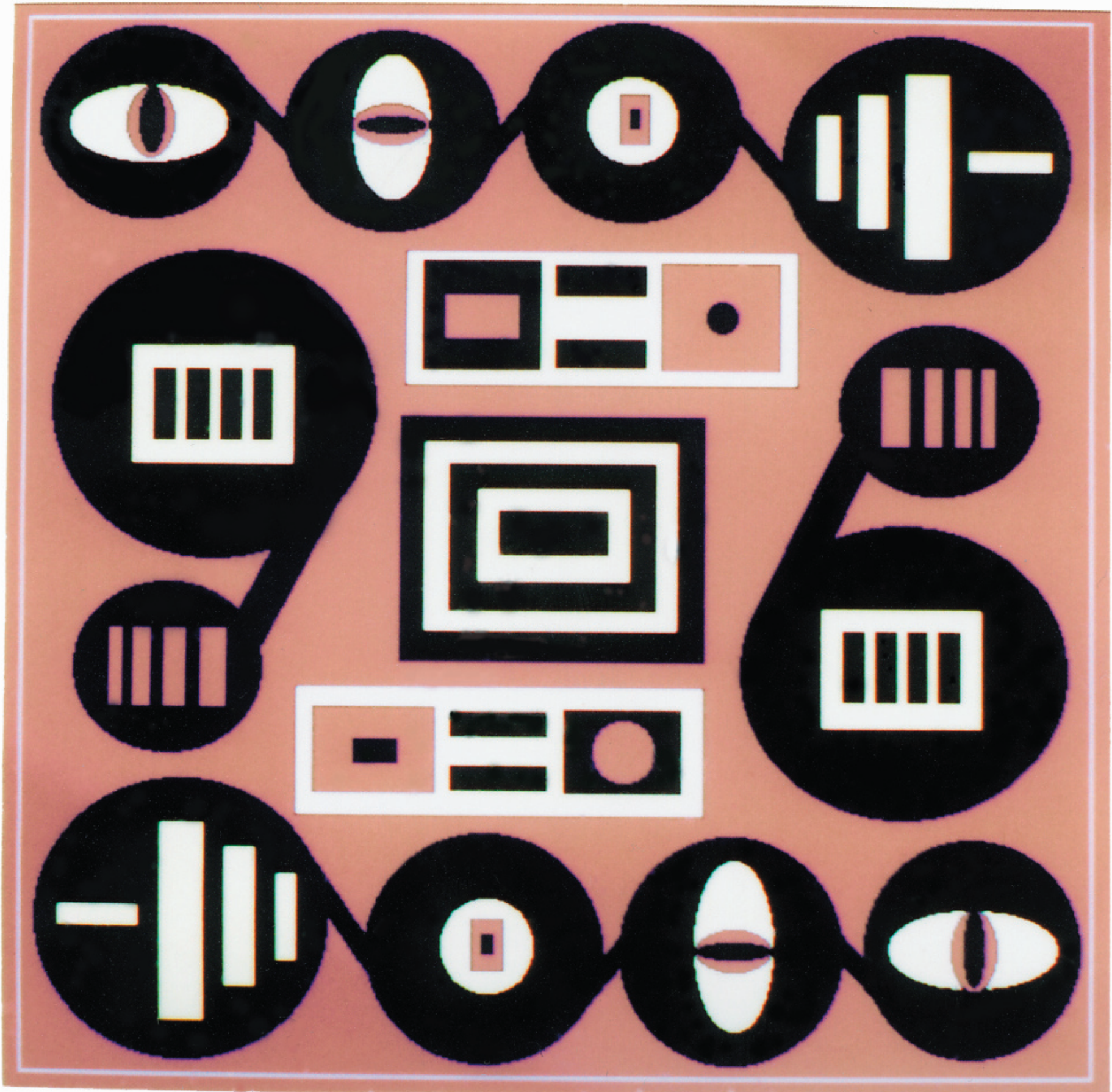


cross currents in culture



# variant

number 24 winter 2005 free



**A. Kennedy** talks to **Bruce LaBruce** about 'Raspberry Reich'

**Tom Jennings** **Breaking Cover** Artists, the veil and identity

**Mark Pawson's** Comic & Zine Reviews

**Owen Logan** reviews 'Afflicted Powers' by Retort



**Variant, no. 24, Winter 2005**

ISSN 0954-8815

Variant is a magazine with the independence to be critical that addresses cultural issues in a social and political context.

Variant is a charitable organisation and functions with the assistance of subscriptions and advertising.

We welcome contributions in the form of news, reviews, articles, interviews, polemical pieces and artists’ pages. Guidelines for writers are available on request and at the Variant website.

Opinions expressed in Variant are those of the writers and not necessarily those of the editors or Variant. All material is copyright (unless stated otherwise) the authors or Variant.

Variant

1/2, 189b Maryhill Road, Glasgow, G20 7XJ

t +44 (0)141 333 9522

email [variantmag@btinternet.com](mailto:variantmag@btinternet.com)

[www.variant.org.uk](http://www.variant.org.uk)

Editorial Input: Daniel Jewesbury, Leigh French, Paula Larkin

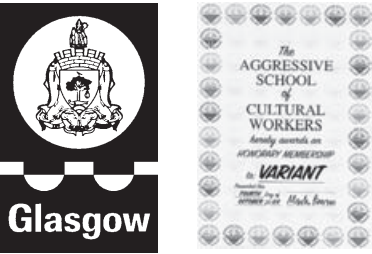
Editorial Contact: Leigh French

Advertising & Distribution Contact: Paula Larkin

Design: Kevin Hobbs

We would like to thank everyone involved in all aspects of supporting Variant.

Printers: Spectator Newspapers, Bangor, BT20 4AF Co. Down, N. Ireland



All articles from Variant vol.2 issues 1–24 are archived and available free at:

[www.variant.org.uk](http://www.variant.org.uk)

Variant is published 3 times a year. The most current issue is posted on the Variant website two months after publication of the newsprint edition.

To receive an e-mail informing you of these posts and to join the on-line forum send a blank e-mail to: [variantforum-subscribe@topica.com](mailto:variantforum-subscribe@topica.com)

**Subscribe**

Receive a three issue (one year) subscription to Variant magazine for:

Institutions: UK & EC £15, Elsewhere £20.00

Individuals: UK £7.50, EC £9.50, Elsewhere £15.00

Libraries can also receive a complete set of back issues of Variant vol.2. Rates are available on request.

Donate: we need your support

‘VARIANT’ account details:

Lloyds TSB Scotland plc  
St. Vincent Street, Glasgow  
Scotland, UK

Sort code: 87-37-99

Account Number: 81142360

IBAN: GB06TSBS 873799 81142360

BIC Code: TSBS GB21210

If you wish to support Variant financially, Variant can now also receive monetary donations in the form of “Gift Aid”. For details please see:

[www.variant.org.uk/donate.html](http://www.variant.org.uk/donate.html)

Variant Scotland is a registered Scottish Charity, Number SC 032063

<b>Comments</b> <b>It’s Corporatocracy, Stupid! : Culture Commission</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>The Ship of Fools</b> <b>A Fictional Reality</b> Hope Roberts	<b>6</b>
<b>I am Curious—Red</b> Alexander Kennedy talks to Bruce LaBruce	<b>8</b>
<b>How to live when the war comes home</b> Paul Chatterton	<b>10</b>
<b>The faction that fools the world</b> Mike Small	<b>12</b>
<b>Breaking Cover</b> Tom Jennings	<b>14</b>
<b>Comic &amp; Zine Reviews</b> Mark Pawson	<b>18</b>
<b>Armchair Spartans and the ‘D’ word</b> John Barker	<b>20</b>
<b>Re-presented Notes on Summits &amp; Counter Summits</b> Andrew X,Y,Z	<b>24</b>
<b>Afflicted Powers</b> Owen Logan	<b>26</b>
<b>Social Housing Privatisation</b> City Strolls	<b>30</b>
<b>Cover</b> Andrew Murray	

# Comments

## If Sharks Were Men

“If sharks were men,” Mr. Keuner was asked by his landlady’s little girl, “would they be nicer to the little fishes?”

“Certainly,” he said. “If sharks were men, they would build enormous boxes in the ocean for the little fish, with all kinds of food inside, both vegetable and animal. They would take care that the boxes always had fresh water, and in general they would make all kinds of sanitary arrangements. If, for example, a little fish were to injure a fin, it would immediately be bandaged, so that it would not die and be lost to the sharks before its time. So that the little fish would not become melancholy, there would be big water festivals from time to time; because cheerful fish taste better than melancholy ones.

“There would, of course, also be schools in the big boxes. In these schools the little fish would learn how to swim into the sharks’ jaws. They would need to know geography, for example, so that they could find the big sharks, who lie idly around somewhere. The principal subject would, of course, be the moral education of the little fish. They would be taught that it would be the best and most beautiful thing in the world if a little fish sacrificed itself cheerfully and that they all had to believe the sharks, especially when the latter said they were providing for a beautiful future. The little fish would be taught that this future is assured only if they learned obedience. The little fish had to beware of all base, materialist, egotistical and Marxist inclinations, and if one of their number betrayed such inclinations they had to report it to the sharks immediately.

“If sharks were men, they would, of course, also wage wars against one another, in order to conquer other fish boxes and other little fish. The wars would be waged by their own little fish. They would teach their little fish that there was an enormous difference between themselves and the little fish belonging to the other sharks. Little fish, they would announce, are well known to be mute, but they are silent in quite different languages and hence find it impossible to understand one another. Each little fish that, in a war, killed a couple of other little fish, enemy ones, silent in their own language, would have a little order made of seaweed pinned to it and be awarded the title of hero.

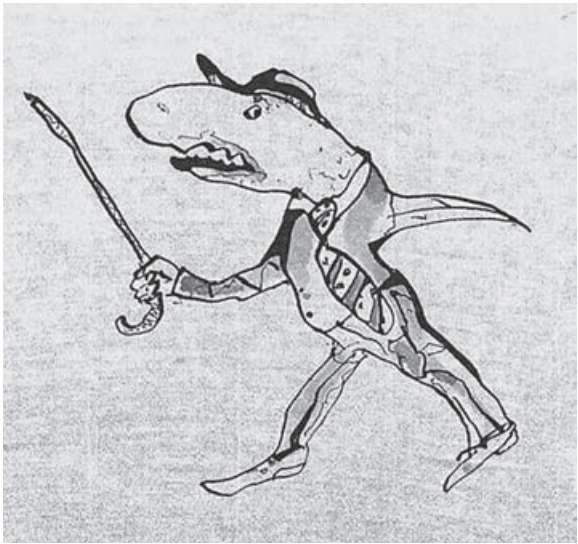
“If sharks were men, there would, of course, also be art. There would be beautiful pictures, in which the sharks’ teeth would be portrayed in magnificent colors and their jaws as pure pleasure gardens, in which one could romp about splendidly. The theaters at the bottom of the sea would show heroic little fish swimming enthusiastically into the jaws of sharks, and the music would be so beautiful that to the accompaniment of its sounds, the orchestra leading the way, the little fish would stream dreamily into the sharks’ jaws, lulled by the most agreeable thoughts.

“There would also be a religion, if sharks were men. It would preach that little fish only really begin to live properly in the sharks’ stomachs.

“Furthermore, if sharks were men there would be an end to all little fish being equal, as is the case now. Some would be given important offices and be placed above the others. Those who were a little bigger would even be allowed to eat up the smaller ones. That would be altogether agreeable for the sharks, since they themselves would more often get bigger bites to eat. And the bigger little fish, occupying their posts, would ensure order among the little fish, become teachers, officers, engineers in box construction, etc.

“In short, if sharks were men, they would for the first time bring culture to the ocean.”

**Excerpt from Bertolt Brecht’s ‘Stories of Mr. Keuner’.**



## It’s Corporatocracy, stupid! Culture Commission : Scotland

“Everything can be. measured, and what can be measured can be managed.”

### McKinseys consultants

“The very act of observing alters the reality being observed.”

### Heisenberg

Scotland’s Cultural Commission emanates from First Minister Jack McConnell’s St. Andrew’s Day speech of 2003 and “the express requirement that all government departments consider how cultural activity can help them meet their aims.”

In April 2004, then Scottish Culture Minister Frank McAveety appointed eight right-thinking people to the Commission, to be chaired by James Boyle (who had jumped ship as Chair of

the Scottish Arts Council to take the job, despite that month agreeing a three-year extension to his contract). With £478,000 to support the Commission for twelve months, it started work that June to review the funding and organisation of the arts in Scotland.

McAveety claimed, no less: “The creativity of Scots – from the classroom to the boardroom – is the edge we need in a competitive world. Our duty as an Executive is to create the conditions that allow that creativity to flourish.” Scotland’s economy is to be inextricably tied up with the miasma of ‘Creativity’.

Protesting that the Commission did not have “practising artists in sufficient proportion from varied artistic and cultural backgrounds”, composer Craig Armstrong resigned from it days after its membership was announced. He was replaced by Scots traditional singer Sheena Wellington (who sang at the opening of the Scottish Parliament).

Come October McAveety was sacked as Scottish Culture Minister by First Minister Jack McConnell in a cabinet reshuffle – in a great example of that sublime juxtaposition, the ‘mature political state’ in which we are to entrust our cultural freedoms, McAveety had misled parliament when he arrived late for question time, claiming to have been at a SAC function; he had, in fact, been in the parliament canteen eating a pie. He was replaced by current Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport Patricia Ferguson.

In November, claims of in-fighting and sabotage arose over the influence of the First Minister’s partner, head of Glasgow City Council’s Culture and Leisure Services, Bridget McConnell, with a rival Review set up by the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities amidst concerns of protecting





their role as ‘cultural sector service providers’.

At the same time, the Arts Council of Wales was brought directly into the political machinery of the Welsh Assembly, causing anxiety amongst artists over freedom of expression.

In June 2005, just days before the Commission was to publish its findings, yet another row broke out, with Boyle accusing the Culture Minister of acting “without integrity” and of insulting his colleagues by stealing and going public with one of the Commission’s ‘best ideas’ – a ‘National Council for the Creative Individual’ for a favoured few artists, not unlike Ireland’s Aosdána Scheme, only with the ‘Scotland Brand’ and community-from-above ‘social cohesion’ ceremonials.

The Commission’s 539 page work was published in late June 2005, in time for the Parliament’s Summer recess in which to digest it.

It is against this acrimonious background of political horse-trading, allegations of cronyism, and central government imposed structural changes that the Commission’s findings will be interpreted, implemented or ignored by the Executive.

Other than a pledge in the form of a painful, clip-art adorned, end-page poem (written on behalf of the people of Scotland in absentia) to ‘honour our best artists’, what’s key to the proposals?

In place of hard politics, it’s saturated with think-tank hokum on ‘Leisure’ and ‘Cultural Industries’, with ‘creativity’, ‘confidence’ and ‘well-being’ collectively presented as an economic panacea, aligning ‘Culture’ still further with orientating the poor into ever more flexible labour markets. At its core is the further opening up and aligning of the public sector to private interests and deregulation. It advances yet more ‘consultation’, ‘measuring’ and ‘monitoring’

in this ever expanding circus. (UK public spending on private consultation topped £1.75 billion in 2004.) Given its origin, it’s unabashed about the instrumentalisation of the arts in “deliver[ing] the policy objectives of other areas of government”. Throughout “the norm is a belief that freedom prevails, which is true for those who have internalized the required values and perspectives.”<sup>1</sup>

Under the thumb of the non-devolved, non-negotiable National Cultural Strategy, it sets out to singularly ‘manage’ “the arts, including drama, dance, literature, music, the visual arts, crafts, film, and all branches of these; the creative industries, including screen and broadcasting; museums and heritage; galleries; libraries; archives; architecture.” (‘Creative Individuals’ should also be interested in the carrot of international research into welfare adjustments and tax breaks, only to be told: “This is operated at UK level and is not, of course, a devolved matter.”)

Presenting this total regulation as a ‘holistic approach’, amongst the Commission’s organisational options, the media consensus is that Scottish Arts Council and Scottish Screen will be abolished and their work absorbed by two limited companies with charitable status: Culture Scotland and The Culture Fund. These would oversee cultural policy and funding respectively. This is legitimised as appeasing artists’ concerns by retaining the fabled ‘arms length principle’ – as if this partial appeal is their only concern.

But let’s look at whose arm and in whose interest?

Culture Scotland would be “owned, governed and managed by members ... drawn from key stakeholders: Cultural Partnerships [led by Local Authority], the Sectoral Councils [representative bodies for “six areas of cultural activity”], business, education and the voluntary sectors,” and also include “ex officio observers representing Scottish Ministers, a European culture agency, Visit Scotland [tourism], DCMS [central government] and perhaps others.”

The Culture Fund board would be “drawn primarily from the cultural, financial and business sectors.” “Government has a golden share and the Scottish Executive is represented on the board by the Minister with responsibility for Culture.”

Depending on which side your positivistic bread’s buttered, it should be remembered there are a number of options laid out by the Commission, ones that include greater or lesser roles for Local Authorities.<sup>2</sup>

Despite this distracting procession of ‘choice’ – where we are presented with competing nuances of the status of various pre-designated ‘stakeholders’ – the ground-plan remains that of government-business partnerships. “By talking about governance rather than policy differences we are led to believe that there is no choice in what we do, only choices in how we do it. By talking about the whole political process in terms of the interpersonal relationships of the key players we are gently led to believe that this is the important thing. The problem has got so bad that quite a lot of the professionals can’t even see the politics anymore.”<sup>3</sup>

The ‘third way’ basis of the structure, with which we are not to engage but which we

must endorse, is that of government-business partnerships and is historically described as Corporatism. Located in Italian Fascism, Corporatism’s genealogy has not gone unmissed by some media pundits. While such historical criticisms will be maligned, as the Cultural Policy Collective state:

“Under Mussolini the state successfully negated competing political programmes and ideological interests in order to extend its control over the whole of society. In less dictatorial guise, corporatism has played a significant role in post-war British politics, perhaps especially in the social pact established between capital and labour whereby trade union leaderships have consistently accommodated themselves to commercial interests in return for minor concessions (modest redistribution, pensions and other benefits, low unemployment etc). However, since the 1970s, this social compact has been overturned by the neoliberal offensive, although trade union bureaucracies in Britain and abroad continue to adhere to notions of partnership despite systematic attacks from business and the state on workers’ rights and conditions of employment. The fact that the language of ‘partnership’ is so prevalent in the public sector is an indication of the extent to which collective social provision has now been undermined by the incursion of market forces.”<sup>4</sup>

David Miller of Spin Watch has documented this incestuous relationship between the pro-business outlook of the Scottish Executive, corporate lobbyists and private business, and the cosy interchange of seconded personnel between them.<sup>5</sup>

It’s reported that Ferguson has already indicated interest in the options put forward by the Commission on infrastructure change. The political parties have called for sound-bite “efficiency savings” and a reduction in bureaucracy, but there is scepticism that this system will deliver – if that’s its true function beyond the propaganda of wresting power. The most far-reaching of any changes are expected to form the basis of a Culture Bill in 2007.

#### Notes

1. ‘Manufacturing Consent’, Chomsky. p. 304
2. CoSLA’s briefing for Councillors, assessing implications of Commission’s report for local government, see: [www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Arts-Culture](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Arts-Culture).
3. ‘No Idea : Control, Liberation and the Social Imagination’, Robin McAlpine
4. ‘Beyond Social Inclusion : Towards Cultural Democracy’, Cultural Policy Collective [www.variant.org.uk/20texts/CultDemo.txt](http://www.variant.org.uk/20texts/CultDemo.txt)
5. [www.corporatewatch.org.uk](http://www.corporatewatch.org.uk)

#### Link

Scottish Executive : Cultural Commission  
<http://www.scottishexecutive.gov.uk/News/Releases/2004/06/5635>

# The Ship of Fools:

# A Fictional Reality

## Hope Roberts

“The probability of the decision element at the top correctly measuring the system state decreases exponentially with the depth of the hierarchy. Each level adds noise to the information as it passes through. Thus the measurement signal is very noisy in a large bureaucracy.”<sup>1</sup>

Agitated, fingers strumming on the table, he looks nervous. There is a bead of sweat on his brow, he straightens up; he doesn’t need to rise to the bait. What was it he learned at college again, how to deal with conflict, that’s it, how to listen and diffuse.

“Are you listening to me, I need help.”

“Don’t talk to me like that.”

“But I’m at the end of my tether, are you going to do ANYTHING for me?”

“Don’t speak to me so aggressively.”

“I’m getting desperate, you take her. I’ve been doing this for too long, I need help, you take her...”

“I’m leaving. I can’t take this abusive behaviour any more.”

He attaches his pen to his clipboard and stands up to leave. He hears a sob. He touches the woman’s arm and says, “Phone me, you can talk to me any time you want.”

“But I only ever get your answer machine.”

He gets into his four wheel drive and turns the key in the ignition, sighs, another job well done.

She finds herself part of an ongoing and surreal experience; of people working within a system so random they have no control over it, where policy decided by some distant committee dictates what happens in the lives of people dependant on others for their care. Where those who provide care try, and fail, to interpret these policies in relation to the reality of people’s lives, dictated by limited finances and limited support.

Those with severe mental health problems, long term illness or learning disabilities are being further handicapped, their lives limited by pointless levels of bureaucracy which cause unimaginable stress to them, their families and care workers. To illustrate: Care in the Community and Inclusion in an ideal world means that everyone is entitled to live in the community and access community activities, such as vocational education, as and when they need them. However, overall, there is little flexibility or creativity in the narrow menu of services and support available to people with learning disabilities, their families and carers.<sup>2</sup> The reality for many people is that a new form of day service is in place. With limited community resources and funding, town centres, bowling alleys and parks are full of people with learning disabilities; turning cheap or free public spaces into unofficial day centres/hospital wards.<sup>3</sup> If we could work together, look at quality, sustainability, invest time and energy into getting it right, then perhaps we could create something which actively supports the individual from opportunity to opportunity—giving them some form of quality of life.

By breaking up the way care is provided, with responsibilities divided across different departments and funding bodies, it has become infinitely more difficult to find one person within local authority who is accountable for service provision. As a practical outcome, for the individual receiving the care, to challenge the service becomes almost an anathema, as you can’t actually locate who is responsible for it. A subsequent problem begins to emerge: through

splitting up care and making accountability harder to identify, it becomes virtually impossible to detect carelessness and indifference, thereby victimising those who the policies were established to protect in the first place.

### Don’t Let The Bastards Get You Down

She sits holding her clip file. Self important, she lords it over an emotional wreck of a woman. The woman’s getting agitated, she can give her what she wants or she can let her wait. She will let her wait, leave her in limbo. It must feel so good, all that power: she can make decisions which will change her insignificant little life. She can decide whether she deserves it, and she doesn’t think that she does. Does she?

As her brother, he thought he knew a thing or two about learning disability but after his father died he had his eyes opened wide. This new found sight was affording him a glimpse of another world, a world of petty bureaucracy, mediocre service and burnt out carers. Emphasis changed for him. It became all important to get a house for his sister, to help his mother. Countless meetings, emails, telephone calls and letters, a campaign to local MSPs and councillors, meetings with social work managers and still things aren’t going anywhere. At first he is told it is because there was no house available; then it is because there wasn’t the finance; then it was because they have too many other people to deal with. He feels tense: his mother wont stop crying and his sister is confused; nipping, scratching and biting anyone who comes near her. The situation is starting to get desperate.

The more desperate you are, the more emotional you become, and the less likely you are to get the help you require. The irony being, the more desperate you become the more help you require. You end up passed from person to person, lost within a system controlled by trivial protocols. The people working within it have to spend so much of their time filling in forms, counting pennies and covering their backs, it leaves little time to deal with people face to face.

Agencies established to support people with learning disabilities and their carers can find themselves in a no win situation. These agencies are dependent on their funding from local authorities. Problem being, as a result they are unable to speak out against inequalities, because if they do they may lose their funding or not have their contracts renewed.

On a wider point, the new Independent Mental Capacity Act<sup>4</sup> allows for an Independent Consultee to advocate for those people who have no family or friends to speak on their behalf. The problem remains: if that independent consultee is funded by the local authority, how can they speak out on behalf of an individual if what they are saying goes against/ contradicts the policies of the people who sign their paycheque? Is it a case of split loyalty?

### Burn Out A Series of Disjointed Vignettes

She picks up the phone, dials.

“Yes,” says a tired voice at the other end of the phone.

“I want to talk to you about how you are getting on sorting out care/housing/respite/funding for your son/daughter?”

“I’m very tired, I can’t do much, it’s still the

same, there’s not much I can say to you, it just goes on.”

She sighs and puts the phone down.

Her friend found a house for her daughter who has a learning disability, three years ago. Her daughter shares with another man, and a private care agency provides her care. She says the care workers aren’t trained<sup>5</sup> and in fact are frightened by her daughter’s behaviour. House staff no longer want to work with her and added to that her house mate doesn’t want to share the house with her any more. The fighting can get physical and her daughters behaviour is getting worse. The mother describes the situation as a time bomb. Until recently, she was receiving phone calls from care staff at all hours of the night, demanding she calm her daughter down. She says if she goes over to the house and sees her in such a state of anxiety she will have to move her back to her home. After all, she is her mother. She has been told that if she removes her daughter from the house, she will have to stay with her permanently and she will lose all her care. So she has to watch from a distance as her daughter gets increasingly depressed and more and more likely to lash out. She has a bright idea. To try and ensure her daughter’s well being, she has offered to move out of her council house, so that her daughter can move in, have her house, and the mother will arrange to live elsewhere. All she needs is the funding for her carers. Her social worker is very helpful. She describes her as ‘salt of the earth’, but it’s not up to her. It’s her managers who are holding things up: they say they can’t find the money.

He looks at her. “Its about giving your son choice and person centred planning<sup>6</sup>, about listening to what you all need.”

She looks blank.

He leaves her house and gets into his car.

She looks out the window, watches him drive off, picks up the phone and calls her daughter. “I have no idea what he just said to me,” she tells her.

Back in the office he listens to the messages on his answer machine. He skips the more irate messages. Sits down, flicks through his paperwork: another training programme to attend on Choice, Empowerment and Vulnerability. The phone rings. He leans over and switches his answer machine back on.

She’s on the phone again. This time to a mother in her early sixties; her husband left years ago. Her son has a profound learning disability; he’s in his mid-thirties. The mother is one of these women who won’t complain, doesn’t want to trouble people. She can hear from her voice that a life time of caring has taken its toll. Her son doesn’t sleep well at night, so his mother sleeps lightly, listening out for footsteps on the floor in case her son falls down the stairs. Her son attends a Day Centre five days a week for six hours a day. On top of that, she gets home help for about seven hours a week. So every morning she gets up, washes her son and gets him dressed, feeds him breakfast and gets him ready to go. Every afternoon her son comes home about 3pm. She feeds him, they sit and watch telly, she washes him, gets him undressed and puts him to bed. She has done this more or less every day for the last thirty-five years, except on a Saturday and Sunday when they get to be with each other all day with the exception



of three hours, when she gets to go to the shops on her own. She loves her son and is scared of what will happen to him when she is gone. She doesn't particularly trust anyone else to look after him, but now she is willing to let go. For the past five years she's been trying to sort out housing for her son, but she is not a fighter. She has offered to give up her own home, in order that her son and his carers can have somewhere to live. She, in turn, will move to sheltered housing. The social work department say that they don't have all the money for his care — as having staff that would need to be awake all night would be too expensive. So in the meantime she waits and they both get older and more vulnerable. Perhaps if she collapses they will listen to her.<sup>7</sup>

“Look, all you have to do is ask them to put you on the housing list and get a doctor to describe your sons disability accurately. Make sure that the social work department psychiatrist gets that information along with a number of letters of support. That will give him all the points he needs to get to the top of the housing list. I have compiled a catalogue of meetings and broken promises they have made with your family since 1990. It was 1990 when you first requested a house, wasn't it?”

“Yes,” they look at her hopefully.

“I have to stay out of this, you say you put all this together, I cant be seen to be involved in this in any way. All I can say is that they are treating you badly and that the catalogue I've put together will embarrass them into doing something for you.”

“They took away my respite,”<sup>8</sup> she says through tears. She's seventy years old; her daughter still stays at home. Her daughter has profound learning disabilities and severe physical disabilities. She needs round the clock personal care. “They told me the respite home isn't properly equipped for people with such extensive physical disabilities”, she says, “but I told them she's been staying there for six years and there has never been a problem, but they wouldn't listen. They said its policy.”<sup>9</sup>

For six months they have been in a state of extreme distress: mentally preparing for their daughter to move home, guilty about moving their daughter into someone else's care, stressed by the constant worry for their daughter's personal safety, let alone the practicalities of getting her house ready. On top of that, they still don't know if their daughter is actually going to be able to move in as they have not heard anything from Social Work in months.

They have the best carers in the world for their daughter; real honest people who know and like their daughter, and they know their daughter likes them. Things are starting to happen. People are starting to talk to each other; it looks like the move may just happen. Trouble is, the care costs are too high. They have been told if it goes beyond a certain cost then the Social Work department will have to ask other companies to tender for the contract. That means their daughter will be cared for by people who don't know her. They are told that the costs need to be kept lower. There are a few days to go, a decision has to be made, but they are still wrangling over the costs. They are both tense, guilty, desperate. They get a phone call: the care organisation and social work department have managed to agree on a price. Their daughter moves in. But what about the actual care? Have all eventualities been planned for? In amongst negotiating costs they try to

remember if they were ever asked about their daughters medical needs. A niggling doubt eats away at them, “What if... ?”

She is sitting in her living room. She has an opened letter in her hand. It is from the Social Work department. She skims its contents and sees the word funding. Her chest tightens, she finds it hard to breathe, but she needs to talk to someone. She's in a state of panic: what if they don't have the money and her daughter has to move back in with her. How would she cope? She picks up the phone, her hands are shaking. She dials and the phone rings out.

“Hello, I'm not at my desk at the moment if you would like to leave a message after the tone I will get back to you as soon as I can.”

### In Conclusion

Learning disability care has become a business, with individuals and their carers transformed into facts and figures to be overseen by social workers who now have to act like accountants. Pretending that these complicated situations don't exist doesn't make them go away, and not planning for them properly has real long term implications. In fact, lack of clear understanding of the day-to-day reality of the situations people find themselves in is exacerbated further by disjointed support and misunderstood policy, as much as it is by limited funding. I am concerned that the policies we are creating to protect those we view as vulnerable inhibits the levels of care they receive. We are actually limiting what they can do, how they do it, where they do it and how we describe how they do it — becoming so protective that we compromise their well being. In relation to the quality of the services and their appropriateness to the individual, listening to the individual and their carers, rather than counting pennies, will result in services which will cost less in the long term, both financially and emotionally.

Maybe one day the people who make the decisions will realise that they should come and see what is actually happening on the ground, experience it from the lower end of the hierarchy, and then perhaps they will create a service which actually provides for the people who really need it.

### Notes

1. Moore's *Laws of Bureaucracy*.
2. *Independence, well-being and choice*, 28th July, 2005. Keith Smith, Chief Executive, BILD.
3. “The Scottish Commission on the Regulation of Care should be given the resources needed to monitor, audit and guide the service providers on standards and best practice in community care services.” The Scottish Parliament, Research Note RN 01/23, 14 February 2001.
4. The Mental Capacity Act 2005 provides a statutory framework to empower and protect vulnerable people who are not able to make their own decisions. It makes it clear who can take decisions, in which situations, and how they should go about this. It enables people to plan ahead for a time when they may lose capacity.
5. “Staff at all levels should have access to, and be encouraged to participate in, appropriate training on multidisciplinary working and team building. This should include opportunities for cross agency placement.” The Scottish Parliament, Research Note RN 01/23, 14 February 2001, *Delivery of Community Care in Scotland*.
6. “We suggest that this takes the form of a new personal life plan. This plan would be for everyone who has a learning disability and wants a life plan. The plan should describe how the person, his or her family and professionals, will work together to help that person lead a fuller life.” *The same as you? A review of services for people with learning disabilities*, The Scottish Executive.
7. “Local authorities, by working with health boards and the voluntary sector, should make sure that they look at the extra needs of those with profound and multiple disabilities and those of their carers. The centre for

learning disability should set up a national network of support to local providers offering advice and training on the extra needs of people with profound and multiple disabilities.” <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/ldsr/docs/tsay-08.asp> ‘Recommendation 29’, *The same as you? A review of services for people with learning disabilities*, The Scottish Executive.

8. Care given as an alternate care arrangement with the primary purpose of giving the carer or a resident a short term break from their usual care arrangement. [www.health.gov.au/internet/wcms/publishing.nsf/Content/ageing-manuals-rcm-contents-glossar3.htm](http://www.health.gov.au/internet/wcms/publishing.nsf/Content/ageing-manuals-rcm-contents-glossar3.htm)
9. “The issue of reasonable risk-taking is closely related to choice and is of great importance, if people with learning disabilities are to lead full lives in the community. However, literature in this area shows discrepancies in the ways in which risk is perceived. People with learning disabilities have been viewed as keen to take risks, while their family carers have been perceived as being protective and seeing risks as hazardous. Professionals, it has been suggested, have a more balanced view.” The Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities

*This is a work of fiction. All characters and events are the product of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.*



# I am Curious – Red

**Alexander Kennedy talks to Bruce LaBruce about his new film ‘The Raspberry Reich’, where subversive sexuality and radical anti-capitalist politics becomes cultural terrorism.**

*Alexander Kennedy: Most of your early films have been political without being overtly so – by this I mean you depict that which could be naïvely perceived as a ‘sub culture’ (queer punks, homo/phobic skinheads), so why did you decide to take this to the opposite extreme and make your characters constantly bark out political slogans in ‘The Raspberry Reich’?*

Bruce LaBruce: With ‘The Raspberry Reich’ I decided to revisit my albeit modest academic training and make something dynamic and spectacular out of it, an approach more proactive than my usual strategy of merely identifying as a “recovering academic”. I was partly motivated by the response of “the left” (if such an entity still exists) to 9/11, which seemed to me to be a non-response to the point of castration. Suddenly open debate based on formerly orthodox leftist principles was perceived as impolitic, if not downright treasonous. The fact that a small group of terrorists could demolish leftist discourse with one simple yet spectacular gesture made a big impression on me, and made me want to revisit terrorist organisations of the past in order to study the fundamental dynamics of terrorism. So even though the terrorists behind 9/11, who are Islamic fundamentalists, are about as far away as you can get in terms of ideology from the extreme left wing terrorist organisations of the west from the past several decades (the RAF, the SLA, the Weathermen, etc.), I was interested in seeing if any of the socio-political dynamics were similar. What struck me when I revisited the manifestos of the SLA, the RAF, etc. was that if you didn’t know they were issued by terrorist organisations, they could be read merely as good old-fashioned, orthodox leftist rhetoric – Marxist-based ideas about sharing the wealth, supporting the rights of disenfranchised minorities, questioning and challenging authority, promoting non-conformist behaviour, supporting the rights of the working class, etc. The difference was that for these organisations, any ends justified the means, and they would inevitably end up contravening or even contradicting their own original principles in order to achieve their goals – in effect the oppressed was more than willing to become the oppressor. The same can be said for Islamic terrorists whose claims to a kind of moral or spiritual superiority are completely negated by their breach of fundamental principles of the sanctity of life. Also, the reaction of western ‘democracies’ to both kinds of ‘terrorist’ group is similar – in the face of (arguably minor) threats, the automatic suspension of civil liberties, the sanctioned use of torture and murder, the



use of double speak and rhetorical overdrive to camouflage the abandonment of democratic principles. Anyway, I didn’t get into this in detail in ‘The Raspberry Reich’, but this was the background I was looking at. Also, in my first feature length film, ‘No Skin Off My Ass’, the lesbian film-maker sister of the skinhead character is shown conducting screen tests for a movie she wants to make called ‘Girls of the SLA’ while Angela Davis can be heard on the soundtrack talking about the Black Panthers and strategies of violent resistance. So I had the germ of the idea there already for ‘The Raspberry Reich’.

*AK: Through didactic political sloganeering and queered political diatribes you demonstrate that sub cultures seem to be the unwitting conduits of power (by happily but stupidly rallying around what is perceived to be ‘outside’ or ‘counter’ to power). Your work could be seen as cynical or realistic because of this, so, is there any use for an avant-garde resistance? Is such a thing possible?*

BLAB: I didn’t want ‘The Raspberry Reich’ to be read as a complete indictment of subcultural resistance or revolution, but in the current conformist climate it’s certainly tempting to interpret it that way. Actually it’s even bleaker than that: At least subcultural militant movements of the past, such as the gay, black, and feminist movements of the seventies, were smart and stylish and had ideas about social and political revolution. Today it seems that the only goal of subcultural or minority movements is to assimilate and gain the same status as the establishment. Gays, for example, fight for the right to participate in the most traditional institutions of the dominant culture, and have easily become its best consumers. In terms of the black movement, the Marxist leanings of the Black Panthers have been replaced by the status hungry, materialistic, sexist and homophobic empire of hip-hop. So indeed the oppressed has become the oppressor with a vengeance. (Feminism, alas, simply disappeared.) ‘The Raspberry Reich’, in bombarding the audience with the leftist manifestos of yesteryear, veers into nostalgia, but it’s also designed to re-introduce those ideas into public discourse. The movie makes fun of radicals who don’t practice what they preach, but it’s also a somewhat romanticised look at people who want to change the world radically.

*AK: ‘The Raspberry Reich’ could be seen as a parody of as well as an exercise in late feminist and queer theories, where sexuality becomes an ontologically empty category, only readable through stylised acts. Do you feel your work is counter to that tradition or is it a continuation of it?*

BLAB: Hmm, I’m not sure that sexuality becomes an ontologically empty category in the movie, mainly because the movie is a porno, which works fairly strictly within the conventions of pornography. I think what gives the movie its political verve, if I may be so bold, is that it’s about sexual revolution and the characters in it are actually having real, unsimulated sex. For me that is putting your Marxism where your mouth is. Susanne Sachsse, the respected Berlin stage actress who plays Gudrun, courageously decided to have real sex in the movie even though it could have had consequences for her career. Having real sex wasn’t a condition of playing the role – I left it up to her, but I told her I would be happy if she did. But no matter how “stylised” the sexual act becomes through porn conventions, it’s still palpably real, which has an effect on the audience. But of course the movie is also a parody of feminist and queer theories and theorists, particularly those who don’t recognise the real consequences of their theories. I used to encounter academics, for example, who supported and encouraged the sex trade or pornography to the point of participating in it themselves, only to find several years down

the line that they were in over their heads and couldn’t deal with the implications of what they had done. It’s one thing to put theory into practice, another to practice it in the real world and not in some controlled or simulated or academic environment.

*AK: To continue this idea of style then – stylistically, ‘The Raspberry Reich’ utilises the colours, language and designs of political propaganda, invoking Russian Constructivist graphic design and more obviously, Barbara Kruger’s advertising aesthetic. Did you consciously use these sources as references and what else did you draw on?*

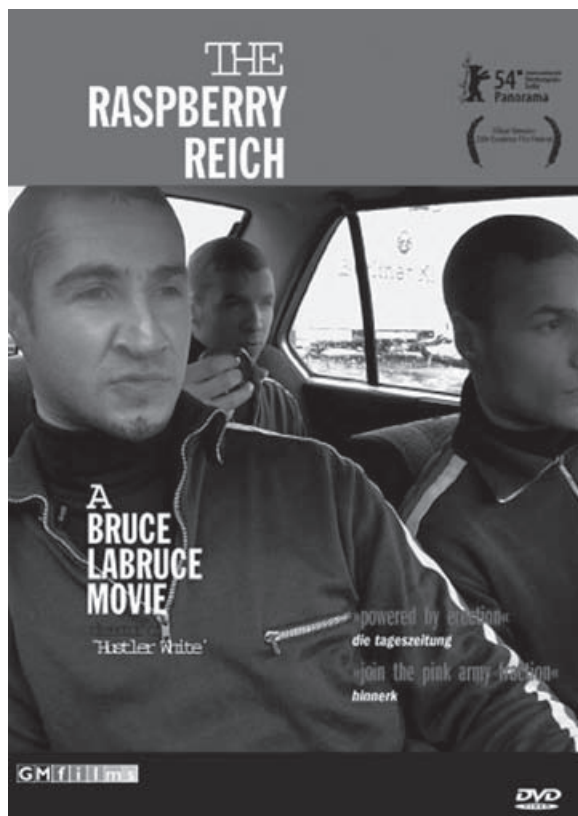
BLAB: I did actually think of Barbara Kruger and Russian Constructivism, but more so of Godard and Makavejev. My three main filmic references were Godard’s ‘La Chinoise’, Makavejev’s ‘WR: Mysteries of the Organism’, and Fassbinder’s ‘The Third Generation’. Godard of course used a lot of intertitles and bold text in his Nouvelle Vague period. I guess I was thinking in terms of propaganda and its aesthetics and the whole notion of agit-prop. But I was also thinking very directly of the current cable news channels like CNN and Fox, which bombard the audience with all kinds of texts and graphics at all times. You have the anchor speaking, plus the ticker-tape news headlines running along the bottom, plus the chyron to read, as well as charts and other graphics all going on at the same time. Audiences today are much more used to taking in a lot of information, and most of our reading is done on screens now, so I wanted the movie to reflect that.

*AK: The film seems to be the resultant clash of expression and raw material, your vision and the varying talents of the actors you use, which seems quite Warholian in its honesty or brutality of approach: you show how artificial the medium is through the stilted interaction between the actors, the dubbed sections of speech, etc. I know that you have consciously invoked Warhol previously (in ‘Super 8 1/2’ for example) why is he such an influence and where else is he in ‘The Raspberry Reich’?*

BLAB: Warhol and Paul Morrissey’s movies have always been a big influence on me. I just like the whole Factory mentality, and the naivety and crudeness of it. I like the fact that they were mirroring the Hollywood system and indulging in the same sort of excesses but at the same time exposing its phoniness and artificiality. I reference Warhol directly or indirectly in all my movies. Even in ‘Skin Flick’ the cameltoe kitchen sequence is meant to be kind of Chelsea Girlish. As far as the acting goes, I guess it just comes off as Warholian because I mainly use non-







actors and porn stars and put them in sexually depraved situations. I prefer bad acting or self-conscious acting to the kind of overly emotive, cloying yet supposedly naturalistic style of modern Hollywood. I actually think that for porn actors, who are never asked to do any real acting, the guys in my movies have done pretty well. In ‘The Raspberry Reich’ in particular they had some very complicated dialogue to deal with. Of course I did dub four of them with the voices of actual actors. I also tend to shoot against flat surfaces a lot in that kind of flat, studio style that Warhol had. I just really love the way those movies look.

*AK: As neither a sex flick nor a politically informed avant-gardist experiment, the film falls into that most intangible of categories – ‘art’. Is this intentional? Also, you seem to be attempting to divide and conquer your audience, so, via late capitalist, administered world speak – who is your audience?*

BLAB: Well, it will be a sex flick. We’re putting out a hardcore version to be called ‘The Revolution Is My Boyfriend’. And I think it does succeed on some level as a politically informed avant-gardist experiment. I mean, what could be more experimental than the attempt to mix the conventions of pornography with those of agit-prop and the nouvelle vague? Part of the experiment for me was seeing how far I could push a movie with complex political rhetoric as a piece of pornography, and what kind of effect that would have on the audience. It’s almost like a lab experiment – how much can you stimulate the mind and the libido simultaneously? So in that sense I’m treating the audience like lab rats. As for the second part of your question, you have to divide and conquer audiences these days. There are such deep recesses of cynicism out there now that you can’t naively put forth a straightforward or simplistic version of any subject if you really want to engage an audience. Part of what I think audiences have responded to in the movie is the fact that it deals in contradictions and paradoxes. The audience is ambivalent, doesn’t know how to respond. Is the movie sympathetic to the terrorists or ridiculing them? Is the critique of capitalist culture sincere or a parody of stale leftist rhetoric? Does the movie romanticise and long for revolution or regard it as an anachronism? I think it does all of those things.

*AK: Patrick, the ‘straight homo’ captive in Raspberry Reich is happily abused by his captors, a glyph for the clean-cut pink pounded homosexual. This figure seems to get the most of your wrath as a writer/director (in ‘Skin Flick’, etc), why?*

BLAB: I’m not sure this character type gets my entire wrath. After all, in ‘The Raspberry Reich’ he ends up one of the only real outlaws, so he’s redeemed in that sense. In fact, all of my movies are about characters who don’t necessarily identify as gay but who nonetheless participate in homosexual sex quite enthusiastically. I think it’s more about rejecting identity politics and the idea

of conforming to certain standards of behaviour or aesthetics on the basis of gender or sexual orientation. I think it’s also about challenging the complacency of certain people who regard gender or sexual orientation as absolute and fixed. But it’s always more complicated than that. The most seemingly “enlightened” skinhead in ‘Skin Flick’, for example – he “seems to take the woman’s point of view”, and acts more civilised – turns out to be arguably the most nasty and homophobic.

*AK: You seem to deconstruct the whole obtuse idea of the penis as a weapon of oppression, by making the passive captive a ‘top’ (this is also true in ‘Skin Flick’). This seems to be a running theme in your work, why do you find this scenario so interesting?*

BLAB: To be honest, this is often just a quirk of working within the porn industry. When casting a porn movie, you have to take into consideration the chemistry between the actors, who’s a top, a bottom, or versatile, and who wants to fuck whom. We try as best we can in casting to match the actors to the characters in order to accommodate active and passive roles, but it doesn’t always work out that way. So if the actor in real life is more comfortable fucking or being fucked, I sometimes allow them to do so even if it may seem to contradict the motivation or desires or situation of the character in the narrative. But of course I like this kind of counter-intuitivity. It just shakes up people’s expectations. Someone told me recently that I also tend to have characters in my movies go bottomless rather than topless, i.e. wear a shirt with nothing on below. This is also disconcerting for an audience because it’s so unusual and unexpected. They don’t know where to look.

*AK: There seem to be no way out for the characters in ‘The Raspberry Reich’, they flee from one oppressive system to another. The closest they get to freedom is Hamburg! Do you see any escape, any political and existential liberation?*

BLAB: Well, yes, I suppose there’s the ‘Revolution of Everyday Life’, the name of the book that I quote from in the movie. I think the most important kind of revolutionary impulse is to resist all sorts of oppression and conformist behaviour on an everyday level as much as possible. I guess for some people that’s what being an artist means, although today there’s no shortage of corporate-minded artists who have very little revolutionary impetus, or even originality. But I’m always fighting my own limitations and trying to question authority and conventional wisdom and different kinds of hegemony. The hegemony of time, for example, or of limited, ordered consciousness. It’s hard, though. I don’t have much faith in the political system, that’s for sure.

*AK: ‘The Raspberry Reich’ revels in the glamorisation of crime and the political revolutionary, terrorism even. This seems to be an aesthetic choice, so where do ethics fit into this, if at all?*

BLAB: I am fond of crime and revolution. Although I’m having an affair with a Cuban exile who doesn’t have much time for the notion of Marxist revolution, for example. He’s a babalu, a kind of priest of Santeria, which is actually a very subversive religion. But I’ve always had the



romantic notion that homosexual is criminal, and that the very act of homosexuality can or should be regarded as a revolutionary act, or, if you play your cards right, even an act of terror. Homosexual panic runs deep in all cultures, even now. And of course crime directed against corporations or corrupt officials is always glamorous. And in terms of terrorism, it’s hard to argue against the claim, as in my movie, that the arrogance of the strong will be met by the violence of the weak. As Angela Davis says on the soundtrack of ‘No Skin Off My Ass’, embracing the philosophy of non-violence is like embracing the philosophy of suicide. I’m not sure if I subscribe to that, but I know what she means.

*AK: With the supposed melodramatic death of the author and the fragmentation of the text’s truth content, it seems naïve to assume (deconstructive theories tell us) that any filmmaker or artist is merely projecting their beliefs or fantasies at the canvas or screen. Yet, by writing the dialogue in RR in such a stylised way, by appropriating such large quotations, the actors become ideologues, the auteur’s puppets. Where does Gudrun stop and Bruce begin?*

BLAB: That’s a good question, and an impossible one to answer. All I know is, I didn’t realise how much I am like Gudrun until after I’d travelled around with the movie for a while and watched it many times. When I was a punk, I used to run into all kinds of supposedly radical punks who thought they were anarchists or revolutionaries but who still managed to be homophobic and even get violent with me if I was too pushy or vocal with my sissy antics. Out of revenge I and my dyke friends would sometimes get them drunk and make them take their clothes off and put them in homosexually compromising positions and take pictures of them and put them in our fanzines. While watching my movie once I realised that in a way that’s what Gudrun does – she uses homosexuality for a kind of political purpose, or to make a point. So I guess Gudrun and I are a lot alike. Gudrun also preaches sexual radicalism but doesn’t go too far in practising it herself, something that I can also personally identify with. I still have my hang-ups and sexually repressed tendencies. But I’m trying to overcome them.

[www.theraspberrereich.com](http://www.theraspberrereich.com)



# How to live when the war comes home

Paul Chatterton

Being a ‘Loiner’ (someone from the city of Leeds) I have had first hand experience of the neighbourhoods which the world’s attention turned to briefly in early July. In my school days I lived in Beeston, home to two of the London suicide bombers, in a large Victorian end terrace near Cross Flats Park. I often visited South Leeds fisheries for fish supper on a Thursday, long before Mahmood Khan, the Edgware Road suicide bomber, worked there. I had a paper round, delivering the *Yorkshire Evening Post* at the local newspaper shop, run by an Asian family and worked and socialised with many young friends from Asian families. My days after school were filled with hanging out with the kids of the area, Asian and white. We would cruise the streets in my mini metro, playing a mixture of bangra and techno after the summer of love in 1990.

I now live in Hyde Park, the location of Alexandra Grove and the house which was suspected to have been the infamous bomb making factory. That hot Tuesday, 12<sup>th</sup> July, I sat in my bedroom-cum-study redrafting a piece of writing for a journal, mildly distracted by the incessant buzz of police helicopters nearby. Life in inner city Leeds had made me immune, almost, to such noises. The link was not made until later that day when I wandered down to make a cup of tea and turned on the national news to hear that not five minutes away 600 people had been evacuated from their homes following the discovery of a suspicious substance during a police raid on a house. The house on Alexandra Grove, near the fruit and veg shop where I often pick up groceries, rented by Magdi al-Nashar the Leeds University Chemistry student and through him to one of the London suicide bombers, is still under 24 hour police surveillance and ominously obscured with black plastic hanging from scaffold.

I am not writing this to shed some light on the links between communities like Hyde Park or Beeston and the acts of the bombers. Let’s face it. They could have come from dozens of other deprived inner city areas in the UK with high concentrations of people with south Asian origins. It is impossible to understand the motivations of one, or in this case four individuals from Leeds who chose to take their, and others, lives. We use labels like ‘Islam’ and ‘fundamentalism’ but we will never be certain. The reasons were complex and manifold, and different in each case. It’s likely to include push and pull, or internal and external factors – that is to say, immediate concerns of poverty, police harassment and marginalisation in deprived communities, along with wider connections to Religious value clashes and responses to past and ongoing war and colonialism across the middle-east.

So, this piece is not about trying to understand the motives of the bombers. But we can make some attempt to understand ourselves and where we are positioned. Hence, this is series of reflections about our role in perpetuating a particular moral way of life in the UK. When discussing our lives many things are usually left unsaid. I want to discuss them here. It is about (re)learning to live when the war comes home.

## Relearning history and a sense of place

*First*, it is worth saying that the war never really went away. It has always been here. It takes different forms in different times and places.

A critical rereading of history in a local area normally reveals a very different story to that which we receive. When we look back over the last 250 years of industrial capitalism, historical examples abound of people who were killed and were prepared to kill to protect their ways of life, or at least turn to violence when their backs were up against the wall. In Leeds for example, in 1664 the decapitated heads of two men charged with plotting a republican uprising were skewered on spikes in the middle of Briggate, now the main shopping street and home to the premier retail outlet Harvey Nichols. In 1734 several people were shot by soldiers on this same street after rioting broke out at the introduction of road tolls. Between 1811-1813, over 40 workers were killed in the Luddite uprisings in Yorkshire where wool croppers attacked the new steam powered factories and their owners, while another 24 were hung and scores deported to Australia.

The 1960s and ‘70s was a time full of such violence across the world against various enemies such as the state, the capitalist economy and industrial civilisation itself. The Angry Brigade, Britain’s first urban guerrilla group, undertook a series of bombings against embassies, politicians and banks and claimed in one of their communiqués that ‘we are ready to give our lives for our liberation’. These were strong words. Although nobody was killed, four people were eventually sentenced for ‘conspiring to cause explosives’.

Other similar groups in Europe and the USA included the *2<sup>nd</sup> June Movement*, the *Weather Underground*, the *Symbionese Liberation Army*, *Bader Meinhoff* and the *Red Army Faction*. Between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> of October 1969 *The Weathermen* undertook their ‘Days of rage’, when scores of people rioted through the streets of Chicago, burning and looting, ending in brutal repression by the police. John Ross in his recent book *Murdered by Capitalism* (2004) highlights how bombing is a quintessentially US pursuit. In the development of US society, ever since the Haymarket bombings during the struggle for the eight-hour day in Chicago, bombing has become a commonplace way for people to fight back at an uncaring system. The same rang true in Britain. Bombings have been a long part of British radical and labour history. They are part of a long tradition of using violence to fight back at the violence of the state, and the excesses of industrial capitalism. Dynamite, mainly due to its cheapness and availability, became the great leveller for the working classes.

*Second*, what we can see is that there are always many people angry enough at the current way society is organised, and the violence which the state is prepared to commit, to turn to violence themselves. And many of them are not Muslim or Arab, or African or Asian, or identifiable as different – brown, black, swarthy. They were and are, more worrying for governments, normal looking white people. They are the enemy within – ordinary people faced with few choices but violence in the name of self preservation. It normally takes longer to identify such people. Their radicalism undermines the liberal consensus that peace can be obtained as long as the number of outsiders or foreigners in a country can be minimised.

*Third*, the terrible problem is that in acts of bombing which are random and aim to cause maximum impact, innocent people, or at least those further away from political and monetary

power, die, and the guilty, or those closer in proximity to positions of power, usually live. What separates the recent bombings in London with those of the *Angry Brigade* in the 1970s for example, is that the latter consciously sided with the oppressed in the UK and abroad and planted bombs which targeted the institutions of British power, while the former were prepared to kill people randomly to create a mass event. In the bombing campaign of the *Weather Underground* in the USA in the 1970s, they promised ‘responsible terrorism’ and ‘principled violence’, killing no-one but themselves accidentally while making bombs. The stakes have risen and now targeted killing is not enough. Mass random killings such as those in New York, London and Madrid may be an attempt to say that there is no such thing as non-complicity in the global web of violence, especially if your government chooses to support war in the middle-east.

*Fourth*, we assume that peace is the norm, when really our state of peace rests on violence and the use of force elsewhere – Bolivian tin mines, Indonesian sweat shops, structural adjustment policies across the developing world, oil and gas pipelines which are built through communities, to name a few. This works on a global and local level – Britain is more peaceful than Sudan, while the suburbs of north Leeds are indeed more peaceful than the inner city areas south of the city like Beeston.

*Finally*, we are surrounded by violence in our daily lives, but have largely become blind to it. A simple list would include: passing dozens of homeless people, *Big Issue* sellers and buskers without comment; black and Asian youth being ‘stopped and searched’ by the police; the deaths of over 1000 people in police custody between 1969 and 1999; the 300 people who die at work every year in the UK due to corporate negligence; asylum seekers being deported or living in squalid housing; the absence of under 16 year olds in city centre due to curfew orders; and isolated and impoverished people living on decaying housing estates. The latest example is an absence of mass civic uproar at the shameful execution of the Brazilian student Jean Charles de Menezes by the London Metropolitan Police due to a case of mistaken identity the day after the attempted bombings of July 21<sup>st</sup>.

Violence also happens slowly in our cities so we don’t notice it. A road may cut through a wildlife area, council housing is cleared for new loft apartments, rents increase pushing small traders out of city centres. Day to day, this violence cannot be heard, smelt or seen. Only after decades do we realise what violence we have been and continue to be subjected to. We may ask ourselves, why did that happen? How could we have let that happen? Why do we not speak out or legislate against any of this, at least enough to bring about real change? But cause and effect have been broken by the passage of time and the complexity which holds together modern day society.

So how do we understand violent acts in our society? The histories of our cities have always been punctured with violence – both from those struggling against the state, and subsequent reactions from the state to quell dissent. We have to deal, then, with many different types: ongoing or everyday violence, which is state-sanctioned and flows daily out of the very nature of our social and economic system; non-state sanctioned violence undertaken by individuals or groups



but which is targeted at specific parts of the system through attacks on property, institutions, politicians and elites; and finally the more recent random violence which targets indiscriminately to maximise effect, panic and shock value, highlighting along the way that there can be no innocents. None of these kinds of violence stem from irrational thinking. They variably stem from frustration, marginalisation, desperation or a sense that one is morally right or superior. I do not want to condone violence, and so it is worth noting some differences here: state-sponsored violence is largely imposed by a minority on a majority and hence has little legitimacy, while ‘targeted’ violence by disrupting the system and minimising the loss of innocent life, may have more legitimacy than ‘random’ violence which aims to shock and panic with little regard to human life. In all cases, we need a much clearer understanding of what we mean by legitimacy, complicity and innocence.

**Towards a self-managed, peaceful society**

So where does this leave us? We seem trapped between the historical inter-relations of religious fundamentalists, capitalist governments, corporate control and repressive legislation – however expressed as a ‘with us or against us’ duality. So how can peace flourish?

Building a peaceful society means several things: *First*, it means challenging many sources of violence and acknowledging the violence which our society is built upon. Some of them are known to us through the mainstream media – that of religious and political extremists (of many different hues). Others are much less known to us – the terror, killings and deportations which our very economy and global empire needed for its take-off, the violence of industrial capitalism and neo-liberal economic policies that continue to kill and deprive in the name of profit and consumer comforts. Almost every act of consumption has in some way become an act of violence against someone or something – through environmental destruction, use of scarce resources, worker exploitation and transport pollution.

*Second*, it also means regarding wars, violence stemming from economic policies and terrorism as moral equivalents, and being prepared to stand up against all of them. The sorrow of the politicians towards the London dead seems hollow in the face of their complicity in continued deaths across the world, but most recently in Iraq. George Monbiot recently discussed in *The Guardian* (9/8/05) the need for an internationalist morality with which to combat a dangerous patriotism in the UK bordering on racism, and valued humans equally regardless of which country they live in.

*Third*, we have to learn to act for ourselves, collectively. We do not need people who will kill us indiscriminately to highlight what we need to do. We should have been able to understand this for ourselves. But we haven’t. We have to unravel the chains of complicity which connect us to atrocities, and act upon them. Derrick Jensen in his book *A Language Older than Words* (2000) suggests: ‘we don’t stop these atrocities, because we don’t talk about them. We don’t talk about them, because we don’t think about them. We don’t think about them, because they’re too horrific to comprehend.’ We all need to take responsibility here – by not relying on easy and reassuring messages from the government and corporate media, and for making more effort to connect with those around us.

We also need to do more to highlight our non complicity in global systems of violence. This would include everyday acts like changing our consumer habits, to more connected attempts at civil disobedience which involve challenging

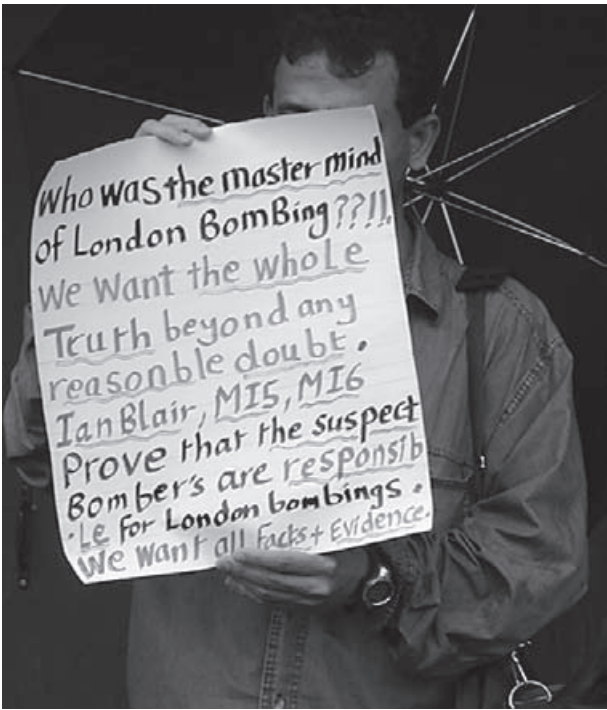
arms traders and war makers, resisting global institutions such as the World Bank, corporate profiteers, or companies who strip resources from developing countries. The list is unfortunately quite long.

A week after the bombings there were peace marches in both Beeston and Hyde Park. In Hyde Park 400 people gathered and walked the local area chanting ‘peace and unity in our community.’ The crowd was as diverse as hoped for and the chant was the invention of the local school children rather than the dogma of a local socialist group eager to use the event as a recruitment drive. A number of speeches at the end, one from a central local figure in the ‘Mothers Against Violence’ campaign, stressed the need for peace and understanding rather than division. Time will tell but the streets of Hyde Park remain quiet, partly due to the absence of the 10,000 strong body of students who live there during the university term. But this community, like many others, is competent enough to heal its own wounds; to manage itself through the resources of its people, rather than through draconian government anti-terror legislation.

There are no good and bad bombs. Most veterans from militant groups look back with anguish and regret at their violent pasts. Perhaps targeted violence stemming from desperation is understandable. But it is not justifiable – drawing lines around the innocent and the guilty is morally difficult. However, unconditionally advocating non-violence is as foolish as trying to defeat the state and its corporate masters through violence. In some situations, violence (including that to property) is a useful last resort to stopping greater violence around us. Groups across the world draw a line in the sand to protect themselves from the excesses of neoliberalism and colonialism. Otherwise they are likely to be steamrollered by current political and economic policies. The Brazilian *Landless Peasants Movement*, the *Zapatista Army of National Liberation* in Mexico, the *Unemployed Workers Movement* in Argentina, the *Soweto Anti-Privatisation Forum*, and the *Free Papua Movement* spring to mind, to name but a few. In the face of ecocide and genocide how can we not occasionally turn to violent outbursts to stop conditions from at least worsening. I cannot embrace non violence in the face of hypocrisy, lying and murdering from those who claim to represent our best interests in government and commerce.

However, in the long term a more realistic and sustainable approach is well-connected non-compliance in the structures that perpetuate the violence. The lessons of Northern Ireland tell us that dialogue and negotiation can be a solution to terrorism. There is much work to be done before we can connect and enter into dialogue with each other as equals about our complicity without distorting interference from the corporate media and the state. But this is where the hope lies – with the power of ordinary people in their communities to self organise in their desire for greater awareness and peace, not in the lies and acts of violence of religious fundamentalists, big business, the state and corporate media.

Paul Chatterton lectures at the School of Geography, University of Leeds. He is an active campaigner in the city and member of the Common Place, Leeds’ autonomous social centre (see [www.thecommonplace.org.uk](http://www.thecommonplace.org.uk)). Email [p.chatterton@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:p.chatterton@leeds.ac.uk)





# The Faction That Fools the World

Mike Small

This August, the leafy parks of Charlotte Square were once again heaving with the boozy intrigue of the Edinburgh International Book Festival. In the last two years, Director Catherine Lockerbie has opened the festival doors in an attempt to cast aside its image as a precious zone for people in the ‘book-biz’ and quill-picklers with too much time on their hands.

On 19th August the mood changed, as the *Institute of Ideas* kicked off one of its Festival slots. ‘The Right to be Offensive’ was one in a string of its sessions, at £8.00 a pop it was billed as:

“A lively and challenging debate on creativity, freedom, and the law. This year has seen plays stopped by outraged religious protestors and increasing calls for censorship of material deemed offensive. Are we creating a new kind of thought crime? What does this mean for art and free speech? Come and discuss with Richard Holloway, Tim Parks, Dolan Cummings and associate director of the National Theatre, Tom Morris — responsible for *Jerry Springer: The Opera*.”<sup>1</sup>

As the tickets sold-out to the *class de bavardage*, a less frivolous note emerged. This was about the *right being offensive* not the *right to free speech*. This was a stage-managed event, but not one managed by the Book Festival.

## The LM Network

The chair of ‘The Right to be Offensive’ was the Director of the Institute of Ideas, one Claire Fox (also known as Claire Foster), who you may recognise. She’s become a bit of a stalwart these days and pops up on Radio 4’s Moral Maze, Question Time and elsewhere with a well-worn line in articulate-sounding libertarian patter.

Claire used to be in the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP), which began life as a Trotskyist sect, split from the British Socialist Workers Party in the 1970s. During the ‘80s they published a magazine called *Living Marxism*. In the ‘90s the magazine was rebranded the less ideologically sounding LM, while the RCP had been, officially, dissolved, and the group as such was downplayed. LM was forced to liquidate when they famously lost out over claims that ITN staged a refugee camp in Bosnia to look like a concentration camp (‘The Picture that Fooled the World’). And in 2000 or so they resurfaced as the *Institute of Ideas* and *Spiked-online* — a website that picks up where they left off — and a dozen or so other fronts. They are all part of what’s been dubbed the LM Network, a maze of political activists who have been extraordinarily successful in infiltrating key cultural and political positions in the last few years; mediums for the propagation of a crude modernist libertarianism.

The Left used to be at the forefront of change, technology, progress, LM Network argue, and so they churn out a treadmill of pro forma ideas: [campaigning] “for example, on gun control (it is a misconceived attack on human liberty), child pornography (legal restraint is simply a Trojan horse for the wider censorship of the Internet), alcohol (its dangers have been exaggerated by a new breed of “puritan”), the British National Party (it’s unfair to associate it with the murder of Stephen Lawrence; its activities and publications should not be restricted), the Anti-Nazi League (it is undemocratic and irrelevant), tribal people (celebrating their lives offends humanity’s potential to better itself; the Yanomami

Indians are not to be envied but pitied), animal rights (they don’t have any), and global warming (it’s a good thing).”<sup>2</sup>

They have been the subject of ongoing rumours about who financially backs them, not least after providing platforms for writers from the corporate think-tanks the *Institute for Economic Affairs* and the *Center for the Defense of Free Enterprise*. This is their territory of the revolutionary today, not the regressive disorganised fools of the anarchist anti-capitalist movement. To be a true revolutionary today you have to be, well, a Thatcherite — as one contributor to an online debate about the LM Network put it:

“I saw Claire Fox of the ‘Institute for Ideas’ on Politics Today (Andrew Neil’s programme) I think it’s called, on Wednesday complaining about the amount of ‘regulation’ inflicted on British business by the government — on the same day that trade unionists and fellow campaigners were holding events to mark Workers Memorial Day in memory of those people killed serving ‘British business.’”<sup>3</sup>

## Frank Furedi

LM’s drastic swing to the right mirrored the lessons being handed down by the ideological “Godfather” of the RCP / LM Network and star of Channel Four’s anti-green series *Against Nature*<sup>4</sup>, the sociologist Frank Furedi, Professor of Sociology at the University of Kent at Canterbury.<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps the high point of LM’s media intervention, the three hour, prime time series directed by Martin Durkin<sup>6</sup>, targeted environmentalists presenting them as ‘the new enemy of science’ and as comparable to the Nazis<sup>7</sup> — they were responsible, the series argued, for the deprivation and death of millions in the Third World — and for which *Channel Four* had to broadcast a prime-time apology.

Furedi has written for the *Centre for Policy Studies* (founded by those well known communists Keith Joseph and Margaret Thatcher) and at one point contacted the big supermarket chains, offering, for £7,500, to educate their customers “about complex scientific issues”.<sup>8</sup> The transmogrification was complete, from so-called ‘revolutionaries’ to a corporate libertarianism which can be read propping-up Monsanto in the pages of *The Wall Street Journal*.<sup>9</sup>

## Entryism

While intellectually the Network was singing from the same hymn sheet as the extreme-right, it drew on tactics from the Trotskyist-left, such as “entryism” — infiltrating an organisation to influence its direction. A decade ago the Network initiated a new style of entryism — overnight its members were sharp-suited and organising seminars, hanging out at the ICA.<sup>10</sup> Rather than political parties, the aim was and is to infiltrate think-tanks, media groups, civil society, and they have been remarkably successful — such as LM’s former editor Mick Hume having a regular column for *The Times*.

There have been other remarkable successes, and we’re not just talking about ex-lefties doing all right in the media:

Juliet Tizzard is another from the LM Network who works for the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA), the

government body which, amongst other things, licenses and monitors all human embryo research conducted in the UK. Then there’s Emily Jackson who is a member of the HFEA committee itself. She co-authors with Dr Ellie Lee on abortion rights and is part of ProChoice Forum network.<sup>11</sup> Both Lee and the ProChoice Forum are closely associated with Frank Furedi, Tizzard, Progress Educational Trust<sup>12</sup> *et al.* At a conference at Furedi’s University, Jackson is down as publicly endorsing human reproductive cloning.<sup>13</sup>

As George Monbiot wrote in a letter to the *Times Higher Education Supplement*:

“Former RCP members control much of the formal infrastructure of public communication used by the science and medical establishment. They hold key positions in Sense About Science, the Science Media Centre, the Genetic Interest Group, the Progress Educational Trust, Genepool and the British Pregnancy Advisory Service. They have used these positions to promote the interests of pharmaceutical and biotech companies and to dismiss the concerns of the public and non-governmental organisations.

Given that the RCP was a tiny splinter of a Trotskyist subgroup, with just a handful of disciples, given that most of the people who have taken these posts do not have a background in science, and given that the movement has a long history of entryism, its former members’ colonisation of these bodies is unlikely to have happened by chance.”<sup>14</sup>

The Network, grounded in an academic ideological framework provided by Furedi, use the media and various self-created outlets to lambast the ‘precautionary principle’. Environmentalism, sustainable development and legal regulation are attacked as holding back humanity and positive change. New technologies, especially biotechnology, and massive industrial development are eulogised.

As one researcher from Lobbywatch — a group that “helps track deceptive PR involving lobbyists, PR firms, front groups, political networks and industry-friendly scientists” — has put it: “The LM network opposes all restrictions on business, science and technology, especially biotechnology.”<sup>15</sup>

Here is a brief list of some of their front organisations, all of which appear to share the same political outlook, many the same personnel, often the same address and funders:

*Africa Direct*: denies the genocide in Rwanda

*Audacity*: argues against any restraints on development, and opposes sustainability

*Sense About Science*: run by Claire’s sister Fiona Fox (or Foster), it supports all forms of biotechnology

*Families for Freedom*: the risks to children are grossly exaggerated

*Feminists for Justice*: there should be no laws on date rape

*Internet Freedom*: no restrictions on paedophilia, race hate etc.<sup>16</sup>

*Global Futures*: a publisher, but only of one author — the RCP’s chief theoretician, the sociologist Frank Furedi (aka Frank Richards)

*Spiked*: Dolan Cummings’ online site of more ‘controversial views’

*WORLDwrite*: anti-green gap years and school exchange<sup>17</sup>





Lampooning the Regency

The Edinburgh Festival is hardly the place to start espousing censorship. I would defend the right for people to hold views I disagree with; to be as ‘offensive’ as they like. The LM Network certainly hold a predictable stable of offensive right-wing views on just about everything. My argument is for transparency and openness. The Network present themselves as being beyond politics — and are naively treated by media establishments as such — all the while backing big business and operating covertly through the media to influence opinion.

Lobbywatch has been following the LM Network’s ways of working: “The construction of the events follows a set pattern. Well-known figures, who will help to draw in audiences, are invited to take part in events designed to promote the LM agenda. Invitations to speakers are sometimes made via third parties. The news broadcaster Jon Snow withdrew from an event to which he had been invited by the Royal Society of Arts after realising the lol’s involvement. Snow felt there was a lack of transparency.”<sup>18</sup>

The panel put together for the Festival by Fox (or Foster, or whatever her name is) included her favourite panellist, friend and colleague from the *Institute of Ideas*, Dolan Cummings. Cummings is the “research and editorial director” for the Institute, but also pops up at their other outlet, *Spiked online*. Cummings is another partially reconstructed Stalinist-libertarian sponsored by the pharmaceutical industry, who has a nice line in sectarianism.

It’s ironic that Fox says on her own website that she “established [the *Institute of Ideas*] to create a public space where ideas can be contested without constraint” then packs debates with placemen and stooges.

When asked about the group’s involvement in the book festival, Director Catherine Lockerbie responded: “Claire Fox is a leading media figure taking part regularly in e.g. The Moral Maze and much in demand for press and broadcasting. The Institute of Ideas has worked with the British Museum, the Tate, the Hay festival, the Cheltenham festival, education authorities throughout England and Scotland (in a major schools debating competition, much praised by professionals) and many other leading arms of the establishment. The Edinburgh International Book Festival is a free and open forum for discussion of all kinds of ideas. We do not practise censorship. We uphold freedom of speech.”

And so you should, but the question remains, do the organisers or the paying public know the context this ‘freedom of speech’ takes place in?

The Art of Government

It would be easy to dismiss the LM Network as a peripheral group who operate at a level that is both abstract and removed, but a quick look at just how successful they have been in embedding themselves into key institutions and bodies is telling. Lockerbie’s own response to our queries for this article is also revealing. Fox appears on the Moral Maze – the apogee of British broadcast intellectualism – ergo she cannot be questioned.

And their methods are not as odd as first appears. In their previous incarnation as the

RCP they were vanguardist and deliberately controversial (a veteran of the Miner’s Strike remembers being at a public meeting where they argued for the Miners to be armed). This vanguardism remains – but the agent of change is no longer the industrial working class but the professional media class.

LM Network’s approach, and a more than coy lack of openness about funding, has led to constant speculation down the years as to the mysterious backers of these eclectically libertarian hucksters. It remains a mystery, until a researcher strikes lucky and a biotech equivalent of ‘Moscow Gold’ is unveiled.

Others point out that this is just Frank Furedi’s team, that Fox, Hume and Cummings are minions to his intellectual mission, and that the relationship of leader-worship pushes them nearer the crypto-fascist wing than the wired-post-communist one. The perhaps more generous analysis is that they have been sent to discredit the left in Britain at a time when the anti-capitalist movement gathers strength and intellectual credibility. This analysis argues that they have been doing such for the last twenty years.

On an purely intellectual level, theirs is the defence of a ‘Long Enlightenment’ (Furedi strongly defends the humanist subject, industrial progress, the commitment to absolute standards of judgement, etc.) and this leads them into the same camp as the French, New Right theorist Alain de Benoist’s theory of a heroic Enlightenment, where the priority of the subject is all and the struggle of self-determination and respect for ‘European’ values is central.

Other companions at this end of the lounge are such fellow travellers as Roger Scruton — oddly often posed as the *right* to Claire Fox’s *left* on the Moral Maze. Reviewing Furedi’s ‘Where Have All the Intellectuals Gone?’ (to which one is tempted to reply probably to act as apologists for the biotech industry) he writes:

“For Furedi the growing contempt for objective truth and transmissible knowledge is the sign of a deeper malaise within society — a loss of trust in rational thought and a flight towards “social inclusion”, where this means, in effect, mob rule. The philistinism of educational theory, the take-over of the humanities by the “postmodern” charlatans, the loss of respect for science, and the growing tendency to put “relevance” at the heart of the curriculum — all these are signs, for Furedi, of a fundamental repudiation of knowledge. And this explains the vanishing of the intellectuals.”<sup>19</sup>

Well it’s not a bad summation of Furedi’s slightly weird set of straightjacket, push-button ‘theories’, though of course they become increasingly tendentious as his coterie straddles the curriculum, the educational theory, the humanities, etc. They say you’re known by the company you keep and Scruton’s lavish reviews make the LM Network known as a dangerous right-wing group. Scruton goes on to argue that Furedi is not really an intellectual just a “genuinely educated (and transparently conservative) man.” Intellectuals you see, “as we know from the cases of Marx, Lenin, Mao, Sartre, Pol Pot and a thousand more...are dangerous.”<sup>20</sup> I’m not sure I’d have thrown poor old Jean Paul Sartre in with Pol Pot, but there you go.

Whatever their ideological backdrop, it is disingenuous for them to present themselves as

beyond left and right and woefully naïve of the book festival organisers and key political and media outlets to invite them to run the show whilst ignoring their clear political agenda. The LM/RCP Network — perhaps only championed by our own neo-cons — are the arch entryists of our era. So if the debate seemed oddly familiar at the Book Festival this year, at least you know why.

Notes

1. [www.edbookfest.co.uk/whatson/event\\_listing.html?event\\_id=16136](http://www.edbookfest.co.uk/whatson/event_listing.html?event_id=16136)
2. Monbiot, 1/11/1998, Far Left or Far Right? [www.monbiot.com/archives/1998/11/01/far-left-or-far-right/](http://www.monbiot.com/archives/1998/11/01/far-left-or-far-right/)
3. [www.urban75.net/vbulletin/archive/index.php/t-74676.html](http://www.urban75.net/vbulletin/archive/index.php/t-74676.html)
4. [www.monbiot.com/archives/1997/11/26/crimes-against-nature/](http://www.monbiot.com/archives/1997/11/26/crimes-against-nature/)  
[www.lobbywatch.org/profile1.asp?PrId=39&page=D](http://www.lobbywatch.org/profile1.asp?PrId=39&page=D)
5. [www.sourcewatch.org/index.php?title=Frank\\_Furedi](http://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php?title=Frank_Furedi)
6. [www.gmwatch.org/profile1.asp?PrId=39](http://www.gmwatch.org/profile1.asp?PrId=39)
7. [www.guardian.co.uk/uk\\_news/story/0,3604,341054,00.html#article\\_continue](http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk_news/story/0,3604,341054,00.html#article_continue)
8. Frank Furedi, 1999. Courting Mistrust: The hidden growth of culture of litigation in Britain, Centre for Policy Studies, London. [www.monbiot.com/archives/2003/12/09/invasion-of-the-entryists/](http://www.monbiot.com/archives/2003/12/09/invasion-of-the-entryists/)
9. ‘Succumbing to Green Scare Tactics’ by Frank Furedi, *The Wall Street Journal Europe*, November 1998
10. [www.infopool.org.uk/cclubs.htm](http://www.infopool.org.uk/cclubs.htm)
11. [www.prochoiceforum.org.uk](http://www.prochoiceforum.org.uk)
12. [www.gmwatch.org/profile1.asp?PrId=160](http://www.gmwatch.org/profile1.asp?PrId=160)
13. [www.spinwatch.org/plog/index.php?blogId=8](http://www.spinwatch.org/plog/index.php?blogId=8)
14. [www.lobbywatch.org/p1temp.asp?pid=52&page=1](http://www.lobbywatch.org/p1temp.asp?pid=52&page=1) *Times Higher Education Supplement*, 11 February 2005
15. [www.sourcewatch.org/index.php?title=Biotechnology](http://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php?title=Biotechnology)
16. [www.netfreedom.org/news.asp?item=30](http://www.netfreedom.org/news.asp?item=30)
17. [www.worldwrite.org.uk/](http://www.worldwrite.org.uk/)
18. [www.lobbywatch.org/profile1.asp?PrId=142](http://www.lobbywatch.org/profile1.asp?PrId=142)
19. Roger Scruton, *The Times*, 4 September 2004, [www.frankfuredi.com/intellectualreviews.shtml](http://www.frankfuredi.com/intellectualreviews.shtml)
20. *ibid*





# Breaking Cover

## Tom Jennings

In ‘Same Difference?’<sup>1</sup> I discussed recent cinematic treatments of Western Muslim lives in terms of the interaction of racism and Islamophobia with conflicts around class, generation and gender. This essay follows some of the implications in investigating the significance of the hijab (headscarf), which is the focus of considerable current attention. Work by artists related to the veil and identity is briefly summarised in terms of how European Muslim women see and present themselves, and two recent photographic exhibitions tackling this subject are described. However, Muslim women’s appearance is a site of intense official interest too. Earlier this year Shabina Begum (16) of Luton overturned the attempt by Denbigh High<sup>2</sup> to prevent her from wearing the hijab at school. Her principled campaign set a UK legal precedent, but circumstances are less favourable in France, where right-wing racism has made considerable inroads into local government and national guidelines seeking to outlaw the veil conjoin cultural prejudice with secularism and feminism. A recent BBC documentary on the ban’s implementation shows the varying meanings invested by young women in these cultural symbols under threat. The concluding section finally seeks to draw together all of the strands from ‘Same Difference?’ and the present work, indicating how the social and political processes at work should be familiar to us all, even if the specifics of their impact upon the experiences of European Muslims are as deep, diverse and distinctive as the influence of religion – or any other cultural tradition – always is.

### Veiled Assertions

The traditions and practices of veiling are widely divergent across the Muslim world<sup>3</sup> thanks to variations in religious interpretation, political and economic conditions and the geographical migration of populations leading to degrees of adjustment and assimilation into host societies.<sup>4</sup> In European countries in particular, “numerous and often contradictory intersecting points of

cultural identification”<sup>5</sup> result. However, the ‘ethnicity’ discourse which has overlain old-fashioned biological racism yields new British stereotypes of ‘alien’ Islam, whereby “groups previously known by national or regional origin ... are now all seen as part of a single Muslim community. This categorisation of minority communities in primarily religious terms assumes them to be internally unified, homogeneous unities with no class or gender differences or conflicts.”<sup>6</sup> The underlying complexity is epitomised by several British-based women artists from Muslim backgrounds who have explored the meanings of the veil, including Jananne Al-Ani (Iraqi/Irish descent), Zenib Sedira (Algerian-French) and Sabhera Bham (British-Indian).

To Fran Lloyd, “the Arab woman’s body is central to Orientalist imagery as the site of this extreme difference or otherness: of eroticism combined with passivity and anonymity, and as a sign of the unknown to be conquered”.<sup>7</sup> Zenib Sedira’s photography and video installations treat “the veil as external sign of difference, social positioning, gender, desire and exclusion/inclusion ... a complex symbol that carries a multiplicity of frequently shifting and often contradictory meanings in differing postcolonial geographies”.<sup>8</sup> Sabera Bham sees the veil as central to images of Muslim women in mainstream media – the most visible aspect which differentiates them from others. Her *Concealed Visions – Veiled Sisters* (1998) projected portraits of veiled women onto suspended transparent fabric, with a soundtrack of British women voicing how the veil expresses their modesty, dignity and self-respect.<sup>9</sup>

The richness of such work reveals the range of attitudes amongst Muslim women; while many not wearing the veil appreciate that others incorporate it symbolically in conceiving personal identity. Veiling “is a specific practice of situating the body within the prevailing exigencies of power; so is unveiling ... Not-to-veil is also another way of turning flesh into a particular type of body,”<sup>10</sup> so that choices around the veil do not necessarily or directly concern either religion or oppression. These complexities should be kept in mind in considering the exhibitions described below concerning representations of British Muslim women. Though mostly of Pakistani descent, their portrayals amply demonstrate as wide a range of concerns and perceptions in relation to appearance, conduct, self and society as would be found among women in the UK of any cultural background.

#### 1. Self Presentation

Like Sabhera Bham’s installation cited above, Clement Cooper’s *Sisters*<sup>11</sup> combined photography with testifying voices. This exhibition and book intended to give a positive public representation of young UK Muslim women,<sup>12</sup> and had the backing of teachers and imams in state and Islamic colleges, schools and mosques in Preston, Oldham, Manchester and Birmingham, as well as the enthusiastic participation of those who volunteered in groups to take part. After extensive consultation with their parents, subjects were asked to wear their ‘best’ or favourite scarves,<sup>13</sup> and pictures were shot

between lessons in normal school sites. Locations and props were used according to aesthetics and convenience; other members of the school going about their business were present along with chaperones; and the subjects decided on their stance and gaze. The best images technically of each were shortlisted, and those used decided jointly with the subjects – the final selection representing the diversity of styles and postures adopted by the girls.

For the sound recordings, they were asked to speak about whatever they felt comfortable with in terms of their lives or beliefs as Muslims; given a list of suggested themes (including religion, the hijab, 9/11, prejudice experienced); and taboo themes such as divorce and sexuality were tacitly avoided to maintain comfort levels. The editing reduced repetition while representing the range of opinions expressed, keeping some of the naïveté and embarrassed laughter but doing justice to the subjects’ efforts to present themselves publicly.<sup>14</sup> Most explicitly characterised themselves primarily as part of family and social networks or communities – those from Islamic schools being more self-confident about their position within Muslim traditions and religion; while state school students preferred to describe how they personally and collectively behaved and were treated as Muslims.

Given the briefing’s emphasis on women’s clothing and ‘Muslim’ ideas and behaviour, many of the statements discussed feminine roles and morality and women’s freedoms and status in Islam. However, it is noticeable that a very wide spectrum of attitudes was audible and visible, whether or not any pressure was felt from authority figures which may have impacted on what the girls said and did. In the pictures the gaze is to camera more often than averted, and the facial expressions and poses struck indicated feelings of being strong, sassy, secure, coy, defiant, vulnerable, knowing, proud, happy or challenging. Tones of voice included the forthright, hesitant, authoritative or thoughtful in criticising, justifying, demystifying, moralising, questioning, declaiming, complaining and explaining. Certainly, interpretations of domesticated, docile downpression on the part of these modern European young women would be hard to sustain irrespective of the degree of their piety, traditional observance of veiling, or modesty of expression.

#### 2. Self Expression

Of course, the public collective identity of the *Sisters* was predetermined as Muslim and symbolised by the veil. Though necessary for the project’s purposes, this hindered the expression of other dimensions in the exploration of selfhood which might resonate with the experiences of viewers in different ways. The NMPFT exhibition *After Cameron*<sup>15</sup> also contains portrayals of a group of British Muslim women. These self-portraits were produced collectively but with no prescribed attention paid to the ethnic or cultural background of the subjects, and therefore no ‘burden of representation’ was placed upon them. With a stress on private and personal development rather than public presence, this provides an interesting contrast.

*After Cameron* was intended to introduce the work of Julia Margaret Cameron to a wider audience. Cameron was a pioneering Victorian photographer belonging to a colonial family in India, and therefore constrained by a variety of technological and social restrictions. In a series of workshops with artist Chris Madge, the subjects experimented with nineteenth century pinhole camera and contemporary digital methods, and the corresponding old and new processing and developing techniques were combined culminating in the final argyrotypes prints. This was decisively not ‘instant’ photography.





Time needed to be taken for trial and error, and therefore for reflection. And while the digital camera captures moments, its autofocus technology renders the point of focus uncertain; whereas the pinhole camera’s longer exposure time gives flexibility in discovering possibilities for staging, movement and definition.

Judging by the results, the Bradford group were just as self-confident as the *Sisters*, evidenced in their sophisticated deployment of concepts and tropes of Western and Eastern beauty, familiarity with conventions of fashion photography, the self-consciousness of display and careful manipulation and playing with Asian and European clothing as well as other culturally iconic props. The expressions, postures and gestures tend towards introspection, with permutations of sadness, poignancy, yearning, amusement and joy as well as modesty, seriousness and stillness – but the pictures are also dynamic and dialogic, with double images and blurring from movement, and interaction between subjects as well as implied communication with viewers. The freedom to vary framing, lighting and camera angles further allowed the depth and complexity of character and mood to be conveyed.

The final ensemble of images captures the richness and provisionality of both personal identity and artistic endeavour as social processes rather than purely individual enterprises. Several of the group had even decided not to allow their pictures into the public domain (due to concerns about possible unauthorised use); though they participated just as fully as the others in the project. *After Cameron* emphasised the cultivation of a cohesive group environment to help overcome inhibitions as well as fostering shared decision-making. Rigid boundaries of both authorship and selfhood were thus comprehensively questioned in the portraits, which were selected for exhibition to represent a record of the learning and achievements of the group as well as the self-images of its members – who in the event largely relinquished the veil as a marker of identity while generally also choosing to avert their gaze.

3. Self Defence

The putative ‘mystery’ of Muslim women is enhanced by traditional practices of modesty only to those with no direct experience (whether through choice or circumstance). On the other hand, the postmodern Western obsession with superficial displays of surface appearance leads to suspicion towards any kind of hidden depths which have the capacity to expose it as the narcissistically trivial but commodifiable perversity it is. Either way, it should be apparent from the work described above that the characterisation of Muslim women as undifferentiated victims of their culture is a travesty, even if that doesn’t hinder its utility in the pursuit of sundry vested interests. These reproduce the generally regressive and racist tendencies of nationalism and other exclusionary discourses corrosively festering away in the body politic, but also often intersect with more urgent contemporary ramifications for everyday lives when powerful institutions weigh in. *The Headmaster and the Headscarves* details how young women are being forced right now to deal with the practical consequences of institutional definitions of their difference.<sup>16</sup>

In a state secondary school in Paris, headmaster Raymond Scieux translated the French government’s outlawing of ‘religious symbols’ by insisting on the visibility of his female pupils’ ears and foreheads – his primary rationale being that his staff shouldn’t have to be aware of their religion. The teachers themselves justified the ban on the veil in quasi-feminist terms of the girls’ welfare (rather than their own) – including protecting them from religious ‘oppression’ by their families and, bizarrely, the importance of encouraging teenage sexual expression. Such clumsy rationales satisfied

neither their more thoughtful colleagues nor the students featured in the documentary. Many of their parents had already urged them to relinquish their veils for the sake of education, and (like the *Sisters*), they recognised the sexualisation of youth to be toxic. They may have held sharply diverging perspectives on the status of ‘Western’ cultural patterns in their daily lives, and most were not particularly devout, but Muslim customs now under attack were felt as integral to their personal identities.

In the meetings and discussions shown in the film, those supporting the government guidelines systematically refused to listen to or take into account the girls’ feelings, opinions and wishes, or even to engage in real debate. Facing such patronising intransigence, the prospect of expulsion just before their final exams understandably tinged the atmosphere among the girls and their supporters with a mixture of indignance, misery and fatalism.<sup>17</sup> However, some began to crystallise their intelligence and integrity into increasing determination and militancy as they grappled with strategies of minimum compromise to maintain self-respect. In this they drew on various social and cultural influences – including the history and steadfastness of parental generations, the self-respect inherent in Islam, pragmatic experience at school so far and an immersion in secular youth culture (such as in appropriating the bandana from hip hop style). Responding to an invidious predicament, their imaginative questioning of the wider social and political implications led to almost palpable intellectual, cultural and spiritual maturation – completely contradicting their erstwhile educational protectors, whose rhetorical claims of benevolence disrespectfully denied them any such capacity.<sup>18</sup>

Rhetorics of Respect and Respectability

Liberal reformist writers and activists within Islam explain the resistance to change in its traditionalist patriarchal models by analysing the Qur’an and pre- and post-Islamic legislation, customs and scholarship.<sup>19</sup> Emphasis is placed on the historical, cultural and political conditions influencing the interpretation of scripture, the development of Shari’a law, and applications in specific circumstances. Humanist rationalism is apparently also rapidly gaining ground among intellectuals and the political classes in many important Islamic countries.<sup>20</sup> However, a conspicuous failure to speak to poor and young Muslims offers hardline political Islam the chance to thrive – not just in the war zones of Palestine, Afghanistan and Iraq but also in Europe. Similarly in Iran, recent presidential elections were won through a tactical appeal to the economic desperation of the poor and against ‘corrupt’ urban middle class interests.

Surveys of patterns of beliefs and behaviour within and between Muslim communities and societies throughout the world<sup>21</sup> show that the most significant variables may not relate directly to religion either. The points of tension producing intellectual challenge, deliberate struggle or subversive response to necessity mean that women are often active against patriarchal restriction in ways corresponding to neither modernist, traditionalist or fundamentalist Islamist prescriptions nor Western liberal or feminist presumptions. So, despite this wide spectrum of lived practice (especially when harsh economic conditions dictate), Chandra Mohanty’s examination of the rhetoric of women’s solidarity shows that “British Asian cultures, in which a wide range of different types of people are living lives in which they are active agents not just passive victims, become reduced to monolithic, stereotyped and ethnocized categories such as the ‘Asian community’ ... characterised by its victim status – victim often not only of white racism but of a set of so-called traditional norms



and values.”<sup>22</sup> Such patronisation is typically compounded with moral panics about ‘barbaric’ customs such as honour killing and female circumcision irrespective of their real prevalence.

When hyperbolized in this way, the general haste to condemn women’s subordination as blanket oppression carries the corollary that any apparent complicity – such as conformity to tradition – may be dismissed as the docility of the slave. The corresponding trivialisation of efforts from within Muslim communities to improve conditions for women then matches the general arrogance of Western discourses in relation to those of ‘inferior’ peoples. It also conveniently overlooks the cultural specifics of tradition. In the defensive conditions of historical domination, tradition is centrally concerned with ‘proper’ femininity – which “is always over-layered with other categorizations such as class and race. Historically ... working-class women (Black and White) ... were precisely what femininity was not. However, to claim respectability, disavowal of the sexual is necessary and constructions, displays and performances of feminine appearance and conduct are seen as necessary [...] masquerades [which are] tactical deployments of forms of femininity which protected their investments and gained cultural approval and validation.”<sup>23</sup>

Not surprisingly then, Britain’s South Asian communities are, according to fictional depictions, riddled with “forms of oppression that relate to caste, class and religion as well as the positive aspects of family and community ... Women and girls, in particular, are subject to irreconcilable contradictions ... What is called for is a life of negotiation that leads to a redefinition of boundaries.”<sup>24</sup> This continual negotiation to prove worth contrasts pressures towards conformity from within one’s family, wider kinship networks and community, with those from unofficial and official racism. None of this can be understood in simplistic terms of static culture, ethnic and race relations or patriarchy – which fix identity in mass, categorical differences clamouring to be recognised. And for those lacking the economic or cultural status needed “to participate in recognition politics ... ethical struggles often occur around use- rather than exchange-values ... Communities [form themselves through] talk of fairness and kindness that glues people together and is based on values of care rather than exchange.”<sup>25</sup> This type of social orientation resists the “tyranny of identity politics”,<sup>26</sup> whether imposed by grass-roots essentialism, institutional discourse or governmental ‘political correctness’.

As with the Bradford groups defending those criminalised after the 2001 riots, the campaign in France against the school headscarves ban prominently features working class Muslim women organising from their own perspective



in ways not reducible to essentialised separable identities – even if conservative ‘community leaders’, the state, academics, media and marketers share that agenda to monopolise tradition, ‘law and order’, knowledge, public opinion, and profit respectively. Likewise, the 1989 demonstrations and *Satanic Verses* ‘book-burning’ rituals by British Muslims in Bradford and elsewhere represented “spontaneous working class anger and hurt pride”<sup>27</sup> akin to that seen also among alienated Black and white inner-city youth throughout the 1970s and 80s. Whenever material deprivation is dismissed as the fault of the poor, it may become a matter of survival to demand respect in response to its absence. Whether white, Black or Asian, there’s nothing ‘natural’ about these processes – even if this is conveniently forgotten by the complacently respectable. Meanwhile the status as white of ‘underclass’ working class people on sink estates “is ‘tainted’ through their multi-ethnic residence, their poverty and their roots in a ‘black’ market economy”<sup>28</sup> along with their thoroughly dangerous conduct and dirty sexuality – echoing previous class-based and colonial discourses of the urban poor, immigrants and racial others used to reinforce distinctions between ‘rough’ and ‘respectable’ classes, castes or strata.

From the range of attitudes, preoccupations and expressions in *Sisters*, *After Cameron* and *The Headmaster and the Headscarves*, religious traditions, beliefs and norms are obviously interwoven with manifold other dimensions of contemporary European Muslim women’s experiences. Similarly, religious precepts and practices may be mobilised for a range of purposes, and are often neither the problem nor the solution nor even the most salient factors in striving for a tolerable life. Acting collectively to maintain and reproduce self, family and community means continually adjusting to conflicting demands from a panoply of social, discursive and official institutions. These claim uniformity, consistency and legitimacy on the grounds of nation, morality and order, yet are riven by and indeed formed from contradictory historical, political and economic interests. Consequently, codes of respectability which are deeply ambiguous in terms of their race, gender and class connotations collide and overlap within Western societies – among people of all secular and spiritual faiths coping with the consequences of consumerism, selfish individualism and contempt for others.

Meanwhile the hapless hysterical hypocrisy of power pretends it can legislate away all complexity and antagonism while encouraging the intensification of inequality. Such attempts are bound to fail; but the failure itself serves both corporate agendas and the divinely-ordained control freak fantasies concerning moral enforcement and punishment indulged in by New Labour, Islamic fascism and US evangelical support for neoconservative neofeudalism. Resistance of any kind to the relentless march of managed misery is defined as bad for business, inherently dangerous, and evil to boot. Deliberately soliciting knee-jerk public reactions which draw on emotional reserves left over from centuries-old colonial and class stratification, the state legitimises unlimited measures to preempt change. And as with anti-social conduct (including wearing headscarves or hoodies); so too for thought-crime and terror. As Paul Gilroy argues, in the UK:

“outlawing incitement to religious hatred ... was just a convenient governmental gambit for separating ‘good’ from ‘bad’ Muslims ... Bolting official religious sensitivity on to the apparatuses of ‘antiracism’ only helps to reproduce exactly the sort of closed and stratified communities that might otherwise be withering away. Processes, identities and feelings that are fluid, complex and internally differentiated become fixed, naturalised and spiritualised ...

“Transposing large cultural, political and economic

problems into the language of faith and religion is a counterproductive oversimplification recycling the ‘clash of civilizations’ idea ... It is only racism that holds all British Muslims responsible for the wrongs perpetrated in the name of their faith by a tiny minority.”<sup>29</sup>

The heavy-handed and misconceived methods of the rule of law, applied to alien civilisations and yob cultures alike, run the gamut from surveillance, profiling and spurious and malicious ‘intelligence’ to peremptory discipline and restrictions on movement and eligibility for work, welfare and services – because on prejudicial examination their targets perpetually fall short of fully human (or British) status deserving respect for life and self-organisation. Appreciating – rather than suppressing, denying and projecting – the inevitable shades of sameness and difference within and between us is therefore no mere aesthetic preference for respectably cultured cosmopolitans. Breaking the cover of monolithic universal prescription by understanding, accepting and building from the implications is instead a precondition for any liberatory politics.<sup>30</sup>

www.tomjennings.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk

#### Notes

1. *Variant* 23, pp.28-31, Summer 2005.
2. Also, as it happens, my old school.
3. Camillia Fawzi El-Solh & Judy Mabro, ‘The Ubiquitous Veil’, pp.7-12 in ‘Introduction: Islam and Muslim Women’, *Muslim Women’s Choices: Religious Belief and Social Reality*, Berg, 1994, pp.1-32.
4. Where, “the hybridity generated by diaspora is not just with the ‘host’ nation but among diasporas themselves ... [from] the historical and continuing interactions between different diasporas, and the increasing frequency with which individuals may inhabit various successive diasporas in the course of a single lifetime” (Nicholas Mitzoeff, *Diaspora and Visual Culture*, Routledge, 1999, p.3-4.
5. Fran Lloyd, ‘Arab Women Artists: Issues of Representation and Gender in Contemporary British Visual Culture’, *Visual Culture in Britain*, Vol. 2, No. 2, 2001, p.5.
6. Nira Yuval-Davis, ‘Fundamentalism, Multiculturalism and Women in Britain’, in James Donald & Ali Rattansi (eds.) *Race, Culture and Difference*, Sage, 1992, p.263.
7. Lloyd, p.13 (see note 5). For various historical reasons, Arab women may have suffered such perceptions in especially acute form; but a similar syndrome could surely be detected applying to Muslim (or indeed, Asian) women in general.
8. Lloyd, p.6. So, *Silent Witness* (1995) has a row of large disembodied but actively moving pairs of eyes complicating questions of agency, activity, passivity and modesty, whereas *Don’t Do To Her What You Did To Me* (1996) has large photographs of “the artist veiling and unveiling herself ... The averted gaze of the artist and the veil suggest an image of subjugation, but ... the scarf (which was made by Sedira) is a patchwork of photographs of an unveiled female with her hair down (the artist’s sister)” (p.8). *Silent Sight (Self-Portrait)* (1999) has a triptych of the artist wearing full-length white veil, recalling Catholic and Islamic symbolism blending in her upbringing in Paris.
9. “I wanted to create alternative images of the veil,



images that would challenge mainstream conceptions and allow the veil wearers to be able to express themselves”: Sabera Bham, quoted in Paul O’Kane, ‘Review of Photographic Installation, *Concealed Visions – Veiled Sisters*, by Sabera Bham’, *Third Text*, Vol. 43, No. 2, 1998, pp. 101-3.

10. Meyda Yegenoglu, *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism*, Cambridge University Press, 1998, p.115. Note that the Qu’ran does not mention the veil; merely exhorting believers to avoid repeated eye contact with members of the opposite sex.
11. *Sisters: A Celebration of British Female Muslim Identity*, by Clement Cooper, © KHADIJA Productions, Manchester, 2004 (distributed by Cornerhouse Publications: see www.cornerhouse.org/publications), includes portraits and statements of women from Oldham, Manchester, Preston and Birmingham, including: Aisha Saleem, Ambia Khatun, Ayah Basil Hatahet, Bushra Iqbal, Danya Al-Astewani, Fatima Abdul, Fatima Begum, Hazera Afia Khatun, Henna



Jameel (pictured), Johura Begum, Mariam Ghaddah, Meyrish Nasreem (pictured), Nipa Begum (pictured), Rebeka Akhtar, Rebeka Khantun, Romana Sunam, Shahina Khatun, Sobia Bibi and sisters (pictured), Sonia Ahmed and Tasneem Aiar. *Sisters* exhibited at The Gallery Oldham in 2004-2005 and is now touring internationally. Clement Cooper's previous work includes *Presence*, looking at life within the African-Caribbean communities of Moss Side and Longsight, Manchester, and *Deep: People of Mixed Race*, on the experiences of people in Liverpool, Cardiff, Manchester and Bristol. A current UK-wide project entitled *Brothers*, under the auspices of Autograph: the Association of Black Photographers, will produce portraits of British Muslim men.

12. "They were quite happy to speak about their faith and have their pictures taken. Even the imams went out of their way to help me. I found Muslim women to be intelligent. They were aware of who they were and felt strongly about their beliefs. They had great respect for themselves and respect for others. What I found most amazing was that an eight-year-old girl wearing the hijab knew far more about herself and who she was than her much older white counterparts" (Clement Cooper, interviewed in 'Beauty and the Faith: Girls and their Hijabs', *Asian News*, 17th December, 2004).

13. In Islamic schools white hijabs were school uniform; dark colours being favoured in state schools. Veil material varied from simple, high-quality cloth to more decorative designs, sometimes prominently featuring fashion brand names (itself a subject of intense discussion). Incidentally, one of the schoolgirls forged her parent's signature for permission to take part, leading to her portrait being temporarily withdrawn. General information regarding the project was provided by Clement Cooper (personal communication, July 2005).

14. From their day-to-day chat many of the girls were also mad about football (though not other sports) and various other 'Western' pursuits; some also routinely discussed 'boyfriends'. In other words, many themes commonplace among British teenage girls were keenly addressed – though only one contributor mentioned leisure pursuits and enjoyment during recording, countering perceptions that being Muslim was boring and serious.

15. *After Cameron*, National Museum of Photography, Film and Television (©), Bradford, 2004 (in association with Bradford Youth Service), including portraits by Billy Ayub, Sylina Sabir, Afiya Hussain, Aaisha Hussain, Salhia Ahmed, Salma Ahmed, Mahmoona Khan and Yasmeen Kosar, working with Chris Madge (see: [www.nmpft.org.uk/aftercameron](http://www.nmpft.org.uk/aftercameron)). Further information concerning this project was gained from Chris Madge (personal communication, May 2005).

16. *The Headmaster and the Headscarves*, dir. Elizabeth C. Jones, screened on BBC2, 29th March 2005, and is set in the Lycée Eugene Delacroix in Drancy, northeast Paris. Note that the history and contemporary repercussions of French colonialism in Africa are rather different from those of the British Empire in Asia (the hijab itself being highly significant in the Algerian independence campaign). However, the Muslim Arab and African presence in France is as firmly established as the South Asian communities are in the UK, with fluctuating patterns of integration and autonomy, tradition and cultural crossover sufficiently parallel in the two countries to merit consideration together – as are the contours and stereotypes of racism and Islamophobia and very substantial levels of deprivation and disaffection.

17. From working class families and poor neighbourhoods, and considering the far more intense degree of institutional racism faced in France even than in Britain, they were keenly aware that their prospects were already highly uncertain. Since the programme was made, school expulsions of French girls refusing to remove their veils have started to accelerate, and an organised campaign against the ban is gaining wide support. Meanwhile hijab bans are planned or are already law in several other European countries, including Germany, Spain and Italy.

18. whereas submitting meekly would represent the effective accomplishment of the repression their communities are accused of. For some responses from young UK Muslim women to *The Headmaster and the Headscarves*, see: <http://forum.mpacuk.org> – including comments that approximate nationalistic pride in asserting that it will never get that bad here. Let's hope they're right (in the prognosis, if not the diagnosis).

19. See, for example, Asghar Ali Engineer, *The Rights of Women in Islam* (2nd ed.), New Dawn Press, 2004.

20. such as Pakistan, Indonesia, Malaysia and Morocco, see: Ziauddin Sardar, 'Islam: the Tide of Change', *New Statesman*, 8th August, 2005.

21. for example. Fawzi El-Solh & Mabro (see note 2).

22. because "the Western gaze, including the Western feminist gaze, tends to construct Third World 'otherness' in ways that deny the differences and specificity of other cultures": Chandra T. Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*, Duke University Press, 2003; cited in Chris Weedon, *Identity and Culture: Narratives of Difference and Belonging*, Open University Press, 2003, p.114.

23. Beverley Skeggs, *Formations of Class and Gender: Becoming Respectable*, Sage, 1997, p.115. See also: Floya Anthias, 'Race and Class Revisited: Conceptualising Race and Racism', *Sociological Review*, Vol. 38, 1990, pp.19-42; Heidi Mirza (ed.), *Black British Feminism: A Reader*, Routledge, 1997; and Tracey Reynolds, 'Black Women and Social-Class Identity', in: Sally R. Munt (ed.) *Cultural Studies and the Working Class: Subject to Change*, Cassell, 2000.

24. Weedon, p.114 (see note 22). The material discussed in 'Same Difference?' (see note 1) bears out such conclusions.

25. Beverley Skeggs, *Class, Self, Culture*, Open University Press, 2004, p.185, who further stresses that "The significance of loyalty and honour has also been well documented in studies of working-class life". And: "While recognition politics becomes the ground for the middle classes to regroup their interests and investments, attempting to gain the moral and national high ground, other groups shape their ethics differently ... "This is the sort of ethics ... [referring to] that which cannot be used, that which has real integrity; something quite rare in an exchange-value Western world. And it is the rarity of integrity that makes it in such demand, for it is one of the cultural practices which is difficult for the accumulative self to access, the prosthetic self to play with, or the omnivore to taste. Authenticity and integrity are ethical qualities that cannot be easily exchanged; they may be one aspect of cultural capital that cannot be harnessed by those intent on increasing their value at the expense of others" (p.186).

26. A. Sivanandan, 'Fighting Our Fundamentalisms' [interview with Campaign Against Racism and Fascism], *Race & Class*, Vol. 36, No. 3, 1995, p.80, who explains that identity politics makes it "impossible to examine issues objectively. Your loyalty is already defined by who you are and, therefore, the side you take is already defined, and there is no point in discussing other views on the subject. The debate is foreclosed before it has begun".

27. Tariq Modood, 'British Asian Muslims and the Rushdie Affair', in James Donald & Ali Rattansi (eds.) *Race, Culture and Difference*, Sage, 1992, p.261. Here the trigger for action concerned religious identity only in the sense that Christians would be similarly outraged if "pissing on the bible" was presented as a "theological argument" (p.269).

28. Anoop Nayak, *Race, Place and Globalization: Youth Cultures in a Changing World*, Berg, 2003, p.76. This study of attitudes among white working class youth in Newcastle upon Tyne revealed different levels and types of multicultural interaction, including defensive respectability and 'classic' white racism, the imitation or cultivation of elements of 'ethnic' style, and underclass groups whose space and circumstances were shared with Asians and who oscillated between virulent prejudice and practical intermixture. In my experience, all these (and more) are also manifest in R&B club nights here, in which local young men and women from Muslim backgrounds enthusiastically participate – though in other public arenas choosing far more restrained conduct.

29. 'Race and Faith Post 7/7' (correspondence with Herman Ouseley), *The Guardian*, 30th July, 2005.

30. Gilroy (see note 29) concludes: "It may be more important to ask what social, economic and cultural conditions can promote solidarity and mutuality across fluid cultural lines ... cultivating a political outlook that does not counterpose solidarity and diversity so that more of one means less of the other". See also Paul Gilroy, *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture?* Routledge, 2004.



# Comic & Zine Reviews

Mark Pawson



*Coleccion Golosina* is a series of tiny books by a gang of emerging Argentinian illustrators and designers. The first three bite-sized 6 cm square books in this ongoing series are *Jack Aviator* by Juan Geist, *Uniformis* by Ariel Cortese and *Infancia* by Magali Mansilla. Each book is packaged as chocolate bar wrapped in silver foil with a paper wrapper round it and information about each designer given in the form of a 'Nutritional Information' panel. If the term 'Eye Candy' didn't already exist, it would have to be invented to describe *Coleccion Golosina*.



*Crap Hound*, the long out of print, totally unavailable zine that I get asked about most often, is back in print for the first time in 8 years, with a revised, expanded version of *Crap Hound* No.5. So it seems appropriate that I should revise and reprint what I wrote about it 8 years ago: Sean Tejaratchi's near-legendary *Crap Hound* is a 68 page extravaganza crammed full of painstakingly arranged clip-art culled from innumerable sources and several decades worth of graphic imagery. This issue's themes are Hands, Hearts and Eyes. *Crap Hound* is the equivalent of a *Dover Pictorial Sourcebook* for the post-slacker zine-producing generation, the fix for image junkies, the image-banker's image-bank, all your image requirements are here. Buy three copies, one to cut up and use, one to file away intact and another to lend to friends — you'll probably never see it again...

*Found* magazine have compiled a special 'Adults Only' *Dirty Found* from all the stuff they thought was too raunchy for the regular *Found* magazine. *Dirty Found* is X-ish rated rather than XXX, with 80 full-colour pages of sexy, saucy, sleazy found material; photos — lots of Polaroids obviously, notes, letters, diaries, prison drawings, school essays and slave contracts. *Dirty Found* comes with cover quotes from suitably sleazy and sex obsessed celebrities: John Waters, Annie Sprinkle, Cynthia Plaster Caster. The magazine has proved extremely popular, it's already been reprinted and Issue



2 is on the way, and my inside source says "You should've seen the stuff people sent in that we couldn't print!"

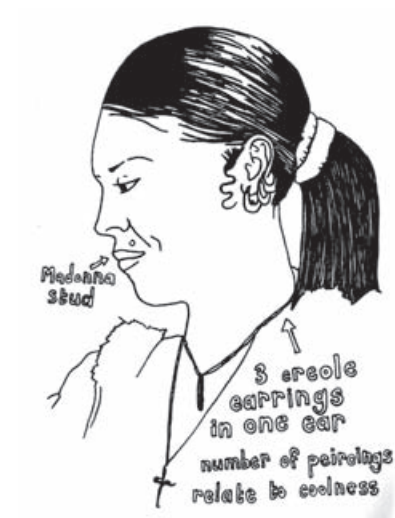


*Trodden Underfoot* is a booklet that asks you to look downwards at the myriad different cast-iron grids, drain covers and electricity/gas pipe covers that we walk over each day without really noticing. Laid out like an *I-Spy* book, this grid spotters guide has spaces to note down the time date and place of each spotting.



*Anthropology a Go-Go* is a collection of Mark 'Wigan' Williams' 1980's drawings of contemporary subculture fashions and London night club tribes, most of which first appeared in *i-D* magazine. An active player in the scene, Wigan ran the Brain Club on Wardour Street, did numerous live painting performances and painted the enormous mural on the domed ceiling of the entrance hall to the Scala Cinema in Kings Cross. Wigan's illustrations in *Anthropology a Go-Go* are a unique mixture of *Where's Wally?* and social observation; clubland tableaux showing a dance floor melting pot of non-manufactured youth cults; hipsters and posers punctuated with speech bubbles and song lyrics. Look closely club kids, can you spot the Skins, Soulboys, Goths, Psychobillies, Mods, Casuals and B-Boys?

There's more incisive social observation in Sarah Doyle's book of illustrations, *Helping You Find The Right Jewellery*, which



follows the journey of jewellery from the album sleeves of female hip-hop icons to the pages of the Argos catalogue and then onto the earlobes of teenage girls in Peckham. Prices and catalogue numbers are helpfully included to assist you in making those all important budget jewellery purchasing decisions. It's Elizabeth Duke as name-checked

by Goldie Lookin' Chain we're talking about here, rather than Jacob The Rap Royalty Jeweller as mentioned by Fifty Cent. Each copy of *Helping You Find The Right Jewellery* comes with a different pair of enormous plastic laminated earrings — mine are 'Victorian style bow creoles'!

Leslie Stein's comic *Yeah, It Is!* is a real oddity with a unique



feel to the illustrations — each panel is cut out by hand. Using just black, brown and white paper she illustrates a tale of a young teenage girl and her best friend starting to explore the wider world outside their school and families; shopping at the occult giftshoppe Harness the Moonlight, hanging out at the local weirdo beatnik coffee shop Cafe Depress and experimenting with bottles of Jack Daniels. I'm guessing that Leslie Stein is fairly young and that this comic is pretty autobiographical.



It was a surprise and delight to find David Heatley's *Dead Pan* #2 comic on the small press friendly shelves of Page 45 in Nottingham recently. *Dead Pan* #2 has beautifully painted full colour artwork throughout and definitely qualifies as a personal comic, the main story 'My Sexual History 1979-2004' is told in excruciating detail in teeny-tiny panels, 42 of them to a page (think Joe Matt — but nowhere near as annoying). It is backed up by several dream stories which feature sex and religion pretty heavily and 3 pages of touching mini comics about his dad. A truly unique comic talent, I enjoyed this so much that I paused when writing this review, surfed along to his website and ordered myself a copy of *Dead Pan* #1.





James Nash's *In The Time of Your Life* is a collection of his quirky one-a-day diary comics about college, girlfriend and work, alongside more composed drawings illustrating a 'Lifestyle Mantra' which he seems to feel pretty ambivalent about — pointing out the futility of such a positive life message. Ask him about his other publications.

Amy Spencer's *DIY: the rise of lo-fi culture* is impressive in scope, tracing do-it-yourself culture and self-publishing as far back as the 1930's, but whilst her accounts of recent events such as the '90's Riot Grrl scene (which I assume she was directly involved in) are interesting, the historical research is largely of the 'read and regurgitate' variety — she inappropriately and annoyingly applies the poorly-defined recent term 'lo-fi' to events taking place up to 50 years previously. Ultimately *DIY: the rise of lo-fi culture* is a major disappointment; when I saw the press release I was looking forward to it, but only my sense of duty to *Variant* got me through all 368 pages. Hmmm, I guess that's a bad review. On principle I try and avoid wasting time and space with bad reviews, but as this book comes from a highly respected publisher, was reviewed in the broadsheets and is widely available in bookshops, it seemed necessary to give my opinion.

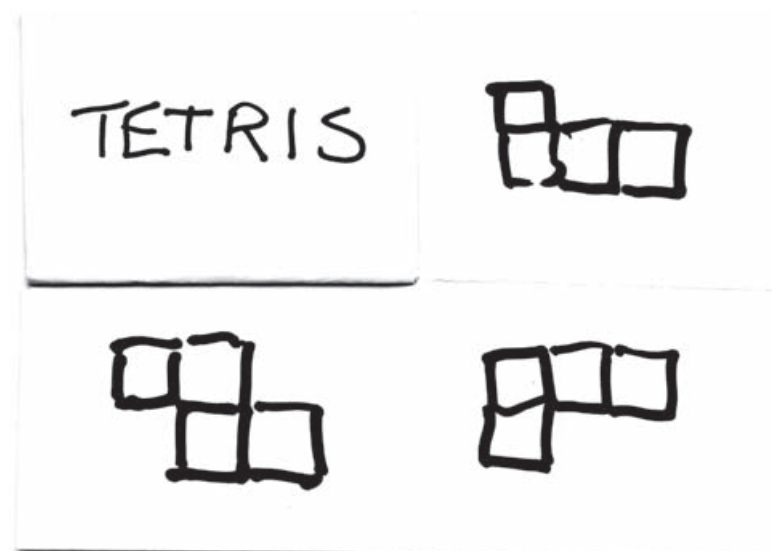
*Swindle* quarterly is a new magazine from Shepard Fairey, best known for his long running worldwide 'OBEY/Andre the Giant' street poster and sticker campaign. *Swindle* aims high with a deluxe format and matching price tag, this magazine wants to stay on your bookshelf rather than being tossed out with the recycling next Tuesday. Topics covered clearly reflect the taste and enthusiasms of its Creative Director without being self indulgent — Music: DEVO, Dead Kennedy's & Easy E; Art: Richard Colman, Rebecca Westcott, Design; Band Logos that you drew on your school desk; Photography: Taco Trucks; and Politics/Activism: Northern Ireland Street Murals. Personally, I could have managed perfectly well without the 36 pages of sunglasses and poncey clothes.

*Snazz* has all the sections you'd expect to find in a regular

magazine: travel, pets, shopping, fashion, celebrity interviews, horoscopes and advertisements. But in the parallel *Snazz* universe editor Tom takes his pet banana skin for a walk, fashion models are locked together in desperate embraces, horoscopes are horror scopes, the products on display in the supermarket get militant and start to revolt, the celebrity interviewed is a stropky Satan and the pretty christmas card is from a Yeti... This is all presented in Tom Mason's heavily worked style combining collage, photography, illustration and hand-lettered text into a distinctive multi-layered cut & paste layout.



My computer is strictly a game-free zone but Tetris the most insidious time-gobbling computer game in the universe, has still managed to reach me in the form of *Tetris*, an anonymously posted set of 4 interactive hand-drawn fold-out booklets, each one is different. I've enjoyed playing with the first 4 *Tetris* booklets and am look forwards to seeing the other 16 million in the series.



*Don't Bother Magazine* by Adam Burton is really a 'Together' — a collection of unbound pages of various shapes and sizes which tumble out of a screenprinted envelope for you to unfold, shuffle through, piece together and try to make sense of. My favourite component, a publishing first, is the poster which thoughtfully comes complete with 4 blobs of blu-tac, ready for your bedroom wall.

*Bypass*, the UK zines listing magazine, last published in the 1990's, has been resurrected in online form by Stephen Drennan, a long-time small press enthusiast/collector and zine-maker. It's fairly modest in size at the moment, but hopefully with the support of people sending in zines and also writing reviews *Bypass* will grow into a valuable online resource. [www.livejournal.com/community/bypasszine](http://www.livejournal.com/community/bypasszine)

*Juxtapoz* the long-running pivotal Skate & Surf Culture/Designer Toy/ Lowbrow Art magazine is upping the frequency and going monthly from Jan 2006. *Juxtapoz* Weekly in 2007?

#### Events

Small Publishers Fair 2005  
Fri 21st, Sat 22nd October  
Conway Hall, Red Lion Square,  
Holborn, London, WC1  
[www.rgap.co.uk/spf.php](http://www.rgap.co.uk/spf.php)

London Anarchist Bookfair 2005  
Saturday 22nd October  
10.00am–6.00pm  
The Resource Centre, 3 56  
Holloway Road, London, N7  
<http://freespace.virgin.net/anarchist.bookfair>

London Artists Book Fair 2005  
ICA, The Mall, London  
Friday 25th to Sunday 27th  
November  
[www.marcuscampbell.co.uk/lab05.html](http://www.marcuscampbell.co.uk/lab05.html)

#### Contacts

*Coleccion Golosina*, from Tatty Devine,  
57b Brewer Street, London W1.  
[www.pinia.com.ar](http://www.pinia.com.ar)

*Crap Hound* #5, £6.50 from [www.mpawson.demon.co.uk](http://www.mpawson.demon.co.uk)

*Dirty Found*, \$10, from MAGMA,  
London & Manchester. [www.dirtyfound.com](http://www.dirtyfound.com)

*Trodden Underfoot*,  
[maxwellverywell@yahoo.com](mailto:maxwellverywell@yahoo.com)

*Anthropology a Go-Go*, <http://markwigan.com>

*Helping You Find The Right Jewellery*,  
£7, [www.sarahdoyle.co.uk](http://www.sarahdoyle.co.uk)

*Yeah, It Is!*, \$5.99, [lams1406@aol.com](mailto:lams1406@aol.com)

*Dead Pan* #2, \$5.95 [davidheatley.com](mailto:davidheatley.com)

*In The Time of Your Life*,  
[jamesnash61@hotmail.com](mailto:jamesnash61@hotmail.com)

*DIY: the rise of lo-fi culture*, Amy  
Spencer, Marion Boyars, £9.95

*Swindle*, \$9.95, [swindlequarterly.com](http://swindlequarterly.com)

*Snazz*, £5.50, [scribblefinger@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:scribblefinger@yahoo.co.uk)

*Don't Bother*, 4 Comfortable Place,  
Upper Bristol Road, Bath BA1 3AJ





# Armchair Spartans and the ‘D’ Word

John Barker

In a reluctantly given news conference in April 2004, one year after the invasion of Iraq, George W. Bush finally got around to saying the ‘D’ word: “The consequence of failure in Iraq would be unthinkable. Every friend of America and Iraq would be betrayed to prison and murder as a new tyranny arose. Every enemy of America and the world would celebrate, proclaiming our weakness and *decadence*, and using that victory to recruit a new generation of killers.”

The same year in Basra, Tony Blair declared: “We British are not a nation of quitters.” Both stuck their pre-invasion rhetoric with the frequent use of ‘appeasement’ to describe and belittle their own citizen’s opposition to the invasion.

Decadence, the nagging psychic fear of it and the accompanying metaphors of ‘softness’ in contrast to ‘resolve’, is a language of various fundamentalisms, and more significantly of empires and their elites. In a typical piece of knockabout, the writer Celine saw the introduction of the icecube as spelling the end of colonialism. More seriously Ibn Khaldoun, the 14th century Arab sociologist born into an elite Tunisian family, described a pattern whereby dynasties lasted just three generations. The first held to the tough life of the countryside, but by the third it had been softened by the commodities of urban life and become incapable of defending itself against a new rural dynasty. Recently, it is the Anglo-Saxon world of Australia, the USA and Britain which has taken upon itself the role of being tough and resolute (the adjectives are many) defenders of Western civilisation: Edward Said’s ‘stern white men’, or the Anglo-Saxon ‘posse’ as Samuel Huntington calls it.

Their elites see themselves in this light both militarily and in their model of fundamentalist capitalism, which calls itself neo-liberalism but which speaks the language of social Darwinism. The irony — if that is what it is — is that what such champions of the resolute are defending is also instrumental in creating the very ‘softness’ it perceives in its own citizens; a successful Western consumer capitalism which challenges individual self-restraint and willpower on a daily basis. My purpose here is to confront the decadence rhetoric of these elites, and the victim-blame, techno-fantasy and outsourcing of contradictions which it uses.

## “The Military Definition of Reality”

In *The Power Elite* (1956), C. Wright Mills’ gives a prescient and detailed description of the USA’s military-industrial complex, a revolving door between the elites of the military, politics, and corporate capitalism. He talks there of this “military definition of reality”. Best known for his grandiosely titled *The Clash of Civilizations* (1993), a work of windy generalisation, in 1957 Samuel Huntington produced his first book, *The Soldier and the State*. It concluded with a eulogy of West Point, the USA’s elite military academy: “West Point is a grey island in a many coloured sea, a bit of Sparta in the midst of Babylon. Yet is it possible to deny that the military values — loyalty, duty, restraint, dedication — are the ones America needs most today. That the disciplined order of West Point has more to offer than the garish individualism of Main Street.”

Tell that to WalMart and Wall Street — but

they are what West Point is there to defend against all-comers! Yet Huntington does not wish to see the fat money in the military-industrial complex, so he looks elsewhere to impose discipline on garish individualism. His support for the Iraq invasion and the virtues of the ‘stern white man’ in a dangerous world of ‘failed states’ meshes with a long-term dislike of any form of democracy that does anything for the poor who, in the face of all the evidence, are perceived to be too comfortable on welfare money.

In the 1960s, a government hawk on Vietnam and adversary of the new counter-culture, Huntington contributed a large essay to a book called *The Crisis of Democracy*. There was too much of it, that was the crisis. The 1960s had this kind of effect on armchair Spartans and elder neocons like Irving Kristol who, like Ibn Khaldoun, saw religion as the essential social glue to combat decadence. For them, or for Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, the 1960s was when western decadence set in; a ‘double-whammy’ of the counter-culture and a confident, hedonistic, working class asking for more. Michael Kalecki could not have anticipated the counter-culture, but in his famous 1944 essay, ‘Economics of Full Employment’, he understood clearly that discipline was more important to capital than immediate profitability, that a confident working class was intolerable to the elite. A government man and armchair Spartan like Huntington is always preoccupied with discipline, arguing that “Democracy is only one way of constituting authority, and it is not necessarily a universally applicable one. In many situations the claim of expertise, seniority, experience and special talents may override the claims of democracy as a means of constituting authority.” This is bog-standard elitism in which what is a ‘special talent’ is determined by a small world which monopolises what constitutes a special talent, and who has it. But the real thrust of his attack on the democratic impulse of the 1960s is that it increased government spending while reducing its authority.

When it comes to government spending, he does not mention the costs of the Vietnam War which he strongly supported, a war which undermined the Great Society social reforms project both politically and economically. No, Huntington — unlike other social-democrat warmongers like W.W.Rostow — blames the Great Society project itself, and picks on the usual suspects, like public sector unionisation and welfare payments. In typically brazen style he wrote, “a government which lacks authority and which is committed to substantial domestic programmes will have little ability, short of a cataclysmic crisis, to impose on its people the sacrifices which may be necessary to deal with foreign policy problems and defence.” This when the Vietnam War budget was at its height.

Huntington is a member of the American Enterprise Institute’s ‘Council of Academic Advisers’. This particular Institution of Assertion, is one of many well financed, non-academically reviewed ‘think tanks’ (as if thinking itself were now an elite specialisation), which have become an integral part of right wing US politics. It is particularly concerned about too many people being born in wrong parts of the world, and the demographic decline of the ‘stern white man’. For Huntington, “Muslim population growth is a





destabilising force,” while Westerners constitute, “a steadily decreasing minority of the world’s population.” Another ‘academic fellow’, Ben Wattenburg talks of how “The West has been the driving force of modern civilisation, inexorably pushing towards democratic values. Will that continue when its share of the total [global] population is only 11 %?”

The Institute also boasts the ‘underclass’ ideologues Robert Bork and Charles Muray. Bork’s *Slouching Towards Gomorrah* is a diatribe against the rise not just of decadence but of a *degeneracy*, with clearly racist overtones. (It provides an instance where for once satire has a cutting edge, where these people were anticipated as the Knights Templar of Ishmael Reed’s novel *Mumbo-Jumbo*.) Murray’s work of correlating race and intelligence has been comprehensively trashed by serious scholars, but you can’t keep these people down. In an article in *The Sunday Times* (3/4/05) he urges Britain to give up on social programmes for the ‘underclass’, and asks instead if Britain is willing to pay the price of a 250,000 prison population, a per capita equivalent to the US Gulag. Unfortunately for Murray the vestiges of a welfare state, still extant in the US as well as Britain, “by its nature generates large numbers of feckless people,” and “Feckless men...” are crucially “unable to get up at the same time every morning.” No doubt they are also those who were late in getting out of New Orleans when the dams broke. Underclass ideology is now creeping into mainstream British politics, and it makes one wonder who Tony Blair’s ‘we’ is, the we who “are not quitters.” It is an ideology also in the service of denial. Its talkers cannot bring themselves to blame this relative shrinking of the Western world’s demography on the success of consumer capitalism. So instead all their subliminal fear and resentment is aimed not just at too many Palestinians being born, but that too many children born within the Western world are born to the wrong sort of people, to feckless people who are quite likely not to be 100% white.

Fat and Frugality

The language of decadence and not-decadence appears frequently in what is written about food and diet. The poor are usually the target of the moralism that goes with much of what is said about obesity: the moralism of the lean, trim, masters of the universe, the Darwinian ‘fittest’. It is true that, as Greg Critser says, “Poverty is a lonely place and cheap food is a natural balm against it,” and it is in the Anglo-Saxon heartlands that obesity levels are highest. It is also there that we find the greatest income inequalities, which exploded during the same period as the emergence of obesity on its present scale. As obesity and inequality continue to rise in tandem, fat has become an issue in the new China too.

The starting point some 25-30 years ago also coincided with a political decision to get American farmers on-side in a new ‘right wing’ voting coalition, created by the Nixon Administration against the remnants of those who had believed in and benefited from Johnson’s Great Society project. Agriculture Secretary Earl Butz set up the subsidisation of corn production (to the continuing anger of the Third World) which has kept prices down along the food chain of carbohydrates and meat. Corn also became the source of HFCS (high fructose corn syrup), six times sweeter than sugar. At around the same time, palm oil was successfully processed for frying French fries (chips) and baking cookies. It is 45 % saturated fat. Cheap food became especially unhealthy food. Reading about 1930s Britain, cheap food was always unhealthy food, but there was not so much of it to trigger conditions like type-2 diabetes that are now so clearly related to cheap corn and its derivatives which, by the rush of insulin produced, could be called addictive. In a moment of radicalism, Atkins of the Atkins diet says such unhealthy “appetites were called forth by the instruments of corporate capitalism.”

These then are material conditions rather than the decadence rhetoric which sees only personal defects. The same period has also seen the development of a diet industry on an

unprecedented scale, and this business is not primarily, if at all, aimed at the poor. It is also one that as Steven Shapin noted has changed its pitch (“The Great Neurotic Art’ *London Review of Books* 5/8/04). A diet book of 1967 by Dr Irving Stillman emphasised will power: “You must develop a firm, almost fanatical desire to lose dangerous excess weight.” By contrast Shapin’s ‘democratic Atkins’ argued that, “Fighting the scale armed only with willpower and determination, works, at best for only five low-fat dieters out of a hundred.” The answer from Atkins and others like Barry Sears, is that it is ‘nutritional science’ that enables us to “bypass our need to rely on will power.” But not entirely, as a few days of willpower are required before those addictive carbohydrate cravings disappear and then “there is no longer any need for willpower, you have remade yourself.” The re-make with the help of professionals is now a general cultural staple on TV and in the ‘life narrative’ of George W. Bush. On diet, Shapin comments that “Atkins, Agatson and other ‘low-carb’ writers seek to resolve the apparent tension between, on the one hand, the idea of addiction as corroding the will and sapping resolve, and on the other, the coherence of making an appeal to fat people’s wills.” They do it by a ‘natural’ technological fix, (the hoodia plant of the Kalahari bushmen being the latest), but also in a cultural climate in which, Shapin says, there has been a “straightforward rejection of the notion that self-control is either instrumentally necessary or morally desirable.”

Consumers of Last Resort

Such a wholesale rejection of the notion of self-control and its associated virtues is blamed entirely on the 1960s counter-culture by a wide range of armchair Spartans. It is from this time that they began to attract money for their think-tanks and institutes. But their immediate political representatives softened things up in advance, terrorising a radical generation. Prisoners, students, and black activists were assassinated. A radical of a much earlier age, Wilhelm Reich died in a Federal penitentiary, but not before he had begun to popularise techniques of finding-your-inner-self. Many of the radical political generation took this up as part of their political practice, but as Adam Curtis has shown, social change via individual self-realisation became an end in itself, a rationalisation for dropping out of public politics after that had been terrorised. More cynical people then developed a series of products and marketing techniques directed at the notion of self-realisation in which there was little glimmer of self-control.

In the mid-to-late 1990s these consumers were lionised. During the East Asian financial crisis and beyond, they became ‘consumers of last resort’, heroes of the global economy, keeping it afloat, a phrase recycled by a host of heavyweights. That such a flip turnover of the traditional ‘banker of last resort’ should become common usage is revealing in itself. ‘Self-indulgence’, the absence of restraint and sacrifice, became a capitalist virtue, when the global downward pressure on wages meant too many low wage earners could not afford to buy what they produced, which as a consequence would affect profitability.

Get Thee Hence Satan

It has turned out that the consumer of last resort was also having to borrow on heroic levels. As Jeffrey Sachs put it, “Remuneration of America’s workers has not been high enough to support consumption without borrowing.” The leaders of the Anglo-Saxon ‘posse’ have turned out to be lax in the financial world: deregulation galore and lots of personal debt. In Britain the explosion of debt began under Thatcher. In the US it is at record levels. In Australia under stalwart John Howard and his fundamentalist policies, in the words of Reserve Bank Governor Ian MacFarlane, “it exceeds any reasonable benchmark by a large margin.”

In the US, the gap between static wages and increased consumption — pointed out by Jeffrey Sachs for one — was covered as in the UK and



Australia by rising house prices, but also by an almost mystical belief that the equity market was a one-way winner, and that with enough people having a stake in it, all would be well. This fantasy collapsed with the dot.com bubble and the deceit bubble of Enron and other corporations. These collapses showed up just how much of the equity purchases themselves were made with borrowed money. By then personal debt, excluding \$7 trillion of mortgage debt, had increased by 41% to \$2 trillion.

US rates of saving continued at an almost uniquely low level, and consumption on borrowed money in Britain and Australia did not slack, but from mid-2003 there began to be outbursts of self-righteousness in the British business press. A classic appeared in *The Independent* (26/08/03) from Stephen King, Managing Director of Economics at the HSBC banking conglomerate. The headline read: “Everyone likes a party but what happens when the music stops.” “The UK is consuming too much and the increase is faster than in any other country,” he wrote, “we cannot go on like this forever.” He proceeded to list the



ways in which consumers are vulnerable, like the ‘outsourcing’ of jobs. What is especially revealing is how he characterises the over-borrowers, making continual reference to the drinkers of 18 pints of lager, and to clubbing and sun-seeking holidaymakers in Cyprus “showing their naughty bits.” Quite obviously this is not a scrupulous description of the class composition of the debt he describes. Rather, it is targeted not at the underclass but working class hedonism. Others pointed out that it might be that in all three countries house prices were all overvalued. Even the Economist, a cheerleader of fundamentalist capitalism, expressed this fear, “the global house-price boom could turn to bust” and found that “Most of the countries in the Eurozone are less addicted to debt and asset-price inflation than the Anglo-Saxon world.” (2/10/04) Addicted! In saying what might be done, it was reduced to banalities which placed responsibility on the shoulders of the individual borrower.

The individual must say in so many words ‘Get thee hence Satan’ as the ‘high street’ banks urge you once again to borrow money,



and governments like Britain aim to introduce a wider scale gambling industry. Wise advice no doubt, because when the shit does hit the fan the ‘consumer of last resort’, the hero of yesteryear, is left to face the music alone. That it is the individual consumer who is to be punished for not showing restraint and willpower in resisting the pressures of finance and consumer capitalism is clearly visible in the Bush administration’s new law on bankruptcy. This law makes it far harder for individuals to apply for Chapter 7 bankruptcy and thus face the tougher demands of Chapter 13 where debtors are put on a stringent repayment schedule in which their wages are docked for years to pay off creditors. Banks and credit card companies have spent \$24 million on political donations to get this legislation passed. It is expected that it is middle class families that will be most at risk through serious illness or losing their jobs.

Outsourcing

The possibility of losing a job is real enough. On this HSBC’s Stephen King, despite his class prejudice, was honest enough. Outsourced is the word of choice for those who take away the jobs, and the threat of outsourcing also holds down wages which he noted as another factor in the increase in levels of debt. In the matter of work, and where it is done, there are yet more contradictions in the power elite’s notion of decadence. Globalisation, in the sense that some production processes can be shifted to wherever the cheapest capable workforce can be found, does wonders for that discipline that Michael Kalecki understood was so important to the capitalist world and its ethos — a discipline minimally defined by Charles Murray as being able to “get up at the same time every morning.” Workers often accept lower pay and worse conditions just to keep the job. At the same time there is a nagging worry within the armchair Spartan section of the elite that the process may place too much economic power elsewhere, China especially, and also that it will make its own citizens decadent in the sense of being soft, incapable of hard work, manual work, the lessening of which also occurs in analyses of obesity. As far back as 1960 John Steinbeck in *Travels with Charley* was worrying along these lines: “Just as the Carthaginians hired mercenaries to do their fighting for them, we Americans bring in mercenaries to do our hard and humble work ... I hope we may not be overwhelmed one day by peoples not too proud or lazy or too soft to bend to the earth and pick up the things we eat.” But it is precisely this ‘bending to the earth’ that is the overwhelming task of immigrant labour in Britain. The rich world also does not want to give up entirely on certain low-tech industrial processes, either agriculture or plastics moulding, because it does not want to face a monopoly on low wage work elsewhere. Contesting this monopoly requires immigrant workers under constant pressure from ‘immigration politics’ with a knock-on effect on domestic wages in general.

To the world at large, however, the macho American work culture of long hours (Britain is the closest in Europe, just as it is the most ‘flexible’, i.e. unregulated) is proclaimed as what makes these countries ‘not-decadent’. In yet another sleight of hand, decadence is defined by the power elite as not working long hours. France and its 35 hour week is the handy punchbag. The ghastly Thomas Friedman writes of “a world of benefits they [Western Europeans] have known for 50 years is coming apart.” This is because they, the French especially, “are trying to preserve a 35 hour work week in a world where Indian engineers are ready to work a 35 hour day.” The hyperbole alone — “a 35 hour day”? — should be warning enough, never mind the smug racism. He concludes that “it’s a bad time for France to lose their appetite for hard work.” Meanwhile in Britain, New Labour makes it a point of principle to opt out from the 48 hour working time directive. This macho work culture has produced its own set of anxieties, where teenagers and parentry are shunted off into a parallel world of outsourced makeover fat-kid boot camps.

The realistic assumption, given the inequalities

of the Anglo-Saxon world and the strategies that perpetuate it, is that only a part of the non-immigrant population, let alone the immigrant one, will have ‘standards of excellence’ in economically efficient professions. Any rhetoric to the contrary is simply deceptive. It is quite visible in the relentless process of US white-collar jobs that are being exported to East Asia and other parts of the developing world. As noted above, only some manufacturing process plant can be easily moved around the globe. Such blockages do not arise with hardware and software computer design or financial services, not since the advent of economically viable telecommunications networks. Once the telecoms blockage had gone no restraint has been shown. Saying that this is a problem only for France and other ‘lazy’ West Europeans is, once again, simply to ride over the contradiction.

Social Immobility

Fundamentalist capitalism sees itself as an active force against decadence through its ideology of competition, a rosy picture of ‘survival of the fittest’ and economic optimums rolled into one. Leaving aside the reality of oligopolies, and the statist nature of much technological development via defence spending, it is competition that is now used as a rationale for this exporting of middle class jobs. As Brian Valentine, a Microsoft VP, puts it, “competitors already have this outsourcing religion,” therefore it’s time for “Microsoft to join the party.” His eyes focused on India with its thousands of low wage graduates. By the end of 2003 more than half of Fortune 500 had shipped a significant fraction of their intellectual labour jobs offshore. This reduces the demand for native US intellectual labour which will not ease the problem of personal indebtedness.

Fundamentalist capitalism has also seen itself as an active force against decadence because it allows, indeed makes for, social mobility. Recent statistics show this to be a deceit, as do changes in the education system of Britain and the US. In Britain New Labour’s slogan of ‘Education, Education, Education’ and now of ‘excellence’ as the only way forward for Britain in the new globalised world, is undermined by the price of higher education and the re-creation of privilege in the state secondary school sector. In the US, as Dion Dennis has shown, students will be paying more at public universities and getting less in terms of high quality tuition. Most state legislatures are cutting their higher education budgets. This is in line with the fundamentalist belief that what is public is no good. This contradicts the claim to social mobility and may be, as Dennis puts it, “That elites are no longer willing to subsidise American public higher education, once they have gained global access via digital communication networks, to cheap and competent intellectual labour.” This, as Greg Palast has pointed out, is in sharp contrast to the fully funded public education systems of the Indian states of Karnataka and Kerala. The very states who produce those “35 hour day engineers” of Thomas Friedman’s fantasy.

‘Yellow Peril’

And yet! Craig Barrett, chief executive of Intel talks of why the company has invested millions in trying to improve the way science is taught in US public schools, because there’s not enough cutting edge talent coming out. And yet! Those armchair Spartans within the power elite must have some anxieties about the trends described. Unable to deal with the contradiction in any straightforward manner, except for the January 2004 decision to ban the outsourcing of government contracts, they focus their anxiety solely on China. That this country would be so focused was predicted nearly 100 years ago by J.A. Hobson in his *Imperialism* — even if, naturally enough, he missed the added attraction to present-day Western capital of the creation of an elite global consumer class of some 200 million people. On the one hand, Hobson wrote, “China seems to offer a unique opportunity to the European businessman. A population ... endowed with an extraordinary capacity of steady labour, with great intelligence,



inured to a low standard of physical comfort ... yielding the largest surplus product of labour in proportion to their cost of keep ...”. On the other hand, “It is at least conceivable that China might so turn the tables upon the Western industrial nations, and, either, by adopting their capital and organisers or, as is more probable, by substituting their own, might flood their markets with her cheaper manufactures, and refusing their imports in exchange, might take her payment in liens upon their capital, reversing the earlier process of investment until she gradually obtained financial control over her quondam patrons and civilizers.”

The factors for such an outcome are in place, but up until now they have taken a ‘benign’ form. That is, the benefit of phenomenal rates of savings in China and East Asia (savings as the disciplined forgoing of instant gratification) largely goes to the US, and supports its consumer binge by investing in the dollar even when interest rates are close to zero and, more importantly, supports the huge state investment in the military-industrial complex from which the US has derived so many successful technologies. Yet, it is still unnerving to the ideologists of decadence, the feeling that there is something profoundly wrong, weakening, about this relationship. It has now come out into the open with the Chinese oil company CNOOC’s bid for the US oil company Unocal.

Mercenaries

So far, the dependence on Asian savings to finance the USA’s Balance of Payment and Budget deficits, has been seen in a sanguine mood in the US itself, if not everywhere else. The advantages of the dollar as the major world reserve currency have been used to the full. Military wise guy Thomas Barnett in *The Pentagon’s New Road Map* put it thus: “We trade little pieces of paper (our currency in the form of trade deficit) for Asia’s amazing array of products and services. We are smart enough to know that this is a patently unfair deal unless we offer something of great value along with those pieces of paper. That product is a strong Pacific Fleet, which squares the transaction nicely.” All this assumes a continued acceptable level of conflict, and it assumes continued US credibility when the occupation of Iraq has dented what was previously a near all-round global ability to punish and reward in the behaviourist style of the boot camp. The Spartan quality (King Leonidas’ last stand) of rock throwers and especially suicide bombers, has also been a challenge. Thus Thomas Barnett while hailing the US’s massive advantages in the weapons and the IT sophistication also says, “we fight fire with fire. If we live in world increasingly populated by Super-Empowered individuals, then we field an army of Super-Empowered individuals.”

This too has its problems. The decline of the citizen army and recruitment of mercenary soldiers has traditionally been seen as a key indicator of decadence. The armies of the ‘stern white men’ are largely professional, and are yet still facing problems of recruitment. These are most acute in the US itself. They have turned on the one hand to a host of private military companies (at least 35 according to Deborah Avant) and the recruitment of non-US citizens to its army. One of Huntington’s anxieties is multiculturalism in the US itself: “Western culture is challenged by groups within Western societies,” those who do not assimilate like “Hispanics in the USA.” And yet as Jacob Heilbrunn has pointed out, Hispanics are amongst the most patriotic Americans, constituting a significant part of the US military which is now bolstered by ‘green card soldiers’, often from Central America and recruited on the promise of US citizenship, the processing of which was sped up on order from George W. Bush before the Iraq invasion began. This at a time when citizenship is much harder to come by since the immigration rules imposed by the post 9-11 Department of Homeland Security.

This development has worried other hard-line US nationalists like Mark Kirkorian, executive director of the Centre for Immigration Studies. In a piece in the *National Review* he argues that

“as the proportion of non-citizens in the armed forces grows there is the real possibility that defending America will become ‘work Americans won’t do’ ... Not to put too fine a point on it, we should go to any lengths to avoid developing a kind of mercenary army, made up of foreigners loyal to their units and commanders but not to the Republic. It didn’t work out well for the Romans.” And he goes on to cite the dangerous precedent of the San Patricio Battalion, a group of Irish immigrants in the US army “who defected to fight for the enemy in the Mexican War.”

Uncomfortable Truths

The occupation of Iraq has also revealed that remnants of a citizen army, the US reservists, have been needed in numbers because occupation is not a speciality of the professional army and Green card soldiers can not fill all the gaps. Since Vietnam the drawing board plan has been for them to be mobilised but then sent home quickly. This has not happened in the last two years. At the same time the *New York Times* reported in July 2004 that some military commanders comment in private that a number of reservists “arrive for duty ill-prepared for the challenges they face in places like Iraq and Afghanistan, and in particular they lack specific combat skills that are required even of truck drivers in a war zone. They say the reservists also lack something more intangible but equally important: a warrior ethos.” This is an ‘uncomfortable truth’ for those like Huntington who trade in uncomfortable truths from their armchairs. Huntington’s chief cheerleader, Robert Kaplan, is one upon whom this lack of a warrior ethos must grate especially. His own book, a rationalisation of unlimited brutality with a gothic overlay, is entitled *Warrior Politics: Why Leadership requires a Pagan Ethos*. In reality the evidence is that the citizen part of the army just isn’t up to it. What they have done, the ‘white trash’ element who by-and-large joined up to get an education they otherwise would not, is to take the rap for the Abu Ghraib tortures. As one of those under investigation, Sabrina Harman said, “I knew nothing about the military except the fact they would pay for college.” Meanwhile, General Taguba’s report on the tortures talked of ineffective officers (also reservists), and painted a picture of armed soldiers wandering around the prison in civilian clothes; logbooks filled with “unprofessional entries and flippant comments”; old friendships replacing the military chain of command; and of how the saluting of officers was “sporadic.”

Elite Fantasies

To avoid the contradictions between the resolute Spartan and the soft consumer, ‘stern white men’ elites go in for both victim blame and for defining decadence on their own terms, namely an unwillingness to work very long hours, often without overtime pay. This enables them to outsource decadence itself — to France. It also involves a nasty mix of fantasy, and the possibility of realising such fantasy, including an uneasy inclination to outsource Spartan qualities to Israel. This leaves out how, like Celine’s icecubes, air conditioning is a basic necessity there; the high level of emigration from and financial corruption in that state; and the ‘deteriorating standards’ of its army remarked on by its reluctantly retired chief, Moshe Yaalon, with its “criminal subculture that had reached officer class.” In reality the armchair Spartans like their comforts too. Look no further than US Vice President Cheney — the ‘pagan warrior’ with the contracts. All Kaplan is looking for with his ‘Pagan ethos’, is to be brutal without limits. Bagram, Guantanamo and Abu Gharib have done their bit, now torture too is being outsourced to hardline ‘pagans’. The realisation of their fantasies will be based on investment in the technological fix, especially in powers of surveillance and punishment. For the obese (with obesity spreading out beyond the poor), there is already stomach stapling, and soon the hoodia plant taken from Kalahari bushmen for a pittance and turned into a product promising weight loss with no willpower involved. Investment in

robotics and AI, both civilian and military — how comforting to have no need of the decadent, but potentially dangerous servant class — is on its way to realising the dream of heterosexually characterised Grecian hoplite (heavy infantry) robots. This in addition to the development of bunker-buster bombs and small scale nuclear weapons. In January 2005, it was announced that the US planned to deploy 18 armed robots (Unmanned Ground Vehicles) in Iraq. According to Dan Glaister they have their drawbacks — they are slow and need refuelling every few hours — but their advantages are that: “They are cheap and require no food; they can be packed away between campaigns; they are unlikely — barring modifications — to write anguished letters to loved ones or the media ... They are also a much better shot than the average GI.”

A recent *Wall Street Journal* report describes an internal Army memo sent to battalion commanders discouraging them from attempting to dismiss recruits for drug or alcohol abuse or poor fitness. This is because the drop-out rate and a failure to meet recruitment targets has become a matter of concern. One commander refers specifically to guys on ‘weight-control’ taking up a lot of his time. Another referred to recruiters under pressure to meet quotas — as if they were on the disappearing assembly lines of the country — and dropping standards. “There are guys showing up at units with physical problems or other issues who you would not have seen a couple of years ago.” Other than the robots, the alternatives would seem to be unacceptable: prison amnesties or a return of the draft; both would make the contradictions of decadence rhetoric unavoidable. Meanwhile President Bush, some 16 months after his use of the “D” word, has had to make another speech on the occupation of Iraq, this time at the Fort Bragg army base. His cynical use of the 9/11 attack in the speech has been widely commented on. What really stands out however are the words ‘sacrifice’, the need for it; ‘resolve’, the need for it; ‘our will’, the certainty of it. Such things would not have to be said if the elite’s monopoly power to define such characteristics were not so threatened by the realities of reality.

[ On going to print, a full version of this article is available online with Mute magazine at: <http://www.metamute.com/look/article.tpl?IdLanguage=1&IdPublication=1&NrIssue=24&NrSection=5&NrArticle=1515> ]



# Re-presented Notes on Summits & Counter Summits

Andrew X,Y,Z

There it was then. After almost two years of planning and a suggested figure of £200,000 spent by the ‘anti-authoritarian’ movement, the appeals to and protests against the Gleneagles G8 summit came and went in the space of a week.

200,000 people walked a caged route around Edinburgh at the Make Poverty History march, replete with Ukranian-democracy style branding; 5,000 that managed to get there, despite illegal efforts against them, took part in marches on Gleneagles; and hundreds took part in blockades. Was it all worth it?

## Crowds and Power

Those caught up in the spectacular disinfotainment of Make Poverty History, having appealed to the G8, should be feeling suitably duped. Lambasting Bob Geldof for his subsequent silence and overall betrayal of the poor, George Monbiot writes:

‘Immediately after the summit, as the world’s attention shifted to the London bombs, Germany and Italy announced that they might not be able to meet the commitments they had just made, due to “budgetary constraints”. A week later, on July 15, the World Development Movement obtained leaked documents showing that four of the IMF’s European directors were trying to overturn the G8’s debt deal. Four days after that, Gordon Brown dropped a bombshell. He admitted that the aid package the G8 leaders had promised “includes the numbers for debt relief”. The extra money they had promised for aid and the extra money they had promised for debt relief were in fact one and the same.

Nine days after that, on July 28, the United States, which had appeared to give some ground at Gleneagles, announced a pact with Australia, China and India to undermine the Kyoto protocol on climate change. On August 2, leaked documents from the World Bank showed that the G8 had not in fact granted 100% debt relief to 18 countries, but had promised enough money only to write off their repayments for the next three years. On August 3, the United Nations revealed that only one-third of the money needed for famine relief in Niger and 14% of the money needed by Mali had been pledged by the rich nations. Some 5 million people in the western Sahel remained at risk of starvation.

Two weeks ago, we discovered that John Bolton, the new US ambassador to the United Nations, had proposed 750 amendments to the agreement that is meant to be concluded at next week’s UN summit. He was, in effect, striking out the millennium development goals on health, education and poverty relief, which the UN set in 2000.’

**The Guardian, 6/9/05**  
www.guardian.co.uk/comment/story/0,,1563338,00.html#article\_continue

The Make Poverty History march may have indicated that a significant number of people oppose the corporate globalisation policies of the G8, but equally such an appeal was easily manipulated to reflect support for the overall concept of the G8 and the dominating power it represents. What’s more, the calls for reformation of the G8 were little more than a very expensive human petition — and petitions aren’t the instruments of social change we’d like to believe they are. A large enough petition may have some domestic influence, but only as tangible proof of a subset of public opinion, one that doesn’t readily break down into any significant voter influence — as was seen from the huge anti-war

demonstrations. A problem which, in turn, has created a debate about the achievements of the anti-war movement.

Along with the Poverty Industry, Brown and Blair’s gross illusion was to promote that from a feeling of a sense of powerlessness these ventures can be transformed into cogent, participatory agents for social change. They gave it the appeal and certainty that real change can be brought about by petitioning ‘decision makers’ through media spectacle — centralising their own self-importance and that of celebrities who promise access to them — irrespective of international realpolitik.

## When they were up, they were up...

A large opposition realises that merely marching in supplication is not going to influence the G8. Far from there being any realistic means of achieving positive change through the G8, it is presented *as* responsible for and indicative of the problems. Their protest was intended to reframe the G8 as criminal, and also draw media and thereby public attention to the ecological, anti-capitalist, anti-terror, anti-globalisation and other issues they hoped to elevate — but to what end?

The paradox for the broad range of participating social movements is that people are called into the streets in the name of another possible world, but with the intention that... absolutely nothing happens. Every time that a more or less oceanic crowd moves peacefully, visibly supervised, it is proclaimed to be a great victory for The Movement.

The crux then may reside in media representation — media visibility, articulation and control over the issues and the ensuing spectacle of protest. There is an argument that such protests need to reach ‘critical mass’ to be deemed ‘newsworthy’, so that through mass media channels they may inform and influence wider public opinion. Yet to appeal for representation through the very corporatist structures they’re protesting appears schizophrenic — there being little point protesting in this way if the architecture to transmit and engage those voices with a wider public either isn’t there or is simply able to render the protest meaningless, when it’s allowed to register at all.

The press reporting of the G8 protests was appropriately atrocious, full of impending apocalyptic catastrophe — even supposedly sympathetic articles were then run featuring archive or framed ‘riot’ photos and salacious headlines. For the most it was neo-corporate propaganda and state agitation posed as reporting — for months prior, there had been a relentless ramping up of public anxiety around dangerous ‘European’ anarchists flooding Scotland. But in yet another dreamlike ‘Intelligence failure’ it didn’t happen; yet the public was successfully terrorised.

The form, focus and dynamic of the media is more-and-more as the ‘legitimising arm of corporate public relations’, and so clearly requires a change in tactics from the protest movements that approach it — if indeed this was their express intention.

The protest movements don’t have anywhere near the resources of mainstream media, but there must be something better than a steady supply of photocopy litter — Indymedia as perhaps a more decentralised while collaborative communication structure is a progressive start,

along with community radio projects. But on the whole it hasn’t happened, with little independent attempt to genuinely inform a broader public.

## The Illusion of Centres and Contested Terrains

In the course of these summits presentations of ‘promises’ of decisions that are made elsewhere are merely formalised and drip-fed to the camped-out media — only to be rolled-back and rewritten *post coitus*. The summits themselves are symbolic — pomp and ceremony where the world leaders profess their elite worthiness, which includes allowing a section of legitimised Carnavalesque ‘petition’. All the while any other critical, unstaged dissent is forcefully suppressed as an exemplar of the generic threat of ‘terror’, one that extends and makes routine the wider suppression of even such basic freedoms.

This dichotomy — between the ‘good’ protesters (who wore white) and ‘bad’ protesters (who wore black) — reached pantomime proportions in the media coverage around Gleneagles (a set-up, complete with Chinook air show) and ‘the Princes Street riots’ (in effect, an upset with local retaliation). It’s a duality that is mirrored in the ideological analysis of the poor, who are internally and externally designated to be deserving or undeserving, the one to be romanticised and patronised, the other to be vilified and beaten — ‘saved’ or shot in New Orleans.

For this reason, no matter how well they go, the protests are always symbolic for one simple reason: even if you did manage to shut down the meetings, the decisions get made anyway — if they weren’t already being made elsewhere. So all the rhetoric of activists calling to “Shut Down the G8!” is, to put it bluntly, absolute nonsense; naïve at best, at worst dishonest. Add to this the number of well-intentioned activists who have been arrested (354 at Gleneagles) and those who’ll get sent down, all for a symbolic protest — Dungavel Detention and Removal Centre was actually emptied.

And yet these *social pacifiers* know quite well that their capacity to pose as negotiators with the institutions doesn’t particularly depend upon the number of people that they lead into the streets (millions of demonstrators opposed to the latest military aggression against Iraq have not greatly worried the governments involved in the war). In fact, if summits and counter-summits are so frequently talked about it is only because in Seattle first and later on other occasions, something happened: thousands actively confronted the damaging structures of capital and state. Without this subversive threat the institutions of domination would have nothing to do with the various representatives.

The Movement’s spokespeople must then distinguish themselves from the bad ones, the extremists, the violent ones (i.e., those who practice direct action) and give political visibility to the others. On the one hand, the slogans of the social forums end up being perfectly suitable for the enlightened bourgeoisie: taxation of finance capital, democratic and transparent regulation over global trade, more state and less market, critical consumption, ethical banks, pacifism, etc. On the other hand, what they sell with their ‘democratic mobilisations’ is a valuable commodity: the illusion of doing something against the injustices of the world. In this sense,



counter-summits are a juicy internal spectacle. The *bad* few repressed and the *good* ones heard in their just demands: end of story?

Power knows that it isn’t so simple. The disgustingly realistic proposals of the domesticated opposition have nothing to say to the millions of poor people parked in the reservations of the market paradise and repressed by the state.

The counter summits got little to no coverage this time. The celebs, apart from Bianca Jagger on this occasion, didn’t have anything to do with them.

It relates to the way that people like Bono and friends work against politics and ultimately against democracy — they are engaged in a fantasy of power. They are not interested in ‘joining in’, they instead want to create novel political conditions. This is a fantasy which is fed from those higher up in the system, in politics and in the international financial institutions. After all, there is value in supporting the delusion of progressive gains happening without struggle.

But the key problem is that labour movements have failed to come to ‘broadside’ terms with globalization. And counter summits, protests, media interventions, and so forth are not confronting that failure, either in horizontal or vertical modes.

(For an understanding of the recent conflicts roughly between the “horizontal” and “vertical” social movements, especially stemming from the experiences of London European Social Forum organising process, see: [www.openspaceforum.net/twiki/tiki-read\\_article.php?articleId=29&PHPSESSID=6969dd80d4cd273902091fafa412eaae](http://www.openspaceforum.net/twiki/tiki-read_article.php?articleId=29&PHPSESSID=6969dd80d4cd273902091fafa412eaae) )

Protest for Protest’s Sake?

Capitalism is a social relationship and not a citadel for the powerful. Starting from this banality one can begin to confront the question of summits and counter-summits. Capitalism is not simply about powerful men sitting round tables running the world. Capitalism is not something we can gather together from all corners of the globe to protest against. Capitalism is a social relationship played out in our daily lives and that is where it must be prosecuted.

Representing capitalist and state domination as a kind of general headquarters (for the G8, the WTO, etc.) is useful to those who would like to oppose that managing centre with another centre: the political structures of the so-called ‘Movement’, or better, their spokespeople. In short, it is useful to those who propose merely a change in management personnel. Besides being reformist in essence and purpose, this logic becomes collaborationist and authoritarian in method, as it leads to a centralisation of the opposition movements. This is where the concern of these leftist adversaries — so anxious to make themselves heard by the Masters of the World, investing money and political hype on the summits — comes from.

But this certainly does not disturb the various representatives of the social forums and counter summits — after all, their opposition is also completely formal, consisting mainly of paid seminars (or, for the more lively, in some opportune combative performance with the police or bemusing ‘street theatre’) in which it is shown that neoliberalism is wrong and humanity is right. But likewise, it is not just a question of how ‘radical’ one is in the streets — anyone can be and was arrested or detained: illegally, arbitrarily and violently to the extreme.

An Aside: Parlour Games

Scotland’s overlooked First Minister, Jack McConnell, shambled along as a minor bystander to events, packing off the Scottish Parliament into summer recess with meagre promises on the right to protest at Gleneagles, unwilling or impotent to commit any further — all the while, knowingly, these rights were being struck off as G8 Alternatives’ months worth of talks with the authorities to seek permission for a march and assembly near Gleneagles spiralled into decline, to the point of protests-about-the-right-to-protest successfully displacing what little critical media there was on the G8 with Parliamentary squabble.

A troop of Scottish Socialist Party MSPs stood up in the Scottish Parliament and refused to leave the chamber in silent protest at the failure of the Parliament to act in the defence of the right to protest in any concrete terms — encased as they were in their own concrete and steel barricade. To do so would have exposed its true obsequious relationship to Westminster— maybe that was their point, if so it was missed.

But nor should the SSP be in any way surprised at the reaction: an obliging media tantrum, as if someone had been caught pimping in the Queen’s bed chamber, succeeded to deflect attention away from the Scottish Parliament’s self-censorship and symbolic limit. Unanimously, all other MSPs voted to sanction and bar the SSP MSPs for one month without pay, affecting their aides and contributions to Party funds, making worse their financial ‘crisis’ — in this circus daring to seek Parliament act beyond its symbolic ritual and speak out of turn is paradoxically treated as bringing it into disrepute. With this outcome, such stunts have been ridiculed as naïve or as ‘gesture politics’ by some celeb supporters. Given the media’s monologue opposition to the SSP, such stunts (think Mark Steele without the humour or content) have become the required cliched incident for media exposure, inevitably attracting a standard and cliched response — no doubt Geldof and cronies would call it ‘consciousness raising’.

The Body Politic

Accepting that the protests themselves were symbolic, we come to the arguments in favour of summit protests: namely, that many have gotten involved in politics after participating in or being exposed to past summit protests, and that some of those who participate for the first time in these protests will eventually develop a more coherent, class-based analysis. But does this justify almost two years of organising meetings and the £200,000 spent? How do summit protests contribute to increasing the sense of solidarity, strength and confidence within working class communities? The simple answer is they don’t. Their effect is at best insignificant and at worst damaging, as it associates radical class politics with protests taking place outside daily class struggles, reinforcing the ever-growing walls of the activist ghetto. (There are numerous valuable critiques of *life-style activism* and *activism tourism* — those camped out in Craigmillar quickly moved on, proving it is not enough simply to momentarily claim solidarity; likewise, the Glasgow Southside urban garden, it quickly deteriorated.) Simply because some got involved through that kind of protest, doesn’t mean that other people necessarily should, if we can develop more effective political alternatives on our doorsteps. Instead of trying to get people involved in solid class politics by first sucking them in through dead-end, life-style activism, we should try and create and encourage better entry points.

The fact is that summit protests are yet more disconnecting of politics from the lives of working-class people. They are totally symbolic and for all their radical talk don’t begin to build a movement capable of challenging capitalism. Our politics are only relevant if we ground them solidly in our everyday lives and orientate ourselves to solve the problems that we and others face through collective struggle to improve daily conditions. ‘Emancipation’ can only be found in struggle that is informed, and grounded, by class politics. This isn’t to say we should reject a global analysis in favour of some kind of ‘localism’. It just means that while we have a global political analysis, we realise that the only way we can fight all the problems of capitalism is by fighting it in solidarity where it affects us. As the old cliché goes, “think globally, act locally”. And we can’t do this through a series of annual symbolic protests with no real substance to them. We can only do it through day-to-day meaningful action — whatever increases confidence, autonomy, initiative, participation, solidarity, equalitarian tendencies and self-activity, and whatever assists in their demystification. Sterile and harmful action is whatever reinforces passivity, apathy, cynicism, differentiation

through hierarchy, their alienation, reliance on others to do things for them and the degree to which they can therefore be manipulated by others — even by those allegedly acting on their behalf.

If domination and dispossession are in every part of society and in daily life, action has no need for staged dates. A subversive ‘federalism’ of actions and groups, signifies an important rupture with the logic of those who centralise *the enemy* in order to centralise *the struggle* (and render it symbolic). Rather, being in the place where the enemy does not expect you, far from the appointments, is the best perspective. Even in their most interesting aspects, counter-summits limit this perspective. Besides, it seems chasing after such dates is becoming a redundant cliché and a devourer of energy: as soon as one counter-summit ends, centralising preparation for another begins. More and more, the dates and agendas are fixed through the mass media, to the point that if many have demonstrated (for example against the war in Iraq) almost no one has managed to express any practical solidarity with anyone, anywhere else. Often more importance is ascribed to clashes with authority that involve almost exclusively ‘militants’ as compared to authentic social and class opposition.

The State of Exception

We know why many go to counter-summits — wide-spread direct action and the generalised ‘clash with the cops’ is only possible in mass situations. Since only in greatly expanded situations can these actions be conducted. But if summits are of fragile importance, why on earth are so many in which decisions are merely being rubber-stamped given such extravagant publicity. All this seems to be a great terrain for the security forces to study and experiment with anti-riot techniques. A kind of homeopathic treatment: power is inoculated with tiny doses of the virus of subversion in order to reinforce its immune system in view of much broader social plagues. It must know how the *bad ones* move and organise themselves, and with which *good ones* it is possible to dialogue in such a way that nothing really changes.

Power is increasingly brazen. On the one hand, The Masters know that the current social conditions, increasingly marked by precariousness and dependence on commodities, can be imposed only through terror: such terror is manifested in the exterior in the form of war and in the interior in the form of fear for the future (for example, fear of remaining without work or through the repression of increasingly widespread social groups). On the other hand, decades of social pacification — in which every despicable act has occurred simply because nothing has been done to prevent the preceding ones, an incredible acceleration of degradation — have given power an arrogance without precedence.

Above all, summits constitute another form of experimentation: seeing what level of oppression the population is willing to put up with. Bringing its armoured patrol cars around every corner, the state informs its subjects that, until proven otherwise, they are criminals; that nothing is secure enough for the policing and technological apparatus; that city planning is the continuation of the social war with other weapons. More than sixty years ago, Walter Benjamin wrote in his ‘Theses on the Concept of History’ that “the state of exception in which we live has become the rule”.

Summits are the concentrated representation of all this, the legal suspension of every right. “What’s going on?” the average citizen asks, forced to take a detour in order to go shopping. “Nothing, it’s just the anti-globalization people,” the woman at the supermarket responds. Meanwhile, they are even privatising the drinking water, while the police are everywhere...



# Afflicted Powers

## Owen Logan



*Afflicted Powers: Capital and Spectacle in a New Age of War*; Verso, ISBN 1 844670317, pb £10

"We are an empire now, and when we act we create our own reality."

**Senior advisor to President Bush**

The above quotation comes at the end of *Afflicted Powers* by Iain Boal, T.J. Clark, Joseph Mathews and Michael Watts of *Retort*, an affinity group based in San Francisco.<sup>1</sup> Their book draws on a range of academic expertise and its scope is ambitious. In an extended examination of post-September 11<sup>th</sup> geopolitics, the writers enter into a direct polemic against capitalism today, naming names and exposing the system's most dubious mechanisms. They are also willing to question the vanguardist inheritance of the Left and some of the too simple arguments which have animated dissent in recent times. They regard these as added burdens in the task of opposing the destructive forces of 'militarised neo-liberalism', a multi-layered oil-driven economy, entrenched zionism and 'revolutionary Islam'. Contesting the significance of the words "No Blood for Oil", for example, they argue that the war on Iraq was provoked by a deeper reversion within capitalism as it moves into a phase of 'primitive accumulation' geared up for a great deal more than oil reserves. Repeating its foundational epoch, capitalism is 'afflicted' by the need to further enclose all that remains common, monopolising, privatising and patenting. Even the genetic basis for life is turned into property. In his book *The New Imperialism* (2003) David Harvey calls this 'accumulation by dispossession', and *Retort* taking their title taken from Milton's *Paradise Lost*, remind us that caught as we are in this rapacious process, 'our powers are afflicted too.' So 'the Left' is a term which is introduced somewhat sceptically but as they say it is also the term they were 'least willing to abandon.'

The book's argument against 'the present order of things' is carried over six chapters: 'The State, the Spectacle and September 11', 'Blood for Oil?', 'Permanent War', 'The Future of an Illusion', 'Revolutionary Islam', and 'Modernity and Terror'. Before going further into some of the key themes of the book, it is worth considering the implications (and the risks) of its introductory frame – namely, the omniscient notion of power and the accompanying hyper-reality which comes about once a state is fully immersed in the logic of accumulation. Perhaps the best way to show what is at issue here is to quote more fully from the Presidential aide who, on the last page of *Afflicted Powers*, is edited down to that neat one-liner above. Here is the longer quote as it appeared elsewhere:

The aide said that guys like me were "in what we call the reality-based community," which he defined as people who believe that solutions emerge from your judicious study of discernible reality." I nodded and said something about enlightenment principles and empiricism. He cut me off. "That's not the way the world really works anymore," he continued. "We're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you're studying that reality – judiciously, as you will – we will act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that's how things will sort out. We're history's actors ... and you, all of you will be left to just study what we do."<sup>2</sup>

*Retort* are not members of the so called 'reality based community', their work is concerned precisely with the imperial production of 'reality'. Central to their argument, to put it crudely, is the idea that US imperialism has been advanced by a PR machine now running out of control. Even regimes which depend upon brute force also desire public justification, and this one more than most seems to live and die by the TV station as much as 'the sword'. Taken on in its own

iconic terms, the United States responded to the defeat of September 11<sup>th</sup> with the same logic of spectacle, partly revealed by the headline phrase, 'shock and awe'. After a relatively effortless demonstration of 'regime change' in Afghanistan, the US went on to execute a high risk war in Iraq, corruptly and irrationally, and is rather aimlessly maintaining an alliance with Zionism long past any real usefulness. Such counter-productive policies might be classically ascribed to 'imperial overstretch', or could be separately investigated in greater detail. In line with Guy Debord's theory of the spectacle, however, these policies taken together signal a broader kind of hegemonic crisis. This, *Retort* argue is the result of almost infinitely interchangeable material interests and ideological imperatives, which they call, 'the interweave' of spectacular, economic, and geo-political compulsions characterising military neo-liberalism.

We may appreciate the extent to which ideological conditions can drive politics into the wall, but is the spectacle – the mass-mediated arena of image-driven narratives – really as determining a factor as the 'dull compulsion of economic relations'? At the macro level of political economy there exist other priorities that are bound to finance capital, federal debt, and the significance of cheap fuel and goal of unfettered growth. Nevertheless, Debord's theoretical reasoning was that the spectacle represents an overwhelming explanatory power over such things. It functions to put everything into the most favourable frame for capital – a frame which amongst other things, strives for a zero degree of historical comprehension on the part of a public that is constantly thrust into 'an eternal present.' Academic studies, like those by Glasgow Media Group, show that the drive to spectacularise and trivialise news does function extremely well in keeping the public in a cloud of disinformation, and consequently disenfranchised. Indeed any civil society notion of the public interest is increasingly weak and fragmented by the marketised criteria of audience ratings, which substitute and conceal the issues of ownership and control in the mass media. *Retort* would argue, however, that there are dire consequences for the state once hegemony operates like this. The logic of the spectacle, reaches a point where it is too late for the state to rationalise its governance over what has inevitably become a flimsy democracy. In such a context the power crazed pronouncements like that of the Bush's aide can look increasingly credible. At some level, the American imperial mind is apparently absorbed in a politics of virtual reality, and almost by definition that is something that can be acted upon endlessly and without restraint.

Of course there are problems if one accepts such an ahistorical rationale of power. One consequence is that the same megalomaniac symptoms of image conceived politics can also appear as effective forms of dissent or resistance. This is the case for al Qaida, (as *Retort* argue at length in an excellent chapter on the postcolonial politicisation of Islam), but it can also impinge on ordinary activism in civil society. It is worth considering the spectacle of mass protest on which this book is silent. Or more precisely, to look at the way 'Third World' politics has been persistently modified and recuperated through the missionary zeal of charitable rock stars, to the point where recent campaign 'victories' of 'Make Poverty History' were actually synonymous with IMF structural readjustment plans. The media organised expression of the 'popular will' depoliticised and simplified the issues of poverty and inequality in a way that the Western political class could never have achieved alone. The mass media is fond of mass demonstrations. They offer the appearance of a functioning democracy, but public protest lacks praxis when it is backed up

by very little power as labour movements are disabled or isolated. Equally, those moments when labour acts in the context of broad public dissent, as in 1968, are fraught with tactical and strategic difficulties from which much can, and should, be learnt.<sup>3</sup> The same practicalities apply elsewhere. The US might possibly engineer a dignified exit from Iraq for its most vulnerable forces, if civil strife curtails the dimensions of hyper-reality there, but we should remember that the U.S. didn't lose in Vietnam because the Vietcong were similarly inflicted by image consciousness.

Theory can leave writers at a distance from the themes of a polemical text. The extent to which *Retort* disentangles geo-political issues and helps to reground discussion on the terrain of capitalism is important, but moving towards the central critique of capital would be more significant if it also sought a clearer understanding of the ideological structuring of the system. Such a task would be aided by a greater measure of cultural materialism in its method. For example, the US attachment to zionism, examined in the chapter 'The Future of an Illusion', is finally appraised on the basis that Israel offers its geo-political patron a mirror image of the white settler dream, but this might be less of a spectacular 'compulsion'. In *Jewish History, Jewish Religion* (1994), Israel Shahak argued '...support for Israel, when considered not in the abstract but in concrete detail, cannot be adequately explained only as a result of American imperial interests'. He instead pointed to the deadening ideological weight of Zionism in the Jewish diaspora, something which has exercised itself with a 'totalitarian cast of mind' at almost every political and institutional level. The theory of spectacle still offers a fractional insight here but elsewhere it tends to obscure how mass-mediated societies live and breathe. As at least one other reviewer has pointed out, the book dismisses some of the more organic functions in mass culture and is one-sided in this respect.<sup>4</sup> As Michel Foucault argued, where there is power there is resistance, but in *Afflicted Powers* the spectacle is shown as an operation which produces 'total obedience to the protocols of the War on Terror'. One only needs to think of the film *Fahrenheit 9/11* to know that this is a simplistic charge. Hans Magnus Enzensberger's 1974 essay *The Industrialisation of the Mind*, offered a more nuanced and intellectually reflexive approach which *Retort* might usefully have employed.

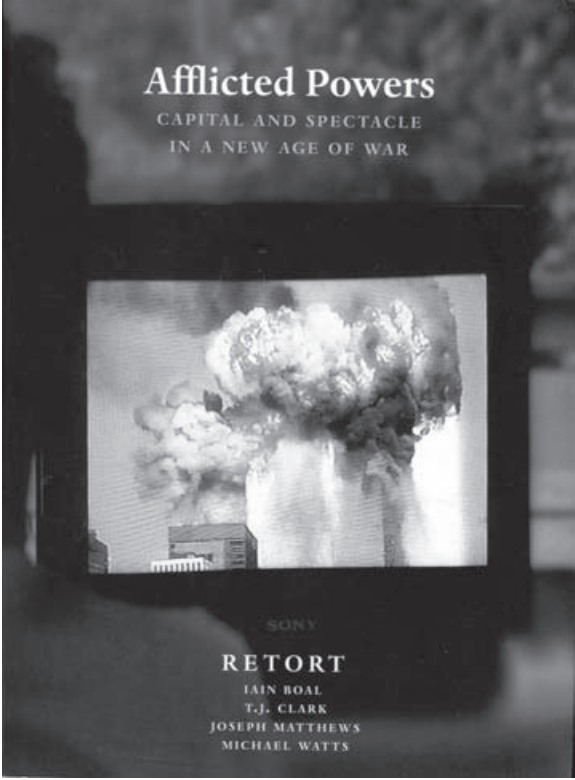
Although Debord's spectacle is a beautifully descriptive theory, it does tend to be taken up in ways which obscure the functioning relations of capitalism. This comes at a time when we need to understand capital in the same fictive terms as the image world it produces. The infamous fiscal rupture of 1971, when the U.S. abandoned their international commitments to a gold-backed dollar was just the beginning of a much broader financial destabilisation. That 98% of the international economy is now based on speculation, and only 2% on real goods and services certainly doesn't undermine the theory of the spectacle, but suggests that it could be applied more carefully and also against some of the vacuous assumptions which came under the umbrella of postmodernity. The phenomenal rise, indicated by the above percentages,<sup>5</sup> may be conceptually linked to the spectacle in the sense that 'reality' is increasingly a zone of subjectivist perception dovetailing with the endless relativism of a speculative market – a market founded on the ability to find an angle on anything and everything from debt default, social breakdown or civil war. The old advice that 'the best time to buy stock is when blood is running on the streets' has been turned into the more emotionally impermeable recommendation to 'buy the dips'.

Neo-liberal dynamism, the ability of the state and capital to collude in the creation and 'micro-

FILL HER UP,  
PLEASE







management’ of new ideological conditions, as began to occur in the UK under Margaret Thatcher, encourages, and finally depends upon, an opportunistic balancing act. North Sea oil revenues paid for deindustrialisation and unemployment in the UK, but Thatcher’s boldness was also influenced by the way her political allies were well trained in speculation. In *Fools Gold* (1994) Christopher Harvie repeated Alan Duncan’s claim to have made a million speculating on oil during the first Gulf War and Harvie points towards the general rise of ‘Casino Capitalism’ to which the younger members of her elite were accustomed.

The oil economy

The popular idea that the invasion of Iraq was driven by the desire of the United States and a few of its corporations to get hold of Iraq’s oil reserves is an inadequate way to grasp what has been going on. The slogan “No Blood for Oil” can easily be set up for a fall, and this is what *Retort* do arguing that while oil was an important factor it must be contextualised within the ‘larger structural imperatives of the system’. Oil should not become a substitute ‘for a wider capitalist nerve centre’. Interestingly in this respect, Donald Rumsfeld admits that “we lack the metrics to know if we are winning or losing the war.” *Retort* end on the subject of oil saying that however it is calculated a ‘few more million barrels of oil will not matter a damn’.

Moving on from *Midnight Oil* (1992) by the Midnight Notes Collective, and Jonathan Nitzan and Shimson Bichler’s work *The Global Political Economy of Israel* (1999), *Retort* take up their argument about a ‘capitalist ghost world’ and a transnational constellation of embedded corporations in countries like Russia, Nigeria and Columbia operating within a greater ‘oil-arms-military-engineering-construction-finance-drugs nexus’. ‘Military neo-liberalism’ here looks pretty much like capitalism revealed in truly dubious and subterranean form, yet it is also caught up in the crisis following the WTO breakdown in Cancun, and is unsettled by the cracks in the World Bank establishment. There would be nothing wrong with the extent of *Retort*’s findings if they were arguing against a certain depth of significance around oil when they explore the decisive factors that led to the invasion, but they are not. So it is hard to see where exactly this leaves us because the question that *Retort* posits, ‘about how oil’s dominance is established’ is absorbed in something like a whirl of phantoms. In other words the overlap between state and private interests is not really depicted. However, finding an answer here does require the recognition of an oil economy as a prism of forces. It is certainly more complex and dispersed than the use value of the resource, yet it also appears bound up by internalised fears. These may be rooted in the potential for internecine feud to escape existing controls. “What the industry wants more than anything is a stable appletart”, is how a

CIA director put it. The petrodollar system, whereby oil and other major commodities are traded in US dollars, means that the United States has been able, in the words of its critics, ‘to produce dollars while the rest of the world produces the things dollars can buy.’<sup>6</sup> Certainly, the neo-liberal project has been projected globally, an enormous federal deficit at its heart while fiscal discipline is imposed everywhere else by the global institutions like the IMF. As Niall Fergusson, the historian and great fan of the British Empire, is keen to point out, America is a debtor empire. The traditional motor for empire has been the need to invest surplus capital abroad but in 2003 the Wall Street Journal was instead asking; ‘Is the US hooked on foreign capital?’ It is, but for the time being, and largely thanks to petrodollars, ‘dollar hegemony’ prevails as a complex mechanism for drawing capital inwards.

*Retort* recognise that petrodollars make oil into a key item of market currency. They also say that only speculation explains the ‘utterly baffling’ mismatches between demand and prices. But they are less impressed with the implications of these dealings at a time when geologists predict an imminent peak in production capacity, a point when world demand outstrips supply. The fact that ‘peak oil’ looks like a bit of a smokescreen for different interested parties may influence their central assumption that OPEC will continue to function in the interests of the US even if OPEC countries gain a majority share of world capacity as supplies dwindle elsewhere. *Retort* point to other potential reserves which might enable the West to keep a fuller hand in a highly speculative game surrounding oil, but those reserves are unlikely to be easy to tap or as cost effective as the ones in OPEC control. Nevertheless, profits will be made as prices rise so *Retort* are probably right to dispel the issue of ‘peak oil’ as something of a red herring, but a ‘cross over’ to a greater dependence on OPEC reserves may not be a simple transition to negotiate. In such a context the maintenance of the petrodollar system, and with it U.S. Federal debt could only look more precarious than it already is. To understand the risks one has to look beyond Iraq.

In return for gaining access to the American market, China is now the major investor in the dollar assets. According to the *Financial Times*, ‘Beijing is now a major prop for the US Federal Reserve and its policies’. This market-led ‘Communist’ support act would suggest that history still has its surprises. Worryingly, the current balance looks increasingly like the kind of delicate arrangement which preceded the First World War. Responding to the growing unease over dollar hegemony, and to much gossip about a ‘petroeuro’ prompted by Saddam Hussein’s oil sales, a U.S. Navy School issued a reassuring paper, denying these factors as possible motivations for the war, and going on to outline the prospects for a soft transition should dollar hegemony come to an end.<sup>7</sup> Many things were left out of this military assessment of a happy United States living in the future without the aid of the petrodollar settlement and coming to terms with massive public debt. Perhaps the key issue, most studiously ignored, was how irksome is the negative rationale which forces central banks around the world to hold dollar assets. This is done in the knowledge that these are deeply insecure in the long term but in the short term are held as a guard against speculative attack on their national currencies. Were the U.S. to become like other national economies vulnerable to the threat of ‘capital flight’ it would not be a ‘soft transition.’ If collective economic pressures bear down on the home of the neo-liberal project the US will be in a weaker position in relation to its principle rival; China. It is difficult to see that kind of shift not having serious consequences for the control of a domestic economy, with an ageing population dependent on cheap fuel, car use, and heavily fixated on consumerism. Gross inequalities in the U.S. would be likely to reach intolerable levels. This far down the line no U.S. government could address that social predicament without a drastic shift in priorities.<sup>8</sup>

China, after the United States, is the second largest net importer of oil. The contingency of Chinese and American economic relationships

across a wide range of sectors is reasonably clear but the ramifications of Chinese growth are a major worry for the U.S. Eight months after 9/11, the American ‘realist’ political scientist, John Mersheimer argued that, ‘the United States will go to great lengths... to contain China and to cut China off at the knees ...’. The U.S. may have gone to lengths that even Mersheimer, an opponent of the Iraq war, would not have advised. By July this year the Washington Post was observing a public dilemma in Beijing after the war ‘destroyed China’s hopes of developing large (oil) assets in Iraq’, encouraging of course a greater dependence on American ‘benevolence’. The subsequent revaluation of the Yuan later in the same month went some way to meeting long-standing demands, helping to protect the American economy from cheap imports but the accompanying Chinese measure of a new ‘currency basket’ in Asia could possibly accelerate a fiscal reckoning for the U.S. Nobody can be entirely sure, and this uncertainty is the really important point. The U.S. is fast approaching a ‘Third World’ scenario of borrowing merely to service debt. As bad as things may appear for the U.S. in Iraq, strategic militarisation around the world’s oil zones, and the establishment of new ‘lily pad’ bases, which *Retort* point to in their chapter ‘Permanent War’, offers the United States some insurance for its financial hegemony and can only bolster their side of the power balance with China.

What about the risks of civil war in Iraq providing greater fuel to Islamic fundamentalism and possibly alienating Middle-Eastern allies? Surely they were crucial factors that had to be considered in the decision to depose Saddam Hussein. Were those issues essentially overridden by a counter-attack mentality on the part of a luridly corrupt and rapacious nexus of interests – a capitalist ghost world – as *Retort* argue? Quite probably, but if that was the case then such motivations could only be strengthened, and indeed rationalised, within the different aspects of an oil economy. This is an economic arena that doesn’t only represent the prospects of directly and indirectly derived booty (primitive accumulation). More importantly in this context, it signifies real weaknesses elsewhere in an interdependent system of oil and financial credibility. And ultimately it is weakness more than power that seems to force action.

Modernity and Resistance

It must be said that one could reasonably expect *Afflicted Powers* to link its nuanced appraisal of 21<sup>st</sup> century capitalism to some of the more concrete problems of effectively resisting its force. Such a task seems to be sidelined in a publication more devoted to the theory of the spectacle. Taking ‘the main propositions of the anti-war movement ... to see if they could be reconstructed’ is not merely a discursive task. In reflecting on questions of social agency the final chapter ‘Modernity and Terror’ skips through an account of the problematic ‘vanguard ideal’ which is more literary than philosophical and never touches down on practical debates about horizontal and vertical organisation. It toys with concepts such as ‘multitude’,<sup>9</sup> and ‘the movement of movements’; ideas which have emerged from the anti-globalisation movement and which were given something of a boost by the sheer breadth of protest against the invasion of Iraq. These terms represent the politics in which *Retort* ‘place most faith’, not least, they say, because the pluralistic politics of multitude hardly depends on the apparatus of the spectacle. The complex dynamics surrounding the G8 meeting in Scotland point to a much more problematic reality. This is a book, like so many others, where the examination of activism against capitalist power eventually sinks into a mere text. If it were taken as a sign of the times it would only confirm how much democratic power is increasingly afflicted by abstraction.

*Retort* argue that the idea of ‘modernity’ must be called into question. If not, the Islamicist disenchantment with the postcolonial secular state, typically a ‘failed state’, may further define urban disaffection and the wider political scene. Yet populations, however erroneously, still strive for modernity. Politics turns on ideas but, as the authors might admit, capitalist modernity is hardly







going to be undermined, on some progressive intellectual basis, when it is also identified with benefits like health care, communications or washing machines, and not just consumerist excess. So it is difficult to imagine sections of humanity rejecting an already contingent sense of modernity, without first finding the way to collectivise its key benefits in some substantial measure. The success of Hamas (even if it is informed by a paranoid response to modernity) is partly based on that sort of social-welfare function. That is not to think in ‘gloomy’ or ‘exultant’ terms – a dichotomy which *Retort* see as being a problem for Left politics. Neither is it an unrealistic or ‘unsustainable’ proposition. If capitalism both inspires and forces people to cast their lives into its speculative logic, which for many means being propelled from rural collapse to the chaos of urban poverty, then the pace of diminishing returns, or the generalised sense of downward mobility, and a common environmental crisis on the planet, does at least invoke a greater scepticism towards individualist ideology. Of course the problem remains on what basis does a collectivist will manifest itself and how does it really act against accumulation and dispossession from above?

*Retort*’s hopes are for the reinvention of Left internationalism. Grasping a strategic sense of internationalism is certainly crucial, to say anything less would be an understatement, but it is needed most so that the labour divisions and gendered parameters of organised labour and trade unionism might be redrawn and become more relevant and internationally responsive.<sup>10</sup> And to spite *Retort*’s suspicion of Lenin’s legacy, his precepts about the significance of trade unionism are not redundant in this respect. Left internationalism entails finally dispensing with the remains of Cold War politics in the international trade union movement if it is to move away from a tradition of voluntarism and towards a greater sense of strategic necessity. It also means comprehending the corporatist drive in modernity

(arguably its structural frame) in the suppression of both labour militancy and a free market, as well as its impact on revolutionary projects. The latter can be seen in the early penetration of Taylorist thinking into the Bolshevik programme, meaning thereafter that the typical Russian worker was regarded as a barrier to the communist modernisation project.<sup>11</sup> Corporatism, including its fallout in everything from Italian fascism to the utter bribery behind New Labour’s partnership ideology, stands in the way of the Left’s agency, and without confronting that political bloc, trade unionism cannot be creatively reinstituted and it may be further eroded in our era of global capital flows and super-charged speculation. No doubt, as *Retort* argue, ‘modernity’ should be questioned but surely if the Left is not to take a lead from paranoid fundamentalism then it is important to concentrate on something less vague; ‘modernity’ might be an intellectually dignified term, but as a generalisation it is almost on a par with ‘The Great Satan.’

It is hard to do justice to the scope of *Afflicted Powers*. At its best, in chapters like ‘Permanent War’, which exposes the violence that for some passed for ‘peace’, or in ‘Revolutionary Islam’, tracing the genealogy of that form of rebellion, the book succeeds in removing any sense that history was dormant at end the Cold War, or that liberal capitalism could ever be ‘on track’, destined somehow to be the final human arrangement. No doubt al Qaida have delighted in the hubris of the ‘liberal empire,’ an imperialism that fatally attempts to justify its plundering by institutionally, economically and ideologically replicating itself in every possible way. In this sense 9/11, was certainly the disaster on which US power awaited. The welcome opportunities afforded by future attacks are now openly contemplated. This dynamic mode of ‘creating other new realities’ must always be traced back (as *Retort* do) to its original sources. They precede Winston Churchill speaking to parliament in 1920

but he is a good spokesman for the long historic cause; “I do not understand this squeamishness about the use of gas ... I am strongly in favour of using poisoned gas against uncivilised tribes to spread a lively terror.”

### Notes

1. *Afflicted Powers* is published by Verso Books (2005).
2. Ron Suskind, quoting a “senior advisor” to President Bush, cited in Niall Ferguson’s, *Colossus*, (2004) Penguin Books.
3. Kristin Ross, *May ‘68 and Its Afterlives* (2002), University of Chicago Press, is a valuable account.
4. Julian Stallabrass, ‘Spectacle and Terror’ forthcoming in *New Left Review*.
5. From Bernard Lietaer’s, *The Future of Money, Creating New Wealth, Work and a Wiser World*, (2001) Century Books.
6. See Henry C K Liu’s, *China vs the almighty dollar*, <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/China/DG23Ad04.html>
7. *Strategic Insights*, volume II, issue 11 (November 2003) ‘From Petrodollars to Petroeuros’... by Robert Looney, Centre for Contemporary Conflict, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, California. <http://www.ccc.nps.navy.mil/si/nov03/middleEast.asp>
8. For an extended examination of the different factors at play see Giovanni Arrighi’s two part essay, ‘Hegemony Unravelling’ in *New Left Review*, Issues 32 and 33, (2005)
9. See *Multitude, War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (2004) by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, published by Hamish Hamilton.
10. In this respect internationally comparative ‘bottom up’ studies are valuable but they are few and far between. Scott Lash’s, *The Militant Worker – class and radicalism in France and America*, (1984), published by Heinemann is possibly one of the most extensive and well grounded. Andrew Cumbers’ journal article ‘Embedded Internationalisms: ‘Building Transnational Solidarity in the British and Norwegian Trade Union Movements’ (2004) in *Antipode*, Blackwell Publishing, describes current challenges as well as the opportunities afforded by what might be called the end of – the end – of the Cold War.
11. For a broad based but concise study of this, see Paul Dukes’ ‘October in the Mind: The Russian Revolution, Freidizm and Pandisciplinarity’ in *Revolutionary Russia*, (2002) Vol.15, No1, published by Frank Cass.



# Social Housing Privatisation

## City Strolls

The mantra of the politicians was ‘the tenants will decide’, but how can a voter deprived of knowledge make an informed decision?

The first I knew of protest against Glasgow City Council pursuing a policy of privatising its social housing was when a group protesting about poverty related issues occupied Keir Hardie House, then HQ of the Labour Party in Glasgow. In January, 1999 the Glasgow Campaign Against Housing Stock Transfer was formed, with many people from different parts of Glasgow becoming involved—of all the privatisation situations this was probably the only exception where some of the people affected might have some effect on the process through a so-called ballot; despite its built-in unfairness. And it was hardly fair. It was trying to take a public asset out of the public sector when only a proportion of that public were being allowed to have any say in the matter, namely only directly affected existing council tenants.

Tenants have a ‘Secure Tenancy Agreement’ with their councils that’s both individual and collective—collective, not just locally but as part of the Government’s wider social contract for housing provision. If you wish to take a public asset out of public ownership surely the whole public, both within their geographical authority and nationally, should have a say in it. To do so democratically it should be a referendum of all the populous, whether it be a local area, a city or a country. But that’s not what’s being done. The Scottish Executive are saying that it’s ok for some tenants to effectively change the landlord of other tenants by unilaterally withdrawing from the collective agreement, leaving others high and dry.

Ample resources from the public purse were (and are) being put behind the privatisation process, with little going to support the proposition to retain housing in the public sector; to keep it accountable and have it properly funded. In the months running up to the ‘ballot’ there was a circular admitting Glasgow City Council was to spend £6.5m on promoting the transfer, with about the same to be spent by what was to become the Glasgow Housing Association Limited, who would take over the housing

stock. Meaning an estimated £13m was spent on pro-transfer propaganda in the run up to the democratically wanting, Government skewed vote on the issue, on April 4th 2002.

Actually, the figures of £40m - £43m circulate as the sum used over the longer period from the first moves on privatisation. This compares to less than £10,000 over a period of under three years by those who opposed it. That is the juxtaposition in terms of resourcing of campaigning. Quite apart from the way it was resourced in relation to any opposition, the so-called ballot as a process was not a democratic test of opinion.

### ...on the way to the Forum

The consultants given the job of pulling the early guidance blurb together for the Council were Ernst & Young—one of the biggest US accountancy firms on the global scene, whose office is conveniently diagonally opposite the council’s City Chambers.

The pro-stock transfer people talked about providing ‘information’, but this was not the case. What ensued was a combination of PR and managerial manipulation of tenants and the wider public—one of the early ‘internal’ guidance documents actually stated that Estates Action Groups and Neighbourhood Forums should be used to promote and develop the transfer proposal, whilst tenants were told, “Not to worry, it’s only a proposal.” This was a laughable misuse of the word ‘proposal’, since we are talking about a mechanism for pushing an essentially understated policy of Government to abrogate its responsibility for addressing housing poverty and reducing the role of local government.

Neighbourhood Forums had started out as a good initiative—they did truly listen to the concerns of tenants in a more participatory way than had been the case, with a view to actually addressing them. But this was a change of purpose which amounted to a deception of tenants by policy process—a concrete example of managerial manipulation to get tenants to ‘come on board’ a new agenda without the tenants being clear what was happening.

### ‘Led by the nose’

People often from fairly moribund residents’ groups and tenants’ associations were invited to join these ‘Forums’, which were then deemed to be representative. This should also be seen in the context of a situation where there had been huge propaganda to get people to become owner-occupiers with the Thatcherite ‘Right to Buy’ policy. In many areas the numerical strength and the extent to which these people had practical links in the community in terms of talking about housing issues as tenants was greatly diminished. They would have broader community credence if they had got together with the ‘Right to Buy’ owners to make sure that they were also properly represented, and that their interests dovetailed in a way that did not split up the community, that it did not become atomised. As it was, local government/housing officials got these people ‘on board’ the process and, importantly, with a few exceptions, they were not reporting back to the local populous—this is what the authorities called ‘Tenants Led’, or as many said ‘By the nose’.

Independent advisors were another aspect of this morally corrupt process, whereby information about the down side of stock transfer at meetings was not given. Discussion or queries regarding any possible negative aspect of this ‘big bang’ for Glasgow’s housing were discouraged with phrases like, “I have been asked to explain what it is about, not whether it is good or bad. That is for tenants to decide.”

### ‘We was robbed.’

The tenants’ movement in Glasgow was also being stripped away. It’s epitomised by what happened to Glasgow Council of Tenants Associations (GCTA) —co-ordinating body for tenants’ issues across the city that liaised with the Local Authority, acted as a ‘clearing house’ distributing useful information to tenants’ associations. Crucially, most people in Tenants Associations paid in a levy then administered by the City Council. Part of it went to this Tenants’ Resource Centre, and the rest the Tenants Groups got back in pooled instalments, as it was their money. Someone involved in GCTA got very disgruntled with the Council, believing they’ve retained substantial monies and that by holding onto them they’ve essentially been stolen.

We were about to have a lot more ‘stolen’ from us through the the huge cost of housing stock transfer, quite apart from what it’s going to cost after transfer—it’s estimated it will cost £800m to move Glasgow into the private sector.

### Murky ‘modernisation’

When it came to the so-called vote, less than 29,000 tenants voted in favour of the replacement ‘Glasgow Housing Association’ on the ballot paper, what they got was a legally registered body named ‘Glasgow Housing Association Limited’. Given what has gone on, it’s not surprising that legal challenges have been made that GHA with the ‘Limited’ is not the legal landlord. Anyway, combining those who voted ‘no’ with those who did not vote, at 50,000 out of over 80,000 tenants declining to favour the ending of Council housing in Glasgow, it’s hardly a ringing endorsement.

### Labouring under illusions

It’s interesting to compare-and-contrast Glasgow with the situation in Birmingham, which was going through a similar process. Birmingham voted 2:1 in opposition to stock transfer. Why did these two cities with a similar council house stock act differently? Could it be that nomenclatura and the power of patronage exerted a stronger force in Glasgow than it did in Birmingham?

In Glasgow, Councillors showed almost total public unity with the leadership, Cllr Charlie Gordon; or at least silence. It’s said some Labour Councillors were against transfer but didn’t feel able to speak out in the interests of tens of thousands of citizens! Only Cllr John Flanagan publicly highlighted the wrongs of the Council abdicating its role as a provider of publicly funded and accountable quality housing provision as a human right to tenants and a duty of care and trust for the local government—Glasgow is still the poorest and unhealthiest city in Europe.

### Privatisation or Community Ownership?

Tommy Sheridan (SSP) and Dorothy Grace Elder (Independent) did speak against mass housing transfer, Sandra White (SNP) too—often seen at public meetings of the Glasgow Campaign Against Stock Transfer, who continues to speak up for her constituents.

However, the SSP manifesto stated ‘community based’ transfers were ok, if that is what tenants wanted. This presumes that tenants were informed of the case against and that the SSP were content with the financial framework within which such ‘Housing Associations’ have to work, in particular their relations with private finance. Initially the SNP had no policy on the issue, when they did it was to oppose it, but when they were accused of vagary they created a new policy which was





essentially another form of stock transfer.

Only a handful of politicians across Scotland’s parties have been prepared to openly oppose housing privatisation. In Birmingham, there were Westminster MPs speaking out in favour of Council housing, City Councillors supporting local tenants’ campaigns, Labour were by no means united against the tenants, and the England Defend Council Housing supported local campaigns.UNISON financially supported publications describing the dangers of losing council housing. By comparison, in the lead up to the ballot in Glasgow, UNISON conducted a lacklustre campaign with a couple of publications and poorly distributed poster. The material they did produce was excellent, but too little late in the day. The argument that they were ‘keeping their powder dry’ does not tell us why they were seldom seen on the campaign trail and why they continue to be so silent on this important issue across Scotland?

When one looks at the size of UNISON’s membership and the potential for distribution across sectors within the union, many of whom are directly affected by housing privatisation in Scotland, there is great potential for a successful ‘NO’ campaign; in the interest of their own members living in council housing as well as the people of Scotland more generally. UNISON is a big well funded union with resources, it is time these were used effectively.

The next big transfer is in Edinburgh and fewer people there have an understanding of what housing transfer means than was the case in Glasgow 2002 transfer—contact the Scottish Tenants’ Organisation and EAST (Edinburgh Against Stock Transfer) for the day-to-day. The Scottish Executive want to ‘fast track’ ahead, with balloting provisionally being rolled out from 16th November until presumably enough people return papers to give the process some air of legitimacy.

Save Our Concierge!

The GMB was also noticeable by its silence. Hopefully it has recognised that, as a good working relationship has arisen based on the mutual interests between GMB members who are Concierge Workers/staff (whose jobs are seriously under threat) and tenants in multi-storey flats, to save the 24-hour fixed-site concierge service that also provides CCTV for tenants’ safety. This is reckoned to be among the best in the UK, and before the transfer was thought to have saved the Council around £6m in graffiti and vandalism prevention alone.

GHA have said that they do not want to cut the concierge service, they want to ‘enhance it’... by replacing it with 24 hour patrols in little vans moving about the city. That this was not a cost cutting exercise. However, information has come to light penned by a senior member of GHA management in Nov. 2003 which clearly states that this proposal, as it was then, was to be a cost cutting exercise and being done to facilitate the demolition programme of the GHA.

Substantial cut back in personnel would mean people feeling a lesser degree of security within their own homes. Without the current level of service it would be giving greater freedom to robbers, violent attacks, drug use and criminality, and incline towards an increased danger of fire risk associated with it. This is what housing activists had been warning about, as, if people feel unsafe in their own homes, it’s a way of getting them to want to leave without being asked.

Demolitions

Around 30,000 homes in Glasgow, mostly high-rise but many low-rise, which have had virtually no

repairs or long term maintenance since GHA took over, are under review for possible demolition. This is a broken promise. It is not because there is anything basically wrong with these buildings that they are under threat, although many people if asked, “Would you like to live there,” would probably say no, as there has been a policy of deliberate neglect since before the GHA took over and continued by them.

There is also a lot of playing with language in relation to the question of demolition. Terms like lack of demand for ‘non-traditional build’ are used as a criteria/excuse—if you went round every house in Scotland on that basis most of the housing would be under threat. They say there is a lack of demand but it is a pitch based on a false premise—you can say there is a lack of demand, if you create it.

There seems to be an unstated yet tangible strategy whereby you have an unsympathetic combination of refugees, elderly ‘locals’, a few young families and a third grouping of people who have medical, addiction and behaviour problems requiring specialist care. It may be constructed on a policy of short-term financial gain from political schemes such as ‘dispersal’ of asylum seekers, but a decision is made to put these groups together in a sociologically negative way that results in people wanting to leave that building. So when a letter comes through door saying the building is soon to be demolished residents may be cheering from the rafters.

Added to this is the exceptional increase in intimidation through legal threats of eviction, where people not making their rent (for many reasons) go through over crowded courts, which also brings up the question of the lack of legal representation (which would be an additional cost). Over a three month period this summer there were 950 alone, which resulted in just 24 decrees, actual evictions—complete with the humiliation of having ‘evicted’ and the day’s date written in chalk on your door. Many cases are what’s known as ‘technical’ arrears’, where there is a lag in say the housing benefit system catching up to a person’s circumstances. Where before there would be an understanding that this was the case, it was ‘in the system’, it seems they are now being fast tracked immediately through the courts.

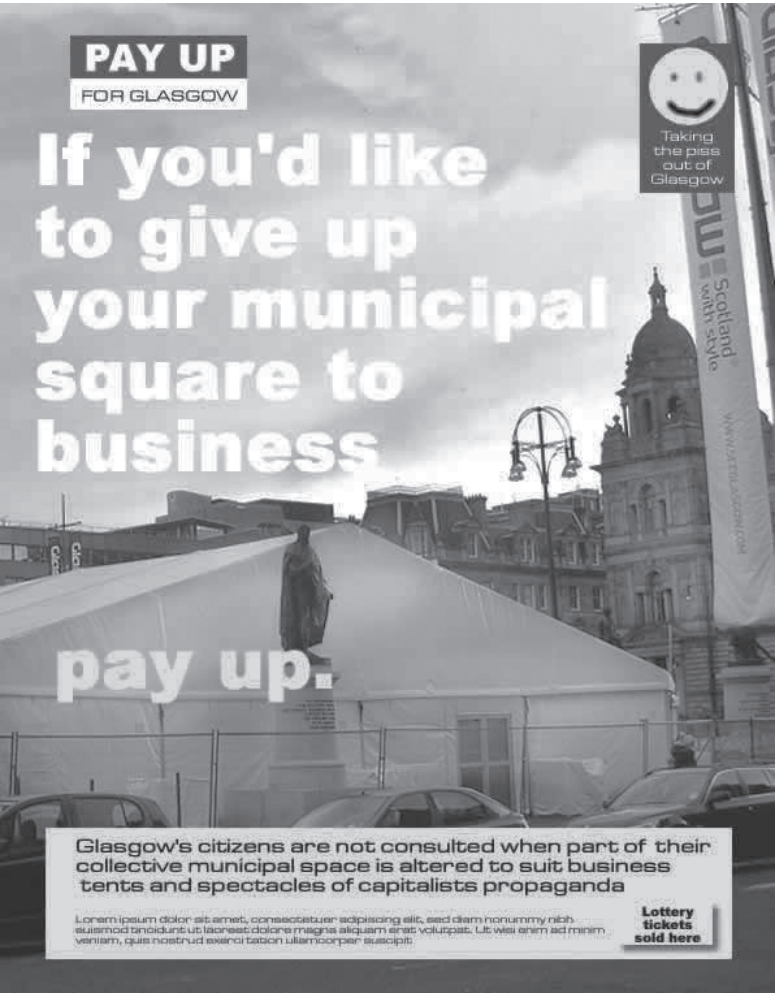
Majic Media

Stock transfer has been thoroughly marketed through the media, especially the Evening Times. You see a headline, you start to read and it looks as if you’re reading about saving trees or having a more pleasant environment. Unless you are reading very astutely, you may not realise the message it’s attempting to convey. If you combine that with other articles and the mass media more generally, then you have what amounts to a campaign in favour of the corporate process sold as a touchy-feely idyll—Housing Associations are oh so much nicer than monolithic council housing.

There has been a mountain of misinformation spewed out from the whole propaganda machine. It seems strange that in a country that prides itself on a level of freedom of the press, campaigners have had to struggle for every column inch of coverage from the point of view of tenants. The process of stock transfer is unnecessary, costs millions of pounds that could be better spent on investing in the housing stock so that people can have a decent home, instead of spending hundreds of million of our taxes in order to mystify and privatise.

The end of ideology?

Campaigners are often maligned as being ideological, as if that weren’t the case with the



so-called ‘pragmatists’ or ‘modernisers’—there is a restructuring process of privatisation going on but it’s not being called that, except amongst themselves: “...the interest in housing and urban issues in Scotland generally, the advent of new procurement methods occasioned by Egan, and the privatisation of local authority housing stock and innovations such as Homes for the Future...” (The Lighthouse, The City of Small Things, a one day conference on housing, 1/3/01, Scottish Homes)

We should ask what are the reasons? Despite spending millions of public money on a compliant press, why are they still trying to disguise it in terms of ‘community ownership’? And why, when in opposition, did Gordon Brown say of stock transfer, “Tenants have to fill in a ballot form but there is only one candidate on the list. This sounds more like a mediaeval dictatorship than a democracy” (Daily Record, 4/1/96)

The fact is that people have never requested it, it’s being foisted on us—they know that people don’t really want it. And if people got truthful information they would know what the real cost of the process is—one which is going to be still more costly yet. And who is going to pay for it all—the general tax payer to some extent, but a large burden is going to be put upon the people who are living in the houses.

It seems like an almighty mess

If the general undisclosed plan goes to term, we are talking about a spatial realignment of the population along economic lines, whereby areas that were thought of as less desirable become more desirable depending on what one can afford. Where the whole process gets labelled as ‘regeneration’, when it’s really a process in some cases of petrification and in others of downgrading the area, which you can see alongside the planned M74 link route.

The Glasgow Save Our Homes Campaign is not simply about houses, it is about saving our communities. There is a realisation that in order to challenge the dominant culture on these issues, common purpose and solidarity is needed. Only by friends and relatives, who happen to live in different areas, communicating and developing their links will people have any chance of a collective voice on this issue. Otherwise communities are likely to be picked off piece meal.

Phased out

Glasgow’s just gone through Phase One, which created the Glasgow Housing Association (Ltd.). Phase Two, or secondary stock transfer, will break most of the housing up into smaller Local Housing



Organisations (LHOs) with further opaqueness and buck-passing. The cozy term is misleading—people (particularly in the West of Scotland) have an idea of what they understand to be a Housing Association but LHOs are different to this. Their financial guidelines, and consequently their reason for existence, have changed as their guidance notes have been handed down from the Scottish Executive, guiding them along increasingly commercial criteria. This has got to the point where tenants on the Board and Committees of the GHA and its branch LHOs, while trumpeted as being Tenant Representatives, are ‘asked’ to sign a confidentiality agreement clearly pointing to the fact that they have signed to be part of the Landlord. So it is a deception when people are said to be Tenant Representatives as where the Landlord’s interests and those of the tenants diverge it clearly creates difficulties.

An example of buck passing includes the manager of an LHO apologising, saying, “I’m sorry someone from the GHA could not come along to the meeting tonight”, as if they are not from the GHA. They try to create the myth of a distance between the two parts of the GHA, when in fact there will only be distance between them when the LHOs become fully fledged Housing Associations on their own. Currently, these local branches may create a draft of their plans for the coming year or for particular housing or environmental projects, but they have to have them passed by GHA centrally, as the local budgets are part of the overall budget of GHA and they are required to comply with the strategic decisions agreed for GHA as a whole. LHOs, even if they have changed their names —e.g. from Streets Ahead Alliance to Mosspark Local Housing Association— are still part of GHA. This type of name change could be seen as yet another manipulation of local and public impressions of accountability and responsibility.

Sometimes the buck is passed the other way—if you talk to senior people in GHA they say they “can’t tell you the detail about what is happening locally, if you talk to the tenants on the Local Management Committee / Board they might be able to tell you”, because after all it is about tenant control. But if you speak to the tenants, whether committee members or not, they will often say, “We’re kept in the dark, they’re no tellin’ us a thing.” But these same tenants, the ones on the Committees, cannot and do not tell other tenants because as you know they’re restricted by confidentiality—“We’re not really supposed to tell people.”

As LHOs leave the GHA and compete with each other for scarce financial resources they are likely to have to amalgamate. If so they may continue to trade under separate names but they would really be part of bigger organisations camouflaging the fact to maintain consumer loyalty at a local level. There are also big predatory landlords looking for new development, such as Homes in Scotland (in England simply called Homes) and Sanctuary. One was recently involved in a stock transfer in Anderson with the backing of the Scottish Executive.

There appears to be at least two lines of thought within this kind of neo-liberal authoritarianism. One is to have large stock transfers and then break thing up; the other is to chip away piece meal at an area, whether it be the size of Glasgow, Edinburgh, a smaller town or a more rural setting until all municipal housing is gone.

### A sign of things to come?

GHA has a surplus in excess of £140m that they could and should have paid to needed repair and maintenance of the homes of Glasgow’s tenants. As with Cedar Tenants Association’s lifts being mostly off for about six months and having to send

to England for a part, which exposes that there is no collective plan. Are they going to go through this every time a lift breaks down? It’s general purposeful neglect by the landlord. It’s not only big things like the lifts, lots of silly jobs are not being done, are accumulating and lending an air of dilapidation. You just have to walk through these places to get the feeling that people are being unconscionably defecated upon from a great height. A decent landlord would have a zero tolerance policy on repairs—if it’s repaired as soon as it is observed or reported it will cost less, even including labour time, simply because their will be no accumulative effect of deterioration.

What have they done with the money?

### Red Road & Sighthill high flats—utter contempt

The tenants who live in these areas were not informed that their buildings were earmarked for demolition—the press was informed before the inhabitants. In the case of Red Road, there was a press conference held within the tower blocks. Nobody knew about it except the invited media—nobody else was supposed to know about it, especially the tenants affected by the decision. The same thing was repeated in Sighthill. It also transpired that they sent out information to some tenants second class, virtually guaranteeing that it would arrive after a meeting. This is from an organisation that says it it has a tenant participation strategy which is freely available to be seen on the GHA web site. Maybe they realise that the majority of tenants do not have computers, never mind access to their web site. Unless information about such things is available in a reasonably popular and available manner then people will not know about tenants’ participation or that it has a specific meaning, having been negotiated with the Scottish Tenants Organisation.

### Rent Rise?—the double negative letter

There was a promise before the transfer that rents would not increase above the level of inflation plus 1-2% for a period of eight years, which was then reduced to five. But very quickly a convoluted, virtually incomprehensible letter was sent to tenants about rents, basically asking for their permission to increase rents and break the guarantee, but written in a way that could only be intended to deceive. Campaigners advocate that people should be able to have affordable rents and a high level of public investment.

### Openness?

It is a strange creature—GHA and other post-transfer landlords tend to portray themselves as private or public when it suits them. They are regarded by the Treasury as private, however they are also regarded as public housing bodies in the sense that they are responsible for housing large numbers of people and links in with public and social policy. So there is a foginess which requires some analytical rigour. Government should make itself open to dialogue to define the situation as regards these new landlords. One thing that deserves attention is that Housing Associations are exempt from the Freedom of Information Act, despite the fact that they are responsible for housing tens of thousands of people all over Scotland. This may be because of the present transitional phase. Given that there is an aim to establish the current LHO branches of the GHA as self standing, maybe their priorities are their future commerciality. They say that there will be community control but what form of realistic community representation has there been, and

then even with community representation what form of power can there be to participate in agenda setting before policy has been set?

### Communities Scotland...

The people who are supposed to be overseeing this, whom you can complain to, are Communities Scotland, which is a branch of the Scottish Executive. Both of these are part of the process of promoting the housing stock transfer process / ideology, but they are also supposedly having a National Engagement with Tenants...? Independently minded tenants’ groups will have to come to a judgement as to what extent the danger of becoming ‘embedded’ in someone else’s process overrides their ability to function. The only thing I’ve noticed is the establishment’s fear of organisation—they are ‘shitting themselves’ at the thought of people getting organised. The thing now is how can we give people all this information, the facts and figures, because they know that if people get to know some of this stuff...

#### Contacts & Links

Glasgow Save Our Homes: Save Our communities  
Tel. 07976 718 111 or 07940 937 241  
or 0141 881 3338.

Scottish Tenants Organisation  
Tel. 07976 718 111 or 07790 214 857

EAST (Edinburgh Against Stock Transfer)  
Tel. 07977294 865

Tayside Tenants  
Tel. 0138 277 4370  
[www.taysidetenants.org](http://www.taysidetenants.org)

City Strolls  
[www.citystrolls.com](http://www.citystrolls.com)

Scotland Indymedia  
[scotland.indymedia.org/newswire/display/2079/index.php](http://scotland.indymedia.org/newswire/display/2079/index.php)

Defend Council Housing  
[www.defendcouncilhousing.org.uk](http://www.defendcouncilhousing.org.uk)