

Craven New World

Tom Jennings

Documenting attacks on civil freedoms in Britain the film *Taking Liberties* (2007) was made for cinema because such a “one-sided” (read honest) appraisal of the Blair regime’s record was thought unlikely to survive the requirements of “balance” (read censorship) on television¹. Supported by *Fahrenheit 9/11*’s producers, *Taking Liberties* apes Michael Moore’s populist combo of comic buffoonery and acid commentary and romps through New Labour’s neurotic erosion of rights to privacy, protest and freedom of speech, its tacit embrace of imprisonment without trial, unaccountable extradition and torture. Recounting the personal experiences of a swathe of victims, from peace protesters to those persecuted in the War on Terror, a convincing picture of escalating totalitarianism is then sketched against a background of animated vignettes showing centuries’ worth of legal ‘checks and balances’ on state power. This is all set to a jaunty Britpop soundtrack. Unfortunately, the potential of mocking the powerful is undermined by a tone veering from flippant to hysterical, before being ultimately ruined by dissolving into overstatements of incipient Nazi-ness among parliamentary leaders and an astounding cluelessness about the prospects of influencing them.²

Worse; the film’s broad-brush, knee-jerk jingoism cripples any political understanding of past or present. Ancient constitutional antecedents are all very well for patronising children with, but the routine reality of peremptory injustice in recent decades has shaped the patterns of close interference now being ratcheted up: from Northern Ireland policy, racist policing and the internment of immigrants; to Tory anti-union and criminal justice legislation and the penalisation of ‘antisocial’ behaviour. Kowtowing to globalising capitalism necessitates welfare suffering, while lower-class community, collectivity and autonomy is hammered to shortcircuit resistance. But *Taking Liberties* ignores the structural and economic frameworks within which governments discipline their subjects, let alone how they achieve apparent consent for it. Instead we’re asked to sympathise with rich US bankers suspected of corporate fraud – after all, ‘we’re all in this together’, a supposedly ‘freedom-loving’ people. This lack of analysis leaves the film wallowing in middle-class moral superiority and outrage, urging self-righteous symbolic protest. Is this more a recipe for apathy than active opposition?

The UK government legitimises the



increasing regulation of the populace in terms of administrative efficiency rather than historical precedence or legal niceties. Even a cursory questioning sees the pragmatic justifications for the National Identity Register and attendant technologies collapse like a house of (identity) cards, yet the debate stubbornly clings to nationalist sentiment³. The latest edition of *Mute* magazine helps make the stakes clearer. As Josephine Berry Slater points out: “The basic survival of the poor, undocumented or ‘illegalised’ often depends on the ability to operate [in a] ... grey zone of anonymity [which] is constantly squeezed in the interests of population management, border enforcement, welfare clamp-downs, technocratic convenience and, of course, the economy”⁴. In fact, precisely those realms of experience which *Taking Liberties* ignores.

Meanwhile, mainstream political discourse brooks no argument that only the free movement of capital allows society to survive and prosper, thanks to the expert, rational-market disposition of resources. But accelerating human and environmental degradation resulting from the application of neoliberal ideology generates inevitable crises, the intransigence of which is disavowed when they are treated merely as management conundrums. Thus the incipient panopticon society obsessively maximises data collection, in the pretence that mass bureaucratisation allows the competent administration of otherwise insoluble problems. In the resulting climate of increasingly routinised emergencies and attendant moral panics, and the overall prospect of multiple impending catastrophes, everyone excluded from polite society can be blamed and targeted while those fortunate enough to temporarily reap the dubious benefits of consumerism look the other way and defend ‘civilisation’⁵. With each burning issue merely grist to media headline-mills, ordinary current affairs paradigms plainly lack the imagination to make sense of such extraordinary circumstances. Conversely, the mysteries of the future are science-fiction’s stock-in-trade, and so what follows seeks signs of hope in recently screened dystopian visions that reflect prevailing trends in biopolitical divide and rule⁶.

Unpleasantville

The Data Protection Act supposedly safeguards against abuse by making transparent what information, about us, private and state agencies collect. In recognition of the epidemic of CCTV systems across the UK (now the internal surveillance capital of the world) its scope was widened in 1998 to include visual imaging. Crime prevention budgets are increasingly syphoned off into an expanding surveillance manufacturing industry’s profits, despite failing to have any significant impact in the reduction of offences. Meanwhile, the sinister centrality of surveillance technology in New Labour’s plans for an integrated database and ID card seems threatened only by the bungling of IT entrepreneurs and bureaucrats. But, apart from the usual suspects, the wider British public seem remarkably acquiescent to intrusion. So, is the public really bewitched by

anti-social crime and terror hype, hypnotised by spectacular media, wrong-footed by seductive virtuality, and domesticated by reality TV? Given that no less a figure than the government’s Information Commissioner Richard Thomas deems us to have already “sleepwalked” into dystopia, it seems pertinent to ask – riffing on *Dr Strangelove* – whether we have ‘learned to stop worrying and love Big Brother’⁷.

Media art collective Ambient TV share the concern, and decided to extend their *Spy School* (2002) dramatisations of hitherto hidden assemblages of data held on citizens into a “science-fiction fairytale” patchwork comprised of visual material plucked from this matrix, with a storyline fitting the philosophical framework used to justify and regulate official omniscience. The result is Manu Luksch’s surprisingly beguiling *Faceless* (2007) – helped in part by Ballet Boyz choreography, Mukul Patel’s haunting soundtrack and Tilda Swinton’s austere voiceover – which emphasises the DPA stricture that individuals deemed uninteresting have their features obliterated, with those remaining targeted for action⁸. The tragic protagonist (necessarily played by Luksch herself) lacks reflexivity or emotion beyond the narcotising flow of interaction with the ubiquitous New Machine. Then, a sudden discovery: she has a face! In her job as data monitor this signifies a disturbance to the *status quo*, destined to be corrected in the interests of stability and safety. But with personal identity come fragments of memory and fantasy, prompting awareness of possible pasts and futures along with uncertainty and fear. Exploiting newly incipient agency, her quest to evade oblivion is enlivened by encounters with mysterious Spectral Children, whose joyful unpredictability confounds the control apparatus. Sadly, they give disastrous advice to trust her instincts, but with no opportunity to develop such skills she soon succumbs to re-zombification.

This apparently conclusive fatalism is misleading, however, since the pivotal social engineering here occurs in reprogramming centres which brainwash people into numb passivity – not the global data-web itself (policed for deviation as administrative corollary). But how these function – or not, permitting escape – is withheld, thereby disabling viewers’ suspension of disbelief. Fittingly, the logistical nightmare of planning a coherent storyboard against the vagaries of CCTV operators complying with legislation (exposing the fiction of state-dispensed ‘rights’) mirrors the impossibility of sketching dystopian citizens with subjectivities echoing digital representations. The fairytale fails precisely because the principles behind *Faceless* were too rigorous, taking at ‘face value’ the viewpoint of power. The government’s fantasy of comprehensive knowledge of the population likewise makes scant human sense, whereas its implacable thirst for control will be far more pragmatically baleful. The film’s major artistic weakness therefore signals crucial (though unacknowledged) political potential. As its makers conclude: “The panopticon is not complete, yet. Regardless, could its one-way gaze ever assure an enabling conception of security?” Clearly, neither that nor a secure ability to conceive – and although beyond this film’s ambition, the relationships between the excluded and included (Spectral Children, and adults, and the erstwhile organic robots) would be key to dismantling the rigid walls of regimented otherness.

Apocalypse Soon

Alfonso Cuarón’s *Children Of Men* (2006) paints a contrasting but equally ominous picture of a near future where dystopian ghosts in machines are exorcised by default – with global environmental collapse, mass starvation and a global pandemic

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leaving humanity infertile. Nevertheless, Bulldog Britain soldiers on, demonising tidal waves of illegal immigrants escaping societal meltdown elsewhere, its increasingly totalitarian government trumping the public's despair at impending extinction with 'homeland security' repression while benevolently distributing 'Quietus' self-euthanasia kits for those not succumbing to day-of-judgement fundamentalisms. A rag-tag resistance dodges the rampant militarised police around an exceedingly grubby and battered London in which death squads, random bombings and cages full of foreigners on their way to incarceration litter rubbish-filled streets. Woken from drunken disillusionment by an old flame's quest, Clive Owen's civil servant, Theo, then flip-flops around saving the world's only pregnant woman – fetching up in Bexhill-on-Sea dressed as monstrous concentration camp – their flight captured in superb action sequences with bravura handheld single-takes, modulated with poignant moments of stillness amidst the bloodbath as the unexpected sight and sound of infancy resurrect temporary empathy.

However, the narrative is less daring than the award-winning cinematography and set design, which achieve an effectively estranged familiarity throughout. Whereas a previous UK-set dystopia *V For Vendetta* scuppered every ounce of political nous in its literary source⁹, crime writer P.D. James' novel here had little anyway. So the rainbow coalition of urban guerilla 'Fishes' (a symbol used by clandestine early Christians, signposting the messianic underbelly of moral politics) opposes the fascist state only by demanding human rights for refugees. Yet these former anti-war, civil rights and green activists launch armed insurrection! The film's naff nativity fable subsequently crumbles into faith in scientific progress (the mythical 'Human Project' run by 'the best brains in the world' on the good ship 'Tomorrow'), as, in an echo of John Wyndham or J.G. Ballard's bleakly bilious postwar sci-fi critiques of bourgeois English anomie, Cuarón twists James' high-church, high-Tory spiritual self-flagellation. The elites barricade themselves in to brazen out armageddon while Theo's death, delivering (Black refugee) madonna and (female) child to sanctuary, finesses the conclusion that middle-class heroism (physical or philosophical) offers no solution.

Cuarón's first feature, *Y Tu Mama Tambien* (2001), cleverly seasoned its road-trip sex tragicomedy with a voiceover insistently detailing the contemporaneous Mexican socio-economic convulsions that the upper-class protagonists remained oblivious to. *Children of Men*'s more starkly visual disjunction contrasts the immediacy of the suffering excludeds with the incapacity of the comfortable to recognise the culpability of their enlightened positions in the mess surrounding them. Slavoj Žižek interprets this philosophical infertility as the ideological

despair of late capitalism, with no sense of history or agency possible in a liberal-democratic worldview which actively fosters disaster while precluding political renewal¹⁰. Nevertheless the film's lack of engagement with the dispossessed themselves rather works against Žižek's conclusion – citing the recurrent motif of crossing water – that overcoming the present impasse requires an acceptance of rootlessness, cutting emotive ties just as the migrants have done with their physical ones. After all, a baptism into fresh solidarity chosen by cosmopolitan intellectuals – already arguable as useful strategy – scarcely compares to the nourishment of collective memory amid desperate necessity.

Mission Implausible

The conspiracy thriller *The Last Enemy*, which occupied five primetime Sunday night slots on BBC1 in February-March 2008, extrapolates more narrowly in projecting only several years hence, albeit with decisive technological advances considerably enhancing identity-paranoia. Returning to terror-struck Britain for his twin's funeral after working abroad, renowned mathematician Stephen (Benedict Cumberbatch) witnesses first-hand the downside of fully integrated monitoring with pre-emptive policing. Biometric ID cards are scanned in all mundane movements or transactions, and any anomaly automatically prompts armed intervention; card use being prohibited forthwith. Recruited by the Home Office's latest PR drive for computerised security, he tests the new system to discover the fate of his NGO sibling supposedly killed helping Afghan refugees afflicted with a mystery illness. Unwittingly opening sundry cans of political, corporate, diplomatic, and academic science worms, Stephen becomes a target of officialdom. With informal subsistence all but impossible, he falls in with an unlikely band of aid-workers, illegal immigrants, renegade intelligence officers ... and his brother, now also underground having faked his own death.

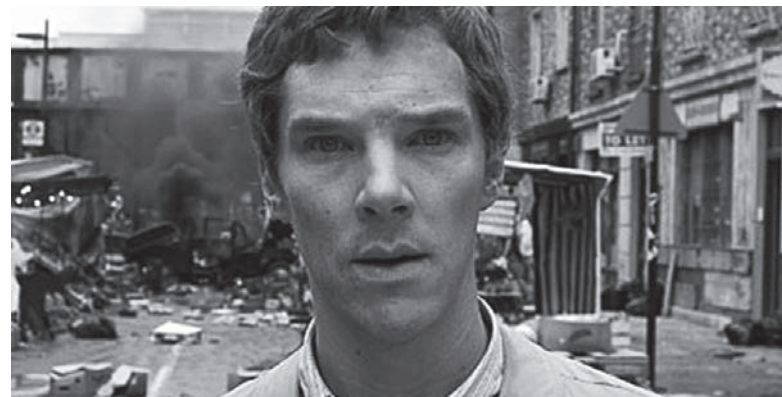
With timely scenario and entertainingly helter-skeleter pacing making for effective hokum – despite unconvincing personal ties among excessively narcissistic characters – the drama is infinitely less subversive than claimed¹¹. At least, though, the refugees and migrants are given independent human texture, agency and social milieux, even while still depending on salvation by criminalised professionals and professional criminals – fake IDs abound, naturally, but welfare and charity staff only able to fulfil their remits by acting illegally is both original and suggestive. And while the national and international dimensions of skulduggery and cynicism also ring true, in classic parapolitical vein, they deflect attention from the nitty gritty of life for the majority in favour of the privileged significance of shallow heroes and villains acting outside of the deep structuring

logics of institutions. As in *Children of Men*, we only get glimpses of the indigenous excluded, kept safely at arms length from all other social fractions – here a mere handful of hopeless homeless abjectly selling their blood and robbing each other for peanuts in a disappointing conservative echo of ASBO rhetoric.

Even more disastrously for present relevance, problems associated with the technology are restricted to its misuse – partly through function-creep, but mainly by corrupt careerists furthering agendas unerringly encouraged by business amorality. In itself this is doubtless accurate, but New Labour's shambolic PFI roll-outs also prove the utter incapacity of the systems to deliver on processing or fit-for-purpose promises. *The Last Enemy*'s effortlessly smooth operation of Total Information Awareness is, however, taken for granted. Even the supremely sinister nanotech radio-frequency tags, secretly injected into bloodstreams, appear neutral in principle – apart from their racially-specific, medical side-effects. The latter contrivance simultaneously kills both the narrative's victims and its pretensions to sharp critique of the surveillance state. Tolerably workable, hard-, soft-, and live-ware is, after all, the crux of government spin. But their likelihood is contradicted by all the available evidence¹² – making stolen identity a risk; victimised identity a probability; and mistaken identity, via faulty data and erroneous interpretation, a commonplace. Yet countless personally disastrous bungles and stitch-ups – which ordinary folk would have least chance of sorting – would inevitably entail disproportionately lower-class effects, which are rendered irrelevant and invisible here compared to those of noble philanthropists selflessly serving helpless clients.

Minority Retort

More promisingly, the marginalised and repressed return with a vengeance in *Exodus*, written and directed by Penny Woolcock and screened by Channel 4 in November 2007. The film attenuates the Old Testament saga down to a parochial parable set in Margate with local non-actors cast in all but a few leading roles,¹³ for many of whom issues of migration and exclusion were immediate personal concerns. In this new testament, charismatic mayor Pharaoh Mann (Bernard Hill with suitably ridiculous barnet) has turned a formerly depressed borough – rechristened the Promised Land – into something of a BNP fantasy of a municipal fiefdom, where the respectable WASP majority have expelled from their midst a veritable anti-shopping list of undesirables. So members of ethnic minorities, asylum seekers and immigrants, homosexuals, the jobless and feckless, drunks, junkies, psychiatric cases and petty criminals have all been dumped in Dreamland – a shanty settlement nestling in the ruins of a funfair on the outskirts – and abandoned



to fend for themselves. Of course, someone still has to undertake the menial and shit-work, but scrupulous surveillance and ruthless movement restrictions ensure that the lower ranks, minutely checked-in and out, barely subsist while being unable to extricate themselves from apartheid imprisonment.

When Pharaoh's adoptive son Moses turns eighteen, he learns from liberal-minded Mrs Mann that his real Romany mother gave him up at birth hoping he might thrive among history's favoured. He resolves to search her out, having long been hurt by the condescending treatment given the family maid (another maternal substitute), but immediately witnesses the arbitrary brutal dehumanisation perpetrated by the 'Pest Control' police in Dreamland's nightmare. He feels compelled to intervene violently and becomes a fugitive there, meeting his family distaff and marrying into the riff-raff. Increasingly appreciative of the unbelievably embattled community's fortitude, spirit and potential, his tentative suggestions of unity go largely derided until his father-in-law, a gentle ghetto pedagogue, is murdered while protecting a pupil. Kickstarting feverish activity with the defiant affirmative gesture of a gigantic funeral pyre, escalating organisation and public confrontations demanding deliverance develop into outright guerilla sabotage, taking advantage of sophisticated knowhow honed individually in bonded servitude and now wielded for collective purpose. Modern biological, chemical and electronic versions of old Egypt's plagues (thus translating divine intervention from hegemonic theological support into the practical weaponry of the weak – a brave and potent, if troubling, rhetorical manoeuvre in the present conjuncture) wreak mortal havoc in the Promised Land, and finally, the defeated fuhrer caves in and strikes down the gates. The longed-for exodus, however, heralds hand-to-hand slaughter on the beach ...

There's no doubting the integrity of Woolcock's commitment, giving voice and expression to society's outcasts and fashioning working practices which flout routine mainstream pretensions and hierarchies so as to respect, celebrate and empower hidden and suppressed storytelling¹⁴. But mortal wounds to this narrative's body-politic are inflicted by its construction and focus – with a quite unwarranted mirroring of Pharaoh and



Moses and their respective spheres of influence. Dominated by high-bourgeois oedipal dynamics, the latter's sullen adolescent demeanour hamstringing any convincing capacity to engage or energise others, and (presumably unintentionally) the uprising ends up resembling a miserable vanguardist farce with scant sign of genuine grass-roots engines. Rather than cod-psychohistory, the mythos of prophecy would surely better emerge from the fine-grain of the internal conflicts and specific material circumstances of the Dreamlanders – where the awakening sense of mission fed on their own cultural fecundity rather than a resentful leader's personality deficiencies which yield predictably reactionary results. Despite its welcome attention to processes transforming suffering into struggle, then, the admittedly well-shot *Exodus* is sunk right from botched conception – with clunky structure and contrived script marooning some decent individual performances (especially from the amateurs) which appear to belong in completely separate dramatic universes¹⁵.

Alienated: Resurrection

Worlds past, present and future eerily co-exist in a specific parallel universe in *Polly II: Plan for a Revolution in Docklands* (2006), Anja Kirschner's marvellous carnivalesque allegory of an underground underwater London after global warming leads to breached tidal barriers. The bibles drawn on here are of impeccable rabble-rousing provenance: John Gay's *Beggar's Opera* (plus its lesser-known sequel *Polly*) whose staging was deconstructed in *The Threepenny Opera*. The project,

"part satirical sci-fi, part soap opera and Brechtian 'Lehrstueck' – portrays the lives of pirates and outcasts surviving in the flooded ruins of East London, a lawless zone set to become the latest in luxury waterside living according to government plans and venturing developers' wet dreams. The film imagines a future insurrection coloured by the legacy of dispossessed peasants, political radicals, whores, sailors ... and former slaves who once inhabited East London and fought a daily battle against their subjection to poverty, displacement and judicial terror"¹⁶.

The story's thrust follows perceptive questioning by the narrator of a welter of contradictory discourses competing to structure her understanding of, and hence action within, the mayhem falteringly presided over by the feudal elite. Engaging in bitter struggle to survive, Polly and her cohorts adopt stances which mobilise them in various barely official or frankly criminal enterprises undermining the monopolisation of



resources by vested interests. With traditional certainties turned upside down, the disoriented and impoverished populace is fractured by any number of crippling hostilities and rivalries but liable to see through the morass in the difficult forging of common cause.

The resonance of an essentially pre-proletarian *Polly II* with prospects in contemporary neoliberal urban blight (euphemised as renewal, gentrification or sterilisation, depending on outlook) is tempered considerably by the iron grip of spatial mastery now pursued by the state and its corporate speculator clientele in regulating an inconvenient lower-class presence¹⁷. Moreover, the unfolding strategy to cybernetically discipline the lifeworlds of previously upwardly-mobile strata is accompanied by the proletarianisation of precarious informational sectors of the middle classes, at the same time as state welfare functions are being downsized, privatised and degraded. Of course, the explicit logic and efficacy of these tactics are themselves supremely doubtful. In addition, the mass squeezing of all manner of petty-bourgeois, lumpen and working-class fractions into collective exclusion, with diverse degrees and levels of psychic and economic desperation, is unlikely to be affordable and manageable: either by the carceral containment of plantation slavery (e.g. in the US and China; possibly coming soon to Britain) or by neo-Stalinist social democracy (Latin America, South Africa). And that's before considering the ravages of ecological disaster that international capital is learning to reckon into its insane calculations. But blueprints weren't in any case Kirschner's intention:

"To some extent the plot of *Polly II* was based on actual events from the 18th century [...]. But I'm not depicting or referencing these moments so they can be measured against so many subsequent defeats or presented as easily digestible celebrations of 'heritage' or downright nostalgia (and I have little sympathy for re-enactments on that level); rather, I use them because they penetrate the present like so many callings and loopholes whose explosive potential still speaks to us"¹⁸.

Such mobile constellations of class, culture, power and practical capacity have characterised previous cycles of grass-roots responses to tectonic shifts in economic exploitation and instrumental governmentality, as revealed in many recent radical histories¹⁹. Even within the activities of the industrial proletariat as understood in more familiar Marxist terms, class composition, consciousness and praxis have been thoroughly and complexly woven through community and cultural biography in ways that elude the programmatic socialist or Leninist grasp. Paul Mason's inspirational book *Live Working Or Die Fighting: How the Working Class Went Global* (Vintage, 2008) indicates how patterns of solidarity, refusal, mutual aid and autonomy have persisted across otherwise alien centuries. Fresh modes of



orientation to the state's New Public Management are also emerging within structurally-adjusted societies in First, Second and Third Worlds – as discussed, for example, in Michael Neocosmos' innovative South African analysis which highlights the magnificent Durban shackdwellers movement Abahlali baseMjondolo²⁰. And, despite the vicious megalomania of New Labour and the Tories' common ground – competing to punish anyone and everyone on suspicion of anything and everything – it would seem the height of arrogance to assume some unique divergence from these epochal trends in this benighted land ...

... Or perhaps not arrogance, so much as escapism – and that's the purpose of juxtaposing documentary realism and frivolous futurist entertainment here. The contemporary cultural artefacts examined work hardest of all to maintain distinctions between those whose survival is most imminently threatened and the comfort zones of aspirational experience – just when the economic and structural conditions which underwrote the flight from drudgery for the twentieth century's new middle-classes unravel before our eyes. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the surprise discovery by TV bosses of defensive, backward-looking ignorance among the depressed, so-called 'indigenous white working class'. BBC 2's *White* season and Channel 4's *Immigration: The Inconvenient Truth*²¹ legitimise the racism and antagonism found as intelligible responses to economic restructuring, while new migrants attempt to forge a future from starvation wages, casual hostility and official contempt. However, great care is taken for the professional media tourists to avoid the countless people and places making horizontal links, conducting joint operations, productive relationships, cultural exchanges and social interactions at the base. Thus a view of society is reproduced as no more than interlocking networks of exclusion zones, where the only negotiation between dimensions of difference – whether biological, social or economic – occurs on the state's terms at its own designated, tightly-policed sites, carried out by the market's credentialled experts. In which case, converging material situations, interests, expressions and struggles among foreigners, natives, underclasses and the new nearly-destitute simply disappear from view.

Writer Margaret Atwood called recently for a re-assessment of the respective merits of *Brave New World* and *1984*, seeing a need to measure the travails of consumer capitalism and globalisation against Aldous Huxley and George Orwell's contrasting anti-utopias²². Of course the question is misplaced, since neither hangover from Victorian middle-class moral conservatism could predict how the tortured and/or noble proles would fare in the New World Orders of their time. So these authors' best efforts to twist the enlightened (or not) liberal consciences of their milieux, thereby masquerading as ordinary folk, hardly succeed even in articulating the presence of the bulk of humanity whose quite different agendas and actions would be decisive. Irrespective of any of their strengths, *Taking Liberties* and the other fictions cited here (with the exception of *Polly II*) fail for comparable reasons – whereas tackling themes of unholy unruly otherness directly, honestly and empathetically is central, as it happens, to the most useful prognostications of sci-fi's genuinely critical dystopias²³. Finally, therefore, and to reverse the point – as well as travestying Giorgio Agamben's famous notion of 'Homo sacer', the abject human object of pity²⁴: Is it instead the achievement of *Faceless* to suggest that an empty, static, sterile existence is actually what is planned for the fortunate included?

Notes

1. Perhaps symptomatic of writer-director Chris Atkins' self-important naivete. *Taking Liberties* was screened on More 4 on May 6th, 2008.
2. To Atkins: "Our only hope is that Brown is desperate to claw back some of the popularity that Blair has lost, so if it becomes a big political issue then he might turn back the authoritarian tide to try and win votes" (*Socialist Review*); and "If several thousand people go to mass lone demos the Metropolitan Police will beg Gordon Brown to repeal the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act" (www.eyeforfilm.co.uk).
3. Journalist Henry Porter's assiduous reporting of the ID card plans regrettably fits this template, e.g. in: 'Blair Laid Bare: the article that may get you arrested', *The*



- Independent*, 29th June 2006. The No2ID campaign's otherwise excellent coverage flirts too with civil liberties particularism (but see Martin Twomey, 'State of Denial', 2007, www.metamute.org/en/State-of-Denial); whereas the Anarchist Federation widen the argument decisively towards class-consciousness – in, for example, 'The Panopticon Society', at <http://libcom.org> – regular updates also appearing in the *Resistance* bulletin (www.afed.org.uk/res/index.html). Recourse to the imagined community of nation is a persistent problem with Michael Moore's work too – see, on *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004), my 'Extracting the Michael', *Variant* 21, September 2004; and on *Sicko* (2007), 'Body Politics', *Freedom*, Vol. 69, No. 2, February 2008 (www.starandshadow.org.uk).
4. 'Editorial', *Mute* magazine, Vol. 2, No. 7, 2008: 'Show Invisibles? Migration, Data Work' (www.metamute.org). Other excellent contributions discuss aspects of the relationships between surveillance and subjection to state control, rights and visibility, informality, legality and the enforcement of work discipline, among various segments of populations here and abroad.
 5. These issues are tackled with great intelligence in Adam Curtis' groundbreaking BBC 2 documentary series, *The Trap: What Happened to Our Dream of Freedom* (2007); see my critique in 'Paradise Misaid', *Freedom*, Vol. 68, No. 10, May 2007 (www.starandshadow.org.uk).
 6. Space here prohibits consideration of otherwise relevant US titles such as *A Scanner Darkly* (dir. Richard Linklater, 2006; a *Slackers*' version of the Philip K. Dick novel), *Look* (dir. Adam Rifkin, 2007; pretending to use CCTV footage), and *Southland Tales* (2007, dir. Richard Kelly; previously renowned for *Donnie Darko*). However for discussions of *Strange Days* (dir. Kathryn Bigelow, 1995) and *Fight Club* (dir. David Fincher, 1999), among others, see my 'Rose Coloured Spectacles', *Variant*, 27, 2006. For comprehensive popular-literary studies of utopian and science fiction subgenres, see: Tom Moylan, *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia*, Westview Press, 2000; Raffaella Baccolini & Tom Moylan (eds), *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination*, Routledge, 2003; and Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*, Verso, 2005.
 7. One of the themes of my 'Closed Circuit Tunnel Vision', *Variant*, 29, 2007; discussing Andrea Arnold's Glasgow-set CCTV suspense drama *Red Road* (2006). See also, for example, Twomey, note 3; and Henry Porter, 'Blair's Big Brother Legacy', *Vanity Fair*, July 2006.
 8. Manu Luksch & Mukul Patel's 'Faceless: Chasing the Data Shadow', *Variant*, 31, 2008, tells the fascinating story of its production (see also www.ambienttv.net).
 9. Alan Moore's seminal graphic novel; the film produced by *The Matrix* series' Andy & Larry Wachowski and directed by James McTeague (2005) – see my review, 'V Signs and Simulations', *Freedom*, 67, No. 7, April 2006 (www.starandshadow.org.uk).
 10. Slavoj Zizek, 2007, www.childrenofmen.net/slavoj.html (video clip at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=pbgrwNP_gYE). Extras on the *Children Of Men* DVD (Universal Pictures, 2007) include a 'Possibility of Hope' featurette with contributions from Fabrizio Eva, John Gray, Naomi Klein, James Lovelock, Saskia Sassen, Tzvetan Todorov and Zizek, as well as a separate 'Comments by Slavoj Zizek'.
 11. See, for example: www.bbc.co.uk/drama/lastenemy; Benji Wilson, *The Telegraph*, 16th February 2008; Peter Tatchell, *The Guardian*, 3rd March 2008; James Rampton, 'Caught Off Camera', *The Scotsman*, 18th February 2008. Writer Peter Berry's major headache in sustaining the sci-fi element was keeping ahead of the government's actual surveillance intentions – a problem also noted by *Judge Dredd* comic writer Alan Grant (*Sunday Herald*, 27th January 2008).
 12. Meanwhile the IT providers whose promotional optimism helped translate these particular authoritarian wet-dreams into policy are now jumping ship as the bubble threatens to burst – see, for example, the Corporate Watch report 'Corporate Identity' (2006, and subsequent updates at www.corporatewatch.org); and, more recently, BAe and Accenture pulling out of ID card systems tendering (after the latter's boss moved

to the Identity & Passport Service), leaving only more shamelessly incompetent profiteers still in the frame (e.g. reported in February this year at www.silicon.com/publicsector/0,3800010403,39169811,00.htm).

13. In addition to this film, corporate art commissioners Artangel's *Margate Exodus* 2006 blockbuster (see www.themargateexodus.org.uk) included Wendy Ewald's *Towards A Promised Land* photographic project, with banners showing children relocated to the area from near and far due to war, poverty, repression or family crisis; a *Plague Songs* music CD with performances by fashionable (so I'm told) artistes Scott Walker, Rufus Wainwright, Laurie Anderson, Cody Chesnutt, Martyn Jaques, Imogen Heap, Brian Eno and Robert Wyatt; the 'Exodus Day' itself on 30th September 2006, held on Margate seafront with various events and performances culminating in a spectacular bonfire consuming Anthony Gormley's 80-odd foot tall *Waste Man* sculpture – built from the vicinity's rubbish, flotsam and jetsam with the help of many local folk of diverse origins – in front of thousands of Thanet residents and visitors; with Caroline Deeds' *Waste Man* documentary (broadcast on Channel 4 on 2nd December 2006) charting its production and destruction.
14. Related to but very distinct from others in European cinema's social realist and naturalist traditions – see her interview about the making of *Exodus* at www.channel4.com/fourdocs/articles/penny_int.html; and another by Stella Papamichael from 28th June 2007 at www.bbc.co.uk/dna/filmnetwork/A24168585. Her refreshing views on the political role of art are summarised in 'Art Has No Real Power', 7th May 2007 (http://blogs.guardian.co.uk/arts/author/penny_woolcock/).
15. Perhaps this reflects the gulf between a turncoat toff as beloved leader and the grimy multitude (or between privileged creator and the objects of her vision, for that matter ...) which the entire enterprise of *Exodus* seems to want to disavow. If so, that would be completely uncharacteristic of the best of this filmmaker's previous work, crafted from meticulous research leading to grass-roots accounts, experiences, anecdotes, characters and perspectives being central – as in the Bradford underclass trilogy *Tina Goes Shopping* (1999), *Tina Takes A Break* (2001), and the culture clash comedy *Mischief Night* (2006; see my appreciation in 'A Midautumn Night's Dream', *Freedom*, Vol. 68, No. 1, January 2007 – also at www.tomjennings.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk). Other highly original (though variously flawed) films by Penny Woolcock include *The Principles of Lust* and *The Death of Klinghoffer* (both 2003).
16. At www.tate.org.uk/modern/eventeducation/film/9891.htm.
17. See the thoughtful review of *Polly II* by Anthony Iles (2006, available at www.metamute.org/en/Polly-II).
18. From an interview with William Fowler in *Vertigo* Magazine, January 2007 (www.vertigomagazine.co.uk). Note that the prescience of this vision, as well as the acclaim the film has received from many quarters, have not been accompanied by the wide distribution its quality certainly deserves and therefore the enthusiastic audiences it would doubtless receive.
19. For example, among many pathbreaking analyses, see those by Ted Allen, *The Invention of the White Race, Volume Two: The Origin of Racial Oppression in Anglo-America* (Verso, 1997); Sylvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (Autonomedia, 2004); Peter Linebaugh, 'Charters of Liberty in Black Face and White Face: Race, Slavery and the Commons' (www.metamute.org, 2005); and Marcus Rediker, *Villains of All Nations: Atlantic Pirates in the Golden Age* (Beacon Press, 2004).
20. 'Civil Society, Citizenship and the Politics of the (Im)possible: Rethinking Militancy in Africa Today' (2007), at <http://libcom.org/library>. Libcom also has a useful array of articles on Abahlali baseMjondolo (which has its own website at www.abahlali.org). For the wider context here, see the excellent collection of essays: 'Naked Cities: Struggles in the Global Slums', *Mute* magazine, Vol. 2, No. 3, 2006 (www.metamute.org); and my review of the *Favela Rising* documentary (covering Rio De Janeiro's Afro Reggae movement) in 'Riodelmption Songs', *Freedom*, Vol. 68, No. 3, February 2007 (also at libcom.org).
21. The *White* season, BBC 2, March 2008, included documentaries on a Bradford workingmen's club, Polish migrants in East Anglia, the BNP in East London, and the relevance of Enoch Powell's 'Rivers of Blood' provocation three decades on; the latter also a touchstone for the three-part *Immigration: The Inconvenient Truth*, Dispatches, Channel 4, April 2008. Covering related ground, in 'Same Difference?' and 'Breaking Cover' (*Variant*, Nos. 23 and 24, 2005) I hinted at some of the implications of such inherently false multicultural dichotomies in the context of prejudicial characterisations of European Asians and Muslims.
22. In 'Everybody Is Happy Now', *The Guardian*, 17 November, 2007. Atwood herself wrote one of the many excellent post-1960s dystopias, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1986; with a film version directed by Volker Schlöndorff, 1990).
23. My personal favourites being Ursula K. LeGuin's *The Dispossessed* (1974) and Samuel R. Delany's response *Trouble On Triton* (1976) through to Marge Piercy's *Body Of Glass* (1992), Kim Stanley Robinson's *California* (1984-90) and *Mars* (1992-96) trilogies, and Octavia Butler's *Parables* (1993/98).
24. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford University Press, 1998).