For info, I’ve emailed as the starting point. So if he phones you up to ask who is this mad woman emailing him about terrorism.....

Wendy

Here are the recommendations we had for comic book artists/designers Many of these people started off with DC Thomson

Having googled a bit, it does seem that we have a critical mass that we should perhaps be celebrating a bit more. Perhaps worth a bit of cross divisional thinking about whether there is something here we could use to promote Scotland’s culture. Perhaps something for next year’s Scotland Week?

On other contacts, I think it would be good to join up with the Scottish Police Services Authority (SPSA) - the Serious Crime and Drugs Enforcement Agency (SCDEA) are part of the SPSA, as is Tulliallan (the police college) (which Brian mentioned he would take Roger Webb to visit). Academics, police, gamers, storytellers and Illustrators all in the same room sounds an interesting mixture!
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Contacts
Variant
1/2, 180 Maryhill Road, Glasgow, G20 7XJ, Scotland, UK
t +44 (0)141 333 9522
e-mail: variantmag@btinternet.com
www.variant.org.uk
Co-editors: Daniel Jewesbury, Leigh French
Advertising & Distribution
Contact: Leigh French
Design: Kevin Hobbs
Printers: Spectator Newspapers,
Bangor, BT20 4AF Co. Down, N. Ireland

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Affect & the Politics of Austerity

An interview exchange with Lauren Berlant
Gesa Helms, Marina Vishmidt, Lauren Berlant

The political climate in the UK, given as it already was to the emotive and nationalist tropes of the War on Terror, found a new affective register with the financial crisis: the invocation of public and personal shame. Admittedly, shame and other moralized negativity has been central to understandings of the vulnerabilities of the casualized body, where the object of anxiety is that of the public’s rage but the profession which continues to operate as the nerve centre of the UK economy. The bankers. Amidst calls for public apologies, financial business practices were re-cast as the reckless activity of individual ‘banksters’. Suddenly it seemed that the whole celebrated financial industry, the backbone of London’s economy, and thus of the UK as a whole, had been driven into the ground by deviant individuals frenzied by ‘perverse incentives’, a ‘bonus culture’ of greed, ambition and excess. Thatcher-era cultural anxieties about ‘City boys’ resurfaced with a vengeance but with little of the class politics. Two years on, we can see how much of this outcry by politicians has not led to a stronger regulation of banking practices, but that indeed it amounted to little more than a public shaming of the appetites of bankers; an appeal to conduct their business a bit more decently, not as if it amounted to deviancy or the influence of black hoodies that were the object of the public’s rage but the profession which continues to operate as the nerve centre of the UK economy. Amidst calls for public apologies, financial business practices were re-cast as the reckless activity of individual ‘banksters’. Suddenly it seemed that the whole celebrated financial industry, the backbone of London’s economy, and thus of the UK as a whole, had been driven into the ground by deviant individuals frenzied by ‘perverse incentives’, a ‘bonus culture’ of greed, ambition and excess. Thatcher-era cultural anxieties about ‘City boys’ resurfaced with a vengeance but with little of the class politics. Two years on, we can see how much of this outcry by politicians has not led to a stronger regulation of banking practices, but that indeed it amounted to little more than a public shaming of the appetites of bankers; an appeal to conduct their business a bit more decently, not as if it amounted to deviancy or the influence of black hoodies that were the object of the public’s rage but the profession which continues to operate as the nerve centre of the UK economy.

The big question is whether the popular culture of a “civil society” unwilling to let go of the collective good life fantasy secured by a beneficent state can mobilize its assertion of its sovereignty over market democracy in a way that can fundamentally restructure the state’s adjudication of capital, and meanwhile avoid fascism. But this is hard too. We remember that the bubble associating economic growth with civil rights of the last sixty years or so is an anomaly in world history. Besides that, though, the demands of the present mean protesting not only the state’s servility to capital but people’s own fantasies of the good life. Just as the relations of the market to the state are fraying and changing, so too the destruction and elaboration of fantasy in relation to what a life is and what a good life is will need to shift about and reknit. The response to a potentially radical reconstruction of the conditions of the reproduction of life ought to be very demanding on everyone, including the resistors. At the moment most resistors are protesting state/capital but not protesting themselves. Without accommodating the affective demands for adjustment to the austerity ordinary with which they’re being confronted, people need to think about what kinds of good life might be better associated with flourishing, and fight that battle (with fantasy, politically) too.

That which is unbearable

MV: I am interested in the point you make about responding to the imposition of austerity by re-thinking what counts as good life, and how that relates to the ‘shaming of the appetites’ which legitimates, as well as provides libidinal satisfaction, to the non-negotiable imperatives of austerity. What forms of social action or structures of feeling do you think it would take for such attempts at reconstruction to rebuff this kind of shame, as it were, with another vision of life rather than adopting shame as a purgative
4

that locates persons and groups in the anxiety of just one of the many moods of affective relation matters to the reproduction of life, but shame is or an ironic, manic-comic sense of not mattering.

not land hard on the concrete. The affect not to which were both real and affective, a sense of cushion to replace the loss of other material ones, think of the pensioners who are about to go down (the thing you’re focused on). The state might as many kinds of negativity, not just shame always presume that even the norm is incoherent. chaotic ways. When I think of political emotions I their appetites to flourish in their unformed and a sham but that people will always make spaces for existence is not evidence that the austere public is good, informal/grey economies flourish whose problem in the world that seems to interfere the neoliberal and democratic economic bubbles of the last 60 years. The concept of the individual, it is, how the idea of a mortgaged future needs to be confronted in its stark realities, how entirely different models of collective dependency need to be forged in relation to the reproduction of life because there is no money and the poverty is both material and imaginary.

I don’t think it’s about converting shame, therefore, into pride or anything. I think it requires a hard confrontation with and a very difficult process of changing what the reproduction of life means in both pragmatic and phantasmatic terms. What this means will vary, but its impact on the political and on the social relations of labour will be astonishing. As has been the case in the big retrenchments does not feel to me to cover the core structure and experience of contemporary exclusion from the comforts and protections even the projection of the burden for revamping the population’s ‘abandonment’ by the world,8 their normative experience. Structure covers much: the self-consciousness whose presence is a blockage for you, is the fundamental emotion of human existence is not developmental (that is too developmental)?

You mention that converting shame into pride is clearly not a way forward. Yet: how can emotions such as shame be acknowledged, made explicit and dealt with (I am tempted to say: overcome, but that is too developmental)?

LB: You need to say more to me about why shame, for you, is the fundamental emotion of human self-consciousness whose presence is a blockage to action or flourishing. I’ve argued that we need to distinguish the structure of shame from its normative experience. It’s a communication of the sense of what Ariella Azoulay calls the subject population’s ‘abandonment’ by the world, their exclusion from the comforts and protections even of a phantasmatic sovereignty; what Eve Sedgwick, in her Kleinian phase, calls ‘the broken circuit’ of reciprocity that induces a reversion of the subject’s attachments onto herself as weight, a heaviness, unworthy of being shared or acknowledged; or what Sedgwick calls, in another idiom, the mimetic relation that transpires between a society that negates a population (shaming as political disenfranchisement, moral aversion, and active denigration) and the feeling of that population that it has been shamed and exiled (thus producing the ‘gay shame’ movement’s mobilization of exuberant negativity). These are all different explanations of the communication of shame as well as different claims about the relation of social negativity to subjectifying effects.

I am trying to be productively pedantic here. If one of the conditions of contemporary precarity is its spreading throughout class and population loci such as everyone is already, and is becoming, unreliable of the world’s commitment to continuing 20th century forms of reciprocity – this is a central argument of Cruel Optimism – it does not follow that people feel in the same way their abandonment or the archaism of their attachment to certain styles of identification, fantasy, and pleasure to be shamed.10 Even in the face of shaming negation they could feel nothing, numb, disbelief, rage, exhaustion, resentment, hatred, dissolving anxiety, shame – or even feel free to be cut loose from the old social structures if you have to name the negation of shaming as the core structure and experience of contemporary entrenchments does not feel to me to cover the range of the relations between experience and structure that we would need to understand in order to theorize adequately the conversion of a stunned public into a demanding one, for example.

The good life as an already sacrificial model

LB: So perhaps there is not a monoaffective imaginary. But what is collective is what Cruel Optimism calls the spectacle of the drama of forced adjustment. In that archive, what ‘shame’ is to be seen seeing one’s own forced adjustment, to be seen seeing the wearing away of the old anchors for being tethered to the world, to be watched or encountered as one displays profound knowledge of what to do, be practically treading water or be encountered in paralysis (again, there is a whole range of proprioceptive performances through which we learn to register feeling the contingencies of survival and the negativity of encountering ourselves as subjects who make sense either in our fantasies or their productivity being seen in one’s incompetence to life produces many compensations. The worst of them is in the conversion of shame into all the razing xenophobia we see in many of monocultural movements (from state-based ones as in Israel, to community-based ones as all over Europe and the US). But even in the context of capitalist restructuring involves mobilizations into mass body politic autopsies, the insistence
that the state remain what it was, as though it is what it was, which it isn’t, manifests a desire to undermine or use the social imaginary. What if people were to take the opportunity to reimagine state/society relations such that the flourishing of reciprocity were differently constructed and assessed, and in which consumer forms of collectivity were not the main way people secure or fantasize securing everyday happiness? This, I would argue, would involve a considerable restructuring of the place of work and expenditure in the production of ordinary life; but might also involve a transformation of what people imagine when they project out what the good life is, when they make images of what will secure satisfaction, and whether “adding up to something” is the best metaphor for justifying having laboured. “Adding up” is just one way to think about what it means to have and to have had a life: it means a radical rethinking of the relation of labor and time, of sacrifice, security, and satisfaction. This involves a huge commitment to rethinking being in relation, and for showing up for the social and sociability. Is it a world, a gathering, a public, a normative fantasy: where are the zones for belonging to be fought out?

The spectre I am proposing of shifting the objects that anchor fantasy and the ambivalent, aleatory affective circuits of sociality is not at all a command to accommodate the current insistence on socializing precarity and privatizing wealth. Far from it. It means gently to point to how the good life model introduced after the war was already a sacrificial model, with softer shadows of longing and shame hovering around aspirations to normative positions of enjoyment, and just with softer landings than what we now confront. I am suggesting that we must begin again to reorganize all of the kinds of value now challenged by the new normal that has not yet become the new ordinary.

GH: Many thanks for being ‘productively pedantic’ on these points. I feel this section is very instructive and constructive as to the limitations of (a) promoting shame as part of a political strategy from above and (b) similarly in explicating all that ‘lies beyond shame’, with which I mean your discussion of the limitations of a political/social imaginary, and to be engaged in a discussion of a different public. With our impression of how shame as a key emotion has risen to the surface of government vis-à-vis its subjects to induce (beyond the shaming) a desire to take responsibility and be prepared for sacrifice, shame has been the key topic for us approaching you to express our appreciation. I am interested in the relation of the noise of the political to the potential to move a question somewhere towards developing more relational modes, among people but among people in terms of the infrastructures of sociality that they create, from the state to loose collectivities, scenes of the intimate public all around. I have little patience for contemptuous judgments about political style, whether of allies or antagonists. It’s like mourning at a funeral: you can’t judge people’s styles of living with loss in the middle of a situation where loss might be all there is even though one is living on and not dead. So the problem of demanding better conditions of living on has no solution at the level of style. My view about your complaint is that we have to throw everything at the hegemons as the real problem. The old left is not the real problem, it’s the hegemons to whom we consent. Who really blocks our imagination of the social? Can we bear to withdraw our consent from these forms without withdrawing our consent to the possibility (not necessarily, sigh) of the capaciously social? The left is not the problem, nor is the fantasy of an older working class solidarity (I hear this story most in the UK from people who lived through the early 20th century Depression). The problem is that in their desperation people try to hide the wave of the forms they know, even when there is a wealth beneath them nor air to float them. The problem is that people do not feel that the world is a generous and patient place for them to be awkward in, that the meantime you remember the good times. I am grateful that in so many political domains there have been and are good times, though, where solidarity is lived and not just projected. It matters for maintaining social justice aspiration even when the episodes of animated convergence are minor, of short duration. But, beyond comfort: we need to make compelling forms for the social (for solidarity, for intimate publics, including the political ones), forms that make taking the leap into the beyond of comfort worth it. It’s hard to ask people to become more uncomfortable at a moment when comfort itself seems like a nostalgic fantasy in the bad sense, but that’s what things are: at the end of one kind of fantasy we need to be lured toward better ones, new misrecognitions of the relation of the materialized real to a projection but now a projection that contracts us to a different, better mode of the reproduction of life, a different sensus communis, a different structure of feeling associated with the small life. There are no unmixed political feelings, there is no unambivalent potentiality for the social. We know that when we come to the social component of the political from affect rather than the ascritive. There is just the possibility of teasing ourselves toward a reorientation in which we can sense a better accommodation of finitude, pleasure, of risk and sweetness, of aversion and attachment, of incoherence and patience.

How does it feel to be a bad investment?

MV: I’d like to come back to something you mentioned at the very beginning: “In capitalist logics of asesis, the workers’ obligation is to be more rational than the system, and their recompense is to be held in a sense of pride in surviving the scene of their own attrition.” Also, to a point you make towards the end of your introduction to Compasion: The Culture and Politics of an Emotion: “What if it turns out that compassion and coldness are not opposite at all but are two sides of a bargain that the subjects of modernity have struck with structural inequality?” The connection between these two propositions for me is that structural inequality as it is produced by capitalist logics effectively disappears by slipping back into a (historically specific) human nature, that of the rational individual, who may on occasion feel some sympathy for the less rational, because after all, contingent sympathy is also part of human nature. But the implication is that when the co-extensivity of capitalism with human nature (as well as with systems of governing human collectives such as democracy) becomes as established as it has – without any serious contestation for some time already – even in times of deadlock and disorientation, the irrationality of the system is so individualized that the person cannot be dealt with on the basis of individual rationality; this is augmented by the actual structural equation between people’s life prospects and the health of financial systems, like pensions and so forth. The imperative to ‘rationalize’ personal spending is then embraced on the scale of the state, thus being converted back into systematic irrationality. So I guess what I’m trying to ask is how that rationality might be disrupted. Would the rupture come from people recognizing not just that the system has failed them and they have...
no one to look to but themselves now, but that there is a difference between themselves and the 'system? Thus to fight not just 'the system' but themselves as reproducers of it, as you say, and I guess that is also a very old question in trying to imagine practical alternatives to capitalism, or how it is practically to be overcome. It is absolutely the question of the imaginary, but an imaginary that has to admit a collective dimension to change in any way. Your observation about the Tea Party as longing to return to a 'private version of absorption' that they're entitled to can perhaps be reflected in the UK context as a feeling of being beleaguered by interests which are scheming to do away with the residual state mechanisms that allow people to pursue that private version of absorption, by and large. So there is generally not a clash of logics, more a vying for the speaking place of a rationality that cannot be breached, that is, an economical one: saving the welfare state in terms of an economistic logic or doing away with it according to an economistic logic.

At the moment, the fight is indeed being led, in the cases where it is happening at all, by defending what remains of former collective settlements, of an already largely – eviscerated welfare state in the UK. But even this – for example, the recent education protests – is creating optimism on the waste ground, and perhaps generating other kinds of projects on a wider level for the first time in this period – rather than just attempts to hold on to the bearable parts of the current situation.

LB: I love the line Mark Fisher23 pulls from Jameson, that “it is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism”: we have become affectively so saturated by attachment to the atrophied field of enjoyment that we are stymied trying to imagine another way of relating to others and to our own optimism. Developing symbolic practical infrastructures for alternativity is the task of progressive praxis, but it’s a daunting task. The collective settlement was that as long as the economy was expanding everyone would have a shot at creatively inventing their version of the good life, and not just assuming the position allotted to them by embedded class, racial, and gendered histories of devalued and unorganized economic and social life. The IMF bailout since the collective settlement was established embeds many generations in a binding fantasy. It wasn’t cruel optimism to think that there would be give in the system, spreading opportunities for living beyond instrumental productivity, and yet we know that even in the good times many people didn’t have enough hours in the day to look each other in the eye and relax. What expanded was fantasy, not time and not a cushion of real-time money. The expansion of the credit economy in Europe and the U.S. once the industrial growth had moved on took care of that, though, purchasing when it couldn’t purchase ordinary time, and now that’s being revoked too. Plus the revocation of educational democracy, the right to talk not just about taking back the state but taking back relationality as such so that the state would seem not the origin of the social but one of its instruments. That would be a good. If people were to converge around an understanding that a bubble is not a habitable world and that believable world requires admitting the need to reinvent work (I am completely an autonomist on this question) that would protect both the people working and the nature and relationality from which they extract value then they would have to look at all the kinds of work there are and figure out a fair way to distribute it not just to match individual capacities but for the good of the world as such.

Can we bear to reinvent “new relational modes” across the incommensurate scenes of work-nature-intimate stranger, and not just among lovers? Can we bear to see the good of education neither as citizen-building towards monoculture (even in “difference”) nor as engineering vocational allegories of self-worth, but a space for the kinds of creativity and improvised interest that cultivate in people a curiosity about living (how it’s been and how it might be) that’s genuine and genuinely experimental and not, as you say, aspires to an unbreachable rational space? If we are educated in experimentality and curiosity, alterity’s comic mode of recognition-in-bafflement, then we diminish our fear of the stranger and of the stranger in ourselves, the place where we don’t make any more sense than the world does, in all of our tenderness and aggression. We would refuse to do the speculative work of policing and foreclosing each other that lets the state and capital off the hook for exhausting workers and pressuring communities to clean up their act, nor be inconvenient, and to be sorry they tried to live well. To make possible the time and space for flourishing affective infrastructures, of grace and graciousness, such as those I’ve described could make happiness and social optimism possible not just in the private realm but also in the public. In other words, there is a difference between themselves and the them. This kind of politics requires active antagonism, which threatens the sense of lateral identification: it sees collective sociability rooted in revelations of what is personal, regardless of how what is personal has itself been devalued. It marks out the nonpolitical situation of personal ordinary life as it is lived as a space of contingency and optimism and social self-cultivation. If it were political, it would be democratic. Ironically, in the United States the denigration of the political sphere that has always marked mass politics increasingly utilizes those pretense or ‘post-political’ sites as resources for providing and maintaining the experience of collectivity that also, sometimes constitute the body politic; intimate publics can provide alibis for politicians who claim to be members of every community everywhere. One is that, all too often, ways of inhabiting these intimate publics: a tiny point of identification can open up a field of fantasy and de-identification, of vagueness, or of ambivalence. All of these energies of attachment can indeed become mobilized as counterpublicity but usually aren’t. Politics requires active antagonism, which threatens the sense in commonsensical: this is why, in an intimate public, the political sphere is not free from比特, chaos, degradation, or retraumatization but a condition of possibility” Lauren Berlant, The Female Complaint. The Imaginary institution of

Notes

6 Lauren Berlant, ‘Slow Death (Sovereignty, Obesity, Lateral Agency)’, Critical Inquiry, Volume 33, Number 4, Summer 2007, http://criticalinquiry.uchicago.edu/33n4/33n4_berlant2.html
11 In The Female Complaint, Lauren Berlant writes: “The concept of the ‘intimate public’ thus carries the fortitude of common sense or a vernacular sense of belonging, but also the unknownness that implies. A public is intimate when it forgoes affective and emotional attachments lodged in the inside of the common, the everyday, and a sense of ordinariness, and where challenging and banal conditions of life take place in proximity to the attentions of power but also squarely in the radar of a recognition that can be provided by other humans... The ‘women’s culture’ concept grows from such a sense of lateral identification: it sees collective sociability rooted in revelations of what is personal, regardless of how what is personal has itself been devalued. It marks out the nonpolitical situation of personal ordinary life as it is lived as a space of contingency and optimism and social self-cultivation. If it were political, it would be democratic. Ironically, in the United States the denigration of the political sphere that has always marked mass politics increasingly utilizes those pretense or ‘post-political’ sites as resources for providing and maintaining the experience of collectivity that also, sometimes constitute the body politic; intimate publics can provide alibis for politicians who claim to be members of every community everywhere.”
About the Elephant in the Room
Peter Conlin interviews Stefan Szczelkun

This is an edited interview with Stefan Szczelkun, artist, organiser and one-time member of the legendary Scratch Orchestra, who set up ‘Working Press: books by and about working class artists’ in the 80s, and more recently organised the Agit Disco project with Martin Dixon, in which people are invited to write a playlist of their favourite political music. He currently teaches part-time at the Open University in England and is a parent. Peter Conlin, originally from Canada, is an artist, writer and organiser, now active with rampART! social centre collective and researching self-organisation in neoliberal times.

The interview, conducted prior to the implementation of the ‘austerity’ cuts, presents views from different political, cultural and academic research and outside the terms of the mainstream media.

Peter Conlin: I think a lot of people when they hear the term ‘class oppression’ would think it an anachronism or something better applied to India or China. While there is an increased interest in class in some academic circles, and the recent finding that Marx has reinvigorated the critical muses of capitalism, this doesn’t seem to be evident in the lived experience of working class people, or is it? But I assume that you think class oppression is alive and well. And so I’m interested in something that you and I feel is very active, formational, and yet considered not to exist. Of course in the UK there is a relation with class, and yet so many day-to-day experiences are nevertheless assumed to be class neutral which results in a kind of elephant-in-the-room situation.

Stefan Szczelkun: Yes it is extraordinary. But that’s the whole thing – when people can’t, or don’t, talk about something, it shows the power of the oppression. If you can’t talk about something then you have been brought up in a box, and you can’t talk about it. So all the questions are vast and some of the issues potentially divisive. The intention of this interview is to contribute a larger discussion about the current lived experience of class that goes off university and is an academic research and outside the terms of the mainstream media.

PC: I understand that your approach to class has often been on a psychological level, trying to understand class in that way. And so I’m wondering, with your experience of approaching class on this personal or affective way, how can we broach class without it becoming merely personal, or without being seen as resentment, an accusation, triggering guilt like a petty personal thing as opposed to a social- and political-personal?

SS: Maybe that is the key problem. I have for years been on part in court cases, and there was something very important in understanding oppression. The practice which was, simply on a very basic level, exchanging time with peers: You talk about what you want to talk about for 20 minutes and then you talk about what they want to talk about for the same amount of time. There was interest from discussing class people to do so and who was common experience. So the protection of having this really clear amount of time, and also, with the general agreement that what was said was confidential and you could say whatever you wanted to and be as emotional as you felt, produced a space to speak beyond the normal boundaries of polite conversation. So there was more chance to expose the affects sides of the class experience. So that was a very important experience in understanding my own ambivalent feelings, but also in being able to witness other people going outside the limits of the conventional discourses.

Also, that segueways into culture and what culture has to do with class, think that fluid expression in all forms relates better to working class culture than anything having to go through the funnel of not only words, but written down words, and written down words that relate to a background of a particular literary tradition. I’ve always thought that was a place where something could happen, where we could get a bit more elbow room, be a bit more expressive...

PC: You have used this term ‘the Definition’ (from the 1990 essay ‘Myths of Class Identity’), and it refers to how working class people are taught to feel inferior. It is a shorthand for a set of scripts and situations that have been internalized, and produce a sense of illegitimacy, and, in doing so, subjugates. So I’m wondering how ‘the Definition’ works today?

SS: To me it’s logically necessary that it must be the case (that we have been conditioned to feel inferior), although not saying I can describe exactly how this happens or have it described. If you could describe the mechanisms of oppression they would fall apart because they would become absurd. And people would say, ‘We can change that’. But as long as they are kept outside our ability to express and define them, we cannot change oppression. But logically it must be the case that something pretty drastic happened to us. All of us human beings with all these fantastic abilities to think and do, but we carry within us this sense of illegitimacy, we can’t do anything to take charge of our own lives. In upper class people you can see the sense of entitlement. Now I would think that every single human being was born with the same potential to take charge of their lives. So if you cannot see that character in most people, where does it go? So something must happen in the lives of young working class people. I don’t think we are conceived as oppressed people – something must have happened in our lifetime. So what is it exactly that happened? It is extraordinary that the mechanisms can be so unknown. The job, as I see it, is to assume that these things did happen and find ways of getting knowledge of them. This is seeing oppression as an affective, psychological, but also mechanical thing that can start to be dismantled once it is known.

PC: So you could say that one side of class culture is to unearth these and to expose what these scripts are, but I’m wondering what are our current examples?

SS: Current examples of what we can’t describe!

PC: But I think they can be described, they are not forever ineffable. You can find really clear examples, lots of songs, a film like Frozen River or books like Carolyn Steedman’s Landscape for a Good Woman. That seems to be a classic example of someone exposing these patterns, but they seem few and far between now.

SS: I think there are examples of artists who have made breakthroughs about this, but the reason we don’t get a picture developing from these pieceselephants breakthroughs is because of this silence that we are trying to talk about. There is perhaps, some extraordinary level of embarrassment about bringing together all the people who have made these insights. As Working Press we published a book on 20th century working class women’s writing after some work had been done on male British authors by Howard Slater. But people did not seem to really get excited about looking at things in this way – there wasn’t any shared vision of how this could lead to a dismantling of oppression, or something! Let’s put all of that stuff together and see what we can learn from it. See what they have already discovered. No, it’s all kept isolated as fragments. My idea with Agit Disco was to put the music that talked politically together and see what that was. As Stewart Home said, ‘There are sheds loaded of agitdisco tracks out there’, it is just that they are enormously diluted in the media.

PC: So in terms of this whole internalized inferiority routine I wonder about the ‘chav’ phenomena as an example of how working class people are seen as a whole. And in part of the class vocabulary of today isn’t it, the class split between the worthy and the unworthy working class?

SS: I guess so. One of our friend’s daughter is in her early teens and very bright, but she talks about people in her school as ‘chavs’ – people who do not have intellectual upwardly mobile ideas; ‘chavs’ take on popular culture without being sufficiently selective about it.

PC: Class is so often the elephant in the room – it’s shaping everything but no one’s saying anything. For myself, some situations in ‘radical culture’ scenes in London, it is sort of a working class environment, but a part of not. There are perma-culture people, radical environmentalists, most of them squatters in their 20s and 30s who cannot really change the existing class terms. They can see it as important, but cannot see their own reality in all that.
There are also some ties with 'Class War', who want 'real working class' and anything outside of that to be something you do. Of course, to see what working class means to someone is a form of research and conversation people think immediately of the 'Class War' style, and it ends there. And then there are middle-class people who are all very 'anti- capitalist' and a bit of a right pain in the says: 'We have all of these bad experiences. Yes, we have had middle class entitlement, and that isn't fair, but it has resulted in a certain confidence and abilities and I shouldn't have to apologise for that, as a group we require those things', or 'Class domination of course exists, but not among us, we're too aware and nice', or just triggering guilt and awkwardness.

People realise the truth in whatever statement but feel all this is too deeply rooted, much of it is beyond our control and was set in motion before we left the womb, so while it is true, 'What can we do? Once I had a guy tell me that I didn't really come from working class background because my mother was a nurse, so the training required to become a nurse severed proletarian ties! And of course having a university degree automatically makes you middle class.

SS: Everyone of us needs to talk about those situations. Everyone has their versions and they need to be talked about! And I guess people, like us, want to break the mould they got into, and need to do a lot of venting their frustration, but he told in no uncertain terms what crap they are talking when they wrongly project that frustration on to others.

PC: In a different way and over a shorter time the elephant in the room situation comes from really narrow ideas of what class is. There is the approach that we shouldn’t focus on class belonging but rather on understanding who we are coming from. J K Gibson Graham who attempts to do a very direct post structural theorisation of class, which ends up in the unfortunate direction of social businesses, but essentially it's a collective, but it also had an aristocratic and elitist prejudice too. Cardew. And it had other kinds of senior people who were part of the early formation of it, and surprisingly they contradicted the notions of structure by saying the youngest should arrange concerts first. So it turned the whole structure around, so those things were there but the actual conscious nature it took turned the whole thing on its head. Something like Briston Gallery was, I would guess, 95% working class, and everyone used to meet in this huge open meeting once a month, and thrash out the next two or three months shows. Obviously people who could speak more fluently, who had good technical skills, could get their ideas supported more than those that were quieter, or silent, or drunk! But we were aware of that and worked against it. It was the most open, democratic situation you could imagine: People did administrative jobs and things like that, but they didn’t really impose themselves on, well, they didn’t draw power away or bring undue attention to themselves. Well they did slightly, but essentially the thing was this very open, democratic entity for about three years, and very interesting results came out of that. So collectively vary a lot really.

PC: A couple of different things come to mind when you say that. I find cross-class alliances are not so easily made in working class groups; they can in some ways almost be a bath in terms of recreating class hierarchies because of a lack of structure. But in other ways I was never a big 'group person' until 7 or 8 years ago, coming out of a highly individualistic society, and from an arts education that is still based on the solitary artist. I felt I sort of came to the end of the road with that. And then I discovered all of those really frustrating organisations! Which I think are invalid, right, but for me this is a different way into a kind of class politics – essentially learning to work together, countering individualism, but it doesn’t come easy, in some ways it comes horribly! We have to figure out how to do it, and often this is almost starting from scratch.

SS: Absolutely, even more, the fact that we don’t have easy ways of working on our class differences, and countering those senses of entitlement in people that tend to dominate, makes those situations very difficult. I think I would run away from a collective formed in that situation going on!

PC: There are lots of good people in the groups I am talking about, but the question is how to introduce class issues into these situations?

SS: Absolutely, often even more, the fact that we don’t have easy ways of working on our class differences, and countering those senses of entitlement in people that tend to dominate, makes those situations very difficult. I think I would run away from a collective formed in that situation going on!

PC: There are lots of good people in the groups I am talking about, but the question is how to introduce class issues into these situations?

SS: Far from it that I suggest what you do. What I would like to see is working class artists, environmentalists, or scientists, coming together and thinking about their own particular area, and how they are affected by the class situation. I tried to do this with Working Press. By inviting any working class artist I met to publish a book, on their own expense but under a collective imprint that supported it, people would, I thought, express what working class artists think and do. I often thought that if 6 or 10 artists got together and said to the Arts Council [England] or powers that be, 'Look, we want this!', we would get it. They would reject it, but it is a way of people saying the same thing is very powerful. Only 6 or 10, I’m not talking about tens of thousands... a few people can be very potent if they can speak fearlessly. But for some reason no one wanted to do that – to really assert ourselves as working class artists. Like some artists didn’t want to be seen as black art, they didn’t want to be labelled, they just wanted to be an artist.

PC: The focus of this interview has been largely on class and affect – emotional domination and resistance, class antagonism from within. I guess this is part of the larger project that has been going on since the late 1960s of getting away from reducing class to economics, seeing culture as a superstructure, etc. But maybe we have gone too far in this direction? We can talk about attitudes, behaviours, mental scripts, humiliation stories, etc, but how much of all this psychological and emotional stuff is tied directly to not having the bucks? Growing up with limited resources means you just cannot entertain certain ideas, you write off entire avenues; and this isn’t due to feeling bad about yourself, negative thinking, what you will, it’s a materialistic thing. We can say the economic and cultural are all tied together, interdependent, but all too often it is one or the other.

SS: Is it all solely held together by economic lack? I think that the effects of economic lack and the past accumulation of the effects of oppression on our psyche are woven together and hard to untangle. If we suddenly got economic equality we would still have a legacy of deep affect issues. But in sum I think it will be difficult to get over that mountain range to achieve economic equality and the end of class division without first doing some other work to recover our ability to think about these things more clearly. This is talking about the effects and affects of class oppression, and then engaging to counter the ongoing reproduction of those conditions. It’s not an either/or really – better to advance on all fronts.

PC: For myself, coming from a working class background with limited resources, there seemed to be this choice between being ultra ambitious, which more or less or more has meant succeeding through the most conventional channels and conservative roles (being the dominated of the dominated as Bourdieu referred to the ambitious working class climber), or accepting more limited horizons. In some ways I am talking about refusing either ‘becoming middle class’ or ‘staying what has been defined as working class’. How do you deal with the ‘career’ question in this respect?

SS: ... AFC Wimbledon is an example of how collective action is struggling with economic necessities that arise because of the success of
the team. Wimbledon was a football team bought by an investor and ‘moved’ from South London to Milton Keynes leaving their fans behind! The fans were a community that existed for generations so when this happened they decided to form their own football club from scratch. The joint resources of a few thousands combined with the eagerness of the many to find another productive skill that was required to set up and run a football club. The fans also pooled money to finance it and paid to follow it to their new club, AFC Wimbledon aka The Dons, is now fan owned. The club is doing well and has now climbed up to the top division. From now on, they may struggle with the rules and regulations that come into play in the higher leagues and their financial implications. Will the club be able to stay fan controlled as well as being successful? Or will they be tempted to take on an investor that will trade capital for control?

In one of career questions, the best and perhaps the most theoretical model I’ve come across is Habermas’ use of system and lifeworld as a binary abstract. When we get into careers to the extent that they become the most important aspect that drives our lives we no longer respond effectively and honestly to the lifeworld which is the direct unmediated communication of our collective desires and needs; the street, the underground, the crowd, even smaller groups. The need to protect career and what comes to depend on it is part of the constraints us. Of course the ingenious ways in which people negotiate this is perhaps one of the main things we should look at.

PC: One thing I didn’t really get across in our talk thus far is what seems to me to be the absolutely dire situation of class politics today, at a time when there is growing inequality with a whole series of indicators of this, such as Danny Dorling’s work.

Who actually identifies as being ‘working class’?

Anyone under 40? Sociologist Bev Skeggs said “I only know what working class is” (possibly only academics are left)6. Or Barbara Peters’ observation, something to the effect of: ‘if you can choose to be working class, you’re probably not’. What vital forces are there to identify with? This connects with the importance of the current economic situation: The professions are harder for working class people to enter into than they were in the 1960s.7

Real incomes of working class people are declining, there seems to be no vital class movement happening. The only class action the mainstream press identifies is the English Defence League and the British National Party. In many ways we need to be a real dead end situation, this is why I wanted to do this interview. Do you see it as dire? In most of the things you’ve said I don’t detect a sense of optimism, which is odd – it’s always bad to panic – but the actual situation seems to be pretty bleak. What’s your take on this?

SS: Maybe having lived through the Cold War when imminent nuclear holocaust seemed quite likely, plus the fact I’ve always chosen to live on the edge of poverty to do art, I don’t know…

PC: Mounting student debt and situations where it is harder for working class people to become journalists or doctors is disempowering, irrespective of negative or positive outlooks.

SS: I think we should resist these slides, but in the longer view I prefer to take an attitude based on strategic class struggle theory. As oppression tends to picture us as powerless I think it is useful to look at the reality of our power both in terms of our historic achievements and our current possibilities to resist. In the latter case I am not under downward trends or do we look at the ways we are doing well, celebrate achievements, and look at what we do have now that we can make use of. It’s a choice of strategies and what is the best use of our time.

PC: Further on this line. One thing I see in you is an identification with the working class – definitely not dogmatic or just some theoretical claim. So many people know who come from working class backgrounds, and who are now in art and the academy, have honed the art of ‘passing’ as middle class. For them the idea of identifying as a working class person would be the kiss of death. With the exception of people like Damin Hirst who haul out their working class-ness, on occasion, as a badge of authenticity. My bind is that in many ways I can’t identify with the very idea of working class that has been identified as working class by any class. My class position is too indeterminate; but no way am I interested in the scary spectacle of trying to pass as middle class. So I can only identify with what is called working class in a few ways. Also my current position – my dilemma or middle class financial situation – is in some way chosen and other ways not. I never know if it is a virtue of necessity kind of thing. But this question undermines class identification, and class! I think that the term ‘working class’ can be taken up as a provocation and strategy rather than being too worried about exactly how it is mapped out at any point.

PC: But maybe this problem of identification is that class politics is going under new terms?

This could be anything from seeing the rights of migration as a class politics to ‘social justice’ approaches. I think the trick for collective forms that we have seen in the past decade, such as recent factory and university occupations, open source production, wiki-forms, and also the collectivism seen in community organisations and self-organised projects – whether this be social centres, co-ops, or supporter-run football clubs. However, a lot of these are lacking in any class language, and generally carefully avoid any overt politics, and not surprisingly, are easily co-opted within capitalism and existing social patterns. Terms like the ‘precariat’ from the Euro Mayday movement, or theoretical concepts like ‘the multitude’ aren’t used by actually existing working class people in the UK.

In terms of activism, who can we identify as active in class issues now: SWP, Class War, organised labour (though unions are expected to usually work for their members’ interests, not for the working class), what else? Does it matter? But maybe the idea is to look for working class culture rather than parties or activist groups. But if we start claiming cultural acts as a putative working class resistance or hidden political agency I am not sure we are left with a social movement. It is too indirect, hedged, all too ‘cultural’.

SS: Maybe there aren’t big flashy organisations but a whole lot of people up and down the country. Maybe we can’t point to groups or activism because of the ubiquitous elephants, but people are there, quietly picking away at their patch.

In terms of looking at working class culture rather than parties or activist groups, I think this could be my next project: To create a virtual festival of working class culture – in all imaginable categories – to seed it with a few names, even reclaim significant venues. Perhaps it could be published with the title of ‘A Guide to Working Class Culture: to all those who doubted its existence(s)’. There is a Festival of Working Class Music1 in Liverpool each year but that is the closest I know of…

PC: I certainly am not too attracted to the tedious game of definitions but there is no way around it. Coming up with terms, names, metaphors, coinage, handles, schema, and all that, is how it works. It is part of a symbolic struggle. We can just let it ride, there is a loss in never asking what it means, and it usually means being defined by some other group, on their terms. If you have a festival of working class music, or whatever, you will have to figure out some kind of criteria of who to invite, the focus of the thing (aside from one’s friends!), etc.

SS: Perhaps friendship is key… I wouldn’t worry about who is and who is not… I always thought of working class culture being a welcoming thing. Funny thought as son of a refugee. But it comes from my mum who felt the exclusion of the class above us that she aspired to and yet had an idea of the East End of London as a warm place that would want her (or me?) back, even though she came from Nottingham. Maybe that’s just a comforting fantasy?

To define things you have to collect them together first… So I’d go about this by intuitively collecting expressive stuff that working class people do. How do we know they are working class? Biography: content of their artform; contexts in which their work is made public; the present day financial situation of each artist; a sense of resonance with the informed collector. Agit Diso is an example: asking (mostly) working class people what music they know. Class politics indeed, music effect them in a political way. The results start to give a sense of what musics are having pointedly political effects in the minds and lives of a quite diverse group of working class writers.

With Working Press I just invited all the people who were activist some way take part. They had to be happy with the imprintsubtitle – books best and about working class artists’ – rather than fitting a definition of being working class. So it was done both through personal meetings and a kind of intuitive agreement.

Notes
1 http://www.stefan-szczelkun.org.uk/phd108.htm
2 http://therafter.wordpress.com/
5 http://www.stevelawhomusiccity.org/
6 http://classwar-uk.blogspot.com/
7 http://phd102.htm
8 http://britton50.co.uk/artists/
9 For Bourdieu the climber is in a further dominated position because they are exposed to cultural inclusions and the concrete instantiations of the positions they attempt to secure. This point is not to be confused with the classic Bourdieuian formulation of the intellectual as occupying a dominated position within the dominant class.

10 According to recent research by the Centre for Research on Socio-cultural Change at the University of Manchester.
11 http://www.workingclassmusic.org.uk
Beyond flurries of current affairs sound and fury, the regressive scale of the UK coalition government’s austerity programme is clear. Massive cuts in state social spending posed as a balance to the banking sector bailout may marginally inconvenience the relatively well-off, but significantly accelerate the attack on the conditions of the working-class begun with Thatcherism and refined under New Labour. Withdrawal of welfare and support infrastructure risk destitution for millions facing punitive sanctions for avoiding starvation wages and quasi-slavery conditions in neoliberal workhouse society. Meanwhile social cleansing in housing and education will leave the respectable poor nowhere to go, their precarious positions propping up the service economy usurped by children of the new middle-classes trading in cultural capital accumulated during Blair’s debt-fuelled consumer growth. And as intensifying proletarianisation and downsizing of insecure professions erodes petty-bourgeois security, status distinctions congenial to flexible affective labour represent one remaining bulwark against ruin.

Structural adjustment’s pitiless downward pressure on the majority’s living standards could conceivably threaten the prevailing commonsense of competitive individualism as preferable and inevitable. Yet the various strata targeted for increasingly intimate disciplining and value extraction remain segmented by market imperatives – ‘good citizenship’ demanding hysterical self-commodification and the infinite infantile acquisition of material trivia. But this collaborative (harry)ness can only masquerade as tolerable lifestyle if its corrosive existential consequences are mystified – accomplished most readily by externalising anxiety about the sustainability of the self and personal relations via the denigration of others. So the recalcitrant underclasses retain residual mass-cultural utility as cautionary tales – their projected vulgarity and irresponsible comportment exemplify an inability to properly adapt to whatever shifts in the privatised status quo promise quick profits for someone this year.

Mainstream moral fascism, forensically dissecting and punishing failure to thrive, is mirrored by reality TV’s gratuitous sadism. Humiliation heaped on willing supplicants subjected to shaming exhortation and judgement echoes the miserable dichotomy of alienating employment and institutional relationships. Trailblazing Cameron’s ‘Big Society’, the sub-Darwinian lottery logic peaks in Channel 4’s The Secret Millionaire – worthy survival under compassionate capitalism depends on fitting the self-serving vanities of elite Western superiority – the mystery thriller structure matching audience puzzlement with the couple’s efforts to conceal from themselves their psychic preponderance of evasion and hypocrisy. Infantile envy wrecking subaltern lives may seem a heavy-handed allegory, even with class and race hatred still fundamental to Eurocentric society. But emotional and cognitive patterns conducive to oppression are nurtured early in the egos and cultures of the established middle-classes, operating precisely through misrecognition and displacement cemented by rationalisation and aestheticisation. Haneke’s nailing of the discreet karma of the bourgeoisie is, nevertheless, tangentially optimistic here. Though surreptitiously embedded in the narrative, the present younger generations’ directly solidaristic rebellion exposes dissembling moral dispositions among elders whose comfort presupposes ignoring the appalling social roots of its constitution.

If pretensions of kinship wellbeing readily implode in hermeneutically-sealed quarantine, neither do surrounding communities escape contamination from its malfunctioning idealisation. In Michael Haneke’s Hidden (France 2005), videotapes of their stylish Paris home are delivered to affluent intellectuals and their twelve year-old son. The partnership unravels as they wrestle with memory, guilt and denial once the anonymous ‘stalker’ also shoots the husband’s childhood home and a grubby high-rise flat – the current address of the son of his parents’ domestic servants, banished to an orphanage when they were among hundreds of Algerian protesters killed by police. Exploring how history dovetails individual biography and social hierarchy, the film punctuates the self-serving vanity of elite Western superiority – the mystery thriller structure matching audience puzzlement with the couple’s efforts to conceal from themselves their psychic preponderance of evasion and hypocrisy. Infantile envy wrecking subaltern lives may seem a heavy-handed allegory, even with class and race hatred still fundamental to Eurocentric society. But emotional and cognitive patterns conducive to oppression are nurtured early in the egos and cultures of the established middle-classes, operating precisely through misrecognition and displacement cemented by rationalisation and aestheticisation. Haneke’s nailing of the discreet karma of the bourgeoisie is, nevertheless, tangentially optimistic here. Though surreptitiously embedded in the narrative, the present younger generations’ directly solidaristic rebellion exposes dissembling moral dispositions among elders whose comfort presupposes ignoring the appalling social roots of its constitution.

The White Ribbon (Germany 2009) finds the same writer-director resuming normal service, hyperbolically delving into the founding fallacies of twentieth-century barbarism but offering no redemption for benighted fruit of rotten ancestry. A feudal Prussian village’s festering network of baronial condescension and cruelly austere burgunderdom births a malevolent 1914 cohort of diversely resentful youngsters countering peremptory patriarchal corruption with murderous delinquency – with blame displaced by default onto long-suffering, if incipiently boshly, local serfs. Immaculate black and white cinematography enhances a metaphorical condensation of conditions facilitating the rise of Nazism and its apparently seamless acceptance, but too much real historical texture is obliterated to convince. Conversely, Babel (USA 2006) overreaches the postmodern puddle, cherrypicking multiple international issues from the progressive zeitgeist. This third collaboration with writer Guillermo Arriaga concludes Alejandro Gonzales Inarritu’s...
depiction of contemporary collisions of fate, from class divisions in Mexico City (Amores Perros, 2000) and suburban US ruminations on the meaning of existence (21 Grams, 2003) to a worldwide web of violent correlation. Dario’s Berber herdsmen are framed as terrorists when an American tourist is accidentally wounded, derailing her husband’s attempt to solve unhappiness, while back home his kids and illegal nanny fall foul of border police after attending a Mexican wedding. Elsewhere a well-off Tokyo teenage dead-mute jumper runs off across the planet with the pointed MacCain of power from the barrel of a gun. Disparities of wealth and mobility determine both the scale of fulfillment realistically sought and the consequent ontology of mistakes and misfortunes. So that when subsistence lifestyle encounters Third World realpolitik, embryonic imaginings of a safer future are snatched up, the neo-colonial service economy exhausts its bondservants in callous class apartheid, with the relatively affluent blind to the human costs of what they take for granted. Their self-oblivion insulated by consumerism allows them neither to connect meaningfully with each other nor avoid trampling over the less fortunate they depend on. The miscommunication hinted in the title flows not from faulty cultural or linguistic translation, but the contradictions of underlying sociopolitical conceptual frameworks shaping perception and action. The characters’ negotiations of corresponding institutional discourses which regulate lives and constrain potential pressure-points devolve the onus onto posturing and decidedly unfunny games, the most poignantly as the film’s raison d’être. Radiating globally through social fabrics, but it scarcely capture deep structures of domination and oppression. The titular middle-aged dentist juggles frustrated sexuality, grief at her mother’s border police after attending a Mexican wedding. Home their kids and illegal nanny fall foul of framed as terrorists when an American tourist is doing the donkeywork. One day she fears she may have accidentally run over one of their youngsters. These are they by the magical promise of infantile simulation of experience, forcing viewers to see anodyne details of their identity.

II. The Welfare of Queens

Fertility Rites and Wrongs

If breeding is a fundamental biosocial function of femininity, its primal mystique occasions fierce desires for control, construction and acculturation. Transcending elite bloodlines, nervousness around reproduction persecutes down hierarchies of privilege, now prompting proliferating technical and discursive regulatory apparatuses. With the affluent increasingly experiencing the practical obstacle of difficulty conceiving, so viable biomass must be harvested elsewhere – accomplished electively in Lisa Cholodenko’s The Kids Are Alright (USA 2010), whose enlightened lesbian mums share sperm donation. Their curious kids inconveniently reintroduce the original anonymously passive male member. Into the house, destabilising its sedimnetation into patriarchal order and unruly earthmotherhood – with resolution partly hinging on the offhand dismissal of faithful subordinates whose distress isn’t even noticed. Götz Spielmann’s Resvaren (Austria 2009), on the other hand, admirably balances a hapless lumpenproletariat’s dangerous virility against the upright, upright sterility generally strangling fulfilment all round. However, vexatious lower-class surpluses of fecundity but fatal shortfalls in other forms of capital almost invariably precipitate unequal exchange – most evidently in Laurent Cantet’s Heading South (France 2006), whose middle-aged female sex tourists mercilessly vampirise young Haitian masculinity in a self-defeating addiction to ephemeral satisfaction. John Sayles’ Casa de los Babys (USA 2003) similarly flays a bunch of middle-income Americans prospecting south of the border among those with no socio-economic option to cash in the fruit of their wombs. The primitive accumulating adopters neither acknowledge the trade’s obscene ethics nor empathise with their benefactresses, so consumed are they by the magical promise of infantile creation. Ben Affleck’s Gone, Baby, Gone (USA 2007) then poses even more baldly the dilemmas arising from differently classed valuations of need and care, when borderline innercity mothers are clandestinely robbed by rogue public servants seeking their own domestic salvation.

Servicing the Domestic Economy

Even given material and cultural wherewithals securely in place, though, holding home and hearth productively together takes its toll. Treating mature order as mere veneer, Lucrecia Martel’s depictions of the Argentinian provincial bourgeoisie see adults as essentially arrogant children, characterising in form and content their aimless anomie and compulsive moral confusion combined with unhinging difference and contempt towards the lower classes. The Headless Woman (2008) further explores conservative pretensions of propriety, excavating fetid depths of family dynamics whose contradictions radiate outwards to overdetermine domination, with distraction and disavowal simultaneously facilitating class stratification’s real violence and concealing its beneficiaries’ responsibility. The titular middle-aged dentist anchors an extended tribe busy with the trivial trials and tribulations befitting their station, barely registering the army of indigenous minions doing the donkeywork. One day she fears she may have accidentally run over one of their youngsters in the rain. Horrified, she daren’t go back to check, sinking into almost catatonic detachment about the damage possibly done – primarily to her flattering self-image. Still, the genteel everyday sheen scarcely suffers apart from her nearest and dearest closing ranks in assurance that the problem has gone away, despite not even existing in the first place – collusive reconciliation eventually being signalled by minor cosmetic renewal, and lo and behold, history is rewritten. Bold technical disjunctions layer allusion and metaphor, with deliberately awkward framing, focus and camera movement obscuring crucial details to powerfully evoke frustrated memory and perception. Flirtation with generic thriller conventions dissolves into pervasive dreamlike anxiety as visual non-sequiturs highlight the dialogic banality and dissembling of milieus devotedly avoiding awareness. The amniotic noise and incongruous pop soundtrack jar any seamless simulation of experience, forcing viewers to see through the eyes of an anti-heroine in abject disarray. Paradoxically, Martel’s surgical precision stems from deep love for her family but hatred of its institutional prototype for societal structure, whereas vagaries of desire ruin individual and collective integrity and cohesion while promising liberation from the dead hand of civilisation as we know it. These dialectics resonate strongly with Argentina’s trajectory – the murderous military Junta years whose horrors resist attention, through to current economic and social crises which once seemed likely to prompt revolution. Yet beyond parochial detail, light is undoubtably shed on universal concerns – not least, the perennially fashionable refusal among middle-classes everywhere to acknowledge the profound political implications of their identity.

Two more South American tales purportedly prioritise insurmountable female perspectives in specifying their parasitisation. Sebastián Silva’s The Maid (Chile 2009) intimately portrays a misanthropic housekeeper whose lifeblood drains in drudgery sustaining petulant employers. Meanwhile Claudia Llosa’s The Milk of Sorrow (Peru 2008) pits indigenous endurance against civilised savagery – first neoclassically in sexual atrocity during 1980s guerilla insurgencies, then neobourgeoisly in the plunder of cultural inheritance. But the latter’s capricious perpetrator is surely the director’s alter-superego projecting a rapacious other. Moreover, both films’ cheerful lower-class life, along with Silva’s infinitely patient mistress, represent classic ruses displacing bad faith – the weight of the world’s phantasmatically rosy glow mitigating guilt while validating objectifying sentiment. No such palliative pathos punctuates Claire Denis’ mordant White Material (France 2009), whose European plantation owner desperately rushes to extract a last harvest of West African coffee before civil war overtakes her. Indentured locals give up the collaborative ghost en masse, her husband has jumped ship, and the son sinks into psychotic stupor – before finally rousing to join drug-added child rebels routinely burchered by government forces whose leaders vie for remaining crumbs. Her imperial majesty thus left barren to face the karmic storm, the end-credit dedication – “To all the fearless young rascals” – nonetheless plants seeds of hope among catastrophe’s progeny even if no nourishable grounds are intellectually identifiable on its biopolitical terrain.
Ill. A Poverty of Aspiration

Downwardly Mobile Makeovers

Fortunately for them, however, Western matriarchs need no longer persevere with patriarchal overdetermination, thanks to feminists’ erosion of male supremacist hegemony. With faultlines prised open in the combined and uneven development of liberal individualisation and commodity fetishism, further lines of flight become available to women of means to seek passionate independent self-realisation without shuddering burdens of guilt for the wreckage. But with newly sovereign selves under injunction to grow and flourish, the flypapered pedestal of the goddess loses its allure and madonna-whore trapdoors their purchase. Archaic romance trajectories then unravel, whereupon costume melodrama revisions reassert the last instance of capital frittered away from the commanding heights once libidinal investment refused to valorise the same old straitjackets. Pascale Ferran’s aseptic Lady Chatterley (France 2006) thus dilutes D.H. Lawrence’s surrender to shameless – complete with burlesque couture, uncourtly of her nineteenth century Devonshire precursor postfeminist fairytragedy in a coffeetable biopic valorise the same old straitjackets. Pascale melodrama revisionisms reassert the last instance trapdoors their purchase. Archaic romance to grow and flourish, the flypapered pedestal of passionate independent self-realisation without become available to women of means to seek commodity fetishism, further lines of flight development of liberal individualisation and of male supremacist hegemony. With faultlines need no longer persevere with patriarchal Fortunately for them, however, Western matriarchs pitched at pressurised middle-class women, whose intelligibly populate entertainment genres pernicious double standards preserve men’s down class-structural snakes-and-ladders may global speculators.

epicurean earthiness to abandon her ice-cold nouveaux riche wife plumping for middlebrow wallowing in exquisite decadence, with a perfect Affairs become even thornier as passage I Am Love (France 2006) thus catalysed her betrayal. The joyous fleshly intensity hostile instrumentality inherent in objectified of legal and financial attrition makes explicit the overconfidence that there is no alternative, calculation. Catherine Corsini’s its heroines occasionally genuinely burn sundry thereby brought home once more. Nevertheless, the screenplay’s apparently proletarian agent provocateur of universal lust herself actually originated in contrasting constellations of incestuous privilege – more poignantly deploying the tragic sins of patriarchal power but no longer pretending to appreciate the positions of those who never harboured such vain hopes to be punctured.

IV. The Socio-Economic Crisis

Failures of Psycho-Social Cohesion

Unsurprisingly, children reared amidst such destructive patterns of intimate passion deeply internalise their elders’ disaffection. Supposedly secure emotional boundaries and channels for catharsis deliver, at best, anxious dissatisfaction bequeathing confused fledging egos guided by neither coherent models for interpersonal fantasy nor intelligible templates organising desire into agency. However, reliably banal economic flows nourishing viciousities of bodies and souls are more readily intuited – with a plethora of personality deviations attributed to cash and blood adornment as manageable social capital, encouraged by media commodifications of callow youthful sexuality. So, reversing American Beauty’s (Sam Mendes, USA 2000) parental regression to class-structural snakes-and-ladders may global speculators.

Leaving (France 2008) endlessly seeks climactic lack of affect after matricidal interruption of a clandestine affair – night stands stems from childish anguish at her woman’s self-harm manifest in perilous one

The Fish Child (Argentina 2009) comparably gestures at conflictually compulsive rites of passage, before gravely inverting into another irreversible insurrection against afﬂuence. A sullen daughter of a seedy Buenos Aires judge prepares elopement with a sexually exploited Peruvian maidervant, but the latter’s framing for his honour’s execution prompts descent into overlookered noir and sex-slave framing for his honour’s execution prompts descents into overwrought The Burning Plain (USA 2008) a woman’s self-harm manifest in perilous one night stands stems from childish anguish at her maternal interruption of a clandestine affair – whereas a sex addict in Clarke Gregg’s Chase (USA 2008) endlessly seeks climactic lack of affect after a manifold exciting and unstable boyhood. But irrespective of the erotic or mundane specifics
Sex and the City from vulgar hardship substituting bitching about in Maren Ade's Liman's stewing in their own solipsistic juices, fanning 2009) or, in Rebecca Miller's upper-class pregnant junkie's refusal of parental 2007) turns the hatchet-job terminally inward venture capital coming unstuck when stockbroker-parents. Olly Blackburn's counterpointing the corrupt downfall of financier (Mexico 2007) degenerates into venal discord kid house-party in Gael Garcia Bernal's Rendering explicit neoliberal narcissism's

Anti Social Bourgeois Orders Rendering explicit neoliberal narcissism's inexorable projection of self-hatred, a rich kid house-party in Gael Garcia Bernal's Deficit (Mexico 2007) degenerates into venal discord countering the corrupt downfall of financier parents. Olly Blackburn's Donkey Punch (UK 2007) then twists teen horror tropes, with sexual venture capital coming unstuck when stockbroker-belt scions lure onto daddy's yacht package-tour lashes of the bananas. And if it's symptomatically how the hard-won spoils of class war are risked for whimsical cheap thrills, Sidney Lumet's The Bank Job (2007) or David Winterbottom's You're Dead (USA 2007) turns the hatchet-job terminally inward – its botched smalltime heist a rancid family collapse whose offspring hyenas pick economic, emotionally battered bodies of hapless petit-bourgeois forebears. But despite tentatively prophesying late-capitalist nihilism's universal disaster, such theatrical experiments rarely generalise circumscribed circumstances to entire dysphemising communities – as hard-boiled down in Michael Winterbottom's The Killer Inside Me (USA 2010).

This adaptation of Jim Thompson's 1952 novel trades dark literary interior monologue for vivid visualisation. Concealing raw hatred, Deputy Sheriff Lou Ford's affably dim Deep-South demeanour discursively bludgeon everyone he encounters – thinly veiling narcissistic self-pity which evades guilt when imagined slights threaten the grandiose paranoia typical of borderline syndromes. So, professional and personal entanglement with prostitute Joyce punctures his character armour, unleashing suppressive hostility and undermining fatally fragile bourgeois romance to childhood sweetheart Amy. Ford's pathology stems from sadistic fathering in a miserable middle-class background, contextualising his sexual proclivities and modes operating, but in mistaking cad-Freudian concepts for moral core Winterbottom expounds the actor's withering cultural commentary. For example, here's the anti-hero's rejoiner to a doomed patty dubbing him fair and honest:

"We're living in a funny world, kid, a peculiar civilization. The police are playing crooks in it, and the crooks are doing police duty. The politicians are preachers, and the preachers are politicians ... The Bad People want us to have more dough, and the Good People are fighting to keep it from us. It's not good for us ... If we all had all we wanted to eat, we'd crap too much. We'd have inflation in the toilet paper industry ... That's about the size of some of the arguments I've heard" (Orion Books edition, 2002, p.105).

Adding that more avowed awareness of how screwed up things are by internalising rules of respectability and scapegoating non-conformists, Thompson plausibly accounts for particular horrors and hypocrisies entirely from serially homicidal sociopathic attitudes, yet ascribing equal culpability to biography and social institutions in narratives.

The film's glossy 1950s West Texas supplants Ford's empathetic understanding with transparent reality – spectacularising extreme transgression to ignore the inherently obsessive nature of mainstream morality and continuity between exploitative societal hierarchy and individual monstrosity. Here, better to masquerade among comforting norms, parroting the psychotic logic of detached compilation which drives 'freaks like Ford as well as other exemplary embodiments of capitalism's congenital antisociality. The decreased of twinned females fatales are thus anatomised with morbid fascination but mere workmanlike graphs in the book illustrating macabre prejudice – Joyce seeking power's covert endorsement, risk expulsing by polite society which demands Amy demanding overt affirmation to avoid the former's fate. His killer's conduct serves for patriarchal relations generally, where the sadomasochistic perversity of domination is reinforced through denial – desire being fatality because it must be repressed and displaced into partial, rigid pathways destined to frustrate and escalate. But with women's passive complicity now explained as complementary personality defects, masculine control materialises as natural order – repeating the fetish's psychological purpose and rewarding feminist complaints of simple misogyny. But Ford also models the constitutive carnivagility of false sex in class stratification to typhoons of state's punitiveness which jeopardise the interests of the powerful. Closing the gap between his distorted apprehensions of his lovers and their own potential abilities arguably marks Thompson's misanthropy, but his pessimism subtly pinpointed bourgeois society's incapacity to reliably apprehend, care about, or benefit those at the bottom of its heap.

V. The Big Bad Society Abstracting small-scale doldrums to wider world disorder, Robert Altman's Gosford Park (USA 2000) indelicately overviews an English stately pastoral standing for the universe of Western incivility – like younger ensemble exponents Paul Thomas Anderson and Iñarittu, only patchily comprehending modernity's manifold Modernist formations. Arrogant overreach also cripples Lars Von Trier's faux-Brechtian Dogville and Manderlay (Denmark 2003 and 2006), creatively aiming to combine imperious ruling-class vanity and stubborn subaltern backwardness. Similarly, pretentious television dramas aspiring to literary novelistic ambit usually prefer pandering to power in mimicking epocal insight, while more trenchant critiques in The Sopranos (David Chase, USA 1999-2007) and The Wire (David Simon/Dennis Burns, USA 2002-8) succumb to analogous strangelands of tragic determinism and naturalistic fixation. At least Red Riding (Tony Grisoni, USA 2009) intradurally exposes the repressive underbelly of mainstream morality facilitating Thackeray's malice – perhaps glimpsing the ex-Soviet Bloc shock doctrine's cannibalistic sex-crime whose criminal David Cronenberg's Eastern Promises (UK 2007) magnifies. But obsessive negative nostalgia and defunct defenses of heroic individuality presenting in the eighties. Yielding resigned fait accompli prefiguring and rubberstamping renewed barbarism. So the present exploration concludes with a film conceived and executed well after the financial meltdown which supposedly changed everything, which also secures within itself a germinal appreciation that a different way is possible.

Juan José Campanella's The Secret In Their Eyes (Argentina 2009) first flirts with derivative cop capers, as retired prosecutor's assistant Benjamin reminisces about his mid-1970s drunken sidekick Pablo, wisecracking like Latin Starsky and Hutchies battling the corrupt Buenos Aires justice system prior to dictatorship. Cheap and cheerful kitsch then darkens, cross-fertilising crime procedural, romance and political thriller to mediate on love and hate, guilt and regret – melodramatically contrasting passions and obsessions and their intense effects where, despite awkward shifts of tone, the structural leviathan leaves many questions unanswered. Stressing the partners' emotional and investigative synergy reflecting shared humble origins, flashbacks revisit a traumatic case of Pablo's: a bereft husband trusted their premature assurance of closure. They eventually identify the psychopath through a combination of his normal appearance with our hero's shy infatuation with aristocratic high-flier boss Irene, who equally hesitantly – neither summoned nor compelled to act. Benjamin's departmental nemesis spurns the killer from life sentence to death squad operations, whereupon his protests precipitate Pablo's assassination. He escapes thanks to Irene's contacts, and back in the present the couple belatedly shuck up. Social and official constraints on perception and comprehension here influence immediate action and retrospective assimilation in individual and collective biography, so this brief encounter with vicious, pernicious history might resonate with anyone's shared suffering. But whose attitudes, situations and potentials count? The lower-class victims had no protection against brutal reality to allow guilty distance from the distress of others – whereas, like his quarry, Benjamin 'got out of jail free'. Representing social democracy's uneasy monopoly of professional morality, our upper-class, our paramours' personal truth and reconciliation helps them imagine that everyone's satisfactorily moved on. But liberalism's compensations secured no justice – their entire shambolic careers as well as private lives, implicitly, wastes of time – estranging the grieving widower to deal alone with the repercussions, in a direct, unreconstructed, mediated manner their worldviews cannot accommodate. Furthermore, specific historical circumstances expose another secret in this story's eyes. Its brave new world of affectionate national partnership, settling unfinished business from a painful past, embarks in 1995. Yet within two years Argentina's caínism capitalism catastrophically crashed, much earlier than elsewhere, leaving millions of lives again in ruins. Wishing away the material foundations of social crisis thus simply increases the likelihood that projected solutions remain flimsy fantasies, destined to precipitate tragedy and farce – as well as actual, misreading the flabby denouement's red herring as redemptive resolution. Unless, that is, ordinary folk forgive mortoring the inability of their 'betters' to safeguard their lifeworlds, and take it upon themselves together to hold the future to account.

www.tomjennings.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk

http://dllcom.org/blog/4271
Once again, people experiencing poverty are represented as among the key ‘problem’ groups in the UK. Nothing new there – since the mid to late nineteenth century, with relatively few exceptions, periods in between, people in poverty have been held up as in some way culpable in their own predicament. So what makes our current period of particular significance? In this paper we explore some of the ways in which poverty is being constructed and people in poverty represented. From the outset we want to locate this within the context of the deep and far reaching assault on public services, social welfare, and on the most disadvantaged groups in society that have recently been unleashed by the Conservative/ Liberal Democrat UK coalition government, accelerating and deepening the 13 years of New Labour attacks which set the stage for this current onslaught.

We are living in the deepest recession and economic crisis since the 1930s, yet for successive governments and for large sections of the media there is another crisis, one characterised as key to the economic ills which grip much of UK society today – as the title of a November 2001 Labour conference had it – ‘Maligning and Illness Deception’1. Underpinning this political discourse is an even more explicitly US-style workfare model, framing ‘the problem’ as one of the individual behaviour of the least powerful, those living in poverty.

This political approach is accompanied by a pervasive media assault on people experiencing poverty – including some of the most disadvantaged groups. The assault comes in a number of formats: A 24/7 news media, both print and television, that seizes on any example of ‘dysfunctionality’ in poor working class communities – which works to both construct and reinforce dominant attitudes to poverty and welfare more generally; while at the same time expressing largely middle class fears and senses of distrust of ‘the poor’. These then serve to harden attitudes to poverty and to justify harsher welfare policies. Alongside these, a range of television documentaries, reality TV shows, and the like, which also allow ‘experts’ to adjudicate on the most disadvantaged groups. The assault comes in a number of formats: A 24/7 news media, both print and television, that seizes on any example of ‘dysfunctionality’ in poor working class communities – which works to both construct and reinforce dominant attitudes to poverty and welfare more generally; while at the same time expressing largely middle class fears and senses of distrust of ‘the poor’. These then serve to harden attitudes to poverty and to justify harsher welfare policies. Alongside these, a range of television documentaries, reality TV shows, and the like, which also allow ‘experts’ to adjudicate on the most disadvantaged groups.

Concurrently, other programmes offer millionaire philanthropists the opportunity to dispense their largess, or very small programmes offer millionaire philanthropists the opportunity to dispense their largess, or very small

Central to our understanding of the contemporary valorisations of ‘the poor’ as ‘problem population’ are a series of anti-welfare narratives and ideologies which are working not only to construct people in poverty as ‘other’, but which operate in different ways to harden public attitudes to poverty and to those experiencing it, as well as paving the way for much tougher and punitive welfare policies. Hardly a week goes by without some media story which purports to depict some episode or crisis around social welfare in some form or another. Indeed, writing this in early December 2010, the front-page headline in The Sun (the most widely read tabloid in Britain) boldly announces: ‘Iain Duncan Smith on benefits Britain’. The article states:

‘Britain’s shirkers’ paradise shame with horde of work shy benefit claimants was blamed last night for much of our economic mess. Paying a fortune to the five million on handouts is a major reason the UK’s deficit soared to a crippling £155billion, Tory minister Iain Duncan Smith told The Sun. The Work and Pensions Secretary vowed to press on with the challenge of ending the benefits culture – which he called a deep embarrassment for a country once known as the workshop of the world. He said: “We have to get Britain to rediscover what was great about this country – the culture of work.”

Immediately, Duncan Smith was again shown to be playing fast and loose with statistics, in particular his claims that out-of-work benefits are “a huge part of the reason” for Britain’s deficit. The numbers are lower than in 1997 and the cost increase since the start of the current recession has been due to rising unemployment118 to the point of the UK Statistics Authority rebuking the Welfare minister over ‘serious deficiencies’ in data use.8

This is about the coalition reconceptualising the language of ‘fairness’11 in the context of a deep economic crisis as means to savage welfare and public services: ‘It is fair that we the hard workers, we the middle classes, we who are striving to do well for ourselves and our families have to bear the brunt of the recession? It is also a story of social welfare in crisis. Such narratives stretch beyond stories of ‘benefits shirkers’ to daily reports about hospital waiting lists, inefficient public sector bureaucracies, through to declining standards of service delivery or the monitoring of such delivery. But over and above these everyday accounts there is a larger set of anxieties around social welfare which focus on particular incidents and episodes as representative of more fundamental problems with social welfare. Three examples serve to illustrate this point:

In 2007 the death of Baby P in London and the subsequent enquiry and trial (of her mother and her partner) in 2009 highlighted like few other cases the absolute horror of violence against and harm of a child within the private spaces of families. This is a story of a failure in welfare services, put firmly at the door of social workers.12 There is little that the right wing media like more than being able to pinpoint the blame for failing public services at the door of apparently failing public sector workers, irrespective of any evidence to the contrary. That child protection systems broke down here or were insufficiently rigorous in the first place is seen as emblematic of much more fundamental problems with social welfare.

The second incident which we highlight concerned the conviction of the so-called Edlington Boys, who were convicted for torturing younger children in Doncaster, South Yorkshire, in 2009. Once more this is set in the context of arguments about the failure of welfare protection and again, as with Baby P, around stories of dysfunctional family life, cultures and lifestyles that are problematic or deviant in some form or another.

However, there are other more potent ideologies...
Poverty, Moral Breakdown and Criminality

Cameron’s above quote both reflects wider discourses around, and re-asserts the alleged relationship between poverty, immorality, and crime. The principle targets of such assertions are the working class poor including those in receipt of benefit welfare. Against the wealth of social scientific research that refutes common-sense claims that crime is more prevalent among the disadvantaged social groups and places.

The ‘problem’ of poor families and communities is told and retold in the print and broadcast media as wreaking havoc on those directly affected but also on wealth and security of the ‘law-abiding majority’. Notions of a ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ poor and assumptions about the trouble the latter create are deeply rooted in social policies and popular culture historically. They have, however, been given renewed currency in the contemporary period in the wake of the worldwide financial crisis in 2008 and, in particular, in the response of governments to this crisis: the justification for spending cuts. Media coverage both follows and shapes official discourses; exaggerated stories and extreme examples used by newspapers are employed uncritically in official pronouncements to justify the claims being made.

Broken Britain and the Dysfunctional Poor

Under both New Labour and now with the Tory-led UK coalition government, there has been a revitalised assault on those living in poverty and in receipt of welfare. In recent years there has been an escalation of what amounts to little more than moralistic scapegoating. There is a renewed political appetite for the condemnation of ‘poor’ places and people. The labels the ‘Broken Society’ and ‘Broken Britain’ have entered wider popular and media discourses to describe the social and moral health of society, and they feature with increasing regularity across a range of stories about public provision and future of welfare. As with many other anti-welfare narratives over recent decades, part of the potency and pervasiveness of the ‘Broken Society’ is that it is a plastic term, able to be deployed without evidence as an explanation for the hugely diverse assortment of social problems.

For Conservatives such as Iain Duncan Smith and the Tory Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) there is an explicit argument that the broken and falling apart society has its roots in ‘broken families’ – teenage pregnancies, increasing numbers of one parent households living in a ‘dependency culture’, feature prominently in such perspectives. The CSJ identifies five poverty ‘drivers’: family breakdown, welfare dependency, educational failure, addiction to drugs and alcohol, and serious personal debt. Stable marriages, authoritative parenting, and a two-parent family life are pinpointed as central to ‘mending’ ‘Broken Britain’, thereby reducing levels of poverty. But for consecutive governments the primary route out of poverty has been propounded as through work. The barriers to employment, however, are regarded as matters of ‘habit’ and ‘culture’ and the unwillingness to be ‘flexible’ and ‘mobile’. There is no recognition of the structural nature of unemployment and long-term economic disadvantage.

‘Broken Britain’ is also portrayed in a ‘broken’ Scotland, or, more correctly, the identification of particular parts of Scotland as symbolic of such. Politicians have painted the stage set of sizeable elements of Scottish society as ‘broken’ and cast ‘Shetland Man’ – a stereotypical working class folk devil – as the perpetrator.

“...This individual has low life expectancy. He lives in social housing, drug and alcohol abuse play an important part in his life and he is always out of work. His white blood cell count killing him directly as a result of his lifestyle and its lack of purpose.”

A key moment in this new mythology was the 2008 Glasgow East by-election. The hotly contested Westminster seat, previously a Labour stronghold, attracted much attention for the power struggles between New Labour – Gordon Brown – and the SNP – Scotland’s First Minister Alex Salmond. However, it wasn’t just the political battle that attracted the spotlight as politicians and the media brought the people of Glasgow East themselves to centre stage for public judgement. The presentation of Glasgow East was overwhelmingly negative, giving voice to a type of thinking that has long featured prominently in the reporting of poverty in disadvantaged urban areas across the UK, in constructing particular locales as ‘problem’ places and ‘welfare ghettos’.

Dramatic newspaper headlines focussed on premature death rates and persistently high and long-term unemployment. The new language of ‘worklessness’ became commonplace as an oversimplification of welfare receipt – use of the term ‘worklessness’ is stigmatising, pays no regard to unpaid labour, and is particularly pernicious as it implies that the ‘lacking’ is on the part of the individual rather than the labour market which is unwilling or unable to provide consistent, decent employment.

Such representations offered inadequate acknowledgement of how the East End of Glasgow suffered long-term economic decline and disinvestment in the second half of the twentieth century, following the dismantling of much of Scotland’s heavy and manufacturing industries. Journalists were quick to comment on other ‘problems’ in the area. In the Independent one commentator spoke of the ‘desolation’ of Easterhouse, and of ‘broken families’, that this is a ‘broken society’.

Glasgow East was viewed as a place of misery, of apathy and despair (read ‘demoralisation’ or moral inadequacy), a place containing ‘wasted highlands’. The Sunday Times journalist Melanie Reid, while perhaps using the most headline-grabbing language referred to the council estates of the East End as ‘Glasgow’s Guantanamo’.17

Media and political commentary acts to influence and shape each other, and visits to the Glasgow East constituency by David Cameron and Iain Duncan Smith played a key role in shaping much of the social commentary of the media during the election. Duncan Smith had visited the area in February 2008 to launch a Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) report, ‘Breakthrough Glasgow’, detailing what he identified as the key problems afflicting the area. Using a language that was soon to be the staple of many of the newspaper reports of the election, Glasgow East was held up to represent the ‘Broken Society’.

Welfare Dependency and Estate Cultures

Across much of this commentary, welfare provision is identified as the factor underpinning a range of social ills:

“For too long, people have been allowed to languish, trapped in a dependency culture that held low expectations of those living there and made no demands of them either. You only need to look at the social housing system that successive governments have pursued to realise why, on so many of these...
The cameras pay attention to the possessions of those experiencing severe poverty (on The Scheme for example) and through the camera’s gaze on the plasma TVs and other goods, use of alcohol and tobacco we learn that few of those in poverty are ‘flawed consumers’ but that, as these are ‘non-essentials’, the benefits which claimants receive must be ‘too much’. Once more the question of the ‘fairness of it all’ is raised, albeit implicitly or by suggestion. In the absence of understanding any further context, the viewer responds with moral indignation and disgust at the ‘binary divide’ between ‘us’ and ‘them’ is reinforced. In the context of increasing economic

confidence/wellbeing market under New Labour, evidenced by the likes of ‘parenting qualifications’. In turn, the messages that we as viewers receive are that, for the most part, working-class people lack aspiration, are lazy, waste national resources and tax-payers’ money – an especially heinous crime when there is an economic crisis and when the middle classes are doing their bit, losing out on child benefit, for instance; they do not have the character to lead a morally upright and crime-free life and lack the wherewithal to improve their condition without being ‘nudged’ in the right direction. But we are also asked to concur on who is designated ‘deserving’ or not. The BBC TV series Saints and Scroungers (in 2009) is one such programme centred on the ‘deserving’ and ‘un deserving’ poor. As its web pages inform us: “Dominic Littlewood follows fraud officers as they bust the benefits thieves stealing millions of pounds every year, while charities and councils track down people who actually deserve government help”. The programme reminds us that ‘we’ law abiding taxpayers are being ‘robbed’ by the ‘scroungers’; we acquire the impression that it is easy to obtain welfare benefits (as evidenced by supposed prevalence of ‘scroungers’ – whereas in 2008/9 £12.7bn of means-tested benefits and £5bn of tax credits went unclaimed).
and social insecurity, flawed consumption and this seemingly pathological behaviour mobilises support for a harsher postcolonial and more punitive construction and asafarism. Furthermore, these messages also work as a warning – inculcating fear that personal ‘failure’ will lead to the flawed and deviant lifestyle of ‘the poor’.

Poverty porn fits with and contributes to the political and cultural zeitgeist. In so doing it constructs destructive film-makers who wish to work outside conventional ‘journalistic rules of relevance’[4], but, moreover, it provides fascination and nurtures revulsion among the viewing public and provides a focus for who is to be ‘blamed’ for our ‘broken society’. Poverty porn provides, or helps to provide, the justification for the ‘remaking’ of welfare along US-style ‘workfare’ models. It fits with the common-place anti-welfarism in the tabloid press. In August 2010, The Sun, for example, ran the headline that ‘Can’s [Can’s] a £5bn Scambuster’. While it is true that some informed commentators in the broadsheet newspapers and on social media quickly pointed out the headline figure of £5bn was misleading – it includes ‘fraud and error’[5] and that fraud in benefits and tax credits combined accounted for the much lower sum of £1.5bn – The Sun was building on ground that had already been well laid; that benefits claimants were ‘takers’, not ‘givers’, and that ‘something needs to be done’. It is important to emphasize that there is resistance to the dominant way people experiencing poverty are represented; there are important challenges to the re-conceptualisation of ‘fairness’ we have described above, and there is support for re-distributive measures as well as critiques of the way many disadvantaged groups are demonized and criminalised. There are examples too numerous to mention of resistance to the way working-class lives and communities are constructed and portrayed in the media, as well as mobilisation against government proposals and policies and the broader ideological framework in which they reside. Acts of resistance remain too frequently met by counter-methods including messages that protesters are behaving in ways that are unreasonable and extreme, but these struggles nevertheless challenge that ‘poverty porn’ and dominant constructions of the ‘Broken Society’ and its core messages are not totalising or all encompassing; rather, they reflect the operation of power.

Not surprisingly, a host of interrelated tensions and contradictions are thrown up here: consumer growth and consumption is heralded as key to national economic salvation, and individual consumption as a sign of having achieved the normative consumer-worker citizen status, a sign of success. Yet at the same time such uncontrolled urges, at least on the part of the most disreputable among ‘us’ who are increasingly also unlike the ‘us’ who are held up as a beacon for others to aspire[6].

In conclusion, the broader narratives of ‘Broken Britain’ with its underpinning alienation to family and community dysfunction is punctuated with heightened anxiety around particular episodes and cases that are accorded so much prominence in the print and broadcast media. In this manner, and in different ways, the Baby P, Edlington Boys, and the Karen Matthews cases (among many others) are regarded as emblematic of welfare failure. Poverty porn in its various formats, with its focus on individual and community failure and wholly de-contextualised from a critical understanding of the broader historical and structural processes that shape working class lives and life chances, reinforce and reproduce the logic of neo-liberal, punitive workfare policies – and, concomitantly, the multi-sectoral restructuring of social welfare policy and social work practices along market principles. The attention accorded to ‘aspirational’ deficits and what are deemed as problematic consumption patterns draws a veil over the contradictions that may be revealed on closer scrutiny. Once more we find ourselves amidst a war on the poor, not on the economic, structural causes of poverty.

Notes
1 A reference to William Hogarth’s 1747 engravings ‘Industry and Idleness’ to illustrate to working children the rewards of hard work and the sure disasters otherwise?
5 Gerry Mooney and Sarah Neal ‘‘Welfare worries’: mapping the directions of welfare futures in the contemporary UK’, Research, Policy and Planning, 27, 3, 2009/10, pp 141-510
6 The Sun, December 1st 2010
9 Reaggrandizing conceptualisations of equality: as ‘fairness’ becomes the lowest common denominator, Brian Barry has stressed equality is of no much value on its own and that we should, rather, be talking about social justice.
11 David Cameron, Daily Mail, December 8th 2008
12 Ian Duncan Smith ‘Why talk alone will never end the misery I saw in Glasgow East’, Mail on Sunday, July 13th 2008.
14 ‘Demmed lies and statistics’, Media Interview, Fraser Nelson, Sunday Herald, July 5th 2009
16 Melanie Reid ‘Labour’s Glasgow fortress may succumb to apathy’, The Times, July 2009.
21 Lawrence, Felicity ‘The first goal of David Cameron’s ‘nudge unit’ is to encourage healthy living’, The Guardian, 12th November 2010 http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2010/nov/12/david-cameron-nudge-unit
22 Ibid.
25 UI, which operates the learndirect brand (covering a range of inter-related services for advice and guidance) also operates a commercial company and runs the UK Online Centre network of community internet access points.
26 ‘Did you see?’, Marketing Week, Vol30, No40, April 10 2007
Also see: http://www.cpsag.org.uk/evi/web/185/LDLA_cancer.htm
30 See: Jock Young The Vertigo of Late Modernity, London, Sage, 2007
32 A guide to what overpayments may now be defined as fraud was rewritten again in September 2010 - part of a system so complex ‘HM Revenues and Customs (HMRC) have begun a tax reconciliation exercise to contact around six million people to tell them that they have either under or over paid tax for 2008/2009 and/or 2009/2010.” http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/g15-2010.pdf
34 See: Jock Young, The Vertigo of Late Modernity, London: Sage, 2007
37 ‘Demmed lies and statistics’, Media Interview, Fraser Nelson, Sunday Herald, July 5th 2009
Real Phôné

Howard Slater

“... it seems that the only thing that counts are the words with which all people manifest that they wish to stay away from being or action.”

– Pierre Guyotat,

It seems that one of the original divisions of social life, one which to some degree defines the practice of politics, could well be that which splits off the domestic and reproductive spheres of existence from the public life. The discriminations that ensue extend to a mode of speech that is permitted into the polis and a mode that, in being akin to animal-like expressions, is excluded. Rancière, discussing Aristotle, states: “the sign of the political nature of humans is constituted by their possession of the logos, which is alone able to demonstrate a communality, the aesthetic of the jested unjust, in contrast to the phôné, appropriate only for expressing feelings of pleasure and displeasure” (p.37).

In some ways Walter Benjamin’s conjectural category of the ‘affective classes’, a class which would be one that sees no regressive wrong in expressing pleasure and displeasure, is one for which phôné would be valued and not sought to be converted into logos simply in order to be admitted into the poleis. If it could be said that the working class was formerly in the position of the excluded and seeking access to representation, then, the retraining of its anger and suffering into the language of politics, has to a degree made it a consensual figure. Its visibility by means of representation has made it into a “figure possessing a specific good or universality” upon which a hoped-for practice is based. Is this maybe why Rancière asserts that “politics cannot be defined on the basis of any pre-existing subject” (p.28) for the pre-existing subject, one that ‘possesses’ the logos, is already a representation made visible, made perceivable, by the currently operative ‘distribution of the sensible’ and as such cannot effect a new “dissensual reconfiguration of the common experience of the sensible” (p.140)?

This may go some way to guessing at Rancière’s reasons for the abandonment of class struggle politics, but it does not explicitly explain what ‘supplement’, what non-existent subject, could come to take its place and effect what could take on a pro-revolutionary hue: the ‘redistribution of the sensible’.

It feels like Rancière’s notion of ‘distribution of the sensible’ is of equal importance for him as such Marxist notions as the ‘ownership of the means of production’ or the ‘redistribution of wealth’ are to a more straightforward socialist means of production’ or the ‘redistribution of the sensible’ as such Marxist notions as the ‘ownership of the means of production’ or the ‘redistribution of wealth’ are to a more straightforward socialist.

As Aristotle: “a lack of strong affection among the citizens is necessary in the interests of obedience and absence of revolt” (p.53) this line of enquiry could extend to cultural critics too. The rash of interpretations of objects and oeuvres has not only a publicity outcome but the ‘cop in your head’ function of prostration and a reducing of the indeterminacy of chance encounters.

Where then for the politics of dissensus? Rancière: “the essence of politics consists in disturbing this arrangement by supplementing it with a part of those without part identified with the community” (p.36). But who could this supplement be and from what community?! Whilst Rancière offers that this supplement could be made up of those “with no qualification to rule, which means at once everybody and anyone at all” (p.53) and whilst this seems less than meretricious, it is still unclear how this ‘non-subject’ would act to ‘redistribute the sensible’ (determine for itself the ‘form of awareness’) or how politics could escape the loop of consensus/disensus. This is further complicated when Rancière, not picking up again the thread of phôné and hence the ‘domesticating’ sphere, seems to be in accord with a form of civilized consensus when he has it that politics is the “making of statements and not simply noise” (p.152); or, in On the Shores of Politics, when he urges individuals to “tear themselves out of the networld of inarticulate sounds”. Taken from the point of view of Benjamin’s prospective affective class, is it not here, in what is definitively and historically excluded from politics, that the ‘non-subject’ arises? The rejection of phôné, of the sound of suffering, of noise and its replacement with the functionality of (theoretic and rhetoric) language, is itself a proviso of permanent consensus and a foreclosure of the strong affect needed for “staging scenes of dissensus”.

In some areas, like music and therapy, noise is a compound of affects, it is that which is not easy to interpret, it is the suffering of the diagnosed and the wailings of the infant that are communicative. In many ways the domestic and productive sphere of health which has never been allotted a ‘sensible’ and in this light the ‘domestic utopia’ of Foucault was one attempt at a ‘redistribution of the sensible’. Barthes suggests that “Fouier has chosen domesticies over politics” and that his penchant for neologisms “upsets the laws of language” (p.37). With this there seems to be a choice that lies beyond choosing the ‘just and unjust’, beyond ‘good and evil’, in that through the domestic comes the noise of desire and the inconsistent expression of suffering that demands that we hear it with all its lawless and inarticulate phôné. These may be grand claims for a polyvalent noise, but it comes to act as a metaphor for the effects of suffering and the self-exclusion from the polis of those that suffer. Where he says that the “the interval between identities”, that Rancière suggests can found the political subject (p.56), than in those ‘non-subjects’ who in attending to the phôné are seeking to refind their species-being through a traumatic refusal of the partitioning effects of identity and the overdetermined forms of awareness that this entails. The ‘domestic and reproductive sphere that has never been allotted a ‘sensible’ (p.37). This may be grand claims for a polyvalent noise, but it comes to act as a metaphor for the effects of suffering and the self-exclusion from the polis of those that suffer. Where he says that the “the interval between identities”, that Rancière suggests can found the political subject (p.56), than in those ‘non-subjects’ who in attending to the phôné are seeking to refind their species-being through a traumatic refusal of the partitioning effects of identity and the overdetermined forms of awareness that this entails. The ‘domestic and reproductive sphere that has never been allotted a ‘sensible’ (p.37).
Rancière’s interest in aesthetics seems to go against what seems to me, in his ‘Ten Theses on Politics’, to be his pro-political aim of injecting discussion into the partition of the sexes. His fight against consensus in this text seems to be about saving politics from ‘annihilation’ (p.14). But, if the required modes of ‘dissensual subjectification’ are such that they should “reveal a society in its difference to itself” (p.42) is it not that we have already taken cognisance of this point? The aesthetic discussions that Rancière engages in seems to have much more to start out from in that they allow for and seem to encourage an impact of the aesthetic on the current ‘distribution of the sensible’. Art, he suggests, can determine our understanding, can upset identitarian equilibriums, can introduce us into the forbidden and can encourage our intervention in the ‘fields of the real’. Aesthetic practice, then, for me, seems to be charged with revealing the difference in ourselves, to revealing and cultivating a sense of society in ourselves (it could consequently be just as much therapeutic as aesthetic).

This troublesome and once pathologisable trait of society in ourselves (it could consequently be just as much therapeutic as aesthetic). Here communism is seen as the founding of the sensible’. Art, he suggests, can engage in seems to have much more to start out from in that it replaces knowing with ‘imbrication of ‘being-there-for’ the partition of the sexes in an aesthetics that Schiller speaks of, then (as well as perhaps hinting at Benjamin’s ‘affective classes’), is maybe not something to herald as such a practice or concern could be ascribed to the ‘determined form of awareness’ in that, following Lacan, perversions could well be seen as “the privileged exploration of an existential possibility of human nature”.

However, leaving aside Fourier’s ideas for a ‘collective prostitution’ as well as the ‘reciprocal polygamy’ of the more risk-unaverse communes, this sensual belonging can be as straightforward as such as to discover in the discontinuities of the unconscious desires that could hazard a guess, at play through and from which group material (for better or for worse) the unconscious desires that is orientated towards phases of singularity rather than carapaced ‘selfs’. Both these spaces are in many ways distant from the polis and political discourse, but maybe it is here in the ‘phôné’ of the ‘determined form of awareness’ in that, following Lacan, ‘metacategorical revol’ to cite Alexander Trocchi. For in both these spaces, as in the unconscious desires that could hazard a guess, at play through and from which group material (for better or for worse) the unconscious desires that is orientated towards phases of singularity rather than carapaced ‘selfs’. 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Protest in the Park
Preliminary Thoughts on the Silencing of Democratic Protest in the Neoliberal Age
Ronan Paddison

On a crisp morning in March 2009, I took part in a demonstration against a proposal to install a novel recreational facility proposed for a major historic park in Glasgow. The brainchild of a commercial company, the 'Go Ape' facility takes participants high into the canopy of the trees and through a variety of experiences that – judging from the opinions of those who had used similar facilities elsewhere in Scotland – is fun. It is an experience which does not come cheap. The issue of financial exclusion aside for now, for the protestors its installation in Pollok Park was intrusive; it was not only that screams of masochistic pleasure would permeate an otherwise peaceful area of the park, but that it would be invasive of one of the last remaining areas of forest within a park which had been progressively eroded through earlier planning developments. This, combined with the fact that Pollok Park is a major green lung which at its northern tip brings a relatively wild space within less than three miles of the city centre, meant that it was perhaps inevitable that the proposal would attract opposition.

The demonstration was fixed by its timing to coincide with the site visit to the park arranged for the councillors on the City’s Planning Committee by the Council’s planners, the purpose of which was to acquaint the decision-makers with the nature of the development and its environmental setting. The demonstrators, of which there were perhaps about 30, were uninvited – and as it turned out unwelcome hangers on. We were a motley crew: from unemployed factory worker to university professor; to mothers with pushchairs, the elderly as well as the young; some were local activists that council officials would describe pejoratively as the “usual suspects”, recidivist participants in local politics, while others had little history of political involvement and would consider themselves apolitical. The common denominator was that all of us were concerned with what appeared to yet another proposal that privatized public space and had, to varying degrees, been involved in earlier protests against Go Ape.

Yet, that we were only there by sufferance, as far as the councillors were concerned, became readily apparent – we had certainly not been ‘greeted’ by the councillors, acknowledged in the sense that Young gives as an essential preliminary to any deliberative process of engagement. At the periodic stops in the visit at which the planner would explain what development was envisaged, the invitation to pose questions was only extended to those on the council. My own attempt to ask a question went unheeded – it was ruled ‘out of order’ – as were those of others. The sole exception to our being treated as non-persons was a single councillor from the opposition.

From the outset as the excluded it was inevitable that our presence would reflect the unequal power relations between elected representatives, their officials and ordinary citizens, reflecting in turn the tensions between representative and participatory modes of democratic engagement. Further, those who control the agenda, and by implication also control what is not on the agenda and thus the realm of representative and participatory modes of to our being treated as non-persons was a single order’ – as were those of others. The sole exception to those on the council. My own attempt to ask the invitation to pose questions was only extended would explain what development was envisaged, to any deliberative process of engagement. At the sense that Young gives as an essential preliminary readily apparent – we had certainly not been far as the councillors were concerned, became

the expropriation of the demos by the elites, but calling on the elites to the elites. Urban populism is not about potential catastrophes “if we refrain from acting of urban life as we know it is under threat from annihilating apocolyptic futures” where the whole of urban life as we know it is under threat from post-political condition that is always externalised and objectified “enemy is always externalised and objectified (in a technocratic-managerial manner) now.” This emergence in the interstices, in in-between spaces that have not yet come under the entrepreneurial gaze of the (local) state or in spaces where effective resistance can be mounted. These caveats are important to bear in mind in the following discussion in which it is argued in two propositions that through the rise of urban entrepreneurialism and its populist advocacy a new style of urban governance may be emergent.

Emergent Styles of Urban Governance: Two Propositions

Proposition 1: Urban Entrepreneurialism as a Post-Political Configuration

It is two decades since David Harvey published his seminal article on the shift towards urban entrepreneurialism as the emergent orthodoxy underpinning how cities were becoming governed in an increasingly globalised and competitive world18; that in “fierce competition with other cities, city governments become curators of their own image as they coordinate aesthetic strategies in a desperate attempt to divert currents of global financial capital.” However, “[contrary to the mainstream argument that urban leaders and elites mobilize such competitive tactics as a response to the assumed inevitability of a neo-liberal global economic order, [Swyngedouw] insists that these strategies in fact construct and consciously produce the very conditions that are symbolically defined as global urbanism.”

Perverts, urban government had been portrayed as an essentially managerial task defined around the processes of planning and managing the city, providing infrastructural, social and cultural services essential to its maintenance, resolving problems of resource allocation, and arbitrating on issues such as planning conflicts. Globalisation and the rise of competitive ‘people’ as a whole, accompanied by the new orthodoxy of entrepreneurial governance defined by the shift from government to governance and the rise of competitive ‘people’ as a whole, accompanied by the new orthodoxy of entrepreneurial governance defined by the shift from government to governance and the rise of competitive

advocates a direct (though fictive) relationship between people and political participation. As such, “populism cuts across the idiocyocracies of different forms of expressions of urban life, silences ideological and other constitutive social differences and papers over fundamental conflicts of interest by distilling a common threat or challenge’, customarily invoking ‘the spectre of annihilating apocalyptic futures’ where the whole of urban life as we know it is under threat from potential catastrophes “if we refrain from acting of urban life as we know it is under threat from

post-political condition is one in which consensus remains often empty, unnamed), supported by the nurturing of disagreement through properly effective resistance can be mounted. These caveats are important to bear in mind in the following discussion in which it is argued in two propositions that through the rise of urban entrepreneurialism and its populist advocacy a new style of urban governance may be emergent.

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entrepreneurialism – expressed through the reproduction across cities of enterprise zones, the advent of place marketing and the competition to hold cultural and sport spectacles, the privatization of public services, the construction of waterfront development – was “embodied in the logic of capitalist spatial development in which competition seems to operate…as an external coercive force”. His arguments were persuasive and, from the place marketing and the subsequent decades, prophetic: urban governance became disciplined into (and re-produced) an assumption that abstaining from competitive urbanism was neither an economic nor a political option. Several decades of urban neoliberal governance have amassed a barrage of evidence demonstrating that its practice is socially divisive and that it has resulted in increasingly polarized and divided cities. This interpretation of urban change is not uncontested – the debate surrounding the cities. This interpretation of urban change is that its practice is socially divisive and that it has neither an economic nor a political option.

Disciplined into (and re-produced) an assumption decades, prophetic: urban governance became and, from the experience of the subsequent ‘artistic critique’ of global capitalist antagonism is pushed into the result of the use of culture to ‘regenerate’ the polis.”

Whereas a genuine politics “implies the recognition of conflict as constitutive of the social condition”: “A true political space is always a site of conflict, in the name of equality, for those who have no name or place … the space for those who are not-All, who are uncounted and unnamed apart of the ‘police’ (symbolic, social, state) order, where they claim their right to the polis.”

As Žižek warns, the essentially “post-political approach has achieved hegemonic currency, the only acceptable line of resistance today is that of supposedly marginalized voices to a mysterious capitalist subjectification through which the fight for the acceptance of such voices. As this resistance itself now becomes the hegemonic norm, the root (Real) of global capitalism against antagonism is pushed into the background.”

Historically, the politics of the city became played out around questions of distribution and redistribution across the dominant political cleavage came to be represented by tribal divisions between Right and Left. Thus, the election of ‘welfarist’ parties saw the initiation of redistributive policies which sought (for example) to ameliorate housing for those who have no name or place … the space for those who are not-All, who are uncounted and unnamed apart of the ‘police’ (symbolic, social, state) order, where they claim their right to the polis.”

It is against this background, particularly since the election of New Labour in 1997, that the post-political configuration to is ‘common-sense’ inevitably requires synthesizing can only tinker with the edges of a system whose core ideological structure remains inviolable.”

Žižek’s contention is that the struggle of multicultural identity-politics has had a depoliticizing effect, a “transformation of ‘politics’ into ‘cultural politics’; where certain questions are simply no longer asked … like those concerning the nature of relationships of production, whether political democracy is really the ultimate horizon, and so on … Take a concrete example, like the multitude of studies on the exploitation of either African Americans or more usually Illegal Mexican immigrants who work as harvesters here in the U.S. I appreciate such studies very much, but in most of them – to a point at least – silently, implicitly, economic exploitation is read as the result of intolerances, racism. …the point is that we now seem to believe that the economic aspect of power is an expression of intolerance. The fundamental problem then becomes ‘How can we tolerate the other?’ Here, we are dealing with a false psychologization. The problem is not that of intrapsychic tolerance…”

In the post-political what is discussed on the political agenda is pre-ordained on the basis of fundamental axioms – e.g. of power relationships, how the economy should be organised – being unquestioned and unquestionable; “to claiming to leave behind old ideological struggles and, instead, focus on expert management and administration … what remains is only the efficient administration of life… almost only that.” Thus, the inevitability of neoliberalism or the status of liberal democracy as the principle around which the processes of government should be organised become unquestionable in the post-political formation (Žižek proposes we instead summon the courage to reject liberal democracy as a master-signifier and a main political fetish, and seek “actual universality”); it achieves hegemonic currency”, conforming to what Bourdieu refers to as the “common-sense of the day” (the doxa, the contemporary unquestionable orthodoxy.

Labhod: “Swyngedouw clearly marks out the topography of the post-political landscape: the entrance of a managerial logic into all aspects of life, the reduction of government to administration where decision making is seen as a question of expertise and not of political position, the diffusion of governance into a host of non-state actors, the brand management of urban space, the advent of place marketing and the competition to hold cultural and sport spectacles, the privatization of public services, the construction of waterfront development – was “embodied in the logic of capitalist spatial development in which competition seems to operate…as an external coercive force”. His arguments were persuasive and, from the place marketing and the subsequent decades, prophetic: urban governance became disciplined into (and re-produced) an assumption that abstaining from competitive urbanism was neither an economic nor a political option. Several decades of urban neoliberal governance have amassed a barrage of evidence demonstrating that its practice is socially divisive and that it has resulted in increasingly polarized and divided cities. This interpretation of urban change is not uncontested – the debate surrounding the cities. This interpretation of urban change is that its practice is socially divisive and that it has neither an economic nor a political option.

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agreement.

For that reason, it is the engineering of this ‘consensus’ configuration that inevitably becomes of concern in this juncture. It is in this juncture that the arguments of the two propositions here elide into one another; that it is through the deployment of techniques of neo-populism that the advantages of consensualism become socially and politically cemented. At the outset, though, Swyngedouw’s account focuses on the political processes that characterize post-politics, the hollowing out of the political dimension: ‘the polis, conceived in the idealized Greek sense as the site for public political debate and democratic negotiation, the spacing of (often) radical dissent, and disagreement, and the place where political subjectivisation emerges and literally takes place, seems moribund. In other words, the ‘political’ is becoming rather while social space is increasingly colonised by policies (or policing).’

But, it is not the sign of post-politics in all Western countries is the growth of a managerial approach to government; government is reconceived as a management function deprived of its proper political dimension121, 122. ‘[T]hat the way the political space is structured today more and more precludes the emergence of the act. But I’m not talking of some metaphysical event… For me, an act is simply something that changes the very horizon in which it takes place, and I claim that the current situation closes the space for such acts.’123 So it is not just that political debate is becoming curtailed as to how supposed collective decisions over specific policy concerns are to be made; rather, more fundamentally, whether those concerns have a site for public political encounter at all. Thus, the premises on which decision making is made become excluded, yet it is precisely in their encounter that democratic negotiation might be transformative. The centring of managerial politics, then, accompanies the marginalization of real political space. ‘The problem for [Ziuk] is that in politics, again, the space for an act is closing viciously.’

At this juncture it is useful to rethread the extent to which urban neoliberal economic governance has become orthodox. Most analysts are in little doubt of ‘the entrance of a managerial logic into all aspects of life, the reduction of government to administration where decision making is seen as a question of expertise and not of political action, the diffusion of governance into a host of non-state actors, the brand management of urban space, the predominance of consensual understandings of political action, the particularization of political demands, and the termination of social agendas in planning.’124 In a thoughtful paper125, the US urbanist Robert Beauregard outlined the rules that defined local economic development as it had developed to date (1993) in the practices of local governments and not-for-profit organizations in the United States. Predictably, the attraction of inward investment was the prime objective repeated across the city. That in the first decade of the twentieth century was the prime objective repeated across the city. Predictably, the attraction of inward investment was the prime objective repeated across the city. The central tenet of the post-political thesis what is critical here is that this evidence points to how policy orthodoxy exists beyond political debate. Added to this is that policies are delivered through the city council, in its capacity as the lead actor amongst the network of partnerships, that economic development policies are delivered. In fact, recent changes by the Scottish Government to the role of Scottish Enterprise, the main quango charged with an economic development role, have further enhanced the role of the state in this debate. In other words, in spite of the assumption that the shift to governance involves the downplaying of the status of (local) government partly in favour of other institutions, recent experience in Scotland suggests that the status of the local democratic institutions based on the principle of representative democracy has been strengthened. Consequently, its ability to claim legitimacy through the electoral system, combined with the powers it has to drive the economic regeneration of the city and the pre-eminence given to the task, gives it the capacity to crowd out the feasibility of debate on the city’s economic future and the means democratic participatory practice, through which it might be expressed. Limiting the boundaries to what is – and what is not – the subject of debate, one means by which economic politics becomes defined, is simultaneously antithetical to the democratic polity; it is what Rancière and others have defined as ‘postdemocracy.

It is not pretended here that the postpolitical thesis is unproblematic. In particular, it undervalues the role of human agency and of resistance in being able to challenge consensus politics. Its claim, then, to outlaw ‘real politics’ is not borne out by empirical reality; all cities have histories of local insurgencies seeking to challenge orthodoxy. Clearly, too, its explanatory power calls out for much deeper empirical scrutiny than is possible here. Yet, the value of the thesis is in its ability to provide clues as to how ‘the protest in the park’ was marginalized by the representatives of the city council as well as the boundaries of consensus politics. Its ability to do so is depend on the second proposition underpinning emergent neoliberal policies in the city.

Proposition 2: Urban Entrepreneurialism and its Emergent Neo-Populism

Future historians of British urban politics looking back at the period between the 1980s and the present day might well come to some surprise that the palpable inequalities following from several decades of neoliberal governance did not result in more opposition on the streets. The poll tax riots apart, together with the Brixton and Liverpool riots in the 1980s and the so-called race riots in northern English towns in 2001, what is paradoxical is that street protest in Britain has become more abstracted (global) and distant (Iraq) problems than it has ones that are rooted in structural inequalities and the local. That in the first decade of the twentieth century Britain is a more unequal society is impliedly evidenced through statistics126. Precisely for that nature cities become the very most visible site of inequalities, where in the finer graining of the post-modern city relative poverty exists in closer propping to relative affluence than was the case in the more spatially coarsely-grained Victorian city, a reality that reflects the progressive gentrifying of the city.

One possible line of explanation (to the absence of street protest) is to be sought in the changing relationships between state, market and civil society marked out by neoliberal governance through the emergence of a new style of urban politics, neo-populism. The linking of populism to neoliberal governance needs careful explanation; conventionally populism and liberalism would be considered as oxymoron to one another. Thus, populism and liberalism tend to have opposite conceptions of the state (maximal vs. minimal), nationality (ethnic vs. civic), social determinism vs. free will and other key dimensions characterising state, market and society. Further, we have already seen how it pretends discursive concept by highlighting its ‘vagueness’127, populism is highly contested.

its most widely quoted examples – from Latin America, in particular, where the political movements aimed at correcting injustices and invoking an appeal to ‘the people’ as in opposition to ‘the enemy’, the exemption from the political project aims to meet redistributive goals, one of the more obvious apparent contradictions it raises in being used alongside neoliberalism. For Weyland128, the re-emergence of new style of urban politics in Latin America – Menemism in Argentina and Fujimorism in Peru – is not accidental, nor is it contingent, but rather it has become employed as a political strategy to accommodate neoliberal governance. The argument envisages two separate but interdependent spheres in which the political (neoliberal politics) exists parallel to the economic, the neoliberal marketplace. Critically, the role of the state is to bolster not just the marketplace but also itself through a strategy which is designed to weaken democracy, in other words to constrain opposition to the neoliberal project.

Such arguments have not been uncontestated including amongst analysts of Latin American politics. Clearly, too, it raises questions as to why electorates disavow the local economic politics of their day, why lower income groups – are willing in effect to vote for it. Tellingly, this is the same question as was posed earlier in relation to British cities, the apparent acquiescence of those less advantaged by neoliberalism who are simultaneously unwilling to challenge it politically, either through the ballot box or through direct action. At this point the neo- populist argument offers explanations through showing how neo-populism is being developed as a new style of politics.

Swyngedouw129 has outlined the methods by which populism has emerged in a new guise as an integral part of the post-political formation. Fundamentally, the state – its component institutions, including city governments – is concerned with the advancement of the neoliberal project and more specifically, for the city, of meeting the exigencies of competitive urbanism. How, then, does city government develop neo-populism as a political strategy? Here, the role of discourse and the employment of language that seeks to persuade that its policies are the only appropriate course of action. In this debate, the threat is global, nearly neocolonial, espressible particularly as it affects everyday. This raises the possibility of talking of the city and the population – or more specifically, the city and the people, and the need for a unified response to meet the challenges of globalization.
By constructing the latter as the ‘enemy’, it lays the blame on a force that is external to the city and by implication diverts focus from the problems of marginalization, injustices or unequal power relations that define the inequalities of the city. Yet, neo-populist strategies do not just emphasize the unity of the people but are active in demonstrating that the people are part of the political process, hence the emphasis given to political participation. How, though, participation is performed – and what participation means – becomes constrained to the agenda needed to pursue economic objectives. What becomes critical is the language, the signifiers, through which developmental objectives become expressed; in Laclau’s terms the use of empty signifiers – constructs such as the ‘European city’, the ‘healthy city’, the ‘sustainable city’, terms that are ‘empty’ in the sense of having one particular meaning but which are capable of alternative interpretation – become a powerful means of projecting visions of the city. As empty signifiers, their apparent inclusiveness – directly reflecting their ambiguity – defies the legitimacy of the being challenged.

As a political strategy it is rich in the suggestions that empirical analysis should include. Simultaneously, it raises questions as to how such a strategy is effective. Limiting the discussion here to the question of participation, the starting point of this paper, it is a question of how, in order to achieve ends drawn within urban governance, a hallmark of New Labour’s urban policies, and one which has been universally remarked upon, has an impact on both ‘citizens’ community’ and ‘community participation’ have been invoked as essential to the transformative process. The development of Area Based Initiatives, normally operating at the neighbourhood or similarly local scale, were introduced; some to address specific needs, health, crime control, education, others with a broader remit, notably the comprehensive renewal, physical and social, of disadvantaged neighbourhoods. All co-opted community participation, albeit in different ways. Cities became criss-crossed by a complex mosaic of neighbourhood governance structures in which local participation was part of a partnership arrangement linked with state agencies. Most observers of the trend have been critical, particularly of the ways in which, while the rhetoric of partnership and collaborative working, the reality was that often local participation came up against the buffers of power within the new ‘regional city’. For its critics, the concept of governmentality was resorted to explanation why and how participation was being emphasized through policy discourse: ‘political fora’ and a ‘policy discourse’; these too are debated, through utilizing and instrumentalising forces of authority other than the ‘State’ in order to govern – spatially and constitutionally – “at a distance” (Rose, 1996, 46). For Foucault, governmentality becomes the means by which the state has been able to progressively establish social control. It becomes exercised through the technologies of power the state has at its disposal, in particular its technical expertise and the skills of the professionals employed by the (local) state. Hence in orchestrating local planning the state’s local planners are able to organize how consultation takes place and offer expert advice, both particularly for their employer, the state. Rose’s post-structuralist analysis offers the connection between discourse and the ability to create governable subjects. Here, discourse is more than language but rather it denotes a way of acting and between discourse and the ability to create power the state has at its disposal, in particular – spatially and constitutionally – ‘at a distance’ authority other than the ‘State’ in order to govern through utilizing and instrumentalising forces of distinction and collective symbolic capital – the process has gathered increasing momentum. This, in turn means that it is a key, and increasingly important, item on the local political agenda. Questioning the strategy is political heresy.

In the efficacious discourses surrounding urban economic development, a consistent trend has been that cities should be ‘attractive’. Whether expressed through urban imagining, soft assets, the quality of place design, the essential narrative is that cities need to be ‘attractive’ places in which to live in order to be competitive. The Go Ape facility, and the council’s support of it, is part of the wider argument of constructing the ‘attractive city’ – while affirming market precursor for common good assets are also there. Judged by its financial benefit for the city, the leasing of the land on which it would be built, the case for support was far from obvious. (Added to this, the city’s existing leasehold rights to Go Ape, a private company, for a relatively long period, 21 years.) Rather, support was publicly expressed in terms of the amenity it would bring and its contribution to the admission of further improvement to the range of facilities in the park. It was anticipated that using the facility would be expensive (c. £20 per person per day entry) and, because of its implications for social inclusion, city officials negotiated that the company offer 2,000 free ‘rides’ to school children from disadvantaged neighbourhoods in the city. Having won a key, the city planning committee and its key officials also energetically argued, would contribute to the quest to making Glasgow a healthier city. It was an argument that connected with another policy trope around which the city’s future is projected through official discourse (‘Glasgow as a healthy City in which to live’), emphasis to which has been given a pronounced fillip since the city’s successful bidding for the Commonwealth Games in 2014. In other words, the facility bolstered the city’s marketing strategy, a key aspect of the official vision of the future Glasgow; the case for its support became indisputable. The city was further pressed as a consensus understanding; it does so through emphasizing the value of local participation as steering policy. As in other British cities, the city administration in Glasgow has innovated a mix of participatory techniques to trow for local opinion including citizens’ panels, opinion poll surveys which monitor council performance and attitudes (as, for example, to the holding of the 2014 Games and the ongoing progress achieved by the city council in meeting objectives) and questionnaires targeted at specific policy fields. In 2005 the (then) Leisure and Parks Department of the city council issued a consultation paper and questionnaire on the problems users had with the Go Ape application – and to other proposals and yet another variant 39/40 | Winter 2010 | 23

48 See, for example, Vila, C.M. (2004) ‘Recycled populism or just more neoliberalism? The myth of Latin American “neo populism”, Revista de Sociología e Política, 22, 135-151.


59 ‘Class, Agency and Resistance in the Old Industrial City’, Andrew Cumbers, Gysa Holms, Kate Swanson, Antipode Vol. 42 No. 1 2010.

60 http://www.gba.uk.org.uk/content/mediumaests/doc/AnnualReport2009.pdf


63 By comparison with other local authorities in Scotland Glasgow is characterized by disproportionately high levels of social deprivation. In 2009 the city accounted for 11% of the nation’s most deprived areas (defined officially where more than 15% of households in a local area are disadvantaged across a range of basic needs including income, employment, accessibility to public services) but only 13% of its population. Nevertheless, there are signs that the city’s problems may be declining relatively; in 2006 the comparable statistic had been 34%.


66 Ibid.


Hierarchies of Risk

John Barker

“We have no future because our present is too volatile. The only possibility that remains is the management of risk. The spinning top of the scenarios of the present.”
— William Gibson, Pattern Reiteration

Risk assessment and management is a serious business these days; professionalised and a major interdisciplinary field of academic research. The European Society for Risk Analysis and the Institute of Risk Management. There are numerous theories and measures, such as the Arrow-Pratt Measure, Prospect Theory, Risk Sciences, Decision Theory, the academic field of Risk Communication, Risk Treatment Plans; and many varieties of Risk and Decision Analysis software. All these have a power of definition. Just as the British government elite elaborated its own distinction between ‘torture’ and ‘inhumane and degrading treatment’, so risk professionals can define what is ‘objective’ and what ‘subjective’ risk; what ‘external’ as against ‘manufactured’. Or, define it as uncertainty multiplied by the impact size of a possible future event.

Risk assessment and management’s fields of interest include: the environmental future; possible effects of new technologies; infrastructural projects; health and safety; both of work and pharmaceuticals; and the world of finance. While a degree of professional knowledge is required in all of these, this is no guarantee that either assessment or management will produce an ‘objective’ outcome. There are interests at work in shaping criteria, interpretation and implementation; predominantly those interests are of capital accumulation via profit making. There is no guarantee that an analysis is disinterested just because it is mathematical.

In recent years this process of accumulation has become more extensive and leveraged (debt-dependent), and in 2007 an internal crisis developed that showed up several of its pretensions. ‘Excessive’ risk-taking and a dependence on mathematicians was blamed, but at a systemic level there was no risk, because banks and other financial institutions were ‘too big to fail’. The notion of ‘moral hazard’ — i.e. that the institutions of finance capital should take responsibility for risk-taking losses — was sidelined, and the risk pushed downwards on to citizens and non-citizens. As for the external risk professionals, auditors, they heard no evil; saw no evil. Either did ‘risk-taking’ take long to be re-established as a virtue by capitalism’s media class. Not long after Goldman Sachs had repaid its government bail-out money a ‘blowout’ profit was reported, with the New York Times commenting: “Goldman has managed to do again what it has always done so well: embrace risks that its rivals feared to take and for the most part, manage those risks better than its rivals deemed possible.”

The melodramatic discourse of ‘teetering on the edge’ and ‘economic collapse’ has changed. Such an event must not happen again is one message, but there is also a shrug of the shoulders which implies a selective version of adulthood of which we’ve suddenly all become members: that’s capitalism for you; got to take the rough with the smooth. The economic and technological future is spoken of in a similar voice. It presents itself, says our neighbour was a cabinet-maker, a welfare state did not just exist but was an article of faith, our neighbour was a cabinet-maker, a

The body of Praveen Vijay Bhakamwar, whose accumulated debts of Rs 40,000 (less than US$ 900) pushed him to suicide.

Photograph by Johann Roussilh

One of many textile and garment factories in Mae Sot, Thailand. In most cases observed, Burmese workers made up the majority of workers inside the factories, as they were cheaper than Thai labour. Photograph by Daniel Cuthbert, 2009.

In June 2010, Foxconn announced its Shenzhen factory in China (which saw wage raises in the wake of a wave of suicides) was too expensive except for iPhone manufacturing.

the world of international ‘free’ trade; where the dice are truly fixed against their interests. The most terrible and stark consequence has been the well-documented suicides over the last decade of a large number of Indian farmers when faced with an unpayable debt. The limits to the efficacy of being simply well-documented, however, is shown in the continuation of this horror year on year. There was some respite in the post loan-waiver year of 2008, but in 2009 suicide numbers rose again. Suicides are especially high amongst cash-crop farmers and, of most, all of cotton farmers using a GM type of cotton seed, BT Cotton, which originated with Monsanto and which was relatively expensive to buy. The promise was of bigger crops and less need for insecticide. But crops did not always materialise, soil was depleted, and secondary pests emerged. One estimate is 120,000 out of 200,000 suicides were committed by BT Cotton farmers, who also faced lower prices for the cotton. Many died by drinking the very pesticide they had bought to improve their situation, but whose cost formed part of the debt; and which, in the medium term, failed to deal with secondary pests. The deaths were painful. The dead-men-to-be screaming for hours on end.

Outside the specific business of GM seeds, neoliberalism rationalises the transfer of risk by contemporary capitalism and also acts politically to enforce it. This was most visible in the attacks on and final demise of several commodity price agreements like that for coffee. This had given a guaranteed price to coffee farmers. Since the 1990s, however, it has been managed by the SMI (Supply-Managed Inventory) system by which suppliers are responsible for maintaining stocks used by the corporate purchaser even if the stocks are held at a port in the purchaser’s own country or its own storage. SMI is a type of modern stock control process enabled by IT development in the 1980s which created Supply Chain Management. It is this, Lyne says, which means: “Risk and cost are passed down the supply chain to those most vulnerable such as developing country farmers, and women or migrant and temp workers.” And on top of this is the sheer power of purchasers: wholesale coffee is an oligopoly and a chain the size of Wal-Mart can micro-manage the market.

More recently, ‘microloans/microcredit’ seen by elites as a method of helping the poor out of poverty at no cost to themselves has, in Andhra Pradesh, become another form of risk-taking rebounding on the poor. The praise accorded to the Gramene bank in Bangladesh made it into a template. It was taken up by conventional Indian banks which financed microlompanies in southern India. The wishful thinking they promoted, risk-without-risk (and profited by), has led to women committing suicide.

In the richer world, too, there is a marked increase in the numbers of vulnerable workers, which has been well documented. Contracts are imposed whereby employer responsibility is vague while the power over conditions, time, and pay are absolute. The starkest form is the zero-hours contract. This is inherently risky for the worker. Being permanently ‘on call’ there is little opportunity to earn a living elsewhere, and if the person doing the work is told to go home after three hours, then to-and-from work transport costs mean the income is derisory. In the UK it is a double-risk for people living on low secure income, especially housing benefit, if they are pushed on to work on such a contract — the time lag between such a job coming to a quick end actually getting housing benefit restored is one of maximum anxiety. It is then, in many instances, a risk to take a job.

Angela Mitropoulos, for one, would say of this working class, and of new forms of insecure work in the richer world, that: “The regular work, or
Besides, a world-wide phenomena. This can take the form of abrupt rises in the price of basic foods, as in 2008, or, in the richer world, somewhere to live becoming more expensive. What is special about the Western working class, however, goes further than this, as Dick Bryan has described: “In the last 20 years or so we have seen the household being treated like a small businesses, have seen labour being treated like capital... It requires households to decide whether to have a 20-year or 30-year mortgage, and at a fixed or floating rate; how to balance the car-loan with the credit card etc. These are complex financial calculations that require taking positions about an unknowable future... being working class now means engaging in competitively-driven risk calculation and management. The IMF has, perhaps surprisingly described households as the global financial system’s depositories of risk as last resort... in terms of risk analysis. Capital has devices to hedge its risks... For workers, labour power cannot be hedged.”

This is the rational individual of classical economics writ large. Only she is an individual who must be an expert in reading the small print, and ruthless in suppressing any wishful thinking. The narrative of the ‘sub-prime’ mortgage ‘crisis’ has had no space for how high-risk lending put all the pressure on borrowers, women most of all, or how, with its deceptive mix of ‘teaser’ rates, variable interest rate, and rescheduling costs, it made this borrowing exceptionally expensive, and the cost often foreclosure and likely homelessness.

III

“The message is that there are no ‘knows’! There are things that we know that we know. There are also known unknowns. That is to say, there are things that we know we don’t know. But there also unknown unknowns. There are things we don’t know we don’t know.”

— Donald Rumsfeld, NATO HQ, 6–7th June 2002

A form of denial when faced with unambiguously ruling class representatives of capitalist states is to laugh at the way they speak. The mangled prose of Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush are obvious examples. Perhaps it gives us a feeling of superiority, or that such people cannot be serious. This is a highly mistaken viewpoint, and is perhaps one that Rumsfeld was conscious of when, immediately after his ‘unknown unknowns’ – which came as a reply to a question – he said: “It sounds like a riddle. It isn’t a riddle. It is a very serious, important matter.” And, as it happened, in this instance, the corporate media also had fun at his expense. Not as a form of denial but rather to smother the significance of what he’d said. For what Rumsfeld’s ‘riddle’ did was to converge neconservative and neoliberal ideologies of risk. On the one hand it provides a generic justification for the pre-emptive strike, while at the same time establishing risk – risk as a capability and characteristic unique to capitalism and its future – as inherent in the world, its technologies, and economy.

In the recent past the promises of the future were visibly deceptive. Describing the New York’s 1964 World Fair, Richard Barbrook talks of how, “Instruments of genocide were successfully disguised as benefactors of humanity”.

The promise was of unmetered electricity from nuclear fusion; a computer revolution meaning more and more free time as a corollary of less work, and space travel. The reality: nuclear weapons, militarized computing, and militarized space use. The consequence: new infections like swine flu are being more dangerous than war. This reintroduced an old language of ‘contagion’, with a psychic underlay of the economic migrant as a disease-carrier, while the language of ‘contagion’, with a psychic underlay of ‘failed states’, and yet they come, apparently, as a nasty surprise to the security part of the business; people like Rumsfeld. Similarly, soon after the UN predicted the end of infectious diseases in the 1980s, structural adjustment policy – austerity – for the poorest people in the world – meant cuts in public health and clean water provision. The consequence: new infections on the rise and the return of old ones, so that by 2000 the World Health Organization was talking the return of infectious diseases as being more dangerous than war. This introduced an old language of ‘contagion’, with a psychic underlay of the economic migrant as a disease-carrier, while during the technical financial crisis it functioned as melodrama, blood-and-sawdust; the ‘risk of contagion’ was a constant and added to the pressure for public money to be used. Since then there’s been the Greek contagion, while the global scare of a non-occurring swine flu pandemic gave more material to a culture of selective fears. Dick Bryan’s conclusions from his analysis of the transference of risk to the working class is that the state can no longer guarantee the future. But the state has other things to do. Aware, underneath the flim-flam, that the casualisation of labour combined with more conditionality on smaller welfare payments might, unlike Bryan’s working class with its financial obligations, produce a class of people with very little to lose, even in the rich world, the UK state is pre-emptively monitoring3 such people seen as presenting a risk. There is no pretence here that this might come as a nasty surprise to the ruling class. Instead, risk, like a form of original sin, is seen as a personality disorder within the individual of a certain class. This was visible not just with new Labour’s ASBOs, prevention orders, and so on, but especially so in ContactPoint, the identity register of all children born in England. Terri Dowty describes it: “What ContactPoint is really doing is keeping tabs on
children, as part of a ‘risk management approach’ to childhood and youth. It tries to spot problems early. There is a belief that future criminals have certain tell-tale signs about them.” Simonsen counted them by numbers: Racism, Power and Risk in a Post-Colonial Context[1] goes further, talking of a Western obsession with risk and criminally evaluating the ‘danger’ posed by potential offenders. She cites what developed in New Zealand whereby models were created to marginalize Maoris and Pacific Islanders, and how they ‘discourse’ and supposedly ‘atheoretical’ mathematics were used to divert attention from an official commitment to the premise of minority criminality. Similarly, Berkeley Law Professor Jonathan Simon has pointed to how ‘bad assumptions’ risk assessment led to both dodgy mortgage sales and to prosecutors grossly overstating the risks to society of a large number of defendants.

For the generic, potential ‘enemy within’ there is as yet no overt ‘war’ rhetoric (the non-legal categorisation ‘domestic extremists’ being heavy with implication), but in the global world it’s all war: against AIDS, drugs, even poverty. It was in the now modified Rumfled’s period as Defense Secretary that ‘environmental’ risks were taken seriously, couched in a language of both war and contagion. In 2003 the Pentagon produced a report on the potential consequences of abrupt climate change for US security, and did so while the Bush Administration was strategically vague on whether there was one such thing. In 2004 the USA approved the largest ever funding project for bio-defense research ($5.45m) under the name of Project BioShield. Meanwhile DARPA (Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency) was working on creating biological sensors that would respond to both known and previously unknown agents to give a warning sign of attack and to develop vaccines and antibiotics.1

These programmes were yet another boost to the US biotech industry, as Melinda Cooper describes. She goes further in her analysis, however, focusing on biotechnology as the perfect material medium for a ‘current’ of neoliberalism coming out of the Santa Fe Institute which renews any notion of equilibrium as either possible or desirable. Cooper uses notions of economist Joseph Schumpeter’s ‘gales of destruction and innovation’ and those of chaos/complexity theory; that the unpredictable and the speculative are essential to capitalism as a model: “Neoliberalism and the biotech industry share a common ambition to overcome the ecological and economic limits to growth associated with industrial production through a speculative reinvention of the future.” It is for this reason that she can identify common modes of capital accumulation are quite comfortable with the unexpected, but in doing so makes one of those quasi-analogies that makes one wary: scientific creativity as an encounter with the unforeseen consequences of the experimental process, and the workings of speculative capital, which, she says, is its ‘reality’. This, for one, simply passes over the long-term planning made by capitalist property interests we are right to be wary not just about to whose benefit and to whose cost, as with GM seeds/crops, but also its irreversibility; master-race fantasies within genetics research and social control in a whole raft of identity technologies and neurosciences. What we look for, short of a social revolution against the dominance of private property interests and the dynamics of capital accumulation, is regulation of such technologies: that agency of some sort can be reached through an accumulation of individual information(s)’ absorption which, through the obstructive and mysterious channels of representative democracy, achieve effective results.

Regulation then, along with a new doctrine of pre-emption and an older one of insurance (with its pretensions to cost-effective pre-emptive capability) is what is offered against an ever riskier world. It is, however, less and less of an offer. Neoliberalism in its breezy voice is constantly chipping away at effective regulation, whether be financial or health and safety at work; at damaging ‘red tape’ which is to the cost of everyone who is not you, the one in the mine or on the oil rig. This goes along with that shrug-of-the-shoulders, treat-you-as-adults voice: ‘You know how it is, regulation is no guarantee, can’t legislate for every circumstance, or for individual error’. The International Association of Drilling Contractors (IADC) has a whole set of Health and Safety Guidelines, while the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Risk entry), describing the “expectation value of a possible negative event”, says: “It is common to use the number of killed persons as a measure of the severity of an accident.” None of this prevented the 2010 explosion of BP’s Deepwater Horizon oil rig in the Gulf of Mexico in which twelve workers were killed.

‘Guidelines’ are the compromise that corporate capital imposes on regulators. In the Deepwater Horizon case key components like the blowout preventer rams and fail-safe valves had not been inspected since 2000, even though the guidelines called for inspection every 3.5 years. The had never been in dry dock. BP and Halliburton knew that the wrong cement had been used to seal the well. What is most disturbing is the evidence that the crew and the company overlooked a negative pressure test on the well hours before the 20th April explosion. What was this; wishful thinking, or a suicidal crew? The Presidential Commission report of November 8th says that warning signs were missed, but that “to date we have not found a single instance where human beings made a conscious decision to favour money over safety.” This misses the point: a survey before the explosion reported several worker concerns but that workers feared reprisals if they reported problems. In a reply that kicks the stuffing out of the banality of the argument as to what is and isn’t ‘conspiracy theory’, Ed Markey, Democrat leader of the Congressional investigation into the event, commented: “When the culture of a company favours risk-taking and cutting corners above other concerns, systemic failures like this oil spill disaster result without direct decisions being made or trade-offs considered.”

“Worker safety cannot be sacrificed on the altar of innovation. We have inadequate standards for workers exposed to infectious materials.”

— David Michaels, director of Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), USA

The limitations of regulation are that much greater within those areas of technological promise and risk which Melinda Cooper has focused on – the bio/techno-industrial use of biotechnology. The promise comes from Tissue Engineering and Stem Cell Research, both of which are characterised by the possibility of the unexpected. Thus, the ‘construct’ works only if it can grow and respond to surrounding tissue after implementation, i.e. to transform in ways that are
not so easily predicted”. There is a danger, she says, of “excess tissue mutability”. With stem cells there is the promise of being transformed into the cell of which ever organ you choose, but as yet no guarantees seem on offer, as the disclaimers in Geron’s reports make clear. One Geron disclaimer reads: “as new technologies these may run the risk of unforeseen side effects for which Geron has no product liability.”

Back in 1998, Swiss Re, the world’s second largest re-insurer, talked of the potential for accidents, demands that “we think the unthinkable and quantify the unquantifiable”. This need to quantify is how private capital deals with risk. Such abstract quantification is also the basis of carbon credit trading. But in this instance where is the pre-emption? Would Swiss Re employ its own specialist health and safety experts to examine every biotech lab? And if so, what criteria would be applied? Do such experts exist? That is, people with highly sophisticated and specialised knowledge, who would – for no doubt less money – work in the health and safety field?

Melinda Cooper does rather force the connection between a financialized world dealing in uncertain futures and the nature of biotechnology, but her take on the overly-capacious notion of Fordism and post-Fordism – despite a seemingly obligatory Deleuzian stamp of approval – is more fruitful. The production of prosthetics, organ transplants and blood transfusion is standardized and regulated (Fordist), she notes, “precise techniques and protocols for freezing, packaging and transportation.” Whereas the bioreactor (post-Fordist) delivers “Not a standardized equivalent but a whole spectrum of variable tissue forms.” She goes on to note that George W. Bush was able to avoid the split between the very different wings of his Republican Party because “there is a highly deregulated market in privately funded scientific research and services exist side by side with an often intensively prohibitive stance on the part of the Federal government.” One consequence, as the New York Times reported, is that “the modern biobank lab has fewer Federal safety regulations than a typical blue-collar factory.”

David Michaels, cited above, said that OHSA rules governing laboratories were not written with genetic manipulation of viruses and bacteria in mind: “The OSHA standard deals with chemicals. It doesn’t deal with infectious diseases.” Regulation in the USA seems to be taking a very long time to catch up with new realities, and in the meantime reports are of a series of deaths and comas among the 232,000 people who have swung up-and-down and up-and-down, as speculative investors divine just how much the Gulf of Mexico well explosion and oil ‘leak’ was going to continue and how it would be quantified. In this dominant narrative of BP’s financial prospects and its ups and downs, there was no room for the death of twelve workers. These swaps were also used to structure Collateralized Debt Obligations. Both they and CDS have taken part of the blame for the banking crisis of 2007-9, of which there has been a recurring talk of ‘excessive’ risk taking. What was supposed to spread risk and make a speculative banking system safer had the opposite effect. In the end it didn’t matter, rather, it turned out, there was in effect no risk. Those melodramas of economic ‘collapse’ were taken at face value, even when other financial instruments were not, and the banks saved by public money. Instead, the result of the ‘crisis’ is to have increased the momentum of the transferral of risk on to government. To effect this shift, the predictions of CDS players have themselves determined the rate of interest sovereign debtors must pay. The result, riskier lives for those with the least economic power and a qualitative increase in class stratification. What stood out in this arcane financial world was that there was a trade “in purchasing insurance against what would in effect be the failure of the modern capitalist system”. Calling this the “End-of-the-World trade”, Donald Mackenzie describes its fantastic assumptions: “No ordinary economic recession or natural disaster short of an asteroid strike could do it”. Neither hurricane or earthquake would bring about such a collapse. All one trader could imagine as a cause was “a revolutionary Marxist government in Washington.” And yet, from a normal price of $2,300 per $10 million, the cost of this fantastical hedge had risen 10-fold by November 2007. Mackenzie ascribed this to “a collapse of public fact”. There was in effect no way to assess what many derivatives were worth. Public facts are almost bound to be rare when the ‘public’ are no more than individualised consumers of information, and yet by having information (or) consume are made complicit in risk-taking decisions. There is of course such a thing as a catastrophe insurance business. There is even a catastrophe bond market which, ironically, gives little weight to predictions. In the face of what is expected to be the worst US hurricane season since 2005, this market is back to normal after the global banking crisis. Reinsurers have transferred $2.35 billion of catastrophe risk to this market where the drawing up of the bonds are conducted by the usual suspects: Goldman Sachs and Deutsche Bank. The luxury insurances and capital market vehicles have been created as a form of insurance against the future. What insurance and its derivatives offers are necessarily partial guarantees against the future.
VII

The realization of this way of dealing with catastrophic risk at once brought to life in a witty and predictive satirical riff in James Kelman’s *You Have to Be Careful in the Land of the Free*. It runs in the first of 30 pages of narrative without flagging6 and scroches a whole sequence of capitalist pretensions in the process. It has as its premise a near-future space of airplane scare stories:

“A common theme had to do with the insurance problem and how you would get a better deal if you accessed a bookie offering odds on yer plane’s survival … Either way you were a winner. If ye survived the flight you lost the bet but if ye perished yer family collected the cash.” This became the *Survive or Perish Option*. Middle America, however, had to learn about bookies, seen as belonging to a dodgy, dangerous world, and this was helped by an attendant ad which begins with “a lil’ feisty lady” who must fly across the USA to look after her grandchildren. However: “Recent disturbances have unsettled so called ‘security’ and in one singular difficult day the feisty old lady’s life savings are gobbled up. The very next day things return to normal and the big boys get their money back with interests. But due to the vagaries of fate the small-time players are left high and dry as usual. The lil’ of feisty lady’s dough is blown. Her entire life savings just upped and disappeared into thin air. How can she take care of the grandkids? A kindly black fellow points her in the direction of a bookie and she finally arrives, bruised and battered at the destination airport in a direction of a bookies and she finally arrives, bruised and battered at the destination airport in a direction of a bookies and she finally arrives, bruised and battered at the destination airport in a direction of a bookies and she finally arrives, bruised and battered at the destination airport in a direction of a bookies and she finally arrives, bruised and battered at the destination airport in a direction of a bookies and she finally arrives, bruised and battered at the destination airport in a direction of a bookies and she finally arrives, bruised and battered at the destination airport in a direction of a bookies and she finally arrives, bruised and battered at the destination airport in a direction of a bookies and she finally arrives, bruised and battered at the destination airport in a direction of a bookies and she finally arrives, bruised and battered at the destination airport in a direction of a bookies and she finally arrives, bruised and battered at the destination airport in a direction of a bookies and she finally arrives, bruised and battered at the destination airport in a direction of a bookies and she finally arrives, bruised and battered at the destination airport in a direction of a bookies and she finally arrives, bruised and battered at the destination airport in a direction of a bookies and she finally arrives, bruised and battered at the destination airport in a direction of a bookies and she finally arrives, bruised and battered at the destination airport in a direction of a bookies and she finally arrives, bruised and battered at the destination airport in a direction of a bookies and she finally arrives, bruised and battered at the destination airport in a direction of a bookies and she finally arrives, bruised and battered at the destination airport in a direction of a bookies and she finally arrives, bruised and battered at the destination airport in a direction of a bookies and she finally arrives, bruised and battered at the destination airport in a direction of a bookies and she finally arrives, bruised and battered at the destination airport in a direction of a bookies and she finally arrives, bruised and battered at the destination airport in a direction of a bookies and she finally arrives, bruised and battered at the destination airport in a direction of a bookies and she finally arrives, bruised and battered at the destination airport in a direction of a bookies and she finally arrives, bruised and battered at the destination airport. 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"Over the last thirty years, capitalist realism has successfully installed a ‘business ontology’ in which it is accepted that everything, including healthcare and education, should be run as a business. As any number of theorists from Brecht through to Foucault and Badiou have maintained, emancipatory politics must always destroy the appearance of the ‘natural order’, must reveal what is presented as necessary and inevitable to be a mere contingency, just as it must make what was previously deemed to be impossible attainable."  

Mark Fisher, Capitalist Realism (Zero books, 2009)

Prologue

As is often the case, events have over taken this article. When I started writing this text, art education was in its familiar state of permanent crisis. Certainly it seemed those working in art education had become quite fatigued by the burden of increased managerialism and its attendant bureaucracy. Now, however, it seems we have accelerated into a new phase.

In occupations it’s been fashionable, with some justification, to accuse critics of resorting to crude economic determinism when discussing culture and education. However, the consequences of massively increasing tuition fees and by extension student debt, especially in the humanities, will, if they go ahead unchallenged, result in the most desperate threat to the development of the world and the increasing, problem of class exclusion within art school values (and perhaps secures its justification, they do point to possible fluctuations in their potential by a blind spot. The majority of these exchanges paid insufficient attention to the ongoing, but now it seems exponentially increasing, problem of class exclusion within art schools and the resultant rise of a homogeneous student body. This is an old story but it's clearly getting worse and will continue to do so – not least due to tuition fee increases and ‘globalisation’ representing the imposition of this neoliberal ideology on a transnational scale. The consequences of this are dire, and not just for art schools. The one solution I can see – as a practicing artist and tutor – is a renewed, reinvigorated, core insertion of comprehensive education values as absolutely essential. To be clear, this isn't just about economics, or questions of diversity, or core values of universal access based on fairness and equality. As fundamental as these are, the assertion here is that a diverse, comprehensive mix of students is absolutely intrinsic to art school culture, pedagogy and by extension the creation of wider culture that it informs.

Art for a few

"The one ‘selecting’ institution that readily agreed to participate did so at the insistence of a senior manager who was concerned that their admissions tutors were ‘trying to make everyone miserable’.

‘Art for a Few’, National Art Learning Network

NALN’s recent report, ‘Art for a Few’, reaffirmed that for art school education issues pertaining to the lack of social diversity are still central; identifying problems relating to continuing overt and covert exclusion (non selection) of students from ‘outside’ the dominant middle class strata. As the report remarks, “the art academy has a deeply embedded, institutionalized class and ethnically biased notion of a highly idealized student against whom they measure students”. While there are many programme run by national agencies that aimed directly at widening the intake of students from outside the ‘normal’ or ‘usual’ selection pools (the report highlights how some tutors refer disparagingly to students as WPs, aka Widening Participation Students), profound problems still persist. The report’s figures (based on those provided by UCAS) state that those students classified as coming from the lower socio-economic classes (referred to as SEC 4-7’s; which range from those in routine occupations to small employers) in Fine Art represent 24-33% of the whole student population (these figures refer to the period between 2004/5 - 2007/8, and compares to 32-34% for all HE students in the UK coming from households classified as SEC 4-7’s). As this is a mean average, this figure needs to be digested with some skepticism. Fluctuations between geographical areas and schools suggest a far more pronounced spiking of those statistics at some schools. For instance, some controversy surrounded this question of class composition in relation to Glasgow School of Art – in 2002 a Guardian article ran with the headline “Glasgow ‘poor’ than Oxbridge,” while a Wikipedia entry in 2008, stating that its class diversity was the third worst in the UK after Oxford and Cambridge, provoked a principled defence of the school’s record on inclusion. While the figures that prompted these articles on the alleged elitism (which related to a 2002 report) were fairly disputed, with some justification, they do point to possible fluctuations within the figure of 24-33% inclusion. For instance, the mean average figures are undoubtedly upwardly skewed by the much higher than average composition of SEC 4-7 category students (working class students) at schools such as Wolverhampton and Sheffield.

The Good Student and the Consensual Ildy

‘Art for a Few’ evidenced how the sample art schools’ admissions procedures were formally and informally prejudiced against students from outside the usual spheres of selection (the
WP student). As the report noted: “Normalised student identity is subtly held in place whilst the WP student is constituted as ‘Other’, deserving of higher education access but only to ‘other’ kinds of discourse and institutions.”

The model of exclusion operating within art school culture at the point of entry into the system then revolves around naturalised assumptions about the right type of student. Notions of good communication skills are, as the report makes clear, “judged from a white, middle class perspective”, which result in judgments […] being enacted, which are claimed to be ‘fair’ and ‘transparent’ and even ‘value free’ but are clearly (from the long list of quite specific and value loaded sets of expectations […] embedded in histories of classed and racialised inequalities/misrecognitions and complex power relations”.

The report goes on to question the increasing emphasis in a certain way in which students from the SEC 4-7 category are prejudiced against. High quality academic qualifications are identified as being a further private domain to which these students may not have been denied – “class-centrist.”

Once they are in…

What the report makes clear is how art schools at the point of selection continue to play an active if largely obscured role in what sociologist Pierre Bourdieu termed ‘cultural reproduction’. Bourdieu’s analysis is fairly explicit in setting out how education plays an active role in perpetuating class-based inequalities between generations (i.e. people from the same backgrounds become artists). For Bourdieu, a key factor is that this cultural reproduction frequently occurs despite the best efforts of those involved in education – exclusion operates often as a result of hidden assumptions on the part of educators.

The mechanisms of cultural reproduction don’t just begin and end at the point of selection. The perhaps thornier question is what kind of experiences those “lucky enough to get in” to art school from outside the usual territories have once they’ve crossed the threshold?

If, “Art for a Few?” reports, there are in many art schools an explicit class-centrist assumption regarding what kind of applicants will make the best future art students, it’s logical that these assumptions (biases) continue to operate with regard to the kind of teaching that occurs within those very same institutions and the kind of education experiences students from the SEC 4-7 groups can expect to experience. The nature of these experiences may well be more difficult to ascertain or ‘prove’, but if the model of the ‘good student’ is a pervasive model, it does seem reasonable to assume that those same internalised categories for grading and assessing students at the point of entry continue to operate internally within the pedagogic culture of the schools.

It’s a shame that the NALN report didn’t explore this further. Issues over inclusion at the point of selection are of course figures that are perhaps well known. But questions regarding these students’ experiences once in art school are more problematic. For instance, researching the social background of students who drop out of art school would be significant. This kind of research might highlight how even in schools where SEC 4-7 indications are high, problems of self-exclusion and the equally problematic one of ghettoisation are high, both as a result of implicit and explicit pedagogic practices. As Bourdieu’s analysis shows, the most effective means of cultural reproduction is the generation of the feeling (‘habitus’) that ‘that’s not for me’. The worry is the distinct possibilities for two tier culture, with clusters/pockets/groups of distinct students, operates within art schools, something which isn’t being flagged up by statistics of inclusion and diversity.

Too Obvious

Within any discussion of exclusion and the need for embedding of comprehensive values within art school culture lies, as detailed in the NALN report, the thorny question of class division, hierarchies and exclusion. The problem of focusing on this issue of class and exclusion within art education is ‘difficult’. Not least because talking about class more broadly is in itself a deeply troubling thing for many to do. Firstly because, as David Harvey has written about at length, there is a pervasive, ideological issue today in discussing class at all. As he notes:

“Progressives of all stripes seem to have caved in to Neoliberal thinking because it is one of the primary fictions of Neoliberalism that class is a fictional category that exists only in the imagination of socialists and crypto-communists. The first lesson we must learn, therefore, is that if it looks like class struggle and acts like class war then we have to name it unashamedly for what it is. The mass of the population has either to resign itself to the historical and geographical trajectory defined by overwhelming and ever increasing upper class power, or respond to it in class terms.”

Elsewhere, Harvey goes on to discuss this ideological sleight of hand in greater detail. The idea of a classless society or the notion that class distinctions are no longer applicable is itself an ideological construct. Few would dispute, and Harvey doesn’t himself, that traditional, simplistic divisions of society into working, middle and upper class are no longer appropriate – for one they fail to take into account the intersections of gender, ethnicity, and sexualities – but to extrapolate and state as many do that class issues have disappeared is at best delusional and at worst ideologically self serving. The statistics Harvey uses to show how much richer the rich have got during the last thirty years are stark.

While Harvey and others identify this naturalising of class inequality and class power as the central, pivotal achievement of the neoliberal project during the last forty years, there has been a far longer silence in the art world as regards class, and it remains the elephant in the room. Rarely does it make any kind of substantive appearance. Although the collaborative group Bank made numerous, highly entertaining excursions into this territory in the mid 1990s, it has generally remained the guilty liberal secret that has propelled many well intentioned participatory practices and socially inclusive public art works. Unfortunately, this ‘traditional’ often embarrassed, guilt-ridden silence that dominates within the art world needs now, a matter of urgency, to be broken within the spaces of education.

To be Comprehensively rewritten (out of history)

Predictably, following Milton Friedman’s and the Chicago boys’ credo, it is every day clearer that ‘crisis opportunities’ are being manipulated and the UK’s current Conservative/Liberal coalition government is implementing Klein’s ‘shock doctrine’. Within the sphere of state education, as many Tories have been gleefully pleased to announce, the opportunities for Conservatives to further privatisate are the ones set up for them by the previous Labour government. Education secretary Michael Gove recently announced plans for schools in England to opt out of Local Authority control point to this – thus green lighting the perennial Tory dream of finally demolishing the state supported comprehensive system. After years of ‘softening up’ by both Tories and New Labour, the comprehensive system, like the health service, is sufficiently on its knees that the ‘sound logic’ of the necessity of applying ‘business ontology’ to education seems likely to be passed without significant parliamentary opposition – who, after all, is there to oppose it?

It is clear to most that this legislation, coupled with what is already known as the postcode lottery, will result in the effective privatisation of the state education system. With a certain historical irony, a moment of crisis is being used to implement legislation that will reverse a previous moment of crisis legislation – which was after all what the Keynesian welfare state emerged from. The consequences will effectively plunge us back to a pre-welfare state, an explicit hierarchical division of education. For an ideology that finds abhorrent the very notion of anything public and outwith (seemingly) the logic of profit, the situation looks perilous. Writing from the context of US education, Henry A Giroux’s analysis is prescient:

“Public schools are under attack not because they are failing or are inefficient, but because they are public, an unwanted reminder of a public sphere and set of institutions whose purpose is to serve the common good and promote democratic ends.”

We are then faced with a pivotal moment, one where the very idea of public subsidised free universal comprehensive education is in danger of being erased from the imagination as a popular viable ideal. The Conservative assault is hardly surprising, but is exaggerated by the manner in which prognosis of its ‘natural death’, its ‘failed logic’ as a system, has been internalised and accepted widely across society – ‘the natural impossibility’ of a comprehensive system owes its success to a similar ideological sleight of hand deployed when (not) discussing class.

Faced with this moment, it is clear to me that issues about exclusion need to be equally embedded alongside all curricula and pedagogic innovation. It is no longer forgivable or strategically appropriate to regard them as appendices to be dealt with by external WP programmes. Tackling exclusion and transforming the culture of art schools are two inextricable sides of the same coin.

Focusing on issues about student satisfaction, or criteria of the latest evaluation regime of Higher Education, resources, or alternatively suggesting the creation of independent small scale artist-run...
art schools, still means that the wrong questions about, and causes for, the current state of art education are being proposed. At present, either the defences of art education are too reactive, and willing to replicate and reinforce the neoliberal agenda, for instance the focus on student mobility, or the dissatisfaction reinforces the paradigm of student consumer and teacher provider; or, as with much of the discussion around new art schools becoming uncritical of the means and consequences of this failure – the extent to which they address this core issue of exclusion and diversity – small scale, privately funded independent art schools as a model would probably face greater challenges than pre-existing schools in terms of diversity.

The second aspect is the inability to imaginatively and publicly state the need for the centrality of comprehensive values as core to any reimagined notion of art school – as being both an ethical, and, more practically, a structural necessity for the informing of artists and art – should also be best understood as part of the bigger problem now facing those who used to, once upon a time, refer to themselves as being of the Left. The problem is the familiar inability to popularise a seductive, imaginative alternative to the bankrupt values of our consumerist-capitalist entertainment-network, which permeates the art education sector too. Just as the Left has largely failed in popularising a set of alternative values (Simon Critchley regards this as fundamentally ‘a problem of naming’), within art education there has been a similar failure of the imagination to express their own values core. The sort of ideological debates that could distinguish between liberalism and democracy. Consequently, there’s been no ‘big idea’ to get behind – e.g. key values such as the principles of cultural pluralism and the means to defend culture from government, and the public interest which that principle is meant to protect – just an increasingly confused, often tribal, partisan defence of something frequently vague, intangible and contradictory. This is a particular problem for art education, as it has always been hampered by its epistemological instability, something that since the breakdown of rigid Modernist certainties has increased. While this loss of authoritative power and control is a good thing, it has created a pedagogic vacuum within art education since filled by the practices that Groys terms an emancipatory project or dimension to education – body snatched by an ‘entrepreneurial’ of the self – finds echoes in other areas. For example, both Nancy Fraser and Power have recently written about the depressing consequences for Feminism of a similar decoupling of its radical politics, or as Fraser puts it, Feminism’s ‘emancipatory edge’10 from its everyday practice, as a result of neoliberalism’s ‘granting’ of its demands. As Power pithily remarks; ‘stripped of any internationalist and political quality, feminism becomes about as radical as a diamante phone cover’.

The fundamental differences here centre on the sort of democratic society one believes in: a technocratic and managerial one, mainly geared towards supporting freedoms of expression hedged within consumerism, or one geared towards freedoms and equalities in public discourse as a whole.

‘Interesting things happen in art schools because of an interesting mix of students’

While a publicly stated commitment to the ideals of a segregated curriculum activity – students or artists sent out on field trips to carry out research into what ‘non art people’ are like. And this is the problem – the extent to which multiculturalism in practice fails to involve interculturalism. If ‘contact with the “alien” or “other” is only ever temporary and structurally prescribed, the kind of interrelatedness, “infection” and “ethical imagination” argued for will at best only ever be transitory. Where art education has, all too briefly, “worked”, the mutual interrelatedness that Groys talks about as being essential for the infection of the artist with foreign bacilli art education ecology, not as a bolted on arranged trip to “foreign lands” or manufactured introductions to “exotic others”. In an education system that is comprehensive, these experiences of being challenged and opened up to foreign subjectivities and identities that contradict who or what you are, and which are frequently antagonistic to our position, is structurally integrated into the fabric of the pedagogy. This bringing together of distinct identities produces the opposite to an “idyll of consensus”12 (a homogenized space of agreement) which is, as the statistics indicate, becoming increasingly common within schools purified of “infections” and “others”.

Missed critiques of multiculturalism

New Labour posted multiculturalism’s “cultural diversity” as an innocuous competition of peers, rather than an unequal struggle, writing over inscriptions of inequality and conflict. However, behind the egalitarian rhetoric, issues of inclusion and control were obscured by talking as if all cultures were distinct and equal. A central issue in the politics of multiculturalism has been its ability to simultaneously recognize and disavow difference – political turmoil has instead been defined as the result of failed communication. Under new Labour, institutions were increasingly called upon to demonstrate their multicultural credentials – who benefitted from the use of multiculturalism as a signifier of institutional value when institutional statements of multicultural purpose have not evidently resulted in tangible changes in staffing or pedagogic practice?

Pragna Patel:

“Sure. And what’s happened in education in the last decade is just a kind of liberal multiculturalism. There’s been no actual antiracism, just ‘recognising diversity’ in different religious festivals – a lesson on how not to tackle racism in schools. One main finding was that the kind of antiracism schools espoused was dogmatic and moralistic with a clear power dynamic. One thing I find frustrating is that the media are discussing these issues in such a compartmentalised
way. There's no attempt to link economics or social deprivation with racism, for instance... But this is not my idea of a civil rights movement. If race is the only focus there's a danger of returning to a hierarchy of oppressions, whereas my experience is that one has to deal with things simultaneously."34

As Homi Bhabha states:

"To question the deployment of 'difference' as a counter to the negatively perceived 'totalisation', is not to deny the fecundity of a notion which insists on subjectivity as polymorphous, community as heterogeneous, social formations as mutable and culture as vagrant. It is to recognise that 'difference' has been diverted by a postmodernist criticism as a theoretical ruse to establish a neutral, ideology-free zone from which the social dissolution and political contest inscribed in the antagonistic pairing of coloniser/colonised, have been expelled. A policy statement defining difference in terms of basic freedoms protected from the planned inequalities of actually existing social regimes and political struggles..."35

The consequence of this consensus — where social dissolution and political contest have been expelled — appears to conform to a broader technologically produced narcissism; as Robert Hassan writes of the negative aspect of new technologies:

"Through the technological ability to be exposed only to what you want to be exposed to, opinions, views and ideas ring as if in an echo chamber. As Sunstein puts it: 'New technologies, emphatically including the internet, are dramatically increasing people's ability to hear echoes of their own voices and to wall themselves off from others'. More than ever there is the tendency to listen out only for 'louder echoes of their own voices'. This presents a major problem as far as a vibrant and diverse democratic functioning is concerned."36

A homogenised student body produces its own form of this broader technologically narcissistically produced paranoia — "I only engage with ideas that reinforce my pre-existing values". It also increasingly appears to replicate the production of consensual islands or ghettos produced by broader social engineering (or apartheid) dominant in our cities and towns ("Where are Britain's working classes?"), These characteristics should be anathema to art school culture. The consequences of encountering distinct subjectivities, namely forms of disensus and antagonism, should exist between students, and occasionally between student and tutor (something which the wholesale adoption of a consumerist ethic absolutely negates again). Indeed, buttressing up against a dominant culture, imbued with an unbrowed sense of being at home within 'real culture'. However, the often antagonistic debates created between these 'others', whose subjectivity is often motivated by being bored and out of place, and those at home within culture, frequently leads to a questioning of dominant modes of thought. In the case of art, it has led to fundamental questions regarding the ontology of art — those radical destabilising acts that, like Conceptualism, produce the sickness Groys argues for; this is mainly because students from outside the strata of 'normal art students' are frequently, because of their backgrounds, more troubled by the divisions in the broader culture that allow for art's "freedom".37

I'm not adhering here to a grassroots fantasy of art schools or some pseudo bullshit version of Cameron's 'Big Society'. I don't have an unbridled faith in the power of students to exclusively develop innovative art, autonomously. Conversely, however, at the moment there's a compensatory overemphasis on pedagogical innovation as the primary, at times it seems exclusive, means of generating energy within the art education system, dominated by critical pedagogical practices from the 1960s is timely, but the power, control and authority, however much it is self-consulting, still lies with the tutor. It's an imposition of change from above, however well meaning. The folly on the part of city managers as to believing they can engineer

the evolution of culture in our cities has been proven to be oxymoronic to 'real' culture. There's a similar danger within the art education system of believing pedagogical and technological innovations are 'engines of change'. Not least, because the notion that art schools and art tutors can envisage the art of the future is as, it always has been, something that should be resisted or dismissed outright.

**Playing God, Social Darwinism**

"This government knows that culture and creativity matter. They matter because they can enrich all our lives, and everyone deserves the opportunity to develop their own creative talents and to benefit from others. They matter because our rich and diverse culture helps bring us together. They also matter because creative talent will be crucial to our individual and national economic success in the economy of the future." Tony Blair

There is another, grimly amusing aspect in which the application of a business ontology rebounds when judged against its own rhetoric: the consequences of neoliberal education restructuring directly contradict the stated aims of its education policy — producing dynamic, original thinkers for the knowledge economy. In this, the actuality of neoliberal practice, as opposed to its ideological rhetoric, is revealed. Its economic aggressive brand of Social Darwinism produces exactly the kind of conditions the neoliberal project was purported to rid society of, namely the stasis and stagnation of flattened, state controlled culture. Harvey elucidates how neoliberal ideology and its beliefs in markets and managerialism are riddled with these kinds of transparent flaws and apparent contradictions. Some are nakedly self-serving, such as a deregulated private banking system that can't be allowed to fail and must be shored up by increasing public debt. What might be presented as flaws in the system, for example those which allow for the unregulated greed of individuals to 'abuse the system', are in reality, as Harvey and Klein have written, intrinsic structural features.

In a 2008 lecture, Judith Williamson referred to our society as being one where a culture of denial dominated.38 Within this culture we actively seek to ‘unknown’ basic facts of our condition — Williamson explicitly focuses on the inability to discuss global warming. We can think of this active unknowing as being another example of the kind of cognitive locking that, as much paraphrased remark by Slavoj Žižek, has meant it's been easier to imagine the end of the world than an alternative to capitalism. Day by day it seems that this denial, this unknowing, this cognitive locking, is loosening its grip. Now, after forty years, the “political project to re-establish the conditions for capital accumulation and to restore the power of economic elites"39 is revealing itself in all its blunt, brutal greed and venality. The hollowness of the rhetoric of freedom, choice and liberty reverberates. The internal contradictions and brutal economic reality of this system are now so publicly known through personal experience as to undermine the authority of the daily common sense pronouncements of ‘capitalist realism’ — nobody needs a degree in economics to see this anymore. What's more, the various window dressing for this system was previously manufactured and bought (easy credit) can no longer deliver on the promise of paying tomorrow for pleasure today.40

Lord Browne's 2010 review of Higher Education funding and student finance, ‘Securing a Sustainable Future for Higher Education’, rehashes the illusion of perfect competition, the sovereignty of consumer choice and demand — its suggestion, that the block grant for teaching be abolished; its overwhelming belief, that social value can only be thought of in the terms of the 'market' and its assumptions. In a scathing overview of the review,41 Stefano Collini made clear the catastrophic consequences and ruinous folly of further adopting the business ontology within higher education — referred to as the requirement to 'meet business needs'.

In Collini's analysis, the report represents a blueprint for a devastating attack on the public role of universities in our social and cultural life. That we are now at pivotal moment is clear for Collini.42 What is at stake here is what is going to happen in the future are to be thought of as having a public cultural role partly sustained by public support, or whether we move further towards regarding them in terms of purely economic calculation of value and wholly individualistic conception of 'consumer satisfaction'.43 He goes on to show how the consequences for universities, which are absolutely core in art school culture. Not just as argument for comprehensive values as being absolutely core values of comprehensive education facing us, means that the imperative to assert the absolute core values of comprehensive education, as polymorphous, community as heterogeneous, the fecundity of a notion which insists on subjectivity to the negatively perceived 'totalisation', is not to deny the actuality of neoliberal practice, as opposed to its ideological rhetoric, is revealed. Its economic aggressive brand of Social Darwinism produces exactly the kind of conditions the neoliberal project was purported to rid society of, namely the stasis and stagnation of flattened, state controlled culture. Harvey elucidates how neoliberal ideology and its beliefs in markets and managerialism are riddled with these kinds of transparent flaws and apparent contradictions. Some are nakedly self-serving, such as a deregulated private banking system that can’t be allowed to fail and must be shored up by increasing public debt. What might be presented as flaws in the system, for example
it is. David Harvey is quite clear about the kind of immediate, imperative choices that need to be made:

“What I think is happening at the moment is that they are now looking for a new financial set-up which can solve the problem not for working people but for the capitalist class. I think they are going to find a solution for the capitalist class and if the rest of us get screwed, too bad. The only thing they would care about is if we rose up in revolt. And while we rise up in revolt they are going to redesign the system according to their own class interests. I don’t know what this new financial architecture will look like. If we look closely at what happened during the New York fiscal crisis I don’t think the bankers or the financiers knew what to do at all, now what they did was bit by bit arrive at a ‘bricolage’; they pieced it together in a new way and eventually they pieced it together in a new way and eventually now what they did was bit by bit arrive at a ‘bricolage’; they pieced it together in a new way and eventually

class interests. I don’t know what this new financial going to redesign the system according to their own capitalist class. I think they are going to find a solution to solve the problem not for working people but for the immediate, imperative choices that need to be


Economic Data Analysis

Notes

1 Jones, K, New labour: The Inheritors in Education in Britain 1944 to the Present, Cambridge, Polity, 2003

2 Harvey, D, A Brief History of Neoliberalism, Oxford, 2007, p. 18.


4 Michael Corriss succinctly pointed out how the internalisation of a key労to student criticisms, “while complaints about poor provision are legitimate, these are often tinged with the value for-money mentality of consumers who aren’t satisfied with what they expect from their purchase. In this situation, it is often the school managers to use the complaints of students against teaching staff, and the ‘customer is always right’ culture does little to accustom students to the experience of robust criticism or demands for intellectual rigor, while the weary hypocrisy of passing students who was being failed by instructors who value the income far more than the educational standards of the teaching staff.” Art Monthly, issue 302


7 Maria Welsh makes this point very well in her contribution to Art Monthly’s special on education. She also counter intuitively, and interestingly, offers some reasons for why we should be optimistic about the changing face of art school.

8 Few independent reports seem to disagree upon the impact of fee increases within the humanities, specifically art school. The information society: A sceptical view


10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 For more information on the Office for National Statistics social-economic classifications of occupation (NS-SEC), see http://www.nso.o.n.uk/about/statistics-classifications/current/ns-sec/index.html

13 ‘Art for a Few’, National Arts Learning Network, 2009; it’s worth mentioning that about one quarter of the classifications/current/ns-sec/index.html


15 ‘Art for a Few’, National Arts Learning Network, 2009; it’s worth mentioning that about one quarter of the applicants do not state their SEC status, so there is a significant ‘unknown’ to these figures.


17 ‘Art for a Few’, National Arts Learning Network, 2009; it’s worth mentioning that about one quarter of the applicants do not state their SEC status, so there is a significant ‘unknown’ to these figures.


20 “The implementation of neoliberal policies in the 1970s led to the national income of the top 1% of income earners in the US soared, to reach 15% (very close to its post WWII share) by the end of the century. The top 0.1% of income earners in the US increased their share of the national income from 15% in 1978 to over 6% by 1999, while the ratio of the median compensation of workers to the salaries of CEOs increased from just over 30 to 1970 to nearly 500 to 1 by 2000”. Ibid. p. 16.

21 Gow’s plans use the rhetoric of choice and freedom to disguise a policy that is highly anti-democratic and actively seeks to increase social segregation – an educational apartheid that wholeheartedly welcomes the end of commitment to ‘mixed education’.

22 A highly inappropriate piece of populist jargon, there is no lottery about it – the ability to send your children to the best schools is clearly directly linked to capital – i.e. having enough money to somewhere expensive.


24 Whether it is an inability or a refusal is worth considering. I’m reminded here of Dave Bock’s argument regarding the problems of the left in ‘Seizing The Reins Of Power’, Art Monthly issue 294.

25 I’m not thinking of a value to come with alternative programmes of social organisation here. That is a problem but the first step, as with Thatcherism in the late 80’s, would be to create a powerful set of core ideals capable of motivating people. At present it’s largely a case of a getting behind a reactive defense. In art school culture, for instance, it would be far more persuasive to demonstrate the appeal of collaboration, collective work, dialogue and constructive dissent as ‘attractive’, as opposed to tribal defence of individualised practices and repertoires.


27 Fraser, N, Feminism, Capitalism And The Cynical Of History, New Left Review 66, March-April 2009 http://newsover.com/uploadsFiles/FacultyNSIR/ Fraser_NLR. pdf


29 The epistemological uncertainty that appears to be simultaneously art school’s biggest handicap and best source for progressive reintegration.


31 With some reservations, I would suggest during the ‘60s, when the class composition of British art schools underwent something of a ‘challenge’


33 Praty, P, Signs of Our Times: Discussion of Homi Bhabha’s “The Location of Culture”, in, The Third text reader: on art, culture, and theory, eds Rashied Araeen, Sean Cubitt, Ziadunn Sardar


35 As Mark E Smith muses on ‘Your Future our Clutter’

36 The idea of a wholesome levelling out of cultural hierarchies has to be taken with a pinch of salt. I can’t use power relations to levels of class exclusion power that easily – it’s mutated for sure, but to say, pace class divisions, that’s it’s disappeared is self serving nonsense.

37 One code: it’s important to be clear that SEC 4-7 students are not figured as inherently radical here, either in the history of British art schools or in any utopian imagined future idle. There isn’t and never has been some pure potent chemical to be added to the mix and stepped back from. Indeed frequently they are, as a consequence of a poor national art curriculum, the most conservative students.


40 Harvey, D A Brief History of Neoliberalism, Oxford, 2007, p. 19

41 See Adam Curtis’ blog for a good overview http://www .bbc.co.uk/blog/adamcurtis/2010/02/bc_economists_ new_clothes.html


43 Ibid.

44 Ibid.

45 Harvey, D, ‘The Crisis and the Consolidation of Class Power Is This Really the End of Neoliberalism?’, Counterpunch, March 13/15 2009 http://www.counterpunch.org/harvey031209.html

Writing in 1965, for example, leading sociologist A.H. Halsey could begin a New Society article with the ringing declaration: ‘Some people, and I am one, want to use education as an instrument in pursuit of an egalitarian society. We tend to favour comprehensive schools, to be against the public schools, and to support the expansion of higher education (Halsey, 1965, p. 13). Other social reformers believed in the idea of the ‘social mix’ – the theory which anticipated the steady amelioration of social class differences and tensions through pupils’ experience of ‘social mixing’ in a new comprehensive school. This very narrow view of egalitarianism could be found in one of Circular to6/93’s definitions of a comprehensive school: A comprehensive school aims to establish a school community in which pupils over the whole ability range and with differing interests and backgrounds can be encouraged to mix with each other, gaining stimulus from the contacts and learning tolerance and understanding in the process (DES, 1965, p.8).’

Comprehensive Education

The 1944 Education Act raised the school-leaving age to 15 and provided universal free schooling in three academically differentiated types of schools – streamed entry was based on “academic intake ability”, selection at the age of eleven via the 11+ exam. Following the 1964 General Election, the Labour government instructed all local authorities to prepare plans for the creation of a common comprehensive education system of new schools, either by amalgamating existing schools or by building new ones. Clyde Chrity, in 2002, reflected on differing conceptions of comprehensive education, past triumphs and mistakes, thus: “…many genuinely believed that a capitalist society could be reformed, and that the new comprehensive schools would be a peaceful means of achieving greater social equality – greater social equality in the sense that working-class children would be able to move into ‘white-collar’ occupations or move on to higher education.”

Building Trenton Comprehensive School, May 1964

Apart from any other considerations, the emphasis on promoting ‘social equality’ or ‘social cohesion’ in a capitalist society was undesirable, if not entirely unexpected, effect of setting up useful targets for the enemies of reform to aim at.”

“The Right To A Comprehensive School,” a lesson by Caroline Bann Memorial Lecture, Clyde Chitty, November 16th 2002
In 1994 the global apparatus of the neo-liberal economic order was solidifying, with the enactment of the North American Free Trade Association; and at the same time contention arose, signalled by the Zapatista uprising. It was also the year that a small but significant book by a US academic, Todd May, was published, called _The Political Philosophy of Post-Structuralist Anarchism_. This book sought to update and renew the anarchist tradition, by highlighting the restrictive strategic and modernist features of traditional revolutionary thought, using some of the theoretical insights derived from poststructuralist thinkers like Jean-François Lyotard, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari.

In the nearly two decades that followed, there has been a noticeable rise in interest not only in anarchism, but also in tracing the similarities and tensions between politically-engaged post-structuralism and anarchism. Amongst the most insightful, prolific and, as a consequence, influential postanarchist thinkers has been Saul Newman. His 2001 book _Bakunin to Lacan_ has been Saul Newman. His 2001 book _similarities and tensions between politically-thinkers like Jean-François Lyotard, Michel revolutionary thought, using some of the strategic and modernist features of traditional anarchist tradition, by highlighting the restrictive This book sought to update and renew the anarchism/postanarchism opened an open commitment to ‘equality’ liberty’ (pp.20,24) or ‘equality’ (pp.144-45), namely the view that freedom and equality are mutually defining rather than in conflict, it does present a number of problems for postanarchism. It does, for example, suggest that the emphasis core to postanarchism, something which Newman's anti-foundationalism rejects. In addition, the principle of 'equality' is a potentially contested and potentially contradictory concept. After all, appeals to equality suggest a shared value structure by which differing phenomena or agents may be assessed as ‘equal’, which is something that Newman problematises with his emphasis on singularities and rejection of moral norms (p.7). As contemporary feminist critics have pointed out, demands for ‘equality’ suggest that there is some standard by which all other entities are measured by, with that gender equality appeal for women to measure up to the standard of ‘man’, and thus privilege the ‘male’. Thus, appeals to equality are actually reassertions of a hierarchy of values and identities.

I am sympathetic to the main thrust of Newman's thesis – “to affirm anarchism's place as the very horizon of radical politics” (p.1) – though it is also slightly problematic, for it assumes that everyone shares the same horizon. It might instead be more accurate to see anarchism as ‘a possible horizon’ rather than the prime or sole discourse and practice of radicalism. The risk of such a clear, but singular, vision is that it potentially closes off routes of political solidarity or risks colonising other thinkers from distinctive radical traditions, claiming them as unconscious anarchists (see for instance p.168, p.176). Although Newman recognises some heterodox movements in Marxism, he places anarchism in opposition to Marxism (pp.11-12, pp.75-76), portraying it as a fundamentally statist and realist political movement. Despite rightly rejecting Leninism, Newman nonetheless adopts an almost entirely Leninist reading of Marx, which risks closing off the possibility of more fruitful engagement between anarchists and Marxists.

A further tension in Newman’s work concerns postanarchism’s location and distance to political modernity. By endorsing poststructuralist anti-essentialism, and a view of power/knowledge as contingent, and a view of power/knowledge as contingent, constructed and situated, Newman suggests that postanarchism offers a substantive improvement on this form of radical politics, whilst at the same time wishing to suggest that post-anarchism is not such a transcendence. Newman views such claims to progress as being a fundamentally part reject – and the other interpretation deals with violent opposition and distributions of power, which anarchists have always engaged in, from the unions and revolutionary syndicates to insurrectionary committees. There is evidence of anarchism in these organisations reflected on how to avoid recreating hierarchies. Newman is right to point out that the state is not just a set of coercive institutions but is evident in the structure of our everyday social relationships. This is a view he finds in the (pre-post) anarchism of Gustav Landauer (pp.161-62), and the last great modernists, the Situationists Guy Debord and Raoul Vaneigem (pp.65-6), who borrowed it from the Marxian-thinker Henri Lefebvre. As a result, it is hard to see what anarchism is bringing here which is not already part of anarchist self-reflection.

By seeking out the aporia in anarchism (even where they are not always present) Newman usefully acts as a spur to re-think postanarchism. Are there perhaps some inherent limits or conflicts in his postanarchism? Whilst sympathetic to Newman’s account of anarchism/postanarchism sharing an open commitment to ‘equality’ liberty’ (pp.20,24) or ‘equality’ (pp.144-45), namely the view that freedom and equality are mutually defining rather than in conflict, it does present a number of problems for postanarchism. It does, for example, suggest that the emphasis core to postanarchism, something which Newman's anti-foundationalism rejects. In addition, the principle of 'equality' is a potentially contested and potentially contradictory concept. After all, appeals to equality suggest a shared value structure by which differing phenomena or agents may be assessed as ‘equal’, which is something that Newman problematises with his emphasis on singularities and rejection of moral norms (p.7). As contemporary feminist critics have pointed out, demands for ‘equality’ suggest that there is some standard by which all other entities are measured by, with that gender equality appeal for women to measure up to the standard of ‘man’, and thus privilege the ‘male’. Thus, appeals to equality are actually reassertions of a hierarchy of values and identities.

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of a Hegelian, modernist mindset that recreates hierarchy (p. 148 and p.153). Newman states explicitly at critical junctures of the book that: “Postanarchism is not [...] an abandonment or movement beyond anarchism. On the contrary, postanarchism is a project of radicalising and renewing anarchism – of thinking of anarchism as a politics.” (pp. 4-5) and “Postanarchism is not a specific form of politics; it offers no formulas or prescriptions for change. It does not have the sovereign ambition of supplanting anarchism with a newer name”, but is rather a “celebration” of anarchism (p.181). This is a position that is consistent with Newman’s arguments against Modernist discourses of progress. However, such assertions seem inconsistent with his other claims that anarchism requires a substantive break, which postanarchism offers – “if anarchism is to remain relevant to political struggles today, it must construct new understandings of politics, ethics, subjectivity and utopia which are not grounded in essentialist or rationalist ontologies and which eschew guarantees of the dialectic” (pp.163-64) – and that postanarchism provides grounds to think of anarchism “in new ways” (p. 182).

Newman seems to suggest that postanarchism provides a way of refreshing or revitalising anarchism. This is an attractive project, but not one without a number of problems. The first is that whilst there is much to agree with in Newman’s account of postanarchism, it is hard to see, bar in its more academically sophisticated mode of expression, how it differs significantly from the internal critiques already part of anarchist and other radical traditions. Take, for instance, Newman’s account of the role of utopianism in anarchist thought, which, like so much of the book, is cogent and insightful. As Newman points out, utopias are not blueprints to determine action, but ways of critiquing present social forms as well as ways to inspire (pp.67-68, pp.138-39). Such an account of utopia one which was already significant in anarchism, drawing as it does from Georges Sorel and Kropotkin. Moreover, the idea that the utopian should be embodied in the practices of the here and now, such as contesting the state in our daily action (p. 163), sounds exactly like the principle of prefiguration – the means embodying the goal – which has been one of the main distinguishing features of anarchism since its earliest classical forms under Michael Bakunin and James Guillaume.

If these characteristics are already present within the classical anarchist canon and within contemporary (non-post prefixed) anarchist tradition, what does Newman’s postanarchism add that is new? It is, first, a welcome reassertion that fluid, anti-hierarchical practices are already a core feature of anarchism. Newman’s postanarchism also rightly highlights the ethical in radical politics, another longstanding feature of anarchism. Here, though, Newman cites Emmanuel Levinas and the concept of the encounter. This posits that in dealing with others we unsettle the sovereignty of our ego and also disrupt others with whom we engage; in relation to others, we have therefore a “radical responsibility for the other” (p. 55). The encounter between academic poststructuralism might radically unsettle anarchism, but rather than produce new anti-hierarchical social relations, it might simply act to assert the sovereignty of the academic discourse. Radical discourses have gone this way before. Terry Eagleton laments that when Marxism encountered academia its trajectory was altered: Socialist analysis which was a resource “among dockers and factory workers [h]as turned into a mildly interesting way of analysing Wuthering Heights” (After Theory, p.44). In this case the danger is that whilst poststructuralist engagements provide useful aids for encouraging anarchists to reflect on their practice, they might override anarchism into a discourse associated only with those located in particular educationally-privileged locations and thereby domesticate and dominate (like the reviled vanguard) radical activity. It is this fear that explains some of the hostility to postanarchism and poststructuralism in anarchist forums less centred on academe (see for instance libcom.org).

There are mitigating factors against this academic colonisation. Newman clarifies – and therefore democratises – some complex debates from within the realms of high theory, making them more accessible to the non-specialist reader. He deserves at least a pint for making sense of the Simon Critchley versus Slavoj Žižek dispute (pp. 111-15); for making the argument between Ralph Milliband and Nico Pouliantzas clear and relevant (pp. 76-77), and for explaining and critiquing potentially obscure concepts such as Negri’s constituent and constituted power (pp. 87-89) and Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe’s post-socialism (pp.89-93).

Also attractive is Newman’s optimism, drawing from examples of militancy like the aforementioned Zapatistas, peasant and landless protection of the commons in Brazil, Peru and West Bengal and factory occupations in Europe (pp. 174-75). It is a refreshing change from discourses of defeat, retreat and retreatenment to hear a knowledgeable theorist propose “that an insurgent political space has already emerged, characterised by new experimental forms of political practice and organisation that are anarchistic in orientation” (pp. 167-68). If he is right it will make for more interesting times.

This article is based on the review that appeared in Anarchist Studies Vol. 16 No. 2 (Autumn 2010). Benjamin Franks is the author of Rebel Alliances: The means and ends of contemporary British anarchisms (AK Press, 2006) and co-editor of Anarchism and Moral Philosophy (Palgrave, due out October 2010).
In his recent review of Alfredo Cramerotti’s *Aesthetic Journalism: How to Inform Without Informing*, David Packer notes that the term ‘aesthetic journalism’ is “alternately deployed throughout the book”, recalling “the way that ‘Relational Aesthetics’ functions in Nicolas Bourriaud”.[5] So it is used both to elaborate upon recent tendencies in art practice and, in a more polemical sense, to propose “a radical interaction yet unfulfilled.”[6] This comparison is appropriate, not least because both authors are curators, but while Bourriaud assumes familiarity with art critics. Each chapter of *Aesthetic Journalism* features suggestions for further reading, in addition to the comprehensive list of “references and niceties” at the back of the book, going so far as to contextualise major art works. So, for instance, an introduction to an art exhibition taking place in Kassel over five years since 1995 [...] an event that helped to shape an idea of art not as an autonomous field, but as a practice investigating (and reporting) the social and the political via aesthetics[7].

As this reference to Documenta suggests, the notion of art practice – and the art exhibition – as an arena for social and political investigation is not new. Cramerotti identifies “early patterns of aesthetic journalism” in the era of Information and Enlightenment, before charting the rise of “art as social criticism” in the 1970s (exemplified by the work of Dan Graham, Hans Haacke, Martha Rosler and the artists associated with Vanguardia). Cramerotti argues, however, that the more self-consciously journalistic turn evident in recent decades can be better understood as a response to shifts in traditional journalistic media. Before exploring the concept of aesthetic journalism further, it is interesting to note another aspect of Cramerotti’s approach that is highlighted by Packer. Aesthetic Journalism includes a list of approximately twenty exhibitions between 2002 and 2005, focusing on artists who work with “the document, the archive, the report and the documentary style”[8], including Documenta 11 and Manifesta 5 (2004), yet Cramerotti does not actually focus directly on curatorial practice. Despite this, it may be possible to infer his position through reference to his input as a member of the Chamber of Public Secrets (CHS), one of three curatorial collectives responsible for Manifesta 8, taking place from October 7, 2010 to January 9, 2011 in the region of Murcia, southern Spain.

**Theorising ‘Aesthetic Journalism’ and the ‘Documentary Turn’**

Cramerotti’s book is one of the first monographic studies dedicated to this identification of journalistic and documentary turns in contemporary art, but it follows a number of relatively recent anthologies exploring similar territory. They include another Intellectual public sphere are Head of Arts at Documenta (2007), edited by Gail Pearce and Caz McLaughlin, featuring contributions from theorists Michael Renov and John Ellis, together with panel discussions and interviews with practitioners such as Trinh T. Minh-ha, Ann-Sofl Siden and Jane and Louise Wilson. A more direct emphasis on curatorial practice is apparent in Teresa Gleadowe’s *Documentary Discursivity and Critical Reception*.

Although Cramerotti favours discussion of artworks over the analysis of exhibition-making, he is careful to speak to the critical and discursive nature of aesthetic journalism. He states; “Two aspects are equally important: for the author not to be forced to adapt to the speed of the news industry, and for the spectator not to be required to accept or refuse it on the spot. Come and go in front of a representation at one’s leisure.”[9] In practice, however, the actual conditions of reception for an exhibition such as Manifesta 8 – particularly during the professional preview – bear little relation to this ideal. On previous editions, hundreds of artists, curators, critics and students attended the preview, which took place over four days. While the accreditation process was hampered by technical glitches, the actual experience was marked by a sense of inclusivity – no obvious VIP areas or parties with restricted access – and generosity, with free bus transport from one venue to the next. Yet the organisation of the exhibition at fourteen venues, spread across two cities (an hour apart) necessitated a very tightly-scheduled programme, so that hundreds of visitors arrived at each venue together. It was difficult to view many video installations in their entirety let alone “come across the front of a representation at one’s leisure”.[10]

The advance information for Manifesta 8 signalled a strong thematic emphasis on curatorial discursivity. This was reflected in the selection of three curatorial collectives (the other two are Alexandria Contemporary Arts Forum and Curator.ing) and the inclusion of various projects requiring audience interaction. During the preview, members of all three collectives organised events, talks and tours, so that those attending were sometimes confused, not quite connoisseurs rather than observers. As several commentators have noted, critics routinely occupy a role similar to that of the embedded journalist, merely being ‘sent’ to the event reporting that offers “no space for critical distance.”[11] According to Cramerotti, art and journalism are sometimes treated by different temporalities of research, production and reception, with artists typically working at a slower pace than news media producers. He also notes proximity between art practice and fiction, stating that “while journalism reports, and fiction reveals, aesthetic journalism does both.”[12]

The slower pace of artistic production and the questioning of truth claims through the exploration of fiction create the potential for critical reflection, at least in theory: “The problem we have today is that a lot of journalistic art merely attempts to disseminate information in a way that is allegedly neutral; an artist is not better at producing a more transparent picture of the real than a journalist. What the artist can do better, instead, is to construct a self-reflective medium, which ‘coaches’ its viewers to ask relevant questions by themselves, instead of accepting (or refusing tout court) representations as they are proposed.”[13] It is interesting to note the use of the term ‘medium’ here – perhaps Cramerotti may be referring to the fact that text, video and photography are employed both by journalists and many of the artists cited in *Aesthetic Journalism*. But it is impossible to conceptualise the ‘medium’ of aesthetic journalism without reference to the discursive and narrative contexts within which artworks are experienced. This is because the self-reflexivity that Cramerotti highlights as a potential property of this type of art practice is located (at least partly) at the heart of the reception, linked to the conditions of exhibition and circulation that differentiate contemporary art from print, online or TV news.
significant problems with exhibition texts, venues editorial support for Manifesta 8, leading to failed to offer the appropriate curatorial and essential to “international positioning”. She professionals, whose presence is presumably one way of ensuring the attendance of visiting suggests an economic imperative for the thematic Foundation “has an interest in curatorial the place of the genius.”

educational aims of the present culminate, just as the all forms of life [...] In the newspaper the peculiar of communication which cements the seams between “the newspaper steps into the place of culture, and he arrogance of nineteenth century journalism: [Cramerotti] notes the longstanding complicity of journalists with culture and social use – part of the funding arrangement with the hosts, as problematised above – might have contributed to technical problems and delays. But this does not easily explain the situation at the two museum venues used by CPS, in which projected videos at times suffered from poor image quality. In fact one of the most effective works, Amnesialand by Stefanos Tsivopolous, was devised in response to a site not previously used for contemporary art exhibition – the Casino in Cartagena. This was one of a relatively small number of works in ¿The Rest is History? to fulfil the potential of aesthetic journalism, as theorised by Cramerotti, through its fusion of fictional and documentary modes of address. In addition, while numerous contributions to Manifesta 8 employed a self-consciously ‘archival’ mode of engagement, Amnesialand was one of the few video installations to make effective use of – and clearly acknowledge – already existing archives.

Nostalgia for the Public Realm
So, to what extent does the CPS presentation at Manifesta 8 succeed in furthering the critique developed by Cramerotti in Aesthetic Journalism? In their primary conjunction to the catalogue, CPS emphasise that they want to “search out and engender dialogues, placing them in the public realm, through the projecting of media, film and documentary production, artistic research and aesthetic journalism”[1]. CPS clearly conceptualise the public realm as aligned with, and dependent upon, diverse forms of cultural production and research. Yet there is also a sense that they are seeking to preserve – or perhaps reanimate – a relatively traditional notion of the public sphere, aligned to specific forms of media production and consumption that are under threat, if not actually in decline; “we need printed journalism and broadcasters to help us make sense of the world around us. The amount of administrative, cultural, political and financial processes that occur during our average day cannot be digested in any other way.”[22]

From this perspective, ¿The Rest is History?’ might then be viewed partly as a nostalgic undertaking, particularly if nostalgia is understood as an acknowledgement of loss. It is too soon to know if CPS actually succeeded in expanding Manifesta’s discursive networks and information systems – the only credible way to determine this would be to undertake a formal study of its reception. In the absence of such a study, the critical response already offered by commentators such as Gleadowe might at least prompt greater self-reflection on the part of the Manifesta Foundation, so that it may perhaps support (some) artists, critics (and curators) to work differently from journalists.

Notes
3 Cramerotti, 84.
4 It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss distinctions between ‘journalistic’ and ‘documentary’ fields and modes of practice. But while documentary is often defined, following John Grierson, as the ‘poetic treatment of actuality’, journalism could be said to assert a stronger truth claim, and has traditionally been more tightly regulated through professional organisations and codes.
5 Recent examples include John Douglas Miller, ‘Watching V Looking’, Art Monthly, October 2010, 7-10, and various contributions to Jane Connarty and Josephine P. Lanyon, eds., Ghosting: The Role of the Archive within Contemporary Artists’ Film and Video, (Bristol: Picture This, 2006).
7 Maeva Connolly, The Place of Artists’ Cinema: Space, Site and Screen, (Bristol: Intellect and University of Chicago Press, 2009). Cramerotti’s research first came to my attention several months before the publication of Aesthetic Journalism, when I was invited by Bristol-based artist Daiphne Wright to take part in a public discussion on her work in June 2009, which he organised as the curator of QUAD gallery in Derby, UK.
8 Cramerotti, 69.
9 Cramerotti, 104.
10 Cramerotti, 103.
11 Cramerotti, 30.
12 Cramerotti, 106.
13 I attended with a group of students on the MA in Visual Arts Practices (www.maris.ru) and my article is partly informed by class discussions, particularly with criticism students such as Joanne Laws, whose review of Manifesta 8 is forthcoming in Afterimage, January/February 2011.
14 Evidently, it is possible to experience Manifesta outside the frame of the professional preview. When I reviewed the exhibition at Donostia-San Sebastian in 2004 it had already been open for several months and I moved from one venue to another at my own pace, relying upon public transport and directions from strangers as well as Manifesta maps and signage. See Maeva Connolly, ‘Nomads, Tourists and Territories: Manifesta and the Basque Country’, Afterimage: Journal of Media and Cultural Criticism, 32, 3 (November/December 2004) 8-9.
16 Teresa Gleadowe, ´Manifesta 8´, Art Monthly 341, November 2010, 22-23.
18 Zolghadr, 155.
20 There is a possible parallel here with the situation of ‘old media’ producers (such as broadcasters, for example) struggling to provide content across multiple platforms.
21 CPS, 128-129.
22 CPS, 133.
Public housing is in a period of major decline. Long-term disinvestment – associated with an ideological shift towards the neo-liberal shibboleths of something called ‘the market’, fetishised as an abstract, uncontrollable, autonomous force – and private property have rendered the construction of new public housing virtually unthinkable at the level of governance. Housing costs are an ever-present concern, yet its socio-political relevance is often overlooked – even as housing costs, as a percentage of median income, have increased exponentially. The subsidence of the mortgage crisis, and its disastrous repercussions in the global economy, put housing on the map again, but the reaction of neo-liberal governance has only been to deepen the ideology that caused the crisis in the first place.

In 1979, council housing represented just a third of all Britain’s housing stock (Glynn p.25), and in Scotland, over half the population once lived in homes provided by the public sector (Glynn p.27). The regressive deflation of this everyday reality, and the naturalisation of home ownership as the first preference in housing relates to a state-sponsored ideological offensive of major proportions. A recent article by Maya Gonzalez for Endnotes explains how the ‘preference’ for home-ownership in the US was engineered by fiscal restructuring of the state in the 1930s. By the middle of the decade, the federal government had set up the mechanisms for the promotion of national economic growth through a flexible market for consumer credit. Credit both supported the economy and fuelled the debt-driven economic expansion; a credit revolution that actively promoted economic growth based on the mass production and consumption of commodities. Central to the reproduction of the private domain, building new homes for rent was the key commodity. New mortgage guarantees insured private lenders against loss, and established the use of long-term mortgages: the Federal Housing Association mortgage insurance programs established in the National Housing Act of 1934, and the Veterans Administration mortgage guarantee programs of 1944 privileged the expansion of the markets for home-improvement and for privately owned homes in the US. These financial arrangements effectively entrenched the kind of debt-financing that helped derail public housing, prioritise private home ownership, and stimulate the commodity-economy. These policies of debt-driven expansion finally imploded in the sub-prime mortgage crisis.

In the UK, a key issue for Thatcher’s success in the Conservative election campaign of 1979 was the sale of council houses. The ‘Right to Buy’ scheme promised massive discounts for long-term council tenants to buy their rented properties, at the same time as it offered the promise of social mobility and a foot on the property ladder. By offering huge discounts on council houses, the state subsidised the sale of the better part of council housing stock in order to break up Labour-dominated estates and establish a distinct private sphere through which the values of the consumer/citizen could be established in working-class estates. The sale of council housing was a key factor in the housing speculation that followed: a massive transfer of wealth from the public to the private domain. Building new homes for rent made no sense for councils if they could just be bought up on the cheap through ‘right to buy’. Loss of rent revenues through reduction of stock also impacted heavily on the maintenance of remaining council homes. Moreover, any money gained from sales was ring-fenced to pay off local housing debt. Years of disinvestment and gentrification have resulted in a negative cycle of stigmatisation with council housing routinely viewed as housing ‘for the last resort’. To the despair of the radical left, owner-occupation since the late 1980s has seemed a more assured way of improving many individuals’ standard of living than collective action. The sale of council housing is one of the most important material conditions underlying the advance of individualism, consumerism and neo-liberal ideology in the past two decades.

The Comprehensive Spending Review of October 2010 represented another massive assault on social housing. The government announced a budget cut for the construction of affordable homes over the next four years of nearly 50%, from £8.4 billion to £4.5 billion. Meanwhile, the system for managing council housing financing – the Housing Revenue Account subsidy system – is set to be replaced with an undisclosed ‘self-financing’ arrangement. Funding for a promised 150,000 new ‘social’ homes, it is proposed, could be raised by allowing Housing Associations to charge their tenants a new ‘Affordable Rent’ tenancy at 80% of the market rate. The principal of secure tenancies is also under threat. For new tenants, Government will give Councils and Housing associations powers to grant ‘fixed-term tenancies’ with a minimum time period of two years,abolishing the right to existing secure or assured lifetime tenancies. Government is also consulting on whether existing tenants should continue the right to a lifetime tenancy if they move. Social polarisation will be further cemented by allocating on the basis of those who are, “the most vulnerable in society and those who need it most”, reinforcing existing policy and further tarnishing the principle of social housing for all. Meanwhile, Government proposes to reduce Housing Benefit by 10% for job seekers who have been out of work for more than 12 months. Unemployed people will have to make up the rent shortfall from the £65 they get on Job Seekers Allowance, even as almost half of those on Local Housing Allowance (for those renting privately) are already £100 a month short of what they need to pay the rent.

Public and social housing is being attacked like never before, and much of it is justified by a campaign of vilification which judges the people who live in public housing, just as harshly as the public housing itself. Militant Modernism, by Owen Hatherley, and Where the Other Half Lives: Lower Income Housing in a Neoliberal World, edited by Sarah Glynn, however affirm the benefits of public housing in quite different ways, but in ways that help provide a critical, progressive conjuncture if we think them both at once. While the dogma of ‘no alternative’ is a neo-liberal commonplace – despite signs everywhere of that creed’s decadence – Hatherley’s excavation of ‘Socialist Modernism’ and Glynn et al’s affirmation of collective housing struggle offer primers for a different kind of future. Militant Modernism ranges from the examination of the political, historical avant-gardes, popular culture, Russian sci-fi modernism, Disurbanism, the ‘SexPol’ of William Reich, Brechtian aesthetics, and more besides. Where the Other Half Lives meanwhile, interrogates the present state of public housing internationally by way of varied contributions from France, New Zealand, Australia, Canada and the US. For the purposes of this review, I want to concentrate on those elements in each book which consider housing and urban questions in the UK.

Militant Modernism

Owen Hatherley’s Militant Modernism attempts to resuscitate a radical modernism from its ossification within academia, the heritage industry, and the jaded discourses of ‘leftism’. Appearing as part of the Zero Books series, the title makes good on the imprint’s manifesto claim that “another kind of discourse – intellectual without being academic, popular without being populist – is not only possible: it is already flourishing”. A dedication to the Southampton City Council Architects Department, and a quote from John Ruskin’s A Defence of the Idiots (1853), frames the eclectic, but critical tone of a wide-ranging excavation of Utopia from the “futures ruins” – those architectural relics of modernism still extant in urban life.

Hatherley asks if the modernist impulse to ‘erase the traces’ – to destroy in order to create – can revive a once radical modernism that would certainly reject current attempts to replicate or ‘preserve’ aspects of its original intentions. Modernist conservation organisations like DOCOMOMO, he argues, have granted Modernism museum status, but in doing so they have surrendered the radical heritage of modernism. As Pawley contends, this tendency meekly accepts Modernism’s “absorption into the art-historical classification system as a style…converting their once proud revolutionary instruments back into monuments for the delectation of the masses alongside the palaces of the ancient regime…” (p.5-6). Hatherley’s argument, however, follows Walter Benjamin, whose “destructive character knows only one watchword: make room. And only one activity: clearing away. His need for fresh air and space is stronger than any hatred” (Cited, p.4). Benjamin’s desire to ‘live without traces’, manifested his desire to suppress the historical accretion of decadent bourgeois culture superbly evoked in the re-posed image of Klee’s ‘Angel of History’. His “dialectical, double-edged” acumen, aimed to blast open the capitalist dream world, with its proliferation of phantasmagorical commodities, “into an entirely new world; one shaped by the promises of the dream itself” (p.5).

For the avant-garde modernisms, as for Benjamin, “erasing the traces” meant “outwring the old world before it has the chance of being with you” (p.5). For Hatherley, modernism had no interest in continuity: the shift from 19th century encrustation to the stark, unfinished concrete wall was “brutally simple and sharp”; not merely progression, but “an interruption, a rupture, a break with the continuum altogether…” (p.6). Militant Modernism was written with the coda “that the Left Modernisms of the 20th century
continue to be useful: a potential index of ideas, such as our present failed, tried, untrue or broken on the wheel of the market or the state” (p.13). Even in their ruinous state, suggests Hatherley, they offer “spectral blueprints” (p.126) alternative to the neoliberal dogma that ‘there is no alternative’.

Hatherley’s ‘nostalgia for the future’ resides in his reflection on modernist architecture as the radical antidote to the more passive aspects of social democracy: the once futurist walkways, precincts and high-rises of modernism, even in their dilapidation, engender a critique of the conservativism, and inequity reproduced through contemporary planning and architecture. What remains of Council Housing and the NBS is the vestige of Tidyfide for the Working Class, envisioned by Anenur Bevan and others. For Hatherley, these contested remains of modernism represent an epochnal moment when the working class got ideas above their station. The worth of his untimely thesis lies in its unashamed determination to consider the more radical moments of modernism dialectically. With a nod to Brecht and Eisler, he points us ‘Forwards! Not Forgetting’

When the Situationist Internationale (SI) developed the theory of the dérive (“a mode of experimental behavior linked to the conditions of modern life; a technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances”)14), they updated techniques from the Surrealists, and cultivated an urban critical praxis as a means to critique the Haussmanisation of Paris and the ideology of urbanism. They thus sought out the labyrinthine alleyways of old Paris where Hausman’s hand had no dominion; where odd corners, the working-class, alleyways of old Paris where Hausmann’s hand had no dominance; where odd corners, the working-class, advocated for an urban critical praxis as a means to critique the Haussmanisation of Paris and the ideology of urbanism. They thus sought out the labyrinthine alleyways of old Paris where Hausmann’s hand had no dominion; where odd corners, the working-class, advocated for an urban critical praxis as a means to critique the Haussmanisation of Paris and the ideology of urbanism. They thus sought out the labyrinthine alleyways of old Paris where Hausmann’s hand had no dominion; where odd corners, the working-class, advocated for an urban critical praxis as a means to critique the Haussmanisation of Paris and the ideology of urbanism. They thus sought out the labyrinthine alleyways of old Paris where Hausmann’s hand had no dominion; where odd corners, the working-class, advocated for an urban critical praxis as a means to critique the Haussmanisation of Paris and the ideology of urbanism. They thus sought out the labyrinthine alleyways of old Paris where Hausmann’s hand had no dominion; where odd corners, the working-class, advocated for an urban critical praxis as a means to critique the Haussmanisation of Paris and the ideology of urbanism. They thus sought out the labyrinthine alleyways of old Paris where Hausmann’s hand had no dominion; where odd corners, the working-class, advocated for an urban critical praxis as a means to critique the Haussmanisation of Paris and the ideology of urbanism. They thus sought out the labyrinthine alleyways of old Paris where Hausmann’s hand had no dominion; where odd corners, the working-class, advocated for an urban critical praxis as a means to critique the Haussmanisation of Paris and the ideology of urbanism. They thus sought out the labyrinthine alleyways of old Paris where Hausmann’s hand had no dominion; where odd corners, the working-class, advocated for an urban critical praxis as a means to critique the Haussmanisation of Paris and the ideology of urbanism. They thus sought out the labyrinthine alleyways of old Paris where Hausmann’s hand had no dominion; where odd corners, the working-class, advocated for an urban critical praxis as a means to critique the Haussmanisation of Paris and the ideology of urbanism. They thus sought out the labyrinthine alleyways of old Paris where Hausmann’s hand had no dominion; where odd corners, the working-class, advocated for an urban critical praxis as a means to critique the Haussmanisation of Paris and the ideology of urbanism. They thus sought out the labyrinthine alleyways of old Paris where Hausmann’s hand had no dominion; where odd corners, the working-class, advocated for an urban critical praxis as a means to critique the Haussmanisation of Paris and the ideology of urbanism. They thus sought out the labyrinthine alleyways of old Paris where Hausmann’s hand had no dominion; where odd corners, the working-class, advocated for an urban critical praxis as a means to critique the Haussmanisation of Paris and the ideology of urbanism. They thus sought out the labyrinthine alleyways of old Paris where Hausmann’s hand had no dominion; where odd corners, the working-class, advocated for an urban critical praxis as a means to critique the Haussmanisation of Paris and the ideology of urbanism. They thus sought out the labyrinthine alleyways of old Paris where Hausmann’s hand had no dominion; where odd corners, the working-class, advocated for an urban critical praxis as a means to critic...
Sarah Glynn et al’s substantive and empirical account of public housing in Where The Other Half Lives helps fill in some of their gaps in his account. Where The Other Half Lives can’t match the imaginative vigour of Militant Modernism, but it does register the fresh siting itself very much from within the perspective of collective class struggle in housing.

**Everyday Modernism**

“Public ownership allowed for a municipal form of collective control, took both the land and housing out of the property market, boosted the role of elected local councils and provided a decent home at affordable rents to more than a third of the population by the late 1920s, dramatically reducing the social power of capital and the disciplinary role of rents and mortgages in the labor market.”

– Stuart Hodgkinson

Hodkinson’s appraisal of public housing as part of a great account of housing privatisation in Where The Other Half Lives does a good job of supplementing this positive role in countering the tyranny of private rent, even if ambivalence remains, for this author at least, over “the role of elected local councils” in the ownership and management of public housing. As well as a bulwark against rent hikes, municipal housing has also been described as a “required service”, obfuscating the failings of the private market. Glynn cites Peter Malpass who has argued that state intervention in council housing played a significant supporting role for the private sector by supplying rents not met by the market, securing government contracts for the construction industry, and withdrawing when housing construction became more profitable for the private sector (p.23-24). Nevertheless, Hodkinson’s summary of the social benefits of public housing provides an important nuance to a dominant narrative of stigmatisation. As Glynn observes, an emphasis on the continuity of capitalist control of the housing market overlooks, by ‘socialising’ class struggle in secure housing, she cites a Community Development Project report in 1976 which contrasted “the political struggle of the working class to establish a socialised form of housing which recognised the right of everyone to a decent house at a reasonable cost”, to the political ‘Right’ who “has always tried to contain development of council housing by narrowly defining the purposes for which it is to be provided, and creating an alternative to it more closely aligned to their interests” (p.24).

While Hetherington’s version of militant modernism tends to rely on the ‘roles’ of specialists in housing (architects, planners, artists, film-makers, etc), Where The Other Half Lives emphasises the role of collective working class agency in obtaining decent, affordable housing. This is “the land we have to fight for. In the 19th century laissez-faire capitalism, the ruling classes believed it was neither right nor necessary to intervene in housing markets. Until after World War I, nine out of ten households rented their homes in housing. Where The Other Half Lives makes a decisive role in working-class composition at the same time as workers fought for better conditions. By 1919, the threat of revolution, if not revolution itself, gave rise to the Government building tanks and soldiers to George Square in order to quell workers’ demonstrations (backed by widespread strike action) for a shorter working week. When Lloyd George delivered his Housing Bill in Cabinet, he argued: “Even if it cost a £100 million pounds, what was that compared to the stability of the state” (p.287). Meanwhile, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Local Government Board told the House of Commons, “the money we are going to spend on housing is an insurance against Bolshevism” (ibid). From the point of view of government and business, investment in housing was necessary to defuse political agitation, and that wrung out of the government in the Housing Acts of 1919 and 1924 were hugely significant gains nonetheless. Threat proved itself. As Glynn notes, there was also a growing awareness of the ‘Red Clydeside’ that rent would have to be found from wages. Questions of reproduction were being linked directly with those of production, with women playing a decisive role in working-class composition at the time. As surplus capital is increasingly invested in urban landscapes rather than industry and manufacturing, the lessons of the 1915 Rent Strike at a repressive as well as productive level are extremely prescient today.

For Glynn, at the heart of today’s housing crisis lies “the prioritisation of the house as investment rather than as home, that is, of its exchange value over its use value” (p.290). Speculation in housing, assisted by decades of deregulation in banks and building societies, alongside the distribution of ‘soft’ mortgage deals, has led to enormous price rises, and until recently, the promise of high returns. This in turn led to more speculative activity, further exacerbating the problem of spiralling rents. However, as Glynn points out and as the differing US and UK contexts briefly outlined in the introduction show – there is nothing inherently natural about home-ownership. Sweden, Germany, and the Netherlands, with eight people of all classes still live in good quality public housing; while in the UK many people have chosen to live in public housing for reasons including security of tenure, affordability and size of home. However, with the onset of Thatcherism, private home ownership began to dominate, with council housing increasingly under-funded and stigmatised, just as private home ownership was both subsidised and eulogised through right-to-buy disinvestment and poor management. The result is since resulted in council housing that has come to be seen as a residual second choice for those unable to afford their own home (p.291). Bevan’s notes, such systemic inequities are crudely ignored in the resultant false choice between degenerated council housing and regenerated ‘social’ housing.

Glynn’s purview suggests other histories unrealised. In the post World War II reconstruction, Anselm Bevan, as Health Minister in charge of Housing, offered a “glimpse of a socialist vision” – housing as a universal public service, just like the National Health Service (p.20-21). Bevan’s redefinition of the state’s role “for the Working Classes” from the Act’s title, and his conception of housing, located firmly within Labourite Keynesian principles of equitable redistribution, was one where good quality homes in mixed communities would be built by local authorities for people of all backgrounds. Bevan failed to nationalise housing, but he did ensure that five-fifths of the country’s new homes were provided by Local Authorities at a quality standard and still recognised in the future. Postwar economic constraints, the prioritisation of foreign policy and defence, and the scale of damage done to Britain’s housing stock during World War II, meant that the government’s and society’s utility universal housing provision was quashed by the realpolitik of the ‘numbers game’. But the scale of ambition in his proposals are signalled by the contemporary demands for the ‘Fourth Option’ in housing (direct investment as an alternative to the three options of ‘stock’ ‘transfer’ of council housing to Housing Associations, PFI schemes, and control by Arms Length Management Organisations).

In fairness, the less than inspiring demand for a ‘Fourth Option’ can be part of current status of Council Housing amongst a raft of public-private options – signified, in the parlance of ‘regeneration’, by ‘social’ not ‘public’ housing (p.225). Housing campaigners continued to apply pressure on government at the same time as workers fought for better conditions. By 1919, the threat of revolution, if not revolution itself, gave rise to the Government building tanks and soldiers to George Square in order to quell workers’ demonstrations (backed by widespread strike action) for a shorter working week. When Lloyd George delivered his Housing Bill in Cabinet, he argued: “Even if it cost a £100 million pounds, what was that compared to the stability of the state” (p.287). Meanwhile, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Local Government Board told the House of Commons, “the money we are going to spend on housing is an insurance against Bolshevism” (ibid). From the point of view of government and business, investment in housing was necessary to defuse political agitation, and that wrung out of the government in the Housing Acts of 1919 and 1924 were hugely significant gains nonetheless. Threat proved itself. As Glynn notes, there was also a growing awareness of the ‘Red Clydeside’ that rent would have to be found from wages. Questions of reproduction were being linked directly with those of production, with women playing a decisive role in working-class composition at the time. As surplus capital is increasingly invested in urban landscapes rather than industry and manufacturing, the lessons of the 1915 Rent Strike at a repressive as well as productive level are extremely prescient today.

It is important to remember that neoliberalism is profoundly assisted by the state, which under neoliberal conditions pro-actively regulates the planning and institutional landscape in behoof of neoliberal accumulation strategies. As Foucault insisted, power is productive. Cuts in state budgets are also opportunities for capitalist growth in former state sectors. It would be better to theorise the neoliberal state alongside, with Hardt and Negri, as “not really a regime of unregulated capital, but rather a regime of capital itself that best facilitates the global movements and profits of capital.” Neil Smith usefully elaborates on this point, framing it within his account of the 18th century liberal assumptions of Locke and Smith – e.g. the free exercise of individual self-interest leads to the optimal collective social good, private property is necessary for this self-interest, free market exchange is its ideal vehicle. Twentieth century US liberalism (Woodrow Wilson, Franklin Roosevelt) for better or worse, social compensation to counter the excesses of capitalism, was not so much a misnomer as a re-appropriation of liberal terms in an attempt to negate their meaning, as opposed to their original axis. Contemporary neoliberalism “represents a significant return to the original axioms of liberalism” but this time galvanised by 20th century liberalism, resulting in “an
unprecedented mobilisation not just of national state power but of state power organised and exercised at different geographical scales.” Henri Lefebvre’s conception of the State of Production (SMP) is also useful here. For Lefebvre, the SMP is intimately bound up with state power, where the state assumes responsibility for ensuring capitalist growth. The SMP thus provides a means to understand the continuity of capitalism through Western liberal-democratic models such as social democracy, Fordism and Keynesianism. Through the SMP, social democratic forms are directly inscribed into the state form, serving as a crucial calculus and legitimising tool for state productivism. But as Benjamin Noys recently wrote, we miss the point of poststructuralism if we simply say that neoliberalism is, as statist as other governmental forms. Writing on Foucault, he argues that, “the necessity to analyse how neoliberalism creates a new form of governmentality in which the state performs a different function: permeating society to subject it to the economic.” In the words of Foucauld, Neoliberalism intervenes on society so that its competitive mechanisms “play a regulatory role at every moment and every point in society and by introducing a new framework this will be possible, that is to say, a general regulation of the society by the market.” Thus we move “from a state under the supervision of the market rather than one that supervises the market.”

The state thus needs to be conceptualised as a demoted but active partner in neoliberal accumulation strategies, and this necessarily creates a more critical position to social democracy than Glynn allows. This has serious consequences for the way change is conceptualised. As Glynn acknowledges, one of the main reasons for the atrophying condition of council housing in the UK has been grass-roots reliance on the Labour Party, with an emphasis on parliamentary socialism and organisation. This adherence to the Labour Party and the state is in contrast to many European socialists who were more wary of state involvement, setting up independent organisations to advance their claims (p.29). The current situation in the UK, where tenants sit on Housing Association committees with the landlords, is indicative of a situation where tenants have been fully incorporated into the management structures of private companies, surrendering whatever independence they had into the bargain. While Glynn is deeply critical of these developments, an inadequate theorisation of the complex of social democracy and the neoliberal conjuncture puts her at risk of falling behind her own analysis, and eliding a self-critical conception of where the new methodologies for radical housing change may arise. The challenges that concern us, the new social movements, even because of them, Glynn et al.’s contribution provides an excellent overview of the housing debate as it currently stands.

Summary

In the recent introduction to the collection of writings by the Situationist International (SI) – *The Situationists and the City* – Tom McDonough argues that what is important about the SI is not the plans they produced in their ‘architectural interlude’ (1955-62), but their critique of urbanism and the challenges it posed to its own premises and ways of thinking. Resisting the viewpoint that the SI simply worked through the plans they produced in their ‘architectural interlude’ (1957-62), but their critique of urbanism evolved its own special technique for molding its own territory, which constitutes the material underpinning for all the facets of this project. Urbanism – ‘city planning’ – is capitalism’s method for taking over the natural and human environment.

Even if a “certain utopian irresolution” (McDonough p.16) hung over the SI project of urban utopianism and its quest for functionalist planning as a concrete expression of the hierarchical organisation of advanced late capitalism casts a long shadow over the housing question as a discrete and specialist mode of inquiry. Hatherley, in a positive review of Glynn’s book, hints at a possible resolution when he asks if we can ever regard council housing as our architecture, or rather, “an architecture we defend as best we can for want of something better” (p.10).

Defending council housing, just defending all those other state institutions currently being attacked by ‘The Cuts’, risks obscuring all the cuts that have preceded the current ones, and hiding the incorporation of social democracy into Fordist/ Keynesian modes of state productivism on behalf of capital. What we defend has already been cut, and this history, and those who sanctioned it, must be recognised. However, Hatherley’s point leads us to certain unavoidable realities. We defend Council Housing, education (“the sausage factory”) (p.16), the NHS, welfare provision, transport, services, etc, because of solidarity, and because we don’t see the options are even worse. But in doing so we risk delimiting the parameters of struggle – only talking about what the telly talks about. These ‘minimum’ demands are necessary, and Glynn’s book lays some of them out very well, but without ‘maximum’ demands (the radical construction of a new world) the claims of the present risk being defined by the limited parameters of a circumscribed past.

The SI have received sustained critique over the years, but their refusal of utopian project building, following Marx’s aversion to formulating abstract schemes within capitalist relations, led them to a position whereby revolution was viewed as the most exemplary critique of human geography, and hence as the most refined critique of urbanism (p.28-29). If that sounds implausible in these austere times, it’s worth remembering – as Glynn’s history of council housing shows – that many of the concerns of the SI have emerged from the existence, or threat, of revolutionary activity backed by sizeable working-class movements.

Notes

1. “In the late nineteenth century the typical mortgage taken out by a skilled worker would take ten to twelve years to pay off. Now the standard length of a mortgage is twenty-five to thirty years.” ‘The Housing Question’, *Aubehven magazine*, #13, 2005: http://libcom.org/library/aubehven/aubehven-13-2005/auhousing-question


3. See the graph in Gonzalez’s article for an indication of the sharp incline in homelessness rates after these housing credit was made widely available. Ibid


5. Ibid.


12. “The society that reshapes its entire surroundings has evolved its own special technique for molding its own territory, which constitutes the material underpinning for all the facets of this project. Urbanism – ‘city planning’ – is capitalism’s method for taking over the natural and human environment. Following its logical development toward total domination, capitalism now can and must refashion the totality of space into its own particular décor”. Debord, Guy, The Society of the Spectacle, Zone books, p.121.


27. Tenants are bound by company law to support their Registered Social Landlord (RSL), http://www.defendcouncilhousing.org.uk/dchc-stocktransfer,


31. ‘Conservation of Buildings, Sites and Neighbourhoods of the 20th century and the historical neo-avant-gardes’. Borrowing heavily from Henri Lefebvre, the SI set about a radical critique of functionalism and modernisation in planning and architecture. Urbanism was seen as the very technology of separation, and modernist architecture, for them, lay somewhere between the barbaric past and the futuristic present. As Guy Debord wrote in 1967, “The society that reshapes its entire surroundings has evolved its own special technique for moulding its own territory, which constitutes the material underpinning for all the facets of this project.” Urbanism – ‘city planning’ – is capitalism’s method for taking over the natural and human environment.