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Apocalyptic Commons: Derek Jarman's *The Last of England*

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Abstract:

This article investigates the critical interplay between utopian collectivity and post-industrial ruins as “apocalyptic commons” in Derek Jarman’s film *The Last of England*. This film’s Thatcher-era critique reveals global capitalism’s repressed yet intensified settler-colonial dimensions, portraying abandoned manufacturing sites intercut with nonlinear evocation of Britain’s imperial past. I argue that this film’s post-apocalyptic ruins perform an allegorical critique of settler colonialism by linking economic histories of imperialism and the “closing of the commons” to the neoliberal present. In this film, Jarman extends the utopian promise of the commons toward an equally radical potential inhering in the *dystopian* commons. These dystopian commons work to reopen a futurity, staging the alleged aftermath of historic crisis as already present-tense. Jarman’s apocalyptic commons reflect unsolved legacies of neoliberal capital, liberal imperialism, early modern financialization, and post-Fordism. *The Last of England* navigates a global landscape where property-relations are liquefied, engendering *ad hoc* assemblages of survival. Centered in ruins of metropolitan industry, Jarman’s film widens the imagination of global annihilation – nuclear, epidemic, neoimperial – while raising specters of earlier, colonial annihilations. In *The Last of England*, pyrrhic potentials bind together a collectivity of aftermath within a dystopian commons uncannily recognizable as the horizon of the neoliberal present-day.

Keywords: Derek Jarman; *The Last of England*; neoliberalism; commons; apocalyptic

In 1986, Derek Jarman was hard at work on a film without a name. For the time being, Jarman was calling it *The Dead Sea*, a title meant as an acerbic reprisal to Conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher’s having recently lamented that Britain’s declining social mores left the waning empire stranded in a “Dead Sea” of defunct cultural values. Beginning work on the film that eventually became *The Last of England*, Jarman expressed a fervent, furiously contrary desire “to explore through metaphor and dream imagery the deep-seated malaise in current Britain,” a malaise he saw as *symptomized* by Thatcher’s own political ascent. Jarman, seeking a filmic manifestation to unmask the truth of “dreams that go wrong,” wrote of wanting to portray “post-industrial decline, whose stagnant waters erode the crumbling cities,” waters where nuclear arms lurk just beneath the surface, secured by the nation’s fleet of submarines. [1]



Figure 1. Still from *The Last of England* (1987)

The film Jarman would create – a bricolage of dystopian imaginings intercut with home movie footage dating from his father’s days with the RAF – has anything but an identifiable plot. Its celebratory violence, its fires and empty factories, its surreal couplings of the shell-shocked, the rabid, and the dreamy eyed vestiges of an urban populace suggest the setting of a metropolis emptied by some unexplained, apocalyptic event (figure 1). Filmed, in fact, in the very heart of London at the then-abandoned district of the Docklands, *The Last of England’s* post-catastrophic London is a frightening yet oddly Edenic terrain, a *de facto* if not *de jure* Commons of ruin, owned by any, all, and none who traverse it. Anonymous packs of people left behind can be seen in this space abandoned to blatantly public yet strangely intimate scenes of somnambulistic fury and desire, vainglorious exultation, even cautious relief amidst atmospheric terror. Filmed on a Super-8 camera, Jarman eschews any diegetic soundtrack, overlaying the film’s images instead with an evocative cacophony of sounds and songs. The unrelenting aesthetic cohesion of this plotless, post-apocalyptic enigma led one contemporary reviewer aptly to dub it “the longest and gloomiest music video ever made” (Maslin 18). In a perhaps more sanguine version of the film, Jarman had toyed with having Tilda Swinton play a “Joan of Arc figure who leads an armed attack on a cruise missile base in the Fenlands” (Peake 367). The wartime mood of *The Last of England*, “with its recurrent imagery of a blitzed and burning London, recall[s] also the Great Fire of 1666... all tarry black and fiery red...like cathedral stained glass,” writes film critic and scholar Peter Wollen, going on to explain that “underlying the imagery of the blitz and the wasteland lies a critique of a destructive society and government – in a word, of Thatcherism” (46). [2]

“The World’s End”

Thatcher’s government had been seven years in power. The Labour Party’s platform had collapsed, as working class voters swung to the side of the Conservatives: something the country’s leading Leftist intellectuals were scrambling to explain, amongst them Stuart Hall. Earlier in the decade, Hall reminded an embattled academic Left that, when this cultural shift began in the early 1970s, “It was Labour, not the Conservatives, which applied the surgical cut to the welfare state.” When, at the time of the first oil crisis in 1973, a Labour government converted to “orthodox monetarism and fiscal restraint – tutored by the IMF and the oil price,” their economic measures set the stage for Thatcher’s neoliberal regime (Hall 40).

How does a working class movement come to be in favor of the *privatization* of public wealth and public services? For Hall, British Cultural Studies has an urgent imperative to seek to explain how it came to be that, in the late 1970s, the British working class had begun to understand their own real-life conditions through “the themes and representations ... of a virulent, emergent ‘petit bourgeois’ ideology” (41). Emanating or sublimating perhaps from that same “Dead Sea” of Victorian values, this spectral ideology strengthens and coalesces into what Hall designates as “authoritarian populism.” He writes:

Thatcherism discovered a powerful means of translating economic doctrine into the language of experience, moral imperative and common sense, thus providing a ‘philosophy’ in the broader sense – an alternative ethic to that of the ‘caring society’. This translation of a theoretical ideology into a populist idiom was a major political achievement. ... Thatcherite populism ... combines the resonant themes of organic Toryism – nation, family, duty, authority, standards, traditionalism – with the aggressive themes of a revived neo-liberalism – self-interest, competitive individualism, anti-statism. (47, 48)

Informed by the contradictory tenets of empire, this powerful myth was mobilized to mask an increasingly dissonant reality of decay and fracture. Thatcher’s government had swiftly dismantled most

public services, unemployment was high, yet at the same time financial deregulation, economic speculation, and North Sea oil brought about a greatly uneven distribution of wealth.

Looking back on Thatcherite cinema, Thomas Elsaesser writes, “the 1980s were a rerun of the Elizabethan... age, if only by virtue of the immense contrasts between rich and poor... violence and ostentation” (68). Ten years before this film, reacting against similar proclamations, Jarman created his time-traveling, punk-apocalypse picaresque, *Jubilee*. Here, a Miranda-like Elizabeth I looks optimistically into the future with the aid of ministering spirits only to glimpse the troubling sight of urban devastation: 1970s England appears to her untutored eyes as a vision of the End of Days. Dwelling on this historical imaginary across his films, Jarman insists on England’s new Elizabethan Age (under Elizabeth II) as Cold War repetition of New World conquest, with renovated tactics of neo-imperial financialization subjugating national economies world-wide:

Elizabeth II’s boarding Britannia... Threadbare dukes and duchesses lugging many cabin trunks with faded stickers: ...Capetown, Sydney, Hong Kong... The ship sails over the horizon with its geriatric cast. Hell-bent for a rendezvous with their assets in Laguna, far in the jammy West where the Imperial sun has not yet set. Leaving the rotting shires to rot. After they have gone, in the deathly silence a small boy dances on the quay, throwing a last stone for England and St George. (Jarman 1987, 11)

The theme of imperial exodus is alluded to in the final version of this film’s title, *The Last of England* being named after a painting by Victorian era realist Ford Madox Brown. As Jarman recounts: “One day I remembered the painting of the emigrants leaving the white cliffs behind for a life in the new world. My great-grandparents had done that. Left their farm in ... Devon, to go to New Zealand ... in the 1850s” (190, 193). The 1855 Madox Brown painting (figure 2) depicts a petit bourgeois couple, perhaps newly impoverished, hunkered in a small, crowded, open craft and making their way out to sea with Dover’s white cliffs receding in the background.



Figure 2. *The Last of England* by Ford Madox Brown, 1855. Oil on panel. www.artchive.com/artchive/B/brown/brown_last_of_england.jpg.html

As the geographical fact of these cliffs semiologically frame the couple’s endeavor, Madox Brown emphasizes the poignant yet disturbing irony of this couple’s purpose: by becoming citizen-émigrés, they can expect to partake in lucrative opportunities offered by nineteenth-century settler colonial expansion. To reap the benefits of empire, they leave their home behind. At the time of Madox Brown’s painting, British emigration to colonial lands was reaching new heights. The end of economic protectionism combined with competition at home encouraged an aspiring bourgeoisie to make their fortunes in the Empire abroad. Blurring the distinction between private and state interests, this mass emigration was informed by colonialist perspectives toward the geographical areas these émigrés intended to “settle.” Colonial or soon-to-be-colonized land, whether in Australia or India, Burma or Rhodesia, was legally and culturally deemed uncultivated, “unowned,” and thus a form of “common” wealth. In Brown’s painting, we see in the grim-jawed settler’s eyes focusing not on the island left behind but rather on the exploitable land he imagines to be lying ahead. Jarman’s allegory links Thatcherite neoliberalism with this earlier apparition of “virulent” petit bourgeois ideology and its historically specific yet structurally repeating “Tragedy of the [alleged] Commons.” The émigrés’ dead-

set eyes, fixed on this “common” territory open to settlement and expropriation, pursues a commons to which nothing but colonial structures of violence gives them the “right” of use.

For Jarman, as we will see, Ford Madox Brown’s painting heralds an uncanny repetition of settler-colonial tactics. This time, however, the exodus is rendered invisible by the neo-imperial dynamics of relocating large-scale industry to sites in the decolonized global south. As industry leaves the city, relocating to the north of England or to territories of the erstwhile colonies, the “ruins” of British industry endure. Located at the heart of its capital city, architectural specters such as those of the Millennium Mills buildings left abandoned in the Docklands paradoxically index *by their very dilapidation* a simultaneous movement toward a new future: decay at home is the new sign of (neo-imperial) growth abroad. [3]

Jarman’s contemporary Stuart Hall detected a similar recapitulation to imperial tactics in the authoritarian populism that fueled Thatcher’s acclaim. He believed that Thatcher’s popularity was born of “a crisis of national identity and culture precipitated by the unresolved psychic trauma of the ‘end of empire.’ Culturally, the project of Thatcherism is defined as a form of ‘regressive modernization’ – the attempt to ‘educate’ and discipline the society into a particularly regressive version of modernity by, paradoxically, dragging it backwards through an equally regressive version of the past” (2). Many on the Left read similar premonitions from the ruins of industry, beyond the immediate horizon of Britain’s prosperous, neoliberally organized future. One reviewer of Jarman’s *The Last of England* explicitly notes the film’s Victorian art-historical allusion, adding that, in the contemporary moment:

The whole population is looking its last on Britain as the land falls foul of greed, decay, and Thatcherite government terrorism. The visual Walpurgisnacht, shot in an ugly, unreclaimed corner of London’s docklands (supposedly Mrs. T’s capitalist New Jerusalem), climaxes in a pyrotechnic danse macabre. (Kennedy 30)

Jarman’s pointed critique of the economic dimensions lying behind the spectacle of London’s “future ruins” was unmistakable to his contemporaries. At the release of this apocalyptic film without a plot, reviewers quickly perceived it as amplifying a message common to left-leaning, dissident artists at the time. As one reviewer paraphrases the effect of Jarman’s montage, such art would lead viewers to the conclusion that “under Mrs. Thatcher, Britain is becoming a greedy society, heartless to the poor, hostile to free speech, in thrall equally to nuclear weapons and America under President Reagan. Works both new and old are being mobilized against Thatcherism” (Wolf 1988). Nelson Stone’s irascible and infamously homophobic review of Jarman’s film excoriates not only the film’s aesthetics but also their link with a wider climate of revolt:

The done thing is to run down Mrs. Thatcher, to assume that capitalism is parasitism, that the established order in this country is imperialist, racist, profiteering, oppressive to women and other minorities. It raises the question of what is happening to the British film industry that so many of its artefacts are of this kind. (1988)

As Colin MacCabe, film scholar and producer of Jarman’s earlier film *Caravaggio* writes of his colleague’s political-aesthetic intentions: “I certainly never met anyone who understood more clearly what was at stake as Margaret Thatcher incubated the Blairites in the blood of the Falklands war and the boom of City deregulation” (28-29).

In an eponymous book relating the artistic process of conceiving and filming *The Last of England*, Jarman adds a further historical dimension to the genealogy linking his postindustrial protest film with Ford Madox Brown’s settler-colonial nostalgia: the link between settler colonialism and the origin of finance capital. [4] Addressing Elizabethan-age colonization of the Americas, he explains:

Puritanism was economic. Fed up with the Catholic Church shilly-shallying about usury, Luther pinned up the ... bill that the Catholic Church was going to pay... The banking system in the City of London wasn’t working very well in the 1620s so the pilgrims made a break for new pastures and founded Wall Street. (212)

Jarman connects this banking initiative to genocide of the indigenous peoples of the Americas, adding that these English settlers “were very good at *lebensraum*, so when you hear Hitler talking about

Czechoslovakia on my soundtrack [of the film], think of it as a pathetic attempt at the end of history to make a little space. The English were already there: Hitler was an amateur, the British professionals" (212).

"Deathwatch"

This hyperbolic comparison is overly provocative, but Jarman was filming in a fighting mood. Genocide was on his mind: he was sensing not only an imminent nuclear apocalypse but also, more pointedly, the growing threat of the AIDS crisis – biopolitically organized as medical negligence, a passive "letting die" of a population deemed unworthy of life by the hegemonic Right. Thatcher's government had recently exacerbated the social climate surrounding the epidemic with homophobic legislation, neglectful administrative policies, and the encouragement of social persecution.^[5] When Jarman, in a 1986 interview, asserted "No metropolitan gay man can be sure he will be alive in six years' time," he referred not only to the threat of infection, but also the growing danger of vigilante violence against gay men (quoted in Peake 377). The recent proposal of Clause 28 had outlined sanctions against local governments or individuals who "promoted homosexuality." Just before Christmas, the filming nearly finished, Jarman was diagnosed HIV positive. ^[6]

Living in country that demonized and abandoned him and his fellow community living with AIDS, Jarman nonetheless continued to insist that *The Last of England's* apocalyptic landscape prefigures something other than damnation. Jarman maintained the film possessed a reparative dimension, visible through the method of the medieval dream-allegory: "In a dream allegory, the poet wakes in a visionary landscape where he encounters personifications of psychic states. Through these encounters he is healed" (188). He had used this method before, to rather more excoriating effects, in his 1978 film, *Jubilee*. Yet he explains that "in *Jubilee*, the past dreamed the future present," while in *The Last of England* "the present dreams the past future" (188).

What does it mean to dream the past future? What are the curative powers of this palimpsestic anachronism for Jarman? Certainly the struggle over the present must always entail a struggle over images of the past, and the future, a condition that Stuart Hall outlines when he describes the Thatcherite version of this past: "Ideologically, Thatcherism is seen as forging new discursive articulations between the liberal discourses of the 'free market' and economic man and the organic conservative themes of tradition, family and nation.... precipitated by the unresolved psychic trauma of the 'end of empire'." If for Jarman's dream allegory, the process unfolds through personification of psychic states, then for Thatcherism, as Hall sees it, the process is not one of personification, but reification, commodification, and dehumanization: "Culturally, the project of Thatcherism is defined as a form of 'regressive modernization' – the attempt to 'educate' and discipline the society into a particularly regressive version of modernity by, paradoxically, dragging it backwards through an equally regressive version of the past" (2).

But Jarman, too, wants to drag us back into and through the past, contra Thatcher: through the past and into that future we had almost forgotten is already here – a landscape in which images of London's ruin leave us uncertain whether its destruction has been caused by some future, apocalyptic war, or by the post-industrial urban collapse of the present. Peter Wollen, in analyzing the ambiguously apocalyptic landscape of Jarman's film, contextualizes the aesthetic choices through a description of Thatcher's de-industrializing organization of England "dividing the country geographically, between North and South, and socially, in terms of the labor market" that "encourages a sharp division between 'inner city' and suburb." Wollen describes these developments not as wholly new but rather as newly intensified: "the South, organized around the City of London, traditionally the hegemonic pole of the economy, is increasingly decoupled from domestic manufacturing industry." As the spectacle of money replaces the spectacle of "goods" in the capitol city, "Socially and visually, the citadels of international capital are abruptly juxtaposed with the decay of London's old industries and docklands" (36). Wollen indicates this trend in post-industrial iconography can be seen in many independent films from Left filmmakers of the period (Greenaway, Gilliam, Frears, Kureishi), and thus Jarman's *The Last of England* needs to be seen as part of a larger, cultural outcry against "the imposition of market criteria in every sector of society, to political authoritarianism ... and to the leading role of the City." For Wollen, such anti-Thatcherite, anti-neoliberal films from this period show a division "doubled within the metropolis itself": between

England's North and England's South – the de-industrializing productive centers and the post-industrial financial centers (35).

The Last of England was shot on-site at a location once famous in British industrial history: London's now derelict Millennium Mills. Exploiting the social realities surrounding the post-industrial decay so glaringly evident in the London Docklands, Jarman's choice of location was meant both to figure and prefigure other destructions to come. [7] The ruins of the Millennium Mills, in another sense, indicate their construction elsewhere in the globalizing world. Yet, strangely, the rubble strewn across the indeterminate edge of the End of Time seems, for Jarman, to offer itself as a world newly atoned. He writes, "The film is an attic...full of the junk of our history, of memory and so on; there's a hurricane blowing outside, I open the doors and the hurricane blows through... it's a cleansing, the whole film is a cleansing. I need a very firm anchor in that hurricane, the anchor is my inheritance... a cultural one" (208, 211).



Figure 3. Still from *The Last of England* (1987)

One remembers Benjamin's Angel, thrust backwards into the future by a gust from History's storm (figure 3). Yet what seems also implicit is that the film's apocalypse involves a landscape from which there is no intended exodus. There are no émigrés stolidly turned from the cliffs of Dover towards lucratively exploitable and colonizable "wastes" claimed by empire. In this post-apocalyptic (read: post-imperial) take on History, the storm, having decimated an urban landscape and transformed its property to waste, leaves survivors in the imperial capital to subsist on an alternative form of Commons: the post-apocalyptic Commons. If the first "waste lands" of colonial legal theory were brought into being by legal fiat, *de jure*, then these *de facto* "Commons" –the Commons of the final instance – come into being as unavoidable *aftermath* at the heart of Imperium. Freed from whatever preexisting order, these motley survivors scavenge and cavort, some violently seeking to reinstate repression, others with a sense of tentatively joyful abandon. Yet the very "plotlessness" of the film seems urgently to insist on an end-stop to crisis *in aeternum*, a terminus to regimes of exploitation that style themselves as immortal laws.

In her recent essay, "Urban Debt, Neoliberalism, and the Politics of the Commons," philosopher and cultural theorist Adrian Parr investigates the contemporary phenomenon of a "rural/metropolitan/wilderness hybrid" that, following decades of neoliberal economic restructuring and widespread urban shrinkage, has become a central terrain, a mode of inhabiting what remains, and a ground of contestation. Her insightful analysis finds in selected scenes of urban commoning:

an alternative to the production and realization of surplus value that predominates throughout the contemporary landscape of neoliberal planetary urbanization... practices that bring a variety of social and environmental struggles into relationship with each other, dismantling the apparatuses of capture that bring land-use and the collective energies animating available land, such as communities and ecosystems, under the control of capital. (70)

Reading Jarman's post-industrial apocalyptic commons for their political potential might suggest that, to concur with Parr's more concrete and resolutely hopeful analyses in which "urban commoning strive[s] for human emancipation and environmental well-being," one might along the way be obliged to journey a terrifying *via negativa*. Citing a phrase from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *Thousand Plateaus*, Parr describes how "urban commoning contravenes the law of value so that exchange value no longer predominates over the land; rather, use-value pervades the land and thereby creates a 'new land'" (87). Yet *The Last of England's* collision-edited images of shocked and wandering figures, insanely revisiting and distorting nightmarish rituals, undergo the unparaphraseable joys of profoundly "plotless" motion,

that time at the end of History that Benjamin calls a “cessation of happening.” Jarman’s film seems similarly to prophecy that, in the period preceding the hoped-for telos of the Commons, there may transpire a significant interval of arrest: a caesura of negativity and mourning, a time for the grace of mayhem as well as the terror of memory. This aftermath, then, would revert to preface. It offers a time to improvise – a time to repent of renovation.

“A Dance at the Edge of Time”

Jarman scholar Steven Dillon argues that this film’s lyrical gestures are not “timeless”; rather, “its relentlessly doomed atmosphere ... may not historicize, yet it still forces upon us the pressure of time” (166). I would suggest that it is precisely the *undecidable* origin of this urban destruction in Jarman’s film that forges the theoretical link between three separate temporalities, each with their own form of pressure: firstly, the pressure of time in age of nuclear escalation – time as “dead-line”; secondly, the pressure of time as it unfolds in capitalist modernity – time as money; and thirdly, the pressure of ecological time, a time conceived of as having belonged to an earlier age of the Commons.

Jarman is not the first filmmaker to show us a landscape in which nuclear devastation precludes any renewal of capitalist world order. To mention one influential instance from the 1980s, the BAFTA-winning British television film *Threads* (dir. Jackson, 1984) depicts a gruesome forecast of life in Sheffield after global detonation of the Cold War stockpile. Showing urban landscape transformed to a perilous Commons of rubble, maggots, and seared corpses, the film flashes forward through the following decade as England’s society and mode of production become explicitly medieval. Aired in 1984, this film shocked the nation so drastically some credit it with turning the tide in Britain’s anti-nuclear movement. This and many other films from the era insistently represent survival predicated upon a state of “no exodus” – a state in which consequences, however horrifying, must be borne. [8] *Threads* opening voiceover declares: “In an urban society, everything connects ... Our lives are woven together in a fabric, but the connections that make society strong also make it vulnerable.” The film goes on to show that this primary vulnerability and explicitly urban interconnection lies in the metropolis’ new political status: that of the nuclear target.

Yet, simultaneously, the historical reality of urban centers as nuclear targets was undermined or even ironized by a concomitant development of the late Cold War, namely, the globalization of finance, causing neo-imperial outsourcing of industrial plants to a decolonized Third World. London, in this period, transitioned away from its established industrial moorings, and Thatcher’s government brought massive changes to London’s urban geography, as the stock market’s so-called “Big Bang revolution” led to its virtually total take-over by international banks. Thatcher’s government scrapped Britain’s Keynesian exchange control system in October 1979, liberating money for global finance schemes (Reid 49-50). Thus, with both nuclear “dead-lines” and capitalist “bottom-lines” in mind, Jarman’s ambiguously post-apocalyptic urban commons aptly expresses precisely this larger global irony: London remains a nuclear target, despite the fact that classic military reasons for its *being* a target (industrial production of goods and armaments) have been annulled by economic re-mappings implemented by that same neoliberal regime investing in the updating of Britain’s nuclear arsenals.

All this transpires “in the age of the world target,” to cite Rey Chow’s reworking of Heidegger’s phrase. Jarman reveals that, in this age, the metropolis will be destroyed only for the sake of an outmoded military exigency. Cities now exist as nothing more than an X that marks the spot – for the bomb, but also, for the emergence of a post-nuclear commons. Thatcher, who achieved both landmark deregulation of the stock market *and* massive expenditures toward updating missile and submarine systems, also dismantled the welfare state with the *permission* of the very working class that system was designed to protect. Thatcher’s neoliberal regime thus can answer to either version of the devastated metropolis-commons in Jarman’s film: the post-nuclear as well as the post-industrial. Indeed, these two scenes of devastation have been rendered so as to be locally indistinguishable. For Jarman, metropolitan, post-Fordist finance capital rushes headlong towards the devastated Commons of a post-apocalyptic dream allegory.

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri assign a rather different logic to these same elements in *Commonwealth*, conclusion to their theory-trilogy including *Empire* and *Multitude*, and published in the wake of the global financial crisis. “Finance capital,” they declare, “is in essence an elaborate machine for

representing the common, that is the common relationships and networks ... necessary for ...production" (157). In their analysis, the Common differs from the Commons; it is abstracted from any geographical template and becomes instead a conceptual network of discourses incorporating thought, language, and affect:

By 'the common' we mean, first of all, the common wealth of the material world – the air, the water, the fruits of the soil, and all nature's bounty – and more significantly those results of social production that are necessary for social interaction and further production, such as knowledges, languages, codes, information, affects, and so forth. (vii)

These elemental forces of the "Common," although manipulated by the world of finance capital, are not thereby exhausted in this process. [9] And what of the geospatial centers of "empire"? In Hardt and Negri's schema:

The metropolis is the site of biopolitical production – of the common, of people living together, sharing resources, communicating, exchanging goods and ideas ... The metropolis is a factory for the production of the common. In contrast to large-scale industry, however, this cycle ... is increasingly autonomous from capital. (250)

Remembering Wollen's contextualization of Jarman's metropolitan ruins, Jarman's Docklands may be read as both an allegory *and* a political (collateral) *fact* of precisely this gradual unmooring, as the post-Fordist/post-Keynesian capital-city phases out large-scale industry and moves toward global-scale finance.

For Jarman, this division leads not to "the production of the common" but to a final wave of settler colonialism. Jarman's allegory of finance capital and the metropolis understands its future to rely on the workings of what already constitutes this order's economic and political *facts*: crisis and collapse. At the release of *The Last of England*, Sarah Radclyffe, who worked as a producer for Jarman's *The Tempest* and *Caravaggio* (1986), made a point of noting to a reporter that this film would be among the last to be fully funded by British arts funding from state sources. Radclyffe decries neoliberal trends of minimizing funding for the arts through the government suspension of tax concessions for arts-investment, a tactic that has the effect of scaring off would-be corporate investors. Radclyffe adds that "everybody you talk to in the City was either involved, or knows someone who was involved, in the crash of Goldcrest. They were one of the first companies to break through and get a lot of City investment, and their going down hasn't helped" (quoted in Byrnes 19). With a possible alternate title, *The Last of England's Publically Funded Films*, Jarman's "Dead Sea" project exemplifies, from inception to aftermath, the effects of what is now called "crisis capitalism" – collapse as a tool that *works*, for the purposes of neoliberal restructuring. [10] The metropolis becomes "autonomous" only insofar as it appears to produce itself *ex nihilo* from the abstractions of economic value and the spectacle of their ceaseless circulation.

Hardt and Negri's declaration of the metropolis' evolving autonomy stands sharply at odds with their earlier formulations of biopolitics that employed more classically Marxist registers. Their analysis of late capital in *Multitude* speaks of a regime under which "Labor and value have become biopolitical in the sense that living and producing tend to be indistinguishable" (148). In *Commonwealth*, however, the negative outlook has changed to promises of liberation – not through ineluctable developments of history but through ever-accessible foundations and "potentials" in the ontological field of the "commons." Establishing this commons entails a search for an "immanent *kairos*" and an "altermodernity" within biopolitical production. Biopolitics itself, now positively construed, recasts the "Multitude" as a form of political organization defined by "equality in horizontal organizational structures" (110). [11] In line with this positive reading of capital's "altermodernity" appear the pronouncements of Hardt and Negri's theoretical ally, Cesare Casarino. For Casarino, the difference between capitalism and the "commons" is a qualitative, perspectival one. Economic profit (surplus value) coincides with a "surplus common": "The point is that *there is only one surplus*, which may effect and be effected in different ways" (22). This ontological reading of the productive forces of late capital see its vast wealth as waiting and ready to be seized through "Revolutionary becoming ... living the common as surplus. Surplus is potentiality qua potentiality" (22). For Casarino, the "commons" of this neoliberal order are a kind of protean totality: "*the common is now (its own self-producing, self-positing, and self-referential) production*" (15). This "commons" – the totality of economic and social production – is not politically marked, historically determined, or economically contingent: rather, "Surplus, potentiality,

production, unconscious, plane of immanence: these are all names for immanence degree zero... It is up to us to decide what to build on this void" (37).

Out of their own framework of "positive" and "productive" biopolitics, Hardt and Negri develop a distinct analytical term for the revolutionary strategy of what it will mean to "build on this void": "Exodus." As they write, "The multitude must flee the family, the corporation, and the nation but at the same time build on the promises of the common they mobilize." This exodus will involve "a process of subtraction from capital and the construction of autonomy of the multitude." Here "subtraction" replaces an earlier politics of "seizing" the means of production: this subtraction-without-seizure takes place at the level of social forms, not at the level of industrial production. Their *Commonwealth* goes so far as to proclaim that "this project of exodus is the primary form class struggle takes today" (164).

"The Last of England": No Exodus

Whence the return of this settler-colonial rhetoric, this echoing of a call to "build on the void"? Moving backwards from the financial bail-outs of the twenty-first-century Global North to the decaying First World of Jarman's Cold War London dockyards, we find a vitriolic suspicion of precisely these rhetorics of hegemonic exodus. The promise of a great Commons beyond must be strictly separated from diasporic histories of exile and loss, precisely because the hegemonic version of diaspora (i.e., settler colonialism) seeks to hide its expropriative intentions in an aura of melancholy so palpable in paintings such as *The Last of England* by Madox Brown. Jarman explicitly cautions us against this Commons of hegemonic fantasy, directing us further backwards in time to the heyday of industrial capital's entanglement with the colonizing exodus. [12] Hardt and Negri, wanting to avoid being confused with an "idealist" politics of *ascesis*, seek to reassure their readers that "exodus does not mean getting out as naked life, barefoot and penniless." We may contrast this with Jarman's film, unrelentingly in pursuit of a vengeful or humbling Commons, where citizens of this erstwhile metropolis do indeed go "barefoot and penniless." Hardt and Negri pronounce, to an undefined, collective first-person, we must "take what is ours, which means re-appropriating the common – the results of our past labors and means of autonomous production" (164). By these "means of autonomous production," they refer to social (i.e., not industrial) institutions: "Every social institution rests on ... the common it draws on, marshals, and creates. Social institutions are thus essential resources for the project of exodus" (159).

Yet it has also been argued that, in the decades preceding this late intellectual movement to "ontologize" the commons, the social resources on which any exodus might rely were already co-opted by a neoliberal order through a series of carefully calibrated transvaluations. Hall cautions us against "marshaling" social institutions for any project of exodus; historically, these institutions have tended to facilitate ideologically recidivist exoduses. For Hall, the "authoritarian populism" of Thatcherism should not be read as belying the existence of a temporarily deluded but immanently revolutionary multitude. Instead, "Thatcherism is related to the ... 'fragmentation' of the historic relations ... between classes and parties ... the shifting boundaries between state and civil society ... the emergence of new ... social subjects and political identities" (2). In Hall's Thatcherite England, these new political identities emerge on a terrain exhausted and exploited, not gleefully transplanted. Fragmentation is the key term, for Hall as for Jarman. This fragmented devastation of the material conditions of the social is no fleeting moment on the way toward a world re-distributed, re-partitioned, or even un-partitioned. Moreover, as Brian Massumi suggests, this fragmentation, under neoliberalism, may appear less as fractures than as fluidity, fungibility, and ceaseless permutation in the social field that, ultimately, both masks and serves the further extraction of value:

The more varied, and even erratic, the better. Normalcy starts to lose its hold. The regularities start to loosen. This loosening of normalcy is part of capitalism's dynamic. It's not a simple liberation. It's capitalism's own form of power. It's no longer disciplinary institutional power that defines everything, it's capitalism's power to produce variety – because markets get saturated. ... Capitalism starts intensifying or diversifying affect, but only in order to extract surplus-value. It hijacks affect in order to intensify profit potential. ... The capitalist logic of surplus-value production starts to take over the relational field. (224)

This capitalistic logic of "take-over" in the relational field is now understood to be among the most salient features of neoliberal affective labor. [13] In the early 1990s, cultural studies scholar Lawrence

Grossberg notices the development of an affective ideology that increasingly defines (or short-circuits) post-Fordist political culture, so that “anyone who actually talks about serious problems and their solutions is a dreamer; anyone who celebrates the mood in which the problem is at once terrifying and boring is a realist. ...Within the new conservative articulation of the frontier, political positions only exist as entirely affective investments, separated from any ability to act” (278-79). Grossberg terms this affective politics the “new Conservatism” of the 1990s, affective performances that produce “not a political rebellion but a rebellion against politics” (278). In this he echoes Stuart Hall’s earlier cry against the paradox of *working-class* support for Thatcher’s neo-conservative fiscal machinations: “Oh, economic determinism ... where art thou now?” (Hall 69).

Jarman, located at this same, earlier moment within the ludic, neoliberal embrace of austerity measures, recommends a dose of performative negativity. When asked about what his film’s apocalyptic montage “meant,” Jarman replied with a vitriolic quotation from the Book of Isaiah: “I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with me... I will tread down the people in mine anger, and make them drunk in my fury” (164). During this period of Jarman’s intense personal agony and vulnerability, persecution and mortality, he urges us not towards escapism, but towards fury; not towards exodus and the immanent Commons of fantasy, but towards painful truth and abiding resolve, towards the Commons lying buried beneath every metropolis but not so easily excavated. This time, in Jarman’s words, “Prospero has returned home, his staff plunged into the roaring nuclear waters, ...heavy waters drunk with death” (170). The ecologically global dimensions of Jarman’s allegory imply little space for escape: “The film is a documentary,” he maintains, “My film is as factual as the news” (215).

As writer and filmmaker Iain Sinclair understands this film, *The Last of England’s* factual allegory constructs an intertextual archive of a city’s transformation, “The catalogue of past and future filmic representations of London’s badlands [that] flicker in rose-red light, a slideshow carousel of deleted potentialities” (8). This film is not the news of those perpetually in search of the next, unexploited terrain. This is the news from those who remain in the fragments and in the ruins: the news of those who throw a rock at the departing ships. Left behind in history’s commons, even amid fragments and ruins, these ones stay to do the work of imagining surviving.

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Endnotes

1. Quoted in Peake, 367. Peake also cites some of Jarman’s sequence titles from his film notes: “The World’s End,” “Deathwatch,” and “A Dance at the Edge of Time.” I have made use of these sequence titles in my own section titles for this article. A relevant summary of Britain’s nuclear policy in the late Cold War can be found in Peter Byrd (157-79). For a description of these policies’ reception, see Lawrence Freedman (143-53).

2. Another important dimension of the film's "wartime" mood came from Jarman's personal and political struggles against homophobic policies of neglect with respect to England's growing HIV/AIDS epidemic. This aspect of the film's context and implicit critique is discussed later in the article. See also Guy Johnson and Chris Lippard (278-93).
3. For a wide-ranging analysis of this phenomenon in the American context from the perspective of labor historians and theorists, see Jefferson Cowie and Joseph Heathcott.
4. In her pointed summary of banking reform, deregulation, re-regulation, and globalization under Thatcher's rule, Margaret Reid relates how "The ten years of Mrs Thatcher's premiership have witnessed the greatest City shake-up this century, the Big Bang revolution in the stock market's workings, and its virtually total take-over by large banks." This revolution began after the government "opened up the ownership of Exchange firms ... with the dramatic result that almost all stock market firms ... became offshoots of big banks, UK or foreign... fostered by the bank of England, with the government's blessing... aimed at entrenching the City's securities market." Subsequently, "The Bank of England... encourage[ed] the giant take-over operation by which the banks bought up the stock market industry... to compete in a world securities arena which the new technology had rendered a 'global village,'" For this reason, Reid explains, "The City of London votes Conservative almost to a man" (49, 54-55).
5. Jarman's film appears in the historical moment of Clause 28, a part of the 1987 Local Government Bill that proclaimed: "a local authority shall not a) promote homosexuality or publish material for the promotion of homosexuality; b) promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship by the publication of such material or otherwise; and c) give financial assistance to any person for either of the purpose referred to." Jarman, receiving funding from government sources for his films, was affected by this bill at an economic as well as a personal level. For a discussion of this dimension of Jarman's career, see Johnson and Lippard (Clause 28 cited 292n11).
6. One reporter at the time relates: "At a press conference, Mr. Jarman said that he has tested positive for AIDS antibodies and that several cast members developed the disease after the film was made. But he said he had not intended AIDS to be this film's principal subject; terrorism, the threat of nuclear annihilation and a general breakdown of society are more prominently addressed. Nevertheless, the gaunt men wandering disorientedly through the destruction-littered landscape of *The Last of England* seem to offer a haunting vision of this plague and its ravages" (Maslin 18). For a discussion of the relevant biographical and political timeline behind this film's creation, see O'Pray.
7. Chrissie Iles suggests that this techno-infrastructure critique of centralization and relocation can be found at the level of the film's own, lo-fi materiality: quoting from Jarman's *Dancing Ledge*, she explains that "Jarman understood the subversive potential of the obscure and delicate Super-8 format to question 'each advance in technology reinforces the grip of central control,' making opposition more difficult (69).
8. Sean O'Sullivan discusses the post-industrial predicaments of Britain's declining middle class through an analysis of late-Cold War, British televisual portrayals of nuclear apocalypse, comparing *Threads* with the wildly successful mini-series *Boys from the Blackstuff*.
9. Their stance intentionally diverges from previously established, more pessimistic critiques of thought, language, and affect's co-optation by neoliberal capitalism and its attendant strategies of corporate culture in the global North. Brian Massumi writes of "a certain kind of convergence between the dynamic of capitalist power and the dynamic of resistance" (224), Slavoj Žižek points to late capital's ability to represent the "'concrete universal' of our historical epoch" that "overdetermines all alternative formations, as well as all noneconomic strata of social life" (185).
10. For a discussion of the effects of Thatcher's own policies concerning the arts and their funding, see Appleyard. For a compelling adumbration of contemporary crisis capitalism, see Klein.

11. Hardt and Negri elaborate on the nature of this conceptual shift as having been politically necessitated by the “emergent centrality of biopolitical production” where the term “biopolitical” is to be understood in the positive (Foucauldian) rather than negative (Agambenian) sense: “Insofar as biopolitical labor is autonomous, finance is the adequate capitalist instrument to expropriate the common wealth produced, external to it and abstract from the production process. And finance cannot expropriate without in some way representing the product and productivity of common social life” (158).
12. It seems that Jarman and Hall, in different ways but from similar positions of political skepticism, would encourage us to think carefully about the political history of *historicizing* nature. In *Commonwealth*, Hardt and Negri see Nature as “constantly transformed by social and cultural interactions,” yet they construct, from this historicization, a commutation between history and ontology: “The claim that nature is subject to mutation is closely related to the philosophical proposition of a constituent ontology,” i.e., an ontology that can represent the Commons (171). Jarman’s use of dream allegory and future ruin would have us question any immanent ontological promise of returning to Nature as a version of Commonwealth. Jarman’s allusions to settler colonialism remind us that Natural Rights and manifest destiny, themselves, were politics of immanence that also “historicized” nature: whether in a religious sense (nature transformed by the past event of human sin) or a secular one (nature transformed from “waste and fallow ground” to property by the process of human labor).
13. See Boltanski and Chiapello, and Brown.

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