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Editorial
Nothing ever happened

... Political language, as used by politicians, does not venture into any of this territory (the exploration of reality to the majority of politicians, on the evidence available to us, are interested not in truth but in power and in the maintenance of that power. To maintain that power is essential to people remain in ignorance, that they live in ignorance of the truth, even the truth of their own lives. What surrounds us therefore is a vast tapestry of lies, upon which we feed.

As every single person here knows, the justification for the invasion of Iraq was that Saddam Hussein possessed a highly dangerous body of weapons of mass destruction, some of which could be fired in 45 minutes, bringing about appalling devastation. We were assured that was true. It was not true. We were told that Iraq had a relationship with Al Qaeda and shared responsibility for the atrocity in New York of September 11th 2001. We were assured that was true. It was not true. We were told that Iraq threatened the security of the world. We were assured it was true. It was not true.

The truth is something entirely different. The truth is to do with how the United States understands its role in the world and how it chooses to embody it.

But before I come back to the present I would like to look at the recent past, by which I mean United States foreign policy since the end of the Second World War. I believe it is obligatory upon us to subject this period to at least some kind of even limited scrutiny which is all that time will allow here.

Everyone knows what happened in the Soviet Union and throughout Eastern Europe during the post-war period. The systematic brutality, the widespread atrocities, the ruthless suppression of independent thought. All this has been fully documented and verified.

But my contention here is that the US crimes in the same period have only been superficially recorded, let alone documented, let alone acknowledged, let alone recognised as crimes at all. I believe this must be addressed and that the truth has considerable bearing on the world stands now. Although constrained, to a certain extent, by the existence of the Soviet Union, the United States’ actions throughout the world made it clear that it had concluded it had carte blanche to do what it liked.

Direct invasion of a sovereign state has never in fact been America’s favoured method. In the main, it has preferred what it has described as ‘low intensity conflict’. Low intensity conflict means that thousands of people die but slower than if you dropped a bomb on them in one fell swoop. It means that you infect the heart of the country, that you establish a malignant growth and watch the gangrene bloom. When the populace has been subdued – or beaten to death – the same thing – and your own friends, the military and the great corporations, sit comfortably in power, you go before the camera and say that democracy has prevailed.

Extract from Harold Pinter’s Nobel Lecture, ‘Art, Truth & Politics’
http://nobelprize.org/literature/lauratreates/2005/pinter-lecture-e.html

The winter’s passed,
The summer’s here.
For this we thank Our party dear!

On January 19th the Scottish Parliament’s Culture Minister Patricia Ferguson delivered their response to the Executive’s £500,000 Culture Commission’s 131 recommendations. [See Variant, issue 24 editorial for an appraisal.] The statement that the Executive aims to “support plans to nurture the best creative and cultural talent while cutting back on unnecessary bureaucracy” has been treated as a dismissal of the Commission’s seemingly over-complex proposals, but will instigate some of its lesser recommendations.

Spelled out by the Minister in a procedural and distancing vernacular, they will legislate for “a legal framework for delivering rights and entitlements”. The Minister tells us that the priorities will develop plans to ensure every person in Scotland is entitled to access cultural activity, reflecting the needs and wishes of local people and communities” within Community Planning—following Best Value.

Community Planning is another oxymoron for extending the involvement of private sectors in public services.

As expected, the Scottish Arts Council (SAC) and Scottish Screen are to be merged creating “a new cultural development agency called Creative Scotland […] with the key task of developing talent and excellence in all branches of the arts, and the creative and screen industries.” However, it will not oversee the National performing companies as the Executive is to now do so directly, with former Scottish Arts Council staff transferred to an Executive unit responsible. There is also to be another review, this time of the National Institutions’ collections. The SAC in response have stated: “The impact on staffing and other resources following their transfer is expected to be minimal.”

While the Centre for Cultural Policy Research at Glasgow University believe, the “proposed changes are more about tinkering with structures than making a radical shift.”

Predictably, there is to be a Scotland-the-Brand “recognition scheme for Scotland’s creative sector.”

Blanket ‘Cultural spend’ by 2007-08 is said by the Minister to “rise to £234 million per annum”, but only once “contribution to local authority cultural expenditure is included”. Such heightened emphasis on Local Authority involvement is what many suspect and raises the spectre of increased tiered political buying—such that a plan to rationalise “unnecessary bureaucracy” will in fact increase the bureaucratisation of culture.

The widely reported “plans to invest an extra £20 million per year from April 2007” relate to the Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport’s entire brief: from National Companies (and their deficits) to fitting out libraries, Sports Scotland, Cultural Portal, Scotland’s Cultural Resources Access Network, Scottish Schools Digital Network, and all the Schools’ curriculum pursuits including reading and music programmes… Not to forget the rushfule to be Creative Scotland with the likely redundancies fixed, office relocations, redesign and rebranding sinks, and the marketing of a needless celebrity award.

“Proposals for a National Box Office”—“a one-stop-shop for culture and sport ticketing”—“will be scoped by the Executive and its national cultural and tourism agencies”. Given their history of waste in this area with fiascos like VisitScotland (an internet gateway set up to promote tourism), we wait to see if this will be another over-priced PPP IT contract, preceded by publicly paid for private consultation out of the Edinburgh finance district.

With the Executive, and McConnell in particular, having recently been embarrassingly chastised by Westminster for posturing on immigration issues [see: ‘They All Belong to Glasgow’ in this issue], is unnecessary legislation on the vagaries of “cultural entitlement” the end of distraction from hard politics that the people of Scotland intended for a Scottish Parliament? Is this not really a mask of unbending responsibilities for delivery onto local government with Parliament being seen to be doing something akin to a legislative programme? Regardless, the reported financial increase is deemed not to start before 2007/8, and the third general election to the Scottish Parliament will be held on May 3, 2007, so no one should feel obliged to keep any vague promises made now with all the competing pressures in an election year.

With the media diversion on how ‘the Arts’ as a category-of-their-concern will supposedly benefit, we also have to know how the reported increase relates to Glasgow’s 2014 Commonwealth Games bid, if successful—the winning city is announced today, though its bid will have to be shored up now [see: ‘Constructing Neoliberal Glasgow: The Privatisation Of Space’ in this issue]. To say nothing of Scotland’s spend on the 2012 London Olympic.

So how has the alleged £20m increase been calculated? For example: The Executive “will make available £400k per annum over the next two years to enable a new match-funding sponsorship initiative proposed by Arts and Business. Arts and Business will use our support to incentivise private sector sponsorship of national cultural initiatives over £700k in additional support for the arts each year, through a mix of public and private sector financing.” Has £400k been sexed-up as a possible future £700k, as it looks that way.

Really there needs to be an accurate assessment of the current deficit in funding across the board for any sum to have any meaning in the overall context of what it’s being applied to. Then, once we know what it’s to cover exactly, a statement of how these time-limited increases (if they are) have been calculated and what they are going to have to cover in terms of stand-still funding now and thereafter given inflation (an announced bid today is not going to be of that value if it kicks-in in a couple of years time and then eight years down the line). And, importantly, any expansion of the Minister’s briefs in support of other policy areas, as expressed in McConnell’s St. Andrew’s Day 2003 Speech—it’s no secret that the Executive needs the excuse of Culture to redirect funding into major taxation areas together with using it as a tool to extend the involvement of private sectors into public services. Is this really what we want?

http://www.scotland.gov.uk/News/Releases/2006/01/19093710

The Comedian’s Comic
François Matarasso of new Labour think-tank Comedia is the new Chair of the Arts Council England, East Midlands and therefore a member of the national Arts Council England governing body. Described on their web site as “a freelance writer and art researcher, specialising in community-based cultural activity and its role in people’s lives”, worryingly there is no mention of his more prominent position as a private consultant going up and down the country promoting a very polite description of government control of the arts—Matarasso’s research was designed to add a dimension to existing economic and aesthetic rationales for the arts by looking at how these time-limited increases (if they are) have been calculated and what they are going to have to cover in terms of stand-still funding now and thereafter given inflation (an announced bid today is not going to be of that value if it kicks-in in a couple of years time and then eight years down the line). And, importantly, any expansion of the Minister’s briefs in support of other policy areas, as expressed in McConnell’s St. Andrew’s Day 2003 Speech—it’s no secret that the Executive needs the excuse of Culture to redirect funding into major taxation areas together with using it as a tool to extend the involvement of private sectors into public services. Is this really what we want?

Beyond Social Inclusion: Towards Cultural Democracy
http://www.culturaldemocracy.net/
Dear Editor, 

For years I subscribed to Living Marxism, until it ceased publishing. I noticed the magazine’s libertarian turn and it published a number of letters I wrote, critiquing articles which were becoming increasingly bizarre, at any rate in an ostensibly left-wing publication.

Mike Small is correct to say that the LM group are right-wing, but his suggestion that a clique is conspiring to enter the media is not correct. LM may or may not have an agenda, whatever that means, but there is no secret that rightwingers and establishment supporters are welcomed by a media only too willing to offer them space. Ever since Thatcher the political scene have moved steadily right. I am therefore envious about this. LM are not going to subvert anything and conspiracy is unnecessary: they are part of a ruling establishment.

When Mike Small says that the Moral Maze is the apogee of British broadcasting intellectualism, I hope he is being ironic. The Moral Maze, Any Questions, Thoughts for the Day (are no thoughts expressed in this 4-minute sermon on the Today programme?), all are products of a narrow, philistine, querulous middle-class for whom preserving the status quo is a paramount aim. Besides, since when has Radio 4 usurped Radio 3 to become the intellectual station?

Mike Small complains that it is disingenuous of LM to present themselves as beyond left and right. No, it is not disingenuous; it’s the age-old, transparent argument of the right. Perhaps too, it was not naïve of the book festival organisers to invite LM to its platform. It might have been exactly what they wanted and now they too, can bask in the reflected glory of the right.

Yours, 

René Gimpel

Mike Small replies:

After writing the piece I have heard many more examples of LM members co-hosting radio programmes with fellow members of LM fronts; Spiked, and the Institute of Ideas (I of I). Mike Small is correct to say that the LM group are right-wing, but his suggestion that a clique is conspiring to enter the media is not correct. It is quite correct. I was not advocating conspiracy but describing a clear and evident process, being tracked and researched by Spinwatch amongst others.

Most disturbing perhaps is their infiltration of key posts in areas of ethical debate and policy. For example Juliet Tizard is not the only Freudelite embedded in the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA), the government body which regulates and monitors all human embryo research conducted in the UK.

Ann Furedi, wife of Revolutionary Communist Party founder Frank Furedi, used to work at HFEA (before she went back to direct the abortion lobby group BPAS), and Ann’s good friend Vishnee Burton) is director of communications at the British Pregnancy Advisory Service (BPAS). Ann Furedi (also known as Ann Bradley and Ann Burton) is director of communications at the British Pregnancy Advisory Service.

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 the ProChoice Forum network. Both Lee and the ProChoice Forum are closely associated with Furedi, Tizzard, et al. As I described, at a conference at Kent University Jackson publicly endorsed human reproductive cloning. 

As well as contributing articles to LM, Tizzard has also contributed to the LM network’s later fronts; Spiked, and the Institute of Ideas (I of I).

She also wrote a chapter for the I of I publication, Designer Babies: Where Should We Draw The Line? (Dodder and Stoughton, 2002).

Then there’s Dr Ellie Lee the co-ordinator of the ProChoice Forum and lecturer in Social Policy at the University of Kent. Surely enough when Ann’s husband Frank Furedi worked. Lee was on the Moral Maze last year (funny that eh?) where she stated her mantra that “abortion should be available as easily as possible and as late as necessary”. She was asked: suppose a mother gave birth to a baby at full term, and then just as the umbilical cord was cut, she found out that the infant had been aborted? Should she be allowed to have the baby killed? “I think so,” yes,” replied Dr Lee.

These people aren’t trivial. We have a pro-cloning lobbyist in charge of regulating cloning.

I have no problem with Gimpel’s argument that “LM are not going to subvert anything and conspiracy is unnecessary: they are part of a ruling establishment.” Accept that they are presented as being iconoclasts, critical theorists, the cutting edge of British broadcasting intellectualism, that last paragraph. Why didn’t the best of Human Rights Watch’s knowledge include:

“The article quotes Marc Garlasco, Senior Military Analyst at Human Rights Watch (HRW): “One thing I want to make clear is we are talking about some really bad guys,” Mr Garlasco said. “These are criminals who need to be brought to justice. One of our main problems with the U.S. is that justice is not being served by having these people held innocent.” Mr Garlasco said, “Our concern is that if illegal methods such as torture are being used against them,” trials may “either be impossible or questionable under international standards of jurisprudence.”

On December 4, 2005 I wrote to Mr. Garlasco, asking:

1. Did the New York Times quote you correctly?
2. If not, will you ask for a formal correction to the NYT?
3. If yes, don’t you think your words are quite bizarre for a HRW’s representative? Did we get to the point that even HRW doesn’t care for the presumption of innocence? Is that really HRW’s concern about torture?

In my e-mail I also wrote:

I had the opportunity to interview HRW’s Reed Brody and Manny Megally just a few years ago. Also because of those interviews I have great esteem and respect for the work of your organization. I fear that your words — as reported by the New York Times’ article — will damage HRW’s image and the trust many people have for its work.

Since I haven’t received any answer, I have now decided to write you an open letter to reiterate my questions and also to ask you if someone who “recommended thousands of定点目标 during operations in Iraq and Serbia” (and who also participated in over 50 interrogations as a subject matter expert) fits a senior position at Human Rights Watch.

Mr. Garlasco’s biography reads:

“Before coming to HRW, Marc spent seven years in the Pentagon as a senior intelligence analyst covering Iraq. His last position there was chief of high-value targeting during the Iraq War in 2003. Marc was on the Operation Desert Fox (Iraq) Battle Damage Assessment team in 1998, led a Pentagon Battle Damage Assessment team to Kosovo in 1999, and recommended thousands of aimpoints on hundreds of targets during operations in Iraq and Serbia. He also participated in over 50 interrogations as a subject matter expert.”

According to The Chronicle of Higher Education, Mr. Garlasco also had an interesting role in damaging a study “published in The Lancet, a prestigious British medical journal, concluding that about 100,000 civilians had been killed in Iraq since it was invaded by a United States-led coalition in March 2003.”

Notes on Watching Human Rights Watch

Macdonald Stainsby, Variant issue 21

Open Letter to Kenneth Roth, Executive Director Human Rights Watch

From Gabriele Zamparini

Dear Mr. Kenneth Roth, Executive Director Human Rights Watch,

On December 2, 2005 the New York Times published an article with the title ‘Rights Group Lists 26 It Says U.S. Is Holding in Secret Abroad’. The article quotes Marc Garlasco, Senior Military Analyst at Human Rights Watch (HRW): “One thing I want to make clear is we are talking about some really bad guys,” Mr Garlasco said. “These are criminals who need to be brought to justice. One of our main problems with the U.S. is that justice is not being served by having these people held innocent.”

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The Chronicle of Higher Education writes:

“The Washington Post, perhaps most damagingly to the study’s reputation, quoted Marc E. Garlasco, a senior military analyst at Human Rights Watch, as saying, “These numbers seem to be inflated.” Mr. Garlasco says now that he hadn’t read the paper at the time and calls his quote in The Post "really unfortunate." He says he told the reporter, “I haven’t read it. I haven’t seen it. I don’t know anything about it, so I shouldn’t comment on it.” But, Mr. Garlasco continues, “Like any good journalist, he got me to.”

Mr Garlasco says he misunderstood the reporter’s description of the paper’s results:

Marc Garlasco, Senior Military Analyst at HRW also had an interesting role in a BBC’s Editorial Complaints Unit’s investigation following a series of Media Lens’ Alerts on the BBC’s reporting on Falluja. The BBC reports:

In its verdict that the NewsWatch report was not misleading, the Editorial Complaints Unit — which investigates complaints independently of journalists — cited the evidence given to it by the HRW spokesman: “I find nothing inaccurate in what Paul stated. I think the issue is with the choice of the word ‘investigation’. As Paul noted, we did not have a full-fledged investigation with testimony from eyewitnesses, etc.

“What we did have, and I communicated to him [BBC’s defence correspondent Paul Wood, who was embedded with the US marines in Falluja at the time] was an investigation more on the lines of what I would term an inquiry. We had folks try to get into Falluja but were unable, and we had folks talk to people in Baghdad who had left Falluja.

“But the information was not of the quality for us to do any reporting. Beyond that, we made inquiries to the US Government, and other press. To the best of our knowledge no banned weapons were used during either battle of Falluja.”

Dear Mr. Roth, I would kindly ask you to re-read that last paragraph. Why didn’t the best of Human Rights Watch’s knowledge include:

1. “Some artillery guns fired white phosphorous rounds that create a screen of fire that cannot be extinguished with water: insurgents reported being attacked with a substance that melted their skin.”


US Troops Reportedly Gassing Falluja, Islam Online, November 10, 2004

5
Letters (continued)

3. “The U.S. military has used poison gas and other non-conventional weapons against civilians in Fallujah, eyewitnesses report.”

‘Unusual Weapons Used in Fallujah’, by Dahr Jamail, November 26, 2004

4. “I saw cluster bombs everywhere, and so many bodies that were burned, dead with no bullets in them. So they definitely used fire weapons, especially in Julan district.”

‘An Eyewitness Account of Fallujah’, by Dahr Jamail, December 16, 2004

5. “White Phosphorous. WP proved to be an effective and versatile munition. We used it for screening missions at two breaches and, later in the fight, as a potent psychological weapon against the insurgents in trench lines and spider holes when we could not get effects on them with HE. We fired “shake and bake” missions at the insurgents, using WP to flush them out and HE to take them out. […] We used improved WP for screening missions when HE smoke would have been more effective and saved our WP for lethal missions.”


6. “Bogert is a mortar team leader who directed his men to fire round after round of high explosives and white phosphorus charges into the city Friday and Saturday, never knowing what the targets were or what damage the resulting explosions caused. […] “Gun up!” Millikin yelled when they finished a few seconds later, grabbing a white phosphorus round from a nearby ammo can and holding it over the tube. “Fire!” Bogert yelled, as Millikin dropped it. The boom kicked dust around the pit as they ran through the drill again and again, sending a mixture of burning white phosphorus and high explosives they call “shake ‘n’ bake” into a cluster of buildings where insurgents have been spotted all week.”

‘Violence Subsides for Marines in Fallujah’, by Darrin Mortenson, North County Times, Saturday, April 10, 2004

I am not making any charge. I am just asking questions. Is it still possible to ask questions in these dark times of pre-emptive wars? After embedded journalists, shall we have embedded human rights organizations? Shouldn’t Caesar’s wife be above suspicion?

Kind regards,

Gabriele Zamparini
info@thecatsdream.com

Notes


2. ‘Questions for Human Rights Watch’, Gabriele Zamparini’s e-mail to Marc Garlasco, Senior Military Analyst HRW and Kenneth Roth, Executive Director HRW


3. Bio of Human Rights Watch’s Mark Garlaesco, Mother Jones, October 2, 2005


http://chronicle.com/free/v51/i22/22a01001.htm

5. Ibidem

6. Rapid Response Media Alert: Doubt Cast On BBC Claims Regarding Fallujah, Media Lens, April 18, 2005

http://www.medialens.org/alerts/05/0418_doubt_cast_on_bbc.php

7. NewsWatch complaint not upheld, NewsWatch, BBC News, 3 August 2005

http://news.bbc.co.uk/newswatch/ukfish/ Newsid_4741400/4741431.stm
Poetry was his interest (a sort of secret hobby). Highlighting a sensitivity that his outward appearance belied. He had been an electrician, was an electrician; but work was hard to come by and now he was sleeping later.

He'd even written a poem for the bin men after they had woken him several weeks in succession:

The urge to sing is great we know
The tenements close the walls echo
But spare a thought for those who keep
Some different hours and need their sleep

Neatly typed on Peter's word processor he had affixed the poem in purple ink to the inside back door of the close. That Thursday morning would henceforth in his mind be thought of as the laughter morning: the guffaws and groans of hysteria resonating well into the weekend.

He hadn't shown his work since but was proud of some fragments he had guarded in a small black spiral bound notebook that still smelled faintly of malodorous damp storage.

And another little piece of paranoid poetry (as he referred to it privately thus, with gentle irony, and no small amount of thinly veiled angst):

Didn't know how long he had been observed.
Followed. Hadn't seen them at the garden fence.
Under surveillance; electrically dense.
Interestingly, he couldn't explain just how, precisely, he had written this. It seemed to ooz forth from the ozone one Saturday morning as he sat ruminating breakfast.

The fridge had felt nice and cold to his head at first that morning. He'd almost wanted to hold a bottle against his scapula and then drink coolly, but on trying this the temperature had gradually increased and then the slow water trickled smelly towards the floor.

Of course, he did not attribute his verse solely to himself but rather ascribed to the somewhat cosmic view that inspiration was, relatively speaking and without religious overtones, divine. His muse had been the clothes pole standing slightly obliquely in the back garden closest to his window. Proud holder of knotted blue twine and rotting remains of Indian weave peg bag. It was while gazing upon this pole that he had seen the bush twitching. True bird watchers, twitchers, in the vernacular, would mutter and mumble to themselves or, more accurately, to microphone and cassette devices discreetly secreted about their persons or hidden in their hats. These men were, it appeared, actually watching him (with binoculars).

At least two of them were; one was reading a copy of Understanding Alchemy and occasionally giggling to himself attempting to muffle his mirth. The other was a small overly hot antechamber.

His late arrival had been celebrated with a photograph. Not a modern digital job but strangely, left to develop as he awaited their bidding in the back garden closest to the house. Proud holder of knotted blue twine and a suit to boot. Cute.

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He suddenly remembered BANG for no BANG apparent reason his last formal interview. Where BANG.

Three dull grey faces clouded over in lack of amusement BANG you bastards. "I'm not usually late," he essayed. Too late. BANG.

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Do you have any faults? Sunshine somehow seemed to stultify and strangle the air in the office. His mouth biscuit-dry and gummed shut. Faults? He was a veritable tapestry of faults: it was what held him together. He tried humour. “I get stress incontinence.” BANG BANG
Ahmed Khan: I'm a consultant psychiatrist. I've been doing the solitary protest at Glasgow's Brand Street immigration removal centre since June 2005, when I was the only one there. There are now groups protesting, especially on a Saturday, although I'm not a member or affiliate of anything.

The Home Office building at Festival Court on Brand Street, Ibrox is where asylum seekers are forced to sign on every week with their family, and whenever else they're called. They only get 70% of the minimum social security. It's where the immigration snatch squad is based that conducts dawn raids on asylum families, forcibly removing them from their homes. When the families walk in to Brand Street to report they are very, very scared as they don't know if they're coming out again.

People go in to sign on and some leave handcuffed in a van, taken to one of the immigrant prisons like Dunagavel or Yarls Wood, before being deported. It's very unpredictable but the families have been saying that if they know there are people outside supporting them it makes them feel better. When you go to Brand Street, especially on a Saturday, you see families with children, toddlers, babies forced to queue up from early in the morning to report. If the general public were made to stand outside and see this they wouldn't tolerate it. They wouldn't be able to live with it.

I'm not there as a political agitator, I'm there from a humanist point of view. The first time I protested I had a placard I found in the street that said, "This is our family", and the police tried to arrest me—they regularly harassed and intimidated me. The authorities are so upset because they have no rights. All we're doing, one way or another, is fighting to give them basic human rights.

When the changes to asylum legislation came into force in 2004, it seemed they were detaining everyone at random. And because many didn't have access to legal representation it was difficult to know how many. It's still unclear how anyone is selected—people have been detained before their cases have even been processed! Immigration go out early morning, they grab people and take them. The government uses the phrase “administrative removal” for deportations. According to the UN: "the methods employed to effect removals should be consistent with human rights requirements and failed asylum seekers should be treated humanely" and that "specially designed return programmes for children should be established which incorporate the necessary safeguards." So, someone bursting into your house at 4am in the morning, dragging you out in your night-clothes, handcuffed, leaving the door wide open with all your possessions inside, dragging away your children, putting you into vans, driving you four to five hundred miles to Yarls Wood on the outskirts of Bedford (because we made such a fuss about Dunagavel)… essentially it's terror tactics.

"On 20 September, the First Minister spoke out on dawn raids on Scottish asylum families like the Vucaj family. On 13 September, this family was subjected to a terrifying dawn raid by a sixteen strong immigration snatch squad. Mr Vucaj and 17 year old Elvis were handcuffed and South, 13 years old, thought she was still dreaming.

"Despite condemnation from every section of Scottish society, the immigration raids have not stopped."

"On 14 October 2005, the Kupeli children, Suna (g) and Yagmar (6), pupils at Blackfriars Primary School, Gorbals, were dragged screaming from their beds at dawn by a twelve strong immigration snatch squad. Their mother and father were both handcuffed and the family was taken separately in caged vans to Brand Street Immigration Office and then to Yarls Wood Removal Centre, Bedfordshire. (The family were bailed on the 9th November, making it very questionable as to why they were detained in the first place.)"
out for qualified people at all levels and yet we’re throwing these people out. It defies common sense and logic. Bureaucracy gone mad.”

Paddy Hill, Miscarriages of Justice Organisation (MOJO)

The whole refugee issue is surrounded by ignorance. Essentially what the government has been doing the last couple of years is making you scared of things you shouldn’t be scared of, and not telling you about things you should be scared of. The general public are ignorant of what’s going on and even the presence of Brand Street. Secondly, it’s ignorance of racism—what motivates the system here is out-and-out racism. I don’t see any white faces going in to report at Brand Street. You don’t meet any Australians or New Zealanders. Scotland’s First Minister Jack McConnell has recently gone to the US and Canada on this ‘Fresh Talent’ tour, bringing a number of people coming to live and work in Scotland, while they’re detaining and deporting the people who want to be here.

Notes

1. www.scottishlabour.org.uk/freshtalentspeech/
2. www.guardian.co.uk/uk_news/story/0,3604,1677505,00.html
3. www.ncadc.org.uk
4. www.openborders.org.uk
5. www.standup4children.org
6. www.positiveactioninhousing.org.uk

3. www.charity-commission.gov.uk/publications/cfca3
4. www.guardian.co.uk/uk_news/story/0,3604,1677505,00.html
5. www.scottishlabour.org.uk/freshtalentspeech/

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Knightwood into a refugee union, formed a database of everyone there, and the kids in school formed support groups so when the Vucaj family were detained they responded immediately.

“Mr McConnell wanted to have a private meeting with us. So we started talking to him and expressed the issues. I looked in his eyes and I begged him, ‘Please help us.’ He said he would see what he could do. He looked like he understood. He gave us so much hope and we had so much faith in him. But after that we went to the parliament again because the Vucaj family were taken away. That time Mr McConnell did not meet us. Saida Vucaj wanted to talk to him. I was upset. She is just a 13-year-old girl and she was saying please help us. It was a horrible feeling. We’ve pictures of us crying from then.

“I really thought he would help us. But obviously there’s no help from him. He didn’t just let me down, he let me and all the others. But vox pops down.”

Sunday Herald, Dec 11 2005, Amal Azzudin, aged 15, Glasgow Girls

The Girls went to a meeting at the Scottish Parliament with Jack McConnell and said to him you lot are all talk, what are you actually going to do for the right of all young people to stay in Scotland, and against deportations? Since they were a group of youngsters who basically put McConnell on the spot they got a lot of publicity. McConnell publicly agreed with them that the diaspora were outrageous... blahdeblah... what everyone wanted to hear. And when it looked like the Scottish Parliament might act the Immigration Minister Tony McNulty was dispatched from Westminster and McConnell stopped talking like that. The parliament’s political impetus to deal with this situation stopped, but more and more people are organising.

“Today the immigration officers came in my house at 9am. First they knocked on the door, then someone said ‘open the door now, I am from the Immigration Service’.

“I am not that sure how many of them there were at the door, but I felt very scared. I was very scared. I was terrified. I was very scared when I saw them because they were telling us to get up and one of them told me to tell my mum that we had to leave the UK that Friday.

“When they came [referring to dawn raid] I just jumped up, thinking what are these four people doing in my room? I was dead scared, you know, I was not thinking, all my good clothes are in my house, I forgot, I left my new clothes and took my old ones, just tired, never expected it, they just said get up. I was shaking, I was tired, I was scared. But my mum was crying in the other room. Here, my mum says I get scared in the middle of the night, I wake and scream some nights... As soon as I wake up I can’t remember why I’m scared, but I feel scared.

“Life in Yarls Wood every single day is becoming more boring. It is. I’m here three weeks and it’s like brain damage, because you’re trapped inside.

“It feels like I’ve done something wrong to be in a prison. I can’t hardly eat, only once a day, because, honest, I’m very, very depressed.

“Mum’s depressed, crying in bed all day, but she’s hanging there. I’m not joking. I’m scared if my mum gets sick. She is already sick with worrying about our case in Glasgow for five years. My dad, he is the same as my mum, very depressed. His eyes are red, his head is pure thumping. But we just have to hang on there, keep strong.

“I heard about my girls meeting the First Minister. He is helping? I haven’t been to the Scottish Parliament, but I could go one day. Have you been there? “If I saw the First Minister, I would just say ‘Hi, how are you doing? I hope you and your family is very well. And if you help me and my family, I would thank you so much’.

“How could I forget life in Glasgow? I love my Glasgow, I remember going shopping with my friends, having fun, listening to music in my own room, not worrying, having my own space.”

“If we come back to Glasgow, I want to finish the book, ‘The Ragged Boy’, with our teacher Mr Turnbull. Anyway, I’m writing my own book now in here—I don’t know my book finishes, but I’ll see tomorrow what’s gonna happen.

“The government might say that Kosovo is safe, but if only they lived there for just two days they would change their minds. Two days there feels like five years. The British government just don’t understand. That’s why I am angry. But what can I do? I am just a child.”

Saida Vucaj, aged 13

Saturday morning vigils at the Brand Street Immigration Centre Immigration and Nationality Directorate office, Festival Court, 200 Brand Street, Glasgow G51 1DH. Nearest Underground, Cessnock.

3. www.charity-commission.gov.uk/publications/cfca3
4. www.guardian.co.uk/uk_news/story/0,3604,1677505,00.html
5. www.scottishlabour.org.uk/freshtalentspeech/
From Precarity to Precariously and Back Again: Labour, Life and Unstable Networks

In Florian Schneider’s documentary Organizing the Unorganizable (2002), Raj Jayadev of the DE-BUG worker’s collective in Silicon Valley identifies the central problem of temporary labour as one of time. Jayadev recounts the story of ‘Edward’, a staff-employee who, having spent six months as a software engineer before being made redundant, finds it impossible to secure a new job: “My Mondays roll into my Tuesdays, and my Tuesdays roll into my Wednesdays without me knowing it. And I lose track of time and I lose hope with what tomorrow’s going to be.” Jayadev continues: “What concerns temp workers the most is not so much a $2 an hour pay raise or safer working conditions. Rather, they want the ability to create, to look forward to something new, and to reclaim the time of life? How does this desire to create, to both equally associated with artistic production, intersect with the experiences of other workers who engage in precarious forms of labour?

With the transformation of labour practices in advanced capitalist systems under the impact of globalisation and information technologies, there has arisen a proliferation of terms to describe the sometimes experienced yet largely undocumented transformations within working life. Creative labour, network labour, cognitive labour, service labour, affective labour, lived labour, immaterial labour; these categories often substitute for each other, but in their very multiplicity they point to diverse qualities of experience that are not simply reducible to each other. On the one hand these labour practices are the oppressive face of post-Fordist capitalism, yet they also contain possibilities that originate from workers’ own refusal of labour and subjective demands for flexibility – demands that in many ways precipitate capital’s own access to interminable restructuring and rescaling, and in so doing condition capital’s own techniques and regimes of control.

The complexity of these relationships has amounted to a crisis within modes of organisation based around the paranoid triad: union, state, firm. Time and again, across the past fifteen years, we heard proclamations of the end of the nation-state, its loss of control or subordination to new forms of political organisation, most notably those of the union and political party. Instead, we find the logic of the network unleashed, manifesting as situated interventions whose effects traverse a combination of spatial scales. The passage from the precarity of events towards the importance of relations. It makes sense, then, to also consider the operation of networks, which above all else are socio-technical systems made possible by the contingency of relations.

Uncertainty, Flexibility, Transformation

To begin to grapple with the sort of questions sketched above it is necessary to acknowledge that the concept of precarity is constituted double-edged. On the one hand, it describes an increasing change of previously guaranteed permanent employment conditions into mainly worse paid, uncertain jobs. In this sense, precarity leads to an interminable lack of certainty, the condition of being unable to predict one’s time, including determined by external forces”. The term refers to all possible shapes of unsure, not guaranteed, flexible exploitation: from illegalised, seasonal and temporary employment to homework, flex- and temp-work to subcontractors, freelancers or so-called self-employed persons. But its reference also extends beyond the world of work to encompass other aspects of interstitial life, including housing, debt, and the ability to build affective social relations.

Classically, the story told about precarity is that it was capital’s response to the rejection of ‘jobs for life’ and demands for free time and flexibility by workers in the 1970s. Thus the opposite of precarity is not regular work, stable housing, and so on. Rather, such material security is another version of precarity, consuming time, energy, and affective relations as well as producing the anxiety that results from the “financialisation of daily life” – to steal a felicitous phrase from Randy Martin (2002). Among other things, the notion of precarity has provided a ratcheting call and connecting device for struggles surrounding citizenship, labour rights, the social wage, and migration. And importantly, these struggles are imagined to require new methods of creative-social organisation that do not make recourse to social state models, trade union solidarities, or Fordist economic structures. The political challenge is to determine whether the uncertain, unpredictable condition of precarity can operate as an empirical object of thought and practice. Precarity would seem to cancel out the possibility of such an undertaking, since the empirical object is presupposed as stable and controllable, whereas, the boundaries between labour, action, and intellect appear increasingly indistinct within a post-Fordist mode of production. Can common resources (political organisation) be found within individual and collective experiences of permanent insecurity? Furthermore, is there a relationship between the potential for political organisation and the technics of communication facilitated by digital technologies? In sum, what promise does precarity offer as a strategy and why has it emerged at this precise historical moment as a key concept for political thought and struggle?

In order to address these questions, we first outline the distinction between ‘precarity’ and ‘precariously’. In surveying the various ways in which these terms have circulated, we wish to establish a framework within which questions of labour, life and social-political organisation can be understood. The various uncertainties defining contemporary life are carried over – and, we argue, internal to – the logic of informatisation. Our aim, however, is not to collapse respective differences into a totalling logic that provides a definitive assessment or system of analysis; rather, we seek to identify some of the feedbacks, rhythms, discourses and actions that render notions such as creativity, innovation, and organisation, along with the operation of capital, with a complexity whose material effects are locally situated within transversal networks. Where there is instances of inter-connection between, say, the work of migrants packaging computer parts or cleaning offices and that of media labour in a call centre, software development firm or digital post-production for a film studio, we see a common expressive capacity predicated on the dual conditions of exploitation and uncertainty.

Yet to cast the experience of informational labour as exclusively oppressive is to overlook the myriad ways in which new socialities emerge with the potential to create political relations that force an adjustment in the practices of capital. Such collectivities are radically different from earlier forms of political organisation, most notably those of the union and political party. Instead, we find the logic of the network unleashed, manifesting as situated interventions whose effects traverse a combination of spatial scales. The passage from the precarity of events towards the importance of relations. It makes sense, then, to also consider the operation of networks, which above all else are socio-technical systems made possible by the contingency of relations.
that the dynamic relationship between material production and social reproduction conveys, under conditions of precarity, on the horizon of language and communication. This argument, as developed in the work of thinkers like Christian Marazzi (1999) and Paolo Virno (2004a, 2004b), has been redeplored in any number of contexts to question the boundaries between creative action and social labour. It would be foolish to underestimate the political viability of these interventions. But implicit in this tendency to collapse otherwise disparate forms of labour into the containing category of creativity is an eclipse of those forms of bodily, coerced, and unpaid work primarily associated with migrants and women (and not with artists, computer workers, or new media labourers)

In this sense, it is probably not a good thing that precarity has become the meme of the moment. Precarity, as the epoch-breaking characteristic of contemporary labour market transformations, while doubtless augmenting the rhetorical force of the struggles surrounding precarity, inevitably occludes two things: the historically specific nature of modernisation, Moulier-Boutang contends that the salariat category of creativity is an eclipse of those forms of labour and, in particular, the mobility of labour. It is not coincidental that neoliberal globalisation and the boom-bust dot.com cycle of information technology have placed new pressures on labour markets in the wealthy countries, it is also important to approach this wider global perspective in a second fact: that capital too is precarious, given to crises, risk, and uncertainty.

**Labour, Communication, Movement**

Importantly, capital has always tried to shore up its own precariousness through the control of labour and, in particular, the mobility of labour. It is the insight of Moulier-Boutang’s *Dé l’esclavage au salariat* (1998) to identify the subjective practice of labour mobility as the connecting thread in the history of capitalism. Far from being archaisms or transitory aberrations destined to be wiped out by modernisation, Moulier-Boutang contends that labour regimes such as slavery and indenture are constituent of capitalist development and arise precisely to frustrate the free movement of the worker’s flight. In this perspective, the figure of the undocumented migrant becomes the exemplary precarious subject, in the current global formation, the entire system of border control and detention technology provides the principal means by which capital controls the mobility of labour. Because the regulation and force of any smuggling labour threatens to engulf the workforce as a whole (and because the subjective mobility and resistance of migrants tests the limits of capitalist control), their position becomes the social anticipation of a political option to struggle against the general development of labour and life in the contemporary world (Mezzadra, 2001; Mezzadra, 2004).

A similar argument can be made regarding the unemployed labour of women, both as regards the status of the patriarchal family as the locus of the reproduction of labour power in capitalist societies and preponderance of women in precarious sectors such as care-work, house-work, or call centres (Hardt and Negri, 2000: 252–293, 2004: 110–111; Huws, 2003). Indeed, the Madrid-based journal Precariedad e Deriva, which has always resisted the temptation to use the term precarity as a common name for diverse and singular situations, has devoted much of its research to the feminisation of precarious work. And the sheer proliferation of women in contemporary labour migration flows means that there is a real take-off of communication strategies through which an analysis of the role of border technologies in capital’s attempts to minimise its precarity and enhance those that focus on the ongoing marginalisation and undervaluation of women’s work (Anderson, 2000; Gill, 2002; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001; Parrenas, 2001; Huws, 2003).

The point is to suggest that the figure of the wither migrant or female care-worker in the discussions and actions surrounding also too to collapse these various kinds of labour practice into a composite category, such as the much circulated term *precariat* (which combines the words precario and proletariato). Equally, it is insufficient to subordinate these very different labour practices to a single logic of production (which is the tactic followed by Hardt and Negri when they argue that all forms of labour in the contemporary world, while maintaining their specificity, are transformed and mastered by processes of commodification). In terms of political and strategic work, the belief there is something to be gained by holding these labour practices in categories of conceptual and material separation but articulating them in struggle.

For instance, the fight for open architectures of electronic communication pursued by many creative workers cannot be equated with the subjective practices of mobility pursued by undocumented labour migrants. While these actions might be conjoned on some conceptual horizon (through notions such as exodus or flow), they have distinct (and always highly contextual) manifestations on the ground. There are clearly important differences between copyright regimes and border control technologies, even if both are ultimately held down by the assertion of sovereign power, whether at the national or transnational level. Recognising this, however, does not mean that the struggles surrounding free software and the ‘no border’ struggles surrounding undocumented migration cannot work in tandem or draw on each other tactically. As the editorial team of *Make*world Paper#1 writes: “the demand to combine the freedom of movement with the freedom of communication is social dynamite” (Bore et al., 2003).

Precarity, then, does not have its model worker. Neither artist nor migrant, nor hacker nor housewife, there is no precarious Stakhno. Rather, precarity strays across any number of labour practices, rendering their relations precisely precarious – which, is to say, given to no essential connection but perpetually open to temporary and contingent relations. In this sense, precarity is something more than a position in the labour market, since it traverses a spectrum of labour markets and positions within them. Moreover, the at best fleeting connections, alliances and affiliations between otherwise distinct social groupings often question much of the current debate around the ‘multitudes’ as somehow constituting a movement of movements. Such a proposition implies a degree of co-ordination and organisation that rarely coalesces at an empirical level beyond the time of the event.

There is little chance, then, that a coherent political opposition will emerge from the organised activities of civil society. Rather, what we see here is a further consolidation of capital. More disconcerting is the likelihood of civil society organisations becoming increasingly decoupled from their material constitution – that is, the continual formation and reformation of social forces from which they were born. This is a predicament faced by activist movements undergoing a scalar transformation. The system of modern sovereignty, which functioned around the dual axiom of representation and rights, cannot encompass these new modes of organisation. Nor can the postliberal model of governance, which rearranges vertical relations into a horizontal order of differentiated subjectivities. Nonetheless, the problem of scale remains. In the case of social movements that begin to engage with what passes as globalisation, this can entail an abstraction of material constitution that is often difficult to separate from the histories and practices of abstract social, cybernetic capitalism. Such a condition begins to explain why there is a tendency to collapse the vastly different situations of workers into the homogenous categories of the multitudes and precarity. This, if you will, is the logic of the empty signifier. And here lies the challenge, and difficulty, of articulating new forms of social-political organisation in ways that remain receptive to local circumstances that are bound to the international division of labour.

The point is to suggest that the category of precarity as a central political motif of the global movement relates not only to labour market conditions and the condition of work and life, but also to the prevalent moods and conditions of labour. For while precarity provides a platform for struggle against the degradation of labour conditions and a means of imagining more flexible and democratic forms of organisation, it also risks dovetailing with the dominant rhetoric of security that emanates from the established political classes of the wealthy world. This is particularly the case for those versions of precarity politics that place that fear in state in action as a means of improving or attenuating the worsening conditions of labour.

**Ontological insecurity in the USA**

Undoubtedly, current perceptions of insecurity are complex and cannot be traced to a single source such as global terrorism, precarity at work, environmental risk, or exposure to the volatility of financial markets (say through pension investments and/or interest rates). At the existential level, these experiences mix or work in concert to create a general feeling of unease. And the conviction that the state (whether conceived on the national scale or in terms of some more extensive sovereign entity like the E.U.) can provide stability in any one of these spheres is not necessarily separable from the notion that it can eliminate risk and contingency in another. Nor does this imply that the struggle against precarity, if not carefully conceived, may bolster and/or feed off state-fueled security politics, but also suggests that there is something deeper about precarity than its articulation to labour alone would suggest – some more fundamental, but never foundational, human vulnerability, that neither the act nor potential of labour can exhaust. This is certainly the sense in which Judith Butler, in *Precarious Life* (2004), confronts what she calls precariness (which should be distinguished from precarity intended in the labour market sense). For Butler, precariness is an ontological and existential category that describes the common, but unevenly distributed, fragility of human corporeal existence. A condition made manifest in the U.S. by the events of 9/11, this fundamental and pre-individual vulnerability is subject to radical denial in the discourses and practices of global security. For instance, Butler understands President George W. Bush’s 9/21 declaration that “our government is angry and our anger to resolution” to constitute a repudiation of precariousness and mourning in the name of action and war work and, it also risks to promote the fantasy that the world formerly was orderly. And she seeks in the recognition of this precariousness an ethical encounter that is essential to the constitution of political and inter-human preconditions for the ‘human’.

Key to Butler’s argument is the proposition that recognition of precariness entails not simply an extrapolation from an understanding of one’s own precariousness to an understanding of
Creative innovation, however, requires a mode of action that escapes this formal space of regulation. Whatever the current privatisation for profit or exclusion, it is hard to escape the observation that the corporate-state nexus increasingly asserts a sovereign command over the very matter of our bodies. With the informationisation of social and economic relations, intellectual property is the regime of scarcity through which control is exerted over the substance of thought. The rush to patent recombinant DNA sequences or the pressure placed upon agricultural industries and government representatives to adopt genetically modified organisms. Despite the dot.com crash of 2000, stocks in biotech industries are again yielding substantial profits – a phenomenon fuelled in part by aging populations that invest in narratives of science and technologies of arrested decay. This revival of biotech stocks can also be seen as a response to the affordable economy associated with the shift of venture capital into the business of bio-terrorism and a move from what Melinda Cooper (2004) calls the irrational exuberance of nineties speculative capital into an era of indefinite insecurity and permanent catastrophe within a post-911 environment. Yet where resides the space of commons exterior to both the state and the interests of the market? Indeed, is it even possible to invoke this sense of exteriority within an ontological and social-technical field of regulation and inherent scarcity? Whatever the current possibilities for desertion or exodus, it is hard to escape the observation of critical potential of such transformations and redefinitions of commodification and capitalist governance that fund terror networks requires a tightening of regulation on that very institution that lies at the heart of global neoliberal enterprise, the deregulated financial market (Napolioni, 2003). Indeed, it may be in these gaps, where scarcity and capital come into conflict, that the future of precarious life will determine its mode of articulation, where precariousness meets precarity, and the struggle against neoliberalism that dominated the global movement from Seattle might finally work in tandem with the struggle against war. Such a realisation must be central to any politics that seeks to reach beyond the limits of precarity as a strategy of organisation.

Innovative Capacities and Common Resources

Key to understanding the human capacity for innovation is the recognition that such change is not the norm but the exception, something that occurs rarely and unexpectedly. Virno (2004b) pursues a reading of paragraph 206 Wittgenstein’s Philosophical Investigations, concerning the impossibility of applying rules, in an attempt to understand the conditions of such an exception and their radical difference from organisational models that extract an economic value from creative practices. Crucial for Virno in Wittgenstein’s understanding of normative or rule-governed behaviour is that the rule can never specify the conditions of its application – e.g., there is no rule that specifies how high the tennis ball can be thrown during service. For such a specification to be made, another rule about the application of rules would have to be instituted, and so on to an infinite regress, just as in the normative legal system of judicial precedent.
Freedom without Security

It is worth recalling that the precondition of surplus-value is cooperation. In this sense, the potential for alternative modalities of organising creative labour is inseparable from the uncertain rhythms, fluctuations and manifestations of global capital. Indeed, it is precisely this relation between labour-power and capital that defines global capital. Indeed, it is precisely this relation and the regime of border reinforcement, that ensue within communicative networks are frequently promiscuous, unlike the ‘old boys’ clubs of business parks or business park are simply not the same as creative projects responsive to situations of contingency and instability or business parks. But the challenge is not to reafirm the productivism implicit in this realisation but rather to take it as the basis for another life – a life in which contingency and instability are not experienced as threats. A life in which, as Goethe wrote in Faust II, many millions can “dwell without security but active and free”.

Notes

1. This is a shorter version of an essay that was first published in Fibreculture Journal 5 (2005), http://journal. fibreculture.org/issue/impact_resister.html.
2. Over the past year there has been a proliferation of magazines, journals and mailing lists exploring the theme of precarity and the associated problematic of labour organisation. These include Greypaper, Mote, Multituida, republican, ephemera, European Journal of the Creative Industries, Derive Approdi, and aut-op-sy.
3. While more expansive on the global dimensions of this problematic, David Harvey (2005) also remains primarily within a U.S. political imaginary. See also Arrighi (2005a, 2005b).
4. While a recent UNCTAD (2004: 3) policy report notes that ‘too often [creative industries] are associated with a precarious form of job security’, such observations remain exceptional within much policy-making and academic research on the creative industries. A recent issue of The International Journal of Cultural Policy, edited by David Hesmondhalgh and Andy C. Pratt (2005), tabulates some of the most sophisticated research on cultural and creative industries to date. See also O’Ragan, Gibson and Jefferificut (2004), Gill (2002), and Ross (2003).

Sites

out-out-op-sy mailing list
https://lists.rssoci.ca/bc/missinglist/lists/out-out-op-sy/
Chaineworkers, http://www.chaineworkers.org/index
Derive Approdi, http://www.deriveapprodi.org/
Dutch labour: http://www.euro indifference.org
EuroMayDay 2004 (Milan and Barcelona), http://www.euromayday.org/
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Incommunicado, http://incommunicado.info/
International Meeting of the Precariat (Berlin, January 2005), http://www.globalprojectinfo.org/art/3264.html
Molsindustrie, http://www.molsindustrie.it/
Organizing the Unorganizable, (dir. Florian Schneider, 2004), http://kaun.tv/
Precariat alla Deriva, http://www.sinodimino.net/karakola/precarias.htm
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Moulier-Boutang, Yann. I confini della liberta: Per un’ analisi politica dell’ economia e i suoi effetti sulla politica (Turin: Baldini Bollati, 1999).

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http://www.chainworkers.org/dev
http://greenpeppermagazine.org/pingPong.html
http://www.euromayday.org/index.php
http://www.chainworkers.org/dev/node/view/102
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http://www.greenpeppermagazine.org/look/issue.tpl?IdLanguage=1&IdPage=1
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http://www.greenpeppermagazine.org/dev/index.php
http://www.mute.org
http://www.metamute.com/look/issue.tpl?IdLanguage=1&IdPage=
http://multitudes.samizdat.net/rubrique.php3?id_rubrique=48
http://incommunicado.info/

or business park are simply not the same as networks. For our purposes, networks consist of social-relational relations that are intermediate in the media of communication. The collaborations that ensue within communicative networks are frequencies rather than a given, unlike the ‘old boys’ clubs of business parks. The style of partnerships developed in what is much better defined as the cluster model of the creative industries.
“Guardians of Power: The Myth of the Liberal Media” is a new book by David Edwards and David Cromwell, the two editors of Media Lens, an internet-based watchdog “correcting for the distorted vision of the corporate media”. According to Noam Chomsky, “Regular critical analysis of the media, filling crucial gaps and correcting the distortions of ideological prisms, has never been more important. Media Lens has performed a major public service by carrying out this task with energy, insight, and care.”

Edward Herman wrote, “Media Lens is doing an outstanding job of pressing the mainstream media to at least follow their own standards, and meet their public service obligations. It is as fun as enlightening to watch their representatives, while sometimes giving straightforward answers to queries, often get flustered, angry, evasive, and sometimes mis-stating the facts.”

John Pilger thinks that, “The creators and editors of Media Lens, David Edwards and David Cromwell, have had such influence in a short time that, by holding those who, it is said, write history’s draft, they may well have changed the course of modern historiography [...] Not since Noam Chomsky’s and Edward Herman’s Manufacturing Consent have we had such an incisive and erudite guide through the media’s thicket of agendas and vested interests: indeed, they have done the job of true journalists: they have set the record straight. For this reason, ‘Guardians of Power’ ought to be a required reading in every media college. It is the most important book about journalism I can remember.”

But not everybody agrees. After he was recently contacted following Media Lens coverage of the Guardian, its Readers’ Editor Ian Mayes described them as “an electronic lobby group”. Expressing his views about the Guardian’s readers, his job and the very idea of democracy, he also said: “I did not engage with or respond to this lobby, whose members poured several hundred emails into the Guardian. I did not read more than a tiny sample of the emails directed at me. I consider organised lobbying in general to be in effect—whatever the rights or wrongs of their position—aggressive to put it mildly.”

Mayes also happens to be the President of the Organization of News Ombudsmen.

I asked David Edwards and David Cromwell to tell me more about their book and their work at Media Lens.

QUESTION: Why the title (and the subtitle) “Guardians of Power: The myth of the liberal media”?

ANSWER: The title is obviously a not very subtle reference to the Guardian, but it also refers to the media in general. The sub-title is intended to indicate that the liberal media—the best media, like the Guardian, the Independent, the Observer (as it is now) and the BBC—play a really crucial role in protecting power. In a totalitarian system it doesn’t matter what people think—if they get out of line, you can hit them on the head, drag them away in the middle of the night. Thanks to centuries of popular struggle, violence of that kind is no longer an option for Western elites. Instead, this is what shapes their assumptions about the world. But they also have access to some honest ideas in comparatively small circulation newspapers like the Guardian and the Independent, and primarily through one or two honest writers like John Pilger and Robert Fisk. This acts as a kind of vaccine—tiny doses of dissent that inoculate people against the idea that they are subject to thought control. But the reality is that dissent is flooded and overwhelmed by propaganda that keeps us thinking the right way, keeps us passive and in line. By the way, we don’t intend to suggest that this is the result of any kind of conspiracy. It happens as a kind of side-effect of the media’s pursuit of maximised profits in a state-capitalist society.

QUESTION: What is Media Lens? When did it start? How does it work?

ANSWER: Media Lens is an attempt to subject the mainstream corporate media to analysis uncompromised by personal hopes of employment, payment or status within the media system. We do this by comparing the media’s versions of events with what we believe are honest versions based on rational arguments, verifiable facts and multiple, credible sources. We provide references and links for all of these, so that readers can evaluate for themselves whether we are distorting the facts in some way. We then invite readers to judge for themselves which is more reasonable and accurate, and to send their opinions to both journalists and ourselves. It is vital for us to provide an accurate account of the media version because we are not ‘selling a line’—we are encouraging readers to make a rational judgement on the basis of the facts. This is why we think it is wrong to describe us as a “lobby”, as often happens. The tobacco lobby, for example, is not motivated to provide the public with the facts it needs to make an informed judgement. The goal of the tobacco lobby is to subordinate truth to maximised profits. Their goal is to manipulate the public to persuade them of their version of the truth. Our goal is to empower the public to establish their own version of the truth based on their own evaluation of the arguments. The world needs self-confident, critical thinking, empowered human beings, not Media Lens drones.

Our readers can check the media version of events for themselves, so we have every reason to be accurate and honest in describing these. Our readers can also easily check out the credibility and accuracy of the facts and sources we give because, as discussed, we provide references for all of them. As Noam Chomsky has noted many times, dissidents challenging the corporate status quo are automatically subjected to intense and relentless attack regardless of the honesty and accuracy of their views—our arguments have to be extremely accurate and reasonable if they are to stand a chance of being taken seriously. Also, unlike, say, corporate lobbies, we are not motivated by profit, nor status or power. Our goal is to provide the facts so that people can draw their own conclusions.

QUESTION: Please give us a couple of concrete examples of your work?

ANSWER: Example One - Climate Change and Advertising

An editorial in the Independent on December 3, 2005 entitled ‘Global warming and the need for all of us to act now to avoid catastrophe’, declared: “Governments must demand greater energy conservation from industry. Action must be taken to curtail emissions from transport. That means extensive investment in the development of alternative fuels and a taxation of air flights.”

The editors concluded:

“Governments must demand greater energy conservation from industry. Action must be taken to curtail emissions from transport. That means extensive investment in the development of alternative fuels and a taxation of air flights.”

Citroen UK Ltd: £418,779
Ford Motor Company Ltd: £247,596
Peugeot Motor Co Plc: £260,920
Renault UK Ltd: £427,097
Toyota (GB) Ltd: £715,050
Vauxhall Motors Ltd: £662,359
Volkswagen UK Ltd: £555,518
BMW British Midland: £60,847
BmiBaby Ltd: £12,810
British Airways Plc: £248,165
Easyjet Airline Co Ltd: £59,905
Monarch Airlines: £15,713
Ryanair Ltd: £28,543
(Email to Media Lens, December 12, 2005)

It is enlightening to compare these figures with the
Independent editors’ suggestion:
“Individuals must act too. By opting to cycle or walk,
instead of driving everywhere, we can all do something
to reduce emissions.”

At the same time, the Independent is hosting adverts specifically designed to disarm dissent and pacify the public.

The point is that the media are structurally obliged to remain on square one. What has a corporate business like the Independent to say about the impact of its own corporate advertising on environmental collapse? What has it to say about the remorseless activities of its business allies working to bend the public mind to their will over decades? What has it to say about their determination to destroy all attempts to subordinate short-term profits to action on climate change? What has it to say about the historical potency of people power in challenging systems of entrenched and irresponsible power of this kind, of which it is itself a part?

Example Two: An Exchange With Newsnight Editor,
George Entwistle

In researching a New Statesman article, Media Lens co-editor David Edwards interviewed George Entwistle (March 31, 2003), then editor of the BBC’s flagship current affairs programme, Newsnight. Part of the interview involved asking Entwistle if Scott Ritter had appeared on Newsnight in recent months. Ritter, a UN weapons inspector in Iraq from 1991-98, described how Iraq had been ‘fundamentally disarmed’ by 1998 without the threat of war, and how any retained weapons of mass destruction would likely have long since become harmless ‘sludge’. He was almost completely ignored by the mainstream press ahead of the war. In 2003, the Guardian and Observer mentioned Iraq in a total of 12,356 pieces. In these articles, Ritter was mentioned a total of 17 times.

David Edwards: ‘Have you pitted Ritter against government spokespeople like Mike O’Brien and John Reid?’

George Entwistle: ‘I can’t recall when we last had Ritter on.’

DE: ‘Have you had him on this year?’

GE: ‘Not this year, not in 2003, no.’

DE: ‘Why would that be?’

GE: ‘I don’t particularly have an answer for that; we just haven’t.’

DE: ‘Isn’t he an incredibly important, authoritative witness on this?’

GE: ‘I think he’s an interesting witness. I mean we’ve had…’

DE: ‘Well, he was chief UNSCOM arms inspector.’

GE: ‘Absolutely yeah. We’ve had likeus on, and lots of people like that.’

DE: ‘But why not Ritter?’

GE: ‘I don’t have a particular answer to that… I mean, sometimes we phone people and they’re not available, sometimes they are!’

DE: ‘Well I know he’s very keen, he’s forever speaking all over the place. He’s travelled to Iraq and so on.’

GE: ‘There’s no particular… there’s no sort of injunction against him, we just haven’t had him on as far as I’m aware.’

DE: ‘The other claim is…’

GE: ‘David, can I ask a question of you at this stage?’

DE: ‘Yes.’

GE: ‘What’s the thesis?’

DE: ‘What, sorry, on why you haven’t…’

GE: ‘No, I mean all these questions tend in a particular direction. Do you think that Newsnight is acting as a pro-government organisation?’

DE: ‘My feeling is that you tend to steer away from embarrassing the government [Entwistle laughs] in your selection of interviewees and so on, they tend to be establishment interviewees. I don’t see people like Chomsky, Edward Herman, Howard Zinn, Michael Albert, you know—there’s an enormous amount of dissenters…’

GE: ‘Well we’re being trying to get Chomsky on lately, and he’s not wanted to come on because I can’t explain. What’s the guy who was the UN aid programme guy…?’

DE: ‘Denis Halliday?’

GE: ‘Yeah, we’ve had him on. I think our Blair special on BBC2 confronted him [Blair] with all sorts of uncomfortable propositions.’

DE: ‘The other thing is that UNSCOM inspectors, CIA reports and so on have said that any retained Iraqi WMD is likely to be “sludge”—that’s the word they use—because, for example, liquid bulk anthrax lasts maybe three years under ideal storage conditions. Again, I haven’t seen that put to people like John Reid and Mike O’Brien.’

GE: ‘Um, I can’t recall whether we have or not. Have you watched every episode, since when?’

DE: ‘Pretty much. This year, for example. Have you covered that?’

GE: ‘Um, I’ll have to check. I mean, we’ve done endless pieces about the state of the WMD, about the dossier and all that stuff.’

DE: ‘Oh sure, about that, but about the fact that any retained WMD is likely to be non-lethal by now, I mean…’

GE: ‘I’ll, I can… I’ll have to have a look.’

DE: ‘You haven’t covered it have you?’

GE: ‘Honesty, I don’t know, I’d have to check. I genuinely can’t remember everything we’ve covered.’

DE: ‘Sure, but I mean it’s a pretty major point isn’t it?’

GE: ‘It’s an interesting point, but it’s the kind of point that we have been engaging with.’

DE: ‘Well, I’ve never seen it.’

GE: ‘Well, I mean, I’ll endeavour to get back to you and see if I can help.’

Following this conversation, Entwistle wrote to Edwards by email. He provided what he considered powerful evidence that Newsnight had in fact challenged the government case for war on Iraq. He cited this exchange between Newsnight presenter Jeremy Paxman and Tony Blair (Blair on Iraq — A Newsnight Special, BBC2, February 6, 2003):

TONY BLAIR: Well I can assure you I’ve said every time I’m asked about this, they have contained him [Saddam Hussein] up to a point and the fact is the sanctions regime was beginning to crumble, it’s why it’s subsequent in fact to that quote we had a whole series of negotiations about tightening the sanctions regime but the truth is the inspectors were put out of Iraq so.

JEREMY PAXMAN: They were not put out of Iraq. Prime Minister, that is just not true. The weapons inspectors left Iraq after being told by the American government that bombs would be dropped on the country.

(Email to Entwistle, March 31, 2003)

We responded to Entwistle:

You mention Paxman raising the myth of inspectors being thrown out. You’re right, Paxman did pick him [Blair] up on the idea that inspectors were “put out” of Iraq, but then the exchange on the topic ended like this:

TONY BLAIR: They were withdrawn because they couldn’t do their job. I mean let’s not be ridiculous about this, there’s no point in the inspectors being in there unless they can do the job they’re put in there to do. And the fact is we know that Iraq throughout that time was concealing its weapons.

JEREMY PAXMAN: Right.

Right! Paxman let Blair get away with this retreat back to a second deception.

(Email to David Entwistle, March, 31, 2003)

In fact the remarkable truth is that the 1991-98 inspections ended in almost complete success. As we have discussed, Ritter insists that Iraq was ‘fundamentally disarmed’ by December 1998, with 90-95% of its weapons of mass destruction eliminated. Thus, Entwistle’s chosen example of Paxman powerfully challenging Blair is in fact an excellent example of him failing to make even the most obvious challenge.

QUESTION: How have the liberal media reacted to your work? Any examples?

ANSWER: Reactions have changed over time. Initially, the reaction was disbelief and open contempt. When we challenged the BBC’s John Sweeney on child deaths in Iraq, he wrote:

“I don’t agree with torturing children. Get stuffed.”

(Email to Media Lens Editors, June 24, 2002)

A typical response has been to suggest that we and our readers can’t possibly have read what has been written, or that we can’t have watched what has been broadcast:

“I wonder—from your email—if you actually read the Guardian, or whether you are responding to a suggested form of words on a website?”

(Email from Alan Rusbridger to Media Lens reader, February 7, 2003)

ITN’s head of news gathering, Jonathan Munro, wrote:

“It would help if the correspondents had actually watched the programmes. Most are round-robins and refer to pieces published in newspapers or in other media.”

(Email to Media Lens, February 17, 2003)

Observer editor Roger Alton here once again follows the customer-friendly protocol familiar to all who have engaged with the press:

“What a lot of balls… do you read the paper old friend?…”

“Pre-digested pablum [sic] from Downing Street…”

my arse. Do you read the paper or are you just recycling garbage from Media Lens?”

Best

Roger Alton”

(February 14, 2003)
It may be that the media are becoming less complacent about internet-based criticism. The Guardian Readers’ Editor, Ian Mayes, noted recently:

“Immediately after what everyone involved took as the resolution of the complaint, the editor of the Guardian sent an email to about 400 of the people who had emailed the Guardian on the subject of the Chomsky interview. He took the opportunity to reject conspiracy theories claiming that senior journalists at the Guardian had colluded in targeting Prof. Chomsky with the object of discrediting him. I believe he was right to do that. Nothing emerged in my interviews to support the idea.”

(Mayes, ‘Open door,’ December 12, 2005)

Previously, the media has simply ignored even large numbers of emails. On this occasion, even the editor of the Guardian felt compelled to respond to the huge numbers of people who had written in.

We are also beginning to receive (comparatively) positive comments from the media. The BBC’s Newsnight editor Peter Barron3 has begun inviting us and our sources (on our suggestion) to appear on the programme, and has even written:

“One of Media Lens’ less ingratiating habits is to suggest to their readers that they contact me to complain about things we’ve done. They’re a website whose rather grand aim is to ‘correct the distorted vision of the corporate media’. They prolifically let us know what they think of our coverage, mainly on Iraq, George Bush and the Middle East, from a Chomskyist perspective.

In fact I rather like them. David Cromwell and David Edwards, who run the site, are unfailingly polite, their points are well-argued and sometimes they’re plain right.

For example, Newsnight hasn’t done enough on the US war on insurgency in Western Iraq. The reason is we don’t have a presence there because it’s too dangerous and pictures and firm evidence are hard to come by. But that shouldn’t be an excuse, and this week we managed to get an interview with a US Marine colonel on the front line to raise some of the points MediaLens and others are concerned about.”

QUESTION: Why should someone who already knows s/he can’t trust the corporate media read your book?

ANSWER: We have read every one of our Media Alerts over and over again. When we took the nuggets out of the alerts, updated them, added material and mashed it all together in the book, we assumed the result would be very familiar to us. But when we read through the result something quite remarkable happened. The combined impact of all this concentrated, damning material and evidence was to open our eyes to just how obviously corrupt and compromised the corporate media system is. It actually opened our eyes to what we’re dealing with!

This points to an interesting feature of media propaganda. It operates by a kind of mass hypnosis—when you’re exposed to it day in day out, it infiltrates the way you see things; it makes even complete absurdity seem serious. The illusion is attenuated somewhat when you read an honest article or two. But when you read a really concentrated blast of powerful evidence, it seems to have a different order of effect on the mind. That’s the conclusion we’ve come to because it was very surprising to be educated by our own book!

To know more, please visit MEDIA LENS
http://www.medialens.org/

Notes
1 http://www.medialens.org/bookshop/guardians_of_power.php
2 To know more, please read an oppressive email by an electronic lobby group’s member: http://www.thecatsdream.com/blog/2005/12/guardians-readers-editors-strange-idea.htm
3 http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/newsnight/4426334.stm

Gabriele Zamparini is an independent filmmaker, writer and journalist living in London. He’s the producer and director of the documentaries ‘XXI CENTURY’ and ‘The Peace!’, and author of ‘American Voices of Dissent’ (Paradigm Publishers). He can be reached at: info@thecatsdream.com http://TheCatsDream.com
KAREN magazine is an antidote to the current glut of mind-numbingly inane celebrity/gossip/showbiz/soap obsessed magazines cluttering up newsagents' shelves across the land. KAREN steps out of her front door and wanders around her village asking the people she meets, “What are you doing tonight?” “What are you having for tea?” and “Who lives on the Green?” Their answers to these mundane questions are recorded verbatim in the pages of KAREN magazine, accompanied with colour snapshots of the people and places. KAREN has a clean, restrained, minimalist approach to layout, using a single typeface throughout and devoting plenty of space to each article. Included are eight pages of beach hut photos accompanied by brief comments from the people who own or rent them, and the correspondence between a granmary in residential care and her granddaughters, where she asks them to make a sign for her door saying “This door sticks. Please knock or push”, together with a photo of it in situ. In other contributions, Neil writes up his food/beer diary for a full eight pages before getting bored of it, and there’s stuff on home improvements, a diary for a full eight pages before getting bored of it, and there’s stuff on home improvements, a

Les Coleman's IMPERFECT SENSE takes the form of one of those rotating card discs where text appears in a small window as you turn the circle around. These curious cardboard constructions—often used for presenting astrological information, handy hints or cocktail recipes—actually have a proper name; Volvelles. Examples of presenting information in this way date back over four hundred years. IMPERFECT SENSE is a beautifully produced dial-a-poem device, containing one-liners like “A slim volume of poverty” and “Her mascara ran away”. This too-nice-to-send postcard is an ambitious new format for presenting succinct wordplays, one of Coleman’s favourite subjects.

KILLOFFER. It's a neurotic jet-lagged drunken chaotic whirlwind journey through the depths of self-loathing which demands to be read in a single sitting. KILLOFFER arrives back home after a foreign trip and is repulsed by the fetid mass of dirty dishes in his overflowing kitchen sink which greets him. Escaping the confines of his apartment, he hits the street and finds himself accompanied by a steadily growing horde of homunculi. KILLOFFER doggedly follow him from bar to bar causing trouble and getting into fights. Failing to shake them off, they follow him back home and take over his apartment for the sole purpose of satisfying their voracious appetites for alcohol and sexual gratification. Eventually KILLOFFER resorts to extreme measures to get rid of his other selves. SIX HUNDRED AND SEVENTY-SIX APPARITIONS OF KILLOFFER starts with words and images intertwined, but as the story gets more hectic and convoluted the words get pushed off the page completely as the action takes it up entirely. Cover quotes from Charles Burns and Ivan Brunetti attest that SIX HUNDRED AND SEVENTY-SIX APPARITIONS OF KILLOFFER should be an essential purchase for connoisseurs of self-hatred.

FILMS IN AMERICA 1929-1969. Working from a second-hand book of the same title, long time zinester LADY LUCY has drawn 41 images for 41 iconic films spanning 41 years. Her drawings are quickly executed, stripped down versions of film stills—maybe they’re done in the dark?—which often just show the main characters together with the year and a single-sentence description of the plot. Occasionally they’re accompanied by anecdotes describing associations or memories that the film has for the artist. The initial source material is filtered by LADY LUCY’s choices of what to include in her drawings, resulting in a sort of through-the-decades classic film quiz book. But don’t worry if you can’t identify them all, the titles are given at the end.

SALAMANDER DREAM by HOPE LARSON is a beautifully drawn tale of a young girl growing up. Eight-year-old Hailey lives just on the edge of town where she can run barefoot into the woods to play alone; chasing butterflies, following tracks of deer footprints and sometimes finding her (imaginary?) friend Salamander—a human-proportioned, mask-wearing salamander. They explore the woods, telling each other stories and sharing their dreams. Printed in black and a bright pastel green, many pages in SALAMANDER DREAM are given over entirely to showing the natural activity of the flora and fauna of the woods and the movements and sounds of the insects and birds that inhabit them, often accompanied with species names. Exploring the woods in this way is just as important a part of the story as the relationship between Hailey and Salamander. Hailey gradually breaks free and finds other friends to play with in the woods, encounters Salamander less often. Eventually, as she nears the end of her teenage years and is about to move away to college, she returns to the woods to see Salamander one last time, ensuring that she’ll treasure her memories of childhood exploring the un-scary woods for ever.
They quickly RAN FROM THE ENORMOUS FINGER...

As someone who has bought flowers about three times in the last fifteen years, who has never been to east London’s famous Columbia Road Flower market, which is only a few minutes from where I live, and who feels contemptuous each time I cycle past a local ‘Floristry school’, I’m surprised to find myself writing about a book called THE FLOWER SHOP. The reason I bought a copy is that it’s by Leonard Koren, whose 13 BOOKS I’ve previously reviewed. My collection of Koren’s A JAPANESE BATH (1992), THE FLOWER SHOP, A SHOWER (1975), WET MAGAZINE (1979-81), STAMPS OF MASS DESTRUCTION AND OTHER POSTAL DISASTERS VOL 2. The predominant cancellation marks. They’re all included in STAMPS OF MASS DESTRUCTION AND OTHER POSTAL DISASTERS VOL 2. The predominant controversy. He enjoyed the kerfluffle caused by his gas mask stamps so much that he’s gone into creative overdrive and produced fifty more stamp sheets and accompanying first day covers with all the requisite rubberstamps, logos and cancellation marks. They’re all included in STAMPS OF MASS DESTRUCTION AND OTHER POSTAL DISASTERS VOL 2. The predominant topics explored on the stamps are environmental and antiwar themes, continuing a long tradition of subversive postage stamps by artists—including William Farley’s 1971 anti-Vietnam War protest stamps which were keenly collected by the US Secret Service. The book is accompanied with a greatest hits sheet of perforated and gummed stamps where his best designs are featured: a gigantic crucifix being used as a mobile phone mast, Big Ben with a 9-11 style explosion ripping through the clock tower; and a clever follow-up to the gas mask stamp with the bust of a Queen figure wearing a haz-mat suit, gas mask and crown! Some themes are explored repeatedly to no great advantage, which Cauty seems to acknowledge with his ‘Running Out of Ideas for Stamps Day’ design. tall, life’s not easy for this minuscule malcontent. As he says, “Popping out for cigarettes is not easy when you live in a window.” Guaranteed intended to offend just about everyone who sees a copy, EMBRYO BOY is printed in duotones of black and a sludgy pinky-brown colour which looks like it’s a mixture of all the leftover bits of ink the printers had lying around.

Indie comix stalwart James Kochalka’s new series is a superhero title—has he finally sold out and gone all commercial and bigtime? Well, with a title like SUPER F*CKERS (that’s what it appears on the cover) and the exhortation, “Hey, Kids! Take your dicks out of the Playstation 3 for one god damn minute and read some fucking comics”, I think we can safely assume not. The SUPER F*CKERS are a mismatched bunch of foul-mouthed, electrotrash club kids and ineffectual science geeks stuck together in a Big Brother style club house. When they should really be figuring out how to rescue their team mates from, ‘uh, like, some other dimension’, these misfits are preoccupied with bickering, ripping the piss out of each others’ lame superpowers, finessing their bad attitudes and getting stoned out of their tiny minds on improvised drugs. All the while a queue of hopeful wannabe superheroes line up outside, desperate to join the team. (Maybe there’s a place for EMBRYO BOY with the SUPER F*CKERS?) Kochalka’s artwork is in ultra bright acid colours, with some photo backgrounds and even a strip shot with a plasticine model of one character. V. stupid, v. juvenile and v. reprehensible, SUPER F*CKERS is v. enjoyable. Issue #2 is out already and #3 is on the way—at last an indie comix series that comes out with something approaching regularity, so you don’t have to scratch your head trying to remember what happened in the previous issue that came out over a year ago. http://www.mpawson.demon.co.uk/

Constructing Neoliberal Glasgow: The Privatisation Of Space

Friend of Zanetti

Of all the arts, architecture is the closest constitutively to the economic, with which, in the form of commissions and land values, it has a virtually unmediated relationship. It will therefore not be surprising to find the extraordinary flowering of the new postmodern architecture is grounded in the patronage of multinational business, whose expansion and development is strictly contemporaneous with it.

Frederic Jameson1

The current amazement that the things we are experiencing are still possible... is not the beginning of knowledge – unless it is the knowledge that the view of history which gives rise to it is untenable.

Walter Benjamin2

Introduction

This article attempts to describe the emergence and proliferation of neoliberalism in Glasgow as it impacts on the urban realm. Central to this is a critical attempt to define some of the key components of neoliberalism in the city. Drawing on urban and social theory to outline some of the contours of the debate, I suggest Glasgow conforms to a model of urban land revaluation whereby discourses of ‘blight’ and ‘obsolescence’ are mobilised to justify wholesale redevelopment and capitalist accumulation strategies based primarily on rent extraction. Finally, I employ a recent critical model of analysis for flagship urban development projects throughout Europe to provide the framework for a closer look at neoliberalism in Glasgow, concluding by questioning the possible extension of urban strategy in the city.

The Neoliberal City

We need to influence business to stimulate our economy.

River Clyde project director of Scottish Enterprise (The Scotsman, October 27, 2005)3

The recent rise of neoliberalism combines a commitment to the extension of markets and logic of competitiveness with a profound antipathy to all kinds of Keynesian or collectivist strategies.

Peck and Tickell4

Peck and Tickell see neoliberalism articulated in the city through a combination of market ideologies and forces. For them, neoliberalism embodies a growth-first ideology, backed by a pervasive naturalisation of market discipline. Neoliberalism operates through and alongside active state partners, scanning the horizon for investment opportunities in an increasingly competitive urban environment. Neoliberalism locks in public sector austerity and growth-orientated investment. A symbolic language of innovation—“dynamic”, “pioneering”, “daring”, “entrepreneurial”—obfuscates a familiar cocktail of state subsidy, place marketing and local boosterism (ramping up or promoting a locale), and suppresses the opportunity for genuinely local development. Neoliberal policy in the urban framework is characterised by uneven local development. Neoliberalism and Geo-bribes

Peck and Tickell5

For the geographer Neil Smith, the neoliberal imperatives of private profit and place-marketing replace, “The demand for an urban life based upon grassroots participation and the satisfaction of social needs.” A cogent example from New York in 1998 illustrates his thesis. Responding to threats that the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) might relocate to New Jersey, Mayor Giuliani announced a $900 million taxpayer subsidy to keep the stock exchange in the city. City and state officials referred to the deal as a “partnership”: Smith termed it a “geo-bribe.” Smith contends that there was never any pretense that financial need was an issue, the question was one of whether the NYSE would stay in New York; or leave, taking its capital with it, potentially damaging the symbolic reputation and place-brand value of New York as an international finance centre.

For Smith this is a paradigmatic example of the public-private “partnership”: “Rather than modulating the track taken by private investment, the local state simply fitted itself into the grooves already established by market logics, becoming, in effect, a junior if highly active partner in global capital.”6 Giuliani’s treatment of the poorer sector of the New York population three years prior revealed the ugly flip-side of state largesse. Giuliani announced major service and budget cuts, admitting at the time, and making transparent its real purpose, that he hoped to encourage the most dependent on social services (the city’s poorest people) to move out of the city: “This would be a good thing” for the city, he said. “That’s not an unspoken part of our strategy,” he added, “that is our strategy.”

Gentrification

For Smith the role of gentrification is paramount to this strategy throughout the global economy, with large as a central part of urban strategy and productive capital investment; “an unassailable capital accumulation strategy for competing urban economies.”7 Gentrification underpins large scale OVPs as urban strategy eviscerates a phalanx of global finance players together, include local state officials, local merchants, property agents and brand name retailers, all lubricated by state subsidy. Official rhetoric precedent social outcomes will be derived from “trickle-down” benefits borne from development. However, this doesn’t hold true and never has... in a context characterised by an absence of regulatory standards or income redistribution systems at the national or EU level.

Gentrification is now misleadingly called “urban regeneration” in a deliberate attempt to obscure its true meaning: “Precisely because the language of gentrification tells the truth about the class shift involved in regeneration of the city, it has become a dirty word to developers, politicians and financiers.”8 This deception has helped increase immiseration for low-income groups, and benefited social elites: “The victory of this language in anesthetising our critical understanding of gentrification in Europe represents a considerable ideological victory for neo-liberal visions of the city.”9

The Return To The River

The effects of gentrification on marginalised groups are still visible in prime city centre locations like the “new” Gorbals where apartments and duplexes kick off at £125,000. Meanwhile, the adjacent riverside high-rise blocks of “old” Gorbals at Stirlingfield and Norfolk Court, perfectly located for access to the amenities of the city centre, await demolition after years of disinvestment. Tenants anticipate months of forced removal anxiously: “The area has million pound potential for redevelopment [...] So how long will I, and my neighbours, be allowed to live in Norfolk Court?”10 Another local critic was clear-minded in his appraisal of developer strategy: “Make no mistake. This is a land grab.”11 This “land grab” should be seen in the context of Glasgow City Council attempting to improve their (Council) tax base — an explicit goal of all UDPs “via socioeconomic reorganisation of metropolitan space.”12 After criticism regarding the price of apartments in the Glasgow Harbour development, former Council leader and current river project leader, Charles Gordon, said: “I don’t care if they are yuppies or middle class professionals they will be most welcome in this city.”13 This cordial invite, however, doesn’t extend to the urban poor in any of the regeneration literature. The “return to the river” rhetoric employed by Council leaders masks a symptomatic silence which obscures the brutal class politics involved in the re-ordering of urban space.
The Rent Gap

For Smith, the physical deterioration and economic depression of the inner city are “a strictly logical, ‘rational’, outcome of the operation of land and housing markets.”22 Deterioration and abandonment are the result of identifiable private and public investment decisions, and as such are far from neutral. Structured disinvestment is a normative procedure designed to produce economically “rational” outcomes, regardless of social impacts. Buildings, like those in the Gorbals, are not always abandoned or left to deteriorate because they are considered useless, meaningfully, but often because they cannot be used profitably.

Central to Smith’s analysis of gentrification is the rent gap theory: “The rent gap is the disparity between the potential ground rent level, and the actual ground rent capitalised under the present use.”23 According to Smith, the ideal investment opportunity for developers and landlords arises when the rent gap is sufficiently wide: “that developers can purchase structures cheaply [...] and can then sell the product for a sale price that leaves a satisfactory return to the developer.”22 Low prices in land and rents are central to a developer’s ambitions as is a renaissance in land values in adjacent areas, as the rent gap will then sufficient be wide to return a large profit. As gentrifying developments along the river at Oakfield, Lauriston and Yardstone gather pace, the rent gap at Gorbals is at an optimum level and demolition seems assured. This has been advocated by locals who have little power to shape development strategy but hope to remain by the river: “I just hope they ensure that the new homes they build are homes at reasonable rent and not like the expensive homes for sale in Crown Street.”24 For developers with ambitions to gentrify, the central location and riverside frontage of Gorbals make it an obvious attraction. The conditions are ripe: “local people have for long complained that the area has been starved of investment as is evident from the large areas of derelict land that scar the landscape.”25

The developments at Pacific Quay and the Glasgow Harbour development just across the river create potent rent gaps with enormous potential for anchoring gentrification strategies. Locals already desperately short of affordable housing claim a focus on commercial development “is eating up scarce housing land and killing the community.”

Meanwhile, 2,000 tenants in the Fountainwell high-rises at Sighthill await demolition in determine homes without capital investment since 2003. While they consider their fate they have to listen to place-marketing cheerleaders offering up the environment up for sale to provide temporary quarters for athletes as part of the city’s Commonwealth Games bid. The houses would then be put up for sale, rather than offered back to the community at affordable rents. The rent gap between current land values and post demolition new build on the back of the Games is likely to be considerable.26

‘Blight’ and ‘Obsolescence’: Stigmatising Space

Rachel Weber (Associate Professor, Urban Planning and Policy Program, University of Illinois at Chicago) argues that state practices have increasingly mobilised discourses of blight and obsolescence against buildings and areas seen as appropriate for redevelopment—the Gorbals and Govan are prime examples of this. She goes on to argue that these discourses have become the ideal neoliberal alibi for Schumpeter’s notion of “creative destruction”, whereby capital restless search for profits requires constant renewal through gale-like forces that simultaneously make way for the old.

In contrast to other commodities the built environment exhibits remarkable durability. This presents a problem for the circulation of capital as capital is locked into steel beams and concrete. A building is stuck with a long economic turnover time and the momentous force of creative destruction fellows. To overcome this problem the invention of ‘blight’, with its quasi-scientific allusions to unhygienic sanitary conditions, has been continually invoked by planners and developers to justify massive urban renewal schemes and to shift the basis of city planning from one of containment to one of elimination and containing this blight. Notwithstanding the shock of these momentous upheavals, the evictions and massive state-planned renewal projects followed, at least rhetorically, paternalistic paths. This is rarely deemed necessary now.

In the era of neoliberalism the old notion of obsolescence has been added to that of blight. Obsolescence differs from blight in that it is not generally associated with health and safety issues, but primarily with concern for loss of potential profitability. All that is required to justify regeneration is the developer’s ability to demonstrate a large profit loss of exchange value in a building or locale. Weber argues that obsolescence presents itself as a technical managerial tool emphasizing the economic imperatives while avoiding “... morally and racially neutral, as if the social has been removed from an entirely technical matter.”27 Little need then to feign municipal concern for health and safety. The argument is more often purely economic, citing concern with place rather than people.

These discourses have proved compelling in the traditionally industrial city of Glasgow, where a series of large scale urban development projects, often preceded by extensive industrial land, and characterised as blighted and obsolete by developers, are reformulating the urban space along the Clyde Corridor.

Large Scale Urban Developments – The Model

Erik Swyngedouw (Professor of Geography and the Environment, Oxford University) et al, recently conducted in-depth research on 13 large-scale Urban Development Projects (UDP’s) throughout Europe, namely Berlin, Copenhagen, Dublin, Athens, Rotterdam, London, Lisbon, Vienna, Bilbao, Birmingham, Naples and Lille. The researchers found, in contrast to a mythos of daring entrepreneurial activity, that the UDPs are almost without exception state-led and very often state-financed. Despite the rhetoric that accompanies these projects, they are marred by processes of social exclusion and marginalisation.

Overall, the common theme in all UDPs is that their success ultimately depends on rent extraction from the built environment.

Four of the main points of convergence emerging across the 13 UDP examples are:

1. Exceptionality measures: large-scale UDPs have increasingly been used as a vehicle to establish exceptionality measures in planning and policy procedures.

The £500 million, five-mile long, six lane M74 extension was recently consented despite the chief reporter of an independent public enquiry recommending against its authorisation. Business leaders considered the road to be a vital component in wider regeneration plans.

Kry catalyst had demolished the old road and had argued that it would “support the road competitiveness” of the west of Scotland and help “some of the poorest areas in Scotland” through “a process of renewal, incrementation and further regeneration activity”. In particular, they argued, the M74 should lead to the “reduction of [...] vacant, derelict and contaminated land”, an “increase in land and property values to help address market failure constraints”, and “improved viability of future property development, through making development of key sites more attractive to the private sector...” In addition they argued the project would “promote tourism” and the “international image of the Glasgow and Clyde Valley area”.

Jam 74: a coalition of community, environmental, and sustainable transport groups had objected to the publicly subsidised road’s construction on the grounds that it would be incompatible with Scottish Executive policy objectives on climate change, traffic stabilisation, urban regeneration, social inclusion, and commitments to environmental justice overall. Jam74 also argued that PPP or PFI financing would likely come into play, potentially increasing the cost to £1 billion.

The chief reporter agreed. His summary concluded: “...the public benefits of the proposal would be insufficient to outweigh the considerable disadvantages that can be expected”, the road “would cause community severance; would be of little use to the local population who have low levels of car ownership; and would have an adverse effect on the environment of the local communities without providing local benefits”...

The conclusion is that this proposal should not be authorised, and that the compulsory purchase order should not be confirmed.

Despite this highly critical summary ministers gave the road the go-ahead. The Scottish Executive’s head of roads maintained, in face of the enquiry’s evidence, that it had a number of “clear advantages”, including “social inclusion benefits” and “significant wider economic benefits [...] which have not been given sufficient weight in the [enquiry’s] conclusions.” Arguments in favour of the road strongly emphasised the discourses of blight and obsolescence; how “vacant”, “derelict”, “contaminated” land would be revalued; and pointed to the role of the road in increasing land and property values. The full range of exceptionality measures were employed, including: “the freezing of conventional planning tools, bypassing statutory regulations and institutional bodies, the creation of project agencies with special or exceptional powers of intervention and decision-making, and/or a change in national regulations”.

Jam74 has always argued the planning process was inherently flawed. The developer, the planning authority and the planning enquiry process were all led by the Scottish Executive, leading to a pronounced democratic deficit. Their fears were well-founded, as reflected in First Minister Jack McConnell’s decision to ignore the enquiry’s findings. The narrative of growth-oriented regeneration, supported by discourses of blight and obsolescence requiring regeneration strategies, was central as justification for the overflowing of the report’s decision. Undeterred, Jam74 will now fight a £100,000 legal case in an attempt to rectify Ministers’ flagrantly undemocratic decision.

2. Local democratic participation mechanisms are not respected or are applied in a very ‘formalist’ way, resulting in a new choreography of elite power.

Three years ago, in tandem with government
housing policy and as part of the wider regeneration effort, Glasgow City Council undertook the policy of stock transfer to Glasgow Housing Association (GHA) Ltd from all 8,000 Council homes. The full weight of blight and obsolescence discourses were mobilised to justify what was effectively a privatisation of public-owned housing.

An article of the period, ‘Misery Key to Housing’s Future,’ encapsulates the mood. Sighthill was looked out on a “sea of blight and decay” and a “landscape of graffiti and windblown rubbish,” from which there is “no prospect of escape.” Before, however, a ballot form dropped through their letter box with (according to The Guardian) “the pledge of a refurbished home in a transformed neighbourhood — if only they would tick the box marked ‘Yes’.” It was on the basis of discourses like these that regeneration proposals were accepted. The transfer was excitedly described as: “the largest public sector modernisation project in Europe.” A central argument was that “tenant participation” and “community empowerment” would be the success stories in the lives of the people of Glasgow who are the architects of this proposal. Their voice will be heard during every part of this development, their hopes and aspirations accommodated and their fears and worries answered. This is for the people. This is by the people.

GHA Ltd is made up of 64 tenant-led Local Housing Organisations, designed to become individual, fully fledged Housing Associations through a process known as second-stage transfer: “Choices will be available to tenants in exercising greater devolved management and opportunities for community ownership. In terms of devolved measures: “The local state’s dependence on its rental income has been razed to the ground and little but unemployment, crime and drugs have thrived since industrial decline hit. Shops lie empty, schools have closed and large tracts of waste ground blight the area.” This hyperbolic description (reflecting the tendency towards narratives of blight and obsolescence characteristic of right-wing tabloid) is not without grounding in reality.

Community activists believe that local people are being left behind and shut out from any benefits from regeneration. Govan is supposed to be prospering from high-profile developments with the regeneration of the waterfront. But the population has fallen by more than 20% in the last 10 years alone and 51% of adults in the area are out of work. This is more than double the Glasgow average [...]. Instead of repopulating the area with affordable housing, Glasgow City Council and Govan Initiative Ltd have secured considerable amounts of European development cash to build industrial units and offices.

Govan has been designated as a ‘Core Economic Development Area’ by planning authorities, and several residential areas razed to make room for industrial units. The strategy has created a vast industrial estate, which is transforming Govan into a poverty-stricken ghetto. Activists point to a marginised people of Govan can expect under the ultimate modern urban community,” in “an entirely new district within the west end of Glasgow.” Apartment’s start at £220,000 and go up to £450,000.

Despite the racy rhetoric, there are those who question what type of urban community Glasgow Harbour is becoming: “We see what is happening in our area in the name of ‘development’ as being an anti-poverty issue.” There are deep concerns about exclusionary, rocketing house prices in the area. Prices in the Harbour development will ensure it remains a “wealthy ghetto” while its presence has stimulated gentrification nearby. In a process akin to the Highland clearances, “People are usually either forced to move away from their families or move into private rented accommodation in desperation. The days when people were forced into the arms of a private landlord are back with a vengeance.”

There is also evidence of two-tiered service provision and a form of apartheid consumerism. “Shops for the ‘poor’ and shops for the ‘rich’ are springing up side by side.” The poor have 9p shops and charity shops while the wealthy have shops “selling Spanish holiday homes.” Meanwhile Council Tax continues to increase: “We see what is happening to rest primarily on Festival Park, a leftover — shouldn’t be doubted: ‘The ultimate modern urban community’, in ‘elementary occupations’ – construction, manufacturing and low-end service jobs. Construction, for instance, is characterised by highly contingent, deregulated structures, and marked by very low levels of unionisation and training: ‘Given current government policies and practices, we are going to lose benefits to work on minimum wage in shops we can’t afford to buy anything in? [...] Are we going to be servicing the rich and their lifestyle?’

The welfare to work agenda comes with “a strong element of compulsion and a retreat from the principle of universal rights to benefits and a decent income.” It is very few cases to these courses provide meaningful training and opportunity: “These programmes have limited value in providing skills training as their main raison d’etre is to deliver the unemployed into work.” Service sector work, and subsidised labour programmes to produce amenities for the rich do not betoken a serious effort, non-alieneed-for work for the low-income and unemployed groups of the west end of Glasgow. The significance and scale of the £500 million Glasgow Harbour project and is responsible for bridging this gap and providing the social inclusion agenda for the development. Two hundred and seventy unemployment cases have been employed through workfare in this way.

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3. UDPs are poorly integrated at best into the wider urban process and planning system.
A Revanchist City

Finally, the neoliberal city, as a site of social polarisation and resistance, develops a corpus of disciplinary procedures including surveillance, welfare cutbacks, and punitive institutions to deal with the fall-out from its policies.60 In reference to the 1870 Paris Commune, Neil Smith terms this the “revanchist city”61. The 1870 uprising encountered military tactics bolstered by a moral discourse of public order on the streets which combined in a violent revenge (revanche) against the radical socialism of the Commune, and led to the killing of 20,000 people in Bloody Week alone. Smith’s point is that control of the city streets is often synonymous with control of its population. For Smith, the revanchist city pertains to a vicious reaction against minorities, the working-class, the homeless and unemployed. It is a place where the reproduction of social relations has gone disastrously wrong, and yet the oppressions and indignities that created the problems are ruthlessly re-affirmed. The revanchist city is at war with its poor, creating the kind of city acutely described by Mitchell: “The city as landscape does not encourage the formations of community or urbanism as a way of life; rather it encourages the maintenance of surfaces, the promotion of order at the expense of lived social relations, and the ability to look past distress, destruction, and marginalisation.”

Charles Murray, infamous author of The Bell Curve, takes a perspective very different of this. Arguing for the “advantages of social apartheid” in a Sunday Times article last year, he wrote: “...the underclass [...] is no longer even a topic of conversation in the United States.”62 This is not because the underclass has disappeared in the US, rather: “The underclass is no longer an issue because we successfully put it out of sight and out of mind.”63 To a large extent this has been achieved by a spatial fix: “Increased geographic segregation has facilitated social segregation”, with the underclass firmly ensconced in “decrepit neighbourhoods on the periphery that need not be on the travel route of the rest of us.”64 Clearly, by “us” he means the people who now inhabit reclaimed inner city areas, with “glitzy shops and gleaming offices.”65

In addition to this, Murray’s chief theoretical baby is the notion of “custodial democracy”66 whereby the ‘underclass’ would be imprisoned both through institutional frameworks such as prisons, and by increasingly segregated ghettos “we seal away from the rest of us.”67 Moreover, Murray guesses that should a City Council leader or Mayor arrive in Britain who would adopt these practices openly, “...he would find the same surge in popularity that Rudy Guiliani experienced in New York.”68 With the odd exception, Government and City leaders refrain from stating strategies like these outright, but even a cursory glance at Glasgow’s urban developments show how segregation is more or less explicitly embedded and articulated in the construction of social space.

Conclusion

The limits of theory, however, should warn us of certain pitfalls. In constructing such a closed and controlling vision of an over-determining machine (such as large-scale urban developments) we run the risk of theorising our own defeat, where the ‘impulses of negation and revolt’69 are seen as vain and trivial in the face of an overwhelming system of power. In order to counteract this, existing and emergent groups from (to use a Zapatista phrase) “below and to the left”70 must continue to challenge “growth-oriented” urban development with the voices, desires and actions of grass-roots organisations to the fore, in order to counter official hegemony and claiming their right to the city.

Recent anti-globalisation movements in Scotland, while welcome, need look no further than their own cities for sites of contestation. The wealthiest suburb in Scotland has a life expectancy of 87.7 years, while a boy born in Calton, in the east end of Glasgow, can expect only 54 years of life.71 Starting from an analysis of the production of space, and the ownership of key functions within this production, we can begin to chart and challenge the uneven power relations that affect all of us wherever we are. Maybe we can then begin to visualise a world where the needs of all to engage in creative activity, play, imagination, physical activities, knowledge and art are given their rightful place, and urban space is constructed to facilitate these needs, rather than fostering a prolific extraction of profit from land as part of a monopolistic economic liberalism which presents us always with a choice already made. It should be clear by now that we can dispel any notion of assistance from mainstream political organisations in this project, firmly embedded as they are in the neoliberal order.

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At the Crossroads

Tom Jennings

The concept of “the crossroads” has been a staple of US blues traditions. It refers to an oscillating state of paralysis when faced with equally unyielding moral choices concerning the personal directions to be taken in life – with the emotional resonance of “feeling the blues” lying in its painful predicament that pain inevitably accompanies any chosen action. The quintessential concept of the blues crossroads contrasts selling one’s soul, the devil in exchange for earthly gain, with the deferred satisfaction of piety promising heavenly reward. Beyond the religious overtones, of course, far more prosaic existential and ethical dilemmas fit the model thanks to its metaphorical economy of memory and biography, social imbriication, fantasy and individual agency, and the sense that the profound complexity and insinuence of the world never permits simple or perfect solutions. So, now that the cutting edge of globalizing capitalism concentrates on squeezing profit from its colonisation of culture, even the most belligerently oppositional genres and forms of production find themselves indented in its dream factory. Short of abject submission, those in the mesmerising matrix of this most secular of crossroads must thus also distinguish lines of flight from dead end postures in avoiding the sacrifice of autonomy.

During the past decade hip-hop musicians, performers and entrepreneurs have transformed the profile of the contemporary popular music industry in an unprecedented invasion of commodified cultural space on the part of largely lower class Black people (with considerable multiracial involvement at all levels and stages). Starting from organic community responses to the social and economic circumstances of mid-1970s New York, hip-hop’s immensely innovative compositional, discursive and productive formations spread like wildfire across the US, then worldwide. Mobilising and infecting other industry in an unprecedented invasion of the profile of the contemporary popular music performers and entrepreneurs have transformed the autonomy. But success due to the greater freedom given by a smaller independent label to combine songwriting, vocal, instrumentalist and production prowess with a

Roads to Nowhere New

In a series of articles in Pop Matters magazine entitled ‘Rhythm & Bullshit’, Mark Anthony Neal details the market consolidation of US recorded and radio sectors in the 1990s, and its severely constricting effects on the range of music coming from blues and soul traditions reaching the public. Crucially, the cultural neo-colonialist recuperation of independent local production systems under monopoly control coincided with the clout of hip-hop’s younger Black audiences who rejected the yuppie 1980s MOR and disco R&B styles. Ironically, the subsequent overdue return of soul to the maturing hip-hop spectrum reflected both the business success of entrepreneurs like Sean ‘Puff Daddy’ Combs whose upward mobility masterminded the move, and major label rap’s rapid tumble into vapid bling. The outcome now, according to Neal, is that the promotion of R&B only through affiliation with superficial hip-hop has effectively evacuated the human heart of the genre.

This analysis accounts for the present preponderance of teenage R&B karaoke acts visibly lacking genuine feeling. However, R&B’s traditional opposition of big money and individual essence is as problematic as any simple model of alienation. Both musically and performatively, hip-hop aesthetics specifically counterpose grass-roots collective experience and personal biography, thriving on the contradictions and ambivalences thrown up which the transcendent emotionality of a single isolated voice could never resolve. The contemporary challenge, then, is to find renewed expressive potential within a landscape of broken beats and fractured subjectivities without sticking with the busted flues of spiritual uplift, liberal civil rights and bootstrap economics promising fortunes for tiny fractions. Hence thugs’ themes grapple forcefully with the fallout of class struggle in a neoliberal age while exploratory R&B musical innovation is only intermittently apparent, as it has serious trouble resisting corporate sanitisation due to its dialogue with hip-hop.

The paucity of significant major 2005 releases largely bears out the story of the suffocation of soul. Flashily fashionable new pop tarts with varying degrees of talent but utterly unoriginal material abound, whereas commercially-proven stars tout more or (less) of the same. The respective vocal strengths of Mary J Blige (The Breakthrough) and Faith Evans (The First Lady) retain considerable evocative power, but the excessively smoothed-out retro ‘80s production and minor tinkering with signature styles contain only flickers of their key contributions to hip-hop soul – an affiliation whose receding substance justifies the alarmist astonishments of Mary J Blige (The Breakthrough) and Faith Evans (The First Lady) retain considerable evocative power, but the excessively smoothed-out retro ‘80s production and minor tinkering with signature styles contain only flickers of their key contributions to hip-hop soul – an affiliation whose receding substance justifies the alarmist astonishments of Mary J Blige (The Breakthrough) and Faith Evans (The First Lady) retain considerable evocative power, but the excessively smoothed-out retro ‘80s production and minor tinkering with signature styles contain only flickers of their key contributions to hip-hop soul – an affiliation whose receding substance justifies the alarmist astonishments of Mary J Blige (The Breakthrough) and Faith Evans (The First Lady) retain considerable evocative power, but the excessively smoothed-out retro ‘80s production and minor tinkering with signature styles contain only flickers of their key contributions to hip-hop soul – an affiliation whose receding substance justifies the alarmist astonishments of Mary J Blige (The Breakthrough) and Faith Evans (The First Lady) retain considerable evocative power, but the excessively smoothed-out retro ‘80s production and minor tinkering with signature styles contain only flickers of their key contributions to hip-hop soul – an affiliation whose receding substance justifies the alarmist astonishments of Mary J Blige (The Breakthrough) and Faith Evans (The First Lady) retain considerable evocative power, but the excessively smoothed-out retro ‘80s production and minor tinkering with signature styles contain only flickers of their key contributions to hip-hop soul – an affiliation whose receding substance justifies the alarmist astonishments of Mary J Blige (The Breakthrough) and Faith Evans (The First Lady) retain considerable evocative power, but the excessively smoothed-out retro ‘80s production and minor tinkering with signature styles contain only flickers of their key contributions to hip-hop soul – an affiliation whose receding substance justifies the alarmist astonishments of.

But the equal appeal of progressive rap to both white and Black youth as well as the class affiliations of Black youth as well as the class affiliations of.

Rising stars signal little forward movement either. John Legend’s earnest soulman anthems in Get Lifted sparked mendacious marketing well beyond self-important moniker and pretentious title. Meanwhile the great black hopes of neo-soul also risks premature greyness. So there’s no doubting the sincerity and sweet soulfulness of Dwele, but second album Some Kinda... virtually recapitulates his debut. And although scarcely musically adventurous, Jaguar Wright’s Divorcning Neo 2 Marry Soul is far grittier and more energising in plumbing depths of fractured desire. Anthony Hamilton’s still longer journey from North Carolina saw his debut SoulFire followed this year by Ain’t Nobody Worryin’– both classic documents of empathic soul detailing the manifold hurts and hopes in life spoiled by emotional, social dysfunction. Hamilton’s voice conveys such generosity of spirit that the uncharacterized heartbreak that questions of sentimental harm seem superfluous – especially when his breakthrough required hired hook singing for tiring radio rap, mirroring the payoff for perseverance of recuperation familiar in hip-hop.

Paths of Least Reminiscence

If R&B authenticity appears possible only in nostalgic reference, hip-hop’s disputed golden ages are too recent to mythologise so effortlessly. From a rich field of hip-hop realism and representation, the only transcendence of pain and struggle yet yielded is a handful of moguls marching into mansions and boardrooms remixing the American dream. The celebration of such unlikely riches without any disavowal of origins may be an instructive demystification of continuing race and class aristocracy, but no political phoenix has yet risen (as anticipated by rap’s cultural visionaries) from the ashes of civil rights and Black power’s encounters with the late-capitalist state. Instead commercial acclissiency has attenuated the potential down to cartoon caricatures of toxic ghetto freaks and monsters, as exemplified by Eminem and 50 Cent and sundry similarly tawdry seductions into the wild goose paper chase. Nevertheless many refuse to resign themselves to a social death of enslavement to repressive commodification – preferring a tactical retreat into harnessing the strengths of early 1990s styles but retroactively questioning the logos of assimilation and accommodation leading to the present impasse.

North Carolina’s Little Brother have no doubts about the status of mainstream rap. The Minaret Show mimics the format of a television talk show, simulating comic interludes, cabaret and comment interspersed among tracks which excoriating the guns, sex and cash obsessions of radio rappers as no more than contemporary stereotyping and justifying racial subordination. But the equal appeal of progressive rap to both white and Black youth as well as the class affiliations of.

Unlike many rap luminaries critiquing the degraded state of the music who need distance from commercial imperatives to speak out, Common continues his sophisticated co-articulation of blues, soul and rap in the consistently excellent Be. The occasional preachy superciliousness of this wordsmith is here more than compensated for by his incisive identification with the ordinary guy on ‘The Corner’ (the first single) mulling over constraints on agency and community and striving to make
honourable sense of a dishonourable world. Whereas on Version 7.0: The Street Scriptures, Guru swaps the hip-hop royalty status he shared with DJ Premier in Gang Starr for the hands-on difficulty of a lyricist, Talib Kweli injects a further authentic to his insistent stress on how the double binds of inner-city hardship threaten to overwhelm integrity – where maintaining a capacity for ethical reflection is even more hard-won and essential than in the music business. And Kazé’s Spirit of ’94: Version 9.0 renders explicit rap’s inherent intergenerational conflicts with its Wunderkinder’s evocative beats enclosing perceptive lyrics intimately connecting family history to individual and communal futures.

Steadfast on the independent underground New York scene, talented lyricist J-Live is a real original in his use of the elements of hip-hop. Preferring live shows with real bands and unusually capable of rhyming whilst scratching, he’s also an excellent producer. If that wasn’t enough, The Hour After osses with intelligence and insight into the contradictions of the music and its social environment. Mobilising the banality of religious themes and concepts, their meanings are renewal being everyday secular emblem to personal meaning and collective ramification with tentative conclusions woven back into a queerness of the purposes of cultural practice. On a similar level of artistry and commitment, Talib Kweli has made steady inroads into the mainstream, but, it seems, enough is enough – and Right About Now

Trade Routes and Branches

Despite the seeming stasis of soul, and the stultifying pressures towards conformity required by major labels packaging rappers as brands rather than artists, as always in hip-hop seeds of originality are being sown, responding to and mobilising technical developments in other genres and emerging from the fertile dynamics of competition and imagination in hip-hop itself. All sorts of musical and lyrical innovation are bubbling under mainstream radar, even if the most obvious evidence of prominence not grass-roots pressure but a commercially-driven need to appear fresh – widening audiences without threatening the existing corporate status quo. So production team the Neptunes (Pharell Williams and Chad Hugo) started in hip-hop but thanks to their unparalleled range and mastery of digital computing out-deliver competing developments in any genre. However, without the vision or project of, say, a Dr Dre, all they’ve aimed for is the celebrity and wealth that gangsta rap ended up with once a depoliticised Black nationalist agenda of business development obliterated, in practice, other political or cultural tactics.37 Here, selling (out) seems the only agenda.

A more interesting template is Outkast’s incorporation of big beat and disco rhythms to appeal to the young pop R&B harbingers mainstream white audiences14 – bringing Atlanta’s southern soul to new listeners without compromising its status as rap music. André 3000 and Big Boi’s innovations in sound to stretch to the limits some of the oldest African-American cultural themes (the trickster’s boasting and posing, plays on words and appearances, etc) that energised hip-hop from the beginning. New US production collectives similarly blur boundaries, such as the Sa-Ra Creative Partners’ soul, funk and ambient-tinged extensions of orthodox hip-hop beats – and Kanye West is attempting something similar without venturing so far from accepted formulae. Late Registration chronicles the distractions and affectations of the black lower-middle classes at the bottom of the greasy meritocratic ladder, nervously (or longingly, depending on the mood) looking over their shoulders at what they’re leaving behind. The similarly schizophrenic musical accompaniments mix wistful melodic arrangements (from indie-rock producer Jon Brion with West’s powerful beats laced with killer vocal hooks and unexpected sampled connections. Many of the lyrics deal with the psychological and social consequences of daily practices of consumerism among those with at least some disposable income, rather than extremes of utter poverty or ghetto fabulous fantasies favoured elsewhere. This is especially pertinent given that a significant minority of hardcore rap icons have more comfortable backgrounds than their performance personas suggest, and also signifies the socio-economic status of increasing numbers employed in the industry itself.

Kanye West’s balancing of compositional artistry with a contemporary thematic spin allows him to maintain subcultural hip-hop credentials, as in his production for Common’s B.C. Missy Elliot’s strategy is bolder still. The Cookbook moves further away than before from Timbaland’s lush multi-layered polyrhythmic production paradigm towards stripped down digital beats – simulating a bygone party aesthetic for a CD-buying MTV audience. Gone too is her video portrayal of a monstrous gothic-futuristic female trickster flouting the rules of pop femininity. Now conforming to acceptable conventions of beauty, trickster flouting the rules of pop femininity. Now conforming to acceptable conventions of beauty, posing, plays on words and appearances, etc) that energised hip-hop from the beginning.

When a piece of black culture is first popularised in the United States, it is likely to be assimilated into African-American culture, and eventually become part of the dominant culture. This process is known as cultural assimilation. Over time, the cultural traits that were once unique to a particular group may become so widespread that they are no longer considered distinctive. In the case of hip-hop, this assimilation has been significant, with many of its original elements now being used by a wider range of people and in different contexts. This has led to some debate about whether hip-hop still retains its identity as a distinct cultural form.

Meanwhile – refracting the other end of the guitar music spectrum – all those dreary white metal bands trading on urban cool with desultorily clueless pseudo-rapping are counterpointed by pre-eminent performance poet Saul Williams pissing away his blistering political spoken word with 1980s NY thrash-style backing. Utilising a rather different conception of Black punk rock, the Ying Yang Twins’ exuberant The United States of America’s manipulation of found material aesthetic of the southern state’s party scene, digitally synthesised using elements of Miami bass and reggae dancehall, with its restless slackness watered down (though not much) to
widen the appeal. But whereas Lil’ Jon and other “dirty south” heavyweights are quite clear about their indebtedness to Jamaican vocal, musical and performative traditions, well-established hip-hop supernovas struggle to do more than blisteringly rip them off. So Lil’ Kim’s latest release The Naked Truth milks the most unimaginative and tediously counterfeit of reggae’s history. Then, in a simple but effective rhetorical move, the magnificent version of reggae’s history. To Jamrock encapsulates a grass-roots parallel manoeuvre, the album’s random changes and sequencing. Unlike other bland attempts to audience reactions determines content to high art, since the privatised consumption of this commodity could never accurately convey the experience which makes its creation possible – the underground origins in UK garage and hip-hop.

Worse, the unforgiving tenor of her arguments snootily equates the moral inadequacies of rich and poor – as if ghetto pressures are comparable to the preciousness of her new paws in the celebrity charity world. Fortunately, redemption songs were at hand from South London duo Floetry, in Flo/logy’s gorgeous blend of Natalie Stewart’s skilfully ironic spoken word and songstress Marsha Ambrosius’ searing gospel-tinged voice floating over the best Philly velvet jazz alchemy: True, only the Roots’ Black Lilly performance poetry venue rescued Floetry’s intelligent womanist sensuality from a lack of UK recognition for the real deal. Conversely, their surprisingly unusual synergy testifies to the rarity of Lauryn Hill’s or Est’ELe’s dual melodic and rapping expertise – and embarrasses those who flop like damp squibs between stools.

Apart from the direct lineage audible in the sounds produced by those of recent Jamaican descent, reggae’s beat structures and performance conventions have had a more circuitous influence on contemporary British music ever since prominent Kingston producers relocated to London in the 1970s, supplying the sonic impetus for trip-hop, Bhanga and various UK electronic innovations. The prime movers of the rave revolution may cite Detroit techno and Chicago house precursors, but subsequent developments regularly counterposed vacuously inclusive artistic or philosophical elitism with dangerous grassroots populism. However, despite the empty escapism of acid house ecstasy, student partying in a global Ibiza or the yuppie new jazz of drum’n’n’bass, there has always already been an abject rueful antithesis blaring out from the nearest sink estate down the road. Originally dubbed “jungle”, chipping and screwing dubplate 45s at 78rpm, the ambivalent clariion calls of its MCs hype up the assembled massive into a mobile frenzy while urging communal coherence in the face of the dog-eat-dog misery the rave offers refuge from.

This side of the Atlantic the familiar MTV/radio-friendly patterns are also readily apparent. Big record companies oscillate between their traditional indifference to indigenous output inspired by Black traditions and packaging new acts as little more than pop idols with street-cred as short-term novelties. By 2005 the usual sorry litany of incompetently marketed bands most obviously lacked soul. So Lemar’s R&B-lite, Joss Stone’s fake funk and half-baked singer-songwriting from Kevin Mark Trail, for example, squeezed out attention for the new singer-songwriting from Kevin Mark Trail, for example, squeezed out attention for the new...

For really exciting advances in British urban culture, though, the many-faceted Jamaican connections are finally coming to fruition in a compelling pincer movement of vocal rows and baseline rhythms. Least unconventionally The Rotton Club – the fourth album from Blak Twang (aka Tony Rotton) – combines a skewering cockney rudeboy swagger with sharply conscious blue-collar decency in deeply personal lyrics. The reggae influence surfaces in the musical tempos too, but this is first and foremost prime UK hip-hop from one of its pre-eminent and most consistent exponents. Considerably more idiosyncratic is Mixed Blessings by Lotek Hi-Fi, which has a refreshingly ragged DIY feel thanks to its unpolished hip-hop magpie aesthetic chipping pure Caribbean ingredients. Roots and dub collide with soul bounce and dancehall minimalism, with English patois running through benevolent gruffness, decisive intonation and sweet harmonising. These folks clearly enjoy their music – and it is infectious. Nonetheless, the most accomplished, self-assured and satisfying UK reggae/rap crossover vibe belongs to Roots Manuva, whose third album Awfully Deep goes further towards synthesising British dub’s bastard offspring into a seamlessly sensual complement to his easygoing, humorously intellectual lyrical mischief.

New Directions Underground

Apart from the direct lineage audible in the sounds produced by those of recent Jamaican descent, reggae’s beat structures and performance conventions have had a more circuitous influence on contemporary British music ever since prominent Kingston producers relocated to London in the 1970s, supplying the sonic impetus for trip-hop, Bhanga and various UK electronic innovations. The prime movers of the rave revolution may cite Detroit techno and Chicago house precursors, but subsequent developments regularly counterposed vacuously inclusive artistic or philosophical elitism with dangerous grassroots populism. However, despite the empty escapism of acid house ecstasy, student partying in a global Ibiza or the yuppie new jazz of drum’n’n’bass, there has always already been an abject rueful antithesis blaring out from the nearest sink estate down the road. Originally dubbed “jungle”, chipping and screwing dubplate 45s at 78rpm, the ambivalent clariion calls of its MCs hype up the assembled massive into a mobile frenzy while urging communal coherence in the face of the dog-eat-dog misery the rave offers refuge from.

Using new computer tools for sophisticated digital invention, pioneers of the drum’n’bass paradigm quickly superseded crude sampling, while mainstream acclaim and huge sales for Goldie, Roni Size and LTJ Bukem made it clear that CDs could be sold by stripping the guitar and the ghetto dancehall appeal. Successive generations of UK garage producers and promoters have oscillated between nourishing the fertile underground where MCs cut their teeth, and commercial soft-peddling to middle class...
consumers. Until recently mainstream airplay necessitated revision to mirror R&B and rap genres reluctantly tolerated thanks to US global dominance, but now all of these boundaries are being transgressed in the catch-all category of ‘grime’. After the fits-and-starts of garage’s So Solid Crew, the pop crossover of The Streets and prominent chart names like Craig David and Ms Dynamite, two successful albums from Dizzee Rascal and excellent debuts from Shystie and Wiley have definitively signalled the arrival of a new urban British phonetic style sweeping away the snobbery.42

Grime vocalists pace themselves to match rapid-fire multiple beats, but lyrically emphasise not just clever rhyming networks and collective expression. Naturally this includes all the tiresome petty beefs and macho melodramas of youth gangs in poverty-stricken environments, translated into battle rhymes and party anthems just as in early hip-hop. Staying closest to jungleist rabble-rousing mode, Lethal Bizzle of More Fire Crew/Fire Camp acknowledges debts to rap braggadocio and rhythm and blues braggadocio but makes no attempt to copy any hip-hop style. After several underground smash hits and even Top 20 hits, his ferocious Against All Odds, crowd pleasing chorus catchphrases with nascent narratives of desperate hope. Ritual East London collective Roll Deep’s eclectic In At The Deep End strays much further musically from the trademarl sparsely synthesised bleeps and squelches of the ‘ski’ production style by mobilising all their pop reference points from the 80s onwards – from Acid House to post-punk, Caribbean, American, and, most of all, UK sources – held together with a dozen MCs in tight-knit breakneck freestyle formation.43

In the lyrical context so far leaves something to be desired for those of a poetic streak, and frantic articulation in the heat of the rave satisfies only speed freaks elsewhere, Bristol’s K-Ners flexes expert delivery from a hip-hop apprenticeship around cutting edge digital percussion in K In Da Flesh. Meanwhile Manchester sextet Raw-T (with 4 MCs and 2 DJs) blend prodigious rap technique and posse sensibility with grimy ease in Realise And Witness, with a naturally uninhibited outlaw flow any studio gangsta would covet._Sway’s flow maintains an unerring balance in realising hip-hop charisma, shrugging off predictable self-serving poise in youthful hits. His MC raps flout its fanciful irrelevance or pretends to copycat, offer branded pop acts the surface promise of safe profitability. In mainstream R&B, media conglomerates build on production and distribution patterns formed in the corporate co-optation of jazz, blues and soul and homed in the homogenisation of disco and contemporary R&B/hip-hop. Here, individual artists can realistically only play with permutations of existing elements, with room to manoeuvre depending on the degree of contractual independence negotiated on the promise of safe profitability. In mainstream R&B, market share consolidation shuts out practitioners who reject the hip-hop glossover styles perfected in the mid-1990s – in the process ignoring innovative work which offers renewal. Likewise, stateside rap flouts its fanciful irrelevance or retreats to the prideful consolations of the past. Occasionally, genuine grass-roots developments – accompanied by changes in local patterns of involvement – still provide leverage for established careers to simulate growth while opening doors a base and a safety net.

Back in London, Lady Sovereign rules the east end underclass party roost like a miniature pearly queen. The deceptive simplicity of the Vertically Challenged EP and singles like ‘Hoodie’ mix lazy ease, wicked humour and pointed everyday social reality of a multiracial Britain, in a media environment saturated with commodified Black culture, where the stark subsistence alternatives for the young poor are crime or slave-labour McJobs as the welfare safety net subsides into the historical sunset. Amid the usual adolescent buff and bluster and the heightened agenies of self-destructive negativity in many of the lyrics, a genuinely fresh social consciousness is manifesting in the manic cross-pollinating grime of reggae, jungle and hip-hop. The call of shared influences and a common pleb plights collective responses in a music widely but unoffically performed and enjoyed in raves and on pirate radio. Grime’s practices face the full panoply of repression, occasioning a chorus of condemnation from outside of the milieus – running the gamut of class-based hatred and moral panic to New Labour’s fascist fantasies of social order. The aesthetics of grime also occasion a cacophony of snears – particularly ironic when its primary poetic and compositional textures are unapologetically half-inked from hip-hop and drum’n’bass. These may be the most sophisticated new musical movements to emerge for decades, but the respective complacencies of subcultural hubs and mystifying technobabble among many proponents tend to render the blood and guts of ordinary audiences irrelevant.

Instead, grime celebrates the dirty commonness of degraded humanity, anchoring hopes and fears in an exhilarating self-organisation of its elements, shrugging off predictable self-serving apprehensions about success,cocooning itself in a media atmosphere of a postmodern identity, reinforced sonically by the eccentricism of Diplo’s towering, swirling and disorienting electronic production.

So, as in other sectors, new cultural enclosures across the globe impound previously autonomous forms and practices under multinational control. Media conglomerates build on production and distribution patterns formed in the corporate co-optation of jazz, blues and soul and homed in the homogenisation of disco and contemporary R&B/hip-hop. Here, individual artists can realistically only play with permutations of existing elements, with room to manoeuvre depending on the degree of contractual independence negotiated on the promise of safe profitability. In mainstream R&B, market share consolidation shuts out practitioners who reject the hip-hop glossover styles perfected in the mid-1990s – in the process ignoring innovative work which offers renewal. Likewise, stateside rap flouts its fanciful irrelevance or retreats to the prideful consolations of the past. Occasionally, genuine grass-roots developments – accompanied by changes in local patterns of involvement – still provide leverage for established careers to simulate growth while opening doors a base and a safety net.

Major labels then filter in a few representatives of emerging trends, pressurise flagship artists to copycat, offer branded pop acts the surface stylistics (to contaminate them with credibility), and/or flood the market with manufactured clones. However, with little understanding of the source they may also be powerless to prevent relatively unadulterated expressions of vernacular lower-class culture gaining exposure. This probability is enhanced by the UK majors’ abiding obsession: combating US commercial threats with legions of middle class guitar bands, and endless permutations of the bubblegum pop formula optimising a combined appeal to younger children and to adult consumers. Contempuous of this packaged froth, urban youth nevertheless increasingly refuse the superiority complexes of their predecessors so that they desire to develop their art and engage wider audiences while earning some kind of living are not felt as remotely contradictory. Aspiration to purity make no sense for those growing up with the complex social reality of a multiracial Britain, in a media

www.tomjennings.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk
Notes
10. See my ‘Br(other) Rabbit’s Tale’, Variant
11. In an album of consistent quality throughout, including
12. Most recently in
13. See my ‘Beautiful Struggles and Gangsta Blues’ (note 16).
14. Little Brother are MCs Phonte and Big Pooh and
15. Also true of my choice as 2004 ‘album of the year’
16. See my ‘Br(other) Rabbit’s Tale’, Variant
17. Shveled by Atlantic in 2001 but now released after the eventual acclaim for 2004’s Comin’ From Where I’m From.
18. See my ‘Br(other) Rabbit’s Tale’, Variant
19. For a poignant and condensed statement of this awareness, see the interview with M-1 from Dead
20. Leading on from the relationship between hip-hop artistry and cultural exploration – former
21. The Minstrel Show’s (Duke University Press), an intelligently illuminating account of the development
22. Trumping rival Foxy Brown’s longer-term project
23. D’Angelo, Erykah Badu, Bilal and Lina.
24. E.g. singing duo Brk & Lasc, who recently toured the UK with ‘Queen of Roots’ Marciia Griffths and
dancehall’s Lady G.
25. Such as No. Doors’s Gwain Stefani in her solo rereading.
27. ‘Come On’ from ‘Feel Like Going Home’ is an incredibly soulful
28. Parallelising the personal travels of ordinary women and the professional pitfalls facing extraordinary female artists – convincingly galvanising anger into strength and
29. Shveled by Atlantic in 2001 but now released after the eventual acclaim for 2004’s Comin’ From Where I’m From.
30. See my ‘Br(other) Rabbit’s Tale’, Variant
31. For a poignant and condensed statement of this awareness, see the interview with M-1 from Dead
32. They are also noted for their use of the beats they
33. Nor, sadly, either of the latters’ political nous; but
34. Notable releases emphasising original skills include UK
35. Standing for ‘fuck the police’ or ‘for the people’, etc.
36. While there are no outright political messages in favour of
37. Thankfully not via humdrum Bob Marley covers, such as
ting with the beats they
38. By eschewing the mainstream form of
39. The group comprise Wayne Lotek (producer/MC),
40. For an enjoyable review of Anwul, Deep celestial
41. For an enjoyable review of Anwul, Deep celestial
42. Their recent departure
43. The group comprise Wayne Lotek (producer/MC),
44. With assistance from the new edition
45. On a political note, for an in-depth review of
46. It is also as
47. The group comprise Wayne Lotek (producer/MC),
48. For an enjoyable review of Anwul, Deep celestial
49. Their recent departure
50. On a political note, for an in-depth review of
51. The group comprise Wayne Lotek (producer/MC),
52. For an enjoyable review of Anwul, Deep celestial
53. Their recent departure
54. For an enjoyable review of Anwul, Deep celestial
55. Their recent departure
56. Their recent departure
57. Their recent departure
58. Their recent departure
59. Their recent departure
60. Their recent departure
Hatred and Respect:
The Class Shame of Ned ‘Humour’
Alex Law

According to the people licensed to talk on our behalf, Scotland suffers from a love of ‘failure’. It celebrates the culture of urban decay and poverty and is apologetic for the anti-social behaviour of knife/drug/wine/gang/hoolie/’ned’ culture. In policy terms this chimes nicely with New Labour’s ‘Respect’ agenda and the use of publicity spectacles to enforce orderly conduct on unruly young people. In response to accusations in 2005 that the Scottish First Minister, Jack McConnell’s ‘ned crusade’ was failing due to the insufficient issue of anti-social behaviour orders (ASBOs) it became necessary to develop a public profile for the crackdown. In February 2005 a 684,000 campaign called ‘Standing up to Anti-Social Behaviour’ was launched by the Scottish Executive. Then, in December 2005, the otherwise unremarkable West Lothian village of Mid-Calder became the first place in the UK to issue a community-wide anti-social behaviour order.2 This allows police to disperse any groups of young people found outdoors. If they refuse, they face the threat of an anti-social behaviour order (ASBO) and up to five years in jail. Hence the Scottish Parliament were proud to announce that a ‘record number of 210 ASBOs were granted across Scotland in 2004/05 - the highest figure since their introduction in 1999 and a 42 per cent increase in the number granted in 2003/04’.3 With all the fanfare of a marketing campaign, Blair’s Respect agenda re-defines the terms of the populist value wars as being between the drunken hooliganism of young people and the upright respectability of orderly communities. ‘Respect is about every citizen working together to build a society in which we can respect one another and communities can live in peace together’.4 While such right-thinking has won the plaudits of conservative thinkers like Roger Scruton and the right-wing press it presents as a new threat to social order a recognisable problem of much longer vintage – the disreputable urban youth. As the sociologist Richard Sennett put it: ‘Is it any surprise that a politician who elicits less and less respect from his public thinks that the public has a problem with respect?’.5 Beyond the platitudes of the Respect agenda, another way to exorcise the cultural demon of the urban poor has been to send it up humorously. This helps to legitimise hateful talk about the poor from counter-attack since it is, after all, ‘only a joke’. But just as Blair’s populist Respect agenda has little to do with mutual respect anti-poor joking represents more than ‘merely’ humour. This appeal to the conventions of humour is an insidious method of licensing hateful discourses against the poor and other oppressed groups. The social psychologist Michael Billig examined the way that appeals to humour is used to justify extreme racist bigotry on Ku Klux Klan-related websites.6 Predictably these sites display violently racist humour. But by deploying website disclaimers that it’s all ‘just a joke’ anti-racist objections are somehow thought to be cancelled out. Billig argues that there is a certain pleasure to be had in humorous displays of hatred, what Sartre called the ‘joy of hating’, whenever it transgresses what is deemed acceptable by established social codes. Humour allows the bigot the opportunity to displace the symbolic violence of hate discourses by denying that social groups are really the object of hateful laughter at all. Instead, it is the shared recognition of the ‘cleverness’ of the joke format that supposedly generates the opportunity for hilarity. Thus, when challenged the bigot can readily shift their justificatory ground from the hateful content of the joke to the intrinsic social acceptability of humour in the manner of ‘I was only joking’, ‘it’s just a joke’. Here small, unnoticed words – ‘only’ and ‘just’ – diminish the right to challenge and critique hateful patter. In other words, it is less how the joke works through its ‘clever’ inner structure than how it is socially and politically situated. By disguising its symbolic violence against the real object of its attack the bigoted joke dissembles and misleads. Class-based bigotry gets coded over in a way that would be disallowed by other types of social communication. Jokes acquire a transcendent quality that puts this special kind of social communication, when it is appropriately signalled to its audience as ‘funny’, as somehow standing outside the bounds of moral or political judgement. In this way the social damage of bigoted joking is both excused and permitted. ‘Ned culture’ This is clearly the case with racist, negative ethnic stereotypes that are otherwise socially taboo and outlawed. In the case of the young, impoverished, white working class the object of attack is a socially marginal group against which there are no public prohibitions on class hate discourses. In fact, venomous rhetoric against precisely this group is the staple of journalists, politicians, and the criminal justice system. In its demonisation of white trash culture, as with much else, the UK is merely catching up with the US. Public discourse in the UK has been awash recently with denunciations of ‘hoodigans’, ‘yobs’, ‘hoodies’ and ‘chavs’. In Scotland (which always has to have its own terms for more general phenomena) this circulates as a vicious discourse of neds. ‘Ned culture’ has become the object of middle class fear and fascination. Seemingly living by their own social codes, neds have dropped out of the respectable, peaceful and hard-working society. Neds lack basic social skills or any kind of a work ethic, and are hell-bent on creating mayhem and misery, especially in the most deprived housing schemes (with ‘schemies’ in some places substituting for neds as the catch-all term). Ned culture is blamed for Scotland’s unenviable crime, rates rather than being seen as a symptom of extreme social polarisation and
in the 1970s called the ‘riff-raff’ and Glasgow 1980s ‘underclass’, or what local people in Govan, Sean Damer charts this discourse of class debauched, hooligan sections of the working of a historical middle class discourse about the
dominating sections of the working class. As Ewan Morrison argues, this was never true for all or most people in the impoverished working class or living in the housing scheme itself, just as it’s not the case today that a single homogenous object - ‘ned culture’ - can be blamed as the source of contemporary society’s problems.

Today, however, the ned discourse of class derision circulates extensively in the daily rhetoric of the mass media. As it does so it has taken on a more spiteful, hateful character than the almost charmingly romantic portrayals of the recalcitrant poor in Rab C. Necht and Chewin’ the Fat. One example of this is the spoof book, Nedworld. Published in 2005, this book satirizes ‘ned’ culture under the pseudonyms ‘Kyle Pilgrim’ and ‘Keanu McGlinchy’. It attempts this in the vernacular of the Glasgow working class but fails to maintain anything like a consistent narrative voice, standing as it does far outside the stereotypical milieu it claims to so humorously depict.

From start to finish a torrent of stereotyped class hatred is unleashed in Nedworld that would be legally impossible against any other minority group in the UK. It purports to offer humorous insight into ‘the outrageous lifestyle of the ASBO group in the UK. It purports to shed humorous insight into ‘the outrageous lifestyle of the ASBO culture stretching back to the eighteenth century, as Dundee Neds

‘Tinkies’ and ‘Gadgies’ as Dundee Neds

The ned discourse of class derision is mainly targeted at working class male youth in the greater Glasgow region. But the hateful discourse of class derision is not confined to Glasgow or young men. Elsewhere in Scotland, other derogatory terms are used to name the same phenomena. Schemie, tinkie or gadgie are east coast terms, the former referring to living on a housing scheme, while the latter two are derived from terms for impoverished itinerant travellers, typically dispossessed Highlanders or Romans, peddling cheap goods door to door. ‘Tink’ is defined by the Scots Dictionary as a ‘contemptuous terms for a person, specifically a foul-mouthed, vituperative, quarrelsome, vulgar person’, though even the Scots Dictionary fails to mention poverty as a defining characteristic of the tinkie. That such terms continue to resonate in Scottish society means that they carry the marks of past periods of anti-Highlander and anti-gypsy racism in present day discourses of bigotry.

Tinkie is the term commonly used in Dundee and the surrounding area of Angus. Dundee as a city has struggled against a poor reputation for, on the one hand, the courteness of the Sunday Post and, on the other, being the poorest, the most concentrated working class city within Scotland. City planners have actively been trying to discourage negative images of the city and to boost city centre regeneration through education, science and culture. While this provides jobs and consumer distractions for the middle class professionals who commute into the city centre to work and who populate its galleries, theatres and wine bars, the local working class, who have suffered from decades of industrial restructuring and factory closures, are visible only as an army of labourers, appearing to service the affluent before trailing back to the hidden housing schemes dotted around the city’s periphery.

However, the young urban poor make their unwanted presence felt in Dundee city centre, hanging around the public and commercial spaces of the city centre, congregating in the shopping centres, bars and clubs, on the street, at bus stops, and in car parks. They may have little purchasing power but they possess an unwanted visibility. Usually, where fears of prolet-youth are typically reserved for young men, most venon is reserved for young women in Dundee, a city with a reputation for the highest level of teenage pregnancies in Scotland. Just as women formed the combative backbone of the Dundee working class, first in the jute mills and later in the manufacturing factories like Levi’s and, most memorably, Timex, so young women remain the object of middle class fears.

Bigotry in ‘Dumpdee’

Websites like ‘Dumpdee’ produce a discursive inverteptive of class, gender and place under the ideological alibi that it’s ‘just a laugh’. One page contains a spoof news report of an earthquake in Dundee that is able to simultaneously mock the poverty of its ‘epicentre’ in the housing scheme of Whitfield, promiscuous teenage mothers, endemic criminality, dissolve lifestyles, welfare dependency, squidal environment, and a general lack of cultural taste among the poor:

Victims were seen wandering around aimlessly muttering ‘who the “**” & Woman that came?’ The earthquake decimated the area causing approximately £30.00 worth of damage. Three areas of historic burnt cars were disturbed and many locals were woken before their Giros arrived.

One resident Tracy Sharon Smith a 15yr old mother of five fea Ormston Crescent said ‘It was such a shock, my little Chardonnay Levi-Mercedes came running into the bedroom crying. My youngest two, Tyler Morgan and Megan Chantelle slept through it all, as well as my great granny Lorraine. I was still shaking while I was watching Tricia the next morning’. Apparently though looting, mugging and car crime did carry on as normal.

And so it goes on in this vein. This has striking parallels with how the black urban poor in New Orleans were callously represented in the aftermath of the devastation wrought by Hurricane Katrina and the indifference of a state that openly despises the black urban poor. A page on the site called ‘Cheryl’s Gadgie Gallery’ purports to show photographs of the poor fashion sense of Burerry and tracksuit-clad locals but includes spoof adverts for a toy, a check-clad Furby doll, bearing the legend: Unlike any Furby seen before, the more you play with it the less it learns! In fact...it learns nothing.

All thanks to the new ‘SCUM’ (Socially Crippled Underage Mother-board) One page depicts a ‘birthday card’ with a check-clad teenage male surrounded by the claim – Congratulations. Your Grandmother is Thirty’. A fear of racial miscegenation among the poor.
is also present. In a page of ‘minutes’ from the ‘Dumpdee Gadgie Society’ an item on ‘Dress codes’ is reported from the ‘meeting’.
How to dress correctly at all times with the latest from the Burberry (sic) collection was given by Chantell Khan-Cohen. (The meeting was then temporarily suspended due to Tayside Police raiding the premises and removing Ms Khan-Cohen and her goods and the 3 models.)
The name ‘Chantell Khan-Cohen’ manages to simultaneously draw upon a fear of Muslims, Jews, and the criminality and bad taste of the poor. This is the wrong end of classless multiculturalism, based as it is on hateful stereotypes rather than the everyday routines of multi-ethnic working class communities.10

Formal and informal disclaimers

Some attempt is given by the website to respond to criticisms that such material may be seen as offensive. Its homepage has the formal disclaimer of a Legal Notice. This allows the site owners to disclaim all liability for such content to the fullest extent permitted by the law. On the final page there is an informal disclaimer, headed-up by the tell-tale slogan, ‘It’s just a joke’. We set up this website in our spare time just for a joke – we had no idea it would become so popular. It’s not meant to poke fun at anyone – it’s just for amusement – we all need that sometimes.

Is it really the case that ‘It’s not meant to poke fun at anyone’? This attempt to forestall critique by the use of disclaimers is a typical device in hate humour. Its function is to publicly dissociate the joke from the social or political consequences of the hateful content under the appeal that this solution would also fail, and continues: ‘It’s funny, it’s tragic, it’s all true (sic)’. This appeal to ‘it’s funny’ is not here qualified by ‘only’ but leads on to the claim that this is all somehow ‘true’, dropping for the moment the usual contrast between ‘just a joke’ and the more serious business of ‘reality’.

Such spurious reasoning puts into relief the more general apologoetics for hateful humour – that at some point it refers, if only implicitly, to its social and political context. Discourses of class derision have real effects. They do feed into political, policy and media offensives that look for remedies for social problems in the more general project of multicultural neo-liberalism. The Respect offensive represents discernible class interests repelled by the very social polarisation that it claims to want to overcome. ‘In these offensives, poor whites function as ciphers for the offloading of a culturally shameful and burdensome whiteness, whilst the symbolic and material violence of that process, pitched both against class identities and against means of subsistence, remains largely unspoken’.11 The more explicitly hateful discourse against the stereotyped Other the more it sanctions the use of draconian powers against the most dominant groups in society, including curfews, exclusions, postcode discrimination, arbitrary policing, punitive laws, the withdrawal of welfare benefits. It is always more than ‘just’ a joke.

Notes

The argument presented here is part of ongoing work with Gerry Mooney on class, urbanism and neo-liberalism in Scotland and the UK. Some of this will appear in the Media Education Journal and Critical Social Policy.

1 See http://www.antisocialbehaviourscotland.com
4 http://www.respect.gov.uk/
8 Haylett, p. 105.
13 In the emerging hate genre see also Little Book Of Neds and the Little Book Of Chaos. The latter sold out its first print run of 100,000, an indication that these cheaply produced texts are also profitable enterprises.
15 Billig, p. 278.
17 http://www.dumpdeac.uk
19 Haylett, p. 386.
The last three decades have witnessed a relentless growth of political Islam to the extent that it is an undeniable reality on the contemporary world stage. From the Middle East to North Africa and South Asia, the proponents of political Islam profess themselves ‘seekers of justice’ and aim their propaganda at the poorest and most deprived sections of society, rivaling traditional socialism. The formulation by the left of a strategy to respond to this challenge requires an understanding of these developments; outlined here are some preliminary theses, based on a necessarily limited consideration of the characteristics and peculiarities of Islamic movements.

From the 1970s onwards, as Islamic societies of the periphery were incorporated ever deeper into the world market, the centre-periphery crisis in these societies entered a new and qualitatively different phase. The fluctuating—but overall downward—trend in the price of raw materials (including, for most of the period, oil) on which these societies depend, speeded up the widening of inequality in social, economic and cultural development, the accumulation of foreign debt and the increasing inability of such states to control and restrain the spiraling crises they have to confront. The Iranian revolution of 1979—which saw the coming to power of the first Islamic government to place pan-Islamism at the centre of its political and ideological agenda—was crucial to the spread of political Islam. From the beginning the Iranian government did whatever it could to directly influence the Islamist movement and take over leadership. Where necessary, the Iranian regime called on radical factions within Islamic organisations, it involved itself in an extensive network of terrorist and jihadi-like cells, and embarked on a concerted drive to shape an Islamic international. Finally, it pursued an eight-year war with Iraq which was, above all, concerned with the export of the revolution by military means. The Islamic Republic of Iran is not alone today in exporting the pan-Islamist movement. Other states, such as Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, are also making active bids to take over the leadership of the Islamist movement, to influence its policies and to spread religious illusions and superstitions. Throughout the Cold War, one of the major weapons of imperialist powers against liberation movements in Islamic countries was religion. In using religion to stupefy the masses and to denounce the opposition, imperialism was both resourceful and relentless; it used the religious weapon to provoke splits in the working class movement, to sabotage progressive and nationalistic movements, and even to destabilise anti-imperialist governments or those allied with class movement, to sabotage progressive and to denounce the opposition, imperialism was religion. The working class is powerless not only because of its relative youth and political immaturity but also because it lacks an effective ideological base. The kind of Marxism-Leninism packaged in the ‘Academies of Science’ of the socialist bloc, in conjunction with various theories of the ‘non-capitalist road to socialism’, in no way served to unite the working class. In some countries, such as Egypt, the communist and workers’ parties went as far as liquidating themselves and joining with the ruling party. In others, there was an inexcusable process aimed at distancing the mass of workers from worker-based political organisations and systematic police repression. At a time when conditions for opposing the bourgeoisie were at their best, the working class remained weaker and more helpless than ever. This catastrophic behaviour, aiming at independence and even isolationism of governments increased the intervention of global capital in the internal affairs of Islamic country.

The ‘revolutionary Islamic movement’ is a contemporary phenomenon, attached by an umbilical cord to the form of world capitalism that has developed in the last three decades. The social roots of the ‘political Islamic movements’ are, essentially, the uprooted—who for a variety of reasons, have been waylaid on the path of socio-economic development; and, to whom the new structures have brought nothing but bankruptcies and ruin. At every level the new ‘Islamic movement’ is the rising of those who not only see themselves as alienated within their own national boundaries, but also of those who think they have discovered the source of their destitution and bankruptcy outside these boundaries. ‘Political Islam’, accordingly, cannot confine itself to national boundaries; to aspire to set up anything less than a world Islamic power would be to acknowledge ultimate defeat. This is the logic behind the rejection of the legitimacy of all the civil and secular systems that sustain nation states, and of all international treaties and agreements between nation states. The Islamic movement may occasionally support tendencies aiming at independence and even isolationism yet it is emphatic in its rejection of nationalisms that come to the fore when the nation against the Islamic community.

The growing crisis and steady weakening of governments increased the intervention of global capital in the internal affairs of Islamic countries. This process reached a point at which the economic ministries of many Islamic countries turned into impotent operatives for the decision-makers of the imperialist world stage. From the Middle East to North Africa, and even in the times of periphery, the imperialist governments or those aligned with capitalist and class movement, to sabotage progressive and to denounce the opposition, imperialism was religion. The working class is powerless not only because of its relative youth and political immaturity but also because it lacks an effective ideological base. The kind of Marxism-Leninism packaged in the ‘Academies of Science’ of the socialist bloc, in conjunction with various theories of the ‘non-capitalist road to socialism’, in no way served to unite the working class. In some countries, such as Egypt, the communist and workers’ parties went as far as liquidating themselves and joining with the ruling party. In others, there was an inexcusable process aimed at distancing the mass of workers from worker-based political organisations and systematic police repression. At a time when conditions for opposing the bourgeoisie were at their best, the working class remained weaker and more helpless than ever. This catastrophic behaviour, aiming at independence and even isolationism of governments increased the intervention of global capital in the internal affairs of Islamic country.

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making centres of global capital, bowing to major and crisis-provoking restructuring of the socio-political life of their countries and presiding over policies that caused massive unemployment and attendant despair; chronic inflation ravaged meager savings, acute housing shortages led to running battles between the guardian of cities and never-ending waves of migrants, and non-existent healthcare facilities effectively transformed hospitals into morgues. The savage demands of the International Monetary Fund and the credit limitations imposed by the World Bank forced peripheral governments to turn on their own people. What little remained of state largesse dried up; millions were made destitute, unprotected against misery, famine and disease. These were the people who carried Egyptian, Tunisian, Moroccan and Algerian pan-Islamism on their shoulders.

Perhaps more than in any other field, the rise to power of the pan-Islamist movement brings the societies it governs into conflict with their own material infrastructure. If the declared role of the state in all societies, including Islamic peripheral countries, is to 'recreate the external conditions for production', the pan-Islamist state tends towards multi-dimensional and permanent economic crisis. In particular, the ideological Islamic state cannot fully utilise the various levers with which most states regulate the economy - the law, money and force. Ideology limits and obstructs the workings of the laws of capitalism, including its fundamental law of value. Ownership is valid so long as religious tax is paid and it has been obtained by ‘legitimate’ means. An ideological element thus enters both into ownership and into the exchange of property. A property used for un-Islamic purposes (e.g. brewing) or for which religious tax has not been paid is illegitimate and cannot be exchanged. Commerce is also affected by ideology (some commodities, such as alcohol, 'immoral' literature or films, videos and many articles of clothing cannot be bought or sold).

On the question of money, this vital lever of state intervention in the economy faces a similar fate. Money essentially loses its function to fulfill the needs of production and circulation. Instead, the religious-ideological state uses money to enforce its political and ideological elements. The volume of money in circulation is allowed to expand at an uncontrolled rate—dictated by political considerations. Consequently the money supply is no longer a stabilising but an anarchic element in the economy. This process allows huge quantities of money to accumulate in a few private hands, creating equity that then confronts the state, vitiating its control, and even determining its actions. Money is used to offset the contradictions between the ideological state and its material economic base and, in the process, to function as its own antithesis—destabilising rather than stabilising the economy.

The use of force as a purely repressive tool in a Radical Islamic government is even more obvious in the economic sphere than in others. Force is not deployed as it is in a ‘normal’ capitalist state, to suppress the conflicts and contradictions between the various sectors of the economy and to paper over cracks so that conditions for the reproduction of capital are optimised. Instead, it is used to suppress the conflicts and contradictions between the economy as a whole and the ruling political power. The result is the creation of a network of non-economic structures, entwined with a parasitic and unaccountable structure of capital. A powerful defensive perimeter is built around this alliance, protecting it against both the ideological-material coercion of the state and against blind economic forces. This huge, mafia-like structure has, at one extreme, bazaars and mosques, and, at the other, armed forces and religious courts. In these societies, both internal and external capital fight shy of investment in long-term projects; domestic investment is discouraged by the fall in the rate of capital accumulation. A huge burden is placed on the gross domestic product and value-adding activities, which hinders the possibilities of capital accumulation in line with developmental needs. The impact on the state sector is decisive and disastrous. The effect on the private sector is less, but considerable; prompted both by the most efficient pursuit of profit and by non-economic considerations, the private sector tends to eschew productive investment in favour of playing the stock market, hoarding, speculation, buying and selling, real estate and land transactions. Such societies have sunk into a lumpen, get-rich-at-all-costs mentality during both money and violence, aggressive towards the weak yet simultaneously characterised by sycophancy and opportunism. Foreign sources of investment are even less likely to be found. The deliberate use of the economic weapon, including official sanctions, by core capitalist countries to control crisis-provoking Islamic governments acts as a barrier to the entrance of international finance into these countries. Where investment does take place, it is highly calculated and of a politico-economic nature. Thus, Japan and Italy have tried to ensure their future supplies of oil in Iran by investing in petrochemicals or other strategic place, it is highly calculated and of a politico-economic nature. Thus, Japan and Italy have tried to ensure their future supplies of oil in Iran by investing in petrochemicals or other strategic goods. But, even here, where monopoly securing their supplies against present and future rivals, advance payment has been extracted in the form of oil sales, itself fulfilling the need to secure oil stocks.

Human resources, this most vital of all factors in economic development, are also exhausted under Radical Islamic governments. The productivity of manpower under capitalism is intricately linked with skill levels, education and research. A secular, scientific and experimental environment encourages development which, in turn, serves to refresh that environment. But the Islamic government crushes through force on secular life (including schools, universities, scientific and research centres). Its ceaseless interference in secular life even forces many of those who already have skills to flee the country or to abandon productive economic activity. The Islamic state thus not only fails to recreate a qualitatively advanced workforce, but deskills the existing labour force, hampering the ability of the economy to expand.

In short, Pan-Islamism in power is a ruinous force for the economy. Though retaining capitalism as the dominant mode of production, capitalist development is slowed down in certain fields without being able to resurrect some pre-capitalist forms of production. Thus, the inherited economy is faced with both paralysing contradictions and internal anarchy and with the existent unequal development of international capitalism, now accentuated to breaking point. The sad reality is that even when the religious-Islamist governments are overthrown, the future looks bleak. What progressive and stable socio-political system can take root in a society mired in uneven development, polarized and depoliticised, where a form of capital accumulation is thwarted? Can a society which has fallen victim to pan-Islamism throw off this massive dead weight of cultural psychological trauma? What is to be done? Our purpose here is to issue an invitation—for a dialogue over one of the most vexed questions of our time. What are we to do about a blind and reactionary trend of the pan-Islamist variety?

A child of our time and a product of the ruinous effects of advanced capitalism in Islamic societies of the periphery, Radical Islam encounters the left with its most difficult challenge: how to respond to a reactionary, grass-roots movement, arising out of desperation—a movement which destroys class, cultural and ideological values and leaves society disarmed and ill-equipped to meaningfully confront its own ruinous state. The actual response of the left has not so far been edifying; both in the region and at a global level, it is paralysed by a phenomenon that presents a contradictory challenge to its instincts.

There have been two basic reactions to Radical Islam—the first a policy of political alliance, the second of confrontation—with the aim of bringing about its ultimate destruction. With the end of the Cold War, the first response has faded. But, at its height, both left and right followed the hallowed doctrine of ‘uniting against the common enemy.’ Radical Islam was both anti-capitalist and anti-communist, so at no stage was it short of potential allies. On the left, there were different attitudes to the potential alliance. Believers in the ‘non-capitalist road to socialism’, for example, saw it as strategic and unconditional; for others, it was tactical, dependent in the longer term on the attainment of proletarian hegemony within the revolution. But, there were also perceived advantages in an alliance for capitalism, which was itself instrumental in directly and through the client (client states) in bringing anti-communist Islam into being and encouraging its growth as part of its policy to contain the challenge of global socialism.

In general terms, two main trends can be discerned in the way the surviving (capitalist) bloc and its allies faced Radical Islam. The first was to liquidate it ideologically; the second to combine
This is not a trivial difference. For one thing, understanding it profoundly affects the strategies needed to overcome political Islam. Radical Islam is not a response to the modern state, modern culture or the separation of the religion and state, but rather to mass unemployment, destitution and hopelessness brought about by the modern state. It is not so much a reaction to the essence of modernism but to the ravages of advanced capitalism in a part of its periphery. Those thrown on to the rubbish heap of history clash at the nearest available ideology at a time when liberalism, nationalism and known forms of socialism are all sinking in a quagmire.

It is, therefore, imperative to imagine that any project must offer a fundamental solution to the political and economic crisis that can forestall the genesis and growth of such blind and ultimately destructive movements. It is also clear that any political solution must be accompanied by a cultural renaissance congenial to human feeling, intellect and thought. This requires nothing less than a full-scale ideological spring-clean for the left. The three major planks on which the pan-Islamist movement must be confronted are: the formulation of an independent and radical economic programme, the development of a coherent political platform and a thorough overhaul of its own system of beliefs and ideas about organisation.

While advanced capitalism is polarising the world into extremes of affluence and poverty that now transcend geographical boundaries, one can only talk of an independent economic programme that now transcend geographical boundaries, one can only talk of an independent economic programme that now transcend geographical boundaries. These policies need to be in public control (which is not necessarily the same as state control), the most suitable form within which the labour force can be directly involved in production, with a major input into meaningful decision-making. The producers must control the means of production not just in legal but in real political and practical terms. A balance must be created between central planning and decentralised workers' control, and a system of social security must improve quality of life. These and other economic policies are crucial if the left is to unite with, and mobilise its main social base, the downtrodden. Only with a radical programme addressing the root cause of mass destitution can the left attract its natural class allies away from the clutches of Islamic obscurantism.

The Islamic movement filled a vacuum created by the ideological feebleness of the two main social classes—the native bourgeoisie and the young working class—and we must confront the fact that the left, as it exists in these countries today, is singularly ill equipped to lead the implementation of the programme outlined above. A major rethink is necessary if the left is to fill this ideological vacuum before those who would promote bourgeois alternatives have produced new prescriptions with their already sharpened pens. Without such a rethink, the left can entertain no hope of truly representing the interests of workers, organising working-class struggles, and becoming integral to a genuinely mass force in those societies.

Notes
1 An incomplete list might include the following. First, the assistance given to the rise of Ekhterev Muslimin (Muslim Brotherhood) against Nasser's regime in Egypt and the Ba'ath Party in Syria. Second, support for the Islamic Amal in Lebanon as a counterweight to the Palestinian Liberation Organisation and progressive Lebanese leaders and parties. Third, the strengthening of the Fadaiyan-e Islam, andSBCC of Ayatollah Kashani, in opposition to Dr Mossadegh's government and the Tudeh (Communist) Party in Iran. Fourth, the massacre of half a million communists in Indonesia. Fifth, the mobilisation of semi-military parties and organisations in Afghanistan and the provision of unlimited support to their efforts to overthrow the Marxist government. In so using religion, the imperialist intelligence networks may rely on facilities provided by countries such as Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, or on their own agents sent directly, to create or to infiltrate religious groupings or parties. Their support can take different forms, but the important point is that they played a central Cold War role in increasing Islamic religious influence in Islamic societies. We see the grave consequences today.

An unedited version of this article can be found at CRITIQUE: Journal of Socialist Theory www.critiqujournal.net/islam.html