

# ephemera

*theory & politics in organization*

© ephemera 2005  
ISSN 1473-2866  
www.ephemeraweb.org  
volume 5(4): 562-661

**volume 5, number 4 (november 2005)**

## **editorial**

- Inscribing Organized Resistance* 562  
Stephen Dunne, Eleni Karamali and Stevphen Shukaitis

## **articles**

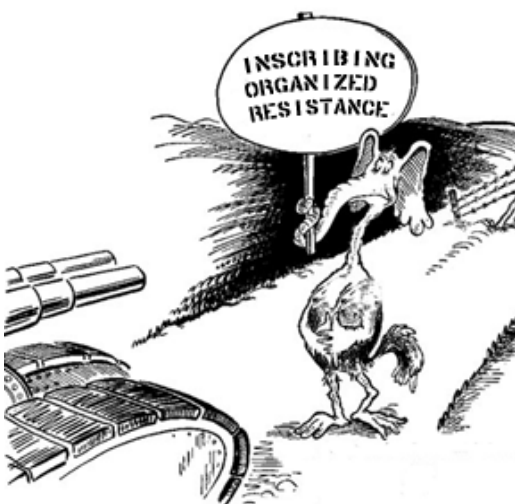
- Event Horizon* 568  
The Free Association
- Treasonous Minds: Capital & Universities, the  
Ideology of the Intellectual and the Desire for Mutiny* 580  
Dave Eden
- Introduction to Colectivo Situaciones* 595  
Nate Holdren and Sebastian Touza
- Further Comments on Research Militancy.  
Footnotes on Procedures and (In)decisions* 602  
Colectivo Situaciones
- Grassrooting the Imaginary: Acting Within the Convergence* 615  
Paul Routledge
- Sewing Stories and Acting Activism: Women's Leadership  
and Learning Through Drama and Craft* 629  
Darlene Clover

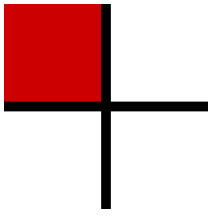
## **notes from the general intellect**

- Beyond Solidarity and Academic Freedom* 643  
A conversation between Luther Blissett and Karen Eliot

## **reviews**

- Nietzsche in the Streets* 652  
Ruud Kaulingfreks
- Gift, She Said* 655  
Valerie Fournier





## Inscribing Organized Resistance

Stephen Dunne, Eleni Karamali and Stephen Shukaitis

That which expresses itself externally, always precedes itself. One action always nudges another ... The great difference between the ground of knowledge and the ground of event ... are connected in ways that are not as certain, but which nevertheless are not uncertain. These series run straight and unbroken, but they do not remain alone or with themselves. (Ernst Bloch, 1974: 96)

Everyday we follow walking before all shadows. (We Ragazzi, 'Walking Before All Shadows', 2003)

### Greetings

Thoughts, antagonisms, innovations, demonstrations, elaborations, expectations and refutations. This is all to say, field-notes, from an array of politically engaged, non-objectifying theoretical work projects. Behold, the current issue of *ephemera*! Foolish is s/he who would seek to encapsulate a supposedly complete or somehow representative spectrum of such concerns within this, or indeed any format. Foolish also are those who would hope to find herein a necessary 'image of thought' (Deleuze, 1995). It is its conditions of impossibility that emphasize the necessity of a worthy task. A task guided by a certain futility then. Yet, it is precisely continuation and openness that constitutes the materially valuable. "[T]he hypothesis understood as provocation (knowledge)" (Tronti-Panzieri, 1962), not understood through itself, but as a relation to an other which destabilizes and recomposes and a self which is dispersed and paradoxically reformed. To formulate without hoping to formalize, to formulate the to-be-de-formed. Our task, attempted here through this medium.

The concern(s) at hand are the ways in which social research (re-)creates the distance between the researcher (as subject) and researched (as object), in so doing silencing the voices, needs, concerns, knowledges, and practices of the researched. Consider the number of academic articles and books that acknowledge the author's supporting grant making body, colleagues, mentors, friends, significant others, children, editors, book companies, household pets, et cetera, without ever taking the time to thank those whom were studied. Beyond a simple thanks, consider the number of texts one has read where it appears that the project was formulated without a consideration and working through of how it might impact upon those studied by it. To point this out is not the copyright or

trademark of any particular intellectual field or subject, yet still, such admittance behaviour often passes itself off as 'critical' scholarship by simple virtue of its taking place. A new danger to be considered far beyond the threshold of politeness appears. The existence of the badge of 'critical' scholarship opens up new avenues for the co-optation and recuperation of radical politics. Critical scholarship, by creating fixed and stable positions, becomes complicit within the very practices it seeks to avoid. To point this out is not to say that any critical scholarly endeavor is not worthwhile, destined to failure from the outset. It is to point out that 'critical' endeavors must take the paradox of their existence seriously if the claim towards criticality is not to be sneered at.

## Relationships

What we are here approaching is the problem of the constitution of the researcher-researched relationship. How, if at all, can research be a process of co-constitution rather than one of objectification? To consider research as an on-going process of dialogue and engagement, of creation and exploration, as the creation of the common through engaged political action. Antonio Negri argues:

Action is a struggle to constitute the world, to invent it ... To act is at once a form of knowledge and a revolt ... [it] is precisely the search for and the construction of the common, which is to say the affirmation of absolute immanence. (2004: 19/28/27)

The task is not one of the researcher going bravely onwards into the field and through Herculean efforts, coming back with findings. Nor is it to reverse the dynamic in the name of auto-ethnography, a supposedly painful soul-searching that makes a virtue out of narcissism, ironically re-inscribing *authority* with the author, the sovereign and bounded subject (Clough, 2001). The task of creative mutual constitution is to explore the relationship between researcher and researched in a manner that underlines the moments where the assumed division between them collapses, revealing a necessary inability for each to exist in and by itself. To illustrate how apparently natural divisions become disturbed by the very act that *naturalises* them.

The relationship between radical intellectuals and social movements has had a tenuous and not always positive history. Far too often, radical theorists have used their knowledge or ideas to claim leadership roles and positions of power within movements, attempting to control and direct through vanguard structures, leading to many problems despite positive intentions. The practices of the interwoven strands of rhizomatic and networked movements, creating and enacting horizontal networks instead of top-down structures, demand that radical theorists and academics consider their role within and relation towards them. The materials contained within this issue are but a sampling of the directions such research could take, part of a much larger project under consideration (Shukaitis and Graeber, forthcoming). To take seriously the endeavors of those who organize resistant mobilisations is to appreciate such work as expressions of vital possibility rather than demonstrations of a theoretically defeatist clutching at straws.

It is of course easy to invoke the thoughts and concepts of a few noted radical theorists, publish them in some journal or other, and fall back upon the self-righteous laurels of one's being an ipso facto radical. Contentment in any sort of commitment – doing one's bit. The point for us, however, is to find ways to be subversive in whatever context, to be a Zapatista in one's own community as it has been put. To do this is to always remain focused upon the relations between one's own actions and the larger social fabric. This is not a call to abandon the academic ghetto for the activist one (as both forms of writing often suffer from certain dynamics of self-marginalization that oddly mirror each other), but to develop a polemical call for a consideration on the part of the academy towards the mechanisms of transmission and interrelation that formulate such ghettos; academic, activist, or bastard hybridizations. We are not arguing for a replacement of one kind of ghetto by another, but for a disturbance of the very processes of engagement that imagines and puts them together in the first place.

## Thinking Change

Raoul Vaneigem, responding to what he saw as the barriers to radical political activity created by the French Communist Party argued:

[R]adical criticism has merely analyzed the old world and its negation. It must now either realize itself in the practical activity of the revolutionary masses or betray itself by becoming a barrier to that activity. (2003: 275)

What we see here is the distinction between theory and praxis, a distinction that can no longer be approached as if it were a watertight binary, Monsieur Vaneigem. Considering Marx's eleventh thesis on Feuerbach (1978: 143-145), Gayatri Spivak argues that the difference between 'interpreting' and 'changing' the world is inherently more complex than the manner in which it is popularly conveyed. Spivak, reading the text in its native tongue, illustrates that the word translated to mean 'change' (*verändern*), refers to an open-ended making other of the self-identical rather than the oft-pandered about notion of complete transformation (1996: 217-218). *Verändern* consists of a twin process of a making other of the self-identical and of a drawing forth of the liberatory possibilities of the present developed through organized resistance. To see value in what exists, to tease out the underlying concepts and their connections, and to create them (Shukaitis, 2004: 17). David Graeber argues that what is needed is low theory, or "a way of grappling with those real, immediate questions that emerge from a transformative project" which is distinct from the manner in which the social sciences generally tackle this realm (as a policy issue). The distinction to be found in Graeber's 'policy' is not based on a notion of a governing apparatus or a core of experts who will develop forms of knowledge to be imposed upon others (2004: 9). He instead suggests that a radical formulation of social theory would rest upon the assumption that the construction of better possible worlds necessitates a rejection of vanguardism.

To look at those who are creating viable alternatives, try to figure out what might be the larger implications of what they are (already) doing, and then offer those ideas back, not as prescriptions, but as contributions, possibilities – as gifts. (Graeber, 2004: 12)

So what is the relation of this rejection of vanguardism to the university occupant? Bousquet and Terranova (2004: 72-81) argue that the institutional setting of the university is not a location outside the workings of the economy (i.e. it is *not* a bubble), but is very much a part of it, existing within the social factory and producing multifarious forms of value (human capital, ability to brandish forth credentials to obtain employment, practices of knowledge, information, and organization that are used throughout the entire social field). This makes the position of the subversive intellectual in the academy quite odd, precisely because the finding of space might be the very act of delivering capital its future. As argued by Harney and Moten, the role of the subversive intellectual in, but not of, the university, is like a thief who steals what she can from it, using the space to form a “collective orientation to the knowledge object as future project” (2004: 102). This would be to utilize the space provided by the university, not as a goal in itself, nor to assert one’s right to such a space, but to accomplish something within this space. This is a form of knowledge production not seeking to form itself as a fixed object and space, but one that constantly moves and morphs across disciplines, frontiers, ideas, and spaces. It is a form of knowledge production that comes not from a perspective of separation but rather one appreciating that

visionary dreams of a new society don’t come from little think tanks of smart people or out of the atomized individualistic world of consumer capitalism where raging against the status quo is simply the hip thing to do. Revolutionary dreams erupt out of political engagement: collective social movements are incubators of new knowledge. (Kelley 2002: 8)

Rather than necessarily assert and affirm an identity or space, these forms of knowledge develop in exodus, in the maroons and hidden alcoves of the university, in the constantly moving spaces that James Scott calls the hidden transcript (1990: 4-5). This hidden social transcript encompasses not just speech but also an array of practices bound to the particular location – which is both mediated and created by those practices – and so is marked between such and the public transcript often through an ongoing struggle and contestation. Between the hidden and public transcripts exists a third realm of politics, what Scott calls the infrapolitics of subordinate groups, or “a politics of disguise and anonymity that takes place in public view but is designed to have a double meaning or to shield the identity of the actor” (1990: 19). It would be arguable that in a sense the overlooking of this space in many ways suits the needs of the social actors who articulate their freedom dreams by constantly reinventing and reinterpreting their cultural practices as a part of this third realm of politics, of the infrapolitics of resistance that creates a space for dreams of transcendence and autonomy to exist in a seen, but unseen manner. Radical academics, when they find a space in the workings of the academy can use their position to create room and possibilities for organizers to use it for their ends, to orient their work towards the needs and desires of organizing, rather than fixing them as objects of study.

All of this leads almost inevitably to the question of science. Is what is being described here science? Not quite, perhaps it approaches something closer to what is described by erstwhile CrimeThinc miscreant Frederick Markatos Dixon (2001) as folk science, that is, the elaboration of invention as free play, breaking with the tradition of linear progress and dynamics of research that have made discovery into the horded treasures

of a priestly caste of shrouded experts speaking in secret languages. As described by Dixon:

[O]ur critique of 'The Scientific Method' skips 'Science' ... skips 'Method' ... but finds 'The' guilty of a crime. The tyranny of 'The' is a part of language that attempts to unify the menagerie of human curiosity and struggle into just one investigative technique and in doing so fails both science and humanity. (2001: 231)

The concerns of a folk science are not directed by some quest for universal knowledge nor to fill the ever-revered gap in the literature but to explore problems and curiosities as they arise, to find new hidden passageways and lines of flight. It becomes a question of inheritance and transformation, of repetition, resistance, and creation. Inheriting the forms of knowledge and practices developed by current organizing efforts along with the historical experiences and concepts of movements and struggles. Inheriting by continuing *and* discontinuing, disrupting. Disrupting by continuing. Continuing by not merely repeating. Continuing and transforming. It becomes the task of continuing in the tradition of nomadic thought, of embodying and working with philosophy as described by Deleuze and Guattari, which is to say in the creation of concepts that through processes of deterritorialization and reterritorialization. Calling forth "not the one who claims to be pure but rather an oppressed, bastard, lower, anarchical, nomadic, and irremediably minor race ... it is this double becoming that constitutes the people to come and the new earth" (1994: 109).

Foucault once commented that philosophy no longer exists, "not that it has disappeared, but it has been disseminated into a great number of diverse activities ... today philosophy is every activity that makes a new object appear for knowledge or practice" (Foucault, 1996: 29). In an age where the dividing lines between labor, action, and intellect are collapsing into one another (Virno, 2004), one finds the creation of concepts and wealths of knowledges of resistance dispersed throughout the social factory. The task of developing an approach to theoretical production is to work with these forms of resistance-creation rather than acting from a distance, a removed position, a position that is the first moment in the recreation of vanguardism.

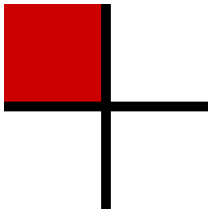
## references

- Bloch, E. (1974) 'Causality and Finality as Active, Objectifying Categories (Categories of Transmission),' *Telos*, 21: 96-107.
- Bousquet, M. and T. Terranova (2004) 'Recomposing the University,' *Mute*, 28: 72-81.
- Cameron, A. and R. Palan (2004) *The Imagined Economies of Globalization*. London: Sage Publications.
- Clough, P. (2001) *Autoaffection: Unconscious Thought in the Age of Teletechnology*. Minneapolis, MI: University of Minnesota Press.
- Deleuze, G. (1995) *Difference and Repetition*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Dixon, F. (2001) 'Here is Folk Science!', in *Days of War, Nights of Love: A Beginner's Guide to Crimethink*. Crimethinc Ex-Workers Collective. Atlanta, GA: CrimeThinc. Free Press, 230-233.
- Foucault, M. (1972) *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith. London: Tavistock Publications.
- Foucault, M. (1996) *Foucault Live: Collected Interviews, 1961-1984*, ed. S. Lotringer, L. Hochroth and J. Johnston. New York: Semiotext(e).
- Graeber, D. (2004) *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology*. Chicago, IL: Prickly Paradigm Press.

- Graeber, D. and S. Shukaitis (forthcoming 2006) *Constituent Imagination: Militant Investigation // Collective Theorization*. Oakland, CA: AK Press.
- Guattari, F. and G. Deleuze (1994 [1991]) *What is Philosophy?*, trans. G. Burchell and H. Tomlinson. London: Verso.
- Kelley, R. (2002) *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Moten, F. and S. Harney (2004) 'The University and the Undercommons: Seven Theses,' *Social Text*, 22 (2): 101-115.
- Marx, K. (1978) 'Theses on Feurbach,' *The Marx-Engels Reader. Second Edition*, ed. R. C. Tucker. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 143-145.
- Negri, A. (2004) *Negri on Negri: Antonio Negri in Conversation with Anne Dufourmantellem*, trans. M. B. DeVoise. New York: Routledge.
- Scott, J. (1990) *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Shukaitis, S. (2003) 'An Ethnography of Nowhere: Notes Toward a Re-envisioning of Utopian Thinking,' *Social Anarchism*, 35: 5-13.
- Shukaitis, S. (2004) *Greenpepper Magazine* 'Life Beyond the Market' Issue.
- Spivak, G. (1996) *The Spivak Reader*, ed. D. Landry and G. Maclean. London: Routledge.
- Tronti, M. and R. Panzieri (1962), 'Theses on the Party,' *Aut-aut* [1975], trans. Nate Holdren. Personal communication, January 3, 2005.
- Vaneigem, R. (2003) *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith. London: Rebel Press.
- Virno, P. (2004) *The Grammar of the Multitude*, trans. S. Lotringer. New York: Semiotext(e).
- We Ragazzi* (2004) 'Walking Before All Shadows,' *Wolves with Pretty Lips*

#### the editors

Stephen Dunne, Eleni Karamali, and Stevphen Shukaitis are all currently PhD students at the University of Leicester and members of the Centre for Philosophy and Political Economy. Recently they delivered a series of lectures to the MSc module "Critical Perspectives on Management" at the University of Leicester focusing on practices within current anti-capitalist movements. Shukaitis is the editor of the *Greenpepper* magazine issue on "Life Beyond the Market" (2004).  
E-mail: sd142@leicester.ac.uk / ek74@leicester.ac.uk / stevphen@mutualaid.org



## Event Horizon<sup>\*</sup>

The Free Association

And what is the phantom fuzz screaming from Chicago to Berlin, from Mexico City to Paris? 'We are REAL REAL REAL!!! as this NIGHTSTICK!' as they feel, in their dim animal way, that reality is slipping away from them... (William Burroughs, commenting on the police beating protesters at the Democratic convention, Chicago, 1968)

### Doctor Who

We're used to thinking of time as a straight line. When we look back at history it seems like all past events only existed to lead us to this point. And when we think about the future we can only imagine that line continuing. The future we imagine is really only the present stretched out ahead of us. Therein lies the truism that science fiction is really always about contemporary society.

But history isn't a straight line. It moves in a series of uncontrolled breaks, jolts and ruptures. Every now and then we get events that seem to have popped out of an alternate dimension. Events that don't seem to belong to the timeline we were just on. These events carry their own timelines. When they appear, history seems to shift to accommodate them. Funny how we couldn't see it before, but now we come to look there's a line of history that seems to have existed just to lead us up to this moment. Such events also seem to carry their own alternate future. Things that seemed impossible a day or two before seem irresistible now.

These moments go down in history under a flattening name. Seattle 1999. May 1968. Kronstadt 1917. They eventually get tamed and forced into the history books but their alternate futures never totally disappear. You read about these events and you can still feel the tug of the future they thought they had. You still feel their potential welling up.

---

\* 'Event Horizon' was written for the counter-mobilisation against the G8 summit in Gleneagles in July 2005, where it was distributed as a pamphlet. That original version is available at <http://www.nadir.org.uk>. We've added some new footnotes here which explain a little more clearly some of our theoretical tools and to discuss how some of our ideas resonate with others. We have also added a new post-Gleneagles postscript.



Events like Gleneagles are semi-conscious attempts to engineer such ruptures in time, attempts to shatter any orderly 'progression' of history. That's why we're here. Plus, of course, it's fun... And exciting. And a little bit scary (at times very scary). Above all, we're here because we want to be. We're not here out of any sense of duty. We're not following our 'conscience'. We're following our desire! It's at events such as Gleneagles that we feel most alive, most human – by which we mean connected to the rest of humanity. And we do mean all of humanity. Not just the folk immediately around us that we know personally, not just the thousands gathered at Gleneagles (or wherever else). And our sense of connection isn't even limited to the six billion humans currently living on the planet in our six billion different ways. At times like these we can feel connected to life in all its forms. Total connection.<sup>1</sup>

And, of course, not only do we feel this total connection, but now everything seems possible. Anything could happen. An infinite number of new dimensions open up. What does it feel like to be inside one of these events, to be a time traveller and leap from one time line to another? And what are these possibilities? These might seem like daft or impossible questions, but we're not the only people asking them. In fact, understanding the meaning of events like this G8 'counter-summit' is one of the most important questions to think about and organise around.

## Close Encounters

It's a physical thing. The hairs on the back on your arms stand up. You get goosebumps. There's a tingling in your spine. Your heart is racing. Your eyes shine and all your senses are heightened: sights, sounds, smells are all more intense. Somebody brushes past you, skin on skin, and you feel sparks. Even the acrid rasp of tear gas at the back of your throat becomes addictive, whilst a sip of water has come from the purest mountain spring. You have an earnest conversation with the total stranger standing next to you and it feels completely normal. (Not something that happens too often in the checkout queue at the supermarket.) Everybody is more attractive. You can't stop grinning. Fuck knows what endorphins your brain's producing, but it feels great. Collectivity is visceral!

It's a little like when you fall in love with someone. There's a surplus of love that gets transferred to the whole world. Simultaneously you fall in love with the individual and the whole world. It can be like this on a 'demonstration', in a riot, in a meeting, sharing food in a collective kitchen. The sense of connection you feel with the people around you becomes a connection with the whole of nature, including other humans. And we're not using metaphors here. Love is not just love for an individual – romantic love. This sense of connectedness is, in itself, love, an immanent love for the whole world. And just as with romantic love, we not only connect with everything outside, but with

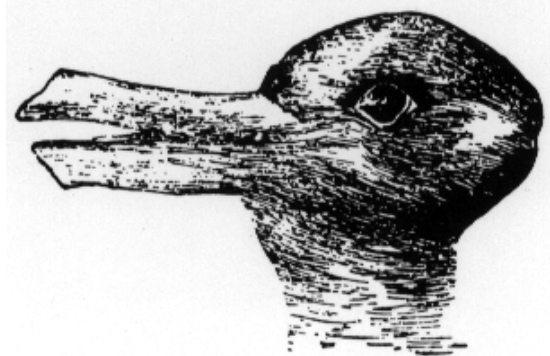
---

1 When it comes to connection, we might make an exception for that riot cop rapidly approaching with a big truncheon... But those state strategists expert in the 'science' of policing are wise to this effect of human connection. The riot cop's face-concealing helmet, big boots, shield and armour, aren't only for physical protection. They're designed to dehumanise, to scramble any possible human communication.

everything within ourselves too. Doors open, barriers dissolve – love isn't just a feeling, it's a force. We fall in love and anything becomes possible – 'Nobody knows what a body can do.'<sup>2</sup> In fact, we're not even sure they're 'our' bodies any more. Our own accounts of those intense moments of collectivity are much closer to 'out-of-body' experiences. As we surrender ourselves to the pull of the crowd, as we sway to its rhythms, it's harder and harder to work out where the one ends and the other begins. "My veins don't end in me".<sup>3</sup> This new-found equality and collectivity is infectious, and rips like a contagion to the core of our being: we don't feel like individuals in a crowd – we are the crowd, and the crowd is in us. It's magical.

Of course this feeling of connectedness doesn't just come from romantic love or 'political' events. You don't have to have been in a riot to know what we're talking about here. The same affect lies behind religious experiences, gigs, sharing drugs, football matches and loads of other social gatherings. What's perhaps different is the presence of transcendent elements. With a congregation, our collective love is channelled through our love of god and is mediated by the priest or imman or rabbi. Or else it's channelled through the band on stage or the team on the pitch. It's far more anchored and controlled, and unity seems to come at the expense of our difference. Whether it's The Hives working the crowd at a gig or a striker saluting the Kop, these are undeniably powerful moments – but you know from the start the direction they're heading in. There's never any real transformation. But when we enter moments without a vertical element, where the energy and desires flow sideways and everyone is a leader, then we're much closer to the old idea of communion. Then we really can walk on water.

Sadly it's not possible to live at that fever pitch forever – that level of intensity is just too demanding on our minds and bodies. One way or another we have to come back 'down to earth'. But while we never seem to achieve the future these collective moments promise, that doesn't mean that things return to normal once they're over. It's like the famous duck/rabbit image. Yes, you can see it as one or the other, but once you've shifted perspective it's impossible to revert completely to the view you had



---

2 The line's from Spinoza's *Ethics*, although we came across it in Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* (London: Athlone Press, 1987).

3 From *Like You* by the El Salvadorian poet Roque Dalton (translated by Jack Hirschman):

Like you I | love love, life, the sweet smell | of things, the sky-blue | landscape of January days. | And my blood boils up | and I laugh through eyes | that have known the buds of tears. | I believe the world is beautiful | and that poetry, like bread, is for everyone. | And that my veins don't end in me | but in the unanimous blood | of those who struggle for life, | love, | little things, | landscape and bread, | the poetry of everyone.

before. The come-down after these events – the ‘return to reality’ – can be really jarring. After the anti-poll tax riot, J18, Evian 2003, etc., etc., all the shit on television, in the newspapers, workplace gossip and so on just seems dead, lifeless, rather than merely intensely annoying. You’d think that we’d come ‘home’ more angry and frustrated than ever but it’s the opposite: we no longer feel like putting our foot through the TV. What’s the point? The moving images on its screen are as inanimate and soulless as the box itself. Tabloid and TV crap annoys us because it seems to have an independent life apart from us, just as other commodities appear to have independent power over us. But in these huge collective events, the mist suddenly clears and we can see things for what they are. Capital is nothing. It might look like everything, but it really is nothing.<sup>4</sup> It’s at these events and after that we see our power: we are alive and in control. The police might be screaming ‘We are REAL REAL REAL!’, but it’s the desperate cry of a dying ghost.

## Back to the Future

But how did we get here? For us, at least, this way of doing ‘politics’ – this way of being, even this way of writing – feels very different from ‘politics’ in the 1980s or early 1990s. Marches weren’t always boring, of course, but political positions seemed rigid. You nearly always knew where you were with people. You knew where to find the ‘anarchists’ and the ‘socialists’, the ‘trade unionists’ and the ‘greens’, the way they dressed, the way they behaved. And you knew where to put them, each in their own ideological and intellectual box.

It seems to us that this shifting nature of ‘politics’ is linked to the shifting nature of capitalism, the transition from ‘Fordism’ to ‘post-Fordism’. In the 1950s and 1960s, the hegemonic form of work – the form which seemed to condition other forms – was the fordist factory. Labour on the production line may have been dull and repetitive, but it was limited, temporally, emotionally, bodily. Clock on. Perform a prescribed range of tasks, requiring a certain range of skills. Clock off. Repeat daily five days a week, 48 weeks a year for 40 years. An (apparently) clear demarcation between these stolen hours, stolen years, and (the rest of) life-time. This organisation of work – with the ‘mass worker’ engaged in ‘mass production’ – seemed to engender a certain form of ‘politics’, a ‘mass politics’ revolving around trade unions and workers’ parties, whether of the ‘reformist’ socialist/social-democratic or ‘revolutionary’ variety. Of course, most people weren’t factory workers, not even in the so-called advanced capitalist countries, and for most of the world’s population, work wasn’t limited. But no matter: the fordist model shaped the way of the world.

All of this changed in the 1970s as the techniques and forms of industrial production shifted towards smaller, more mobile labour units and more flexible structures of production. Information, communication and co-operation have become absolutely fundamental to social production. The trouble is these things don’t stop at the factory

---

4 The notion that ‘Capital is nothing but looks like everything...’ was posted on The Wrong Side of Capitalism [<http://huh.34sp.com/wrong>].

gates – in many cases, there isn't even a factory any more. Industrial labour has clearly lost its dominant role. That's not to say that it's disappeared (it hasn't) but the leading role is now taken by what's known as 'immaterial labour' – labour that produces immaterial products, like knowledge, information, a relationship, communication or an emotional response. In fact, most of the time it feels as if it's actually our whole lives that are being put to work (although we're only getting paid for a fraction of the hours we're awake). That's why people talk about the blurring of the line between work and non-work. Whatever paid work we do, the production process increasingly draws on all our social relationships, our passions, our interests outside work. In short, capital now attempts to appropriate our very capacity to be human.

To put this another way, assembly line workers in the 1930s produced motor cars, but they also 'produced' themselves as 'workers'. A whole mass of political institutions (trade unions, social democratic parties) and tactics (strikes, sabotage, wage demands, lobbying) were built on the back of this identity. Many of these traditions still exist but their foundation has long since crumbled – when we say 'I'm a computer operator/cleaner/nurse' we're just describing where this month's pay cheque is coming from. The question 'what do you do?' is increasingly anachronistic, or else invites a kaleidoscopic response. In fact the subjectivity we produce (in and out of the workplace) has changed. The key words here are flexible, mobile and precarious. Flexible because we're expected to do a whole range of tasks within our working day (which of course never ends); mobile because we migrate from job to job; and precarious because there are precious few guarantees left.

This flexibility cuts both ways: on the one hand, even the most highly paid workers are just a few pay cheques from the prospect of destitution; but on the other hand, this new-found flexibility is the result of our actions. Fordism collapsed because workers found that they didn't want to do the same job, day in, day out, for 40 years. Maybe we didn't even want to work at all... How else can we explain this 'movement of movements', which we understand as a *moving* of social relations? It's exploded over the last five or six years because it resonates – it 'makes sense'. In fact, crazy as it might seem, there's not a massive distinction between those incendiary moments (like Seattle, Genoa) and the rest of our lives. In and out of work, we spend our lives communicating and producing in a way that's far more visible than it was to our forebears: the world is, more than ever, our creation. That's why engaging in this whole process, living and producing here in Gleneagles, seems so natural to us – far more natural and more realistic, in fact, than relying on Bob Geldof or Make Poverty History with their rhetoric of measured demands and long term strategies. And since we're all now encouraged to be more 'flexible' – as consumers, as employees, as parents – it's actually a lot easier to imagine a different world...

Another way of looking at this is through the move from 'opposition' to 'composition'. The Fordist model of social production threw up particular forms of organisation and resistance. On the one hand there were built-in mechanisms for collective bargaining around wage demands, job conditions, grievances and so on: movements were channelled through official and unofficial trade union structures. On the other hand, when these processes broke down, there was the option of more oppositional forms – work-to-rule, overtime bans, walk-outs, slow-downs, strikes. These forms weren't

restricted to work: they flavoured almost all forms of political activity, across the board. The more reformist groups followed the first approach of negotiation and engagement, the more radical groups were more confrontational.

Fast forward to the 1990s and everything starts to change incredibly quickly. Reclaim The Streets is an excellent example of a shift towards a more compositional approach. But what do we mean by composition? Maybe it's as simple as acting as though we already exist in a different reality – we reclaim a street and recompose it according to a logic different to that of cars and capital. Without exception, every political organisation in the UK has been left flat-footed by this switch, as the dreamers out on the streets suddenly became the realists. From here on in, compositional tactics are the only ones worth having. In many ways there's nothing new about this: in 1955, in Montgomery, when Rosa Parks refused to obey a public bus driver's orders to move to the back of the bus to make extra seats for whites, she wasn't 'making a protest'. She wasn't even in 'opposition'. She was in a different reality. It's a reality that can be traced back to the Diggers and the Paris Communards. We can trace it across the world to Buenos Aires or Chiapas. It's the reality underlying the slogan 'Don't Strike, Occupy!' of May 1968 and the auto-reduction practices of 1970s Italy. And this reality re-emerges here at Gleneagles: again and again, the most productive place to start is with the question of what we want, not what we're against. And we mean 'start' – sometimes we get what we want and then we realise it isn't what we wanted after all. So we start over again.

## Altered States

But if history isn't just a straight line, it's also true that we straddle many different timelines. We can think of the present as being defined by a tension between alternate futures. And big events are the moment when there's a snap or a rush forward due to a change in that tension. "A rush and a push and the land that we stand on is ours."<sup>5</sup> But this rush forwards, the Event – the moment of excess or of becoming<sup>6</sup> – has a history of desires and subjectivities, which are changed by the Event. So when we're engaged in those huge collective moments, not only is it easy to feel a real physical connection to people the other side of the world, we can also feel connected to people the other side of the millennium. And these moments leave indelible traces. It only takes a second for us to flip back to that place. It might be something as direct as the whiff of tear gas, the

---

5 From The Smiths' song 'A Rush and a Push and the Land is Ours'.

6 We first used the concept of 'moments of excess' in a pamphlet of the same title (Leeds May Day Group, Moments of Excess, 2004). For us it means those intense moments during which we (re)produce so much life, such a surplus of humanity, creativity and collectivity, that it overflows existing social forms. And thus, we simultaneously change those forms, those social relationships, and ourselves. Our 'moments of excess' would seem to correspond to – or resonate with – E.P. Thompson's 'moments of becoming', Ana Dinerstein's 'moments of (political) subjectivity' and Aristide Zolberg's 'moments of madness'. Apparently, Georges Bataille also used the concept of 'excess'. We are not familiar with Bataille's work, so we aren't sure how his use of term corresponds to our own, but we will put him on our reading list.

taste of a biscuit, or something less tangible – those of us at the Annemasse blockade of the 2003 G8 summit still go weak at the knees when we hear PJ Harvey’s ‘Big Exit’.<sup>7</sup>

So is Gleneagles really going to be like May 1968? No, of course not – no event is ever like any other. But we may get echoes of this, just as we’ll enjoy moments that recall the first time we fell in love or the Kronstadt uprising... In fact, it’s essential that we keep receptive to all those possibilities because if we’re constantly stuck in one groove, it can kill all movement. There are some groups whose reality is forever 1917: they may sell papers and recruit in 2005, but in their heads they’re storming the Winter Palace. Or there are others who are stuck in the jungles of Chiapas (not the Zapatistas themselves), or stuck in the European Social Forum, or stuck with the PGA.<sup>8</sup>

Crucial though these times and places might be, we see them in much the same way as we see opposition – as a moment of focus, but as a jumping-off point as well, a way of channelling our energies to transport us to a different dimension. Social movements often arise in opposition to some injustice: it might be live animal exports or climate change or the outbreak of war. Opposition is a way of focusing our energies, allowing a number of people to get together and channel their flows into a concentrated point. For almost a whole year, between 2000 and 2001, summit-hopping was the name of the game: from Prague to Quebec, Gothenburg to Genoa, everywhere our rulers met, we were there to greet them.

But opposition on its own, while essential, is never enough. No matter how militant, no matter how masked-up, could we ever really close down one of their summits? Could we force McDonalds/Starbucks/Nike out of business? More importantly, did we *want* to? Social movements crystallise around opposition but they rapidly create new desires, and it’s this aspect which is fundamental: “the only real revenge we can possibly have is by our own efforts bringing ourselves to happiness”.<sup>9</sup> The Zapatista uprising would not have resonated around the world in the way it has if it had simply stayed at the level of opposition to NAFTA. Again, the move to a more compositional approach can similarly be seen in the shifting role of convergence centres: at every major summit, we’ve fought back ferociously against the world that is daily imposed on us, but along the way we’ve also discovered new ways of doing things, invented new tactics, and found a new

---

7 Look out ahead | I see danger come | I wanna pistol | I wanna gun | I’m scared baby | I wanna run | This world’s crazy | Give me the gun

Baby, baby | Ain’t it true | I’m immortal | When I’m with you | But I wanna pistol | In my hand | I wanna go to | A different land

I met a man | He told me straight | ‘You gotta leave | It’s getting late’ | Too many cops | Too many guns | All trying to do something | No-one else has done

Baby, baby...

I walk on concrete | I walk on sand | But I can’t find | A safe place to stand | I’m scared baby | I wanna run | This world’s crazy | Gimme the gun

Baby, baby

8 How ironic that after all these years fighting our way clear of ‘Aims and Principles’ we now find ourselves hemmed in by the PGA ‘hallmarks’: ‘Aims & Principles’ can always be modified, hallmarks are permanently stamped in metal as a guarantee of purity.

9 The line comes from William Morris in 1891, when he argued against those calling for revenge for police attacks on demonstrations in Trafalgar Square. (Although we might have disagreed with him at the time.)

commonality – literally created new worlds. That's why the convergence centres have become more and more indispensable: here is where desires can exercise an almost irresistible pull on people inside and outside our movements – those desires act as amplifying chambers, unleashing huge flows of energy.

Social movements are enormously productive, that's why people talk about a 'buzz' – it's the hum of life, energy and desire, a constant process of contraction and expansion as a movement breathes. Way back in 1977 why did all the super-rich like John Paul Getty suddenly want to hang out with punks? Not because it was trendy but because it created a new reality, with new desires which made previous life seem hollow and irrelevant. It's when they are creating new desires that social movements seem not only attractive but irresistible. Closer to home, Make Poverty History might operate as if it's under the leadership of Bono or *The Observer*, but its real energy and impetus comes from this movement of movements here at Gleneagles and everywhere else.

Conversely social movements can and do settle down and become calcified: desires get frozen, and the life seeps out of them. It's when you get too comfortable that problems set in. When safe spaces become completely calcified and formally or informally institutionalised, then we can talk of a ghetto. It might be a social centre with paid workers, or a summit-hopping mentality, or a music scene, it doesn't much matter. A certain way of eating, of dressing, of thinking comes to dominate and starts to freeze our desires. New orthodoxies arise, and those who can interpret them the quickest become an invisible leadership, however unintentionally.

Some of this is totally unavoidable. Just as we can't live our lives at a constant fever pitch, so social movements need to ground themselves. Maybe a certain element of contraction, of taking stock, is inevitable after a period of intense expansion – after a wild night's partying, few of us can manage without some sort of safe space to retreat to. But that doesn't mean that these refuges have to be dead or closed. They can be spaces where we can experiment with other ideas, other forms of life. In fact, without some sort of safe space it would be impossible for different velocities, different movements to compose together. A few of us have been involved in a social centre in Leeds – what's really refreshing is that we can say what we really think and do what we feel passionate about without worrying that we might be 'being unorthodox' or 'making mistakes'. This has only been possible because there is enough common impetus to keep the process going while people go off in different directions or come in from different places, moving at different speeds.

It's tempting to assume that these things are simply a matter of time – that social movements start off with opposition to some injustice, explode with desire and then gradually burn out. But that'd be to miss what's really exciting about social movements, their ability to operate on a multiplicity of levels, at different speeds and on different timelines. It makes more sense to see all these processes happening simultaneously, so that calcification is present from the outset – or more accurately, that social movements are constantly solidifying and at the same time liquefying. And sometimes we need things to get a little compacted to enable us to go spinning off again to another time and place; sometimes it's only by being in cramped situations that we can make that leap

and burst through those boundaries.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps a key question now is how to create spaces that provide the safety to allow further experiments without then becoming stultifying. Maybe it's a matter of teaching ourselves how to distinguish flows of energy that are productive from channels that are a dead end.

Of course, we can only think about and organise around the future that's presented by the timeline we're on at the moment. But being open – to new ideas, to new connections, new ways of acting – seems much more important than that tired old question of reform versus revolution. One of the ways to blow apart that dichotomy is to get into the habit of facing 'out' as well as facing 'in' – a kind of double-jointed action. We know that the words 'in' and 'out' are problematic, because there isn't anywhere that's really 'outside', but they seem to make some sort of sense here. What do we mean by facing in and facing out? We are constantly organising safe spaces – social centres, movements, or any other community – that allow us to experiment with excavating the power of capital. This is part of what social movements do. When these spaces turn into ghettos, it's precisely because they've stopped having a face to the outside. Rather than being doors to other worlds, they've become gated communities with limited horizons: 'safe' in the sense of 'sheltered' and 'risk-free'. The way to avoid this is to keep one face open to the outside, and to operate with a more fluid notion of boundaries. We have a greater chance of seeing our experiments trigger other events that will then knock us off course, making all our plans redundant, making our demands look ridiculously feeble. Sure, things will go wrong, unexpected outcomes will emerge, but that will only open up further possibilities. In any case, we can't ever avoid making mistakes and, in fact, social movements only work by fucking up and breaking down. All we can do is experiment with the events as they come along, look for the potential of the new desires they unleash, and allow them to develop in the most productive directions.

## War of the Worlds

One way of thinking about this is through the idea of 'precarity,' which attempts to capture the precariousness of work and life under neo-liberalism and has become a new buzz-word in certain social movements over the last few years. It's easy to slip into the trap of using precarity as some kind of sociological category: so precarity comes to

---

10 'Cramped space' is a concept that can be found in the work of Deleuze and Guattari, but our attention was drawn to it by Nick Thoburn, who places great emphasis on it in his book *Deleuze, Marx and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2003). The crux of the concept can be seen in Deleuze's comments that "Creation takes place in bottlenecks" or that "we have to see creation as tracing a path between impossibilities" ('Mediators', in *Negotiations*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1995). Thoburn uses this to argue against any idea that we exist in a state of plenitude. Rather, we need to pay attention to the limits that capital displaces onto us. While we respect the need to be aware of dangers and limits, we think it is very important always to emphasise that we are active and capital is reactive. Perhaps we are overly sensitive to this issue, but we believe that any other emphasis risks a return to identifying and privileging the most cramped sector, the most oppressed people, which we believe would be a terrible mistake. Cramped space for us is something we create, something we have inside ourselves, not something capital does to us. As Deleuze goes on to say: "A creator's someone who creates their own impossibilities, and thereby creates possibilities".



mean talking about migrants, or workers in fast food outlets, or the ‘cognitariat’, or culture workers or any number of fixed identities. Used in this way, it’s as though we’re trying to spot the next key area: ‘This will be the next round of struggles!’ ‘These are the new Zapatistas!’ Some of us were involved in Class War around the time of the poll tax: the Trafalgar Square riot was one of our high points, but it was followed by a strange period of casting around for the next ‘poll tax’, as if it was simply a matter of finding it and lighting the blue touch-paper. It was a mistake. At the time we were so fixated on the forms the anti-poll tax struggles had taken we couldn’t see the potential of the new anti-roads movement and the forms it developed. We couldn’t see that similar underlying processes threw up differently shaped movements that could resonate with each other. History has a great way of throwing up new struggles, and new forms, from workers’ councils to social forums. And they have a habit of popping up where we least expect them. If we get stuck on the forms, and ignore the dynamic that underpins them, then our demands can easily become limits.

If we shift focus away from the forms of precarity and look at the dynamic, we get a different perspective. Precarity becomes a tool to help us see connections between apparently disparate struggles. It helps us see how ideas and tactics developed in one struggle could spread to another. But what’s really powerful about the idea of precarity is that it is entirely the result of our actions. The massive wave of struggles from the 1970s onwards, especially the refusal of work, were all attempts to slip the leash of Fordist control – that’s where precarity comes from. Looked at this way, precarity is not in itself a bad thing, which is why some people are trying to re-think it with the slogan ‘reclaim flexibility’. And it’s an even richer concept when it’s expanded to include a whole series of biopolitical concerns, from climate change to border controls to the ‘war on terror’. In this way precarity isn’t the preserve of a particular struggle or a particular set of workers – it’s far closer to a universal condition of being in this world. Our lives seem to hover permanently on the edge of an abyss as we try to pick our way through a permanent state of exception. In fact, it’s increasingly become clear that all the language and technologies of securitisation – surveillance, ID cards, ‘war on terror’, etc. – are not intended to produce a feeling of security but rather to perpetuate insecurity. Combating this generalised insecurity can only really be done through the mobile safe spaces created by social movements.

Events such as Gleneagles are really experiments in creating new worlds. It’s not that these events, these moments of excess, contain the seeds of new worlds, they *are* new worlds. In one sense little has changed. We are living, more or less, in the same physical bodies, the same collections of molecules. And we are not some ‘marginal’ segments of humanity, ‘extremists’ or ‘politicos’. Rather, we are everyone. People who know how to heal or to grow food, people with skills in parenting or constructing physical structures, above all, people with skills in simply being human. Think what we have created here: collective kitchens, medical facilities, the ‘trauma’ zone.<sup>11</sup> It’s not that this horizontal,

---

11 The trauma zone is a space a safe distance from Gleneagles where any injured ‘shell-shocked’ counter-summiteers can be taken to recuperate. People plan to maintain it for as long as necessary, up to several months if need be. Compare this with the shoddy way the state treats ‘its’ traumatised soldiers.

network form of organising is more ‘democratic’, it’s so obviously better, more ‘efficient’, and more ‘productive’.

But wait a minute; perhaps these new worlds aren’t alternate realities. As we look around we see all the parts of the previous world are still there. Except they seem rearranged slightly. Displaced just a few centimetres and yet that makes all the difference. When we’re hemmed in, all the affects of precarity seem terrifying and debilitating. But as soon as things start moving, those same affects become advantageous – precarity becomes flexibility and all those attitudes and techniques we’ve needed just to survive suddenly become tools of liberation. It’s the same as the principle of ju-jitsu: with one deft move all the multiple fears and insecurities that politicians dump on us, all the shit about immigration, terrorism, crime can be turned to our advantage. What previously seemed a cramped, crushing world full of limits and restrictions now seems a world of almost unlimited possibilities. That’s the promise of the situation, that the new capacities that we feel at events like Gleneagles can be made concrete in our everyday, habitual lives. That we can develop new tactics, new technologies and new ways of living that will cause a cascade of events to sweep through society.

## Postscript

‘Event Horizon’ was written for, and distributed at, the mobilisation against the G8 summit in Gleneagles, Scotland in the summer of 2005. It was inspiring and exhilarating to play a part in the convergence centres and to realise there many of the processes we talk about here. In Edinburgh, in the Hori-Zone (the ‘eco-camp’) just outside Stirling, on the road blockades, everywhere we came across the same creativity, flexibility and imagination. Another world really didn’t seem that ludicrous.

Two points are particularly worth highlighting. First, it would have been easy to go for a single set-piece battle in an attempt to shut down the summit. But that would have flattened all of our compositional efforts (creating and maintaining multiple convergence spaces, each containing a multiplicity of subjectivities) into one spectacular moment of opposition. We decided instead to use flexibility and mobility to our advantage, planning multiple blockades and actions wherever and however we wanted to. The result was chaos on the opening day of the summit. Second, this diversity of approaches and tactics only seemed to strengthen the incredible feeling of connection. When we heard about the successful blockade of the M9, we felt as if we had been there too (even though we were 20 miles away on the A9). We heard that the Gleneagles fence had been breached we felt it was us who’d torn it down. Those people who had chosen to be medics or to stay in the convergence centres and cook reported the same feelings of connection, of having done it all. Everyone felt a part of everything!

But precarity is nothing if not fickle. The forces that worked to our advantage for the first day of the summit turned against us when news of the 7 July London bombings filtered through. In Stirling, where we were based, we experienced them as a moment of vertical power which effectively de-mobilised many of us. Earlier in the week at a

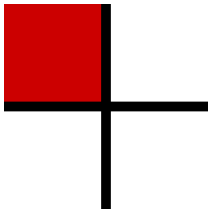
massive site-wide meeting to discuss strategies for the opening day, there was an amazing fluidity, and a clear willingness to engage and to find common ground. But by Thursday morning many people had reverted to the default mode of either partying or party politics: there was another massive site-wide meeting, but this time it was dominated by ideology and old style politics. We came up against a widespread feeling that we had to 'take a position'. In fact, the opposite was true. We should have dealt with this external event in the same way a crowd of 200 of us dealt with an oncoming police car early on Wednesday morning: we literally flowed around it. 'Taking a position' means standing still and losing the initiative. After Thursday the mood, affect, feeling, buzz – call it what you like – was defensive and closed, compared to previous days: the desire had gone, and with it the energy.

Of course, it's important not to over-state the impact or significance of the bombings. They are simply the flip-side of the processes we highlight in Event Horizon: a particularly intense and accelerated comedown. 'When we're on the move, all the affects of precarity seem exhilarating and empowering. But as soon as things stop moving, those same affects become disadvantageous – flexibility becomes precarity and all those attitudes and techniques we've developed suddenly become obstacles to liberation.' And because we experienced these bombings as a mediated event, it's tempting to see them as proof that there are far wider forces at work, making our mobilisations at Gleneagles and elsewhere pale into insignificance. This is the deflationary effect of all mediation. But in fact the opposite is true. Our week in Gleneagles, just like all the weeks before and since, makes it even clearer that there is no 'wider' field of play, no 'real world' outside of what we do. There is one power – and it's ours.

**the authors**

The Free Association is an ongoing reading, writing and socialising project. Some of us sometimes write under the name Leeds May Day Group. Freely associating to produce 'Event Horizon' were Alex, Brian, David, Keir, Nate and Nette, whose corporeal bodies usually reside in Minneapolis, Halifax and Leeds. Comments, criticisms and communication are always welcome. Our virtual home is [www.nadir.org.uk](http://www.nadir.org.uk).

E-mail: [the.free.association@gmail.com](mailto:the.free.association@gmail.com)



## Treasonous Minds: Capital & Universities, the Ideology of the Intellectual and the Desire for Mutiny

Dave Eden

The tenor and the speed of capital are such that often all one wants to do is stand still in silence. The continual re/deterritorialisation of neo-liberalism, now neo-conservatism, as part of an endless process of accumulation and counter-revolution leaves us on the back foot. As the Left – that is the *left-wing of capitalism* – undergoes meltdown after meltdown there appears to be little room from which to mount and sustain critique. The fear of the trajectory of global capitalism – the fear of the future – can lead to a defense of what there is today. All this is seen on the campuses of universities in Australia; a new round of restructuring is planned, restructuring based on the erosion of the last vestiges of social democracy and the intensification of neo-liberal aspects.<sup>1</sup> The most vocal voices of opposition such as the National Tertiary Education Union positions their arguments on a firmly liberal terrain. The defense is based on an ideology of liberal meritocracy and various inherited notions of the university being a place of excellence, unsullied by the direct machinations of government or money, yet contributing to the general health of civil society and thus both. These arguments are palatable in the official spaces that manufacture public opinion. They will be debated in editorials and on the floor of parliament, a polite campaign of public rallies is in the works – in this sense they reaffirm the illusions of parliamentary democracy; they will have little to no effect on the actual administration of these applications. But under this is a sense of frustration, as the alienation experienced by all who ‘work’ in universities (a place where ‘work’ takes on new and strange meanings) is reaching new levels. Many university staff members, like much of the global multitude, face a work environment where personal autonomy is shrinking and the conditions are increasingly precarious (some staff remain protected by privileges that are both feudal and postmodern); that is to say they are experiencing the ‘new enclosures’ – a work environment that, clothed in an ideology of autonomy, flexibility and choice, is characterized by the intensification of work-discipline through increased insecurity, monetarization and speed up.<sup>2</sup> And

---

1 For updates of both government legislation and the official union response see <http://www.nteu.org.au/home>

2 Midnight Notes Collective (1992) ‘The New Enclosures,’ *Midnight Oil: Work, Energy, War 1973-1992*. Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 317-333.

staff are experiencing this in a context where the traditional methods of insubordination, the Left in general and social democracy specifically, have shown themselves to be not only exhausted and deteriorating, but part of the world we must leave – chains on thought and action.

In short, the only way out for those who work at universities is the only way out for the entire multitude. To work out ways of constructing alliances of defiance and affinity with each other, so revolt can be realized, the world ‘that is’ swept away and new forms of liberated existence (anarchy) created in this revolt. Yet for those university staff that are knowledge workers – academics – this will involve a profound rethink. The danger is that since it is partly through the university that the social machine thinks academics who do not transgress their position through revolt (and thus actually do not revolt), can work to recuperate radical praxis back onto acceptable social terrain. The rethink that is necessary is one that rejects the classical view of the role of the intellectual, engages with how thought is put to work, and dreams of the possibilities of conspiracy, mutiny and treason.

## The Intellectual

Most commonly the academic is seen as some kind of continuation of the ‘Intellectual’. This perspective is an ideological mystification inherited from the heyday of the Left – the periods of both the classic workers’ movement of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the struggles of the mass worker in the lead up to the Second World War. It is a mystification that invokes a special role for the intellectual – one that simultaneously elevates the intellectual yet demands their degradation in front of the ‘genuine agents’ of revolution: the proletariat proper, or their official representatives. This is seen clearly in both Lenin’s and Malatesta’s work; signifying that despite their serious political differences both Marxist-Leninism and classical anarchism often shared a similar political cosmology.<sup>3</sup>

For Lenin the intelligentsia plays a special and specific role in the process of revolutionary struggle. The working class for Lenin cannot through its own activity generate a radical critical theory – it can “develop only trade union consciousness”.<sup>4</sup> The actual process of class struggle would only develop a politics that was firmly within the boundaries of capitalist society. The antagonism of the factory floor would generate a politics that only sought the amelioration of direct injustices through a process of trade unionism and campaigns for government reforms. Whilst this might often take insurrectionary and violent forms, for Lenin it could never lead to a praxis that would

---

3 It might seem strange that this paper starts by referencing Lenin and Malatesta – as if we have never moved past the classical revolutionary theorists. For those unfamiliar with the terrain of radical thought in Australia it could be useful to note that despite the collapse of the Marxist-Leninist project organizationally as a paradigm of revolution it remains hegemonic. Equally Anarchism – as ideology – often plays the role of loyal opposition to Marxist-Leninism rather than contribute to the generation of new practices and approaches. The hope here is that by attempting to negate this paradigm approaches will become possible and obvious.

4 Lenin, V. I. (1973) *What is to be Done*. Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 37.

transcend capitalist society. Rather a socialist ideology would have to be developed outside of the life of the proletariat – that is in the realm of the intelligentsia. To quote: “[t]he theory of Socialism, however grew out of the philosophic, historical and economic theories that were elaborated by the educated representatives of the propertied classes, the intellectuals”.<sup>5</sup> This development of theory we are told takes place “independently of the spontaneous growth of the working class movement” – its origins instead being in the progressive development of Enlightenment thought.<sup>6</sup> Knowledge of capitalism then is seen as separate from the experience of capitalism. Indeed, it is those that do not experience the daily agonies and tussles of the struggle over the wage that are seen as those who can know its truth, whilst those that experience it cannot. Lenin does think that individual workers can take part in this process. Yet to do so they do not take part *as workers* but rather as ‘socialist theoreticians’ – and they can do this by their immersion in the “knowledge of their age”, that is the practices of culture, politics and science that are separate from the image of working class experience.<sup>7</sup> What is so stark here are the deeply authoritarian reiterations of the division of mind and body – the split between the sensuous and the intellectual. A split that does not arise naturally; as Federici has shown part of the process of the origin of capitalism was the creation and hierarchalization of the mind / body split – a process that was brought into being through violence and terror.<sup>8</sup> Within this discourse the sensuous is denied an ability to understand, in fact sensual experience is actually misleading; it produces untruths. It is only the transcendent and transcending intellect that can produce insight.

Yet Lenin’s thinking also carries a paradoxical but typical inversion of virtue when it comes to the mind/body split that he projects into the split between intellectual and worker. The very distance from the productive processes of capitalism that is meant to allow for the intellectuals ability for insight – their inhabitation in a world of knowledge – also makes them untrustworthy. There is a small comment near the end of *State & Revolution* that is particularly telling. When describing how in communism those who brake from “national accounting and control” will be met by “swift and severe punishment”, he states: “for the armed workers are practical men and not sentimental intellectuals, and they will scarcely allow anyone to trifle with them.”<sup>9</sup> The rationalization of violence and repression here, that it is practical – thus ‘rational’ – is startling and a telling insight into what the Bolshevik revolution became; the subjection of the human to supreme rationalization and industrialization, subjection to the practical. The focus here is that the tasks that Lenin sees as being necessary to the revolutionary process are alien to the intellectual, whose sentiment is something distanced from Lenin’s depiction of the proletarian condition. For Lenin, the task of revolution is that of the violent destruction of the old state and the construction of a new proletarian apparatus: “specific tasks in relation to violence, authority, power, the

---

5 *Ibid.*

6 *Ibid.*

7 *Ibid.*, 48 (footnote)

8 Federici, S. (2004) *Caliban and The Witch: Women, The Body and Primitive Accumulation*. Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia.

9 Lenin, V.I. (1973) *State & Revolution: How To Change the Social Order*. Melbourne: International Book Shop, 78.

state”.<sup>10</sup> These tasks require a kind of resolve, a steeling, that is of the body, of labor. The intellectual, then, in this schema is objectively *un*-revolutionary. For Lenin, the way out is the fusing of mind and body back together through the medium of the party and then the worker’s state. It is the revolutionary party here that will unite the violent power of proletarian uprising with socialist consciousness. It is the party that “*brings closer and merges into a single whole the elemental destructive force of the crowd and the conscious destructive force of the organization of revolutionaries*”.<sup>11</sup> The implication also is that the intellectual is a revolutionary only by their existence in the party – and that party is a revolutionary party by the presence of the correct program, and thus the right ‘thoughts’.

Whilst different in many ways Malatesta subscribes to a generally similar paradigm. In common with anarchist thinking he is different from Lenin in his rejection of uncritical scientism and an opposition to authoritarianism. There is different *tone* that runs through his work – less of a predilection to mechanical certainties. Yet the same view towards the division between intellectuals and workers remains. Interestingly, like Lenin, Malatesta worries that without the injection of revolutionary ideas from outside, the struggle of the proletariat will not go beyond capitalism but will only seek reforms within it. He writes: “it would be a great and fatal illusion to believe, as many do, that the workers’ movement can and must on its own, by its very nature lead to such a revolution.” Thus, “the impelling need for strictly anarchist organizations which struggle both inside and outside the trade unions for the achievement of anarchism and which seek to sterilize all the germs of degeneration and reaction.”<sup>12</sup> Differing from Lenin it is less clear if these ideas embodied in the organization have an ontology that arises outside of the proletarian experience.

Specifically on the issue of intellectuals Malatesta writes of the importance of “forces and values which cannot be acquired without an intellectual background”. The lack of these ideas means that an actual uprising could end up being “an explosion of anger without significance and without a future.”<sup>13</sup> But the revolutionary movement must be wary for the “intellectuals are, by reason of their education, their family background, their class prejudices, tied to the Establishment, and tend to want the subjection of the mass of people to their will”. This is juxtaposed to the ‘mass of workers’ whose class position means that they are “the principle force behind the revolution and the guarantee that it will not resolve itself into a simple change of masters.”<sup>14</sup>

Malatesta also voices a worry that not only is the class position of intellectuals un-revolutionary but that it is counter-revolutionary. He suggests the failure of the Russian Revolution to produce liberation could lie with the dominance of intellectuals in the

---

10 *Ibid.*, 49

11 Lenin, V.I. (1973), *op cit.*, 214

12 Malatesta, E. (1993) *Malatesta: Life & Idea*. London: Freedom Press, 133.

13 *Ibid.*, 138

14 *Ibid.*

leadership who simply used the mass as an ‘instrument’ to replace the old masters with themselves.<sup>15</sup>

The only way out for the intellectual then is to “fuse with the working class”. But this process of fusing is a process of supplication, one in which the intellectual must pay the ‘debt’ they owe the working masses. This is a crucial part of this paradigm. It is apparent that solidarity – the formation of alliances of antagonism – is a central part of revolutionary struggle. However in this formulation, solidarity is only possible by a dual movement of negating the position of the academic and affirming of the position of the worker. It is an essentially authoritarian formulation that has much to do with the workerist ideology of the Left – the validation of the condition of proletarianisation as the condition of virtue that will persist even after the overthrow of capital. Faced with the brutalities of capitalism, the idea of the “[o]rganisation of social life by means of free association and federations of producers and consumers” sounds deeply libertarian.<sup>16</sup> Yet here the human is still framed within the terms of capital/work/commodity – producing and consuming. Thus this workerism in fact only posits the change of the management of capitalist society *not* its suppression/transgression. It is understandable where this ideology emerges from. It arises with a specific class composition – that of the *professional worker*. As Negri puts it, in this period the composition of struggle was one that “involved primarily transforming the specific power of valorization of the worker’s own labor and productive cooperation into a weapon to be used in a project of *reappropriation*, a project in which the singular figure of the worker’s own productive power would be exalted”.<sup>17</sup> What ever the heroism and tragedy of this period it has past. Yet the figure of the intellectual haunts us – it is a chain around the neck of the living.

The position of the academic is still seen on the one hand as being a moment of privileged insight, yet on the other illegitimate and lacking real power (or even a sense of the Real). It is a strange neurosis of power frustrated that manifests into an exceptional elitism mixed with guilt and paranoia. As the 20th century progressed and the insurgent power of the industrial proletariat and the socialist project seemed increasingly reconciled and integrated into the functions of industrial civilization, some chose to cling to the figure of the intellectual – or at least to a conception of the purity of thought. Examples of this can be found amongst the Frankfurt School; whilst so much of their collective efforts work to show how the rationalization of capitalism has spread throughout and subordinate the social body, they still hold on to the possibility of thinking being exterior from the relationships of power. But at the same time they express the powerlessness of this thought that lacks a body. Horkheimer writes: “philosophy would be mankind’s memory and conscience, and thereby help to keep the course of humanity from resembling the meaningless round of the asylum inmates’ recreation hour”. Yet he also admits that philosophy, as it is cannot “bring it about that either the barbarizing tendency or the humanistic outlook should prevail”.<sup>18</sup> Marcuse

---

15 *Ibid.*, 139

16 *Ibid.*, 184

17 Hardt, M. and T. Negri (2000) *Empire*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 40.9

18 Horkheimer, M. (2004) *Eclipse of Reason*. London: Continuum, 126.



tries to reconcile this by returning to the paradigm that was common to Lenin and Malatesta – but with one exception. Instead of the proletariat here it is the “outcasts and outsiders”. Marcuse hopes for the meeting of “the most advanced consciousness of humanity, and its most exploited force”.<sup>19</sup> Marcuse’s language betrays again the rift of mind/body – spirit /matter: the intellectual is *consciousness* whilst the exploited are *force*.

The unhappy figure of the intellectual is a sickness and must be left behind. The mind / body dichotomy was always an illusion despite its importance to capitalism and the effort exerted in attempts to make it appear concrete. The most manual of labor has always been a cerebral experience and thought has always been embodied and fleshy. Its appearance of separation has more to do with specific discourses and ideologies.

For a revolutionary project it is useless. The revolt against capital as *civilization* will involve the lucid and the ludic – and put into play ideas of humanity that cannot be constrained by any Enlightenment cosmology. But more than this, the idea that ‘thought’, the work of the intellectual, is somehow separate from the machinery of capital is false. Arguably it has always been false – but now more than ever the mind is being put to work and the specific intellectual replaced by mass intellectuality. Here pathways for the revolt of academics can be sensed.

## Thinking about/as Work

A useful and fertile tool for this investigation is Marx’s idea of *real subsumption*. Simply put, Marx makes a distinction between formal and real subsumption. Marx argues that in its early period(s) capitalism does “not at first affect the actual mode of production” but rather imposes its control over what it has inherited.<sup>20</sup> It is only later with the “production of relative surplus-value the entire real form of production is altered and a *specifically capitalist form of production* comes into being”.<sup>21</sup> Real subsumption involves at least two interrelated phenomenon. What goes on in the process of production increasingly involves the social, and the social increasingly becomes a moment in the general process of production. The clear distinctions between work and what is outside work begins to crumble under a general logic of capitalism – *even if they maintain an illusionary appearance of separation*. Read writes that in “real

---

19 Marcuse, H. (1968) *One Dimensional Man: The Ideology of Industrial Society*. London: Sphere Books, 200-201.

20 Marx, K. (1990) *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy Volume 1*. London: Penguin Classics, 1010.

21 *Ibid.*, 1024. This raises a host of questions: When did this happen? And where? Marx writes as if this moment of real subsumption is emerging or has emerged as he writes. Yet capitalism has changed massively since then- and the development of capitalism is un-even. With confidence we can look at the modern metropolis and say that life is subsumed by the relations of capital – the commodity, wage-labour, (cyber)-industrialization etc – but what about in the peripheries, that is if they even still exist? Is there something beyond real subsumption – a total subsumption for instance? All these are questions that beg answers. Yet here we can still use the idea of real subsumption as a broad abstraction to help us understand the role of the academic in capitalism.

subsumption...every act of production incorporates knowledge, instruments, discoveries, and social relations that are not present in the limited space or time of the factory. The factory becomes a social factory".<sup>22</sup> Camatte describes this process as capital coming to constitute the "material community".<sup>23</sup> On one hand the majority of human existence now takes place as commodified and alienated human activity, on the other the general social conditions become increasingly crucial to the process of work/commodification. It becomes almost impossible to find human interactions that are not stamped or formed by capitalist modes of production/exchange/consumption. If some spaces can be found that are not directly under capitalist logics they seem to be *generally* motivated by them. In this sense we can talk about the proletarianisation of humanity. This arises partly through increasing amounts of human activity being organized via alienating wage-labor, but also the tasks of social reproduction that sit outside that wage (house-work, study etc) are 'work' (activity commanded by capital that serves its regime of accumulation) in the period of real subsumption. Note – in a sense this is a process of homogenization, but it has not produced the homogenized proletariat beloved by classical Marxism.

Marx asserts that in the process of real subsumption there is the development of the "productive forces of *socialized labor*" coupled with "the use of *science* (the *general* product of social development) in the *immediate process of production*."<sup>24</sup> Both these processes involve the emergence and development of the collective intellectual powers of the population and their application in the now society wide matrix of production. In the *Grundrisse* Marx writes that:

the development of fixed capital indicates to what degree general social knowledge has become a *direct force of production*, and to what degree, hence, the conditions of the process of social life itself have come under the control of the general intellect and been transformed in accordance with it.<sup>25</sup>

Both socialized labor and the productive apparatus (which now encompasses society) are increasingly characterized by the application of this 'general intellect'. The old figure of the intellectual has no place in this. The realm of thought does not live outside capitalism but rather becomes a crucial component to it. The role of the academic has to be seen then in this light of the production and application of knowledge as a crucial ingredient in the general re/creation of the social relations of capital. Not only that, the figure of the intellectual as a member of a minority that holds some unique access to knowledge is replaced by the development of *mass intellectuality*.

It has been amongst the work of the 'post-autonomia' and their immanent critique of Marx's idea of the general intellect that some useful attempts to apply it to

---

22 Read, J. (2003) *The Micro-Politics of Capital: Marx and the Prehistory of the Present*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 122.

23 Camatte, J. (1995) *This World We Must Leave and Other Essays*. Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 39.

24 Marx, *op cit*.

25 Marx, K. (1993) *Grundrisse : Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft)* London: Penguin Classics, 706.

contemporary conditions have been generated.<sup>26</sup> Lazzarato argues that immaterial labor has risen in contemporary capitalism both from the increased application of communicative skills in the work process; and through activity not typically conceived of as 'work' creating the "cultural content" of the commodity.<sup>27</sup> The vast expansion of cybernation/info-tech, the mobilizing of nuanced identities in the production of commodity fetishism, the application of micro-management etc. all require mass intellectuality. This manifests in over-lapping ways; the need to display certain emotions in the work place, investing cultural understandings in what is being produced, relating to others in particular ways and so on. Also, for this to function a certain type of individual must be created that can function in this work place. To quote Lazzarato:

If production today is directly the production of a social relationship, the 'raw materials' of immaterial labor is subjectivity and the 'ideological' environment in which this subjectivity lives and reproduces. The production of subjectivity ceases to be only an instrument of social control (for the reproduction of mercantile relationships) and becomes directly productive, because the goal of our postindustrial society is to construct the consumer/communicator – and to construct it as 'active'.<sup>28</sup>

It is then in people – in the collective life of the population that works in the context of post-Fordism that the general intellect is located. This is a break from Marx. Whilst Marx located the general intellect in "fixed capital, with the 'objective scientific capacity' inherent in the system of machines", Virno does not.<sup>29</sup> Rather, Virno sees the general intellect present itself as "living labor".<sup>30</sup> The general intellect then involves all the cognitive –linguistic functions of the population put to work. He contests that even in the classic manufacturing industries, those bastions of work associated with the Fordist mass worker, this is the case. Lazzarato has previously argued that in large-scale industry production has already become geared to what goes on outside the factory – "sales and relationship with the consumer" – a process that requires the application of mass intellectuality in the entire circuit of conception and promotion.<sup>31</sup> Virno complements this by arguing that within the process of production it is the communicative skills of the workers with each other that become crucial.<sup>32</sup> The modern workplace involves the putting into motion of the entire 'team' (to use a key stone of the modern management lexicon). Hence the centrality of human relations to capitalism and more disturbing the defining of human relations by capital

(There are a number of criticisms to raise against all of this. Whilst some times 'post-autonomia' theorists of the general intellect make their observations site specific, there is a counter-veiling often-louder tendency to overemphasize the importance of the

---

26 For those unfamiliar with the various trajectories that came out of the Italian operismo and autonomia I recommend Dyer-Witheford (1999) *Cyber-Marx: cycles and circuits of struggle in high-technology capitalism*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

27 Lazzarato, M. (1996) 'Immaterial Labour,' in M. Hardt and P. Virno (eds.) Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 132.

28 *Ibid.*, 142.

29 Virno, P. (2004) *A Grammar of the Multitude*. New York: Semiotext(e), 106.

30 *Ibid.*

31 Lazzarato, M. *op cit.*, 140-141.

32 Virno, P. *op cit.*

general intellect. Virno is careful enough to locate his analysis in the work done in the “post-Fordist metropolis”.<sup>33</sup> Negri on the other hand makes the figure of mass intellectuality – called in turn the social worker and the cyborg – the hegemonic figure of struggle. An excellent critique of this can be found in George Caffentzis’ ‘The End of Work or The Renaissance of Slavery’. Caffentzis’ critique is that this entire line of thinking conforms to the old Marxist paradigm of emphasizing the activity of the most ‘productive’ workers, often resulting in blindness to the rebellions and self-activity of the vast majority of the world proletarianised population.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, these formulations do not fit with the actual patterns of revolt in which those who appear to be engaged the least in immaterial labor – indigenous peasants in Chiapas or the Miners of Bolivia – are also those that seem to be having the most success in destabilising the order of capital.)

This investigation leads us to an interesting vantage point to understand, sublimate, critique and/or negate the academic. It is quite simple now to see the university as *a* node (and probably not the most important) in the general chain of the application of immaterial labor, the creation of mass intellectuality and the development of the general intellectual. Some academics’ work (especially those whose labor sees direct results in industrial development – bio-tech, informatics etc) appears to be more obviously related to the constant advancement of the productive apparatuses. Teaching might be less obvious though its role is still apparent. A process of training students is one of creating the boundaries for thought to function in the social machine. The emphasis is on developing students’ abilities to ingest past knowledge and relate it in a group form – all under the disciplinary function of the grade. Even if study appears to have no direct relationship to later wage-labor, it still works to create mass intellectuality; it produces the linguistic-cognitive abilities of the student in a way that is *generally* copasetic with the functions of capital. The process of study is one element in the creation of the subjectivities necessary for this post-Fordist metropolis to function.

The labor of teaching shares similarities with contemporary service work in that it is what Hardt and Negri call ‘affective labor’. To quote: “[a]ffective labor, then is the labor that produces or manipulates affects such as feelings of ease, well-being, satisfaction, excitement, or passion. One can recognize affective labor, for example, in the work of legal assistances, flight attendants, and fast food workers (service with a smile)”.<sup>35</sup> The difficulty with approaching affective labor is the contradictory nature of generating pleasurable experiences that are part of the world of alienation. Teaching has a sense of reward and joy to it – yet this joy works in affect to reinforce the process of reification that places human experience into fetishised forms. It would be a mistake however to see the more positive moments of teachings as being *unreal*: as a manifestation of some kind of false needs that trample over deeper needs that arise from our species-being. Such dichotomies are no longer supportable. Rather, it is a question

---

33 Virno, P. (2003) *Labour & Language* [<http://www.generation-online.org/t/labourlanguage.htm>], visited 12 June 2005.

34 Caffentzis, G. (2003) ‘The End of Work or The Renaissance of Slavery’, in W. Bonefeld (eds.) *Revolutionary Writing: Common Sense Essays in Post-Political Politics* Brooklyn NY: Autonomedia, 129-130.

35 Hardt, M and A. Negri (2004) *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*. New York: Penguin Press, 108.

of what invests desire into the social machinery that negates a more liberating possibility and how we can invest desire in negations against that machinery.

There is one element of academic work that deserves specific attention – *research*. In broad terms the process of academic research is a process in which elements of the world are made intelligible to the society of capital. It is the process of the fetishisation of phenomena – their transformation into things, into a form that can be linked into and reaffirm the general intellect. Irigaray makes a savage and nuanced critique of this (ultimately gendered) process. Research is still, almost without exception, conceived within the parameters of scientific discourse. The activity of science is the activity of “[i]mposing a *model* on the universe so as to take possession of it, an abstract, invisible, intangible model that is *thrown over* the universe like an encasing garment”.<sup>36</sup> Thus the gaze of the university constructs and imposes. It is a part of the broader matrix that codifies flows of desire. This codification normalizes what is studied to the patterns of social conformity of capital. They become invested into its symbolic economy. The object of study is now spoken about with the voice of authority and ‘taught’ to broader society. Again this might seem more obvious in those disciplines with an apparently direct techno-rationalist application: sciences that involve the subjecting of natural forces to economic imperatives. It is also the case for the more intangible subjects. What goes under the name of the Humanities or Arts are often the disciplines that still cling the hardest to notion of intellectual exceptionalism – that still wish to define themselves as outside the tawdry world of the state and the dollar. Some wish to define themselves as inherently subversive. They often bring to light histories and stories that have been almost erased by the trajectories of colonialism. This bringing to light still carries on the work of transformation/assimilation. They become another commodity in the general market place of ideas. All the standard conditions of the commodity apply – their process of reification, most often into an ideology, imbues the product of research with potentialities that were previously human. So too the academic in the process of research reifies their labor into a fetishised form and cements their own misery.

The university then is a moment of both the application and the re/production of the general intellect – in ways that make these two tasks difficult to distinguish from each other with any confidence.

What does this mean for the revolt of the academic? The posing of the application of the general intellect is for the ‘post-autonomia’ writers generally an optimistic and a positivist one. Capitalism has had to move towards this particular régime of accumulation because of struggle – and libertarian social relations exist already in this communicative multitude. Important to this is the idea that the shift from Fordism to post-Fordism was driven by the struggle of the proletariat against the former. The worker then is the inheritor of previous victories of struggles. The work that takes place under post-Fordism then is the product of these struggles – it is liberation, which capital is merely a parasite on. To quote Negri: “[t]he socialized worker is a kind of actualization of communism, its developed condition”.<sup>37</sup> If this is the case, then the task is quite easy. All that is needed is to overthrow the axiomatics that capital imposes and

---

36 Irigaray, L. (2004) *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*. London: Continuum, 103.

37 Negri, T. (1989) *The Politics of Subversion*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 81.

let communism speak its own name. What is needed is the “reappropriation of administration” through “the soviets of mass intellectuality”.<sup>38</sup> If this is the case the struggle of academics is essentially one of struggling for autonomy – the delinking of their work from the pressures of the state and market and the creation of new truly democratic bodies of social organization. Indeed, this is how Bifo typifies recent social struggles – a struggle to “reclaim the autonomy of their brain from profit”.<sup>39</sup> This would only be possible as part of a society wide revolt and would involve much turmoil and confrontation with the baggage of history, yet...

## Problem 1

What if a more separate, more autonomous workforce has not accompanied the rise of mass intellectuality? What if the application of the general intellect, rather than creating a more antagonistic social subject, has done the reverse? What if the continual development of technology actually produces increased domestication? In the schema above the development of productive forces (both that of ‘actual’ machinery – fixed capital – and the ‘social’ machinery of the general intellect) is seen as progress. Indeed, the continual constitution of life with a techno-scientific framework – as cyborgs – is seen as liberatory. Hardt & Negri assert that the process of exodus – of rebelling against /leaving from empire – is a “machinic exodus”. That part of the process of liberation is the actual “hybridization of humans and machines”.<sup>40</sup> Here it hits a wall. Whilst the development of information technologies involved moments of rebellious activity – from the hacker to computer piracy – it seems impossible that this world of cyber-tech can exist *without* capitalism. How can the actual physical structures of the cyborg exist without the manufacturing of its parts in sweatshops, without the soldier-miner of the Congo, without vast toxic pollution? Indeed, does not the development and application of mass intellectuality exist in a world of increasing fracture, incorporation, biopolitical domination and social atomization?

Working against the technological determinism of orthodox Marxism Camatte writes, “[c]apitalism imposes its despotism on human beings by means of objects and things that are invested with new modes of being appropriate to capital’s new requirements”.<sup>41</sup> The continual subsumption of existence by capital is facilitated in part by the continual application of techno-scientific rationality throughout the social body. Mass intellectuality is in a constant state of surveillance, construction and guidance – much of this facilitated by the hardware of information technology. This continual application of techno-scientific rationality also results in an escalating specialization and division of labor – a fracturing of the human population. Camatte continues that in this condition, this despotism of capital, “[i]t is things that are the real subjects. They impose their own

---

38 Negri, T. (2003) ‘Constituent Republic’, in W. Bonefeld (eds.) *Revolutionary Writing: Common Sense Essays in Post-Political Politics*. Brooklyn NY: Autonomedia, 252.

39 Bifo. *The Warrior, The Merchant & the Sage* [<http://www.generation-online.org/t/twarriormerchantsage.htm>], visited 12 June 2005.

40 Hardt, M. and T. Negri, *op cit*.

41 Camatte, J. *op cit*.

rhythm of life and ensure that people are confined to the level of their own single existences.”<sup>42</sup> Post-Fordism is the further erasing of wild and unplanned behavior from the bodies of humans and the world through the continual application of the will of capital congealed into the bio/cyber/industrial-technological apparatus.

In this sense the ‘post-autonomia’ authors still hold too much of a debt to the past, believing that the world of work can be taken over freed from capital and made liberating. But to really be rid of alienation must not we completely destroy the proletarian condition? The general intellect and mass intellectuality – as moments of proletarianisation – are not to be liberated from the control of capital, but destroyed as part of the world of capital.

## Problem 2

It is common for academics (especially in art/humanities) with ‘radical’ politics, to make rebellion their study: to write on critical theory, uprisings, social movements etc. It is what I’m doing right now. What does this mean if it is through research that the universe is, in part, transformed into an item that fits into the productive machinery of capital? If academic work is alienating then is the study of rebellion the process of its recuperation? One of the privileges of being an academic is the ability to often choose what one studies. But is this really a privilege? It is only allowed because the process of research nullifies the radical potential of what is studied. In fact contemporary capital thrives on its ability to ingest previously radical moments and reintegrate them into the commodification and social management. Žižek asserts that the modern freedom of thought “does not undermine actual social servitude, it positively sustains it”.<sup>43</sup> The contemporary academic can study *anything* as long as they study, as long as the production of ‘ideas’ continues. Conferences and journals can be on any topic as long as they work to reproduce the world of conferences and journals. You may work on anything as long as you work. All this means is that academic labor is consistent with labor generally – it reproduces the conditions of alienation. The university however functions under certain ideological mystifications that obscure this and generate a certain kind of semi-autonomous servitude that is necessary for academic work to take place. This is even more horrific when you consider that academics often bring movements and rebellions they have been involved and deeply invested in, into this process of recuperation. All the little rebellions that make life actually livable are encouraged to enter the spotlight of legitimate research. Through building a career as an academic we built monuments of our accumulated alienation. When do you stop being a punk and start theorizing about punk? When do you stop being a feminist but become a theorizer of feminism? Is not the pleasure of reading searing critique nullified by the process of marking it? Is not the joy of creative labor drained by its entrapment in forms that slot into the larger productive matrix? The result of this process is the draining of radical content from both the object of study and our very lives.

---

42 *Ibid.*

43 Žižek, S. (2002) *Welcome to the Desert of the Real!* London: Verso, 3.

It might be possible to reverse the polarity. Rather than struggle entering the terrain of the university as an object of study, the process of academic work could be subverted by our own immersion in struggles. The more we rebel the more we can ally with the rebellion of others. These alliances, spiraling conspiracies, open up the terrain of our lives, allowing us to de-invest from the dominant order and build radical subjectivities of our own. This itself would be the beginnings of the formation of another world, a collective dreaming, a group fantasy that could help us unplug our investments in the social machine and offer fragmentary glimpses of other ways of being. These conspiracies of fantasy and support are what Deleuze and Guattari call “agents of the real productivity of desire”.<sup>44</sup> This is *not* the movement of the intellectual going to the people bringing knowledge and receiving authenticity. It is collective exodus and the mingling of desire and autonomy based on both what we share and what we hold uniquely.

There are of course moral panics that do occur over certain academics and certain works: the media attack on a conference at Sydney University where Negri was going to speak for instance.<sup>45</sup> But what is crucial here is what is being attacked is the academic going beyond the boundaries of study. It was Negri’s relationship to *revolutionary praxis* that was the issue – not philosophical anti-capitalism. The study of an idea becomes a problem for capital when it stops being the study of an idea. This perhaps is our point of rupture.

## Conspiracy & Treason

Academic labor can be subverted. On any given day it probably is. The same tactics of *auto-valorisation* are carried out as much as they are anywhere. People slack off, fudge deadlines, email friends endlessly, steal office supplies. Students and staff form other dynamics, they hang out together, fall in love, have sex, get drunk etc. Within the pressure to produce, we can often weasel out little parts of our day in which we can dedicate to labor that actually brings us joy. In a period of low level of overt struggle this is all hidden; it exists as a special little secret world that we try to escape into as much as possible. Our precarity often makes us the ones who hide this. People talk of how hard they work because of the presence of discipline. And this discipline can function largely because of our atomization; both the atomization amongst academics and also the general atomization of the multitude (that continues despite / because of capital’s reliance on general social co-operation in post-Fordism). As already alluded to, processes of proletarianisation have only homogenized the population in the *broadest* sense. Our daily lives are still those of being alone in a crowd. Federici identifies that the process of proletarianisation has historically been the production of difference

---

44 Deleuze, G. and F. Guattari (2004) *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. London: Continuum, 33.

45 Windschuttle, K. (2005) ‘Tutorials in Terrorism’, in *The Australian*, 16-03-2005, 15.



*within* the proletariat.<sup>46</sup> This is part of the condition of precarity – there is always someone worse and better off than you.

*This same precariousness forces humiliating compromises; I intellectually critique marking, but I still mark – I need the tutoring money. In honesty this article will contribute to my CV; because when lying in bed in the middle of the night, worrying about my future, with the only realistic solution, revolution, seeming so far away, I would like to get an academic job. The only other work I can get without cutting my hair, and taking out my piercings (a humiliation that as of yet I refuse to accept) is in call centers – and I'll be fucked if I am ever going back there.*

What are the possibilities? In the short term it seems that conspiracy is the most obvious form of dissent. This could consist of loose networks that weave out across and beyond the university forming links of trust and mutual aid involving us not through our roles allotted by capital but against them. These could work to firstly provide social solidarity to weather the storms of wage-labor and provide material comfort that make the prospect of outright rebellion less daunting. They would work to generalize our experiences, help develop revolutionary self-theory and over come in practical way the divisions of labor and specialization that cripple us. Indeed, most of us already form such conspiracies with family and friends as a defense mechanism. But we can push them to more aggressive footings and also open up to other similar networks.

Doing this would allow the *possibility* of acts of treason. These acts would be any that defy the application of our labor towards to re/creation of capital. In the daily work of an academic – teaching, marking, administration, research etc – there could be numerous opportunities for sabotage. What simple acts could just fuck things up a little and create/reclaim moments of joy? What would be the more public confrontational ones? Refusal to mark, perhaps, or strikes on research? If social struggle intensified what possibilities would open up? Objectively the power of academics to disrupt the functioning of capital has never been more potent. If mass intellectuality is crucial to the functioning of capital, then we are in a prime position to sabotage its development.

The figure of the revolt of knowledge workers has not yet truly made its presence known. Cyber-punk seems to have been overtly optimistic. I prefer to think in terms of pirates. The pirate is a representation of the triumph of previously contained and repressed desire. Think of the sailor: uniformed, codified and slotted into a hierarchy. The sailor press-ganged for matters of state, becomes a cog in a greater national, mercantile and military project. Any sense of individual subjectivity is broken by harsh discipline. Yet it is the sailor who transforms into the pirate – an explosion of colour, rage, desire and violence through a collective process of reappropriation. The loyal subjected who participates in the internal functioning of power becomes the outsider, becomes barbaric. Whilst the pirate world is one of rich symbols in its own egalitarian cosmology their lives no longer fit into a reified cause that demands their supplication. The mercantile naval apparatus, build by their alienated labor is turned on – not to be taken over wholesale – but broken up, destroyed and consumed to increase their enjoyment and liberty. Of course every strike, since it weakens a key imperial

---

46 Federici, S. *op cit.*

apparatus, opens up the possibilities for freedom for all those facing the machinery. And in doing so the pirate takes part in the creation of a new world of the commons and of anarchy.<sup>47</sup> Is it possible to dream of black flags on our horizon?

## By Way of Conclusion

Ultimately, humanity will only be in any sense free when the totality of global capitalism is destroyed through conscious revolution. This involves the destruction of the university as part of the destruction of all concretized moments of the division of labor. We can really only dream about what this would look like, drawing on the tumultuous history of revolt and our own experience of struggle for sustenance. Yet the potential to turn the world upside down is not some gift in the future, but an immanent and imminent possibility. This possibility, at least in Australian society, has not been picked up. Rather contemporary conditions are typified by a numbing social peace. Molecular forms of disobedience seem to be the only ones really open to us. Though this could change – just one really serious moment of struggle could suddenly make everything appear combustible.

It seems facile to suggest some kind of platform for a way forward. Struggles on campus, are at this point, still locked in Leftism. There are some brief and beautiful exceptions. Recently posters entitled the *Destructivist Position on Militarism and Higher Education* appeared around the Australian National University. They contained beautiful and lucid calls for students and soldiers to join together and with the aid of “powerful weaponry...partake in the enjoyable exercise of absolutely smashing all the current ivory towers and ivy covered halls, all the sandstone monuments to elitism, business and boredom”.<sup>48</sup> Its surreal ‘madness’ expressed so well the very manifestation of desire and the schizing out of normality that is needed in the here and now. As such it simply does not compute with the standard and repressive consciousness of the academic, the paranoid and self righteous fantasies that lead so many of us into a defense of our own alienation. Like so many of the subjects of capital in the post-Fordist metropolis we find ourselves constantly reinvesting into the machinery, apparatus, practices and technologies that enrage us. The process out is unclear, but the removal of ideologies based on the reified position of the intellectual and academic might help clear the decks for a practice that can take into account, basing itself on desire, creativity and revolt.

### the author

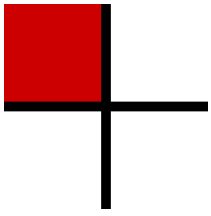
Dave Eden is currently working on his PhD thesis, entitled “Insurrection & Exodus: a Contribution to Contemporary Anarchist Theory” at the Australian National University. His work generally involves an eclectic reading of divergent threads of anti-capitalist praxis. He also writes under the pseudonym Dave Antagonism for multiple radical publications. He has been involved in anti-capitalist struggle long enough to know better, most notably the collectives Revolutionary Action in Wollongong and Treason in Canberra.

E-mail: david.eden@anu.edu.au

---

47 Linbaugh, P. and M. Rediker (2000) *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic*. Boston: Beacon Press.

48 Temporary Bureau of Destructivist Activity *Destructivist Position on Militarism and Higher Education* Leaflet



## Introduction to Colectivo Situaciones

Nate Holdren and Sebastian Touza

The following translation of the article on ‘research militancy’, a fundamental piece insofar as it lays bare the values and principles Colectivo Situaciones invoke in their definition of themselves as militants, calls for a reflection on our role as translators. It is our hope that this English version of the article will find resonances among those who practice a politics that is inseparable from thinking in their own situation. But we feel that it is important to share with the reader our urge to dispel any mythical (mis)understanding of the transparency of language. We share with Colectivo Situaciones the conviction that the abstraction involved in the attempt to communicate inevitably impoverishes experience. Translation adds one more layer of abstraction. In this sense, we assume the full significance of the Italian adage *traduttore, traditore*. Not because we intend to betray anybody, but because the acknowledgment that every translation is a betrayal is our attempt to keep faith with the concrete situation in which the experience being communicated unfolds.

In this introduction, we would like to go through some of the difficulties we had in doing the translation. We hope that explaining the decisions we made will provide some steps toward bringing the reader closer to the work of Colectivo Situaciones.

We faced our first difficulty when trying to translate the title. We were unsure how to translate the term *militancia de investigación*. This phrase can be rendered into English as either ‘research militancy’ or ‘militant research’. At the risk of taking words too seriously (always a risk in translation), it may be useful to spend some time on these two possible translations. ‘Militant research’ implies a continuity with other examples of militant research, those presented in other parts of this volume and elsewhere. ‘Research militancy’ may sound strange to the English speaker’s ear and it is less immediately clear what the term means.

The grammatical difference between these two phrases is a matter of which word defines the activity and which word qualifies it, which word will be the predicate of the other. The difference seems to be one of emphasis. Does the Spanish phrase refer to knowledge production which happens to be radical in some way (militant research)? Or does it refer to radical activism which happens to take the form of knowledge production (research militancy)?

Our indecision brought us to ask Colectivo Situaciones which one of the two expressions they felt more comfortable with. To our surprise – or perhaps not – the response was “with both.” “We think of our practice as a double movement: to create ways of being militants that escape the political certainties established a priori and embrace politics as research (in this case, it would be ‘research militancy’), and, at the same time, to invent forms of thinking and producing concepts that reject academic procedures, breaking away from the image of an object to be known and putting at the centre subjective experience (in this case, it would be ‘militant research’).”

Situaciones came together as a collective in the late 1990s. Previously they had been involved in El Mate, a student group notable for creating the Che Guevara Free Lecturership, an experiment oriented to recuperating the memory of the generation of Argentinean and Latin American revolutionaries of the 1960s and 1970s that began at the faculty of social sciences of the University of Buenos Aires and quickly spread throughout several universities in Argentina and abroad. The Argentinean social landscape in which the men and women of Situaciones forged their ideas was a desert swept by neoliberal winds, in which only a few movements of resistance could stand up by themselves. Those were times in which dilettante postmodern thinkers had come to the conclusion that social change was a relic from the past and in which people involved in politics could only see their activity through rarely questioned models.

Research militancy was the response to the need to rebuild the links between thought and the new forms of political involvement that were rapidly becoming part of the Argentinean reality. In the prologue ‘On Method’ of the book Colectivo Situaciones wrote together with the unemployed workers’ movement of Solano, the authors distinguish research militancy from three other relations to knowledge.<sup>1</sup> On the one hand, academic research inevitably reifies those it constructs as objects. Academics cannot help leaving outside the scope of their investigation the function of attributing meaning, values, interests, and rationalities of the subject who does the research. On the other hand, traditional political activists – those involved in parties or party-like organizations – usually hold that their commitment and involvement makes their relation to knowledge more advanced than the work done by academics. But their activity is not less objectifying, in the sense that it always approaches the struggles from a previously constituted knowledge framework. Struggles are thus regarded not for their value in themselves, but rather in terms of their contribution to something other than themselves – the socialist or communist society waiting at the end of the road. A third figure, the humanitarian activist, also relates to others in an instrumental fashion – in the justification and funding of NGOs (non-governmental organizations) – and takes the world as static, not subject to being changed radically (thus, the best one can hope for is the alleviation of the worst abuses).

Research militancy does not distinguish between thinking and doing politics. For, insofar as we reserve the notion of thought for the thinking/doing activity that deposes

---

1 MTD of Solano and Colectivo Situaciones (2002) *Hipótesis 891: Más Allá de los Piquetes*. Buenos Aires: De Mano en Mano [Hypothesis 891: Beyond the Roadblocks]. An updated version of this passage will appear as an article in the book, Day, R., C. Mark & G. de Peuter (eds.) (forthcoming) *Utopian Pedagogy*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

the logic by which existing models acquire meaning, thinking is immediately political. On the other hand, if we reserve the concept of politics for the struggle for freedom and justice, all politics involves thinking, because there are forms of thinking against established models implicit in every radical practice – a thought people carry out with their bodies.

This brings us to a second translation difficulty. Two Spanish words translate as the English word ‘power’: *poder* and *potencia*. Generally speaking, we could say that *poder* defines power as ‘power over’ (the sense it has, for instance, when it refers to state or sovereign power) and *potencia* defines ‘power to,’ the type of capacity expressed in the statement ‘I can.’<sup>2</sup> To continue with the generalization, it is possible to say that *poder* refers to static forms of power, while *potencia* refers to its dynamic forms. *Potencia* always exists in the ‘here and now’ of its exercise; it coincides with the act in which it is effected. This is because *potencia* is inseparable from our capacity – indeed, our bodies’ capacity – to be affected. This capacity cannot be detached from the moment, place, and concrete social relations in which *potencia* manifests itself. This is the reason for arguing, in the article we are introducing, that anything said about *potencia* is an abstraction of the results. Whatever is said or communicated about it can never be the *potencia* itself. Research militancy is concerned with the expansion of *potencia*. For that reason, a descriptive presentation of its techniques would necessarily lead to an abstraction. Such a description might produce a ‘method’ in which all the richness of the *potencia* of research militancy in the situation is trimmed off to leave only that part whose utilitarian value make it transferable to other situations.

The thought of practices is thought with the body, because bodies encounter each other in acts that immediately define their mutual capacities to be affected. History can only be the history of contingency, a sequence of moments with their own non-detachable intensities. Miguel Benasayag argues that act and state – to which correspond *potencia* and *poder* – are two levels of thought and life.<sup>3</sup> None of them can be subsumed under the other. Either one takes the side of *potencia* or the side of the *poder* (or of the desire for *poder*, as expressed in militants who want to ‘take power,’ build The Party, construct hegemonies, etc.).

*Potencias* found in different forms of resistance are the foundation of counterpower, but both terms are not the same. Counterpower indicates a point of irreversibility in the development of resistance, a moment when the principal task becomes to develop and secure what has been achieved by the struggle (Benasayag & Sztulwark: 213). Counterpower is diffuse and multiple. It displaces the question of power from the centrality it has historically enjoyed, because its struggle is “against the powers such as they act in our situations” (MTD of Solano and Colectivo Situaciones, *Hipótesis 891*

---

2 For further discussion of this distinction see Holloway, J. (2002) *Change the World Without Taking Power*. London: Pluto Press. Translators of works by French and Italian philosophers inspired by Spinoza usually run into similar difficulties. See the translator’s introduction written by Michael Hardt in Negri, A. (1991) *The Savage Anomaly: The Power of Spinoza’s Metaphysics and Politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

3 Miguel Benasayag, a former member of the Argentinean Guevarist guerrilla army PRT-ERP, is now philosopher and activist residing in Paris. He participates in the collective Malgré Tout and played an important role in the early life of Colectivo Situaciones.

104). To be on the side of *potencia* is to recognize that the state and the market originate at the level of the values we embrace and the bonds that connect us to others.

*Potencia* defines the material dimension of the encounter of bodies, while *poder* is a level characterized by idealization, representation, and normalization. *Colectivo Situaciones* avoid a name to define their political identity, which would freeze the fluid material multiplicity of militant research by subordinating it to the one-dimensional nature of idealizations. “We are not ‘autonomists’, ‘situationists’, or anything ending with ‘-ist’” they once told us. Identities have normalizing effects: they establish models, they place multiplicity under control, they reduce the multiple dimensions of life to the one dimension of an idealization. They make an exception with *Guevarism*, because Che Guevara clearly preferred to stay on the side of *potencia* and opposed those who calmed down concrete struggles in the name of ideal recipes on how to achieve a communist society.<sup>4</sup>

An investigation into the forms of *potencia* and the social relations that produce it can only be done from a standpoint that systematically embraces doubt and ignorance. If we recognize that the practical thought of struggles is an activity of bodies, we have to recognize as well – with Spinoza – that nobody knows what a body can do. To do research in the realm of *potencia* – to investigate that which is alive and multiple – militant researchers have to abandon their previous certainties, their desire to encounter pure subjects, and the drive to recuperate their practice as an ideal of coherence and consistency. In this regard, one might say that *Colectivo Situaciones* seek to concretely embody two Zapatista slogans: ‘asking we walk,’ and ‘we make the road by walking,’ such that, the act of questioning and collective reflection is part of the process of constructing power.

Research militancy is a form of intervention, a practice that accompanies other practices, or *experiencias*. This is our third translation difficulty. *Colectivo Situaciones*, like many other activists belonging to the wave of new protagonism in Argentina, uses the word *experiencia* to refer to singular, more or less organized groups, with flexible boundaries, involved in an ongoing emancipatory practice. Examples of *experiencias* with whom *Colectivo Situaciones* have practiced research militancy include H.I.J.O.S. (the human rights group formed by children of the disappeared), MoCaSE (a campesino group), and MTD of Solano (a movement within the larger *piquetero* movement, formed mainly by unemployed workers), Grupo de Arte Callejero (a street art group that works very close to H.I.J.O.S), the educational community *Creciendo Juntos* (a free school run by militant teachers), the political prisoners of Néstor Kirchner’s government, and a number of other *experiencias* in Argentina, Bolivia, Uruguay, and Mexico. The word *experiencia* connotes both *experience*, in the sense of accumulation of knowledges of resistance, and *experiment*, understood as a practice. In the article, when the word *experiencia* has this double connotation we have translated it as *experience/experiment*.

---

4 Cf. Benasayag, M. and D. Sztulwark. (2000) *Política y Situación: De la potencia al contrapoder*. Buenos Aires: Ediciones de Mano en Mano, 217-21. Diego Sztulwark is one of the members of *Colectivo Situaciones*.

We keep these words together because we find it important to keep present the experiential dimension to which the word *experiencia* makes reference. An *experiencia* can have territorial characteristics, such as MTD of Solano, whose roots are in a shanty town located in the south of greater Buenos Aires, or can be more deterritorialized, like Colectivo Situaciones itself. But in all cases, *experiencias* are defined by a certain form of organization of the life-world, a particular quest to redefine the bonds that define that group of people as a collective in such way that they produce, in the situation, social relations that are superior to those of capitalism. The construction of a non-capitalist sociability is a key activity for the *experiencias* Colectivo Situaciones works with. For MTD of Solano, for instance, the production of subjective bonds that are alternative to those of the state and the market is a defining moment of their concept of autonomy. For the material basis of support of both the market and the state are the bonds produced at the local level. Thus, one of their most important activities of self-reflection involves the critique of individualist values, contractual relations, and the instrumentalization of life such as they appear at the most basic and concrete level, that is, the same level, the same temporal and spatial dimension, at which *potencia* exists. There are certain types of social bonds that make *potencia* stronger. Others make it weaker. The research militancy theorized and practiced by Colectivo Situaciones is a committed effort to both producing bonds at that concrete level and weaving them in such way that they allow for a maximum of *potencia*.

Militant researchers work toward making more potent the elements of a non-capitalist sociability. This requires from them the development of a particular type of relation with the groups and movements with which they work. Following Spinoza, Colectivo Situaciones calls this relation *composition*. Composition defines relations between bodies. It does not refer to agreements established at a discursive level but to the multi-dimensional flows of affect and desire the relationship puts in motion. Thus, research militancy becomes immanent to the *experiencias* it works with. This concrete relation is not achieved through conscious understanding, but by letting oneself open to the dynamics of affect that define the possibility of *potencia* in the situation.

Here Colectivo Situaciones take distance from a certain truism pervasive in much of contemporary activist culture, both in Argentina and in North America: the idea that certain type of communication (be it the use of the internet, grassroots film making, or any other type) has an inherent emancipatory effect on people. Communication produces abstractions of experience. The experience itself can only be lived. Even though there is *potencia*, for instance, in the activism that carries out grassroots communication experiments, that which in the situation exists as a *potencia* cannot be communicated. In this sense, perhaps Colectivo Situaciones would agree with the thesis put forward by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri according to which there is no circulation of struggles.<sup>5</sup> Except that, for Colectivo Situaciones, this is not just the case of this point in history. Struggles do not communicate their *potencia*, they never did and they never will. There is, however, the possibility of resonances between struggles and points of resistance, but that is something entirely different. There are resonances between struggles when there are ‘shared epochal problems’ and they face similar obstacles, making possible the transference of “certain knowledges, feelings, and

---

5 Hardt, M. and A. Negri (2000) *Empire*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 52-9.

declarations” (2002: 199). Thus, there could be resonances between, for instance, Argentinean *piqueteros* and migrant workers in Western Europe, even if there is no actual exchange of words between them.<sup>6</sup>

Colectivo Situaciones makes a crucial distinction between the standpoint that looks at the social whole from the abstract bird’s eye perspective of ‘global thinking’ and the thought of the situation, for which the experiential dimension is the concrete form of existence of the world. Here, as the Malgré Tout collective puts it, the choice is clear: either world or situation.<sup>7</sup> The global standpoint is one in which we look at the world as spectators, the mass-mediated outlook that turns us into concerned individuals, concerned about issues that come to us only as representations. The restricted sphere of the situation, however, is one whose configuration we are responsible for. We produce and are produced by the situations we inhabit. Either our practices are those of the individual-spectator, and thus keep in place certain values, bonds, and affects that reproduce the centrality of state power and the pervasiveness of market relations, or we are persons in situation, open to produce and maintain the bonds that assemble a different, non-capitalist sociability.

Research militancy takes an immanent commitment to the situation. The situation, as Colectivo Situaciones understands it, is a sovereign space and time that defines its own senses and subtracts itself from the senses produced by the state and the market. The working hypotheses of research militants are direct elaborations on the exigencies of the situation. By contrast with the academic researcher, the traditional militant, and the humanitarian activist, who are ‘extrasituational,’ the militant researcher thinks and acts in situation.

How to write about the *potencia* of an experience/experiment knowing that its *potencia* will not be transferred in the writing? What kind of writing can at least look for resonances? Certainly, not a writing that presents itself as a blueprint, as an outline, as a forecast. A writing like this has to be antipedagogical. Militant research does not teach, at least not in the sense of an explication which assumes the stupidity and powerlessness of those to whom it explains.<sup>8</sup> Research militancy is a composition of wills, an attempt to create what Spinoza called joyful passions, which starts from and increases the power (*potencia*) of everyone involved. Such a perspective is only possible by admitting from the beginning that one does not have answers, and, by doing so, abandoning the desire to lead others or be seen as an expert.

---

6 For a discussion of the notion of resonance see Holloway, J. (1998) ‘Dignity’s Revolt,’ in J. Holloway and E. Peláez (eds.) *Zapatista! Reinventing Revolution in Mexico*. London: Pluto Press.

7 Collectif Malgré Tout (2005) ‘Manifeste’ [<http://1libertaire.free.fr/malgretout02.html>], accessed 28 August 2005, English translation forthcoming. In 1999, El Mate (Colectivo Situaciones had not appeared yet), Malgré Tout, Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, along with other collectives from Latin America and Europe, gathered in Buenos Aires to form the Network of Alternative Resistance. Their joint declaration outlines several of the principles of Colectivo Situaciones’ philosophy. An English translation can be found here [[http://www.voiceoftheturtle.org/library/nar\\_manifesto.php](http://www.voiceoftheturtle.org/library/nar_manifesto.php)].

8 See Ranciere, J. (1991) *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons In Intellectual Emancipation*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.



Of course, it should be clear that we as translators believe there is much to be learned from Colectivo Situaciones. But it is not a matter of receiving correct ideas that they transmit, as if copying recipes from a cookbook. Rather, we believe it is a matter of learning to recognize and amplify the *potencia* in our own situations, and so to act in a way that resonates with the practice of Colectivo Situaciones. We hope that our introduction and translation helps people make use of the text for their own purposes and in their own situations.

### **bibliography of colectivo situaciones**

#### *In Spanish:*

- Colectivo Situaciones (2001) *Contrapoder: Una Introducción*. Buenos Aires: De Mano en Mano.,
- Colectivo Situaciones (2002) *19 y 20: Apuntes Para el Nuevo Protagonismo Social*. Buenos Aires: De Mano en Mano.
- Colectivo Situaciones (2002) *Genocida en el Barrio. Mesa de Escrache Popular*. Buenos Aires: De Mano en Mano.
- Colectivo Situaciones and Universidad Trashumante (2004) *Universidad Trashumante: Territorios, Redes, Lenguajes*. Buenos Aires: Tinta Limón.
- MTD of Solano and Colectivo Situaciones (2002) *La Hipótesis 891: Más Allá de los Piquetes*. Buenos Aires: De Mano en Mano.
- Numerous articles and militant research notes can be found in the collective's website: [www.situaciones.org](http://www.situaciones.org)

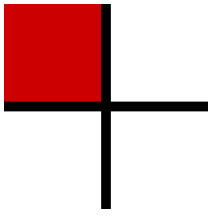
#### *In English:*

- Colectivo Situaciones (2004) 'Causes and Hapenstance: Dilemmas of Argentina's New Social Protagonism' [<http://www.commoner.org.uk/08situaciones.pdf>], also at [[http://multitudes.samizdat.net/article.php3?id\\_article=1949](http://multitudes.samizdat.net/article.php3?id_article=1949)].
- Colectivo Situaciones and Marina Sitrin (2004) 'The Shock of the New: An Interview with Colectivo Situaciones' [<http://www.anarchist-studies.org/article/articleview/36/1/6>].
- Colectivo Situaciones (forthcoming) 'Argentina, December 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>, 2001: A New Type of Insurrection,' *Perspectives on Anarchist Theory*.
- Colectivo Situaciones (forthcoming) 'On the Researcher-Militant', in M. Coté, G. DePeuter and R. Day (eds.) *Utopian Pedagogy*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

### **the authors**

Nate Holdren is a teaching assistant and Ph.D. candidate in Comparative Literature at the University of Minnesota. Nate has contributed numerous translations and other material to various electronic projects. He continues to benefit from collaborating on translations with Sebastian Touza.  
E-mail: [nateholdren@gmail.com](mailto:nateholdren@gmail.com)

Sebastian Touza is a Ph.D. candidate at the School of Communication of Simon Fraser University (in Vancouver, Canada). His dissertation, *Antipedagogies for Liberation*, is a critique of the emancipatory potential of intellectual interventions seeking to expand intelligence, raise consciousness, and facilitate communication. In the late 1980s Sebastian was involved in the Argentinean student movement. Recently he has collaborated with Nate Holdren in the translation of one book and several articles by Colectivo Situaciones.  
E-mail: [lstouza@sfu.ca](mailto:lstouza@sfu.ca)



## Something More on Research Militancy: Footnotes on Procedures and (In)Decisions

Colectivo Situaciones

translated by Sebastian Touza and Nate Holdren

### I

This article tells a real story. That story – like so many other stories these days – begins with a message, an email. It is signed by a friend from Madrid. She is from the group *Precarias a la Deriva*.<sup>1</sup> The message is addressed to Colectivo Situaciones. She asks us for an article, neither too short nor too long, about the experience of the collective in Argentina. More specifically in Buenos Aires, although not just there. In particular – she tells us – the idea is that we say ‘something more’ about the figure of the *militant researcher*, the name we give, in the collective, to our activities. Something ‘more’ not so much about the concept, but about the practice. “About the context, about difficulties, knowledges, procedures, notions,” our friend says. “Because – she adds – the piece *On Method*<sup>2</sup> leaves many doubts about concrete questions regarding the workshops.”

Our friend suggested that we further elaborate on four fundamental questions: ‘Decision,’ ‘concepts,’ ‘procedures,’ and ‘knowledges’ (‘know-hows’). To begin the exchange, we were told about how each of these questions can narrate a dimension of an experience/experiment: she referred to that of the *Precarias a la Deriva*.

---

1 Precarias a la Deriva, whose name translates as Precarious Women Adrift, are a collective who undertake militant research on precarious and feminine labor, primarily in Madrid. More information on and by the Precarias can be found at [<http://www.sindominio.net/karakola/precarias>]. This article originally appeared in a Spanish language collection dedicated to militant research, entitled *Nociones Comunes*, edited by Marta Malo of Precarias a la Deriva. *Nociones Comunes* is available at [[http://www.nodo50.org/ts/editorial/librospdf/nociones\\_comunes.pdf](http://www.nodo50.org/ts/editorial/librospdf/nociones_comunes.pdf)] – Tr.

2 This text is the prologue of the book, Colectivo Situaciones and the Movement of Unemployed Workers (MTD) of Solano (2002) *Hipótesis 891. Más allá de los piquetes*. Buenos Aires: De mano en mano.

We tried to understand. ‘Decision’: refers to the decision(s) we made in order to produce and develop *research militancy*. A story not so much of the Colectivo Situaciones as of the way in which we developed the research militancy. ‘Concepts’: to show a bit of our relation to the notions we use. Not so much explaining them (which would be very boring), but introducing a bit of their operation in concrete situations. ‘Procedures,’ namely, getting inside the material processes that configure the activity of research militancy as such. Finally, there are the ‘know-hows,’ which are referred to the infinite local knowledges that make possible the creation and development of the procedures.

To be sure, this task turned out to be – then and now – *titanic*. In fact, we were capable of confronting it, in a very partial way, only because our friend was willing to maintain a more or less regular correspondence with us on these issues.<sup>3</sup> As a result of this conversation, issues related to two of the four proposed items were laid down: ‘decision’ and ‘procedures,’ aspects to which we will give, here, central importance.

What follows, then, is an attempt to develop the context and the characterization of some facets of research militancy: not so much by doing a historico-political description of our circumstances, nor from a narration of the concrete experiences that we have carried out (both aspects are partially registered in our publications<sup>4</sup>), but rather from the modes in which such circumstances (contexts, experiences) produced a trajectory.

## II

The first problem we ran into when we started the correspondence (which refers to a fundamental issue of research militancy) was that of *communication*. And this is so in more than one sense.

First, there is the question of what does it mean to *communicate*. On one hand, of course, there is the fundamental, insurmountable impossibility of the nontransferable character of experience. We can tell ‘this’ and ‘that.’ We can even tell ‘everything,’ but there is always *something* that slips away. And, moreover, there are differing points of view. How to bring them all together? And even when this could be done, there is an intensity of what happens that can only be captured in full by ‘being there,’ physically present, subjectively involved.<sup>5</sup>

---

3 The exchange took place during the last trimester of 2003 and, as we said, constitutes the basis for this text. In our experience, productive friendship turns out to be the greatest source of inspiration, with the bonus of giving us the greatest satisfactions.

4 Many of which can be found in our website [[www.situaciones.org](http://www.situaciones.org)].

5 Faced with these deliberations, our friend poses questions: “How is it that you do not believe in communicating and publishing texts?” In order to separate ourselves from the alienating image of communication, in its ingenuous version as a message from one consciousness to another, we suppose that writing, implicit in a practice, in a living thought, is particularly moving for those who search. We experience publication more as a search for (producing-receiving) *resonances* than as a transmission of messages. The final goal of publication is, in our case, extending experimentation,

On the other hand, how to communicate *what we do* if not – precisely – by *doing*. That is, how to transmit a reflection (a word committed to an experience/experiment, to certain practices, to living thought) about reflection without making a meta-theory about ourselves?

Moreover, how to explain each singular operation, in all its precarity, without turning it, in the same exposition, into a technique (our friend shares this concern: “*Suffice it to think of all the Methods, with capital ‘M,’ and their disastrous consequences*”)?

In the end, when we reject the word ‘communication’ we don’t do so in the name of an *incommunicability* that would confirm the ‘financial’ dispersion of experience, but as an impeachment of the accompanying assumptions of the ‘society of communication.’ If the ideology of communication presupposes that “all that is communicable deserves to exist and all that deserves to exist is communicable,” only because technologies provide the means to do it, what is cut out is, precisely, the affirmation of the experience (as a weave and experiential constellation) that causes the word to be said. From here onwards, to the word ‘communication’ we will oppose the word *composition* (or processes of interaction, collective valorization, system of productive compatibilities), understanding as such the sketching of a plane in whose interior the *word* does say *something*.

Finally, something that might be easy to say but difficult to accept: how to narrate the fact that research militancy is not the name of the experience of someone who does research but that of the production of (an) *encounter(s)* without *subject(s)* or, if you prefer, of (an) encounter(s) that produce(s) subject(s)? How to admit the fact that the Colectivo Situaciones is not the subject of its own activities, and that the encounters in which it found itself – fortunately – involved were neither foreseen nor planned or implemented at will by those who write this article? (We will come back to this.)

In an era in which ‘communication’ is the indisputable maxim, in which everything is out there to be communicated, and everything is justifiable by its communicable usefulness, research militancy refers to *experimentation*: not to thoughts, but to the *power to think*; not to the circumstances, but to the *possibility of experience*; not to this or that concept, but to *experiences* by which such notions acquire *power (potencia)*; not to identities but to a *different becoming*; in one word: intensity does not lie so much in that which is produced (that which is ‘communicable’) as in the process of production itself (that which is lost in ‘communication’). How to *say* something, then, about all this and not merely exhibit the *results* of such a process?

### III

Let’s turn to what our friend from Madrid calls ‘decision’ – and we call experiment, rather, as ‘indecision.’ How does research militancy arise? What is it that we call

---

establishing links with those who experiment in other places. This bond is incompatible with the pure “will to communicate.”

militant research? What is it made of? Answering these questions would be more or less like telling the *history* of the Collective. But that history does not exist. In its place we can – at best – force things a little and reconstruct briefly a trajectory. But how to do it? How to say something interesting about such homely issues?

For very complex – and, as we suppose, very frequent – reasons, towards the end of the decade of the 1990s, as a group of comrades we began to look through what had been – and still was – our shared experience. We found two issues with which to come to terms: on one side, *militant commitment* as a directly political element and the efficacy of our experience thus far; on the other, our *relation to the university* and the processes of generation of knowledge. This double problematization is a good starting point.

The group, then, developed reconsidering these two faces of its existence: the one that rose from looking through its own militant practice, and the other, which asked itself about the modes in which political practice is related ‘from within’ to the production of effective knowledges.

There were two figures to interrogate: on one hand, the remains of the ‘sad militant’ – as Miguel Benasayag<sup>6</sup> (who was a key figure in this period of elaboration and in many of the notions we use to think our own ‘decisions’) calls it – who is always ‘setting out the party line’ and keeping for himself a knowledge of what ought to happen in the situation, which he always approaches from outside, in an instrumental and transitive way (situations have value as moments of a general strategy that encompasses them), because his fidelity is, above all, ideological and preexists all situations.

The other figure to problematize is that of the ‘university researcher,’ detached, unchangeable, who links himself to his research as to an object of analysis whose value is strictly related to his capacity to confirm preexisting theses. Here, once again, fidelity to institutional procedures, academic or para-academic, eludes any commitment to the situation.

The issue was, in any case, to transform the very foundations of our practice, the presuppositions on which research stands. We can identify here, then, a first decision: to create a practice capable of articulating *involvement* and *thought*.

In turn, this (in)decision implied a whole series of operational resolutions: we had to reorganize ourselves as a smaller group, based in an intense affective affinity as the foundation of a greater commitment (and higher productivity), and also reorganize our way of working entirely. This process, which culminated in the formation of the collective, became frenetic during the years 1999 and 2000.

In practical terms, what has research militancy meant for us since then? That politics abandoned power as an image in which to recognize itself and found in thought a more

---

6 The notion of Militant Researcher itself came up, for us, from the encounter with Miguel. See Benasayag, M and D. Sztulwark (2000) *Política y Situación: De la Potencia al Contrapoder*. Buenos Aires: De mano en mano. Later published in French and Italian as Benasayag, M and D. Sztulwark (2002) *Du contre-pouvoir*. Paris: La Découverte; and Benasayag, M and D. Sztulwark (2002) *Contropotere*. Milan: Eleuthera.

powerful (*potente*) interlocutor. And that our way of thinking was related – precisely – to practices. That thought and politics depended on the capacity for experience, involvement, and encounter. And that the subject of knowledge or of political action could not be conceived as transcendent with respect to situations, but made itself present for us as an effect of those encounters. If there was a *hinge* decision, in this sense, it was that of thinking ‘in and from’ the *situation*; that is, without conceiving practices, theories, or subjects ‘a priori.’

The emergence of Colectivo Situaciones was directly linked to that of other practices that emerged toward the end of the 1990s in Argentina as both cause and product of the social and political crisis<sup>7</sup> that was brewing since then.<sup>8</sup> From then on, we found ourselves involved in the hyper-accelerated dynamic of the crisis (whose peak were the events of December 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> of 2001), and in the dizzy transformations that took place in the country. In this variable context we developed some working hypotheses, which were, perhaps, precarious but suitable at least in order to participate in this process – still open, under very ambivalent forms – in an active way.

At this point in the story it may be productive to pose some of the questions that we formulated to ourselves in order to ponder the problematicity that organized this trajectory, avoiding a history of ‘happy decisions,’ which would erase every real mark of concrete labour. And so, with which perceptual and conceptual mechanisms is it possible to capture the emergence of these new elements of sociability if they demand, precisely, a new disposition to feel and think? How to link ourselves to the fragility of this emergence, helping its development rather than contributing to neutralize it, even against our intentions? What degree of ignorance do we need to arm ourselves with in order to make research a real organizer of our practices and not merely a tactical façade?

According to our friend, in the experience of Precarias a la Deriva, “the driving force of our Militant Research is a desire for common ground when the common ground is shattered. That is why it has, for us, a performative-connective function: something like the activity of a communicative Wobbly, of a weaver of affective-linguistic territorialities.”

---

7 And, yet, it is not productive to reduce the presentation of these experiences/experiments to their relation – of cause or of effect – to the subsequent social and political crisis in Argentina. In fact, all these experiments had been producing an extended elaboration whose fundamental point of origin was the failure of revolution in the decade of the 1970s. In relation to this balance – in which the issue was to maintain a commitment but rediscussing at length the conditions and procedures – a vast spectrum of comrades recreated ideas and ways of approaching struggle. Our participation, at that moment, in the Che Guevara Free Lectureship was inscribed within this fabric.

8 Our first activities had to do with the articulation of our encounters with the experience/experiment of *escraches* by H.I.J.O.S., with the MLN-Tupamaros, with the Peasants Movement of Santiago del Estero (MOCASE) and with the Movement of Unemployed workers (MTD) of Solano. [The word ‘*escrache*’ is Argentinean slang that means ‘exposing something outrageous.’ *Escraches* are street demonstrations in front of the houses where people involved in human rights violations during the dictatorship live. H.I.J.O.S. is the acronym for Children for Identity and Justice, against Oblivion and Silence. Also, ‘*hijos*’ is the Spanish word for ‘children.’ This organization was formed in 1995 by children of the disappeared during the dictatorship (1976-1983). –Tr.]

This driving force that gives impulse to the Precarias a la Deriva, that search for “the common ground that has shattered,” constitutes for us a fundamental question: how to produce consistency between experiences/experiments of a counterpower that neither emerges any longer as spontaneously unified nor does it desire an external, imposed, state-like union? How to articulate the points of power (*potencia*) and creation without developing a hierarchizing unity in charge of ‘thinking’ on behalf of ‘everyone,’ of ‘leading’ ‘everyone’? How to draw lines of resonance within the existing networks without either subordinating or submitting?

Research militancy takes shape, at least among us, as a series of operations when in the face of concrete problems (or of anguish that stubbornness turns into productive interrogations): how to establish bonds capable of altering our subjectivities and finding some sort of community in the middle of today’s radical *dispersion*? How to provoke interventions that strengthen horizontality and resonances, avoiding both hierarchical centralism and pure fragmentation? And, to continue in this line: how to co-elaborate thinking in common with the experiences/experiments that have been elaborating hyper-intelligent practices? How to produce authentic compositions, clues that later circulate through the diffuse network of counterpower, without being perceived as an outsider to the experience of thought, but, at the same time, without merging with experience(s) that is/are not *directly* our own? How to avoid ideologization, the idealization with which everything that generates interest is welcome in our times? What kind of writing does justice to that which is produced in a singular situation? What is to be done with the *friendship* that arises from these encounters? How do we continue later? And, finally, what to do with *ourselves*, if with each of these experiences/experiments of composition we get further and further away from our initial subjectivities, now without being able to return?

The list of these (in)decisions gives an idea of the collection of problems that often arise among experiences/experiments that are sometimes quite different. The friends from *Universidad Trashumante*<sup>9</sup> say that when they start a workshop they know “how to start, but not how to end.” If there is a productive (in)decision it is – precisely – that of not knowing in advance how are we going to both go through all these issues and be ready to face them time and again, to the point that the absence of this insistence speaks more of the collapse of the ongoing experience than of its maturation – or its ‘being overcome.’

Indeed, the consistency of the experience that follows the *encounter* is staked more on these procedures than on the invocation of a common *ideal*. In our experience of research militancy, the labour of dissolving ideology as constitutive cement of cohesion (be it ‘autonomist,’ ‘horizontalist,’ ‘situationist,’ or ‘multiple’) has turned out to be decisive. In our context, *idealization* is a destructive force. A real, contradictory, rich, and always conflictive experience is placed on the one-dimensional pedestal of the

---

9 Universidad Trashumante is an itinerant collective based in the city of San Luis, Argentina, whose field of activity includes popular education, the recuperation of popular memory, and the production of grassroots networks. After the publication of this article, Colectivo Situaciones published a book based on dialogues with those involved in this experience/experiment: Colectivo Situaciones (2004) *Universidad Trashumante: Territorios, Redes, Lenguajes*. Buenos Aires: Tinta Limón –Tr.

redeeming ideal. Operations are idealized that permit the experience/experiment to produce existence. This is, then, transformed into a 'good form' to apply anytime and anywhere, as a new set of *a priori* principles. It is, subsequently, asked to be able to confirm this ideal for everyone. The fragility of the experience/experiment creates tensions. How to sustain that burden? Later, of course, deception comes and, with it, destruction continues: "I thought this time it really was it, but it was only a fraud." What to do when we are faced with this mechanism of massive adhesions and rejections, which elevate and dethrone radical experiments repeating the consumerist mechanisms of the society of the spectacle? What resources do we have in hand to look after this unexpected front of *exteriority* to which the ideal subordinates us? What effective modes of implication place us inside these procedures: in their *reality* and no longer in their ideality?

Indeed, in our experience there is a very strong component of thinking against the ideals in their function as promise. That is to say: how to work from the power (*potencia*) of what is and not of what 'ought to be' (ideal)? Above all, when the ideal is a – more or less arbitrary – personal projection to which nobody has necessarily to adapt. Research militancy does not extract its commitment from a model of the future, but from a search for power (*potencia*) in the present. That is why the most serious fight is against the 'a priori,' against predefined schemes. Fighting the a priori, then, does not imply giving up for dead any stretch of reality. Nothing needs to die. It does imply, however, a permanent introspective revision over the type of perceptions that we are bringing into play in each situation.

We think that the labour of research militancy is linked to the construction of a new *perception*, a new working style towards tuning up and empowering (*potenciar*) the elements of a new sociability. Perhaps the figure to describe it would be clay: a capacity to receive affections without opposing resistances, in order to understand the real play of powers (*potencias*). The question is not, then, to configure a center that thinks radical practices, but to elaborate a style that allows us to become immanent to this multiplicity, without being insiders to each multiple: a multiple among multiples, a *métier* that, while doing its own thing, is involved with the others.

It will be clear, then, that the main (in)decision of research militancy is shared by the multiplicity in which it operates, and does not belong (except in fantasy) to the group that claims to be doing research, as if it existed before and outside this multiple.

#### IV

As we noticed at the beginning of the article – and from our own experience as a collective – *there are not any* 'procedures' outside the situation. To produce a narrative on the activities that the collective carries out, a formalization of its 'knowledges,' would be so inadmissible as making a 'manual' on RM, and that – a dismayingly poor gesture – is in nobody's mind.

When one looks back and observes the work done, things appear invested of a coherence and functionality they by no means had at the very moment of their



production. That recollection, that ‘anti-utilitarian’ insistence, is vital for the development of research militancy, at least in our view.

When we talk about ‘workshops’ and ‘publications’ as practices of the collective, we immediately find ourselves in need of remembering that there are no such ‘workshops,’ but an heterogeneous conglomerate of meetings without other threads of coherence than those that suddenly spring up from chaos and without knowing exactly how to develop them. Something similar happens to the publications: they emerge as provisional needs to invoke the presence of other experiences with whom to extend ourselves, but they do not represent a necessary phase of a larger system.

So, “we only know how to start.” And that very relatively. In fact, all the procedures (mechanisms) that we prepare prove to be authentically inappropriate when confronted with the texture of a concrete situation. Thus, the very conditions of the encounter are somewhat anticipated by the shared will to co-research, it does not matter much what about (the topic might change), as long as in this ‘journey’ we all experiment substantial changes, that is, that we emerge with new capacities to empower (*potenciar*) practices.

Then, whatever it is that operates setting the conditions, there is a prior functionality of the workshop: to produce an ‘uncoupling’ (in each meeting, once and again) from the immediate everyday spatiality and velocity. The disposition to think emerges from allowing thought itself to be what spatializes and temporalizes according to its own requirements.

According to our friend from Madrid, there is, in this “search in the surroundings of the experiences of self-organization, in approaching them in order to propose work in common, an immediate problem that comes up: that of the exteriority (theirs) in relation to the reality to which they come close, more so when their condition and their biography is so different from that of the people with whom they come in touch with. In fact, to break with the separation between ‘we’ and ‘they’ is one of the fundamental challenges of their workshops.” Above all if those encounters are animated by the “search for a radicality that is not said from high above, that clings to the surface of the real; a practice of self-interrogation, of detection of problems and launching of hypotheses (always from the practices) that would constitute the ‘hardcore’ of militant research.”

But, is it like that? Does *difference* inevitably lead to *distance*? What distances and differences are we talking about? And regarding the image of *approaching*, to what *perception* does it refer?

We could call ‘procedures’ precisely those forms of ‘putting into practice’ that arise from the questions about how to come to terms with the existence of *differences*. How to build an *us* of thought, albeit a transient one? How to lay out a common plane as a condition, although more or less ephemeral, of joint production? These questions are valid for the social experiences/experiments that are apparently ‘close’ as much as for those supposedly ‘distant.’

The movement of the encounter, then, is not so much one of getting closer as it is of *elaboration* of a *common plane*. And this refers to a more complex scenario, in which

the mutual measurement of ‘distances’ and ‘proximities’ (the ‘insides’ and ‘outsides’) should not be considered only in relation to the initial *positions* (of departure) but also – and above all – with respect to whether one’s own *plane* (which includes steps forward and backward, enthusiasms and distrusts, periods of production and depressive lacunae) is drawn or not.

Without a doubt, a plane difficult to draw: counterpower exists only as a fold or knot between heterogeneous experiences/experiments. One dynamic is *territorial*, the others more *deterritorialized*. Thus, the territory is *impoverished* and the more deterritorialized experiences/experiments are *virtualized* without this common fabric (without this encounter between both). Deterritorialized spatiality and territorial modes are polarities inside the fold of counterpower and their being knotted to one another is one of the fundamental matters of the new radicality. The experiences/experiments more linked to the territory – more ‘concentrated’ – and those more ‘diffuse’ – more nomadic – can, in their dynamic difference, articulate, combine, or interact as instances of an occupation of the public sphere by counterpower.

*Difference(s)*, then, call for a more in-depth interrogation. On one side, of course, they exist and are evident. The postmodern impossibility of experience is nurtured by this ‘festival of difference’ (which, strictly speaking, becomes ‘indifference,’ *dispersion*). But that says nothing about the possibilities of articulation of those experiences.

Moreover, we could ask whether an *experience/experiment* has value as such – and, in this sense, a profound *political* character – precisely when it manages to suspend that *indifferent* enacting of differences. When one manages to produce a conjunction (or plane) capable of subtracting itself from the ‘logic of pure heterogeneity’ (which says ‘differences separate’ and “there is no possible connection in the *indifferent difference*”). An experience/experiment – or situation – would be, then, that which is founded in the articulation of points (as relative as they might be) of a certain *homogeneity*. The question is neither to erase nor to disguise differences, but to summon them from setting out certain *common problems*.

Let’s go back to our friend from Precarias a la Deriva: “I wonder whether you interrogate yourselves about your own composition and biography, about the position of your equals, and whether this militant research with others precedes or accompanies a self-analysis, above all in order not to fall in the trap of a displacement that avoids questioning one’s life and one’s own practices (and that ends up introducing a split between militancy and life). In Precarias a la Deriva we consider as a primary problem to ‘start from oneself,’ as one among many, in order to ‘get out of oneself’ (both of the individual ego and the radical group to which one belongs) and encounter with any other resisting people (hence what I said above about being between exteriority and interiority, in a dislocated ourselves).”

Precarias a la Deriva claim to “politicize life from within.” To turn life itself – from immediate experience – into something political, that is, committed. We would formulate this another way: to revitalize politics by immersing it in the most immediate multiple experience. We use these phrases not without a certain uneasiness because they sometimes refer to the idea that “there is something missing in life,” “life still needs to

be well organized.” Perhaps it would be better to talk about a politics that measures up to life itself. And even in this case we think this is not enough, because we prefer without a doubt a life that disorganizes politics rather than a ‘good politics’ that manages to organize it, displacing it, proposing to it transcendental problems, determining its ‘priorities and obligations.’

But let’s go deeper inside the questions of our friend: why does Colectivo Situaciones look for sites of intervention *outside*? What truth do we expect to find in *different* people? Is this not a sort of *escape* from the exigency to politicize ‘our own lives’ in their everydayness? Moreover, in all this isn’t there a renewal of the old militancy (the classical exteriority) under new forms, to the extent that – beyond rehashed languages and mechanisms – people keep *going* (‘approaching’) ‘from outside’ to ‘other places’ out of which they expect a more or less magical solution to their own subjective and political constitution?

These questions would be rhetorical if we only formulated them in order to refute them. It turns out, however, that it is not true that these are questions that can be eliminated in a single stroke. They live inside us and speak to us of certain tendencies whose control completely escapes our manifest intentions. Again and again we must insist on them, because there is no definitive antidote and, moreover, they are tendencies widely favoured by the dominant social dynamics. In fact, the main value of formulating them is to force ourselves to work in-depth on the problem of *exteriority*.

Nevertheless, there is another image that it would be necessary to consider. Not only that of *finite* points escaping their tragic destiny of radical exteriority, and producing simulacra of ‘interiority’ (the union of the ‘separate as separate,’ as Guy Debord says), but also that of points that need (and work) to find resonances with the resonances of others.<sup>10</sup> The distinction might seem hollow, even though it describes opposite paths: while in dispersion (*exteriority*) the alternatives oscillate between ‘irremediable fragmentation’ or ‘necessary centralization;’ once the plane is drawn (a very different alternative to that of ‘inside and outside’), consistency refers to a *transversality*.<sup>11</sup>

Of course, we would still have ahead of us resisting the accusation of ‘spontaneism.’ A curious thing, since what is *spontaneous* is not *composition* but – precisely – dispersion. And the question we pose to ourselves is what to do with it. Is centralization the only viable alternative? Or is the experience of that which is common strong enough to prefigure new constituent modes of doing?

This is a fundamental question for research militancy, because the elaboration of the plane is, precisely, neither spontaneous nor irreversible, but rather requires a fine and sustained practice (which we would call ‘procedures’ and which we could not define

---

10 Of course, *outside* and *inside* do not refer to a predefined spatiality, but to different immanent or transcendent ways of conceiving the bond: when we establish bonds with others seeking to create new worlds, are we looking *outside*? Or, put another way, what to do if those ‘other worlds’ already exist in the process of creation, in acts of resistance? Would we sacrifice our *common* being with others in the name of a purely physical vicinity determined by crudely spatial criteria?

11 Which helps understanding the *non-institutional* horizon of research militancy.

abstractly) of collaboration in order to make this *commonality* emerge in (and from) difference (*immanence* is a strategy of *cutting in* exteriority).

Thus, from this persistent construction work in a context of fragmentation we can come back to the question of everydayness. Our obsession with *composition* is precisely inscribed in this concern about ‘ourselves,’ but under a new set of suppositions: the overcoming of *dispersal* is not solved by way of *representation*. The question of immanence, then, would be: how to *be/with/others*?

As in a phenomenology, we could then describe the path of research militancy as the manifestation of this rejection of exteriority and spectacle, along with – and as a procedure for – the production of keys for composition, for the construction of modes of immanence.<sup>12</sup>

If collective experience has for us any meaning, it is – above all – the way in which it allows us to confront, produce, and inhabit the context in which we live-produce actively: neither as a ‘subject who knows and explains’ nor in the individual passivity of postmodernity. A capacity that appears to us in the form of recognizing ourselves as multiple within a multiplicity and of coming to terms with a certain mode of being of that multiplicity in practice.

Hence the strong *existential* components of research militancy.<sup>13</sup> And the absurdity of pretending that it becomes a ‘task’ (or, even worse, the ‘fundamental task’) of the movement.<sup>14</sup>

The questions that research militancy has are but the questions that hundreds of groups<sup>15</sup> ask themselves: What new elements of sociability emerge? Which ones will persist (do they persist?) and which ones disintegrate? What kind of relations (barriers and bridges)

---

12 In this sense, both the knowledges produced and the current questions about the *construction of networks* acquire a very precise value: Isn’t it valid to look for transversal forms of composition that articulate the social practices of different groups on the basis of what they can have (and defend) in common? It seems clear that these experiments in networks can be very useful in order to know each other (and ourselves) and to relate to each other (and to ourselves), but, what happens when we reach the limit of the tensions that a network can generate? Isn’t it necessary, then, to de-center the networks, to produce new nodes, to conceive heterogeneous planes, and to open oneself towards stretches of the network that have not been *made explicit*?

13 *Falling in love* or *friendship* is how we call the feeling that accompanies and envelops *composition*. And, precisely, we experiment research militancy as the perception that something develops between us and in others, at least for a moment; above all, when, instead of being lost in anonymity, this *moment* sparks off other moments, and the memory that is the result of that sequence becomes a ‘productive resource’ of the situation. This is the most persistent feeling we have about the concrete meaning of becoming ‘something else.’

14 Above all if what we take into consideration is the extent to which research militancy does not seek to ‘organize others.’ Not because it renounces organization – there is no research militancy without high levels of organization – but because its problem is posed in terms of a self-organization that collaborates with the self-organization of networks.

15 Shared problems in the face of which there is no subject-object distinction. The researcher is the person who participates in the problematization. And the research objects are problems, ways of posing them, and self-research about dispositions to be able to pose those problems.

are drawn by the instances of the state and the market? How do the new resistances emerge? What problems are posed at the different levels?

Now that we are at this point it is, perhaps, possible to perceive the difference between thinking the *situation* in its universality or simply assuming it *locally*. When we talk about a situation we talk about the mode in which the *universal* appears *in* the local, not about the local as ‘part’ of the global. That is why the drift of the situation is much more interesting (sinuous) than the locality itself. If the *local* is defined by a fixed environment and a limited and predefined set of resources, reducing its alliances to neighboring points, the situational is actively produced, in determining its dimensions and multiplying its resources. Unlike the local, the situational expands the capacities for *composition-affection*.<sup>16</sup>

## V

While ‘exteriority’ names the *spatial* impossibility of *connection*, dispersion is produced in the plane of *temporality*, by acceleration, preventing us from finding a point to stop, to elaborate. In any case, questions seem to be: what does *politics* in this context (a ‘nocturnal politics,’ as Mar Traful says<sup>17</sup>) consist of? Are the elements of our practices powerful (*potentes*) enough to become constituent of experience, of a new politics? What are the ways of ‘measuring’ such efficacy?

In any case, if these questions come up (as Marx said) it is because there are practical elements that justify them. But these elements neither explain nor develop those questions.

A new type of politics: what would it be like? And, more specifically, what type of exigencies does the possibility of a new understanding of politics present to research militancy? What can the experience of research militancy contribute to this understanding?

From our angle, these questions refer to the forms of efficacy of action: what kind of intervention does it *construct*? What does the *power* (*potencia*) of the *act* depend upon?

Research militancy experiments, as we have said, the development of new modules of space-time. It experiments the becoming agent (*agenciamiento*) of heterogeneous elements in points of homogeneity that both turn dispersive experience (a desert) into a

---

16 The exchange with *Precarias a la Deriva* has for us a fundamental immediate value. Moreover, the exchanges maintained on the basis of this article have left the trace of a certain style of work that it is necessary to deepen and, in this sense, are not very far from what we call ‘workshops.’ ‘Workshops’ are, then, just like that. They do not constitute themselves – nor they aspire to – into the General Staff of the situation: they constitute themselves as a point of encounter capable of thinking and, in the best of cases, elaborating practical hypotheses with the force of an intervention.

17 *Por una política nocturna*. Barcelona: Editorial Debate, 2002. [<http://www.sindominio.net/ofic2004/publicaciones/pn/indice.html>]

matter upon which it is possible to elaborate and produce notions of composition (beyond the discourse of *communication*).

In a concrete situation, as we usually tell ourselves, intelligence springs up neither from erudition nor from pure quickness of mind, but rather from the capacity for *involvement*. In the same way that stultification can be explained by very concrete forms of *distraction*.<sup>18</sup>

Hence the possibility of establishing a concrete link between the *affective-fabric* that operates in a situation and its operational productivity.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, what determines the *efficacy* of the *act* is not so much the number, quantity, or massive nature (*aggregation capacity*), as is the *aptitude* for composition of the new *relations* (*consistency capacity*).

As is evident, what we are suggesting is linked to a very concrete situation: the *current* Argentinean crisis. Here a desert blown by violent neoliberal winds blasted the bonds that had been produced and intensified the process of dispersion to which we have been referring. The social practices committed to the development of a counterpower experimented this tension between the configuration of new bonds and the massive demand for containment. This tension, in fact, manifested itself as a contradiction between quantitative presence (of dispersed elements waiting to be reunited) and need of a system of new relations capable of sustaining this process of aggregation, no longer as a mere reunification of the dispersed but as a new type of *active configuration*.

In fact, one of the features of Argentina during the last months has been precisely the way in which the meteoric growth experimented by numerous social groupings is immediately followed by a rapid degradation. Then, we are not talking about some kind of absurd invalidation of mass actions or organizations,<sup>20</sup> but rather about an interrogation posed by the criteria that make experiments influential.

Much likely there is not one single valid criterion in this regard. Each experience/experiment of struggle and creation needs to produce its own resources and procedures. We only intend to raise the following question: what does 'aggregation' add to composition, given that the latter – unlike the former – organizes people and resources convoked according to certain constituent relations (considering this valid at any numeric or geographic scale)?

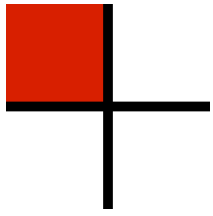
Hasta Siempre, Colectivo Situaciones, February 29<sup>th</sup>, 2004.

---

18 On this see the very interesting lessons of Joseph Jacotot, brought to us by Rancière in a book that is fundamental for us: Rancière, J. (1991) *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

19 In this sense we can fully rehabilitate – from our most immediate experience – the theories that speak about an 'affect-value.'

20 There is no doubt that the insurreccional actions of the Argentinean December of 2001 opened a new and fertile field of actions and debates of all kinds and, even closely, the same sequence is empowered (*potenciada*) by the revolts that took place in Bolivia in 2003.



## Grassrooting the Imaginary: Acting within the Convergence

Paul Routledge

### Enfolding

*Glasgow apartment, Scotland, 1999.*

I read an article in the *Guardian* newspaper. It was by the Indian author Arundhati Roy. In it she described the plight of the *advivasi* (tribal) people on the banks of India's holiest river, the Narmada. She made a call for international observers and participants to come and support/participate in the Monsoon-long *satyagraha*<sup>1</sup> that was going to be conducted in defiance of the construction of mega dams along the valley (that would, if all built, displace up to 15 million people). I decided to travel to India to participate in the struggle against the dams. At about the same time, by a series of chance encounters, through contacts with acquaintances and friends, I heard about the burning of fields of (Monsanto-owned) GM cotton in India's southern state of Karnataka by the Karnatakan State Farmer's Union. I also decided to visit them with the intention of setting up a research project. The Farmer's Union was to be the host of the second international conference of the recently formed international network of grassroots movements, People's Global Action. After participating in the *satyagraha* along the banks of the Narmada, I took a series of trains, buses, rickshaws to just south of Bangalore where the conference was to be held. There I met a charming, charismatic Spaniard who discussed with me the brief history of the network that I had just become tentatively entwined in. He introduced me to a gathering of people, who, through their proficiency in languages, experiences of political action, access to financial, technological and cultural resources, represented a range of social movements. Through my appearance at this gathering of individuals, so my further enfolding into the network commenced. I attended workshops, informal discussions, roundtables, plenaries, parties, communal meals, confidential asides, and social drinking. I became further entwined in the entangled relations, interactions, relays, intimacies, arguments, and jealousies that comprised the

---

1 Literally 'truth force'. Each Monsoon since 1991, the NBA (Narmada Bachao Andolan, Save the Narmada movement) has initiated nonviolent satyagrahas, whereby villagers in the submergence-threatened areas near the dams resist eviction from their homes, pledging to remain even at the risk of being drowned.

web of contacts that enabled these people to strategise, and the network to act. I became increasingly drawn and bound to this group of charismatic, experienced, hard working activists with a lust for life and rebellion. Subsequently, during the next five years, I travelled to some of the network's nodes, located in India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Thailand, to hold face-to-face meetings with various activists. We are the network, all of us who resist.

A white, male academic and activist, I have been working and researching within this network of grassroots peasant movements in order to facilitate collective action and solidarity. After describing the network (*converging*) and my positionality and experiences within it (*following, threading, embodying*), I raise the issue of relationality between resisting subjects in order to discuss how movements might forge sustainable mutual articulations of resistance that negotiate differences in power, culture, resources, politics etc. I argue for a relational ethics of struggle, attentive to difference, that stresses the importance of collaboration between resisting subjects, and analyse some of the preliminary ways that such a networked imaginary might be 'grounded' in grassroots communities, reflecting upon my role (and others) in facilitating this process.

Acting within this network consists of a set of informational, experiential, emotional, and bodily practices (Juris 2004). As Riles (2001) notes, networks generate their own reality by reflecting upon themselves: "an ambition for political change through communication and information exchange" (2001: 3). So what follows is also communication and information exchange, articulating "not so much my position in the field, as the way the field is both within and without myself" (2001: 20).

## Converging

People's Global Action (PGA) represents a network for communication and co-ordination between diverse social movements, whose membership cuts across differences in gender, ethnicity, language, nationality, age, class and caste. PGA Asia is concerned with five principal processes of facilitation and interaction between movements. It acts as a facilitating space for communication, information-sharing, solidarity, coordination, and resource mobilisation (Routledge, 2003a). The network articulates certain symbolic unifying values – what I would term collective visions – to provide common ground for movements from which to articulate common opponents (e.g. neoliberalism) and coordinate collective struggles.<sup>2</sup>

---

2 The collective visions of PGA, are as follows (Taken from the PGA website: [www.agp.org](http://www.agp.org)):

1. A very clear rejection of capitalism, imperialism and feudalism; and all trade agreements, institutions and governments that promote destructive globalisation.
2. We reject all forms and systems of domination and discrimination including, but not limited to, patriarchy, racism and religious fundamentalism of all creeds. We embrace the full dignity of all human beings.
3. A confrontational attitude, since we do not think that lobbying can have a major impact in such biased and undemocratic organisations, in which transnational capital is the only real policy-maker.



The broad objectives of the network are to offer an instrument for co-ordination and mutual support at the global level for those resisting corporate rule and the neoliberal capitalist development paradigm, to provide international projection to their struggles, and to inspire people to resist corporate domination through civil disobedience and people-oriented constructive actions. PGA has also established regional networks – e.g. PGA Latin America, PGA Europe, PGA North America and PGA Asia – to decentralise the everyday workings of the network. The principal means of materialising the network have been thru the internet (PGA has established its own website ([www.agp.org](http://www.agp.org)) and email list in order to facilitate network communication); global and regional conferences; activist caravans (organised in order for activists from different struggles and countries to communicate with one another, exchange information, and participate in various solidarity actions); and global days of action.

The PGA network is facilitated by social movements within the network but much of the organisational work has been conducted by ‘free radical’<sup>3</sup> activists and key movement contacts (usually movement leaders or general secretaries) who have helped organise conferences, mobilise resources (e.g. funds), and facilitate communication and information flows. These free radicals and key contacts constitute the ‘imagineers’ of the network, who attempt to ‘ground’ the concept or imaginary of the network (what it is, how it works, what it is attempting to achieve) within grassroots communities who comprise the membership of the participant movements. As one such ‘free radical’ in PGA Asia, I want to consider an embodied relational ethics of struggle drawing in part from some of the insights from actor-network theory (ANT) and feminist political theory and some personal experiences that come from direct action.

## Following and Threading

### *Ganges river delta, Bangladesh, 2002*

Following the network, so many bodily memories. Sleeping on a wooden table in a corrugated hut, waiting for a meeting that never happened. Overcrowded rickshaw spewing exhaust fumes into our eyes and lungs. Bouts of diarrhoea and clenching stomach cramps. Blistering humid heat before cooling monsoon rains. Tip-towing on intermittent brick stepping stones amid the squelching mud. On a small motor-powered fishing boat, our group of activists sail down the Tetulia river in the Ganges delta, Bangladesh. Separated by the flooding blue-green river are tiny islands only large enough for one or two houses and few trees. Turbid delta braids, endless as the driving rain. Gathered nets, abandoned boats dancing to the river’s swell. Mao Zedong entreated his cadres to move among the peasants like fish in water. In the Monsoon, that is literally what we do. Jungle, and fields of *padi*<sup>4</sup> and *paan*<sup>5</sup> form a necklace to the river

---

4. A call to direct action and civil disobedience, support for social movements' struggles, advocating forms of resistance which maximize respect for life and oppressed peoples' rights, as well as the construction of local alternatives to global capitalism.

5. An organisational philosophy based on decentralisation and autonomy

3 I have taken this term from a fellow activist within PGA.

4 Rice.

that shimmers emerald, turquoise and jade. We paddle across rain-sodden, river-encroached padi fields to meet landless peasants who have occupied islands in the river. We sleep on board the small wooden boat only to wake as the rain begins to fall. Under darkened monsoon skies, as hunting bats emerge from the jungle, we shelter in the boat's small cabin from the torrential rains. Siren whoops, rusting rooftops, huddled shadows wait at the river's edge. We meander our way across the vast river and its myriad tributaries.

The Monsoon flooding in the delta effaces the difference between the land and the river, creating a surreal landscape. Close to the river, the land is inundated, but only by a few inches. A fishing boat sails past herd of cows seemingly walking on water. Behind them a strip of land is sandwiched between strips of water. Beyond, small huts are nestled amongst clumps of trees, surrounded by water. Here, on the islands – or chars – that have emerged from the migrating river, the landless have occupied the land, fertile with alluvial soils. I travel with activists from the 'Aah Sangathan' – or Eight organizations – which are involved in various struggles including organising landless peasants in Bangladesh to occupy the chars<sup>6</sup>. In particular, I am visiting Bangladesh at the invitation of the Bangladesh Krishok Federation (the landless people's movement, BKF), which forms the largest group of the national network that is the Sangathan, which is in turn, part of PGA.

The PGA network comprises a multiplicity of connections, articulations, moments of action, meeting points, desires, intimacies etc. Every network comprises other networks, a multiplicity of individuals who are part of families, communities, social movements with all of their problematic, messy relationships, interactions, and dynamics. Networks are in part held together by the connective flow of narratives, or stories, that people tell. They provide a grounded expression of people's imaginations, experiences, interests and values. Stories express a sense of identity and belonging – who 'we' are, why a 'we' have come together, what 'we' stand for. Stories also communicate a sense of cause, purpose, and mission. They express aims, methods and cultural dispositions and can be deployed to attract external audiences. While my narrative can be related to other narratives, since at particular junctures they intersect, they remain quite different, voices from different realities, which converge momentarily. Each time we enter the flow of the network, we encounter some of the myriad connections, interactions, relays, social relations and discourses/texts that circulate in ever-changing forms and which differ from place to place (cf. Juris 2004). To understand acting in the network requires immersion in the waters of participation, in the specific nodes/places of the network, even as we freely flow through the network wherever it leads.

Bruno Latour (1993) argues that context is always made in process, rather than being pre-given. Contexts are constructed around/by specific projects (out of materials,

---

5 Betel.

6 The Eight organizations have a membership of 1.3 million people and comprise: the Bangladesh Krishok Federation (landless peasants organization, 700,000 members); the Bangladesh Kisan Sabha (women peasants organization); the Bangladesh Floating Labour Union (migrant labourers); the Bangladesh Floating Women's Labour Union; the Bangladesh Adivasi Samiti (indigenous people's organization); the Bangladesh Rural Intellectual Front; the Ganochaya Sangskritik Kendro (cultural center); and the Revolutionary Youth Sabha (youth front).

resources etc.) that are available 'locally' to the project. As Laurier and Philo (1999) note, this demand for specificity, parallels demands of geographers that 'contextual thinking' always pay attention to the precise time-spaces which are involved (Gregory, 1994; Thrift, 1996). Every network is a node, every node a network, hence ANT's interest in how connections are fostered and sustained within networks, also includes consideration the nodes (people and places) of the network and how they influence, and in turn are influenced by, the weaving of webs and the drawing of connections. Understanding the dynamics of network operational logics entails thinking about power relations across space and not necessarily in any one place. This is a relational perspective that focuses on the effectiveness of connections (e.g. communication and operational links) between the actors in the network (Massey, 1994). Because, within the vortex of desire, feeling, imagination, symbols, speech, movement, action and terrain such experiences are lived as theater, ceremony, spontaneity or ritual as the demonstration of the will of those who are capable of and desirous of resistance. There are also ghosts here, as the past continues to haunt the actions of those who live in the present. There are also those unexpected moments; the fleeting contexts and predicaments which produce potential, and human capacities of expression and invention, i.e. the power of the imagination (Thrift, 2000: 214-215). In order to begin to understand how events are shaped as they happen, it is important to weave "a poetic of the common practices and skills which produce people, selves and worlds" (Thrift, 2000: 216).

It was my intention to follow part of the network's flows, interactions and nodes of action, to obtain a 'sense' of it and to act within it. In part, I was able to follow the network wherever I chose to travel. Of course, this was due in large part due to the privileges of mobility, funding, class, nationality that accrue to the white, male, Western academic. Privileges that included the time to engage in critical evaluation while activists were resisting the impacts of neoliberalism on their local environment, and the ability to leave Asia whenever I wanted to (see Nast, 1994; Routledge, 2002).

Following is an active, embodied process. According to Deleuze and Guattari, following forgoes the autonomy of a fixed perspective in order to chart the course along which it flows, while being borne along by the flux of events and the singularities (e.g. nodes) it encounters, engaging in "a continuous variation of variables instead of extracting constants from them" (1987: 372). Following connects the singularities it encounters by its own movement between and within them, and seeks to draw a flow of connections, rather than enact a process of appropriation, between these experiences.

I followed the PGA network by being part of it – by going with and being part of the flow of interactions, communications, connections that comprise part of its action. For, in some senses I acted like a thread, linking parts of the network together. I followed the PGA network by being part of it – by going with and being part of the flow of interactions, communications, connections that comprise part of its action. I followed, participated, but also created certain encounters. Certain materials enabled such encounters to take place – computers, airplanes, buses, taxis, rickshaws, pen and paper etc. Indeed, agency is constructed through the combination of heterogeneous materials, human and non-human. However, what do we do with that agency? Communication between people, eye to heart to mind, replete with intonations and gestures, are crucial

to forming the crucial common grounding that enables the network to act. The ideas brainstormed, plans hatched, schemes discarded, itineraries planned, logistics worked through – all initially take place in interpersonal meetings away from the insecure sites of internet and telephone communication technologies. Moreover, such face-to-face meetings enable the embodying of a relational ethics of struggle (Juris 2004).

## Embodying

Following the connective flow initiated by a newspaper article read in Scotland, brought me twice (in 1999 and 2000) to the Narmada river in India, and a participant in PGA and the *Narmada Bachao Andolan* (NBA, Save the Narmada movement). The movement – which consists of *adivasi*<sup>7</sup> subsistence farmers and wealthy cash-crop peasant farmers – has waged a non-violent struggle against the construction of mega-dams along the river valley since 1985 (see Routledge, 2003b).

*Satyagraha camp: Domkhedi, Maharashtra, India, 2000*

The rhythm of the camp begins as dawn breaks over the silver waters of the Narmada river. I'm awoken around 6am from my fitful sleep by the singing of Bhajans outside the Pawra hut in which I have slung my hammock. I lie there waiting for the sound of the *chai wallah*, beating his metal ladle on the side of his metal bucket, filled with black *chai* sweetened with unrefined sugar. By 7am tea has been served, and we begin to gather in the meeting tent, overlooking the river. By 7:30am the meeting has begun. First with prayers to the river goddess, Narmada, then meditation. Subsequently, introductions of newcomers to the camp are made, information disseminated about forthcoming actions, and future political projects are discussed. The meeting usually lasts approximately one and a half hours. Following that, the camp's occupants conduct *shramdan* (donated labour), such as creating water lines from the river to fill the camps drinking water supply. Only after this work is completed do we sit down on the baked earthen floors of an *adivasi* hut to eat breakfast. After that we have some free time to bathe, relax, and do our own work. The rest of the day is taken up with organising meetings, interviews and the ferrying of activists to various parts of the valley according to what activities are currently being arranged. If we are lucky then we drink another *chai* around 4pm. The only other meal, dinner, is usually just after sun has set. Following that, we have more meetings long into the night. At one such meeting a group of perhaps fifty people are huddled under the meeting tent in the hamlet. They are *adivasi* peasants, who have arrived by boat from their villages many miles down the river. Under the light of a single hurricane lamp, the faces of *adivasis* are dimly illuminated. A waning moon casts a silvery light across the Narmada. In the distance the thrum of the NBA motor boat fades into the darkness. One by one the assembled men relate their testimonies concerning the impacts of large dam construction in their valley – the trauma of displacement, the hardships and deceptions of resettlement, the ongoing struggle for justice.

---

7 Indigenous person.

Participants at the *satyagraha* during July September 2000 included local *adivasis*, farmers from the nearby Nimar Plains, Indian students, activists from a range of Indian women's, environmental, and peasant organizations, and international activists, researchers, and students from Britain, Canada, United States and the Netherlands. Because space is bound into local to global networks, which act to configure particular places, places such as Domkhedi become the focus of a "distinct *mixture* of wider and more local social relations" (Massey, 1994: 156), and hence can be imagined as "articulated moments" (*ibid.*, 154) in the fluid spaces of networked social relations.

We – humans and non-humans – are constituted through the performance of myriad, heterogeneous, and messy moments and modes of being-in-the-world and through the living fabrics of association and relation that configure that world. By taking embodiment as the nexus of our situatedness/embeddedness in the world is to foreground relationality, like ANT's networks and Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) rhizomes (Whatmore, 2002: 117-118). Embodiment is about the content of social worlds, the material as well as the ephemeral: "The actors are themselves reconfigured in the light of the possibilities that flow through them" (Radley, 1996: 570). Woven into this notion of embodiment are the emotions, becomings and intensities that prefigure, set up, and work through encounters with human and non-human others.

Through the practices of our everyday lives, we conduct political acts through the adoption, negotiation, and rejection – through the performance – of a complex of identities (Madge, 1993). Performance deals with actions more than text, and with habits of the body. However, writing about performance is a difficult task, since the immediacy and intensity of the performance is dulled by its re-presentation in textual form – the event itself is distanced. This is because the *lived* character of resistance practices is imbued with a 'seizure of presence' (Bey, 1991: 23) that experiences reality as immediate. All that remains is this story that I add to the flow, evoked from some bodily memories.

## Acting for a Relational Ethics

A *satyagraha* camp on the banks of the Narmada river. Occupied islands in the Tetulia river in the Ganges delta. Hundreds of activists from around the world gathered together in Bangalore for a week of discussions, strategies, testimonies, socialising. Each place represents an articulated moment of the PGA network. Different yet connected. Each imbued with a particular intensity regarding how "stuff is dispersed in, through, and across the spaces which are this world" (Laurier and Philo, 1999: 1067). More particularly, they are indicative of how various facets of the PGA network act in the world. The processes of interaction, communication, and multi-scalar action are 'global' – in that, together, they form part of the multiplicity of action that comprises the PGA network – even as they are primarily composed of the ties between different 'localities'.

Collaborations, eye to heart to mind enable the embodiment of a relational ethics. Cultivating a dialogue on ethics in political activism enables the development of relations of honesty, truth, and interpersonal acknowledgement; and through

constructing a genuine moral language contributes to us becoming more fully conscious human beings (Pulido, 2003). Relational ethical positionalities need to be for dignity, self-determination, and empowerment that are non-dominating, and environmentally sustainable. However, such an ethics of political responsibility has to acknowledge that any collaborative 'we' constitutes the performance of multiple lived worlds, and an entangled web of power relationships, that privilege different parties under different contexts. The personal is both political and collective, enabling what Gibson-Graham term a 'partial identification' (1994: 218) between ourselves and resisting others, and articulation of a temporary common ground.

This contrasts with Habermasian notions of consensus reached through dialogue decided by the most persuasive argument, because a relational ethics acknowledges the plurality of voices and positionalities that comprise political collaborations. Multiplicity (of opinion, tactics, strategies and solutions), rather than consensus, comprises the outcome of a relational ethics, the struggle for which will involve choosing our battles in the light of political circumstances that are themselves in flux. The ways that this can be done, contingencies permitting, are as diverse as our imaginations. Contextualised, relational ethics of struggle, deployed in collaborative methodologies need to be a product of reciprocity between ourselves and resisting others, negotiated in practice (Bailey, 2001). This requires sensitivity to various degrees and kinds of difference (e.g. gender, ethnicity, age, class, sexuality etc.), but also to the problematic and unequal relations of power that exists between collaborators. This necessitates working with the differences between collaborators, searching for mutual understanding.

It is based on the notion of difference in relation, constituted in an intersubjective manner in the context of always/already existing configurations of self and community (Whatmore, 1997). It is enacted in a material, embodied way, for example through relations of friendship, solidarity, and empathy. A relational ethics thus requires that we are sensitive to the contingency of things, and that our responsibility to others and to difference is connected to the responsibility to act (Slater, 1997). Such a responsibility, within the context of political struggle, implies that we take sides, albeit in a critical way. This acknowledges an embodied politics that is committed yet partial in perspective (Hyndman, 2003).

Creating common ground with resisting others serves to highlight and 'ground' differences (in language, ethnicity, power, access to resources etc.) in particular ways in particular places. For example, my participation in the *satyagraha* camp along the banks of the Narmada river, brought me and many different 'others' into close collaborative contact. When placed in such active proximity – through meetings, communal meals, sleeping etc. – difference (in ways of being, talking, acting) can be both recognised and negotiated.

Of course, there are problematic differences between activist collaborators pertaining to differences in political ideologies, gender relations, cultures, languages etc. Such differences are negotiated, in part, through the acceptance of the collective visions of the PGA network mentioned earlier. These provide a symbolic terrain of common ground that unites differences in solidarity against common enemies. They provide meeting points of constructed equivalence between the diverse multiplicities that

comprise different movements. The building of such equivalences is a process of ongoing negotiation, an engagement of political practices and imaginations in which ground is sought through which struggles can construct common cause (Massey, 2005). Because gender relations remain one of the most problematic differences within the network, gender workshops and education programmes have been initiated within PGA conferences and caravans, in order for the movement to begin to address these issues.

However, the technology for reaching out cannot extend networks where the notion of extension fails to capture the imagination (Riles, 2001: 26). While following and acting in the network I had numerous conversations with grassroots activists in a variety of struggles. Some grassroots activists in Nepal and Bangladesh thought of PGA as an organization which arranged events for them, rather than imagining themselves as being part of the PGA network. Other activists articulated the need for more traditional, tangible organizational structures than the notion of a network implied. As one BKF activist remarked: "We have to disseminate information to people in rural areas, but so far they have not been able too visualise what the network is. We need a national conference to begin the process of visualization of the PGA process in Bangladesh" (interview Dhaka, Bangladesh, 2004). In addition, activists do not necessarily see a link between their movement and their daily lives, and the PGA network. This leads us to a discussion of how the PGA imaginary is 'grassrooted' in the countries of participant movements.

## **Grassrooting the Imaginary**

Sustaining collective action over time is related to the capacity of a group to develop strong interpersonal ties that provide the basis for the construction of collective identities (Bosco, 2001). As noted earlier, PGA has periodic international and regional conferences and meetings that provide material spaces within which representatives of participant movements can converge, and discuss issues that pertain to the functioning of the network. At the conferences, the hosts (a social movement or movements) explain the specific problems and ongoing history of their campaigns and each participant movement gets to introduce themselves and their struggle to the conference participants. Study tours are often organized at the conclusion of the conferences for the participants, in order to experience a particular struggle or conditions of a particular community. PGA caravans are organized to enable cross-movement exchanges and to encourage new movements into the convergence. The emphasis on such processes is the two-way communication regarding struggles, strategies, visions of society, and the construction of economic and political alternatives to neoliberalism. Such conferences, caravans, and meetings also enable strategies to be developed in secure sequestered sites, beyond the surveillance that accompanies any communicative technology in the public realm. Moreover, such gatherings enable deeper interpersonal ties to be established between different activists from different cultural spaces and struggles.

While an important aspect of the work is to build interpersonal relationships with contacts within these movements, another is to coordinate joint actions across space, for example against particular neoliberal institutions such as the WTO. As Jeffrey Juris

argues, concerning the World Social Forum, PGA gatherings also “provide spaces for performing, representing, and physically manifesting alternative movement networks” (2004: 419). These gatherings have played a vital role in face-to-face communication and exchange of experience, strategies and ideas. PGA conferences, and the network, “provides an opportunity, beyond mass actions, for social movement networks to come together, represent themselves to themselves and others, generate emotional energy, broadcast oppositional discourses, and wage internal symbolic struggles” (ibid).

PGA is a collective ritual where alternative social movement networks become embodied (Juris, 2004: 434). People’s positionality in relation to others can be re-assessed, as an activist in the Slum dwellers network (within Thailand’s AoP) noted about a PGA Asia conference in Dhaka in 2004: “There was a real chance for exchange between activists. We usually stereotype people by nation but when we meet face to face it breaks down the borders between us, and generates collective strength to make change” (interview, Bangkok, 2004). PGA is a performative ritual, a symbolic manifestation of the strength and diversity where diverse activist networks constitute themselves and symbolically map their relationship to one another through verbal and embodied communication (Juris, 2004). In addition, many movements hold post-conference de-briefing meetings at national and district levels to explain to people about the conferences and the PGA process. As a Bangladesh *Kisani Sabha* (peasant women’s assembly) activist explained, concerning the process in Bangladesh:

The Dhaka delegates disseminated information into the rural areas. I held several meetings for *Kisani Sabha* members in villages (in yard meetings outside activists’ houses) to discuss the PGA conference and process. Rural women and members of *Kisani Sabha* now know about PGA, have got new impressions and the sense that *Kisani Sabha* has an international role. So, rural women have got a sense of empowerment (interview, Dhaka, 2004).

The role of the imagineers has also been important in grassrooting the PGA imaginary. For poor *adivasi* communities along the Narmada’s banks, and peasant communities in Bangladesh and Nepal for example, their only source of connection to the network is primarily through the activist organisers who operate from the movements’ offices, and who visit the communities as part of their organising practices. ‘Free radical’ activists (accompanying activist organizers) have also often traveled to visit social movements in Asia before PGA events such as conferences to discuss with them the PGA process, conduct workshops, and invite them to participate in forthcoming events.

In Khulna district, Bangladesh, accompanied by friends from the BKF, I walked along brick lanes through flooded *padi* fields to local meeting after local meeting, there to share information with folks about the PGA network, and about future events and collaborations. Under the humming fan we drink sweet milky tea and I begin: “brothers and sisters peace be to you.” The imagineers act as ‘grassrooting vectors’ furthering the process of communication, information sharing and interaction within grassroots communities. For the poor of grassroots movements such relational dynamics can constitute an expansion of their geographical imagination and practical political knowledge. The presence of imagineers in grassroots communities embodies the network, and can constitute proof of sorts of the international character of the network – a tangible, visual example that peasants are part of something wider and larger. It also enables the concept of PGA to begin to take root in peoples imaginations.



However, owing to differential access to (financial, temporal) resources and network flows, differential material and discursive power relations exist within and between participant movements. The imagineers tend to act as the driving force of the network imaginary coordinating disproportionate amounts of informational traffic, and actively determining the 'content' of that traffic. Certain decision-making power accrues to them by virtue of access to resources (time, money, language skills etc.), as well as personal qualities like energy, commitment and charisma. Social capital accrues to these imagineers by virtue of their key positionalities within the network, and the experience that they gain from this.

Transnational networks, such as PGA Asia, feature a constant movement of people, information, and resources, enabled by the multiple sites and scales at which participants work. Horizontal (and within movements somewhat vertical) networks interconnect villagers at the grassroots (of social movements), the imagineers, and even some NGO workers, who act and speak in various contexts to construct PGA Asia. These networks are also interlinked with a variety of media, journalists, academics, other social movements and organizations, and those networks which PGA Asia participant movements are also involved in (such as *La Via Campesina*). These interactions are also entwined with the ideas, information, and resources which flow through the skein of networks. Through the collective rituals of the network – the practices of meetings, conferences, protests, caravans and other forms of networking – participants come to embody activism and cultures of solidarity.

However, although networks are both local and global at all points, enabling network analysts to refrain from a shift in scale between local and global (Latour 1993), movements themselves, and the communities from which they are comprised, are differentially connected to networks. As Sarah Whatmore has suggested, the geographies of networks imply “the multiplicity of space-times generated in/by the movements and rhythms of heterogeneous association. The spatial vernacular of such geographies is fluid, unsettling the coordinates of distance and proximity; local and global” (2002: 6). But, she continues, “this is not to ignore the potent affects of territorialization”, but rather to attend more closely “to the labours of division that (re)iterate their performance and the host of socio-material practices in which they inhere” (*ibid.*).

For most of the grassroots activists of PGA Asia's participant movements, their most immediate source of self-recognition and autonomous organisation is their locality: they mobilise to protect their community, their land, and their environment (Castells, 1997). Moreover, particular experiences of neoliberalism, and the formulation of understandings and responses, differ according to place. However, these immediate issues of survival and livelihood nevertheless can act as motivations for people to participate (as social movement members) within transnational networks such as PGA Asia, in order to meet activists in other movements, to learn from them, and increase their understanding of the issues that affect them.

Networking is based upon the making of connections, across difference and distance. At base of networks are shared experiences as well as shared interests, which articulate a politics of relations. Thus networks consisting of different place-based movements are

held together by multiplicity and commonality. Networks facilitate multiple localized oppositions that articulate diverse critiques, approaches, and styles in various places of action (Schlosberg, 1999). In particular, what can get transnationalised in the network imaginary are notions of mutual solidarity – constructing the grievances and aspirations of geographically, culturally, economically and at times politically different and distant peoples as interlinked. Mutual solidarity across place-based movements enables connections to be drawn that extend beyond the local and particular. Such mutual solidarity recognizes and respects differences between actors within networks while at the same time recognizing similarities (for example, in people’s aspirations). In this sense network imaginaries may help to reconfigure distance in different ways –which emphasizes commonalities rather than differences. As Olesen (2005) argues, “mutual solidarity builds on a greater level of openness to different forms of social struggle” [and] “entails a constant mediation between particularity and universality – that is, an invocation of global consciousness resting on recognition of the other” (2005: 111). A network imaginary that can invoke interconnectedness opens up potentials for mutual solidarity that enables a diversity of struggles to articulate their particularities while simultaneously asserting and transcending identity (Holloway and Pelaez, 1998).

Many activists believed that an important step in bringing the PGA imaginary to the grassroots, lay not only in having local post-conference debriefing meetings, or meetings where imagineers spoke, but also to create a national PGA process within their respective countries (which would also involve caravan activities such as meetings between activists from different countries):

We need to bring the PGA process to the national level and then down to the grassroots workers, we need a national PGA process to which the grassroots are linked, via conferences, workshops, discussions, trainings. I have begun to talk to the grassroots communities in my district (Saptari) and in my union about my Dhaka experiences. But this has to be a collective process of growth. We also need to bring other international activists to the grassroots communities. The problem with the grassroots process is that we do not talk in depth, we need a national action plan for PGA (activist, interview Kathmandu, Nepal, 2004).

In addition, activists articulated the need to establish more ongoing grassroots programmes, whereby some of the experiences that activists would normally only get at conferences (such as learning about the dynamics of globalization, and the struggles of other movements) could be provided. This was seen as the responsibility of the participant movements in PGA Asia: “movements need to take responsibility for the PGA process. We need to make each local district organization have representatives on a PGA committee, and responsibility for international matters” (KRRS activist, interview, Kathmandu, Nepal, 2004).

As Juris (2004) points out, Global Justice Networks “are never fully formed, but are constantly produced and reproduced through concrete networking practices involving... conflict and contestation over issues related to power [and] authority,” as well as language and operational logics within the network (469). Hence an important aspect of network dynamics entails deepening the process of network imagination within grassroots communities for whom digital technologies remain relatively inaccessible. Network imaginaries at the grassroots remain uneven and potentially ‘biodegradable’ (Plows, 2004: 104), i.e. they may dissipate without sufficient and constant nurturance.

Moreover, while networking as a process constitutes much of the vitality of PGA Asia, the question remains as to whether such networking is sufficient to enable transformative political projects to be realized. Network imaginaries must be grounded in the geopoetics of resistance the cultural and ideological expressions of social movement agency – e.g. drawn from place-specific knowledges, cultural practices and vernacular languages – which inspire, empower, and motivate people to resist. This will require the mutual articulation of grassroots and network practices and imaginaries. Sustainable forms of material resistance are required to prevent the performative events of the network – the conferences, caravans and days of action – from becoming only memories in the imaginations of grassroots communities. Occupied islands in the Tetulia river, *satyagraha* camps on the banks of the Narmada, burning fields of GM cotton – we are the network, all of us who resist.

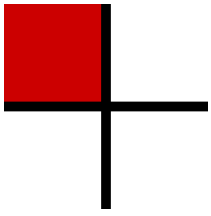
## references

- Bailey, C. (2001) 'Geographers doing household research: intrusive research and moral accountability' *Area* 33 (1): 107-110.
- Bey, H. (1991) *T.A.Z.* Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia.
- Bosco, F. (2001) 'Place, space, networks, and the sustainability of collective action: the Madres de Plaza de Mayo,' *Global Networks*, 1(4): 307-329.
- Castells, M. (1997) *The Power of Identity*. Blackwell, Oxford.
- Deleuze, G. and F. Guattari (1987) *A Thousand Plateaus*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Gregory, D. (1994) *Geographical Imaginations*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Holloway, J. and E. Pelaez (1998) 'Introduction: reinventing Revolution', in J. Holloway and E. Pelaez (eds.) *Zapatista! Reinventing Revolution in Mexico*. London: Pluto Press.
- Hyndman, J. (2003) 'Beyond Either/Or: A feminist Analysis of September 11<sup>th</sup>,' *ACME: An International E-journal for Critical Geographies*, 2(1): 1-13.
- Juris, J. (2004) *Digital Age Activism: Anti-Corporate Globalization and The Cultural Politics of Transnational Networking*. Unpublished PhD, University of California, Berkeley.
- Latour, B. (1993) *We Have Never Been Modern*. Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Laurier, E. and C. Philo (1999) 'X-morphising: review essay of Bruno Latour's *Aramis, or the Love of Technology*,' *Environment and Planning, A* 31: 1047-1071.
- Madge, C. (1993) 'Boundary disputes: comments on Sidaway (1992),' *Area*, 25(3): 294-299.
- Massey, D. (1994) *Space, Place and Gender*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Massey, D. (2005) *For Space*. London: Sage.
- Missingham, B.D. (2003) *The Assembly of the Poor in Thailand*. Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books.
- Nast, H. (1994) 'Opening Remarks on Women in the Field,' *The Professional Geographer*, 46: 54-66.
- Olesen, Thomas (2005) *International Zapatismo*. London: Zed Books.
- Plows, A. (2004) 'Activist Networks in the UK: Mapping the Build Up to the Anti-Globalization Movement', in J. Carter and D. Morland (eds) *Anti-Capitalist Britain*. New Clarion Press: Cheltenham, 95-113.
- Radley, A. (1996) 'Displays and fragments: embodiment and the configuration of social worlds,' *Theory and Psychology*, 6: 559-576.
- Riles, A. (2001) *The Network Inside Out*. Michigan: University of Michigan Press.
- Routledge, P. (2002) 'Travelling East as Walter Kurtz: Identity, Performance and Collaboration in Goa, India,' *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 20: 477-498.
- Routledge, P. (2003a) 'Convergence Space: process geographies of grassroots globalisation networks,' *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 28(3): 333-349

- Routledge, P. (2003b) 'Voices of the dammed: discursive resistance amidst erasure in the Narmada Valley, India,' *Political Geography*, 22(3): 243-270.
- Schlosberg, D. (1999) 'Networks and Mobile Arrangements: Political Innovation in the U.S. Environmental Justice Movement,' *Environmental Politics*, 6(1): 122-148.
- Slater, D. (1997) 'Spatialities of power and postmodern ethics - rethinking geopolitical encounters,' *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 15: 55-72.
- Thrift, N. (1996) *Spatial Formations*. London: Sage.
- Thrift, N. (2000) 'Afterwords,' *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 18: 213-255.
- Whatmore, S. (1997) 'Dissecting the autonomous self: hybrid cartographies for a relational ethics,' *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 15: 37-53.
- Whatmore, S. (2002) *Hybrid Geographies*. London: Sage.

**the author**

Paul Routledge is a Reader in Human Geography at the University of Glasgow. As an activist he has been involved in anti-nuclear, anti-imperialist, and environmental movements, anti-dam struggles in India, and People's Global Action. Most recently he participated in the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army at the G8 protests in Scotland. He is author of *Terrains of Resistance* (1993, Praeger) and co-editor (with Gearoid O'Tuathail and Simon Dalby) of *The Geopolitics Reader* (2006, Routledge).  
E-mail: proutledge@geog.gla.ac.uk



## Sewing Stories and Acting Activism: Women's Leadership and Learning Through Drama and Craft

Darlene Clover

### abstract

Current neo-liberal practices across Canada have profoundly negative impacts but they are not without resistance. Framed within discourses of empowerment, feminist pedagogy and imagination, this article explores two collective issue-based aesthetic learning activities – quilting in British Columbia and popular theatre in Ontario. The power of women's leadership and arts-based social learning practices lie in their ability to construct counter-narratives and make visible, stimulate reflection, verbal and non-verbal communicative action and oppositional imaginations and strengthen human agency. However, there are also risks involved in these creative public learning processes that include marginalisation and censorship. Feminist issue-based arts education constitutes an important discourse of social organisation by drawing attention to a diverse form of community educative-leadership and the potential of drama and craft as tools of critical learning that both exercise and contest power within Canada's neo-liberal landscape.

The symbolic creativity involved in making meaning – using language, having feelings, playing roles, producing rituals, and performances in relation to others – is a necessary and ordinary human activity. (Thompson, 2002: 15)

Albo argues that “for over the past two decades the ideology of neoliberalism has dominated public discourse and the modalities of the state” in Canada and around the world. Its ascendancy can be linked to economic changes introduced in the 1970s, “the rise of New Right governments across the 1980s, and the deepening internationalization of...money and industrial capital, modes of communication and governance structures in the 1990s” (2002: 1). Neoliberalism has come to mark an historic turning-point in how society is organised, social forms of economic and political power and the patterns of everyday life. “However, even economists admit it is not a “monolithic ideology or political programme” (2002: 2). And to adult educators, it is definitely not “a static and closed order, a given reality which one must accept and to which one must adjust; rather, it is a problem to be worked on” (Freire, 2002: 32).

Framed through theories of empowerment, feminist adult education, and the role of the imagination and creativity in learning, this article examines two Canadian feminist issue-based arts education projects that openly challenge neo-liberal discourses and

practices. The first story comes from British Columbia in the form of a quilt titled 'Crying the Blues'. Spearhead by Clara and Alison and collectively developed by a group of feisty Old Age Pensioners, this creative tapestry of story, image, symbol, metaphor and experience draws attention to plethora of often subversive government social programme cutbacks and their impact on the well-being and vitality of citizens. The second tale comes from Sudbury in northern Ontario. Myths and Mirrors, a feminist issue-based arts education organisation headed by Laurie, worked with six women and man tele-marketer to develop a play titled 'Get a Real Job'. Through humour, interactive scenes and pithy monologues, the working conditions and the delicate process of unionising in a Call Centre, one of the fastest growing under-employment sectors in Canada, enter the spotlight.

These projects represent "an exhilarating...[and] creative outpouring of a human community" concerned with workplace and community (Wyman, 2004: 14). An alternative to neo-liberalism can only be built through the broadest kind of activism: in our workplaces and communities. This activism cannot be separated from ideas and experience, from education and learning, from imagination and humour. Through its diverse means and methods, feminist issue-based arts education constitutes an important discourse of social organisation by drawing attention to the potential of imaginative community practices of theatre and quilting as tools of learning to exercise and challenge power and dominance within Canada's neo-liberal landscape.

## **Neo-liberalism in Canada**

Variety of imaginative response is humanity's great glory, and it is the height of self-delusion to believe that the human spirit can be subordinated to a tidy social vision. (Wyman, 2004: 15)

Canada was built on a tradition of collectivism and socialism. Its people worked together to establish one of "the most generous and open-handed benefit provisions to be found anywhere in the world" (Clarke, 1997: 17). Although neo-liberalism as an economic theory began having a distinctive influence on Canadian conservative parties in the mid-1970s, socially-oriented parties continued for many years to see it solely as "a form of anomalous political extremism" (Teeple, 1995: 3). However, it has become normalised to such an extreme that even when an electorate replaces a conservative party with more liberal or social democratic one, there remains the core expectation of maintaining or protecting these policies. The result has been the systematic "demise of long-established social and political institutions" (Teeple, 1995: 2).

While governments across Canada continue to espouse support for collective responsibility and rights, universal health-care, public education, democratic participation, public ownership, living wages, workers' right to organise, and protection of the environment, the 'golden rules' or practices they seem to be following are expansion of the sphere of the capitalist market, legislated discouragement of public protest, diminishment of the role of the state, and encouragement of individual private initiative which is seen to be "the best way to [bring about prosperity] and improve human welfare" (Albo, 2002; Hammond, 1998: 26; Teeple, 1995). The impact of this on communities across the country have been far reaching and hard hitting.

One major impact is the closure of publicly owned and operated hospitals and care centres. Paralleling this is an open climate for creating unaccountable private enterprise. There has also been a drop in funding for public universities and schools coupled with a rise in private, for profit (but actually propped-up by taxes) educational institutions. We have begun to witness the growing phenomenon of what is known as 'under-employment'. Livingstone (1999: 1) sees this as a major social problem of our time, premised on the diminishment of "meaningful, sustaining jobs." Within Canada, Call Centres are one of the fastest growing businesses in the under-employment sector. Placed most often in remote, depressed areas, they are touted as the answer to economic development and prosperity. The vast majority of employees in call centres are women (Belt, Richardson & Webster, 2000). Keeping pace with this proliferation are contesting scholarly debates. For example, Kinnie, Hutchinson & Purcell argue that Call Centres are not the 'satanic mills' some try to make them out to be but rather sites where employers have "developed sophisticated human resource practices" which demonstrate a high employee commitment approach (2000: 967). But Belt, Richardson & Webster question whether call centre work actually offers "new opportunities for women for skill development and career progression", or whether "a more familiar trend is taking place" in which women, the vast majority of the employees "are being drawn into a highly routinized, 'de-skilled' and de-valued area of work" (2000: 66). Perhaps not surprisingly, once strong unions, the backbone of fair living wages in Canada, have been weakened, dismantled and discouraged. This has undermined common voice and past gain, narrowed working people's expectations and dashed their hopes. Worse yet, it has made working people suspicious of one another and even unions who appear powerless to stop the demise (Albo, 2002).

In Canada, as in many other countries, adults over 65 are the fastest growing segment of the population. "This demographic 'shift' is now often referred to as an 'apocalyptic demography or a 'ticking time bomb'. The younger generation is told relentlessly that they will have to carry too many "dependent elderly on their shoulders" (Narushima, 2004: 25) and that they will not be able to hang onto the universal health care system as a result but must accept privatisation. The underlying premise is that older people are draining, post-productive sector that longer makes valuable social contributions. The vast majority of the elderly, are women (Narushima, 2000). "On all sides, people withdraw into enclaves", isolate themselves from one, or engage in relentless competition for everything from jobs and services to dignity (Greenem, 1998: 48).

Against this backdrop it would be easy to lose hope. However, there is strong resistance and one form is the imaginative and innovative arts-based pedagogies that women are using to educate, empower and demand visibility and justice. These practices are highly relevant, as Appadurai argues, although the world today is "characterised by disjunctive flows that generate acute problems of social well-being, one positive force that encourages an emancipatory politics is the role of the imagination" (2001: 6).

## Empowerment, Feminist Pedagogy and the Imagination

Critical theory is concerned with empowering human beings to understand and transcend constraints placed upon them by particular ideologies, structures and cultural practices. Theories of empowerment suggest that power is the increased capacity to engage in meaningful interactions, critical thinking and leadership activities (Narushima, 2004). Feminist adult education, a pedagogy of empowerment, aims to deepen “understandings of the relations configuring one’s life” and to work towards controlling in one way or another, those conditions and to create new knowledges (Walters & Manicom, 1996: 17). It is a cultural and intellectual project and “kind of public dialogue [that] has the radically democratic development of knowledge at its heart” (Barr, 1999a: 71). Weaving a tapestry of activism and learning, people work collectively, creatively and often times subversively to challenge social inequality (Blackmore, 1999). The reflexive praxis of feminist adult education includes giving voice, critical self and social reflection and conscientization. Giving voice is beginning with the concerns that women themselves identify and creating activities and spaces that deal with the real needs that women themselves breaking silence and gaining the confidence to articulate concerns publicly (Manicom & Walters, 1997; Barr, 1999). Empowering women to speak out is premised upon finding media with which they are comfortable and which offer ways to express a diversity of feelings and perceptions. Educational practices of critical self and social reflection and conscientization and (from the Spanish *concientizacion*) work to create new understandings of daily lived/felt realities of oppression, injustice and/or inequity. They combine a political and action-oriented framework with a process of social critique based “on overcoming false consciousness by rejecting an absolute and static view of reality” and revealing hidden structures and ideologies (Greene, 1995: 61). But it is not “simply bringing what is hidden into consciousness...it is a breaking into consciousness of hidden dimensions of our reality through...reflective engagement” (Freire, cited in Heaney & Horton, 1990: 85). And consciousness, Greene reminds us, “always has an imaginative phase” (1995: 21).

Feminist educators argue that innovative pedagogies are required if we are to continue to challenge, re-create or transform this world in which we live (Greene, 1995; Medel-Anonuevo, 1996; Clover, 2000; Thompson, 2002). A crucial element of innovative pedagogies is the space and ability to imagine. The opportunity to imagine “can lead to the creation of alternatives” (Greene, 1995). It provides an aesthetic space for conscientization, to see or present the world as if it should be otherwise, and defy the constraints of expectations and mythos of the everyday. There is also a strong connection between imagination, creativity and resistance to socialization which in fact takes a great deal of courage and a readiness to diverge, defy conventional opinion or go public (Cropley, 2003). To create learning opportunities to imagine new possibilities of being and action is to enlarge the scope of freedom and work towards “new forms of civic association and collaboration” (Greene, 1995: 6).

But discourses of the value of imagination as a cognitive activity of learning are often “met with deep suspicion...banished to an ontological homelessness [and regarded] with scorn, condescension and averted gaze” (Shakotko and Walker, 1999: 201). The arts are identified as “frivolous, a mere frill, irrelevant to learning in the post-industrial world”



(Greene, 1995: 125). Women's activities such as knitting circles were referred to as gossiping circles, trivial and domestic, and even feminist adult education, until recently has not looked closely at arts and crafts (Clover, 2000). But as Greene notes, of all our cognitive capacities the imagination is the one that permits us to give credence and depth to alternative realities by breaking through "the inertia of habit" (1995: 21).

## Women's Issue-Based Arts and Crafts Learning: The Stories

We now turn to how two groups of women in British Columbia and Ontario use arts-based learning to articulate the suppressed, to challenge and to re-claim. Since these projects are about both education and the arts, we examine both the process of creation as well as the images, symbols and metaphors.

### Crying the Blues

Textile practices have been treated with disregard for so long it is almost inconceivable for some critics and artists to acknowledge them as discursive formations from which meaning can emerge. (Perron, 1998: 124)



The 'Crying the Blues' quilt

The collective quilt titled 'Crying the Blues' was created by a group of women seniors who belong to the Old Age Pensioners (OAP), a radical and feisty branch of the provincial Seniors Association which has over 8,000 members across British Columbia. The purpose was to initiate a creative and innovative method for members across the province to engage in an exploration and depiction of social problems that result from

government cutbacks. The idea to create the quilt came from Clara: “I realised [one day] that many of the women who belong to seniors organisations [knew] something about quilting so it seemed a natural fit.” While not all crafts could be considered ‘feminist’ by any means, Clara and Alison envisioned a feminist base for their work – a quilt that would become a politically active aesthetic practice. They also realised that this would work because, although not for activist purposes, it is often a craft with which many women would be familiar and feel comfortable. Moreover, it could work across health and mobility issues that many seniors face and respond to the fact that many are interested in participating in learning and change initiatives if they can do so in their own homes (MacKeracher, 1998).

Alison agreed to coordinate the effort and put the quilt together. She noted that she would rather have had a quilting bee, but the deadline was tight and the distances made it impossible. Letters containing the idea for the quilt were then sent out to 75 branches of the seniors around Vancouver Island and the mainland. There were no specifics except for size and colour: it had to be some shade related to blue. Alison had chosen blue as the colour in order to give the quilt focus. She also came up with the proposal for a name, ‘Crying the Blues’, to which everyone agreed. Women across the province were given three months to create their squares and, as Clara stated, “those [were] the squares we got back – all 75 of them. Now we could not use all of them as it would have made the quilt totally unmanageable.”

The quilt used 32 of the 75 squares. Some of the pieces are symbolic. Symbols make connections between things that are concrete and things that are abstract. Moreover, interpretive illustrations present perspectives on objects which are not part of the ordinary experience of the objects. A single pair of scissors represents social cuts. Scales tipped are a metaphor for the social equity imbalance created by neo-liberal policies but also the reduction of funding to crown legal services which have left many unable to gain access to legal redress or support. A large H has a line drawn through it. The line is a common symbol for ‘do not enter’. The image represents hospital closures but also, the growing problem of diseases people contract in hospitals due to a reduction in cleaning staff and nurses. Housing costs in major cities of the province are said to be ‘going through the roof’ and a clever symbolic play on words is a large hammer coming down on a house. Others combine symbols with words. For example, the words Broken Promises are severed.

A few squares draw attention directly to problems faced by seniors. The contribution from Cumberland on Vancouver Island depicts a woman aged 104 denied home care. The ‘universal’ health care system of which Canadians are so proud is being subversively dismantled (read privatisation) to such an extent that care centres are closed, beds removed from hospitals and seniors now face what they call ‘home invasions’. Medical staff actually enter their homes to check to see if a) they are really seniors; b) they are really sick/disabled; or c) they are really poor. But the vast majority address issues that go beyond the specific concerns of seniors.

In addition to the problem of hospital beds and care centre closures, the closing down of maternity beds is depicted. While seniors are beyond this stage of life, it is gratifying to see this ‘gender’ issue on the list of concerns. Many images address or represent attacks

against organised labour and the cuts to people's jobs, benefits packages and wages. Another major issue is both the privatisation of schooling and the rise in university and college tuition fees. This affects 'grandchildren' and society as whole as the 'haves' are able to attend while the 'have-nots' are 'weeded' out as other images show. There are also depictions of cutbacks to ferry services and the privatisation of roads. Much of the B.C. coastline is an archipelago and these ferries are the only link to the mainland. Moreover, B.C. is often referred to as the vertical province as it is primarily mountainous. Roads are few so their ownership matters. Other squares allude to the rising prices of gas but also, to the war and violence that is now irrevocably linked with this fossil fuel. The women have also uncovered the debates around the decimation of the forests and the destruction of the environment. They are displayed with passion and artistry. This is most interesting because the environment is so often seen to be a young person's issue.

Alison sewed the stories, ideas and concerns together with care. She herself developed the central image of the quilt, a woman with her arms in the air, to symbolise her understanding of the overall theme of the quilt: "We are really *up in arms* about everything." Alison also created the tear-drops sprinkled throughout the cloth. This a working and storied quilt. As Alison suggested, "We have tapped into a deep, common concern, using a traditional form of expression. The people who have contributed might not feel comfortable protesting in the streets but they have something to say and the craft to make an artistic statement." So now, the question was what to do with the quilt.

One idea was to give the completed quilt to Mr. Campbell, the Premier of the province. But people throughout the province said absolutely "No Way!" They felt he would rip it apart. So then the question was asked: "If not to Campbell then what can we do with it?" The OAP members discussed giving the quilt to a museum, but after much thought, decided it should be kept and used as a tool of education and debate. Since Clara had actually promised in her letter that accompanied the squares that it would be taken to the Legislature Building in Victoria, they made arrangements with the leader of the opposition (the New Democratic Party) to display the quilt one day for the media. While the quilt did appear in the local newspaper, nothing appeared on television although all the cameras were there and the quilt is extremely photogenic. The mainstream media had in the end, marginalised the quilt and silenced the voices of the seniors.

But the voices have not been silenced in other venues. Across the province, directors of the local organisations have asked to borrow the quilt to show to their members and get them involved in doing something creative and political. The quilt was also put on display at an international adult education conference that was held at the University of Victoria in May 2004 and traveled to New Zealand in January 2005 to be part of two exhibitions of Subversive Quilts. As Clara notes "the quilt is traveling and it's not going to stop!"

The power of any educational practice is how it responds to the needs of a community. This project was in fact an extremely effective response. As Clara noted:

I think in Victoria we've taken the leadership in demonstrations and this sort of thing – campaigns and writing. But I think all together the hardships that older people are facing are making people think, well what can we do about it? How can we keep learning and doing?

This project enabled those in distant parts of the country to be involved and it touched upon a skill, sewing and an artistic side to people which encouraged broad participation.

### Get A Real Job

Creativity needs to be recognised as an important part of social activism. Claiming and developing our creativity is an integral part of our work to reclaim control over our lives and economies. (Wolfwood, No Date: 1)



'Get a Real Job': Opening recruitment scene. Actor is found sufficiently malleable and desperate for employment to be hired.

Created by a group of six female tele-marketers and one male, 'Get a Real Job' is a popular theatre piece about the working conditions in a Call Centre in Sudbury, Ontario. Sudbury is now a very depressed town with a legacy of joblessness and pollution resulting from the pull-out of mining and other resource-based activities. The development of the play was facilitated by Laurie, a feminist popular educator who runs an organisation titled Myths and Mirrors. When Laurie first approached the people at the Call Centre, by invitation from the union, the workers were shy and frightened. But seven people soon agreed mainly because they thought it would be fun. It has been much more than that.

The first activity undertaken by the group was research. They engaged in conversations with other telemarketers across the country. The purpose of these investigations was to uncover the experiences of others in order to analyse their own work through both a personal and a larger social frame of reference. Armed with ideas and knowledge, the core group met every Sunday morning – the only time everyone was free – for one year. The title of the play was a phrase that kept appearing when they were improvising around the comments received from other tele-marketers as well as people on the other phones. 'You know', actor tele-marketer Cheryl noted, 'Get a real job!' You hear that so often when you call people. We talked about this a lot because so many people do not understand it is a 'real' job. They just think it's a fly by night kind of thing. We're not considered real, legitimate workers. The purpose of the play was to raise awareness of what working in this type of industry is really like, to share their struggles and gains

from unionising and to “let people know we are ‘people’ and we are doing a job, just like everybody else.”

In the beginning, Laurie noticed that in spite of the enthusiasm, not to mention giving up their Sunday mornings, the actors ironically did not take too easily to doing theatre. As Laurie noted “there was a lot of resistance to actually doing theatre exercises. I’d go with wherever they wanted to go. I certainly wasn’t going to force them into anything.” Perhaps this fear comes in part from arts education experiences that marginalised and discouraged, as Greene (1995) suggests. Since the theatre seemed so intimidating, Laurie suggested they begin with song-writing. This they took to as it was creative but not as intimidating. Tele-marketer Wendy explained their activities around the songs: “I’m not sure how we came up with the songs...we just brainstormed and then we came up with melodies. But for sure they were all around stress and things that do happen in the call centre.” Laurie then encouraged them to create ‘monologues’ about their own specific situations and feelings and this worked extremely well. While Laurie suggests the script for the play “came together from the discussions, the songs the written monologues”, the women say it was from ‘the venting’.

The play begins with the recruitment process. People who apply are told there will be a substantial benefits package, flexible working hours, a relaxed atmosphere, excellent pay, private lockers, child-care, and possibilities for a spa. There is music, balloons, free food and drinks. All the actors are there to sign-up and they pull two people from the audience. However, those two are quickly eliminated from the selection process. The actors are all hired because they are seen to be sufficiently subdued, malleable and desperate for employment.

The next scene is a bank of telephones. Sitting side by side with an incessant cacophony of ringing in the background to provide atmosphere, they make their calls. One woman’s eardrum is blown out by a disgruntled male who let off an air-horn into her ear. She is immediately fired for being ‘disabled’. Other women are sexually harassed. Lonely men answer the phone and begin speaking ‘dirty and worse’ (and here the audience is treated to a mime so use your imagination). Others end up reaching older people which has its own problematic:

You spend the first five minutes trying to sell them something and the rest of the time trying to talk them out of it. You know they don’t need it. They are buying it because they are lonely and they want someone to talk to. You feel bad. But it’s my job and if you get caught, you lose your job.

Soon the women at the Centre begin to encounter more and more internal harassment. The heels of their shoes are measured, the lengths of their skirts are discussed.

After each scene of phone calling and inter-action, an actor individually moves to a microphone set off to one side to tell her or his personal story. It always begins with their hopes and dreams for this work, and ends with their humiliations and fears. The hours are not flexible, the pay is not good and there are no benefits, no lockers, no child-care and no spa. As the play progresses, the actors begin to organise themselves to unionise and discuss the difficulties involved. As the play comes to a close, we learn that they have been successful and what things have changed as a result such as now.

For example, whenever a woman is hassled about her heels, she simply calls the union steward and it is immediately dropped. So while things are not perfect, they are better.

There were challenges along the way. Firstly, there was a lot of suspicion about what this play was all about and questions such as, “Are you guys slagging the Call Centre?” were common in the beginning. Secondly, and related, there was the real concern that creating this play could result in people actually losing their jobs. Since this was certainly was not part of the exercise, they treaded carefully. They group showed the play first outside their own community to the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) at their annual general meeting. They also performed at the above mentioned international adult education conference where they received a standing ovation. It was with much fear and trepidation that they showed the play at home to friends, family and colleagues. But now they are off and running, re-enacting the play for unions and communities across Canada. The actors, as Sheryl articulates so well, are very proud of their accomplishment:

When we did finally end up with a final product, it was something that was so amazing and something that was built on experience and built on the knowledge of the telemarketers. It took on a life of its own. I don't think any of us really realised where we were going with this play. It really gave people [in the audience] the opportunity to open a dialogue because what they had actually seen in the play, they had experienced, they had *lived!* We had one lady who spoke afterwards and she was in tears. She said, “I could see myself up on stage. I could see it and I could relate!”

This latter point is reflected in the work of O'Toole & Lepp (2000) who argue that “drama is always in some way a special event that provides the motivation...It is also intimate – it speaks personally, communally and viscerally [and] sometimes people discover something through the language of theatre.” It also involves what Heng calls “listening with the heart, an attentiveness that includes emotional responsiveness” (1996: 217).

## Oppositional Imaginations

In their own unique ways, the women in these projects made visible and construct counter-narratives by weaving them into a tangible object of imagination or a disarmingly simple and provocative little play. Stories are what we use to portray the personal. And this is why stories work so well. They signify and encapsulate a “structure of feeling, and this tacit, underlying way of seeing and responding to one's circumstances contributes to forms of consciousness” (Beyer, 2000: 69). But these stories go beyond the personal. In fact, they were informed by the social and political landscapes around them. Manicom & Walters argue that this is very important in terms of learning because unless the personal “is informed by an appreciation and analysis of the broader developments that are refracted in the local milieu...[the] potential to effect and consolidate substantive changes in women's lives is diminished” (1997: 71).

Adding to the above, is the strengthening of human agency through critical self and social reflection. On one hand, education must strengthen confidence in the individual and build self-esteem. But it must also help to develop an “active, engaged citizenship”

(Thompson, 2002: 34). Both projects allowed for individuality, a certain amount of anonymity and yet a collectively and publicness. In the play, they were ‘actors’, playing parts of others yet their monologues were their lived realities openly voiced. They played individual parts, but the overall power came from the collective production of inter-weaving stories and experiences. While the squares were created individually and anonymously (if you wished), the quilt is a collective voice but its power lies in the collectivity and diversity of issues it explores and portrays. In short, like society, the final products represent multiple and individual realities and stories, addressing a broad array of ideas and experiences and fashioning them into something that is at the same time similar and diverse, individual yet collective.

In addition, the making of collective artworks presupposes a long process, from a stage of imagination and representation in people’s minds to the final product. It is a continuous process of negotiation between initial designs and dreams and the possibilities offered by the chosen form of representation – in this case a quilt and a play. Choices of materials or techniques are neither passive nor individual. In the actual coming into existence of a collective artwork, as people discover more materials or ideas, and as people come to understand better the possibilities, design alters, taking on new shapes and forms. Perhaps it is this slowness and multiplicity that allows for deeper reflections on why one is making the quilt or creating the play, and this act of sustained contemplation imbued in and through the artwork in turn provides a space of critical reflection. And any dialogical education activity must have at its centre this space “reflection on individual and social transformation – consciousness-raising” (Barr, 1999a: 15).

During a speech in Toronto, Canadian feminist Ursula Franklin addressed the propensity to over critique by saying: “having taken the dim view, now what?” This is an important question in terms of maintaining hope and engaging people’s attention. The quilts and the play are poignant, but they are also very funny and irreverent. Roy (2004: 59) writes that humour is often “a sign of rebelliousness; laughter can defeat the fear of the unknown.” Humour works as a metaphor “for transformation...a communal response of sensuous solidarity as it implies common understanding with others.. [and helps people] to cope with the situation of the world” (2004: 59). Making people laugh, as the arts can do so well, has proven to be an effective way to address issues which might otherwise have people shutting down or turning away. This does not mean that they are trivial and mindless, but rather that they are versatile and provide opportunities for creative self and social critique.

John Dewey argued many years ago that the imagination was not “a special, self-contained faculty, differing from others in possession of mysterious potencies” (1934: 237). Rather, it was a faculty that informed daily life in myriad ways. The imagination animates and pervades all processes of making and observation. It is a way of seeing and feeling things, a “blending of interests where the mind comes in contact with world” (1934: 237). These project stimulated oppositional imaginations. Oppositional imaginations emerge from daily lived reality of inequity or oppression. They make critical and creative meaning out of common lives, providing new ways of speaking and being heard through imagery and form. Oppositional imaginations destabilise fixed ideas of the ‘world’ and our ways of experiencing and understanding the familiar which

brings about complexity and challenge. Ironically, quilts are something normally used for comfort, warmth and security. These women turned them into a backdrop for prickly images and ideas not always apparent in the fabric of society. “The combination of unconventional representations of knowing in a conventional framework such as a quilt creates a powerful tool for representing patterns and themes that are different from those we are told to believe” (Halsall and Ali, 2004: 139). Popular theatre is inherently oppositional and imaginative. It is both a concrete and metaphoric representation of human behaviour. It carries a multiplicity of often conflicting messages with a strong analysis on both discourses of power and pleasure and hope. The actors convey and reinforce certain types of knowledge and experiences but are also “entirely passive in terms of their permission to engage in dialogue with the ideas being purveyed” (O’Toole and Lepp, 2000: 27).

These types of educational practices are time-consuming, risky and have their limits. They do not, for example, stop neo-liberalism in its tracks. They do not completely transform working conditions in Call Centres. (Well, yet anyway). The quilts were ignored by TV (although picked-up enthusiastically by the local papers), silencing through this major medium an important voice so seldom heard in Canadian society. They were also barred from hanging the quilt in the Legislature. The play is predominantly confined to union meetings and some of the scenes were ‘modified’ for the local audience out of fear of reprisal (job loss). People often do not engage in public learning activities such as these out of fear of reprisal. Because as Cropley puts it, “people who produce novelty in settings that are not open for it are likely to suffer various kinds of negative sanctions” (2003: 3). But they also do not take part in arts-based learning activities because in the process of growing up, adults are told that there are certain legitimate public behaviours for adults and creativity is a gift with which people are born, i.e. artists. Therefore, people will often restrict their responses and activities “to a narrow range of socially tolerated behaviours” (Cropley, 2003: 3). But these women dared to use the arts as a tool of protest, of investigation, of engagement and learning, of visibility and for this they must be seen as nothing less than courageous. These defiantly public acts are important because it is often from discomfort and challenge that we learn the most. They force us to at least acknowledge alternative realities. After seeing the play, a number of people acknowledged that they had been rude on many occasions to a call centre worker. Others who viewed the quilt suggested that they had ignored the views of an older person in their lives.

The women actors in *Get a Real Job* have joined Myths and Mirrors as board and/or advisory members and are now actively involved in their communities as activists but also, as artists, something they never would have believed themselves to be. The quilt has had an impact in terms of the revival of women’s crafts and a difference in how they are viewed:

I think it was a great idea to plug into a craft that hasn’t been used, as far as I know, very much for political purposes in Canada. I’m really fascinated by the way crafts and fabric arts have developed because I think there was a great hiatus where you didn’t do that because granny did it. So I think in a way the resurgence of women’s arts and crafts is a political statement (Alison).



Also, there are now in community meetings more and more women bringing something to do: knitting, or embroidery. As Alison noted, “you now see these women at meetings and they actually bring their knitting. Actually, we now see more women.”

The power of women’s leadership and issue-based aesthetic learning activities lie in their ability to construct counter-narratives and to make visible the concerns and daily-lived realities of people whose voices are seldom heard. In both cases, many of the women involved have gone on to engage more actively in their communities and/or workplaces as a result of these empowering activities. They are valuable educational practices that engage people in verbal and non-verbal action, stimulate oppositional imaginations and demonstrate a more critical and socially-oriented form of arts-based inquiry. Through humour, image, monologue, inter-action and defiance, they empower. However, there are also risks involved in using such public arts-based learning practices. The participants in their own diverse ways faced marginalisation and censorship and Canada is not yet a bastion of social reform.

Feminist issue-based arts education constitutes an important discourse of social organisation by drawing attention to an imaginative form of community educative-leadership by women and the potential of theatre and crafts to be both objects of art as well as tools of critical learning that exercise and contest power. Through image, fabric, song and story women make visible fundamental mythos of neoliberal ideology and challenge us to work for a more socially humane, just, pluralistic, imaginative and joyful society.

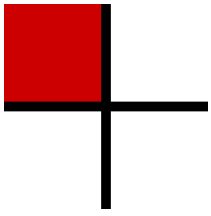
## references

- Albo, Gregg (2002) ‘Neoliberalism, the state and the left’ [[http://www.canadiandimension.mb.ca/v36/v36\\_2ga.htm#three](http://www.canadiandimension.mb.ca/v36/v36_2ga.htm#three)], retrieved December 23, 2004.
- Appadurai, A. (2001) *Globalization*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Ball, H. K. (2002) ‘Subversive Materials: Quilts as Social Text’, *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, XLVIII(3): 1-27.
- Barr, J. (1999) ‘Women, adult education and really useful knowledge,’ in J. Crowther, I. Martin & M. Shaw (eds.) *Popular Education and Social Movements in Scotland Today*. Leicester: NIACE, 70-82.
- Barr, J. (1999a) *Liberating knowledge, research, feminism and adult education*. Leicester: NIACE.
- Belt V., R. Richardson R. & J. Webster (2000) ‘Women’s Work in the Information Economy: A case of Telephone Call Centres’, *Information, Communication and Society*, 3(3): 366-385.
- Beyer, L. (2000) *The Arts, Popular Culture and Social Change*. New York and Frankfurt: Peter Lang.
- Blackmore, J (1999) *Troubling Women: Feminism, Leadership and Educational Change*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Butterwick, S. (2002) ‘Your Story/My Story/Our Story: Performing Interpretation in Participatory Theatre’, *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, XLVIII(3): 240-253.
- Clover, D.E. (2000) ‘Feminist Artist-Educators, Leadership and Community Revitalisation: Case Studies from Toronto,’ *CASAE Conference Proceedings*, Laval University, Sherbrooke, Quebec, 43-48.
- Clarke, T. (1997) *Silent Coup: Confronting the Big Business Takeover in Canada, Ottawa and Toronto*. Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives and James Lorimer & Company Limited.
- Cropley, A.J. (2001) *Creativity in Education and Learning*. London: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Dewey, J. (1980) *Art As Experience*. New York: First Perigee Printing.
- Freire, P. (2002) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Continuum.
- Greene, M. (1995) *Releasing the imagination. Essays on education, the arts and social change*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

- Halsall, E. & S. Ali (2004) 'Unravelling Quilted Texts: An Alternate Inquiry into the Social Fabric of Life', *Journal of child and Youth Care Work*, 17(1): 136-140.
- Hammond, Allen (1998) *Which World? Scenarios for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Washington, D.C.: Island Press.
- Heaney, T.W. & A.I. Horton (1990) 'Reflective engagement for social change,' in J. Mezirow & Associates (eds.) *Fostering critical reflection in adulthood: A guide to transformative and emancipatory learning*. San Francisco, 74-98.
- Heng, C.L. (1996) 'Talking pain: educational work with factory women in Malaysia,' in S. Walters and L. Manicom (eds.) *Gender in Popular Education*. London: Zed Books.
- Kinnie, N., S. Hutchinson, J. Purcell (2000) 'Fun and surveillance: the paradox of high commitment management in call centres,' *International Journal of Human Resources Management*, 11(5): 967-985.
- Livingstone, D. (1999) *The Education-Jobs Gap: Underemployment or Economic Democracy*. Toronto: Garamond Press.
- MacKeracher, D. (1998) 'Senior Learners Optimizing the Learning Community,' in S. Scott, B. Spencer & A. Thomas (eds.) *Learning for Life, Canadian Readings in Adult Education*. Toronto: Thompson Publishing, 259-272.
- Manicom L. & S. Walters (1997) 'Feminist Popular Education in Light of Globalization,' in S. Walters (ed.) *Globalization, Adult Education and Training*. London: Zed Books, 69-78.
- Marino, D. (1997) *Wild Garden, Art, Education and the Culture of Resistance*. Toronto: Between the Lines.
- Medel-Anonuevo, C. (1996) 'From activism to feminism to gender and development work in the Philippines,' in S. Walters and L. Manicom (eds.) *Gender in Popular Education*. London: Zed Books.
- Narushima, M. (2004) 'A gaggle of raging grannies: the empowerment of older Canadian women through social activism,' *International Journal of Lifelong Learning*, 23(1): 23-42.
- O'Toole, J. & M. Lepp (2000) *Drama For Life: Stories of Adult Learning and Empowerment*. Brisbane: Playlab Press.
- Perron, M. (1998) 'Common Threads: Local Strategies for Inappropriated Artists,' in Bachmann and R. Scheuing (eds.) *Material Matters, The Art and Culture of Contemporary Textiles*. Toronto: YYZ Books, 121-136.
- Roy, C. (2004) *The Raging Grannies: Wild Hats, Cheeky Songs and Witty Actions for a Better World*. Montreal: Black Rose.
- Shakotko, D. & K. Walker (1999) 'Poietic Leadership,' in P. Begley & P. Leonard (eds.) *The Values of Educational Administration*. London: Falmer Press, 201-222.
- Sutton-Smith, B. (1988) 'In Search of the Imagination,' in Egan & D. Nadaner (eds.) *Imagination and Education*. New York & London: Teachers College, Columbia University, 3-29.
- Teeple, G. (1995) *Globalization and the Decline of Social Reform*. Toronto: Garamond Press.
- Thompson, J. (2002) *Bread and Roses, Arts, Culture and Lifelong Learning*. Leicester: NIACE.
- Walters, S. & L. Manicom (1996) *Gender in Popular Education*. London: Zed Books.
- Wolfwood, T. (No Date) *Art & Activism: The Integration of Politics and Art* [www.bbcf.ca].
- Wyman, M. (2004) *The Defiant Imagination*. Vancouver: Douglas & MacIntyre.

#### the author

Darlene E. Clover is a professor in Leadership Studies at the University of Victoria, British Columbia. She teaches and researches in the areas of women and community leadership, environmental and feminist adult education, adult literacy, and social activism and learning through arts and crafts. Her most recent publications are: *Feminist arts practices of popular education: Imagination, counter-narratives and activism on Vancouver Island and Gabriola Island* (New Zealand Journal of Adult Education, 2003); *Feminist popular education and community leadership: The case for new directions* (Adult Education for Democracy, Social Justice and a Culture of Peace, 2004); *Environmental Adult Education in Canada* (Learning for Life, 2005).  
E-mail: clover@uvic.ca



## Beyond Solidarity and Academic Freedom

A conversation between Luther Blissett and Karen Eliot

Over the past year there have been an increasing number of attacks on the activities of radicals and progressives in the academy. These attacks have both occurred in the US (with the media circus around Ward Churchill and the attempts to pin trumped bioterrorism charges on Steve Kurtz from the Critical Art Ensemble) to the controversy around the invited appearance of Antonio Negri at a conference in Australia. Most recently Yale anthropologist David Graeber has been fired under somewhat dubious circumstances that appear to be largely politically motivated.

As argued by Angela Mitropoulos in her article ‘Physiognomy of Civilisation’<sup>1</sup> it is not the truth or falsity of the claims that matter for making them is damaging enough in itself. Furthermore, it is not enough to fall back on claims of academic freedom or appeals to the status of being a philosopher or well respected academic. For if there existed a space in the alleged ivory towers where this kind of protection was afforded (which is doubtful to begin with), this very depoliticization of knowledge often served to mask other forms of nefarious power and dealings.

But this begs the question, what then would a response be to these on-going attempts to ferret radical voices out of the academy? And if one is not appealing to a conception of academic freedom or the space of the university, how does one respond? To what or whom does one appeal? As argued by Noam Chomsky, “It would be criminal to overlook the serious flaws and inadequacies in our institutions, or to fail to utilize the substantial degree of freedom that most of us enjoy, within the framework of these flawed institutions, to modify or even replace them by a better social order.”<sup>2</sup> In a time where this degree of freedom is increasingly encroached upon by a well organized and mobilized right wing, what kind of response(s) should one take up? We posed these questions to Luther Blissett, who holds the Marvelous Chair in Ontological Mayhem at the University of Bleckableckastan, and Karen Eliot, who is a Reader in the Uncanny from the Center for Study of Psychogeographic Self-Negation in Milano, as a means of sparking a conversation. The authors, who may have not been feeling as much as themselves as usual that day resulted in the following ways.

---

1 Mitropoulos, A. (2005) ‘Physiognomy of Civilisation,’ Interactivist InfoExchange [http://info.interactivist.net/article.pl?sid=05/04/04/1850213&mode=thread&tid=9]  
2 Chomsky, N. (2003) *Objectivity and Liberal Scholarship*. New York: New Press, 19.

**Luther Blissett:** First, as a radical, I've never appreciated liberalism more than in the years since 9/11, including in the academy. While the academy has never matched in reality the image of protected intellectual freedom, even the battered and tattered versions of that idea have created more space for free thinking than anywhere else in the economy. If you think, for instance, of why you find a broader range of opinions and ideas on a university campus than in a newsroom, even though journalists too are writers and thinkers, I don't think it's because we're smarter than them or even because we have the luxury of longer-term investigation and writing. It's because academia is the only place where, mostly, you can't be fired for your opinion. As flawed as this protection is in reality, I think the post-9/11 regime is threatening to erase the line much more, and this is something we need to resist.

**Karen Eliot:** For me this raises some basic but important issues about what academic radicalism means in itself. This gets to thinking about the idea of being a radical academic, that is, having one's being an academic be one's radicalism. Part of the motivation is a story a friend told about being in grad school during the start of the Iraq war. He tells me that in one of his classes there was a big discussion about how now is a time when we must all be very political. By 'being political' (a problematic phrase I know), what was meant was reading a lot of Lacan very closely. Which, presumably, is what grad students in a seminar on Lacan are expected to do closely.



**Luther Blissett:** I think we need to think about the particular role of universities in societies, especially at a time when much of what academics do is now done in think-tanks, corporate science labs or social science operations, and much of what happens on campus is now high-level job training rather than intellectual development. The line has been blurred but that just makes it more important to know what our particular role is. I think a key component of what a university is, is that we are supposed to be the home of or repository of ideas that can't be tolerated anywhere else in society. A university is not supposed to be 'balanced' per se – it is not supposed to reflect the thinking outside the university. It's supposed to be much more radical and varied than what for-profit or government agencies allow.

**Karen Eliot:** But that doesn't really get around the problem. The gist of my hesitation is quite simple – 'academic' is a job class. If it's possible to be a radical academic then that would mean that 'academic' is a job unlike nearly any other. That is, what would it mean to be a radical doctor, a radical teacher, a radical electrician, etc? I can see an element of shopfloor resistance in all of this, but, if the radical teacher's students don't pass the US Constitution test, or if the radical electrician doesn't take the job doing some of the wiring at the mental hospital, there are tremendous personal job related consequences. Similarly, if a professor's students rate them poorly or they don't get into grad school or they don't finish their PhDs or whatever, there are big consequences as well. I think the change, though, is that the freedom of academics is becoming closer to the range of freedom that most other people have on the job, which is to say, very little on their own. That's definitely a shame, but do you think it's happening because of a shift in power relations in the academy as a workplace, or is it a response to something else, a response that can happen with relatively little impediment because of an already existing imbalance of power in the academy as a workplace?

**Luther Blissett:** I'm increasingly of the view that the attacks on academics are part of a broader process – what one might call the enclosure of the academy, or a neoliberal transformation. Basically, 'traditional' universities have been functional to capitalism but in an indirect way; their own mode of production was either pre-capitalist or early capitalist – pre-capitalist in the sense of being similar to the organisation of a guild of artisans, with internal standards of expertise determining acceptance and status in the 'trade' (even to the point of the production of a 'masterpiece', the PhD) – early (or earlier) capitalist in the sense of being linked to the elite-based kinds of capitalism and later, to welfare state education expansion goals. Universities have performed roles for capitalism but are not yet fully made-capitalist. They have been formally but not really subsumed in capitalism. Actually the functions performed by universities were/are indirect. One of the most important functions for capitalism is (meritocratic or elite-reproducing) social stratification – the selection of layers of people for entry into certain social strata. In relation to this function, the activities of academics and the specifics of what is taught and how it is taught are actually not very important to capitalism.

**Karen Eliot:** Thus, many of the kinds of things people like Chomsky criticise, are not necessarily aspects of capitalism itself. They're ways in which academic research is functional or profitable for capitalism, or oppressive structures specific to the kind of oppressive structure pertaining to early or pre-capitalist forms. Academic freedoms are usually in fact veiled references to the self-regulation or internal disciplining of

academics as a professional group – a reproduction of the structure of artisan guilds. This self-regulation is dependent on the autonomy and freedom of the group from external limitations and requirements. At the same time, it is not necessarily freedom for each worker, since the profession may be structured hierarchically or involve conservative pressures from the established professionals. Apart from academics, the only professions structured this way in the West today are lawyers and doctors. Another thing critics point to are the signs of the early stages of capitalist real-subsumption of the universities: for instance, direct corporate and military-industrial-complex involvement in scientific research.

**Luther Blissett:** The present period of capitalism seems to be typified by pervasive neoliberal attacks on any sectors which appear decommodified or are not fully integrated into capitalism. In many ways this is a desperate attack by capitalism, similar to what Gramsci calls the ‘economic-corporate’ kind of politics (rather than hegemonic) – by imposing the logic of ‘the market’ everywhere, capitalism destroys other logics which are necessary for its own functioning and stability. In universities, the attack takes the following forms, among others: Pay-to-learn fee based access, mathematised performance measurement rather than self-regulation of the profession, a switch from education and research to ‘skill training,’ and attempts to form direct links between taught materials and capitalist functioning. Actually, there is an ambiguity here, because the ‘reforms’ weaken functionality for capitalism – pay-to-learn eliminates the small meritocratic element which existed before and makes elite reproduction both mechanical and explicit; performance measurement creates pressures for quantity (over quality) and acceptance (over originality) which impede research; and the whole process makes capitalist control explicit. It’s likely to become harder for the social system to legitimate itself as its mechanisms are less obscured and as legitimacy institutions and secondary mediations are eliminated.

**Karen Eliot:** As regards critical academics, the ‘traditional’ situation is that, because the functionality of universities for capitalism was not dependent on what academics teach or research but rather, on the elite-selecting function and the legitimacy effects. Universities are something of a niche for radicals who meet the criteria of the profession but not those of capitalism; and there is a space for engaging in critical writing as recognised ‘work’. This openness/self-regulation is under attack, with basically an attempt to proletarianise academics along the lines previously seen in the case of artisans and craft-workers (the switch to ‘skill-training’ and the attempt to impose course content eliminating professional self-regulation in determining course content, the performance indicators limiting what counts as ‘research’ and the amount and type to be produced, pay-to-learn restricting access into the profession of people from working-class and so-called ‘non-traditional’ backgrounds). There is still some leeway left, mainly because the performance indicators are impersonal and leave some room for continued self-regulation of the profession (e.g. if critical journals are accepted as ‘top’ journals in a field, critical scholarship will continue to be valorised).

**Luther Blissett:** Hmm, are there other notions of academic freedom that aren’t just ‘radical’ negations of it in practice? The main issue I actually want to get at is the whole ‘theory’ bit, as the program I chair is very theory heavy and seems to have an implied view that theory is valuable in itself, and politically so. I’m ambivalent, as I like the

stuff, but am not sure that it has a political value all the time, in all contexts. I'm particularly suspicious because, as a professor, part of one's job is theory, reading and writing it, and I'm just always very suspicious about the idea that one can get paid for smashing the state or overthrowing the bosses.

**Karen Eliot:** It's very possible that 'academic freedom' has always been an empty, hollow, and problematic term and concept that has only been useful and will only continue to be of any use if it holds any effective rhetorical value; which, if it did, seems to be declining, which does not mean we've figured out what to do now in that situation. In some ways, it's the kind of thing that happens to people all the time in regular jobs – always fucked up, but not atypical – but my sense is that academia had been an atypical workplace for a while, so that this type of thing is particularly striking. I wonder if that atypical-ness is changing/under attack. It clearly is in some places, from both sides – management restructuring and employee organizing – but I suspect none of this is really news to you. A struggle against neoliberal decimation of the universities, and thus against the attacks on academic self-regulation, needs to be combined with a critique of the ways in which this professional autonomy is used. The line of flight to be sought here is one which takes the aspect of traditional universities which is peripheral to capitalism (academic autonomy) and take it on a line leading away from functionality for capitalism and away from hierarchic organisation. The eventual destination of this line, in my view, would be something akin to the deschooled universities proposed by Paul Goodman, where those who see the point in carrying on a particular line of research or study have the resources and opportunities to do so, with holders of knowledge available to help on a networked and gift-economical basis.

**Luther Blissett:** Those who follow the 'passage through capitalism instead of resisting it' line à la recent Hardt and Negri, Žižek, etc. should (if they are consistent) take the position of supporting the neoliberal restructuring of higher education. Though I don't see how this process of neoliberal imposition helps create the potential for later resistance or overcoming. But then again, I don't see this in terms of most other applications of this particular dogma either. Obviously a defence of welfare state institutions etc. can be viewed as reactionary if capitalism is taken as definitive of progress – but this is precisely the identification to reject. It can also be criticised as reformist, and certainly in the first instance it is a defence of discourses and arrangements of space which are functional to capitalism, and which are only relatively autonomous, so to speak. But this isn't really reformist so much as transitional, as long as the goal of reconstructing capitalism on a less neoliberal basis is not affirmed. The transition is through the most peripheral elements into the possibility of a 'beyond' irreducible to capitalism.

**Karen Eliot:** This said, many of those involved in the struggle at the present stage will not share the transformative goal. And a defence of relatively autonomous (but functional) university spaces is itself better than a neoliberal reconstruction. And it is possible to rally to this defence, not only critical academics, but also conservative academics concerned about 'standards,' liberal academics concerned about academic freedom and tolerance, and social-democratic academics concerned about the social role of education. Basically, academics as a social group are threatened by these measures, pretty much regardless of their political affiliations and preferences (albeit the measures

have the worst impact on critical academics). There is thus the potential – and it is at present only a potential – for profession-wide resistance to the ‘restructuring’ measures. I would suggest a resistance strategy based on refusal to implement, organised across the profession as a whole. Basically, because the academic profession is largely self-regulated, the imposition of neoliberalism is being attempted through the medium of the profession itself, and depends at many points on the labour of academics – as quality auditors, as assessors for funding bodies, as people involved in deciding appointments, as journal editors and referees, as course designers, as members of committees deciding on course design and performance and other issues, etc. A withdrawal or syncretic appropriation of this function would effectively neutralise the imposition of neoliberalism

**Luther Blissett:** While the treatment of Ward Churchill is to be deplored, we would do well to remember that this kind of behaviour directed towards an academic is nothing new. Rather, universities are bastions of academic freedom but only within certain bounds, and these limits become obvious when we take a brief tour through some of the less salubrious examples. As an attempt at problematising the very concept of academic freedom, those practical tensions that suffuse the academy and stepping back to look at this form of life we inhabit, let us consider just a few historical cases for only then can we fully appreciate that coercion is the natural order of things. It is academic freedom that is socially engineered.<sup>3</sup> The limits to academic freedom can, in the modern age, be seen to emerge most prominently in the early twentieth century

**Karen Eliot:** Yes, exactly. By 1915 the lateral relations of power had spread still further with the first report of the American Association of University Professors Commission on Academic Freedom and Tenure registering that cases where academic freedom had been delimited while once primarily associated with religion or science now appeared ever more prevalent in connection to the political and social sciences. Indeed, places for resistance shrink to the extent that certain subjects, such as philosophy, are said to be outside of the bounds of intellectual debate for social scientists because of their speculative nature – there could be no objective conclusions that ended debate and therefore the professors could only potentially open themselves up for criticism and potential disciplinary action by their employer. This was no empty threat. Among those disciplined in this manner were radical scholars such as Ely, Bemis, Commons, Pattern, Nearing and Adams. The excessive, abnormal individuals who attempted to stray beyond the proscribed limits were normalized and their intellectual course redirected along routes deemed safe. Hardly surprising but even Ely who was sheltered at the liberal University of Wisconsin relented from his ethical agenda and bracketed his researches into labour issues turning instead to more socially respectable studies of land economics and research for private utilities. Here it was much safer to avoid controversial topics or topics otherwise out of favour with those in positions of power than to engage in any form of speaking the truth to power or *parrhesia*.

---

3 Menad, L. (1996) ‘The Limits of Academic Freedom’, in L. Menand (ed.) *The Future of Academic Freedom*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 3-20.



**Luther Blissett:** This is not an unrepresentative example. Nearing, then assistant professor of economics at Wharton was actively campaigned against by influential alumni because of his ‘radical teachings’. Radical in the sense that they did not conform to ‘sound’ economic theory as supported by the founder of the school – Joseph Wharton – and led to him being denied reappointment despite his colleagues’ protestations otherwise. In a similar vein Montana State University, a frequent violator of academic freedom, suspended Louis Levine, professor of economics after he had authored a manuscript on mine taxation that had aroused the ire of powerful interests in the local community. Our genealogy of discursive closure does not, unfortunately, end here. In 1937 another lamentable case and one that bears all the hallmarks of the academic unfreedom found throughout the McCarthyite era can be found. J.P. Rowe, a professor of geology, was widely known to have been critical of his institutions administration and the censorship of library books by either the board of trustees or the president. He was charged with supporting socialistic, communistic, and atheistic attitudes and vulgar discussion of sex matters. These were all examples of the limits placed on the seeable and sayable that would accelerate through the 1940s and 1950s where the Oath Controversy triggered by academics not only having to swear a constitutional oath but also one that affirmed that they were not members of the Communist Party or committed to the overthrow of the U.S. government as “a condition of my employment and a consideration of payment of my salary.”<sup>4</sup>

**Karen Eliot:** One final example will serve to hammer the point home. Speaking to Paul Lazarsfeld and Wagner Thielens in their magisterial study of academic freedom conducted during the 1950s, an economist currently teaching a course in Soviet Economics highlights the tension and pressures that were ever present: “Members of the administration sat in on the course – a charming idea! Good course, they said afterwards. I was never actually criticized, never anything actually wrong with my teaching. There was something wrong with the course – it didn’t damn communism enough. The president suggested to me that it wasn’t advisable to have the course just now. It didn’t look nice in the catalogue. It was dropped.”<sup>5</sup> Of course, the development of knowledge particularly within the business school and in the disciplines that we associate with this institution are only intelligible against the wider set of organized and organizing practices in which they themselves play a crucial role.

**Luther Blissett:** The production of knowledge does not liberate here; it serves to close down what can be said – at least from the sanctuary of the university. No longer sanctioned by this institution does it lose some of the credibility – I hesitate to say objectivity – but then this is probably something that continues to signal something beyond the ivory towers other than academic debates about positivism. We might preach otherness and solidarity for colleagues but do we often pause to reflect on the limited nature of the form of life in university and intellectual debate. I think not. See how wide ranging academic debate generally is; it is freedom within certain bounds. There are certain names and theories that we must repeat and recognize if our own speech acts are to be taken seriously by our peers. These are not necessarily the brand names that are associated in certain circles with philosophical faddism. They are those

---

4 Stewart, G.R. (1950) *The Year of the Oath*. New York: Doubleday.

5 Lazarsfeld, P.F. and W. Thielens (1958) *The Academic Mind*. Illinois: The Free Press.

who are now well into their gerontology and who might not have full control over their own bodily organs still retain control over those ideation distribution outlets that cause research assessment committees the kind of sexual stimulation that they once gained from carnal activities and now extract from golf or rambling.

**Karen Eliot:** Perhaps now that such instances of the flagrant abuse and constriction of academic freedom are again on the rise, what we need to issue academics with is a version of an *Index Verborum Prohibitorum* in which all the dangerous terms and subject areas – that those who wish to retain their jobs in this most precarious academic labour market should not touch – are listed so that any possibility of transgressing the boundaries of what is or is not acceptable are clear for one and all.<sup>6</sup> But then I'm not a logical positivist and see no benefit to be had from closing down the already limited vocabulary that academics are conversant with especially at a time when we are only beginning to expand our way of looking at the world beyond a much too dominant Western, male, middle-class view.

**Luther Blissett:** Simply because our intellectual horizons appear to be expanding we should nevertheless remain cautious about the extent to which academic freedom always remains precarious; it is not simply during times of economic, political and social crisis that academic freedom can be called into question or otherwise subject to gradual elision. Here I could gesture towards the appointment strategies adopted in relation to the hiring and subsequent appointment to academic posts seen across university campuses. These may be the preserve of the selective choices of Vice Chancellors who like to hire old cronies; hypothetically speaking of course.

**Karen Eliot:** Whatever is the view of academic freedom that we might care to hold – usually in private – it seems clear that it is contingent in certain respects on those, and I am aware I am generalising horrendously, least fit to want to protect it. Where Deans, VCs and Chancellors are dependent on hand outs from well-heeled alumni or other important bodies – the case of Nottingham University and their willingness to take cash from the hand of death is perhaps the most blatant form of offering one's own intellectual and academic freedom in exchange for fifty pieces of silver (give or take three million or so) – what role does the academic freedom we lament play here? God only knows. Funny how none of the papers released by the International Centre for Corporate Social Responsibility have yet to look at the Tobacco industry<sup>7</sup> – or so said *Private Eye* in Issue 1133 last week. Are things getting better or are they worse? About the same as they have always been, I'd say.

**Luther Blissett:** Given that it has been cogently argued that academic freedom is most precarious when the regents of the university or those in the upper echelons of the institutional hierarchy are more conservative economically and politically than their staff members, I see only one long-term alternative, all those who want to contribute most effectively to thinking beyond thoughts on solidarity, organizing and academic freedom and move such discussion beyond its present, somewhat groundhog day status,

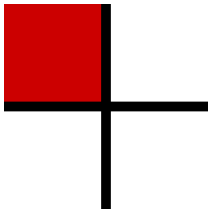
---

6 Neurath, O. (1941) 'Universal Jargon and Terminology', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, XLI: 127-148.

7 [<http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/business/ICCSR/research/paperseries.html>]

is to join such bodies themselves and agitate from within. The alternative is too sad to consider.

**Karen Eliot:** Education in general and the university in particular are part of the web of domination and have to be destroyed if we are to be free. As technology, the systematic science of relating to the world through artifice, has developed, artificial knowledge has come to replace experiential knowledge. We 'learn' by reading or listening to the words of experts or performing a set of prescribed rituals called experiments in a totally artificial environment called a laboratory (and this only after we've taken in enough of the words of the experts). In fact, we are taught to believe that what we 'know' is what authority tells us is true and that this is more trustworthy than our own experience. So, the university is nothing more than an indoctrination centre for training us to accept authority and the dominant ideology. There may, indeed, be material in a university that can be used in the undermining of authority, but it has to be used in a way that utterly undermines the university itself, a way that counters the dominant ideology with the knowledge that comes from direct lived experience. And ultimately, that means destroying all universities and schools along with the rest of the web of domination.



## Nietzsche in the Streets

Ruud Kaulingfreks

**review of:**

**John Moore with Spencer Sunshine (ed.) (2004) *I Am Not A Man, I Am Dynamite! Friedrich Nietzsche and the Anarchist Tradition*. Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia (pbk., 160p, \$14.95, ISBN 1570271216)**

When is an anarchist a real anarchist? When his thoughts are in line with the teachings of Proudhon, Kropotkin, Bakunin and the like? When he engages in direct political action behind a black flag? Or when his thoughts are clearly libertarian? Anarchism has always struggled with the impossibility of becoming a movement. In a sense it fits Groucho Marx's famous paradox of not wanting to become a member of a club who would like to accept him as a member. By its own principles, becoming an anarchist is a kind of paradox – that is, as long as one thinks in terms of movements or affiliations. Libertarianism, freedom for man to choose his own rules (and definitely not the so-called democratic freedom for man to accept his ruler) and be master of his own destiny in a society without private ownership goes against affiliation. The struggle against all forms of authority and the permanent revolt against institutions that coerce freedom make it quite difficult – if not impossible – to define somebody as an anarchist. In a sense the last thing an anarchist accepts is being pinned down as such. He will probably deny it.

Does a philosopher who preaches the transvaluation of all values, who defines mankind as a sick animal in need of a herd, and as full of resentment because he is not able to live by himself qualify as an anarchist? Can a philosopher who writes in almost every line about the old adagio '*ni dieu ni maitre*' (nor god nor master) and pleads for a morality of laughing and mocking at all moral precepts to the point of attacking social movements all together still be considered a libertarian? Would this thinker who wanted us to live and dance and not to be preoccupied with the oughts and don'ts but who was realistic enough to realize that this is an impossible task to ask from this weak animal called man so he had to invent a new name for it: Overman, be pleased with the qualification anarchist? Can we still ask the question if the writer of Zarathustra, the preacher of the strong will, of living beyond moral precepts, of being able to invent ones

own life and not to be submissive to anything at all, the most libertarian of all philosophers, Friedrich Nietzsche, is an anarchist?

As said, he would be the first to roar with laughter at such a question. Probably he would take his hammer out and attack anarchism with the same vehemence he attacked almost everything. He would remind us that the only life worth living is the one we make ourselves beyond any label or ideology: *'primum vivere deinde philosophare'* (live first philosophize later).

Still, the book I have in front of me poses this question and tries to answer it in eleven essays. *I Am not A Man, I Am Dynamite*, edited by John Moore with Spencer Sunshine, claims to look in detail to Nietzsche and the anarchist tradition. It may be of no surprise, all the authors consider the German moustache in line with anarchism. Still, this is remarkable. Nietzsche is so overtly against authoritarianism that it is almost impossible to read him otherwise. Yes, Nietzsche has had some bad publicity in the past, but that was mainly by people who didn't make the effort to read him and because of the travesty his sister made of his unpublished work. Since the beginning of the 1980s, when the edition of the complete works by Colli and Montinari appeared, we are not dependent any more on dubious editions by the *'Nachlass'*. The completed edition was also responsible for new books on Nietzsche that left behind them his so-called relation with Fascism and other dubious figures. French philosophers paid tribute to him and with the discovering of modern French philosophy outside France Nietzsche has widely been acclaimed as one of the most influential sources of post-modern philosophy. Nowadays, almost 30 years after, very few will even think of Nietzsche's involvement with oppressing philosophies.

Although some of the essays draw on the work of French Philosophers like Deleuze Foucault and Derrida (for instance Franco Riccio's analysis of the death of God and contemporary thinking), the main canon of the book is seeking for parallels between Nietzsche's philosophy and the classical writings of anarchism and libertarian socialism – such as Saul Newman's article on the relation between Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals* and the writings of Bakunin and Kropotkin, Daniel Colson's contribution on the relation between Nietzsche and the Libertarian Workers Movement, and Leigh Starcross on Emma Goldman's lectures in the USA. This difference in approaches is not explained in the introduction. The editor sadly passed out before the completion of the book which was subsequently finished by Spencer Sunshine. So, the introduction is a necrology of John Moore. The article by Guy Aldred more or less sets the stage in presenting the main issue of Nietzsche as an anarchist. He explains the importance of Nietzsche's individualism for social movements. In the end Nietzsche is of course an advocate of individualism. But in order to have a social movement we need individuals who are able to be social. A real social movement should not be purely an expression of resentment but a movement of free individuals. As the authors clearly explain, Nietzsche shows the way.

So, it sounds like it is a book proving a point already well made. But that is not fair. What is interesting is the struggle to identify Nietzsche as an inspiration source for libertarian social action and therefore an attempt to take him out of academic philosophy. It shows how squatters, antiglobalists, anarcho-syndicalists, find in

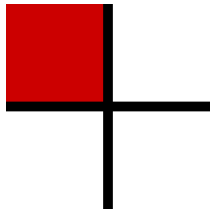
Nietzsche and Deleuze's reading of him a ground for their actions and a broadening of Nietzsche's philosophy into the praxis of social movements. Philosophy almost becomes practical and enriches a tradition of social struggle with the libertarian morality of the free spirit.

By doing so, it opens the way to a further integration of Nietzsche's thought into protest movements. It takes Nietzsche outside academia into the streets, the squatted buildings, alternative cultural centres and the like. And then of course the old nagging question appears again; how can we make theory that is useful for political action? After all I'm writing this review from a very comfortable office surrounded by books and trying to be erudite. A transvaluation of all values looks quite different from the streets. Maybe radical political activism has leaned too long on an established social theory and has now turned into the moral struggle Nietzsche envisaged. After all, God is dead. Even the God of socialist utopia.

A concept of Dionysian politics, for instance, as it is put forward by Andrew Koch in his essay on Dionysian politics, opens up a new perspective on radical protest. A light-hearted protest that is willing to dance and to laugh even about serious matters like social change. In the end Nietzsche expresses a libertarian political philosophy of living without imposed structures that make us despise ourselves. As said, he leads the way into a politics of creation of aesthetic judgement without founding morality. Therefore man has first to recognize the lack of a foundation of values; he has to be able to live in a bottomless world beyond metaphysics. It is the light-heartedness of Koch's programme, the willingness to laugh at the own enterprise that brings it beyond the mere translation of a philosophy into praxis. Nietzsche, as a strong antidote against all too high ideas of ourselves, makes us laugh even at our ideals. This is not only an inspiration for libertarian activist but also for academics and certainly for management and organization scholars.

**the author**

Ruud Kaulingfreks studied sociology and philosophy at Santiago de Chile, Tiburg and Amsterdam. After working for 15 years in art schools he moved to organization studies and became a management consultant. Currently he combines his consultancy work with academic work at the University for Humanistics at Utrecht. He is a member of the CPPE at the University of Leicester. Since he has not forgotten about his aesthetic passions, in his research he combines philosophy, art and organization theory. He lives in Rotterdam and would like to travel and climb mountains much more than he does now. E-mail: kaulingfreks@luna.nl



## Gift, She Said

Valérie Fournier

**review of:** G. Vaughan (ed.) (2004) *The Gift, Il Dono: A Feminist Analysis*. Rome: Meltemi editore (pbk, 334p, 15 Euros, ISBN 8883533437)

This mammoth volume consists in 27 contributions inspired by Genevieve Vaughan's theorization of the gift economy; it offers a wide range of personal reflections on the ways in which the idea of the gift can help us reconstruct social and economic relations on more generous, sustainable and caring basis: on the basis of an ethic of care and generosity rather than greed and self-interest.

The book opens with a short introduction (in English and Italian) and a lengthier paper by Genevieve Vaughan outlining her theorization of the gift economy, and is followed by 25 contributions that all play a variation on the tune of the gift from different perspectives. Indeed, this diversity is one of the strengths of the book. Contributors include women from the Global South and North, from academic and non-academic backgrounds, tackling a wide range of issues (justice, biodiversity, nursing, education, indigenous people's relationships to the land, matriarchy, community radio) from very different positions (as mothers, activists, researchers, victims of oppression, poets, spiritual healers, community workers...) and disciplines (philosophy, anthropology, sociology, linguistics, semiotics, ethnobotany, education sciences). The wealth of voices and experiences included in the book provides a fitting illustration of the principle of abundance central to the gift economy.

But before saying more about the diversity of these contributions, it seems opportune to outline the idea of the gift economy. According to Vaughan and many of her fellow contributors, the 'gift paradigm' exists both within and outside 'patriarchal capitalism' but has been made invisible by the predominance of 'exchange'. The gift economy and the exchange economy are defined in contradistinction to each other, and here it is useful to outline some of the contrasts that are drawn. Whilst relations of exchange are brought to visibility through the acts of identification and calculations that are required to establish equivalence between what is given and what is received, gift giving remains mainly hidden within 'patriarchal capitalism'. By definition a gift does not establish

claims of 'equivalent' return, or any return for that matter. This raises an important issue that is rightly raised by Vaughan, if gift giving does not make any claim about its value, how can it be brought to visibility, how can it be re-valued, or recognised, without becoming subsumed by the competing logic of exchange? As Vaughan suggests, by definition, the gift economy can't compete with exchange since it refuses the very principle of competition, "it loses the competition by not competing" (p. 22).

The gift and exchange economies also produce two different kinds of subjectivities. The exchange logic produces ego-oriented subjectivities governed by self-interest, it encourages competition and hierarchy by setting people against each other in the calculation of equivalence, of who has more or less, or who owes what. On the other hand, the gift logic produces other-oriented subjectivities governed by the principle of nurturing. Here it is the figure of the mother nurturing the child that provides the gender basis and the imagery of the gift logic. Mothering is based on unilateral giving from the mother to the dependent child, without expectation of return as the child can't give back. But if mothering, grounded in giving without receiving back, symbolises (for many of the contributors) the economy of giving, many other examples of other-orientation, of acts of generosity, are offered in the book. For example, in a chapter on 'Education as a Gift', Eila Estola finds this orientation towards satisfying the needs of others in the narrative identity of teachers. Rauna Kuokkanen also vividly illustrates this other-orientation with the example of the Sami's (the indigenous population in the northern tip of Europe, now divided between the nation states of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia) gift to the dead and the land. Similarly, Susan Lee Solar and Susan Bright find this other orientation in the Restorative Justice Movement, a model of justice based on forgiving and reconciliation that seeks to break the cycle of violence engendered by eye to eye, retaliative justice. They offer powerful and moving stories of mothers who have reached out to the murderers of their own son in acts of healing, who have offered reconciliation in front of the sense of despair and brokenness of the murderers.

Another point of distinction between the gift economy and the exchange economy outlined in the volume is the contrast between abundance and scarcity. The logic of exchange requires scarcity for people to be willing to trade, to give up things against other goods they need. On the other hand, the gift economy is based on abundance, an abundance that according to the various contributions in this volume is to be found, for example, in the 'free gifts of nature' (e.g. water, biodiversity, the capacity of the earth to produce enough food to feed the planet), traditional knowledge of plants and agriculture, the care a mother gives to a child, communication (as Genevieve Vaughan points out, language provides the ideal gift economy as everyone has the 'means of production' and participation), the free and open information to be found on the net through open system software... But, as Ana Isla poignantly illustrates in her chapter on 'Dispossessing the local commons by credit', such abundance has often been artificially transformed into scarcity through the commoditisation and privatisation of land, biodiversity, and traditional knowledge. She provides a well informed account of how Third World Debt has been used as leverage by banks, corporations and international institutions representing the Global North to dispossess people in the South from communal resources, and create scarcity out of abundance.



So, the volume provides a conceptual framework for envisaging an alternative economy to global capitalism, and provides evidence that the bases of the gift economy are already with us, and have always been. The gift economy may have been hidden and trivialised by capitalism and the exchange paradigm on which it relies, but it is manifested in the generosity of nature, of motherly care, of communication. The task is to bring these everyday acts of giving to visibility and build upon them. However, as several of the authors recognise, there is a danger in seeking to revalorise gift giving; that is, it could easily be reduced to relationships of exchange, as has been done in much anthropological research. Rauna Kuokkanen develops this point particularly well in her essay on 'The gift as a world view in indigenous thought'. She argues that from Mauss' classical essay on the gift, anthropological studies have re-inscribed 'giving' within economic relations of exchange; indeed, Mauss talked of gift exchange, of contracts and purchases. He accounted for indigenous gifts to gods or nature in terms of 'sacrifices' through which people exchanged contracts with the spirits of the dead and the gods. This view of the gift as a mode of exchange characterised by obligations, counter-gifts, paybacks, forced reciprocity, and even violence has informed most anthropological studies and modern studies of the gift. For example, Bourdieu sees the gift as a mark of symbolic violence which is 'the most economic mode of domination'. From this perspective, gifts give power to the giver and work through the accumulation of social capital in the form of 'debt', homage, respect, loyalty. To counter this classical view of the gift, Kuokkanen provides the example of the Sami people's 'grave gifts' and gifts to nature. She argues that these gifts have no 'economic function' of expected return, but serve to establish continuity between the living and the dead, connectedness between humans and the land on which they depend not only for 'survival' but also as a repository of traditions, culture, and knowledge. These gifts should not be seen as 'sacrifice', as suggested by Mauss, as this would imply some forced giving in the hope of receiving something back, in other words it would re-inscribe the gift within a relationships of exchange based on 'forced reciprocity'. According to Kuokkanen, in order to save gift giving from relationships of exchange, we need a different conceptualisation of reciprocity; and she offers the notion of circular reciprocity. For Kuokkanen, gift giving works according to the logic of circular reciprocity; this kind of reciprocity is not reduced to 'give and take' relationships but works through connectedness and sharing, through keeping the gift moving. Circular reciprocity affirms the myriad relationships that stem from collective necessity; it is based on a world view that sees the well-being of the living, the dead and the land and closely intertwined.

In sum, this book sends a welcome message of hope by going beyond providing a feminist critique of global capitalism, and offering an alternative based on generosity and gift. As Kaarina Kailo suggests in her piece, whilst Vaughan's thesis is clearly situated within the tradition of Marxist feminism that sees women's labour as an unacknowledged source of capital accumulation, it moves on to more positive ground. It proposes to conceptualise women's 'free labour', but also the 'free gifts' of nature, not merely in terms of exploitation, but also as offering the basis for building a different economic paradigm, saving women from the position of helpless, exploited victims in the process.

However, there are also many problems with the book, some related to Vaughan's thesis itself (but replicated in many of the contributions that draw upon it); others related to the uneven quality of the various contributions.

One of the fundamental problems of Vaughan's thesis is its incoherent position on gender essentialism. On the one hand, Vaughan refutes biological essentialism by suggesting that women's commonality comes from what they do rather than what they are. Vaughan insists that gender is a 'relational quality', a process rather than a biological property. On the other hand, essentialism seems to creep back in two forms in various parts of her account of the gift economy: firstly there are sometimes strong hints of biological essentialism, and secondly essentialism points its head in terms of universalist claims about 'womanhood'. On the first point, Vaughan's position against biological essentialism in her analysis of 'womanhood' is difficult to reconcile with the connections she draws between male competitive and aggressive behaviour characteristic of capitalism and war, and the possession of a penis:

Since the penis is the identifying property of those in the non nurturing category, 'male', it is not surprising that the individuals and the groups that are competing for dominance provide themselves with even larger and more dangerous category markers. From sticks to swords and from guns to missiles. (p. 21-22)

Thus whilst womanhood is not grounded in biology, manhood seems to be so. In addition, whilst Vaughan refutes (albeit inconsistently) biological essentialism, she resorts to another form of essentialism: universalism. Whilst she denies that women commonality is rooted in biology, she still assumes that there are some universal patterns, traits, characteristics that make up womanhood (and manhood) and provide the bases for the development of gendered economic identities. Thus for Vaughan, "women are similar because they make themselves by making others through satisfying their needs unlitary, beyond the exchange process" (p. 32). This other orientation means that women's identities are strongly anchored in the gift economy, even if they come to participate in the exchange economy by entering the labour market. Women "remain in the gift logic in many parts of their lives, even when they have been absorbed into the market and see the world mainly through the eye glasses of the exchange paradigm" (p. 23).

This simultaneous denial of biological essentialism and reliance on universalist forms of essentialism is reproduced in many of the other contributions in the book. For example, Kaarina Kailo, having stressed the non-essentialist position of Vaughan goes on to suggest that "girls as a group are more sensitive to the environment, they are less racist and also more collaborative in their working lives" (p. 60). This connection between womanhood and the environment could have been grounded in a material analysis of the sexual division of labour; thus, for example, some ecofeminist such as Plumwood (1993) or Warren (1997) see women's predominant role in traditional agriculture and household management (cooking, food production, child care, health care) as providing the basis for their close understanding of, and sympathy towards, the environment. However, no such explanation is offered here. In addition, some contributions seem to re-introduce biological essentialism. For example, Hildur Ve claims that "without arguing for a special women's essence, I find it important to take as a point of departure the experience and learning that result from the bearing of, giving birth to and nurturing

of children” (p. 119). This begs the question of how this position that foregrounds childbearing differs from a biologically essentialist one, and what this means for women who do not bear children.

In sum, the position of Vaughan and her fellow contributors on essentialism is problematic on several counts: firstly it is inconsistent by on the one hand explicitly rejecting biological essentialism, on the other hand sometimes resorting to claims that come close to biological determinism. Secondly, it relies on universalist claims about womanhood, thus women’s commonality may be grounded in what they do rather than in their biology, but it remains that women are assumed to share something that clearly inscribes them within the gift economy. The articulation of a common experience giving women a common voice has long been considered problematic within feminism (e.g. Butler, 1992; hooks, 1990; Rich, 1980) since it is based on representations of women that privilege certain experiences (e.g. white, middle class, heterosexual...) and tend to exclude and silence others (e.g. black, working class, lesbian...). As suggested above, some have tried to ground the articulation of women’s common experiences in a material analysis of the sexual division of labour, whilst others have tried to reconcile non-essentialist conceptualisations of womanhood with the deployment of strategic essentialism as a political weapon with which women can, at least temporarily, speak with a common voice in the face of a common enemy (e.g. Braidotti, 1994; Fuss, 1989; Sturgeon, 1997). However, no such argument for justifying universalist claims is offered in this book.

Another problem in Vaughan’s thesis, also reproduced in some of the other contributions, is the assumed primordial nature of the gift over exchange. For example, Vaughan asserts that “gifts are ... prior to exchange” (p. 26). Such assertions are problematic on several counts. Firstly no explanation is provided as to why we should be convinced that this is the case. Secondly, it has a jarring moralistic tone that not only fails to convince but is also dangerous. Just like invoking some divine law, or law of nature, invoking the primordial nature of the gift presents the potential danger of totalitarianism. Does it mean that we should simply and uncritically accept the superiority of the gift economy over other economic models because of its presumed pre-existence? Even if we accept that gift preceded exchange, why should this make it ‘better’? This primordialism appears in many of the other contributions. For example, for Lee Ann Labar, in the gift economy, “we are all able to be our natural selves” (p. 299); for Kaarina Kailo “patriarchy is a societal disease, while gift giving creates an alignment with nature” (p. 61). Both Heide Gotter-Abendroth and Hildur Ve make a similar move in relation to matriarchy that is taken to be an “originary system” (p. 124) whilst patriarchy is ‘derivative’. Throughout these arguments, it is as if invoking the connection between gift and nature (a connection that is simply asserted) was proof enough of the goodness and moral superiority of the ‘gift’. However, we could ask why give such prominence and moral weight to nature (especially, if the authors also profess to adopt an anti-essentialist view)? Why should nature be assumed to be ‘good’? And how would the author adjudicate on what is / isn’t nature? Moreover, this primordialism is not only problematic but also unnecessary to the stance the authors of this volume want to take: if the aim is to offer the gift economy as an alternative to global capitalism, the contributors to this volume could have relied on ethical arguments,

arguments that would of course not be grounded in the certainty or superiority of 'nature' but in uncertain ethical choices.

A third problem with Vaughan's thesis is that it tends to collapse patriarchy, capitalism, exchange economy, neoliberalism... as if we could all agree that all these terms indexed the same thing. Whilst equating neoliberalism, capitalism and exchange might be less problematic; conflating (without much discussion) capitalism and patriarchy is more problematic. Vaughan talks of 'patriarchal capitalism', this system is allegedly based on a world view that sees everything in terms of exchange; but does that mean that there is a non-patriarchal form of capitalism? Are patriarchy and capitalism the same thing? If so, how did it come to be so? These questions are unfortunately not considered. This conflation and loose usage of concepts is again reproduced in other chapters in the volume; for example, Bhanumati Natarajan claims that: "Patriarchal institutions of capitalism have expanded more than ever due to the mantra of globalisation, which goes beyond privatisation, taking control of biodiversity and knowledge for control of people's lives, just as colonisation did 500 years ago" (p. 113). I certainly do not wish to defend capitalism, patriarchy, or globalisation from the critique to which they are subjected, but simply would suggest that the critique could have been more powerful had its terms (globalisation, capitalism, patriarchy) be used and connected more sharply.

In addition to these substantive problems related to Vaughan's thesis, and repeated in many other contributions, there are also problems of form and structure with the collection. Each of the contribution picks up on Vaughan's gift economy, but does not always add much to it in the way of either empirical illustration or conceptual refinement ...In addition, it is not clear how some of the contributions are related to the notion of the gift. For example, Frieda Werden's describes community radio as a 'gift of sounds'; perhaps, but the connection would need to be teased out a bit more. This sense of repetition of Vaughan's thesis, and disconnection between this framework and some of the empirical material discussed in the chapters make the book rather disjointed. The incoherent structure of the book as a whole, and of some of the individual chapters, is exacerbated by the uneven quality of the writing. In many of the contributions, the analysis too often proceeds by vast over-generalisations that may be 'worthy' but are rather simplistic. Thus we are often left with wild assertions that are not grounded either in theoretical or empirical discussion. For example, Paola Mechiori is able to claim that "the gift launches you into the future and at the same time is rooted in the wisdoms of the past, with the conviction that the only future we have lies in the ability to recreate the knowledge, technology and wisdoms that come from the deeply rooted laws that can help us to survive: the logic of relationship, which is the logic of the only 'real economy' in the best sense of this word" (p. 207). On an equally grand note, Rokeya Begum affirms that "women, whether as feminists, activist or as mothers, daughters, wives, have a passion towards human values" (p. 221), and Leslene della Madre claims that "The mother culture is a far different culture than this patriarchal one in which we are all trying to survive. The mother culture is free from violence, domination and control. It is rooted in the earth, and is governed by the magical rhythms of the moon-mind" (p. 309). The list could go on but I think this is sufficient to give a flavour of the problematic tone of the writing. Such wide assertions are not only groundless, but they are also not particularly helpful in finding ways in which the gift economy can be built upon. It could of course be argued that this is not meant to be a purely academic book,

that indeed its strength is to combine academic and non-academic voices, and that therefore it is exempt of dry scholarship. Maybe, but this does not exempt it from formulating convincing argumentation that would strengthen the case for the gift economy.

In sum, I think that despite the flaws in conceptualisation I outlined above (essentialism, primordialism, conflation of concepts) some of the chapters in this volume make a worthwhile contribution to the feminist literature by providing a message of hope for the development and possibility of alternative economies. The imagery and practice of gift giving reported in some of the pieces in this book offer strong bases and evocative material for constructing alternative economies to global capitalism. Even with the problems mentioned above, there are some thoughtful chapters, in particular Genevieve Vaughan's own introductory two papers, Rauna Kuokkanen's piece on 'The gift as a world view in indigenous thought', Mechthild Hart's piece on 'Transnational feminist politics: Being at home in the world', Ana Isla's wiring on 'Dispossessing the local commons by credit' and Susan Lee Solar and Susan Bright's work on restorative justice. It is a shame, however, that the inspirational nature of these few pieces gets drowned in a sea of cumbersome and unconvincing discussion.

#### references

- Braidotti, R. (1994) *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and sexual difference in contemporary feminist theory*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Butler, J. (1992) 'Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the question of postmodernism,' in J. Butler and J. Scott (eds.) *Feminists Theorize the Political*. New York: Routledge, 3-21.
- hooks, b. (1990) 'Feminism: A transformational politics,' in D. Rhodes (ed.) *Theoretical perspectives on Sexual Difference*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 185-193.
- Plumwood, V. (1993) *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. London: Routledge.
- Rich, A. (1980) 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,' *Signs*, 5: 631-660.
- Sturgeon, N. (1997) *Ecofeminist Natures*. London: Routledge.
- Warren, K. (ed.) (1997) *Ecofeminism: Women, Nature, Culture*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

#### the author

Valérie Fournier is Senior Lecturer in Organization Studies at the University of Leicester. She has taught undergraduate and postgraduate courses in Organisational Behaviour, Organisation Studies, HRM, Gender & Organisations, and more recently Alternative Organisations and Economies. Her writing so far has been concerned with disciplinary practices, subjectivity and embodiment in organisations, and has been published in a range of sociological and organisational journals such as *Body & Society*, *Gender, Work & Organization*, *Organization* and *The Sociological Review*. Her current research interests centre on alternative organisations and economies and include: rural economies and sustainable development, alternative forms of exchange and markets, co-operative and communal organisational structures, and critical pedagogy. She currently divides her time between the University of Leicester and various rural communes in France and Italy.  
E-mail: vf18@le.ac.uk



[www.ephemeraweb.org](http://www.ephemeraweb.org)

**editorial collective**

Steffen Böhm

Damian O'Doherty

Tony O'Shea

Alf Rehn

Bent Meier Sørensen

André Spicer

Sverre Spoelstra

Sian Sullivan

Jussi Vähämäki

Katie Vann

Akseli Virtanen

Samantha Warren