immanent, apocalypse, of capitalist relations. If capitalism started to rupture the structure of the factory and guaranteed employment then one should not regret this and go backwards to some lost world of social democracy, but push the tendency further into exodus, sabotage and destruction of the "fetters" of the remnants of Fordism. The implication of his work, reflecting on the crisis of Fordism and its "planner-state", was that communism had already arrived and would need to simply be realised. Negri was obviously "prepared to accept risks", and the uncharitable could say that his own reading of the tendency fell victim to the *failure* of verification, with the defeat of the movement of autonomy and Negri's imprisonment. This failure did not, however, lead to a further nuancing of the method of the trajectory in his work. Rather, especially in *Empire* (2000), co-written with Michael Hardt, Negri would exchange the "encounter with the complexities of reality" for an "adventure of reason" in which the tendency was flattened further into the pure immanence and positivity of communism.

### Accelerationism

The second element of the "fusion", which would partly license Negri's later anti-dialectical "positivisation" of the tendency, is derived from the work of Deleuze and Guattari. In their 1972 work *Anti-Oedipus*, they gave a different spin to the notion of the tendency as the means of liberation and rupture. In a by now well-known argument they indicated two fundamental tendencies of capitalism: a primary axiomatic of deterritorialisation or decoding (something like Karl Polanyi's "disembedding"), and a secondary, but also essential, axiomatic of reterritorialisation, in which capitalism recoded and reabsorbed the desires it unleashed. They posed the question:

But which is the revolutionary path? Is there one? — To withdraw from the world market, as Samir Amin advises Third World Countries to do, in a curious revival of the fascist "economic solution"? Or might it be to go in the opposite direction? To go further still, that is, in the movement of the market, of decoding and deterritorialization? For perhaps the flows are not yet deterritorialized enough, not decoded enough, from the viewpoint of a theory and practice of a highly schizophrenic character. Not to withdraw from the process, but to go further, to "accelerate the process," as Nietzsche put it: in this matter, the truth is that we haven't seen anything yet.<sup>17</sup>

The tendency now becomes the immanent radicalisation of capital's own

dynamic of deterritorialisation, a theoretical manoeuvre which I call "accelerationism".

Deleuze and Guattari were not the only practitioners of this form of the method of the tendency in the early to mid 1970s. In the wake of the failures of the movements of May '68 a number of French thinkers, particularly Jean-François Lyotard and Jean Baudrillard, also argued for a nihilist embrace of the disenchanting forces of capitalism as the means for achieving a strange kind of liberation through absolute immersion in the flows and fluxes of a libidinalised capitalism. Lyotard couched accelerationism in its most extreme form in his 1974 work *Libidinal Economy*:

the English unemployed did not have to become workers to survive, they — hang on tight and spit on me — *enjoyed* the hysterical, masochistic, whatever exhaustion it was of *hanging on* in the mines, in the foundries, in the factories, in hell, they enjoyed it, enjoyed the mad destruction of their organic body which was indeed imposed upon them, they enjoyed the decomposition of their personal identity, the identity that the peasant tradition had constructed for them, enjoyed the dissolutions of their families and villages, and enjoyed the new monstrous *anonymity* of the suburbs and the pubs in morning and evening.<sup>18</sup>

Truly we may not have seen anything like this before, and it is no surprise that this would prove a remarkably unpopular theoretical moment.

Of course Deleuze and Guattari did put the brakes on before conclusions like Lyotard's could be reached. They still held faith in an *anti*-capitalist project of liberation, but one that certainly courted confusion with a simple faith in capitalism to deliver the goods. Negri, on the other hand, fuses his work with that of Deleuze and Guattari by mapping this accelerationism together with the desire of workers to flee the Fordist compact. Rather than the valorisation of capitalism per se, as Deleuze and Guattari's model might seem to intimate, we have the valorisation of deterritorialisation (later often refigured in terms of "exodus") as a proletarian strategy of resistance and rupture. In *Empire*, Hardt and Negri are critical of Deleuze and Guattari's model of "continuous movement and absolute flows", regarding it as "insubstantial and impotent".<sup>19</sup> The difficulty is, however, that their solution to this problem is to *substantialise* the tendency. This is achieved by the ontologisation of the tendency in the immanent and positive power of the multitude. It appears, then, that the dispute is not so much that Deleuze and Guattari valorise flux or movement, but that they cannot *ground* that flux and movement in an absolute immanent power of collective potential communism. Once again the positive and accelerating tendency is that "flux" that can override and dissolve reified reality.

### Deviations of the tendency

In a case of unlikely bedfellows, Alain Badiou, in his 1982 work *Theory of the Subject* (just translated into English by Bruno Bosteels), also makes recourse to the method of the tendency:

To the logic of the trajectory, which the structural dialectic comes up against and which announces the new only in the retroactive operation of its *mise-en-scène*, we oppose the

logic of tendencies, of currents, of vanguards, wherein that which is barely at its birth, though placed and subjected, links up with the most terrible force of the future.<sup>20</sup>

Badiou's presentation of a contrast between the "logic of tendencies" to a quasi-structuralist "logic of the trajectory" is cast in surprisingly Lukácsian terms — considering that they would usually be regarded as antithetical figures. Badiou's comment that in the logic of the trajectory "time is extinguished by space", could easily be mistaken for a quotation from Lukács.<sup>21</sup>

More relevantly to this discussion Badiou also identifies a second possible deviation of the method or logic of tendencies: this is committed by "the dynamicists" who "posit [...] the multiplicity of variable intensities" and "who believe in the insoluble tendency."<sup>22</sup> These thinkers, and Badiou obviously has in mind Deleuze and Guattari, emphasise the *priority* of the flowing tendency over any objective moment. In Badiou's brilliant piece of diagnostics:

the asymptotic perspective of flight makes of the empiricist a wandering materialist, a vagabond philosopher of natural substances. Ignorance of the mirror turns the empiricist into the mirror of the world.<sup>23</sup>

Badiou's contention is that in their haste to depart from the "static" or reified nature of capital's logic of economic and political places, the dynamicists, ironically, end up *reflecting* the accumulatory logic of capital.<sup>24</sup>

The importance of Badiou's analysis of the tendency is that he suggests the necessity for a careful *practice* of this method. What is particularly interesting is that Badiou does not simply suggest we condemn the errors of these deviations, but that the method of the tendency can only proceed by zig-zagging between these errors, which in this way correct each other. Those who emphasise a static logic of the trajectory and the necessity of patient analysis of the world as it is prevent us from rushing into revisions of our method that would leave it detached from reality. At the same time the dynamicists provide a necessary sense that we must take risks with the method and cannot simply follow the contours of reality. Although not consistently developed in his later work, Badiou's suggestion provides a useful means for "balancing" between those sorts of pessimistic analyses which suggest an all-encompassing capitalism that always allocates people to their ideological place (as we find in certain moments in Althusser, Adorno and contemporary value-form theorists like Moishe Postone), and those "optimistic" analyses that always stress "resistance comes first" and the imminent arrival of a new era of flux and freedom (precisely Negri, Deleuze and Guattari and even certain moments in Jacques Rancière).

Considering Badiou's criticism of Deleuze and Guattari, and his suggestion that we practice a method of the tendency that does not embrace the perspective of "flight", it comes as no surprise that he should later vehemently reject Negri's own variant of "accelerationism":

As is well known, for Negri, the Spinozist, there is only one historic substance, so that the capitalist empire is also the scene of an unprecedented communist deployment. This surely has the advantage of authorizing the belief that the worse it gets, the better it gets; or of getting you to (mis)take those

demonstrations — fruitlessly convened to meet wherever the powerful re-unite — for the "creation" and the "multiform invention" of new petit-bourgeois proletarians.<sup>25</sup>

Badiou notes what we earlier gestured towards: the tendency is taken by Negri as the *immediate* fusion of reason and reality in one Spinozist "historic substanc". What is lost is any nuancing of the tendency, any real sense of the tendency as riven by contradictions, tensions and reversals. The implication of such a reading of the tendency is that crisis is not to be reined in by the rationality of socialist or communist planning, but exacerbated by new forms of flight and flow — truly we have not seen anything yet.

Perhaps the best indication of the fatality of Negri's "mirroring" of capital is his constant stress that the revolutionary movements of the 1960s and 1970s were *successful*. Negri argued that the recuperation of the revolutionary impulses of the 1970s was not a sign of defeat, but of actual communist success lurking beneath the rotted carapace of capital. One more effort and the fetters of capital would be shaken free, releasing the communist content within. This perpetual chant can crescendo at the onset of any crisis. Paolo Virno, in contrast, and rightly in my view, argued that the defeat of the revolutions of the 1960s and 1970s led to a "communism of capital"; rather than a hyper-capitalism leading to communism, instead capitalism recuperated and redeployed communist elements (abolition of wage labour, extinction of the state and valorisation of the individual's uniqueness) for its own purposes.<sup>26</sup> Negri magically parlays defeat into victory.

## Decelerationism

Of course the criticism that Negri's theorisation of the multitude is a "mirror of capital" is not particularly original. My concern is not simply to point out the possible confusion of a supposedly communist apocalypse with an actually capitalist apocalypse. Instead, another, more important, irony is at work in this apocalyptic accelerationism. In a recent editorial for *New Left Review*, Gopal Balakrishnan raises again the more classical form of the tendency by returning to Marx's speculations about the tendential *limits* of capitalism. Deleuze and Guattari had argued that Marx's contention that "the *real barrier* of capitalist production is *capital itself*" did not so much indicate that capitalism was doomed by its own limits of accumulation, but rather that this barrier should be smashed by the radicalisation of capitalism's deterritorialising tendencies.<sup>27</sup> Balakrishnan, instead, returns to the implied meaning of Marx's barrier metaphor that capitalism actually "undermin[es] the original sources of all wealth".<sup>28</sup> He notes that the "acceleration" of capitalism since the 1970s, especially its technological developments of new cybernetic production forces, did not indicate some "exhilarating new cultural condition" but rather "[c]apitalism's culture became an organized semblance of world-historic dynamism concealing and counteracting a secular deceleration in 'the real economy'."<sup>29</sup>

Accelerationism, as cultural and theoretical moment, is predicated on economic deceleration — there is a disjuncture, or even inversion, between the superstructure and the base. The "mirror" of accelerationism is, as in Marx's famous metaphor of ideology as *camera obscura*, in fact an "upside-down" image of "historical life-processes."<sup>30</sup> Although claiming to track the tendencies, the analyses of the accelerationists took appearance for reality, or to put it in more precise Marxist terms could only grasp the "real abstractions" of the capitalist form of value. While these "real abstractions" truly are real,

they shape and determine the forms of value, they lack the dynamism that accelerationists detected, and which such forms had, of necessity, to project. This is what makes Deleuze and Guattari's analysis of capital as an axiomatic machine or virus of deterritorialisation at once so resonant and so problematic.

Balakrishnan's chosen example of the paradoxical effects that can result from such a cultural diagnosis is the work of Fredric Jameson on postmodernism, who was, of course, heavily influenced by accelerationist thinkers like Deleuze and Guattari and Baudrillard. Jameson too tried to connect economic shifts, into what he called "late" or "third stage" capitalism, with cultural shifts, the birth of postmodernism as a cultural dominant. Balakrishnan argues that Jameson's analysis was predicated on the "immeasurable disproportion between human agency and newly unleashed cybernetic productive forces."<sup>31</sup> What we might call the "cyberpunk moment", and it is one which retains its belated followers today.<sup>32</sup> Jameson, Balakrishnan suggests, mitigated this accelerationism, with a shift "to mapping an opaque, pseudo-dynamic world of financial markets."<sup>33</sup> While Jameson made a cautious shift towards noting the cultural signs of impasse, the perennial apocalyptic attraction of accelerationism, which has persisted up to and through the current financial crisis, is a cultural and theoretical "bubble" which has yet to burst.

Balakrishnan is amusingly scathing about the supposed technological and economic achievements which might be thought to give material substance to these speculative flights:

the innovations of this period of capitalism have powered transformations in the Lebenswelt of diversion and sociability, an expansion of discount and luxury shopping, but above all a heroic age of what was until recently called "financial technology". Internet and mobile phones, Walmart and Prada, Black-Scholes and subprime — such are the technological landmarks of the period.<sup>34</sup>

Certainly Balakrishnan indicates the danger of a tendential accelerationism taking a particular projected tendency of capital, or even the phantasmatic self-image of capital, for its reality. It must be said, however, that accelerationism has been given a new lease of "life" by recent developments in genetics and neuroscience. Fantasies of "re-sleeving" consciousness, or, as Lyotard speculated, of escaping a dying or doomed earth in a radically modified or downloaded post-human form, persistently haunt the Zeitgeist.

Balakrishnan's conclusion that "we are entering into a period of inconclusive struggles between a weakened capitalism and dispersed agencies of opposition, within delegitimated and insolvent political orders" is a plausible diagnosis of the near future, even if only time will tell whether his claim that the capitalist renewal of a new expanding cycle of accumulation will fail is true.<sup>35</sup> The cultural and theoretical apocalyptic tone is highly resistant to the kind of diagnosis Balakrishnan makes of capitalism as tending towards a "stationary state". To adapt T. S. Eliot, the apocalyptic tone can only imagine the end of the world in the form of a "bang", and never a "whimper". While I am not suggesting the complacency of simply denying out of hand any possibility of apocalypse, which seems most likely at the moment to come in an ecological form, the apocalyptic tone I have been tracing is one which actually *welcomes* apocalypse as the decisive moment, the moment of the "lifting of the veil" (the Greek meaning of the word "apocalypse"). More particularly I am suggesting that the cycle of this tone, especially its accelerationism, is closely imbricated

with the shift to a neoliberal financial and political regime and its crisis. Of course it was an attempt to grasp and resist that order, whatever we think of what I regard as its failings. The difficulty I am pointing to is that it *mistook* the tendency of that order, taking a "real appearance" for reality and missing the structural and economic limits of that order.

### **Bursting the theoretical bubble**

The method of the tendency is, precisely, a method that does not offer guarantees, except in the form of future verification or confirmation. The apocalyptic tone of accelerationism is, quite unusually, predicated in a firm and traditional Marxist belief that reality was on our side and that reason and reality were fused. I say unusual because more commonly radical thought in the last century saw a detachment between reason and reality, not such a surprising conclusion in light of the events of the "age of extremes". Perhaps, in the wake of the events of the '60s, as Herbert Marcuse suggested, the hope that reason and reality could be re-aligned once again was on the agenda. The error of the apocalyptic tone is to presume the fusion *too quickly* — that the tendency will deliver on its own, or, in Badiou's words, that there is "one historic substance" (it could be contrasted, as a symmetrical error, with those forms of "negative dialectics" which seem to presume no possible integration of reason with reality). Thus "accelerationism" takes capitalism at its word, reading capitalism's promise of endless accelerating productivity as a given actuality.

I am not, as seems to be the case in some currents of ecological thought, arguing for a return to the detachment of reason and reality. In this case pessimism licenses retreat, with reason reduced to ever diminishing pockets or niches of resistance — often art, the body, or a certain elect. Instead, as should be evident, I argue that we return to a more nuanced realism about the contemporary conjuncture, and a closer analysis of its possibilities and limits. In his closing address to the *Historical Materialism* conference in London, 2009, Fredric Jameson argued that the aim of critical intellectuals should be to present or represent the contradictions of the time, even to sharpen them. Although a seemingly modest proposal, I am suggesting that this is in fact a necessary and radical process of re-ordering and, even, cultural struggle.

With the bursting of the financial bubble and resulting economic crisis we could argue that a gap, perhaps only temporary, has opened up globally in our perception of the real abstractions of capitalism. If not exactly the fabled moment of the Emperor's New Clothes, at least capitalism's jingoism, and the thinness or weakness of its claims to constitute an order of development, freedom and liberation, ring hollow. Of course, into that gap, capital has responded as it knows best: by redoubling abstractions, in creating what Alain Badiou has called the spectacle of the "crisis-film", in which the financial crisis becomes another apocalyptic film to elicit our awe and terror.<sup>36</sup> Perhaps, however, at this moment of the opening of the gap we could also burst the theoretical bubble of accelerationism. We could renew our theoretical analysis by practising a method of the tendency that more closely aligns base and superstructure in our analysis, that permits a closer grasp of the failures, tensions and contradictions of this order, and that may condition the possibility of a true fusion of reason and reality in practice.

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November 2009. I would like to thank my co-panellists, Evan Calder Williams and Mark Fisher and the audience, for their comments and criticisms. I would also like to thank Benedict Seymour for the invitation to develop the presentation into this essay.

- 2 See Not Bored!'s discussion of the Situationists détournement of Cohn, "Norman Cohn's The Pursuit of the Millennium", <http://www.notbored.org/cohn.html> and also the Italian radical authorial collective Luther Blisset's novel *Q*, London: Arrow, 2004, which re-imagines the Anabaptists of the Peasant War through the lens of 1970s Italian autonomist radicalism.
- 3 Derrida offers the best analysis of this "tone" in his essay "Of an Apocalyptic Tone Recently Adopted in Philosophy", trans. John P. Leavey Jr., *Oxford Literary Review*, 1984, vol. 6, #2, pp 3–37.
- 4 Alberto Toscano's *Fanaticism*, London and New York: Verso, 2009, develops a thorough analysis of the uses and abuses of the idea of the fanatic, taking in both Cohn and Kant, to which I am heavily indebted.
- 5 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, 1848, Chapter One "Bourgeois and Proletarians", The Marxists Internet Archive, 2004, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch01.htm#007>
- 6 Franco "Bifo" Berardi, "Communism is back but we should call it the therapy of singularisation", *Generation Online*, 2009, [http://www.generation-online.org/p/fp\\_bifo6.htm](http://www.generation-online.org/p/fp_bifo6.htm); Angela Mitropolous and Melinda Cooper, "In Praise of Ursula", *Mute*, Autumn 2009, vol. 2, #13, p.107, [http://www.metamute.org/content/in\\_praise\\_of\\_usura](http://www.metamute.org/content/in_praise_of_usura); Antonio Negri, "No New Deal is possible", trans. Arianna Bove, *Radical Philosophy* May/June 2009, no. 155, [http://www.radicalphilosophy.com/default.asp?channel\\_id=2187&editorial\\_id=27980](http://www.radicalphilosophy.com/default.asp?channel_id=2187&editorial_id=27980)
- 7 Karl Marx, "Preface" to "A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy", 1859, Marxists Internet Archive, 1999, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1859/critique-pol-economy/preface.htm>.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Gopal Balakrishnan, "On the Stationary State", *New Left Review*, September / October 2009, #59, p.7, n2, <http://www.newleftreview.org/?view=2799>
- 10 Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, trans. Rodney Livingstone, London: Merlin Press, 1971, 181.
- 11 Ibid. Emphasis in original.
- 12 Ibid., 180.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Ibid., 183.
- 15 Antonio Negri, *Books for Burning: Between Civil War and Democracy in 1970s Italy*, ed. Timothy S. Murphy, trans. Arianna Bove, Ed Emery, Timothy S. Murphy and Francesca Novello, London and New York: Verso, 2005, 27.
- 16 Ibid., my italics.
- 17 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983, 239–240.
- 18 Jean-François Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, trans. Iain Hamilton Grant, London: Athlone, 1993, 214.
- 19 Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000, 28.
- 20 Alain Badiou, *Theory of the Subject*, trans. and intro. Bruno Bosteels, London and New York: Continuum, 2009, 109, my italics.
- 21 Ibid., 108.
- 22 Ibid., 209.
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 In one of those ironies of history this charge had been made earlier by Jean Baudrillard in his 1977 work *Forget Foucault*, (trans. Nicole Dufresne, New York: Semiotext(e), 1987), where he argued that the "compulsion toward liquidity, flow, and an accelerated circulation" in Deleuzo-Guattarian models of desire is only the replica or mirror of capitalist circulation (p. 25). Of course this analysis was vitiated by Baudrillard's own "negative" accelerationism, in which the capitalist system produces its own moment of crisis and reversal, or "implosion", through the acceleration of its own tendencies to commodify all reality into the hyperreality of simulacra.
- 25 Alain Badiou, *Polemics*, trans. and intro. Steve Corcoran, London and New York: Verso, 2006, 45.
- 26

Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life*, trans. Isabella Bertolletti, James Cascaito and Andrea Casson, foreword by Sylvère Lotringer, Los Angeles and New York: Semiotext(e), 2005, pp.110–111.

<sup>27</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital vol. 3*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981, 358.

<sup>28</sup> Balakrishnan, op. cit., 7 n2.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>30</sup> Karl Marx, *The German Ideology*, 1845, Marxists Internet Archive, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/ch01a.htm>

<sup>31</sup> Balakrishnan, op. cit., 14–15.

<sup>32</sup> A key example would be Alexander R. Galloway and Eugene Thacker's *The Exploit: A Theory of Networks*, Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2007, which retains a Deleuze and Guattari / Negri accelerationist model of rupturing with the "protocols" of control systems through overload, excess and "viral" apocalypse.

<sup>33</sup> Balakrishnan, op. cit., 15.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>36</sup> Alain Badiou, "Of Which Real is this Crisis a Spectacle?", trans. Nina Power and Alberto Toscano, Infinite Thought, 18 October 2008, <http://www.cinestatic.com/infinithought/2008/10/badiou-on-financial-crisis.asp>

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