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CONTENTS

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COMMENTARY

ARTICLES

REVIEWS

NEWS

COMMENTARY

Lash out and cover up

Austerity nostalgia and ironic authoritarianism in recession Britain

Owen Hatherley

Britain has reacted strangely to the crisis of neoliberalism. The country's seemingly endemic nostalgia, particularly for the Second World War, has long been exploited by Thatcherites and Blairites; but its recent political use shows, in an especially acute form, the contradictions produced by an economy of consumption attempting to adapt to thrift, and to normalize surveillance and security in an ironic, depoliticized cultural politics. This can be traced through a single artefact, the Keep Calm and Carry On poster, which has spread all over Britain in the wake of the spectacular demise of the Blair-era boom. From nowhere, this image, which combines bare modernist typography with the consoling iconography of the crown and a similarly reassuring message, has spread everywhere. In the snows that beset London this winter, it became ubiquitous, although the implied message about hardiness in the face of adversity and the Blitz spirit seemed rather absurd in a context where a bit of snow caused the shut-down of London's entire transport network. This poster seems to exemplify a design phenomenon which has slowly crept up on us in the last few years to the point where it is now unavoidable – a sort of austerity nostalgia, or, more particularly, a nostalgia for the kind of public modernism which, rightly or wrongly, was seen to have characterized the period from the 1930s to the early 1970s, and which has recently been gradually rediscovered and reappropriated. The poster is the most visible form of a vague nostalgia for a benevolent, quasi-modernist English bureaucratic aesthetic. Yet its spread, and its adaptation into a series of police posters, have managed to create a sort of ironic aesthetic authoritarianism, which has a direct correlation with an entirely unironic intensification of repression and police violence.

Unlike many forms of nostalgia, the memory invoked by the Keep Calm and Carry On poster is in no way based on lived experience. Most of those who have bought this poster, or worn the various bags, T-shirts and other memorabilia based upon it, were most likely born in the 1970s or 1980s, and have no memory whatsoever of the kind of benevolent statism it purports to exemplify. The poster is an example of the phenomenon given a capsule definition by Douglas Coupland in the early 1990s: 'Legislated Nostalgia', that is, 'to force a body of people to have memories they do not actually possess.' The poster itself was never actually mass-produced, so even those who can recall the 1940s would be highly unlikely to remember it. It was designed for the Ministry of Information in 1939. The 'official website', which sells a variety of Keep Calm and Carry On tat, mentions that it never became an official propaganda poster, so only a handful must have been produced. (The specific purpose of the poster was to 'stiffen resolve' in the event of a Nazi invasion. There were two others in the series, 'Your Courage, Your Cheerfulness, Your Resolution Will Bring Us Victory' and

'Freedom is in Peril'.) One of those few was found in among a consignment of second-hand books bought at auction, then reproduced by a provincial bookshop.

Initially sold in London by the Victoria & Albert Museum, the poster only gradually became the middlebrow staple it is now when the recession, euphemistically the 'credit crunch', hit. Through this poster, the way to display one's commitment to the new austerity was to buy more consumer goods, albeit with a less garish aesthetic than was customary during the boom. It is in a sense not so different to the 'keep calm and carry on shopping' commanded by George W. Bush both after September 11 and when the sub-prime crisis hit America – though the 'wartime' use of this rhetoric has escalated during the economic turmoil, especially in the UK. Essentially, the power of 'Keep Calm and Carry On' comes from a yearning for an actual or imaginary English patrician attitude of stoicism and muddling through, something which survives only in the popular imaginary, in a country devoted to services and consumption, and given to sudden outpourings of sentiment and grief, as over the deaths of celebrities like Diana Spencer or Jade Goody. The poster isn't just a case of the return of the repressed, it is rather the return of repression itself, a nostalgia for the state of being repressed – solid, stoic, public-spirited, as opposed to the depoliticized, hysterical and privatized reality of Britain over the last thirty years. At the same time as it evokes a sense of loss over the decline of this idea of Britain and the British, it is both reassuring and flattering, implying a virtuous (if highly self-aware) stoicism in the displayer of the poster or wearer of the T-shirt.

Austere consumerism

The Keep Calm and Carry On poster is only the tip of a veritable iceberg of austerity nostalgia, and although early examples can be seen as a reaction to the 'threat of terrorism' and the allegedly attendant 'Blitz spirit', it has become an increasingly prevalent response to the uncertainties of economic collapse. One example is Jamie Oliver's television programme, book and shop, the Ministry of Food, which, with its 1940s' typography and its name echoing the wartime Ministry of Information, appeals to a time when things like food or information were apparently dispensed by a benign paternalist bureaucracy, before consumer choice carried all before it; although here the nostalgia is particularly dubious, in that the existence of such a Ministry of Food is all but politically inconceivable, given how it would antagonize such planks of British capital as the supermarkets and the tabloids. Even then, the Ministry of Food appeals to the element in the middle classes that has always enjoyed lecturing the lower orders on their poor choice of nutrition. Then there are the incessant newspaper articles on thrift, usually drawing directly on wartime imagery – such as when a *Guardian* style columnist offered her make-do-and-mend tips while re-enacting various World War II posters exhorting women to go into the factories.

Another, more established example is the use of the 1930s' Penguin Books cover design as an 'iconic' logo for all manner of goods, deliberately calling to mind Penguin's former role as a substantially educative publisher; or the modifications of their designs into something more eerie and psychedelic practised by the Ghost Box

record label. Ghost Box records, such as the Advisory Circle's *Other Channels*, explicitly play with the notion of an enlightened, aesthetically advanced bureaucracy, through references to the functionalist *musique concrète* of the BBC Radiophonic Workshop, the authoritative patrician voices of re-enacted or fictional public service broadcasts, referring to both road-safety films and the apocalyptic horror of the *Protect and Survive* films designed to be shown in the event of a nuclear war. Ghost Box is a rare example of austerity nostalgia as something genuinely strange and unnerving – the blurring and mess of actual memory, and a persistent hint of the uncanny, prevent them from being merely reassuring. Their aesthetic was described by Mark Fisher as 'hauntological' – a sort of return of the social-democratic repressed, as rupture – an aesthetic warped by the intervention of forgetting, vague recollection, and fifty years of history, creating a dream-world of public modernism which never actually existed. Instead of hankering for the past in the context of neoliberalism's unforgiving bull market, their aesthetic suggests a haunting of the present by the unfulfilled promises of the past.

A more typical instance is the company 'People Will Always Need Plates', who have made a name for themselves making towels, mugs, plates and badges emblazoned with various British modernist buildings from the 1930s to the 1960s, elegantly redrawn in stark, schematic form, sidestepping the often rather shabby reality of the buildings. However, by re-creating the pure image of the historically untainted building, they manage to precisely reverse the original modernist ethos. If for Adolf Loos ornament was crime, here modernist buildings are made into ornaments. However, the choice of buildings is politically interesting. Blocks of 1930s' collective housing, 1960s' council flats, interwar London Underground stations – exactly the sort of architectural programmes now considered obsolete in favour of retail and property speculation. Some of the buildings immortalized in these plates have been the subject of direct transfers of assets from the public sector into the private. An early instance of this was the sell-off of Keeling House, Denys Lasdun's East London 'Cluster Block', to a private developer, who promptly marketed the flats to 'creatives'; the first in a series of gentrifications of modernist social housing, from the Brunswick Centre in Bloomsbury (turned from a rotting brutalist megastructure into the home of London's largest branch of Waitrose), to Park Hill, an architecturally extraordinary council estate in Sheffield, given away for free to the developer Urban Splash – although when the boom ended, their privatization scheme was bailed out by millions of pounds in public money. Meanwhile, minimalism has become virtuous. Speculative apartments that became hard to sell in the aftermath of the financial crisis have been sold on their thrifty nature. The Leftbank Apartments, a large, recently completed housing complex in central Manchester, which would almost certainly have marketed itself once as a 'luxury development', is now billed as 'the home of credit crunch chic', with cheap furnishing tips in the property brochure.

Blairism and the Blitz spirit

New Labour, for all its Americanism and its dizzy ideology of 'modernization', has always relied upon the myth of scarcity that characterizes both the British experience of World War II and Thatcher's invocation of its nebulous 'spirit'. Even during the boom, 'hard choices' were perpetually invoked whenever benefits were to be cut or repression and surveillance to be intensified. Yet some of their politicians appear specifically connected to this trend in political aesthetics, among them the recently disgraced Hazel Blears, who resigned amidst the recent furore over parliamentary expenses. One of the most authoritarian of Labour ministers (launching the 'five a day' nutrition campaign as under-secretary of health, defending various repressive measures as minister of state at the Home Office, and echoing the rhetoric of the British National Party as 'communities' and local government secretary), Blears is also one of the few prominent New Labour figures from a working-class background. Accordingly, her upbringing itself is

mythologized as a subject of austerity nostalgia – she grew up among the deserving poor of Salford, and was featured as one of the child extras in Tony Richardson's film of that bleakest of kitchen-sink dramas, Shelagh Delaney's *A Taste of Honey*. Her somewhat Thatcheresque rhetorical combination of 1950s' schoolteacher and 2000s' motivational manager led to a seemingly meteoric rise in New Labour, now halted by a resignation elicited by the thrifty, if not especially austere, matter of huge, and possibly criminal, mortgage fiddling. A *Times* interview in December 2008 showed that Blears' public persona was based on a curious combination of homely wartime rhetoric and ruthless Blairite modernization. As such it is grimly intriguing as an exemplar of austerity nostalgia, the only deficiency being a lack of the requisite ironic distance. Much of the interview reads as a document from a country where the Second World War never ended. Not only is Blears's office decorated with the 'Keep Calm and Carry On' poster itself; her rhetoric is pervaded by a strange combination of Victorianism and Blitz spirit platitudes. You can see a frankly impressive performance of Blairite dialectic in her clear desire to play to every constituency at once, mocking bankers on the one hand, but earlier talking about (in a symptomatically progressivist metaphor) how the 'train' which they presumably commandeered bafflingly failed to transport every member of society; defending the strict working-class Salford that created her but sticking up for the ending of 'deference' and backing off from the possibility that she would ever stand in the way of anyone's fun; an obvious contempt for the welfare state combined with a belief that the 'underclasses' need to be surveilled at all times. But the most interesting phrase used in the interview is that, in the recession, 'we've all got to do our bit'.

Blears decries the 1980s as a time when yuppies caroused and others suffered, seemingly unaware that this is by now the public perception of the boom of the last decade (as well as, ironically, of her own behaviour). She represents one of the most unequal places in the country, but one which has been very keen on remaking itself under her watch, via a series of high-profile regeneration strategies. Among them are the transformation of the former Salford Docks into an exclusive entertainment and luxury housing enclave, soon to be occupied by a large section of the BBC, and the selling of terraced houses condemned by the government's Pathfinder 'Housing Market Renewal' scheme (in which a property market was artificially stimulated in former manufacturing towns by the wholesale demolition of working-class housing) to the aforementioned Urban Splash, which turned them into 'Chimney Pot Park', a proletarian theme park for Manchester media workers. Yet, when Blears talks of her love of modern buildings, it's striking how much this fits the nostalgia template: take out the politics and you could imagine her in grainy footage next to an architect's model in a GPO film. But she certainly wasn't referring to any new housing for the Salford working class she perpetually invokes. Rather, Blears explicitly distanced herself from council housing in favour of the spectacularly severe solution of 'mother and baby homes'.

Benevolent policing: the poster and the kettle

Although nostalgia for the watchful eye of benevolent public institutions has led to some direct takeovers of previously public spaces, its most immediately obvious manifestation has been through posters. Perhaps the earliest example was provided by Transport for London, the somewhat beleaguered transport network created by Ken Livingstone as Mayor of London in 2000, which began by trying to reverse privatization and ended by embracing it, in the form of the PFI-funded East London Line extension. A series of posters appeared on bus shelters in 2002, with slogans such as 'Secure Beneath the Watchful Eyes' (with said eyes being CCTV cameras). They had distinct similarities in their typography with 1930s' posters for London Transport by the Bauhaus designer László Moholy-Nagy. They quite deliberately played with the Orwellian associations of 1930s' and 1940s' design, the benign eyes watching over

London's bus commuters being explicitly delineated in mock-'totalitarian' terms. This is a rather queasy joke. London has some of the heaviest surveillance in the world, and more CCTV cameras than any other city. To treat this as something jollily benevolent is deeply dubious. It advertises the allegedly caring role of the Metropolitan Police in their surveillance of the bus or tube passenger; something which can only leave a foul taste in the mouth after the public execution of Jean Charles de Menezes. The great irony of all this is that the supposedly rather overbearing paternalistic public institutions of the 1940s were either unable or unwilling to set up the apparatus of surveillance that every Londoner now regards as normal. What Orwell did not realize was that the surveillance society would be accompanied by ironic jokes, not shrill exhortations.

In April 2009, another series of posters appeared on British streets, this time under the auspices of the police. Based ostentatiously on 'Keep Calm', they share the same centred design, the same humanist sans serifs, but replacing the crown with the police badge. The written content consists of three slogans, all based on particular clichés used by the police in the popular imagination, albeit in one case with a decidedly sinister twist: 'We'd Like to Give You a Good Talking To', 'Anything You Say May Be Taken Down and Used as Evidence', and, remarkably, 'You Have the Right Not to Remain Silent'. Underneath, in an extremely small, easily missed print, is the 'official' message, based on 'the Policing Pledge', one of the many managerial initiatives intended to 'restore confidence' or 'enable choice' in one or another public body. For instance, the 'talking to' poster's pledge is to listen to the consumer of policing, while 'not to remain silent' suggests you make complaints against the police should they inconvenience you. In their split between an authoritarian exclamation and a liberal, caring small print which, supposedly, gives an amusing gloss to the large print, these are spectacular examples of disavowal and the use of irony to say appalling things unchallenged. The sleight of hand is thus: the pun, the pay-off, is in small print, reminding us that really the police force are all about helping old ladies across the road, 'the police now pledge to listen…', the truth is in large print. Given the recent suspension of habeas corpus, one genuinely does not have the right to remain silent. So while this 'witty' gesture claims to play with the brutally state-protecting image of the police, it also says, very loudly, that the rules no longer apply, as would be made obvious at the G20 protests on 1 April.

The true obscenity of these police posters was made apparent in an advertisement produced by the Ministry of Justice, which ran in local papers in spring 2009 – the version I have is pulled from the South London *Mercury* on 1 April. Again the

centring, the vaguely Gillesque typography; again, the large message and small print; again, the replacement of the crown, this time by the coat of arms of the Ministry of Justice. The background this time isn't the original red, the police posters' blue, but a Guantánamo orange. The slogan, 'Have Your Say on How Criminals Pay Back'. The observer of recent advances in the world of punishment will recognize the reference to the Community Payback scheme, an intensification of community service, where petty criminals are made to work in ostentatiously bright outfits, in gangs, as a display of their debt to the public. 'Justice Seen Justice Done', as another Ministry of Justice slogan at the foot of the poster has it.

The advertisement explains: 'Community Payback is a punishment that can be handed out by the courts. It is physical work, carried out by criminals in the community. Offenders have to wear bright orange jackets marked Community Payback, so you'll see them paying back for their crimes. Members of the public can have their say on where offenders are working and the kind of work they are doing'. To witness an instance of Community Payback, as I recently did in a Greenwich council estate, is an alarming experience – a score of downcast black youth, being led by a similarly orange-jacketed overseer, to pick up rubbish in an area where the council infrequently collect. The community, meanwhile, on this weekday morning, were conspicuous by their absence, meaning this was a display without an audience. This is a spectacular method of punishment, intended to be watched and, it would seem, enjoyed. The description in the ad's small print combines some of the most salient features of Blairite discipline: the tabloid-courting methods of punishment, inching as close as possible to public humiliation while stopping short of outright violence. The combination of the focus-group/*Guardian* Society supplement sound of 'community' and the macho 'payback' is especially telling. Note, too, that this is all about 'choice' and 'empowerment', in that the community is asked specifically to choose the punishment for the petty criminal. The ad offers few clues as to what this might entail, but the message is more important than the actual possibility that the victim of a burglary might ask orange-jacketed teenagers to weed their front gardens. Meanwhile, the dividing line between authoritarianism as design in-joke and as actual political practice has been definitively crossed.

Yet what made these posters and advertisements especially remarkable was that they coincided with one of the first instances of public protest after the financial crisis – the G20 protests on 1 April, in the City of London. In the months leading up to them, the police had promised violence, even to the extent of issuing a statement of unusual aggression, declaring themselves to be 'up for it'. Meanwhile, new anti-terrorism laws made photographing policemen potentially illegal, if it could be proven that they were in the midst of an approximately anti-terrorist activity, or if the photographs could be useful for terrorists themselves. Within minutes of entering the space between the Bank of England and the Royal Exchange, it was obvious that the police – who had already made a return to aggressive policing, absent on the heavily attended Stop the War demonstrations of 2003–05, at the Gaza protests the previous winter – were intent on a riot, irrespective of whatever the protesters wanted. The 'kettle' in which the G20 protesters were enclosed became the site, later recorded on digital cameras and mobile phones, of women being hit for talking back, of climate camp protesters with their hands in the air being baton-charged, of police medics wielding truncheons, and most famously, of the manslaughter (at least) of a passer-by, Ian Tomlinson. In the aftermath of the police riot and the blizzard of false information on Tomlinson's death, an anonymous Internet user produced a variant on the 'Keep Calm' poster, sadly photoshopped into a bus-stop billboard rather than replacing one of the actual posters: 'Lash Out and Cover Up'. In the face of the consolatory aesthetics of austerity nostalgia and the use of a legislated memory of World War II as the public face of police brutality, an act of *détournement* seemed decidedly appropriate.

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October 9 – 11.
Encountering Althusser.

Can the dynamic of Althusser's thinking be reproposed as an intervention on the contested terrain of contemporary radical thought? How might an encounter with Althusser today help us to respond theoretically and politically to the contemporary capitalist conjuncture?

Panel discussions
Dis/continuities in Althusser's thought.
The primacy of politics.
The critique of political economy.
The philosophy of the encounter and aleatory materialism.

Participants
Giorgos Fourtounis, Geoffrey Goshgarian, Slobodan Karamanić, Katja Kolšek, Marko Kržan, Mikko Lahtinen, Rastko Močnik, Vittorio Morfino, Ozren Pupovac, Jason Read, Panagiotis Sotiris, Maria Turchetto, Caroline Williams, Frieder Otto Wolf.

Organised by Gal Kirn, Peter Thomas, Sara Farris and Katja Diefenbach.

http://after1968.org/encounteringalthusser

November 7 – 8.
Form & formalism: thinking method, transmission and rupture.

Is the shared concept and process of "formalism" across different fields (social and hard sciences, psychoanalysis) nothing more than an equivocation imposed by the limits of philosophical thought?

Participants
Matteo Bonazzi, Ray Brassier, Gabriel Catren, Robin MacKay, Patrice Maniglier, Paul-Antoine Miquel, Antonello Sciacchitano.

Organised by Pietro Bianchi, Giuseppe Bianco and Tzuchien Tho.

http://versuslaboratory.janvaneyck.nl

October
November
December 2009
International conferences

November 27 – 28.
Anxiety. On Lacan's Seminar X.

Panel discussions
The lack of the lack.
Anxiety as an affect.
Phantasma and stage.
Transference and countertransference.

Participants
Marcus Coelen, Aranye Fradenburg, Norbert Haas, Eva-Maria Jobst, Robert Pfaller, Marianne Schuller, Anna Tuschling, Mai Wegener, Roman Widholm.

Organised by Michaela Wünsch.

http://clic.janvaneyck.nl

December 3 – 5.
Becoming-major / Becoming-minor.

Panel discussions
From becoming-major to becoming-minor?
Becoming-minor: an act of resistance or of emancipation?
A minor figure: Bartleby's case.
Minors: childhood and emancipation.

On December 5, roundtable discussion with René Schérer, led by Giuseppe Bianco, Vanessa Brito and Nathalie Périn.

Participants
Branka Arsić, Emiliano Battista, Katja Diefenbach, Jack Fisher, Dominiek Hoens, Eric Lecerf, Oliver Marchart, Marie-José Mondzain (tbc), Eduardo Pellejero, Diogo Sardinha, René Schérer, Jelica Sumic, Jörg Volbers.

Organised by Vanessa Brito.

http://www.after1968.org/major-minor

JVE's Theory Department is a workshop for experimental and critical thinking offering two collective research projects: *After 1968*. On the notion of the political in post-Marxist theory, and *Circle for Lacanian Ideology Critique*.
For more information: http://clic.janvaneyck.nl / http://after1968.org / http://janvaneyck.nl

William James

An ethics of thought?

Isabelle Stengers

William James's pragmatism, and in particular the thesis according to which the sole truth of ideas is the difference that they make, and therefore also the interest that they create, has often been felt to be an offence by those who consider themselves to be engaged 'for' thought.[1] Shouldn't ideas be disinterested, supremely indifferent to the interest that they create? I will try to show here that – at once both thematically, that is to say in a declared manner, and practically, that is to say immanently – there is an ethics of thought at work in James's œuvre. This ethics is pragmatic, certainly, because the question is posed at the level of effects, not at the level of what authorizes. But it will be a matter here, we will see, of a pragmatic *constraint*, a constraint which confers on the refusal of certain effects, accepted as perfectly legitimate by many 'ethical' philosophers, the power to put thinking to the test, to oblige it to expose itself to the violence of the world. If my attempt succeeds, it should lead to wonder about the tranquil and consensual judgement like this one: 'history is lit by the deeds of men and women for whom ideas were things other than instruments of adjustment. Pragmatism explains everything about ideas except why a person would be willing to die for one.'[2]

Recent years have seen a growth of interest within francophone philosophy in the work of English and American empiricists and pragmatists, quite distinct from the transcendental epistemological concerns that characterized its reception in Germany. This essay by Isabelle Stengers is part of this trend. Engaging with pragmatism via Bergson and Deleuze, it shifts the focus of James's philosophy from epistemology towards the questions of the world and of experience in the making. In particular, it envisages pragmatism as a demanding 'art of consequences', a conception akin to Donna Haraway's notion of accountable situated knowledge. This is an art that guides Stengers' own work both about the 'ecology of practices' (*Cosmopolitiques*, 1997; *La sorcellerie capitaliste*, 2004; *La vierge et le neutrino*, 2006) and Whitehead's renewal of speculative philosophy (*Penser avec Whitehead*, 2002). Moving James's work away from the references informing the readings of Habermas, Rorty and Putnam (Austin, Wittgenstein, Davidson), the essay engages a broader set of philosophies of relation that tackle the limitations of critical philosophy and display a reflexive attentiveness to what it is that philosophy does.

Questions of engagement

Let us begin with the thematic point of view, that is to say the manner in which James links thought and choices that engage and expose. This link corresponds to what in *The Will to Believe* James calls 'genuine option'. Such an option is defined by the triple quality of being living, obliged and momentous.[3] For an option to be living, its two terms must provoke a willingness to act, that is to say be situated in a concrete bifurcation. Excluded, then, are the absurd choices invented for the needs of a philosophical argument, for example, or so as to place an interlocutor in difficulty. But not all bifurcations demand an option. Some can be avoided and do not oblige one to choose. And some have no importance. The choice that matters has the characteristics of the 'chance to be seized', which will not occur again; its stake must count and it must engage in an irrevocable manner.

This triple characterization is not at all a logical construction, for which one would have to verify the independence of the three requirements. They are

not independent, because James also writes that a hypothesis possesses the maximum of life if it engages irrevocably.[4] It is much more a matter of a proposition addressed to a concrete reader, a reader who James knows will try to escape, to think using abstract examples which neither oblige nor matter.

Now, among the options that don't oblige, James gives the example of accepting a theory – his, for instance – as true or rejecting it as false: if James and his ideas make no difference to me, the demand that I accept or reject his theory will collide with this indifference. On the other hand, James writes, the reader would be obliged to choose if one can say to him 'accept this truth or live without it', as is the case when a dilemma, without any possible way out, imposes itself. The question of the truth, then, is not situated in the true/false alternative, but poses the question of its efficacy, its possible power of breaking through indifference and of engaging and obliging one to choose. Now, and this is a leitmotif of the texts that I will examine here, nothing, as such, has this power. A dilemma only constrains if it gets a hold. To become truth, a truth 'calls' for this power to be conferred on it by those who will as a consequence accept the alternative: consent or refuse.

In other words, James does not attribute genuineness to an option 'in itself'. Such an option does not require the 'good will' of recognition, but an effort, the effort of allowing itself to be affected by that which it would be easy to turn one's back on, the effort of responding to that which demands a response, whether this response is consent or refusal. In this way, James confronts the reader who would be tempted by critical indifference to a genuine option. Either one attaches oneself to the 'theory', and tests its 'validity', or one accepts the path proposed. That is to say: one consents to the possibility that such a philosophical address requires an answer. Not an answer to the question of what engages the addressee, rather to a more crucial one: does he or she have the slightest idea of what an option that engages might mean?

It is more than probable that William James knew that most of his academic readers would refuse such a path. His casualness in relation to the rules of logical construction – as exemplified in his definition of a genuine option – may well manifest his indifference towards those who would flatten his argument out in order to control its validity. The power of a dilemma – accept this truth or live without it – is not the power of logic, and if the power of logic prevailed James knew that he would appear as a desperately confused and contradictory author anyway.

In fact, in a text where he describes the manner in which Bergsonian sympathy rejoins the point of view of a 'thing's interior doing', James describes very precisely the consequences of the lack of sympathy that intellectualist thinkers assimilate to rigour:

> Place yourself similarly at the centre of a man's philosophic vision and you understand at once all the different things it makes him write or say. But keep up outside, use your post-mortem method, try to build the philosophy up out of single phrases, taking first one and then another and seeking to make them fit, and of course you fail. You crawl over the thing like a myopic ant over a building, tumbling into every microscopic crack or fissure, finding nothing but inconsistencies, and never suspecting that a centre exists.[5]

However, when it is a matter of reading James, 'placing oneself' doesn't have quite the same meaning as for the reader of Bergson. According to James, Bergson has a way of presenting things that 'seduces you and bribes you in advance to become his disciple. It is a miracle and he a real magician.'[6] He himself did not try to take his reader down a continuous path deprived of those accidents that break up the spell and attract the attention to the way in which the magician proceeds. Certainly Bergsonian attention is an effort, but an effort that scorns effort, an effort at opening, at availability for an experience which demands to be accepted as such, in its fluid and living truth. Jamesian truth, for its part, demands the accident, which alone can make the bifurcation felt, which doesn't make one accept but obliges one to hesitate, which doesn't engage by seduction, but requires that one consent or refuse.

When speaking of the *will to believe*, James deliberately takes up the old accusation according to which one only believes what one wants to believe. His argument about belief will not try to impose itself as if by its own power and the adhesion this power entails. He will not refute the subjectivist interpretation of belief but transform it into an option, challenging those who take it to live with it. While Bergson reserves effort for the struggle with words, which always mobilize rigid abstractions, we will see that James mobilizes these abstractions in the construction of dilemmas whose efficacy should be to trouble routine thought, and most notably routine academic thought, forcing choice against intellectualist evasion.

The test of choice

That 'placing oneself in the centre' demands an effort, when it is a matter of James, is testified to by the manner in which his work can effortlessly be reduced

to a psychologizing interpretation. Thus Richard Gale has made the demand to 'have it all', to 'grab with gusto all we can' the centre of James's philosophy, along with his anguish when faced with the necessity of sacrificing certain possibilities of experience, not being able to actualize them all.[7] Didn't James himself confess, in the chapter of *Principles of Psychology* consecrated to 'The Consciousness of Self':

> I am often confronted by the necessity of standing by one of my empirical selves and relinquishing the rest. Not that I would not, if I could, be both handsome and fat and well dressed, and a great athlete, and make a million a year, and be a wit, a *bon-vivant*, and a lady-killer, as well as … a saint.[8]

It may well be that the conclusion of the text does not speak of anguish but of decision for one possibility: 'to make any one of them actual, the rest must more or less be suppressed. So the seeker of his truest, strongest, deepest self must review the list carefully, and pick out the one on which to stake his salvation'.[9] But the psycho-philosophical interpreter is free, for his or her part, to place the temptation to be everything, to refuse nothing at the centre and he or she will thus interpret James's effort as a symptom. To put it bluntly, James 'had a problem with the question of choice' and it is clearly understood that the interpreter does not have this problem, or if he does, it is part of his private life, and doesn't concern the reader.

Placing oneself at the centre, in the case of William James, is in one way or another to agree to accompany him in the operation which made him a thinker, the one who doesn't suffer the problem he has with choices but accepts being put to work and to the test by this question. 'We can and we may, as it were, jump with both feet off the ground into or towards a world of which we trust the other parts to meet our jump and *only so* can the *making* of a perfected world of the pluralistic pattern take place.'[10] Jumping off the ground, which the psycho-philosophical interpreter sticks to, transmutes the question of choice. It is no longer a worldly choice – what should one choose to be or do in this world? – but a choice for the world to which it is a matter of contributing. This choice doesn't only imply a world in the making; it affirms a world whose components are themselves indeterminate, whose 'perfectibility' depends on the jumper's trust that he may connect with 'other parts' that may become an ingredient in its fabric.

Jumping, trusting, eventually meeting: here we rediscover the contrast with Bergson, for whom the experience of a choice to be made is not privileged, because even that which we live as a pause and a hesitation is always already caught up in a becoming in which pausing and hesitation can only participate. Buridan's Ass will never hesitate between two meadows, and Buridan himself, if he is thirsty, will not hesitate between two glasses of cold water. For Bergson, it is only afterwards that the terms of a choice can be analysed, in a static mode, as abstractly equivalent possibilities between which the self represents itself as having oscillated. Such an analysis belongs to common sense, as it is this common sense which is expressed in the *mise en scène* associating the free act with a choice between two possibilities that are defined, according to one's needs, as equivalent.

In contrast to this *mise en scène*, Bergson proposes the celebrated image of free action as a fruit that falls from the tree when it is ripe. Not that there is not any hesitation, but it is not the 'self' which hesitates: the self 'lives and develops by means of its very hesitations',[11] and it is the self which 'matures'. Whoever has chosen will certainly be able to represent himself at the moment of his choice, but he will not be able to 'retrace his steps' and escape the fact that his representation itself is caught up in the becoming which issues from what it reconstituted *a posteriori* as 'his' choice. As for foreseeing such a choice, it would mean following closely the unfolding experience of the one who will choose, reliving it in its slightest details. 'You thus reached the very moment when, the action taking place, there was no longer anything to be foreseen, but only something to be done.'[12]

'Only something to be done': for William James, who had to be born a second time, and for all those who today we label 'depressed', Bergsonian simplicity is out of the question. They have been told, and have said to themselves so many times, 'but just do something', whereas that is precisely what is impossible for them. To do something, in the full sense of the phrase, for them, would be to affirm that 'life is worth living', to decide to live against the real possibility of suicide. Jumping with both feet in this sense affirms what the plenitude of Bergsonian duration did not envisage – the possibility of an inability to choose, the experience of an impotent coming and going between abstract and sneering alternatives. Certainly one can repeat, with the psycho-philosophical interpreter, that William James had a problem with the question of choice that apparently Bergson did not have, but the contrast explains nothing. What matters is *the manner* in which James made of his problem the ground for his jump into thinking.

Thinking 'before'

It is not a matter of affirming that William James attempted to construct the propositions that would have succeeded in activating the capacity to act, where the exhortations addressed to those who are incapable of acting previously failed. Rather, one can say that, like Artaud writing 'for' the illiterate, that is to say not for the sake of them but 'before them', under the test of their presence,[13] James writes 'before' the suicidal, before those who succumbed, whereas he had a second chance.

That is what I would like to call an 'ethics of thought'. Every thought is, in some way, a jump, an affirmation that there is something to think and that it can be thought. And it is so even if the thinker denies it, preferring rather to spit on those who remain on the ground, describing their voluntary servitude or denouncing life as an illusion: if thought is a jump 'towards', what comes to meet the one who jumps may be frightening. But even for a thinker who arrives at the conclusion that life is to be condemned, thought is still an affirmation of it. I will experiment with the hypothesis that when James is concerned, 'placing oneself in the centre' is not about understanding a 'vision' but an engagement, the engagement that the choice for life maintains the possibility of suicide as a genuine option. The power to jump and live will not make the suicide case wrong, nor any of those others beaten by life, whom James convokes in his texts. Thought will have to accept the constraint and the test of their presence.

Again, James does not address himself to the 'potential suicide' that he was. He addresses himself to his audience, Christians or agnostics, academics or pastors, as to those who live questions such as those of choice, free will, morality with a certain tranquillity, all reduced to the 'classic' questions of philosophy. And it is to such an audience, who without even knowing it are rich with a sense of the possible, which seems as natural to them as the air that they breathe, that he proposes a supposition borrowed from John Ruskin.

> In the midst of the enjoyments of the palate and the lightnesses of heart of a London dinner-party, the walls of the chamber were parted, and through their gap the nearest human beings who were famishing and in misery were borne into the midst of the company feasting and free.[14]

It is a matter of making something of the experience of those who live in a world denuded of possibilities pass over into those who are 'rich in possibility', a matter of making them think in the presence of the 'whole army of suicides'. 'The plainest intellectual integrity – nay, more, the simplest manliness and honor'[15] – ought to forbid the rich from denigrating their riches, from considering the enjoyment of the possible as 'normal'.

This is perhaps why in *The Dilemma of Determinism* James presents as inconclusive an analysis of decision 'as it is lived' which he calls 'psychological', but which is of a kind Bergson, for his part, would judge sufficient, together with those readers of James who privilege *Radical Empiricism* over the question of belief. It offers an interesting contrast with Bergson's analysis, a contrast which bears on what Deleuze, in *Difference and Repetition*, calls the syntheses of time: the 'self' charged with the continuity of the past for Bergson, the present of the living moment which decides on continuity for James.

> To *yourselves*, it is true, those very acts of choice, which to me are so blind, opaque and external, are the opposites of this, for you are within them and effect them. To you they appear as decisions; and decisions, for him who makes them, are altogether peculiar psychic facts. Self-luminous and self-justifying, at the living moment at which they occur, they appeal to no outside moment to put its stamp upon them or make them continuous with the rest of nature. Themselves it is rather who seem to make nature continuous; and in their strange and intense function of granting consent to one possibility and withholding it from another, to transform an equivocal and double future into an inalterable and simple past.[16]

Produced ceaselessly, decision by decision, living moment by living moment, such a continuity may seduce, but it will only engage James when it can be 'de-psychologized', affirmed for everything which exists.[17] As psychological, it privileges in a unilateral manner those who 'know how' to decide, who enjoy the living moment, those 'rich' people who grant or withhold without qualms.

The question that James is seeking to resolve would be this then: how can one address those who are, one might say, profiteers of their psychological self-assurance, who profit from it as if it was normal, who are unshakable to the point that they can allow themselves not to pose the question of what it requires? How can they be led to think 'in the presence' of those for whom the present is empty of meaning, those who find themselves imprisoned in a labyrinth of sneering dilemmas? How is one to disturb a colleague who moves in an 'orderly' world and limits himself to selecting an aspect of it so as to put it to the test without himself being put to the test? Without the consequences of what he consents to or what he

refuses making him run any risks other than that of a counter-argument coming from an equally tranquil colleague?

Do you think what you affirm?

How, for example, can one address those who seem capable of tranquilly affirming determinism – that is to say, the illusory character of that which we who are rich in possibilities live as choice? This question is important because it involves the question of the relation between the problem of knowledge and the problem of existence. The experience that 'the dice are already cast', that one is unable to change anything, to make any difference, is called despair. Certainly the Stoics made the absence of hope the path to an austere and demanding wisdom, but James's colleagues are not Stoics. The determinism that they affirm is tranquil, and requires no effort because it demands not consent but rather refusal. For its partisans, determinism imposes itself starting from an alternative that they present as obligatory. The dilemma would be: either accept determinism as the requisite horizon of a rational comprehension of the world, or accept an arbitrary world, opaque to reason.

The Bergsonian category of the 'false problem' is unsuitable here because what is singular about determinism is the manner in which it is imposed. What dominates in this case is a pale 'I know very well…' – for example, as Bergson maintains, that it can never be verified by a correlative capacity for prediction, followed by a vibrant 'but all the same!': if we abandon determinism, we lose science, we endanger reason.

The fact that in *The Dilemma of Determinism* James chooses to tackle the problem starting from the question of chance clearly indicates that for him it is a matter of breaking a sort of spell that separates those who affirm determinism from the consequences of this affirmation. Breaking the spell implies the need to undo the alternative that gives determinism the power to impose itself, it implies discerning the force which nourishes it. And this force, such as it is diagnosed by James, is nothing other than the repulsion which the idea of 'holes' in the causal chain gives rise to, that is to say chance, assimilated to a 'barefaced crazy unreason, the negation of intelligibility and law'.[18] Those who affirm determinism do not think what they affirm in the positive sense; their consenting to determinism is in fact a refusal of chance, a veritable hatred of chance. And it is this hatred that they spread when one takes seriously their threat: 'determinism must be accepted, or else…' It is thus on this terrible 'or else' that James will attempt to operate.

The choice of taking the side of chance is part of James's ethics of thought. The means chosen for a problem must respond to this problem, without giving it a weight that it does not have. The question of chance, a Bergsonian false problem, is fitting precisely because it is not a matter of responding to the 'belief in determinism' with a 'belief in chance', just as it is not a matter of thinking 'before' those who are crushed by fate, but of addressing oneself to those colleagues who tranquilly affirm their determinist convictions. Their hatred of chance doesn't demand that one opposes them with another truth, in the positive sense – that of our psychological experience, for example. This hatred must lose its grip, and making something lose its grip is what might be called an experimental operation: success or failure. The criterion is not one of truth but of efficacy: it is a matter for James of succeeding in making the absurd character of this panicky hatred of chance felt.

That is why William James will accept the image that Bergson refuses: that of the two routes that he can take indifferently in order to return home. One route having been taken, the determinist will affirm that it had to have been taken, and to claim the other could have been taken is to admit chance, irrationality, dementia, 'a horrid gap in nature'.[19] The universe has always been such that it is the first route that had to be taken, that to take the second was an impossibility, even if, as Leibniz would maintain, no vision, but the infinitely acute vision of God, could have determined which was necessary, which impossible.

James does not maintain that the choice of routes was made 'by chance'. This term is not a part of the experience of someone taking one or the other route, even if he tosses a coin to decide: the choice of tossing the coin will not itself be lived as the 'fruit of chance'. Chance corresponds perfectly to the sort of vision 'from the outside' that Bergson refuses. But it is not a question here of posing the problem of vision but that of consent and refusal. Chance has a meaning only in relation to its refusal, and using the artificial simplicity of the thought experiment aims not at proving but at making sensible the suffocating experience of a world where everything conspires, where the most radical difference – necessity and impossibility – opposes two universes, each corresponding to the choice of one of the two routes. And this even though either of the two universes would have had every claim to being explained rationally, because both 'spring equally from the soil of the past'.[20] Here, chance does not communicate with the disordered reign of chaos, terrible confusion, the frighteningly arbitrary, but only

with the sober affirmation that the route which was not taken could have been, that taking it was not an impossibility.

James has not 'proved' chance. Chance cannot be proved (even in quantum physics). He tried to convey the experience of the consequences of refusing chance if we took it seriously, if instead of linking it to a definition of rationality and its demands, we gave it a toehold in our lives. Are we capable of living in a world without real possibilities, that is to say of consenting to an experience that would signal to every psychiatrist a grave psychopathological state? In the name of what? We really do have the experience of ensembles whose parts are dissociated and are each determined with a certain independence, without the overall functioning evading all intelligibility.

'That the universe may actually be a sort of joint stock company … in which the sharers have both limited liabilities and limited powers, is of course a simple and conceivable notion.'[21] If one explained to shareholders that they must recognize that they should admit their decisions to be the 'unconditional property of the whole', or else the fabric of the company would collapse, they would claim for these decisions what, according to James, must be accorded to every phenomenon which imposes itself on us as fortuitous. The shareholders would say 'hands off!',[22] 'do not treat us as hostages of the order of the whole, our decisions are ours.'

Chance signifies nothing other than this 'hands off!', this refusal of a block universe, where what happens would be controlled, guaranteed, necessitated by the rest. What happens can concord marvellously with the rest, without the latter having a positive, determining hold on the happening. Finally, the idea of chance is only the pejorative version of the idea of the gift: that to which we cannot lay claim as if it was a right. The fortuitous is not the inexplicable but that which comes 'when it comes, in the manner of a free gift, or not at all'.[23] And if the universe wishes to appropriate this gift, integrate it into its properties, it will certainly be able to, and the fortuitous will appear as perfectly intelligible. But it will be able to do so only after this fortuitous event has occurred.

Chance and regret

The question of the two routes was a thought experiment destined to make the dilemma 'determinism or meaningless chance' lose its force and to prepare the terrain for another dilemma. The alternative that James wishes to render living, obligatory and momentous, bears on the consequences of the determinist doctrine. Think of a horrific crime of your choice. If you declare yourself a determinist, you must forbid yourself the 'judgement of regret' because one cannot comprehend the regret that such a crime took place 'without the admission of real, genuine possibilities into the world'.[24] And so you either accept the reality

of the possible or you declare that this crime was necessary and the regret that it took place subjective and a vector of illusion. But that is not yet enough: the same dilemma also forbids you from regretting that your contemporaries allowed themselves this error, since you will have to recognize that it too is necessary once it has occurred.

The long description of the crime of Brockton, whose horror James revives, is a fascinating element of the Jamesian operation. It is a matter of details that perhaps intellectualists will judge to be anecdotal. But if they affirm the illusory character of regret, they must be capable of affirming that the crime was determined by the order of things if not 'before' the unhappy woman who, shot with four bullets, asked her husband 'you didn't do it deliberately, did you, darling?'; in any case, before the self-satisfaction of the latter who said that he replied 'No, I didn't do it deliberately' as he picked up the rock with which he would smash her skull.

This moment of cruelty and terror must be rendered present because it has as its correlate the veritable cry of disgust and anger of James faced with the 'subjectivist proposition'. This proposition allows certain determinists to escape from pessimistic despair and to attribute a positive dimension to the crime and the sorrow to which it gives rise, as contributing to human progress: 'Crime justifies its criminality by awakening our intelligence of that criminality, and eventually our remorse and regrets; and the error included in our remorses and regrets, the error of supposing that the past could have been different, justifies itself by its use. Its use is to quicken our sense of *what* the irretrievably lost is.'[25] Let us be thankful for the Brockton murder because it finds its meaning by provoking in us moral or scientific judgements.

> If *this* be the whole fruit of the victory, we say; if the generations of mankind suffered and laid down their lives; if prophets confessed and martyrs sang in the fire, and all the sacred tears were shed for no other end than that a race of creatures of such unexampled insipidity should succeed, and protract *in saecula saeculorum* their contented and inoffensive lives, – why at such a rate, better lose than win the battle, or at all events better ring down the curtain before the last act of the play, so that a business that began so importantly may be saved from so singularly flat a winding-up.[26]

James's cry is the correlate of the ethics of thought I have hypothesized, and should rule out the identification of pragmatism and utilitarianism. The acknowledged utilitarian value of regret, as subjective as it may be, disgusts him, because it places the horror of the world at the service of those in the position of spectators, indeed even of consumers. The act of thinking evades what James calls the battle, the choice of affirming that the world has a meaning even when burning on the stake. The only meaning assigned to the horror of the crime is to add a little spice, provoking a judgement which revives the flavour of insipid goods, whose values lies only in the possibility that they could be irretrievably lost. The thinker does not think before the crime; he uses such a regrettable event in order to forge moral judgement or scientific explanations.

For James regret founds no judgement. To regret is not to condemn. Contrary to the imputation 'you should not have' that Kant demands we be able to apply unconditionally in order to impose the postulate of an unconditionally free transcendental subject, regret does not preclude the murderer's being irresponsible. What is more, regret is not in itself a secret preparation for the definition of what it is right to regret. The rapist who gets caught will regret not his attack but the fact that he didn't murder the victim who identified him. There is no cynicism here but an ethics of the problem. The purpose that gives its importance to the judgement of regret is not to address the choice of the battle or the meaning of life. It is nothing other than to dispel the power of determinism, and this power is not worthy of engaging a thinking bearing on evil, freedom, or responsibility: 'the word "chance", with its singular negativity, is just the word for this purpose. Whoever uses it instead of "freedom", squarely and resolutely gives up all pretence to control the things that he says are free. For *him* he confesses that they are no better than mere chance would be.'[27]

It is not a matter of affirming that the abominable gesture of the Brockton murderer is the product of chance – that would be to use chance in a positive way, as an explanation. Rather, faced with those who would like to take control, whether that be in the name of freedom or duty, or in the name of all the determinisms you like – genes, environment or passions – it is a matter of repeating the cry of the fortuitous event 'hands off!' Horror must, so to speak, remain open; the abyss of the last moments of the victim must not be filled up with scientific or moral judgements.

The consent that engages

Thinking 'before' the last moments of the victim is also to pose the question 'is life worth living?', and this time not before the murdered wife, who never had to pose herself this question, but before those who replied

'no'. There is a properly Jamesian ethic in the fact of avoiding every passage leading from regret, with its correlative, chance, to betting on a consent that engages *for this world*, full of blood, drama and fury, betting that this world does not confirm the suicides' despair, just a matter of a confusion of stories told by idiots, signifying nothing.

Chance allows for games of chance, and the player will certainly regret that the roulette ball landed on the number just next to the one she had bet everything on, but the confidence that she had in her luck was addressed to a 'free gift' which comes when it comes or not at all. The bet, for its part, certainly requires that the outcome is not given – that is why a universe which is not a block has to be affirmed. But the bet must also affirm the Jamesian version of responsibility, a responsibility that is not moral – you ought not to have – but 'existential', one might say, because engagement makes its consequences exist. Whoever thinks that life signifies nothing, that chance is at the controls, will find only confirmation, and will say the suicides were right.

As for the option of trust – 'Believe that life *is* worth living, and your belief will help create the fact'[28] – it is undeniably backed up with examples corresponding to a utilitarian version of pragmatism. Notably the recurrent one of the mountaineer, forced to take a terrible leap, who will fall into the crevice if he doesn't have the faith that he can accomplish it. However, it cannot be reduced to this. First, the mountaineer, experienced and trusting in his own means, can nevertheless fall into the crevice, because the rock that he trusted he would be able to reach was cracked, for example: chance is not eliminated by trust. Second, the mountaineer's leap, the 'faith that saves', is only a pedagogical example, as all the other examples which have served to feed the myth of Jamesian pragmatism as the philosophy of the *cash* value of ideas. In fact because his trust in his capacities creates a disymmetry that concerns his survival, the mountaineer can be inscribed in the continuity of examples that bear on animal needs. The mountaineer needs to believe that he can succeed, like a goat seeking the slightest blade of grass on a deserted plateau.

Would the difference, then, be that whilst the goat's faith seems indestructible, the mountaineer can doubt? This might take James into the vicinity of a Romantic 'critique' of thinking as that which doubts and corrupts the assured instincts of animal life. However, whenever James's argumentation has a 'biological' stage, putting physiology and psychology or animal and human needs in continuity, it is always a matter of preparing the terrain. To those who think that the continuity step risks giving a purely natural basis to values supposed to transcend nature, James replies that it is 'an honest stage; and no man should dare to speak meanly of these instincts which are our nature's best equipment, and to which religion herself must in the last resort address her own peculiar appeals.'[29] The continuity stage allows human needs to resist both censure and intellectualist hopes, but it is then a matter of posing the question of what these needs specifically require. They require… that there may be something that may come and meet those who jump off the solid ground of factual statements.

We are well equipped but that does not prevent doubt. On the contrary, whoever bets on life, for the world, engages in a fight whose outcome is uncertain. Perhaps he will succumb, and, worse still, because chance is always there, he is not in the slightest bit assured that his choice will not have catastrophic consequences. To think 'before' the whole army of suicides, it is not enough to accept the fight from which they subtracted themselves. The real bet must be able to conjugate trust and uncertainty. It must imply a jump towards what can make the fight for life a 'real' fight, where something is decided that exceeds the interests of the protagonists and requires them despite the uncertainty of the consequences. If the fight for life 'be not a real fight, in which something is eternally gained for the Universe by success, it is not better than a game of private theatricals from which one may withdraw at will'.[30]

Consequently, faith is what is required against the 'all is vanity' opium of scepticism, but it should be underlined that it does not offer any of the assurances that would silence the sceptic. One should even say that the Jamesian ethic cannot consent to any of these assurances, not because it would spoil a pure or heroic faith but because assured thinking doesn't think 'in the presence of'. Assured thinking can only include in the same address those whom life has beaten and those who do not know how rich they are, condemning the former and making the latter right.

Tragedy and collective experimentation

What I am calling James's ethics of thought is not only a constraint that confers on this thinking its own style. In the case of 'moral life', it becomes the recipient of a solution to what might appear to be an insoluble dilemma. Here William James is addressing himself to moral philosophers who struggle with moral scepticism, with the claim that all morality responds to the

law of the most powerful. And he defines himself as participating in this struggle. But he begins by refusing to give to the philosophers what they think they need in order to beat scepticism – give me a fixed point and I will construct for you the complete system of human obligations and duties.

Not only does James refuse even the shadow of a fixed point, but his definition of the good – 'the essence of good is simply to satisfy demand'[31] – seems destined to result in the relativism of every moral position. Not all demands can be met at the same time: they thwart and offend each other. Everyone is liable to construct a 'moral world' where he or she will be in the position of vindicating their right to oblige everyone else to submit to their demand, and the philosopher does nothing different when he confers a force of law on the ideal to which he aspires. Such, then, is the dilemma: either the philosopher actually vindicates this right in the name of an authority which nobody conferred on him, and thereby confirms that conflicting authority is the ultimate horizon of every definition of morality; or he accepts the obligation to reject his own spontaneous ideals, even those he cherishes most, and to examine conflicting claims impartially. But according to what criteria? With what unity is one to render conflicting aspirations commensurable?

It is there, at the moment when there seems to be no way out, that James transforms the problem. What rises up before the examiner, he writes, is 'a tragic situation and no mere speculative conundrum'.[32] It is not a matter of searching for a criterion that would justify as normal the situation in which some demands or ideals are satisfied and not others. Genuine impartiality happens through the capacity to *feel the tragedy* that they cannot all be satisfied, that is to say through a resistance to the anaesthesia that our conventions give rise to.

> If we follow the ideal which is conventionally highest, the others which we butcher either die and do not return to haunt us; or if they come back and accuse us of murder, every one applauds us for turning to them a deaf ear. In other words, our environment encourages us not to be philosophers but partisans.[33]

William James had nothing against conventions, quite the contrary. But it is to philosophers that he is addressing himself here, because philosophers always try to transcend conventions, to derive them from what ought to be in order to protect them from the accusation of deriving from what ought not to be – the arbitrary law of the most powerful, in this instance. Now, a convention is not 'derived'. It is not reducible to anything more general at all. To defend a convention against scepticism therefore is not for James to found it but to think of it as the solution to a problem that no sceptic could deny. What the Jamesian philosopher insists is to keep alive the memory of the problem to which moral conventions respond. That is to say, to think in the presence of 'ghosts', of all those muffled demands that insist on being heard although a convention excluded them.

This does not mean that the moral philosopher is the spokesperson of these ghosts, because to the extent that the problem is, tragically, inescapable, exclusion is not unjust. Instead James proposes a guiding principle that seems to indicate a possible solution: 'to satisfy at all times as many demands as we can'. As a consequence:

> those ideals must be written highest which *prevail at the least cost*, or by whose realization the least possible number of other ideals are destroyed. Since victory and defeat there must be, the victory to be philosophically prayed for is that of the more inclusive side – of the side which even in the hour of triumph will to some degree do justice to the ideals in which the vanquished party's interests lay.[34]

But, knowing that the vanquished are innumerable, how can such a calculus work? Without having the means, should the philosopher occupy the position of Leibniz's God, calculating the best of all possible worlds under the constraint of incompossibility? Such a position is untenable not only because we are not God but for a positive reason: the 'comprehensive' character of an ideal – what it has to condemn in order to affirm itself – is an unknown. Is it remembered today that, for Catholics sixty years ago, refusing to let Jewish survivors of the death camps reclaim their children if they had been baptised seemed an unavoidable consequence of their faith?

What James proposes to moral philosophers is not to calculate, but to accompany him on an adventure that no 'closet-solution'[35] can anticipate because it is only in real time that a winning ideal may come to answer the philosopher's prayer – that is, become compossible with some of the demands it excluded. This will not happen through the good will of the winners who would listen to the advice of a philosopher. If the winners can learn to modify their demands, it is because these demands have been put to the test, and because this test has succeeded in having their abusive character felt. This test begins every time that an excluded ideal 'has its special champion already provided in the shape of some genius expressly born to feel it, and to fight to death in its behalf'.[36]

Certainly the philosopher can become such a champion, but then he will have to refrain from founding the demand for which he is the spokesperson on an authoritative philosophical argument. He is engaged in a 'real battle' at the side of others who similarly denounce what excludes them as an abuse of power. And the result of this battle cannot be defined by thought, because the possible victorious outcome will not be only the suspension of an abusive arbitrariness. What will be invented is a new composition of the world, implying the concrete modification of those components that had claimed the necessity of excluding what they finally come to admit.

What James envisages is a link between morality and a large-scale collective experimentation, the making of connections between what was mutually exclusive, the results of which can only be judged *a posteriori* 'by finding, after the fact of their making, how much more outcry or how much appeasement comes about'.[37] Such a link has nothing relativistic about it. One could even say that it requires that those collectives confronted with the demands of those they exclude not be 'demoralized', ready to give way to every demand. Appeasement testifies to an event, and, if it was produced instead by the relativistic understanding that no demand should impose anything on anyone, there would then be no 'gain', no apprenticeship, only the sadness of renunciation.[38]

Keeping doors and windows open

Moral philosophers are called to bracket off their demands, whether they coincide or enter into conflict with those that make innovators act and struggle, because of their very engagement, because a trust in the collective making of history is the only way to escape moral relativism. The role of trust is not a matter of the powerlessness of the individual, of his incapacity to envisage the transformations that only such a history is capable of producing. It is rather because such transformations are a matter of fighting, involving the very fabrication of the world, not a matter of knowledge, which is always relative to a given moment of its fabric. The situation is similar in the case of biological evolution, where there can be no theory of adaptation, only retroactive comments.

However, the analogy with evolution might give rise to scepticism again, because biological evolution doesn't follow any 'guiding principle', giving meaning to a 'better' world. That is why it is important to underline that in the case of morality the stake is not the selection of the best adapted, the victory of some and the elimination of others. The stake is the invention of new modes of composition, maximizing the possibilities for coexistence of what in every epoch seem destined to exclude each other. And the stimulus to this collective history is not 'new ideas', similar to random mutations. It is what a social organization excludes which comes back to haunt it and which, sometimes, gives rise to spokespeople capable of imposing the collective test or experiment which will, maybe, produce a better world.[39]

'Keep the doors and windows open': James's affirmation of this urgency, which the psycho-philosophical commentator has interpreted as the search for a way to 'have it all', could indeed effectively be the centre of James's thinking, but in the manner of an engagement, not a symptom. Keeping the doors and windows open is a constraint on thinking. It does not only demand that the thinker leave the solid ground of agreed human conventions, which affirm the legitimacy of certain possibilities and condemn others. In order to leave this ground, it also demands that the thinker not aim at what would transcend the conventions that give its consistency to this ground. The moral philosopher's jump is not towards an ideal that would ratify the legitimacy of some demands and the condemnation of others. What I have called an 'ethics of thought' responds to this strange jump, which nevertheless has nothing to do with levitation. It means jumping off a ground silencing the ghosts of those who have been sacrificed, refusing to ratify their condemnation or to define their destiny as 'normal' in the name of some generality (genes, the environment, etc.). Such a jump is not a 'moral one' because it is not a matter of a demand but of a test. Correlatively, what James jumps towards has nothing to do with a morality of the beyond, which would promise redemption to the sacrificed, which would punish the unspeakable Brockton murderer and console his unfortunate victim. The 'invisible' world that he sometimes invokes, when it is a matter of denying that the world of facts has the last word, does not for its part have the final word. It is not another world, where suicides would be reconciled with eternal life, a world where what has cruelly, irreversibly, taken place could be undone. The jump is not made into a world that would welcome and justify. It may even be the case that the 'invisible' which may come to meet the jumper vitally needs the jumper. Jumping demands a 'fidelity' to *our* world, placed 'between barbarism and freedom',[40] and 'God himself, in short, *may* draw vital strength and increase of very being from our fidelity.'[41]

Living demands courage for whoever has hesitated – really hesitated – between living and dying, for

whom this has been a genuine option and who refuses to forget it, to turn his or her back on the one who hesitated, by retroactively transforming consent into a norm and refusal into a weakness. Courage is a recurrent theme in James because it is what every genuine option depends on. But because in his case the choice of living was equally the choice of thinking, not of taking part, not of devoting his life to a particular cause, to a demand which fights to have its legitimacy recognized, this courage destined James to the thinking of consequences that he called 'pragmatism'. Pragmatism: a thinking that accepts as a constraint the exclusion of every idea that implies, among its consequences, a transmutation of *our* reasons into *Reason*, into what should have been valid also for those who disregarded it and chose not to live.

This is probably why James has disappointed, if not those who are engaged in a cause, then those who live off the rent of the engagement of others. Doubtless that is why his pragmatism exposed itself to the accusation that it 'degrades' ideas by taking away from them their claim to a truth independent of their consequences, indeed even by linking them to what they can 'yield'.

Translated by Andrew Goffey

Notes

1. The original version of this article was published as 'William James: une éthique de la pensée?' in Didier Debaise, ed., *Vie et expérimentation: Peirce, James, Dewey*, Annales de l'institut de Philosophie de l'Université de Bruxelles, Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, Paris, 2007. The translation is published here with the kind permission of J. Vrin.
2. Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club*, Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, New York, 2001, p. 375. I have chosen this author because the misunderstanding is all the more remarkable given the way that the book shows the role that the American Civil War, undertaken in the name of a noble idea but that led to carnage and the destruction of a world, played for the generation of thinkers Menand associates with pragmatism.
3. William James, 'The Will to Believe', in *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy*, Longmans, London, 1897, p. 3.
4. Ibid.
5. William James, 'Bergson and his Critique of Intellectualism', in *The Writings of William James: A Comprehensive Edition*, ed. John J. McDermott, Chicago University Press, Chicago, 1977, p. 577.
6. Ibid., p. 562.
7. Richard M. Gale *The Divided Self of William James,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999.
8. William James, *The Principles of Psychology*, Vol. 1, Henry Holt, New York, 1927, p. 309; available at www.psychclassics.yorku.ca/James/Principles/index.htm.
9. Ibid., p. 310.
10. William James, Appendix to *Some Problems in Philosophy*, Longmans, London, 1911, p. 230.
11. Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, Harper & Row, New York, 1960, p. 176.
12. Ibid., p. 189.
13. See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy*?, Verso, London, 1994, p. 109.
14. John Ruskin, cited in William James 'Is Life Worth Living?', in *The Will to Believe*, p. 37.
15. Ibid.
16. William James, 'The Dilemma of Determinism', in *The Will to Believe*, p. 158.
17. Readers familiar with Whitehead won't be able to help thinking that he had read the passage I have just cited when choosing the term 'decision' to designate the process of self-determination of every actual entity.
18. James, 'The Dilemma of Determinism', p. 153.
19. Ibid., p. 156.
20. Ibid., p. 157.
21. Ibid., p. 154.
22. Ibid., p. 154.
23. Ibid., p. 154.
24. Ibid., p. 175.
25. Ibid., p. 165.
26. Ibid., p. 168.
27. Ibid., p. 180.
28. Ibid., p. 62.
29. Ibid., p. 51.
30. Ibid., p. 61.
31. William James, 'Moral Philosophers and the Moral Life', in *The Will to Believe*, p. 201.
32. Ibid., p. 203.
33. Ibid., p. 203.
34. Ibid., p. 205.
35. Ibid., p. 207.
36. Ibid., pp. 207–8.
37. Ibid., p. 207.
38. In *Science and The Modern World*, Whitehead affirmed that religion would only get its moral authority back if religious thinkers stopped opposing new situations as if it was a vital matter only to congratulate themselves, after their defeat, on the new depth acquired by religious intuition. It was a question for religion of envisaging change in the same manner as science. Here too this did not signal relativism, since change in science needs active and demanding controversies. Between relativism and certainty, Whitehead, like James, envisages protagonists able to cultivate an art of hesitating which affirms a more important stake than that of knowing who is right and who is wrong. See Isabelle Stengers, *La Vierge et le neutrino*, Les Empêcheurs de penser en rond, Paris, 2006.
39. Cf. Bruno Latour, *The Politics of Nature*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 2004; and what I call a (political) culture of interstices, in Isabelle Stengers *Penser avec Whitehead*, Seuil, Paris, 2002.
40. James, 'Is Life Worth Living?', p. 61.
41. Ibid. This supposition was taken up again by Whitehead, whose God doesn't transcend the world without being transcended by it in turn, and whose experience Whitehead defined by a 'yearning' for actual responses that he can neither command nor anticipate. Even if it is for completely different reasons, God, according to Whitehead, can no more anticipate how the world will produce new contrasts able to affirm together what had seemed contradictory than could the thinker meditating in the shadows of his chamber. This is the stake of the new Jamesian composition of the moral world taken to the level of a cosmic stake.

Theatre and the public

Badiou, Rancière, Virno

Simon Bayly

The theatre has always carried a special and contested significance for thinking about ways in which the polis, collective or community might symbolically grasp its elusive self-actualization. Yet, in the late twentieth century, considerations of the theatre as the place where something like 'the public' is made present – or fails to be made present – were eclipsed by the imperatives of performance and performativity, in which 'theatre' was often occluded as both philosophically and politically retrograde. Nonetheless, the theatre is still perhaps one of the cultural venues to which the philosophically inclined might turn for a thought-provoking encounter, echoing Roland Barthes (an ardent supporter of the theatre in his early career) when he remarked that 'I've always liked the theatre, yet I hardly go there any more.'[1] Moreover, the theatrical – rather than increasingly banal conceptions of performance – has resurfaced in some of the most influential contemporary philosophy (the writings of Alain Badiou and Jacques Rancière are the examples considered here) not simply as a specific object of attention but as the source of both a conceptual apparatus and a series of metaphors that are once again deployed to think not just about the politics and aesthetics of collective activity, but about the advent of political subjectivization *tout court*.

In selecting the problematic term 'public' to denote a form of the collective, my intention is to refer not to the diverse set of partial publics that might make up any particular occasion of assembly, but to the fact that the theatre constitutes a collective as a public and, more specifically, as an audience. This fact – that the very notion of the public is dependent on a theatrical division of actor and spectator – would still seem to be profoundly and problematically connected with the etiolated political conceptions of the public currently in circulation. Throughout political, philosophical and artistic history, the production of spectators – the theatre's constitutive function – has been regularly condemned, from Rousseau to Situationism to the current and 'relational' turn in contemporary art practice. The claim restaged here is that the theatrical is still what makes a political problem of something like 'the public', which in many contemporary philosophical understandings no longer appears at all.

Making public

The lack of the appearance of a collective political subject is embraced by contemporary philosophies of multitude, which refuse any sense of the necessity for the specularization that underpins the concept of the public. In its Hobbesian origins, the self-destructive and dangerously indeterminate multitude had to be transformed into 'the people' by being bound into singular subjection to the state, its laws and ultimate monarchical authority. This subjection takes place through myriad forms of visibility, initially enforced and subsequently self-administered, in which the spectatorial relationship is central. In the contemporary re-evaluation of multitude, its Hobbesian disavowal is entirely inverted.[2] In this understanding, peoples and citizens become reactionary formations allied with an anachronistic statism in rapid retreat in the face of 'empire', a world structured primarily by global flows of capital and economic migration. Under the regime of empire, those collections of individuals previously named as the masses, the proletariat or the working class come to constitute the multitude, a term which acquires an almost incantatory, prophetic status as the name of an ever-emergent collective social subject that is unmediated, revolutionary, immanent and affirmative, refusing any form of historically established organization or mode of specularization. Given the already copious commentary, here is not the place to examine in detail the many invocations of multitude, other than to affirm that the very possibility of a human future is often predicated on the emergence of multitude in a manner that has to remain axiomatically unpredictable yet entirely necessary. However, it is not at all clear

how multitude as either political (non-)formation or philosophical concept can do without specularization. It is perhaps equally questionable whether its declared survival strategies of imperceptibility, exit and escape within the organizing logic of the powers-that-be do not in fact manifest themselves through an aesthetic that uses at least some theatrical means.

In fact, it is precisely towards the theatricalized appearance of different constituencies of multitude that so-called 'relational' or 'socially engaged' art practices have orientated themselves. Recent publications that gather up the eclectic array of artistic practice in this field include Nicolas Bourriaud's much-cited and derided *Relational Aesthetics*, Bruno Latour's exhibition and catalogue *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy* and Grant Kester's *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art*.[3] These texts explore a wide range of contemporary art (and non-art) practices which share an interest in diverse forms of audience participation and engagement in which the remaking of social relations is central. They include: Rirkrit Tiravanja's genial invitations to gallery-goers to join him in cooking and eating Thai food in re-creations of his own apartment, Suzanne Lacy's stagings of a series of non-fictional large-scale interactions between Californian police and youth gangs in a parking lot or basketball court, as well as a range of more antagonistic or interventionist works by individual artists and collectives. These often take place in locations and with people identified as either the post-colonial victims of global capital (economic migrants, criminalized sectors of the populace such as prostitutes or drug users, the inhabitants of urban neighbourhoods undergoing gentrification) or, at the other extreme, in antagonistic or playful confrontations with its chief orchestrators (multinational corporations, free-market trade organizations, civic authorities).

One example here would be the ongoing project *Je et Nous* by the collective Campement Urbain. This consists of an orchestrated and documented process of 'community' consultation in an economically depressed, ethnically diverse, Parisian suburb, otherwise notorious only as a centre for the violence of the riots of 2000. The central proposal of the project is the collective construction and upkeep of a 'useless, fragile and non-productive' contemplative space for single persons – a kind of anti-panopticon – situated in a local open space. Its main function is to offer 'a place open to everyone, where people can step away from the community under the protection of the community … a place for hanging out and getting together but a "one-seater", as it were, where people can sample the attractions of solitude.'[4] The political significations here are fairly clear; this is a place that suffers not so much from a deficiency of the social bond but from its dysfunctional excess, in which a solitary place for thinking and reflection is almost unimaginable. Other aspects of the project include the creation of a series of videos and photographs of residents wearing black T-shirts emblazoned with texts of their own improvisation, such as 'I often like to be alone, it helps me to concentrate', 'I want an empty word that I could fill' and 'Here is how others see me'. Like many works of its kind, *Je et Nous* does not offer itself up as an aesthetic experience for the casual viewer in the typical art contexts in which its documentary traces are disseminated. Indeed, its inimicality to such contexts is part of the politics of its aesthetic. This paradoxically gives it an inaccessible exclusivity more familiar from the you-had-to-be-there of the theatre performance, but with the added qualification that simply being there might itself be inadequate in comparison to being a participant in the extended temporality of the work itself.

From a critical perspective that broadly commends this type of work (as well as articulating its often problematic status as art), the task for art in the 'post-democractic' era is to *make things public*, in all the connotations of that phrase, including a preference for a certain kind of transparency and the rejection of tricky mimetic or fictionalizing strategies, which often do not translate well to the transnational spaces of display in the art world. In practical terms, art's paradoxically perverse task then becomes the modelling of localized forms and places of collective subjectivity – association, gathering, meeting, encounter, congregation – that use theatrical means to overcome theatre as a separating power, one that is essentially allied to encysted and reactionary forms of social organization. This task is not pursued solely through a Brechtian-style representational critique but in the transformation of the terms of the encounter itself. At the heart of this process is the thorough reorganization of the 'address' of the artwork, in terms of both its location and the temporal and spatial configuration of its stagings of audience, actor and event, which, like *Je et Nous*, refuse unitary conceptions of artwork and authorship.

In its solicitation of the desire for individuality, solitude and contemplation in the midst of multitude, *Je et Nous* draws on another thinking of the public (via its related term, 'community') that we can provisionally mark as recommencing in earnest with Blanchot's *The Unavowable Community and* Nancy's *The Inoperative*

Community.[5] This line of thought evidences a profound suspicion of the communitarian, the collective and any other notion that seeks to displace the primacy of the self-emancipated individual-as-singularity or other non-Cartesian forms of the subject. For these thinkers, literally nothing good can come from attempting to think the public as such, let alone make the public happen or appear as such, because it is precisely this sort of totalizing gesture that annihilates the fundamental equality and heterogeneity of an axiomatically indefinable social formation that is always 'to come'. (It is precisely such perpetually deferred formation that the philosophy of multitude so insistently revalues as already here.) Put in theatrical terms, what emerges from this perspective is the necessity of a space of distance and difference in which the right to silence, non-participation and the possibility of unprescribed individual acts of critical imagination are paramount.

The two French thinkers whose work is currently particularly influential on European and anglophone thinking on art, aesthetics and politics – Badiou and Rancière – are clearly aligned with this tradition. In broad terms, while there are obvious differences and disagreements, there are also a number of significant points of convergence in their sense of the conjunctions between politics and aesthetics. First, politics is a fundamentally rare occurrence that interrupts the going-on-being of the existing state/situation (Badiou) or 'police order' (Rancière) via a disjunction manifested from within a localized destabilization of the 'space of placements' or 'distribution of the sensible' of that same state or order. Second, this emergent event of politics and its subsequent trajectory can neither be anticipated nor calculated. Third, the process of subjectivization that occurs during these moments of politics is the antithesis of any form of social body caught up with its own process of unification or belonging, whether organized around class, ethnicity, nation, language or any other form of politics based on identity. In fact, there is marked resistance to any developed sense of an organized, collective political subject in favour of, in Badiou, a purely formal process of generic and possibly temporary subject-formation in the process of fidelity to a truth. Rancière's formulation is more or less content with the category of the workers or proletariat, figured from within specific historical contexts (mostly in nineteenth-century France), as 'the part who have no part'. The latter stage their own disaggregation at the same time as they make tactical use of the means of articulation and visibility that are otherwise refused them by the police order, by acting as if they were indeed already in their rightful possession. Fourth, and most significantly for my purposes here, both Badiou and Rancière are philosophers of politics who both literally and metaphorically deploy the aesthetics of the theatre in different ways to articulate the scene in which the necessarily abbreviated occasions of politics take place. In doing so, they declare that politics as such does indeed require a scene, a stage, some actors, some spectators, a text and, in effect, the entire aesthetic paraphernalia of the theatrical assemblage.

The two theatres

In Badiou's work, art is one of the four conditions which permit philosophy to think the truth procedures that it cannot produce out of itself. According to a similar logic, Badiou's division of art via a so-called 'inaesthetics' is remarkable for the almost classical distinction made between various art forms; the poem, the painting, the novel, the cinema, dance and the theatre all 'think' in their own particular fashion and must themselves be thought separately and counterposed. So the task for 'Theses on Theatre' is

> To establish – as we must for every art – that theatre thinks. What should we understand here by 'theatre'? Contrary to dance, whose sole rule is that a body be capable of exchanging the earth with the air (and for which even music is not essential), theatre is an assemblage … of extremely disparate components, both material and ideal whose only existence lies in the performance, the act of theatrical representation.[6]

Beyond the scant five pages of the 'Theses', Badiou's explicit consideration of the theatre receives a more extended treatment in his earlier *Rhapsody for the Theatre*.[7] In that text, the theatre is predicated on an understanding of performance as the collision of the contingent and the necessary, in which an event – Theatre with a capital T – might or might not emerge out of a featureless expanse of theatre – small 't'. As the 'Theses' continue:

> these components (a text, a place, some bodies, voices, costumes, lights, a public…) are gathered together in an event, the performance, whose repetition, night after night, does not in any sense hinder the fact that, each and every time, the performance is evental, that is singular.[8]

Even from this short extract, it should be apparent that Badiou's conception of theatre is, as he suggests, 'isomorphic with that singular activity we call "politics"' (*RT* 190) and with the theory of the event and the state or situation that it traverses. Here, the state is conceived both as a political entity and as the network of relations

which structure what Badiou calls the 'situation', the latter being something akin to the set of discrete elements counted in a 'pure', numerical fashion as a multiplicity. Badiou opposes 'the theatre' to 'Theatre', echoing his philosophical distinction between the state and the situation. The former denotes the art of the state of things as a closed set of relations, a status quo governed by power grounded in a specific set of knowledges (the 'encyclopedia'). Representing representations, it states the state, so to speak, as the set of organized opinions that form the necessary basis of all sociality – even if it purports to represent revolution – but without saying anything about it. 'Theatre', on the other hand, says the state as a situation, not as a form of description or analysis at the level of content, but rather as what delimits the 'stateliness' of theatre. In such a saying, Theatre exposes 'the theatre' to the militancy of the event; Theatre will have been that which interrupted 'the theatre' and is thus a rare and anomalous phenomena which can be encompassed by neither a political programme nor a theatrical style. As such, Theatre is a momentary but momentous event for the spectator equipped with a sensibility that is primed for such occurrences. The act of witnessing and subsequent public declaration for the event (did you see that?) inaugurates both the actualization of the event itself and the becoming-subject of whoever engaged in such an act of fidelity.

Badiou remarks that, contra the typical discourses surrounding the arts, theatre does not in fact address a public; rather, it addresses a spectator (*RT* 188). Only the cinema, the art of capital, requires a public: anonymous, general, a whole whose parts are infinitely replaceable. A National Theatre can be imagined and indeed effectuated, but a National Cinema? Cinema is international, global, but private, Badiou continues; it bears no relation to the state. However, if there have been times when theatre has literally been summoned in and out of existence by royal command, every theatre performance today still carries a sense of being a 'command performance'. According to Badiou, the theatre (small 't') is the art of the state, isomorphic with politics and so, even today, all theatre is official in an obscure sense, with or without the 'royal' or 'national' epithets.

Whilst some might want to resist such a hard and fast distinction between theatre and cinema in terms of the politics of spectatorship, there is nevertheless a strong resonance to the remark that 'what is said in the theatre, even in a school hall with two small lanterns, is said *en majesté*' (*RT* 203, translation modified). It demands a spectator whom it can address as a citizen-subject, someone who, in some obscure way, consents to being put in his or her place. For Badiou, Theatre will thus be an event – something that happens, something particular, localized and situated – that upsets this address, emerging from within theatre itself, out of a certain 'void' within it. But in what ways does this upset appear? What kind of subjectivity does it generate? Or is the truth of this event only properly available, as with Kant's detached observers of the French Revolution, to the disinterested onlooker, spectating upon the actions of those whose generic humanity appears upon a political stage of their own construction?[9]

Yet, in much the same way as Badiou's examples of political events and accompanying manifestations of a generic humanity are restricted to a wholly orthodox set of historical examples drawn from French history (mostly simply marked by years such as 1789, 1871 and 1968), reading Badiou himself on theatre, we find ourselves not straying very far from the main playhouses of Paris or from a canonical set of dramatic references. In his *Rhapsody*, Badiou adopts the Platonic dialogue form to stage an interlocutor called the Empiricist. The Empiricist forces the philosopher to provide actual examples of theatrical practice that might constitute an event; left to his own devices, it is clear that the philosopher, like Melville's Bartleby, 'would prefer not

to'. He does finally succumb to the provision of lists of playwrights, directors and performers – but they are entirely unexceptional in their canonical, high-cultural affiliations. As Badiou ventriloquizes though the accusation of his Empiricist: 'and all these spectacles in the great official temples … not one small place … none of the provinces…. Your "diagonal" is that of the opulent and of big business' (*RT* 201, translation modified). Being generous, we might be content with the reply that theatre is always and only a matter of national culture, wherever and whenever it takes place, redeemable only by the Theatre-event, individual performances of particular texts figured through particular names of playwrights, directors (all male) and performers (axiomatically only female, according to a curious Lacanian logic deployed by Badiou) that may or may not be grasped by individual spectators. Taking a less benevolent attitude to the somewhat awkward humour of this text, the radical break announced by Badiou's thinking of being and event appears, in its theatrical incarnation, curiously cauterized by a desire for continuity with the familiarity of an institutionalized Parisian theatrical tradition and an orthodox notion of aesthetic subjectivization.

What is entirely absent in Badiou's inaesthetics are the kinds of hybrid collective artistic practices, alluded to earlier, that have profoundly expanded and traduced the traditional boundaries between the live and visual arts and between art and progressive practices of social, political and ecological transformation since the early twentieth century. Many of these practices may not only be read as performance, but as assemblages that – contra a Debordian refusal of spectacle – explicitly make self-conscious uses of spectacular tactics. Before following through the implications of this omission – which might, albeit problematically, be put down to questions of age, taste and aesthetic sensibility – however, let us briefly explore Jacques Rancière's understanding of spectatorship, theatricality and equality, given that he has paid considerable attention to the kinds of artistic practice that appear to have left little mark on Badiou's inaesthetics.

Separation and the sensible

Rancière's interventions into the politics of aesthetics seem to share Badiou's more positive regard for theatre and some version of generic humanity. Detecting an emergent 'theatrocracy' across Rancière's work, Peter Hallward writes: 'perhaps the most fundamental, and illuminating, dimension of Rancière's anarchic conception of equality is that which relates to theatre – in both the literal and metaphorical senses of the term'.[10] Hallward provides no fewer than seven ways in which this conception of equality (the axiomatic assumption of which is for Rancière the primary agent of any political sequence) might be considered as 'theatrocratic': in its constitution as spectacle via the separation of stage and audience, its artificiality, its privileging of multiplicity over unity, its disruptive capacity, its contingency, its improvisatory character and, finally, its liminality – a propensity to blur the difference between art and non-art.

Rancière himself states unequivocally: 'this aesthetic regime of politics [understood as the contemporary regime from which we may or may not be emerging] is strictly identical with the regime of democracy, the regime based on the assembly of artisans, inviolable written laws, and the theatre as institution'.[11] Furthermore, writing in *Disagreement*, he defines politics as:

> Performing or playing, in the theatrical sense of the word, the gap between a place where the *demos* exists and a place where it does not … Politics consists in playing or acting out this relationship, which means first setting it up as a theatre, inventing the argument, in the double logical and dramatic sense of the term, connecting the unconnected.[12]

This is political subjectivity figured in terms that theatre practitioners and thinkers are familiar with, from Brecht to Augusto Boal. The figure is that of the 'spect-actor', who exercises active powers of critical interpretation as well as the powers of participation evoked earlier – taking up his or her rightful place in the scene itself or, rather, literally creating a stage and establishing a theatre where none was supposed to exist according to the logic of the established order. In short, Rancière's version of the spect-actor takes up the mimetic function that Plato found so problematic in his conception of the *polis*. The spect-actor supposedly confounds the Platonic order of function and place – everyone in his place and a place for everyone – on which the *polis* as such is founded.

Rancière is more interested than Badiou in taking seriously some of the critical issues facing contemporary art practices, especially those which explicitly focus on remaking the social bond or staging forms of political antagonism and dissensus through renegotiations of the experience of spectatorship. However, he is consistently critical of most of these practices, including that of the *Je et Nous* project outlined earlier, which are construed as so many mistaken variations on a theme that is as old as modernity itself: the aesthetic break that proposes the dissolution between life and art. Thus, they can effectively be figured as minor

cultural by-products in some much larger aesthetic regime within which they merely amplify a series of ill-fated breaks staged by previous incarnations of the avant-garde. In fact, Rancière is unequivocal; it is precisely the theatre as allegory of inequality that must be refused. The only good way to approach a so-called 'confusion of genres' that characterizes the space of contemporary art is to develop a practice that

> invalidates the opposition between activity and passivity [between performers and spectators] as well as the scheme of 'equal transmission' and the communitarian idea of the theatre that makes it in fact an allegory of inequality. The crossing of the borders and the confusion of the roles should not lead to some sort of 'hypertheatre' turning spectatorship into activity, by turning representation to presence. On the contrary, it should question the theatrical privilege of living presence and bring the stage back to a level of equality with the telling of a story or the writing and the reading of a book. … It calls for spectators who are active as interpreters, who try to invent their own translation in order to appropriate the story for themselves and make their own story out of it. An emancipated community is in fact a community of storytellers and translators.[13]

The deconstructive logic of the observation that the suppression of the distance between actor and spectator might actually be constitutive of that same distance is obviously worth noting. But despite its overtly theatrocratic orientation, Rancière's thinking nevertheless appears to engage in a kind of disappearance of the theatrical the closer it approaches some of its actual instances in contemporary art, which seem just too – how to say it? – too theatrey, too sutured to the delusions of belonging or over-earnest identification. Amidst the proliferating language of stage, actors and scene in his writing – and in an opposite move to Badiou's preference for dramatic formalism – Rancière's preferred examples of successful contemporary artistic work are photographic works or video documentaries with overt political significations which, largely due to the economics of artistic presentation and distribution, are typically shown at large-scale art shows and biennales. Their formal organization of spectatorship (the no-nonsense contemplation of an image or screen) endows them with an appropriately out-of-place aura when surrounded by the 'confusion of genres' manifest in so much relational or socially engaged art practice that has found significant curatorial support.[14] While an effective *aesthetics* of politics would seem to be one that both proposes and undoes the terms of its theatrical self-presentation, the *politics* of an aesthetic practice that attempts the same thing are seen as deluded. With echoes of Michael Fried's infamous denunciation of theatricality in 'Art and Objecthood', it seems that, for Rancière, artistic *practice* infected by a 'postmodern' theatricalized aesthetic is congenitally unable to keep separate what should remain apart according to the *theory* of a progressive distribution of the sensible. What matters is that right-thinking spectators and performers become both narrators and readers of their own stories and do not succumb to the incoherent temptations of pseudo-activity, pseudo-collectivity or pseudo-community.

The main problem here is that Rancière's conception of what might be involved in the 'setting up of a theatre' appears magically inoculated against the effects of the police order, preserving its militant challenge to the distribution of the sensible in a way that seems entirely implausible under contemporary cultural conditions. Badiou is surely correct in asserting that the theatre today is indeed 'more solidly state-like than the State itself … essentially under surveillance' and only ever 'the possible place of political effects: *an official conspiracy*' (*RT* 202). The entirely diminished status of the theatre as a site of such effects cannot be wished away by a simple revaluation of the transgressive vices attributed to mimesis and poesis by Plato or the city authorities in nineteenth-century European cities. After all, the characteristics of Rancière's theatocracy as delineated by Hallward – spectacular, artificial, multiple, disruptive, contingent, improvisatory and liminal – are precisely those used to describe the aesthetics of capital. While this is in itself hardly a decisive challenge – every critical practice has to work from the inside of the police order or situation – it is hard to square Rancière's conceptions of politics and aesthetics with the suggestion that a so-called 'confusion of genres' must literally be brought to book, back within a clear-headed and egalitarian regime of the literary-critical, the writerly and the readerly. In this understanding, the theatrical can only become emancipatory through an act of self-evisceration in which its histrionic qualities are once again excised, an act that has long characterized philosophy's persistently uneasy relationship with the theatre.

There is something troubling in this militant theatrical archaism (consistently setting itself up against anything and everything 'postmodern'), which is perhaps the absence of the trouble provided by the histrionic sensibility itself.[15] One aspect of such a sensibility is perhaps a simultaneous attraction and repulsion towards the messy affects and effects generated by the forms of being-together-apart offered by the 'confusion of genres' that is perhaps more characteristic

of the theatrical in its multifarious historical and contemporary manifestations than any hygienic regime of distance and separation. To attempt to realize that ambivalence productively (i.e. for the realm of artistic or political appearances), without seeking to overcome it in the name of thought, is a continuing difficulty. In fact, for Rancière, it is simply neither possible nor desirable:

> Aesthetic experience has a political effect to the extent that the loss of destination that it presupposes disturbs the way in which bodies fit their functions and destinations. What it produces is not a rhetorical persuasion about what has to be done … It is a multiplicity of folds and gaps in the fabric of common experience that change the cartography of the perceptible, the thinkable and the feasible. As such, it allows for new modes of political construction of common objects and new possibilities of collective enunciation. Now this political effect operates under the condition of an original disjunction, of an original effect, which is the suspension of any straight cause–effect relationship. The aesthetic effect first is an effect of dis-identification. … Now there is no measure of the dis-identifying effect.[16]

Rancière's insistence on an 'original disjunction' between political ends and aesthetic means implicitly and explicitly informs much recent critical writing on theatre and performance from within their own disciplinary perspectives.[17] These perspectives suspend a belief in the earlier promise of performance from the 1960s and 1970s as a means of direct political transformation, but acknowledge in different ways that the politics of theatre can now only be entrusted to the *possibility* of heterogeneous and incalculable imaginings by individual spectators of the *possibilities* of a new 'cartography of the perceptible, the thinkable and the feasible'. In other words, art is political, ethical or simply educational to the extent that it gives up the 'passion for the real' and refuses to 'do' politics, ethics or pedagogy in ways that they might be recognized as such in any particular politico-aesthetic configuration. This is achieved through the way in which the distance of aesthetic separation (taken as the integral to the theatrical) contingently permits the spectator an awareness of the inconsistencies in the seemingly ruthless machinery of representation and in his or her collective subsumption within it as a spectator. But there can be no expectation that this will be directly translated into action in any specific milieu, either in or outside of the immediate context of spectatorship itself.

With respect to the constitutive constraints and limitations of a subjectivity figured through spectatorship, the argument here has little to contest with the cautious politics of the post-Brechtian perspectives of these approaches. However, the implicit assumption that theatrical spectatorship is the only (or at least the hegemonic) mode of contemporary subjectification is surely open to question. That question would be directed by a sense that a *theatrocractic* thinking of politics might occlude the very 'new modes of political construction of common objects and new possibilities of collective enunciation' that it suggests might be made possible. In this respect, the philosophical diminishment that Badiou stages in his imaginary interlocutions with 'the empiricist', who demands examples of exemplary theatrical praxis, testifies to an all-too-familiar sense of their rarity in both theatrical and political experience. Of course, there is a much wider question at work here about the transitivity between the practice of philosophy and the world it attempts to articulate and address, as well as the limitations of too concrete or specific an analysis. However, while Rancière is brilliantly insightful about the pitfalls and paradoxes of the aesthetic regime in both politics and art, it seems that the *idea* of theatre as the public scene of a dis-identified community is infinitely more preferable to him in both metaphorical and literal terms to any of its actual attempted manifestations.

It would seem that the theatre-as-ideal, untainted by a 'confusion of genres', functions in both these philosophies (Badiou's and Rancière's) as an archaeological figure of the visible materialization of being-together-apart that is otherwise so conspicuously absent or problematic in contemporary thought. Such an appearance is invoked everywhere but exists nowhere, except in an unspecified future 'to come', in isolated episodes of urban revolution or in the archives of working-class history. For both Badiou and Rancière, it seems that it is only by paradoxically adhering to its 'proper' function as the production of the public as citizen-spectators that the thankfully creaky machinery of theatrical representation might work its dis-identifying political effects. While for Rancière the separation provided by spectatorship permits the worker to abandon the place of labour and activity prescribed for him or her by the police order, for Badiou it is the possibility that this state-sanctioned organization of bodies might be rendered eventful through its rare and unwitting perforation by uncanny Theatre-events that makes it isomorphic with a properly political process. Taken together, these determinations imply that the theatrical function – both inside and outside the theatre itself – is simply to remind the spectator of what it feels like to be put in one's place by taking one's allotted seat and

then to re-imagine, though entirely individual acts of ostensibly emancipatory interpretation or fidelity, alternatives to its space of placements in other times and in other places.

The basic conceit of the 1980s' BBC television cult children's programme, *Why Don't You Just Switch Off Your Television Set and Go and Do Something Less Boring Instead?* made it possible to think of oneself as an energetic and civic-minded variety of couch potato without actually having to leave the couch. Is the theatre's public purpose to convoke the possibly eventful assembly of a generic multiplicity of spectators – while at the same time symbolizing their moribund constitution as an audience – before continuing with business as usual and getting on with the show?[18] The flipside of this argument would be to suggest, as Rancière implies, that artists might be better off using their skills towards the representation of proletarian life (and death) within the confines of the public places traditionally set out by the state for such things: theatres, museums, galleries and festivals. In turn, this work would then be kept separate from aesthetic support – the making of posters is a historical example suggested by Rancière – provided to other kinds of activities of resistance which might use different methods of public engagement as the means to work towards the possible, but entirely contingent, emergence of politics.[19] However, this would seem to reinstate the logic of 'a place for everything and everything in its place' and a division of aesthetic labour that, while it might have characterized the imaginary Platonic republic, corresponds neither to any of the actual modes of aesthetic organization of capital nor to the experience of many living within its ambit.

Virtuosity and the appearance of the people

The mode of the aesthetic organization of capital that might, albeit unevenly and unequally, characterize the experience of multitude today is described in another recent attempt to think the contemporary collective, Paolo Virno's *A Grammar of the Multitude*.[20] Virno's text is also notable for the centrality of theatricality (figured as 'virtuosity' in the English translation) to contemporary social life, in a way that clearly connects with earlier discourses on the normative aspects of performativity. For Virno, the cardinal feature of contemporary labour is its transformation into an activity in which the generation of a separate end-product gives way to the figure of the worker as embodying his or her labour through virtuosic, contingent acts of human communication that require the presence (actual or virtual) of others. This happens in many, but by no means all, contexts that constitute work under capitalism, whether answering the phone in a call centre, nursing a sick hospital patient, addressing an executive meeting, serving coffee in a branch of a multinational chain, teaching schoolchildren or writing papers for academic journals. Virtuosic acts of communication are not restricted to sets of professionals or experts; they are the characteristic behaviour of almost anyone in the post-Fordist era because 'the fundamental model of virtuosity, the experience which is the base of the concept, is the activity of the speaker.' As Virno continues, this is not to say that 'car dashboards are no longer produced' but that 'the communication industry (or rather, the spectacle, or even yet, the culture industry) is an industry among others, with its specific techniques, its particular procedures, its peculiar profits, etc.; on the other hand, it also plays the role of *industry of the means of production*' (*GM* 61).

While, as Virno acknowledges, such an analysis has multiple precedents, the most significant contemporary aspect of this arrival of the multitude of virtuosos is the collapse of the preceding era's differentiation, based upon the Aristotelian categories of labour, politics and thought. Whereas politics was historically the discrete social activity that was 'without end product' and that required the presence of others, speakers and audiences and publicly organized space, now these elements saturate the politico-aesthetic world of work. The upshot of this is that real 'public space' is now the reconfigured space–time of perpetual labour, which no longer conforms to Fordist patterns of clear divisions between work time and 'free' or leisure time. Except that now work is not only increasingly figured as an opportunity for participatory conviviality and generalized sociability geared towards the production of communication, but also, more invisibly, *as* politics. In Virno's grammar, what cements this analogy between virtuosity and politics is the organization of this generalized form of public space through the creation of performances and audiences; in effect, through the setting up of a series of pseudo-theatres, asymmetric scenes of communication, display and self-presentation 'in role'.

It is this theatrical redoubling that Virno examines in the culture of life reduced to forms of work structured by the industry of communicative action. But the success of this redoubling has occurred not through strict delimitation of theatrical activity that would avoid any 'confusion of genres', but through the *informal generalization of such confusion*. What

characterizes the contemporary multitude is a complete adjustment to – but not necessarily a reconciliation with – life as an omnilateral exposure to a world lacking consistency, security and stability, experienced as a dialectic between an underlying dread and a seeking after refuge. This is adjustment achieved through a permanently instantiated series of stagings of extimacy, performances that render redundant notions of public versus private, functioning as incommensurate and often conflictual 'strategies of reassurance' through which 'the many' cope with the fundamental disquiet of 'not feeling at home' (*GM* 34). This ambiguous thinking of the multitude can go two ways. From it can spring 'ghastly forms of protection or forms of protection capable of achieving a real sense of comfort' (in other words, some forms of the police order are simply not as unequal as others) or 'it can even give way to a non-public public sphere, to a *non-governmental* public sphere'. Virno sums up:

> [I]f the publicness of the intellect does not yield to the realm of a public sphere, of a political space in which the many can tend to common affairs, then it produces terrifying effects. *A publicness without a public sphere*: here is the negative side – the evil, if you wish – of the experience of the multitude (*GM* 40).

But Virno's text is silent about what forms this 'non-public, public sphere' might take. Given that he has been careful to provide a grammar of terms such as 'people', 'citizen', 'state' and 'multitude', the absence from his analysis of as central a term as 'public' itself is surprising. While it is tempting to align a refusal to exemplify the public sphere with the subtractive understandings of multitude, might it also be more directly attributable to the return to the strangely unproblematic use of the term 'the public'?

The preceding discussion has attempted to indicate the way in which the concept of the public may still be conditioned by a particular form of theatre, as idea and ideal. What is 'evil' for Virno (and equally problematic for Rancière and Badiou in different but commensurable ways) appears to be the generalization of this situation and its dislocation from any particular scene. The dis-ease of a generalized theatricality is thus diagnosed via the very lack of *a* theatre, the absence of tangible embodiments of the public sphere that might catalyse the evental formation of politics. Hence the obvious importance of the theatre and its metaphors in the attempt to address this deficiency. But if the notion of the public is indeed conceptually linked to a type of theatrical apparatus that no longer structures social or political relations, then the question of politics today centres on the ways in which the aesthetic (re)organization of the situation of a space of placements actually occurs. How *do* the people appear? Put more concretely, in the terms that Virno and others offer as possible alternatives to 'publicness without a public sphere': what are the aesthetic forms of the politics of civil disobedience, exit or escape beyond the predictable (and predictably policed) tropes of protest or the clandestine tactics of imperceptibility? If, as Hallward and many others suggest, philosophy ought to be able to account for processes such as 'organization, simplification, mobilization, decision, polarization',[21] then it might have to engage with (non-)events as banal as the meeting, a serial form of collective activity whose centrality to almost any kind of political sequence is outweighed only by the almost complete neglect of its formal and aesthetic characteristics, except in isolated examples of cultural anthropology or the dreary formulas of management texts on their 'effective' control.

In some more recent analyses, the improvised aesthetics and pedagogical self-organization of anti-capitalist protest events are articulated as spaces of radical learning. These scenes are described as evidencing a range of expressive and intellectual capacities beyond taking to the streets (from chanting to speech-making to the meeting forms for decision-making) that are mobilized in an assemblage that both requires and generates very particular knowledges and skills – to use terms that themselves are otherwise taken as axiomatically anti-democratic for Badiou and Rancière.[22] The 'encampment', in its overlapping characteristics of autonomy, control and necessity might be another such zone, not totally circumscribed by its historical binding of 'the camp' to the Holocaust or to current instances of the 'state of exception' for para-legal incarceration. An encampment is a constructed environment or situation made out of a specific set of architectural, choreographic and theatrical techniques in which control and autonomy are not necessarily mutally exclusive operations.[23] Recent analyses of the experience of economic migrants to the EU show that the transit camps in countries such as Greece are not simply places of confinement and exclusion. Rather, they are 'used' in complex and often unanticipated ways as nodes or knots in the flow of migration to facilitate the speeding up or slowing down of the temporality of population movement and mobility, which paradoxically make visible what would otherwise remain largely imperceptible, if no less significant, in the unevenly globalized lifeworld.[24]

These analyses also return us to the familiar notion that the concept of appearance itself (and the primacy its gives to the visual) may be problematically structured via a kind of rudimentary theatricality in which one is *either* actor *or* spectator, onstage or offstage, visible or invisible, in the streets en masse or sequestered in private. But they also suggest the limits to an aesthetics of emancipation figured as an incalculable potential for individualized acts of critical spectatorship that may or may not grasp this very problem. If the examples outlined above seem like less than ideal places for the 'setting up as a theatre of … the gap between a place where the *demos* exists and a place where it does not', then this perhaps indicates the advantages of abandoning the literal and critical comforts of idealized theatrical separation for encounters of a different kind, in which other configurations of specularization – with different temporal and spatial dimensions – are at work.

Notes

1. Roland Barthes, 'Témoignage sur le théâtre' (1965), in *Œuvres complètes*, Vol 1, ed. Eric Marty, Paris: Seuil, 1993, p. 1530.
2. The obvious landmarks here are Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA and London, 2000; Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, Penguin Putnam, London, 2004.
3. Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, Les Presses du Réel, Paris, 1996; Grant Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art*, University of California Press, Berkley and London, 2004; Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel, *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy*, MIT Press, London and Cambridge MA, 2004.
4. An English introduction to the project can be found at www.evensfoundation.be/downloads/campement urbain(anglais).pdf. I use this example because it is one also used by Jacques Rancière, whose 'theatrocracy' is discussed later, in a recent consideration of aesthetic separation. See Jacques Rancière, 'Aesthetic Separation, Aesthetic Community: Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art', *Art and Research: A Journal of Ideas, Contexts and Methods*, vol. 2, no. 1, Summer 2008, available at www.artandresearch.org.uk/v2n1/rancière.html.
5. Maurice Blanchot, *The Unavowable Community* (1983), Station Hill Press, Barrytown NY, 1989; Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community* (1986), University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1989.
6. Alain Badiou, 'Theses on Theater', in *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, trans. Alberto Toscano, Stanford University Press, Stanford CA, 2004, p. 113.
7. Alain Badiou, *Rhapsodie pour le Théâtre*, Imprimeries Nationale, Paris, 1990; translated by Bruno Bosteels as *Rhapsody for the Theatre*, *Theatre Survey*, vol. 49, no. 2, November 2008, pp. 187–238. English version hereafter cited as *RT*.
8. Badiou, 'Theses on Theater', p. 113.
9. The philosophical anthropology implicit in Badiou's work is explored in Nina Power, 'Towards an Anthropology of Infinitude: Badiou and the Political Subject', *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy*, vol. 2, no. 2, pp. 186–209; available at www.cosmosandhistory.org.
10. Peter Hallward, 'Staging Equality', *New Left Review* 37, January–February 2006, pp. 109–29.
11. Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill, Continuum, London, 2006, p. 14.
12. Rancière quoted in Hallward, 'Staging Equality', p. 111.
13. Jacques Rancière, 'The Emancipated Spectator', *Art-Forum International*, vol. 45, no. 7, 2007, p. 275.
14. The specific examples mentioned in 'Aesthetic Separation, Aesthetic Community' are Ritty Pahn's 2004 film *S-21, The Death Machine of the Khymer Rouge* and Pedro Costa's 2001 film *Vanda's Room*.
15. There are obvious gendered aspects to such a 'sensibility' that have been extensively explored in both feminist philosophies and theatre histories.
16. Rancière, 'Aesthetic Separation, Aesthetic Community', p.13.
17. Rancière's approach to the politics of spectatorship is broadly consonant with that of several of the texts in a recent series of short books on theatre and its various supplements, including Joe Kelleher's *Theatre and Politics*, Nick Ridout's *Theatre and Ethics* and Helen Freshwater's *Theatre and Audience*, all Palgrave, London, 2009; Alan Read's *Theatre, Intimacy and Engagement*, London, Palgrave, 2008; as well as Hans-Thies Lehmann's *Postdramatic Theatre,* trans. Karen Jürs-Munby, Routledge, London and New York, 1999, which explicitly delimits theatre in particular (and implicitly art in general) to a politics of perception.
18. This contradiction is the subject of Peter Handke's 1966 play *Offending the Audience*.
19. 'An Exchange with Jacques Rancière', *Art and Research: A Journal of Ideas, Contexts and Methods*, vol. 2. no. 1, Summer 2008, p. 7; available at www.artandresearch.org.uk/v2n1/jrexchange.html.
20. Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life*, trans. Isabella Bertoletti, James Cascaito and Andrea Casson, Semiotext(e), New York, 2004. Hereafter cited as *GM*.
21. Hallward, 'Staging Equality', p. 126.
22. Despite its hostility towards traditional forms of sustained political organization and trade unionism, Masteneh Shah-Shuja's *Zones of Proletarian Development* (Openmute, London, 2008), reviewed in *RP* 153, offers an excellent contribution in this respect, especially in uncoupling events of protest from their popular dramatization in the mass media as more or less articulate demands by citizens for redress that might be granted from within the political order that are somehow always infiltrated by a faceless minority dedicated to 'mindless' violence.
23. As catalogued in Charlie Hailey's possibly overly comprehensive *Camps: A* Guide to 21st-Century Space, MIT Press, Cambridge MA and London, 2009.
24. Dimitris Papadopoulous, Niamh Stephenson and Vassilis Tsianos, *Escape Routes: Control and Subversion in the Twenty-First Century*, Pluto Press, London and Ann Arbor MI, 2008; reviewed below in this issue of *RP*.

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They the people

Problems of alter-globalization

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

You have asked for current thinking about different concepts and forms of political collectivity.* If I were speaking as an academic, I would, I suppose, look once again at the implications of 'multitudes', as conceived by our colleagues and allies Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt. Speaking as an activist, however, I am obliged to say that the bold and indeed brave and intriguing notion of the multitude does not quite match up yet to the practical fact of the transformation of Antonio Gramsci's Modern Prince into what is too easily called international civil society. I will speak about the world's 'people' as constructed by this haphazardly put together episteme, 'international' by default.

The developmental logic of the expression 'international civil society' might be taken to run as follows: first step, 'social' as opposed to 'political' – in other words, movement as opposed to party; second step, non-governmental, effective social engagement as opposed to party politics; third step, a management-style decision not to use the negative ('non'-governmental), but to invent a positive, not-state-therefore-civil-society. The crucial political-theoretical fact that the emergence of 'civil society' presupposed a certain type of social contract, which linked it to the production of an urbanity in a controlling relationship with a specific state, is completely ignored here. The importance of the *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* to the bourgeois state is therefore precisely forgotten, as the possibility of the welfare state as accountable is closed off more and more in the interest of a globalization that alter-globalization must accept in order to come into existence. This potted possible history is always in my mind as I use the expression 'international civil society'.[1]

It is well known that Gramsci thought of the Party as the Modern Prince.[2] As Laclau and Mouffe, and before them Christine Buci-Glucksmann, have pointed out, the ideas in Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*, which he circled around in many different ways, are most often what Derrida has called *pharmakon*.[3] Ideas like hegemony, the Party and indeed the state have the ambivalence of something that can be both poison and medicine. Gramsci's work is a blueprint for practical and epistemological activism. Parties still have a degree of archaic importance in local and national politics, with their local and national traditions, spiced by human intrigue. After the failure of state and revolution, in this era of world governance, the importance that Gramsci perceived in the intellectual formation called the Party, belonging to a democratic international socialism, has displaced itself. The mood of the Left is altogether in favour of what, twenty years ago, Immanuel Wallerstein, Giovanni Arrighi and Terence Hopkins called 'anti-systemic movements' – the then newish social movements – extra-state collective action to attend to problems neglected by state and party alike.[4] Wallerstein's fear then was that they would seek state power. Now, these movements have gained so much strength that they bypass the state almost completely and provoke us into asking if they should take the helm of world governance. My title today is directed to their clientele.

What is called terrorism can also be defined as extra-state collective action. George W. Bush attempted to take up arms against this from the point of view of the state. I will not here be able to consider how the 'war on terror' haphazardly took the shape of international governance, in spite of the petulant and self-centralizing role of the USA. I would, however, like to draw a parallel between the war on terror and the control of migration. For just as the violent management of international extra-state violence was undertaken *nationally* by the United States of America and became internationalized, so migration is provoked

* This is the text of a talk to the *Radical Philosophy* conference, *Power to the People?*, London, 9 May 2009. I should like to dedicate these few words to Professor Nanjundaswamy, valiant fighter against Cargill and Monsanto, who died in 2004, and who was imprisoned for destroying a Kentucky Fried Chicken in Bangalore, India in 1997. It was my great good fortune to spend some time with him that year. I could not join forces with him because, although we ourselves could converse in English, his field of operation was in the idiom of Kannada, the language of his native state, mine in Bengali. However, as I will argue here, linguistic diversity is not an obstacle to an effectively international socialism, but rather its constitutive double bind.

by globalization in a heterogeneous way, as can be seen in Amit Bhaduri's critical focus on what the Right calls 'the managerial state', brought into being by the pressures of globalization.[5] We live in an uneven world, determined by global *and* state-based imperatives, with geopolitical difference determined by history and geography, not yet inhabited by a multitude. Into this world steps the international civil society, 'we the saviours', with its clientele of 'they, the people', and a jubilant cry: 'Another world is possible.'

After Bernard Cassen's 2003 interview in *New Left Review*,[6] we all know that the ATTAC (Association pour la Taxation des Transactions pour l'Aide de Citoyens) – the French organization at the helm of alter-globalization or the international integration of globalization – spawned the World Social Forum. But it is also possible to say that the World Social Forum is a necessary outcome of that slow failure of state and revolution, by internal and external forces, which is one of the major narratives of the past century. This *décalage*, between the efficient and the necessary cause of the World Social Forum, has created a radical philosophy that can allow for only a sentimental version of auto-critique, if at all; far indeed from the systemic goals of Marxism. The difference between 'Another Europe is Possible' and 'Another World is Possible' is a crucial part of this.

The South and the North

It was between the inception of the social movements in the 1980s and the founding of the ATTAC in 1998 that the slow appropriation of these movements by the forces of international capital and the recognition of so-called international civil society by our imperfect but venerable organization of world governance (I refer, of course, to the United Nations) took place, in 1994: the opening of the NGO forum at the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo. It is significant that the theme of the ICPD dealt with reproductive heteronormativity in the context of 'development', which was blatantly an alibi for transnational capitalism, then even without any serious commitment to the figure of 'sustainability', hovering over the nakedness of its double bind. Never had the real difference between North and South come clearer, and also, of course, the usefulness of acknowledging gender in this re-coding of 'the people'.[7] This is a supremely important point. None of the words in the subtitle of this conference – the people, proletariat, workers, masses, nations, communities, multitudes, commons – pays the slightest attention to gendering. But capitalism, as it freed labour, also produced what we recognize as feminism in the enlightened European eighteenth century. At last, in Cairo, the two came together as that crucial connection between town and state, included within Marx's own narrative, loosened. This is something that requires an *Eighteenth Brumaire* type of analysis of its own.

I travelled with UBINIG that year, a Bangladeshi non-governmental organization that was not registered as an NGO, precisely because of the narrative I have laid out in the international context, and also because in the context of the poorer nation-states, the connections between the managerial state and the NGOs were in fact strong. In other words, UBINIG wanted to retain an older sense of 'we the people', recoding ideological feudality in the tradition of a Rosa Luxemburg or a W.E.B. Du Bois theorizing the general strike, where the agent is the 'worker'; not in terms of a strike, which would relate to the Gramscian concept of the Modern Prince, but as slowly creating another world – not as decreed by the whirlwind activism of the World Social Forum.

We were working against pharmaceutical dumping on women's bodies; our sense of reproductive rights was against enforced sterilization. We could only be perceived as 'consensus breakers' against the overwhelming Northern perception that the right to a legal abortion – which we strictly supported, of course – was the only right that could be mentioned in the draft resolution. As a member of the Asian Women's Human Rights Council, I wrote an open letter that year to Gro Harlem Brundtland, then chair of the World Commission on Environment and Development. I cite it here to give you a sense of what it is to think from the perspective of Bangladesh, to create a simulacrum of membership in a 'we', rather than a distant obligation to a 'they'. I am not Bangladeshi, I am Indian. The perspective is here a linguistic link that pre-dates artificial frontiers. The national language of India is not my mother tongue, but the national language of Bangladesh is. In order to come close to achieving a simulacrum of idiomatic continuity with oppressed groups so that the activism in a social movement can represent them as portrait – 'we' – as well as proxy – *for* 'us' – activists have to learn to inhabit the 'lingual memory' of the oppressed. (The idea that the 'oppressed themselves' agitate in the social movements is questionable.) Since the question of representation in the social movements is not subject to the abstract structures of state-run democratic procedure (for better or for worse), this is particularly important in this sphere and gives the lie to universalism in a practical way. Unless universalism is mediated by linguistic

diversity, and not by the ruse of metropolitan 'translation' alone, ATTAC (which has my admiration and support in principle) will not have to face the problem of the named-language register, but the World Social Forum does. Without exaggeration, this is a baseline issue that should not be reduced to the metropolitan debate on universalism, singularity and particularism. Any attempt at socialism run through inter-state agreements, by hierarchically arranged vanguards connected by hegemonic languages, defines the people as 'they the people', and crumbles easily under the seduction of capitalism. In contemporary London, for example, the politically correct acknowledgement that the language of a majority of Bangladeshi British is the language of Sylhet (a specific district of Bangladesh, a language not generally understandable across the rich dialectal map of Bengali) transforms Bengali into a private language, in the sense described by Ngugi wa Thiong'o.[8] Here we need to attend to Gramsci's notion of historical linguistics as a play of power, in his extraordinary last notebook, no. 29, revising his earlier position on national language and dialect, as his native Sardinian was grammatized.[9] We need also to remind ourselves that migrant activism, the most urgent field of action today, is the primary theatre of they-(allocthon or autochthon, depending on your situation)-the-people-ism.

I want to attend to the deep separation between 'us' the gendered people and 'they' the gendered people, reflected in 'us' the classed people and 'they' the classed gendered people, which relates unevenly to racialization. That is where current conceptions of those synonyms must go – 'multitude' as well – in order to be in the least effective in our world.

Here is my letter.

A Response to Gro Harlem Brundtland

Ms Brundtland has started a good and spirited discussion. Her criticism of religious obscurantism, her emphasis on the education of women, and her call for decriminalizing abortion, combating sexually transmitted diseases, and expanding adolescent sex education cannot be questioned, no more than can be her perception of the connection between 'the peoples of the industrialized North and the privileged in the developing South', and her general emphasis on accountability. There remain, however, some assumptions that do need questioning.

1. An apparently innocent descriptive remark, '95 per cent of population increase takes place in developing countries … the ecologically fragile areas where current numbers … reflect an appalling disequilibrium between people and Earth's resources', resonates with an unspoken assumption that troubles those with some experience of the running debate: the poorest are guiltiest for the current global disaster, the very guiltiest being the poorest women of the South. The move from this to specious comparisons between the harm done by the resource-poor peasant of the South and the monstrous expenditure of resources in the North is only too familiar to some of us.

2. When overpopulation as the root cause of global disaster is so unquestioned, the approach to education becomes mechanical. 'The girl who receives her diploma will have fewer babies than her sister who does not' has a nice ring, and no doubt has statistical support. But internationally aided education schemes have peculiar priorities. As Amaryllis Tiglao Torres states, women's education in the Philippines is 'tailor fit for the dominant forces in the global economy' (Jill Conway, ed., *The Politics of Women's Education*; the book makes this point for the entire South). The control, either of the bodies of women through coercive population policy, or of their minds through an 'education' that propagates the 'values' underlying the financialization of the globe, is too often celebrated as free choice and 'women in development'.

3. Sex education for the adolescent is another excellent idea. But it only fits the established infrastructure in the North. Sex education schemes for the adolescents of the rural or urban poor in the South, without prior incentives to sustained social redistribution, is of no practical use. The popular videographic image of a woman oppressed by tradition and ignorance waiting to be 'rescued' by Northern body control has little reference to the existing situation: people suffering from centuries of neglect, now bewildered and helpless before an obsessive focus on the reproductive systems of women even as general health declines, and all resistance is foiled by governments mortgaged to the forces of so-called development.

For 'family planning as a universal right for all', 'reproductive rights' must be redefined in a global perspective. Brundtland's emphasis on abortion was perhaps provoked by Cairo. We are against the criminalization of abortion but perceive access to safe and legal abortion as an important and *society-specific* issue. In a situation where extreme poverty makes children mean social security, the right to abortion may be immaterial. In a situation where coercive contraception lays waste a woman's reproductive and general health, a right to abortion may be irrelevant. In a situation where the absence of resources makes it impossible to think of male and female children becoming equally competitive in future, the right to abortion may facilitate the removal of female fetuses, where internalized gendering is misrepresented as woman's choice.

We applaud the Prime Minister's obvious goodwill. But when she speaks of 'allocating at least 4 per cent of Official Development Assistance to population programs', she should take cognizance of the obvious blackmailing potential in the connection between aid packages and population control

(although the letter of the law may sometimes reassure us to the contrary): 'control the reproductive bodies of your poorest women [and men] or else.' To 'empower' women would mean to start a process that would reverse this trend, so that infrastructural supports may be secured through which these women, by no means passive victims, can resist the crimes committed in the name of population control.

Brundtland speaks of 'accountability' in a general way. It may not be possible in a keynote address to be more specific. But the long-established consensus among activist NGOs in the South has been to ask for monitored accountability for multinational pharmaceuticals which ravage the bodies of the women and, through chemical fertilizers and pesticides, the land. Therefore, while commending Gro Harlem Brundtland's words, we regret that the best of the North still remains set in the usual and recognizable mould.

In such brief compass, I can only hint at the immense effort required to operate a transition from this earned bitterness about Northern radicalism to the possibility of working together, to overlook, however briefly, the rift between us and them.

State and party

Let us consider the transition achieved as I express my conviction that ATTAC is most astute in focusing on the Tobin tax on foreign-exchange transactions. In doing so, it targets finance capital, the not-so-silent silent killer in capitalist globalization. We must also appreciate the idea of a global tax revenue fund. The thought of an equitable global tax revenue fund can be entertained only on an ad hoc basis today. We are obliged to recall that the work of taxes is to *sustain* a polity, not to solve problems on an ad hoc basis, nor to shore up private-sector voluntarism. For the effective functioning of an equitable global tax revenue, in a divided world, the structurally imaginable instrument is still the state structure, although it is a broken instrument. It can be imagined that the oppressed (I am using this word because it is not on the list making up the subtitle to this event, although it is of course susceptible to the crosshatching that I proposed when I mentioned the words on your list) will engage the public sphere of the state, and thus step into the 'we' of the citizen. It cannot be imagined that s/he will engage the structure of world governance without the prosthesis of international civil society, as part of the perennial 'they'. The emergence of a global functioning structure is, in its turn, predicated upon the establishment of a parity that would make the World Social Forum powerfully *advisory*. This question cannot be begged. Only a romantic part-time academic activist would deny this. In spite of the many ecstatic remarks of the genre 'the slum dwellers in Mumbai know how to build a just world', we have to take into account the difference between our justified moral outrage and their equally justified self-interest. Freedom *from* oppression does not automatically lead to the use of that freedom *to* redistribute. As for the UN's 'millennium goals', you may read Samir Amin's criticism, in *Monthly Review*.[10]

Yet a democratic state entails parties. And the party today, the intellectual formation envisaged as the party by Gramsci, has displaced itself. Yet it is still the only real candidate for a Modern Prince. Our list of aporetic tasks must include rethinking the definition of democracy as competition between parties. The aporetic is a situation where we cannot cross over fully to the other side, yet must continue to perform carefully mustered imperfect crossings, manoeuvring wars entailing impermanent wars of position. Such a description releases the aporetic potential of that Gramscian distinction.[11] I might mention that the aporia is often Socrates' gift to his students, especially in the dialogues surrounding his death.[12] This structure is also classically raced, classed and gendered as women's work, agricultural and domestic work. The Socratic maieutic metaphorizes this, and the horticultural crosses the divides, literally and metaphorically. Shall we call the task of tending the texture of the party in the structure of the state 'gardening' or 'housekeeping', if 'aporetic' sends the wrong message? Confidence in the urban network model altogether ignores the nature of this necessary labour.

In effect, all parties today are more or less capitalist in their economic policy. The difference lies in the degree of privatization. The platform-orientation of parties, in an economically restructured globe, invariably deal with questions of identity, shading into the mobilization of the differences between discourses of the transcendental, gender-in-religion. After all, the transnational agencies that run welfare these days, in international civil society, do not work through party competition. We are suggesting that parliamentary representation is a social contract. We are proposing an aporetic and persistent cleansing of the state of nationalism. The task of theory is to rethink the party structure as welfare-issue-based collectivities that urge the state into redistribution. This too calls for (subaltern) epistemological transformation on a massive scale – uncoercive rearrangement of desires on a humanities-based Du Bois–Gramscian model, rather than the claim for a transformed episteme based on the presence of electronic telecommunication.

Capitalist globalization cannot continue to be the only source of authority and legitimation in our world. The empirical-in-the-aporetic is more challenging than a self-legitimating 'theory' that makes no difference to the forces that run the world.

ATTAC has some theoretical sense of the importance of the Gramsci who thought a 'philosophy of praxis' in an Italy divided by more than class, and took Lenin a step further into an idea of hegemony that saw the state as *pharmakon*, medicine as well as poison, working with a civil society that is both imbricated with it and remains its monitor. Bernard Cassen says this in his interview:

> we can envisage other ways of living and organizing society than those we have at present. So our task is to persuade the largest number of people possible of the viability of such alternatives, and prepare the ground for a Gramscian hegemony that would allow different policies to be realized.[13]

This statement is made by an enlightened journalist writing for *Le Monde diplomatique*, interested in helping the world without systemic change. 'The largest number of people' is a journalistic way of saying 'multitude', and carries the same problems. This is where the deep double bind facing the uniformization needed by a democratic international socialism (not easily accessible from any benevolent capitalist/corporatist globalization, as alter-globalization seems to imagine) must be confronted by activists or remain doomed to repeat a Little Britain Marxism as a panacea against statements as wild as mine. In the context of the global South, the failure of the first Bandung on the altar of nationalism is no more than a lesson. The second Bandung, called by South Africa, is not necessarily the solution. The Cancún group – Brazil, China, India, South Africa – is also marked by the state. The usefulness of the deeply ambiguous state structure – so easily claimed by party competition, nationalist patriarchy and the forces of fascism – is not over in the postcolonial world. One unintended consequence of alter-globalization may be to accept the loss of accountability of the state restructured by neoliberalism, and thus to lose the only access to a contracted 'we the people' that we have. Revolution leading to a change in state-formation looking forward to an altered globe may not have a chance any more. But the dangerous structure of the state, persistently cleared of nationalism, party competition as such, and a merely economic regionalism, as a locus of redress, may still be useful in a fractured globe, if only as a transition. It is this persistence, forever looking forward to a transition, which is the aporetic.

Education

This is a tough entry into a concept of the people. It is reminiscent of Marx's third thesis on Feuerbach, in which he insisted that the built-in power structure between teacher and taught must constantly be overturned in order to institute change.[14] (Unfortunately, a mistranslation in the English versions, invariably translating overturning (*Umwälzung*) as revolution, makes the thesis useless in English.)

In the European and Latin American theatre, ATTAC calls upon the resources of the state. This is the state in its international face, seeking to win back the right to redistribution. When expanded internationally through the World Social Forum and other institutions of the social movement, this is the force of thinking a left future. Yet, if unsupplemented by the ethico-political education of each generation of the subaltern as potential agents of redistribution, this future may come to as ignoble an end as the Bolshevik or the Maoist experiment. Like class, subaltern is a position without identity. We are not, therefore, speaking necessarily of hetero-normatively reproduced generations, but rather of the irreducible and determining *production of subalternization* in all systems using capital, including socialism. Another aporetic task.

When Gramsci had time in jail, he elaborated his plans on education. ATTAC sees itself as an 'action-oriented movement of popular education'. What does this mean today? 'Essentially, that militants must be well-informed, intellectually equipped for action. We don't want people turning out on demonstrations without really knowing why.'[15] In the context of language-learning, the World Social Forum faces certain kinds of problems that the ATTAC does not. Educating into alter-globalization, the models of teach-ins, workers' education and the pedagogy of the oppressed, or indeed the nineteenth-century Ligue de l'Enseignement mentioned by Cassen, will not travel to the largest sectors of the electorate of the global South. Gramsci, had already gone far beyond the notion of education as adequate information. Today, in the context not only of an allocthonic Europe but also of a world, I am insisting that access to subaltern idiom is extremely important. NGOs building schools or Human Rights Watch shaming states into good behaviour are not a systematic plan for the future. If we want to 'change the world', alter-globalism must think of the education of the disenfranchised into disinterest, in a double bind with the interest of class struggle: 'democracy … cannot mean merely that an unskilled worker can become skilled', writes Gramsci. 'It must mean that every "citizen" can "govern" and

that society places him, even if only abstractly, in a general condition to achieve this.'[16] From 'they' to 'we', however aporetic, imperfect…

In conclusion, then, let me say that we need the state structure to fight the power of the big snarling beast-states that prowl still in a Hobbesian world. In the geopolitical sphere, which manages capitalist globalization as crisis, the alter-globalization lobby, as well as Euro-specific Marxism feudally benevolent towards coloured immigrants, is inefficiently and insufficiently oppositional. We need 'citizens' still, to work the state structures of rising nations impatient with the arrogance of European leadership, slouching towards Africa without a civilizing mission. For that, Gramsci's project – coming to terms with ideology practically, as *pharmakon*, instrumentalizing the organic intellectual – is still on target. The impatience of the World Social Forum, its idealist love affair with the digital, is tempered here by the fact that 'Intellectuals develop slowly, far more slowly than any other social group. … to think it possible that such intellectuals' – self-selected moral entrepreneurs – 'can, *en masse* break with the entire past and situate themselves totally upon the terrain of a new ideology, is absurd.'[17] Alter-globalization is at best based on a hastily cobbled relationship between the intellectual and the subaltern in the broadest possible sense.[18]

Gramsci thought of the dictatorship of the proletariat as a transition to a democratic world-state. In a transformed conjuncture, I am asking you to consider the possibility of the state *structure* as an aporetic transition to the globe. That structure can be useful in actively constructing a 'we the people' that must be persistently fractured along the lines I have indicated. Most transformations academically proposed require divine intervention. This one is fairly susceptible to a collective movement that takes advantage of the digital. This will mean relaxing the implicit and only sometimes self-critical control of the movement by the North and the more feudal North-in-the-South. In the old days, when obliged to deal with NGOs, we would inquire into their funding and evaluation structures. In globalized capitalism, can a tendentially aporetic state structure serve as damage control for a persistent rewriting of 'they' as 'we'? I ask the international Left to make it their double-binding question, making internationality itself aporetic in the linguistic diversity of the world.[19] I am back where I began.

Notes

1. This fable is widely accepted among activists. For a more academic suggestion, see Gil Eyal, 'Anti-politics and the Spirit of Capitalism: Dissidents, Monetarists, and the Czech Transition to Capitalism', *Theory and Society* 29, 2000, p. 52. What follows may seem 'too empirical' to a particular habit of writing systematic theory in a self-enclosed and self-legitimizing space. However, I write in the conviction that theory and the empirical are irreducibly imbricated. Indeed, theory is in the empirical, and the empirical cannot be thought as such without the intervention of the theoretical.
2. Antonio Gramsci, *The Modern Prince*, trans. Louis Marks, International Publishers, New York, 1957.
3. '[O]ne and the same suspicion envelops, in the same gesture, the book ['theory'] and the drug [*pharmakon*], writing and the occult and ambiguous efficacy, given over to empiricism and chance, operating by the ways of magic and not the laws of necessity.' Jacques Derrida, 'Plato's Pharmacy', in *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1981, pp. 61–171; p. 73, translation modified.
4. Giovanni Arrighi, Terence Hopkins and Immanuel Wallerstein, *Antisystemic Movements*, Verso, London, 1989.
5. Amit Bhaduri, *Development with Dignity: A Case for Full Employment*, National Book Trust, New Delhi, 2005.
6. Bernard Cassen, 'On the Attack', *New Left Review* 19, January–February 2003, pp. 41–60.
7. For the United Nations' contradictory role in this, see Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, '"Woman" as Theatre: United Nations Conference on Women, Beijing 1995', *Radical Philosophy* 75, Jan/Feb 1996, pp. 2–4.
8. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, Curry, London, 1986.
9. Antonio Gramsci, *The Gramsci Reader*, ed. David Forgacs, NYU Press, New York, 2000, pp. 353–60.
10. Samir Amin, 'The Millennium Development Goals: A Critique from the South', *Monthly Review*, vol. 57, no. 10, March 2006; available at www.monthlyreview.org/0306amin.htm.
11. Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, trans. J.A. Buttigieg, Columbia University Press, New York, 2007, Vol. 3, pp. 168–9.
12. Plato, *Phaedo* 91b is among the most poignant articulations of this.
13. Cassen, 'On the Attack', p. 56.
14. Karl Marx, 'Theses on Feuerbach', in *Early Writings*, trans. Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton, Vintage Books, New York, 1975, pp. 421–3.
15. Cassen, 'On the Attack', pp 44–5.
16. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, International Publishers, New York, 1971, p. 40.
17. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from Political Writings (1921–1926)*, International Publishers, New York, 1978, p. 462.
18. I have long warned against the credulous vanity of believing that unmediated cyberliteracy is an unquestioned good, that the electronic broadening of access does not mean an automatic epistemic transformation. See, for example, my 'Megacity', *Grey Room* 1, 2000, pp. 8–25. Now an excellent new book provides research and argument to support this: David Golumbia, *The Cultural Logic of Computation*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA and London, 2009.
19. I discuss linguistic diversity in 'Rethinking Comparativism', *New Literary History*, forthcoming.

The involution of photography

Andrew Fisher

As we settle further into the era of digital media and globalized visual culture, it might be tempting to think that photography holds no more than historical interest. Yet it continues to feature in debates with considerable significance for the present.[1] The terms by which it was negotiated in the twentieth century – the print, the negative and the mechanical-optical apparatus, the affective experience of a moment stilled, and any truth that its rendering promises – have been technically and culturally displaced and expanded. New instabilities have become familiar and have distanced us from how photography was understood, even in the fairly recent past. The current historical conjuncture is marked by a widespread suspicion that existing theories – including those that turned, in the 1970s, to Marxism, feminist critique, semiotics or psychoanalysis so as to politicize and contest mainstream photographic culture – might no longer be adequate to photography's contemporary situation. That photography still matters, however, can be evidenced, prosaically and contingently, by noting the increasing number of new scholarly journals and exhibitions devoted to its past, present and future in recent years.[2] There is, in this – as Fred Ritchin is only the latest to note – a sense that the undoing of photography's prior certainties constitutes an ending and an enlargement. The fate of photography provides an 'expansive filter' through which to chart the 'chaos of possibilities that emerge and recede, back up and move forward, crisscrossing each other.'[3] Expectations of the new and the old, the obsolete and as yet only anticipated, are thrown into temporal disarray as its openness to reformation gives the photographic past a futural slant.

One case in point is the photographic index. Photography has often been thought to produce indexes of things in a way that enables its ontological characterization. The idea is that the photographic index arises out of a strict relation the apparatus establishes with something that has to be in front of the camera in order for its image to be produced. However, the lack of motivation in this process tends also to indicate other (contextual and dialogic) meanings. As Blake Stimson and Robin Kelsey noted recently, photographic indexicality is tendentious and has shifted 'from scientific guarantee to social promise to myth'. They think of this history as foregrounding a 'double indexicality' in photography's 'peculiar pointing both outward to the world before the camera and inward to the photographer behind it.'[4] In the wake of new media, this relation has shifted again. Whilst one might be sceptical of the ways in which indexicality has been used as a key to the definition of photography, it is striking that in some senses – at the very moment at which the mechanical-optical apparatus guaranteeing its sense is eclipsed – the ontological purchase of the concept on theorizations of the photographic has only seemed to increase. Certainly, this marks recent controversies between those who want its apparent sudden obsolescence to renew indexicality for the task of capping photography off historically, and those who carry on using the term regardless of the ground shifting beneath them. Indexicality has come to act as a retrospective and comprehensive stand-in for a range of related terms (such as evidence and reference), which, at various stages in its history, served different ends in contests over photography's character and meaning. This does not leave the present untouched. One might say that photography is undergoing an involution registered by the transformation of indexicality. The historically freighted and politically ambivalent ways in which this might unfold call for close scrutiny.

Three recent books adopt different approaches to understanding photography in this regard.* Michael Fried's *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never*

* Arielle Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*, trans., Rela Mazall and Ruvik Danieli, Zone Books, New York, 2008. 585 pp. £26.95 hb., 978 1 89095 188 7; Michael Fried, *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2008. 410 pp., £28.50 hb., 978 0 300 13684 5; Hilde Van Gelder and Helen Westgeest, eds., *Photography between Poetry and Politics: The Critical Position of the Photographic Medium in Contemporary Art*, Leuven University Press, Leuven, 2008. 191 pp., £32.00 pb., 978 90 5867 664 1.

Before is a grandiose attempt to interpret a mainstream tendency in post-1980s' photographic art as the redemption of certain modernist values. In *The Civil Contract of Photography* Arielle Azoulay develops a novel account of photography's conflicted and fundamentally social form, reframing its political imperatives in light of the 'civil contract' she takes to subtend the production and consumption of photographic images. There are significant points of relation between these two publications. One is the manner in which they deal with Barthes's *Camera Lucida*. As many – not least Jacques Rancière in the previous issue of this journal – have noted, the pivotal influence of this text is marked by certain historical ironies.[5] Barthes's account of indexicality as an unmediated experience of the 'having-been' of the photographed came just before the digital image began to destabilize its technical basis. Furthermore, the separation of photography's powerful affects from a generic notion of visual culture – central to Barthes's search for the essence of photography – is premissed on the rejection of different modalities of intentionality, notably, artfulness and art. Yet, it is in photographic art and its critical discourses that *Camera Lucida* has had most impact.

The anthology *Photography between Poetry and Politics: The Critical Position of the Photographic Medium in Contemporary Art* sets out to evaluate photography's abiding critical value through the examination of recent photographic art. Its framing contrast between poetry and politics is highly suggestive as a way of thinking the 'chaos of possibilities' that marks these spheres. While, for a number of reasons, the anthology disappoints, the critical articulation of this disappointment nonetheless enables one to think of Fried's and Azoulay's rather different claims on the past, present and future of photography as, in some ways, filling out the problematic terrain that the idea of *Photography between Poetry and Politics* aims to understand.

Epic dimensions

Since the 1970s, photography has become increasingly central to the critical discourses and institutions of art. A familiar way of narrating this is to note photography's importance for the conceptual art of the 1970s and the dovetailing of its influence with that of radical criticisms of photographic culture developed at around the same time. These factors paved the way for photography's widespread acceptance as art in the 1980s and provided it with a critical framework. Different forms of photographic art have thrived since this period. Some have explored material and organizational questions (appropriating found images, exploiting archival contexts). Others took on existing genres of photography to investigate cultural formations of identity (as in Cindy Sherman's film stills). Many (like the American 'pictures' group) scrutinized the simulacral character of photographic culture. Whilst there are some who have consistently worked in a documentary vein (such as Allan Sekula and Martha Rosler), the broad drift has been to problematize or reject photography as a realistic and documentary form. Significantly, this tendency has found often nuanced expression in elaborate photographic constructs that foreground their status as pictures and not documents, as in Jeff Wall's lightboxes. Wall has come to act as a model for the characterization of a genre: the 'photographic tableau', which combines large scale with high production values in the self-conscious design of photographs for the gallery wall and adopts modes of visual address that are more traditionally associated with paintings.[6]

In light of the proliferation of artistic uses of photography this prevalence of the photographic tableau provokes reconsideration of medium specificity. As the editors of *Photography between Poetry and Politics* ask in their introduction, 'Does photography today have a hybrid or chameleonic character because it can be part of entirely different mixed-media works of art or should it be understood as a medium-specific, well-defined way of making contemporary works of art?' The photographic artwork's mode of engagement with the social world is thus foregrounded by the collection's framing contrast. In turn, Van Gelder and Westgeest distinguish between a 'larger' and 'more narrow' sense of the poetic that characterize this relation as itself a broadly conceived 'political' question:

> The wider employment of the notion [of poetry] indicates an autonomous art, a photography that is foremostly engaged in art – or an artistic tradition – itself without so much aspiring to take up a socially engaged or critical position. The more specific reading of the term 'poetry' hints at an art which uses photography in order to create a visual imagery that is marked by its epic dimension and which is so politically freestanding that it becomes extremely difficult to understand how such images position themselves in the world at all. The photo-tableau appears to be the example by excellence of such a more narrow interpretation of 'poetic' uses of photography today.

Both these senses of the poetic are modes of relative autonomy, which appear to delimit the means by which the photographic artwork might engage the social. The epic self-absorption of the tableau appears wanting here, because its elements seem to exhaust

Claes Oldenburg, *Placid Civic Monument*, 1967. Photo Daniel Partlin/NYC Parks Photo Archive

their representational claim on external reality in the constitution of the work's autonomy.[7] This gestures towards a familiar modernist sense of the critical: the artwork's auto-critical or self-reflexive constitution. But one must recall the force of the idea that even the most 'freestanding' photographic artwork cannot help but depict something. The brevity of the editors' introduction does not allow further articulation of this idea, or of its alternatives. This task is taken up with varying degrees of interest and success by the nine contributions that make up the collection.

These are organized into three sections. Sections one and two are mostly taken up with defences of specific practices in light of post-Greenbergian debates about medium specificity. Broadly speaking, the first is shaped by the influence of Rosalind Krauss and the second by Michael Fried. Famously, Krauss conceptualized art's 'expanded field' in an early rejection of Greenberg's medium-specific definition of the arts according to their material substrates, but later, in the 1990s, retreated from this expansion of art into a reconsideration of the notion of artistic medium.[8] Here, Westgeest's discussion of the 'changeability of photographs in multimedia art', and Marsh's account of the 'spectral' persistence of photography's medium specificity, both trade on this equivocation, but remain within its terms. The crudely titled second section – 'Processes of (Re)construction, (Re)production, and (Re)presentation in Photography, in Relation to Reception and Memory' – features essays by Cliff Lauson and Susan Laxton which already look, by way of contrast, to Fried's *Why Photography Matters*. Lauson, in particular, compares Wall's digital construction *Flooded Grave* (1998–2000) with a sequence documenting Claes Oldenburg's *Placid Civil Monument* (comprising fairly banal staged images that depict the artist and others watching a hole being dug and refilled in Central Park one afternoon in 1967). No doubt one could make a lot of the similarities and contrasts between the staged character of these works, the relative values evident in their production, and their singular and sequential forms, especially in light of Fried's privileging of the tableau, which I will discuss further below, but such critical questions remain undeveloped here.

The final section goes a long way to make up for the shortcomings of the preceding two, and anticipates the kinds of issue discussed in Azoulay's *The Civil Contract of Photography* in interesting ways. Alexandra Moschovi gives a measured account of photography's institutional successes since the 1980s, whilst Simon Faulkner and T.J. Demos discuss work produced in the context of the Israel–Palestine conflict. Faulkner (drawing on some of Azoulay's previous publications) focuses on Israeli painter David Reeb's appropriation of journalistic photographs by Miki Kratsman and Eldad Rafaeli. These photographs depicting the 'tunnel war' in the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1996 aim at being explicitly 'connotative' so as to disrupt the assumption that press photographs are smoothly 'denotative'. The context is an analysis of the Oslo peace process and the way it ended in the enhancement of Israeli military control in the area. Reeb's later use of these photographs is read as allowing 'the extension of the connotations of the Tunnel War' in examination of this. Demos discusses photographs by Ahlam Shibli and gives a critical defence of two of her documentary works, claiming that they problematize documentary form at the levels of its interpretation and institutional context by striking a nuanced critical and aesthetic balance.[9] His reading centres on a familiar theme in documentary photography: the desire to make the invisible visible. The people depicted in these works are often obscured – 'rarely do they appear uninterrupted or clearly legible' – and Demos draws out of this an elegant account of the heterogeneity that characterizes the works' relation to the people they depict. He identifies 'an antinomy … at the crux of her practice – to *represent* the unrecognised, but also to *deny* them representation'. As an engagement with the social world through the aesthetic and critical conditions of documentary form, this is explicitly oriented to avoid the monumentalizing aestheticism that haunts the tableau form. For Demos, Shibli articulates an alternative

aesthetic that evidences the 'fundamental uncertainty of photographic meaning', and strives neither to monumentalize its objects nor to dismantle its ideological framing simply to cover it with another.

The photographic tableau and the belated redemption of modernist art

As various contributions to *Photography between Poetry and Politics* suggest, for good or ill, Michael Fried's *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before* will feature significantly in coming debates about photographic art.[10] It is an ambitious, much anticipated and problematic book that centres on a relatively small number of contemporary artists. Among these, Jeff Wall is central. Earlier photographers do feature (Walker Evans, Paul Strand, Lee Friedlander, Stephen Shore, August Sander and Diane Arbus) but reference to these 'pre-tableau' figures serves mostly to illustrate the historical novelty and artistic value asserted of various works made after this watershed.

Fried is best known for his 1967 critique of minimalism in 'Art and Objecthood', which argued against the 'theatricality' of minimalist art and for modernist painting's and sculpture's 'anti-theatricality'. Minimalist works were 'by definition incomplete without the experiencing subject'. Modernist works, in contrast, were anti-theatrical as they 'took no notice of the beholder, who was left to come to terms with them … as best as he or she could'. Contemporary art is, for Fried, defined by the crisis induced by the relegation of anti-theatricality and he takes the photographic tableau to redeem this situation. The central claim is that such photography foregrounds and mediates a tension between its status as a discreet picture (that 'takes no notice of the beholder') and what Fried calls its 'to-be-seenness' (its mode of self-reflexively confronting its audience). The central concepts used to articulate the argument he makes on this basis derive from his later art-historical work on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century painting, which obliquely fills out his critique of minimalism.

> Starting in the 1750s in France a new conception of painting came to the fore that required that the personages depicted in a canvas appear genuinely absorbed in whatever they were doing, thinking, and feeling, which also meant that they had to be wholly unaware of everything other than the objects of their absorption, including … the beholder standing in front of the painting. Any failure of absorption … was considered theatrical in the pejorative sense of the term and was regarded as an egregious fault.[11]

Modernist painting emerged in the nineteenth century with Manet, who attempted, according to Fried, 'to make not just each painting as a whole but every bit of its surface – every brush stroke, so to speak – face the beholder as never before'. Manet's 'crisis' was that of absorption and his response was to acknowledge the 'facingness' of painting. Wall performs a similar, historically reflexive, overcoming of the crisis of post-minimalism: 'The new art photography seeks to come to grips with the issue of beholding in ways that do not succumb to theatricality but which at the same time register the epochality of minimalism/literalism's intervention by an acknowledgement of to-be-seenness'. Fried thus commits himself to an account of photographic art that is anti-theatrical *and* self-conscious of its 'to-be-seenness'. This is an uncomfortable combination, to say the least.

The book starts with three 'beginnings', the major function of which appears to be to sideline other discourses on photographic art. First, Wall's, Sherman's and Hiroshi Sugimoto's engagement with cinema in the 1980s is formalized in the terminology of 'absorption' and 'anti-theatricality'; a depoliticizing shift away from categories such as 'spectatorship', 'distraction' and 'fascination' through which these engagements have, productively, tended to be read. An account of the emergence of the photographic tableau as a recasting of relations between artwork and 'beholder' provides a second frame. A third addresses 'the problematizing of beholding in the context of voyeurism' and appeals to literary sources: an anonymous French tale from 1755 and a narrative by Yukio Mishima, *The Temple of Dawn*.[12] Whilst this latter story of visually figured, restrained and tragic desire is highly suggestive, one can't help but suspect that its explicit function here is to displace other accounts of spectatorship, with which Fried is unwilling to engage. The overall effect is that questions of desire and difference are displaced onto a formal aesthetic dyad of artwork and beholder.

His territory thus marked, Fried develops his argument through discussion of Wall with reference to Heidegger and Wittgenstein. His account of the photographic tableau as an exemplary form rests on the singularity of particular works, to the extent that he even analyses explicitly serial works in these terms. Indeed, it is in Fried's account of Bernd and Hilla Becher's seriality that his idea of photography overreaches itself and the relation between art and photography stretches to breaking point. Though it goes against the grain of Fried's narrative, I think his strategy can be summarized as follows: to bracket the hybridity of photographic art, its relation to photography more

broadly conceived (and the relative diversity of the practices he discusses), between the emphatic singularity of Wall's pictorial tableau and the Bechers' serially organized documents of industrial architecture. Whilst this attempt at containment might draw out some revealing truths regarding Wall's photographs, it gains virtually no critical purchase on the Bechers' project and leaves Fried's claim on what might lie between these two poles insecure.

Wall's concept of 'near documentary' photography (staged images depicting events that seem as if they might have occurred without intervention) is read through Heidegger's analysis of the practical engagements that structure being-in-the-world. Fried articulates this in terms of the ready-to-hand character of equipment and the manner in which – when practical involvements break down – Heidegger claims one might 'encounter entities within-the-world purely in the *way they look*'.[13] Appeal to the primordial and encompassing context of the worldhood of the world is used to generalize Fried's art historically specific concept of absorption, 'as if Heidegger in *Being and Time* develops philosophically an insight that had belonged to Western painting … for more than three centuries'. Photography's ubiquity and its capacity to render anything are thus read as a mundane register of the (practical but inauthentic) ready-to-hand, leaving Fried's art concept of photography to pick up the thread of more authentic modes of being-in-the-world.

Wall's balance of the presentation of absorptive figures in obviously staged pictures is exemplary here. The crux of the matter in this Heideggerian context is what is to be made of photography's historical achievement of an art status. For Fried, this is clear: 'the stage has been set … for certain photographers, Wall preeminently, to work against the grain of photographic spatialization and world-deprivation – of its address to a subject who "looks explicitly" at the photograph and all it depicts.' This champions Wall's artistry in constructing a 'shared world, inflected individually'. The formal balance of Wall's pictures is compounded with their staging of the social world in this existential expansion of Fried's art-historical terms. But what of the social ambition previously generally accepted as a key aspect of Wall's formal constructions?[14] What specificity might a viewer gain as a player in this game? A clue might be found on the other side, so to speak, of the beholder/artwork dyad and in the fact that, ending his Heideggerean exposition of one photograph by Wall – *Untangling* (1994), showing two workmen, one of whom is intent on the task of untangling a big knot of ropes – Fried comments that 'it is hard not to feel that the picture would be stronger if both men were absent'.

In the chapter 'Barthes' *Punctum*' Fried reads *Camera Lucida* as an anti-theatrical tract. His interpretation turns on the manner in which Barthes ties the phenomenology of photographic affect to the rejection of different modes of intentionality. Famously, the *punctum* is a relational concept that finds its locus, initially at least, in those striking elements of a photograph that might interrupt its conventional use. Such extraneous details are sneaked into the image by the camera despite, and not because of, the intent of the photographer, and there they stand, for Barthes, as a plenipotentiary of affective experience that promises transcendence over the instrumentalized form of mass culture. Fried exploits this layered critique of intentionality in discussions of the poses adopted by young beachgoers in Dijkstra's portraits and, most forcefully, in the account he gives of Thomas Demand's reconstructed archival photographs. These celebrated works are images of blank

Thomas Demand, *Archive*, 1995. Chromogenic process print with diasec. 183.5 x 233 cm

paper reconstructions, photographed 'straight' and printed large. Demand's perversely straight attenuation of the photographic index, for Fried, draws attention to the photographic as such, in so far as it suggests, but bars from view, the informative details that gave sense to the source images thus faithfully reproduced and simultaneously erased. For Fried, Demand's work approaches an index of photography's ability to index things, which is an interesting interpretation. But the claim that this is directly entwined with the author's animus towards minimalism is not convincing; nor is the attempt to think these works in terms of the relation between anti-theatricality and to-be-seenness. With regard to the interpretation of Barthes, this removes the possibility of any lacerating encounter with a paradoxical temporal ecstasy spurred by some detail. The *punctum* remains limited to the critique of only one layer of intention and loses its metaphysical singularity. Fried's Demand faces one with the bare demonstration of an indexicality that comes after the fact to stand, so to speak, before the fact.

The most problematic part of the book is the penultimate chapter devoted to reading the Bechers' project through Hegel's notions of 'genuine' and 'spurious' infinity. This is not a bad idea, but in Fried's articulation it remains limited by the concern for single autonomous pictures and their claim on art, rather than, as seems logical, expanding to engage with the multifaceted form of photography as such. The chapter is titled '"Good" versus "Bad" Objectivity' and it sandwiches the Bechers between a photograph of a plank leant against a wall (James Welling, *Lock*, 1976) and one of the few photographs Wall has designated a 'documentary' image (*Concrete Ball*, 2003). Fried quotes himself from an earlier text on Welling (that, unsurprisingly, links *Lock* to 'Art and Objecthood') claiming the image is informed by 'an interest in real as opposed to abstract literalness or even "good" as distinct from "bad" objecthood'.

The Bechers' longstanding project documenting types of industrial architecture according to systematized procedure and standardized modes of display is, perhaps, the most influential photographic project to have adopted seriality as its organizing principle. Whilst Fried's focus is on seriality, his interpretation is oriented to understanding the Bechers' multiple, gridded images as a kind of tableau. One can't help but suspect that, for an argument so deeply invested in the essential singularity of the photographic artwork, seriality stands as a formal limit that threatens the dissolution of the singular into photography's broader and more slippery entirety. There's a sense in which Fried's account of the Bechers is marked by an undertow of ironic indetermination, which informs the use he makes of Hegel's good and bad infinities. As the Bechers said in a 1988 interview, which Fried quotes, they wanted to 'complete the world of things'. To explain this, Fried links Hegel's distinction between 'true' and 'spurious' modes of infinity to his own notions of 'good' and 'bad' objectivity:

> What is at stake is … the problem Hegel inherited from Kant, of how to specify the finitude or determinateness or (more simply) the individuality of objects in a way that does not simply contrast all the characteristics that a particular object allegedly possesses with all other characteristics it does not – an endless task that is precisely what Hegel means by the 'spurious infinite'.

The distinction between 'spurious' and 'true' infinities turns on the critical observation that determinations of the being of some finite thing, which rely on external or transcendent factors, import indeterminacies that remain wholly abstract and other to the object and thus impose a 'spurious' horizon of infinity. A determinate object bears a 'relation of itself to itself' that is, in some sense, genuinely infinite.[15] Fried seeks to establish a 'genuine' or 'good' infinity by carving a tableau out of the relationship between specific and generic elements encountered in the Bechers' grids:

> I understand the Bechers' project as at bottom ontological in intent in ways that bear suggestive analogy to Hegel's reflections in both *Logics* about objects and their finitude or determinateness. The individual objects on the Bechers' 'Typologies' are finite in their specificity but … that finitude emerges as such … against a background of the true or 'genuine' infinity of possibilities established by the types, families, groupings, and myriad industrial instances of all these that are the basis of their art.

Implicitly linking this appropriation of Hegel's 'genuine' infinity to his earlier Heideggerean framing of Wall, Fried takes himself to have established the Bechers' work as having a tableau form, in so far as their typology shows 'what is missing from the world of things', namely 'its capacity for individuation *as* a world'.

Jeff Wall's *Concrete Ball* (a Vancouver street scene in the middle of which stands a plinth supporting the eponymous globe) is supposed to provide a singular parallel to the Bechers' typologies. It is Fried's third example of 'good objecthood', but it seems not to obey the conditions set for the tableau in its singular or serial forms, except for the fact that it is quite big. Just before *Why Photography Matters* ends with a return to

the narrative analogy between Wall and Mishima, one finds Fried – perhaps distracted by the chance, finally, to do away with minimalism – unravelling the threads of his own attempt to consolidate the significance of the tableau as an exemplary instance of resurgent modernism in photographic art. The sense of Fried's claim on contemporary photography rests on the consistency and explanatory value of his interpretation of the photographic tableau as the belated redemption of his own idea of modernism. This is partial in its account of photographic art, not as compelling as the tenor of his prose would have one think, and blinkered in its address to other aspects of photography.

Citizens and spectators

Arielle Azoulay's *The Civil Contract of Photography* presents an argument that cuts across and goes against the tendency championed by Fried, and takes up some of the issues broached in the final section of the Van Gelder and Westgeest collection. Her focus is predominantly on photojournalistic and documentary practices (though often these are mediated through examples of artistic appropriation). She seeks to refigure the understanding of photography in terms of critically oriented political philosophy. The argument is a synthesis of two approaches, dependent upon and directed towards one another. Though she doesn't really put it in these terms, one can take the concept of 'the civil contract of photography' as the central term of a photographic ontology that conceives of it as a fundamentally socio-historical form. Her manifest critical commitment to the close reading of particular images results in analyses that are oriented to testing out the general theoretical framework, but they are also compelled to deal with the gaps thus opened up between the particular and the general. Throughout, Azoulay repeats the demand that one needs to 'watch' photographs in order to make them 'speak'. This is a slightly sloganistic way of condensing the lengthy and complex consideration she gives both particular images and photography as such. The point is that both registers present ethical demands and politically inflected possibilities for those that make, disseminate and use them. If, at times, these different levels of analysis don't mesh entirely with each other, they do, nonetheless, project a promising synthetic framework that has the value of restaging familiar and divisive debates in a way that provokes one to think them afresh. However, it has to be noted that *The Civil Contract of Photography* is an overlong, meandering book. Its scale allows space for Azoulay to develop and consolidate her argument, but also many repetitions that distract from this task.

The central objects of analyses are: 'two injured groups … female citizens in Israel and Palestinians living in the territories occupied by Israeli since 1967'. These distinct but overlapping groups are discussed in terms of the impaired status of their citizenry and the modes of exclusion and violence that shape this: the 'partial' or 'non-'citizen's exposure to conditions of 'catastrophe'. The impairments that distinguish the two groups are specified as the social constraints imposed by the fear of rape and the facts of lives lived under conditions of permanent but 'temporary' emergency. These factors are examined under the following assumption, which is inspired by Agamben but sees itself as presenting a critical inflection of his political thought: 'citizenship in any particular historical situation cannot be understood without taking into account the noncitizens who make up part of the governed population and constitute a governed group *with and alongside which* the citizens are governed'. As Azoulay describes it:

> We can, following Giorgio Agamben, renounce the concept of citizenship altogether as fatally compromised by the exception of the noncitizens that it always entails and therefore seek to replace it, or, as I will argue, we can seek to rehabilitate the concept by overcoming the distinction between citizen and noncitizens and with it the state of exception that is its basis. To do so … we also will need to rehabilitate the concept of a political community of the governed as the basis of politics in the coming age, not, as Agamben would have it, bare life.

Some of the richest and most convincing parts of Azoulay's argument develop out of her readings of images that stand as testimony to such pressures, as, for instance, in her discussion of a photograph by Miki Kratsman, *Migrant Worker, Tel Aviv, 1998*, which shows a dead Palestinian man lying on the floor of a sandy ditch (see over).[16] Kratsman's artful deployment of lens distortion and point of view in this image – destined for publication in an Israeli newspaper – are oriented to aesthetic and public affect. Azoulay's discussion centres on the length of time a Palestinian (as opposed to an Israeli) body might lie so exposed before the corpse is covered. The difference dramatizes a moral question about whether the photographer acted in an exploitative manner in taking the time to compose such an artful shot. Her answer nuances a familiar question asked of documentary images. The tension between displaying and covering up that one might – if informed – read out of this image formalizes a civil association by carrying over into the public sphere a grievance, which is, as Azoulay has it: 'not that of the

Luc Delahaye, *Taliban*, 2001.
Digital chromogenic process print. 111 x 237 cm

photographed person, but of the photographed scene or event; the dispossession of citizenship, which the photographic act has posited itself against. … Photography, at times, is the only civic refuge at the disposal of those robbed of citizenship.' Here one finds a specific register of one of her major points: the politics, ethics and aesthetics of photography are not intrinsically separable as modes of attention and behaviour that correspond to different roles in the production and consumption of images (photographer, photographed and viewer or user). On the contrary, Azoulay posits a basic social relation that subtends each and every photographic situation or act that, in its generality and ubiquity, is the basis of the civil contract of photography. In this, already existing, 'community' or 'civil space',

> Anyone who addresses others through photographs or takes the position of a photograph's addressee, even if she is a stateless person, who has 'lost her right to have rights', as in Arendt's formulation, is nevertheless a citizen – a member in the citizenry of photography. The civil space of photography is open to her as well. That space is configured by what I call the civil contract of photography.

There is some equivocation, here and throughout, with regard to the generality of such claims. At times they seem to be premissed on and limited to certain kinds of photograph, documents of specific socio-political ills made to give the dispossessed visibility. Visibility, here, is a mode of airing grievances that signifies equitable civil association *in potentia*. At other times such claims are used to project the ontological form of photography. Contrary to historicist narratives of photography's invention, for example, Azoulay develops a social narrative of how and when photography came into its own:

> Photography was invented at precisely the moment when the individual inventor lost the authority to determine the meaning of his invention. … Not only is the invention of photography the invention of a new encounter between people, but the invention of an encounter between people and the camera. Photography was invented at the moment when a space of plurality was initiated, at the moment when a large number of people … took hold of a camera and began using it as a means of producing images.

The significance of the social history and meaning of photography is inflected by a range of theoretical linkages. For example, in an interesting passage that informs the argument significantly, Azoulay appeals to Hannah Arendt in order to refigure critically Barthes' bare noematic claim on the photographic index:

> What every photograph says of its subject, that it 'was there,' is at most a testimony to the moment of a photograph's eventuation in which photographer, photographed and camera encountered one another. Even when this encounter occurs under the difficult conditions of distress or disaster … as a space of plurality and action, the act of photography and the photographs it produces might, at least potentially, restore it. In other words, although photography may appear to be a distinctive object of contemplative life (*vita contemplativa*), a moment in which all movements have been eliminated, it is actually deeply embedded in the active life (*vita activa*); it attests to action and continues to take part in it, always engaged in an ongoing present that challenges the very distinction between contemplation and action. The photograph always includes a supplement that makes it possible to say show that what 'was there' wasn't there *necessarily* in that way.

Whilst this might seem rather optimistic, it presents an interesting extension of Barthes's noematic correlation of photographic affect and bare reference. His acedic version of contemplation is, here, dissolved in the concretely social potential that a photograph has to testify, even if this remains unrealized. Azoulay develops this in terms of Arendt's further distinction between labour, work and action to 'characterize various forms of active, noncontemplative gazes': first, those associated with identification and survival; second, intentionally directed modes of looking that seek to control what is visible; and, third, the civic form of the 'singular gaze enabled by photography'.

The major ethical inference Azoulay draws from the possible civil association photography enables is

expressed as a contract. This is an association that quite literally, if quietly, implies responsibilities that are sedimented in photographs and their uses. The general political inference drawn is that this contract establishes an already achieved form of 'citizenship' in the photographed world. Whilst, at times, this sounds rather weak in its general form, it is backed up by a couple of hundred pages of critically incisive analyses of highly politicized photographs. The idea of photographic citizenship also finds a credible, if wistful, form as a relief from the operations of power, which has an echo of Foucauldian micropolitics, but seems also to avoid the reductive temptations that dog photographic discourse in this vein: 'photography is one of the distinctive practices by means of which individuals can establish a distance between themselves and power in order to observe its actions and to do so not as its subjects.'

The self-consciously problematic attempt to synthesize the political plight of Israeli women and Palestinians living in occupied territories works at the level of Azoulay's analyses of particular images. Unfortunately, it falls short of the more general promise that it might make theoretically concrete the relationships between geopolitically overlapping situations in a theory of photography's social form. The large central chapter, 'Has Anyone Ever Seen a Photograph of a Rape?', relates a critical history of the representation of rape in public and political discourses, in documentary photography (largely as an absence) and in pornography. Azoulay charts feminist critical discourse on rape since the 1970s to examine changing 'codes of knowledge' constitutive of 'what has been meant by "rape"'. Her astonishment at the absence of public (photographic) representations of rape informs the reading she gives of the debates about its political, social and cultural framing. The stark representational gap between the few graphic photographic documents Azoulay does find (a notorious series of images depicting brutal sexual violence in Nanking during the Chinese–Japanese war in 1937 is central) and the public service advertisements for official reports on sexual violence and anti-rape legislation frames the discussion. The argument takes the reluctance to represent rape in a non-pornographic or instrumentalizing manner to be too easily and too often co-opted to other, spectacularizing and/or patronizing ends, and her account of these issues ends in an epilogue that discusses a photomontage by the Israeli artist Michal Heiman. This work superimposes the artist's horrified face and camera on the body in Duchamp's *Etant Donnés*, and stamps it with the phrase 'I was there' (*I Was There: No. 6*, 2004). This shift into discussion of a polemical, appropriative artwork demonstrates the paucity of representations of the subject, which Azoulay's interpretation draws out critically. It also stands as an indicator of her often problematic recourse to artworks throughout the book. Heiman's works are, with varying degrees of success, central to Azoulay's attempt to link her general argument to the particular situations that it promises to illuminate. That such linkages seem far more compelling when played out through interpretation of photo-journalistic and documentary photographs is telling.

Miki Kratsman, *Migrant Worker*, Tel Aviv, 1998

There is a significant Barthesian theme running through Azoulay's philosophy of photography. One can read *The Civil Contract of Photography*, in part, as an attempt to socialize the modes of intersubjectivity that structure, but remain implicit in, Barthes's singular metaphysics of photographic affect. In one passage, she picks up on the 'other' unpublished image that structures *Camera Lucida* (upon which few commentators remark), the image of Jerome, Napoleon's cousin, which Barthes tells us sparked his desire to find out what photography is. Few tend to question the affective relationship he claims for the more celebrated 'Winter Garden' photograph of his mother as a child, whether or not they agree with Barthes's theses on the essence of photography, because of the pathos that surrounds it and the issues of privacy that determine its

withdrawal from publicity. In her brief analysis of his introduction of the Jerome photograph, Azoulay posits a negotiation between reciprocal but asymmetrical gazes that returns Barthes's influential first-person narrative to a discourse on the social form of photographic experience. The unmediated experience of the 'having-been' of the photographed actually entails a negotiation between projection and identification, judgement and desire. This, in light of her thesis of the civil contract of photography, is the basis for an inversion of Barthes's move from the generality of a *mathesis universalis* of photography to the *mathesis singularis* of the photograph. Neither the photograph, nor its viewer, is ever alone in the sense that Barthes would have us think – and which Fried trades upon in justifying his thesis on photographic art.

Problems associated with art appear crucial in light of the imperative to rethink photograph. Given that, presently, past forms are entwined with the projection of future possibilities, the complex heritage of modernism is significant, but only partially so. It would be unfortunate if photographic discourse allowed itself to be overcome by the desire to foreclose possibilities that might arise from this situation. If photography is undergoing an involution, registered in the concept of indexicality, the importance of photographic art and the socio-historical forms of its testimony, then, Azoulay's attempt to theorize the openness and complexity of photographic form will prove helpful in scrutinizing the historically freighted and politically ambivalent ways in which its involution might unfold. Far more so than Fried's efforts to the contrary.

Notes

1. See, for example, Jacques Rancière, 'Notes on the Photographic Image', *Radical Philosophy* 156, July/August 2009, pp. 8–15. Note also the centrality of photography to Judith Butler's *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?*, Verso, London and New York, 2009.
2. In just the last two years, two new English-language photography theory journals have appeared: *Photographies* and *Photography and Culture*; another is due in February 2010, *Philosophy of Photography*. In Britain, the institutional success of photographic art encouraged major galleries to confront their previous lack of interest in photography, head on. The Tate is exemplary. Their landmark was the exhibition *Cruel and Tender: The Real in the Twentieth Century Photograph*, June–September 2003, after which other exhibitions supplemented the display of photographic artworks, including *How We Are: Photographing Britain*, Tate Britain, May–June 2007, and *Street and Studio: An Urban History of Photography*, Tate Modern, May–August 2008.
3. Fred Ritchin, *After Photography*, W.W. Norton, New York, 2009, p. 11.
4. Blake Stimson and Robin Kelsey, eds, *The Meaning of Photography*, Sterling and Francine Clark Institute, Williamstown MA, 2008, pp. xxv, xi.
5. See Rancière, 'Notes on the Photographic Image', p. 9. See also my discussion of *Camera Lucida* in 'Beyond Barthes: Rethinking the Phenomenology of Photography', *Radical Philosophy* 148, March/April 2008, pp. 19–29.
6. For Wall's account of his trajectory from conceptual to pictorial photographic art, see Peter Osborne, 'Art after Photography, after Conceptual Art: An Interview with Jeff Wall', *Radical Philosophy* 150, July/August 2008, pp. 36–51.
7. The problem with this criticism of the tableau's 'poetry' is that it overformalizes the case. There remain critical distinctions to be made between those works that exploit the form's grand political thematics to sophisticated but telling critical effect and those that are no less sophisticated but much less critically acute. For instance, compare the treatment of conflicts in Afghanistan by Jeff Wall in *Dead Troops Talk (A Vision after an Ambush of a Red Army Patrol near Moqor, Afghanistan, Winter, 1986)*, 1992, and Luc Delahaye, *Taliban*, 2001, which are both illustrated in Fried's *Why Photography Matters*, pp. 112 and 183, respectively.
8. See Rosalind Krauss, 'Reinventing the Medium', *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 25, no. 2, 1999, pp. 289–305; and *'A Voyage on the North Sea': Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition*, London, Thames & Hudson, 2000.
9. The works in question are *Unrecognised* (2000), which depicts Palestinians of Bedouin descent living in northern Galilee in a village that lies in the territory of, but remains unrecognized by, the Israeli state, and *Goter* (2003), which documents Palestinian Bedouin of the Naqab desert region.
10. Fried's discussion of photographic art already loomed large in James Elkins, ed., *Photography Theory*, Routledge, New York and London, 2007; in particular, in Diarmuid Costello's Friedian chapter, 'After Medium Specificity Chez Fried: Jeff Wall as a Painter; Gerhard Richter as a Photographer', pp. 75–90.
11. *Why Photography Matters*, p. 26. See also, among Fried's earlier works, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and the Beholder in the Age of Diderot*, University of California, Berkeley, 1980; *Manet's Modernism or the Face of Painting in the 1860s*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1996.
12. The anonymous tale is *Adelaide, ou la femme morte d'amour*, which Fried informs us 'appeared in the journal *Mercure de France* in January 1755' (24). Yukio Mishima, *The Temple of Dawn*, trans., E. Dale Saunders and Celcila Segawa Seigle, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1970.
13. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Maquarrie and Edward Robinson, New York and Evanston IL, 1962, p. 88; cited (and given emphasis) in *Why Photography Matters*, p. 48.
14. See, for example, John Roberts, *The Art of Interruption*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1998, pp. 184–99.
15. G.W.F. Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic*, trans. T.F. Garaets, W.A. Suchting and H.S. Harris, Hackett, Indianapolis and Cambridge, 1991, p. 149; cited in *Why Photography Matters*, p. 325.
16. It is interesting to compare Azoulay on Kratsman's *Migrant Worker* and Fried on Delahaye's *Taliban* in *Why Photography Matters*, p. 183.

Disposable time

István Mészáros, *The Challenge and Burden of Historical Time: Socialism in the Twenty-First Century*, Monthly Review Press, New York, 2008. 479 pp., £16.95 pb., 978 1 58367 169 6.

In recent years there has been a surprisingly steady growth of interest in the status of time and temporality and the role accorded to them in studies of modern society and history. Much of this interest has been generated by left-leaning social scientists and philosophers, and a gradual recognition of the binding relationship between capitalism, time and history. Even so, this apparent upsurge of interest in the problem of temporality among the Left has too often been trumped by the predilection of cultural studies to privilege the spatial and static countenance of contemporary social life, at the risk of diminishing the role played by time in structures of determination. Spatial fixes invariably lead to calls for ending temporality. Among the disciplines, history has shown far less interest in the question of time than philosophy, despite its heralded dedication to chronology, dating and marking. Moreover, sensitivity shown by historians towards the temporal dimensions of history rarely exceeds the abstract measuring of time and the quantitative sanctity of chronology, contrasting dramatically with the commitment of philosophy, which, since Bergson's and Heidegger's projects promising a 'reckoning with time', had already embarked upon a search for qualitative time. While the philosophical intervention rarely assessed the relationship between time and capitalism (excepting Lukács's powerful critique of quantification and objectivity), more recent signs of interest have sought to make philosophy answerable to history and vice versa. This has meant addressing the central role occupied by capitalism as the temporal dominant of modern society and the effects of its structuring of time on history and politics. These writings have converged upon the incontrovertible observation that capitalism itself is, above all else, an immense organization of time that seeks, through the commodity relation, to regulate and thus dominate what István Mészáros has named in *The Challenge and Burden of Historical Time* a system of 'social metabolic control' capable of penetrating every aspect of society. Mészáros's book matches precisely the confirmation brutally experienced today that capitalism is an all-encompassing system devoted to ordering the rhythms of time with an unrelenting and inescapable circularity that, accordingly, has truncated history itself.

Mészáros's purpose is to provide both an analysis of contemporary capitalist domination on a global scale (via the extension of US imperial power) and a detailed template for 'socialism in the twenty-first century' based on the recognition of capitalism's singular necessity to organize the social formation according to its conception of temporality – a bold outline of what socialism must do in the twenty-first century to capture this temporal ground and free humanity from its imperative form of accountancy. In this respect, this new book on the tyranny of historical time condenses arguments of an earlier study, *Beyond Capital: Towards a Theory of Transition* (1995), which contained a long meditation on the path socialism must pursue beyond nineteenth- and twentieth-century forms of capital, in order to find a genuinely human alternative to the 'no alternative' policies of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan. What he advised in the earlier book was ways to discard the social democratic aptitude (in both the USA and UK after the Reagan–Thatcher years) for reconciling capitalism with social welfare, which inevitably results in the wholesale elimination of the latter. It is said that Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez is an admirer of Mészáros and has apparently drawn from *Beyond Capital* to align his perspective with the move proposed by Mészáros to replace commodity exchange with communal exchange. By the same measure, Mészáros's hope for a socialist future is leavened by his admiration for what is happening in Latin America in states like Venezuela and Bolivia, which serve him as models for the concrete structuring of a socialist utopia.

Mészáros's critique of the imperative of capitalism's time accountancy restores to contemporary discussion one of the most powerful observations made by the mature Marx, and followed through by thinkers like Lukács, Gramsci and Uno Kozo. While taking his cue from scattered, lapidary passages attesting to the force of time ('Time is everything, man is nothing') and subsequent pronouncements by people like Gramsci that ratify time's primacy, his own reckoning with historical

time argues that capital's logic must 'annihilate history' because it is posited on the eternality of the present – as Marx himself had observed of the 'religion' of bourgeois political economy and its claims to have no history. Since capital can tolerate no challenge to its limitless reach, to its mode of 'social metabolic reproduction', any alternative conception of time is unacceptable to it. This promotion of a specific form of social metabolic reproduction implies the installation of an idea of culture that requires a corresponding conception of temporality and by extension a figuration of history adequate to it. Humanity is committed to an existence embedded in the passage of successive moments in an endless present, 'being-in time', being another name for endless accumulation, rather than realizing the promise of 'being-in-history', which Marx saw as the original dimension of human nature.

The putative history humans believe they live and write is nothing more than what Gramsci described as a 'simple pseudonym for life' under capitalism. Despite history's appeal to development, its experience coincides only with the time of capitalism, whose circular repetition serving expanded accumulation simply signifies completion and the eternality of the now. Capital must disavow history, seeing in it the 'enemy' of the eternal present. Accordingly, the 'apologists' of capital have resorted to every possible device to eliminate awareness of historical time in order to project the present as both eternal and natural. (Contemporary neoclassical economics still refuses to recognize that the production of crises like the recent one is historical rather than accidental.) Mészáros's account amply discloses the nature of capitalism's inimical relationship to history, considered as external to economic processes everywhere and in all times, which must be repressed and banished to concealment, waiting to be restored in an emancipatory act. Here, Mészáros risks simplifying Marx's own understanding of the relationship between historical temporality and the temporal logic of capitalism as distinct categories of time, whereby the latter undermines the former but fails to obliterate it.

Marx's conception of human time is that of a dialectical process involving the fundamental meaning of historical necessity, which, because it is historical, points to its own eventual disappearance and its definite differentiation from natural determinations. History thus appears in the natural order with the inaugural act of human cooperation, bringing with it a consciousness of time and a progressive preoccupation with 'meaning'. The origin of meaning is unveiled with the categorization of the 'meaningful life time of the individual', which is deeply implicated in the productive capacity of humans and their struggle over time to remove the more 'brutish' constraints based on primitive forms of 'hand-to-mouth existence'. Mészáros finds in this historical development the revelation of the 'power of making genuine choices'. He also sees in this act the human community's capacity to transcend the time span of individual life with which it maintains a continuing dialectical relationship. And with this accumulation of historical time comes the identification of value. Yet he is sensitive to the temporal difference between the individual's time and the experience of humanity, which will constitute the objective foundation of *value* and *countervalue*. In time, various conceptions of civil society appeared to replace the social individual by imposing an imaginary composed of isolated individuals and their fixed human nature to make them 'naturally' capable of occupying an eternal present as a temporal habitus. The transformation also produced the figure of 'asocial sociability'. What has occurred is the familiar superscripting of the first order of mediation by a second order, whereby capitalist time comes forward as the natural state of social life, presenting no avenue of escape from the imperative of its time accountancy. In this way, Mészáros argues, capitalism's misrecognition of history opened the way for its social metabolic system of reproduction to become the ontological ground of the social formation.

Even though Marx designated 'disposable time' as a refuge from the constraints of the working day and its abstract measure of value, it was for him still a haven used by workers for their self-formation, depending upon their level of civilization. With Mészáros it is only a viable measure of time for the future, which requires rethinking and resituating in the register of a qualitatively different social metabolic order, namely socialism. Yet Marx attributed disposable time solely to workers, as the only time belonging to them in a regime dominated by socially necessary work. It was thus only through this narrowing corridor of temporality, which workers struggled to preserve, that the occasion was provided for them to assert and satisfy their role as historical subjects, controlling their life activity. Its meaning derived directly from the circumstances of their struggle to prevent the further encroachment of abstract labour and its time, even as it was undoubtedly mediated by these steadily delimiting quantitative constraints. As a result, Mészáros's recommendation to rethink the category of disposable time for a new socialist temporality raises more problems than it solves, because it overlooks the circumstances accompanying the tranche of non-commodified time and the consciousness of struggle it produced to prevent its further limitation. It is hard to know what disposable time would mean or even look like outside of the specific context of capitalism.

While these formulations calling for the re-articulation of older Marxian exemplars echo the plaints of a more familiar past, Mészáros, nevertheless, raises anew the question of history's status in Marx's meditations and its consequences for how it is practised under capitalist time accountancy. He dismisses the better-known historical practices linked to the earlier Internationals, with their productivist trajectories rooted in an evolutionarily driven stage theory. At the same time, following Lukács, Mészáros argues that the 'real enlightened historical conception of the bourgeois philosophical tradition' progressively succumbed to scepticism and pessimism after Hegel's death. Moreover, the dimming of the Enlightenment historical ideal seemed to inspire a penchant for affirming the present and worrying about the past, as reflected in von Ranke's insistence on the equidistance of all peoples in the eyes of God and de Tocqueville's advocacy of greater distance from the 'desolateness' of the human predicament. The great Enlightenment project upholding the powers of humans as historical subjects capable of making their own history and founding a historical knowledge on it collapsed into the 'meaningless nature' it had sought to overcome.

Following the path of the earlier Lukácsian critique of Rickertian cultural history, Mészáros targets the British social and political historian Lewis Namier, who eschewed the force of ideas and ideology, even though he remained a Zionist, and aggressively valorized the act of grasping history only in terms of the immediacy of appearance. This proclamation of closure not only underscored the inclusive singularity of capitalist logic on a global scale but also robbed history (and its practice) of temporality, inasmuch as it counselled contemplation of a storyline already made and completed. After all, what other vocation does national history have? Here, chronology replaced considerations of temporality to denote only that things happened in history but not through it. The great consequence of this closure was to yoke the nation form to capital, like hand in glove, whereby the national narrative invariably came to stand in for capital's logic by embodying it. In his personification of the pitfalls of bourgeois historical practice, Mészáros concludes, Namier's work on the Hapsburg monarchy resulted in nothing more than serving the 'Intelligence Department' of another 'doomed empire'.

If, along his way, Mészáros sidesteps the problem of orthodox Marxian historiography, without recognizing that Foucault, and before him Walter Benjamin, once identified it with bourgeois history, he also falls short of providing an account of Marx's own understanding of the status of history in texts like *Grundrisse* and *Capital*. In these texts, Marx plainly distinguished historical time from capital logic, viewing them as separate domains with their own temporalities. Although acknowledging and even demonstrating that they were often implicated with each other, he still drew an unmistakable line separating the historical development of the categories of capitalism from the order of their relationship within the functioning system. History referred to the duration of a past in which the categories developed outside of and often before the achievement of the mature operating system, yet would come to an end when the capitalist mode of production emerged and arranged the order of relationships between its categories according to a logical sequence rather than temporal succession. Under such circumstances, history and its temporalities didn't really end but acquired another kind of existence in relationship to capitalism, reappearing in the form of residues and traces, 'readymades' taken over and utilized differently and illustrating the capacity of prior economic practices to coexist with different modes of production.

Mészáros's account inadvertently recalls Antonio Negri's confident presentation of the established reign of real subsumption, without taking into consideration the broader historical persistence of coexisting uneven and heterogeneous temporalities embodied in the presence of these 'readymades' and their residues and how, as Uno Kozo noted of modern Japan, they are often invented and reproduced. For Mészáros, there is the unjustified assumption that capital everywhere has reached the state of accomplished real subsumption and the final completion of the commodity relation on a global scale, even though the Latin American states he favours to provide concrete templates for his utopian vision are clearly marked by this continuing history of unevenness. Instead of attending to this problem, much of his book is concerned with instantiating the contemporary effects of the social metabolic system – implying the completion of real subsumption throughout the globe – as a condition for preparing the way for socialism in the twenty-first century. Like Negri and a host of 'Western Marxists', Mészáros still views much of the world outside of Euro-America through an impaired diplopic optic producing double vision of a single image.

The second area where history and capital collide is in Marx's reflections on the working day – the scene of real abstraction and the domination of the quantitative measuring of socially necessary labour power and its remaindered disposable time belonging to the worker. In Marx's mapping of the working day, there is already an interlacing of different temporalities, one belonging to the owner constituted of surplus labour, the other claimed by the worker outside the realm of real abstraction. What Marx managed to demonstrate was an accounting of how the everyday was reconfigured by the ceaseless effort to prolong the linear working day; by the same measure the domain of lived time was increasingly replaced by dead time to leave only a truncated remainder that was still able to exist outside of the regime of commodified wage labour. This excess representing disposable time was the object of struggle over the limits of the working day, even though it was allegedly reserved for the worker's self-development and cultural satisfaction. Ultimately, the recognition of an opposing and consequential dualism between this quantification of abstract time and a more human time would lead to a complex philosophical discussion in twentieth-century European philosophy. For our purpose, the Marxian observation of the conquest of the working day and the reconfiguration of everydayness paved the way for identifying all those efforts committed to regaining what many believed to be an authentic historical time, not through a developmental experience involving a Hegelian negation of negation, but by praxis – concrete activity – directed towards an approximate recovery of the original historical nature of humans. Whatever else we might say of Marx's undertheorized conception of historical time, it could not be associated with time as empty and homogenous, or even a 'continuous and infinite succession of precise moments', as it showed that capitalist modernity – the regime devoted to the 'restless striving of the new' – had not yet been able to align an experience of time that is adequate to its conception of history.

To perceive in disposable time something more than the template of a future time, and to rescue the programme of 'making history' advised by Mészáros, would require the act of ascertaining the different identities between a history obeying the rhythms of capital logic within the nation-state form and the found source of historical time within the lived everyday; the former distinguished by eventfulness and great personalities far removed from daily life, the latter scarce in events and rich in the experience of living close to coexisting and mixed temporalities and contingent acts. Even though it is difficult to disagree with Mészáros's sentiment that disposable time represents the ideal model of temporality for a socialist accountancy to come, it defers the making of history to a millennial alteration announcing the advent of qualitative time. Yet while waiting for the moment to arrive, we still have available examples of completed action from different times and places where workers seized disposable time for their own pleasure and self-formation. Rancière has documented the activities of French workers in mid-nineteenth-century France who stole the nights for poetic composition. Peter Weiss narrated the endeavour of young German workers in the 1930s seeking self-formation through an aesthetic education capable of teaching them about politics. And Japanese historians have recently organized an archive related to the Workers' Circles in Japan of the 1950s devoted to producing literature, art and criticism within the narrow temporal confines of disposable time. Even more, we have the example of persisting mixed temporalities throughout the globe which continue to provide the temporal occasion for 'making history' in the everyday that departs from the repetitive temporalities of capitalism and national narratives that personify its logic. For, to quote from one of Mészáros's favourite poets, Attila József, 'Time is lifting the fog, we have brought time with us,/ we brought it with our struggles, with our reserves of misery.'

Harry Harootunian

Ups and downs

Sandra Harding, *Sciences from Below: Feminisms, Postcolonialities and Modernities*, Duke University Press, Durham NC, 2008. 296 pp., £58.00 hb., £14.99 pb., 978 0 8223 4259 5 hb., 978 0 8223 4282 3 pb.

Social theory often reproduces a familiar geometry and a straightforward mathematics. The geometry is marked by an above and a below. The above is characterized by loftiness, of course, and can be associated mostly with rather abstract thinking. Below is where the real action is to be found. As New Order put it, 'thoughts from above and good people down below', and this captures pretty well social theorists' normative slant on this up/down division. While the knowledge production industry, be it Western science, Northern development theory, economics or philosophy, tends towards the hubristic, those below, and their knowledges and ways of life, look increasingly marginalized and dispossessed. Moreover, this above/below distinction maps onto and helps to perform other binaries including men/women, North/South, mind/body, and so on. The co-mappings are of course co-productive of uneven power relations. One of the purposes of social theory is to demonstrate the artificial and unjust nature of these divisions. Unlike those trapped in Plato's cave, lost in a world of shadows, this social theory speaks not of the enlightened versus the uneducated, but of a world of distributed knowledge and expertise. Empirically and theoretically it attempts to engage a world below that is characteristically experienced and knowledgeable. To ignore this world is not only unjust; it also misses opportunities for a better world.

The mathematics of this social theory is similarly divided. Social theory tends to focus on the one and the many. (One culture or multi-cultures, the public or publics, and so on.) In knowledge talk this translates into a confrontation between one enlightened truth and a plurality of knowledges. Either truth is singular and universal or there are plural truths, none of which can claim more than a modest spatial and temporal reach. While the uni-verse invites allegiances based on certain forms of rationality and shared characteristics (from human rights to the global environment), the pluriverse can claim the democratic high ground. There is something obviously authoritarian and anti-political about the uni-verse, despite or even because of its claims to non-social and therefore neutral verification, while the pluriverse needs to put its faith in forms of democratic politics in order to rise above a chaotic world of relativism and continuous inaction. The democratic 'many' is obviously, perhaps, preferable to the authoritarian 'one', although it is always tempting to bypass the slow and tortuous due process that is democracy with a claim to knowing what is best.

Sandra Harding, who has done more than most to challenge the elevated and singular version of an authoritarian and masculine world of science and technology, clearly positions herself below and on the side of the many. Building on her previous work and that of other feminist science studies scholars, *Sciences from Below* is an argument for more than one science and for recognizing the hybrid nature of what is often taken to be purely Western science (which has always grown and developed through numerous and unequal borrowings). It is a call for a recognition of the distributed expertise that exists outside and below the normal confines of Western knowledge institutions and for an understanding of that science as historically dependent upon what are now read as other (traditional and non-modern) knowledge forms. Harding rightly lampoons the exceptionalism and triumphalism of Western science, the belief that 'the West alone has developed the scientific and technological resources to achieve modernity and its social progress'. Triumphalism here refers to the tendency for techno-sciences to accept no part in the categorical failures of Western societies to take care of their own and other people's health and welfare, and the inability to produce flourishing human and nonhuman environments. Harding reminds us of the wonderful lyric from the Tom Lehrer song which had the rocket scientist Werner von Braun singing he was just responsible for getting the rockets up (science), not for where they came down (politics). For Harding, of course, such a distinction between science and technology, knowledge and politics, is largely untenable. Science's failure should not be glossed over with an imagined divide between truth and context. This argument should not, however, be confused with an anti-science position. Harding's feminism is clear enough on the benefits of good knowledge and good science. Rather than a disembodied body of knowledge, good science is made by working with, not against, a context. It's not that science makes truths which are then let down by those who use the science. It's that science is already deeply contextual and therefore a

more radical approach is needed which reconfigures knowledge as broadly distributed.

Harding thus aims to radicalize the real progress that has been made by the scientific study of science (often referred to as Science and Technology Studies, or STS for short). STS has given us the means to question the 'given' authority of Western science, and has demonstrated with painstaking empirical detail that truths are made in context, that knowledge is always situated and partial. However, for Harding, the science studies community has become rather too uncontroversial. Arguably, the strange peace that followed the Science Wars has been bought by STS and related areas becoming rather tame. Compared to the radical science studies of the 1970s and 1980s, there is something, many argue, rather antiseptic or disengaged about current work, which seems to have lost some of the emancipatory verve (and certainties) of that earlier period. Against this, Harding seeks to bring together a number of more radical strands of work that together form a 'below'. The book, which starts out with brief and partial reviews of three quite different but individually important contributions to current understandings of science (Latour, Beck, and Nowotny and colleagues), then aims to draw in a variety of related and progressive tendencies in studies of science and of culture. The contention is that the transformative insights from feminist scholarship and postcolonial studies in particular have not been satisfactorily taken up by mainstream science studies. This book thus offers something of a corrective, urging scholars and students to engage with a range of studies from South as well as North, from 'traditional' practice as well as 'modern' laboratories and science field study sites. Rather than simply adding more insights from below, the book argues for taking up standpoints, noting that the world will look and be performed quite differently once we learn to see it and do it from below.

It's worth dwelling on the last point about addition. Addition is important, Harding argues, as we need always to consider what adding does to the centre. Adding women's or Southern voices to studies of scientific knowledge starts to challenge our understanding of Western science. And by researching and/or taking up standpoints of those positioned below, academics can further undermine the pretence of the centre to speak for all. And yet, despite talk of calibration of STS with feminist and postcolonial science studies, I couldn't help notice that this was a rather one-way exchange. Many of the real gains from science studies, and its theoretical offshoots like actor network theory, are not here asked to add to the transformative potential of feminism and postcolonial studies (especially those versions of feminism and postcolonial studies that exist outside science studies). In the main this is a book about adding to science studies and not about using science studies to add to these other literatures. My point is not that science studies has all the answers (far from it), and certainly I am supportive of a project that aims to increase understanding of, and engagement with, areas of scholarship that are systematically ignored or undervalued in academia and in political circles. However, there is a radical project being written in some parts of STS (not only, but certainly not least, in feminist and postcolonial versions) which combines the transformative potential of feminist and postcolonial challenges to modernisms with an engagement with some of the more theoretically and empirically disturbing elements within the science studies literature.

I can only be indicative here, but there are a few candidates from the broad spectrum of STS that might help to develop an even more progressive area of engagement. I will start with the easy maths that I mentioned at the outset. There are many in science studies who are working to refuse the one-or-many choice that seems to inform most social theory. Or, more to the point, while single versions or truths have been largely given up by social theorists, there are those who find the insistence on plural truths to be both philosophically problematic and politically unhelpful. Perhaps the clearest demonstration of this problem is in the work of the Dutch philosopher Annemarie Mol, who refuses current liberal versions of knowledge politics that beset the medical world. Rejecting the notion that a disease can be plural, and arguing against perspectivalism (for example, there being a patient's experience or perception of disease, a clinician's reading of that disease, and a pathologist's or laboratory assessment, and that the patient should be free to choose which version of the disease they can believe), she has ethnographically explored how a (diseased) body is simultaneously more than one but less than many. By looking at the care practices that go on within a clinic, within nursing, in the laboratory and in other places, Mol shows us how such practices are unlikely to produce a coherent whole, but they are and can be assembled together to form something of a working body of knowledges that can be used to devise good treatment. This is a normative account, one that is interested in better knowledges, but it isn't satisfied with plurality, with patient choice or even with dialogue, but with the expertises involved in devising practical means to get on with lives that are complex

and always unfinished. It is worth noting that authors like Mol (and John Law has done something similar and just as challenging) talk of multiplicity rather than plurality. While plurality refers to the many (and also implies a reduction through due process to the one), the multiple refers to the realization that there will be an ongoing politics, an onto-politics, that attempts to live with this more-than-one but less-than-many world. There is no presumption either that the many or the one can be ever realized. The multiple speaks to the need to live with things being made by more than one practice in more than one place but in ways that don't lead to fragmentation, to a world that more or less coherently holds together.

The multiple has effects, too, on the geometry of social theory. Instead of arguing for reversals of the above and the below, by for example supporting patients' right to choose (choose what?) over doctors' right to diagnose, Mol's politics is about providing resources for good practices that are located in the whereabouts, the patchings, the overlaps that improve clinical practice, inform patients and develop a more caring and careful medical science. It is worth comparing this spatial complexity with the more limited spatial imagination that is 'below'. Harding ends her book with a call for scholars to study below, by, in her example, using households as a key knowledge production site. This is certainly justified as a strategy. It would be wrong to assume, I think, that any politics of knowledge and material practice that approached issues like climate change, for example, could afford to ignore households. Climate change is certainly done in households and to focus only on energy supply would miss the demand side issues of dealing with this issue. Nevertheless, we need to understand households as not simply 'below' but also as patched up, thoroughly networked locales which do climate change in ways that more or less coherently map onto all the other locales (from the heating engineer who fixes a new boiler to energy companies, and so on) that also make change. While climate change, to continue the example, is certainly done in households, it won't, as Barack Obama is said to have remarked, be solved by people simply changing light bulbs. It will be necessary to look at how climate is practised at many sites and how they make a more or less coherent object in order to start to see how climate is an onto-political issue. How might such an insight into the practical politics of technoscience change our current attempts to engage a broader range of places and forms of knowledge practice? How could this move us forward from a rather hopeful and underspecified 'pluricentric global dialogue' to a politics not only of who but also of wheres and of what?

Mol's work is both theoretical and empirical. It is also interested in materials and materialities. Perhaps my biggest disappointment with *Sciences from Below* is that, paradoxically, it steers clear of the messiness of empirical and political work, and, perhaps as a result, does not engage with the material complexities of science in society. This is a survey of texts, a study in plural epistemologies. And yet one of the most important insights from STS over the last few decades has been an insistence on the need to re-distribute knowledge not only outside of conventional knowledge institutions but also outside of humanist framings of who can be knowledgeable. It is not only people that matter but the people, things and people-things that go to make the world. Harding does not engage in this book with the distributions of agency that are of concern for many of her colleagues within STS and within feminist science studies. The political injunction of *Sciences from Below* is to claim that all people are 'fully human', irrespective of sex, gender, race, location, and so on. That such a claim should be necessary is perhaps all too obvious. Go to any airport or border crossing and you can witness a dehumanization of some people forced to account for their movements while others pass freely. However, such vital politics must not be allowed to obscure the ways that other lives are also, as both Derrida and Haraway have reminded us, made killable and expendable. And nor should concern for people render invisible the complex relations between ourselves and a host of heterogeneous others (from animals to landscapes, from microbes to climates). Indeed, such concern needs

to see people alongside their objects, their materials, their nonhuman companions, if it is to have any chance of making a better and more radical political contexture. The politics that follows from a more worldly world isn't just about giving voice to those who have been marginalized (important though that is). 'Ecologies of practice', 'multi-naturalism' and 'thing power' are just some of the terms that have been mobilized by recent feminists, postcolonial anthropologists and science studies scholars and that speak to a more than human world. This is where feminism, postcolonial studies and understandings of modernity have really challenged science studies (including, I would argue, Latour, through his engagement with philosophers like Stengers), and where science studies has duly amplified the 'what' of what's at stake, but it is not something that is dwelt on in this book as a source for a different kind of politics. It may be the case that some of the real problems that scholarship is facing in this area, and that rightly concern Harding, are only now starting to be addressed in quite radical, interesting and productive ways. This book should help us to see the issues and then prompt us to find some partial answers.

Steve Hinchliffe

Escape from reality

Dimitris Papadopoulos, Niamh Stephenson and Vassilis Tsianos, *Escape Routes: Control and Subversion in the Twenty-First Century*, Pluto Press, London and Ann Arbor MI, 2008. xx + 300 pp., £17.99 pb., 978 0 745 327785.

'Escape' alone, according to the authors of *Escape Routes*, constitutes the real foundation of all social transformation. This transformation does not consist in the revolutionary 'event' but is located within the 'imperceptible politics' of the everyday; within processual, pre-personal becomings and the responses these force upon mechanisms of control: 'The thesis of the book is that people escape: only *after* control tries to recapture escape routes can we speak of "escape from". Prior to its regulation, escape is primarily imperceptible.' While social transformation, on this account, has always proceeded along such lines, the authors claim to address their analysis to the unique historical juncture of contemporary forms of escape and the emergent configurations of power attempting to absorb them. Hence they argue that we are currently witnessing a transition from neoliberalism to what they call 'postliberalism'; from the 'horizontal' control space of transnational and globalized forms of governance, which themselves followed in the wake of the centralized power of the nation-state, to the new 'vertical aggregates' of control. These vertical aggregates operate as clusters through which strategic alliances composed of government, business, research centres, the military, and local informal economies are bundled together. Analysing first the conditions leading to this historically significant moment of transition, Papadopoulos, Stephenson and Tsianos then turn their attention to certain fields in which contemporary forms of escape are met with these new forms of postliberal control: those of 'emergent life', 'mobility and migration' and 'labour and precarity'.

Staking out their position in *Escape Routes*, the authors open with their assertion of the primacy of 'escape' as the constituent moment of all social change: 'Escape comes first! People's efforts to escape can force the reorganization of control itself; regimes of control must respond to the new situations created by escape.' As they acknowledge, they are following here the lead of Antonio Negri and his plea that the 'history of capitalism' be written 'from the perspective of worker's mobility' – as well as that of Italian Workerism and Autonomia more broadly – in according autonomy to 'people' rather than forms of sovereignty, governance or capital. Yet here 'escape' is pushed to the status of an absolute, a self-sufficient and unconditioned essence which drives all change in the first instance. 'Escape' is to be understood, they argue, not as 'escape from', but as 'escape', full stop. The broad thrust of the position they adopt from Negri is clearly employed to argue for the agency of the processes and subjects that they attend to in their case studies, and to elaborate the necessarily reactive role of control in response to these. But 'escape' simply will not stand up on its own as a non-relational term, either grammatically or historically, and it is not long before the contradictions inherent to the maintenance of this position appear.

Hence we read of the social movements and 'refusal of work' of the Italian experience of the 1960s and 1970s that these were an '*escape from* the subject form of Global North Atlantic societies', or of the '*escape from* feudal immobility' (my emphases), represented by fifteenth- and sixteenth-century vagabondage. Of this latter example the authors assert that the peasants were 'forced' from their land and into a condition of exile, and subjected as a consequence to the most severe forms of punishment, yet they wish to maintain, at the same time, that 'we cannot understand social change and people's agency if we always see them as

already entangled in and regulated by control'. It might be argued, on the contrary, and using the evidence of the same events that they cast as examples of 'escape' – including those referred to above, as well as those of the Paris Commune and the German revolution of 1918 – that 'people's agency' can *only* be understood within the context of their entanglements with control. If the point here is, as it appears to be, to argue for the agency of people, of their creative capacity to produce forces which put control on the back foot, compelling it to reinvent its mechanisms and reabsorb these forces, then this can surely be achieved whilst acknowledging too that control also acts, at times, as a historical agent, or that capital too is productive, and not merely reactive. However, in their telling of the feudal seizure of the commons and land clearances, the development of wage labour and early capitalism appear as forms *forced* upon governance as a means of controlling peasant mobility.

A similarly one-sided picture appears in the authors' treatment of neoliberalism. Fredric Jameson, David Harvey et al. have it wrong, it seems, in understanding neoliberalism as a 'new mode of economic regulation' or a 'new relation between culture and production'. Instead it can be explained, from the perspective of escape, solely as a response to the 'wild anomaly' of new forms of subjectivity produced within the counter-cultural movements of the 1960s and 1970s. 'There is only', they write, 'the necessity to tame the imperceptible and escaping subjectivities', and this necessity alone defines the project of neoliberalism. To choose only one example from any number that would trouble this reductionism: how would we even begin to understand Thatcher's showdown with the NUM and the miners' strike of 1984 within this perspective alone?

Whilst certain theoretical tools are thus reworked by Papadopoulos, Stephenson and Tsianos in light of their 'escape' thesis, other positions appearing to contradict them are, in places, dismissed through crude, inaccurate caricature. Their own concern with what they call the 'imperceptible politics' of the everyday, of the unseen creative agency of the people, for instance, renders both Marxism and Foucault irrelevant at a single stroke: 'The imperceptible politics of escape eschews the Marxist obsession with the state as well as the Foucauldian paranoia about control pervading the whole of society.'

From the positions outlined here the authors then turn their analysis to the ways in which escape operates through certain fields of practice and experience. Here, at least, there are moments where their discourse is made more convincing through reference to their research, though even this is at times problematic in its methods and conclusions. In their treatment of the conditions of escape pertaining to 'emergent life', for instance the shift from the horizontalized forms of transnational governance and neoliberalism to the strategic 'vertical aggregates' of postliberal control, is exemplified around the issue of influenza vaccination. Whereas the internationalist response would be met through the function of the World Health Organization, the 'supranational' character of postliberalism is exemplified for the authors in the new alliances being wrought between the pharmaceuticals industry, national governments and NGOs around such matters, and problematized around the inequalities of access which follow from these new arrangements.

Drawing upon their own 'militant research' project in analysing contemporary forms of migration and mobility, Papadopoulos, Stephenson and Tsianos identify a similar movement from the neoliberal to the postliberal. Faced with the current extent of people's mobility, of their desire to escape and their refusal to be constrained by the borders or identities of nationality, they argue, control is forced to abandon the types of international agreements on immigration it has recently established. The European Community's Schengen treaty on immigration of 1985, for example, is succeeded by what they term 'liminal porocratic institutions': forms of mobility control 'which lie and operate beyond public negotiation and beyond norms and rules instituted through governance'. The role of the 'shadowy' alliances composing these liminal porocratic institutions is to work with, rather than against, the conditions of porosity produced through the mobility of migrants. Hence borders are constructed on a strategic and contingent basis in respect of 'security', but also made to work for the fluctuating demands of the labour market within given territories, whilst at the same time absolving that market of any responsibility towards its employees. Of the temporary camps in which migrants are detained they assert that they 'facilitate the entrance of people into the regime of labour and at the same time they outsource any responsibility for the maintenance of their life conditions to the detainees themselves'.

Where the authors turn to the issue of 'labour and precarity' as a form of escape, they find the accounts of figures such as Sennett or Boltanski and Chiapello unhelpful, based, as they allege they are, on a pessimistic reading, according no agency to the force of precarity itself. Such thinking victimizes the experience of precarity, and in that very process shapes it

into a convenient form of subjectivity, one which can then be 'represented' within the union, the party or the remedial discourse of cultural studies. Precarity should not be understood, they continue, as the basis for the identity of either a new subject position or a class composition – the so-called 'precariat' – but as an 'embodied experience' containing within itself the potential to challenge the subjectifying practice of governance and the 'embodied' forms of cognitive capitalism itself. This potential, again following Negri, supposedly resides in the *excess* of sociability produced under conditions of precarity, and the ways in which this surfeit might be rechannelled into forms of existence escaping control and representation altogether.

Whilst such arguments may bear repeating, they raise a question mark over the 'originality' of the thesis proclaimed on the book's back cover blurb by no lesser figures than Negri and Saskia Sassen. It is now almost thirty years, after all, since Deleuze and Guattari wrote, in *A Thousand Plateaus*, that 'A social field is always animated by all kinds of movements of decoding and deterritorialization affecting "masses" and operating at different speeds and paces. These are not contradictions but escapes.' Certainly the authors add some flesh and contemporary resonance to this position, but, in working so strenuously and uncompromisingly to essentialize it around the figure of 'escape' alone, and in this placing 'escape' *before* all forms of control, they devalue critical positions which remain valuable assets to theory, whilst obscuring from consideration, and hence critique, the active, and not merely reactive, agency of capital itself.

Douglas Spencer

The canon is the solution

Mark Neocleous, *Critique of Security*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2008. 256 pp., £60.00 hb., £19.99 pb., 978 0 74863 328 9 hb., 978 0 74863 329 6 pb.

A critic of C.B. Macpherson once wrote that this Canadian political theorist knew but one big thing. This remark was offered both as a criticism and as a compliment. The reviewer remonstrated that Macpherson in a lifetime spent on writing about liberal political theory never moved beyond his initial conception of possessive individualism. On the other hand, that same reviewer allowed that the theory of possessive individualism which Macpherson worked and reworked was an invaluable contribution to the study of political theory. The same can easily be said of Mark Neocleous. A prolific writer in political and social theory, Neocleous returns time and again to the theme he first explored in *Fabrication of Social Order*, specifically how the state is responsible for creating and sustaining a social order appropriate to the needs of capitalism. In his newest book, *Critique of Security,* Neocleous focuses on the materialization of national security as the dominant question in contemporary liberal politics. His aim is to explain how this security agenda has been constituted and to critique the ways in which it has colonized the minutiae of everyday life.

Whilst liberal critics of the emergent security state decry its threat to liberty, Neocleous refuses to engage this now familiar dispute about the relative value of liberty and security. Indeed, his argument is that this liberal debate is a sham that can be traced to the philosophical underpinnings of classical liberalism found in the writings of Hobbes and Locke. On his view, classical liberalism is really a theory that upholds the value of security first and advocates liberty only in so far as it serves the needs of capitalism. To make this case, Neocleous closely examines Locke's argument about prerogative power, in the process debunking the idea that the philosophical champion of the Glorious Revolution is somehow fundamentally different from Hobbes. This conceptual history is meant to show that the real liberal project aims at security, albeit security wrapped up in a discourse of individual rights, which in turn is wrapped up in a myth of individual emancipation. According to Neocleous, Locke's conceptual manoeuvres obscure his all-important discussion of prerogative power. While Locke averred that the exercise of prerogative power is incidental to the social contract because it is only to be used in emergencies, Neocleous points out that in fact Locke's conception of occasional crisis easily gives way to a constant state of emergency that normalizes the quest for security. This is so not only at the level of theory but and especially at the level of practice. For example, Neocleous shows how martial law, which originally only applied to military personnel, gradually began to be used for purposes of general 'security' and 'order'.

Neocleous proceeds to draw on insights from his brief conceptual history of classical liberal theory together with observations from social history, IPE (International Political Economy) and securitization studies to argue that the best way of comprehend-

ing the postwar development of the national security state is to link it to the prewar emergence of the social security state. Both social security and national security, according to Neocleous, serve the same goal of economic security for which capitalists are always striving. This political project of linking social and national security was exemplified by innovations in American policy during the Roosevelt and subsequent Cold War years and became the model for a new international capitalist order developed under American hegemony.

One of the most interesting parts of *Critique of Security* is the chapter in which Neocleous explores the fabrication of what he calls the 'security–identity–loyalty complex'. Central to this discussion is the idea that while national security typically is evoked as a ubiquitous interest of all states, it is in fact, particularly in its postwar manifestation, a deliberate construction meant to normalize the security needs of capital.

To illustrate this point Neocleous explores, at some length, the way in which loyalty to the state feeds national identity and how these two nurture the concept of security. Neocleous argues that it is through this process that liberal security gets fused with the notion of national security. Exploring the already well traversed ground of American (dis)loyalty during the McCarthy era, Neocleous argues that the spectre of national insecurity is used again and again to induce citizens to become 'orderly'. In so doing, perfectly pliant capitalist subjects are created who do not question their ideological force-feeding but instead continue to work and consume. There is definitely a profit to be made in patriotism.

'Canons, rather than cannons', writes Neocleous in his final chapter, is a way for the security industry associated with the emergence of the security state to rationalize and vindicate its existence. By turns ironic and polemical, Neocleous attempts in this concluding chapter to show just how complicit academic disciplines are in the production and reproduction of the security discourse. Scornful of the way so many academics have contributed to the reification of the concept of security, Neocleous insists throughout that this supposed material gift of the state is entirely illusory. It is time, Neocleous says as he brings his book to a close, to return the gift.

There is no doubt that this is a book rich in ideas. Neocleous eschews the regimented approach of the traditional historian of ideas in favour of sweeping conceptual analysis that is boldly interdisciplinary. His writing is accessible and can at times be riveting. Neocleous's research in this as in his other books is impressive (fully a fifth of the text is given to footnotes). His anecdotes and asides are invariably interesting and often amusing. And it goes without saying that the central contention of his book about the way in which security has been fetishized in the service of a modern capitalist order is important. At the same time it should be noted that Neocleous frequently relies on allusions where demonstration is called for. Too often his conclusions are question-begging, and the reason for that is that the causal relations that the reader is looking for are not always spelled out as precisely as they could be. For example, Neocleous depicts the relationship between the state and capitalism in this process of the formation of a security discourse in at least two different ways. Time and again he tends to frame this relationship in a functionalist and reductive manner as evidenced by the following quotation: 'Global order has come to be fabricated and administered according to security doctrine underpinned by the logic of capital

accumulation and a bourgeois conception of order.' At other times, however, Neocleous offers us a more nuanced portrait of this relationship, as for example when he asserts that 'it is through the combined effect of "social" and "national" security that security per se has come to be one of the major mechanisms for the fabrication of the political order of capitalist modernity, a nexus of power conjoining capital and the state.' In this latter formulation Neocleous implies that the state system has at least some independent history from the social formation engendered by capitalism, and that their interaction is one that involves autonomous as well as interdependent institutional logics. The difference in these two depictions is consequential to his overall argument. Whereas the functionalist account leads Neocleous to indulge in his own fetishization of the state as a unitary actor imposing precisely the order called forth by capital, his alternative narrative suggests a state–society nexus that is more complexly constituted by multiple institutional logics. This latter approach, though never really developed systematically by Neocleous, points to what has now become a rather vigorous debate among Marxists about how to conceptualize a non-economistic historical materialism that, among other things, acknowledges the abiding legacies of pre-capitalist state systems for contemporary capitalism (see, for instance, the work of Wood, Brenner, Bonefield, Sayer, Lacher).

Had Neocleous chosen to engage directly this debate about the legacies of the pre-capitalist state system, it is unlikely he would have been so quick to identify the modern security discourse so unequivocally with what he posits as some rather abstract requirements of capitalism. Still, his own counsel about how we should respond to this security discourse is certainly worth considering. In his conclusion, he calls on us to be bold enough to be 'open to debate', to be brave enough to 'accept that insecurity is part of the human condition' and to 'tolerate the uncertainties, ambiguities and "insecurities" that come with being human'. What we need to do, he avows, is 'to fight for an alternative political language' and 'to develop a new political language more adequate to the kind of society we want'. One is tempted in the circumstances to remind Neocleous of the oft-cited line from Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach* where he chided the so-called Young Hegelians for the practical inadequacy of their contemplative materialism: 'The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it.' This particular charge follows upon an earlier admonition Marx had penned as he tried to come to terms with his own intellectual forebearers in *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*: 'The weapon of criticism cannot in any case replace the criticism of weapons, material force must be overthrown by material force.' Perhaps it is a telling symptom of just how entrenched the liberal discourse of security has become that so eloquent a Marxist censor of the capitalist order as Neocleous no longer imagines it possible to identify the social forces that might oppose it but instead fastens on the strategy of critique and normative wish as the way forward.

Olena Kobzar

Losing the war

Thomas C. Hilde, ed., *On Torture*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 2008. 228 pp., £16.50 pb., 978 0 8018 9026 0.

In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of 2001, Cofer Black, former head of counter-terrorism at the CIA, told a congressional committee: 'All you need to know: there was a before 9/11 and there was an after 9/11. After 9/11 the gloves came off.' Or as Tony Blair, eager to back the US 'war on terror', put it: 'Let no one be in any doubt. The rules of the game are changing.' The sporting metaphors were transparent: in the international struggle against al-Qaeda and its myriad offshoots, the end justified the means.

The fifteen essays gathered together in this special issue of *South Central Review* examine aspects of what happens when the gloves come off and when the rules change. The contributors are mainly American-based, and although the essays look at precedents from Nazi Germany, France's colonial wars in Algeria, Colombia (a particularly grim but compelling contribution from Margarita Serje) and Gaza, the main focus is, perhaps inevitably, Bush's America. If there is a philosophical issue involved in debates about torture, its terms are well outlined by Hilde in his introduction. A crude instrumentalist utilitarianism or cost–benefit analysis argues that, whilst it may be distasteful, torture works: it allows intelligence to be gathered. Moral absolutism contends that it is an assault on human dignity and therefore cannot be justified in any circumstances. Carlos Castresana, a public prosecutor of the Supreme Court of Spain, refutes the instrumentalist argument by citing Hobbes, writing in 1651: 'What is confessed in such a situation tends only to relieve the pain of he who is being tortured, not to provide information to the torturers.' Few, surely, would accuse Hobbes of being

a liberal with an over-squeamish concern for human rights. That torture is a poor way of obtaining reliable intelligence is widely accepted. It is also recognized to be an effective way of terrorizing populations. But terrorized populations subjected to repression are rarely passive victims, and torturers can become effective recruiting sergeants for the very cause they claim to be fighting. When mass internment without trial was introduced in Northern Ireland in 1972, recruitment to the Provisional IRA increased dramatically; a measure intended to end a conflict probably prolonged it.

In terms of international law, and the national legislations of all democracies, torture is, quite simply, illegal: severe pain, whether physical or mental, applied as a punishment or in an attempt to extract information. No exceptional circumstances can be invoked as a justification of torture. International law and conventions notwithstanding, the 'ticking bomb' scenario is still evoked: you have a suspected terrorist in your hands, and he knows where the bomb is. What are you going to do to extract the information that will save innocent lives? No one has ever produced a convincing instance of this scenario, and this fiction betrays a failure to understand how most terrorist organizations are structured. In the classic cell structure, the prisoner will almost certainly be ignorant of where the bomb is and of who will trigger it, even if he or she was involved in its manufacture or transportation. He or she may well talk, but the talk is likely to be nonsense and intended only to relieve the pain.

One way to circumvent legal niceties is, of course, to define them away. For the Bush administration, in particular, guerrillas captured in Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere were redefined as 'illegal enemy combatants' who did not enjoy the protection of the Geneva Convention; they became non-people to be held in non-places. Under the terms of a 2002 US memorandum, torture is redefined as the infliction of pain so severe that death, organ failure or permanent damage is likely to result. Sensory deprivation, beatings, waterboarding, sexual humiliation, rape, simulated executions and all the other tricks of the trade are, by this definition, not torture. The Bush administration's legal advisers may have been good at semantics, but there is nothing new about such casuistry. FLN suspects were never tortured by French paratroopers in Algeria; they underwent 'muscular interrogations'. Unfortunately, some died as a result but they were not tortured to death.

Better still, torture can be 'outsourced' as though it were just another unpleasant service industry or a form of pollution. Suspects from battlefields in Afghanistan can be rendered to Guantánamo, a non-space on Cuban territory that appears to come under no definable legal jurisdiction, or the secret prisons or 'black sites' operated by the CIA that appear on no maps (closer to home, they can be placed under control orders and effectively removed from public view). They can be rendered to other countries and handed over to authorities who make no pretence of abjuring torture. For Western governments, this has the advantage of 'deniability', though it takes a vast amount of credulity (or cynicism) even to suggest that anyone handed over to the intelligence services of Syria or Pakistan is going to avoid a very muscular interrogation indeed. To move away from the American perspective of this collection, British governments habitually argue that they neither participate, solicit, encourage nor condone the use of torture. Yet there have for some years been repeated claims that terrorist suspects have been rendered from Britain to Pakistan, where they were tortured with the full knowledge and complicity of British agents. When such claims were voiced, the mantra of 'we do not condone' was repeated. The second line of defence was to invoke a 'national security' defined in terms so nebulous as to cover anything and everything. Discussion of policies intended to defend national security could be curtailed on the grounds that it was a threat to the said national security. On 7 July 2009, Conservative MP David Davis, speaking under parliamentary privilege, described how a terrorist suspect who was

allowed to travel from Manchester to Pakistan was arrested and tortured. The Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate had been tipped off by MI5 and the police. After thirteen months in custody, he was returned to Britain – minus several fingernails – prosecuted and jailed for life after being found guilt of directing a terrorist organization. The jury was not told that he had been tortured, and some details of the counter-terrorist operation that led to his arrest were heard *in camera*. Presumably, a trial in an open court can now be construed as a threat to national security. As so often, the British state wraps itself in layer after layer of secrecy and talks of the need for transparency.

This is an important collection and deserves to be read widely. Some doubts must, however, arise. Barbara Ehrenreich's contribution (originally published in the *Los Angeles Times*) describes how the picture from Abu Ghraib 'broke my heart': they showed women performing sickening forms of abuse. They destroyed what she calls 'a certain kind of feminism or … a certain kind of feminist naivety', namely the belief in the innate moral superiority of women. It now transpired that 'women can do the unthinkable'. Ehrenreich need not have been surprised: two of those hanged for war crimes after the Belsen trial of December 1945 were young women. When it comes to torture, nothing, it would appear, is ever new. It has all happened before. The attempts made here to explore 'representations' of torture also raise certain doubts, some of them relating to Darius Rejalli's discussion of 'torture and manhood' in Algeria, or rather in a novel about Algeria. Larteguy's *Les Centurions* (1960) deals with the infamous Battle of Algiers, sings the praises of French paratroops (the 'centurions' of the title) and uses the ticking bomb trope to justify the use of torture. It also invokes tropes of masculinity: are you man enough to use the torture that will save the innocent? In the context of colonial Algeria, the issue easily becomes sexualized, and Rejalli relies heavily on the Sartre–Fanon analysis of colonial sexuality. For Fanon, in particular, torture is one of the ways in which white men can act out the fears inspired by the sexual imaginary of colonialism. The victim is the sexually powerful black man who haunts the dreams of the colonist; the white torturer is abusing the figure on which his dreams feed and kills him in a bid to outdo his supposed hyper-virility. Fanon's analysis is at times as confused as it is powerful. Whether he is talking in his last writings about Algeria or a generalized (and mythologized) Third World is never entirely clear; memories of Martinique and the Caribbean fuse uneasily with images of Algeria; white fantasies about blacks are projected onto North African Arabs, and so on. The writing is immensely powerful; the analysis less clear than one might wish. To use this as a general model for a phenomenology of torture is perhaps misleading, even dangerous. Torture was commonplace during Argentina's dirty war (1976–83), but these sexual–racial fantasies were not part of it: Argentines tortured not a racialized other, but 'fellow' Argentines. If there was a sexual element, it was not that analysed by Fanon, and it was, if anything, still more perverse: the babies of pregnant young women who were disappeared were adopted by officers in the forces that disappeared their mothers.

To argue that there are no circumstances that justify torture, extrajudicial killings off the battlefield, disappearances or extraordinary renditions is not to justify or condone terrorism. Terrorism, not least in its Islamicist guise, is a real threat. The individual in the case discussed by David Davis was guilty. Certain Islamicist organizations that reportedly act as recruitment pools probably should be banned. The danger is that the way in which the 'war on terror' is being waged may well help to reproduce what it is trying to eradicate. France 'won' the Battle of Algiers, but the way in which it won it helped it lose the war in Algeria.

David Macey

The horror, the horror

Adriano Cavarero, *Horrorism: Naming Contemporary Violence*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2008. 168 pp., £21.00 hb., 978 0 231 14456 8.

On 12 June the *Guardian* newspaper told the story of Samira al-Jaseem, a 52-year-old Iraqi woman accused of training eighty women as suicide bombers, twenty-eight of whom went on to die in attacks. Although she now denies the charges, she confessed to them in a video in February, after her arrest – a video that, as journalist Martin Chulov reported, 'shocked a war-weary Iraq, jaded by the most extreme and indiscriminate violence of the last six years, where snuff videos, taped beheadings and the rampant slaughter of civilians have become commonplace'. Suicide bomb attacks by women have escalated in Iraq, from thirty-three between late 2007 and late 2008, as opposed to only two or three in the few years before that. These female bombers seem to be especially disturbing, and

the figure of Samira al-Jaseem, as the person who allegedly persuaded young women to use their bodies as weapons against defenceless crowds, heightens our disturbance considerably. Where women are 'manipulated' into carrying out such attacks, a core assumption is that they are manipulated by men. That the key manipulator here – the 'evil genius' behind the attacks – is also a woman deepens our disorientation.

Adriano Cavarero takes us some way towards an understanding of this disturbance through the idea of 'horrorism'. She wishes to introduce the idea of horror into our contemporary understanding of 'terrorism', and uses the word 'horrorism' specifically to capture the point of view of the victims of terrorist attacks. From the military perspective we are witnessing terrorism, from the 'insurgent' point of view martyrdom, but from the point of view of the helpless victims, she writes, 'the picture changes: the end melts away, and the means become substance. More than terror, what stands out is horror.' Cavarero thus argues that we must place the perspective of the victim at the centre of our account: 'the viewpoint of the defenceless must not only be adopted here, it must be adopted exclusively; that is what really matters'. We are terrified of what we cannot see, and when in a state of terror we are on the edge of flight or actually fleeing; but horror has to do with feeling frozen with repugnance at the spectacle of violence. To the extent that contemporary 'terrorism' involves the spectacle of beheadings on the Internet, and pictures of bodies dismembered by suicide attacks, then, she asserts, we should learn to speak of 'horrorism'. Conceptualizing the violence in this way thereby 'helps us to see that a certain model of horror is indispensable for understanding our present'. But what pushes Cavarero further towards the discourse of horror is the presence of the female suicide bomber in particular. For 'what is new', she writes, 'is the way in which the massacre is now perpetrated: a body that blows itself up in order to rip other bodies to pieces. And more than that, a female body as happens ever more frequently.'

While the word 'horrorism' may be new, Cavarero acknowledges that she is drawing on a history of violence against the helpless, and the repugnance it invokes, which 'has been known … for millennia'. In Greek mythology there are scenes of extreme horror, as bodies are graphically tortured and dismembered. And here, too, the presence of women is especially disturbing: 'when a woman steps to the front of the stage of horror, the scene turns darker and, although more disconcerting, more familiar. Repugnance is heightened, and the effect is augmented: as though horror, just as the myth already knew, required the feminine to reveal its authentic roots.' Drawing on the image of the gorgon Medusa and the alleged child-killer Medea, Cavarero concludes that, 'according to mythology, horror has the face of a woman'.

This special repugnance is replayed in our experience of the contemporary figure of the suicide bomber. Whatever the circumstances, 'a female body thrust into the foreground of the scene of violence … still remains particularly scandalous': 'Whatever the emancipatory or military value assigned to it, the female body that explodes in order to rip apart innocent bodies is always, symbolically, a maternal body.' There is something childlike about the condition of the defenceless, and so 'violence stands out more forcefully because it is from the mother that care is expected'. It is in this light that, for example, Cavarero cites Julija Juzik writing about the Chechen female suicide bombers, and her reaction to 'the scandal of female bodies that make themselves into instruments of death rather than sources of life'.

On the cover of *Horrorism* is a photograph of a woman howling in desperation. Cavarero refers to the 'howl of Medusa', in the moment of the gorgon's horror at being dismembered by Perseus, which develops into a universal howl of horror at the spectacle of the innocent bodies dismembered by military and political violence. The book is an expression of the desperate and outraged howl of the innocent against their torture; a howl, for Cavarero, which expresses a moral outrage, an ethical judgement upon those who have carried out such attacks. But the point cannot be that there is something morally repugnant in *women* engaging in violent resistance, and while the repugnance Cavarero describes concerns female suicide bombers, there is an ambiguity in the text over whether she is claiming that there is a general psychic disturbance when women engage in this violent activity – which, judging by the *Guardian* report, seems to be true – or whether she is claiming we *ought* to be disturbed by it. Should we be *morally* outraged that women engage in such violence, and if so who should be the target of that outrage: the women themselves or those who 'manipulate' them?

The fact is that the woman in the front cover photo is not howling at the spectacle of horror – she is a Palestinian suicide bomber whose bomb has failed to detonate, and she is desperately trying to activate the explosives. And so while the book is written to express horror at the vulnerability of the defenceless against military or 'terrorist' attack – which, at various moments, includes all of us – this image in fact asks another question: why would a woman howl in

despair at her failure to blow apart defenceless bodies alongside her own?

Cavarero is clear that her concern is not with the motivation or the strategy of the bomber, but at the same time it is an unavoidable aspect of the discussion. Where she does address this she does so in terms of an extreme Islamicism, such that the motivation is expressed through an idea of religious martyrdom. She also discusses the work of Carl Schmitt, writing in the 1960s, and his distinction between two kinds of 'partisan': the tellurian partisan, who fights a real enemy in terms of resisting an invading force, and the partisan who fights an absolute enemy. The latter, writes Cavarero, 'cutting loose from the "tellurian" dimension, wages a struggle that aims at world revolution because he [or she] identifies his enemy as a class or as the characteristics of any kind of identity (including the Western lifestyle, to give an up-to-date example)'. This partisan, according to Schmitt, wages a new kind of war characterized by a 'pure means of destruction', weapons of absolute annihilation to be used against an absolute enemy.

In a footnote detailing the number of suicide attacks between 1980 and 2003 (just over 300), Cavarero refers to Robert Pape's book *Dying to Win: Why Terrorists Do It*, published in 2006. In that book Pape and his team investigated all the cases of suicide bombers they could find during that period, and of the 38 Hizbollah suicide bombers they investigated, only 8 could actually be regarded as Islamic fundamentalists; 3 were Christians, and the rest were members of left political groups. In a newspaper interview following the book's publication, Pape commented:

> There is not the close connection between suicide terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism that many people think. Rather, what nearly all suicide terror campaigns have in common is a specific secular and strategic goal: the compel democracies to withdraw military forces from territory that the terrorists consider to be their homeland.

To use Schmitt's distinction, the majority of suicide bombers remain 'tellurian', whether in the Palestinian struggle, Chechnya or Sri Lanka. This of course may have changed since the publication of Pape's findings in 2006. The suicide bombers who attacked Londoners in 2007 were British citizens and so cannot be understood in these 'tellurian' terms. Equally, many of the attacks in contemporary Iraq are directed against other Iraqis rather than occupying forces, as the story of the female suicide bombers trained by Samira al-Jaseem suggests. Nonetheless, as Pape observes, while religion is no doubt often used as a recruitment tool, and while it would be naive to suggest that it plays no role in the motivations of suicide bombers in a country such as Iraq, it is not the root cause. And so while Cavarero may be right that the context for understanding suicide bombings has changed, it may still be that the occupation of Iraq by foreign, and specifically non-Muslim, forces remains that root cause.

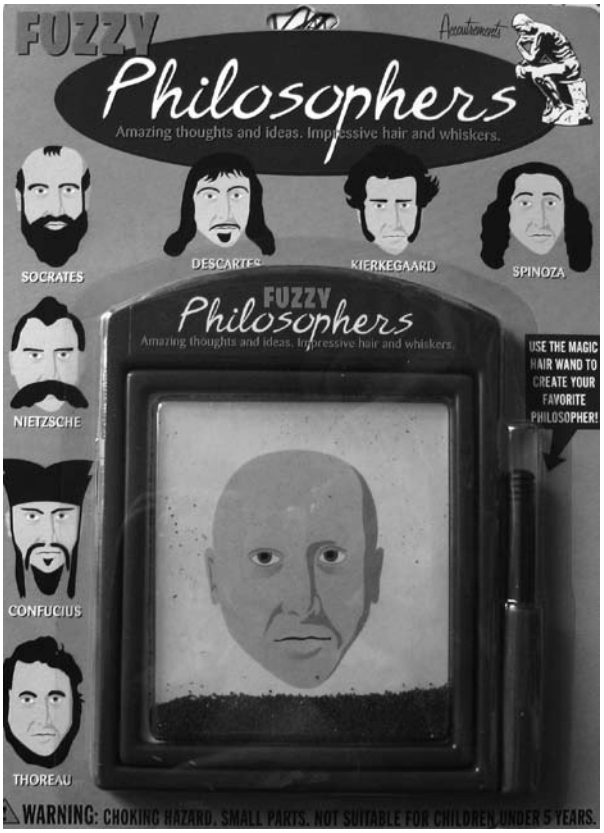
These questions of motivation are complex, and, for Cavarero, fall outside the scope of her book, with its focus of the phenomenology of the defenceless, which is for her 'what really matters'. Yet if an aspect of that consciousness is that we believe we are under attack by religious martyrs because of their radical rejection of 'Western' lifestyles and because they conceive of 'us' as an absolute enemy to be exterminated, rather than because of the invasion of 'Islamic' lands by 'Christian' armies, then we have to consider whether there is a radical gap between this consciousness of the 'Western' victim and the reality of the strategy and motivation of those actually carrying out the attacks. If we do not hear the howl of despair of the Palestinian woman pictured in the cover of Cavarero's book, we are ourselves in danger of reducing her and others like her to an absolute enemy, who must be exterminated by the use of weapons of absolute annihilation.

Phillip Cole

A unified field of fiction

Annalisa Di Liddo, *Alan Moore: Comics as Performance, Fiction as Scalpel*, University Press of Mississippi, Jackson, 2009. 211 pp., £42.99 hb., £21.99 pb., 978 1 60473 212 2 hb., 978 1 60473 213 9 pb.

In her essay 'Notes from the Front Line', Angela Carter famously said that she was in the business of demythologizing, interrogating regulatory social fictions by dismantling what Blake called 'mind-forg'd manacles'. Such an approach also characterizes Carter's near contemporary, comics writer and Northampton 'mage' Alan Moore, whose work encompasses revisionary superhero epics such as *Marvelman* and *Watchmen*; the metaphysical examination of the Whitechapel murders in *From Hell*; the regionalist psycho-history of the prose novel *Voice of the Fire*; the polemical poetry of *The Mirror of Love*, originally written in response to the homophobic section 28 amendment of the British Local Government Act; and



multi-media performances inspired by his commitment to both magic and anarchism.

Moore has been publishing for the past thirty years or so, having started out writing and drawing in fanzines, progressing to strips for the now defunct music paper *Sounds* before he joined that university for British comics' creators, *2000AD*, in the early 1980s, having decided to concentrate on writing. To say that Moore has had a fraught, and at times bad-tempered, relationship with mainstream comics' publishers Marvel and DC would be an understatement. Similarly, he has dissociated himself entirely from the various substandard film adaptations of his work – he had his name removed from the cinema versions of *V for Vendetta* and *Watchmen* – and is currently published by independent Top Shelf. Given this, it seems surprising that it has taken so long for a critical monograph to appear (James Keller's *V for Vendetta as Cultural Pastiche* from 2007 actually focused on the Wachowski brothers produced film), though there have been plenty of fannish celebrations, annotated bibliographies and numerous interviews, as well as a growing body of journal articles which tend to concentrate on *Watchmen* or *From Hell*.

Alan Moore: Comics as Performance, Fiction as Scalpel by Annalisa Di Liddo, who completed an M.A. thesis on Carter and a Ph.D. on Moore, is published by the University Press of Mississippi as part of their 'Great Comics Artists Series' that includes studies of Disney artist Carl Barks, satirical cartoonist Garry Trudeau, and manga godfather Osamu Tezuka. The publication coincides with that of the anthology *The Comics Studies Reader* by the same publisher, which also features an essay by Di Liddo on Moore. Such an alignment of critic, subject and publisher is serendipitous. The field of comics criticism is now well established, particularly in Europe and the States, with numerous journals and annual conferences evidence of a vibrant multidisciplinary concern.

Di Liddo rightly acknowledges that Moore's prodigious canon precludes any comprehensive analysis of his work and her study is pleasingly thematic rather than schematically chronological. Divided into four chapters, the first seeks to examine formal qualities; the second presents an interesting argument for considering the Bakhtinian chronotope as a model for reading comics; the third, and by far the most revealing, focuses on constructions of English regional and national identity; and the fourth is something of an odd one out, spotlighting a single text, the extravagant pornotopia of *Lost Girls*. Thankfully Di Liddo avoids hagiography, as is evident in her analysis of *Lost Girls*, a polymorphous, dialogical narrative in which female characters from classic children's fiction swap sexually explicit stories, and which she reads as lapsing into tired postmodern pastiche. For Di Liddo, this makes the text an artistic failure in comparison with the more critically parodic *Watchmen*.

Any consideration of Moore's extensive work would of necessity need to consider the often hyperbolic citational tendency his writing exhibits, and Di Liddo places much emphasis on this propensity for allusion, quotation and irony, arguing that Moore's texts 'are built on a proper web of references that are not only mentioned or suggested but challenged and recontextualized in order to convey new meanings'. Such intertextuality is theorized in a discussion of *Watchmen* and the intradiegetic pirate/horror comic – *Tales of the Black Freighter* (the title is a deliberate referencing of Brecht) – which one of the comic's characters reads within the story. As Di Liddo points out, this *mise en abîme* micronarrative is an ironic juxtaposition to the main frame and at times appears to invade the diegetic world, the separate visual and verbal elements intentionally misaligned. This leads Di Liddo to draw on Genette's notion of transtextuality from *Paratexts*, a move which promises much. Regrettably, however, such a line of argument falters before it has really had a chance to get going and her reading settles for merely pointing to perceived correspondences between primary text and theoretical model. This is indicative

of the general tone of the book, which too often lapses into explicatory cataloguing of the events of the narratives discussed and to the referential connection suggested. Genette is never mentioned again, and what looked like a potential development is jettisoned prematurely.

More promising is Di Liddo's original employment of the chronotope as part of a narratology of comics. Bringing Bakhtin together with comics formalists such as Scott McCloud and Will Eisner seems on the face of it so intuitive that it is surprising that no one has attempted it before. The chronotope, the spatio-temporal figuration peculiar to different genres, could have been formulated with comics in mind; as McCloud and Eisner contend, comics literally spatialize time in frames and page layout. Di Liddo returns to the chronotope at various points, but unfortunately it is employed in an overgeneralized way, though this may be in part due to the vagueness of Bakhtin's own theorization of the term. Discussing the underrated *Ballad of Halo Jones*, Di Liddo proposes a chronotope of science fiction without ever really defining what it is. Given that intertextuality is so important to her account, more perhaps could have been made of dialogism and heteroglossia, which receive only brief references. Similarly, Di Liddo places great emphasis on performativity in the title and in her introduction, but this largely disappears until it re-emerges in her conclusion, and then only to be considered in literal theatrical terms.

Di Liddo largely skirts the issue of the alleged postmodernism of Moore's texts, acknowledging the problematic nature of the term but settling early on for Linda Hutcheon over Fredric Jameson. This means that Moore's writing is associated, above all, with the forms of what Hutcheon calls 'historiographic metafiction', allowing Di Liddo to read and place Moore alongside literary writers such as Carter, Iain Sinclair and Peter Ackroyd. The claim is that Moore's writing dissects the literary canon as well as, if not more than, the comics tradition. But while there are undoubtedly relevant connections to be made here, there is also a danger in overemphasis and special pleading that comes at the expense of in-depth materialist consideration of Moore as part of a genealogy of comics writing. This results in lacunae in Di Liddo's thesis. For example, she acknowledges the importance of the Northampton Arts Lab in influencing Moore's aesthetic, but she makes almost no mention of comix, an alternative tradition that grew out of the 1960s' counter-culture (the 'x' denoted adult content, either sexual, violent or political, often all three). Comix mixed radical politics with the recontextualization of copyrighted icons and clearly prefigured Moore's work. Anti-establishment cartoonists such as S. Clay Wilson and Spain (whose revolutionary anti-hero Trashman, 'Agent of the Sixth International', anticipates Moore's terrorist V) are obvious forerunners. Comix were also contemporary to the New Wave of science fiction, another stated influence on Moore, and Di Liddo's argument could have been further strengthened by engaging with genre criticism as well as literary models. A good place to start would have been Jameson's writing on science fiction. If Moore has a literary equivalent then surely it is Michael Moorcock, whose anarchist politics and transgeneric narratives look forward to the post-Imperial steampunk of *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*.

The most successful and interesting chapter of the book is on the crisis of English identity and its representation in Moore's comics and prose writing. One subsection is enticingly entitled 'Alan Moore vs. Margaret Thatcher', and Di Liddo does an excellent job of reading examples of Moore's work in the 1980s against a background of social reaction, unemployment and disenfranchisement. She is equally good at selecting underrated or forgotten texts. Her reading of the *2000AD* serial *Skizz*, about a sympathetic alien stranded in Birmingham, for example, makes for a topical allegory on immigration and assimilation, and she suggests a fascinating connection between Moore's Northampton-set prose novel *Voice of the Fire* and Raymond Williams's unfinished *People of the Black Mountains*, allowing for an incisive comparative reading that emphasizes place, history and agency. This theme of 'Englishness' could certainly have been extended further, which, if nothing else, bodes well for future studies of Moore by others who will no doubt follow in Di Liddo's steps.

Tony Venezia

Iran and the Left

Iran's current rulers are the latest in a long line coming from the peasantry. The small clique of village elders headed by Ayatollah Ali Khamenei enjoy control over all state activity thanks to a politics of strategic marriages between philosopher kings, a model now reflected throughout Iranian society. With a contradictory balance between the elected and the appointed, Arab-leaning Islamist and Persian nationalist, bureaucrat and bourgeois, the Supreme Leader has ensured no group has enough power to challenge his supremacy.

In 2005 Ahmadinejad was brought in to further consolidate Khamenei's special relationship with the clique – who were rewarded with a continued transfer of state economic assets to what amounts to state–private Revolutionary Guard ownership – and to move power away from that part of the private sector championed by presidents since 1989. The state bureaucracy is represented by Ahmadinejad through clever lip service to administrative justice, which provides little beyond a justification for the powers that would deliver it. Fashioned in 'man of the people' guise, Ahmadinejad has overseen reforms that have favoured the nepotistic ruling class over entrepreneurs.

The Revolutionary Guard have seen their power buttressed by rumours of war and the revival of the spectacle of martyrdom, which came to represent religiosity during the repulsion of Saddam's eight-year attempted invasion. Fetishization of the martyrdom and courage that saw off the threat of Iraq now directs the legacy of the war onto the Iranian people. Tehran is plastered with the faces of those who gave their lives in the war, so as to associate their sacrifice with the might and right of the regime.

For the majority of those who brought it about, the 1979 revolution was Islamic only in the last instance. Yet today those who speak for the revolutionaries – mostly sidelined or dead – have fetishized the religious element out of all proportion, while directing Iran's wealth into the pockets of their cronies. The enforced hijab, the dismantling of traditional cabaret, as well as the prohibition on nightclubs, bars and loud music have a levelling effect on appearances. The mullahs need something to show for their ideological ramblings, and a lack of miniskirts or cleavage is one of the major achievements they hold up as evidence of moral governance – a position buttressed by a Western indignation that ignores the country's deeper social ills. Ahmadinejad's introduction of Iran's current moral police – the Gasht Ershad – reaffirmed this commitment to the surface appearance of a uniquely Islamic state. Meanwhile, inconspicuous breaches of morality are endemic: lying, fraud, corruption and theft are the offences that favour power and are permitted. Nepotism is the norm.

Three points come across in Ahmadinejad's speeches – defence of the poor, opposition to corruption, and the upholding of Iran's international dignity – clumsily wrapped in a package of mystification which often finds him blasphemously claiming to have direct connection with Shia Islam's 'Hidden Imam', a messianic figure whose return from occultation will bring an end to suffering and injustice in the world. This simple rhetoric fires across all sections of society, sweeping up all manner of discontent, and allowing Ahmadinejad and his masters to redirect 'accumulated resentment' towards the resting places of foreign intervention and the corruption of their domestic political rivals. The secret operations of meddling and corruption – actual or proverbial – can only be attacked through the actions of the leaders, through whom the people must find vicarious satisfaction. Thus the Khamenei clan appropriate the discontent they created, claim the monopoly on its remedy and sell it in alienated, distorted form back to the people.

Yet however much Ahmadinejad claims to be working tirelessly for the good of the people, the facts of his presidency are stark. Rising inflation, a jump in unemployment, new forms of privatization and growing inequality, while oil revenues for the country reach an all-time high, can only be concealed for so long, and the 'soil of mass psychology' is becoming infertile.

A striking example comes from one of the physical and ideological frontiers of the revolution, Khorramshahr. The city, which borders Iraq, was captured by Saddam in 1981 and remained under occupation for around eighteen months, during which time it was razed to the ground. The anniversary of its liberation is still celebrated in Iran every year. Khorramshahr lies in the province of Khuzestan, the major oil-producing region of Iran. It also has the country's largest river running through it. Yet there is a persistent shortage of drinking water, and poverty and unemployment have

been left to rise steadily. A leadership that regularly takes political benefit from the now-mythical struggle in the city has done nothing to remedy the destitute infrastructure. When Ahmadinejad went to the city shortly before the election amid a massive publicity campaign, fewer than 1,000 people from the city of 166,000 residents bothered to show up, many of them officials and members of the president's travelling rent-a-crowd. When Ahmadinejad's appointees – the mayor, the parliamentary representative and the district commissioner – took to the stage, the crowd began heckling, damning them with specific instances of graft and corruption, and the jeering continued for the president himself, who was visibly rattled by this evident rejection of his 'man of the people' facade. Similar scenes would be repeated throughout Iran. Policies akin to an invading army, with lucrative no-bid and cost-plus deals given to government contractors and officials, characterize Ahmadinejad's economic policies. State capitalism, but without the measure of redistribution traditionally associated with such regimes, is on the back foot. The perpetual US threat has not only seen Iran practise what Noam Chomsky calls 'successful defiance', but the entire state has become defined by its opposition to everything US; a strange sort of independence that does not in any event hold up to scrutiny, since the mullah elite are a godsend to US imperial ambitions in the region.

George Galloway isn't the only one championing the Ahmadinejad line from the Left (although he is the only one with a hefty salary from London-based Iranian state-sponsored Press TV), when he writes 'Mahmoud Ahmadinejad commands the loyalty of the poor, the working class and the rural voters whose development he has championed.' Much left-leaning thought in the UK has sided with Ahmadinejad, branding the opposition movement 'reactionary' puppets of imperial powers. Leftist commentary is littered with praise for Ahmadinejad's 'bold' defiance of the USA and his pro-poor rhetoric. These unlikely allies of a theocratic state point to the Western media's coverage of the northern Tehran 'green' pre-election street parties – the most spectacular element of the opposition campaign, most closely linked to the social-democratic concerns of Western liberals (civil liberties not economic justice) – as evidence of a petty-bourgeois Western invention. They thereby collude with those they claim to oppose, in pushing the much wider discontent with Ahmadinejad out of the frame. The opposition movement is brushed off as a Gucci revolution, lacking real mass support and led by US stooges, while the facts on the ground show mass popular support coming from all sectors of Iranian society. Trade unions came out unanimously in favour of Moussavi and, despite reports to the contrary, the reformists appealed to the working class with a shift away from the free-marketeering of Khatami to the more egalitarian-minded Moussavi.

Perhaps a certain Left's confusion can be put down in part to an awe felt towards leaders who, despite standing for everything else it opposes, have the spectacle of global mass media through which to voice the one trite point of agreement: US imperialism is bad. Perhaps also there is disdain towards the techno-savvy youth of north Tehran, through whose mobile phones, YouTube uploads and Facebook accounts the opposition view has reached the world.

Others put the street protesters down as puppets in a war of ayatollahs doing Rafsanjani's dirty work. And it's true that the protesters are not, for now, calling for an overthrow of the establishment; they are holding the state up to its own ideals. They simply demand that their opinion be heard. As such, their protest is a moral one that transcends the political manoeuvring at the top. At its most extreme it has become a protest at the unreliability of the Leader's pronouncements and the rule of the Guardian Council; it is not a direct challenge to the Islamic Republic. Indeed the support behind Mir-Hossein Moussavi is far bigger than the man himself. When Iranians exchange a knowing *faghat Moussavi* ('only Moussavi') in passing, it is barely connected to the living individual. His name now represents the demand for more transparent, equitable governance. He was the justification for the state the people were asking for, not its overthrow.

Right now, the frontier lies between the police and the opposition in the streets, who have been striking up friendly chats, when not being chased and beaten. Those of us who exchanged the opposition's victory V-sign with no small number of riot police know that they are ready to be won over, at which point Khamenei will face a very serious challenge.

An alternative to the Islamic Republic is currently absent, save Iran going back to being a US puppet state. With such a limited political spectrum, and treachery at every turn, the green opposition's negative quality makes it the only movement worth supporting at present. Pointing to petty-bourgeois trends within it is unhelpful in a state ruled by an aristocracy, in which all underclasses need to come together if they are to move towards a greater equality. The bitter calm of unofficial general strike and disengagement from public life that shrouds all sections of Iran today is the swelling of what could be a very bloody storm.

NK

Academic freedom in California?

The American university has become a battleground in struggles surrounding the legitimacy of Israeli policy (see Judith Butler, *RP* 135, January/February 2006, pp. 8–17). It is no secret that the American Israeli Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) has targeted universities in a 'war of position' to win the hearts and minds of tomorrow's leaders. This war of ideas increasingly seeks to stifle all classroom criticism of Israel.

In February 2009, Professor at the University of California, Santa Barbara, William I. Robinson, received a letter from the local chapter of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL). The letter castigated Robinson for an email he had circulated to students on his Sociology of Globalization course that compared the Israeli military's recent invasion of Gaza to Nazi atrocities in Warsaw. The next week Robinson was notified that two students from his course had dropped out and had filed formal complaints against him. The students' complaints paralleled the contents of the ADL letter and claimed an incoherent hodgepodge of faculty code violations, including allegations of sexual harassment, even though Robinson had never met either. To add to these contrivances, the students labelled Robinson's criticism of Israel 'anti-Semitic', a grave charge whose unforgivable misapplication betrays the desperate machinations of those who sling it. The most legible claims were 'significant intrusion of irrelevant material' and 'coercion of conscience', but, when applied in context to the circulation of a single email sent as optional course material, these two charges were manifestly baseless. The Charges Officer, whose duty is to filter out frivolous claims, instead forced the issue into serious consideration by the Academic Senate. He was likely encouraged by national ADL president Abraham Foxman's intervening visit to UCSB during which he urged administration officials to prosecute Robinson. Backed by the extraordinary vigilance of the national ADL, the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles, StandWithUs International, and the Santa Barbara chapter of Hillel, the complaining students sparked a five-month investigation of Robinson's decision to send the email. Notwithstanding their factual and legal flimsiness, the charges were given an incredible amount of consideration. The ensuing investigation was rife with procedural violations and irregularities, not to mention a baffling opaqueness. It became clear that the charges were not just about students' sensitivities, but rather part of a political inoculation organized in consort with outside organizations (see http://sb4af.wordpress.com).

In response, a group of students formed the Committee to Defend Academic Freedom (CDAF) and launched a campaign to put pressure on the university administration that gained considerable international attention. Key to CDAF's success was its ability to expose the Israel lobby operating behind a veil of flimsy allegations. As it turned out, the weight of the lobby buckled underneath itself. After five months with nary a word to Robinson, Vice Chancellor Gene Lucas delivered the abrupt news on 23 June that the charges against Robinson were dismissed.

Victory in the Robinson case must nonetheless be viewed in the context of an ongoing transnational campaign to stifle any criticism of Israel. Underlying the specific claims of faculty misconduct levelled at Robinson was an idea of Israeli exceptionality. Pedagogically, the effectiveness of comparing two different historical instances of state violence is demonstrated by its ability to provoke discussion and to be subsequently evaluated in terms of its actual closeness of fit. In Robinson's case, the comparison of Nazi and Israeli atrocities was, however, sidelined by the automatic accusations of anti-Semitism. In many similar cases, professors have lost their tenure battles and even their jobs – Norman Finkelstein, Joel Kovel and Margo Ramlal-Nankoe, to name but a few – while others, like Joseph Massad, have suffered significant delays in tenure decisions and public smear campaigns. The ADL in recent years has explicitly focused its political repression efforts on the University of California. Given the hostile backdrop, Robinson's ultimate triumph is extraordinary.

Sadly, the Charges Committee's findings that Robinson had not violated the faculty code do little to assuage the damage already caused by the witch-hunt against him. Scholars will undoubtedly think about the five-month persecution of Robinson before they dare challenge the hegemony of pro-Israel groups. In order to counteract this fallout, the activities of the CDAF show the need to work proactively to promote and maintain a space in American universities for counter-hegemonic discourse about the Israeli occupation.

Maryam Griffin and Daniel Olmos

Immigration raid on SOAS

On 12 June 2009 an immigration raid on a group of cleaners took place at the London School of African and Asian Studies (SOAS). The week before, the SOAS cleaners had set a precedent when they became the first cleaners of a London college to unionize, after a successful campaign for higher wages. The cleaners were employed by ISS, a company providing cleaning services to a number of London colleges. Nine employees were arrested and taken to deportation facilities; some were deported within days, all but one by the end of June. The raid sparked immediate protests, culminating in the occupation of the SOAS directorate's offices, which ended only after the directors agreed to a joint statement condemning the raid and agreeing to prevent any such raids in the future.

The attack is a clear example of the way the state services the interests of employers and owners of capital over working people. A private company, faced with the undesirable precedent of labour unionization, can call upon the immigration police to crack down on those who have dared to raise their heads above the minimum wage threshold. Several 'deviant' workers are deported, the intimidation of other branches is effective and the company continues to pay low wages. The pool of impoverished and undocumented workers, from which the company recruits its staff, remains. This has been the most basic and cynical effect of the raid and it is against this that resistance must focus.

But the raid also highlights several other complex political dilemmas of immigration policing and opposition to it. The immediate vocal demonstrations against the raid prove that at least in London, where one third of the city's population was born outside the UK, repressive immigration policies stand on thin ice. Despite the raid occurring towards the very end of the academic year, at a time when most undergraduates had left, hundreds of SOAS students and staff instantly expressed solidarity with the detained employees. Media articles condemned the raid, and messages of support were sent from at least two members of parliament and from migrant support groups and trade unions around the world.

The obscurity surrounding Immigration Removal Centres, as migrant prisons are referred to in a typically euphemistic fashion, are evidence that the government is already wary of an unfavourable public reaction, should the practices at these detention centres become widely known. Such practices include the imprisonment of children of all ages, without educational or nursery facilities, a lack of sufficient medical care and a bureaucratic labyrinth that can result in years of detention as the legal machine grinds on. Occasionally the appalling treatment of migrants at the hands of security officers and the random banning of visitors have been documented. The remote location of these migrant prisons, often outside of impoverished towns where the low-skill employment opportunity dampens any resistance, and the restrictive access to them, block unwanted public attention.

This lack of transparency, combined with the swift way in which migrants can be imprisoned and, if they don't quickly find legal representation, deported, means that state and police actions for the most part remain hidden. It is an important victory that opposition against the SOAS raid brought the brutal reality of immigration policy into the public eye.

The SOAS events have shown that a small amount of civil courage and disobedience can make a big difference to the reality of migrant oppression. If only the SOAS directorship, which received a day's notice of the raid, had taken such a stand. Instead, the directorship's cowardly attitude and failure to oppose or obstruct the raid in any way – indeed, its facilitation of it – were shameful and unnecessary, inspired by fear of controversy. The SOAS director later declared his opposition to the raid 'in a personal capacity', but only after widespread condemnation of it had become clear. University leaders should realize that protecting their campus and its people from state violence is part of their mandate. Immigration controls are a particularly insidious way to introduce surveillance into universities, which currently remain relatively sheltered places from which political activism can be organized.

The day-to-day implementation of UK immigration policies results in a steady supply of employees whose security is so precarious that they can be exploited to the hilt. Large-scale policy change in this area seems depressingly remote. But the SOAS events have shown that on a local level, solidarity and decisive action can at least achieve some (future) protection of migrant colleagues from falling victim to the vicious trap of illegality and exploitation.

Sophia Marie Hoffmann