cross currents in culture

variant

contents

Express Yourself!

Anna Dezeuze

The Guerilla Art Kit
Keri Smith
New York, Princeton Architectural Press, 2007
ISBN 1568986882
website: http://www.kerismith.com

Learning to Love You More
Harrell Fletcher and Miranda July
New York, Prestel, 2007
ISBN 3791337335
website: http://www.learningtoloveyoumore.com

If love and war are indeed opposites, then *The Guerilla Art Kit* by Keri Smith and *Learning to Love You More* by Harrell Fletcher and Miranda July appear to be two very distinct projects. While the former privileges medium over message, by providing techniques inspired by street and protest art to disrupt everyday spaces and routines, the latter encourages participants to share their personal experiences by performing a number of fixed, content-driven 'assignments' documented on the project's website as well as the new book. Both projects share, however, two crucial characteristics: a focus on small interventions within the fabric of everyday life and an emphasis on self-expression – *The Guerilla Art Kit*'s principal objective, it turns out, is to help you "get your message out in the world." Keri Smith actually refers to the *Learning to Love You More* (LTLYM) website in her *Guerilla Art Kit*, and one of her proposed 'exercises' – to "make a poster of your day" – is very similar to LTLYM assignment 10 ("make a flyer of your day"), as both involve summarizing one's day and posting photocopies of the poster/flier in public spaces. In another 'exercise' proposed by Smith, readers are invited to write encouraging fortune-cookie-style messages on small paper slips, and "drop them randomly" wherever they go, while LTLYM assignment 63 gives instructions for making an "encouraging banner" including a positive thought or affirmation. "You are a star," Smith suggests as an example of a "hidden fortune"; "You are incomparable," were the words chosen by Skye Gilkerson from Minneapolis, Minnesota, for her (his?) realization of the LTLYM banner. If distributing a poster of your day involves sharing snapshots of your personal life with strangers, and making encouraging banners or hidden fortunes is about spreading positive thoughts in the world, another concern running through both projects focuses on ways "to beautify or recreate a space that is soulless or without character" (to use Smith's words). LTLYM's suggestion, in assignment 15, to "hang a windchime in a parking lot" is a good example of this 'beautifying' agenda. Smith's step-by-step guide to how to make 'seed bombs' aims at the same result as LTLYM assignment 36,

which encourages readers to "grow a garden in an expected spot." In addition to gardening, both Keri Smith and the LTLYM authors tend to encourage the use of old-fashioned crafts – whether collage or drawing, stencils or papier maché, crochet or knitting.

Of course, as it will have now become clear, the main reason why both projects are not so different after all is that Smith's 'guerilla art' bears no real connection to any political intervention, whether anarchist or situationist. Even if 'beautifying' the environment is only one of the three aims of guerilla art stated by Smith – the others involve the slightly more promising, if equally vague, "challenging the status quo" and "interacting" with the environment and other people – Keri Smith can be more appropriately described as a Martha Stewart on pot than any guerilla activist. All trace of violence has been excised from her definition of guerilla art as "any anonymous work […] installed, performed, or attached in public or private spaces with the distinct purpose of affecting the world in a creative or thought-provoking way." In her essay in the *Learning to Love You More* book, art historian Julia Bryan-Wilson rightly points out that the project does not claim any 'grandiose' political goals of social protest or community building; LTLYM's claims are indeed nothing but 'modest,' as are those embodied by Smith's guerilla art. 'Modest' however, does not mean non-existent, and it is the specific brand of politics at stake here that seems most relevant to contemporary forms of art and activism concerned above all with what Rebecca Gordon Nesbitt has aptly called "micro-attempts at change."[1] And, since over five thousand contributors have sent their reports to the LTLYM website, and ten thousand readers a day (according to Princeton Architectural Press) visit Smith's weblog, the two projects themselves are as good barometers of current social trends as any other book, website or artwork around.

The projects are premised on a general sense that some vital connections have been lost in our societies. For Miranda July, we have lost touch with our feelings and our spirituality – a project such as LTLYM tries to satisfy "our desire to feel more"[2] through "joyful" and "profound experiences" leading to a rediscovery of ourselves, and our relations to other people. For Keri Smith, we have become disconnected from our environment because we are constantly bombarded by an overwhelming mass of information. Guerilla art, according to her, can "reawaken a sense of connection of the environment" (whether urban landscapes, the natural world, or a local community) "by pointing out something I might not have seen, by adding a new image to the world that is unexpected, or by presenting an alternative
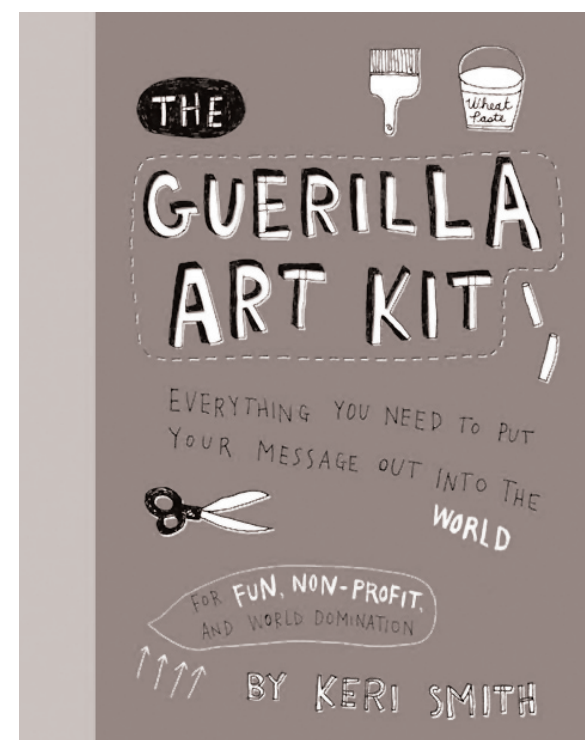
point of view." Both projects, then, use exercises or assignments to help us 'reawaken,' or re-'learn' these connections within the spaces of everyday life, rather than in an explicitly political realm of social activism. Many LTLYM assignments sound like psychotherapy exercises, and Smith's 'how to' book points to the convergence between self-help and do-it-yourself manuals. Both are responding to a need for directions, a craving for community, for direct connections in a fragmented and uncertain world.

Small satisfactions, it seems, can nevertheless still be found within this melancholy context: the pleasure in following instructions (the LTLYM assignments are compared to recipes, exercise classes or singing along to someone else's song), the "wonderful feeling of elation" in anticipating the future discovery of a guerilla art object. These momentary losses of self-consciousness by voluntarily submitting to someone else's orders, or by focusing on making someone else happy secretly certainly seem risk-free (Smith discourages any major infringement of the law.) One is reminded of the little tricks invented by the eponymous heroine of the French film *Amélie* (2001), who spends most of her time contriving to bring happiness, anonymously, to people around her. As in *Amélie*, the emphasis on tiny pleasures and minute acts, which can bring "a beautiful human touch" to our everyday lives (in Bryan-Wilson's words[3]), can slip into a problematic cuteness and sentimentality. Keri Smith's exercises and LTLYM assignments fall into this trap because they often infantilise their readers. Smith finds it necessary to warn readers that the new blades of 'x-acto' knives "are *very* sharp." "Go slowly," she advises. The instructions in LTLYM are usually very detailed, advising on the form and content of the assignment, including "don'ts" as well as dos, and offering reassurances and general thoughts about the objective of the task. Moreover, LTLYM knowingly invites regressions into childhood and adolescence, whether by inviting participants to "make a child's outfit in an adult size" or to

"reread" their "favorite book from fifth grade." Meanwhile, Smith encourages us to "make 'friends'" by pasting cut-out eyes onto inanimate objects in public spaces, and to create "miniature environments" complete with cork figurines and landscapes made out of paper clips, spools, shells and buttons. Add some instructions for making potato prints (in the 'stamp' section), and you have enough activities to keep a bunch of five-year olds busy on a rainy afternoon.

"We are living in a golden age of self expression."[4] The press release for *The Guerilla Art Kit* underlines its relation to the explosion of blogs and 'social networking sites' such as YouTube and MySpace, which are also obvious points of comparison for the web-based LTLYM. For Smith, such 'independent media' provide "a way for people to take power back" in a context dominated by "a growing mistrust in corporate media" and a sense of impotence in the face of "a system that seems to be dominated by corruption and money." Guerilla art is more than a reaction to the present American context, however: "the need" for people "to share and express themselves in a public way" can, apparently, be traced as far back as prehistoric cave painting. (I like the image of a cave painter indignantly rejecting the invitation to exhibit in a white cube gallery because this wouldn't allow her to express herself 'in a public way'). "*The Guerilla Art Kit* is," we are told, "about leaving your mark," in order to remind the world, as the Adbusters blog (cited by Smith) puts it, that "the human spirit is alive here." LTLYM encourages a similar form of mark-making through the creation of objects and stories. The ongoing flux of confiding and confessing invited by the more personal assignments (from explaining the significance of a scar or a special outfit to recording an argument, spending time with a dying person or writing down a phone conversation you would like to have) inevitably sets up a voyeurist/exhibitionist dynamic reminiscent of US talk shows. (The LTLYM book even includes the 'real life' story of long lost siblings reunited through the website.) In this sense, LTLYM is even more closely related to another web project – the hugely popular *PostSecret*, which invites contributors to send in their secrets anonymously. (With its 180,000 contributions and over one hundred million website hits since 2004, as well as a series of bestselling anthologies, Frank Warren's *PostSecret* has in fact been a far more visible social phenomenon than either LTLYM or Keri Smith's books and blog.[5]) Like *PostSecret*, the stories in LTLYM make for compulsive reading, exploiting
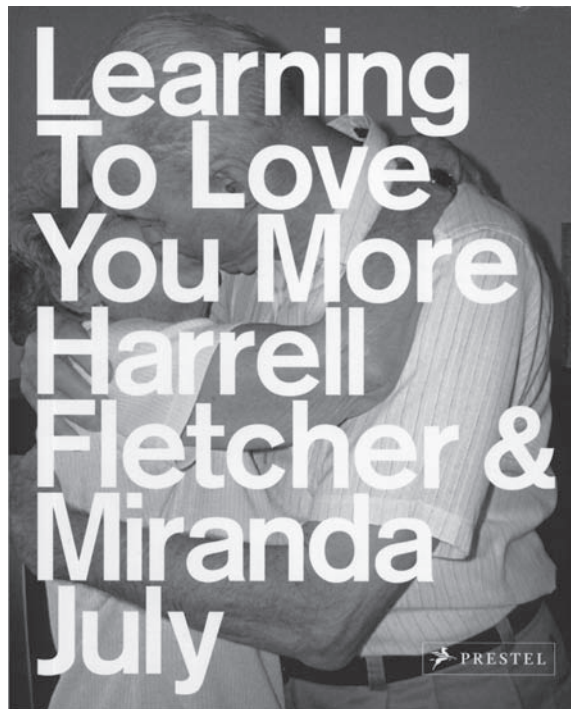
the same mechanisms at the root of Tracey Emin's success, in order to present for our pleasure the neuroses not of one tormented individual, but of a whole society. Indeed, one of the reports for assignment 14 – "write your life story in less than a day" – was singled out by July and Fletcher for an award, and described by them as "The Great American Story" (complete with dysfunctional family, alcohol abuse, homelessness, mental illness, and, of course, a happy end).

In drawing a composite portrait of America, LTLYM acts as a counterpart to Jeremy Deller and Allan Kane's Britain-based *Folk Archive*, which similarly operates as both a website and a range of changing exhibitions in different locations.[6] The *Folk Archive* documents existing rituals and objects, rather than encouraging people to make their own contributions, but Deller and Kane would no doubt agree with Fletcher and July's claim that they are recording "the frequently wild, sometimes hilarious, and quietly stunning creative lives of a few people living on earth right now." The fact that Deller and Kane would never express themselves in this way should not only be attributed to good old British reserve: their difficulties in articulating the aims of their project stem largely from the awkward power relations implied by their ambivalent roles as 'outsiders' recording popular pastimes. July and Fletcher avoid this pitfall by resolutely placing themselves on the same level as their contributors. Anyone who has watched July's award-winning feature film *You and Me and Everyone We Know* (2005) can vouch for her sincerity: in it, she stars

as a young artist whose sensibility and activities clearly display significant features of the LTLYM aesthetics. While July and Fletcher do not adopt Deller and Kane's problematically superior position, the infantilizing and sentimentalizing drives in LTLYM can nevertheless be considered as forms of manipulation. This is why, I think, the 'cuteness' factor of this project, like that of *The Guerilla Art Kit*, leaves me uneasy: their cheerful and friendly format seem to encourage an eager submission to orders and instructions which may not be as empowering as they even 'modestly' claim. The concept of the gift mobilized by both projects has become a leitmotif of critical discussions of contemporary art, and most critics agree with Marcel Mauss that the logic of the gift involves reciprocal relations which establish forms of obligations as much as pure generosity.[7] The democratic operation and the sincerity of LTLYM have the merit of making these relations more transparent: both parties, it seems, are getting something out of this exchange, although what this 'something' is, remains somewhat elusive. Behind its pretty design and upbeat rhetoric, *The Guerilla Art Kit* is, in contrast, as vacuous as Keri Smith's own weblog, which, like most blogs, contributes to the mass of useless information that led us to 'tune out' in the first place. Why should I be interested in what kind of tea Ms Smith drank yesterday? How can "knitted ornaments hung from trees" change the world? Keri Smith provides answers to neither question, and leaves us wondering how Princeton Architectural Press came up with the notion that "*The Guerilla Art Kit* shows how small acts can start a revolution." LTLYM is certainly more effective in demonstrating that the 'human spirit' (to refer the Adbusters' quote again) has not yet been entirely crushed – but is staying alive enough? I am still left wondering what kind of revolution will come out of our "golden age of self expression."

Notes

1. Rebecca Gordon Nesbitt, 'The Reality of my Desires,' *Variant*, 30, Winter 2007, p. 4.

2. Julia Bryan-Wilson, 'Some Kind of Grace: an Interview with Miranda July,' *Camera Obscura*, vol. 55, no. 1, p. 196.

3. Ibid, p. 182.

4. http://www.papress.com/bookpage.tpl?cart=12003327246 97&isbn=1568986882(accessed on January 21, 2008).

5. Cf. http://postsecret.blogspot.com

6. Cf. http://www.mini-host.org/folkarchive/

7. Marcel Mauss (2001) *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies* (London: Routledge)

Miraculous Mass-communication

"The performance-, theatre- and radio-art group LIGNA (formed 1997) consists of the media theorists and radio artists Ole Frahm, Michael Hüners and Torsten Michaelsen, who work in the FSK (Free Broadcaster Combine), a non-commercial, local radio in Hamburg. LIGNA repeatedly design experimental situations which aim for the transgression of the conventional application of radio technology and the re-actualisation of its inherent, but forgotten or ignored potentials.

The action *Radioballet* took place in the main station of Hamburg and one year later in Leipzig. Both spaces had been recently privatised and subject to control by surveillance cameras and security guards. People who beg, sit on the floor, and express 'inadequate behaviour' are usually expelled from these spaces. The *Radioballet* brought back these excluded gestures. Several hundred people followed the invitation to spread around with small radio devices in their pockets. The participants could act where they wanted: on the platforms, stairs or escalators or in the shopping mall. The 'ballet' was synchronised by the instructions that participants received through portable radios: sit down, stand up, hold your hand in a begging motion, turn around, dance and wave good-bye to the departing train of the revolution... The *Radioballet* was not conceived as a demonstration or assembly (that could have been forbidden by the police) but rather as a 'Zerstreuung', a german term that could be translated as dispersion, distraction or distribution. Like ghostly remnants, the excluded gestures haunted and disturbed the surveyed public space during the 90 minutes of the performance and opened it up for uncanny and uncontrollable situation. If the medium of radio is sometimes blamed for the depopulation of the public sphere and keeping its listeners in their homes, LIGNA turned radio reception into a public event."

Jelena Vesic (curator and writer based in Belgrade)

The following discussion, led by Jelena, considers the impact of the networked performance Radioballet *and the ethics of collective action, not least with the absence of material and reciprocal relationships limiting expressions of solidarity. It was recorded 14/07/07 with the participants Rael Artel, Anna Łazar, Karol Sienkiewicz, Margus Tamm, Airi Triisberg and Andreas Trossek, in the workshop on 'Collectives, Actions, Re-enactments' held as part of the 'Exercises on Adhocracy' camp in Parnu, Estonia.*

LIGNA, *Radioballet*, 2003, documentation of a performance at the Leipzig main station. Photos by Eiko Grimberg.

Jelena Vesić: The *Radioballet* actions by LIGNA not only had a performative value, I think they are also interesting in relation to the question: "Why are our demonstrations so boring today?", which was posed earlier this week by Anna and Karol from *Sekcja* magazine. I would argue that this

Straightness
- Balance with spread out arms

action was definitely not "boring", but very much inventive, and not only as an aesthetic invention of, for example, collective performance, but also as an invention of a tool which makes the process of demonstrating effective in the places where demonstrations are actually not allowed. The tool was to bridge the space between gathering and scattering, and the main question was how – if the people are scattered – the action can be co-ordinated, and how collectivity can be established? The police and security people were very confused because they could not find the source of this action, the center of coordination.

Anna Łazar: What this action showed are the gaps in the law. They were assuming that this kind of behaviour would be forbidden but it wasn't. Actually, I would like to emphasise something else – it was the creation of a community that enabled the administration of individuals. What they did was act together but in a totally atomised way, without too much emotional effort to create a sense of community.

Karol Sienkiewicz: I did not like the fact instructions were transmitted from above, broadcast from above. These people were behaving without expressing their own opinions, somebody else took advantage of their bodies and they had nothing against that.

Jelena: I think you cannot say that, because they accepted it. All these people were willing to protest against the privatisation of public space. Otherwise it would not be possible to demonstrate at all, unless one invents another mechanism to interconnect the scattered groups of people.

Karol: But for what purpose was the radio? The radio is just a gadget, one could organise the same kind of performance by making an agreement that everybody will go to the public space at a certain time and perform certain gestures – make a salto in the air or lay on the floor, etc. For what purpose is the radio? Is it the kind of hope that maybe somebody is listening to the same waves at that moment and will join the action?

Jelena: No-no-no. As far as I know, there is quite a strong activist scene in Hamburg which is really well interconnected from the inside. They were the ones who wanted to do something, who wanted to express their opinion about the gentrification and privatisation of public space. *Radioballet* was

something that was not imposed but discussed and elaborated before the very action was performed. Those people listen to independent radio stations because they offer quite different programs than commercial radio. Also, these radio stations are sometimes developing really interesting participatory programs and mechanisms through which the public or the listeners can immediately contribute to the program. For example, they organise thematic evenings together with their listeners, etc. The entire action was collectively discussed beforehand. It was definitely not the case that somebody came over and said: "Hey people, I want you to produce an aesthetic action for me…" Of course, there was the person, the voice which symbolically co-ordinated the action through the radio, but this is not a crucial fact for me – I think that in this case radio was used collectively as a tool which helped the group of people to express a certain political opinion.

Karol: But these people didn't know in advance what gesture they were going to do next before they were told to.

Jelena: Maybe they didn't really know the exact order of the gestures or all the formal details, but for me it is much more important that they were all aware of the idea behind the gestures performed during *Radioballet*, and that the idea of such an action had been collectively discussed and accepted. Of course, why this aesthetisation and synchronisation is necessary is that if they would perform these 'prohibited gestures' separately, it could much more easily happen that some of them would be arrested. In this case, and with the use of radio as the tool for co-ordination and synchronisation, the police and security people were confused. They couldn't figure out where the source of this action was located.

Airi Triisberg: I think the image of homogeneity is really important here. This is how they actually experiment the extent of what is possible and what is not. Creating the image of homogeneity is what basically manifests this action as a demonstration.

Karol: I agree that these kinds of actions make demonstrations more attractive and maybe it was our mistake that we posed this question ["Why are our demonstrations so boring today?"] in the title of our workshop – actually there were two important things that we wanted to stress in our presentation. One was that our demonstrations are boring, but even more important was that our demonstrations do not provide this kind of platform for individuals to communicate and express their opinions, which can indeed be very different. In this kind of action everybody is behaving in the same way. I know that they all agree with the main aim of the demonstration. But for me, it is not something that I would like to participate in because I would have the feeling that somebody is violating my personal freedom.

We can of course say that this action shows what the limits and borders are of public space. But we can also say that this action shows how easy it is to convince people to behave in a strange way in public space.

Jelena: The *Radioballet* was more of an experiment. I disagree with the opinion that it expressed some kind of totalitarian ideological model which stands in the way of individual freedom. I think that you universalise things too much. Even on the surface of the representation, on the perceptual level, we can see that the performers did not act as a 'trained army', but that everybody moved spontaneously, or individualistically if you like, each one of them danced in a different way, moved

Nazification of Sport: choreographed pageantry, 1936 Summer Olympics, Germany.

their hand in different way and so on. I mean, they had a clear goal: They managed to demonstrate in a place where demonstrations are prohibited. This is not so easy to achieve, in my opinion. I mean, they invented something like a new technique for demonstrating in public space.

Andreas Trossek: Yet they managed to organise the whole action without any security guys getting involved.

Karol: So actually it was not successful. They did not manage to demonstrate anything.

Jelena: *Radioballet* was not meant to be a demonstration which would stand for a certain goal until that goal was fulfilled. This was more of an experiment in re-inventing the process of demonstration. I see it as laboratory: Let's try something and see if it works, let's see if we can transgress the given rules, or not? So, your claim that the action would have been much more successful if the security guards had got involved demonstrates your preference to see violence in the process of demonstrating, which, in my opinion overlaps with the desires of professional news reporters from BBC, CNN and so on...

Airi: What we are actually addressing here is the question of collectivity. And, of course, every collective action needs some consensus.

Jelena: Yes. We could even say that it was an experiment in how to practice collectivity. This was an experiment. I disagree with the interpretation that something was imposed from above. Quite the opposite, it was exactly about participation, and the performers of the action could hardly be seen as passive in any sense...

Margus Tamm: But why do you think this was a political act at all? There are many different city-space games that look quite similar – treasure hunting, flash mobs or some war games. For example, midnight London is full of people running and acting in strange ways. People communicate over the internet, make up some rules and you get this very bizarre picture in the city space at night when small groups of people are hunting for some 'treasure', or gather at a certain time in the supermarket, lie down for five minutes and then just disperse again. What is the difference between those games and the *Radioballet* action?

Jelena: One of the goals in this case was to express disagreement with the policies of gentrification and privatisation of public spaces and consequently with the imposed 'politics of security' against the presumable 'war against terrorism'. The goal was also to experiment with the use of radio and the possibilities of collective action. Of course, people who participated there had different desires – some of them were probably interested in different applications of radio technology, some of them maybe came just

for fun – but I guess what I just listed here was something they all had in common.

Karol: The question is, was this demonstration readable for other people who were not listening to the radio and just happened to be in the train station because they were travelling? What are the conclusions of this action? Is it something that should be implemented on a larger scale or not?

Jelena: Well, their claim, as well as my claim, is that this action was non-representationalist. It was an experiment. Therefore, the actionists didn't mobilise classic or professional mechanisms of publicity. So, whether it was readable for the other people or not we cannot clearly diagnose. Of course, many people noticed that something strange happened there. I don't know if it is necessary to back up this statement. What the conclusions would be? Hmmm ... the conclusion could be that if people are not allowed to gather in certain places then they can invent other ways of communication in order to perform collective action. Regarding the issue of effectivity ... I don't know what to say ... we can come to the point where we can clearly conclude that demonstrations today are not producing a rupture in political space and that they are more-and-more becoming accepted and well situated in the neo-liberal, democratic policy of freedom of speech ... in public space as well. *Radioballet* was not designed that way. It was an artistic action with a certain political meaning. I am sure that there were people who did not understand it, but there will always be people who do not understand.

Rael Artel: I would rather see this action as an appearance of a particular dispersed community

which only through this get-together actually gets conscious of how many they are. This reminds me of a similar type of radio action that happened in Detroit in the 1970s. It was one of the first radio stations broadcasting for the Black community. There was one part of a radio program called the *Midnight Funk Association* hosetd by DJ Mojo who each night at midnight would tell his listeners to switch on their lights[1], so that people would find out how many of their neighbours were listening to the same station. Moreover, the fact that you are listening to the same radio can also mean that you are sharing a common taste for music, as well some political views, etc.

Jelena: I can also make a parallel with an action which was for me completely meaningless in comparison to the *Radioballet*, although it also had a certain aesthetic-pleasurable value comparable to *Radioballet*. During Milošević's government, the citizens of Belgrade used to go to their balconies and drum on pots at the very moment the national news started on TV. I was boycotting this action because I knew that it was supported by the democratic neo-liberal forces who wanted to come into power. As I was against this political solution, I did not play along. But somehow the action had a strong aesthetic aspect, some kind of excitement and pleasure in this newly established moment of collectivity. This aesthetic aspect also reproduced a wish of belonging and I have to say that I was tempted somehow, but still I resisted this temptation.

Karol: In the 1980s in Poland, during the *Solidarity* movement, there was an illegal *Solidarity Television*. It was not a separate TV-channel – in fact, there were only two channels in Poland at

Solidarity, Piotr Uklański,
3,000 soldiers were deployed so as to create
the inscription 'Solidarity' at the Gdańsk
Shipyard, June 17 2007.

the time. They hacked the broadcasting system of the official channels and sometimes people would see a text appearing on their TV-screens: "This is *Solidarity TV* broadcasting…" And everybody who was against the prevailing order was asked to turn off their lights, for example. Of course, it is an action that happened in a different context, this kind of strategy would probably not be suitable for the liberal state that we live in. Back then, it was something that gave people some energy or encouragement – thanks to that they knew that they were not the only ones who were against the system. I was very young back then, of course, and I don't remember it personally.

Jelena: For me, it is very similar to the events in 1999 in Belgrade, and the drumming on the pots. In Serbia this energy and encouragement was also important, because the Milošević government had forged the results of the elections. Drumming on the pots was a symbolic act of showing that this government was not legitimate, to demonstrate how many people were against it.

Karol: Radio waves were the site of political struggle in the communist block as well. There was this radio *Free Europe* that was broadcast from Munich. Many people in Poland were listening to it.

Anna: I want to show something that is a little bit connected to the *Radioballet* and a little bit to the Polish 1980s. It is an artwork made by Piotr Uklański a few weeks ago, titled *Solidarność*. This is the logo of the *Solidarity* movement formed by the soldiers of the Polish army. It would be impossible to organise such an action in such a short period of time with any other group of people except the army. They are used to discipline and to obeying orders. Apparently, some media figure had enough influence to convince the generals to give permission to use the soldiers. Of course, every single soldier was happy to participate, which was shown in a short feature film that accompanied this piece. What I find problematic here is the kind of soft oppression of the individual that is needed and used in an artwork in order to address the topic of solidarity.

Jelena: This is an image similar to the what we call *Slet* in the Serbian language, which is a collective performance that used to be organised on special occasions in the former Yugoslavia, during the socialist era. For example, the government would organise something like that for Tito's birthday. A huge mass of people would participate forming different patterns with their bodies, performing live images… Young members of the Yugoslav Peoples Army were always the best – simply perfect and the most precise – and it was always considered to be the most virtuous element of the *Slet*, the *prime time* moment.

Anna: Yes, but it applies a very totalitarian way of using people. That was a dissonance in this *Radioballet*.

Rael: I understand what you mean. Susan Sontag explains this issue in one of her essays entitled Fascinating Fascism where she writes about the *Triumph des Willens* by Leni Riefenstahl.[2] Sontag describes the way of taking power over the masses by making them do exactly the same thing at the same time, so that the individual becomes just a small unit of the mass moved by a *führer* sitting at the top of that power structure.

Jelena: Oh, but we cannot universalise visual representation that way. It reminds me to the discourse of equalisation of Communism and Fascism on the basis of superficial aesthetic appearance that we often meet in the post-socialist artistic, art historian and theoretical discourses.

I think it is very important to be aware of what the statement is, what the political background is. Collective celebration of the birthday of the leader is quite a different political act than the interventionist critique of the neo-liberal political position which is realised through the format of collective action. We cannot observe
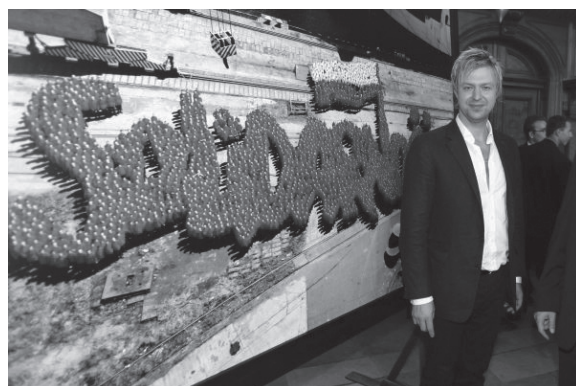
those things through a universalist depoliticised view. In the case of *Radioballet,* participatory collective form is quite obvious. All those people wanted to participate and their participation was voluntary and at the same time political. They are self-organised demonstrators who wanted to join a certain action and who also initiated this action. This action addressed a quite clear political statement that we already discussed.

Airi: This discussion reminds me of another I participated in at *United Nations Plaza* recently. Hito Steyerl was elaborating on the same kind of problem in the framework of the topic, why do conferences usually fail. There she emphasised the kind of paradox that in order to create a really democratic discussion you actually have to behave in a very authoritarian way. You have to limit the access in a way, to establish some rules, to set the discourse so that a fruitful discussion could emerge at all. Because public discussions that are really open for everybody tend to be rather unproductive.

Jelena: Yes, that's interesting, but that's another thing. Here, in this discussion, I'm afraid we are faced with the consequences of post-socialist discourse in Eastern Europe and its stereotypical fear of so-called 'totalitarianism'. For me, this political subjectivation is very symptomatic, and I am sad it is happening here and now among the people who live under obviously predominant capitalist circumstances. I consider the idea of 'natural' democracy to be very naïve as well, as the simple opposition to democracy and totalitarianism. I would describe this discourse as ideological, and for me its source is clearly neo-liberal.

Translocal Express: Jubilee Edition, Tallinn, Feb 21–23 2008, is a three-day workshop-seminar addressing the growing tendencies of nationalism on the Eastern borders of 'new Europe'. Taking place in the close proximity of the celebration of the 90th anniversary of the Republic of Estonia, it will gather a number of artists, writers and curators in order to search for alternative ways to think about society in the 'era of global democracy'. The seminar is organised in collaboration with Van Abbemuseum as a parallel project to *Be(com)Ing Dutch*.
www.publicpreparation.org
http://becomingdutch.com

Notes

1. According to Wikipedia, the words of DJ Mojo are best remembered as: "Will the members of the Midnight Funk Association please rise. Please go to your porch light and turn it on for the next hour to show us your solidarity. If you're in your car please honk your horn and flash your lights, wherever you are. If you're in bed, get ready to dance on your back, in Technicolor…"
2. 'Fascinating Fascism', Under the Sign of Saturn (New York, 1980), 73-105, Susan Sontag

critical.network.co.uk

Radical Popular?
Stefan Szczelkun
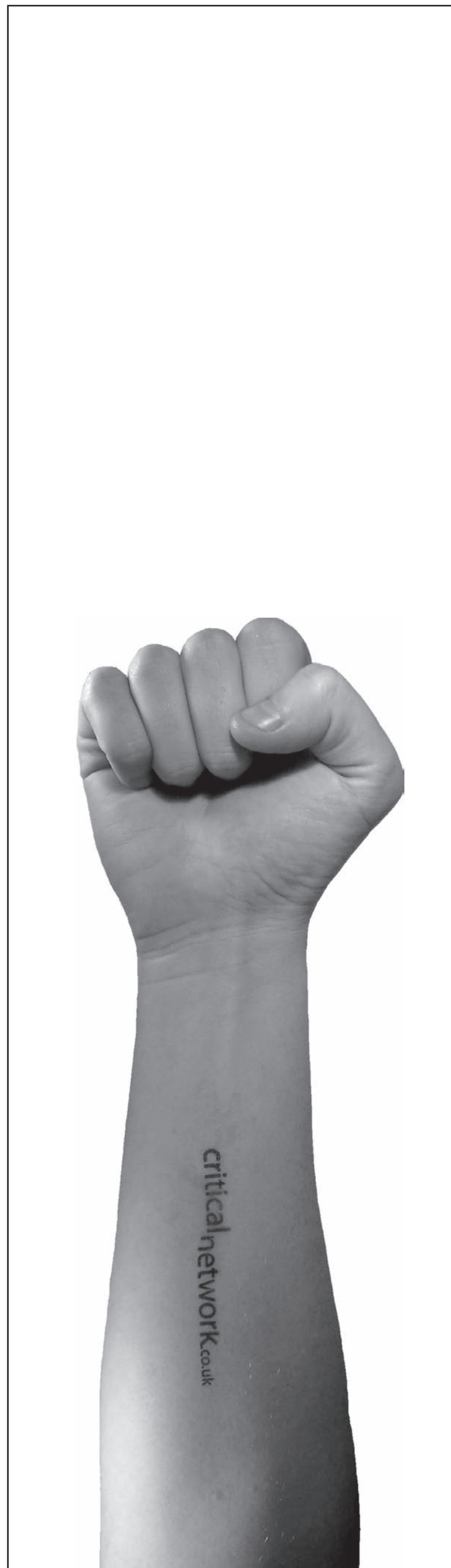
Subversion: the definitive history of underground cinema
Duncan Reekie
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This book is badly titled – in the sense that the title does not give much clue as to its much wider significance. But maybe this is how it sneaked through some of the publishing industry's gate-keepers. It is not just about underground film and is a defense of popular culture more broadly. What this book does more powerfully than any I've read is to hack through the weedy and tangled field that is the study of popular culture and come up with a radical reclaiming of the term. However, in the course of making a new case for the vitality and innovation of the popular as a category it also sets about the category of Art, which the establishment sets above popular culture as a means to devalue it. But, again, it's not so much about artwork as about the discourses and theories which prop up the systemic ideology.

"Cultural theory has become for the British state a crucial bureaucracy for the negotiation and maintenance of the border between the art and the popular. The function of theory is to convert the incoherent, chaotic, vulgar collective and popular into an authorised, academic and legitimate culture. This is not simply a textual strategy, it is an educational process since state education is the institution developed by the bourgeoisie to convert the illegitimate popular culture of studious working class youth into art…" (p167)

As a working class artist / thinker I have been waylaid, confused and thwarted throughout my life by trying to read about popular culture – something I grew up immersed in. *Subversion* does an excellent job of going through all the books that I either turned away from perplexed, went to sleep reading or couldn't see the point of. It outlines the key landmarks of this material and summarily gives a voice to, and explains, the multiple intuitive turn-offs I experienced. *Subversion* is essential reading for anyone like me.

I had found a path through some of this tedious stuff in conversation with Howard Slater, Graham Harwood and others in the '80s, and self-published my own conclusions in the early '90s with Working Press. However, there was much that I just didn't have the energy or time to approach. Reekie has filled many gaps for me in a way that is forthright, concise and incisive. He has certainly done a lot of reading to expose middle class aspirational leadership in the mechanisms and rituals of cultural legitimation. Often masquerading as Socialist or Marxist, the line that is missing from these tracts is that 'the revolution' will be televised and managed by the middle class and their wannabee allies and turned into a charade.

The book may be easy for reviewers to dismiss just because it is so wide ranging. A large part of it is a critical and selective literature review of a mass of secondary material, much of which is known to cultural studies academics. But the discourse is both re-assembled and given pragmatic orientation by Reekie's experiences of working as an experimental filmmaker. There are also areas that are based on original new research, like the chapter that draws an outline history of the burgeoning amateur film scene in the UK from the '30s to the '60s. This is derived from the magazines that were a regular part of the British amateur film scene. The close relationships between amateur filmmaking and the underground are, according to Reekie, about "alternativity and experimentalism." (p112) It is astounding to realise that this amateur movement, at its height in the '60s, was the "the most successful integrated autonomous film movement in British Cinema history." (p115)

Reekie comments that the most convincing evidence of the autonomy of the amateur movement is its very obscurity within film history. This is true of many other art forms: the very fact of not being observed by state cadres contains the frustration and pain of not having the recognition one's effort deserves, but it is also a liberation from having one's life funneled into a meaningless careerist path or being extracted from one's organic community. As Reekie argues, "the ruling culture of the bourgeoisie […] represses, appropriates and enervates all radical projects designed to democratise and liberate cultural production." (p123)

Reekie roots the history of underground cinema here in the class blurring history of 19th century bohemian cabaret. As the technology of movies burst onto the urbanised market places in the early 20th century, film was, for a while, a 'cinema of attractions', a visual spectacle.

"As cinema superceded popular theatre and music hall, so it became the crucial site of the border conflict between the popular and bourgeois art, the inevitable target of bourgeois licensing, sedation, gentrification and appropriation. This conflict has two discrete fronts: the first was an initiative within the nascent film industry which was stimulated and guided by state intervention; the second was a movement which sought to appropriate cinema for autonomous art." (p72)

The story of the underground is then woven through Dada cabaret to the British underground in the late '60s, itself the progeny of the US beat/hippie film scene. Here, attention is put onto the London Filmmakers Co-op (LFMC) which was

modeled on Jonas Mekas's earlier Film Maker's Co-op, with its 'no selection' policy. Reekie traces how the early counter cultural approach gives way to a split between underground film and a banal, abstract but heavily theorised structuralist film. The latter becomes dominant as the LFMC became mired in state subsidy and institutionalised within British academia:

"The demand for cinematic purity is not the trajectory of modernist abstraction or the drive for medium specificity, it is the demand of an autonomous art cinema which will correct an historical aberration: popular cinema. The aberration is that a dynamic creative culture could emerge from outside the legitimate sphere of bourgeois art." (p78)

The critical stuff

There are gaps one could point to. The popular culture that Reekie refers to is a particular construction defined at the end of the book by 16 characteristics. These characteristics are not used to analyse the radical components of popular culture, although predictably they bring Bakhtin's concept of 'carnival' into a contemporary context of underground and counter culture. But a complex 16-part definition of the radical popular does seem to be put in as an afterthought and it would have been better in the introduction. Of course that may have imposed a more unwieldy frame on the book.

No doubt for strategic reasons he backs off from being critical of poplar culture. His focus is on attacking the miserable, fake, dishonest and nepotistic aspects of state 'experimental' culture and positioning underground cinema as part of a 'radical popular' tradition. It might be unreasonable to also expect a critique of popular culture as a whole. He is after all coming from a background of growing up imbued with popular moving image culture and he doesn't take on the Adornian critique of mass culture and popular film culture. Even cult genres are clearly impregnated and driven by capitalist interests. Big bourgeois capitalism took control of the early film industry by using its long established literary arm. A control that was sealed as talkies technology wrenched film from its basis in purely visual communication and inserted the script as central to the rituals of cinematic conception.[1]

The commercial popular is inevitably guided by the interests of the system and big money with inevitable alienation effects. Reekie does not bother to make a distinction between the commercial context of such capital intensive productions and the micro economies that he invests a good deal of hope in. The music hall provides ample illustration of what happens as big business moves into carnivalesque popular culture, but this invasion of economic interests does not surface in *Subversion*. I can see why he did not want to get mired in economistic arguments, but, for me, it does leave a certain weakness in the book's critique.

There is another relevant discourse that he does not engage. The establishment was embarrassingly late in accommodating popular culture into its batteries of aesthetic defenses. When Richard Shusterman first appears of the pages of the redoubtable *British Journal of Aesthetics* with his 'Form and Funk: the aesthetic challenge of popular art' in July 1991, his contribution made the rest of the articles look like they are out of the ark. Shusterman did an intelligent job of ignoring and throwing off the fusty old attitudes to the popular. In spite of this, he never really takes his critique onto grounds that threaten anything

but the most decrepit defenders of 'good taste'. Those were the people already left behind by the contemporary art scene's embracing of, first pop art, then 'bad taste', and then (turning full circle for many) kitsch itself. Reekie does not wrangle with this discourse in defense of popular culture which meanders from Herbert Gans in 1974 to Shusterman in the '90s.[2]

But to give him credit, Reekie doesn't shy from the main point, which is that on no account must the idea that culture is renewed and created outside of the bourgeois realm be allowed to gain currency. The idea that the bourgeoisie are the font of the highest forms of creativity is essential to justify their superiority. The result of such an ideology is that a whole institutional framework is brought into existence which controls and extends culture, and which is fundamentally resistant to cultural democracy.

My own story

I have to admit that one reason I was so fascinated with this book was that its later narrative touches my own life directly. Reekie's research belies and often explains my own experience as an aspiring member of the audience. It helps me unpack the sense of both excitement and exclusion that I felt. By offering a personal account of a period that Reekie covers I want to point to the bias in my reading and hopefully add something to his critique.

I had been part of the regional Arts Workshop movement of the late '60s after being inspired as a visitor to Jim Hayne's seminal Arts Lab in Drury Lane, London. After a period dropping out in Wales in the mid '70s I had returned to London in time for the punk explosion. I was an avid, if occasional, audience member at the Musicians Co-op and the Film-makers Co-op which were adjacent to each other in old warehouses in Gloucester Avenue, Camden, North London.

Ten years before, I had been impressed by Andy Warhol's long almost motionless movies which were shown late-night at the Arts Lab, and I think it may have been at the LFMC that I saw Michael Snow's Wavelength, an hour long zoom across a room. I had been doing a sort of Zen Buddhist meditation with the Thai master Chou Kuhn Damasobutsi and I treated Wavelength as a kind of challenge to give attention to the minutiae of change.

But even with this sympathetic but naïve mind-set, I found the later 'Structuralist' films, especially of Peter Gidal, very hard to take. It was these films and the accompanying theory that came to dominate British experimental film and, as Reekie so eloquently argues, stifle the lower class, pop orientated underground. I struggled to engage with these works and came to think that I was perhaps not intellectually adequate for this refined level of aesthetic experience! But it takes Reekie's analysis to expose just how, what I felt was my 'problem', was in fact a mechanism of class oppression, with which the Co-op structuralists were engaged in undermining my value system. Of course, my internalised classism, coming from an aspirational family, would also have played a part. I found other structuralist films like Malcolm Le Grice's looping horses, and another US film where a boat constantly came down a stream, bearable and even enjoyable as they had rhythm and lurid colours which I could find hypnotic, especially if stoned. So appreciation here again for the wrong reasons! They are still running forever in a corner of my mind...

It is interesting to reflect that I found the other avant-garde scene which Reekie dubs 'Counter Cinema', which was associated with Peter Wollen and the BFI axis, even less accessible. Just the fact

the LFMC was called a Co-op and had evolved out of the old Art Lab through the agency of David Curtis encouraged me to seek knowledge there. Nonetheless, the overall experience of the later Co-op was always rather cold. I was friends with a few people like Annabel Nicholson, more due to me frequenting X6 dance space, another collective artists' initiative of the time in Butlers Wharf near Tower Bridge. I found myself more at home there.

Fifteen or so years later I was looking for an MA to give myself academic credentials to back up my part-time work at London Guildhall Communications department. I was teaching in University without a proper degree having dropped out of Architecture. I also wanted to learn the digital media skills I needed to take my book publishing activity into the digital era. When I joined the 'Time Base Media: with electronic imaging' course it was run by A.L. Rees with Malcolm Le Grice as the external examiner. Le Grice is the author of 'Experimental Cinema in the Digital Age' (2001) and AL Rees is the author of 'A History of Experimental Film & Video' (1999), a history Reekie effectively shreds, calling it "the subjective account of a participant in a closed system of reciprocal justification." (p8)

The MA tutors looked down their noses at my interest in editing a video of my self-build co-op erecting our houses in Kennington. The footage was shot by my then 13 year old son Lech and was not a form of video art that they recognised. Nor did I want to mash up the material in that direction. They didn't try to stop me but just politely ignored my efforts to get this footage substantially presented. The same level of enthusiasm greeted my dissertation on 'The epistemonical status of working class culture' which was a minor effort in the same area as Reekie's more erudite and coherent argument. However Subversion helps me understand and even 'read' the quality of attention I received and the historical forces that were mediating it.

Later, I attended the Royal College of Art and was supervised by A.L. Rees for my doctoral study of cultural collectives with a focus on Exploding Cinema. I felt alienated from the RCA which was proudly elitist and made no distinction between excellence and elitism. Although it housed me for whatever motives, no-one asked me to present or teach and I was nervous when I wanted to meet up with other research students. Although grateful for a bursary from Tomato, paying my fees for two years, that eminent design group took no interest in my work. A.L. was affable and very nice to be around as a supervisor, but I felt he was afraid of the power the RCA held. He had come to the RCA on the possibility that he might become head of a revived film department. The post did not materialise and he was left in limbo as 'Reader'. He never went to an Exploding Cinema show and I got to feel I was acting as his agent. I was never invited along to in-crowd socials and generally I felt was being kept at arms length. I'm not suggesting any of this was conspiratorial – just the way class exclusion works.

I'm not sure why fate looped me up in these networks. Possibly because I was pushing hard for Knowledge-with-a-big-K, as well as access to cultural power, and so I was bound to come in contact with the border guards. Reading Reekie's critique I see more clearly what forces were in play and just how easy it is to drown out the carnival spirit of a common fella when in fact that fellow is not only alone but is psychically overshadowed in the portals of the great and good. I once wrote an appeal in the RCA in-house newsletter for any working class artists to meet. The article was received with almighty silence. It is easy to come to the conclusion that you are wrong-headed, foolhardy or out of time. On the other hand, now I can appreciate my own brazenness and perhaps a radical insensitivity.

Through the work I took up on completing my PhD I met Patrick Russel at the BFI. He was one of a new generation to take key posts and bring in expertise on amateur and counter culture films missing among the old guard. Only now is it ok for the BFI national archive to collect amateur film from the lower classes and radical films about the lower classes, like those of Cinema Action, which had been almost absent. The interesting dissertation that Russell had written for his MA on a local amateur film scene seemed to embarrass him and was not published. In fact, little has been published within film literature on Amateur film[3] and so Reekie's outline history of the period is especially significant.

So for me Subversion has allowed me to re-evaluate some of the dead-end streets in my life. The book's critique is pertinent to any person who has been formed by popular culture and for whatever reason finds him or herself wandering in these alien spaces.

A concluding thought

In the end, the history of the recent resurgence of the British underground, which Exploding Cinema led, is sketchily written. Too few references are made to the scattering of contemporary texts that exist mainly in magazines and programmes. The films of this period, especially those left out of the official canon, need especial attention from archives. Many are on the edge of being lost. My own doctoral thesis listed the films and film-makers shown at Exploding Cinema but I did not have the resources to trace the location of originals or copies that could be archived. Without archiving, the underground of this period will probably exist more as myth and hearsay to future generations. The existing Arts Council/BFI canon will be hard to dislodge.

This book is not really so much about underground cinema as it is about rethinking popular culture, yet it is not about any and all popular culture. It is really searching for a concept of a radical popular culture. But even then it is not so much about radical popular culture as it is about the way art devalues working class culture. In dealing with Art it focuses more on the theories by which art legitimates itself and frames its own importance; the way the state channels cultural experiment and play into forms that are safe for bourgeois power. In this sense Subversion is counter theory coming out of sustained radical praxis.

Notes

1. See: William Uricchio & Roberta E.Pearson's *Reframing Culture Princeton*, UP (1993)

2. Gans, Herbert J., *Popular and High Culture: an analysis and evaluation of taste*, Basic Books, New York (1974)

3. Szczelkun, Stefan. 'The Value of Home Movies', Oral *History Society Journal*, Autumn 2000 (V28 No 2 pp94/98)

Faceless:
Chasing the Data Shadow
Manu Luksch & Mukul Patel

Stranger than fiction

Remote-controlled UAVs (Unmanned Aerial Vehicles) scan the city for anti-social behaviour. Talking cameras scold people for littering the streets (in children's voices). Biometric data is extracted from CCTV images to identify pedestrians by their face or gait. A housing project's surveillance cameras stream images onto the local cable channel, enabling the community to monitor itself.

These are not projections of the science fiction film that this text discusses, but techniques that are used today in Merseyside[1], Middlesborough[2], Newham and Shoreditch[3] in the UK. In terms of both density and sophistication, the UK leads the world in the deployment of surveillance technologies. With an estimated 4.2 million CCTV cameras in place, its inhabitants are the most watched in the world.[4] Many London buses have five or more cameras inside, plus several outside, including one recording cars that drive in bus lanes.

The Rotakin test, devised by the UK Home Office Police Scientific Development Branch, measures surveillance camera performance.

But CCTV images of our bodies are only one of many traces of data that we leave in our wake, voluntarily and involuntarily. Vehicles are tracked using Automated Number Plate Recognition systems, our movements revealed via location-aware devices (such as cell phones), the trails of our online activities recorded by Interent Service Providers, our conversations overheard by the international communications surveillance system Echelon, shopping habits monitored through store loyalty cards, individual purchases located using RFID (Radio-frequency identification) tags, and our meal preferences collected as part of PNR (flight passenger) data.[5] Our digital selves are many dimensional, alert, unforgetting.

Increasingly, these data traces are arrayed and administered in networked structures of global reach. It is not necessary to posit a totalitarian conspiracy behind this accumulation – data mining is an exigency of both market efficiency and bureaucratic rationality. Much has been written on the surveillance society and the society of control, and it is not the object here to construct a general critique of data collection, retention and analysis. However it should be recognised that, in the name of efficiency and rationality – and, of course, "security" – an ever-increasing amount of data is being shared (also sold, lost and leaked[6]) between the keepers of such seemingly unconnected records as medical histories, shopping habits, and border crossings. Legal frameworks intended to safeguard a conception of privacy by limiting data transfers to appropriate parties exist. Such laws, and in particular the UK Data Protection Act (DPA, 1998)[7], are the subject of investigation of the film Faceless.

From Act to Manifesto

"I wish to apply, under the Data Protection Act, for any and all CCTV images of my person held within your system. I was present at [place] from approximately [time] onwards on [date]."
From the template for subject access requests used for Faceless

For several years, ambientTV.NET[8] conducted a series of exercises to visualise the data traces that we leave behind, to render them into experience and to dramatise them, to watch those who watch us. These experiments, scrutinising the boundary between public and private in post-9/11 daily life, were run under the title The Spy School. In 2002,
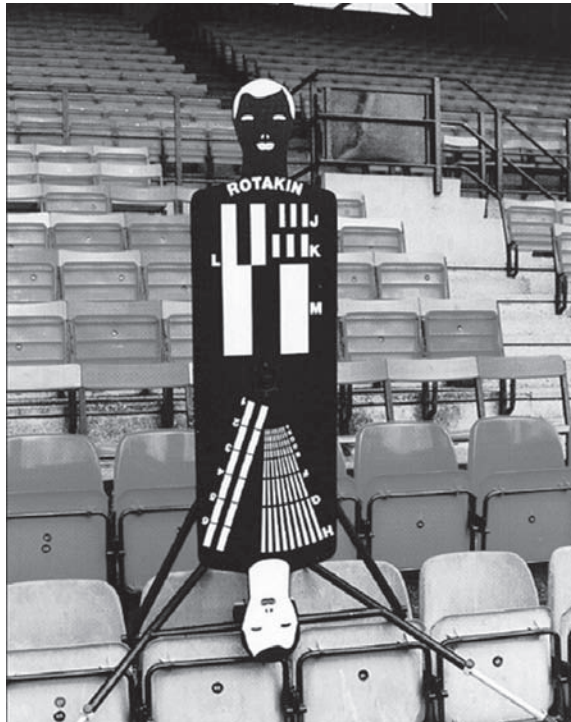
the Spy School carried out an exercise to test the reach of the UK Data Protection Act as it applies to CCTV image data.

"The Data Protection Act 1998 seeks to strike a balance between the rights of individuals and the sometimes competing interests of those with legitimate reasons for using personal information. The DPA gives individuals certain rights regarding information held about them. It places obligations on those who process information (data controllers) while giving rights to those who are the subject of that data (data subjects). Personal information covers both facts and opinions about the individual."
Data Protection Act Factsheet available from the UK Information Commissioners Office, www.ico.gov.uk

The original DPA (1984) was devised to 'permit and regulate' access to computerised personal data such as health and financial records. A later EU directive broadened the scope of data protection and the remit of the DPA (1998) extended to cover, amongst other data, CCTV recordings. In addition to the DPA, CCTV operators 'must' comply with other laws related to human rights, privacy, and procedures for criminal investigations, as specified in the CCTV Code of Practice (www.ico.gov.uk).

As the first subject access request letters were successful in delivering CCTV recordings for the Spy School, it then became pertinent to investigate how robust the legal framework was. The Manifesto for CCTV Filmmakers was drawn up, permitting the use only of recordings obtained under the DPA. Art would be used to probe the law.

A legal readymade

"Vague spectres of menace caught on time-coded surveillance cameras justify an entire network of peeping vulture lenses. A web of indifferent watching devices, sweeping every street, every building, to eliminate the possibility of a past tense, the freedom to forget. There can be no highlights, no special moments: a discreet tyranny of now has been established. Real time in its most pedantic form."
Ian Sinclair: *Lights out for the territory*, Granta, London, 1998, p. 91

Faceless is a CCTV science fiction fairy tale set in London, the city with the greatest density of surveillance cameras on earth. The film is made under the constraints of the Manifesto – images

are obtained from existing CCTV systems by the director/protagonist exercising her/his rights as a surveilled person under the DPA. Obviously the protagonist has to be present in every frame. To comply with privacy legislation, CCTV operators are obliged to render other people in the recordings unidentifiable – typically by erasing their faces, hence the faceless world depicted in the film. The scenario of Faceless thus derives from the legal properties of CCTV images.

"RealTime orients the life of every citizen. Eating, resting, going to work, getting married – every act is tied to RealTime. And every act leaves a trace of data – a footprint in the snow of noise...
Faceless, 2007

The film plays in an eerily familiar city, where the reformed RealTime calendar has dispensed with the past and the future, freeing citizens from guilt and regret, anxiety and fear. Without memory or anticipation, faces have become vestigial – the population is literally faceless. Unimaginable happiness abounds – until a woman recovers her face...

There was no traditional shooting script: the plot evolved during the four-year long process of obtaining images. Scenes were planned in particular locations, but the CCTV recordings were not always obtainable, so the story had to be continually rewritten.

Faceless treats the CCTV image as an example of a legal readymade (objet trouvé). The medium, in the sense of raw materials that are transformed into artwork, is not adequately described as simply video or even captured light. More accurately, the medium comprises images that exist contingent on particular social and legal circumstances – essentially, images with a legal superstructure. Faceless interrogates the laws that govern the video surveillance of society and the codes of communication that articulate their operation, and in both its mode of coming into being and its plot, develops a specific critique.

Reclaiming the data body

Through putting the DPA into practice and observing the consequences over a long exposure, close-up, subtle developments of the law were made visible and its strengths and lacunae revealed.

"I can confirm there are no such recordings of yourself from that date, our recording system was not working at that time." (11/2003)

Many data requests had negative outcomes because either the surveillance camera, or the recorder, or the entire CCTV system in question was not operational. Such a situation constitutes an illegal use of CCTV: the law demands that operators,

"comply with the DPA by making sure [...] equipment works properly."
CCTV Systems and the Data Protection Act 1998, available from www.ico.gov.uk

In some instances, the non-functionality of the system was only revealed to its operators when a subject access request was made. In the case below, the CCTV system had been installed two years prior to the request.

"Upon receipt of your letter [...] enclosing the required £10 fee, I have been sourcing a company who would edit these tapes to preserve the privacy of other individuals who had not consented to disclosure. [...] I was informed [...] that all tapes on site were blank. [.. W]hen the engineer was called he confirmed that the

machine had not been working since its installation. Unfortunately there is nothing further that can be done regarding the tapes, and I can only apologise for all the inconvenience you have been caused." **(11/2003)**

Technical failures on this scale were common. Gross human errors were also readily admitted to:

"As I had advised you in my previous letter, a request was made to remove the tape and for it not to be destroyed. Unhappily this request was not carried out and the tape was wiped according with the standard tape retention policy employed by [deleted]. Please accept my apologies for this and assurance that steps have been taken to ensure a similar mistake does not happen again." (10/2003)

Some responses, such as the following, were just mysterious (data request made after spending an hour below several cameras installed in a train carriage).

"We have carried out a careful review of all relevant tapes and we confirm that we have no images of you in our control." (06/2005)

Could such a denial simply be an excuse not to comply with the costly demands of the DPA?

"Many older cameras deliver image quality so poor that faces are unrecognisable. In such cases the operator fails in the obligation to run CCTV for the declared purposes.
You will note that yourself and a colleague s faces look quite indistinct in the tape, but the picture you sent to us shows you wearing a similar fur coat, and our main identification had been made through this and your description of the location." (07/2002)

To release data on the basis of such weak identification compounds the failure.

Much confusion is caused by the obligation to protect the privacy of third parties in the images. Several data controllers claimed that this relieved them of their duty to release images:

"[... W]e are not able to supply you with the images you requested because to do so would involve disclosure of information and images relating to other persons who can be identified from the tape and we are not in a position to obtain their consent to disclosure of the images. Further, it is simply not possible for us to eradicate the other images. I would refer you to section 7 of the Data Protection Act 1998 and in particular Section 7 (4)." (11/2003)

Even though the section referred to states that it is:

"not to be construed as excusing a data controller from communicating so much of the information sought by the request as can be communicated without disclosing the identity of the other individual concerned, whether by the omission of names or other identifying particulars or otherwise."

Where video is concerned, anonymisation of third parties is an expensive, labour-intensive procedure – one common technique is to occlude each head with a black oval. Data controllers may only charge the statutory maximum of £10 per

Multiple, conflicting timecode stamps

request, though not all seemed to be aware of this:

"It was our understanding that a charge for production of the tape should be borne by the person making the enquiry, of course we will now be checking into that for clarification. Meanwhile please accept the enclosed video tape with compliments of [deleted], with no charge to yourself." (07/2002)

Visually provocative and symbolically charged as the occluded heads are, they do not necessarily guarantee anonymity. The erasure of a face may be insufficient if the third party is known to the person requesting images. Only one data controller undeniably (and elegantly) met the demands of third party privacy, by masking everything but the data subject, who was framed in a keyhole. (This was an uncommented second offering; the first tape sent was unprocessed.) One CCTV operator discovered a useful loophole in the DPA:

"I should point out that we reserve the right, in accordance with Section 8(2) of the Data Protection Act, not to provide you with copies of the information requested if to do so would take disproportionate effort." (12/2004)

What counts as disproportionate effort ? The gold standard was set by an institution whose approach was almost baroque – they delivered hard copies of each of the several hundred relevant frames from the timelapse camera, with third parties heads cut out, apparently with nail scissors.

Two documents had (accidentally?) slipped in between the printouts – one a letter from a junior employee tendering her resignation (was it connected with the beheading job?), and the other an ironic memo:

"And the good news – I enclose the £10 fee to be passed to the branch sundry income account."
Head of Security, internal communication 09/2003

From 2004, the process of obtaining images became much more difficult.

"It is clear from your letter that you are aware of the provisions of the Data Protection Act and that being the case I am sure you are aware of the principles in the recent Court of Appeal decision in the case of Durant vs. Financial Services Authority. It is my view that the footage you have requested is not personal data and therefore [deleted] will not be releasing to you the footage which you have requested." (12/2004)

Under Common Law, judgements set precedents. The decision in the case Durant vs. Financial Service Authority (2003) redefined personal data ; since then, simply featuring in raw video data does not give a data subject the right to obtain copies of the recording. Only if something of a biographical nature is revealed does the subject retain the right.

"Having considered the matter carefully, we do not

believe that the information we hold has the necessary relevance or proximity to you. Accordingly we do not believe that we are obligated to provide you with a copy pursuant to the Data Protection Act 1988. In particular, we would remark that the video is not biographical of you in any significant way." **(11/2004)**

Further, with the introduction of cameras that pan and zoom, being filmed as part of a crowd by a static camera is no longer grounds for a data request.

"[T]he Information Commissioners office have indicated that this would not constitute your personal data as the system has been set up to monitor the area and not one individual." **(09/2005)**

As awareness of the importance of data rights grows, so the actual provision of those rights diminishes:

"I draw your attention to CCTV systems and the Data Protection Act 1998 (DPA) Guidance Note on when the Act applies. Under the guidance notes our CCTV system is no longer covered by the DPA [because] we:
• only have a couple of cameras
• cannot move them remotely
• just record on video whatever the cameras pick up
• only give the recorded images to the police to investigate an incident on our premises" **(05/2004)**

Data retention periods (which data controllers define themselves) also constitute a hazard to the CCTV filmmaker:

"Thank you for your letter dated 9 November addressed to our Newcastle store, who have passed it to me for reply. Unfortunately, your letter was delayed in the post to me and only received this week. [...] There was nothing on the tapes that you requested that caused the store to retain the tape beyond the normal retention period and therefore CCTV footage from 28 October and 2 November is no longer available." (12/2004)

Amidst this sorry litany of malfunctioning equipment, erased tapes, lost letters and sheer evasiveness, one CCTV operator did produce reasonable justification for not being able to deliver images:

"We are not in a position to advise whether or not we collected any images of you at [deleted]. The tapes for the requested period at [deleted] had been passed to the police before your request was received in order to assist their investigations into various activities at [deleted] during the carnival." (10/2003)

Still from Faceless, 2007

In the shadow of the shadow

There is debate about the efficacy, value for money, quality of implementation, political legitimacy, and cultural impact of CCTV systems in the UK. While CCTV has been presented as being vital in solving some high profile cases (e.g. the 1999 London nail bomber, or the 1993 murder of James Bulger), at other times it has been strangely, publicly, impotent (e.g. the 2005 police killing of Jean Charles de Menezes). The prime promulgators of CCTV may have lost some faith: during the 1990s the Home Office spent 78% of it crime prevention budget on installing CCTV, but in 2005, an evaluation report by the same office concluded that, "the CCTV schemes that have been assessed had little overall effect on crime levels."[9]

An earlier, 1992, evaluation reported CCTV's broadly positive public reception due to its assumed effectiveness in crime control, acknowledging "public acceptance is based on limited, and partly inaccurate knowledge of the functions and capabilities of CCTV systems in public places."[10]

By the 2005 assesment, support for CCTV still "remained high in the majority of cases" but public support was seen to decrease after implementation by as much as 20%. This "was found not to be the reflection of increased concern about privacy and civil liberties, as this remained at a low rate following the installation of the cameras," but "that support for CCTV was reduced because the public became more realistic about its capabilities" to lower crime.

Concerns, however, have begun to be voiced about function creep and the rising costs of such systems, prompted, for example, by the disclosure

Poster in London

SECURE BENEATH THE WATCHFUL EYES

CCTV & METROPOLITAN POLICE ON BUSES ARE JUST TWO WAYS WE'RE MAKING YOUR JOURNEY MORE SECURE

MAYOR OF LONDON

that the cameras policing London's Congestion Charge remain switched on outside charging hours and that the Metropolitan Police are to have live access to them, having been exempted from parts of the Data Protection Act to do so.[11] As such realities of CCTV's daily operation become more widely known, existing acceptance may be somewhat tempered.

Physical bodies leave data traces: shadows of presence, conversation, movement. Networked databases incorporate these traces into data bodies, whose behaviour and risk are priorities for analysis and commodification, by business and by government. The securing of a data body is supposedly necessary to secure the human body, either preventatively or as a forensic tool. But if the former cannot be assured, as is the case, what grounds are there for trust in the hollow promise of the latter? The all-seeing eye of the panopticon is not complete, yet. Regardless, could its one-way gaze ever assure an enabling conception of security?

There will be a screening of Faceless *on Tuesday 6th May at Peacock Visual Art, Aberdeen. For details, see: www.peacockvisualarts.com*

Right: Manu Luksch at datacontrolCCTV
Far Right: sculpture in a park in London

Notes

1. Police spy in the sky fuels 'Big Brother' fears, Philip Johnston, *Telegraph*, 23/05/2007
http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2007/05/22/ndrone22.xml
The Guardian has reported the MoD rents out an RAF-staffed spy plane for public surveillance, carrying reconasance equipment able to monitor telephone conversations on the ground. It can also be used for automatic number plate recognition: "Cheshire police recently revealed they were using the Islander [aircraft] to identify people speeding, driving when using mobile phones, overtaking on double white lines, or driving erratically."
http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk_news/story/0,,2181393,00.html

2. 'Talking' CCTV scolds offenders, BBC News, 4 April 2007
http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/england/6524495.stm

3. If the face fits, you're nicked, *Independent*, Nick Huber, Monday, 1 April 2002
http://www.independent.co.uk/news/business/analysis-and-features/if-the-face-fits-youre-nicked-656092.html
Also see: "In 2001 the Newham system was linked to a central control room operated by the London Metropolitan Police Force. In April 2001 the existing CCTV system in Birmingham city centre was upgraded to smart CCTV. People are routinely scanned by both systems and have their faces checked against the police databases." Centre for Computing and Social Responsibility
http://www.ccsr.cse.dmu.ac.uk/resources/general/ethicol/Ecv12no1.html

4. *A Report on the Surveillance Society. For the Information Commissioner by the Surveillance Studies Network*, September 2006, p.19. Available from www.ico.gov.uk

5. 'e-Borders' is a £1.2bn passenger-screening programme to be introduced in 2009 and complete by 2014. The single border agency, combining immigration, customs and visa checks, includes a £650m contract with consortia Trusted Borders for a passenger-screening IT system: anyone entering or leaving Britain are to give 53 pieces of information in advance of travel. This information, taken when a travel ticket is bought, will be shared among police, customs, immigration and the security services for at least 24 hours before a journey is due to take place. Ministers are also said to be considering the creation of a list of "disruptive" passengers. Trusted Borders consists of US military contractor Raytheon Systems who will work with Accenture, Detica, Serco, QinetiQ, Steria, Capgemini, and Daon. It is expected to cost travel companies £20million a year compiling the information. These costs will be passed on to customers via ticket prices, and the Government is considering introducing its own charge on travellers to recoup costs. A pilot of the e-borders technology, Project Semaphore, has already screened 29 million passengers
Similarly, Lockheed Martin, the biggest defense contractor in the U.S, that undertakes intelligence work as well as contributing to the Trident programme in the UK, is bidding to run the UK 2011 census. New questions in the 2011 Census will include information about income and place of birth, as well as existing questions about languages spoken in the household and many other personal details. The Canadian Federal Government granted Lockheed Martin a $43.3 million deal to conduct its 2006 census. Public outcry resulted in only civil servants handling the actual data, and a new government task force being set up to monitor privacy during the Census. See: http://censusalert.org.uk/ http://www.vivelecanada.ca/staticpages/index.php/20060423184107361

6. *Sales*:
"Personal details of all 44 million adults living in Britain could be sold to private companies as part of government attempts to arrest spiralling costs for the new national identity card scheme, set to get the go-ahead this week. [...] ministers have opened talks with private firms to pass on personal details of UK citizens for an initial cost of £750 each."
'Ministers plan to sell your ID card details to raise cash', Francis Elliott, Andy McSmith and Sophie Goodchild, *Independent*, Sunday 26 June 2005
http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/ministers-plan-to-sell-your-id-card-details-to-raise-cash-496602.html
Losses:
In January 2008, hundreds of documents with passport photocopies, bank statements and benefit claims details from the Department of Work and Pensions were found on a road near Exeter airport, following their loss from a TNT courier vehicle. There were also documents relating to home loans and mortgage interest, and details of national insurance numbers, addresses and dates of birth.
In November 2007, HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) posted, unrecorded and unregistered via private courier TNT, computer discs containing personal information on 25 million people from families claiming child benefit, including the bank details of parents and the dates of birth and national insurance numbers of children. The discs were then lost.
Also in November, HMRC admitted a CD containing the personal details of thousands of Standard Life pension holders has gone missing, leaving them at heightened risk of identity theft. The CD, which contained data relating to 15,000 Standard Life pensions customers including their names, National Insurance numbers and pension plan reference numbers was lost in transit from the Revenue office in Newcastle to the company's headquarters in Edinburgh by 'an external courier'.
Thefts:
In November 2007, MoD acknowledged the theft of a laptop computer containing the personal details of 600,000 Royal Navy, Royal Marines, and RAF recruits and of people who had expressed interest in joining, which contained, among other information, passport, and national insurance numbers and bank details.
In October 2007, a laptop holding sensitive information was stolen from the boot of an HMRC car. A staff member had been using the PC for a routine audit of tax information from several investment firms. HMRC refused to comment on how many individuals may be at risk, or how many financial institutions have had their data stolen as well. BBC suggest the computer held data on around 400 customers with high value individual savings accounts (ISAs), at each of five different companies -- including Standard Life and Liontrust. (In May, Standard Life sent around 300 policy documents to the wrong people.)

7. The full text of the DPA (1998) is at www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts1998/19980029.htm

8. ambientTV.NET : "a crucible led by Manu Luksch and Mukul Patel, conceives and produces interdisciplinary art projects, develops social and technical infrastructure, and promotes network architectures that allow explorations of alternatives to current socio-political and economic practice."

9. Gill, M. and Spriggs, A.: Assessing the impact of CCTV. London: Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate 2005, pp.60-61
www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs05/hors292.pdf

10. www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/prgpdfs/fcpu35.pdf

11. Surveillance State Function Creep - London Congestion Charge "real-time bulk data" to be automatically handed over to the Metropolitan Police etc.
http://p10.hostingprod.com/@spyblog.org.uk/blog/2007/07/surveillance_state_function_creep_london_congestion_charge_realtime_bulk_data.html

CSI: The Big Sleazy

Tom Jennings

James Lee Burke's *The Tin Roof Blowdown* (Orion Books, 2007) is the 16th and most successful novel so far in a widely-acclaimed hardboiled crime series featuring Dave Robicheaux – a multiply flawed and emotionally damaged, world-weary but basically decent Sheriff's Deputy in New Iberia, 125 miles down the Louisiana coast from New Orleans. The book opens with this Vietnam veteran cursed with a recurring dream of that carnage: "Their lives are taken incrementally – by flying shrapnel, by liquid flame on their skin, and by drowning in a river. In effect, they are forced to die three times. A medieval torturer could not have devised a more diabolic fate" (p.2). On waking, he reminds himself that,

"the past is a decaying memory and that I do not have to relive and empower it unless I choose to do so. As a recovering drunk, I know I cannot allow myself the luxury of resenting my government for lying to a whole generation of young men and women who believed they were serving a noble cause ... When I go back to sleep, I once again tell myself I will never again have to witness the wide-scale suffering of innocent civilians, nor the betrayal and abandonment of our countrymen when they need us most.

But that was before Katrina. That was before a storm with greater impact than the bomb blast that struck Hiroshima peeled the face off southern Louisiana. That was before one of the most beautiful cities in the Western hemisphere was killed three times, and not just by the forces of nature" (p.2).

As this excerpt promises, there is much more in this story than typical noir thriller fare. The author's abiding concern with the struggles of the powerless to handle the larger forces, violence and depravity that confront them while retaining some semblance of dignity and honour has consistently been deployed over five decades to mull over America's conflicts of race, class, and good and evil, here seen through the deeply ambivalent prism of Cajun working-class masculinity contextualised squarely in the genre traditions handed down through Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett. The first major work of popular fiction dealing with the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina[1], which devastated New Orleans on 29th August 2005, *Blowdown* demonstrates both the possibilities and problems of attempting to tell the truth through drama – from a writer who does "not trust people who seek authority and control over other people"[2] aiming to force Americans "into an introspection that ... will lead people from dismay to anger" at a continuing tragedy which, he asserts, signposts a dismal likely future for the whole country[3]. And, we might add, for the globe, as corporate governance, graft and greed negotiate Nero's course through environmental ruin ...

A Chronicle of Death Foretold

Citing literary inspirations like Faulkner, Hemingway, Orwell and Tennessee Williams, Burke's prose has always been noted for its emotive supercharge, verging oftentimes on delirium; but also for an elegaic, lyrical elegance in characterising his beloved native Gulf coast, where he still lives for part of the year. These attributes dovetail as Robicheaux bears witness to Katrina: before its landfall, in realist dread watching the telly; afterwards in disbelief, with shades of Blake, Bosch, and Ballard, as he's seconded to an overwhelmed New Orleans Police Department many of whose personnel went AWOL and/or rogue. In effect, he concludes, "The entire city, within one night, had been reduced to the technological level of the Middle Ages" (p.34). Yet, for days before the hurricane struck, "the governor of Louisiana, Kathleen Blanco, has been pleading for help to anyone who will listen. A state emergency official in Metaire has become emotionally undone during a CNN interview ... He states unequivocally that sixty-two thousand

people will die if the storm maintains its current category 5 strength and hits New Orleans head-on" (p.23).

This scale of disaster indeed transpired, with Robicheaux summarising the geological backstory:

"a tidal surge ... can turn a levee system into serpentine lines of black sand or level a city, particularly when the city has no natural barriers. The barrier islands off the Louisiana coast have long ago eroded away or been dredged up and heaped on barges and sold for shale parking lots. The petrochemical companies have cut roughly ten thousand miles of channels through the wetlands, allowing saline intrusion to poison and kill freshwater marsh areas from Plaquemines Parish to Sabine Pass. The levees along the Mississippi River shotgun hundreds of tons of mud over the edge of the continental shelf, preventing it from flowing westward along the coastline, where it is needed the most. Louisiana's wetlands continue to disappear at a rate of forty-seven square miles a year" (p. 28).

Unsurprisingly then:

"The levees burst because they were structurally weak and had only a marginal chance of surviving a category 3 storm, much less one of category 5 strength. Every state emergency official knew this. The Army Corps of Engineers knew this. The National Hurricane Center in Miami knew this.

But apparently the United States Congress and the current administration in Washington, D.C., did not, since they had dramatically cut funding for repair of the levee system only months earlier" (p.32).

Charged with investigating the murders of alleged looters, Robicheaux and fellow officers navigate the institutional vacuum, infrastructural wreckage and social chaos of the stricken city, surveying victims and survivors and striving to differentiate predators from prey among the latter. Many of those unable to leave, especially from the Ninth Ward, took refuge in the Superdome and Convention Center: "The thousands of people who had sought shelter there had been told to bring their own food for five days. Many of them were from the projects or the poorest neighbourhoods in the city and did not own automobiles and had little money or food at the end of the month. Many of them had brought elderly and sick people with them – diabetics, paraplegics, Alzheimer's patients, and people in need of kidney dialysis" (p.35). Elsewhere:

"From a boat or any other elevated position, as far as the eye could see, New Orleans looked like a Caribbean city that had collapsed beneath the waves ... The linear structure of a neighbourhood could be recognized only by the green smudge of yard trees that cut the waterline and row upon row of rooftops dotted with people who perched on sloped shingles that scalded their hands.

The smell was like none I ever experienced. The water was chocolate-brown, the surface glistening with a blue-green sheen of oil and industrial chemicals. Raw feces and used toilet paper issued from broken sewer lines. The gray, throat-gagging odor of decomposition permeated not only the air but everything we touched. The bodies of dead animals, including deer, rolled in the wake of our rescue boats. And so did those of human beings, sometimes just a shoulder or an arm or the back of a head, suddenly surfacing, then sinking under the froth.

They drowned in attics and on the second floors of their houses. They drowned along the edges of Highway 23 when they tried to drive out of Plaquemines Parish. They drowned in retirement homes and in trees and on car tops while they waved frantically at helicopters flying overhead. They died in hospitals and nursing homes of dehydration and heat exhaustion, and they died because an attending nurse could not continue to operate a hand ventilator for hours upon hours without rest" (p.37).

Then a little later, a preliminary cognitive

mapping:

"It wasn't the individual destruction of the homes in the Lower Ninth Ward that seemed unreal. It was the disconnection of them from their environment that was hard for the eye to accept. They had been lifted from their foundations, twisted from the plumbing that held them to the ground, and redeposited upside down or piled against one another as though they had been dropped from the sky ... The insides of all of them were black-green with sludge and mold, their exteriors spray-painted with code numbers to indicate they had already been searched for bodies.

But every day more bodies were discovered ... Feral dogs prowled the wreckage and so did the few people who were being allowed back into their neighbourhoods" (p.199).

These and countless other vignettes throughout the novel are as powerful and evocative in their own way as Spike Lee's heartbreaking visual testament, *When The Levees Broke*, and Greg MacGillivray's meticulous documentary detailing the ecological significance, *Hurricane On The Bayou* (both 2006). However, the conventions of crime fiction offer much greater potential for situating such events in a narrative with full cultural, historical and political texture and complexity – most crucially, from perspectives towards the bottom of the social hierarchy rather than according to the agendas of the Great and the Good; Burke himself seeing the genre as "having replaced the sociological novel. We know a society not by its symbols but by its cultural rejects and failures"[4]. So, progressively immersed in escalating webs of malice, misdeeds and moral compromises spun long before and in Katrina's aftermath, *Blowdown*'s unruly welter of unreliable characters tell variegated tales as revealing in their conceits, discrepancies, and silences as in their manifest content.

The Big Sleep of Reasons

Initial scenes mingling mayhem, disorder, suffering, selfless heroism, and cynical opportunism utterly confuse the New Iberia contingent's senses as they descend into the flooded city, reflected in their contradictory attributions of responsibility for what they see. First, as putative public servants charged with protecting the populace, Robicheaux gives credit where most obviously due – "The United States Coastguard flew nonstop ... They rescued more than thirty-three thousand souls" (p.38) – though soon undercut by his sidekick Clete Purcel's caustic contrast with the Supreme Commander's own aerial display: "Did you see that big plane that flew over? ... It was Air Force One. After three days the Shrubster did a flyover. Gee, I feel better now" (p.41). The identification of honourable intent is similarly frustrated by reality on the ground for traumatised survivors and erstwhile saviours alike, with praise for rescue agencies unravelling in recrimination against officialdom, and the ethical superiority of law enforcers over criminals and vigilantes confounded by pervasive inept, corrupt, and lethal practice. Still, incidents of the latter tend to be described on reflex as 'rumour', with police reports, however hyperbolic or prejudicial, related as deadpan fact in Robicheaux's breathless accounts:

"Looters were hitting pharmacies and liquor and jewellery stores first, then working their way down the buffet table. A rogue group of NOPD cops had actually set up a thieves headquarters on the tenth floor of a downtown hotel, storing their loot in the rooms, terrorizing the management, and threatening to kill a reporter who tried to question them. New Orleans cops also drove off with automobiles from the Cadillac agency. Gangbangers had converged on the Garden District and were having a Visigoth holiday, burning homes built before the Civil War, carrying away whatever wasn't bolted down.

Evacuees in the Superdome and Convention Center tried to walk across the bridge into Jefferson Parish. Most of these people were black, some carrying children in their arms, all of them exhausted, hungry, and dehydrated. They were met by armed police officers who fired shotguns over their heads and allowed none of them to leave Orleans Parish ... An NOPD cop shot a black man with a twelve-gauge through the glass window of his cruiser in front of the Convention Center while hundreds of people watched ... Emergency personnel in rescue boats became afraid of the very people they were supposed to save. Some people airlifted out by the Coast Guard in the Lower Nine said the gunfire was a desperate attempt to signal the boat crews" (pp.38-9).

And the dangerous felony of desperate foraging by the starving sits awkwardly with wanton and organised neglect and execution:

"I saw people eating from plastic packages of mustard and ketchup they had looted from a cafe, dividing what they had amongst themselves ... Some NOPD cops said the personnel at Orleans Parish Prison had blown town and left the inmates to drown. Others said a downtown mob rushed a command center, thinking food and water were being distributed. A deputy panicked and began firing an automatic weapon into the night sky, quickly adding to the widespread conviction that cops were arbitrarily killing innocent people ... We heard rumors that teams of elite troops ... were taking out snipers under a black flag" (p.44).

Given minimal time to make sense of his crime scene data, Robicheaux's general conclusion resembles that famously reached by hip-hop star Kanye West[5], leaving an irksome FBI agent in no doubt about the greater scheme of things: "Hundreds if not thousands of New Orleans residents drowned who didn't have to. I suspect that's because some of the guys in Washington you work for couldn't care less" (p.171). But as the specific murder case he pursues sinks into a moral quagmire linking all social strata – implicating upstanding insurance men, industrialists and clergy alongside petty thieves, Mob bosses, rapists, lone psychopaths and drug dealers – his own sanity, integrity and family come under mortal threat, triggering increasingly excessive violence to keep internal and external demons at bay. Along the way he reflects on the overarching structures and processes that both precipitate and thrive on the greater and lesser tragedies at hand:

"The images I had seen during the seven-day period immediately after the storm would never leave me. Nor could I afford the anger they engendered in me. Nor did I wish to deal with the latent racism in our culture that was already beginning to rear its head. According to the Washington Post, a state legislator had just told a group of lobbyists in Baton Rouge, 'We finally cleaned up public housing in New Orleans. We couldn't do it, but God did'." (p.83)[6].

By the time Hurricane Rita hit the Gulf coast three weeks afterwards, occasioning further mass evacuations:

"The original sympathy for the evacuees from New Orleans was incurring a strange transformation. Right-wing talk shows abounded with callers viscerally enraged at the fact that evacuees were receiving a onetime two-thousand-dollar payment to help them buy food and find lodging. The old southern nemesis was back, naked and raw and dripping – absolute hatred for the poorest of the poor ... [while a] tidal wave of salt water, mud, dead fish, oil sludge, and organic debris literally effaced the southern rim of Louisiana" (pp.115-116).

And as for the larger reconstruction:

"Clete had said that after Katrina he had heard the sounds of little piggy feet clattering to the trough. I think his image was kind. I think the reality was far worse. The players were much bigger than the homegrown parasites that have sucked the life out of Louisiana for generations. The new bunch was educated and groomed and had global experience in avarice and venality ... Staggering sums of money were given to insider corporations who subcontracted the jobs to small outfits that used only nonunion labor ... It became obvious right after Katrina that the destruction of New Orleans was an ongoing national tragedy and probably an American watershed in the history of political cynicism" (p.148).

As Robicheaux judges later: "The job ahead was Herculean and it was compounded by a level of corporate theft and governmental incompetence and cynicism that probably has no equal outside the Third World. I wasn't sure New Orleans had a future" (p.196)[7]. But it certainly has a long, dishonourable past, and Burke excels in excavating the sins of the fathers while retaining a nostalgic faith in potential redemption (with innocence scarcely realistic) in the present.

Crimes and Punishments

As *Blowdown*'s tortuous, labyrinthine plot proceeds, unlikely leads overlap and loose ends abound. Exasperated at every turn by the refusal of suspects, victims and informants to co-operate with (or even acknowledge) his knight's errand, Robicheaux explains his embattled bafflement in terms of the simplistic worldviews of others – thus disavowing the contradictions and inadequacies of his own position as lone crusader for truth and justice floundering in the forces of darkness; maintaining self-belief via quintessential petit-bourgeois resentment:

"As Americans we are a peculiar breed. We believe in law and order, but we also believe that real crimes are committed by a separate class of people, one that has nothing to do with our own lives or the world of reasonable behaviour and mutual respect to which we belong. As a consequence, many people, particularly in higher income brackets, think of police officers as suburban maintenance personnel who should be treated politely but whose social importance is one cut above their gardeners.

Ever watch reality cop shows? ... What conclusion does the viewer arrive at? Crimes are committed by shirtless pukes. Slumlords and politicians on a pad get no play" (pp.152-3).

These manic manoeuvres of splitting, denial and projection serve to fully implicate the respectable fractions of society colluding in processes which generate and nourish patterns of foul play, while insulating the untarnished detached self from both the seething mass of ignorance below and venal dissolution above. Though a wholly artificial balance between culpability and blamelessness, this facilitates the pragmatic separation of investigative wheat from chaff, but sedimented as belief-system has a seductive, self-serving clarity requiring Herculean physical and emotional efforts to sustain when the going gets tough – so extreme, indeed, as to virtually obliterate the boundaries between good and bad guys all over again. Nevertheless, an immediate payoff is a clearsighted appreciation of the thoroughgoing dependence of business as usual on class- and race-based contempt and domination in mainstream culture and its legitimising discourses.

History then resolves into a litany of criminal enterprise, with the fallout from Katrina entirely in keeping:

"In Louisiana, as in the rest of the South, the issue was always power. Wealth did not buy it. Wealth came with it. Televangelist preachers and fundamentalist churches sold magic as a way of acquiring it. The measure of one's success was the degree to which he could exploit his fellow man or reward his friends or punish his enemies ... In our state's history, a demagogue with holes in his shoes forced Standard Oil to kiss his ring" (p.290).

The latter refers to populist Senator Huey P. Long, gifting, we are told[8], the state to the Costello crime family in the 1930s, who duly subcontracted all vice operations in New Orleans to a local Mafia outfit. The police and Mob coexisted comfortably (as elsewhere), running the French Quarter tourist area of the city as a joint franchise where, irrespective of legal niceties, nothing was allowed to interfere with the pleasure business – a "cultural symbiosis" responsible for the locals dubbing the city 'The Great Whore of Babylon' and 'The Big Easy' as well as Purcel and Robicheaux's favoured 'The Big Sleazy'; which, however, progressively broke down after crack cocaine flooded the city in the 1980s before finally drowning in August 2005.

This socio-economic fabric, however, was always co-constituted and crosscut with the legacies of racial segregation, where, in Robicheaux's otherwise idealised post-Depression youth,

"The majority of people were poor, and for generations the oligarchy that ruled the state exerted every effort to ensure they stayed that way. The Negro was the scapegoat for our problems, the trade unions the agents of northern troublemakers. With the coming of integration every demagogue in the state could not wait to stoke up the fires of racial fear and hatred. Many of their consitituents rose to the occasion" (p. 187)[9].

Correspondingly, Burke himself is at pains to emphasise that, "Within New Orleans' city limits, the population is 70% black. These are mainly hard-working, blue-collar people who have endured every form of adversity over many generations. But another element is ... heavily armed and morally insane. These are people who will rob the victim, then arbitrarily kill him out of sheer meanness"[10]. Tellingly, this stark dichotomising of a rich, complex Creole culture into sets of Manichean opposites produces one asymmetry – poor whites led astray by external forces; poor Blacks generating monsters from within – which, though never explicitly acknowledged, echoes the official bad faith the author excoriates in responses to Katrina; yet its ramifications dominate his novel's frantic denouement.

Remember, the police perspective routinely focused on Black criminality as the major problem after the storm hit, even though the bulk of supposedly factual media horror-stories were officially admitted to represent unsubstantiated paranoia. Slavoj Zizek has perceptively remarked that, here, "The official ... discourse is accompanied and sustained by a whole nest of obscene, brutal racist and sexist fantasies, which can only be admitted in a censored form"[11] – that is, masquerading as unfortunate truth. For all his enlightened liberal humanism, procedural protocols govern Robicheaux's working life too, and his default template for understanding and dealing with the black underclass presumes the same lowest common denominator – albeit uneasily displaced onto and attributed to his disreputable partner in crime-fighting:

"For Clete, Bertrand Melancon seemed to personify what he hated most in the clientele he dealt with on a daily basis. They were raised by their grandmothers and didn't have a clue who their fathers were. They ... thought of sexual roles in terms of prey or predator. They lied instinctively, even when there was no reason to. Trying to find a handle on them was impossible. They were inured to insult, indifferent to their own fate, and devoid of guilt or shame. What bothered Clete most about them was his belief that anyone from their background would probably turn out the same" (p.76).

Nevertheless, Purcel's job is to locate bail fugitives, and in "any American slum, two enterprises are never torched by urban rioters: the funeral home and the bondsman's office ... [whose] huge clientele of miscreants was sycophantic by nature and always trying to curry favor from those who had control over their lives" (p.72).

The conflicting characterisations here clearly signal the 'moral insanity' of traditional police culture, which dehumanises in advance those attracting its gaze, backed with baleful institutional clout obliging its targets to shape their conduct accordingly. But even choosing respectable conformism as accommodation to systemic injustice generates troubling grey areas – witness erstwhile law-abiding members of the Black community obstinately shielding less savoury relatives or neighbours from the official

attention they know as malevolent. Unable to assimilate this phenomenon, Robicheaux instead retreats to an Oakland Baptist minister's retrograde assertion that the 1960s Black "Panthers did not respect either the church or the traditional ethos of the family" (p.296), and therefore their appeal would not last. This dubious thesis was destined to remain untested, however. For its audacity in flouting sterotypes and collectively eschewing passivity, 1970s Black radicalism was crushed by a merciless police and military onslaught courtesy of the government's COINTELPRO conspiracy.

To Gary Younge, in a real-life setting far stranger than fiction, *Blowdown*'s "search for black rapists and looters and their white assailants is a literary version of wasting police time" – where, although "they do not act as archetypes ... the characters must operate within the narrow confines of racial cliché"[12]. Unfortunately – possibly misled by lofty disdain for its artistic merits – Younge doesn't realise that Burke is specifically drawing attention to the problems this causes rather than merely reproducing them. That's why Robicheaux's favourite passage from Hemingway (in *Death in the Afternoon*) suggests "that the world's ills could be corrected by a three-day open season on people. Less heartening is his addendum that the first group he would wipe out would be police officers everywhere" (p.186). Robicheaux thus "has a classic flaw: hubris. The tragic hero takes a fall because of pride ... When Dave acts in a violent fashion it's almost always in the defense of another. But he knows violence is the last resort of an intelligent person and the first resort of a primitive person, and that everyone is diminished by it, usually the perpetrator the most"[13]. Acting-out violent fantasy, furthermore, has always been the stock in trade of the hardboiled detective.

The Unsound and the Fury

Private dicks began life as struggling entrepreneurs from blue-collar backgrounds in the utterly corrupt public miasma of the modern city. Unlike the detached aristocratic geniuses previously populating detective fiction, the hardboiled protagonist mucks in and deliberately intensifies the disorder he finds in the hope of shaking out clues. But to survive he has to be as tough and adeptly schooled as his adversaries in the evil they do – the thoroughgoing imbrication of the hero in the conduct for which he seeks to extract accounting or achieve resolution being the constitutive dilemma of hardboiled genres[14]. Philip Marlowe, Sam Spade and their direct descendants thus handle their contradictory positions with ironic isolation from the decadence around them, maintaining a strict regime of masculinity to bolster immunity from the dangerous seductions of *femme fatales*[15] – a spartan solipsism inevitably eroded, however, with the emerging social structure of consumer capitalism, which offers the seeking of pleasures and blurring of patriarchal boundaries to ordinary folk as well as the idle rich.

Hence new generations of hard-nosed investigators had to relax their masculinist certainties and rigid ego structures in order to convince their clients of professional competence (and their readers, of contemporary relevance). Yet this neo-noir worldliness and flexibility now makes it far harder to resist sinking into the moral degeneracy that they must be so intimate with to contest. As Fred Pfeil shows, the paradoxical outcome is that greater attentiveness to emotional depth and complexity necessitates ever more hysterical levels of violence to differentiate the honourably tough but vulnerable detective from the villain[16]. And whereas for most representatives

of the genre, this,

"sensitivity is both unproblematically positive and narcissistically self-regarding, Robicheaux's is openly riven by ambivalence, troubled by complicit desires and doubts, and obsessed with its old, unhealable wounds ... explicitly defined by its connective affiliations to and with a continuum of others, from the various white male monsters whose terrible appetites he finds within himself, to the innocent vulnerability of those morally pure women, children, and Blacks he saves and protects"[17].

His creator specifies that "Dave's greatest anger is over the loss of the Cajun culture into which he was born. He's never been able to accept the fact that it's gone and won't be coming back"[18]. His nostalgic yearning in defence against this fury is then set against fantasies of the purity and unconditional love offered by the isolated nuclear family, but in both cases the reality is infected with exactly the same social diseases and questionable motives that he prefers only to register in those marked irredeemably criminal.

Robicheaux originates in a dysfunctional family with a capricious and cruel father and absent promiscuous mother, substituting his disappointment at a broken home with valorisation of the Cajun working class that at least had clear-cut standards to measure its failure. Similarly he idealises his intimate relationships but compulsively endangers them – his saintly second wife was slaughtered by thugs he was pursuing, and in *Blowdown* his third wife (an ex-nun) and adopted daughter very nearly suffer the same fate. The grotesque white psychopath who poses this most serious threat to Robicheaux (as in most of his novels) then obviously represents an incarnation of the alter-ego that he could so easily have become.

Burke's evident awareness of all of these pathological dynamics is tempered by his focus on the overarching theme of redemption – sadly understood as an individual spiritual matter rather than a question of social and political dialectic, and therefore verging on vanity as well as pridefulness, where the conquering hero flatters himself on his goodness (and seeks regular reassurance to that effect from his nearest and dearest). Still, the author's genre craftsmanship is such that the story's resolution succeeds in tying all the narrative strands together, including Robicheaux's encouragement (as part of his faltering attempt to transcend the racist mythology he grew up with) of the Black fugitive's desire to atone for his many sins. Nevertheless, the scale of the central character's hysterical propensities and the hyperbolic violence he has to be willing to indulge in to end up 'on the side of the angels' heralds the self-destructive nature of a quest condemned to endlessly repeat itself so long as collective remedies remain out of reach ... In which case, as an allegory of the contortions of mainstream America avoiding recognition of its deep intrinsic culpability in the tragedy of New Orleans, perhaps *The Tin Roof Blowdown* is a minor masterpiece after all.

Notes

1. Along with the title story – first appearing in *Esquire* in March 2006 (and so popular that the magazine reinstated regular short fiction features) – of Burke's collection *Jesus Out To Sea*. These have been swiftly followed by several other notable novels in diverse genres, as well as a crude, action-based, *Miami Vice*-style cop series (*K-Ville*) from Fox TV.

2. From an interview with Martha Woodroof on US National Public Radio, July 30, 2007 (www.npr.org). In an interview with Skylar Browning, 'No Regrets', *Missoula Independent Weekly*, February 8, 2006 (www.theind.com), he fleshes out this conviction: "George Orwell put it much better than I. He said, 'A writer writes in order to correct history, to set the record straight.' By that he meant it's an obsession. You feel that somehow – and it's a vanity, of course – that inside you, you have trapped a perfect picture of truth, and

you feel compelled every minute of the day to convey it to someone else". More specifically, "We've given over the country to the worst people in it ... In part, it's because we've forgotten the importance of working people. ... We've given up the high road to the people who have hijacked Christianity ... We've allowed people who have no compassion at all for the working classes to pretend successfully that it is they who hate Joe Bob and Bubba and Betty Sue's interests at heart ... Anyone who believes that the people running this country today care about the interests of working people has a serious thinking disorder".

3. Quotation from Burke's *Los Angeles Times* op-ed, 'A City of Saints and Sancho Panza', September, 2005 (www.jamesleeburke.com). See also interview with Jeff Baker, 'From Montana's Heartland: Redemption for New Orleans', *The Oregonian*, August 26, 2007 (www.oregonlive.com).

4. Interview with Jeffrey Trachtenberg, *Wall Street Journal* (www.wsj.com). Also, no doubt, audiences for detective stories are rather different from those for current affairs programming, however worthy – see Ken Worpole, *Dockers and Detectives: Popular Reading, Popular Writing*, Verso 1983, for a pathbreaking account of the class connotations of popular fiction.

5. "George Bush doesn't care about Black people", during NBC's Concert for Hurricane Relief, September 2, 2005, after other unscripted remarks like: "I hate the way they portray us in the media. You see a black family, it [the media] says, 'they're looting'. You see a white family, it says, 'they're looking for food'. And, you know, it's been five days [waiting for federal help] because most of the people are black".

6. And in his first town hall meeting after Katrina, New Orleans Mayor C. Ray Nagin invited an evangelist pastor to speak first, who called it a "purging and cleansing" of the city – Nagin himself later suggesting that God had taken revenge on America for the Iraq war. Despite Burke's disgust here, though, his Catholicism also attracts him (and therefore Robicheaux) to equally ecclesiastical imagery; for example: "But the damage we in New Orleans was of a kind we associate with apocalyptical images from the Bible" (p.195). For more on such theodicy and mainstream and crackpot godbothering in general, as well as cogent analyses of political and media treatments of the crisis, see Michael Eric Dyson, *Come Hell Or High Water: Hurricane Katrina and the Color of Disaster*, Basic Civitas Books, 2006 – who also cites the only significant remaining records of life in the drowned zones as being music videos by Southern rappers (and for further reference to their responses to Katrina, see my 'Rebel Poets Reloaded', *Variant* 30, 2007).

7. Robicheaux sees firsthand, and duly notes, the sundry paltry and woefully belated grassroots fruits of Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA; run by Bush crony Michael Brown with no experience in this, or any relevant, field) activity; i.e. granting enormous contracts to notoriously vicious, corrupt corporations like Blackwater, resulting in minimal resources trickling down to relief recipients. Given Blackwater's record in Iraq, the Third World parallel is doubly ironic even while exposing the general logic of 'private finance initiatives'.

8. For example: *Blowdown*, pp.140-1; and 'A City of Saints and Sancho Panza', *L.A. Times* (see note 3).

9. Including very nearly electing ex-KKK Nazi David Duke as state Governor as recently as 1991. For the best review of *Blowdown* I've read anchored in New Orleans nuance, see Robert Maxwell, 'After the Storm: James Lee Burke Answers Katrina's Wrath with His Own', *Mobile Press-Register* (Alabama), August 5, 2007 (www.press-register.com).

10. *L.A. Times*, note 3.

11. In 'The Subject Supposed to Loot and Rape: Reality and Fantasy in New Orleans', *In These Times*, 20 October, 2005; invoking a parallel with anti-semitism in Nazi Germany where, quite irrespective of any actual misdeeds, "the causes of all social antagonisms were projected onto the 'Jew' – an object of perverted love-hatred, a spectral figure of mixed fascination and disgust".

12. *The Guardian*, December 1, 2007.

13. Burke, in Trachtenberg, *Wall Street Journal*, note 4.

14. See, for example, John Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture*, Chicago University Press, 1976; David Geherin, *The American Private Eye: The Image in Fiction*, New York, Vintage, 1985; Yvonne Tasker, *Spectacular Bodies: Gender, Genre and the Action Cinema*, Routledge, 1993.

15. See Frank Krutnik, *In a Lonely Street: Film Noir, Genre, Masculinity*, Routledge, 1991; and various contributions to Joan Copjec (ed.), *Shades of Noir,* Verso, 1993.

16. In 'Soft Boiled Dicks', *White Guys: Studies in Postmodern Domination and Difference*, Verso, 1995.

17. 'Soft Boiled Dicks', pp.116-7. Burke's foregrounding of Robicheaux's psychic conflicts also contrasts most sharply with the fashionable serial killer subgenre – for example, the Hannibal Lecter series, where class hatred is mystified and dispersed into outlandishly supernatural empathetic connections between detectives, murderers and amoral upper-class incarnations of the Devil.

18. In Trachtenberg, *Wall Street Journal*, note 4.
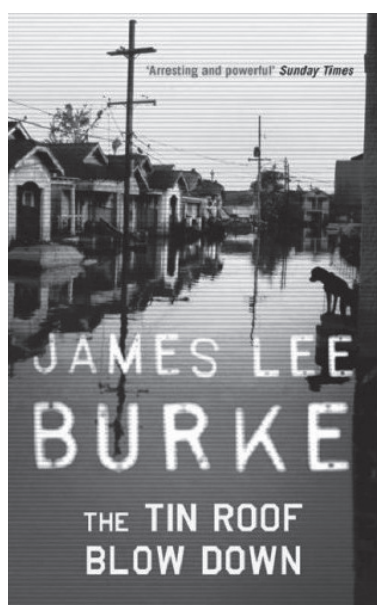
Back to the Future of the Creative City

Merijn Oudenampsen

Constant Nieuwenhuys in his studio, 1967

Sometimes digging into the past is necessary in order to illuminate the present. In this case, contrasting Amsterdam's ongoing Creative City policy with a utopian precursor will hopefully shed some light on the contradictions inherent in the contemporary fusion between creativity and industry. Despite being a recent hype, the Creative City policy has shown remarkable vigour and longevity. Not unlike famous ageing rock bands, even in advancing years it has still been able to maintain a spell on groupies and adherents at local city governments around the western world.[1] However, I do not intend to argue that when it was young and fresh, Richard Florida's Creative Class Rock rang any truer, only that all along the line a different tune is being played than the lyrics imply. Rather, that Amsterdam's Creative City policy – far from intending to make the city's entire population more creative – is predominantly a branding exercise, an expression of a more general shift towards entrepreneurial modes of city government; a shift that is currently being played out through an impressive urban redevelopment of Amsterdam.

The comparison between sociologist Richard Florida – author of two books on the rise and flight of the Creative Class – and a rock star is not unusual. Google 'rock star' with 'Richard Florida' and you will find dozens of descriptions of performances by the 'rock star academic' responsible for introducing pop sociology into regional economics. Amongst his urban policy dos and don'ts, "lacking rock bands" even figures prominently among the reasons why a city could lose out on the economic development race.[2] This article, however, is not about the peculiar fusion occurring between pop culture and social science, but rather about the utopian claims that are being made for the creative economy. Florida has pronounced creativity to be a "great equaliser", pleading for a 'New Deal' of the creative economy. Likewise, Job Cohen – the mayor of Amsterdam – has pronounced Amsterdam to be a Creative City that will "foster the creativity of all its inhabitants".[3]

In retrospect, these claims can be seen as somewhat distorted echoes of an earlier utopian project that alluded to the revolutionary rise of creativity. Let's take a short leap back in history, back to the future as imagined by the Dutch avant-garde, and more specifically, the artist Constant Nieuwenhuys. He was one of the founders of the experimental art group Reflex, which later became part of the international CoBrA movement. Discontented with the limitations of the world of art and the "individualistic nature" of painting, Constant abandoned them in 1953 to focus on a more promising exploration of metal and architectural techniques. In 1957, he became a co-founder of the Situationist International (SI) and wrote the renowned tract on Unitary Urbanism with Guy Debord. Until his resignation in 1961, he would play an essential role in the formulation of a Situationist perspective on the contemporary city and a critique of modernist urbanism.

In 1956, Constant started a visionary architectural project that would stretch out over twenty years. A utopian city that went by the name of New Babylon, it consisted of an almost endless series of scale models, sketches, etchings and collages, further elaborated by manifestoes, lectures, essays and films. The project was a provocation, an explicit metaphor for the Creative City:

"The modern city is dead; it has been sacrificed to the cult of utility. New Babylon is the project for a city in which people will be able to live. For to live means to be creative. New Babylon is the product of the creativity of the masses, based on the activation of the enormous creative potential which at the moment lies dormant and unexploited in the people. New Babylon assumes that as a result of automation non-creative work will disappear, that there will be a metamorphosis in morals and thinking, that a new form of society will emerge."[4]

Constant Nieuwenhuys envisaged a society where automation had realised the liberation of humanity from the toils of industrial work, replacing labour with a nomadic life of creative play outside of the economic domain and in disregard of any considerations of functionality. "Contrary to what the functionalists think, culture is situated at the point where usefulness ends", was one of Constant's more provocative statements.[5] Homo Faber, the worker of industrial society, was to be succeeded by Homo Ludens, the playful man or as Constant stated, the creative man. This was the inhabitant of New Babylon that thanks to modern architectural techniques would be able to spontaneously control and reconfigure every aspect of the urban environment. Constant took the surrealist slogan "poetry should be made by all" and translated it to the urban environment, "tomorrow, life will reside in poetry".[6] The work of Constant thus combined an aversion for modernist functionalism with an intense appreciation of the emancipatory potentials of new technology. Mechanisation would result in the arrival of a "mass culture of creativity" that would revolt against the superstructure of bourgeois society, destroying it completely and taking the privileged position of the artist down with it. A society would be created where, in accordance with Marx's vision of art in a communist society, "there are no painters but only people who engage in painting among other activities".[7] The work of Nieuwenhuys would have a direct and major influence on the rise of youth movement Provo. The Dutch counterculture proved to be an almost perfect incarnation of the Homo Ludens; through relentless provocation, happenings and playful actions, Provo would bring the authoritarianism of the Dutch '50s down to its knees.

Life Is Put to Work

However, developments took an unexpected turn. Automation and consequent de-industrialisation – the outsourcing of manufacturing to developing countries – did not lead to the liberation of the Homo Ludens (or maybe we should grant Homo Ludens a short and partial victory, a short interlude located somewhere in the youth culture of the '60s, before being sent back to work). It is well known that since the '60s the total amount of working hours has grown steeply. Together with the consolidation of consumption as a leisure activity, the expansion of labour time has led to an unprecedented amount of human activity being directly or indirectly incorporated into the sphere of economic transactions through a process Marx would have called 'real subsumption', or the extension of capitalism onto the field of ontology, of lived social practice. Whereas Constant envisioned the liberation of the creative domain from the economic, we are currently witnessing – in sync with the Creative City discourse – the extension of the economic into the creative
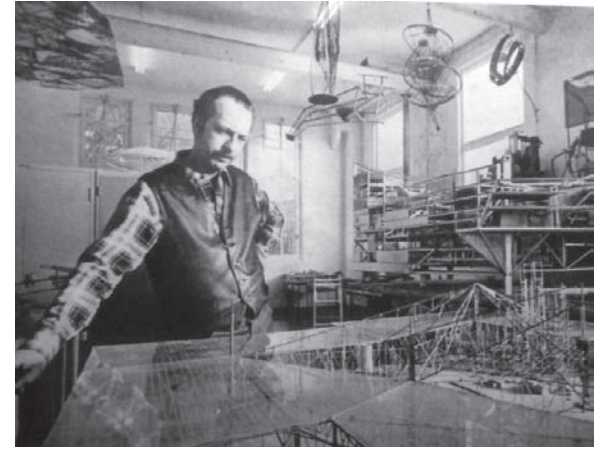
domain. This is exemplified by the transformation of the artist into a cultural entrepreneur, the marketing of (sub)cultural expressions, the subservience of culture to tourist flows and the triumph of functionalism over *bildungsideal* (an educational ideal) at the university. There is an interesting spatial illustration of this dynamic. The once niche economy of the arts occupied a fringe position in the Amsterdam housing market as squatted dockland warehouses. Now that the artistic production has been incorporated and elevated towards a seemingly pivotal position in the urban economy, it has been accommodated into the city through mechanisms such as *het broedplaatsenbeleid* or temporary housing contracts.[8] The majority of non-functional space in the city, derelict or squatted territories, has now been redeveloped or is in process of redevelopment. There is no longer an outside position.

What distinguishes the earlier utopian creative 'Babylon' from the one referred to by Florida and the Amsterdam City Council? To start with, in the post-Fordist economy, the rise of the creative sector in advanced economies is predicated upon displacement of industrial functions to low wage localities and the exploitation of cheap manual labour. This new functional divide in the global economy and its polarised wage structure is referred to as the New International Division of Labour.[9] As part of this development, we have seen the rise of global cities whose economic success depends on the presence of high tech innovation and global control functions. These economic nodes co-ordinate international flows of goods, finance outsourced production, market and design global commodities and maintain a monopolist control over client relations.[10] From a macro perspective, the claims of the new creative city as being a 'great equalizer' actually appear as the opposite; it is based on functional inequality. Now let's take a closer look at the city.

Amsterdam™

To properly understand the arrival of the Creative City policy and what sets it aside from its utopian predecessor, we have to place it in a larger context. The Creative City is part and parcel of a greater shift impacting on the city, causing the Keynesian management of bygone eras to be replaced by an entrepreneurial approach. The rise in importance of productive sectors that are considered *laissez faire* approaches to a city's economic well-being has led to increased interurban competition. Amsterdam is pitted against urban centres such as Barcelona, London, Paris and Frankfurt in a struggle to attract economic success in the form

Top:
'New Babylon',
large yellow
sector, 1967
Middle:
Construction of
'New Babylon'
sector, 1959
Bottom:
Sketch of
'New Babylon'
sector 1961-62
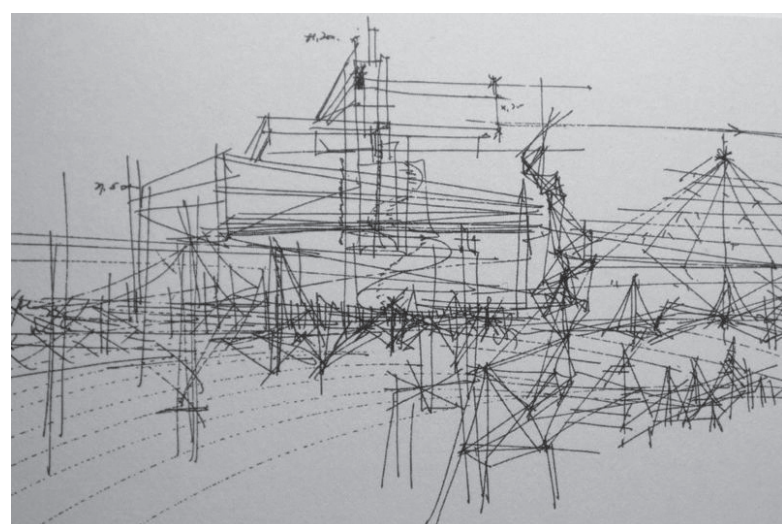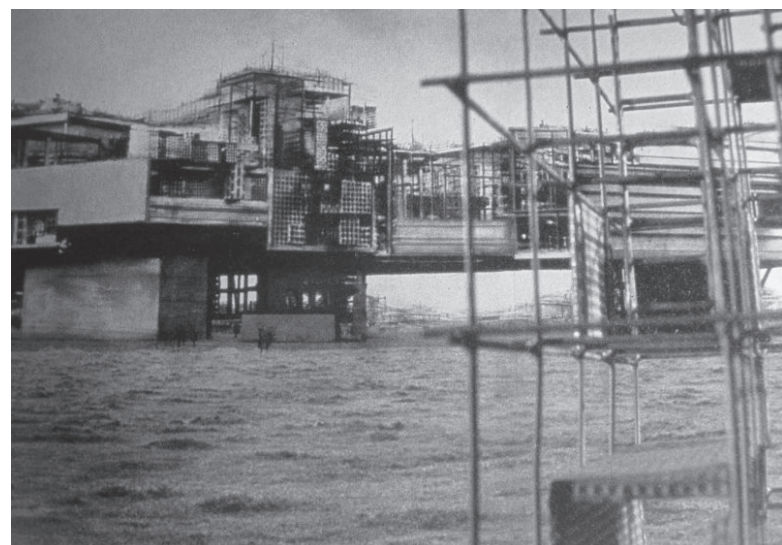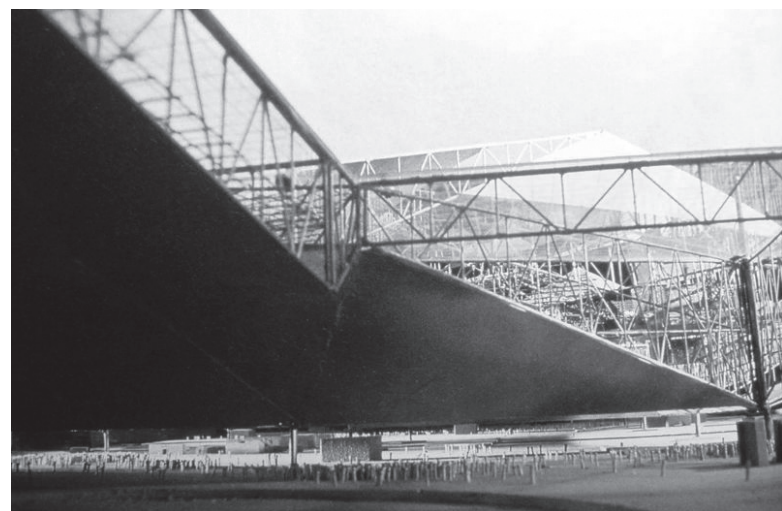
of investments, a talented workforce and tourists flocking to the city. The ever-present threat of inter-urban competition is continuously invoked and inflated throughout the policy rhetoric. To illustrate my point, even the discussion on whether to discontinue a prohibition of gas heaters on the terraces of Amsterdam cafés was recently framed in these terms: "it's a serious disadvantage in comparison with cities like Berlin and Paris", according to the leader of the local social democrat party.[11] The opinion of the city's population itself was not even mentioned in the newspaper article.

The dominance of entrepreneurial approaches to city politics is the feature of a new urban regime, labelled by scholars as the 'Entrepreneurial City'.[12] With origins in the reality of neoliberal state withdrawal from urban plight in the United States, it has taken some time to arrive in the corporatist Netherlands and filter through the minds of policy makers. In this new urban regime, independent of any specific party in power, the public sector displays behaviour that was once characteristic of the private sector: risk assessment, innovation, marketing and profit motivated thinking. Public money is invested into private economic development through public-private partnerships to outflank inter-urban competition, hence the rise of mega-developments and marketing projects such as the Docklands in London, the Guggenheim in Bilbao or the Zuid As in Amsterdam. A concern voiced by critics such as David Harvey is that although costs are public, profit will be allocated to the urban elite, hypothetically to 'trickle down' to the rest of the population. To face this new market reality – where cities are seen as products and city councils operate as business units – Amsterdam Inc. has launched the branding projects *I Amsterdam* and *Amsterdam Creative City*. After coming to power in Spring 2006, one of the first steps of the new progressive city council was to launch a 'Top City Programme' aimed at consolidating the city's 'flagging' position in the top ten of preferred urban business climates:

"Viewed from an outsider's vantage point, Amsterdam is clearly ready to reposition itself. This is why we've launched the Amsterdam Top City programme. In order to keep ahead of the global competition, Amsterdam needs to renew itself. In other words, in order to enjoy a great future worthy of its great past, what Amsterdam needs now is great thinking."[13]

Of course, "creativity will be the central focus point" of this programme, since "creativity is the motor that gives the city its magnetism and dynamism". However, when one looks beyond the rhetoric to the practicalities of the programme, it is surprisingly modest: sponsored expatriate welcome centres in Schiphol Airport; coaching for creative entrepreneurs by major Dutch banks and MTV; 'hospitality training' for caterers; 'Amsterdam Top City' publications in KLM flights; and the annual Picnic Cross Media week, a conference aspiring to be the Dutch Davos of creative entrepreneurs.

In arguably one of the best critiques of Creative City theory, geographer Jamie Peck examines why Florida's work proved to have such an impressive influence on policy makers around the world.[14] According to Peck's sobering conclusion, Florida's creative city thesis was by no means groundbreaking – various authors had published on the knowledge economy before – but it provided a cheap, non-controversial and pragmatic marketing script that fitted well with the existing entrepreneurial schemes of urban economic development. It offered a program that city authorities could afford to do on the side, a low budget public relations scheme complemented by a reorientation of already existing cultural funding. In Amsterdam, however, this creative branding may appear modest in its budget but is actually extensive in its effects, it is the immaterial icing on the cake of an impressive urban redevelopment of the city.

Amsterdam currently abounds with building works, it is facing what I have called an 'Extreme Makeover'. The city's old harbours are being redeveloped into luxurious living and working environments; in its southern side, a new skyline is being realised, the Zuid As, a high rise business district that is supposed to function as a portal to the world economy. In the post-war popular neighbourhoods, more houses are being demolished than ever before in the history of the city, and a significant part of the social housing will make way for more expensive owner-occupant apartments. The trajectory of the new metro line – a straight line of sand, cement and continuous construction works – crosses the city from North to South and thus connects the new city with the old.

Not only is one of Europe's largest urban renewal operations underway, with demolition reaching historic levels, the image of the city itself is also being reworked. In both the re-branding and redevelopment of Amsterdam, the creative sector plays an important role. Creative industries are supposed to function as a catalyst for urban redevelopment, changing the image of a neighbourhood from backward to hip. Schemes have been put into place to temporarily or permanently house artists in neighbourhoods sited to be upgraded. Though modest in its budget, the *I Amsterdam* and *Creative City* marketing campaigns are conceptually advanced (and extensively present in the public consciousness), for city marketing is the apex of *consumer generated content*, the dominant trend in marketing techniques. Creative hipsters serve as communicative vessels for branding projects; between concept stores, galleries, fashion and street art magazines, the cultural economy expands itself over the urban domain and into the public realm.

The new marketing function of the creative sector is perhaps best illustrated by the recent project of Sandberg called *Artvertising*. It involves the facade of the Sandberg fine arts and design faculty being turned into a huge billboard filled with logos of predominantly major companies and also some smaller cultural projects. Following the model of the Million Dollar Homepage, the sixteen thousand tiles of the facade (35 x 29cm each) were sold for 20 euros a piece, making sure to mention that all the business savvy people of the office park Zuid As would be passing on the adjacent ring road. A small blurb from the website of *Artvertising*:

"Every self considered art or design intellectual ends up twisting his or her nose to the so-called 'commercial world'. Art, culture, criticism is what it matters. But we don't think so. We believe that now, more than always, the world is ruled by commercial and economical relationships. Culture defines, and most important, is defined these days by market dynamics."[15]

The Sandberg project is a beautiful illustration of the state of art in the Entrepreneurial City.

Perfectly vacuous, it's like a bubble that's bound to burst. The accomplishment of the project – note also its grammatical bluntness – is that it becomes at once the tool of critique and its object; the embodiment of post-critical art, stretched beyond the cynical dystopias of Rem Koolhaas. However, it did not fail in sparking some resistance during its one month's existence, it was modestly vandalised by a group calling itself the 'Pollock commando', wanting to reclaim the facade as a "public canvas" by throwing paint bombs on it.[16] Besides its uncritical embrace of the new commercial role of the artist as entrepreneur, the *Artvertising* project is also reflective of another tendency in Amsterdam's creative economy: with the borders between culture and economy fading away, the assessment of the value of art and cultural practice has risen in significance.

The Artificial Organic of Real Estate

In a recent article in *Real Estate Magazine*, we can read more about the strange collusion between the arts and real estate. It reads: "the concept of the Creative City is on the rise. Sometimes planned, sometimes organic, but up till now always thanks to real estate developers."[17] The article consequently describes a roundtable discussion on the Creative City by real estate entrepreneurs, organised by René Hoogendoorn. She is the director of 'Strategic Projects' at *ING Real Estate*, the real estate branch of one of the biggest banking conglomerates of the Netherlands. 'Strategic Projects' means, according to Hoogendoorn, that she initiates the development of projects that need 'soul', in this case the Zuid As and the new development in the northern docklands, Overhoeks. She

'I amsterdam'
city-wide
branding,
web banners

combines this function with membership on the advisory board of the *Rietveld Art Academy*, the spatial planning department of the employers federation, and the *Amsterdam Creativity Exchange* – a club subsidised by the Creative City policy that, according to its own words, "provides an environment in which business and creativity meet."[18] It is no coincidence that the last meeting of the Creativity Exchange took place in the old Shell offices of the strategic Overhoeks district, in a way, already providing a taste of much-needed 'soul'.[19] Hoogendoorn explains that ING Real Estate invests in art and culture up to the point that it increases the value of real estate surrounding it. Interesting examples are *ING Real Estate* funding *Platform 21*, the design museum at the Zuid As, and the sponsoring of the post-squatter performance festival *Robodock* on the northern docklands. Hoogendoorn and other real estate developers are still struggling with the question "how to assess up-front the net cash value of the future added value of culture", which shows there is still some way to go for the colonisation of culture.[20]

Another interesting announcement in the article is that real estate developers have now come to realise the importance of 'software' for the successful realisation of real estate 'hardware'. Cultural institutions and temporary art projects create 'traffic', and allow developers to slowly bring property "up to flavour":

"it's about creating space! The thing not to do is to publicly announce you're going to haul in artists; instead, give them the feeling they've thought of it themselves. If it arises organically, levels will rise organically."[21]

The distinction between urban 'software' and 'hardware' was initially coined as an architectural term by the pop-art architecture group *Archigram* to champion the use of soft and flexible materials like the inflatable bubble instead of modernist 'hardware' realised with steel and cement. Together with contemporaries such as the Italian group *Archizoom*, the French collective *Utopie* and publications such as Jonathan Raban's *Soft City*[22], *Archigram* levelled a critique against deadpan modernism, putting forward a more organic conception of the city as a living organism. Urban utopian theory thus acquired its present day computer analogy, where software is the 'programming' of the city and hardware its 'infrastructure'. Much like the SI – experimenting with the bottom up approach through psychogeography and the *dérive* – subjective, organic and 'soft' approaches became a focus point for utopian urbanism.[23]

The recuperation of the utopian language of the '60s into neo-functionalism by real estate entrepreneurs is tragically appropriate. In the SI's 'Formulary for a New Urbanism', Ivan Chtcheglov argues for a city where everyone could live in their "personal cathedral". He proposed a city where districts correspond to their inhabitants emotional lives: Bizarre Quarter, Happy Quarter, Noble and Tragic Quarter, Historical Quarter, Useful Quarter, Sinister Quarter, etc.[24] In a similar vein, the present restructuring of the Dutch housing market has seen the arrival of "differentiated living milieus", where planners partition existing neighbourhoods into themed areas accompanied by a discourse of 'consumer choice'. In the Westelijke Tuinsteden, the biggest redevelopment of social housing in Amsterdam, planners have 're-imagined' the entire neighbourhood in terms of different consumer identities, like 'dreamer', 'doer', 'urbanite', 'networker', 'villager', etc. When consumer demand from outside of the neighbourhood failed to materialise, however, the planners had to readapt their visions, reluctantly returning to a half-hearted focus on the needs of the local population.[25]

As Brain Holmes has shown in his article 'The Flexible Personality'[26], the cultural critique of the '60s and '70s, directed at the authoritarianism and centralized monotony of modernism, was all

too easily met by niche marketing and flexible production. The situationist quest for authenticity could now be experienced through new and ever-changing life style products, as advertisers and fashion designers began to commodify youth subculture. Similarly, the claim of the rise of the creative class has been accompanied by the renewed popularity of "fun and authentic" urban neighbourhoods. With the demise of the effectiveness of the old cultural critique (which cannot progress further than a never ending fear of recuperation), Holmes argues for the construction of a new cultural critique: that of the flexible personality. What better place to start it at, then the present day creative economy.

Notes

1. Even though according to a recent investigation the creative economy in Amsterdam is experiencing decline instead of growth, the City Council still expresses its confidence in the strategic importance of the creative sector. "It's beyond numbers", according to Alderman Asscher of *Economic Affairs*.
'Creatieve Industrie Slinkt', *Het Parool*, 25 January, 2007, http://www.parool.nl/nieuws/2007/JAN/25/eco2.html.

2. Richard Florida, 'The Rise of the Creative Class. Why Cities Without Gays and Rock Bands Are Losing the Economic Development Race'. *Washington Monthly*,

2 May, 2002, http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/features/2001/0205.florida.html.

3. Speech delivered by Cohen at the Creative Capital Conference, 17-18 March 2005, Amsterdam. See: http://www.creativecapital.nl/

4. Constant Nieuwenhuys and Simon Vinkenoog, *New Babylon: Ten Lithographs*, Amsterdam: Galerie d'Eendt, 1963: p. 10.

5. Constant Nieuwenhuys, 'Opkomst en Ondergang van de Avant-Garde'. In: *Randstad 8* (1964), pp 6-35.

6. Not Bored, http://www.notbored.org/tomorrow.html

7. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, New York, International Publishers, 1970: p. 109.

8. 'Het broedplaatsenbeleid' (literally 'incubator policy') is a city policy whereby subsidies are allocated to house artists below the going market rates in specially redeveloped buildings (a significant part of the policy has been targeted at legalising squats). Like baby chickens, the idea behind the policy is that cultural activity needs to be sheltered from the market during its initial phase; when the chick finally turns into a chicken, it should support itself. It is a controversial policy and the artists benefiting from it often complain about the strict bureaucratic requirements. See Justus Uitermark, 'De omarming van subversiviteit'. *Agora* 24.3 (2004): pp. 32-35. Available online: http://squat.net/studenten/kraken-is-terug.pdf.

9. Folker Fröbel et al., 'The New International Division of Labour'. *Social Science Information* 17.1 (1978), pp. 123-

142.

10. Saskia Sassen, *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001.

11. 'Kachels op Terras gaan aan', *Het Parool*, 23 January 2007, http://www.parool.nl/nieuws/2007/JAN/23/p2.html.

12. David Harvey, 'From Managerialism to Entrepreneurialism: The Transformation in Urban Governance in Late Capitalism'. *Geografiska Annaler* 71.1 (1989): pp. 3-17.
Tim Hall and Phil Hubbard (eds) *The Entrepreneurial City. Geographies of Politics, Regimes and Representation*. West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, 1998.

13. Gemeente Amsterdam, Amsterdam Topstad: Metropool, Economische Zaken Amsterdam (14 July 2006), Amsterdam, http://www.amsterdam.nl/ondernemen?Act ItmIdt=12153.

14. Jamie Peck, 'Struggling with the Creative Class', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 29.4 (2005), pp. 740-770.

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RICHARD
FLORIDA

The Rise of the
Creative Class

and how it's transforming work, leisure,
community and everyday life
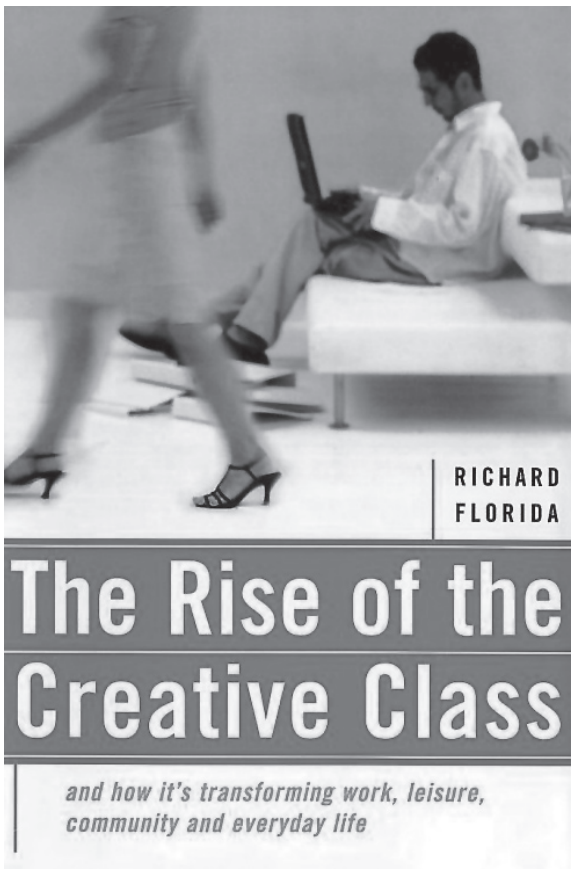
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Reclaiming the Economy

Owen Logan

"This is the way the world is today. It may not be what people always want to hear but it is the truth. The best thing government can do is not to offer a false prospectus to people that we can prevent these changes."

Tony Blair's words in April 2004 on the occasion of the 'world's fifth-largest insurance group', Aviva's, decision to 'offshore' 2,300 jobs.

"...instead of the unelected dealers gambling with our welfare on the stock exchange, it would be more democratic if the Government gambled with the economy. So the Budget would be full of announcements such as, "After due consideration, and in line with our insistence on fiscal competence the car industry has been put on greyhound number four in the 6.38 tonight at Wimbledon Stadium."

Mark Steel, *The Independent*, 23rd January 2008

In *Reclaiming the Economy, Alternatives to Market Fundamentalism in Scotland and beyond*, (2007) Phil Taylor and the late Peter Bain bring their chapter to a close with the above quote from Tony Blair. Politicians imply that the erosion of economic sovereignty to international financial institutions, multinational corporations and stock markets is an unstoppable phenomenon. Consequently hi-end tax cuts, privatisation and the constant threat of capital flight appear more natural than climate change. This is all the more believable when the fortresses of capitalist transaction remain perfectly in tact after stock market crashes like the one in January. No matter how naïve sounding it should be recalled more often, and with greater seriousness, that no citizen anywhere was ever asked to vote for the appropriation of economic governance by financial markets unleashing a speculative boom that dwarfs real goods and services, nor was a manifesto commitment ever devised to couple the world to the strategic expansion of US debt.

At the end of January, Gordon Brown announced the concern of European leaders with "a transparency deficit". This was articulated by such a highly selective body (UK Prime Minister, Gordon Brown; German Chancellor, Angela Merkel; Italian Prime Minister, Romano Prodi; and French President, Nicolas Sarkozy) that many people in the world will argue these representatives showed their interest, not in transparency, but more simply in guarding concentrations of consumer spending now threatened by the excesses of casino capitalism. The market's abstraction of power, which has the effect of smothering needs with frivolous wants, leaves anyone interested in real transparency or in the co-determination of the economy with the difficult question of where to begin? *Reclaiming the Economy* was initiated by a series of discussions outlining practical anti-capitalist economic policies. In keeping with the thinking of John Holloway (the Marxian political philosopher) cited in the book's introduction, its authors believe that alternative visions should be debated and forged from the histories of particular places, not handed down as 'tablets of stone.' In such a plural approach the conception of state obviously varies between contributors. For some, the politics of the state (or multi-state economic blocks) is almost invisible whilst for others the role of the state within an Anglo-American alliance comes through from critiques of the civil service and the public sector. Arguably, all possible human alternatives to market fundamentalism will inevitably be shaped, however unconsciously, by our historical experience, particularly by participation in the British Empire project and the ideological twilight of social democracy in the UK, now turned into a domestic attack on the human politics of production. Really these factors cannot be underestimated if one is to genuinely proceed from our 'particular experiences in time

Photograph by Owen Logan.

and space.'

With energy policy torn between environmental limits and market-led growth, the mainstream political treatment of climate change is of course extremely relevant to the theme of this book edited by Andy Cumbers and Geoff Whittam. Cumbers' chapter on 'Economic Democracy and Public Ownership' is directed towards a sustainable energy policy and implicitly revisits the discussions of writers like Carole Pateman in the 1970s who recognised that nationalised industry would not thrive in the absence of grass roots economic democracy.[1] Recognising that the window of opportunity for a nationalised oil industry in the North Sea has passed, Cumbers makes a persuasive social and environmental case for decentralisation under a national energy agency. 'Climate Change and the Bioregional Economy' by the Green economist Molly Scott Cato emphasises a more "Robinson Crusoe approach" which some people may see merely returning us to a classic problem of liberal thought. But before ushering in environmental imperatives, perhaps the chapter by Taylor and Bain examining a crisis for trade unionism in the current neoliberal order makes a good introduction to the terrain of this book. If so, it is because Green thinking is strong on what *should* happen but by envisaging various forms of opting-out environmentalists tend to be vague about *how* radical social change comes about.

In looking at call centre work, where jobs are notoriously easy to shift from one place to the next according to the viscitudes of the global labour market, Taylor and Bain are hardly bright-eyed optimists of proletarian social agency, although, importantly, they identify the limits of corporate hypermobility. In doing so they also point to room for internationalist inspired manoeuvre on the part of workers and give examples of trade union successes in the UK as well as the development of UNITES in India, a union representing call centre workers. Their argument is that modest successes which articulate solidarity between workers in different countries can influence the pattern of future organisation. Essentially, the scale of the internationalist task in unions needs to be broken down into practical goals made possible by internationalist thinking. At the centre of this argument could be a greater emphasis on the importance of understanding broader frustrations of life beyond the workplace – a level of comprehension which is hampered by the bureaucratic protectionism that makes so many trade unions unprepared for this century. Bain and Taylor mention how interviews helped UNITES articulate members' complaints and, arguably, a renewed interest in the impact of

working conditions needs to be matched by an unsentimental examination of the upwards redistribution of economic power. Companies may be 'vulnerable' to the charge of driving a race to the bottom in rights and pay but the evidence suggests that they don't care, and indeed, why should they? Inevitably this calls for unions to re-organise or identify precisely focused tactics, or both.

In a journal article, published in *Defragmenting: Towards a critical understanding of the new global division of labour*, Norene Pupo gives a detailed view of the same sector.[2] The now almost customary mode of opening governance to business has seen cities in Canada and the US offering a "highly acclaimed" call answering service which is said to improve government accessibility and accountability. According to Bell Canada, its new 311 information service "can transform the way cities deliver services, and change the way cities communicate and connect with their citizens." This last statement is true. 311 is not intended to replace the 911 emergency line, instead having been designed for burning questions rather than burning buildings. However, call centre workers respond using a database of scripted answers in an assembly line approach to communication. Calls are timed to ensure workers deal with different queries within a set number of seconds and maintain a quota of calls. 'Downtime' between calls varies regionally. Some workers are allowed up to 15 seconds while others only get 3-5 seconds between calls in six hour shifts.

The pressure of this emotionally gruelling regime means that employees worry about going to the toilet or looking away from the screen. From grievances to annoyances and basic information the 311 franchise signals the underlying ideology of governance that goes along with "plundering the public sector". According to the more benign vocabulary of the *Financial Times* this is now an explosive area of economic activity in the UK.[3] Nevertheless, what is equally pertinent about the 311 line is the way it belongs to a de-skilled and atomised universe in which commodity values come to life. The psychological dimensions of this may threaten the progressive role of the public sector as much as the material implications of contracting out or straightforward cutbacks.

The complex nature of things raises the issue of how economics is defined by its gurus today. For all those (including this reviewer) who prefer to discuss public service in both its poetic and prosaic possibilities, this is what Robert McMaster's chapter on commodification in health care addresses. He tackles the commodification of health care where "money has been accepted as a proper conception of value [...] reducing all

human relations essentially to those of exchange …". McMaster would no doubt argue that monetary exchange values must be separated from reciprocity in which the notions of "duty, obligations, dignity and power" that he mentions are the basis for co-operation and accountability. Without reciprocity those high sounding words can also be turned to the cause of producing "healthy figures" that mask a deeply unhealthy reality. *Reclaiming the Economy* exposes the dark side of public accounting methods that merely serve private interests. This is particularly evident in Chik Collins' chapter, writing on the Scottish Executive's assault on the community agenda which he spotted being tied up with the Royal Bank of Scotland's interventions[4], Christine Cooper and Phil Taylor's on autocratic and senseless prison privatisation, and Sarah Glynn's writing on the cynicism behind the stock transfer of council housing. Here we see the stealthy withdrawal of public ownership and control under the doublespeak banner of 'community ownership.' Glynn calls the warm and fuzzy language of community "New-Labour-Speak", but what comes through in all the cases are the basic contradictions of meaning, intention and real functions that underpin much of what *Reclaiming the Economy* may deal with too implicitly; namely cryptic economics.

In their introduction, Cumbers and Whittam remark that "economic syllabuses increasingly exclude some of the great heterodox thinkers such as Keynes, Schumpeter, Polanyi and Marx […] Who would have thought thirty years ago that it would be possible to graduate from an economics degree without having come into contact with Keynes' *General Theory*?" But thanks to the knowledge economy daily succeeding in turning education into training, the impoverishment of economic philosophy is the norm in universities. The Harvard guru Jeffrey Sachs, who brands his method 'Clinical Economics', does a great deal to burn back the discursive ground which Gerry Mooney and Gill Scott in their 'Tackling Poverty and Disadvantage' ably defend.[3] They argue that poverty must be understood as the structural outcome of exploitation, not an abstract malady that demands the sort of fixes envisaged by someone like Sachs, who describes himself entering like the doctor called in the middle of the night to tend to a sick child running a high fever of hyperinflation. What Sachs is really describing is his dealings among power elites. The contrast with Mooney and Scott's approach could not be sharper. If mass exodus or radical transformation are anything to go by, countries like Poland and Bolivia are hardly satisfied with Sachs' charity. Bolivia's government responded with a sharp leftward turn, while women stuck in Poland's impoverished zones and pushed to the edges of existence say that "ours is like a voice in the desert". Predictably the Sachs publicity machine is profoundly deaf. Seemingly unaware of the pratfalls, Bono Vox hypes-up Sachs telling us that the economist's voice is "louder than any electric guitar, heavier than heavy metal".[5]

Wrestling with Gurus

In referring back to Adam Smith, the new breed of economist is unwilling to address the analytical gaps in *The Wealth of Nations* although the work is likely to be cited as part of the genealogy belonging to any mainstream economist wishing to forecast reality. Smith himself was open about the possibility of self-delusion, although he washed over the problem of separating facts from values with an insistence on 'general rules', leaving a key issue lingering on to become the preoccupation of German philosophy. This led to the work of Marx for whom, of course, economics was no clinical system and was all about the misrecognition of labour which, as the Chartists declared, was the source of all wealth. With manufacturing exiled from UK plc today, the Marxian struggle around the social origins of wealth appears to have been won hands down by the managerial class who we are now told with unrelenting pomposity are the wealth creators. As radical market analysts show

this is no mere ideological achievement. It reflects (though fails to describe) the subversive processes in which money is autonomously created from nothing.[6]

In his chapter 'Towards an Alternative Economic Development Strategy for Scotland', Danny Mackinnon shows how the Scottish Executive adopted the knowledge-economy rationale; expressed in its ideological documents like *Smart Successful Scotland*. Mackinnon links this to the 'guru-led' approach to development now typifying mainstream economic discourse in the United States. It's worth returning to Sachs for a moment who, if nothing else, exemplifies the syndrome. Things went so badly wrong in his plans for Bolivia that the hitherto divided politics of miners and peasants overlapped and the Movement for Socialism was created. But its coming to power with Evo Morales is more than evidence for the law of unintended consequences and reveals the economic planner's characteristic blindness to social meanings and ways of life, which are equally problematic factors in economic designs for full blown consumerist societies. Moving from relative security provided by social democratic welfarism into a precarious and increasingly indebted way of life is sustainable only for as long as the dispersal of risk away from capital and from the centres of speculation is left uncontested. Despite all the recent talk of carnage in the markets, and front page pictures of distraught traders, any real distress in their ranks will be redistributed downwards.

Writing on closures of brewing and industrial research companies in the north east of England, Andy Pike says that the prospects for workplace resistance and social agency are conditioned by specific histories. He goes on to argue that in bringing up any concept of socially useful production it is crucial to address underlying functions of capital. In quoting from Robin Blackburn's *Banking on Death, or Investing in Life* (2002).[7] Pike's chapter is suggestive of the way the socialisation of ailing companies through public investment or in cooperative buy-out schemes can signify the off-loading of risk in a corporate-dominated market. Forms of de-commodification or socialisation come into play, "since only this can 'neutralise' the free floating electric charge of capital by tying to the 'earth' of mutual or public property, which can no longer be bought or sold". Yet unless they are cash-based, public or mutual ownership interventions still need to "generate a return for their capitalist lenders." The case of Northern Rock, where Gordon Brown's government is currently doing everything to avoid nationalisation, seems to be the worst of all worlds. Each tax payer is to be lumbered with around £2000 worth of unwanted capitalist risk, said to be the largest bail-out of a private company ever.[8]

Taking up Pike's arguments, it might be argued that the poverty of the political imagination is the most disabling factor in the contemporary nation state which cannot conceive of any avowedly anti-capitalist or pro-worker enterprise amounting to meaningful economic activity. When such projects based on social production surface in post-shock economies such as Argentina, there have been concerted attempts to co-opt and denude them of an anti-managerial organisational praxis in which the seeds of a wider cooperative economy lie. In a country like the UK, the scale of not-for-profit activity is often underestimated but its meaning and functions are at best ambiguous and the ethos of the sector is hardly pro-worker. At worst, the voluntary sector erodes labour organisation as charitable trusts, functioning as tax breaks for local government, take on services from the public sector where trade unionism is still a significant force.

In the context of a civic branding effort, 'Creative Plymouth', a recent meeting organised by the Plymouth Arts Centre and the Committee for Radical Diplomacy, brought out the extent to which local authorities are seen to be engineering the development of apparently self-organised groups. The criticism of this endeavour to nurture new organisations is that they are less

directly accountable and through them the work of the public sector is potentially *voluntarised*. Nevertheless, employment in the voluntary sector has risen by more than a quarter in the past decade with government and local authorities becoming purchasers rather than providers of public services which are increasingly pitted against each other in the process.[9] The Scottish Trade Union Congress is now trying to define a common ground with the voluntary sector but it remains to be seen what effective political weapons can be shared. Perhaps it is a hopeful sign that a campaigning residents' association in Plymouth reflects critically on its own successes by measuring them against the un-paid work they are effectively performing for the public sector. This is hardly surprising when the demigods and gurus of consultancy and public relations are seen to be squandering public sector resources.

Of course, the self-inflicted paradox for bureaucracy caught in this nexus is that their desire to demonstrate public participation and social coherency can never be met. A healthy democracy depends on citizens having meaningful economic powers as producers, not only as consumers. Such a balance is essentially a liberal idea, held to by old fashioned sorts like Lord Beaumont of Whitley who moved to the Green Party and who is cited by Molly Scott Cato in her chapter on the bioregional economy. Not for the first time in history, liberal ideals have become incompatible with liberal 'free-trade' economics. One response is an idealistic localism that fails to confront the underlying issues of reciprocity, or indeed transparency, in a global market which cannot be expected to disappear, and be replaced by Cato's notion of medieval immobility. Worryingly, an implicitly apocalyptic rationale is crossed with what looks like another lifestyle plan for the British middle classes. George Monbiot's *The Age of Consent* (2003) remains more far sighted in tackling the contradictions of global governance and international trade by also calling the international monetary system to account.[10] Monbiot proposed an adaptation of Keynes' untried *demurrage* (negative interest) system which would tie the reproduction of capital to ecological and genuinely sustainable growth. This key idea got submerged in Monbiot's rather too grandiose vision for a world parliament, but to whatever side of such arguments you may tend, it is clear that the disempowerment of all productive forces, and the exploitation of all life, is now undermining democratic systems in different countries.

If bureaucracy is in an unenviable position it is partly because it is increasingly tooled-up to cover over political hollowness with the appearance of consensus. Is it any wonder that the public sector is more and more consumed by its own marketing? When one considers how governance at all levels is taking on greater representational authority on the back of very weak mandates we should be worried. The technocratic mood of boredom with qualitative democracy pervades many areas of civil society and any dissenting form of organisation can be easily purged by fiscal starvation. The still unfolding story of Creative Scotland, envisaged as a more efficient commissariat of culture, has so far been an exercise in political deference and intellectual cowardice dressed up as a (costly) consultation process. Its terms of reference stumbled from an antiquated and undiscussed notion of culture to the economically instrumental notion of creativity that now pervades the whole affair. Creative Scotland may well turn out to be a prime example of impatience with reasoned democratic debate, just when as a society that is what we need the most!

More optimistically, what might be discerned from a complex situation in which any segregated discussion of the economic, the political or the cultural is destined to go round in circles, is a certain depth of interest in working for a better politics of the public sector. This has occurred in Norway where non-linear trade union organisation brought about the Popular Movement for Public Services. Twenty-nine national organisations from

unions to charities came together representing more than one million members, not too far short of a quarter of Norway's population. The campaign succeeded in strengthening a democratic mandate for the public sector and reversed neoliberal policies of competitive tendering and privatisation. But as Norwegian campaigner Asbjorn Whal described in the UK trade union journal *Solidarity*, it was important not just to defend the achievements of the public sector in Norway but also to admit to its weaknesses and fight for improvement. According to Bjorn, this was a socially radicalising process moving Norway's government to the left. In *Reclaiming the Economy* no doubt Andy Pike is right about social agency being "conditioned" by different histories. The multi-faceted history of Scandinavian militancy counts in the case of Norway, but it might be argued more strongly that if participation and democratic organisation are genuinely upheld then politics, if not spontaneous, still remains the unpredictable factor in the midst of economic reductionism.

Corporate Games

The virtue of *Reclaiming the Economy*, no doubt making it implausible to conformist minds, is that the book's perspective cannot be separated from citizenship. It is also true that its critical grasp of the state varies greatly between contributors. Nevertheless, different levels of qualitative citizenship underpin the policy agenda: from writers such as Cumbers or Cato, who project substantial rather than token shifts towards renewable energy; Geoff Whittam and Mike Danson, who argue for progressive local taxation based on the ability to pay, seeing this as one of the few real openings under devolution; or Roberta Sonnino and Kevin Morgan's work on local 'green procurement' for school meals. Pioneered in East Ayrshire, the engagement of schools there with local production in an area of multiple deprivation shows the crucial and progressive role of the public sector in relation to market development. If Jamie Oliver was tough on crap school meals, East Ayrshire looks tougher on their causes! This is an important move which should be widely replicated as Sonnino and Morgan argue.

Against the deservedly optimistic tone of the Ayrshire case study, Prem Sikka's chapter reveals the delinquency of corporations disabling the capacities of the public sector and it working against a free market. Among the many examples of corporate parasitism which Sikka gives are the five companies charged with conspiracy to defraud the NHS to the tune of £150 million. Sikka argues that "taming the corporations" requires the diffusion of corporate governance and much greater transparency. Citizens, not just share holders, he argues should have greater powers to question and challenge big businesses which have been shaping laws unto themselves for decades. Consider the 1973 US supreme court judgement that did away with equalities in political communication when it found that "money is speech". Sikka argues that the corporate books must be opened to public scrutiny and evidence of tax-dodging should rule companies out of public contracts. The TUC estimates that £25 billion annually is currently lost to the public purse through tax dodging.[11] Nevertheless, the corrupting aspects of corporate power are a fashionable target. The state's immersion in the logic of capital accumulation may ultimately be more problematic. Considering the way government was outmanoeuvred by the flight offshore of Totesport Casino, the internet arm of government-owned bookmaker the Tote, and the way the Inland Revenue disposed of public assets to a private company based in a tax haven, mirroring local authorities' uses of charitable trusts, Gordon Brown really should be questioned when he says he's in line with people who want to "play by the rules".[12] Is he talking about the rules of institutionally organised capital flight? The UK's capacity for economic self-deception makes us look rather like a chip off a US block when the state itself is fascinated by parasitical 'ingenuity' in the market.

Reclaiming the ECONOMY
Alternatives to Market Fundamentalism in Scotland and beyond
edited by **Andy Cumbers and Geoff Whittam**

Terror and crypto-economics

Its proponents claim that the financial markets are too complex to understand and regulate as they once were by central banks and governments. With democracy held in contempt this can be announced with utter impunity from places like the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, rather than admitted as the most serious sort of political problem. In *The Future of Democracy* (1998), subtitled *A Defence of the Rules of the Game*, Norberto Bobbio suggested that once power is invisible or beyond comprehension and at the same time the state has ever greater capacities of knowledge over citizens, a quasi-occult dynamic of terror comes into play.[13] When it comes to economics undoubtedly there is a comic side to this, easily brought out by people like Mark Steel who see in the domain of hi-finance the surreal character of capitalism. Although driven by speculation and usury (which leads to the auto-genesis of money) Marxists often suggest that reforming or 'tinkering' with financial systems of transaction is unlikely to address the dialectic of exchange (money) and production (commodities). But some will argue that the conflict between money capitalists and industrial capitalists needs to be taken into greater account and point to the unfinished nature of Marx's engagement with money. In a useful review article of Anitra Nelson's *Marx's Concept of Money* (1999) Phillip Anthony O'Hara defends the development of Marxist thought in this respect while accepting that Marx himself utilised a commodity theory of money "when a fuller understanding of money and credit was in order".[14]

There are several reasons to take this problem more seriously. As a micro level mechanism of social control, credit drives a consumerist economy based on superficial wants rather than deeper needs. Recall Margaret Thatcher's ideal home-owning populace, brought into being in the midst of an epidemic of homelessness; or in the US now, the human uprooting of subprime mortgages. Yet if the terrors of debt still support the logic of speculation, normative individualism and further conformity to commodification, they can also bring about insurrection. Athenian direct democracy emerged from precisely such a moment of resistance against usury when the dispersal of risk from lenders was leading to self-enslavement of debtors. Needless to say, not all insurrectionary tendencies against debt have been as culturally fruitful as Solon's essentially political reforms from BC 594. The tragedy of Make Poverty History was the way it segregated and stage managed contemporary issues of debt and democratic accountability. And without grasping the latent dynamic of conflict between finance and industry the real economic universe of capitalism is invisible although it casts shadows in everyday life and politics that are easily misinterpreted.

The idea that the invasion of Iraq was just about getting oil rather than a collateralisation of the flammable US economy is an example.[15] Even more problematically, corporatist reaction is increasingly dressed up as democracy and requests for new networks and information circuits as transparency. To allow government to secretly rescue future 'Northern Wrecks', Alistair Darling, the Chancellor, wants to deploy 'The Cobra System' designed for emergencies and terrorist attacks. No wonder we live in era of rampantly one-dimensional conspiracy theories.

Any move towards economic democracy demands redrawing the role of the state and also rethinking money in terms of reciprocity. At the grass roots there are many attempts to do this through community currencies, but without a proper state supported framework these currencies are easier to earn than spend, tending to suffer from problems of initial over-accumulation. And when they have been in real demand they are too easy to forge. Monbiot was right to attend first to institutional and structural questions at a global level because without major reforms of international governance, progressive social change is unlikely to be sustainable at the local level. *Reclaiming the Economy* has come about through avowedly bottom up discussions hosted by the STUC in Glasgow. The book's authors look forward to the continuation of this process which should situate Scotland more in the 'beyond'. Because that is where the post industrial state, immersed in the logic of finance capital, is already placed.

Reclaiming the Economy, Alternatives to Market Fundamentalism in Scotland and beyond, Edited by Andy Cumbers and Geoff Whittam, Scottish Left Review Press (2007) £9.99

Notes

1. See for example *Participation and Democratic Theory*, by Carole Pateman, Cambridge University Press (1975)

2. 'Behind the Screens' by Norene Pupo, *Defragmenting: Towards a critical understanding of the new global division of labour*, Volume 1, Number 2, Summer 2007, edited by Ursula Huws, published by Analytica / Merlin Press.

3. 'Private sector role in public services explodes' by Nicholas Timmins, *Financial Times*, published, Dec 05 2007

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6. See for example 'The Road to Hyperinflation, Fed helpless in its own crisis', *Asia Times Online* by Henry C K Liu http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Global_Economy/ JA26Dj06.html

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8. See 'Cityphilia', by John Lanchester, *London Review of Books*, January 3 2008, http://www.lrb.co.uk/v30/n01/lanc01_.html and 'Revenue sell-off to tax haven firm', by Stefan Armbruster, *BBC News Online*, September 23 2002, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/2263208.stm

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Lenin Reloaded...
and engaged in friendly fire?
Benjamin Franks

Sebastian Budgen, Stathis Kouvelakis and Slavoj Žižek, eds, Lenin Reloaded: Towards a Politics of Truth *(Durham and London, Duke University Press 2007).*

Lenin Reloaded is largely constructed from papers delivered at a conference held in Essen in February 2001. Collections of essays drawn from academic presentations are often neglected by reviewers. There are a number of reasons for this marginalisation, many of which relate to the lack of cohesion and complexity that results from having diverse expert contributors. The chapters tend to be hard to digest, as they reproduce many of the vices of contemporary academe, in which the aim is to demonstrate the paper-giver's theoretical superiority to his (and it is usually a 'he') small audience, rather than engage and promote critical discourses to aid collaborative projects. Thus, such edited volumes of traditional scholarship, whilst demonstrating the virtues of rigour, frequently lack the sparkle of readability to appeal to a larger audience or the provocative tension required to maintain a reviewer's interest. *Lenin Reloaded* however, attempts to be more challenging than the usual collections of conference proceedings. It deliberately seeks to shake what the editors believe is a moribund academic community out of its stupor.

There are a number of differences between standard repackaged conference proceedings and this volume. First there is the title's eye-catching attempt to play with popular culture, with its allusion to near-contemporary movies (in particular *The Matrix Reloaded*). A cinematic pun as the film *Reloaded* was followed by *Revolutions*, and the introduction, along with many of the essays, expresses an overt insurrectionary intent that this Reloaded will be followed by revolutions also. The filmic conceit was no doubt inspired by the contribution of Slavoj Žižek, who amongst other claims to fame was the presenter of *The Pervert's Guide to the Cinema* (Channel 4, 2006).

More important distinctions lie in the sheer quality of the contributors that include Alain Badiou, Etienne Balibar, Terry Eagleton, Frederic Jameson and Antonio Negri, which might not constitute 'big names' when compared to the worldwide recognition of Laurence Fishburne, Keanu Reeves or even Carrie-Anne Moss, but in the world of political philosophy and cultural theory they are amongst the superstar elite.

It is the subtitle of the volume that provokes a stronger reaction, with its claims to assist the project of a "politics of truth". This is a claim, repeated in the introduction, that against the messy "postmodern sophists" of contemporary academic fashion (p.2), that there is not only a singular reality whose ultimate end is liberation, but that Lenin's interpretation of Marx is the unique voice able to articulate this truth. Lenin is capable of "dispelling all opportunistic compromises" and reasserting the "revolutionary project" (p.3). However, such ambitions are hugely problematic: first, because the ideal of a singular revolutionary truth is epistemologically suspect; second, because Lenin appears an unsuitable totem to use to advance some of these goals; and finally, because the papers themselves contradict one another on how far Lenin, and his model of praxis, is an adequate counter to the social problems of postmodernity.

Thus Negri's contribution outlines some of the problems of advancing and clarifying the 'revolutionary project' through the application of Leninist principles. The mechanisms of emancipatory social change have substantially changed since the era of industrial capitalism (pp.303-04). The development of post-Fordist global capitalism, argues Negri, has produced a completely different range of revolutionary agencies. These diverse and fluid agents of change Negri calls the 'multitude', and they are distinct from the singular revolutionary subject of Leninism, namely the proletariat (pp.301-03 and p.306). The altered economic terrain no longer permits the same sorts of strategic intervention long associated with the Leninist party (pp.304-05). At best, Negri argues, Lenin provides an example of a theorist analysing the particularity of the historical-specific terrain of struggle to generate transformative practice. This is echoed by Savas Michael-Mauss, who considers Lenin's personal commitment, the heroism of continuing resistance in the face of monumental oppressions, rather than his strategic pronouncements, that is most important for the current situation (pp.102-03). However, the question then arises, why choose Lenin? There are other figures that can inspire collective liberatory practices without the connotations of dogmatism that are associated with the oppressive, instrumentalist methods defended in Lenin's name.

If Lenin is chosen because he is viewed, as the editors maintain, as a forthright figure unyielding in the face of class hierarchies, then this too is deeply problematic. As even Lenin was aware, in class society there are no 'pure' spaces in which revolutionary practices exist in a 'compromised' state. There are always concessions to the apparatuses of the capitalist social order in whatever activities radicals undertake, whether it is selling their intellectual labour for employers to profit, or producing revolutionary texts as commodities for sale by multinational organisations (in the case of this volume, £50

for the hardback). Indeed, Lenin seems a remarkable figure to pick on as an inspiration to those rejecting concessions. Lenin was often making settlements with oppressive social orders, such as conducting negotiations with imperial powers; or, as Alex Callinicos acknowledges in his contribution, reintroducing bureaucratic management to post-revolutionary Russia, an economic response, Callinicos argues, that was the result of the civil war, discontent from the peasantry and failure of the German revolution to provide much-needed support (pp.25-26). Yet as libertarian-left critics such as Maurice Brinton describe, the response to these events need not have taken the officious turn approved by the Bolshevik-leader.[1] Lenin's responses to the economic problems that arose in the post-revolutionary period were not necessarily the only credible alternative, despite Callinicos's assertion. More autonomous modes of organisation and production arose but these would have reduced the role of the Party – and for this reason they were deliberately crushed.

Finally, is Lenin a sufficient counter to the postmodern malaise regretted by the editors? The eloquent essay by Terry Eagleton suggests that rather than being a counterpoint to postmodernity, Lenin embraces some of its key features. For Eagleton makes the surprising assertion, all the more astonishing given the overt purpose of the book, that Lenin is a postmodernist 'suspicious of teleologies', viewing historical developments as 'fractured and multi-layered', 'allergic to political purity [...] and favouring the hybrid and the ambiguous over the glare of absolute certainty' (p.42), a man who was every much an avant-gardeist as James Joyce (p.51). Eagleton's Lenin is not the 'steel hardened vanguardist' (p.44), but one who sees knowledge as being context-specific and provisional. This specialist, revolutionary know-how is neither universal nor innate, and thus Eagleton rightly defends the idea

that within a particular domain some will have greater facility to assess appropriate action, and to act. In a liberatory context this is more likely to be generated by a 'bus driver' than a 'banker' or academic (pp.45-46), though plenty of academics and precious few bus drivers seem to have contributed to this textual attempt at revitalising the revolutionary tradition.

The logic of this position would be to regard all authority to be dependent on context-specific knowledge, not social status, and this knowledge is provisional, meaning no group is privileged as the universal vanguard, a seeming rejection of Leninist views on the proletariat. Indeed, Eagleton regards Lenin as rejecting a particular singular revolutionary subject, that of the proletariat, for a constellation of arising subjects whose collectivity creates revolutionary change (p.54). This Lenin does not 'lead' the working classes, but recognises that no conscious collective predicts the myriad desires and actions of subjects resisting oppression (p.53). Eagleton's Lenin is, therefore, far from the hectoring Leninist bureaucrat, who swamps autonomous initiatives with their programmatic strategies, and justifies paternalist intervention through spurious appeals to the science of revolution. The postmodern Lenin is guilty only of embracing modernity too much, as opposed to contemporary activists' apparent readiness to reject it (pp.57-58).

Instead of a singular revolutionary truth emerging from the analyses of Lenin, the book becomes deeply complex, as there seems to be so many different Lenins to reload. With so much rearming going on there is a danger of being caught in the crossfire. There is a bloody history of conflict between the various groups claiming to be the true inheritors of Leninist thought, whether it is the sectarian rivalries of the minor revolutionary parties of the European left or, more dramatically, the murderous conflicts between Stalin and the Trotskyists throughout the 1930s or the full-blown civil war between Eritrea People's Liberation Front and the Ethiopian regime of Mengistu Haile Mariam in the 1980s.

By contrast to Eagleton's postmodern Lenin, Lars T. Lih's evangelical Lenin knows the absolute truth and seeks a programme and vehicle to awaken the masses to it (pp.283-94). Lih's Lenin is, perhaps, stereotypical, as Alan Shandro indicates (308), but one which captures many of the features of contemporary Leninist parties. Lih's Lenin is not only in conflict with Eagleton, but also diverges from Callinicos. Though Lih and Callinicos both maintain the importance of the proletarian-party to their Lenin, for Lih Lenin is a Messianic figure (p.294), whilst for Callinicos, the representations of Lenin as a man ruled by charismatic rage is a historical distortion (pp.18-19): rather, he is a moral rational figure whose philosophy is best exemplified by his follower Trotsky (pp.29-30).

Callinicos' Lenin is roughed up Kevin Anderson, as this Lenin is theoretically weak concerning

the role of the revolutionary party, and the undermining of revolutionary democracy (pp.120-21) – a subject also opened up to critique by Sylvain Lazarus (pp.257-60). Yet Anderson's and Callinicos' Lenin have similarities as both view this moral, scientific strategist as being distinct from the failures of state socialism and the totalitarianism of Stalin, a view also shared by Daniel Bensaïd in his pluralist account of Lenin (pp.154-55). Yet this division of Stalin from Lenin (and Trotsky) is in turn rejected by Žižek (p.76), who regards Stalin as the necessary outcome of Lenin's October Revolution (p.74). Badiou is even more explicit than Zizek, in his high regard of state-socialist dictators. The two agree that Lenin is best exemplified through his rigorous instrumentalism of totalitarianism, although Badiou selects Mao Tse-Tung's cultural revolution as the key to creating a new epoch (pp.11-12, p.16). Consequently, the myriad perspectives illustrate not just the complexity of identifying Lenin, but in drawing out relevant features to guide radical practice. This confusion jumble of Leninisms is partly the result of the evolution, or – as Etienne Balibar proposes – 'contradiction' within Lenin's thought (p.207).

Thus, rather than showing the particular pertinence of a reinvented Lenin to guide us in the current climate of capitalist ascendancy, his proponents, on the contrary, show that more-or-less anything can be justified by reference to him. He is both the father of totalitarianism and distinct from it; the key strategist and the fatally-flawed tactician permanently tied to the monolithic revolutionary party; he identifies the universal agent of change, but also outdated with regards to his analysis of where resistance to capitalism is generated; he is the charismatic champion,

but also the rational, composed everyman. To repeat Žižek's comment concerning his own commentators, "with defenders like these who needs attackers".[2]

It is rare to come across a book with so many papers one disagrees with, to find the project, as described in the editors' terms, so uncomfortable and problematic, yet also to welcome the volume nonetheless. First, many of the papers, especially those by Matsas, Anderson, Bensaïd and Stathis Kouvelakis provide informed interpretations of Hegelian philosophy through the engagement of Lenin, though this often shows the magnitude (and enigmatic nature) of Hegel's thought, rather than the relevance and importance of Lenin.

Second, many of the papers present a challenge to those who identify with different political movements, by presenting alternative versions of Leninism that run counter to the stereotypes adopted by his main opponents: anarchists, liberals and social democrats. Often criticisms of Lenin concentrate on just a few texts (*"Left Wing" Communism: An infantile disorder, What is to be Done?, Materialism and Empirio-criticism*) or questionable, liberal biographical histories. Anderson and Eagleton's versions of Lenin stand out as providing alternative, pluralist accounts that could be critically and constructively engaged with.

Third, and perhaps most importantly, whilst these alternative Lenins might not be convincing, they at least open up some of the key concepts for greater consideration and wider use, in particular, the return of the concept of 'revolution', which as Jameson has pointed out, has been lost in the hurry to ditch political engagement for more fashionable concerns (p.67). This is not to say that there are not terrible problems in viewing revolution as a singular event, which predetermines the lines of conflict and becomes the unique moment of rupture (pp.67-68). This singular account of revolution leads to a dangerous consequentialism, in which any manner of oppressive, hierarchical tactics can be justified to bring about the rapture of social realignment. Nonetheless, by reaffirming the importance of revolution the editors and contributors make a vital point: without this concept we lose the possibility of conceiving of transformative social practices and the construction of a more humane ethic.

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Notes
1. M. Brinton (2005), 'The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control' in *For Workers' Power*, (Edinburgh AK Press).
2. S. Žižek (2007), 'Afterward: With defenders like these who needs attackers', P. Bowman and R. Stamp, *The Truth of Zizek* (London, Contiuum).

Resisting New Labour's 'hard labour'

Alex Law & Gerry Mooney

Few readers of Variant will be unaware of New Labour's welfare 'reform' and public sector 'modernisation' agendas. Since 1997 the restructuring of welfare and public services has been a central component of the government's political project. Welfare reform was viewed by Blair and is presently by Brown as contributing to a neoliberal vision of the UK as a modern, lean, flexible and competitive economy. Much has been written about the many and varied forms that privatisation has taken, of the contracting-out of public services, of Public Private Partnerships/Public Finance Initiatives (PFI/PPP), and of the increasing encroachment and indeed take-over by the private sector in the delivery of many key 'heartland' public and social services. In contrast, there has been much less concern with how these reforms are impacting on the workers involved in delivering services. Our concern here is to draw attention to some of the many ways in which welfare workers are being adversely affected by the restructuring of the welfare state and, more importantly, how they are resisting New Labour in new and significant ways.

Welfare Workers on the Frontline

Our focus is on workers in what we call the 'welfare industry' – that is, workers who are involved in diverse ways in both the production and delivery of social and welfare policy and practice. In short, 'welfare industry' is not just an umbrella label for those six million or so workers employed in what's left of the welfare state in the UK – such as NHS workers, teachers, university workers, social workers and care workers – but it also includes important sections of the civil service, in areas of criminal justice and public administration. Beyond a narrow focus on the traditional institutions of the welfare state, the notion of a 'welfare industry' also encompasses non-state sectors, chiefly the voluntary sector and private provision. Speaking of a welfare industry also helps to focus attention on the specific way that welfare functions are being further industrialised and degraded using technological systems, such as call centres, and centralised managerial commands and targets to restructure the welfare labour process. This has involved the flexible intensification of worker effort during working time. Work time has also been elongated in a variety of ways with the loss of 'porous time' and breathing space in both worker-worker and worker-user social interactions. Additional duties have been imposed on welfare workers, especially administrative burdens, creating tensions with their core duty for the care and well-being of welfare users. That this is having morbid consequences is amply testified by the

scores of deaths[1] in British hospitals as a result of the managerialist obsession with cost-cutting and targets.

Many workers in the welfare industry deliver services to some of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in society. However, what is also significant is that such workers, themselves often low waged, are central to the delivery and maintenance of public services, in the process supporting other disadvantaged groups, including those who struggle to survive on what the state provides through benefits. Public sector workers, and in particular those involved in the welfare sectors, are not simply delivering services, administering benefits and managing poor people. They are also tasked with the delivery and implementation of government social policy initiatives, such as workfare/work activation programmes which force those in poverty into low paid employment and vulnerable forms of work. 'Work', understood as paid employment, underpins New Labour's vision. Public services are central to achieving the goals that this vision generates. Public servants are therefore critical to delivering not only services but also central to implementing New Labour's political and ideological objectives.

Work, Work, Work! - The World of New Labour

'Work' lies at the heart of the entire New Labour project. With Gordon Brown's new found 'Protestant ethic' being rather self-consciously aligned to the 'spirit of neoliberal capitalism', work is seen as the most morally elevating means through which poverty can be alleviated. Work represents the 'best' form of welfare! Work is central to 'social inclusion'. Work is salvational; its morally uplifting properties enables the 'socially excluded' to be transformed into model citizens, exercising the opportunity to make choices and consume as part of 'respectable' or 'mainstream' society. However, at the very time when New Labour has sought to valorise work as a central dimension of daily life and personal existence, what is going on in the workplace, the site where society's ills are going to be cured, has, with a few honourable exceptions, been neglected across large swathes of academic, media and political discourse. This, despite the fact that much welfare work is carried out in full view of the public. In the meantime, waged work has not stopped being an exploitative social relation. For many groups of workers in the welfare industry things have, if anything, deteriorated in the last decade. But this also throws up its own contradictions as it rubs up against certain limits to how far services can be degraded, not least the permanent tension between the depreciating nature of the welfare labour process and the end product of enhancing the capacities of welfare users.

Public sector workers and the services they help to provide have undergone profound changes in recent decades. To name only some of the more obvious forms that this has taken: Privatisation, Marketisation, Contracting-out, Outsourcing, Profit centres, Competitive tendering, PPP/PFI, 'Best value', Managerialism, Targets, League tables, Performance indicators, Audits.

The consequences of these 'reforms' for welfare workers has been far-reaching. Workers now fear that the loss of a contract will lead to redundancies or a wage cut or both. Private companies attack collective bargaining and place constraints on effective trade union organisation. Against employer and government hostility to collective organisation is their preference for exercising

'control at a distance' to advance the project for the individualisation and atomisation of the workforce. This works through pseudo-market mechanisms, performance related pay, increased pressures to 'self-manage', a greater emphasis on 'emotional' skills wage and qualities, regrading and reclassification, casualisation, increased workplace regulation, and inspection, and flexibility in its various guises. In the process, work intensification and extensification is advanced, in some cases to breaking point. Job devaluation, a declining sense of personal worth and job insecurity leads to increasing levels of workplace stress and related illnesses. Alongside deskilling and the loss of autonomy there is also employer-led demands for reskilling and upskilling, often leading to 'qualification inflation' and therefore a loss of market value for credentials, directly contradicting claims that engagement in lifelong learning will equip workers with the human capital so as to make them into highly marketable assets. And then there are the growing numbers of cases of the substitution of labour through the use of new technologies and ICTs (Information and Communications Technologies), from NHS call centres to online educational packages.

New Labour's social policy agenda demands 'more and more' from public sector workers as they struggle to meet the bewildering myriad of targets and strategies that have been deployed since 1997. As Fairbrother and Poynter argue:

"State employees are increasingly entreated to take on tasks that their occupation previously did not require – teachers are engaged in health promotion activities, university lecturers are encouraged to ensure the employability of their graduates and doctors are called upon to advise on healthy life styles rather than specifically treating illnesses....In this sense, the social and moral dimensions of the customer-oriented approach have been deployed to reform the relationships between professionals and their various publics and erode the monopolies of skill and discretion over decision-making and job content that professional staff traditionally exercised."[2]

Market modes of delivery along with aggressive and pervasive managerialism are restricting the 'space' that many welfare professionals once enjoyed to provide the services and support that service users require, resulting in a significant deskilling of work tasks. Routinisation and work degradation is contributing to what Richard Sennett calls "the spectre of uselessness" that is now gripping increasing numbers of professional workers in the welfare industry.[3]

Work intensification under New Labour has led to millions of workers facing increasing demands on their work time. Successive and multiple policy measures – 'initiative-itis' – has led to already hard pressed workers undertaking additional responsibilities. In some local authority nurseries, for instance, nurses find themselves taking on additional tasks to meet newly implemented nursery curriculum targets, regular inspections and workplace audits. Such examples prove that New Labour has today made satire seem superfluous, since these very same low-paid, over-worked female workers are also expected to play a strategic role in 'helping' young unemployed mothers back into the labour force – often in low paid childcare work! The story here is all too often one of more-and-more for less-and-less pay. In other areas of the public sector, for example in the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), maintaining service provision against a background of large scale redundancies has been achieved only by fewer-and-fewer workers doing

more and more. The DWP has struggled to achieve the same level of service provision with less and less of a workforce.

It is important to recognise, however, the unevenness of reform and modernisation (and worker unrest and resistance) that exists across different sectors, for instance in relation to the use of PPP/PFI or the vastly different levels of contracting out and redundancies. This awareness, however, does not detract from the point that public sector work in the UK is a world that has undergone far reaching change, change that has all too frequently been detrimental to and at the cost of the workers delivering public services. Managerialism and the drive to restructure and intensify work while curtailing wages and worsening conditions is a self-contradictory process that relies on the emotional, intellectual and bodily creativity of the labour that it attempts to dominate through managerialist regimes and controls held at a distance. Degrading the work process also invites resistance at the point of welfare production in ways that cannot be captured by even the most strenuous supervisory regime. Workers may elect to mechanically follow orders to protect themselves from managerial opprobrium. In which case, the affective embodied side of worker interaction with user groups like patients, clients or student, suffers. Measuring output in the form of targets and internal audits gives little indication that worker commitment has been withdrawn and disaffection increased. So long as boxes are ticked and numbers are massaged then managers are protected and the embodied nature of the welfare labour process becomes a matter of mutual indifference.

The changing nature of public sector work is part and parcel of New Labour's Third Way/Neo-Liberal reconstruction of the idea of the 'public' itself, a process that crucially involves blurring the boundaries between public and private forms of provision. This involves a shift towards the privatisation of public goods and services and the greater involvement of the private sector in 'public' service provision. Neither should we forget that much welfare work, particularly caring work, is dependent on unpaid forms of labour in the private realms of family, household and community, overwhelmingly carried out by women, many of whom are also providing paid labour in public and welfare services outside the home.

Co-existing with the emphasis on paid work this there is also an attempt to reconstruct the ideal citizen both as a *citizen* and a *consumer*.[4] Here the overarching context is one of consumerism and the extension of 'choice'. Under Blair and Brown 'consumer choice' had something of an occult quality about it - the more fervently it was invoked
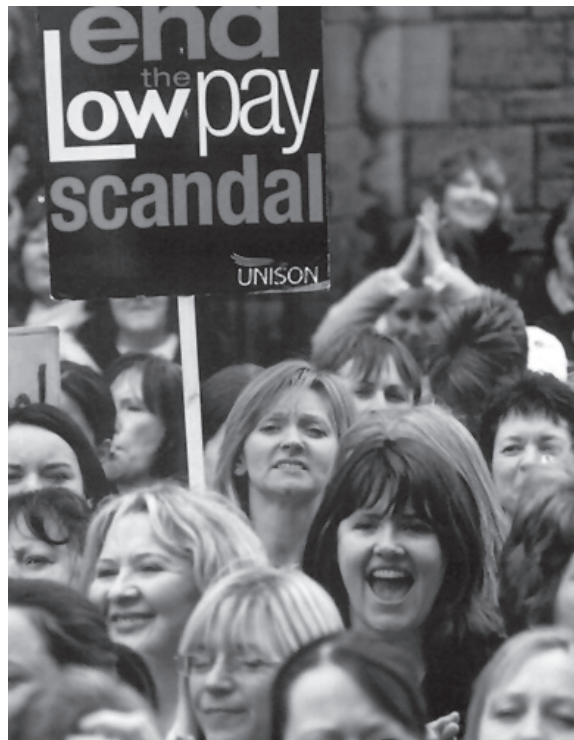
the less its ideological magic worked! To quote Blair:

"In reality, I believe that people do want choice, in public services as in other services. But anyway, choice isn't an end in itself. It is one important mechanism to ensure that citizens can indeed secure good schools and health services in their communities. Choice puts the levers in the hands of parents and patients so that they as citizens and consumers can be a driving force for improvement in their public services. We are proposing to put an entirely different dynamic in place to drive our public services; one where the service will be driven not by the government or by the manager but by the user – the patient, the parent, the pupil and the law-abiding citizen."[5]

The promotion of choice reflects a desire to reconstruct the role of the state, no longer always and everywhere the provider of services – except at times as a last resort – but as an 'enabler' and regulator of services provided by other 'partners' and 'stakeholders'. In repeated speeches and announcements the emphasis on choice at the heart of New Labour's project contained a sometimes implied and sometimes explicit threat of dire consequences for public sector workers. Public sector workers often exist as an 'absent presence' in political discourse. It is noticeable, for instance, that Blair's 'belief' about 'people' wanting 'choice' that other 'people', namely welfare workers, are curiously absent at a denotative level while they are clearly present at the connotative level. Implicit in this comment is a stark warning to public sector workers that they have to become more customer focused, and this requires far reaching changes in the working lives of those concerned.

It is well understood that New Labour views public sector workers as an outdated obstacle to modernisation and reform, therefore undermining social policy objectives. At Labour's Spring Conference in Cardiff in February 2002, Blair drew a distinction between 'reformers' and 'wreckers', the latter category referred to public sector workers and unions who were resisting 'modernisation'. Speaking to the British Venture Capital Association in London in 1999, Blair also talked of the bearing "the scars on my back" from trying to reform welfare. This was followed up at the Labour Party Conference in 1999, where Blair made his now infamous "forces of conservatism" speech in which he identified some groups of education and health professionals as holding back the government's reform programme. And again in 1999 Blair attacked what he saw as a "culture of excuses" among school teachers who were resistant to aspects of his reform agenda. Such views played a significant role in helping to ferment the growing disillusionment with New Labour among public sector workers, fuelling continuing and growing resistance.[6]

Welfare Workers: Resisting New Labour

Increasing numbers of public sector workers are challenging the government's reforms. In the process they are contesting some of the core

ideological assumptions of New Labour. Opposition to New Labour's policies varies considerably across different areas of the public sector and within hierarchically-organised welfare sites, for instance, between different groups of workers in the NHS. However, since the mid- to late-1990s, there has been continual and recurring episodes of industrial action of various kinds involving social workers, teachers, lecturers (both in further and in higher education), nurses, hospital ancillary staff, nursery nurses, home helps and care workers, and local authority librarians among others. Welfare delivery has become a central point of industrial relations disputes across the devolved UK.

Few would have predicted that New Labour's reforms would have met with the levels of resistance from across the public and welfare sectors that have been witnessed since 1997:

**Selected Industrial Action
in the Welfare Industry 1998-2007**
- Library Workers -1998
- Social Workers - 1998, 2004, 2005
- Care Workers - 1998, 1999, 2000, 2007
- Teachers - 1999
- FE College Lecturers - 2001, 2006
- Local Government Workers - 2001, 2006, 2007
- Hospital Ancillary Staff - 2002
- University Lecturers - 2004, 2006
- Civil Servants (PCS) - 2004, 2005,2006, 2007
- Nursery Nurses - 2004
- Housing Association Workers - 2006
- School Ancillary Staff - 2006
- NHS Logistics Workers - 2006
- Local Government Workers - 2006, 2007

Highlighted are some of the key disputes and struggles in the 'welfare industries' that have featured since 1997, but this list is by no means exhaustive of all forms or instances of resistance to New Labour's reforms. What is notable is the ways in which groups of workers, once often viewed as 'passive' or unlikely to take action, have found themselves under attack and have organised to fight back and challenge New Labour head on. The case of librarians in Glasgow in 1998 is one example of this, as are strikes among university lecturers and nurses. A particularly important example is the Scotland-wide local authority nursery nurses strike in 2004 which saw around 5,000 mainly female and relatively low paid workers take action to preserve conditions while challenging employer demands for local pay agreements.[7] In the case of lecturers, nurses, social workers and other 'professionals' – that is, those often classed and sometimes dismissed as middle class, white-collar workers – organising to contest welfare restructuring has also become a permanent feature of working life.

As was widely documented at the time, during its first two years in government New Labour remained committed to the tight public sector spending constraints put in place by the previous Conservative administration. That this did not lead to widespread resentment and anger among public sector workers is largely due to the 'honeymoon' period that Labour enjoyed during the first few years in office, subsequently helped by the easing of public sector spending restrictions from 1999 and after. The promise that New Labour would deliver, however, was soon followed by a growing disillusionment with the New Labour Government among some groups in the public sector workforce, traditionally among Labour's core voters. It was to become increasingly evident that although there would be considerable increases in public expenditure, especially for education and the health service, this would not signal an end to privatisation. Instead it would be accompanied by the increasing penetration of the market (and in some cases also by the voluntary or 'third sector') into heartland areas of public and welfare services provision, moving well beyond the role accorded to the private sector even by the Tories. Pay would increase for public sector workers, that

is for those that were not transferred to private firms through outsourcing. However, the growing pay differentials of the 1980s and 1990s between public and private sector employees was largely unaffected. The public sector has become a central battle ground of New Labour under Blair. It is already shaping up in similar ways to characterise the Brown administration.

New Labour's celebration of choice and of the consumer-citizen is likely to remain central to the ongoing programme of welfare reforms; not least that such a figure is central to the government's vision of a 'modern' welfare state. The government has sought to legitimate this on the grounds that it will deliver 'better' services and more customer orientated services. Such thinking informs much of the rhetoric that accompanies announcements of 'modernisation'. However, it is clear that under Brown New Labour is seeking to develop this much further, in no small part through its 'personalisation' agenda. Personalisation is now informing important areas of government policy making, taking the emphasis on the individual as consumer to a new level. Perhaps not surprisingly this allows for a greater role for private providers and firms in the development of more personalised services. So, on the one hand, decentralisation and personalisation and, on the other, the further centralisation and concentration of impersonal corporate control over welfare production. This is radically at odds with the demand for 'bottom-up' involvement as advanced over the past two decades by service user movements.

The Re-emergence of 'Political' Trade Unionism?

In many of the disputes that have taken place in recent years the struggle to preserve wages and conditions, and also for better pay and conditions, has at the same time folded into campaigns to protect public services. Public sector workers and trade unions have played a leading role in campaigns against privatisation, against hospital closure, cuts in local services and so on. In organising to defend the integrity of the NHS, for example, or to save hospitals and other amenities up and down the country, workers and other campaigners have sought to make direct links between privatisation and profits from illness and disadvantage, the erosion of services and attacks on workers pay, employment conditions and jobs.

There are a growing number of examples we can use here to illustrate this. The Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS) run a high profile 'public services not private profit' campaign (http://pcs.org.uk) while Unison (www.unison.org.uk) have been at the forefront of contesting PFI/PPP projects. Both have involved non-union members and users groups as well as the wider public. Keep our NHS Public (www.keepournhspublic.com) brings together NHS workers, unions and the users of NHS services. Defend Council Housing (www.dch.org.uk) has also mobilised tenants and public sector unions in defence of state provision of affordable housing to rent. 'Privatisation', in all its guises, has worked to re-energise debates around health and other public services over the past decade and this has given rise to a large number or more localised campaigns and organisations that fight to prevent hospital closures or reductions in health and other public services.

There is a further dimension to this. As with the Tories, New Labour has inadvertently repoliticised the whole question of welfare and public sector provision in a multitude of ways. One of the most important aspects of this is that the increasing use of PPP/PFI alongside welfare provision by the market, often involving large multinational firms, has brought the question of 'profits from illness' onto centre stage. For-profit forms of provision remain highly unpopular. This has contributed to the re-emergence of political unionism, challenging in the process the 'division' that has existed until the early 1990s at least between a trade union concern only with 'bread and butter'
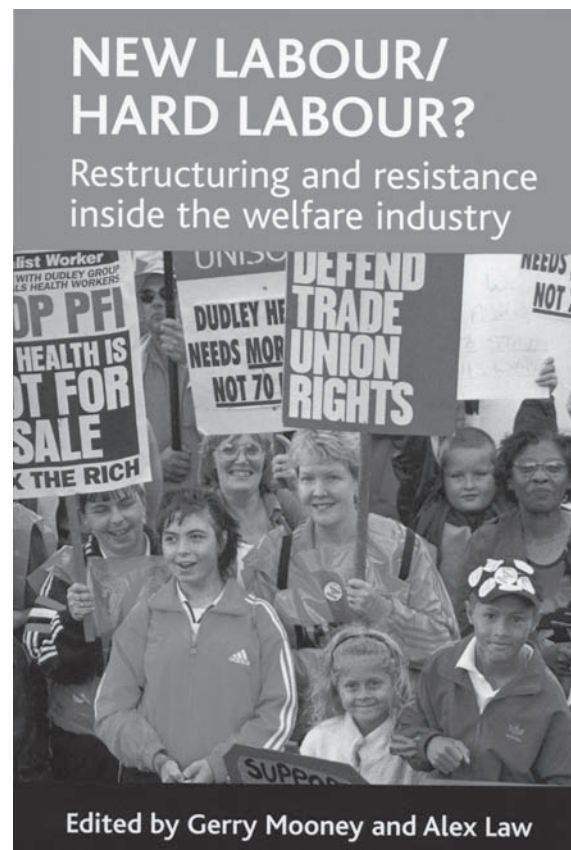
issues such as pay and conditions and not with more 'political' matters. Such a divide – which was often more apparent than real and which tended to characterise the union bureaucracy more than ordinary members on the ward, the office or the classroom – now looks seriously dated in the face of New Labour's political agenda of the past decade. Trade union leaders have also been driven to question the continuing funding of the Labour Party from members' contributions. We do not have to look far to see union leaders and union-sponsored campaigns making direct links between pay and conditions; of the importance of good quality services for those in need; for a well funded and free at point of delivery NHS and issues of progressive taxation, pensions; and, in not a few instances, between 'cut-backs' and service withdrawals alongside massive expenditure on wars on Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere. Campaigns for global social justice and for environmental sustainability similarly fold into the opposition to public sector modernisation.

New Labour is being challenged 'head on' here: its entire social and economic agenda is under serious dispute and questioning. The challenge here is also to the Third Way project itself and New Labour's neo-liberal underpinnings. Such campaigns frequently bring together the 'producers' and 'consumers' of welfare in ways that are far removed from claims of an unbridgeable gulf between the demands of each. Among New Labour politicians and not a few policy makers and academics, the idea that public service workers may take action to defend both their jobs as well as services to a wide spectrum of UK society including the most impoverished is something that is all too readily ignored or otherwise obscured from view. It also overlooks the point that public sector workers and their families are also themselves consumers of welfare. In another sense the growing campaigns of resistance to New Labour's public sector modernisation and welfare reforms also illustrate that far from being 'passive recipients of welfare', clients and users can and do take action to both defend and to fight for public service provision.

The Shape of Things to Come?

The significance of the struggles that have taken place across the public and welfare sectors since New Labour came to power in 1997 should not be underestimated – though all too often this is exactly what has happened. Against the general downturn in strike activity and in other forms of 'industrial action' during the past twenty or so years, the re-emergence of widespread, large-scale and continuing action in the public sector shows that oft repeated assumptions and claims that workers would no longer struggle or resist in the 'new' conditions of the early twenty first century to be very wide of the mark. This is not to be taken that we are implying that there is a return to the

heady days of the 1970s and 1980s but simply to counter the general rejection of the capacity of labour to resist that has been a stock in trade for much academic and wider commentary in recent years.

The important point of all of this for us is that contrary to the myriad of assorted 'end of class' or 'death of class' proclamations of the past few decades[8], public sector workers in the UK today now comprise some of the key sections of the working class. Our image of the working class is constantly changing as the workforce is replenished as more ethnically diverse, with more recognised women workers, and from recent movements of migrant labour. Welfare workers are just as representative of this shift, indeed more so as it employs women in greater proportions and traditionally recruits from abroad to occupy positions in the welfare state that are difficult to fill from the local labour market. Women, migrants and ethnic minority groups are of course often found at the very bottom of the welfare industry hierarchy.

Finally, and against much of the doom and gloom that pervades the discussion and analysis of neo-liberalism and of New Labour there are different ways of thinking about the developments and events which are unfolding and of the potential opportunities for the future. Against neo-liberalism's central drive to corrode and erode social and political solidarity, new forms of struggle and resistance have emerged and are emerging – locally, nationally and multinationally. Certainly this is not undertaken in conditions of their own choosing but in active response to welfare restructuring. Welfare workers and their unions are challenging the fundamental neoliberal premises advanced by New Labour using tried-and-tested forms of action as well as new, imaginative participatory strategies with their allies in the wider social and welfare movements.

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Notes

1. Healthcare Commission (2007) Investigation into outbreaks of Clostridium difficile at Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust, London: Commission for Healthcare Audit and Inspection: http://www.healthcarecommission.org.uk/_db/_documents/Maidstone_and_Tunbridge_Wells_investigation_report_Oct_2007.pdf
2. Fairbrother, P. and Poynter, G. (2001) 'State Restructuring: Managerialism, Marketisation and the Implications for Labour', *Competition and Change*, 5: 311-333, p. 319
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4. Clarke, J., Newman, J., Smith, N., Vidler, E. and Westmarland, L. (2007) *Creating Citizen-Consumers: Changing Publics and Changing Public Services*, London: Sage.
5. Blair, T. (2004) 'Choice, Excellent and Equality', Speech at Guys and St Thomas' Hospital, London, June 23.
6. See Chapter 1, Mooney and Law (2007) *New Labour/Hard Labour? Restructuring and Resistance inside the Welfare Industry*, Bristol: Policy Press.
7. Mooney, G. and McCafferty, T. (2005) "Only looking after the weans'? The Scottish Nursery Nurses Strike, 2004', *Critical Social Policy, 25*, 2: 223-239.
8. See Ferguson, I., Lavalette, M. and Mooney, G. (2002) *Rethinking Welfare*, London: Sage.

NEW LABOUR/ HARD LABOUR?
Restructuring and resistance inside the welfare industry

Edited by Gerry Mooney and Alex Law

Of bread and caviar

Colin Gavaghan

From the Womb to the Tomb: Issues in Medical Ethics
Hugh V. McLachlan and J. Kim Swales
Humming Earth, 2007

From the Womb to the Tomb: Issues in Medical Ethics is less a book than a collection of essays spanning three decades and many journals. The actual authorship of the essays is initially a source of confusion. Although the book's cover proclaims Hugh V. McLachlan and J. Kim Swales as joint authors, it appears that 14 of the 24 chapters are written by Dr McLachlan alone, although this becomes apparent only by scrutinising the footnotes at the end of each chapter.

While the title may be taken to imply a chronological progression through a range of bioethical issues, the collection actually focuses on three large areas: Embryology and Human Cloning, Surrogate Motherhood, Health and Health Care. Each of these topics contains half a dozen subheadings, but it quickly becomes apparent that they do not focus on specific areas of controversy within these topics, but rather represent pretty much the entirety of McLachlan's output on these topics, listed (usually, though not invariably) in chronological order, and apparently unedited from their original journal appearances. The result is a rather piecemeal and often repetitive assortment of overlapping observations and arguments; sometimes incisive and persuasive, but lacking much in the way of progression or development of the ideas therein.

The degree of repetition is a source of mild irritation. To the reader coming across McLachlan's work as it was published, over a number of years and a number of journals, it would be useful to be reminded of his basic assumptions and the examples he uses to illustrate them. Reading his work in one sitting, one quickly develops a sense of *déjà vu* when exactly the same point about clones/identical twins having different fingerprints is repeated three times in fairly short order (pp. 59, 69, 81), while other analogies and examples – the fact that we do not criminalise adultery, the claim that a foetus is a partially developed human body – also recur throughout the book.

It would be churlish to make too much of this – if anything, it is a criticism of this *type* of collection, rather than this specific example – but the irritation is perhaps exacerbated by the fact that certain of these claims are repeated without being developed. The claim, for instance, that the deceased retain certain rights (pp. 5, 42, 53) is not unproblematic. In law, the dead have no protection from defamation. In ethics, though attempts have been made to construct theories around 'surviving interests'[1] and 'critical interests'[2], the notion that the deceased can be *rights-bearers* has attracted less support.

Nonetheless, there is nothing conceptually incoherent about such an approach, though it would have been interesting to see McLachlan develop it further. (Do all such rights derive from promises made while the rights-bearer was alive? The suggestion that Donald Dewar retains a posthumous right not to be slandered by anyone {p.53} suggests otherwise, but McLachlan does not elaborate on what non-promise-derived rights the deceased retain.) More problematic, though, is his attempt to infer from this putative 'duty to the dead' some sort of 'duty to non-existent persons':

"We might say that the person whose body a foetus might develop into has rights and that, correspondingly, we have duties towards him whether or not he is an actual living person or ever will become one." (p.5)

The inference itself is questionable. Duties to the dead might derive either from promises made during their lives, or from something like 'surviving interests' – if your greatest wish is to be buried at sea, maybe you have some sort of 'surviving interest' in having that wish carried out, and maybe someone who promised to see that it

is done even has a duty to fulfil that promise. It is much harder to establish any duties to the 'never alive' from this basis, as they will never have harboured any sort of wants and preferences, and will never have been in a position to have promises made to them.

Of course, it may be intelligible to attribute rights to putative future people, insofar as some of our decisions now will predictably impact on interests they will later possess. Thus, if a procreative act was destined to give rise to a life "of abject misery" (p.5), it may be that we have a duty to refrain from that act; at least, it isn't obviously illogical to say so. But from that, it doesn't follow that we have a corollary duty to bring into existence a currently non-existent individual, which is what McLachlan seems to imply when he writes:

"We might say that in some, although not necessarily all, cases there is either a duty to abort *or a duty not to abort* where this duty corresponds to a non-existent person's right." (p.10, my emphasis)

It may be prudent, or even obligatory, to act in a manner that will respect the rights and interests that future people will have once they come into existence. If I act so as to pollute the planet, or deplete its resources, in a manner that almost guarantees that future lives will be impoverished, then actual people will, some day, suffer unnecessarily. Their actual lives will go less well, their actual interests will be thwarted, maybe even their actual rights will be violated.

But all of this is contingent on these potential lives becoming *actual* lives. If I act to ensure that these potential lives never become actual lives, then there will be no interests to be thwarted, no people to suffer unnecessarily, no lives to go less well than they might have. It makes no sense to speak of an obligation borne out of rights that – by virtue of our decision – will certainly never exist. There is nothing in McLachlan's – entirely plausible – thesis that we can owe duties to future generations that undermines what he calls the "extreme liberal" position on abortion.

This failure to present a truly coherent view of our duties to future persons means that even an uncontentious claim – that we should not destroy the planet – is weaker than it might be. "We might," McLachlan maintains, "fulfil our obligations towards the members of future generations by failing to destroy the world without knowing who such people are." (pp.8-9)

I personally would find it a great shame to learn that human life was doomed to extinction, but I'm not sure there is a moral aspect to this. The notion of a duty to create new lives *ab intitio* is problematic for all sorts of reasons. To whom is this duty owed? The Universe? Posterity? How many such lives should we create? Would it be enough that there was some conscious being left to remember us and appreciate our achievements? Or is it a case of the more the better?

None of which is to say that there would be nothing wrong in obliterating the planet; aside from the harm done to presently existing people, some ingenious attempts have been made to construct theories of non-person-affecting harms, acts that cause things to go better than they should have gone, but which harm no individual people. McLachlan offers no such account (and certainly doesn't respond to the problems with such attempts suggested by, among others, Derek Parfit and David Heyd), appearing instead to ground his objection to global annihilation on the putative rights of those who might have lived.

McLachlan is on considerably safer ground when he expresses scepticism about the widespread opposition to reproductive cloning. He first sets about demolishing the 'dignitarian' claim that cloning presents a threat to some sort of right to genetic uniqueness or identity:

"It is insulting and antithetical to human dignity to

suggest that the (supposed) physical uniqueness of their bodies is a condition of the inherent moral worth of individual people." (p.77)

As he persuasively argues, the fact that we do not regard the birth of monozygotic (sometimes erroneously called 'identical') twins as any sort of tragedy suggests that we should feel no more concerned for the children of reproductive cloning. As for the burdens associated with their unusual origins, these rather pale when we consider what the options were for *this particular* child:

"It might be tough to be a clone, but this is no reason for making human cloning a criminal offence. It is tough to be a human being of any sort, or it can be: it is still, I would suggest, better to have been born than not to exist, in all or virtually all circumstances. One is hardly doing a clone a favour by sparing him the hardships of life." (p.75)

McLachlan's rather bluff writing style lends itself well to this type of knockdown argument, and it is difficult to conceive of any sort of sensible child-centred retort to this contention.

The same non-identity argument[3] is used to defend the practice of commercial surrogate motherhood (CSM) from the criticism that children born through such arrangements would be somehow 'commodified', or have their dignity compromised:

"...it is surely better to be born with one's dignity violated than not to be born at all. If the only way that a particular person could be born is through becoming an object of barter then no obvious favour is being done by that person by failing to allow him to become an object of barter." (p.121)

In fact, McLachlan – this time writing with Swales – argues quite persuasively that, although the parties to CSM contracts may erroneously view them as such, these children are not in reality reduced to the status of commodities. Their rights and freedoms will be no less than those of any child born by more conventional means.

An equally compelling, though predictably more contentious, suggestion is offered against the suggestion that CSM 'exploits' the surrogate mother. Accepting for the sake of argument the far from certain contention that surrogate mothers will generally be less educated and financially worse off than the commissioning parents who hire them, the authors challenge us to explain how a ban on CSM actually helps them:

"Why should the option of the lesser evil be denied to poor people? If relative poverty is wrong, then one should condemn that rather than the means of alleviating it." (p.130)

It is surely right that we ill-serve those with fewest options when we interfere only to reduce their options still further. If it bothers us that some woman are driven through desperation to CSM (or, for that matter, prostitution, with which surrogate motherhood is sometimes compared), the challenge for us is surely to present them with options sufficiently more enticing that they don't need to avail themselves of these 'alternatives'.

There is, though, scope for greater debate about McLachlan and Swales' fairly restrictive definition of 'exploitation', which seems to involve not merely taking advantage of, but actually creating, the desperate circumstances that drive people to take up such options:

"There is a difference between driving someone to the wall and transacting – perhaps fairly and non-exploitatively – with someone who is already at the wall." (p.116)

While I doubt that many people would wish to argue that *any* transaction with a desperate person is inherently exploitative, it doesn't seem like a great distortion of the verb to suggest that an employer who takes advantage of workers' desperate fear of employment to pay them poverty wages, or expose them to unreasonably dangerous or humiliating working conditions, is 'exploiting'

them, even if the employer did not create the circumstances that rendered them vulnerable to such exploitation.

The challenge for those concerned about such employees – and perhaps also for those concerned about surrogate mothers – is to ensure that they are not exploited in the sense of being underpaid, or exposed to dangerous or humiliating working conditions, while at the same time not depriving them of the option of a job at all. This we might do in a number of ways, but one legitimate role for the law, we might think, is to ensure that surrogate mothers are paid a minimally decent, non-exploitative wage (it is perverse that the various reports on the subject have professed concern about payments being too *high*!) and that commissioning parents do not impose dangerous or humiliating conditions (such as a legally enforceable waiver of their right to abortion, or intimate examinations on demand) that we would find unacceptable in other employment situations. We should expect no gratitude from desperate women, though, if we outlaw the option altogether, driving them presumably to an even worse (from their point of view) alternative.

McLachlan (with or without his co-author) is perhaps at his best when clinically slaughtering ethical sacred cows. Again in relation to children born from CSM, he asks:

"Why should the interests of such children be paramount? Why should the interests of any particular category of people be paramount? In deciding whether or not, say, to join the Euro-zone, would one say that the interests of children should be paramount? Let us hope not. Children, after all, are not children for long but their interests, like they, outlive their childhood." (p.159)

It is refreshing to see such questions asked. In much contemporary discourse, the interests or welfare of 'the children' is too often seen as a trump card, stifling further debate, rather than one valid consideration among many. McLachlan and Swales are right to point out the absurdity in a position that sees someone's interests immediately devalued on their sixteenth birthday.

The discussion of surrogacy sees McLachlan and Swales espousing a broadly Millian liberalism (though they apparently take issue to being described as Millian liberals; p142), that places the onus firmly with those who would support legal restriction of others' choices to justify such interference. This is entirely reasonable; that the powerful – numerically, financially, or in any other way – should impose their values and preferences on the less powerful, arbitrarily, without justification, is surely objectionable. Our 'Big Brother society' may not be of the kind that Orwell anticipated, but the ubiquitous 'Reality TV' and 'celebrity exposés' encourage us to scrutinise the mundane minutiae of other people's daily lives, in the most judgmental of ways. In such a context, it is well worth restating that, sometimes, what we decide and how we live is, frankly, our own business, and no-one else's.

But … there's liberalism, and there's liberalism. The last substantial section of the book sees McLachlan and Swales turn their attention to considerations of justice and equality in healthcare, and here their analysis is – to this reader at least – decidedly less satisfying. In an article critical of the Scottish Executive's *Working Together for a Healthier Scotland* consultation (1998), the authors set out to show not – as one might have expected – that the Executive's policy objective of tackling health inequalities was unrealistic, but that it was flawed even as an aspiration.

"It is not at all clear that the reduction of health inequalities *per se* is a reasonable or even a meaningful aim of governmental policy. It is not clear why, other than on grounds of social aesthetics or dogmatic egalitarianism, inequalities in health – whether between men and women, rich or poor, black or white or whatever – should in themselves be considered undesirable." (p.208)

It is certainly part of the ethicist's role to challenge sacred cows and shibboleths, and egalitarianism should receive no exemption from that treatment. Even the most progressive
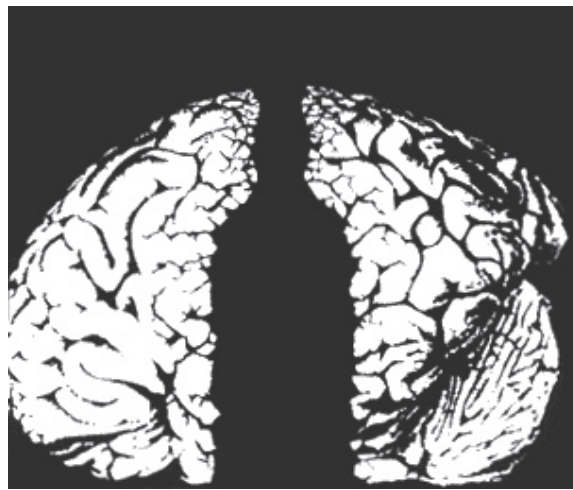
advocate of distributive justice would do well to revisit his/her first principles from time to time, to ask what equality means in this context, and why it is valuable. Were this merely an invitation to do that, it would be unobjectionable. But the reference to "dogmatic egalitarianism" suggests that this is more in the way of a polemic against, than a forensic dissection of, the aspiration to equality. Why should egalitarianism, or the version that underpins the consultation, be regarded as any more 'dogmatic' than the liberal and deontological principles espoused by McLachlan himself throughout this collection? At root, all ethical arguments rely on acceptance of 'moral axioms', core principles that cannot themselves be justified by reference to any higher principle, and that probably (though attempts have been made) cannot be *proved* to be true. In that (trivial) sense, all ethical arguments are 'dogmatic'.

It swiftly becomes apparent that McLachlan and Swales' approach to justice and healthcare is an extremely restrictive one, whereby 'justice' requires only that the state – or anyone else charged with allocating healthcare – should remain scrupulously impartial:

"If the state provides health care then that health care should be distributed impartially by the state. If health and ill health are unequally distributed, even as a partial consequence of this equitable treatment, so be it. … [The state] is not obliged to ensure that the outcome of its actions, in combination with a host of other factors, will produce a fair, or in any other respect a morally desirable distribution of health. The distribution of health is not the business of the state, or of its agents or agencies." (p.247)

That is certainly one way of thinking about 'justice', but it is far from the only, and I would suggest far from the best, way of thinking about it. Yet the most influential alternative approaches are not acknowledged, far less refuted. Instead, the assault on the equality aspiration continues with the customary recourse to *reductio ad absurdum*. McLachlan and Swales point out that a devotion to health equality at all costs would seem to rule out a medical advance that would prolong the lives only of women; since, in the UK, women already – on average – outlive men, this would serve to widen the 'health gap', frustrating the aims of equality.

Similarly, they suggest that the committed egalitarian should welcome only medical breakthroughs that benefit *only* the worst off:

"Infant mortality rates are higher in Scotland in more socially deprived localities. It would certainly be good if the infant mortality rates in the poorest areas of Scotland were to be reduced. What if they were to be reduced and, at the same time, the infant mortality rates of the best-off area were also reduced? Would that not be better still, even if health inequalities were no reduced? Why the stress on reducing inequalities?"

Although this may seem, on the face of it, a fair point, it succeeds as a criticism only of the authors' 'straw man' version of egalitarianism, a version that corresponds to few if any of the versions seriously espoused in bioethical literature. For one thing, few egalitarians in fact do care *only* about equality – and even if they did, there would be no reason why we should follow. Ethical pluralists like Beauchamp and Childress[4] certainly value fair distribution as an important ethical principle, but they are also concerned about, for instance, *beneficence* (doing good). In the example given, we might think that the imperative to save infant lives – among whatever cohort – should take precedence over the demands of egalitarianism, but this isn't

the same as saying that the latter demands are entirely fanciful or trivial.

As McLachlan and Swales are surely aware, most influential models of egalitarianism are concerned about a decent minimum for all, rather than achieving equality at all costs; no-one is seriously arguing that health equality should be achieved by *worsening* the health of the currently fortunate, or even by spitefully depriving them of further health improvements if these improvements cannot be made available to all.[5]

Where concern for equality might guide our hand, though, would be in the allocation of scarce healthcare resources. On average, men in Glasgow die about eleven years younger than men in East Dorset.[6] If a choice existed – perhaps due to finite resources – between a policy targeted at increasing life expectancy among either population, would it really be ethically incoherent to prioritise the Glaswegians? Would it really, as McLachlan and Swales contend, *violate* principles of equity to do so? Is deciding to ensure a minimum life expectancy for all, rather than an even longer lifespan for the already long-lived, actually impermissible? The sentiment behind the maxim "bread for all before caviar for any" may be a little simplistic, but it is not *obviously* flawed or unintelligible, or at least not as obviously as McLachlan and Swales seem to think.

As lecturers at Glasgow universities (respectively, Glasgow Caledonian and Strathclyde), one could certainly not accuse the authors of partisanship in this matter! But their treatment of healthcare and justice is let down by a failure to contend with the most influential models of distributive justice – those expounded by John Rawls[7] and Norman Daniels[8], for instance – and by regular reliance on assertion rather than attempt at persuasion or argument: maybe it's right that the state should be concerned only with avoiding unfair methods of distribution, rather than with addressing existing unfairness, but I suspect there is little here that will persuade those not already attracted to that way of thinking.

Let me end, though, on an unreservedly positive note. It is refreshing to see that two of the entries in this collection appeared originally in *The Scotsman* newspaper. It is a recurring cause of consternation to me that academic research and thinking is often available exclusively to an elite band of matriculated students and journal subscribers. We professional academics still generally have our wages paid from the public purse, and it surely isn't unreasonable that the public should be able to have access to what they are paying for. As open access publishing struggles to establish itself in the UK, and the ubiquitous shadow of the Research Assessment Exercise pushes academics towards targeting exclusive journals, McLachlan deserves considerable respect for taking the time to contribute not only his column, but frequently to online discussions on a wide range of subjects. Not all readers may be persuaded by all of his arguments, but it's to his considerable credit that he is at least willing to put them up for public scrutiny.

Footnotes

1. Allen Buchanan, 'Advance Directives and the Personal Identity Problem', *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, Vol. 17, No. 4. (Autumn, 1988), pp. 277-302

2. Ronald Dworkin, *Life's Dominion*, London, HarperCollins, 1995

3. The term was coined by Derek Parfit; see *Reasons and Persons*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984.

4. Tom L. Beauchamp and James F. Childress, *Principles of Biomedical Ethics*, Fifth Edition, Oxford University Press, 2001.

5. As Jonathan Glover has recently written, "Few accept the 'dog-in-the-manger' version of egalitarianism according to which, if all cannot benefit, no one should." Jonathan Glover, *Choosing Children: the ethical dilemmas of genetic intervention*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2006, p79.

6. Shaw, Smith and Dorling, 'Health inequalities and New Labour: how the promises compare with real progress', *BMJ* 2005;330:1016-1021 (30 April)

7. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice: Revised Edition*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999

8. Daniels, J*ust Health Care*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985