

cross currents in culture ●

variant

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Kat Gollock The Filth, and the Fury Mark Pawson Comic & Zine Reviews Jorge Ribalta Towards a New Documentalism Emma Louise Briant If... On Martial Values and Britishness Tom Coles "Organise your mourning" Ellen Feiss Santiago Sierra... Ethics and the political efficacy of citation Tom Jennings The Poverty of Imagination Rosemary Meade "Our country's calling card" Joanne Laws Generation Bailout Friendofzanetti The Housing Monster

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Variant engages in the examination and critique of society and culture, drawing from knowledge across the arts, social sciences and humanities, as an approach to creative cultural practice and as something distinct from promotional culture.

It is an engagement of practice which seeks to publicly participate in and understand culture 'in the round'. That is, in the many and various ways culture exemplifies, illuminates and engages with larger societal processes.

We contend it is constructive and essential to place articles which address the multiple facets of culture alongside articles on issues that inform or have consequences for the very production and subject of knowledge and its communication.

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Cover

Illustration from 'The Housing Monster', available at: www.prole.info

Back Cover

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The Filth, and the Fury

Kat Gollock

More than 60% of those charged in the 2011 London riots were reported to be under the age of twenty-four.¹ This raises all too obvious questions about what society is offering young people in terms of educational and social support. In the midst of a double-dip recession (if indeed we ever left it), with government funding cuts affecting most areas of education, social and cultural provision, the political debates of the 1970s have a renewed prominence in Britain.

Although media and political reactions to the riots in England sparked discussions about the underlying social and economic causes, it was the outpouring of rage in damage against property that warranted the greatest media attention. Among those angered by the riots we can include the broom wielding, riot clean-up gentrifiers who wanted to reclaim the “real London from those who are scum”.² Evidently, many of these people relished wielding self-righteousness more than their brooms. Upping the mood of moral outrage still further was the e-petition demanding that looters, rioters, their flatmates and families³ lose their homes. Clearly the second part of New Labour’s sanctimonious mantra “tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime” never made an impression on this virtual constituency.

Such backlash to the civil unrest calls to mind the cautionary remark of a Parisian train driver in 1995, quoted by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. Following a terrorist attack on his train, the driver warned against any want to take revenge on the Algerian community. “They are’, he said, ‘simply people like us’.”⁴ Bourdieu elaborated on the driver’s point; “It is infinitely easier to take up a position of for or against an idea, a value, a person, an institution or a situation than it is to analyse what it truly is, in all its complexity.”⁵

The question has to be asked, had the mass of young people who rioted in London had a more ‘affirmative’ political message would they be viewed by UK politicians and media with the same esteem they profess to hold for the recent uprisings across the Middle East? Is it really merely a supposed lack of a clear political objective that has made the London and other riots so objectionable? After all, what could be clearer than ‘Not This!’, in all their multiple, overlapping contexts? Beatrix Campbell’s 1993 book *Goliath*, which looks at the 1991 and 1992 suburban riots in England, attests to their disavowal, thus:

“These extravagant events were an enigma. They made worldwide news and yet they seemed to be powered by no particular protest, no just cause, no fantasy of the future. However, even in their political emptiness they were telling us something about what Britain had become; the message in the medium of riotous assemblies showed us how the authorities and the angry young men were communicating with each other.”⁶

Yet if such a reductive view contains some validity, then how, if at all, can this situation become otherwise? To make a more genuine start than the broom wielders and their draconian allies, I suggest we look first to the 1970s. What follows is a development of my graduate dissertation, which explores the changing face of photography in Britain in that period. By taking a retrospective look at the community photographers, their political successes and failures during the ‘70s, I think we can begin to understand more about the situation we find ourselves in today, while acknowledging the political foreclosures that have happened since.

The Rear View

By the 1970s many photographers had grown tired of the continual demands of a competitive and commercially driven practice. The falsifying of truth and the empty stylisations of pseudo-realism, as well as the emphatic use of stereotypes – all predominantly for commercial gain – were becoming highly disputed. Some photographers were prepared to sacrifice financial gain for a more fulfilling, socially useful practice.⁷ The newly appointed photography department within the Arts Council of Great Britain, created in 1973, also meant that funding opportunities were much more readily available. As the Arts Council encouraged practice at a grass roots level, community orientated projects were set to benefit the most. This guarantee of funding from a recognised government body allowed established practitioners some emancipation from the highly commercialised work which had previously been one of the few avenues that offered most photographers any form of financial support. Although they weren’t necessarily making money, with government funding and a programme of in-house fund-raising events, projects could generate enough income to sustain themselves and for some they provided the only viable alternative to unemployment. “It was a time of idealism; those involved gave their time freely to a movement they thought exciting and important.”⁸



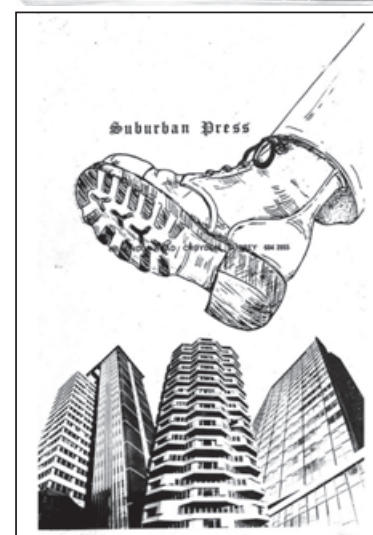
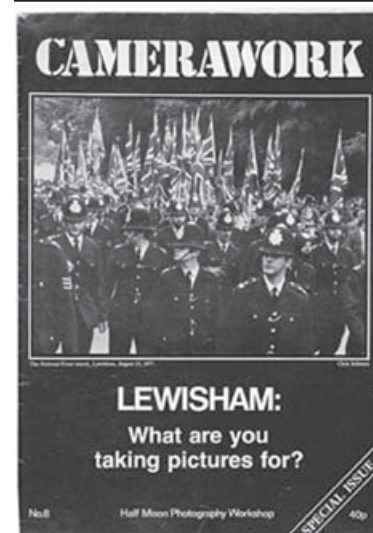
The majority of the practitioners involved with these new community projects were, perhaps obviously at the time⁹, politically and socially ‘left-leaning’. Continual reference to the work of the Mass Observation movement¹⁰, The Film and Photo League¹¹, and Worker-Photography Movement¹² in contemporary and subsequent journals and exhibitions outlined how important the early decades of the twentieth century were among many community photographers. The social documentary genre that had developed in the 1930s greatly influenced the work that was produced at this time. Many photographers adopted the paradigm of the worker-photographer, using photography to expose social issues relating to poverty, housing and education, and energised the working class to try wrest control of their own situation.¹³ Through collaborative workshops and events, a social network of groups formed that was open to everyone and anyone who had an interest in getting involved. Aided by the Civil Rights movements of the 1960s, and the continued push for widespread race, gender and sexual equality, the belief that change could come from below was stronger than ever.

An important hub in the UK in all of this was The Photography Workshop established by Jo Spence and Terry Dennett in 1974, which brought with it the promise of a more inclusive and freely accessible photographic practice, marking a renewed sense of the social purpose within the

medium in Britain. Community photographers were proactive in their response to the issues of the time and wrote prolifically on the subjects of photography theory, education reform, and visual representation. Their work provided the basis for these expanded photographic debates and appeared as a challenge to a disinterested aestheticism within photography and in the arts more broadly. The surge of alternative press organisations also facilitated the publication of a great deal of this work and helped to establish a national network of community art based workshops.

Since the early 1900s, socially and politically progressive organisations had maintained an organisational relationship with the printed press and self-publishing.¹⁴ Produced and distributed cheaply and easily, photography, in this context, was the fitting vehicle for dissemination of political ideas by and for the working class – for the communist groupings, it was essential the proletariat, as ‘the one revolutionary class’, be reached in order to advance the necessary political uprising.¹⁵ Leap forward more than half a century of political agitation – including achievements of women’s suffrage and the ‘end of Empire’ – during the 1970s marginalised groups continued to use ephemeral material to ensure widespread availability of their work and garner mass support for their causes. The start of the decade saw the publication of the first issue of *Suburban Press*, an anarchistic political magazine, and continued with influential ‘minority’ publications such as *Spare Rib* and *Gay News*. Publications like *Camerawork*, *Ten:8*, and *Creative Camera* helped showcase and disseminate the work that grew from community workshops. These publications also served as an important platform for discussion.

The inclusion of reader views and responses facilitated debate amongst readers and contributors alike, and created an arena for full-blooded political discussions. In *Camerawork*, one reader’s criticism of Jo Spence’s leftist values and the “boring religion of Marxism” inspired Spence to write another full article in response.¹⁶ The publication of ‘The Unpolitical Photograph’ was a clear indication of the interaction between reader and editor and the shared belief in the importance of debate.



Right, top: Half Moon workshop, late 1970s, taken during meeting of squatting photo project.
Right, below: 'Lost At School', Half Moon exhibition poster, 1979. Photographs by George Plemper.

It is interesting to also reflect that following the riots of 1981 – grown out of racial tension, police confrontation, and inner city deprivation¹⁷ – portraits of some of the rioters were printed in papers like the *Daily Mail* and *The People* but also in *Camerawork* and *Ten:8*. The latter magazines offered a rather different platform and viewpoint from which to understand the causes and the motives for the riots. Of course we can find similar discussions on the internet today but community photography was, very importantly, a way whereby people developed face-to-face relationships based on trust.

Part of a broader political tradition of workers' education¹⁸ and history-from-below movements, the intellectual roots of the community workshops can in part be traced back to Raphael Samuel, a socialist and lecturer at Ruskin College, Oxford, where in 1967 he embarked on a programme of history based workshops that were 'open to all'. According to Samuel, the study and writing of history were reserved for specialist groups and those within the ranks of academic history. The premise of these workshops was to counteract this continued elitism and instil the idea that history belonged to everyone. It was Samuel's belief that teaching and research had "become increasingly divided, and both divorced from wider or explicit social purposes".¹⁹ By adopting the form of a workshop, a more collaborative process was nurtured in which debate, argument and exploration into the theoretical principals of the subject was encouraged rather than the simple acceptance of dominant arguments. It, too, had its own publication, *History Workshop Journal*, released in 1976, and like many of the other independent journals, was to act as a study aid and aimed for their readers to be both contributors and critics of the issues at hand.²⁰

Much like the History Workshop, the more art-based workshops set out to encourage people to explore the issues of identity and representation within their own lives but through the use of photography. Through image making, archival research, and theoretical education in visual literacy, photographers felt they could engage people in gaining a fuller understanding of themselves, the communities in which they lived, and the problems within those spheres. Don Slater indicates the movement's apparent success in an essay published in issue 20 of *Camerawork*: "Community photography was the outcome of a specific form of production and consumption which overruled the

marketplace".²¹ By encouraging ordinary people to occupy the role of professional photographer, they were showing that they were more than just consumers. The removal of the commercial middleman ensured a more accurate account of the situation by "keeping the least possible distance between those who produce and those who consume the images"²².

The majority of these groups' core interests were the issues that faced the socially and politically marginalised: The Hackney Flashers were feminist in theory, The Blackfriars Settlement were solely concerned with youth and education reform, and the major concerns of MINDA were with race and an increased focus on fascist organising in Britain, to name but a few. To maintain a unified presence, most worked under these monikers and very little work was accredited to individuals, thus inspiring a group congeniality and sense of belonging. These workshops, for and by marginalised, discriminated and working class groups, opened up a forum for debate and discussion on the principals of photography otherwise absent. They not only taught the practicalities of photography but explored a purpose for taking photographs within the context of their reception. Through subsequent discussions about their images, participants were encouraged to be reflective of themselves and their actions and were taught to recognise what was implicit in the images.²³ By combining theory and practical work many people learned how to create work that encouraged them to see themselves outwith the confines of stereotypes. In keeping with the whole history of the socialist project of working class self-representation, by taking control of how they, themselves, were documented, they were also (in theory) able to influence how others viewed them.

Such a critical politics of representation inspired sophisticated theoretical development, none more so than Jo Spence's self reflexive project *Beyond the Family Album*. As she writes, "There is no way I could have understood fully the political implications of trying to represent other people (however well intentioned) if I had not first of all begun to explore how I had built a view of myself through people's representation of me".²⁴

Spence acknowledged that her previous work had been produced within a fixed ideology that was not always in the best interests of many people, including those in her images. However, the benefits of what Spence tried to achieve far out weighed any reservations she may have had about the method. The Photography Workshop movement explored representation and endeavoured to inform young people, and others, how to understand themselves outwith media stereotypes and through the lens of 'class conflict theory' – drawing attention to power differentials in society, emphasising social, political and material inequalities – in the days before that sort of thinking was officially ditched by New Labour.

In addition to the practical and theoretical teachings which workshops provided, most were able to offer a platform to exhibit the work produced, and this added a further incentive to be involved. As well as providing a platform for showing work, Andrew Dewdney, who was a founding member of The Cockpit Gallery, felt that exhibitions focused the participants and provided a legitimate avenue for audience development. It was his opinion that "the exhibition was a powerful medium for output"²⁵. Rather than relying on external institutions for the space and funding to facilitate exhibitions, participants sought their own solution. Devised in this context by the Half Moon Gallery, the portable exhibition was quickly adopted by several community art groups. By providing a travel-friendly package that could easily be delivered by post, photography could be exhibited in a variety of locations ranging from community art centres and schools to foyers and corridors of offices and town halls. This form of exhibition gave many community photographers freedom outwith the constraints of the art establishments and patronage control and allowed their work to be seen by the people it was most relevant to. The nationwide demand for such exhibitions facilitated the establishment of several independent photography galleries during the 1970s: the Cockpit Gallery in Holborn, The Side

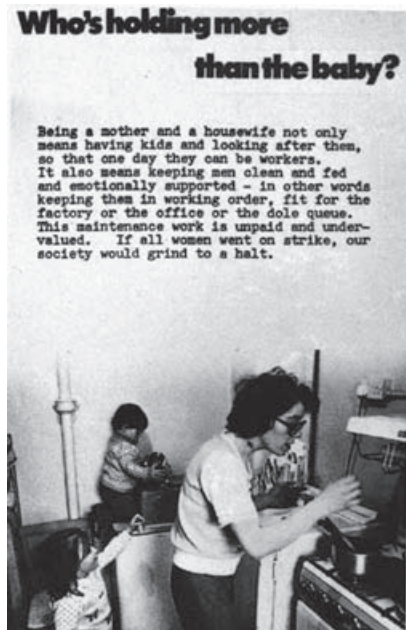


Gallery in Newcastle, Stills Gallery in Edinburgh, to name but a few. And of course the rise in available gallery space also meant a rise in the chances to exhibit on a more wide spread basis. It was this collaborative nature of the workshops that was central to their success.

Opportunities and Fault Lines

Although in many ways the workshops were succeeding, internal conflicts about political standpoints and the direction in which these projects should progress were starting to create a fractious environment. The underlying principles that had shaped the activities of the Workshop movement had been, by their very nature, 'left-leaning' but more specifically towards the old Left(s) of the 1930s. Britain had changed dramatically since then and the nostalgia for the tenets of a traditional Left was becoming outmoded with rises in more white-collar and media based jobs. By 1974 less than half the population were employed in manual labour, compared to 75% in 1900.²⁶ During the '70s the changing nature of the British labour market continued to fuel cultural aspirations that had been fatefully implanted by the ethics of 'the opportunity state' and so the rise of upward mobility, in place of the rise of class equality, ensured the reduction of a socialist-orientated demographic and the destabilisation of the traditional (male) support base of a working class left politics. Within the space of hardly more than a decade, the working class traditions of employment and, indirectly, identity were all but extinguished.

In addition to these fault lines, which were to have a decisive impact on the electoral strategies of the Labour Party to gain power at the expense of advancing socialism, the failures and crises of consciousness (as before and since) among the 'Peace and Love' generation of the 1960s saw the formation of a much more antagonistic and disenfranchised generation in the next decade. Massive cuts to education, mass unemployment and an increasing divide between old and young in the 1970s instilled a sense of animosity within the youth (in part, a continuation of struggle with patriarchal power) and a rising disillusionment towards all aspects of the parent and dominant cultures. The significance of youth responses to social and cultural events became a much researched area of study in the 1970s, not least with the rise of Cultural Studies, and helped to secure the importance of the education and race debates of the time. Adapting a more anarchistic



Above: Jo Spence & The Hackney Flashers. Exhibition Panels from 'Who's Holding the Baby?', 1977-1978.



Below: CARF poster, 1977.

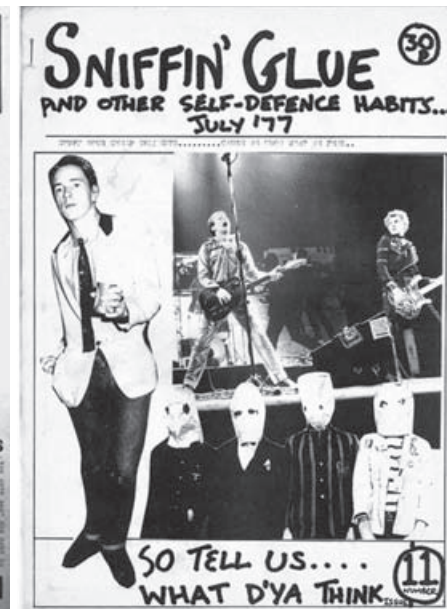
attitudinal outlook, such as the rejection of electoral politics, many young people of Britain in the 1970s had their own ideas about social reform; ideas which would lead to the formation of the Punk phenomenon.

Although the proliferation of Punk's uttermost oppositionality was short-lived²⁷, it still helped to spread more enduring facets of anarchistic thought. Rather than adopt mainstream political means to agitate for social reform, Punk promoted a 'Do It Yourself' ethos which inspired a whole generation of young and creative people to take matters into their own hands, and was the vehicle through which many became politicised. Although 'purists' despised Punk's rise to the level of Zeitgeist by the end of the decade, some basic features of the movement remained, to be adopted and adapted by successive generations. Establishment reaction towards Punk, as with previous 'moral panics', helped to distinguish a clear British youth culture, one marked by a rising rejection of mainstream politics within the younger generation – a rejection which would go on to inspire, amongst others, the animal rights, rave, squat, anti-road, and climate change 'social justice movements'.

Jo Spence and Terry Dennett, from the Half Moon Photography Workshop collaboration, had always been concerned with the continued working through of a Left politics within their work, emphasising the importance of change from below. The edging out of both Spence and Dennett after only seven issues of *Camerawork* was an indicator that people were becoming wary of being thought of as out-of-date and wanted to inhabit a more populist space.²⁸ Following these events, *Camerawork* began to adopt a different tack; they published their last serious article on community art in 1980 and underwent a physical change in format. It made a conscious effort to include work about more mainstream media culture and practitioners who were more concerned with a gallery audience. A similar fate awaited the original members of MINDA. What started as creative disagreements over the layout of their accompanying publication, *Campaign Against Racism and Fascism* (CARF), soon became more deep-rooted political feuds, which resulted in the disbanding of the original organisation.²⁹

An indispensable guide to the fault lines of the 'opportunity state' at this time is Dick Hebdige's article 'The Bottom Line on Planet One: Squaring Up to *The Face*' (*Ten:8*, 1985), which explores the success of *The Face* magazine, first published in 1980. When asked why they didn't read *Ten:8*, visual communications students at West Midlands College gave answers such as; "It's not like *The Face*...It's too political... It looks too heavy... It's got the ratio of image to text wrong...I don't like the layout...It depresses me...you never see it anywhere...It doesn't relate to anything I know or anything I'm interested in...It's too left wing... What use is it to someone like me?"³⁰

Hebdige goes on to comment, "For them *Ten:8* is the profane text – its subject matter dull, verbose and prolix; its tone earnest and teacherly; its contributors obsessed with arcane genealogies and inflated theoretical concerns"³¹



Epitomising the Thatcher era, *The Face* was a self-funded 'street style' magazine which encapsulated everything that *Camerawork* and *Ten:8* were not; 'a visual-orientated youth culture magazine' whose circulation figures reflected its then market success (selling 88,000 copies a month). For whatever reason, it captured the imagination of what a significant enough number of young people with disposable income were looking for at that moment, and that, clearly, was not highly politicised wordy journals. The landslide victory of Thatcher in 1979 marked the symbolic demise of the Left in party politics, just as the publication of *The Face* in 1980 marked the demise of the politicised 'history-from-below' photography magazines that had driven and engaged debates of the 1970s.

Both these 'defeats' signalled the decline of 'the Left' in enacting any successful mass alternative to neo-liberalism throughout the '80s, and beyond. Despite their best intentions, it was clear that the community workshops were finding it increasingly difficult to connect with some of the people they were intended to support. The harshening conditions of mass unemployment, rising poverty and poor housing – many seeing housing estates fall to a standard well below the poverty line – coupled with sensationalist media reporting and exploitation by politicians, combined to produce a general perception of a rise in criminality. These increasingly degraded conditions, with community projects also suffering cuts, saw those most likely to contribute and benefit move further beyond reach.³²

Society's Child

The final, and perhaps most significant, way in which workshop based practice began to falter was the increasing acceptance of photography into the contemporary fine art market by the end of the decade. By the 1980s, the arts and education were being more fully positioned as aspirant entrepreneurial enterprise, and a boom in the art market directed interest towards perceived profitable forms. The growing financial interest in photographic work meant that community arts, and its infrastructure, became increasingly marginalised as a practice. (Thatcher's infamous "there is no such thing as society" statement being delivered in 1987.³³) The success of the workshops was the more even playing field on which work was developed and presented; participants working and debating together with no apparent hierarchy, the seeming opposite of the competitive and increasingly marketised art school culture.³⁴

Yet, whether by choice or by default, community photographers began to find their work being placed in contexts it was never intended for and which tended to distance the genre from the communities where it was created. The closing chapter of this period was the *Three Perspectives* exhibition that took place at the Hayward Gallery in London in 1979. Although it signified the growing influence that photography had within the art world, it also saw those involved relinquish their critical stance regarding the fine art establishment and marked the continued departure from more community orientated work.

By 1985 the time of idealism had passed, as Hebdige points out, "with the public sector,

education, the welfare state – all the big 'safe' institutions up against the wall, there's nothing good or clever or heroic about going under. When all is said and done, why bother to think 'deeply' when you're not paid to think 'deeply'."³⁵ More recently, incidents like Cindy Sherman shooting for M.A.C makeup, the commissioning of Banksy graffiti for the Swiss embassy in London, the inclusion of King Mob propaganda in a Tate Britain exhibition in 2008³⁶, along with so many other examples, 'cool capitalism' has proven that even the most ardent expressions of cultural dissent can, eventually, be absorbed into the dominant culture they seemingly once fought against.³⁷ Whatever the flaws of the community workshops at that time, or the political weaknesses in their wider networks of support, this generation of community photographers did take equality seriously.

What is essential, now, is that we move against the real world positioning of working class youth as an underclass – or, the 'forgotten ones'³⁸. Instead, like the community workshop ethos, they need to be accepted as equals in what would be a more inclusive society. This is not an argument

I can make here but if examples are needed of not doing so, we need look no further than the glorification of CHAV culture or the apotheosised reception of parody personas such as Vikki Polard, to start to understand some of the current problems facing the self-perception of young people. Moreover, to magnify the problem, as I pointed out at the outset, many of those charged with offences in the 2011 riots were, in fact, over the age of twenty-four (up to 40%) but the real establishment outrage was directed at youth. As Hebdige observed, "youth is present only when its presence is a problem or is regarded as a problem."³⁹ If there was ever a need for education towards positive self-representation of youth, one embedded in attaining structural equality across society, surely the time is now.

Otherwise, one way to consider the perceived negative effects of increased low self-esteem – as an inextricable factor of structural inequality⁴⁰ – is to, again, look at Beatrix Campbell's not unproblematic and not unchallenged description of the (male) youth

Below, top: Linder Sterling & Jon Savage: *The Secret Public*. Punk Montages, Photography and Collages 1976-1981



Right: Peter Dunn and Loraine Leeson, Health Cuts Can Kill. Campaign to Save Bethnal Green Hospital, 1978. A2 poster produced and distributed through the hospital campaign committee.

community in Blackbird Leys in 1991: “Economically they were spare; surplus; personally dependent on someone else; socially they were fugitives whose lawlessness kept them inside and yet outside of their own communities. They had no job, no incomes, no property, no cars, no responsibilities... What they did have was a reputation.”⁴¹

Society, as increasingly more fully incorporated into the operations of the market, has become more about individuals than community; more about supposed entrepreneurs than co-operatives. At the very least the workshops of the 1970s facilitated tangible artistic and creative development and opened up the hegemony of history writing to the working class – a ‘history from below’ increasingly willing to incorporate women, workers, and subalterns of various kinds as historical agents.

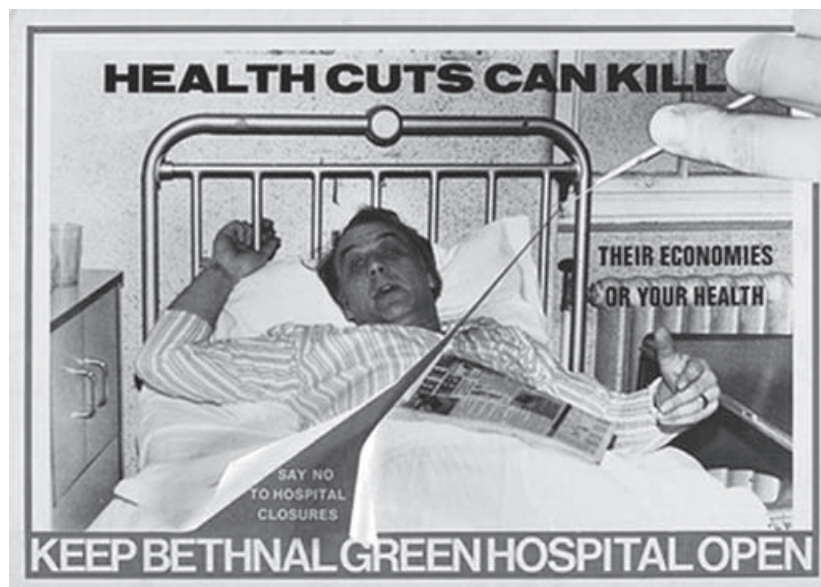
The question remains, how do young people politically engage with a system that seeks and succeeds to disenfranchise them? As Simon Critchley notes in his 2008 text, *Infinitely Demanding*, “there is increased talk of a democratic deficit, a feeling of irrelevance of traditional electoral politics to the lives of citizens [...] where citizens experience the governmental norms that rule contemporary society as externally binding but not internally compelling.”⁴² Contrary to Hebdige’s notion, ‘cool’ was not the key. As someone who was a teenager in the mid-1990s, coupled with a distinct lack of general political teaching, the patronising displays of camaraderie between Tony Blair and Noel Gallagher *et al* were enough that I remained politically inactive until my late twenties – success?! Young people don’t want politicians to come ‘down’ to their level – a false generosity and litmus of the imbalance. They want to be respected enough to be allowed to engage their own decision making and make their own inquiry.

The workshops of the 1970s may have been flawed, nonetheless, they did foster political ideals that strived to achieve a class-based history as part of an oppositional engagement – aiming to “attack vigorously those types of historical enquiries which reinforce the structures of power and inequality in our society”⁴³. By embedding these ideals within photographic and educational practices they were able to encourage and enact a more socially conscious and collaborative way of working. As Richard Sennett, author of *The Craftsmen*, says, “the head and the hand are not simply separated intellectually but socially”.⁴⁴

Notes

- 1 ‘UK riots: suspects, statistics and cases mapped and listed’, Conrad Quilty-Harper, Amy Willis, Martin Beckford and Edward Malnick, *The Telegraph*, 12 Aug 2011: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/crime/8698443/UK-riots-suspected-looters-statistics-and-court-cases.html>
- 2 ‘A few quick clarifications on the recent riots’, A group, London, *Libcom*, 28 Aug 2011: <http://libcom.org/forums/news/few-quick-clarifications-recent-riots-28082011> Other contemporary articles relating to these and related issues include: ‘Riot Polit-Econ - A Joint Report of the Khalid Qureshi Foundation and Chelsea Ives Youth Centre’, available at metamute.org, 22 August 2011: <http://www.metamute.org/community/your-posts/riot-polit-econ> ‘An open letter to those who condemn looting (Part one)’, available at *Libcom*, 12 Aug 2011: <http://libcom.org/news/open-letter-those-who-condemn-looting-part-one-11082011> ‘Detest and Survive: self-deregulation and asset reallocation in England, August 2011’ by Clinical Wasteman, available at metamute.org, 17 August 2011: <http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/detest-and-survive-self-deregulation-and-asset-reallocation-england-august-2011> ‘Unlimited Liability or Nothing to Lose?’ by Clinical Wasteman, available at metamute.org, 16 August 2011: <http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/unlimited-liability-or-nothing-to-lose> ‘The August 2011 Riots in Britain’, Ricardo Reis, *Revolt Against Plenty*, 23 August 2011: <http://www.revoltagainstoplenty.com/index.php/recent/1-recent/183-ricardo-reis> Also, for a more recent overview, see: *Mute Vol3 #2 (Winter 2011/12) ‘Politics My Arse’*: <http://www.metamute.org/editorial/magazine/mute-vol-3-no-2-politics-my-arse>

Right: Jamie Reid, *Keep Warm This Winter*. Lithoprint on paper, 1975.



in Britain’, Institute of Historical Research, University of London School of Advanced Studies, <http://www.history.ac.uk/makinghistory/resources/articles/HWJ.html>

21 Slater, Don, ‘Community Photography’, *Camerawork*, no. 20 (Dec 1980) pp.9-10

22 *ibid.*

23 Andrew Dewdney, interviewed by Shirley Read Part 10 - 12, British Library Sound Archives (April 2000). <http://sounds.bl.uk/SearchResults.aspx?query=Andrew%20Dewdney&category=All+categories&publicdomainonly=false>

24 Spence, Jo, *Putting Myself in the Picture*, Avon: Camden Press Ltd, 1986, p.83

25 Andrew Dewdney, interviewed by Shirley Read Part 10-12, British Library Sound Archives (April 2000).

26 Black, Jeremy, *Modern British History since 1900*, Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 2000, p.125

27 With exceptions!, see e.g.: <http://ianbone.wordpress.com/>

28 Spence and Dennett, ‘A Statment from Photography Workshop’, in *Photography/Politics* 1, ii.

29 Minda, ‘Minda’, in *Photography/ Politics* 1, p.139

30 Hebdige, Dick ‘The Bottom Line on Planet One: Squaring Up to *The Face*’, in Hebdige, Dick, *Hiding in the Light*, Routledge, London, 1988, p.156

31 *ibid.*

32 Pinnington, ‘Art in Action’ in *Ten:8*, no 20: 20

33 Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, talking to *Women’s Own* magazine, 31 October 1987: <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/106689>

34 *The Face* publishing a ‘Shock report’ on Thatcher’s art school budget cuts.

35 Hebdige, Dick ‘The Bottom Line on Planet One: Squaring Up to *The Face*’, in Hebdige, Dick, *Hiding in the Light*, Routledge, London, 1988, p.166

36 An archive of King Mob’s printed materials was acquired by Tate Britain, and several anti-art collage works by the King Mob collective included in the Tate Britain’s Collage Montage Assemblage exhibit in July 2008.

37 See McGuigan, Jim, *Cool Capitalism*, London: Pluto, 2010

38 In a society where currently you must be over 35 to be fully eligible for Housing Benefit; where under 25s are bracketed for a lower level of living ‘allowance’ Benefits; where the much lower minimum wage for under-21s is alone frozen; where if you’re under 18 you’re likely not entitled to Jobseeker’s Allowance; yet the age of full criminal responsibility is between 10 to 12 years. As we see from proposals to further increase the age of retirement, ‘youth’ is a flexible, arbitrary, benchmark according to who’s counting and for what purposes.

39 Hebdige, Dick, ‘Youth surveillance and display’, in *Hiding in the light: On images and things* (chapter 1), London: Routledge, 1988

40 “As Nancy Fraser has argued, cultural domination, non-recognition and disrespect invariably involve economic and political inequities.” See: Fraser, Nancy, ‘Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the Postsocialist Condition (London: Routledge, 1997) p. 15, cited in ‘Beyond Social Inclusion: Towards Cultural Democracy’, Cultural Policy Collective: <http://www.variant.org.uk/20texts/CultDemo.txt>

41 Campbell, Beatrix, *Goliath: Britain’s Dangerous Places*, Michigan, US, Methuen, 1993, p.29

42 Critchley, Simon, *Infinitely Demanding*, Pennsylvania, U.S.A, Merse, 2008, p.7

43 *History Workshop Journal*: <http://www.history.ac.uk/makinghistory/resources/articles/HWJ.html>

44 Sennett, Richard, *The Craftsmen*, London, Penguin Books, 2008, p.45

- 3 ‘Westminster vows to evict social tenants involved in riots’, Kate McCann, *The Guardian*, 10 August 2011: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/housing-network/2011/aug/10/council-seeks-eviction-for-looters>
- 4 Bourdieu, Pierre, ‘A Train Driver’s Remark’ in *Acts of Resistance*, Polity Press and The New Press, 1998, p.21
- 5 *Ibid.*, p.22
- 6 This extract of Campbell’s (1993) book *Goliath* is in Jim McGuigan’s (1996) *Culture and the Public Sphere*, London: Routledge
- 7 Spence, Jo, ‘The Politics of Photography’, in *Camerawork*, no.1 (February 1976): pp.1-3
- 8 Hebdige, Dick, ‘Well Maybe’
- 9 For a critique of the later, new Labour developments of engaging members of ‘excluded groups’ in historically privileged cultural arenas, see: ‘Beyond Social Inclusion: Towards Cultural Democracy’, The Cultural Policy Collective: <http://www.variant.org.uk/20texts/CultDemo.txt>
- 10 The Mass Observation movement started in the 1930s - the population was encouraged to keep a record of their lives and then submit transcripts to the movement’s editors for analysis and storage. The aim was to obtain an ‘intimate’ record of peoples’ day-to-day lives. Writers recorded conversations overheard on buses or in pubs, their views on current affairs or technological advances of the day, the food they ate, how they spent their Sunday afternoons and domestic issues.
- 11 The Workers Film and Photo League in the United States (known as the Film and Photo League after 1933) was part of an extensive cultural movement sponsored by the Communist International and its affiliated national parties in the interwar period.
- 12 Starting in Germany and the USSR - and spreading across Europe, and to the United States, central America and beyond - the movement promoted the depiction of proletarian working conditions and everyday life. Communist-affiliated groups of amateur worker-photographers were exhorted to lay bare, in a “hard and merciless light”, the iniquities and social ills of capitalism: “Photography has become an outstanding and indispensable means of propaganda in the revolutionary class struggle.”
- 13 W. Korner and J.Stuber, ‘Germany:Arbeiter - Fotografie’, trans. David Evans and Sylia Gohl in *Photography/ Politics* 1, p.73
- 14 See, for instance, Guy Aldred (1886-1963): <http://www.gcu.ac.uk/radicalglasgow/chapters/aldred.html>
- 15 Judt, Tony, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945*, Suffolk: Pimlico 2005, p.406
- 16 Spence, Jo, *Cultural Snipings: The Art of Transgression*, London: Routledge, 1995, p.37
- 17 See ‘1981 Brixton riot’: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1981_Brixton_riot
- 18 See e.g. ‘The Working Class Self-Education Movement: The League of the *Plebs*’, Colin Waugh, *Workers’ Liberty*, 16 January 2009: <http://www.workersliberty.org/story/2009/01/16/league-plebs>
- 19 Editorial Collective, ‘Editorial’, *History Workshop Journal*, no. 1 Issue 1 (Spring 1976): <http://hwj.oxfordjournals.org/content/1/1.toc>
- 20 ‘Making History: The Changing Face of the Profession



Comic & Zine Reviews

Mark Pawson

Fan/Zines have been getting a lot of coverage over the last year, they were featured in the **Loud Flash: British Punk on Paper** exhibition at **Haunch of Venison** gallery; were showcased at **Dazed & Confused** magazine's **Dazed Live** extravaganza; anarcho-punk band **Crass's** collection of several hundred **Fan/Zines** was exhibited recently at **Boo-Hooray** gallery in New York; **Verso** have just published a 480 page complete collection of **Laura Oldfield Ford's Fan/Zine Savage Messiah**; and there's even a specialist vintage **Fan/Zine** store, **Goteblud**, in San Francisco. At the **New York Art Bookfair** it seemed that just about any **Fan/Zine** produced in the last 40 years had been bagged up and priced up. And there're three books which examine different areas of all this **Fan/Zine** publishing activity that deserve your attention: **'Fanzines'**, **'100 Fanzines/10 Years Of British Punk: 1976-1985'**, and **'Behind The Zines: Self-Publishing Culture'**.

But first we need to get a couple of things straight, apologies for inflicting **'Fan/Zines'** on you, I won't do it again. Now let's work at establishing a practical working definition of a **Fanzine**. **Fanzine**, a term in use since the 1930s, refers to an amateur, autonomous, self-produced publication, made using readily accessible production tools and printing methods, sold at an affordable price and not primarily intended as a profit-making venture. A **Fanzine's** subject matter is usually a specific genre of entertainment or popular culture – for example, science fiction, comics, music, or sport. **Zine**, a term popularised in the mid-late '80s, simply drops the word **Fan** and jettisons the last sentence of the above definition, thus escaping fandom and gaining the freedom to be about anything whatsoever it chooses as its subject matter. This column has always used the term **Zine** in its title.

'Fanzines', by design historian **Teal Triggs**, is the largest and has the widest viewpoint of the three books under consideration. Published by **Thames & Hudson**, it's designed as a companion volume to **'200 Trips from the Counter Culture: Graphics and Stories from the Underground Press Syndicate'** (2006). This oversized volume sensibly calls itself 'a' history of **Fanzines** rather than pretending to be a definitive textbook on the subject. It looks at **Fanzine** activity as far back as the 1930s, with its main focus on the late 1970s right up to 2009. Most of the book is taken up with colour images of **Fanzine** covers grouped into thematic, roughly chronological chapters: 'A Do-It-Yourself Revolution: Definitions and Early Days', 'Its as easy as 1-2-3: The Graphic Language of Punk 1975-1983', 'Liberated Spaces: Subcultures, Protest and Consumer Culture 1980s-1990s', 'Girl Power and Personal Politics' (a particular interest of the

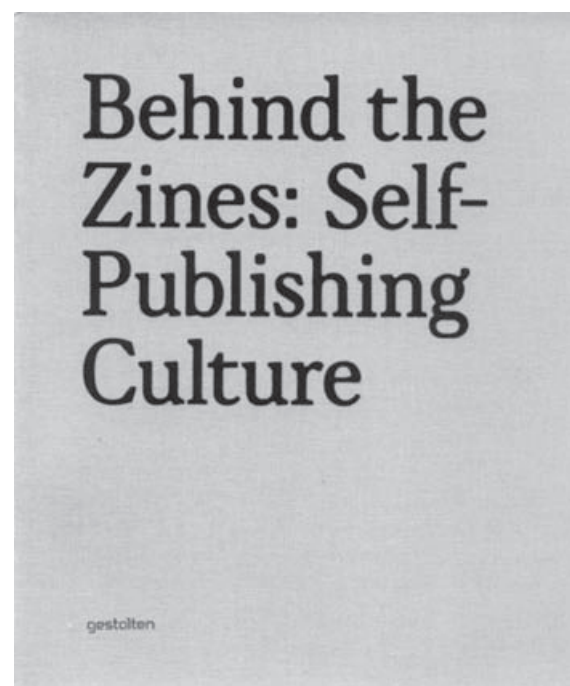
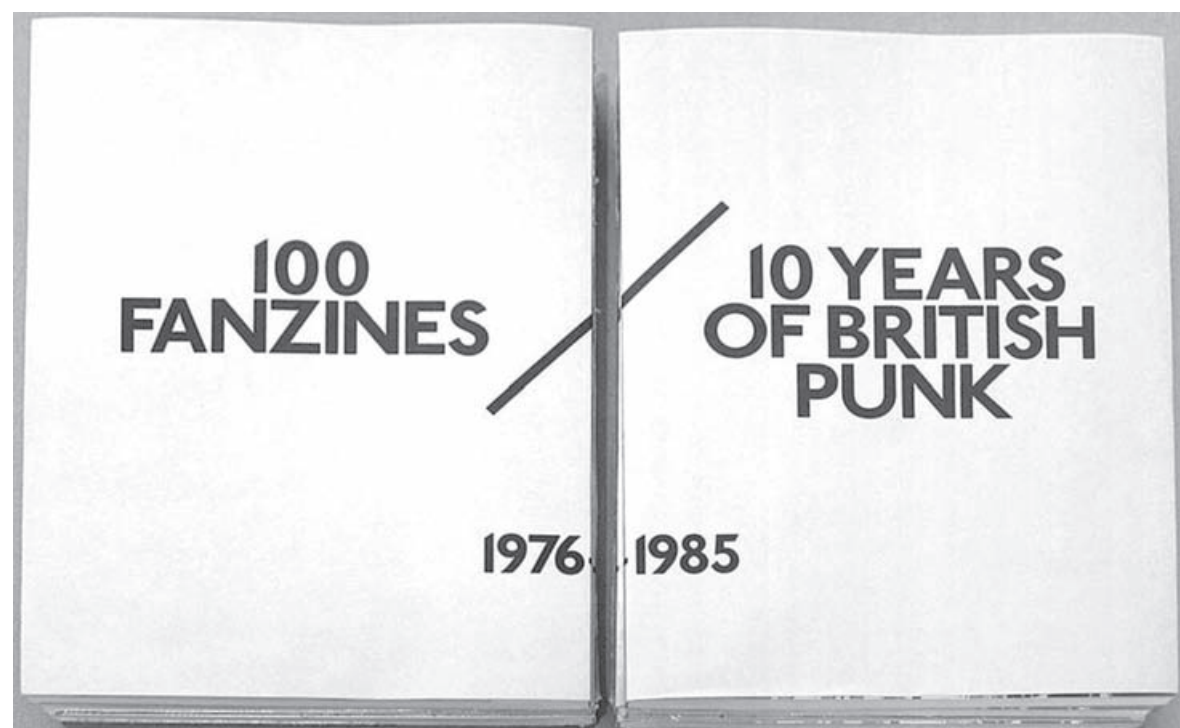


authors), 'E-zines 1998-2009', and 'The Crafting of Contemporary Fanzines'. Each chapter is introduced with a 3-page essay. Altogether, 550 publications are included, predominantly from the UK and USA, this large selection of titles allows lots of oddball, one-off and generally uncategorisable zines to be included, many of which are unlikely to be given coverage elsewhere. All the **Fanzine** covers are accompanied with short descriptions, which are useful but sometimes perfunctory, as readers only see cover images. Considering the extreme difficulty of accessing original copies, slightly longer descriptions would be useful. I enjoyed slowly working my way through **FANZINES**, as someone who for the last 30 years has **Fanzine**, sold, collected, contributed to, distributed, curated and reviewed **Zines** and **Fanzines**. This book parallels a large part of my life and interests. Approaching **Fanzines** from a design history perspective is interesting but has its limitations. In *The City* (1977-1980) is commented upon as "being notable for its... standardised logo", but to someone involved in creating publications at the same time it's easy to see that they just cut the title off the artwork of the last issue and stuck it onto the paste-up of the next one! The final chapter, covering 2000-09, seems a bit scrappy, but accurately reflects the disparity of **Zines** and **Fanzines** made in this period. Linking

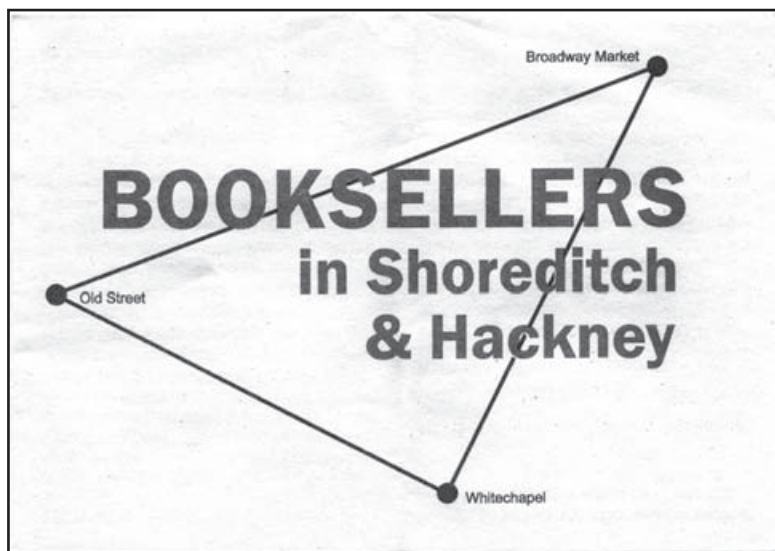
these publications to a theory of Craftivism seems spurious, few of the examples shown back it up. Craft values can tend to emphasise materials and construction over content, shifting the resulting publication away from any useful definition of **ZINES** or **Fanzines**.

'100 Fanzines/10 Years Of British Punk: 1976-1985' features 100 publications from **Toby Mott's** seemingly endless collection of Punk ephemera. The title tells you exactly what to expect: a short, sharp, shock of **100 Fanzine** covers reproduced full size in chronological order. This format lends itself readily to flicking back and forth, comparing and contrasting. It's notable that many covers are entirely hand drawn, the total cost of materials used would be just a few pennies. Several covers are hand drawn and augmented with sparingly used rub-down lettering – I can't remember how much **Letraset** cost in the mid '80s; it was expensive, priced for professional use at something like £2.95 a sheet, but **W H Smith** transfer lettering was just 25p a pack and **Decadry** was 75p. Only two magazines, both from 1976, are professionally typeset, featuring **The Crusaders** and **Steve Hillage** on their covers! At this time – years before the availability of home computers and good quality, affordable printers – typesetting was expensive and largely inaccessible to self-publishers unless you were lucky enough to have friend who worked in the industry. As well as punk rock **Fanzines**, mod, new wave, skinhead, Oi, and anarcho-punk **Fanzines** are included – the first anarchy sign appeared in 1981, followed by a British Movement symbol in 1985. Several of the **Fanzines** illustrated are free, proudly proclaiming this fact on their covers; a small attempt to combat capitalism, or maybe the makers were just able to rip off hundreds of photocopies at work. The cover images are accompanied by **Toby Mott's** memories of making **Raw Power Fanzine** as a teenager, and an essay by **Vic Brand** which makes the insightful point that "The zine-makers...generally...represent the consumers of punk culture, rather than its producers"; **Fanzines** rather than **Zines**. But then **Brand** lapses into the tired cliché of lionising the power of the photocopier. Copiers have always been powerful creative tools, but the **Fanzine** covers shown in **100 Fanzines** are printed using 6 different techniques – most of the slightly more proficient-looking examples, with multi-colour covers, were printed offset litho by **Joly** at **Better Badges**.

'Behind the Zines: Self-Publishing Culture' from German publishers **Gestalten** is a survey of recent European self-publishing and small publishers. The publications included are primarily concerned with art, design, graphic design,

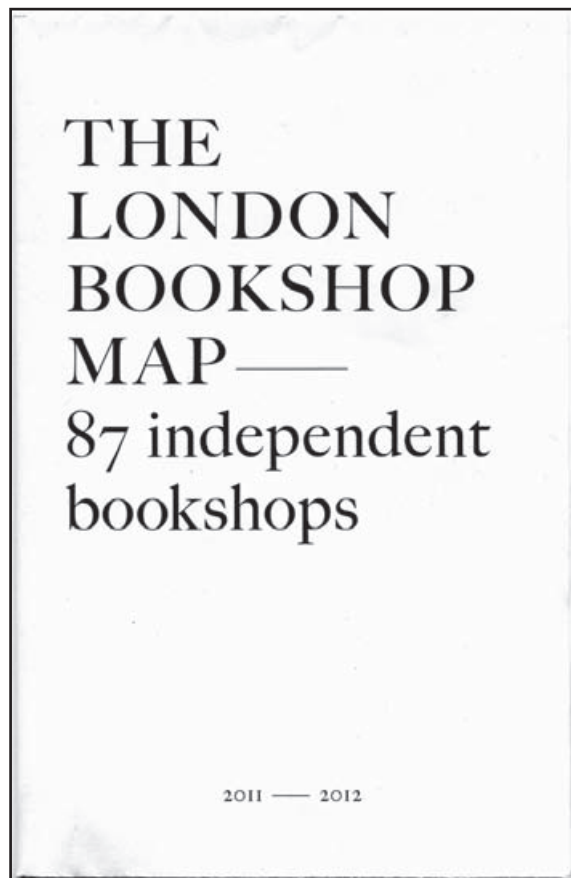


drawing, illustration, photography, and art writing. Each title is given an entire page, showing the cover and several page spreads – giving a good overall impression – and accompanied by a brief description and information on the creators, edition size, frequency and printing methods used – **Risograph** stencil printers are very much in evidence – but cover prices are omitted. Websites, e-mails and countries of origin are all listed in the index. Compared with the publications shown in **Fanzines** and **100 Fanzines/10 Years**, these are more colourful with carefully composed layouts, but there's little of the passion, politics, urgency, engagement and excitement demonstrated in the other two books. A particular strongpoint is that **Behind the Zines'** contemporaneity allows for the inclusion of interviews with publishers and some interesting behind-the-scenes photographs. The image showing **Dot Dot Dot #15** underway is instructive, showing simultaneously, in the same room, an editorial meeting, designers working on computers shading the adverts and preparing files ready to be sent direct to the adjacent digital stencil printers, and a printer changing ink colours. Most of the publications in **Behind the Zines** seem much more insular and inward-looking than those in the other two books; some fit our definition of a ZINE but most would be more usefully described as artzines, illzines, pamphlets, drawing books, compendiums or maybe just picture books. Showing so much of the publications featured is a



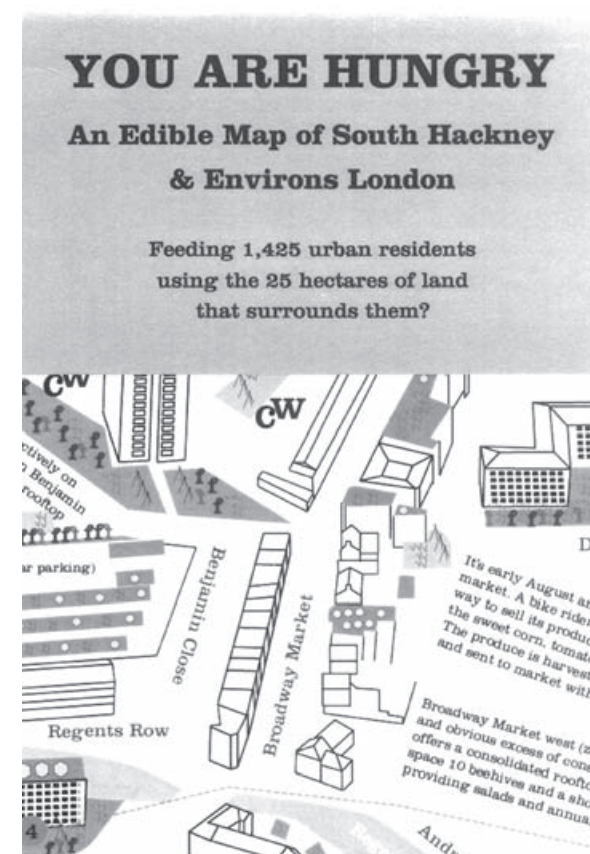
laudable approach, but almost reveals too much – there's only two books shown that I'm tempted to get hold of.

Everybody's mapping nowadays. I can't remember reviewing maps previously in this column, but a small stack of them have built up which deserve a closer look. First up is the elegantly designed **The London Bookshop Map: 87 Independent Bookshops**. This foldout map covers an enormous area; from Wood Green in North London to Streatham in the South, and from Hackney in the East to Ladbroke Grove out West. The 87 independent bookshops are all listed with contact information, opening hours and a brief description. They encompass specialists and generalists, new and secondhand, antiquarian, occult and anarchist, with a strong showing of art, design and photography, but curiously there're no pornographers. You'll discover a bookshop/reading room inside an operating railway station – open at peak commuting hours – and there's even a bookshop inside a greenhouse. More modest in scope and utilitarian in design is **Booksellers In Shoreditch & Hackney**, a pocket sized map compiled by the **Bookartbookshop** and printed locally by **Ditto Press**. Covering an East London triangle which spans from Old Street up to Broadway Market and down to Whitechapel, it includes 17



locations, which are all within walking or bus hopping distance of each other. These include a bookshop with its own curiosities museum in the basement and there's also details of weekly market stalls selling books. Both these bookshop maps are independent initiatives. They're the result of lots of hard work by people who've had the vision and energy to go ahead and get their projects off the ground. Hopefully it isn't a thankless task. They're both funded mainly by the bookshops listed and are refreshingly free of funding body logo clutter. Both are intended as ongoing projects and invite users to send in suggestions and recommendations for future issues – it will be interesting to see how they evolve and grow. A bookshop map is a fairly simple idea and could be easily replicated in other locations.

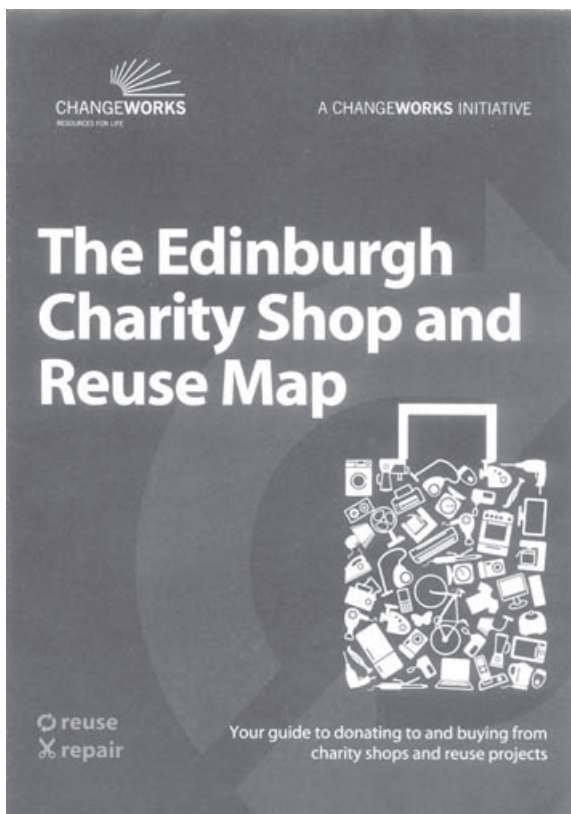
Books are important, but feeding your brain and amusing your eyeballs is not quite as vital to survival as food. **You Are Hungry – An Edible Map of South Hackney & Environs** by **Mikey Tomkins** focuses on public space in a small corner of East London and maps the locations of actual and imagined food growing activities alongside each other. Examples of current food production include beehives on top of the **Space** gallery and studio complex, Bangladeshi families creating small ad hoc gardens outside their windows to grow runner beans and dodis (marrows), and there's even some grapevines growing in the back yard and up the walls of a cafe planted by the **Urban Wine Company** who collect the ripe grapes and make local wine from them. To complement this existing food growing activity



Mikey Tomkins proposes using the grassed areas surrounding the local authority housing blocks for vegetable growing, empty garages for mushroom farms, and plenty of beehives on the roofs of taller buildings. He backs up these proposals by measuring the available growing spaces, suggesting suitable, easy to grow fruit and vegetables, and working out the potential annual yield of these crops. What may initially seem like a fantasy could only be a few steps away from the ad hoc planting and growing already taking place. **You Are Hungry – An Edible Map of South Hackney & Environs** overlaps with the area covered by **Booksellers In Shoreditch & Hackney**. **Mikey Tomkins** imagines a near future when fresh local sweetcorn and tomatoes will be sold at the Saturday market on Broadway Market, on the same day they've been picked, with zero food miles, processing or storage. I don't know if any booksellers in the area are already growing herbs in window boxes or composting unsold magazines, but I suspect a few of them would be very interested in planting some grape vines.

Okay, three London maps is enough – I do realise that not everyone lives in London, but thrift is omnipresent. On a recent trip to Edinburgh I luckily stumbled across Raeburn Place, with its rich seam of Charity shops and specialist Charity Bookshops, where I picked up a copy of **The Edinburgh Charity Shop And Reuse Map**. It's an impressive resource covering the whole city. The map shows 112 charity shops, furniture projects and a string of Community Recycling Centre Reuse Cabins, all with detailed information on the items/services they specialise in, what they sell and the type of donations they'll accept. The main function of this map, published by Changeworks Waste Prevention Team, is to actively encourage people to reuse and repair consumer goods; prioritising reuse and repair over the less intelligent route of simply recycling things back into raw materials. There's plenty more information on the back of the map – they're almost trying to squeeze too much in. There's a resource list of other places to buy and sell secondhand goods: carboot sales, auction houses, gumtree and eBay. There's also a disappointingly small section about simply giving stuff away to other people, which strangely doesn't mention the active Edinburgh freecycle group or Free Stuff events. I'd really like to see direct unmediated giving, without third parties regulating or profiting from the exchange, publicised as much as other reuse schemes. The Free Stuff Stores must happen. I've never seen anything quite like The Edinburgh Charity Shop And Reuse Map before: it's a unique, broadminded publication useful for cheapskates, bargain hunters, declutterers, booklovers, and more importantly those in genuine need and trying to survive on very limited incomes.

If there was a bookshop map for Edinburgh, **Analogue Books** would definitely be included, in



fact they'd probably be the instigators of such a project. This compact shop offers a precisely curated selection of books and magazines focussing on illustration, design, graphic design and the visual arts, together with screenprints by local designers and their own publications, including several books by Nigel Peake. Analogue Books have a policy of displaying everything in their shop with the full cover on show. There's no overlapping magazines or rows of book spines which you have to bend your neck to look through. In retailing this is an approach that takes a lot of conviction and is very rarely seen.

(December 2011)

Links

Fanzines, Teal Triggs, Thames & Hudson, London, 2010.

100 Fanzines/10 Years of British Punk: 1976-1985, Toby Mott, Andrew Roth Inc., New York, 2011.

Behind the Zines: Self-Publishing Culture, R. Klaten, A. Mollard, M. Hübner, S. Commentz, Gestalten, Berlin, 2011.

Panel Discussion about *100 Fanzines* at NYABF 2011: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oEVOvfAh42o>

750+ fanzines from the Joly/Better Badges archive:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_jYQ2dTLeOo

The London Bookshop Map
<http://www.thelondonbookshopmap.org>

bookartbookshop
<http://www.bookartbookshop.com>

Mikey Tomkins: Research on food growing
<http://www.mikeytomkins.co.uk>

Changeworks
<http://www.changeworks.org>

Haunch of Venison - 'Loud Flash: British Punk on Paper'
http://haunchofvenison.com/exhibitions/past/2010/loud_flash/

Boo-hooray
<http://boo-hooray.com>

Savage Messiah
<http://www.versobooks.com/books/1022-savage-messiah>

gotablud
<http://gotablud.livejournal.com>

Urban Wine Company
<http://www.urbanwineco.com>

Towards a New Documentalism

Jorge Ribalta

Tagg, John. *The Disciplinary Frame: Photographic Truths and the Capture of Meaning*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009. (9780816642885)

Azoulay, Ariella. *The Civil Contract of Photography*. Cambridge, MA: Zone Books, 2008. (9781890951887)

Since John Tagg published his first book, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), he has been one of the most recognised figures in photographic theory. He is part of a brilliant generation of Anglo-American authors who emerged from the 1968 political movement, appeared in the public arena in the context of the 1970s New Art History, and whose contribution to a theorisation of photography using the tools of Marxism, poststructuralism, Gramscian cultural studies, feminism, and psychoanalysis remains unsurpassed. Tagg himself recently formulated the project of this group in these terms: “we half believed that this State could be smashed and that the first brick could be thrown by photographic theory” (John Tagg, “Mindless Photography,” in J. J. Long, Andrea Noble, and Edward Welch, eds., *Photography: Theoretical Snapshots*, New York: Routledge, 2009, 29). Tagg’s *Disciplinary Frame* continues the project of a cultural history of photography critically inscribed in the discourses and institutions of modern culture that he initiated with his first book. However, Tagg’s strong investment in a Foucauldian framework (noticeable in the book’s title) account’s for certain of the project’s epistemic (and political) limitations.

The first chapter of *Disciplinary Frame* traces the role of the photographic archive and the socially regulatory uses of photography in the constitution of the modern liberal State. According to Tagg, this State is characterised by two factors: an implicit war logic, which determines the coercive force and the violence inherent to the State logic; and the instrumentalisation of culture as a means of producing social inclusion and constructing citizenship, a process he calls “recruitment and mobilisation” (49).

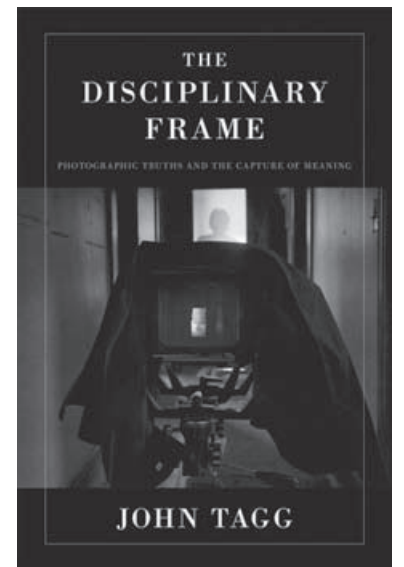
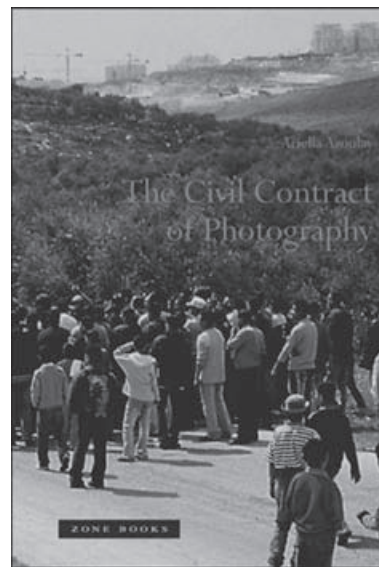
The central chapters deal with the 1930s, the key period when documentary discourse was constituted according to technocratic-liberal New Deal policies. In claiming that Farm Security Administration (FSA) documentary photography represented the “first and only true art form produced by social democracy” (61), Tagg follows the work of John Grierson, the recognised founder of the reformist documentary film movement in the late 1920s. The second chapter studies FSA and Griersonian discourse as constituting documentary photography as a specific cultural form for social “recruitment and mobilisation” within the specific historical conditions of the 1930s. The ethical contract between the citizen and the paternalistic State as a form of collective participation was based on an ethics of transparency and expressed in documentary tropes such as “truth,” “dignity of fact,” or the “innate decency of the ordinary” (93). The third chapter focuses on Walker Evans as a specific and problematic case study inside of the hegemonic documentary paradigm in 1930s America (emblematised by *Life* magazine). Tagg argues that Evans’s “melancholic lassitude,” or his characteristic ambiguity and resistance to meaning, determines “an impossible internal distance from the very discursive frame in which it is produced as subject” (177), and would introduce a degree of self-critique to that “documentary style” of which he has been canonised as “father.” Chapter 4 focuses on the dissolution of

both documentary and social democracy in the United States, determined not only by the completion of the FSA project and the participation of the United States in World War II, but also by the structural transformations in the composition of the working class and the new public role of minorities (here Tagg refers to women, African American, and Latino movements) throughout the 1940s. By examining practices related to those social groups, Tagg argues that the rhetoric of transparency, which characterised the New Deal documentary contract, lost its historical conditions. The New Deal logic of universal social inclusion, in other words, had reached its limit.

The last two chapters are shorter and of a different nature; they break the historical focus and sequence of the previous chapters and take on the “disciplinary mechanisms of history and art history” (209). By referring to Roland Barthes’s statement in *Camera Lucida* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981) that the inventions of Photography and History were simultaneous, chapter 5 attempts to write a pre-history of the documentary discourse in photography. In this way, it problematises the limits and conditions of the discursive field of documentary photography and the photographic archive, and it exposes some of the exclusions that they produce. The final chapter is articulated as thematic flashes on terms such as “the image,” “the frame,” and “the apparatus” and their attempts to formulate possible directions for the continuation of the project of the 1970’s New Art History, which Tagg calls an “endless metacommentary,” where the discursive practice is not detached from the realm of the social and the political.

Tagg’s major contribution in this book seems, quite paradoxically, to occur in its most “traditional” aspects, such as its political-genealogical reading of the constitution of the documentary paradigm as an expression of New Deal policies. It is very important (and Tagg does this exceedingly well) to understand how documentary rhetoric has been historically built upon such notions of universalism and transparency, which are inherent not only to New Deal’s social democracy but to liberal representative democracy technologies for public address and communication. By focusing on the Griersonian-FSA paradigm, Tagg illuminates the structural link between the documentary approach and the liberal democratic public sphere. But this important and necessary discourse is hardly new. Maren Stange’s, *Symbols of Ideal Life: Social Documentary Photography in America, 1890–1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) and John Roberts’s *The Art of Interruption: Realism, Photography and the Everyday* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998) are two good examples of other theoretical photographic studies emerging from the New Art History approach that have traced that lineage before; we might also point to the work of artists like Martha Rosler or Allan Sekula, whose political readings of photographic modernism since the mid-1970s on many levels coincide with and precede those of Tagg.

My main dissatisfaction with Tagg’s approach



stems from the fact that he limits his discussion of documentary culture to the Anglo-American Griersonian-FSA mode, which is (for good reason) the hegemonic model of the twentieth century. But he should be aware that such a focus excludes other practices that may question or invalidate his own conclusions. In this respect, it would be interesting to see Tagg’s brilliant scholarship applied to the American Photo League as part of the international worker-photography movement of the 1930s, which is the other (and still rather repressed) side of the 1930s documentary and political dilemmas. The Photo League constitutes a possible counter-model to FSA documentary, and it is part of the many successful attempts in the 1930s to constitute a proletarian public sphere. One wonders to what extent Tagg’s theoretical framework simply does not allow him to study anything but hegemonic practices and discourses, or the ways in which the bourgeois State co-opts, “recruits and mobilises” rather than the deviations, ruptures, and moments of indeterminacy or resistance. Tagg’s method also seems to predetermine his melancholic defeatism, which we might associate with his decision not to read documentary photography after 1945 or to think beyond the genealogical and intervene politically in current debates.

So, what if what is politically needed today is precisely what Tagg seeks to avoid – namely, “the reconstitution of a new archivism or of a new documentalism” (233)? What if, in other words, we need to reinvent some equivalent (but not identical) conditions of universality and transparency associated with the classic forms of New Deal documentary, precisely because the documentary social function continues to exist and operate publicly and hegemonically in spite of declarations from academia that it is obsolete? Documentary is everywhere today, since it is structurally linked to democratic discourse and to the ideological conditions of the liberal public sphere in which we live, as Tagg himself has worked to illuminate. That said, we also need to recognise that documentary practices will continue to exist as long as liberal democracy does. What do we do with that?

We can look for a possible and productive answer to that question in Ariella Azoulay’s book, *The Civil Contract of Photography*. Azoulay lives and works in Israel and her study of photography, particularly in this book, is very much informed by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This means that the book’s theoretical elaborations are rooted in the empirical observation of and participation in the photographic practices related to that conflict,

which produces well-known conditions of exclusion of political rights and citizenship to a large number of people. In such a context, photography has demonstrated that it continues to be a key political instrument of emancipation in current social struggles.

Azoulay's theoretical tools are grounded in feminism, postcolonial theory, and political philosophy. She draws from the work of Etienne Balibar, Giorgio Agamben, and Judith Butler, as well as Walter Benjamin, Hannah Arendt, and Martin Heidegger. Her book is an unusual combination of photographic theory and political philosophy which reconceives citizenship as based on the "relations between the governed" in ways not limited to the conditions of the State. This notion of citizenship is based on a "new ontological-political understanding of photography" (23) that considers the many different agents involved in the production and circulation of photographic discourse (the camera, the photographer, the photographed subject, and the spectator), with none of these granted the power to control meaning alone. Azoulay's notion of photography as a civil contract is, moreover, a reference to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *The Social Contract* (1760). She thus theorises photography as a non-essentialist secular agreement amongst citizens, as defined by modern political philosophy.

The book is divided into nine chapters, as a "progression of different, but related topics," and combines a theoretical elaboration on and analysis of practices primarily concerning the Middle East conflict. In the introduction, Azoulay explains that her project is to analyse how photography may contribute to a public and collective space that creates conditions of citizenship and participation beyond the regulation of governing powers. She writes: "*The Civil Contract of Photography* is an attempt to anchor spectatorship in civic duty toward the photographed persons who haven't stopped being 'there', towards dispossessed citizens who, in turn, enable the rethinking of the concept and practice of citizenship.... An emphasis on the dimension of being governed allows a rethinking of the political sphere as a space between the governed, whose political duty is first and foremost a duty toward one another, rather than toward the ruling power" (16-17). She goes on to explain that her use of the term "contract" replaces others like "shame" or "compassion." As a result, it is grounded in an understanding of the relations established through photography and its modes of public circulation, which produces a de-territorialised public sphere that offers a general and equally shared condition of citizenship.

The first chapter is a reading of the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* from the French Revolution of 1789 as a constitutive document for modern (male and female) citizens. The second chapter explains the civil contract of photography itself and constitutes the core of the book's argument. Chapters 3 and 7 contribute to an understanding of the conditions of consent among partners and the figure of the spectator as an effect of photography. Chapter 4 analyses the image of horror as a case study for understanding what the author calls the production of an "emergency claim" in photography, drawing examples from the second intifada. Chapters 5 and 9 deal with representations of women and sexual violence, while chapters 6 and 8 present the "living conditions of Palestinians as existence on the threshold of catastrophe," as well as the photographic methods of managing and oppressing the Palestinian population.

What makes this book important is the way it changes the conditions for thinking about the public life of the photographic document and opens up a fertile new space to be explored in the future. Bringing together modern philosophy and her own observations of Palestinian political struggles, Azoulay reinserts micro-political practices into discursive production and reactivates the social potential of the photographic document. Contrary to photographic theory produced in the context of the New Art History, Azoulay's book displays neither a theoretical nor a political hesitation to reintroduce notions of universality and transparency into her discussion of documentary photography. Here it is useful to compare Azoulay with Tagg, whose discursive process challenges the positivistic universalism of modern political philosophy, based on a universal classless-genderless-raceless citizen. Post-1968 theory (what has been variously labelled poststructuralism and postcolonialism) introduced micro-politics, or a politics of minorities not predetermined by State logic, as the site of political struggles in new social movements, at the same time that it de-centered the myth of the universal citizen. Tagg also expresses the limits or failure of a micro-political scope by stopping short of bringing micro-politics into a transformative logic – that is, into a practice able to overcome the repressive macro-political machine of the State. By internalising the theoretical legacy of both modernity and postmodernity, on the other hand, Azoulay addresses the fact that micro-politics needs to generate forms of universalism, or somehow deal with the macro-political scale, in order to produce transformative and emancipatory effects. It is precisely in the photographic documentary contract that she finds space for such an operation: "photography remains part of the *res publica* of the citizenry," she writes, "and is or can become one of the last lines of defense in the battle over citizenship for those who still see citizenship as something worth fighting for" (131).

It is meaningful in this respect to see how Azoulay's book liquidates simply and quickly questions concerning the photographic index and photographic realism, which have been so determining in postmodern approaches to the medium precisely because the index has functioned as an emblem of positivism and thus of the (false) universalism and transparency of the photographic sign. By examining how "indexical" documentary photography continues to circulate and function socially in the media in spite of philosophical debates about the death of photographic realism, she observes that "critical discussions seeking to challenge the truth of photography, or argue that 'photography lies', remain anecdotal and marginal to the institutionalised practices of exhibiting and publishing photographs. Only a glance at a newspaper kiosk is needed to realise the enduring power of the news photo. Photography's critics tend to forget that despite the fact that photography speaks falsely, it *also* speaks the truth" (126-27). This is not a negation or refusal of postmodernism, but a change of emphasis, a new focus. While a critique on the level of artistic mediation or representation is fundamental, it cannot stop there; the theoretical tools Azoulay offers have powerful ethical implications and suggest new ways to reconnect discursive production with social struggles.

The Disciplinary Frame and *The Civil Contract of Photography* are thus complementary books insofar as they update the cultural and political space of

the photographic document. They do so, moreover, in a period when photographic theory has not been particularly productive on that front, trapped as it has been in metaphysical dilemmas concerning the indexicality of the photographic sign, which includes the debates on post-photography and the impact of digital technologies on photography's nature. Paradigmatic of this state of the field is the recent anthology edited by James Elkins, *Photography Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2007), which continues to foreground somewhat sterile debates about indexicality above all others, one can hope for the last time. The appearance of these new books by Tagg and Azoulay, along with other recent studies by authors like Blake Stimson (*The Pivot of The World: Photography and its Nation*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), may be symptomatic of a welcomed turning point. What these authors do is particularly important, since they also fundamentally challenge Michael Fried's claim that today "photography matters as art as never before" (*Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008). Together they offer a very different conclusion: if photography can return to a polemical documentary status today, then it will come back to life. What is more, photography may be useful for throwing bricks against the State, but it can also transcend and surpass the State. It can produce what we might call a "citizenry of photography," or a de-territorialised restoration of citizenship in the global era.

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On Martial Values and Britishness

Emma Louise Briant



Shaking the Pyramid

Back in 2008, the now Foreign Secretary William Hague assured the US that he, “David Cameron and George Osborne were ‘children of Thatcher’ and staunch Atlanticists”.¹ Hague said while he recognised this was at odds with British public opinion, politicians “sit at the top of the pyramid”.² This autocratic approach extends beyond foreign policy and, it seems, among those being ‘sat on’ at the bottom are thousands of people who rioted in England last August, 2011. These disturbances were ultimately seen to result from marginalisation and resentment felt in communities experiencing joblessness and aggressive policing.³ 66% of those charged with related offences were from neighbourhoods that got poorer between 2007 and 2010.⁴

It is perhaps unsurprising that the Tories are feeling their pyramid rather unstable. Worsening economic deprivation and lack of opportunity are the foundations of young people’s alienation in Britain, paucities exacerbated by policy measures including, but not limited to, the scrapping of Education Maintenance Allowances; the arbitrary suspensions of benefits⁵; and ‘workfare’ programmes demanding the free labour of benefit recipients in return for their continued state welfare provisions.⁶ Two years into Coalition government, PM Cameron’s brand of Thatcherite⁷ ‘there is no alternative’ government has had quite the impact. And yet somewhat ironically, the government diagnose the resulting riots as symptomatic of behavioural issues, weak morality, poor schooling⁸, criminality and gangs.⁹

Autocratic martial values and a deepening militarisation of state and civil society are the mortars used in an attempt to patch-up the now-Tory pyramid – a neoliberal system of governance, after all, spanning all the dominant political parties. Michael Gove, the Education Secretary, is currently polarising the population into a “hard-working majority” and a “vicious, lawless, immoral minority” – reconstructing the problem of the riots as one of *culture*, rather than one of inequality and unbounded capitalism.¹⁰ In so doing he appeals to a fear and populism that turns humanity against itself, instead of against government policies. As the theorist Slavoj Žižek argues “the cause of the troubles is ultimately never the system as such, but the intruder who corrupted it (financial manipulators, not capitalists as such, etc.); not a fatal flaw inscribed into the structure as such, but an element that doesn’t play its role within the structure properly”.¹¹ Following Žižek’s analysis, and in this case: the rioters. The lack of real media debate during the period allowed the favoured

of moral panic to prevail; fuelling a reactionary thrust of public anger used to justify the continuity of significant state restructuring. One petition calling for rioters’ benefits to be revoked gained at least 60,000 signatures in the 24 hours after the riots.¹² Such malice and demagoguery may be startling, but isn’t all that new. Successive governments have emphasised vigilance to threats at home and abroad, creating scapegoats to distract from domestic and foreign policy and drum up support. The solution to Gove’s redefined problem is now, as before, being presented to the public as a return to old-fashioned discipline and martial values, starting with the ‘moral decay’ of the imagined nation’s amassed children.



Discipline the Youth

‘Citizenship’ has been securing the foundations of this pyramid in schools in England since 2002. These compulsory classes set out to nurture cohesion through socialisation, implicitly minimising any questioning of societies’ institutions. That pupils *did* gain a more complex understanding of contemporary laws and political systems from such classes is something clearly undesirable to the Coalition. In favour of more subtly-integrated propaganda delivered through history teaching Gove’s curriculum review has scrapped these compulsory classes. Gove has said the emphasis will now be on “our island story”, the value of ‘Britishness’, national pride and cohesion.¹³ It’s the return of the ‘Kings and Queens’ approach, the rote boredom of yesteryear. Under advice from ‘Better History Group’ think-tank and ‘history tsar’, Simon Schama, British-centred history will strengthen our “national memory”.¹⁴ Elsewhere Gove’s policies have been criticised by Cambridge History Professor, Richard Evans, who said they would deliver “self-congratulatory narrow myths of history” to schoolchildren.¹⁵ Quintessentially English myths of ‘Britishness’ on which martial values can be better built.

Coalition plans sunk lower still in August, when Cameron announced his goal to militarise schools in England and Wales. Initiating a wider project for 10 state-run military academies, the ‘Phoenix’ school opens in September 2013.¹⁶ Conservative Party think-tank ResPublica recommended “a chain of academies sponsored by the Armed Forces” and “using their practical experience and existing governance support”.¹⁷ They will institutionalise militarism; the schools will be entirely operated using ex-military personnel, or ‘civilian teachers’ “recruited with an intention of joining the Reserves”. The priority will be for ‘vertical grouping’ of children. This will instill a

hierarchy with lower-ability children held back in lower grades regardless of increasing age; a demoralising teaching structure that reflects the pyramid society itself, ensuring children become familiar with their place in its structure.¹⁸ ResPublica calls the schools a MoD and DfE “partnership in the delivery of education”.¹⁹ This despite criticism during MoD governance of privatisations (QinetiQ was undervalued leading to massive profits for its executives²⁰ and losses for the public).²¹ The Phoenix school’s ‘zero-tolerance’ approach is presented as a direct response to the riots, seeking to halt ‘indiscipline’, instilling martial values such as “self-discipline, respect and an ability to listen”.²² Unmentioned goes the need to develop enquiring minds. The initiative is directed at those in poverty, and claims to be “tackling disadvantage” and “social ills”.²³ Effectively, it seeks to mould the poor and oppressed into a more compliant population. The question remains, what ‘opportunities’ will be offered to young people in disadvantaged areas, many of whom already see few choices beyond ‘economic conscription’ into the military? – the creation of another captive market for the privateers.

Increasing authoritarian discipline is in reality a political trajectory of the last few decades. *The Guardian* criticised the harsh policies of New Labour and its “immediate predecessors”, revealing that “between 1992 and 2001, the number of children being jailed every year soared by 90% [...] The number of children under 15 sent to custody increased by 800%” and despite “around 80%” of these having “at least two mental disorders”, this course continued.²⁴ Furthermore, the sort of ‘preventative’ repression we’re now seeing actually began under Labour, when they announced that through surveillance they could predict which children would become criminals.²⁵ Since 2004, police have added the DNA of children over 10 to a database identifying





those 'at-risk' of becoming criminals with 87,459 samples taken from 10-16 year olds in 2005-2006 alone, and the DNA of 24,000 youngsters aged 10-18 who had not even been convicted of an offence remaining held in 2010.²⁶ Hundreds of these young people were arrested in Camden, only for it to be revealed in 2009 that police were arresting these young people, who had committed no crime, just to get them on the database. The purpose of this blatant harassment was said to be to deter future crime, and to make it easier to catch them if they did do something.²⁷ Perhaps unsurprisingly, Camden and Tottenham were areas in which the riots kicked off, in part triggered by increasingly oppressive policing. Phoenix School head-teacher, Captain Affan Burki, told *The Telegraph*, without intended irony, that "All the old remedies for poverty, underachievement and alienation have been tested to destruction. The consequences were starkly before us on the streets of Tottenham and Croydon".²⁸ And the subsequent Government response? A military approach to educational discipline (Camden was flagged as a priority military academy location²⁹), nationwide surveillance and still more aggressive policing.

In fact, Burki argues that Army discipline, integrated into teaching, will instil "selfless commitment".³⁰ Upping the pressure, Michael Gove recently scrapped the requirement for teachers in England to record all instances of 'physical restraint', and effectively welcomed harsher disciplinary measures in all schools.³¹ He's keen to be seen as deploying discipline in and out of schools across England; extending headteachers' powers to punish children for any public misdemeanour, and employing former-military male personnel as 'mentors'.³² Conceivably, Gove needs to explain why "former soldiers and military personnel are the highest single former occupational group serving sentences in British prisons"³³? And also, to explain whether these troubling statistics are part of the reason why this growing former occupational group are securing

preferential state-backed employment at the expense of existing professional teachers?

After the public was, and continues to be, repeatedly lied to about consecutive illegal invasions and occupations – from the Balkans to Iraq, from Afghanistan to Libya – why are we allowing this government to further embed the military into our lives, our schools and our culture with such little resistance? They argue it is positive to instil the culture of the military in our children. But, according to a former Army Officer, the culture nurtured within the British Armed Forces holds that "they are good at Colonial warfare, [...] at turning out in Nyasaland, talking to the Chiefs, getting the natives in line, lining people up with a picture of Queen Victoria, and giving them all a Martini-Henry rifle".³⁴ This was reflected in the conduct of British Officers in Iraq. Human rights lawyer Phil Shiner claims British abuse of Iraqis could not be dismissed as "one-offs" but was "colonial savagery" reflective of a wider systemic problem.³⁵ It is a problem in the way Britain is constructed and propagandised, at home and abroad, as a nation. Eminent US critic of the militarisation of education, Henry A. Giroux argues that, "as an educational force, military power produces identities, goods, institutions, knowledge, modes of communication and affective investments – in short, it now bears down on all aspects of social life and the social order."³⁶ The fabrication of the British pyramid is being reinforced through intimidation or force, and the intended and unintended impacts of this across our whole culture cannot be underestimated.

Police at War

After the London riots, Affan Burki claimed that, "...before we put troops on the streets we should consider putting them in our schools" – yet, militarisation does not stop at the pyramid's foundations.³⁷ The attempt to insert martial values into the psychology of how public space is to function as a site for political encounter is reinforced by the militarisation of domestic policing and harsh social control methods on streets throughout the UK. Images of police 'kettling' protesters (including children and young people) in 2010 and charging at students resisting education cuts shocked many.³⁸ And yet the state-corporate media opted to rage at the (surely unsurprising) response of a group of protesters when a car carried flustered royals travelled through their midst, whilst the reporting of protesters trapped without food in horrendous conditions for 10 hours remained scant in comparison. Cameron, of course, called for the "full force" of law against the group (the individual now held to be collectively responsible³⁹) and the police denied kettling contributed to the frustrated actions.⁴⁰ This supposedly 'violent' incident (only property was actually damaged) was used to distract public and media attention from actual *injuries* to 43 protesters – Alfie Meadows required brain surgery after being hit by a police baton.⁴¹ Since the August 2011 riots, the focus of, and resistance to, government policies and imperatives has shifted from the social advancement appeals of young people wanting access to education, to the disenfranchised of our cities – even easier to dismiss as a "vicious lawless, immoral minority".⁴² It was a smooth transition of narrative, barely noticed in our media, but we see the same rhetoric used to justify the extension of 'counter-terrorism' measures; ever-harsher actions against the new 'enemy to stability' in Britain.

It's not just rhetoric. 'Anti-Terror' legislation was used against protesters in England and Wales as early as 2003, with extended stop and search powers (ruled illegal by the European Court of Human Rights by 2010) used against protesters demonstrating outside an arms fair.⁴³ The Tories in opposition were posturing on ending state intrusion – Tony Blair's Labour government having created more than 3,000 new offences⁴⁴ – while the then Labour government's Policing and Security Minister, David Hanson, justified it saying: "Stop and search [...] is an important tool in a package of measures in the ongoing fight against terrorism."⁴⁵ Police have faced continued pressure to subdue public protests, while portraying them as a public threat. The tactic of 'kettling' "also attempts to incite the crowd".⁴⁶ The Coalition has taken a

lead in extending police powers further.⁴⁷ The media role has been crucial in framing protest to justify this build-up of domestic 'security measures', extending the rhetoric of 'terrorism' into their coverage of what are largely 'crimes against property', e.g. trespass (by refusing to leave a department store) which is being further criminalised. During the public sector cuts protest back in March 2011, one *Daily Mail* byline read "extremists hijack anti-government cuts demonstration" [my emphasis].⁴⁸ *The Mail* leapt on a group of protestors in "the Queen's Grocer" Fortnum and Mason, arguing they "terrorised staff and customers" [my emphasis], though 109 charges were dismissed by the Crown Prosecution Service.⁴⁹ *The Mail* of course doesn't mention that five months before this article, the police had already admitted misleading protesters into thinking they would let them leave Fortnum's peacefully, before detaining all 150 in custody (five minors were in cells overnight).⁵⁰ Less peaceful attacks on property came with the London riots in August and Cameron then promised to abandon restraint completely, "Whatever resources the police need they will get. Whatever tactics they feel they need they will have legal backing to do so."⁵¹

Eager attempts to bring in US 'zero-tolerance' expert William Bratton as Commissioner at London's Metropolitan Police followed.⁵² There's been a gradual militarisation in approach with ministers saying (despite the debacle of the 'War on Terror'), that Army officers having served in Afghanistan should be fast-tracked into high-ranking police positions. Support for a Sandhurst-style police training college was also suggested, mixing former soldiers and intelligence officials with police in Theresa May's vision of a British FBI.⁵³ (A rolling out of Special Branch, British Army, and Security Services' actions in Northern Ireland more widely?) Then, in February 2012 the government ordered a police crackdown on protests and demonstrations against its controversial 'workfare' scheme. Police and intelligence are to further target "extreme left-wing activity".⁵⁴ Furthermore, the media, particularly the BBC, are facing government attack for having voiced the concerns of those opposing workfare, and other authoritarian policies. Critics have been dismissed as "hard-left militants", echoing Thatcherite rhetoric.⁵⁵ Even critics, it seems, are the new *terrorists*. As the 'War on Terror' fades from dominant media memory, if not the day-to-day realities of millions across the globe, the 'War on Critics' escalates; the infrastructure of counter-terrorism becomes an infrastructure of counter-criticism, an anti-politics, and our streets and our culture are battlefields on which it's being fought.

In the wake of riots brought on in large part by massive austerity measures and oppressive policing, it is unsurprising the government has been jittery about the run up to the London Olympics. Militarisation strategies and martial values are strongly influencing Olympic planning. Philip Hammond MP promised us a "peaceful celebration of sporting achievement and a cultural celebration – not a security event".⁵⁶ It's depressing to observe that the Government's vision of 'cultural celebration' in London takes the form of an intimidating 13,500-strong uniformed military presence.⁵⁷ We are brazenly told there will be surface to air missiles, a large number of aircraft, and SAS units floating on the Thames ready to deploy.⁵⁸ In addition to pulling in what is, according to *The Guardian*, more uniformed military than deployed in Afghanistan, the Navy's largest ship will be based in Greenwich throughout the games, though it was 'accidentally' airbrushed from posters displayed throughout the London Underground network. Expectedly, *The Daily Mail* decried this as organisers ashamed of our "proud military history"⁵⁹ whereas this "history" as a carrier of martial values is being promoted at every opportunity, down to Tower of London-inspired Olympic uniforms.⁶⁰

Unsurprisingly the FBI have stated that they have established a "close working relationship" with the UK's Olympic security.⁶¹ Most reports put the FBI numbers at 500 agents, who may or may not be armed.⁶² To a large extent heightened security is an attempt to justify responses to

public protest being portrayed as counter-terrorism in a domestic context. This all has a horrible resonance with the 2008 Olympic Games. The Chinese authorities similarly increased security and deployed its Navy during their hosting of the Games, also in fear of their own people's mass protests. The UK government similarly wants to prevent the Games being used as an opportunity for public protest, and it is prepared to do this through a demonstration of power. If anything, such measures would appear more likely to guarantee unrest.

Giroux argues that, "what appears new about the amplified militarization of the post-9/11 world is that it has become normalized, serving as a powerful educational force that shapes our lives, memories and daily experiences."⁶³ In one recent worrying development in militarisation, the government has been trying to exploit a loophole in the Chemical Weapons Convention to sanction the use of nerve-agents for "domestic law enforcement", or riot-control.⁶⁴ There was international criticism when, in 2002, 115 hostages died from a mystery gas used by Russian Special Forces to end the Moscow Theatre Siege.⁶⁵ But a group of neuroscientists, commissioned by the Royal Society, concluded that the UK Government's position on the use of "incapacitating chemical agents" for domestic use has been relaxed in recent years, allowing development of nerve-agents of the kind used during Russian sieges.⁶⁶ China has also been criticized for use of nerve agents against its own people and it is *terrifying* that the public are not more active in holding to account a UK government that would consider similar authoritarian tactics.⁶⁷ There is a degree of public complacency or 'selective inattention'⁶⁸, one even tinged with imperial superiority, concerning the voyeurism of repression elsewhere – be it Tahrir or Tiananmen Square – and it not happening here. At times of emergent dissent a narrative of embattled continuity in taking a 'great nation' with a 'rich past' into the future is often engaged, and this is clearly being used today to reinforce the edifice of Cameron's pyramid, through an even more compliant culture.



Contracting in Control

Beyond controlling mass unrest, there are political and commercial interests that benefit from criminalising dissent and manipulating fear. The rhetoric of an 'ethical foreign policy' and public fear were manipulated throughout the ongoing 'War on Terror' to make defence contracting at home and abroad seem acceptable; another part of normal governance. An 'ethical foreign policy' never emerges in reality, but it justifies martial values among our new generation, people raised in a country in a state of continuous war since before Desert Storm. Of course, Blair made 'liberal

interventions' in Sierra Leone and Kosovo. The UK leadership continues to use this international role to maintain its interests and power on the world stage (with Blair's ongoing prominent involvement). Actually, the UK Government has been repeatedly criticised for unethical policies; in its dealings with China, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Afghanistan, Bahrain, Libya, amongst others.⁶⁹ After Robin Cook said Labour would build an 'ethical' foreign policy, the Foreign Office scrambled to cover themselves; its then minister Peter Hain said "we don't live in an ethical world" and it was a "mistake" to allow "policy to be presented as if we could have perfection".⁷⁰ In 2011 the depth of Foreign Office involvement in UK citizens' torture in Guantanamo Bay was revealed.⁷¹ But having normalised contracting in 'ethical interventions' abroad it was not hard to extend this practise back home, increasing private sector deployment for domestic 'interventions'. British experience in imperial policing, according to Cassidy, a major in the U.S. Army, has "made internal security the norm and conventional war the exception" for Britain, and 'creating stability within' has long been seen as a crucial part of British security strategy.⁷² This is a permanent war in which Britain is engaged. It invokes a climate of fear in which martial values are seen as 'of value to the nation', our culture comes to emphasise security and conformity against 'political extremists' who dare to question. Terming it "the shock doctrine", Naomi Klein argues through numerous examples that the disorientation that follows natural and man-made crises has been systematically exploited for political and economic gain.⁷³ We're seeing an accelerating encroachment of the private sector (of its interest, narratives, and imperatives) into the area of public control (boosting private interests of politicians and their hangers-on). Indeed, former Conservative party treasurer Peter Cruddas recently showed that political influence is being sold to the highest bidder.⁷⁴ Offerings are made at the top of Cameron's pyramid to the gods of commerce, impoverishing the lives of those at its base, who still must respect its traditional command. The party of 'law and order' is now regularly caught being cavalier with its uneven application – a disdain that might be described as neo-feudalist.

Great swathes of British defence are moving into the hands of profit-seeking companies, including Trident. Despite criticism of Lockheed Martin's record managing large-scale U.S. public projects, it will lead a consortium responsible for missile "processing, handling and storage"; "radiological safety" and "nuclear emergency response".⁷⁵ AWE, its partner within the consortium, has been criticised on safety, and MSP Michael Russell has called the plans "foolhardy and reckless".⁷⁶ With other privatisations including explosives, ammunitions, small arms, air search and rescue, aircraft maintenance and weapons procurement, data collection and processing, martial interests can be seen to have an immense hold in public and private sectors, consolidating the 'value' of 'security' in society. Society is coming to function as a means to invest and expand this lucrative system. Research by The International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons recently demonstrated that "teachers' pension funds [...] invest heavily in companies involved in the nuclear weapons industry" including BAE Systems and Babcock International through Barclays, HSBC, Lloyds and Royal Bank.⁷⁷ The UK Universities Superannuation Scheme, the "principal pension scheme" of University and College employees also invests in war production.⁷⁸ As Michael Gayer observes, with militarisation, civil society comes to support and organise itself behind this new driving force "for the production of violence", resulting in a steady erosion of civil liberties and the encroachment of defence on other aspects of national life.⁷⁹ Privatisation and militarisation together create vested interests in continuing threats alongside fear of, and actual, unrest and violence.

The contracting trend has brought the gradual blurring of public and private in policing. ACPO, set up as a PLC in 1997 and replacing an informal network of police chiefs, decides on national policing strategies and consequently both influences and shapes government policy. ACPO has grown in power, influence and snowballing

financial profit even though it claims to be a 'not for profit' organisation – having lucrative subsidiary commercial companies, some of which have either an unfair advantage or a complete monopoly over their market. In addition, local authorities are inviting 'security' bids for "a wide range of services, including criminal investigations, patrolling neighbourhoods and detaining suspects".⁸⁰ Brian Paddick, the former Scotland Yard deputy assistant commissioner, told *The Guardian*, "The British tradition of policing by consent, rather than by force and weight of numbers, is being eroded" and these plans "will accelerate that process."⁸¹ The Police Federation also called this radical shift towards private policing "an extremely dangerous road to take".⁸² Those benefiting from the lucrative business of police militarisation, are manufacturers – supplying armoured vehicles, body scanners and surveillance equipment, including unmanned spy drones proposed for covert surveillance throughout UK airspace during future protests.⁸³ Steel cordons designed for chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear emergencies have been bought in; they kept parliament 'uninfected' by protest in London.⁸⁴ This equipment, designed for extreme quarantine situations, was used to keep politicians distant from those wanting to question them. Boxing-in protest with 10ft high steel walls is as much a statement about state weakness and distancing us from decision-making as it is about explicit control over the public. It physicalises the divides of inequality on which the pyramid society's layers are constructed.

With so much investment in new security technologies, security contractors will be showcased throughout the Olympic Games, celebrating industry's role in the militarisation of UK society. Ray Mey, from the UN International Permanent Observatory on Security for Major Events, recommended 'lessons' be drawn from China for London Olympic security resource planning.⁸⁵ US-based Security Industry Association regarded the 2008 Olympics a great opportunity as they "not only showcase world-class athletes, they showcase world-class security technologies and services from our industry".⁸⁶ Showcasing British 'security' will be "twice the number" of media as athletes, and the focus is Chinese investment, encouraged through a 'China Business Day' during the Games and £25m spent on international investment campaigns.⁸⁷ Minister for the Olympics Hugh Robertson said Olympic ceremonies represent a "once-in-a-generation opportunity to showcase the very best of our country to four billion people around the world and have a potential advertising value of £2.5 billion".⁸⁸ But British *power* is what's being demonstrated and here it seems, for the Government, "the best of our country" is social control and security technology.

Britain's 'security showcase' will occur in a London where business confidence was recently shaken by mass public protest, and the Government have promised to ensure London is a 'clean city' during the games – one free of any product or advertisement rivalling Olympic sponsors. Volunteers will target anyone wearing a T-shirt with a corporate logo; putting masking tape over it or forcing them to remove their clothes. Apparently, "sponsors pay a lot of money for the Olympics and they are entitled to protect their investment".⁸⁹ In many ways, Cameron is also protecting his own investment, bringing in a 'clean city' for marketing his vision of Britain; a 'clean city' free of alternative political messages provided by protesters. Helping re-package the city for international consumption are G4 Security, whose contract shot from 10,000 to 23,700 personnel in December.⁹⁰ Police powers were extended ahead of the games, including "the right to enter private homes and seize political posters".⁹¹ There will be fast-track removal of un-approved protests, with 'exclusion zones', probably utilising steel cordons.⁹² And, protecting Cameron's investment, the Met has acknowledged the UK will spend whatever it takes to keep the Olympic venues 'secure'.⁹³ The Olympic budget was doubled in December, with a 'security' rise to £553m expected.⁹⁴ The London Olympics are being used as a manufacturing and investment opportunity – where the private sector is reliant on significant public outlay – one that helps instil compliant values in British culture. Indeed security trade organisations use contacts in

the media to emphasise the existence of a threat, and stress the value of contractors in maintaining order.⁹⁵

Now at the University of Bath, following the University of Strathclyde's closure of its Sociology department due to its "too critical"⁹⁶ stance, David Miller and Tom Mills have charted the rise of the 'terrologist'; a community of security 'experts' with backgrounds in government or contracting who dominate our media. Having few academic credentials, 73% of these 'experts' were found to reproduce 'orthodox' statements supportive of official rhetoric and focused on violence directed at states, not state-sponsored violence.⁹⁷ The study cited Paul Wilkerson from the University of St. Andrews 'Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence'⁹⁸ whose counter-terrorism expertise helped the Government rationalise permanent anti-terror legislation.⁹⁹ A trend toward close supportive relationships between academics and government or industry is being imported from the US. America has a strong tradition of 'think-tanks' producing politically-skewed 'research' with conclusions that reflect their political or commercial sympathies. Conflicts of interest result from increasing ties between academic institutions and the Government or security industry.

Influential military experts Maj. Gen. Mackay and Commander Tatham have argued that this networking of "civilian and military" in the US is "urgently required" in Britain.¹⁰⁰ In the US, academics assist in, among other things, psychological warfare¹⁰¹ and concern has been raised over the affects of military-sponsored research on academic freedom and curriculum.¹⁰² The father of PR, Edward Bernays, once said, "If you can influence the leaders, either with or without their conscious co-operation, you automatically influence the group which they sway".¹⁰³ Anthropological writings were used to engineer oppression, blackmail and psychological techniques in Abu Ghraib.¹⁰⁴ The US 'Network of Concerned Anthropologists' has therefore been encouraging the discipline to pledge against attempts to "militarise anthropology in a way that undermines the integrity of the discipline and returns anthropology to its sad roots as a tool of colonial occupation, oppression, and violence".¹⁰⁵ Efforts are similarly threatening UK academia; proposals have included bringing social scientists into counter-terrorism and intelligence. Due to criticism, this strategy entitled 'Combating Terrorism by Countering Radicalisation' failed to have the impact of similar US programmes.¹⁰⁶ But since it was withdrawn in 2006, the ESRC ("the UK's largest funder of [academic] research on economic and social issues") has channelled funding into studies of 'security threats' and "new security challenges", incentivising research that contributes to security policy¹⁰⁷ – PhDs producing militarised knowledge for the war industries. More direct efforts are also still under active pursuit. Mackay and Tatham, both influential figures in this area, recommended that plans to put researchers at the employ of defence be adapted for trial by the MoD.¹⁰⁸

Some charities are also used to socialise war into notions of 'Britishness', through reinforcing war as a noble institution in itself, and making 'sacrifice' something to be worshipped. They sustain a system in which, the 112 years since the 20th Century began have seen only one in which no British military personnel were killed in action (1968).¹⁰⁹ In praising what veterans have 'given' rather than criticising what was *taken* from them, groups, like the 'British Legion' and 'Help for Heroes', conceptualise military intervention as an *always* necessary sacrifice. The British Legion, being devoid of critique of any of 'our' wars, serves to mediate and even excuse the impact of this system. Past meaning of the poppy emblem largely forgotten, fundraising drives support the notion that the costs of war in general are sad but legitimate and acceptable. They conflate images of recent wars with those of WWI and WWII which saturate the TV viewing schedule. All war, viewed as 'sacrifice', is seen as the same. A dangerous education promoted through the military's expanding engagement in British schools. Since 2009 the British Legion has organised a drive for children to send postcards to soldiers bearing messages such as, "Thank you for fighting for our

country and risking your life for us. It must have been very scary and a difficult task to do. I'm sure it was hard to leave your friends and family behind. You were very brave."¹¹⁰ The Legion draws on public sympathy for the millions injured or killed by war, without questioning its causes. It frowns on any criticism of military institutions or policy. One soldier spokesman calls the programme "a great way to get youngsters to connect with what the military has done. Anything which brings civilians and the military close together is a good thing and these cards do that."¹¹¹



Manufacturing Martial Culture

This brings us to the cultural consequences; the ripples throughout our day-to-day lives. Militarism has gone commercial with the use of contractors now barely questioned in domestic or international contexts. And British popular culture is being carefully adapted to support this policy through its culture industry. The idea of a 'Culture Industry', first introduced by Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer, was popularised in the 1960s and '70s as a way of thinking about the rising industries of mass-produced culture, and its ability to create conformity.¹¹² Guided by Government policy, the media have an increasingly dominant role in marketing militarism and war, as apparent through the 'War on Terror'.¹¹³ Robin Beste at Stop the War Coalition claims that Rupert Murdoch's media "supported all the US-UK wars over the past 30 years, from Margaret Thatcher and the Falklands war in 1982... [right] up to the present, with Barack Obama continuing the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and now adding Libya to his tally of seven wars."¹¹⁴ The British Legion also nurtures strong media partnerships, building support by populist appeals for 'our boys'. We are now targeted across television during poppy appeals in a way unprecedented before 9/11. The X-Factor has become a particular vehicle for this with 2011's bling-factor poppies; finalists covering first Mariah Cary's 'Hero' in 2008, then a cover of David Bowie's 'Heroes' in 2010, which sold 100,000 copies in three days.¹¹⁵ War charities' abilities to fundraise rest on their promoting martial values and the concept that war, and 'defence' expenditure, are 'necessary'. This media power is also used to target economic or political 'problems' at home, through a collaboration of different government agencies from MI5 to Downing Street's Press Office.¹¹⁶ The modern era of this began with Margaret Thatcher, Bernard Ingham and the Miners' Strike¹¹⁷, accelerated throughout 'The Troubles' in Northern Ireland,¹¹⁸ and continued to gather pace through Blair's 'spin Britain'.¹¹⁹ Now, a veteran and adaptive culture industry is increasingly seductive for those with million-pound PR budgets – a process facilitated by the revolving door between government, the PR industry and the media. It is playing an important role in presenting the Government's latest 'crisis' to each level of the pyramid; facilitating the Government response to dissent by manufacturing an edifice of

martial values out of our cultural fabric.

Returning to the case study of the London Olympics, we can see how efforts stretch beyond physical military presence, into representations of wider national culture that associate 'Britishness' with conservative values and militarism. There will, for example, be the usual Adidas-clad volunteers and staff. But this is no ordinary sportswear; the 76,000 organisers will be sporting military-style uniform. Adidas have based the Olympic uniform style upon the Beatles' 'Sgt. Pepper' uniforms. This iconic image from popular culture, now detached from its original context, makes the authority of military-wear seem more palatable for the event. Uniforms had great significance in '60s counterculture; their popularity rooted in the shock value of a "parody of treasured cultural icons" or "conservative values".¹²⁰ Such items were not manufactured by Adidas, but genuine symbols of power, used in protest – Carnaby Street shop 'I was Lord Kitchener's Valet' fed a growing demand for genuine military paraphernalia. The challenge to mainstream values inspired attempts to make military wear look 'effeminate' (as day-glo Beatles uniforms would have appeared).¹²¹ The Olympic uniforms, in contrast, disassociate the use of uniforms from counterculture. Indeed, 2012 Olympic chief executive Paul Deighton stated their intent was to be "traditional" and "non-divisive" – a 'regal' purple and Grenadier Guard "poppy red".¹²² With nostalgia, the popularity remains, but meaning is reassigned to conservative social values in our collective memory.

More widely, the military/royal iconography of '60s counterculture, is being referenced throughout mainstream culture, but redefined in contemporary marketing. Memorabilia has swamped UK stores. A flurry of press attention celebrated Kate Middleton's taste in choosing a vintage McQueen wedding dress. But there was no discussion about the way her and Will's nuptials were marketed as a logical extension of the 'Vintage' movement in the UK. What has been interesting is that manufactured regalia is being aggressively associated with the past through its very design. The bunting that went on sale in Tesco Superstores ahead of the Royal wedding – 'pre-crumpled', faded and aged – should be making a reappearance for the Queen's upcoming jubilee. Those seeking to capitalise on the Royal Wedding attempted to sidestep the outright jingoism and uncomfortable connotations that have commonly become associated with the Union Jack flag. Instead, we are to buy into an invented past of the cricket green and garden parties – the same implicit *England*, ironically, of unapologetic imperialism.¹²³

The Vintage movement was borne out of 'pop-up shops'; an effort of culture in resisting dominant retail monopolies, reacting against overconsumption and disposability through an ethic to reuse. But increasingly vintage is becoming another mass-produced commodity. The Royal Wedding and Olympics demonstrate how 'Vintage' has gone full circle, moving beyond simple appropriation to the promotion of



conservatism. Overpriced vintage shops seized on the wedding with gusto, filling shelves with mismatched tea sets and 3-tier china cake stands that granny would love. Vintage Shop 'Beyond Retro' staged a 'Royal Wedding Party' as a marketing scheme unquestionably embracing images of 'royalty' within a readily accepted aesthetic of 'retro' products. Apparently, the event was "Right royal fun, whether you're a monarchist or an anarchist".¹²⁴

Interestingly, the largest-selling item at 'I was Lord Kitchener's Valet' was the WWII Lord Kitchener poster that read 'Your Country Needs You'. These yesteryear public information posters were brought back into mass manufacture in recent years. But no longer do such items represent an attempt to "subvert conventional ideas",¹²⁵ as their former '60s counterculture appropriation did. Those reproducing the 'Keep Calm and Carry On' poster say it represents "nostalgia for a certain British character, an outlook"; an idea of 'national character' as 'not making a fuss' over austerity.¹²⁶ The recession hit in 2009, and their sales soared. The slogan even appeared on 'environmentally friendly' shopping bags – a must-have student shopping accessory. In a mood of 'keep your chin up' the 'Nectar' loyalty scheme even urged us to 'Keep Calm and Carry One'.¹²⁷ Psychologist Lesley Prince claimed that "people have been sold a lie since the 1970s. They were promised the earth and now they're worried about everything [...] This is saying, [...] it'll be all right".¹²⁸ In contrast to the sentimental British stereotype through which it's seen now, Lewis points out that the 'Keep Calm' poster was never released during WWII, because one with a similar message caused quite a "fuss" of public opposition, it being seen as "condescending" and "authoritarian".¹²⁹

In invoking a mythical and nostalgic notion of what is, essentially, an affected *Englishness*, the Olympics, according to organisers, is unashamedly making a tribute to "Britian's Royal, military and sporting history".¹³⁰ Technical staff uniforms, an even more formal 'flannel, blazer and trilby' affair, nods at the Henley Regatta.¹³¹ According to organisers they represent "heritage with a modern twist"¹³² – but whose heritage exactly? The 'British' sporting heritage used in the design is the exclusive, conservative style of the Henley Regatta and Wimbledon. But then the tickets have mostly gone to bureaucrats, politicians and corporate sponsors. Maybe blazers with Big Ben buttons are a consolation to Londoners, who pay 38p a week more than the rest of us through their council tax for the Games despite unavailable tickets.¹³³ It is no coincidence that organisers have chosen to celebrate 'royal' heritage, with its inferred deference. Immediately prior to the Olympics



will be the pageantry of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee¹³⁴, a fitting vehicle for engendering martial values and overlaying cohesion onto an uneasy population. Jubilee merchandise was available to buy in the stores months ago.¹³⁵ Moreover, the Queen will be marketing herself in person – we are told a lead-up royal tour of Britain is planned; and more sprightly members of the family will be reminding the Commonwealth of her eternal reign.¹³⁶ Indeed, we've already had Prince William's heavily publicised military tour of the Falkland Islands (Islas Malvinas) in a run up to celebrating the 30th anniversary of the Falklands' war, just having had 'major celebrations' to mark the 25th anniversary.¹³⁷

By creating objects of nostalgia, such as uniforms for the Olympics, in our culture we commodify, glamorise and romanticise power. For immediate political reasons, conservative forces are adjusting our perspective on the past, sanitising our real-world associations through the manufacture of nostalgic folk memory. With careful attention to image, the Royal family has undergone a complete turnaround from the status of (according to *The Guardian*) a "repressed memory" at the end of the 1990s, to the reborn popular figureheads being celebrated in 2012.¹³⁸ The Coalition's history tsar Simon Schama claims the Royals can "be a cheer-up panacea for our tough times, an emblem of Britishness, optimism and the community coming together".¹³⁹ Or, as it's otherwise been described, "an attempt to promote 'dreamlike constructions' of earlier 'golden ages' by recourse to an invented past of imperial greatness when 'Britannia ruled the waves' and the English were not 'beaten at their own game' of cricket" as "a way of managing 'contemporary political, economic and social problems'".¹⁴⁰

Shaking the Foundations

Back in 2006 a Nordic festival of art and social criticism voiced a warning (now poignant, in the wake of Breivik's Utoeya killings) that if we try to forget or romanticise our colonial past this "continues to reproduce itself as waves of intolerance, xenophobia, and nationalism".¹⁴¹ Simon Jenkins has critically pointed to the huge representation of WWII imagery saturating British institutional culture, arguing that only "insecure nations" would need the psychological support of clinging to stories of themselves as victors.¹⁴² Britain's island and colonial histories are of course more complex than this, but so much of the state that has been and remains violently exploitative is gradually being erased from representations of the institutions responsible. The racism of empire is rewritten and fed back to us in the more palatable forms of entrepreneurialism and 'national security'. Paul Gilroy argues that, "without the removal of the cultural and psychological screens that block access to [the past], Europe has no chance".¹⁴³ Martial values are becoming the mortar of unthinking cohesion; infiltrating the meaning of the habitual and familiar, and prioritising superficial reactions over complex understandings in our culture.

Furthermore, they are used to justify authoritarian repression a full 18 years after Margaret Thatcher waved her fist at "the enemy without" (in the Falklands) and the "enemies within" (protesting miners and trades unions).¹⁴⁴ We can see the Coalition government engaged in an internationally provocative talking-up of a militarisation of the Falklands, and Cameron readying to crush any opportunity for protest in a constitutionally unravelling Britain. The period of the Falklands War propelled the public image of Thatcher from "inexperienced young girl" to "formidable leader". At a time of unrest, David Cameron similarly seeks to appear decisive, and bolster his own strength by reawakening populist images of colonial power – this, remember, when only in 2003 a million marched in London expressing opposition to the then-imminent war against Iraq. When Prince William took up an 'entirely routine' posting to the Falkland Islands the political build-up made for a strong statement.¹⁴⁵ MP Penny Mordaunt told parliament she approved of William delivering the message of ownership and that "his destiny as the future king" to whom "the islanders will owe their allegiance should not go unnoticed in this jubilee

year".¹⁴⁶ As in Thatcher's time, the Falklands episode for Cameron offers a media opportunity to distract attention from austerity and persistent unease in Britain; focussing martial values behind a distant 'defence of British subjects', so attacks can be made on civil liberties on the home front.

The martial values seeking further purchase on popular culture talk of 'interventions' rather than war in a misrepresentation of its permanency and its principal aggressor, yet seek justification with reference to WWII and a partial, heavily romanticised national narrative. They extend beyond foreign 'interventions' into civil society; commercial interventions, interventions in childhood, in academia, in culture, in debate and democratic process... The experience of young people in Britain today is of a country that's been continuously at war, conduct which sets out to seize 'information space' too; they have witnessed an increase in oppressive domestic policing, and are now to be aggressively trained not to question authority. Evidently the youth of Britain must know their place, if they are to be the reproductive force of an authoritarian pyramid. It's a pyramid that may be weighing greatly on our backs, but one suspects it will continue to be resisted, shaken from its foundations...

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Tom Coles “Organise your mourning”

Endless Growth

“Under capital, austerity is necessary.”
(Escalate Collective, *Salt*, p.4)

The common commitment of the texts *Springtime, Users Guide to Demanding the Impossible*¹, and *The Occupation Cookbook*², which have been produced as responses to a series of struggles since 2008 – struggles against policy, struggles for space, for new ideas – is that they make use of assemblages of materials to try and simultaneously document, promote and develop new forms of resistance. While one struggles to make out easily recognisable formal political projects emerging from what is unsatisfactorily known as ‘this crisis’, all around there seems to be an incessant drive to document every small event. The pieces are typical of the proliferation of tactical documents; documents that collate the detritus from, rather than demonstrate the nature of, this unnameable. Conceding that even an analysis of detritus may help towards a praxis of change, this, to my mind, cannot be undertaken by mimicking in form the professional legislative ‘white paper’ or policy review. The famous dictum of song-writer and poet Joe Hill, “*Don’t mourn, organise!*”, can be recalibrated as “Organise your mourning”: these documents either mourn or organise, but, crucially, as of yet, our *mourning remains unorganised*. They are users’ guides that operate as quick overviews and re-bakings of old events, movements and motivations to flatten differences of time and space through positing possibly non-existent common motivations or effective forms. Is this a revolutionary tract or a funding proposal? Is it a measurably ‘outcome orientated’ revolutionary practise that would be most useful in this situation? This review is intended as a proposal towards a discourse of resistance that is beginning to resist mere resistance.

The narrative is clear now, every rant written, spoken or declaimed begins with its own version: the banking crisis of 2007/8 quickly became a series of world crises, a complex chain of spatial, institutional and temporal deflections which continues to lengthen, interlink and take the form of a steady inundation. The banking crisis is translatable into a public debt crisis; a US crisis into a European crisis; a public debt crisis has become a crisis of international finance; and this a crisis of international finance is quickly becoming, if it wasn’t already, a crisis of national and international democracy. Greece, Italy and Ireland are occupied by hostile bureaucrats. In our preparation for a decade of deepening economic depression, a deepening of the social effects of these crises should be expected, as should an ebb and flow of social and protest movements in response.

In a year in which so much ‘history’ seems to be taking place – to catch up with the short period of its claimed obliteration between 1989 and 2008 at the hands of what Mark Fisher outlines, in his 2009 book of the same name, as ‘Capitalist Realism’ – there are not only periodisations to be made, but spatialisations. It is the simultaneity of these events combined with their spatial and cultural reach that is so astounding, resulting in a sudden glut of spectacle and movement. For the majority of participants and commentators there is very little contemporary history to compare this with, they stand in amazement or resort to documentation. It should never be forgotten that our culture has a ready stock of the cynical and the superlative, and the amazed stance is a well learned one (as is that of the variably arrogant or cynical commentator) – and its deployment delays analysis. As with BBC Radio 4’s *Today* programme, the informed listener is presented with a comprehensive overview of the day’s events *without context*, daily (sometimes hourly) restating that these events are historically *world-changing*, and therefore *beyond analysis*. For example, debate around the alter-globalisation movements of the 1990s is insufficient, despite the similarity of the targets and sentiments. The 1960s is the ubiquitous reference, not only for advertising companies and pop singers but for protesters and commentators. It is now being reconfigured by the ugly fact that we are having to ‘re-live’, rather than simply remember, such complicated historical transitions.

What, it is asked, are the connections between Millbank Square, Puerta del Sol, Tahir Square, Zucotti Park, Paternoster Square? What does it signify that the age-old tactic of ‘occupation’ of public space has become so prevalent as identifiable and visible forms of resistance and protest? Under what circumstances are occupations politically effective, and with what implications?

This exploration will tend to function as a partial (incomplete and partisan) review of the techniques and justifications for operating an occupation, as outlined to a greater or lesser extent in a series of publications and drawing on subsequent interventions – most notably: Danny Hayward’s ‘Adventures in the Sausage Factory’³ published by *Mute*, and *Salt*⁴ by Escalate Collective. It will also

draw on my own experience of the seven-month occupation at the University of Glasgow between February and August 2011, known since as the Free Hetherington.

Springtime

These texts – *Springtime, Users Guide, Occupation Cookbook* – and the manner in which their ideas are expressed, have now been overtaken by events. This is necessary and desirable; as forewords use to say in the future anterior tense: ‘May this book soon become redundant due to the abolition of these problems through struggle!’. When the student protests of 2010, emerging from the short invasion and occupation of Conservative Party HQ on November 10th, were largely put to rest with the passing of the fee hike in the Houses of Parliament on December 9th, many of the arguments produced as agitation became instantly outdated. For those involved, their struggle was immediately followed by more important events in the chain of escalations of popular unrest; the North African self-immolations which triggered a pan-Arab uprising on an unprecedented and unexpected scale. In the face of this example it must be insisted, if we are to have any hope, that the month of protest in Britain does not represent the limit of the reconfiguration of British education politics: the implications of events in the Middle East and North Africa could bring far reaching change. Similarly it is difficult to know what will become of the ‘Occupy Wall Street’ movement, now that it is being referenced by Bruce Springsteen’s new album. Economic crises are as uneven in their development as growth. In the year after the publication of *Springtime*, a collection of journalism and essays previously published in pamphlets and various blogs, we see that many of their conjectures (“Simmering Greece” outlining the ‘troika’-led collapse of Greek democratic legitimacy, escalating action on US campuses) have now become reality, and grown to a new urgency. The deadly inevitability of the ‘capitalist realist’ construction of ‘no alternative’ and ‘the end of history’ no longer remains self-evident; we can see changes happening, we can see choices being made to achieve those changes however ‘tough’ they may be. Will another moment like ‘68 emerge, where students in France were taken aback at how the edifice fell, like fruit rotted through except for the skin? The growing almanac of minor crises for the UK Government – pasties, police horses, corruption and bought legislation – are surely proxy conflicts masking a larger implicit logic that must become apparent? David Harvey anticipates change for all:

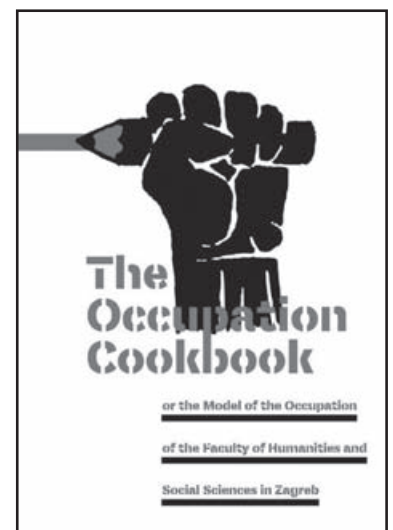
“Can capitalism survive the present trauma? Yes, of course. But at what cost? This question masks another. Can the capitalist class reproduce its power in the face of the raft of economic, social, political and geopolitical and environmental difficulties? Again, the answer is a resounding ‘Yes it can’. This will, however, require the mass of the people to give generously of the fruits of their labour to those in power, to surrender many of their rights and their hard-won asset values (in everything from housing to pension rights) and to suffer environmental degradations galore... More than a little political repression, police violence and militarised state control will be required to stifle the ensuing unrest... The capitalist class cannot, if history is any guide, maintain its power without changing its character...”
(David Harvey, *The Enigma of Capital*, p.215-216)

Springtime, edited by University of London Union president and sudden student leadership figure Clare Solomon, presents itself as a historical source-book, published before the dust has settled. It documents a series of stifled attempts to create an emerging mass mobilisation of students (prevented by not a little political repression). The volume’s impulse – to view documentation and collation as active a protest as any other – is typical of those, for whom transmission is always anterior to content, as they are long used to being bystanders instead of one amongst many agitators. Its temptation is to pre-emptively historicise, to transmit the idea of happening before knowing what is happening, to communicate rather than act upon history: in the case of *Springtime* it is as though the History has pre-empted the event. The inclusion of ‘flashback’ pieces from the 1960s by Eric Hobsbawm, Fritz Teufel and Ernest Mandel stand-in for any new analysis of the history of student radicalism – there is a radical edge to historical re-enactment, but it is the re-enactment of the impulse that is radical, not the reprinting of the articulation – and this is one assessment that will bear on the glut of (profitable?) publishing projects in the near future. However, the inclusion of Nina Power and Peter Hallward (including his blog posts from Cairo as a voice from outside the UK), who, along with Laurie Penny, Peter Osborne, Owen Hatherley and Owen Jones have emerged from the discontent of 2011 as an increasingly recognisable grouping of ‘citizen’-journalists/bloggers and academics, showing the emergence of newer voices. Owen Jones’s appearances on the



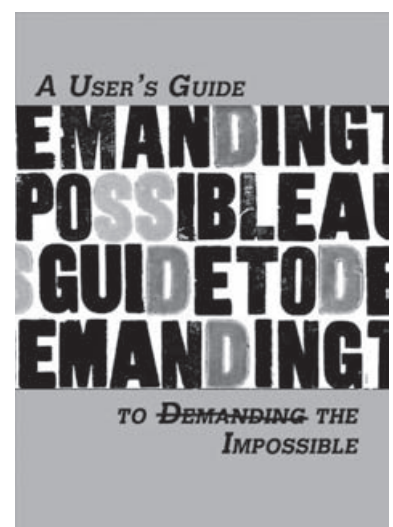
Springtime: The New Student Rebellions

edited by Clare Solomon & Tania Palmieri
Paperback, 296 pages
ISBN: 9781844677405
Verso, September 2011



The Occupation Cookbook: or the Model of the Occupation of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb

by various authors, English translation by Drago Markisa / introduction by Marc Bousquet
ISBN 978-1-57027-218-9
Minor Compositions, 2010. Originally published by the Center for Anarchist Studies, 2009



Users Guide to Demanding the Impossible

by Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination (John Jordan & Gavin Grindon)
ISBN 978-1-57027-218-9
Minor Compositions, 2010

weekly spectacle of UK ‘democracy’, Question Time, and his and Laurie Penny’s inclusion on other mainstream broadcast channels as tokens of a mostly unheard left-wing voice, is particularly interesting despite the condescension they are shown. This group can be found as initially emerging around the Middlesex University protests (including its occupation) prior to the UK general election in early 2010, when its Centre for Research in Modern European Philosophy was closed. The “Con-Lib coalition’s aggressively philistine and class-driven rhetoric was amply anticipated by the Middlesex management” says Hatherley⁵.

More recently, two new texts have appeared that belong to an emerging and productive line of enquiry, self-consciously outlining the underlying situation and political topography on which a coming intervention might act. In January 2012 Escalate Collective, a writing and activist group associated with the University of London, produced the pamphlet *Salt*, demystifying the collapse of the logic of neoliberalism. Later that month *Mute* (tagline: “we would feast on those that would subdue us”) published Danny Hayward’s ‘*Adventures in the Sausage Factory: a cursory overview of the university struggles, November 2010 - July 2011*’. Where the earlier publications left me despondent, these subsequent texts represent an evolving, alternative critique that ought to be of use in coming months to understand the blasted landscape that the receding froth of the earlier wave of publications has left.

Leaderlessness?

Critiques must provide actionable ‘alternatives’ to the stances taken by contemporary representatives and leaders: that of the ineffectual or discredited role of official student representatives who so far, at the very least, have opposed any militant mobilisation; similarly, the positions of trade union leaders have tended towards the conservative; and, perhaps unsurprisingly, mainstream political leaders and their parties have only sought to capitalise on the current popular actions to continue their reactionary policies. This, even as, in the UK and the US, there appears to be a public questioning of some of the consequences of contemporary capitalism.

Even a cursory involvement in the current movements, whether it is the wave of ‘Occupy’ events or the student occupations of 2010/11, gives witness to a characteristic expression and advocacy of ‘leaderlessness’ – something not uniformly practised nor actually attained. Mistakenly, this confusion of ‘leaderlessness’ with declarations of ‘consensus’ (such as through subsequent evokings of a ‘99%’), has led to a disavowal of all hierarchy – viewed as being susceptible to co-option. However, on these flattened swamps of consensus there are bubbles rising.

The ‘Free Hetherington’, a seven month occupation at the University of Glasgow, more or less sincerely attempted (and never achieved) a non-hierarchical formation. Its focus on hierarchy involved continual attempts at the breaking down of accrued status and privilege, rather than seeking to attain the necessary platform – involving a level of hierarchy and leadership – from which effective actions could more quickly flow. The debate over who should speak, when and how, was frustrating for those who saw this as a ‘cultural’ issue irrelevant or subordinate to issues of revolutionary mobilisations and State power. The revolutionary groupings that involved themselves, and participated in these debates, did so principally by their ascetic removal of political tactics such as co-option. This was perhaps the first prominent grass roots political event I have experienced where the question would regularly be asked: ‘Where is the Socialist Workers Party?’ This is not to say that such groupings weren’t influential, but it was more their non-Centralist presence that influenced debate. The implosions of the party political ‘left’ in Scotland have necessitated other stances, thereby opening up other potentialities. There were figures who at times dominated through their regular attendance or their ability to speak, but they either refrained from seeking a formal dominance or could not arrange for it to be conceded to them, and a cultural norm emerged whereby those keenest to

speak were expected to self-censor. The intake of breath and of holding back in political meetings was palpable, if only in comparison to the more usual flow of debate:

“More information is not going to motivate us to act, neither are representations or pictures of politics, what makes us move is tasting dreams of what could be, stepping into the cracks where another world is coming into view.”

(*Users Guide to Demanding the Impossible*, p.25)

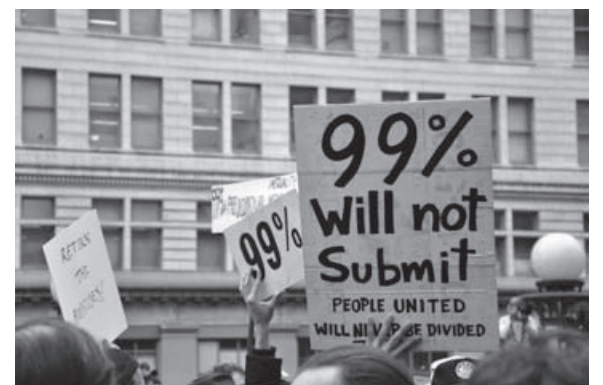
This commitment to pre-figurative politics – ranging from promoting non-gendered terminology, communal vegan cooking, removing images of objectification, running a donation and in-kind economy – was an important experience for many, though difficult to sustain. It has continued subsequently in collective reflection, and, as with campuses across the world, there is an explosion of collectives and reading groups: invitations to join reading groups of Marx’s *Capital* (led online by David Harvey) flooded into inboxes just as reports of police-free streets in Tottenham were pouring in. Marxism and the working class are back as spectre though not as force: *The Telegraph*⁶ raves against ‘far-left’ groups attacking government policy, Conservative MPs have started to blame communists, anarchists and even largely absent unions⁷ for online protests and picketing of abusive employers. Conversely, as the contestation of established institutions began to generalise beyond Universities, the apparent routes of potential action began to narrow. After the experiment of the Hetherington, the local and much national focus of student activism switched to running in student elections. The ‘broad left’ coalitions on campus which had mobilised over 2010/11 attempted to use their new prominence to focus on more traditional attempts to capture supposed power. On some campuses this has been successful, though at the University of Glasgow the ‘OurGlasgow’ coalition campaign narrowly failed to win any of the major positions. Whether those attempting to change institutions like the National Union of Students from within will manage to do so, or are in fact embarking upon a well-worn career path, is yet to be seen.

Endo-Politics

Compare this to the UK/US manifestations of the Occupy Movements, where ‘politics’ is not just mistrusted but actively feared and rejected – because acting politically or ‘politics’ (sometimes ‘as usual’) is seen as the problem. The ‘person in the street’, the authentic individual member of the public, is not interested in the ‘political’, only in challenging injustice: we have politicians to do politics for us, the problem is that they aren’t listening! The failure is seen as one of communication and education, we’re not speaking loudly enough! While much remains uncertain and in flux, the construction and then rejection of a certain image of ‘politics’ among the Occupy Movements results largely from a reductive conflation of the term with ‘party politics’. The result has been a loose consensus for a commitment to a form of ‘distributed protest’, where the job of each activist is to focus on facilitating the voicing of every voice except their own – the isolated voice is mistrusted as a voice of unwelcome authority. The ‘People’s Mic’ of Occupy Wall Street, an echo chamber devised to avoid a local by-law against amplification (crowd repeats the words back to the speaker) is a potent manifestation of this tendency. It is an extremely ‘low bandwidth’ method, which communicates action but rarely allows for extemporisation or rhetorical power.

If the Hetherington said “We are not political!” less loudly, it was because it was understood that the problem is the political process – including those extra-parliamentary tactics commonly practised by progressives – rather than politics as such. This tacit agreement to keep ‘politics’ on the back-burner can quickly become something more unpleasant once it morphs into dogma: within ‘Occupy’ people have been attacked as a dangerous cabal for being ‘Maoists’, ‘Communists’, or, in the furore surrounding Chris Hedges’ criticism of ‘black bloc anarchists’ in Oakland, as simply “criminal”⁸.

For the wider sympathetic constituency that





these protests have managed to activate (and of which it is constituent), it mimics the familiar amplification of the online social network, the repeating is a formal re-occurrence of the impulse to re-blog: such protest today is not *action* – when defined as confrontational counterpower – but is limited to sorting and retransmitting previously existing information which, when done on a mass level, takes on the appearance of political action. The desiderata is no longer the new, but faster and more coherent transmission. In fact the form of a ‘mob’ (to use the terminology of the detractors) has found its closest match in technological form in Twitter and Blackberry messaging – forward forward forward! The message matters little as long as it is passed on. The reciprocal relationship between response and message, both feeding off each other, takes the effect of an increasingly lubricated situation that allows ritualistic dissent to spread more quickly than ever. And as long as it is the communicative rather than the operative that is given primacy, a non-violent fundamentalism prevails – Occupy needs to appear both everywhere and non-threateningly.

The actors congregate around a tactic rather than a political project: a confluence of anger, entertainment, aesthetic and action that comes before understanding or politics, this is not a novelty in terms of historical mobilisations. What is interesting about the new protests is the tendency for protesters to quickly change their designation and apparent allegiance – such as the quick transition from ‘acquiescent’ protester to a more militant stance either in response to police aggression or in order to catch police off-guard.

“Wanton press releases from the Met confirmed this fact, as the authoritarian PR service pumped out anxious declarations about how ‘extremely disappointed’ the service was ‘with the actions of many protesters’, who were evidently becoming more confrontational, quicker and more spirited, more prepared to abandon routes and disregard ‘advice’ issued by frantic ‘organisers’ wherever the balance of forced on the ground demanded it.”

(Danny Hayward, ‘Adventures in the Sausage Factory’, *Mute*)

It is this duplicity and instability of the nature of the crowd which is (quite rightly) identified by security services as a threat of the becoming mob. Similarly there is a worry among organisers (whether it be the NUS at student demonstrations or the adherents of non-violence in Occupy) of the Jekyll and Hyde nature of protests. The infectious nature of these tendencies is latent, initially not apparent and difficult to locate, its almost instantaneous emergence at the protests of 2010/11 reflecting both frustration at further constriction and criminalisation of protest. But key is what Hayward, to my mind rightly, identifies as a revived cross-class mobilisation: it was the ‘EMA kids’, of long-oppressed minority groups, who brought the trouble that so shocked and exhilarated the other students – the ones that truly understood the nature of urban territory. To a great extent the training and development work of the anti-capitalist protesters of the ‘90s, the experience of many during protests against the Iraq War, and the climate change movement, mean that under current conditions there is an available body of experience in society – the potential for co-operation here is astounding and unrealised. That the mobilisations dropped away in militancy and size is largely down to the failure to maintain consistent and reciprocal relationships with the more marginalised protesters. There is a very deep class prejudice at work in those parts of the left dominated by middle classes that find the potential power of cross-class solidarity terrifying – in Glasgow those college and school students who took to the streets at the end of 2010 would, in my experience, be told by police that ‘you don’t belong here’, and they would be looked at suspiciously by the ‘real students’ as potentially disruptive or even dangerous; they were *not like us*. As Danny Hayward neatly summarises in ‘Adventures in the Sausage Factory...’, “Middle class students might piously hope that working class teenagers will be allowed to ‘access’ universities and become more like them.” They might even fight to do so if they believe it is necessary to bolster their own position.

Different and Similar Forms of Dissent

Largely unspoken within the context of all these protests is the biggest determinant of Western foreign and domestic policy in the post-2001 era: the ‘War on Terror’ and its urban militarism. Iranian philosopher Reza Negarestani – whose works of ‘theory-fiction’ I believe usefully explore modern politics – describes the tactics of Jihadis, explaining their strategic response to postmodern and neoliberal hegemonic global politics. There is an overlap in the imagination of some observers (especially policy makers) between the apparent form and effect of the terrorist and the Occupy protester, the ‘Islamist’ and the ‘domestic’ terrorist. Where there may be a similarity between the two is in attempts at moving away from anti-politics into an ‘endo-politics’.

“This, ‘endo-militarization of peace’, a new type of tactical line which totally blends with the enemy’s lines in such a configuration that it introduces radical instability and eventually violent fissions into the system from within... In attempting defence the enemy can only necrotize and dissolve itself.”

(Reza Negarestani, ‘The Militarization of Peace: Absence of Terror or Terror of Absence’, *Collapse I*, ed. R. Mackay. Oxford: Urbanomic, September 2007, p.55-6)

The success of the insurgency – itself a cyclical “blowback”⁹ of US strategy/support for the anti-Soviet insurgency in Afghanistan – has been to entice the repressive apparatus of the State into ‘hyperfoliant’ (excessive and overspeed) cycles of investment in, and development of, containment techniques that, unable to complete the imposition of ‘peace’ on Western societies, and always unable to eliminate the enemy within, will never attain their declared horizon of ‘stability’. While since 2001 the external, ‘Muslim’ enemy has been promoted as the likely terrorist, such constructions are supplemented with the internal threat of the potential catastrophes of dissent and non-competitiveness, as witnessed in the responses to recent workfare protests. More disruptive are the hacktivist tactics of ‘Anonymous’, a sort of online Black Bloc, and the appropriation of ‘meme culture’ as a political vehicle by groups such as DSG (Deterritorial Support Group¹⁰). The cultural, contextual and doctrinal differences between the insurgent ‘network’ of Al Qaeda and the ‘network’ of activist actors cannot be ignored, nor can the former’s willingness to use their own death as a tactic (a doctrine of asymmetric warfare) – nor attempts to criminalise political engagement in the form of dissent/protest by *cynically* conflating the two. However, from a *structural* point of view, they can seem to share a morphology; the flashmob that disrupts a train station or shop *is not* an explosion, but it is a disruption not easily resolved by the authorities, it represents a time-limited interruption of accumulation.

The networks and conceptual arrangements are ‘ad hoc’ in the technical sense. As complex adaptive systems they not only work around the unreliability of individuals, but draw power from it, giving up the discipline of hierarchy for the power of anonymity. The shared technical standards that allow networked computers to replicate information resemble agreements of limited solidarity which can be assumed in situation of unrest. As with any complex system, small core groups and organisations emerge based on affinity and trust, but as with the copy-cat explosions of Occupy (or indeed, the riots in England) there is no need for formal links to exist for a series of events to take on a common external appearance.

When ‘networks’ can “at one moment appear to be universal and at another vanish into thin air”¹¹ the result is that the State’s readiness for excessive violence will find its target in the ‘host population’ of such potential emergences – students, workers and other malcontents. These were recently the (unwitting or complicit?) test group for *spectacular* ‘total policing’ witnessed at the November 9th 2011 student protest. Billed by student organisations as the one year anniversary of the Millbank occupation, it in fact took the form of a parade of (State) force as 10,000 students were chaperoned around the City of London by 4,000 police for the benefit of the camera phones of investment bank staff standing behind floor-to-ceiling windows.

At indeterminate intervals the police would put on their helmets, extend their batons. Later, they would remove their helmets, retract their batons and attempt to chat with protesters. Similar to the appearance of arbitrary escalation by protesters, for protesters the actions of the security forces were just opaque. Suddenly, a three-layered blockade of officers would present itself, flanked by horses. The 'militarisation of peace', and of the police – distending the accepted distribution of violence dictating social relations – results in the well documented systematic use of anti-terrorist legislation against 'regular' citizens, designating them 'domestic extremists'.

"Today, strikes remain battle re-enactments – but re-enactments which exist *solely* within the realm of cathartic performativity. Institutionalised by the state, neutralised through anti-union legislation, strikes become dress rehearsals for nothing – since all claim to challenging state violence has been forsaken. They can neither be 'political' (the assertion of labour against capital; the product of class consciousness) nor consecutive (where they could threaten infinitude). Reduced to the status of impromptu public holiday, defined by *action-as-symbolism*, the new strike abandons politics for theatre: a gesture not of antagonism but of conciliation, reinforcing its impotence in every moment of its articulation." (Escalate, *Salt*, p.15-16)

This is the space prepared for us, but where in the past there was a managed political consensus – be it by Union leaders, officers, the Labour party, the courts – on occupying this space, there is a new attempt to keep the shape of that consensus not by politics but by blunt force. The enforced carnivals that are one-off occasions, such as football matches or the Commonwealth Games, are the model for protest. Protest quickly becomes another form of entertainment, but it can quickly return to the political: the 'Kelvingrove Party' was an example of this. Following on from David Cameron's invitation to celebrate the Royal Wedding, with its on-the-ground class and sectarian tensions, it quickly became a riot. The skill embodied in the techniques of cultural production under capitalism are formidable, as Mark Fisher puts it: "authenticity has proven highly marketable"¹². The 'Great Britain: You're Invited' ad campaign focusing on images of Tudor villages and Highland scenery grates with the February announcement of the deployment of surface-to-air missiles to 'protect athletes' confirming the 2012 Olympic Games as a London-based 'Green Zone': "Why will an unmanned drone be flying over the London Olympics next year in 2012" asks Escalate (p.47), while Francis Fukuyama explains "Why we all need a drone of our own"¹³. History has restarted, and the theoriser of its end is arming himself, as if a State-driven hyper-inflation of the full-spectrum panopticon and dispersed militarism runs counter to, rather than continuous with, State violence. Indeed, some appear to propose that certain of these technologies, assuming access, may, at least for a short time, provide advantages that can be used in the interests of the oppressed while primarily being tools of oppression:

"Know your enemy – how it moves, reacts, changes shape, lies. Know your material – the people and movements around you, the places you occupy, the desires you keep.... Take up residence in the thing you will transform, flow with it until your relationship becomes seamless. Feel its patterns and networks so deeply that they somehow become you." (Users Guide to Demanding the Impossible, p.13)

The role of University occupations for 're-appropriation', as the Hetherington was, applies a technique which can also be found in Negarestani's Jihadi, or the Users Guide's model artist – "take up residence in the thing you will transform" – in a strained effort to become a site for a general social dissent. One of the key demands of university authorities, one that was never granted, was that the occupation should be able to prove that all occupiers of the building were enrolled as students – members of the public could have no legitimate interest in the fate of higher education. This demand is usually acceded to – often without question by student occupations that contain no non-students – but turns a potential re-appropriation by the community into a recuperation on behalf of the power structures of the University. As long as



it remains within the University body, protest and rebellion can be billed as a part of the lively student experience, a safely bounded constituency where disputes remain on-campus. It was this mixture of constituents, and the attempt to project messages beyond the recuperative structures of the University bodies into wider society, that is necessary and which often cannot occur.

By sitting directly on a nexus between the State, the Church and the City of London, Occupy the London Stock Exchange pulled a largely unexpected but impressive feat. By turning the dead transit spaces between Paternoster Square and St. Paul's into a public place it acted as a significant enough irritation (intentionally or not) to elicit a process of systematic over-reaction. The tools brought to bear: first 'Health and Safety', then the legal process contorts to find purchase on an assembly which eschews individualism, the basis of the judicial system. This was, for one, exemplified in the judgement delivered in the case of the Fortnum & Mason's sit-in "that each defendant did take part by encouraging others with his or her presence". The systematic reaction of councils and local governments to occupations exposes the impasse between the administration and the administrated. A similar narrative played out in the occupation at the University of Glasgow. First control was applied to occupiers for their own safety, then appeals were made to vacate the building so it could be returned to the use of staff and students (for which it was intended), before the authorities resorted to a violent eviction. Months after the occupation ended, the building is still shuttered.

Collectivisms

"The most important trait of the media strategy was depersonalization.... The reason for this was not because students feared possible sanctions, but rather because they wanted to emphasize the collectivity of the action and the general demands which concern not individuals but the society in general. This was also a way to avoid creating leaders and recognizable individuals who might avert the media's attention from the action and its goals, reducing it to a vehicle for turning several 'leading' students into new media stars.... The continuous rotation of spokespersons (as well as delegates and plenum moderators) served to ensure that the plenum is the collective and only political subject of the action." (Occupy Cookbook, p.55)



This demonstrative submission by the individual to the 'multitude'¹⁴ is the key marker of membership of the new protest movements. Often this formal submission is a form of cynical Pieta, where those cradling, mourning and celebrating the dying of leadership figures will soon be the new leaders. The idea of leaving formal positions of responsibility vacant is not new; in fact it is the essential truth underlying capitalism's vigorousness. The occupation of the Hetherington, like the Occupy Movement, consciously used this logic as a simple technique to derail criticism. By insisting that everyone is welcome to make their views heard (including University administrators, Mayors, Police officials, and other opponents) it makes opposition more difficult. In short, critics must submit to the operational structures of the General Assembly to reject the General Assembly. The response to critics is simple: come down and make your view heard. The alternative democracy of the recuperated space, like the mass 'democracy' of the Nation State, demands that the enemies of a structure accept that structure, one which is well placed to defend itself in its own terms and can claim tacit legitimacy. Liberal societies promote the equality of the laws and institutions, while ignoring the arguably more important inequalities of social and economic relations. Occupy and similar movements promote the legitimacy of their arguments while ignoring their lack of power, defining non-violence as an unwavering moral principle rather than a tactic. In trying to use the power of the multitude, while denying the use of force by any tendencies in that multitude, they fail to acknowledge that there is a problem with saying violence is never justified:

"Power needs no justification, being inherent in the very existence of political communities; what it does need is legitimacy... Power springs up whenever people get together and act in concert, but it derives its legitimacy from the initial getting together rather than from any action that then may follow. Legitimacy, when challenged, bases itself on an appeal to the past, while justification relates to an end that lies in the future. Violence can be justifiable, but it never will be legitimate." (Hannah Arendt, *On Violence*,¹⁵ p.52)

The ethico-political response of the pre-existing – in the case of the University of Glasgow, the role of student bodies – is to sustain the structuring principle that there are 'legitimate' and right decision making bodies of a non-political authority. This was seen in the response by University management, who stated that they would not negotiate with people who violated the concept of rightful property ownership. The power of an occupation is that it matches a demand that can be seen as legitimate by the current system – 'no fees, no cuts' – with a certain amount of ('illegitimate') hard power – 'this building is ours'. It creates lines of defence and sovereign boundaries that are to be defended, usually passively, and invites possibilities to cross those boundaries. This poses a problem for the 'legitimate' bodies, who must respond with active violence against the power of passive resistance, which will be justified as necessary to restore some form of status quo, but will, as Arendt states, never be legitimate. Slavoj Žižek suggests "political space is never 'pure' but always involves some kind of reliance on 'pre-political' violence"¹⁶, and, to go beyond Arendt, aggressive use of violence by those who nominally have power actively saps whatever legitimacy is appealed to. This sapping of legitimacy is the necrosis identified by Reza Negarestani cited above. As Escalate outline in *Salt*, "you can only asset strip once" (p.38). The legitimacy of the post war consensus was based on welfare – universal healthcare, guaranteed housing, and, if capitalism cannot provide you with work, guaranteed benefits. After the London riots this logic has returned as censure, where councils (Conservative and Labour) threatened the families of rioters with the loss of their council houses. However, as the state hollows, privatising housing, utilities, transport, healthcare and education, when "there are no means of purchasing a new class base" (p.41), and it is the very people who gained from 'right to buy' schemes who are now losing their homes, the only resort may be violent suppression. "Where social peace can be ensured only by the

police... the class struggle is converted ever more definitely into a situation of war" (p.50). Even commentators on the *Daily Mail* website have started referring to the return of the days when the police were more readily understood as being the "paramilitary arm of the conservative party."¹⁷

This spectre of oppression will appear more on more – it is repeated on a small level with every eviction that takes place. This is particularly noticeable in the controversy surrounding the use of 'pepper spray' against a sit-down protest at University of California, Davis, on November 18th 2011. The most widely circulated video¹⁸, which attracted around 1.5 million online viewings within 3 days, is edited to show none of the limited confrontation between police and protesters, instead focusing on the particularly gladiatorial flourish of one of the officers involved and this direct act of violence – the spraying of sedentary protesters with chemical agents (to use language which re-animates the violence quashed in the name 'pepper-spray'). This is designed to further decontextualise and erase all possible legitimisation of the officers' actions. It has been called a 'Bull Connor' moment in the media, referring to the use of fire-hoses and dogs against peaceful civil rights protesters in May 1963. This focus on the violent moment delegitimises the authority of the (civic) State, while, in a similar way, representations of violence among protesters seek to delegitimise their claim to power. The media focus on violence in protests appears to have the effect of seemingly eradicating politics from the narrative, and of turning it into a moral game of good vs. evil. On March 26th 2011 the Hetherington was evicted by police, though there was active resistance and attempts to break through police lines by protesters, the final image of the day presented by the media was that of almost a hundred officers used to evict half a dozen students.

Manuals for Action

The Zagreb occupation, outlined in *The Occupation Cookbook* lasted for 35 days in protest against tuition fees. It was organised around a 'plenum', or general assembly, which was designated the "central organ of decision making" (p.19). The Cookbook/Manual, like any such blueprint document, presents an ideal that almost certainly was not achieved. At the Hetherington the result of the 'plenum' format was often a constant deferral with a specific result: acceptable inaction. The tactic of peaceful occupation can have only limited claims to power: 1) to present a serious enough alternative to the normal power relations to represent a formidable *challenge* of legitimacy, or 2) to halt the operation of the target institution to such an extent that they choose to act (in the public eye) in a disproportionate manner, leading similarly to a *crisis* of legitimacy. For both, the concept of 'legitimacy' hinges on a perceived continuity of a public consensus around underlying desires for social justice and/or solidarity. The Zagreb occupation attempted the first method: "What does it mean to 'occupy' a school? A school occupation is not, as the corporate media like to portray it, a hostile takeover. A school occupation is an action by those who are already its inhabitants – students, faculty, and staff – and those for whom the school exists. (Which is to say for a public institution, the public itself.) The actions termed 'occupations' of a public institution, then, are really re-occupations, a renovation and reopening to the public of a space long captured and stolen by the private interests of wealth and privilege. The goal of this renovation and reopening is to inhabit school spaces as fully as possible, to make them truly habitable – to make the school a place fit for living." (*The Occupy Cookbook*, p.7)

Off With Our Heads!

The idea that if citizens remain passive in the streets – thus allowing the state to oppress us directly and violently – then the 'masses' will be able to recognise injustice and rise, is beginning to wear thin. It is an essential failure of liberalism to assume that all political actors have the same general interest in a 'good' society, that it can be achieved through discussion, and that all bad behaviours are merely error. It also presupposes a degree of access to and transparency of public



communication in the form of 'the media'. This was, however, to some extent, the stance of the Hetherington: publicly it was framed as a re-appropriation of education, privately we understood that the best chance of producing a political effect was a violent confrontation where the occupiers could be positioned as victims – but where was justice to be imposed from?

But requiring punishment from the state is as useless a route towards autonomy as requiring praise or pity. There is an increasing seriousness and movement from ironies to concrete affirmation and direct conflict. This is different to the previous tendency to push protest into the realm of self-expression and entertainment. Instead of finding release in the assemblage and carnivalesque there are indications that a new seriousness is breaking out: "The beauty of protest is not simply about how it looks, the fun and pleasure it engenders in our bodies, but as importantly it's about its success. ... nothing is more beautiful than winning." (*Users Guide*, p.57) There is an important opportunity (the example here being the *Users Guide*) for art practise to move into the politics of work, to produce victories rather than artworks. All around, more artists are downing tools and beginning to discuss rather than 'produce': in New York the Arts and Labour group of Occupy Wall Street have demanded the end of the Whitney Biennial, pointing out its position in the apparatus of the State and the abusive practices of key sponsors such as Sothebys and Deutsche Bank¹⁹. Will the Whitney take the joke, react angrily, ignore it or absorb it? As Art Not Oil have found in attempting to publicly shame UK institutions such as the Tate's continuing co-reliance on BP sponsorship, assuming a moral high ground for the arts does little to account for the conservative nature of its public and practitioners or shared institutional value systems. One of the key logics of direct action is to destabilise a situation enough that forces of authority will react – and by reacting against a fissure the authority widens the gap between itself and the processes by which it constructs its legitimacy.

Such an over-reaction took place in California – the police spraying chemical agents on students sitting peacefully on the ground. It also took place during the UK education protests with the use of mounted police charging 'kettled' protesters.

The spectre here is the precedence of the Kent State shootings of 1970. As one of the key delegitimising moments against expansion of the Vietnam War it is seen as a model turning point in struggle: the hyperbolic cries of 'brutality' and 'shame' during every encounter with the police may be a willfully amnesic, though not inaccurate, calling out of the repressive and deadly nature of state violence. While at the Free Hetherington the precedent of an autonomous space was important both in principal and as an organising hub for action and education, equally important was that we waited for the use of force.

"...the government... itself begins to filter, purge and hunt down its own civilians, curtailing their rights, confining them to economic, social and political quarantine to isolate or even purge the disease and its potential hosts at the same time."

(Reza Negarestani, *The Militarisation of Peace*, p.62)

One concern with such a 'quarantine' is the fear of the activist in the face of potentially deadly violence; it is not enough to be angry and act, it is necessary to find a way of holding out. The new protests are not a demand for death. They have, however, organised around a self-produced vacuum of leaders and demands which are a result of what is commonly thought of as a postmodern crisis of grand narratives – there is a form of Protest Realism that, like 'Capitalist Realism', "...no longer stages this kind of confrontation with modernism. On the contrary, it takes the vanquishing of modernism for granted; modernism is now something that can periodically return, but only as a frozen aesthetic style, never as an ideal for living."²⁰ We have the slogans of 1968, of 1917 even, but it is all already aesthetic. The events remain primarily reformist, incipient rebellion is rehabilitated in advance and radical critiques are quickly overcome and made redundant due to the pace of neoliberal 'shock and awe' – what Naomi Klein famously describes in her 2007 book *The Shock Doctrine* as 'disaster capitalism'. Why, after

all, are some people demanding free education but not free food? ‘Shock and awe’ seems clearly to be the tactic of the current UK administration: NHS privatisation is eclipsed by privatisation of the roads, the police, and so on, backwards and forwards. The initial crisis of 2007/8 is used as cover for a series of social dismemberments and instead of providing an increasing stock of motivational injustices, the protest movements are increasingly silenced by the weight and speed. An echo of political death returned shockingly with the suicide of 77-year-old Dimitris Christoulas who shot himself outside the Greek Parliament on April 4th 2012; unlike the young Mohamed Bouazizi, who set fire to himself on December 28th 2010 in Tunisia, Christoulas’s anger was no longer directed only at a government but the people who were too passive, writing in his suicide note:

“I believe that youth who have no future will one day take up arms and hang the national traitors upside-down in Syntagma square just as the Italians did in 1945 to Mussolini.”²¹

‘Occupy’ in its current form will probably not work for much longer, and as a single tactic is not enough – in many locales the state can be seen to have eradicated resistance through the use of greater force – but it has got us a long way: Does anyone believe the other when she declares ‘we have nothing to lose’? If there was really nothing to lose, would campaigners still be mobilising around defending single issue campaigns?

As stated at the beginning of this piece, the dictum of protest singer Joe Hill (‘Don’t mourn, organise’) can be recalibrated as “organise your mourning”. Too much can be made of apparent novelty: organisation, communication and co-operation are common to all historical periods, and political experiences today are not fundamentally different than in the past. It is their ornament and a lack of historicity which obscure this. They still predominate on the street, they still rely on territorial concepts, they still produce the exhilarating feeling of licence and comradeship. Tragedy, resistance and community are everywhere at lower or higher intensities. They are not enough. Critically, and yet again, we need a new form to inhabit. To restate the Salt Collective, rather than merely quote: under capital, austerity is necessary. It should be remembered that the social wage and the settlement for those subsisting under capital *has always been austere*.

First the tragedy, then the funeral, then...

What would an organised mourning look like? As the *Users Guide* says, “Nothing is more beautiful than winning”. This is not a co-ordinate but a common direction of travel. It is to abandon the image in favour of the event, or, more accurately perhaps, it is to consciously appreciate the necessity of an orientation with which to position our values, processes, tactics. and objectives. The tragic becomes farce only because the mistakes of the past have not been appropriately understood and buried – the capitalism we hoped had died in 2007 must be dug up and reburied with the social consensus that has preceded it into the grave. Taking the worst seriously is not very different to what the pessimist does today: we would announce the failure of our projects before we have attempted them, we would take on the grief of our incapacity to change our situation. We would accept the return of the past, and rely on the fact that this time the same will be not better or more bearable but different. If we are mourning the wastage of our lives under capital, it must be an ‘organised mourning’. What is key is taking the horror, the scale and the intensity seriously. We cannot demand our own immiseration, but we can mobilise it as it happens. As organisational form switching overspeeds, technological fact overcomes legal and national barriers for communication, and techniques of co-operation become more permissive – that as the machine begins to heat up and lose control then we can imagine a coming social [eu]catastrophe. Our civilization is a blight, and whatever happens next, it will be worse for all involved.



Notes

- 1 PDF available freely online: <http://www.minorcompositions.info/usersguide.html>
- 2 PDF available freely online: <http://www.minorcompositions.info/occupationcookbook.html>
- 3 ‘Adventures in the Sausage Factory: a cursory overview of the university struggles, November 2010 - July 2011’, by Danny Hayward, *Mute*, January 2012. PDF freely available online: <http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/adventures-sausage-factory-cursory-overview-uk-university-struggles-november-2010-%E2%80%93-july-2011>
- 4 *Salt*, by Escalate Collective, January 2012. PDF freely available online: <http://www.escalatecollective.net/?p=32>
- 5 ‘The Occupation of Space’, Owen Hatherley, *Afterall*, 21 October 2010: <http://www.afterall.org/online/the-occupation-of-space>
- 6 ‘Tiny band of left-wing radicals bring jobs policy to its knees’, Patrick Sawyer and Robert Mendick, *The Telegraph*, 25 February 2012: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/9105983/Tiny-band-of-left-wing-radicals-bring-jobs-policy-to-its-knees.html>, 25.2.2012
- 7 ‘Owen Jones: If trade unions don’t fight the workers’ corner – others will’, Owen Jones, *The Independent*, 2 March 2012: <http://www.independent.co.uk/opinion/commentators/owen-jones-if-trade-unions-dont-fight-the-workers-corner—others-will-7468921.html>
- 8 ‘The Cancer in Occupy’, Chris Hedges, *Truthdig*, 6 February 2012: http://www.truthdig.com/report/item/the_cancer_of_occupy_20120206/
- 9 Johnson, Chalmers. *Blowback, Second Edition: The Costs and Consequences of American Empire* (January 4, 2004 ed.). Holt Paperbacks. pp. 288.
- 10 ‘Autonomy Tonight / Utopia Tomorrow: DSG is over’: <http://deteritorialsupportgroup.wordpress.com/>
- 11 Hardt & Negri, *Multitude* (London, Penguin: 2004)
- 12 Fisher, Mark, *Capitalist Realism: Is there no alternative?* (London: Zero Books, 2009) p.14
- 13 ‘Why we all need a drone of our own’, Francis Fukuyama, *Financial Times*, 24 February 2012: <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/9cc59dce-5e27-11e1-8c87-00144feabdc0.html#axzz1rd6OSgML>
- 14 Hardt and Negri’s: “The deterritorializing power of the multitude is the productive force that sustains Empire and at the same time the force that calls for and makes necessary its destruction.” Hardt, Michael & Negri, Antonio, *Empire*. (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000) p. 61
- 15 Arendt, Hannah, *On Violence* (Orlando, Harcourt, 1969)
- 16 ‘The Obscenity of Human Rights: Violence as Symptom’, Slavoj Žižek, *lacan.com*, 2005: <http://www.lacan.com/zizviol.htm>; *libcom.org*, 2011: <http://libcom.org/library/the-obscenity-of-human-rights-violence-as-symptom>
- 17 ‘Tories order police to halt workfare demos as MP makes formal protest to BBC over bias in favour of hard-Left militants’, Simon Walters and Glen Owen, *Daily Mail Online*, 26 February 2012: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2106601/Tories-order-police-halt-workfare-demos-MP-makes-formal-protest-BBC-bias-favour-hard-Left-militants.html>
- 18 ‘UC Davis Protestors Pepper Sprayed’, 18 November 2011: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6AdDLhPwpp4>
- 19 ‘2012 Whitney Biennial to open March 1; Museum breaks with two Corporate Sponsors, apologizes to participating artists’: <http://whitney2012.org>
- 20 Fisher, Mark, *Capitalist Realism: Is there no alternative?* (London: Zero Books, 2009)
- 21 The translated, full text of Dimitris Christoulas’s suicide note is reported as reading: “The Tsolakoglou government has annihilated all traces

for my survival, which was based on a very dignified pension that I alone paid for 35 years with no help from the state.

And since my advanced age does not allow me a way of dynamically reacting (although if a fellow Greek were to grab a Kalashnikov, I would be right behind him), I see no other solution than this dignified end to my life, so I don’t find myself fishing through garbage cans for my sustenance.

I believe that young people with no future will one day take up arms and hang the traitors of this country at Syntagma square, just like the Italians did to Mussolini in 1945.”

Ethics and the political efficacy of citation in the work of Santiago Sierra

Ellen Feiss

In his essay 'Signature Event Context', Jacques Derrida utilises J.L. Austin's definitive theory of the "performative utterance"¹ from 'How to Do Things With Words'.² That "utterance which allows us to do something by means of speech itself"³ interests Derrida; a speech act which does "not designate the transport or passage of content of meaning"⁴ but in itself enacts an event, provides an entry point through which to break down the conception of speech, and therefore communication, as it is defined within Western philosophy.⁵ By destabilising the institution of communication, Derrida contests the understanding of meaning as a fortified entity transported from speaker or author to listener or reader, in order to undo the notion of the conscious intention of the speaking subject as the central force in language. However, more specifically, it is what Austin expressly excludes from his definition of the performative utterance which presents Derrida with a framework for recasting speech as constituted through its citationality, or "iterability"⁶, rather than tied to the context of a speaker.

Austin's strict definition of the performative utterance requires the "conscious presence of the intentional speaking subject"⁷ and a laundry list of historically contingent regulations in order for the "successful"⁸ performative utterance to come into being. Austin contends that the "successful" or the "serious" performative utterance is its only form. For example, the historically contingent 'I do' speech act in a marriage ceremony is a performative utterance for Austin only when it is between two consenting people, and its success further demands that the subject not be "already married with a [spouse] living, sane and undivorced."⁹ Austin specifically excludes those utterances outside the conditions of intention and context that don't result in social constitution. He precisely states that performative language in "circumstances (where it is) *intelligibly used not seriously* but in ways *parasitic* upon its normal use... All this we are excluding from consideration"¹⁰ (my emphasis). That Austin renders those failed performative utterances outside the terms of his argument – a "possible risk" in all performatives, as he highlights them as a constant structural possibility – is significant. In contrast, Derrida resurrects these utterances which Austin casts off as failures¹¹ and establishes them as spoken citations; indications of a "general iterability"¹² without which the "successful" performative wouldn't be possible. Derrida uses Austin to extrapolate his notion of iterability by illustrating both forms, the serious and non serious utterance, as citational.

I restrict my discussion of Derrida to 'Signature Event Context' in order to use his analysis of Austin's original conjuring of the stage and the fictional in his definition of the parasitic utterance, or the non-serious. The conception of audience and the context of the stage in Austin's examples of fictional exclusion are crucial in my application of iterability to art. I exclude other theorists' use of the parasitic and its fictional backdrops, specifically John Searle, because of my exclusive reliance on iterability – I don't engage at this point with debates surrounding the legitimacy of iterability but instead move forward with the concept as a core pillar.¹³ I use 'Signature Event Context' in tandem with Judith Butler's concept of performativity to describe artistic utterances that hover between statement and embodiment. To clarify, Derrida's iterability reaches beyond my restriction of it to the success

and failure of utterances. Rather, the term serves to account for the role of the speech act within a notion of language as socially constituted, as part of Derrida's larger project of deconstruction.¹⁴ Iterability as a process of alteration, accounting for the way in which meaning is unbound by context and infinitely transmutable, as opposed to an account that emphasises context and linguistic conventions in the service of individual intention, is bound up in Derrida's notion of the non-serious but is not confined to it.¹⁵

Derrida's establishment of the serious and non-serious utterance¹⁶ as co-dependent linguistic structures, reliant on each other in the creation of meaning, presents a paradox. What of the event that embodies both the serious and non-serious performative utterance? The excavation of such an event offers a method for analysing the self-referential nature of power in late capitalism, that utterance which acknowledges the terms of its constitution while simultaneously acting. Significantly, iterations of the serious and non-serious event have been employed in contemporary art practice since the post-war period as a mode of critique, from Claes Oldenburg's storefront to the institutional critique of Andrea Fraser. This article seeks to question the dissident potential of this framework in art by considering the work of Santiago Sierra. The ethical and political consequences of Sierra's work have been debated for over a decade, most significantly, perhaps, in Claire Bishop's pioneering essay 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics'. However, the performative utterance I attempt to illustrate is a conceptual mechanism through which the binary of ethics that Sierra's work is often trapped in (ie, is the work damaging or necessary artistic transgression?) can be transcended. Furthermore, I seek to reconsider the question of citation and political potency: is it possible to use the language of power in critique? How does one assess the political potential of a cultural strategy of resistance that utilises the hegemonic structures it seeks to dismantle? As well as drawing on Derrida, I will look to Judith Butler's incarnation of iterability¹⁷ in order to establish a new framework for understanding the consequences of Sierra's work.

Further definition of serious and non-serious utterances is needed, particularly in establishing them as necessarily *materialised* enterprises. Austin's specification of the non-serious, when an utterance is "intelligibly used not seriously"¹⁸, implies a conscious and purposeful usage of the performative utterance out of context. These incorrect contexts are listed as "said by an actor on the stage, or if introduced in a poem, or spoken in soliloquy."¹⁹ Austin deems the "non-serious" as contextualised within the staged medium, or indeed any form that indicates fiction. This not only serves to undermine the ability of those contexts to enact social landmarks, but additionally, it connotes the "non-serious" as being necessarily experiential and as always having an audience. While Derrida's central problem with Austin's argument is his reliance on "the conscious intention of the subject", I wish to highlight that the conscious mis-use of performatives alternatively indicates that intention can be part of the larger societal process of iterability.²⁰ Derrida does not disagree with intention playing a role in language as long as the process of iterability, as a process outside the consciousness of individuals, is understood to be responsible for the production of that language, requiring that conscious intention should no longer be understood as the central governing force in

language.²¹ As such, Austin's non-serious 'staged performative' becomes the *performed* citation; the referencing of speech said or written elsewhere. This, performing the non-serious utterance is both an unconscious and conscious act with performers embodying an unconscious medium of the iterable process whilst knowingly, and consciously, reciting a script.

The non-serious is a transparent speech act, as its conditions foreground language as necessarily circulated and constituted through repetition. Derrida chooses the performative utterance as an entity which, through its non-serious



manifestations, provides windows onto the iterable process. Conversely, Derrida describes the serious as a 'statement event,' experienced as having a status of singularity and understood (incorrectly) through the intention of the speaker. The serious utterance can thus be understood as invisible through naturalisation, concealing the processes by which language is constituted, and the non-serious as necessarily that of repetition as it is, in part, knowingly performed.



Judith Butler moves the concept of the materialised citation onto the realm of the body, through her definition of gender "performativity"²², an analysis which uses Derrida's iterability to deconstruct sex and gender categories. Recognising the process of iterability as a force of hegemonic power, "the citational practice by which discourse produces the effects it names"²³, Butler's performativity is fundamental to an understanding of iterability as "materialized"²⁴ and as a tool of social control. In terms of importing Butler's analysis into the

250cm line tattooed on six paid people. Espacio Aglutinador, Havana, 1999. Six unemployed young men from Old Havana were hired for \$30 in exchange for being tattooed.



160 cm Line Tattooed on 4 People. El Gallo Arte Contemporáneo. Salamanca, Spain, 2000. Four prostitutes addicted to heroin were hired for the price of a shot of heroin to give consent to be tattooed. Normally they charge 2,000 or 3,000 pesetas, between 15 and \$17, for fallatio, while the price of a shot of heroin is around 12,000 pesetas, about \$67.

terms of the serious and non-serious, “naturalized gender”²⁵ can be understood as the serious and the non-serious as those acts which “reflect on the imitative structure [iterability] by which hegemonic gender is itself produced”.²⁶ Butler understands the “reiteration” of gender as a process that fundamentally includes “instabilities” and that it “mark[s] one domain in which the force of the regulatory law can be turned against itself”.²⁷ Butler further establishes such instabilities – the politicised non-serious – as having the potential for the revolutionary use of the “alterity”²⁸ of citation and a fundamental ability to deviate from, while also reflecting the original. The potential for critique in Butler’s “non-serious” is conceptualised as gender parody, specifically practices of drag, which situates Austin’s specification of the utterance used “intelligibly not seriously” as one in revolt. This is not to say, however, that certain subjects are not constituted through the involuntary process of iterability, or interpellation²⁹ in the case of Butler’s performativity. Just as it was the case that under Derrida’s account all utterances were subject to iterability, for Butler, all subjects are gendered through that “very regulatory law”.³⁰ Derrida’s allowance for intention requires that while a subject’s intention is not completely void in speech, it is no longer the central axis. The same is true in Butler’s evocation of drag: where the intention in these events could be seen as palpable, it does not undermine the larger structure of performativity. Rather, as a non-serious entity, drag can only be comprehended in relation to the “serious” normative categories of gender and the overarching process of performativity. Butler is clear that in drag, and it is possible to infer that in all citational parody,

“there is no necessary relation between drag and subversion” and that “drag may well be used in the service of both the denaturalization and the reidealization of hyperbolic heterosexual gender norms.”³¹ In establishing the non-serious as potentially political, but not structurally subversive, Butler’s drag can be appreciated as a crucial tool for evaluating instances of the non-serious in other critical cultural practices.

The definitional capabilities of the stage, and its accompanying relationship of speaker and audience, are a structural component in Butler’s understanding of the serious and non-serious. In her analysis, both serious utterances of gender and non-serious “instabilities” are physically materialised, however, staged qualities are structurally necessary for recognition of the non-serious as a citation. In her analysis of *Paris Is Burning* (1991) – Butler’s central discussion of drag – it is precisely because “drag pageantry”³² is watched by a live audience that the non-serious is articulated. The audience within the film reads the pageant, judging each performer in terms of the success of their impersonation by a degree of “realness”.³³ Attaining realness is the ability of a performer to successfully dissolve the artifice of their own performance, or any indication of non-serious qualities, and seamlessly become, for example, a “bangie, from straight black masculinist culture”.³⁴ The judging audience and the performer together evoke the non-serious, creating a literal runway where the serious utterance, a successfully “real” impersonation of a straight black male, for example, is recognised as a citation. The necessary context of the non-serious, then, is on the stage and in the mouths of Others, revealing that recognition is a foundational component of citation. While the serious (in the case of Butler, hegemonic gender) also requires performance for constitution, as a normalised occurrence, its viewing is not announced. The stage of the non-serious is what marks it as such and, as in *Paris Is Burning*, the naming by its audience is also what establishes it as citation. The gaze of the audience, Butler reminds, is “structured through those hegemonies” and, therefore, through “the hyperbolic staging of the scene”³⁵ the non-serious is born, or, in fact, witnessed.

An “ambivalent”³⁶ politicisation of the audience is articulated by Butler as the audience being “drawn into the abjection it wants to both resist and overcome.”³⁷ While Butler is discussing an audience with a specific “abject”³⁸ identity, the ambiguous political potential of the non-serious that she describes is applicable to citational events more generally. The non-serious is often interpreted as universally subversive, a citation that is, therefore, a critique of the norm, where a closer reading could prove otherwise. If “realness” is an example of the dual event, the enactment of the serious as a non-serious project, a similarly complex combination of utterances should be read in other citational mobilisations.

Guy Debord’s “integrated spectacle” argues that the serious and non-serious event is a powerful tool in service of liberal democratic hegemony. Here, it is clear that the dual utterance is not only an occurrence in (sub)cultural³⁹ activities. Rather, the integrated spectacle contextualises Butler’s reminder of the reinscription of power as a possibility in citation, in terms of late capitalist strategy. The stress Butler places on the precarity of citational subversion, the possible reinscription of power, is expressed by Debord’s integrated spectacle as not solely a possible outcome but a method of expanding capital’s frontier. The integrated spectacle is a form of power that “has integrated itself into reality to the same extent that it is describing it, and that it was reconstructing it as it was describing it.”⁴⁰ Understanding manifestations of the non-serious and their ‘description of reality’, as a re-establishment of the serious (the hegemonic) highlights the power of description to integrate power. Contemporary art practice is one method of description and given the art market’s inseparability from global capitalism, its practices of integration operate with much at stake. Santiago Sierra’s “ethnographic realism”, or his art “actions” which “form an indexical trace of the economic and social reality of the place in which he works”⁴¹, can be understood as an incarnate of the serious/non-serious utterance.

He enacts a labour contract which cites its own construction in capitalism. In terms of the logic of the performative utterance however, can the context of Sierra’s work be localised, as Claire Bishop suggests through the “indexical trace”? As he is replicating the same power dynamic⁴² in each city he is invited to work in, hiring cheap labour, Sierra is, rather, providing a view into the construction of the impoverished subject. This non-serious gesture pries at a process much larger than local economies, while at the same time excavating local realities both for aesthetic definition as well as in a serious utterance that is not as “ephemeral”⁴³ as Bishop concludes in ‘Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics’. Like the integrated spectacle, Sierra’s work reinscribes an abusive power relation by describing it, in an iteration that garners power through the embodiment of the labour contract, contextualising performativity as a process which similarly constitutes the identity of the worker. For the performer-workers in *The wall of a gallery pulled out, inclined 60 degrees from the ground and sustained by five people* (2000) or *Twenty-four blocks of concrete constantly moved during a day’s work by paid workers* (1999) they perform acts of manual labor that utilise their bodies as any “real” contract would, albeit in the ‘wrong’ context of the art institution. Bishop points out that Sierra’s critics quickly summarise his work as illustrating the “pessimistic obvious: capitalism exploits”.⁴⁴ She is right that the work is more than that. Like the mixed utterance of the ball queens, that expression of subscription and simultaneous defiance, Sierra’s work is a complex interrogation as well as a proliferation of the processes of capital it deals in. As in the drag pageant, some utterances are more resistant and others more complicit.

Sierra created a living map of the racial and class based exclusions of the Venice Biennale, evoking a sense of role reversal for viewers of *Persons Paid to Have Their Hair Dyed Blond*, (2001). This work astutely references the systematic oppression of whole populations by liberal democracy, which the art world is a part of, as Bishop rightfully points out.⁴⁵ Bishop describes feeling implicated by this piece in the processes of economic exclusion that structure society, noticing the unsettlement of her self-identification at the fair because of the inclusion of the street vendors. “Surely these guys were actors? Had they crept in here for a joke?”⁴⁶ The unsettlement of identity, in this case one of elite cultural belonging and financial privilege, is what the successfully denaturalising serious/non-serious utterance sends out in rippling waves. Other variations of Sierra’s practice though have yielded what Butler described as the “reidealization” of norms. *Ian the Irish* (2002), involved Sierra paying an Irish street person to stand outside a gallery in Birmingham, England, repeating, “My participation in this piece could generate a profit of 72,000 dollars. I am being paid 5 pounds”.⁴⁷ An instance of integrated spectacle, this dual utterance serves only to echo a relation of inequity. While attempting a citation, this event fails to activate a non-serious relation to its audience, as the street person remains naturalised: in a familiar position, soliciting passersby on the street. Serving up the obviously pessimistic, in a form which does not transcend the serious labour contract it enacts. The same is true of *160cm Line Tattooed on Four People* (2000). As both an unusual and aggressively exploitative project, *Tattooed* avoids a non-serious reading as an un-placeable utterance, rendering viewers either appalled⁴⁸ or non-plussed, such as Bishop when she referred to it as “ephemeral”,⁴⁹ which even its title disproves. Its formal relationship to minimalism adds a dimension to the exploitation of bodies as part of the history of art, but confuses the labour relationship it references. Therefore, *Tattooed* cannot be seen as citation. Lacking “realness”, like a bad drag performance, it has gone too far.

The serious/non-serious utterance can be described as parasitic, in revival of Austin’s original term, to both its conflicting ends. Either it is a hegemonic parasite, burrowing deeper down new pathways, or it is a counter insurgent, attaching itself and poisoning the vital internal system of power relations. At the end of ‘Bodies That Matter’, Butler addresses this relationship by asking: “How to know what might qualify as an affirmative resignification – with all the weight and difficulty of that labor – and how



also, to run the risk of reinstalling the abject at the site of its opposition?"⁵⁰ Sierra's work puts this question to task with much at stake, namely intensifying contemporary complicity in the degradation of Others and, as Butler will come to in later writings, their precarious lives.⁵¹ Looking forward, Butler notes the mutual, "unstable and continuing condition of the 'one' and the 'we'", or as humans we are all "used by, expropriated in" language together, "the ambivalent condition of the power that binds".⁵² Sierra's work implicates both the I and the We, to variously parasitic ends. The reinscription of power occurs. But alternately, like Bishop and the whole of the Biennale that *Blond* (2001) year, an entire community can be rearticulated through such an utterance.

Sierra's work illustrates that the political potential of the citation as always a potentiality, and that strategies of resistance open themselves up to failure every time they import the language of power into critique. This risk however, is structural to the citation's critical efficacy. As the activation of the audience is the dissident potential of the citational utterance, this effect can only be aimed for and not preemptively guaranteed. The risk of not being recognised, as in the case of some of Sierra's labour contracts and for any variable reason not affecting viewers subversively, is inescapable, structural to the citation and cannot be accounted for. As an event without a 'successful' formula to appropriate, I would argue it is one of the more potent strategies available in cultural critique. In terms of evaluation, each instance of the serious and non-serious utterance must be analysed individually, with an eye to the activation of the audience; the impact of Sierra's work cannot be appropriately addressed when viewed as a whole. In light of this risk, Sierra's work operates through an ethics of pragmatism rather than of drama or shock. He puts into play citation after citation, as few will succeed.

Notes

- 1 J. Derrida. 'Signature Event Context'. *Margins of Philosophy*. (Chicago: University of Chicago P, 1982.) p321.
- 2 J.L. Austin, *How To Do Things With Words*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962.)
- 3 J. Derrida. 'Signature Event Context'. *Margins of Philosophy*. (Chicago: University of Chicago P, 1982.) p321.
- 4 *ibid.*, p321.
- 5 Earlier in the essay, Derrida deconstructs the primacy of speech over writing in Western philosophy, see pp309-321.
- 6 Derrida's concept of the potential for citation as a structural necessity of language. Iterability equals

- 'repetition/alterity', p317.
- 7 J. Derrida. 'Signature Event Context'. *Margins of Philosophy*. (Chicago: University of Chicago P, 1982.) p322.
 - 8 J.L. Austin, *How To Do Things With Words*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962.) pp8-9 qtd. in J. Derrida. 'Signature Event Context'. *Margins of Philosophy*. (Chicago: University of Chicago P, 1982.) p323.
 - 9 J. Derrida. 'Signature Event Context'. *Margins of Philosophy*. (Chicago: University of Chicago P, 1982.) p323.
 - 10 *ibid.*, p325. In the text Derrida italicises seriously and parasitic and signs J.D. I am doing the same, to draw attention to another aspect of Austin's quote.
 - 11 *ibid.*, p324. Derrida notes Austin's creation of a success/failure opposition.
 - 12 *ibid.*, p325. Or a 'general citationality'.
 - 13 Furthermore, Searle's notion of the parasitic utterance as reliant on the non-serious intention of the speaker or writer isn't useful for my analysis and instead serves Searle's description of literature, namely metaphor. Towards an analysis of contemporary art, I use Austin and Derrida's deconstruction of Austin, and the definition of the parasitic as the product of abnormal context. See: J.R. Searle. *Expression and Meaning: Studies in the Theory of Speech Acts*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979.
 - 14 Derrida utilises the non-serious because it is the central exclusion of Austin's argument, the exclusion for Derrida being a necessary mechanism in metaphysical thought. Derrida's conception of the "trace" and his work on absence and presence in 'On Grammatology' and 'Writing and Difference' are important precursors to iterability and together, form a more complete picture of Derridian deconstruction.
 - 15 Searle's critique of 'Signature Event Context' elucidates the latter claim, that language is tied explicitly to context and intention and iterability is the process by which linguistic conventions are repeated, across contexts. I do not enter into much of Derrida's debate with Searle, instead taking Derrida's conception of iterability to task uncontested.
 - 16 In this essay, the serious and non-serious will be used without quotations to signify the use of them as terms outside the context of 'Signature Event Context'.
 - 17 Specifically, Butler's discussion of drag and its precariously subversive potential in *Bodies That Matter: On The Discursive Limits Of 'Sex'* (New York: Routledge, 1993.)
 - 18 J.L. Austin, *How To Do Things With Words*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962.) pp8-9 qtd. in J. Derrida. 'Signature Event Context'. *Margins of Philosophy*. (Chicago: University of Chicago P, 1982.) p323.
 - 19 *ibid.*, 324.
 - 20 Derrida's response to Searle in *Limited Inc.* provides further elaboration on the role of intention, and its limits, in iterability. In *Reiterating the Differences*, Searle understands iterability to be the "necessary presupposition of the forms which intentionality takes," and therefore, iterability solely constitutes the meaning of linguistic conventions, which are then applied uniformly across contexts. Iterability provides the tools for the individual speaker to load with meaning. Rather, Derrida clarifies that iterability is both the basic presupposition for the creation of meaning, and the creator of meaning itself, that which continually fragments meaning through repetition. See: J. Derrida. 'Limited Inc a B C ...' and 'Summary of Reiterating the Differences' *Limited Inc.* Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1988. Print.
 - 21 J. Derrida. 'Signature Event Context'. *Margins of Philosophy*. (Chicago: University of Chicago P, 1982.) pp326-327.
 - 22 J. Butler. *Bodies That Matter: On The Discursive Limits Of 'Sex'* (New York: Routledge, 1993.) p2.
 - 23 *ibid.*, p2.
 - 24 *ibid.*, p2.
 - 25 Hegemonic expressions of sex and gender, where the iterable structure of gender construction is rendered invisible.
 - 26 J. Butler. *Bodies That Matter: On The Discursive Limits Of 'Sex'* (New York: Routledge, 1993.) p125.
 - 27 *ibid.*, p2.
 - 28 J. Derrida. 'Signature Event Context'. *Margins of Philosophy*. (Chicago: University of Chicago P, 1982.) p317. 'The essential iterability of communication (repetition/alterity)'.
 - 29 "Interpellation is the constitutive process where individuals acknowledge and respond to ideologies, thereby recognizing themselves as subjects." 'Interpellation'. *Index*. 12 Nov. 2011 <<http://csmt.uchicago.edu/glossary2004/interpellation.htm>>.
 - 30 J. Butler. *Bodies That Matter: On The Discursive Limits Of 'Sex'* (New York: Routledge, 1993.) p2.
 - 31 *ibid.*, p125.
 - 32 J. Butler. *Bodies That Matter: On The Discursive Limits Of 'Sex'* (New York: Routledge, 1993.) p128.
 - 33 *ibid.*, 129. Butler defines realness as "a morphological ideal". "What determines the effect of realness is the ability to compel belief, to produce the naturalized effect." *Ibid.*, p129.
 - 34 *ibid.*, p129.
 - 35 *ibid.*, p132.
 - 36 *ibid.*, p124. "Ambivalent" is Butler's term to describe

- drag as not always subversive, but rather containing both "a sense of defeat and a sense of insurrection". *Ibid.*, p128.
- 37 *ibid.*, p132.
 - 38 Butler uses abject to signify the construction of bodies outside the norm. "Given this understanding of construction...it is still possible to raise the critical question of how such constraints not only produce the domain of intelligible bodies, but produce as well a domain of unthinkable, abject, unlivable bodies." Butler, xi.
 - 39 Sierra's work and the art world more generally cannot be considered a subculture, whereas drag as a practice is connected to a specific queer subculture.
 - 40 Guy Debord. *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*. (London: Verso, 1998.) p9.
 - 41 Claire Bishop. 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics'. (October 110 2004: 51-79) p70. Available at: <http://roundtable.kein.org/files/roundtable/claire%20bishop-antagonism&relational%20aesthetics.pdf> And Liam Gillick's response, 'Contingent Factors: A Response to Claire Bishop's "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics"', is at: http://www.practiceincontext.net/wp-content/uploads/04_gillick_responds_to_bishop.pdf
 - 42 The same power dynamic but different outcomes of oppression dependent on the city. As Bishop notes "immigration, the minimum wage, traffic congestion, illegal street commerce, homelessness". *ibid.*, p72.
 - 43 Claire Bishop. 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics'. (October 110 2004: 51-79) p70.
 - 44 *ibid.*, p71.
 - 45 *ibid.*, p73. Referencing her own discomfort at the 2001 Venice Biennale at the inclusion of illegal street vendors in Sierra's piece, Bishop clearly articulates "Sierra's action disrupted the art audience's sense of identity, which is founded precisely on unspoken racial and class exclusions".
 - 46 *ibid.*, p73.
 - 47 Katy Siegel and Paul Mattick. *Money: Art Works*. (London: Thames & Hudson, 2004.) p77.
 - 48 "Sierra has attracted tabloid attention and belligerent criticism for some of his more extreme actions, such as *160 cm Line Tattooed on Four People* (2000)", Bishop p70.
 - 49 Claire Bishop. 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics'. (October 110 2004: 51-79) p70.
 - 50 J. Butler. *Bodies That Matter: On The Discursive Limits Of 'Sex'* (New York: Routledge, 1993.) p240.
 - 51 J. Butler. *Precarious Life: the Powers of Mourning and Violence*. London: Verso, 2004. Print. In which Butler considers the relation to the Other after 9/11. In relation to my concluding paragraph, her call for 'imagining interdependency'. *Ibid.*, xii-xiii.
 - 52 J. Butler. *Bodies That Matter: On The Discursive Limits Of 'Sex'* (New York: Routledge, 1993.) p242.

Right:
133 Persons Paid to Have Their Hair Dyed Blond at the 2001 Venice Biennale. Illegal street vendors in venice were paid to have their hair dyed blond.



Person Paid to remain inside the trunk of a car. Limerick City Gallery, Limerick, Ireland, 2000. Produced during the opening of the Fourth EVA Biennial, at the entrance to its main site. A vehicle was parked at the gallery entrance and a person was put into its trunk. The person was paid 30 Irish Punts, about \$40. Nobody noticed his presence, since he was put into the trunk before the public arrived at the opening.

Tom Jennings **The Poverty of Imagination**

The UK's soporific slide deeper into fiscally-imposed structurally-readjusted barbarity, without much in the way of disturbance to putative social peace, has now been thoroughly punctured. First the exuberant Lethal Bizzle of EMA kids prompted their university 'betters' to trash Conservative HQ. Latterly, so-called Black Blocs bypassed passive masses of notional protest and pissed on complicit bureaucracy to attack the City. And then, most vividly, came unexpected eruptions of spontaneous sustained rage among festering slumdweller that blazed all over the national shop.

What is remarkable, nevertheless, is how unprepared those supposedly in-the-know were in the face of these socio-political squalls, storms and tornadoes. Sure enough, the *flog-'em-and-bang-'em-up* brigade broadcast their bile in a prompt chorus of class-hatred, as if the perpetrators of anti-social crime were restricted to archetypal, opportunistic, small-time hoodies and arsonists. As if it had nothing to do with a wider, more deliberate orchestration on an apocalyptic scale, thanks to elite financial obscenities mugging the 99% and foreclosing on the mortgaged futures of global and local populations.

But why do the revolting poor come as such a surprise? After all, despite unhealthy upstart idealisms regularly messing up business-as-usual elsewhere, a mythic enlightened middlebrow rationalism is normally alleged to have bewitched this geographic idyll. Early last century it even gave birth to that dispassionately charitable media empiricism called 'documentary' or 'social realism'. This has remained at the centre of the country's fantasy factories ever since – despite infernal colonisations by vulgar American kitsch and purist continental aesthetics. And this cultural paraphernalia of institutional and representational patterns, disciplines, practices, and rhetorics has always taken as its very special scientific project the minute observation and adumbration of the travails of the poor. In other words, where was the careful data gathering, processing and interpretation, on large and small public screens, when the think-tanks, policymakers, police, and movers-and-shakers seemingly needed it?

Accepting that current predicaments set-in during Thatcher's yesteryears, not yesterday's recession, this essay subjectively surveys two decades of austere growth in British poverty porn. Dissecting grim-up-north platitudes, perilous-down-south perambulations and sundry slumming-it social-realist serenades, an attempt is made to see if the national film oeuvre ought to have opened any eyes.



The Coming of Age of Austerity

UK cinema responded in a relatively sluggish manner to the tragedies of the 1980s, hot on the heels of the Tories' first decade of cuts and the accompanying degradation of working and living conditions for vast swathes of the populace. In the 1990s, however, veteran social-realist director Ken Loach was soon able to make up for lost ground, forensically detailing the latter in terms of restructured employment (*Riff Raff*, 1992; *The Navigators*, 2001) and unemployment (*Raining Stones*, 1993; *Ladybird Ladybird*, 1994; *My Name Is Joe*, 1998) – with Jimmy McGovern's rare account of grassroots industrial struggle in *Dockers* (Channel 4, 1999) integrating both within a wider urban context.¹ Elsewhere, less shackled by documentary motivations, more expressive aesthetic and narrative means were mobilised to bemoan crumbling lower-class ties – whether these were traditional (*Nil By Mouth*, Gary Oldman 1995), biological (*Orphans*, Peter Mullen 1997) or alternative (*Among Giants*, Sam Miller 1998). Yet, despite not shrinking from the heft and scope of misery suffered, these films still reserved space for germs of unprepossessing hope – some genuine residue, albeit tenuous, conflictual or deeply buried, of affiliation, commitment, conviviality and solidarity.

But beyond being corruptible for cynical enterprise, such organic human values have no obvious place in the New British Order. If Thatcher's "no such thing as society ... only individuals" was not so much empirical description as statement of intent in a parochial version of global neoliberalism, its enduring corollary that "there is no alternative" was pointedly rendered in baleful portraits of attenuated nihilism and hopelessness among younger generations in *Naked* (Mike Leigh 1993), *Butterfly Kiss* (Michael Winterbottom 1994) and *Stella Does Tricks* (Coky Giedroyc 1997). Conversely, a cinematic coming to terms with 'capitalist realism'² sketched resignation to the rule-of-the-market over economic and social relations among impoverished post-industrial subjects, yielding three highly successful British films which profited from blending social-realist tropes with populist melodrama, comedy and romance. Worse, *Brassed Off* (Mark Herman 1996), *The Full Monty* (Peter Cattaneo 1997) and *Billy Elliott* (Stephen Daldry 2000), as well as sad retreats like *Up 'N' Under* (John Godber 1998), displaced structural relations of class into its contrived performance³ – projectively mystifying the contemporary crisis into anachronistic patterns of masculinity⁴ presented as wilful personal obstacles to survival, health and happiness via vicissitudes of cultural capital.

With class-denialism promulgated promiscuously – left, right and centre – elegies to what was lost from a mythical social-democratic golden age of the political clout, social stability and economic security of labour now readily figured as mere consolation. Period drama recuperations of recent proletarian experience strategically accentuate style over substance in a distanced nostalgia of 'decadent mannerism'⁵ cut loose from specific historical moorings. This ironic mendacity retrospectively legitimises its referent's inevitable demise, having eviscerated the messy contextual blood and guts which animated it. The

outcome is queasy revisionist hokum in outwardly well-meaning, commemorative approximations of, say, traditions of northern music-hall (*Little Voice*, Mark Herman 1998), Northern Soul (*Soulboy*, Shimmy Marcus 2008) and even the militancy of factory women (*Made In Dagenham*, Nigel Cole 2010). Having said that, other film revivals of working-class life – in the 1950s (*Vera Drake*, Mike Leigh 2005), '60s (*Small Faces*, Gillies MacKinnon 1995), '70s (*Neds*, Peter Mullan 2011) or '80s (*This Is England*, Shane Meadows 2006, plus 2010/2011 television series sequels)⁶ – may flirt with sentimental closure but, courtesy of subject matter and handling, instead serve genealogies of the present far better than safe paeans to, or laments for, heroic or hellish pasts.



Service economy realignments in value-generation also nudged middle-class identification from institutional professionalism towards crass corporate or petit-entrepreneurialism – which, among only recently mobile fractions, often led steadily back to precarity. Class recomposition had myriad reflections in new social movements – from anti-Poll Tax action, hunt sabotage, New Age travel and Reclaim the Streets, to anti-globalisation – but direct political manifestation scarcely troubled mainstream media fiction. Instead, as in working-class realism, markers of commodified (counter) culture dominated representations of hipsters and bohemians flaunting superior fashion; foregrounding consumption over production and assuming assimilation to blind materialism in biopics of youth music scene appropriation like *Velvet Goldmine* (Todd Haynes 1998) and *24 Hour Party People* (Michael Winterbottom 2002)⁷. The postmodern manoeuvring was more deviously deployed by Cool Britannia's celebrated middle-class vanguards who, adapting slick cinematic innovations from Hollywood and MTV spectacle, purportedly blurred class boundaries in superficial travesties of underclass abjection – such as *Shopping* (Paul Anderson 1994), *Twin Town* (Kevin Allen 1997), *South West 9* (Richard Parry 2001) and, most iconically, Danny Boyle's *Trainspotting* (1996)⁸.

If the illusory bubble of New Labour's "Things can only get better" mirrored Boyle's thematic trajectory – from yuppie psychosis (*Shallow Grave*, 1994), through *Trainspotting*, to *X-Factor* transcendence (*Slumdog Millionaire*, 2008) – concurrent trends in UK cinema thoroughly tainted any seamless passage to consumerist nirvana⁹. Darker urban pastorals spoiled ersatz streetwise cosmopolitanism with the return of the repressed, signalled again through dysfunctional macho convolutions – such as the 'disease' of football hooliganism forever worried over in *The*

Firm (Allan Clarke 1989) all the way to a protracted 2000s cycle spearheaded by Nick Love. A parallel nostalgic restoration dredged up more archaic ghosts of mockney spivs and hardnuts dressed up in Tarantinoesque neo-noir, posturing at hyperstylised gangster gloss in the *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* (Guy Ritchie 1998) franchise. These twin fetishisms then promptly smart-casually cross-fertilised in a lucrative homegrown exploitation genre greeted with universal critical derision. A common denominator throughout is supine acceptance of the petty bourgeois order, with its pitilessly diminishing real returns wished away in infantile dreams of lottery wealth and celebrity lifestyle. The accompanying solipsistic vacuum is then hysterically concealed in atavistic charisma, in the latter cases of 'New Lad' vintage, coding stranded, fragmentary memories of collective vigour, pride, and even resistance to the present desperate state of things. Even when upwardly-mobile, it seems the rough and dangerous classes could not be persuaded to exit the big historical stages and screens.

Coming of Age in Austerity

Meanwhile the working and workless inhabitants of sink estates and industrial wastelands suffered the New Public Management of state provision, which increasingly appeared premised on shortchanging both its demoralised education, health and welfare staff and 'customers' punished for privatised, personalised deficiencies. But in the ruins of the post-war Keynesian settlement – the practical and psychological ramifications of which their parents wrestled with in struggling to survive – fresh cohorts of kids were growing up relatively unencumbered by broken twentieth-century promises. For them, material and social decay and deprivation were always already facts of life; the glittering sheen of consumerism a world away even when on sale round the corner. And again, the millennium's social-realist filmmakers were well-placed to explore how these young generations could conceive, build and live lives in such straitened circumstances. After all, the original colonial impetus of early British realism also thrust anthropological apparatuses into slums to observe and record their strange exotica. This time round, many of its exponents had themselves emerged from working-class backgrounds and, with more intimate knowledge, were motivated by their own unfinished business.

So a heterodox flow of realist films by low-budget auteurs blended poetic naturalism with European arthouse enchantment and popular melodramatics. Each sought potential in contemporary poverty, in contradistinction to the deafening discourses flooding media, culture and politics which blame, dismiss and demonise neoliberalism's victims. Established old hands like Amber Films¹⁰ paid painstaking attention to authentic sources, while bold faces like Lynne Ramsay, Pawel Pawlikowski and Andrea Arnold tempered miserabilism with impressionist perspective or mixed-genre expressionism. Shane Meadows had also privileged local and autobiographical narratives for *Smalltime* (1996), *Twenty Four Seven* (1997) and *A Room for Romeo Brass* (1999) before risking provincial Hollywood pastiche in *Once Upon a Time in the Midlands* (2002) and *Dead Man's Shoes* (2004) and subsequently returning to more expansive social-realism in *This Is England*. Conversely, Penny Woolcock's faithful ethnography in *Tina*



Goes Shopping and *Tina Takes a Break* (Channel 4, 1999; 2001) gave way to audacious crossovers, with wildly uneven results, in *The Principles of Lust* (2002), *Mischief Night* (2006), *Exodus* (Channel 4, 2007) and *1 Day* (2009).

UK cinema's 2000s infancy intelligibly embarked from middle-childhood fantasies of escape, after the surreal end-of-century *Ratcatcher* (Lynne Ramsay 1999) cut adrift abandoned offspring to blissful suicidal merger in the poisoned urban womb. A rash of kitchen-sink stories then set about the salvation of dying families via wounded youthful innocence, with fairytale resolutions varying in outlandish naffness in *Purely Belter* (Mark Herman 2000), *Billy Elliott*, and *Gabriel and Me* (Udayan Prasad 2001)¹¹. More complex portrayals of the negotiation of naïve Oedipal archetypes among networks of kith and kin – for example in *Like Father* (Amber 2001), *All or Nothing* (Mike Leigh 2001), *Sweet Sixteen* (Ken Loach 2002), or *A Boy Called Dad* (Brian Percival 2009) – again endeavoured to resurrect the nuclear alms across intransigent generations, and amid corrosive infrastructure. Perhaps more presciently, further contributions fast-forwarded past adolescence to recalibrate bad family romance in elective relational antagonisms no longer so bogged down in blood provenance – including *A Way Of Life* (Amma Asante 2004), *Love + Hate* (Dominic Savage 2005), *Summer* (Kenny Glenaan 2008) and *Somers Town* (Shane Meadows 2008).

However, uprooting from unsafe havens in migrant dislocation to make economic and emotional ends meet risks alienation at every turn. This was charted in melancholic accounts of young adults depressed beyond their years in transient oddball communities of uncertain motive, in *Human Traffic* (Justin Kerrigan 1999), *The Last Resort* (Pawel Pawlikowski 2000), *Late Night Shopping* (Saul Metzstein 2001) and *Morvern Callar* (Lynne Ramsay 2002). Corresponding paranoid detachment may then follow overweening malevolence, as in *London To Brighton* (Paul Andrew Williams 2006), but also prehistories of impersonal or absent nurturance poignantly conveyed in *Helen* (Christine Molloy & Joe Lawlor 2008) and *The Unloved* (Samantha Morton, Channel 4, 2009). Finally, black-magic temptations of addiction to stave off social and psychic collapse easily prove fatal, overwhelming ambivalent forbearance and despairing care offered against all the odds in *Pure* (Gillies MacKinnon 2002), *Shooting Magpies* (Amber 2005), *Better Things* (Duane Hopkins 2008) and *The Arbor* (Clio Barnard 2010)¹² – thus circuitously recalling *Ratcatcher's* comparably psychotic oblivion in other polluted hinterlands that no last-ditch love could cleanse.

But the love remained alive, albeit in abeyance, and the newbies weren't giving up without a fight. Filmmakers who had matured within Thatcher's blight, witnessed at first-hand the squandered and dashed hopes among peer groups which they had,

nevertheless, survived. So Nick Love's biographically inflected picaresque, *Goodbye Charlie Bright* (2001), chased its eponymous likely lad, streaking round a run-down but still marginally benevolent south London manor, flanked by equally schematic petty criminals and sociopaths. Despite ducking and diving soon going decisively pear-shaped, Charlie's readiness to put away childish things gets spun unconscionably sunny – even if his creator's own output graduated from wideboy thuggery to middle-aged bovver and raving vigilantism. However, in many rotting metropolitan boroughs, things already were more murderous, and

dilemmas starker, for schoolkid armies brokering narcotic economies with knives and guns. And this wasn't just according to moral-panic merchants and tabloid crisis-mongers – the teenagers believed the hype too. But before their versions of events reached the screen, there was still time for sober documentary observation as well as cynically intemperate exploitation.

In depth and texture, *Bullet Boy* (Saul Dibb 2005) merited promotion as the 'Brit Boyz N the Hood' even if hardly matching the gang-infested intensity of American New Black Cinema. The film's restrained picturing of Hackey towerblocks, terraces and playing fields counterpointed troubled biographies and questionable futures, as a paroled aggravated assaulter fails to go straight thanks to irreconcilable demands of family, friends and foes. His pre-teen brother strives to avoid the same fate with an integrity built from scratch, himself facing multiple threats in an environment of jaundiced institutional hypocrisy and thoroughly compromised masculine power. With their own preoccupations, the damaged and besieged elders exhibit contradictory nobility and inflexibility, with the generations' lifestyles barely intersecting. Even when they do, mutual incomprehensibility ensures a zero-sum game of passionate relations. In impressive yet impeccably modest social-realist style – thanks to a complex, subtle script and naturalistic dialogue delivered by a committed cast – both the spiralling determinism of violence and, counterintuitively, genuine chances of youngsters thriving without abandoning homemade ethics or home turf are convincingly rendered.



Only the former was managed by the resolutely unrealistic *Rollin' With the Nines* (Julian Gilbey 2005), a cheap blaxploitation ripoff revelling in kinetic drug-fuelled brutality and depths of sexual depravity. It did, however, showcase the indigenous gangster-rap incarnation of Grime –

London's ascendant mixed-race music subculture which, like the tawdry trappings of pornographic consumerism, was neglected in *Bullet Boy's* atmosphere before being thoroughly integrated into later youth-centric fare. Accordingly, *Life and Lyrics* (Richard Laxton 2006) was next up in the neighbourhood-watched stakes – a relatively mild Brixton hip-hop romance kitsching Eminem's *8 Mile* – which was promptly blown away by the manic virtuosity of *Kidulthood* (Menhaj Huda 2006). Written by Noel Clarke (who directed *Adulthood*, the 2008 sequel), this pursuit of classmates dragging a panoply of delinquent predicaments round streets and high-rises drew on his intimacy with its disreputable setting – more like four funerals and a teenage pregnancy than in the yuppie *Notting Hill* – and the vernacular of impatient yearning, impassioned loyalty and harsh wit rang as true as the quickfire intimidation and unforgiving shaming and disrespect among incipient predators and prey.

Sadly, rushing to deliver revelations of moral squalor in juvenile rites and wrongs of passage rammed far too much implausibility into a twenty-four hour exegesis. Inflated physical, mental and sexual cynical prowess in characters left little of the humdrum anomie and vulnerable uncertainty of real adolescent shades of grey. The breathless narrative panned out thick, fast and predictable, leaving no space for reflection let alone quotidian teenage kicks such as enjoying the spot-on beats blaring on the soundtrack. Maybe kids do mature that quickly and wickedly. But such suspiciously partial verisimilitude seems rather to reflect teenage's own delusions of grandeur, keeping fear of the future at bay while inadvertently nourishing agendas pushing the repressive containment of subhuman underclasses. And authorities in any sense are conspicuously absent here, as in later *Menace II Society* wannabes like the rather charming *1 Day* (Penny Woolcock 2009) and relentlessly charmless *Cherry Tree Lane* (Paul Andrew Williams 2010), as well as, at another figurative extreme, the comedic contempt of *Anuvahood* (Adam Deacon & Daniel Toland 2011) where clueless cretins with Ali G pretensions are antisociality's primary perpetrators.

Recent entries in UK youth cinema's urban killing fields continued to earnestly craft dialogue scripted from authentic patterns of banter and patter, but disguise blindingly obvious narrative arcs with increasingly tired crowd-pleasing novelty gimmicks. *Sket* (Nirpal Bhogal 2011) at least tempered testosterone overdoses with feminine ferocity and tenderness in girl gangs betraying their men and each other – whereas *Shank* (Mo Ali 2010) and *Attack the Block* (Joe Cornish 2011) traded respectively in *Mad Max* and Spielbergian sci-fi buffoonery. The former parachuted an utterly unconvincing nonviolent direct action credo into the directionless moral starvation of infantile teens, while the latter's unwelcome intruders were rampaging pitch-dark aliens disrupting mugging, drugging and blagging in a motley starstruck crew. Our petty posse transform themselves into unlikely superboys in ridding the 'hood of its unspeakable nemeses – forging alliance with a slew of more or less respectable middle-class fractions in the process. Sadly, and ruinously, however, the ultimate deeply offensive corollary implies that the otherworldly invasion actually emanated from their own psychic recesses, whose 'blackness' they must expunge to prevail.

Alongside high-energy grimefests running out of steam for want of hints of the transcendence of endless, restless immaturity, more contemplative slices of community hard-knock life have embedded individual outsiders within – as opposed to insiders without prospects – in translating elements of the filmmakers' own conflicted upbringings. Among the best was Andrea Arnold's *Fish Tank* (2009), updating her Oscar-winning desperate single-mother short *Wasp* (2003) and showing a disaffected daughter suffocating under constricting Thames Estuary horizons. Her obsessive-compulsive acting-out veers from solitary hip-hop dancing to cathexis with her mam's new boyfriend – the exotic downhome appeal of local travellers and strangeness of semi-natural landscapes beyond the estate contrasting with its familiar ambient clamour of a back-catalogue of plaintive calls and responses from British soul musics. Coloured and lit with bewitching point-

of-view cinematography, this potent expressive interplay of single-minded interior and implacable exterior alienation perfectly conveys the reckless damage risked for self and others; when lashing-out at each successive vain option threatens a self-fulfilling prophecy of disappointment.



The grievous hostility here evident in dysfunctional lower-class daily life, however, matches fractiously vibrant intimacy, spirit and intelligence, and such vital human impulses can warp destructively when inchoate fury narrows the limits of the foreseeable. Refusal to relinquish desirous intensity, no matter how inadequately articulated and negotiated, or subsume it in conventional role prescriptions, is highly likely to result in schism. Yet emotional bonds run as deep as the profanity even in a family this fragile; one which nurtures as well as neglects. Conversely, Channel 4's recent four-part *Top Boy* (Ronan Bennett 2011) revisits *Bullet Boy's* Hackney(ed) crossroads, whose socio-economic climate over intervening years has exacerbated the unravelling of further impoverished kinship networks: blood connectivity now stretches beyond breaking point. Fashioning substitute clans from social detritus at hand is thus imperative and, as in its precursor, realism and crime melodrama are skilfully blended, daring to expose prevailing commonplaces of urban deviance as simplistically prejudicial with Ashley Walters nailing yet another bad boy with a heart of tarnished gold, and a young cousin warding off his ambivalent mentorship.

Psychiatric and relationship breakdown and overworked drudgery leave kids fending for themselves among drug cartels who succumb to the vicious logic of their enterprise more from lack of alternatives than psychopathy – paralleling the affective sufferation among children, parents and intermediate cohorts alike. Highlighting one lad's navigation through everyone's stormy weather, a sophisticated meshing of trauma, painful love and hope, in overlapping biographies, convincingly sketches manifold constituents of crumbling commons, in spite of an unfeasibly minimal cast and plentiful questionable plot holes. In the light of dishonest commonplaces elsewhere overstating degraded sociality, the anachronistically threadbare gangs and police presence here rather suggest institutional neglect, paradoxically letting autonomous interaction breathe. Dehumanisations of feral scum crescendoed after the series' completion, but no deterministic truck is had with clichéd inadequate parenthood, positive role models and the 'Victorian' values toxic in any strata, but pathetic in these. So, Reality TV's tough-love presaging of soft-cop invasion to transform fortunes is trashed along with traditional professional imperialism; with social workers only being useful when disavowing officialdom and following class-conscious noses, instead of turning them up in disgust at respectability's failure to thrive.

The older characters seem paralysed in sad individualistic tactics just as useless these days as the moral homilies which blatantly failed them. Acutely so aware, the youngsters combine wily intelligence and obstinate interpersonal commitment to carve out coherent paths from

limited material resources, relations and ethics discernible in the city's wreckage. Their tentatively awkward strategies may have only modest chances of pragmatic success, but ultimately they reject the false promises of embracing addictive barbarity to feed fatal fancies of fulfilment. Maybe *Top Boy's* author retains radical sensibilities from his own outspoken revolutionary republican, libertarian-Left youth, even if in dotage accepting political and artistic limits of temporary respite for isolated souls. But what works best, as in much of the work described above – whether focusing on personal or interpersonal change or stasis – is imaginatively brewing trials and tribulations into ensemble patchworks of juxtaposition to creatively mull over. This was already explicit in the rhythms and rhymes of the local soundsystems and griots, and now brings to life on screen the extraordinarily multifarious striving for individual and collective redemption and empowerment still characteristic of environments mired in the most unpromising circumstances. Misery? Yes: in spades – but far more besides, and by no means only representable miserably.

Community De- / Re-generation

For the most comprehensive excommunication of kitchen-sink drudgery in the service of exuberant flatulent hilarity – but never abandoning a scandalous sacreligious slant on magical realism – the unique, groundbreaking *Shameless* (Channel 4 2004-2012), now in its ninth series, is unlikely to be beaten. With nary a trace of patronisation or mockery, but profound and abiding respect for those making the most of the slings and arrows of outrageous misfortune, Paul Abbott's barnstorming soap-operatic brainchild – based on memories of his troubled childhood – began serial offending with a humble family-in-meltdown on a satellite Manchester sink thoughtfully dubbed the 'Chatsworth'. The non-landed gentry of this lumpen country estate are the Gallaghers, presided over by drunken, feckless Frank: a fleetingly present, irredeemably self-centred dad gone rotten who was doubtless never good for much other than siring nine. Successive series inexorably haemorrhaged siblings pining for greener grass, so narrative blinkers slowly widen to a panoramic kaleidoscope of ne'er-do-wells and inadequates who actually do tolerably and adequately well, from day to day at least – shoring up mutual, unapologetically glaring weaknesses and bad-luck excuses with irrepressible optimism, surprising nous, and adventurous brio. And, as well as their effortless practical genius in syncretic cultural expropriation, this best of humanity certainly know how to throw a party – both in the dry political and festive wet-bar senses¹³.



The writing team's eschewal of any harsh judgement that the characters wouldn't already level at one another – affectionately or otherwise, though never with superior snobbish boosterism in mind – instantly and consistently irked all conceivable sneering moral majorities. The high-minded chatterati can't handle every facet of their bourgeois omniscience being bawdily punctured with unforgiving regularity, pinpoint alacrity and alarming accuracy. And they writhe and whinge in apoplexy about this 'fetishisation' of poverty as if we haven't had to put up long enough with schedules full of the pompous circumstances nourishing their vanity. Yet among sublime

crackpot pratfalls and subversive overcomings of official and informal malignancy, mistakes have certainly proliferated – like embracing local Plods to the bosom or, worse, installing criminal tribe the Maguires at the heart of the darkness – but the surefooted guiding vision sweeps such embarrassing accidents under the carpet-bombing profanations of sincere single-issue and PC complacencies. *Shameless* automatically and unerringly takes the side of the subalterns, without sacrificing clear-sighted vulgar class pride and righteous reverse prejudice. And if the proof of TV puddings is ratings, it has vastly overperformed, whilst remaining fondly appreciated by all demographics closest to its beady-eyed gaze.

Among few cultural products with the bare-faced cheek to compare, *Under the Mud's* (Sol Papadopoulos 2006) repair of a lame marriage seems wastefully unambitious given the scouring Scouse humour and invention in its community workshop source material. *Mischief Night* (Penny Woolcock 2006) also skims romcoms and amateur northern (this time Leeds) raconteurship, but with inspired whittling and surreal realisation is a different kettle of fish altogether from the previous *Tina* films. They located their Channel 4 *Cutting Edge* credentials in recounting everyday resourcefulness among the urban deprived struggling to stay afloat, rather than merely reactions to trauma as in normal social-realist agonies. But the cinematic denouement was shot amid heightened police paramilitarism after the London bombings, reinforcing aims to comedically undermine increasing segregation of British Asians from neighbours. Here, legacies of closer prior interaction converge on a single mum seeking stability for the kids, and various diverse connectives develop with the embattled Khan family leading to November 4th's festivities of benign delinquency set against the mundane disrespect and darker anti-sociability of crime, racism, drugs and violence.

Design and photography magnify warmth and vitality despite divisions, and the overlain New Beats and bhangra avoid cliché as the mayhem resolves into generational contrasts of multiracial hope. Romance rekindled breaks backward-looking traditions, while teenagers pursue quests and forge friendships based on generosity and – glimpsing the limitations of parental blind alleys – working-through toxic power relations to serve future needs. But deterministic narrative arcs rather miss the point – an urge obliquely lampooned in the Big Men's ballooning fetish; a deft condensation of joyriding, lifestylism and the Northern kitchen-sink ritual of climbing a hill to look down on the town. The lieutenants flail out of control of their territory, ending impaled on the mosque tower – contrasting the failed Western secular hot air of mastery with the impotence of the Muslim hierarchy in challenging the fundamentalists eventually repelled by enlisting dope-dealers' muscle. Such plot absurdities likewise signal the humility of the film-maker in relinquishing authorial omnipotence – bravely weaving the weft and warp of meticulously collected grass-roots anecdotes and repartee to demolish pretension, free up energy and facilitate agency.

Fittingly, the children's exploration of a mysterious adult world provides most bite, blithely juggling real danger and heartache with naïve sass and insight. They grapple with the inanities of respectability (“My mam's a smackhead.” “Mine's a dinner-lady.”) and are drawn to the relatively well-off ‘Death Row’ whose denizens – paedophiles, headteachers, gangsters, bosses – correlate posh with perverse. While one joyrider views Osama bin Laden screensavers and jihad videos as comic relief from being pressganged into iniquity, another's apprenticeship to a hardman grandad entails blundering around junkie mums and courier pensioners. And whereas one lass finally guns down her unlikely father, a younger Muslim stepsister strategises her transcendence of patriarchy in the local urban music nightclub – a temporary autonomous zone where lower-class

youth of all races enjoy their hybrid culture in relative peace away from vexing intransigence elsewhere.

Cross-stitching the corrosive fissures of white and Asian communities, the film's hysteria consistently erodes stereotypes, remaining rooted in working-class neighbourhoods. Here, despite intense material pressures, upward mobility's false promises are just as destructive as the baleful allure of the law of the criminal jungle in crystallising vicious circles of isolation. The desperate rearguard defence of ancestral families provides no useful prognosis, merely locking members into perpetual hypertension and the submission to oppression which carnivals have always had the function of momentarily overturning. In fact, though now celebrated only in Yorkshire, the druidic origins of *Mischief Night* – a time when fairies walk the earth – predate Hallowe'en and Guy Fawkes by many centuries. While hardly supernatural, the outcomes of this highly unusual urban fairytale “with its head in the clouds and its feet on the ground” might also appear somewhat improbable. Nevertheless, its hidden script alchemy of pragmatic irreverence for authority, laughing-off of adversity, and imaginative empathy and engagement updates age-old formulae for survival, solidarity and resistance still applicable most anywhere.



Of course, a crucial salient caveat with suspiciously benevolent heterotopias like the aforementioned is a risk of soft-peddling tragedies and turning points, indelible scars and intransigent devilishnesses probably present in many midsummer night dreamers' real lives. *Shameless* sometimes surely errs on the rosy side since, for example, sticky ends are so few and far between. But significant negativity can nonetheless be acknowledged and encompassed if the storytelling is sufficiently freewheeling while being carefully, caring choreographed. Exemplary in this category are Greg Hall's super-ultra-low budget guerrilla productions¹⁴ – *The Plague* (2005) and *Same Sh*t, Different Day* (2010) – chronicling teetering trajectories among lovable London hip-hop chancers, which allow frustrating prevarication and protracted interludes to modulate impending agony or ecstasy and judiciously sprinkle sudden serious twists among inadvertent clowning and slobbering. But for deep dramatic chutzpah, oscillating humour and winning gross caricature, as well as in facing nightmare scenarios head-on, the 1980s saga *This Is England* (2006-12) might, if mentally calibrated to regional, sonic and sartorial specifics, share common class co-ordinates across the present day UK.

The four-part *This Is England '86* (2010) reconstituted threads of the initial film, depicting its ensemble's continuing misadventures three years later. The skinhead subculture whose ambivalences the earlier work unpicked – echoing only in fading NF graffiti – has diluted further into post-punk, goth, mod and casual crossovers. Style-sense promiscuity mirrors diverse fortunes among misfit gang members who nevertheless retain the rabid loyalty emblematic of the depressed post-industrial contexts excavated so convincingly. Again structured by the re-engagement of old mates, Meadows' loosening of the semi-autobiographical focus allows fully-realised grappling with the challenges of young working-class adulthood, with prospects dire and dubious past certainties disappearing in rampant political Machiavellianism. In such inauspicious circumstances the ‘imagined community’ of nation coheres no better than England's footballers at tournaments then or since – rendering concrete damage to social fabrics most explicit in gamuts of savage stress and ill-ease which friendship networks struggle to heal or ameliorate –

metaphorised in failed marital attempts by the couple at the centre of comic gravity. Cheap, cheerful ceremonials fall foul of material, social and historical stumbling blocks threatening to cripple the future. The groom sorrowfully panics about turning into his father's facsimile, and the bride's abused backstory comes intolerably into conscious relief in a transfixing strand escalating to unlikely resolution.

Switching format seemed natural in light of the cinematic inspiration of social-realism by Alan Clarke, Ken Loach and Mike Leigh which failed to attract film funding. Trademark collaborative practices with a superb cast shine through, improvising everything from dialogue to design and costume, placing a premium on the awkward naturalism of time, place and interaction rather than slavish devotion to seamless superficial simulation. This approach favours narratives weaving together multiple characters without relegating subsidiary roles as mere props for conflicted heroes – which previous work, including the cinema film, was regularly guilty of. That it augured well for emphasising the open-endedness of real communities – haunted by ghosts of crisis past but with potential for resilience, autonomy and creativity as well as regression, submission and malice – was amply demonstrated in the 2011 series set at Christmas 1988 and with the most

gut-wrenching but almost inconceivably optimistic collective passion on display. Skilfully melding the mildly amusing, sympathetically grotesque and downright horrific without detracting from very serious concern, Meadows' best script yet sketches comparably tangled personal tensions and pressures across the board in a compelling portrait of a desolate generation boding their own coming of age¹⁵.

“We Come From the Slums of ...”

Not only run of t' mill rations of awfulness, but also fascinating cornucopias of fictional fancy and food for thought about the social and cultural reproductive conditions of the wretched of our earth have smuggled through the closed-circuit Big Brother filters of conformism in the towering manufacture of consent. On closer inspection, grounds for provisional encouragement that another world is possible seem least opaque in exactly those scenarios where groups of characters have some paltry time and space to arrange their affairs without constantly being individually and collectively fingered and pestered by formal market and governmental forces. In which case, it's telling that the remnants of Old Left patrician vanguardism these days, in concert with the usual bourgeois suspects, line up to a man, woman and transgendered being in the parties of the dark angels of capitalism and the State. No doubt we should also give a passing nod to conspiratorial paranoia over the recuperative inoculation of animalistic carnival among human couch-potatoes vegetating in the future-in-the-present matrix of Baudrillardian simulation. But that too comfortably coincides with the absorption of comfortable classes into twittering Webs inconsequentially cluttering up so many Occupy Everything liberal world views. Effete consensual dissociation from the obscene Real cannot stomach any of the hideous visceral immediacy and euphoria, let alone convulsive mortal agonies, of the libidinous and death-drive imaginaries of illiberal billions – who can't in any case afford the latest must-have digital gadgetry or other high-blown or low-rent distractions of fashion, let alone decent IT facilities. Descending back to ground zero, two tendential gaps may be noted in TV and cinematic transitional programmes out of the post-war social-democratic settlement ushering in the post-class-war neoliberal consensus and beyond.

First is the odd erasure alluded to above of signs and symptoms of the direct intervention of either corporate or state services and utilities, be it hard forces of law, disorder and criminal injustice or, for that matter, soft bizzies of all education, social work, or welfare disciplinary stripes. But then the contemporary repressive SNAFU (‘situation

normal, all fucked-up') of the militarily-industrious complex is moderately disinclined to bother mobilising its bungling apparatus unless the lower-classes collectively impinge outside abject zones on solid middle-England ground. Except, of course, in cultural representations – those discussed herein, but more especially in the mesmerising panopticon of Reality TV¹⁶. Of course, once sticking our necks above the parapets and daring to intrude in the sterile civic spaces of genteel residence and dirty commerce, they'll come down like a ton of bricks – but neither is there much hint of that on telly or at the pictures. Whereas, as the riotous August proved¹⁷, if there's more than a few of us at a time they're not really fit for that purpose anyway, unless tooled up like robocops bludgeoning and blasting innocuous passers-by and those deluding themselves trying to cash in on 'rights'.

At stake, then, is what will happen when the unruly multitudes emerge en masse from symbolic and actual repositories of despair and sleepwalking estates of mind, to posture, frolic and act directly in the faces of authority, its reluctant or enthusiastic servants, and those who just don't care and are content – if not intent on it – for us to remain corralled there? Apart from sideways glances and glimpses in *Shameless* and the like, and occasional frescoes of fury against the indiscriminate, discriminatory intrusion of public policing and, even rarer, the intimate internal biopolitics of the nano-commodification of desire, UK filmmakers are largely silent on such questions – and would doubtless be booted offscreen pronto if presuming otherwise¹⁸. However, in matter of fact – to cite one tiny recent example – when East London's Muslim and other youth come out and about scouting against fascist manifestation, blatantly flouting the commands of community 'leaders', and make a point of seeking out 'Mischief Night' camaraderie with 'the anarchists' while the woefully backward self-styled 'advanced fractions' of self-important politicians studiously self-kettle down the other end of the road; well, maybe there's hope for us all.



Notes

- 1 And, even now, we can confidently predict that no right-on leftie accountancy will reach our plasma screens – matching the mainstream media news blackout of the most significant victory of British industrial labour for many years – of the recent magnificently horizontal national networking militancy of sparks, siteworkers and allies, defeating with inspired direct determined action (against the grain of their appalled and appalling trade union hierarchy) the massed ranks of the Big Seven construction companies; thus, for now, retaining some of the precious terms and conditions remaining from what their ancestors battled so hard for (see, for example, reports at <http://neanarchists.com/>).
- 2 Cf. Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Zero, 2009); see also Slavoj Žižek, 'Risk Society and its Discontents', *Historical Materialism*, 2, 1998, pp143-64.
- 3 See Mike Wayne, 'The Performing Northern Working Class in British Cinema: Cultural Representation and its Political Economy', *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, 23 (4), 2006, pp287-297.
- 4 For relevant discussions and varying interpretations, see: Slavoj Žižek, 'Whither Oedipus', in: *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (Verso, 1999); John Hill, 'Failure and Utopianism: Representations of the Working Class', in: R. Murphy (ed.) *British Cinema of the 1990s* (BFI, 2000) and 'From New Wave to Brit-Grit: Continuity and Difference in Working Class Realism', in: J. Ashby & A. Higson (eds.) *British Cinema Past and Present* (Routledge, 2000); Claire Monk, 'Underbelly UK: the 1990s Underclass Film, Masculinity and the Ideologies of "New" Britain', also in Ashby & Higson; and Cora Kaplan, 'The Death of the Working Class Hero', *New Formations*, 52, 2004, pp94-110. For a corrective, see James Heartfield, 'There is No Masculinity Crisis', *Genders*, 35, 2002, www.genders.org/g35/g35_heartfield.html.
- 5 As Paul Marris aptly puts it, in 'Northern Realism: An Exhausted Tradition?' *Cineaste*, 26 (4), 2001, pp30-66.
- 6 Not to mention the excoriating postmodernist grandeur of the Dante-meets-James Ellroy apparitions of 1970s-80s West Yorkshire in the *Red Riding* trilogy (by Tony Grisoni, from four David Peace novels, Channel 4, 2009); let alone those dipping into the rural and urban class-saturated vicissitudes of previous centuries, such as Andrea Arnold's exhilaratingly trenchant take on *Wuthering Heights* (2011) and the sickly-sour sex-work exposé *The Crimson Petal and The White* (by Lucinda Coxon, based on the Michel Faber novel, BBC2 2011).
- 7 A rare exception being the reggae dancehall-themed *Babymother* (Julian Henriques 1998); discussed in Rachel Moseley-Wood, 'Colonizin' Englan' in Reverse', *Visual Culture in Britain*, 5, 2004, pp91-104.
- 8 In *Visions of England: Class and Culture in Contemporary Cinema* (Berg, 2006), Paul Dave convincingly parallels the venture capital speculation on low-cultural signifiers emptied of context in *Trainspotting* with similarly blatant cultural commodity trading among the era's Young British artists – as critiqued by Julian Stallabrass in *High Art Lite* (Verso, 2000) – calculatingly pandering to sundry aspirational, reactionary and aristocratic deceptions that class really no longer mattered.
- 9 See Carl Neville's valuable analysis in *Classless: Recent Essays on British Film* (Zero, 2011).
- 10 Amber's work is discussed in more detail in my 'Hunting, Fishing and Shooting the Working Classes', *Variant*, 34, 2009, pp25-27.
- 11 See James Leggott, 'Like Father? Failing Parents and Angelic Children in Contemporary British Social Realist Cinema', in: P. Powrie, A. Davies & B. Babbington (eds), *The Trouble With Men: Masculinities in European & Hollywood Cinema* (Wallflower, 2004).
- 12 The latter not being fiction at all, but a quasi-documentary with professional actors ventriloquising the family and friends of troubled Bradford playwright Andrea Dunbar. For a discussion of the 'truth' irretrievably lost in this variety of realism, see Omar El-Khairy, 'Clio Barnard's Talking Heads', *Mute*, 3 (1), 2011, 'Double Negative Feedback'; www.metamute.org.
- 13 Despite all these uncommon attributes, it is revealing that scant recorded intelligent attention has accrued to *Shameless* so far. What does exist includes: James Walters, 'Saving Face: Inflections of Character Role Play in *Shameless*', *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, 3 (1), 2006, pp95-106; Sally Munt, 'Shameless in Queer Street', in *Queer Attachments: The Cultural Politics of Shame* (Ashgate, 2007); and Stephen Baker, 'Shameless and the Question of England: Genre, Class and Nation', *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, 6 (3), 2009, pp452-67. For discussion of the first series in terms of previous television comedy and drama, see my 'A Low Down Dirty Lack of Shame', *Variant*, 12, 2004, pp11-12. Note also a considerably tamer *Shameless U.S.* (produced by John Wells and Paul Abbott in 2010), with the otherwise superlative loser-actor William H. Macy completely unconvincing as a Yank Frank. Whereas north of their border, the comparably mordant mockumentary saga *Trailer Park Boys* (Mike Clattenburg, Canada 1999-2009), as with Manchester's favourite fictional pikeys, broke viewing figure records year on year – see Dean DeFino, 'From Trailer Trash to Trailer Park Boys', *Post Script magazine*, 2009 (posted at <http://libcom.org/library/trailer-trash-trailer-park-boys>).
- 14 The outfit responsible is called Broke But Making Films, whose website at www.broke-but-making-films.com can now be visited to snap up *The Plague* and extras on DVD for only a fiver ...
- 15 For an account of Meadows' own coming of age in bodging bang up-to-date slickly digital production, see his interview in *The Guardian*, 16th December 2011, online at www.guardian.co.uk/technology/2011/dec/16/making-of-this-is-england-88.
- 16 At the turn of the century, sociologist Beverley Skeggs embarked on a thoroughgoing decade-long investigation of Reality TV's primary function of informally legislating popular orientations to lived class – see: the excellent collection *Reality Television and Class* (edited with Helen Wood, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); *Reacting to Reality Television* (by Skeggs & Wood, Routledge, 2012); and, for tentative political lessons, 'Imagining Personhood Differently: Person Value and Auonomist Working-Class Value Practices', *Sociological Review*, 59 (3), 2011, pp496-513 (also at: www.hum.aau.dk/~proj-forsk/beverley_skeggs/articleskeggs.pdf).
- 17 For a range of interesting perspectives on the significance of the UK riots, see: 'Paul Gilroy Speaks on the Riots, August 2011, Tottenham, North London', <http://dreamofsafety.blogspot.com>; Slavoj Žižek, 'Shoplifters of the World Unite', *London Review of Books*, 19th August 2011; Aufheben, 'Communities, Commodities and Class in the August 2011 Riots', *Aufheben*, 20, 2012, pp1-17 (available at <http://libcom.org>); *The Guardian*, 'Reading the Riots: Investigating England's Summer of Disorder', 2012, www.guardian.co.uk/uk/series/reading-the-riots; plus the Khalid Qureshi Foundation & Chelsea Ives Youth Centre, 'Riot Polit-Econ', and Howard Slater, 'FTH: The Savage and Beyond', both in *Mute*, 3 (2), 2012, 'Politics My Arse', www.metamute.org. Finally, for a preliminary – if sometimes strangely misconceived and over-reaching – exploration of what insurgent educational praxis might entail, see the admirable Mastaneh Shah-Shuja, 'Zones of Proletarian Development' (*Open Mute*, 2008).
- 18 Perhaps that's why the risibly underwhelming Wachowski brothers-produced American version of Alan Moore's graphic novel *V For Vendetta* (James McTeigue 2005) wasn't a whole lot more illuminating on the subject, either.

“Our country’s calling card”¹

Culture as the Brand in Recessionary Ireland

Rosemary Meade

Introduction: A moral crisis begets an economic crisis?

While there have been some efforts to explain Ireland’s² economic crisis with reference to the dialectical tendencies of capitalism³, globalisation and neo-liberalism, mainstream media and political commentary has preferred to avoid this kind of sustained analysis. Instead, with varying degrees of emphasis, commentators have attributed causality to specific errors – some collective, others individual – in behaviour or judgment. They include our foolhardy reliance on the property sector, the misbehaviour and miscalculations of rotten apples in the banking sphere, and cronyism and ineptitude within ruling political elites. In the general rush to censure, the Irish public has not escaped criticism. The profoundly ideological contention that *we are all somehow to blame*⁴ is repeatedly passed off as an incontestable fact; a ‘common sense’ legitimising reductions in the minimum wage⁵, assaults on public sector spending and conditions, the broadening of the tax base to include the low-paid and the avoidance of more decisive redistribution from the summit of the earnings hierarchy. For example, former Finance Minister, Brian Lenihan, ritually invoked our collective responsibility – constituted by one part guilt and one part patriotism – to rationalise his government’s deference to global markets and the new climate of austerity⁶.

“This Budget serves no vested interest. Rather, it provides an opportunity for us all to pull together and play our part according to our means” (October 14th, 2008)

“Everybody pays and those who can pay most will pay most. The Plan calls on us all to take more responsibility for ourselves.” (Budget 2011 Speech, December 7th, 2010)

“I accept that I have to take responsibility as a member of the governing party during that period for what happened, but let’s be fair about it, *we all partied.*” (Prime Time, November 24th, 2010) [My italics.]

In the mainstream media, discussions about the economic crisis have displayed a comparable moralising sensibility, with recurring references to how we’ve been let down by elites⁷ – politicians,

Despite all the moralising about *Celtic Tiger* evils of consumption, hegemonic discourses inevitably retreat into a consumerist model of culture

state officials, bankers – and how we as a people let ourselves down. The economic crisis is thus framed as a kind of un-cool karma, drawn down by citizens’ relentless pursuit of hedonism during the period of the Celtic Tiger⁸. In April 2011, the Finnish Banking expert Peter Nyberg, who was charged with reporting on the causes of the banking crisis, finally published his analysis:

“[T]he way Irish households, investors, banks and public authorities voluntarily reacted to foreign and domestic developments was probably not very different to that in other countries now experiencing financial problems. However, the extent to which large parts of Irish society were willing to let the good times roll on until the very last minute (a feature of the financial mania) may have been exceptional.”⁹ [My italics.]

‘Our’ obsession with the property ladder, speculative investments and conspicuous consumption are now memorialised in the ugly reality of ghost estates, abandoned race-horses and home repossessions. Former President Mary Macaleese became something of an early touchstone for anxieties about prosperity’s impact on our national value system. Having warned against the dangers of “the *cul de sac* of complacent consumerism”¹⁰ in November 2005, she would later suggest that recession presented an opportunity for moral rehabilitation, “Somewhere along the line, we began to think that we weren’t happy with deferred gratification. We had to have it now and in this moment and I think that we have paid a very, very big price for that very radical shift. And now the balance presumably is going to swing back the other way and it will be no harm.”¹¹

These would become the narratives of blame: either so universalising that they fail to interrogate issues of power, social reproduction, inequality and exclusion in the Irish context; or so narrowly targeted on charismatic miscreants that they avoid analysis of the structural roots of this latest crisis in capitalism. Demonstrating, a wilful denial of their own partiality they ultimately fall back onto that most pervasive of ideological devices, the fetishisation of individual choice. As with doctrinaire neo-liberalism they assume that individual citizens – be they ordinary consumers, politicians or employees of financial institutions – can be disassociated from their economic and social habitus and thus hold sovereign responsibility for their risky choices in the market place. Sometimes these choices are represented as ‘rational calculations’ and sometimes as ‘moral lapses’, but the overall effect is similar; to gloss over the contradictions of late capitalism as a global system that governs our every day practices.

A functionalised culture

There is another problem with all this showy lancing of collective guilt; it typically prefaces a more urgent kind of ‘X Factor’ quest, where the search is on for those innovators who can lead the economic revival. It became manifest in the recurring calls for particular business ‘dynamos’, celebrities, economists or civil society leaders to run for elected office in the General Election of 2011. It also became manifest in various representations of the cultural sector, the arts and artists – or as Fintan O’Toole describes them “Ireland’s greatest remaining asset”¹² – as storm troopers in the battle to rescue the nation’s beleaguered reputation. When the economic crisis punctured the credibility of old elites, it also cleared a space for new icons of hope and as the National Campaign for the Arts recognised, “There is now a broad consensus that the arts will play a dynamic part in Ireland’s economic and social recovery. To maintain the role of the arts as a significant driver of employment, cultural tourism, the creative industries, our collective wellbeing and international reputation...”¹³

What manifests as a consensus, I am inclined to describe as hegemony; the broad acceptance that culture be ‘functionalised’ in the interests of the economy. In September 2009, the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs hosted the “inaugural Global Irish Economic Forum”, which was attended by “members of the Government; Secretaries General of Government Departments, CEOs of State Agencies, and leading members of the Irish business and cultural sectors”¹⁴. Among the principal themes under discussion were the uncertain status of Ireland’s reputation and the urgency of ‘brand’ consolidation¹⁵. The report on the event explained that,

“[S]peakers focused on the concept of branding, noting the strength of ‘Brand Ireland’, but that in today’s hugely competitive environment, resources must be targeted and the message focussed so that Ireland, could distinguish itself on the global stage. The arts and culture had a key role to play in this process. Participants strongly argued that the arts are no longer a luxury or a charity, but are a hugely important part of the economy.”¹⁶

It’s a limited and limiting appraisal of the role of the arts – charity, luxury or brand extension – and it could easily be dismissed as corporate babble, typical of an event such as this. However, the ever present threat of further cuts in public spending has done much to focus Ireland’s

Expectations of the arts to reboot the economy seem inconsistent with the actual earning power of artists themselves

collective consciousness. ‘Brand Ireland’ discourses have been adopted by arts organisations that are cognisant of the rising expectation that all must prove our commitment to the economic revival. Even before the Global Economic Forum, Visual Artists Ireland “the all Ireland Development and resource body for professional visual artists”¹⁷ made a submission to the Innovation Task Force on September 16th 2009, in which it positioned improved grants and resources for artists as “further support of the cultural identity of Brand Ireland”¹⁸. It is also worth noting that similar tendencies were common in Japan in the wake of its economic crash in 1991, with the ‘J-cool Brand’ invoked to counteract the country’s reputational and image problems¹⁹. During March 2010, RTE Radio’s flagship news show *Morning Ireland* ran a week-long discussion series centred around the somewhat rhetorical question ‘Can the Arts help revive the economy?’, incorporating interviews with guests who were described by presenter Áine Lawlor as “the great and good”²⁰ of the Irish arts world. Significantly the interviews were timetabled to coincide with the St Patrick’s holiday, the now ‘traditional’ focal point for international marketing of Brand Ireland. Participants included Abbey Theatre director Fiach Mac Conghail, musician and broadcaster Philip King, writer Colm Tóibín, theatre director Garry Hynes and the newly appointed Cultural Ambassador to the US, actor Gabriel Byrne. The interviews did not allow participants to reflect on the social, democratic or transformative possibilities of the arts, or how and why culture might be meaningful to citizens. Instead questions were framed to elicit arguments regarding the economic, and specifically touristic, dividends that could be yielded by investment in the cultural sphere.

In Ireland there has been a long-standing tendency for government and mainstream media to privilege a narrow frame of economic rationality in their evaluations of cultural, scientific, social and political developments²¹. As the economic crisis has unfolded, invocations of that rationality have become cruder and more frenetic. Given that the artistic sphere is often attributed transcendent properties – based on its ability to elevate our minds and desires – it is notable that it too should fall victim to that tendency. A speech by former Taoiseach Brian Cowen, “at the announcement of Ireland’s next Professor of Poetry – Harry Clifton” comically illustrates the case:

“[T]his country is fighting its way out of a severe recession and we will come through this because of the quality of our people, their self-belief and their ingenuity. The arts and our culture has a big role to play in getting Ireland back on track.

I believe that being Irish holds a distinct and intrinsic value. Ireland is a brand. People know us. Our country, her landscape and her culture are known the world over. *We must connect with that brand now and use it to give us the competitive advantage in a globalised world that is increasingly the same. We must ourselves portray the positives that others see in us.*²² [My italics.]

In other words: creativity must be entrepreneurial, cultural distinctiveness means market advantage.

Rhetorical status Vs structural location

As Howard Becker observed, the arts are never immune from social processes and are never merely the products of sequestered minds or individual imaginations. Instead they should be viewed as outcomes of collective action where “[R]elations of co-operation and constraint, ... penetrate the entire process of artistic creation and composition”²³. Despite all the ‘Brand Ireland’ rhetoric, issues of economic survival constitute a pressing constraint on contemporary Irish arts organisations and individual artists. Significant in this regard are the findings of survey of 1,128 artists that was jointly commissioned by both Arts Councils on the island of Ireland. It suggested that the average income from their arts practice for artists in the Republic of Ireland was less than “€15,000 in 2008, with 50% of artists earning €8,000 or less from their work”²⁴. Expectations of the ability of the arts to re-boot the economy seem inconsistent with the actual earning power of artists themselves. Furthermore, hegemonic discourses about culture and its role are taking shape against the backdrop of significant cuts in revenue for the Arts Council and arts organisations. Launching its strategic plan, in October 2010, the Arts Council chair Pat Moylan²⁵ noted some of the challenges it now faces:

“[T]he Arts Council said it was publishing the strategic overview ‘in a spirit of confidence, tempered by the realism required to plan and provide for the arts at a time of significant difficulty in the public finances’, and stressed that the consequences of some decisions could be ‘far from what we would wish in ideal circumstances’.”

In 2009 the *Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditure Programmes*, chaired by economist Colm McCarthy and established for the explicit purpose of rationalising cutbacks in government spending, recommended €5.3 billion in savings and staff reductions of 17,300 across the public sector. It identified the arts and cultural fields as a “lower priority”²⁶ for the state and posited that the existing government department’s functions be re-allocated to other departments. It also recommended a €6.1million reduction in the Arts Council budget, along with the discontinuation of financial support for Culture Ireland and the Irish Film Board. This ‘lower priority’ status was underscored by the ‘controversy’ that surrounded the appointment of Mary Hanafin as minister for ‘Tourism, Culture and Sport’ in 2010, a move that was widely regarded as a demotion.

“I did say, that whereas I would be very happy to take the job, that it would be perceived as a demotion – because, unfortunately, media over the years has perceived arts, sports and culture to be something of less importance than some of the other departments. And, yet when you see the importance of it to the economy, when you see the people who came last year to Farmleigh²⁷ to share their ideas on how to promote Ireland, culture and tourism was at the heart of what people were suggesting.”²⁸ [My italics.]

Simultaneously championed and treated as an afterthought, the rhetorical status of arts and culture seems to be at odds with its structural location. This contradiction is less puzzling if we consider the broader economic and discursive context, and what Hardt and Negri have described as the hegemony of ‘immaterial labour’ in the contemporary period. By immaterial labour they mean labour that produces “immaterial products,

such as knowledge, information, communication, a relationship or an emotional response”²⁹. By hegemony they are not claiming that the majority of workers are engaged in this kind of labour – clearly they are not – but that this labour has a comparatively elevated status in contemporary capitalism, whereby it is perceived to embody all that is most market friendly, innovative and forward-looking. Immaterial labour imposes “a tendency on all other forms of labour”³⁰ and societies, states and industries must show that they are willing to “informationalize, become intelligent, become communicative, become affective”. Given that the arts and cultural spheres are already invested with these kinds of attributes, they are well placed to be activated in the interests of economic accumulation and commodification. In Ireland the ‘Smart Economy’ has become a new signifier of economic progress, with the arts and cultural sectors identified as key potential contributors, but ones that require ‘leveraging’: “[F]uture investment in this sector must be based on world-class ambition and achievement, and it must also be based on engaging and attracting the business sector”³¹. Hegemonic discourses, therefore, simultaneously seek to discipline and

Upbeat prescriptions of the arts’ economic role and their centrality to *Brand Ireland* carry a parallel threat regarding the fate of the economically irrelevant

enable the arts and cultural sectors. Upbeat prescriptions of their economic role and their centrality to Brand Ireland carry a parallel – albeit often implicit – threat regarding the fate of the economically irrelevant.

A case for resistance

Given their sector’s vulnerabilities, it’s unsurprising that many artists and arts organisations have mobilised collectively to resist the threat of cutbacks and to argue for continued public subsidy of the arts. For example, the National Campaign for the Arts has combined high energy and visually arresting forms of advocacy with repeated assertions of the sector’s economic relevance. During the 2011 election, it urged supporters to deliver a unified message to canvassers and candidates.

“The arts enrich our lives

The arts enhance Ireland’s image and reputation on the world stage

The arts are a stimulant of and contributor to the smart economy

The arts are a significant employer

The arts drive cultural tourism”³²

Arguably, lobbying by artists and arts organisations has been quite successful in obviating austerity’s more draconian effects³³. In many ways their structural position resembles that of community organisations that are feted for their contribution to society, yet are ultimately dependent on state favour for their financial survival. Community organisations can find themselves strategically adapting to government policy in order to protect their sector and to legitimise their particular value claims. Likewise arts organisations may draw upon hegemonic discourses and economic rationalities in order to defend what are already precarious funding streams and support networks.

However, when resistance is framed within the parameters of the prevailing hegemony it ultimately speaks to the short term material interests of (a minority within) the arts sector and its audiences. It is worth remembering that beyond that sector, cultures are generated through everyday encounters and uncelebrated forms of aesthetic practice. As Paul Willis explains, ‘aesthetics’ and ‘Art’ are presented as universal signifiers of what is best and most exceptional in cultures, but those signifiers are themselves

socially constructed: their status is derived from and sustained by social distinctions, patterns of exclusion, power inequalities and market relationships³⁴. As the arts and cultural sectors are responsibilised to fashion brand identity and attract consumers in international markets, their responsibilities to Irish citizens are trivialised. Alternative expectations of the sectors might include: the broadening and deepening of audience participation; the creation of new opportunities for ordinary citizens to make and distribute their own cultures; and a critical interrogation of hegemonic discourses of culture, Irishness and our so-called ‘Brand’ identity.

Ultimately hegemonic discourses, such as those embedded in the fantasy of ‘Brand Ireland’, offer an impoverished conception of culture. The ‘arts sector’ becomes a proxy for creativity in its broader sense. ‘Tourism potential’ and ‘market share’ become the default measures of cultural and artistic achievement. A nationalist imperative is imposed on artists who must generate positive PR for Brand Ireland. Citizens are responsibilised to take pride in and to cheerlead those PR achievements, like supporters of the national football team, while our own contributions to the contestation and re-fashioning of culture are overlooked. Despite all the empty moralising about the evils of consumption in the period of the Celtic Tiger, hegemonic discourses inevitably retreat into a consumerist model of culture: privileging spectacle and things – they can be bought, sold, visited or reproduced – over communication, critique and “ordinary common meanings”³⁵.

Finally, it is worth emphasising that this hegemony is not absolute, that there are some vital expressions of resistant culture in Ireland today. In any functionalised reckoning of what constitutes a society’s cultural wealth, it is difficult to monetise these localised, provisional and reactive processes: although particular, they do not seem so special; although real, they usually lack celebrity. Nonetheless, un-branded culture that speaks against the crude hegemony is vibrantly present in the creative solidarity that artists, musicians, poets, dancers – professional and otherwise – give to social movements. In its most limited form, the ‘cultural contribution’ to activism is reduced to fundraising or PR. At its best, the political reclamation also coincides with a cultural reclamation and celebration, so that culture and creativity is seen as intrinsic to social change, not merely as a decorative accessory. Cultural reclamation and resistance is also evident in the emergence of independent social centres, poetry slams, lo-fi festivals, alternative screenings and all those other spaces – be they intellectual or physical – where people get together to communicate and co-operate democratically. These efforts may well be temporary expressions of an always elusive autonomy, but even when they disappear and reappear in other forms they add up to a cumulative culture of resistance – maybe even a culture beyond the brand.

Notes

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- 3 See Allen, K (2009) *Ireland’s Economic Crash: A Radical Agenda for Change*. Dublin: The Liffey Press and Kirby, P (2010) *The Celtic Tiger in Collapse*, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.
- 4 Following the general election of June 2011 a new coalition government came to power in the Republic. In advance of its first budget in later that year, Taoiseach Enda Kenny was moved to address the nation and to assure us that the crisis was not our ‘fault’. His analysis seems to have been revised by January 2012 when he told the World Economic Forum at Davos that ‘people went mad borrowing’. Scally, D (27/01/2012) ‘Taoiseach blames crisis on ‘mad borrowing’ and greed’, *Irish Times*: Accessed 19/04/2012 <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/frontpage/2012/0127/1224310810287.html>
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Generation Bailout

Art, Psycho-Geography, and 'The Irish Mind' debate

Joanne Laws

The Crisis Becomes Visible: Ireland and the European Project

Following a period of rapid economic growth beginning in the 1990s, Ireland was ranked by management consultants in 2002 as the most 'globally connected' country in the world¹. With this newly awarded status, Celtic Tiger exceptionalism, and a uniform acceptance of capitalist ideologies among the neo-rich, "a new monetary hero" was spawned – "the brilliant Irish capitalist"².

Under the centre-right *Fianna Fáil*, 'crony capitalism' prospered, and was largely defined by mutually beneficial arrangements between government and the corporate elite. The Irish Financial Services Regulatory Authority was appointed in 2003, but failed to "impose major sanctions on any Irish institution, even though Ireland had recently experienced several major banking scandals", prompting the *New York Times* to dub Ireland "The wild west of European finance"³. The economic boom, (fuelled by an over active construction sector, extreme house price inflation, an unhealthy dependence on foreign multinationals, and easy access to credit) came



Superflex, *The Financial Crisis (Session I-V)*, film Still (2009). A hypnotist takes us through four stages of economical disaster. The film is divided into four sessions. Presented by Frieze Films and Channel 4 and created for Frieze Art Fair 2009.

to an end in 2008 when the economy collapsed and Irish banks were unable to refinance their foreign borrowings, exposing corruption in Anglo Irish Bank in the form of hidden money and loans to 'anonymous' businessmen. In order to alleviate fears of a sovereign debt crisis, the Irish government nationalised six banks and issued a spectacular blanket guarantee to pay the bondholders, in the hope that the financial markets would regain 'confidence' in the euro-zone overall.

Receiving a bailout of €67 billion from the European Central Bank for this purpose in 2010, the Irish government swiftly shackled this debt onto the public, through the implementation of 'austerity measures' – a euphemism across Europe for forced cuts to public services and public ownership. Under such conditions, Ireland's dire fiscal situation is set to continue for generations, amidst soaring unemployment, tax hikes, shrinking public services, and crumbling infrastructures for health, housing and education; the original pillars of the Irish free-state and 1937 Irish Constitution.

If Ireland's boom phase was an exemplary model – an archetypal blueprint from which to observe the extent of 'functioning Capital' – then the bust phase will surely provide a necessary gauge to study its effects and measure its repercussions, not least for those still advocating larger doses of the same. Once a small, introverted,

post-Imperial⁴ country on the peripheries of Europe, Ireland, having joined the anti-pluralist ranks of 'new muscular liberalism',⁵ is now compelled to scramble, like the rest, for restitution in the crisis-ridden European project.

Many economists and cultural analysts have ruminated on the systemic failings of the Celtic Tiger era, and the implications of the subsequent financial collapse for Irish society. "The Celtic Tiger wasn't just an economic ideology," wrote Fintan O'Toole, "It was also a substitute identity. It was a new way of being that arrived just at the point when Catholicism and nationalism were not working anymore."⁶ Describing the Celtic Tiger as a "mirage" largely defined by social inequality, Peadar Kirby warned of the "social costs of economic success in the era of neoliberal globalization"⁷. The main purpose of this text however, is to examine what is happening to the visual arts in Ireland at this post-bust juncture, with a view to highlighting current socio-political, intellectual and artistic concerns.

An emerging 'political turn', visible across recent festival formats in Ireland, will be examined in detail, portraying an institutional framing of an 'emergence' from crisis, supported by discourse on political exhibition making. Most notably, in cultivating a new fidelity to the 'local', contemporary Irish art is re-inhabiting familiar terrain – that of 'land', 'place' and the "native sensibilities of the local genius"⁸. Concluding thoughts will draw on a revival of the 'Irish mind debate' in cultural studies⁹, harking back to an earlier, seemingly simpler, era of pre-globalisation. Doing so it will query whether there is a specifically Irish intellectual tradition counter to a 'hegemonic rationalism' of 'Anglo-Saxon/Ango-American logic' which might enable "a reinvestment in the notion of what it means to be a republic"¹⁰. In framing culture as decisively conditioned by changing economic and socio-political relations, how are current artistic and curatorial practices in Ireland producing a "systematic analysis of relations between economic interest and competing versions of identity on offer"¹¹? In short, I will examine artistic practices which consider national psycho-geographies as a supposed counter culture to material interest and burgeoning global hegemony.

Festival Formats: Curating the Political Turn

2011 was defined by waves of political protest and sustained campaigns of civil resistance, whose groupings were perceived as largely non-hierarchical in structure, characterised by a heavy reliance on internet technology and social networking sites for communication, mobilisation and reportage. Describing the Arab Spring protestors as "democracy's new pioneers", Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri outlined how the self-organised, leaderless "multitudes in Tunis, Cairo and Benghazi" have the capacity to "invent a common plan to manage natural resources and social production", concluding that "This is a threshold through which neoliberalism cannot pass and capitalism is put to question...Here insurrection touches on not only the equilibriums of north Africa and the Middle East but also the global system of economic governance...raising aspirations for freedom and democracy beyond the region."¹²

Inspired in part by Cairo's Tahrir Square, the global Occupy Movements patchily called for an examination of alternatives to capitalism, reactivating modes of resistance in the public consciousness with demonstrations, sit-ins and occupations of work places, corporate buildings and civic spaces. In an Irish context, Occupy protests in Dublin's financial district and other parts of the country aligned in opposition to the State sale of Ireland's oil and gas reserves, and the burden of 'private debt', referring to the billions currently being paid in increments to the unsecured bondholders of defunct banks. As redundant workers of the Vita Cortex factory continue to occupy the Cork premises in an ongoing dispute over the terms of their dismissals, an Anti-Eviction Taskforce¹³ seeks to prevent county sheriffs from carrying out 'unlawful and unconstitutional' repossessions and evictions, while Occupy protestors seek to 'liberate' NAMA¹⁴ property, retaining vacant buildings as community centres and civic spaces, highlighting NAMA's failure to deliver on a promised 'social dividend'.¹⁵

In February 2011 the governing *Fianna Fáil* party suffered defeat on a historic scale. The new Fine Gael/Labour coalition, inheriting the post-Celtic Tiger economic wasteland, have subsequently reneged on many pre-election promises, most notably on political reform and the elimination of (crony) political patronage. Historic state visits from Queen Elizabeth II and Barack Obama articulated international statements of solidarity with Ireland, but the strategic interests behind the visits went largely unchallenged, with mainstream media coverage centring on the morale-boosting effects of these symbolic gestures. Visiting his great-great-great grandfather's ancestral home in Moneygall, County Offaly, Barack Obama spoke about Irish-American connections, blood lineage and the (voting?) Irish Diaspora for whom the 'homeland' symbolised such extraordinary traditions and people. The Queen's visit in May, the first by a British sovereign to the Republic since 1911 when Ireland was still under British rule, was a powerful reminder of the troubled relationship between the two nations. Poignantly, Ireland's colonial past and history of mass emigration found contemporary resonance below the glossy media veneer, against the current backdrop of increasingly depleted national sovereignty, Europeanisation and financial ruin.

As 2011 drew to a close, several prominent Irish art events utilised their respective exhibition and seminar platforms to consider the current Irish situation, citing art's potential to navigate political terrain. The curatorial framing of this 'emergence from crisis' centred largely on negotiating a position for art within this period of 're-building'. References to local and global networks of exchange persisted as a reoccurring theme. Curator driven statements gestured towards something radical, while substance was delivered with varying degrees of success.

Irit Rogoff recently described the process of 'turning' as not only a move away from out-dated modes of doing towards something more urgent, but also a means of propelling an audience towards active engagement. "In a 'turn', we shift away from something or towards or around something, and it is *we* who are in movement, rather than *it*. Something is activated in us, perhaps even actualized, as we move."¹⁶ In reading 'the political' across curatorial formats, how were

new perspectives generated? How were audiences engaged, forcing “these spaces to be more active, more questioning, less insular, and more challenging”?

Dublin Contemporary 2011: ‘Terrible Beauty – Art, Crisis, Change & The Office of Non-Compliance’

Dublin Contemporary 2011 marked Ireland’s inauguration onto the international art circuit, promising a “quinquennial art exhibition of global magnitude and local consequence”. But while lavish international launches and optimistic visitor/revenue statistics created a celebratory veneer, tensions (both internal and external) overshadowed the ambitious project. Resistance had built up among the arts community in Ireland, who generally felt that the lack of information and communication projected an air of exclusivity. In early 2011 the original management board was dissolved¹⁷ and new curators were appointed. New York-based curator and critic, Christian Viveros-Fauné, and Franco-Peruvian artist and curator, Jota Castro, swiftly assembled the ‘Terrible Beauty’ theme, referencing Yeats and the 1916 Rising, alluding to the current climate of austerity, which could hardly go unnoticed.

The curatorial vision for the large scale event aimed to provide a departure from the flashy, conventional biennial or art fair model, drawing inspiration from the principles of the Italian Arte Povera Movement of the 1960s, which had reacted against the corporatisation of art and culture. This positioning aligned with a growing acknowledgement that the global art biennial format is a product of the “distorted relationship between art and market” – a value system based on “west-eurocentrism”¹⁸ – which is currently experiencing retrenchment in an age of “art-funding austerity”¹⁹.

As a platform for contemporary practices and periphery events, *Dublin Contemporary 2011* was critically relatively well received.²⁰ Certainly, there was an acknowledgement of the quality of the work produced by artists in Ireland, when viewed on this international stage. An emerging kind of ‘constructionist’²¹ aesthetic was discernable, suggesting an impulse to deconstruct, to salvage, and to clear, privileging an active ‘learning through building’ over a transmission of existing limiting forms of knowledge.

The Danish Art collective Superflex provided the most biting prognosis of the current Irish predicament, with a video-installation entitled *The Financial Crisis (Session I-IV)*. A space, containing hundreds of euro coins (which were glued to the floor), provided a backdrop for a video projection, which presented crisis in the euro-zone from a “therapeutic perspective”: “A hypnotist guides us through our worst nightmares to reveal the crisis without as the psychosis within. During 4 sessions you will experience the fascination of speculation and power, too fear, anxieties and frustration of losing control, economic loss and personal disaster. In Session 1 ‘The Invisible Hand’ we are introduced to the backbone of capitalism, the idea of the ‘invisible hand’ as the benign faith in self-regulation that prevents markets and people from spinning out of economic control. Under hypnosis we are asked to interrogate that faith and to imagine a world no longer governed by the invisible hand. In the following Sessions we go deeper and deeper into the financial crisis...”²²

Declarations that Dublin Contemporary could engage with “art and its place in society” or operate as a hub for “non-conformist art proposals”²³ proved unconvincing. Occasional glimpses of curator-centred hierarchies, and knowledge that the event was executed with a heavy reliance on internship staff, made it difficult to reconcile such a radical preamble with the hostile atmosphere palpable within the venues. Most disappointing was the format of the event, which did not deviate from the typical biennial model, doing little to circumvent notions of art as entertainment. Art market rhetoric and tourism statistics took precedence over any

politically motivated curation, bypassing any opportunity to engender political agency through the implementation of robust exhibition making strategies. Slogans reminding us that “art has the capacity to imagine and effect change in the social sphere” adorned the walls of the main venue at Earlsfort Terrace, while graffiti ‘subverted’ the walls of the National Gallery, producing a lacklustre veneer, conveying vague gestures towards institutional critique that were never formally realised.

Tulca Festival of Visual Arts, 2011 - ‘After The Fall’

Tulca 2011, curated by Megs Morley, embarked on a socio-political inquiry into the world ‘After the Fall’, which negotiated imagined pasts and dystopian futures, producing an experience that was unequivocally of the moment. The programme was tightly under-pinned by an incisive curatorial statement, framing the event as a “pause in an endless circulation of ideas... positioning itself in the juncture at the end of one era and the beginning of the next”. The exhibition functioned as a point of convergence for many relevant conversations – civil protest, emigration, how capital moves – referencing land, territory and nationhood, punctuated with potent imagery such as ‘flag’, ‘border’, ‘island’, and ‘counter-monument’. These images resonated within an immediately perceived and conceived surrounding ‘Irish landscape’, while also offering access to wider geopolitical discourse.

Filip Berta’s single channel video, *Homo Homini Lupus* (2011) gestured towards conflict in the euro-zone, with a depiction of wolves fighting over an Italian flag. A symbol of territory, the flag, luminous against the desolate landscape, is decimated, as the wolves each display their instinct to survive and dominate. In Elaine Byrne’s *A Message to Salinas* (2010), Mexican citizens articulated their desire to retain national sovereignty in the face of US intervention and state privatisation. A border is a defining national and geographical feature. The border zone, as place and ‘non-place’, as a site of migration, surveillance, and a threshold between native/foreigner, enemy/ally, import/export, has been revived as a source of study within geography and wider fields of social theory, providing a counter-culture to ‘borderless’ transnationalism. To the simple construction of binary terms – Good? Evil? Terrorist?²⁵ – the notion of borderlands enables a more nuanced engagement.

While The Good Hatchery, informed by their ‘islanded’ position, cultivated a fidelity to micro-geographies with a meditation on the transportation of cargo and *monarú earraí* (manufactured goods), Gareth Kennedy referenced 19th century industrialist logic, plotting an average location for all of the cargo pallets currently traversing the planet with his folk-fictional *Mean Pallet*.²⁶ In developing rural ‘folk-fictions’, Kennedy stages encounters between globalised and localised material cultures, in an attempt to identify social and environmental concerns within macro-economic contexts. Kennedy often works collaboratively with Irish artist Sarah Browne, producing temporary occupations which trace “alternative historical trajectories linked to contemporary concerns”²⁷.

In *Oral Hearing* (2009), Seamus Nolan re-staged and filmed the final session of a Bord Pleanála public hearing, where members of a small North Mayo community voiced objections to the Corrib Gas project, and the laying of a production pipeline by Shell Oil to bring high pressure gas inland, reaching the Irish coast at Glengad and Rosspport. Members of the community took part in the re-construction, which took place in a local community centre. Formed out of a deep connection with their own locality, the contentious ten-year struggle against corporate and state forces cited concerns about public safety and safeguarding the rights of its farmers and fishermen as their main areas of concern, displaying an impressive accumulative knowledge of judicial

and democratic processes. The Irish state, viewing the Corrib gas field as ‘a gateway to sustainability’ deployed Gardaí to heavily police the area, facilitating construction workers to carry out their production schedule. “No matter how much knowledge or information people had gathered, it was secondary to a homogeneous globalised model of how things work”²⁸ stated Nolan. The myth of progress, enticed by corporate investment and the prospect of economic growth, was upheld, while the endangerment of nationhood, identity and cultural sovereignty declared by those claiming historical rights to working the land and seas, was unilaterally disregarded by an amorphous enemy. The local had become marginal.

Collective modes of resistance, protest and activism were expressed by several other artists including Amie Siegal and Jesse Jones. When re-appropriated into the present moment, surveillance footage²⁹ and megaphones³⁰ – symbols of ‘them and us’; the state and the disenfranchised classes – become inscribed with the time that has lapsed, calling for new modes of resistance within this post-binary political landscape. Recession in the 1980s was defined by trade union unrest following the adoption of neoliberal economic policies in the west, creating a shift from manufacturing and heavy industry into finance and service industries. The current recession is a product of these global economic systems, as the flight of capital shifts to the east, highlighting the precarious nature of labour within capitalism. Contemporary campaigns of resistance, as



already described, are becoming increasingly self-organised and more informed about law and civil rights, in trying to hold the state, authorities or corporations accountable for breeches of their own policies, relying on the judicial and democratic systems of international law. “The shift from the industrial form of production to the semiotic form of production – the shift from physical labour to cognitive labor – has propelled capitalism out of itself, out of its ideological self-conception”³¹.

Paul O’Neill has written extensively on the shifting parameters and apparatus of exhibition making, biennial culture, and the emerging role of the curator as “subject and producer of this discourse”³². Reflecting on O’Neill’s description of exhibitions as “subjective political tools” and “modern ritual settings which uphold identities”³³, it seems plausible that the formation of a ‘political exhibition’ is partially, if not largely, determined by the radicality of the curators’ own personal politics. Insights into Megs Morely’s own political persuasion are provided not just through her approaches to curation but also in her work as an artist. Recent works such as *Post-Fordlandia*³⁴ (a film produced in collaboration with Tom Flanagan) portray a fidelity to anthropological research, supported by textual analysis in the critique of capital, which frame the visual and material narratives, outlining artistic inquiries that are echoed in her approaches to curation. Tulca 2011 was a panorama of embedded insights that gradually merged, contributing to an overarching dialogue. O’Neill’s concern that artistic and curatorial practices should not be treated in isolation, but as co-existing spectrums “within the field of cultural production”, is further expanded

Seamus Nolan, *Corrib Gas*, Project Arts Centre, film still (2009). See, *Corrib Gas Project*: <http://vimeo.com/6947901>



The Good Hatchery, *Missionary 52,-7*, mixed media sculpture (2010). 'Commonage', Callan, Co. Kilkenny.

by Boris Groys when he described the interplay between exhibition-making and art as producing a space that "installs everything that usually circulates in our civilisation"³⁵. For Groys, the mass of exhibition visitors "...become part of the exhibition ...in a way that assists them in reflecting upon their own condition, offering them an opportunity to exhibit themselves to themselves."

Examining civil rights, environmental campaigns, judicial structures and corporate agendas in proximity to artistic processes, Tulca's visitors observed tangible connections with the surrounding location. This 'landscape revival' is not concerned with nostalgia for celtic romanticism, nor has it become interestingly kitsch following decades of subversion. An island engulfed for so long in cross-border conflict must now acknowledge that the biggest threat to national sovereignty comes not simply from the conditions of already having renounced national economic sovereignty under globalisation, but from the continuing political compliance and the "democratic deficit"³⁶ of the 'flexible developmental state'. EU/ IMF financial logic and restructuring, enacted through the state via directives for local and regional government, propose another, arguably more intrusive round of regulating the rural and legislating for the domestic. Multinationals, most typically those in the business of oil and gas exploration and production, continue to seek to exploit and monetise the land and waterways, a prospect welcomed by the Irish government with the same enthusiasm as it embraced foreign direct investment in its economy. 'After The Fall', while focusing on these locally sited issues, is questioning the broader body politic, just as crisis in the euro-zone points to a broader systemic

concern – that of the 'utility'³⁷ and permanent nature of 'crisis' as a function of capitalism³⁸.

TRADE Seminar 2011³⁹

Foreign multinational gas and oil exploration also became the focus of a group of artists participating in TRADE residency 2011, in Carrick-on-Shannon, with an examination of the devastation that hydraulic fracturing (a.k.a 'fracking'⁴⁰) for gas would have on their locality. Their campaign 'Talk About Fracking' pertinently demonstrates the tangible links between global practice and local impact, with the national, (i.e the capacity of state governance to implement, mediate or reject those practices) occupying a determining position. As already outlined, the government stance on this issue focuses heavily on economic prospects, with Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Fergus O'Dowd, recently stating that "if there was a chance that billions of euros in untapped gas could provide a massive economic boost, the Government must take account of that"⁴¹.

The 'Talk About Fracking' campaign, while questioning the apparent consensus of economic necessity that subordinated the local, also functions self-reflexively in its capacity to align artistic activity with societal concerns. Interrogations regarding the social function of art have persisted across a spectrum of twentieth century movements, from dadaist and constructivist directives towards a new social order, to conceptualist and feminist experiments of the 1970s and relational aesthetics practices of the 1990s. Much of the discussion at the TRADE seminar centred on how art might continue to negotiate a socially engaged position, and the important role the artist plays in advocating active citizenship, challenging the commodity and entertainment functions designated by capitalism, which define art as a servant of the economy and support the bourgeois image of the artist as a 'creative genius' existing on the margins of society. Coupled with the proliferation of artist led initiatives across the country, alternative methods of production and display are emerging as defining features of the "new ecologies of practice"⁴² in contemporary Irish art. Formed largely out of practical necessity - the sharing of space and resources - artist led co-operative structures have become increasingly associated with seemingly political models of collective self-organisation. Although the suggestion that art, in this recessionary time, might experience a "renewed purpose" seem patronising, it does seem tenable that institutional and art market hierarchies are less prevalent in these spaces, with less of an emphasis on commerciality. But that is not to say they are entirely emancipated. In many Irish urban districts, artistic activity is becoming increasingly intertwined with urban planning, with numerous county councils inviting artists to temporarily 'activate' vacant commercial spaces in dormant retail sectors. While artistic practices in Ireland appear to be genuinely thriving under these conditions, revealing an underlying capacity for co-operative production, the lingering uneasy relationship between developer and artist is yet to be tested. Pitched as a 'win win situation for everyone', this arrangement is reminiscent of the gentrification discourse which followed the development of 'creative quarters' in Temple Bar, Shoreditch, Soho, etc. ; a debate too lengthy to enter into in this text. By contrast, the image of rural art practices emerging from the TRADE seminar utilised the distance from the (urban) centre as a pensive site for many artistic inquiries – commonage, local infrastructure, connectivity, and temporary publics – producing meditations on 'the periphery' and 'the local', which are translatable across a spectrum of geographies, cartographies and cultural discussions.

Cultural Geography - Signs, Routes, Perspectives

In his contribution to the TRADE seminar, artist Phillip Napier described the M1 motorway connecting Belfast and Dublin, which forms part of a larger European EU01 route infrastructure connecting Ireland to mainland Europe via land and sea links with Portugal and Spain, facilitating

an ease of passage for production and distribution within 'Fortress Europe'. His observations centred on the 'absent' border checkpoint – no military, no surveillance, no flags – where the transition from one country to another, north to south, is only visible via the signage denoting either miles or kilometres. [Paraphrasing] "The logic economy has swept away the sovereignties of the foreign. A nation that historically was defined by Unionist introversion is now being asked to adopt an outward-looking perspective."

'Border-zone' study within traditional anthropology, which examined primitivism and the typology of ethnic groups, seems increasingly static in the context of contemporary globalisation. The relationships between populations and the heterogeneous structures of geography, nation states and international law are becoming correspondingly blurred. Drawing on the influence of post-structural, post-colonial and Marxist theories, emerging interdisciplinary thought re-asserts the role of cultural struggle in reproducing social life, while making apparent the inherent power relations. Much of this deconstruction centres on a re-examination of cultural convergence and population mobility. Meanwhile emerging anthropological studies focus on the cultural differences between ethnic groups which persist precisely because of border division and examine identity and political organisation across national spaces in the context of global economic expansion, increased global transportation and telecommunication technologies.

Speaking recently north of the border, at the opening of his exhibition 'Recalculating', at The Void in Derry, Philip Napier examined the persistent connections between "frontier discovery" and the "lingering idea of terror in civil society"⁴³. 'Recalculating' is a continuation of the narratives explored in previous bodies of work, most recently in his 'HMS Terror' series, which examined Franklin's ill-fated arctic expedition to the North West Passage in the 1840s, headed by Captain Francis Crozier, from Banbridge, Co. Down. Several countries are currently in competition to locate the shipwreck, which could establish economic sovereignty over the major sea way. Suggesting that the Arctic explorers were "the space men of their time", Napier considered the HMS Terror expedition as being enshrined in myth and romantic imagination. With global warming the North West Passage has widened, offering potential for the expansion of a trade route linking Europe to China and the Far East. With dominant global power now shifting eastwards, the industrial and economic logic of connecting to China becomes salient, thus "accelerating consumption where the Communist 'command economy' meets and the capitalist 'laissez faire' economy".

The most radical aspect of Napier's work is the ease with which his sculptural installations oscillate between aesthetic manifestation, site specificity and cognitive abstraction. When linked to contemporary culture – the "atomisation of human experience, which creates anxiety and then offers a (comforting) resolution to that anxiety, for the purposes of consumption"⁴⁴ – any symbolic exploration into uncharted territory, (going without maps or satellite navigation technology, being stripped of co-ordinates) reactivates a potential to be curious; to navigate using fear as an instinctive force; to discover political alternatives; to observe the spaces where civil resistance occurs before armed combat is deployed; to devise our own 'global positioning systems'. In this way the "expectations of the conditioned mind"⁴⁵ are disrupted, and there is "no easy resolution to that anxiety"⁴⁶. Referencing French philosopher Michel Serres' analogy of the fly, whose pattern of discovery on a window pane portrays a "speculative route-making between cartographies of knowledge", it becomes possible to observe the sites where translation between accounts can occur, back and forth between domains, without privileging one as accurate or authoritative.

On my journey into Derry city I was aware of the significance of painted kerbs stones, and the ceremonial removal of 'London' from its precursory position on road signs. I had heard about the tours of the Bogside, and the murals – enduring icons of the troubles – which have accumulated an ironic distance and become in

some way kitsch, turning the residents into tourists of their own history. These “visible manifestations of underlying conflicted realities”⁴⁷, which became legible externally through the mass media (with its “hunger for ‘drama’, a beginning, a middle and an end, heroes and villains and the idea of resolution”⁴⁸) are still palpable, real, and “not consigned (completely) to historical abstraction” in present day northern Ireland, despite its constant inscription as a post-conflict zone. When competing powers have caused turmoil to erupt, how might this ‘discontinuity’ of history and ‘unresolved remembering’ be meaningfully inhabited? Art, as a site for communally constructed, lateral rather than linear meaning, can pose the question of “...not, what does it mean, but what do *we* mean?”

When asked how art might navigate a position for the historical, national or local within globalised or post-colonial contexts, Napier suggested that these structures can be redefined through emphasis on ‘the particular’ through the embedded processes of situation, and the “transference of agency to place and context”. By constructing ‘psycho-geographies’, which engage across the symbolic structures of land, religion, place names, language and identity, micro-political landscapes can be represented while also acknowledging those “deep seated fault-lines which, like trade routes, are local and global, at the same time.” In this way, art practice becomes “local, but legible and meaningful elsewhere”, and the land becomes an active cultural force, rather than merely a subject of monetisation, consumption and political division. ‘Territoriality’, as an epistemological principle, provides a “cognitive framework through which the world is observed”⁴⁹, while it nonetheless remains a concept that needs careful attention and critique.

Concluding Thoughts - Art, Ethnocentrism, and the Future

Cultural accounts of ‘Irishness’ projected internationally via references to the land and territory have historically persisted through romanticism, celtic revival and nationalism, conveying an ethnocentric mindset constructed largely through an introverted fidelity to the native landscape. The idea that Irish cultural tradition is a product of specific (and previously unacknowledged) intellectual traits was the focus of the Richard Kearney’s ‘Irish Mind Debate’ of the mid-1980s.⁵⁰ With reference to Ireland’s strong literary tradition, Kearney suggested that the Irish position – of periphery and exile – produced an intrinsic ‘decentredness’ in the Irish population, generating a stereotype of the geographical or linguistic ‘other’, with a capacity to “respond creatively to dislocation and incongruity”⁵¹. The border, as a partition between Gael and Saxon, colonised and coloniser, catholic and protestant, was a geographical division that further permeated the Irish intellect, producing a distinct capacity to identify the ‘foreign’ over the ‘familiar’. Kearney also proposed that double vision – a Joycean kind of lateral thinking which simultaneously holds two contradicting thoughts in the mind – demonstrated a ‘dialectical logic’ characterised by an “intellectual ability to hold the traditional oppositions of classical reason together in creative confluence”, providing a counter-movement to the “mainstream hegemonic rationalism” and “linear, centralising logic of the Greco-Roman culture which dominated most of Western Europe”.

The main oppositions to this classification of ‘the Irish mind’, centred on a rejection of these proposed ethnic characteristics, which ultimately reinforced the celtic racial stereo-types devised under English rule, formed out of an enduring master/slave colonial self image. “...Kearney, in the cause of Irish nationalism, had essentialised Irishness and simply reversed the usual colonial claims that Ireland was full of people who simply couldn’t think straight, privileging this inability as an ‘alternative system of thought’.”⁵²

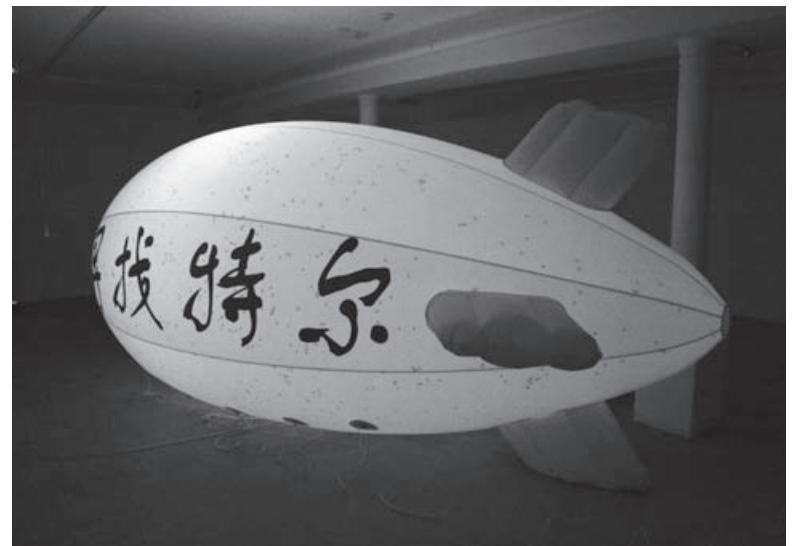
In attempts to identify a particular native sensibility in Irish art in the 1970s and ‘80s, ‘poetic, passive and introspective’ interpretations were positioned within nationalist, anti-modernist and romantic stylistic and iconographic contexts and aligned with a distinct lack of scholarly

analysis in art criticism pre 1990. These in turn contributed to the marginalised position of the visual arts in comparison with a strong literary tradition⁵³. Under these conditions, the Irish landscape, as a site of artistic, ‘native imagination’, assumed priority over any reference to increasing modernisation, or the influence of economic and consumerist forces.

Calling for a balanced assessment of ‘provincialism’ in art criticism in the 1980s, Tom Duddy highlighted a need for lateral thinking in the ‘local versus global’ dichotomy. In carving out an identity for ‘Irish art’ at that time, Duddy insisted that the ‘geographical aesthetic’ should resonate within the local, but must endeavour to resist clichés of Celtic mysticism and Nationalism (a ‘provincialism of the right’). Similarly, for Irish art to convey a ‘sense of place’, it should articulate an awareness of international influence, global issues, and the economic realities of modernism (a ‘provincialism of the left’) without pandering to trends.

In examining the influence of the Irish intellectual tradition on national identity, much of the discourse generated in the fields of cultural theory has historically privileged the ‘literary imaginative vision’ of traditional intellectual thought, which addressed nationalist, political and cultural concerns but “left the analysis of economic and class issues to others.”⁵⁴ Conversely, the emerging ‘specialist’ intellectual stratum of economic modernisation, reliant on state institutions, delivered only the technical requirements of nationalism (trade, economy, etc.) that were based on a generated ideological consensus, while marginalising socialist or radical alternatives. How can contemporary debates on nationalism (or localism?), as a counter to neoliberal globalised positions, move beyond historical abstraction, nostalgia or idealism? Fundamental to this debate must be a self-reflexivity regarding Ireland’s newly assumed national role in continuing to reproduce a competitive globalised space favourable to transnational capital, underscored by an acknowledgement of the power relations already put in place by a colonial past. How can “nationalism, culture and even racial stereotyping”⁵⁵ endure amidst current portrayals of Europe as one big “Western tribe” – a model conceived for the collectivisation of trade and resources, implemented through the modernisation of infrastructures, in the pursuit of a single European financial market over the last fifty years. The recent relegation of the older periphery states such as Ireland, Italy, Greece, and Portugal – which remain comparatively central given the new eastern european periphery⁵⁶ – and the socialising or ‘nationalisation’ of their respective debts have caused many cultural commentators to describe the European project as fundamentally flawed and unsustainable⁵⁷, with German philosopher Jürgen Habermas warning that present policies are leading to the “creeping death” of the European Union and the “sinking [of] 50 years of European history”. This ‘democratic deficit’ in Europe is representative not only of the increasingly precarious relationship between citizen and nation state, but also of the increasingly visible discrepancies between economic forces and societal realities, something which has arguably been at the core of the European common market/ currency from its conception.

This ideological void was the basis of (post-) autonomist media theorist Franco ‘Bifo’ Berardi’s recent ruminations on ‘The Future After the End of the Economy’. Aligning economics not with the logic of science but with religious doctrine, he outlined an ideology based on “profits, accumulation, and power”, which gives credence to the future as a site of “infinite expansion”. Economists, akin to priests, “worship the dogmas of growth and competition, denounce the bad behaviour of society, require repentance for your debts, threaten inflation and misery for your sins, and profess social reality to be in crisis if it does not conform to the dictates of these notions.”⁵⁸ The implications of his argument are further evident not only in the ‘crucifixion’ of Ireland⁵⁹ but also in the sacrifice of Greece to the economic gods of the European Union.⁶⁰ The future orientated ideology of finance, which draws its momentum from the



philosophy of flexible accumulation, cannot evolve self-reflexively in response to “changes in the social paradigm”.

Current economic ‘solutions’ to the global recession – that in refinancing the banks, credit will flow again, and consumption will resume, thus re-activating a stagnant economy, returning it to a path of exponential accumulation – place infinite faith in an ideology defined by the conceptual framework of future growth, with an insistence that society comply. But what if, as Berardi suggests, this version of ‘the future’ is actually over and we are “living in a space that is beyond the future?” This question forms a point of departure for the upcoming EVA International, in Limerick (19th May - 12th August 2012) curated by Annie Fletcher, and provides a few short thoughts on which to conclude this text. In the EVA press release Annie Fletcher states that “aesthetic practices and artistic thinking have an integral role at the juncture of the present and past, rather than as part of a prophetic future fantasy”⁶¹, supporting Berardi’s advocacy “for living slowly in the infinite present”. The active, contemporary Irish arts community, more educated and outwardly aware than previous generations, is displaying a capacity to engage not only with enduring legacies of the past, but with the destabilising and complex current realities of permanent crisis in a post-industrial era.

In distilling the present moment through historical, geographical and social lenses, identity unfolds within the vernacular of profit, privatisation and economic transnationalism with increasing ambiguity. A distinct connection with wider art practices reveals a congruity with international discourse, the elevation of the curator, the fluctuating form and function of the biennial, the temporary public⁶², the welcoming of the ‘political’ into the gallery space⁶³, supported and extended by a return to substance in art criticism. Echoing the politically self-organised and the horizontally collectivised, supplanting the alienated and exploitable individual, a reorganisation of the production process attests to the implications of community, which searches for alternative modes of being – exploring, living,

Above, top: Philip Napier, *Recalculating*, mixed media sculpture, (2012). The Void, Derry.

Above, bottom: Philip Napier, *Visual Amenity 1 (Erebus) & Visual Amenity 2 (Terror)*, mixed media sculpture, (2011). The Dock, Carrick on Shannon.

acknowledging fear, in being, for the moment, bereft of the answers previously provided by a linear and unconscious belief in the future. Drawing on this 'present collective intelligence', alternative routes can be found, proposing that, like Serres' fly, we might experience "abrupt, unexpected, diagonal transitions of the mind" and "oblique accidental insights" which lead us up "the zigzagging but royal road to the understanding of how things come, and cease, to be."⁶⁴

Notes

- 1 A.T Kearney, 'Globalisation Index', *Foreign Policy Magazine*, (2003). http://www.atkearney.com/images/global/pdf/Measuring_Globalization_S.pdf
- 2 Ciarán Bennett, 'Dublin Contemporary, Dublin Diary', *Artnet*, (September 2011). <http://www.artnet.com/magazine/reviews/bennett/dublin-contemporary-9-7-11.asp>
- 3 Brian Lavery and Timothy L. O'Brien, 'For Insurance Regulators, Trails Lead to Dublin', *New York Times*, (2005). http://www.nytimes.com/2005/04/01/business/worldbusiness/01irish.html?_r=1
- 4 Luke Strongman, 'Post-Colonialism or Post-Imperialism?' *Deep South*, v.2 n.3 (Spring, 1996). <http://www.otago.ac.nz/DeepSouth/vol2no3/post-col.html>
- 5 Bryan Fanning, 'Irish Connections, Immigration and the Politics of Belonging', *Variant*, Issue 26, (Summer 2006). <http://www.variant.org.uk/26texts/BFanning26.html>



Jesse Jones, *Against The Realm of the Absolute*, film still, 16mm film 12 mins, (2011).

- 6 Fintan O'Toole, *Enough is Enough: How to Build a New Republic*, (London: Faber and Faber, 2010).
- 7 Peadar Kirby, 'Globalization, the Celtic Tiger and social outcomes: is Ireland a model or a mirage?' *Globalizations* Volume 1, Issue 2, (2004) pp205-222.
- 8 Tom Duddy 'Irish Art Criticism - A Provincialism of the Right?' published in *Sources in Irish Art: A Reader*, Fintan Cullen ed. (Cork University Press, 2000) p91.
- 9 Richard Kearney, *Navigations: Collected Irish Essays 1976-2006*, (New York: University Press, 2006) pp17-31.
- 10 Fintan O'Toole, *Enough is Enough: How to Build a New Republic*, (London: Faber and Faber, 2010).
- 11 Liam O'Dowd, 'Neglecting the Material Dimension: Irish Intellectuals and the Problem of Identity', in *The Irish Review*, No.3 (1988), pp8-17.
- 12 Michael Harte and Antonio Negri, 'Arabs are Democracy's New Pioneers', *The Guardian*, (February 2011). <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/feb/24/arabs-democracy-latin-america>
- 13 Fiona Gartland, 'Anti-eviction Blockades Promise', *The Irish Times*, (February 2012). <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/ireland/2012/0223/1224312243910.html>
- 14 NAMA - National Assets Management Agency
- 15 Brian O'Connell, 'Protesters take empty offices for community use', *The Irish Times*, (Jan 2012) <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/ireland/2012/0103/1224309736369.html>
- 16 Irit Rogoff, 'Turning', *e-flux*, (2011). <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/turning/>
- 17 "At the end of 2010 some money was actually committed to the project, but with the condition that it be managed by the same firm that had handled the St Patrick's Festival, a very successful tourist event, though not one having to do with contemporary art. With the inevitable change in focus, the international art star curators disappeared and so did Rachel Thomas as curator, along with many of the original Irish artists." Ciarán Bennett 'Dublin Diary', *Artnet.com* <http://www.artnet.com/magazine/reviews/bennett/dublin-contemporary-9-7-11.asp>
- 18 Interview with Huang Zhuan, *ArtZineChina*, (2008). http://artzinechina.com/display_vol_aid717_en.html
- 19 Ben Davis 'The Humbling of the Art Biennial in the Age of Austerity', *artinfo.com*, (December 2011) <http://www.artinfo.com/news/story/753700/the-humbling->

- of-the-biennale-in-the-age-of-global-austerity
- 20 Several critics have produced cohesive responses to the exhibition, outlining details of artists, artworks and venues. See Chris Fite-Wassilak, 'Dublin Contemporary', *Frieze Magazine*, Issue 143, (Nov/Dec 2011). <http://www.frieze.com/issue/review/dublin-contemporary/>
- 21 I am using the term 'constructionist', while acknowledging the existence of the deconstructionist activity of the 1930s, and its revival in architecture in the 1980s. Firstly, I am commenting on a masculine DIY aesthetic visible in the work of several artists at Dublin Contemporary 2011, and other Irish art platforms. Secondly I am drawing comparisons between these artistic processes and the psychological process of 'leaning through making'- the basis of Jean Piaget's epistemological theory of constructivism. Using this term in this way I am seeking a linguistic definition for the experimental process of 'constructionist learning' - the making of tangible objects as a mode of processing the world. See M. Cakir 'Constructionist Approaches to Learning in Science and Their Implications for Science Pedagogy: A Literature Review', *International Journal of Environmental & Science Education*, 3(4), (2008), pp.193-206.
- 22 http://superflex.net/tools/the_financial_crisis
- 23 <http://www.dublincontemporary.com/exhibition>
- 24 Tulca Festival of Visual Arts takes place annually in Galway, in the west of Ireland: <http://www.tulca.ie/>
- 25 Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, 'The Global State of War', *War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, (New York: Penguin Press, 2004), p16.
- 26 "The Mean Pallet functions as a symbolic barometer for worldwide economic activity. Estimated to be somewhere over the Caspian Sea, the mean pallet is moving eastward with an approximate velocity of 0.24 km/day, attributable to a high level of manufacturing and economic growth of the far eastern 'Tiger economy' countries." [A tiger economy refers most commonly to Asian countries (such as Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Taiwan) who have undergone a period of rapid economic growth. In the 1990s the term Celtic Tiger was applied to the republic of Ireland.]
- 27 <http://www.kennedybrowne.com/>
- 28 Judy Murphy, 'Corrib Gas row the subject of show in Tulca Festival of Art', *The Connacht Tribune*, (Nov 2011). <http://www.galwaynews.ie/22584-corrib-gas-row-subject-show-tulca-festival-art>
- 29 Amie Siegel, *DDR/DDR*, HD Film, (2008).
- 30 Jesse Jones, *Against the Realm of the Absolute*, Film, (2011).
- 31 Franco 'Bifo' Berardi, 'The Future After the End of the Economy', *e-flux journal*, (2011) <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/the-future-after-the-end-of-the-economy/>
- 32 Paul O'Neil, 'The Curatorial Turn: From Practice to Discourse', in *Issues in Curating Contemporary Art and Performance*, Judith Rugg and Michèle Sedgwick eds. (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2007) p13-28.
- 33 *ibid.*
- 34 Post-Fordlandia, Press release, June 2011. <http://www.galwayartscentre.ie/events/view-event/168.html>
- 35 Boris Groys, 'Politics of Installation', *e-flux journal*, (2011) <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/politics-of-installation/>
- 36 Mathias Albert, 'Territoriality and Modernization', *Institute for Global Society Studies*, (2001) http://www.uni-bielefeld.de/soz/iw/pdf/albert_3.pdf
- 37 Naomi Klein, 'Wall St. Crisis Should Be for Neoliberalism What Fall of Berlin Wall Was for Communism', presentation at the University of Chicago, (2008), available at *Democracy Now*: http://www.democracynow.org/2008/10/6/naomi_klein
- 38 Slavoj Žižek, 'A Permanent Economic Emergency', *New Left Review*, Issue 64, (July/August 2010) <http://www.newleftreview.org/?view=2853>
- 39 TRADE is an annual Visual Arts Programme supported by Leitrim and Roscommon County Councils, and the Arts Council of Ireland. "The initiative consists of a residency phase, where four local artists work under the mentorship of an invited artist, and a seminar event - which has historically displayed a substantial engagement with current critical discourse. An interesting legacy has evolved out of contributions from an array of national and international participating artists, curators and thinkers." Joanne Laws, TRADE report, *Paper Visual Art Journal*, <http://papervisualart.com/?p=7560>
- 40 Hydraulic fracturing (fracking) involves the propagation of shale and rock layers using pressurized fluid as a means of releasing oil or gas for extraction. Fracking has been suspended in France, South Africa, parts of Australia and a number of US states pending more detailed investigations
- 41 'Minister of State's comments alarm opponents of fracking', *The Irish Times*, (Jan 2012): "Exploration licences were granted to companies such as Tamboran Resources by the preceding Fianna Fáil government before any policy was developed around the fracking process. The income generated to the exchequer is thought to be negligible, especially considering the favourable tax concessions in place for oil and gas exploration, which allow consortiums to right off all capital and development debt, including security, policing and ultimately hefty public relations costs, before declaring any taxable profit. Any extra revenue

- generated from future rises in inflation of gas and oil prices will be distributed as profits multi-national overseas partners." <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/ireland/2012/0127/1224310808790.html>
- 42 New Ecologies of Practice: A short season of projects by Catalyst Arts [Belfast] / Occupy Space [Limerick] / The Good Hatchery [Offaly] / Basic Space [Dublin]. NCAD Gallery, (9th February -13th April 2012). Exhibition and public seminar presenting the work of a number of Irish artist led initiatives, embodying new approaches to production, distribution and display, as a perceived counter to mainstream and institutional practices. <http://gallery.ncad.ie/index.php/2012/02/newecologiesofpractice/>
- 43 Parts of this section are paraphrased from Philip Napier's artists' talk in The Void, Derry, (10th March, 2012.)
- 44 Parts of this section are paraphrased from Declan McGonagle's, 'Remembering The Future'; an upcoming text on Napier's work.
- 45 *ibid.*
- 46 *ibid.*
- 47 *ibid.*
- 48 *ibid.*
- 49 Mathias Albert, 'Territoriality and Modernization', *Institute for Global Society Studies*, (2001). http://www.uni-bielefeld.de/soz/iw/pdf/albert_3.pdf
- 50 Richard Kearney, 'The Irish Mind Debate' in *Navigations: Collected Essays 1976-2006*, (New York: Syracuse, 2006) p19.
- 51 Vivian Mercier, *The Irish Comic Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962) p173.
- 52 Richard Haslam, citing Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'A Race Bashed in the Face: Imaging Ireland as a Damaged Child', *Jouvert*, 4: 1 (Fall 1999). <http://social.chass.ncsu.edu/jouvert>
- 53 Dr. Róisín Kennedy, 'Made in England: The Critical Reception of Louis le Brocquy's A Family', *Third Text*, Vol. 19, Issue 5, (September 2005), pp475-486.
- 54 Liam O'Dowd, 'Neglecting the Material Dimension: Irish Intellectuals and the Problem of Identity', in *The Irish Review*, No.3 (1988), pp8-17. Considers the roles played by intellectuals in debating Irish communal and national identity and investigates why material circumstances have been ignored in cultural studies worldwide; applies Michael Foucault's definitions of traditional and specific intellectuals when examining intellectual criticism of Irish society, North and South, while comparing the focus on abstract traditional debates to the marginalisation of socialist or radical alternatives; refers to theories put forth by Benedict Anderson, Ernest Gellner and Maurice Goldring.
- 55 *ibid.*
- 56 The so-called peripheral countries of the eurozone are: Portugal, Ireland, Italy, Greece and Spain. However, EU membership has today grown to 27, including northern and eastern countries, the most recent being: Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia in 2004; Bulgaria, Romania in 2007. Until the mid-1990s, Ireland was classified by the EU as a single territorial unit eligible for aid from the Structural Funds (Objective 1). However, by 1999, because of the high levels of economic growth experienced during the previous five years, average GDP for the state exceeded this threshold. Regional disparities in levels of development and well-being were still recognised though, with the Irish government successfully seeking to have two regions recognised as eligible. See: Doris Schmiel ed., 'Winning and Losing: the Changing Geography of Europe's Rural Areas', (USA: Ashgate press, 2005).
- 57 See Fintan O'Toole, 'Treatment of Ireland a disaster for European project', *The Irish Times*, (May 2011) <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/opinion/2011/0503/1224295913381.html>
- 58 Franco 'Bifo' Berardi, 'The Future After the End of the Economy', *e-flux journal*, (2011). <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/the-future-after-the-end-of-the-economy/>
- 59 Fintan O'Toole, 'Treatment of Ireland a disaster for European project', *The Irish Times*, (May 2011) <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/opinion/2011/0503/1224295913381.html>
- 60 William Wall, 'This shameful sacrifice of Greece to the gods of the market', *Irish Left Review*, (February 2012). <http://www.irishleftreview.org/2012/02/13/shameful-sacrifice-greece-gods-market/>
- 61 EVA International 2012, Press Release March 2012, <http://gallery.limerick.ie/Events/evaInternationalAftertheFutureMarchAnnouncement.html>
- 62 Simon Sheikh, 'In the Place of the Public Sphere' <http://www.societyofcontrol.com/research/sheikh.htm>
- 63 Tempered as it is by Anthony Davies' observations in 'Take Me I'm Yours: Neoliberalising The Cultural Institution', *Mute* Vol 2, No.5 - 'It's Not East being Green: The Climate Change Issue', (2007). <http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/take-me-im-yours-neoliberalising-cultural-institution>
- 64 Steven Connor, 'Fly' (London: Reaktion Press, 2006) p184.

The Housing Monster

Friendofzanetti

“We may call such a monster the ‘beast of property’. It now rules the world, making mankind miserable, and gains in cruelty and voracity with the progress of our so-called ‘civilization’. This monster we will in the following characterize and recommend to extermination.”
Johann Most, cited in *The Housing Monster* (p.3)

Just as Marx set out to de-mystify the commodity form in the first chapter in *Capital* Volume 1, *The Housing Monster* by prole.info sets out to de-fetishise housing as a commodity form by means of an illustrated book. That we have waited so long for such a clear and compelling introduction to this subject says much about the aporias of the productivist Left which has traditionally relegated reproductive issues, including housing, behind workplace issues¹. The book’s arrival provides an opportunity to discuss housing in a way that does not merely replicate the dull compulsions of social democracy, which assumes that distribution always follows behind production, and thereby implicitly accepts the capitalist relation in the wage-labour form². Of course, Marx’s writing is replete with monsters. The ideal workhouse for the capitalist, he relates, is a “House of Terror”³, and vampires, werewolves and ‘the Furies of private interest’ populate *Capital* throughout. In the preface to the first edition, he describes how Perseus, slayer of monsters in Greek mythology, wore a magic cap so that monsters could not see him, yet in our times, “We draw the magic cap down over our own eyes and ears so as to deny that there are any monsters”⁴. This book is an attempt to lift the cap from over our eyes again – the monsters must be slain!

By necessity there is something *universal* about our relation to housing that makes it such a crucial subject. Excepting deepening homelessness and destitution⁵, we live in different types of houses, but we all live in homes. Thus the opening ‘Foreword’, in the form of a narrative vignette, tells an everyday tale of alienation, tiredness and compulsion – commuting and working to pay a constantly increasing rent. The book is notable for its attention to the individual forms of stress and estrangement that the vast majority of us experience on the capital-deficit side of property relations. However, these problems reflect a wider context of subsumption under the tyranny of rent, and the relation between subjective observations and wider objective social relations are what gives the book a critical pedagogical form. Like Marx, prole.info takes nothing for granted in an elaboration of real, material social relations and a certain repetitive turn is concomitant with this approach. Given the normalisation of extortionate property relations in the present climate, however, ‘don’t understand me too quickly!’ could serve as the book’s coda. The review here thus intends to tease out some of the main arguments with particular reference to the UK context of the housing crisis.

Part I. The Construction Site

Construction labour, the dirty end of the production of commodities, has all but disappeared from view behind hoardings promising ‘safe construction’, and nylon sheets advertising capitalist consumption on scaffolding (often fetishising the finished form of the building itself before it has even been built). Meanwhile hymns to ‘immaterial’ and ‘affective’ labour’ on the Left sometimes obscure the fact that workers are still working and still producing surplus value. The first section, ‘The Construction Site’, sets out to rectify this incomplete view, itself embarked upon as a corrective⁶, by emphasising the labour relations of production in the construction phase. The chapter opens with a quote by Isaak Illich Rubin, a Marxist value theorist, who, reclaiming Marx from vulgar political economy, noted that capitalism was not a science of “the relation of things to things”, but the relation of “people to

people in the process of production” (p.10). Like Marx, Rubin assumes that labour is the basic element of human society, and he emphasises Marx’s theory of fetishism as the basis of Marx’s critique of the economic system, and his theory of value⁷. This simple, yet often mystified, materialist analysis forms the core of the book, challenging the arbitrary ‘value’ of the home as commodity. That prole.info performs the difficult task of deconstructing value-form theory in the popular form of a highly-readable illustrated book – freely available to download⁸ – is highly commendable. The book approaches the housing commodity in a clear, straightforward manner that both demystifies the ‘social hieroglyphic’ of housing as a commodity, and suggests a form of critique that is widely applicable – though rarely applied with the same lucidity as found here⁹. This is no doubt down to the deployment of the graphic form, with a series of excellent illustrations complementing the economic use of text.



As The Situationist International used to say, capitalism is separation perfected¹⁰, and for prole.info “the biggest obstacle” (p.27) to forming political groups which develop their own collectivity is the division of labour. The construction site is the shared workplace of different types of workers with different types of bosses, and with different work schedules. Specialised subcontracting, which separates activity even more, means that collective socialisation across these different roles is difficult (pp.23-28). These divisions are also overlaid with cultural differences such as class, race and gender. Divide and rule, as ever, is both the method and outcome of surplus value extraction. The pressure to build houses for profit means that the work process is constantly being intensified¹¹. De-skilling means that employees need less training, get paid less, and are easier to replace. A familiar tale of alienation and erosion of autonomy then, but as prole.info usefully points out, rote tasks are less evident on the construction site than elsewhere (in factory production, telesales, cashier work, etc). Limits to growth, due to the durability of existing buildings, and land costs, means that there is an incentive to build small and quickly, and the need to create at least the appearance of choice in design for the consumer market means that production is rarely completely standardised over a large amount of units. This means that workers on construction sites have a certain degree of autonomy in their work, which must be performed with a certain degree of skill (p.35).

The book makes clear that workers’ interests (to work less for more money) are diametrically opposed to the bosses’ (more profit for less outlay). This antagonism is the foundation for solidarity, and the *inversion* of socialised separation is posited as the formation of workers groups amidst a range of different collective tactics including theft,

skiving, mutual support, and playfulness (p.28, p.42). While these observations counter a typical Left narrative of woe and alienation for workers – finding instead moments of craft pride, relative autonomy and banter in a kind of workers ‘history-from-below’ – they sit contradictorily (as may be expected) with the hierarchies and divisions so convincingly evinced as “the biggest obstacle” to mutual solidarity elsewhere in the text. Prole.info acknowledges the extent of specialisation and separation in the work process, but continues to deploy the collective “we” (as a means of designating ‘the workers’) in a way that is sometimes problematic. Divisions *within* the working class are most evident between skilled and ‘non-skilled’ workers (apprentices, agency workers and casual or ‘illegal’ labourers). Talking of “we” in this context tends to flatten out very real differences – in much the same way that the ‘we are the 99%’ slogan of the Occupy movement, or Hardt and Negri’s concept of ‘the multitude’ does. Perhaps the problem is the assertion of this “we” anecdotally, without adequate evidence of the forms it takes in organisation. Maybe this is deliberate: the book works very well as an abstract depiction around the relations of production and reproduction in housing, and ‘templates’ for radical activity were generally scorned as ahistorical by Marx for instance. However, the deployment of some kind of ‘workers’ enquiry’¹² into the conditions and experiences of construction site workers would have been useful, as a means to counter the sometimes god-like character of the narration, and as a means to actively engage the workers as subjects of research and action.

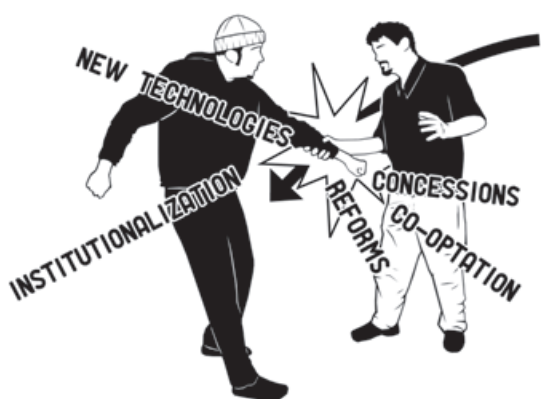
As Marx noted long ago, the development of the division of labour for the enhanced extraction of surplus value takes, as its necessary corollary, a “purely despotic” form through an enhanced regime of supervision¹³, and the book clearly expresses the everyday contradictions between workers and management. While construction work is not regulated by an assembly line, the drive for profits ensures that the pace of work is constantly being monitored and sped up by bosses. Piece work, a form of performance related pay, is just one way in which labour is enjoined to accelerate, at other times the methods are more crude and disciplinary:

“The fewer breaks we take, the faster we work, the more work we get done in a day, the more surplus value the company squeezes out of us. The faster we work, the more likely we are to have accidents or to get repetitive injuries. The harder we work, the more work is likely to eat up our free time. When we get home from work we’ll be too tired to do anything but take a shower. The less time we spend talking to our co-workers, the more boring the work is. We push in the exact opposite direction as the company. We’re constantly trying to slow down the pace of work as much as possible” (p.40).

Time and work-discipline are not trans-historical as the historian E.P. Thompson noted. ‘Saint Monday’ (a day for avoiding work) was ‘honoured’ by workers almost universally in the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries, with Tuesdays sometimes thrown in too. Even in 1967 it was still apparently kept by “a few coopers in Burton-on-Trent”¹⁴. The drive to increase work time and intensity is always being met with an opposing force that seeks to reclaim lived time from work time. The Glasgow dock workers, for instance, mobilised a collective slow-down with the innovative ‘ca canny’ movement in 1889. Returning strikers (funds exhausted) replicated the slower and inefficient labour practices of imported scab labour as a means to re-assert the worth of their



All images, illustrations from *The Housing Monster*, prole.info



skilled labour. With profits affected, the ‘ca canny’ action got the wage increase that the dockers had failed to get by striking. The strike-breakers could neither work as fast or as safely as the long-term dockers and thus the balance of forces had shifted towards their return¹⁵. This “balance of forces” is the territory that is constantly disputed in prole.info’s account of the contradictions between labour and bosses on the construction site. The book does not neglect the smaller details. Even though work is harder to come by, most people are still compelled to be there, and all the little methods – skiving, talking gibberish, singing, mimicry, pranks – by which the day is made less boring are evoked with a degree of solidarity and understanding that is often absent from sociological accounts of labour practice. However, as John Holloway argues, the transformation of the struggle against time at work to a struggle *about* time at work has rarely been elucidated. The struggle over the length and intensity of the working day is crucial, but we should not forget that this struggle is inseparable from the imposition of capitalist labour. When we represent ourselves as workers we tacitly accept the capitalist wage labour relation¹⁶.

While acknowledging the need to find an exit from capitalism, the ‘Blue Collar Blues’ chapter re-affirms the compulsion we face to drag our hides to work for sale: “We have to spend our time working for someone else to be able to exist on our time. We both need and hate work” (p.55). This basic antinomy – the need to accept waged work at one level, even if we may violently reject it in principle – creates a situation whereby we resign ourselves to our identification as workers: ‘the working class’. From a Left point of view, one of the more interesting discussions in the book is over ‘working-class’ identity. As prole.info notes, ‘working class’ in the context of capitalist relations can soon become a stereotype of itself, defined internally as a sign of ‘authenticity’, and externally as a sociological category defined by income and lifestyle choices that can be marketed to and pandered to by politicians. But escaping from this ‘role’ is not as easy as changing ‘lifestyle’ options, a notion which prole.info describes as the “the ideology of the wage labourer who can’t imagine any way out of wage labor” (p.57). It is

not working-class pride or a sense of identity that keeps workers working, but the class relationships within capitalism where we are reproduced as ‘workers’ (and non-workers) on a daily basis. Wage labour and surplus value are the foundation of capitalist relations. Waving the flag for ‘the working-class’ sometimes obscures the need to escape from the wage labour relation in order to exit our designated roles (pp.50-59). The object of the everyday struggles prole.info depicts is clear: “We are not just the working class; we are the working class that struggles to do away with work and class, and the society built around them”¹⁷.

Part II. The Neighbourhood

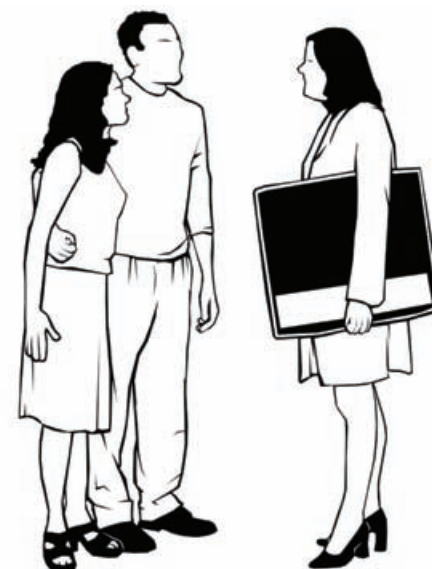
Part II of the book looks at capital flows in land and property and their impacts on labour, ownership, class and gender. Credit is essential to the flow of capital in construction, allowing investors to keep their capital in constant circulation, and avoiding devaluation through under-use. The loan capital of banks is based on interest. Unlike value derived from exploiting labour, this capital is fictitious, based on future claims to wealth generated from the loans it distributes. Crucially, the credit is predicated on continual growth, but as repeated cyclical downturns and the ‘sub-prime’ mortgage crisis has shown – with its defaults, ‘delinquencies’ and foreclosures – the miracle of continual growth always turns out to be a fallacy. Repayments are never guaranteed: “When the crash inevitable comes, last year’s (or last week’s) confidence looks like stupidity. Prices that had built-in assumptions of a profitable future pop or deflate like balloons” (p.65). Here, ‘fictitious capital’ disappears or becomes ‘toxic’ (if it wasn’t already), businesses can’t sell their commodities (houses in this case), and capital loses its liquidity (essential to its functioning), getting ‘stored up’ in unsold houses that become subject to devaluation and decay.

For an analysis that emphasises labour processes, *The Housing Monster* could say more about the role of off-shoring in production. Graham Turner¹⁸, in his analysis of the roots of the housing bubble, argues that the credit bubble was the direct result of companies moving jobs abroad for cheaper labour and the maximisation of profits, leading to the reduction of consumer spending in the UK through unemployment and a more ‘competitive’ job market. The rise in debt was the flipside to jobs being lost to the East: property inflation was a “necessary stimulus” for economic growth in the West, with cheap interest rates and easy credit fostering “money illusion” and “property mania”; a short term, myopic bid for growth. Debt was the major factor in the housing bubble. No wonder that the UK government publicly understated the importance of the housing market to the economy: the economy was supported by record levels of borrowing, and the spectres of chronic debt deflation and negative equity haunt our debt-ridden homes. A recent *Shelter* report¹⁹ suggests that almost seven million people in the UK are relying on “unsustainable” credit with extortionate interest rates to help pay their housing costs, including payday loans, unauthorised overdrafts, other loans or credit cards. According to Credit Action²⁰, the average household debt (including mortgages) in January 2012 was £55,988, and the average amount owed per UK adult around 122% of average earnings. Every 15 minutes a household is repossessed. Every 4 minutes someone is made bankrupt or insolvent. As Michael Hudson argues, mortgage loans, by far the biggest form of debt, are increasingly a form of peonage; a “new road to serfdom”²¹.

But while prole.info may neglect the links between financialisation and property, there is a thorough analysis of land ownership and the rentier economy. As David Harvey explains, land is a unique non-fungible resource which cannot, as a rule, be produced or built anew: there is a limited supply and it already has owners²². This is what Mark Twain meant when he said, “Buy land, they’re not making it any more” (cited, p.68). Without contributing to ‘development’ the landowner can profit off other developments such as a new train station or a large ‘regeneration’ project, as with the multiple land-grabs via the London Olympics 2012 and Glasgow’s

Commonwealth Games 2014²³. As prole.info puts it, landowners are in the position “to charge us a fee for the right to live on earth” (p.72). For Michael Hudson, the important category is *economic rent*, “which is the profit one earns simply by owning something”; an “unearned increment”, which to the financier or capitalist is, “earned in their sleep”²⁴. But the ‘right to rents’ in the rentier economy depends on the type and location of the land. Claims to future rents are predicated on the use of that land. Zoning laws are introduced to separate out land uses for effective planning, but these are constantly under threat as developers manipulate planning as an adjunct of economic development. Land speculators are not concerned with the most useful use of land, but the most profitable, and they actively intervene in the process of development through a phalanx of opaque quasi-autonomous bodies that supposedly form the public interest in regeneration projects and urban planning in general (pp.68-73)²⁵.

Changes in the urban landscape are not natural processes. The economic boom in the US after the World War II, for instance, was heavily state-supported. The G.I. bill subsidised home ownership by giving out loans to veterans with no down payment necessary (p.91). This was, in effect, a debt-financing strategy that helped derail public housing, prioritise private home ownership and individualism, and stimulate the commodity-economy²⁶. The economic boom sustained demand for housing and allowed for the expansion of huge development firms. ‘Levittown’, for instance, a symbol of post-war US suburbia, was the fiefdom of William Levitt, the ‘King of Suburbia’, who ran both a development firm and a construction company, utilising standardisation and prefabrication methods which allowed him to build the first model mass-produced suburb (p.75). This is the type of American landscape which Theodore Adorno might have meant when he said it was, “as if no-one had ever passed their hands over the landscape’s hair”²⁷. Costs of machinery and labour were reduced massively through Fordist production methods, enabling the construction of a homogenised landscape of tens of thousands of homes. ‘Dumping’ money into urban infrastructural projects is one way in which capital attempts to resolve its frequent crises. David Harvey, has written of Robert Moses, the urban planner, who updated Hausmannisation for the post-WWII US context, by embarking on a huge process of debt-financed suburbanisation as a means to resolve a capital surplus problem arising from the economic crisis of the 1930s²⁸.



Land speculation is even more profitable than construction and the developers' main interest is in making sure the value of the land rises. Gentrification is one of the chief mechanisms for this revaluation. Transport links make an area attractive to affluent incomers and often serve to separate an area from poorer neighbourhoods nearby, while state subsidies make the area more alluring for developers. Increased investment creates a vicious spiral of higher rents, higher house prices and higher taxes, all of which price out poorer people in the neighbourhood, changing its character and making it more acceptable for higher band tax payers. With huge amounts of money to be made, state intervention and policing assist the process – often violently. As prole.info notes: “Quick, speculative development is an obvious attack on us” (p.78). Urban theorists like Neil Smith and Rachel Weber have pointed out the role of disinvestment, defamation and stigmatisation in creating the conditions for wholesale makeovers of urban areas, and prole.info insists that the decay and development of neighbourhoods are, “both automatic market processes and the result of conscious action by developers and city planners” (p.79). This is not a rational process from a social point of view, but it is from an economic one: whatever use value we might want to make of urban space, exchange value dominates as the privileged motor of social change under capitalist relations.

The housing market and the labour market are inextricably interlinked: ‘Levittown’ is only an extreme example of a ‘company town’; every town is really a company town (p.95)²⁹. Without property we are forced to sell our labour power on the market to those who already have property and capital. We make just enough to reproduce ourselves as workers for the next day, covering all our essential costs such as housing, energy, transport costs and food. We need housing to survive, to reproduce ourselves, and the need to keep up rent and mortgage payments keeps us going back to work every day – because landowners have the right to charge us money for a place to live (p.81). The tendency of the labour market is to push down wages; the tendency of the property market is to push up the cost of housing. We get squeezed in between. Rent rises, de-regulation, overcrowding, fewer repairs, damp housing have been our lot, except when sustained pressure from below has resulted in gains. While the traditional Left has tended to emphasise struggles in production over wages as opposed to reproductive struggles over everyday living conditions, capitalists have understood that higher house and rent prices lower the real value of our wages. Inflation is just as effective a means to subdue the worker as strike-breaking, and Heinrich Zille, who as an illustrator portrayed the desperate overcrowding of the ‘tenement barracks’ in Berlin in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, is quoted judiciously here: “You can kill a man with an apartment just as easily as with an axe” (p.80). With little or no public or social housing available, the market for private letting and home-buying has escalated out of control. The ludicrous house-building booms in Spain and Ireland are exemplary cases. What is notable here is that neither country has a tradition of public housing, meaning that housing production has been completely dominated by a private sector that acted like the boom would never end. Now that the crash has come, whole ‘ghost estates’ lie empty (as of January 2012, 400,000 properties lay vacant in the Republic of Ireland alone³⁰), negative equity is rampant and construction workers are made redundant, not because there is nothing to do, but because capital cannot do it profitably.

Good public housing is anathema according to the capitalist imperative of growth – “Accumulate, Accumulate! That is Moses and the prophets!”³¹ The disinvestment and defamation of public housing has been no accident: public housing, without the intervention of strong left-wing movement³², is meant to be shit – private property depends on it (p.93). The landlord is a capitalist. Exchange-value will always trump use-value in the class relationship between the landlord and the renter. As Thatcher understood, promoting a ‘property owning-democracy’ (an aspirational working class) through the ‘right-to-buy’ scheme in council housing was an important

link in developing class cleavages and divisions and tying a new group of atomised consumer citizens more thoroughly into capitalist relations. Home-ownership is tied up with respectability, individualism and hierarchy. By owning a house, we largely relate to it as exchange-value rather than use-value, becoming our own landlords (p.92), and scanning the housing market ourselves for (now vastly diminished) profitable opportunities. But how much respectability is there in owning your own home when, as Michael Hudson argues, in the odd logic of the real estate bubble, debt has come to equal wealth? In the UK the bait on ‘the new road to serfdom’ was low interest rates, access to subsidised public housing (a one-off fire sale) and easy credit. While some got in on the property ladder and made money, the trap for most is a lifetime of work to pay off debt on an asset rapidly dwindling in value³³.

As prole.info argues, the terrain of reproduction (housing, health, social services, transport, leisure) is as significant as the terrain of the workplace in challenging capitalist relations. This argument was hammered home by the Italian autonomous feminist movement in the early 1970s through key figures such as Selma James, Maria Dalla Costa and Leopaldi Fortunati, but these different terrains suggest different problems of organisation. The workplace has traditionally been built on co-operation. As Marx noted, this created the possibility of “a new productive power, which is intrinsically a collective one”³⁴ – although this tremendous potential power has more often been harnessed for the production of surplus value within an elaborate division of labour. In housing, especially when the working-class has been weak, the tendency is towards separation and privacy, creating an in-built set of divisions and hierarchies to overcome (p.84). While at work, on the bosses’ time, it may be possible to squeeze something out of ‘their time’, at home after work, we’re on ‘our own time’, facing tiredness and other threats to our already diminished leisure time. On the other hand, prole.info argues, neighbourhood struggles over housing or community services help break down the atomisation of communities and create the potential for new modes of face-to-face communication over direct needs (p.85). As the urban theorist Henri Lefebvre has argued, when it comes to alienation, there really is no substitute for participation.³⁵

Part III. Pushing, Pulling, Breaking

“Because things are the way they are, things will not stay the way they are.”
Bertold Brecht, cited in *The Housing Monster* (p.108)

As prole.info notes, it is not always possible to tell when real gains or losses have been made, a ‘defeat’ can be demoralising, but it can also lead to reorganisation and regrouping. For what may be considered a radical ultra-left perspective, in terms of a fundamental critique of capital, prole.info is careful not to succumb to the hoary old dichotomy of reform versus revolution. In the balance of forces that makes up the capitalist relation, unified militant action can extract real concessions, yet ‘victory’ can easily be mediated by top-down union bureaucracies whose unity is decidedly self-interested. This much we know. The push for reforms is partly about achieving gains but must also be about developing strength from the bottom-up, and revealing the contradictions and the shifting terrain of interconnected forms of capitalist social relationships. The demand for ‘more public housing!’ – a necessity given the acute shortage of available public housing – is only one aspect of the struggle: what about the location of these houses; their insulation; their interior spatial arrangement; connections to the city, town, countryside; transport and amenities? The question is qualitative as well as quantitative.

Yet beyond the problems of the ‘numbers game’ played by previous administrations who have sought to control unrest in times of crisis through the provision of mass public housing, there is clearly a need for a more universal provision of affordable public housing. The privatisation of housing epitomises the separation and atomisation of individuals inherent to the capitalist system, and various early experiments in collective living incorporated, in some cases, integrated collective



kitchens, gardens, laundries, sport facilities, libraries, day care, schools, etc. These experiments collectivised housework and freed up women to participate in other activities – for this they were routinely demonised and denounced as ungodly and dangerously socialist (p.117-118). This reaction may point to collectivised living as a model for living outside capital relation – the threat of good example – but self-management of housing does not free it from capitalist relations, even if it might mitigate some of the worst aspects of those relations for small groups of people³⁶. As prole.info points out, where collective living has really taken off *en masse* is when governments have been pressurised by strong movements with a commitment to public housing. Marx made clear the problem of co-ops and mutual forms of organisation that concerned themselves more with the distribution of resources rather than their mode of production³⁷, and this question cannot be elided in the housing problem: “Detached from a militant workers movement, collective housing easily becomes a marginalized commodity” (p.118).

While the workers’ movement, mediated by the trades unions, has traditionally relegated reproduction in favour of production issues, it is no surprise that lifestyle experiments in collective living are still explored, even if they are ever more subject to the constraints of the market³⁸. However, prole.info cites the US practice of Union ‘hiring halls’ as one reform, whereby employment is mediated through the unions rather than a direct capital-labour relation, meaning that: “The amount of crap we have to take from asshole bosses is greatly reduced” (p.122). This would seem to compare favourably with the casual employment agencies that operate in the UK context, yet the hiring halls also perform the function of “labor brokerages” – mediating agents who tend to accede to membership concerns, reify craft separation, and control militant and disruptive workers with the threat of exclusion from work (p.123). Gilles Deleuze asserted that ‘recognition’ is the lowest form of philosophy, and the need for legitimation that the unions crave – both from the workers and the bosses – puts them in a position of compromise whose negotiating position can be summarised as the guarantee of a workforce that’s ready to work (p.124). For instance, Ken Loach’s ‘Days of Hope’ (1975), written by Jim Allen, shows precisely how the UK Labour Party and the Trade Union Council (TUC) were willing to sacrifice workers to the pyramids of accumulation in the General Strike of 1926, in order to maintain legitimacy at parliamentary level (to the scorn of even the Conservatives)³⁹. Unions have failed to escape commodification themselves, and routinely take part in managing capitalist relations, and

undermining rank and file struggle. As prole.info argues, at a time of intense struggle, the need to go beyond the control of the union quickly makes itself felt (p.125).

State mediation and support is a normative function of the 'free market': a wealth of subsidies, guarantees, zoning laws and exemptions prop up the housing market (p.127). The state has only had an interest in controlling rents when they rose to a level that required an unacceptably amplified demand on wages, but these concessions were typically nominal, partial and inadequate. What is required to lower rents, as has been proven time and time again, is a major "threat from below", and prole.info discusses the rent strikes of New York and Glasgow in the 1910s and early 1920s that led to rent control and tenant protection in the first example, and, eventually, the beginnings of government funded public housing on a large scale in the second example (p.127-128). While this legislation was passed to *prevent* the further development of tenants' movements, they must be seen as a real gain from below. Rent control on a large scale limits profitability in the housing commodity and leads to disinvestment by private capital, forcing state intervention as a means to stave off a housing shortage crisis (*ibid*).



Yet, as a measure forced on the ruling class, state housing has often been constructed as an inferior complement to private housing – with notable exceptions at points of organisational strength – serving to remind a precarious class of where they might end up. The decimation and ghettoisation of the UK's public housing stock over the past 30 years is apposite. To compete with private housing, historically there generally needed to be a serious crisis, and a very strong working-class movement (p.129). Moreover, access to cheap land to build on is essential; a need that has been increasingly undermined by land speculation and continual rounds of primitive accumulation and enclosure. The re-appropriation of public wealth – a wealth generated by labour after all – in the form of subsidies for housing is a real material gain, but is considered expensive by government and therefore always prone to cuts. This is why there is a need for constant agitation by independent tenants and residents groups to both protect previous gains and demand more gains in the present. Of course, state housing is only a concession wrung from the capitalist system. Housing remains a commodity, but the most brutal aspects are in this way attenuated, and more people, at least, can reclaim more lived time (p.130).

While the kind of Keynesian economic solution that has traditionally secured public housing may seem tempting, in a historical digression prole.info warns against an over-identification with this solution to the housing problem. In the wake of the Bolshevik revolution, the central plan guaranteed a continuous source of demand for housing within Soviet state productivism. Large governmental capital outlay and prefabricated mass production techniques brought the cost of housing down massively with workers often paying less than 5% of their income towards it (p.135). Workers received a large part of their wages in a socialised form through free healthcare, education, transport and housing, but this didn't preclude the wage-labour relation, which was subject to the same

Taylorist/Fordist principles that dominated the US-American production system⁴⁰. Experiments in collective living took place within this context of productivist ideology and capitalist development: "Social life was being radically reorganized but the changes were more the result of building modern capitalist society than of dismantling it" (p.137). Keynesianism, as Negri has reminded us, was a solution to working-class antagonism *within* the capitalist relation⁴¹. In the Soviet case, as elsewhere, as long as the value form was left intact social gains would be under attack through competition and the restless need of capital to expand and flow: thus the needs of the workers were increasingly squeezed out by the "needs of the economy" (p.138).

The tension between the need to create immediate gains through the existing system, while at the same time understanding the *necessity* to move beyond inherently contradictory and destructive capitalist relations, is carefully navigated in the book. By locating these wider contradictions within everyday social relations from the starting point of a seemingly simple object, the home, 'the housing problem' is not just posed as a question for well-meaning reformers, but as a central problematic in our everyday existence.

Getting Rid Of Monsters?

By emphasising actual social relations between people, prole.info goes some way to undermining the "magic and necromancy" that surrounds the production of housing as a commodity⁴². Getting rid of monsters involves unmasking the social relations that produce them and dissolving pseudo-critiques of capital for more fundamental ones: "All the critiques of immoral businessmen or the attempts to set up ethical businesses do not make value flow through the economy according to ethical rules. Clichéd criticism of capitalism only works to make criticism of capitalism into a cliché" (p.141). By explaining capitalism only through its worst aspects we risk conjuring monsters everywhere, creating a binary between our own actions and a fetishised world 'out there'. The basic capitalist relationships reinforce monstrous relationships: in a commodity economy, everything costs money; we have to buy what we need to subsist. In order to buy what we need, without capital or property, all we have to sell is our ability to work (p.144-145). We might make our own housing, but we do not make it as we please; we do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past. The solutions we seek are immanent to the capitalist relations we want to exit:

"This is not about comparing the present to an imaginary classless, moneyless future and finding it lacking [...] It's about developing our everyday struggles to the point where we're in a position to break capitalist social relationships once and for all. We need decisive ideas and elegant actions" (p.146)

The substance of these "decisive ideas and elegant actions" is not made clear beyond the need for a critique of capitalist relations *tout court*, and an emphasis on reproductive relations long subdued in Left discourse. But with the cap pulled from over the eyes, there is at least the possibility of addressing our real material relations. This was the core of Lefebvre's 'critique of everyday life', first elaborated in the 1940s; the 'dead gestures' of organised religion, and the Surrealist 'theme of the marvellous' were seen as mystifying ideas that demoted everyday life and served to obfuscate its potential greatness⁴³. In the late 1960s, interrogating new modes of capitalist production, Lefebvre speculated that urbanisation was beginning to supplant industrialisation in advanced capitalist economies:

"...capitalism has found itself able to attenuate (if not resolve) its internal contradictions for a century, and consequently, in the hundred years since the writing of *Capital*, it has succeeded in achieving 'growth'. We cannot calculate at what price, but we do know the means: *by occupying space, by producing a space.*"⁴⁴

Despite resistance to this thesis, his central idea that we have "passed from the production of things in space to the production of space itself", seems less fanciful when considered in relation to the

urban roots of the financial crisis, and the obvious links between capitalist accumulation and the production of urban space⁴⁵. The housing bubble, as Graham Turner argues, was the direct result of capital's accelerated flight to Eastern economies in the 1970s for access to cheap labour. To retain consumption levels in the so-called advanced capitalist economies – increasingly without jobs and with a yawning wage gap – it was necessary to create liquid wealth through debt (cheap credit). The housing bubble, in both the US and the UK, was the necessary component of the incessant drive to expand profits through the exploitation of a global labour force⁴⁶. The huge capital surplus generated by the simple expedience of not paying the price of labour greatly assisted the expansion of the credit system, which Marx had described in *Capital*, as "a new and terrible weapon in the battle of competition"⁴⁷. Enormous wealth differentials, financialisation on a vastly increased scale and the expansion of the 'rentier economy' ran in parallel with these processes⁴⁸. Important differences between countries and continents suggests the need for caution regarding this thesis, but the link between property bubbles, capitalist crisis and social reproduction suggests a requirement to focus on a politics of space as a key terrain of anti-capitalist struggle. Cities have become more than ever "the ultimate of exchange"⁴⁹ since Lefebvre's time, and the "beast of property" that Johann Most recommended for extermination won't disappear by merely pulling the cap down over our eyes again. It's about time, as Lefebvre advocated, that the urban realm, with housing foregrounded as a universal category, became an explicit locus of political organising alongside the workplace.

Notes

- 1 See, for instance, Dalla Costa, Mariarosa and James, Selma, *The Power of Women and the Subversion of Community*: <http://libcom.org/library/power-women-subversion-community-della-costa-selma-james>
- 2 Marx's *Critique of the Gotha Program* skewered this social democratic fallacy decisively in 1875: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1875/gotha/>
- 3 Marx, Karl, *Capital* Volume 1, Penguin Books, pp.388.
- 4 Marx, Karl, Preface, *ibid*, pp.91-92.
- 5 In England, homelessness applications are up 18% this year, In London 36%: http://england.shelter.org.uk/news/march_2012/homelessness_up_18. For more news on the destitution crisis facing rejected asylum seekers, see the Glasgow Destitution Network: <http://destitutionaction.wordpress.com/>
- 6 For a good critical overview of these discussions within the autonomous Marxist tradition, see: <http://libcom.org/library/aufheben/aufheben-14-2006/keep-on-smiling-questions-on-immaterial-labour>
- 7 Rubin, Issak Illich, *Essays on Marx's Theory of Value*, Aakar books, 2008
- 8 <http://www.prole.info/>
- 9 Prole.info is perhaps the exception that proves the rule. See for instance, 'Abolish Restaurants: A Workers Critique of the Food Industry', *Ibid*. See also, Wu Ming, 'Fetishism of Digital Commodities and Hidden Exploitation: The Cases of Amazon and Apple': <http://www.wumingfoundation.com/english/wumingblog/?p=1895>
- 10 Debord, Guy, *The Society of the Spectacle*, Zone Books, 1994. Available at Situationist International Online: <http://www.cdcc.vt.edu/sionline/si/tsots00.html>
- 11 Broadly speaking, Marx described this process of intensification as the extraction of 'absolute' surplus value (extending and intensifying the hours of work) and 'relative' surplus value (increasing productivity by mechanization and rationalization).
- 12 See, for instance, Emery, Ed, *No Politics Without Enquiry*, Available at: <http://www.wildcat-www.de/en/material/cs18inqu.htm>
- 13 Karl Marx, *Capital* Volume 1, Penguin Books, p.450
- 14 Thompson, E.P, 'Time, Work, Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism', *Past and Present*, Number 38, pp.73-74. Available as PDF at: <http://libcom.org/library/time-work-discipline-industrial-capitalism-e-p-thompson>
- 15 <http://libcom.org/history/1889-glasgow-dockers-go-slow>
- 16 Holloway, John, *Crack Capitalism*, Pluto Press, p.227. For a good summary version of the main themes in the book, see, Holloway, John, 'Cracks and the Crisis of Abstract Labour', *Antipode*: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1467-8330.2010.00781.x/pdf>
- 17 <http://www.pmpress.org/content/article.php?story=Prole>
- 18 Turner, Graham, *The Credit Crunch: Housing Bubbles, Globalisation and the Worldwide Economic Crisis*, Pluto Press, 2008
- 19 http://england.shelter.org.uk/news/january_2012/millions_rely_on_credit_to_pay_for_home
- 20 <http://www.creditaction.org.uk/helpful-resources/debt-statistics.html>

- 21 Hudson, Michael, 'The New Road to Serfdom: An Illustrated Guide to the Coming Real Estate Collapse': http://www.outstutute.org/blog/download/MichaelHudson/Hudson_RoadToSerfdom.pdf
- 22 For a detailed examination of how land monopoly has played out in Glasgow via Harvey, see: http://www.variant.org.uk/37_38texts/13RentTyranny.html
- 23 <http://gamesmonitor2014.wordpress.com/2012/01/17/dodgy-land-deals-in-dalmarnock/>
- 24 Hudson, Michael, 'From Marx to Goldman Sachs: The Fictions of Fictitious Capital': <http://michael-hudson.com/2010/07/from-marx-to-goldman-sachs-the-fictions-of-fictitious-capital1/>
- 25 Swyngedouw et al give an excellent account of these structural processes, albeit with little attention to resistance, in Swyngedouw *et al*, 'Neoliberal Urbanization in Europe: Large-Scale Urban Development Projects and the New Urban Policy', in, *Spaces of Neoliberalism: Urban Restructuring in North America and Western Europe*, Blackwell Publishing, 2002, p.201-209
- 26 See Gonzalez, Maya, 'Notes on the New Housing Question: Home Ownership, Credit and Reproduction in the US Post-war Economy', *Endnotes*, # 2, April, 2010: Misery and the Value Form: <http://endnotes.org.uk/articles/3>
- 27 Adorno, Theodore, 'Paysage' in *Minima Moralia*, p.48
- 28 Harvey, David, *The Enigma of Capital*, Profile Books, p.169
- 29 See Stuart Hodkinson's excellent critique of neoliberal urbanism in Leeds: 'From Popular Capitalism to Third-Way Modernisation: the Case of Leeds', in Glynn, Sarah, ed, *Where the Other Half Lives: Lower-income Housing in a Neoliberal World*, Pluto Press, 2009
- 30 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/business/2012/jan/03/ireland-squatters-occupy-homes-nama?INTCMP=SRCH>
- 31 Marx, Karl, *Capital*, Chapter 24, 'The Transformation of Surplus Value into Capital', Penguin, p.742
- 32 For examples of radical progressive public housing, see, Hatherley, Owen, *Militant Modernism*, Zero Books, 2009
- 33 Hudson, Michael, 'The New Road to Serfdom: An Illustrated Guide to the Coming Real Estate Collapse': http://www.outstutute.org/blog/download/MichaelHudson/Hudson_RoadToSerfdom.pdf
- 34 *Ibid.*, Chapter 13, 'Co-operation', p.443
- 35 Lefebvre, Henri, *Critique of Everyday Life*, Volume 1, Verso, p.237
- 36 This problematic is raised in co-housing and mutual home-ownership schemes. For a current model, see: <http://www.lilac.coop/>
- 37 <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1875/gotha/>
- 38 Two social centres in Glasgow, for instance, have been closed down in recent years, in part because the rent was simply too much to cover.
- 39 <http://www.screenonline.org.uk/tv/id/467647/index.html>
- 40 Guy Debord describes the Bolshevik Party as "a substitute ruling class for the market economy". Further, "when the bureaucracy attempts to demonstrate its superiority on capitalism's own ground, it is exposed as capitalism's *poor cousin*". *The Society of the Spectacle*, p.73, p.79
- 41 Negri, Antonio, *Keynes and the Capitalist Theory of the State: 1929 as a Fundamental Moment for a Periodisation of the Modern State*: http://libcom.org/files/negli_keynes.pdf
- 42 For Marx, the commodity was "a very strange thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties". At once a material object (such as a table), and also a commodity, it "evolves out of its wooden brain grotesque ideas, far more wonderful than if it were to begin dancing of its own free will", Marx, Karl, *Capital* Volume 1, Penguin Books, p.165
- 43 Lefebvre, Henri, *Critique of Everyday Life*, Volume 1, Verso, p.237
- 44 Lefebvre, Henri, *The Survival of Capitalism*, Motive series, Allison & Busby, 1976, p.21
- 45 See, for instance, 'The Geography of it All' chapter in, *The Enigma of Capital*, Profile Books, 2010, pp.140-183
- 46 Turner, Graham, *The Credit Crunch: Housing Bubbles, Globalisation and the Worldwide Economic Crisis*, Pluto Press, 2008.
- 47 Marx, Karl, *Capital*, Chapter 24, 'The General Law of Accumulation', Penguin, pp.777-778
- 48 Hudson, Michael, 'From Marx to Goldman Sachs: The Fictions of Fictitious Capital': <http://michael-hudson.com/2010/07/from-marx-to-goldman-sachs-the-fictions-of-fictitious-capital1/>
- 49 Lefebvre, Henri, *The Urban Revolution*, Minnesota Press, p.154

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A. OCCUPY