

# ephemera

*theory & politics in organization*

© ephemera 2006  
ISSN 1473-2866  
[www.ephemeraweb.org](http://www.ephemeraweb.org)  
volume 6(4): 391-525

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## **Experience, Movement and the Creation of New Political Forms**

Brett Neilson and Ned Rossiter

This collection of essays was born somewhere between Moscow and Beijing. While the *ephemera* conference on the trans-Siberian train has already inspired an issue of this journal, the experience of that journey would raise, for some who were on the train, a number of issues that go way beyond that which unfolded between these points of departure and arrival. At stake are a series of questions about experience, movement and political life that were neither loaded nor unloaded with the baggage carried by each participant. More than the conference's content, it was its form that interested us – which is to say its organizational process. 'Organization without ends' was one way in which this process was repeatedly described – a practice that intervenes at the level of human potentialities rather than some goal-oriented activity. A bringing together of bodies and minds not in common cause but in movement: attraction and rejection, combination and withdrawal.

As with every passage between content and form, however, there is a remainder. No experience can present itself as immediate without exhibiting something of what it must exclude in order to constitute itself as an experience. This is the detritus of present life, a kind of unwanted surplus that knocks down the laboratory walls of political experimentation, leaving each subject 'alone with others'. Perhaps once it was possible to identify neutral circumstances against which to establish spaces of experimentation, laboratory conditions – whether temporarily autonomous or otherwise. But with the emptying of political modernity – the double system of rights and representation and all its implied institutions – this 'normality' had receded before the exceptional economic forces of neoliberalism. Never before has the invisible hand been so visible! No longer can the institutions of modernity function as a placebo. There are no more 'models' or handrails.

How then to give political form to diverse and arbitrary experiences, which at once manifest the generic capacities of the human being but also are a site of contestation (since experience is never self-evident or merely 'given')? This is the fundamental question we posed to the contributors to this issue of *ephemera*, both those who write about the trans-Siberian and those on an altogether different trip.

The sheer difficulty of this question is evident in the essays that follow. Everyone seems to recognise the need for new political or institutional forms, but no-one seems to know how to construct them. But perhaps this is because construction is the wrong metaphor? Perhaps the gap between experience and organization is forever closed. How then to occupy a space that no longer exists? How to search for that crucial break or political opening, when the possibility of living outside or beneath the screens of control seems ever less possible? Aside from the tired formulations of *being inside and against* or the activist's vocational zeal, there is a need to derive new forms of creative resistance and political relation. This is the *Aufgabe* to which the current issue of *ephemera* is dedicated.

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# Towards a Political Anthropology of New Institutional Forms

Brett Neilson and Ned Rossiter

## abstract

Exploring the connections between experience, movement and the creation of new political forms requires a fundamental anthropological investigation into the seeming human need for institutions. While the early twentieth century ‘philosophical anthropology’ developed by figures like Arnold Gehlen and Günther Anders provides some initial clues in this regard, recent debates concerning the organization of networked political forms require a rethinking of the negative vision of technics articulated by the conservative philosophical consciousness. Thinking the seeming limitlessness of experience in relation to the seeming need for determination in politics, the text asks how experience can function as a generative principle in the creation of new institutional forms immanent to the dynamics of social-technical networks.

What is the link between experience, movement and the creation of new political forms? We ask this question with both a sense of exhaustion and expectation, boredom and urgency. As Nietzsche taught us so magisterially in ‘The Uses and Abuses of History for Life’, amnesia is no less dangerous than nostalgia. It is always propitious to be suspicious of the new. Yet perhaps now, more than at the time of this particular philosopher’s senescence, there is also reason to be suspicious of the old. With this term, we refer above all to the political forms of modernity: primarily the institutional architecture of the nation-state and its subsidiary forms – the parliament, the army, the university, and so on – but also the trade union, the party, and the firm (in its extraterritorial as well as local manifestations). To be certain, there is a ploy in describing modern institutions as old. Let’s face it. Some of the postnationalist rhetoric of the 1990s was as inflated as the dot.com bubble.<sup>1</sup> And, while no one was naïve enough to claim that entities like the Union of Myanmar or the Belgium Federal Parliament would suddenly disappear, we now have more detailed accounts of the ways in which neoliberalism invests itself in specific regulatory environments and how the capabilities of nation-states can enhance global processes.<sup>2</sup>

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1 We have in mind texts such as Appadurai (1996) and Hardt and Negri (2000).

2 See, for instance, Wang (2003), Harvey (2006) or Sassen (2006).

In a certain sense, however, we feel closer to the earlier postnational articulations than these later sociological descriptions. This is because the question for us is not whether modern institutions still exist or even whether they should exist. The answer to the former is surely incontrovertible, while the second begs the convenience of the high moral ground. What interests us are rather the possibilities for the creation of new political forms and the ways in which such possibilities are enhanced or restricted by the existing institutional architectures. For some time now it has been clear that novel forms of organization have begun to challenge the top down, vertical-horizontal, representative institutions of modernity and their rights-based notions of political life. In response, the existing institutions have attempted to ward off these new organizational practices or to absorb and imitate them, often under the mantle of policy directives encouraging ‘innovation’, ‘creativity’, and the like. In reality, however, the existing institutions have tended merely to adapt to prevailing global circumstances, rather than to actively innovate in ways that seek to intervene upon or change these conditions. It is time to ask whether new organizational practices, which have largely evolved around fragile practices of techno-social networking, might be given some more sustainable institutional form. The question is at once dangerous and crucial: dangerous because such institutionalization seems to threaten routinization and the closure of possibilities, crucial because networked modes of organization, despite the potentialities they harbour for new forms of political relation and expression, have as yet been inadequate to address the key contingencies, needs, and uncertainties that define contemporary labour and life.

Why then pose the question of political form on the cusp of experience and movement? In doing this we certainly don’t hope to provide some kind of twelve step program or how-to. These terms signal instead a different sense or register of politics, equally remote from the social contract and political theology, identity politics and micropolitics, activist conviction or libertarian dropping out. In this sense our proposal invites attack or dismissal from across the ideological spectrum of constituted politics. That is easy. Refusing to address the variegated conditions of many and desiring instead a retreat into the harbour of false security, such critique gets us nowhere other than reproducing the *ressentiment* so cogently demolished by Nietzsche. Invention, we maintain, is a resource to mine as it subsists within the realm of experience. Movement individuates form – which can be understood as the contours, properties and communication of an organizing capacity – from the distribution of experience. As forces in tension, it is this doubling of movement – individuation coupled with distribution – that comprises ‘the political’ that attends the invention of new institutional forms. How to negotiate such tensions is a question of governance, and below we outline some general principles of how this pertains to networks.

The notion of experience calls our attention to immanent modes of sociality whose significance derives not from representation or interpretation but from phenomenal life itself. As opposed to experiment, which takes place under controlled conditions and seeks to create verifiable incremental knowledge, experience is always contingent. Whether accumulated or fleeting, remembered or immediate, coherent or jumbled, experience materializes in, or, perhaps more accurately, creates specific forms of life. We could say that, through experience, ontology reveals itself phenomenologically – a situation which means that sensation, affect, and aesthetics acquire an important role in

political life.<sup>3</sup> Yet, despite this creative and relational impulse, experience does not supply firm grounds of evidence or authority. As Joan Scott writes, what “counts as experience is neither self-evident nor straightforward; it is always contested, and always therefore political” (1991: 797). To comprehend such politics is to begin to ask hard questions not only about how the seeming expansiveness of experience relates to limits and closure but also about how this tension conditions the possibilities for the emergence of new institutional forms.

Movement, unlike experience, is a term with immediate political resonance insofar as it describes nongovernmental forms of organization often associated with activist networks and their complex practices of horizontal connection and multiscalar engagement: new social movements, the movement of movements, global civil society, and so on. These modes of organization are certainly relevant to our investigation. Indeed, they provide some of its most fertile grounds. Already there exist many groups that embody and conduct research into these organizational modes, exploring the potentialities of practices such as swarming, the role of information technologies, or the possibilities for occupying and exploiting the institutional gaps created by the construction of multilevel political systems (for instance, in the contexts of the EU constitutional debates, educational reforms associated with the Bologna Process and the new discursive legitimacy obtained by civil society organizations participating in the UN’s World Summit on the Information Society). But it is not only and not primarily this sort of movement that we want to discuss. We are interested in the experience of movement as such – that is, movement in the kinetic sense. The tendency to attribute political status to the activities of social movements but to understand actual physical movement as apolitical is one that has received criticism from those who understand the mobility of migrants, particularly undocumented migrants, to pose a challenge to modern forms of political organization. As one of us explains in an article co-written with Angela Mitropoulos:

In the case of struggles surrounding undocumented migration, the very notion of movement fractures along a biopolitical or racialised axis: between movement understood in a political register (as political actors and/or forces more or less representable) and movement undertaken in a kinetic sense (as a passage between points on the globe or from one point to an unknown or unreachable destination). To keep these two senses of movement separate not only denies political meaning to the passages of migration but, also, fails to think through the complexities of political movement as such, not simply as the incompleteness and risk of every politics but, more crucially, as the necessarily kinetic aspects of political movements that might be something more, or indeed other, than representational. (Mitropoulos and Neilson, 2006a)

Without fully rehearsing this argument, we can say that movement, understood as kinesis, involves not only mobility in space but also in time (it is at once temporalized and temporalizing). In other words, movement unfolds in the relation between potential and act. Whether this relation is conceived as one of negativity or convergence, it implies a complication of the ends-driven ethos of action, which has always been held to constitute the political in the traditional sense (Neilson, 2004). Consequently, the kinesis of movement calls into question many of the shibboleths of modern politics, including the need for a sovereign body that can exercise the power of decision, identify

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3 On the role of sense and affect in the contemporary expression of political power see Neilson (2005).

an enemy, and organize itself by means of an autolegitimating constitution. In such movement, the moment of self-valorization or self-representation is subtracted or given over to a dynamism or interminable negotiation of difference that eludes the mirage of a *telos* or an end. This is why one way of describing the new institutional forms that might emerge in and through the experience of movement is to say that they involve ‘organization without ends’ or ‘organizing the unorganizable’.<sup>4</sup> Such formulations are more than elegant paradoxes or easy invocations of social complexity. They signal the real challenges faced by political creativity in an institutional environment still dominated by the market and state.

Experience and movement then do not denote purely categorical or self-motivating ways of being: the experience of experience or movement for the sake of movement. It would be wrong to understand them either as unrestrained potentialities or foundational blocks for an alternative politics. They are always implicated in practices of control and, thus, remain limited. But it is precisely with respect to these constraints or, more accurately, the borders imposed upon politics by modernity, that new institutional forms might be grasped in their incipiency. We are not interested in crossing borders simply to get to the other side. For it may be that the capabilities fashioned in the modern institutional environment can be recast, and perhaps radically so, within a new organizing logic. It is the moment of border crossing itself, with all its risk and untimeliness, which draws the immanence of experience and the indefiniteness of movement into an unstable and creative relation. There are also some practical considerations to take into account here. When economic resources are scarce, networks that wish to undertake a scalar transformation are compelled to draw on that which is available, however fragile that may be. It is in this sense that we understand the strategic (non- or counter-sovereign) decision to organize by drawing on the generic capacities of post-Fordist life: experience and movement.

At stake here is not only the question of the inheritance of modern politics, whether posed as the responsibility to choose one’s heritage or understood as that which, through our struggles, chooses us.<sup>5</sup> To derive new ways of being political we must be prepared to travel to the very edge of politics. Only at this limit might we question both the modern tendency to reduce the political to technics and administration and the opposite but equally modern propensity to imagine politics only as spontaneous transgression. If the challenge is to give sustainable constitution to networked forms of multiplicity without destroying their constitutive fragility and flexibility, there is a need to ask difficult questions about the partiality of politics, the potentialities inherent in technical practices, and the apparent human need for institutions – not just modern institutions but all institutions. This is a mode of investigation that draws us immediately to anthropological issues.

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4 The references are to Virtanen, A. (2005) and to Florian Schneider’s 2004 documentary film, *Organizing the Unorganizable*.

5 On these (opposed) positions on political heritage see Derrida and Roudinesco (2004) and Gabri’s (2004) interview with Brian Holmes.

## Institutions and Security

Institutions are always related to the question of security. Let us be clear. We are not speaking of this or that institution, say, the family, the university, the Duma, or the Enron Corporation. Nor do we wish to analyse the sociological processes, complete or incomplete, of institutionalisation, which have always been a source of anxiety for those who seek to embody alternative political lives. Rather, we wish to consider the way in which institutions habitualize and stabilize patterns of thought, feeling, judgement and action. The word institution, in this sense, describes a pattern of human relation. It sits alongside other words such as community, network, or movement. But, unlike these words, it implies a degree of rigidity or predictability: one that, in the modern context, is all too quickly associated with the operations of hierarchy, bureaucracy, or the Weberian concept of rationalization. What we want to explore is something more fundamental and anthropological – not simply institutions as they establish themselves under conditions of modernity, neoliberalism, or whatever, but institutional form as such. And this, we suggest, involves an engagement with the question of security in its properly political sense.<sup>6</sup>

Our motives for this investigation are twofold. First, they derive from an uneasiness with some of the more reactive discourses against the current neoconservative rhetoric of security. Without doubt, there is a real urgency to deconstruct and criticize the securitization of political discourse that is promoted across the formal political spectrum today. But there also exist situations where issues of security need to be addressed, politically developed and articulated. This is already occurring in the discussions concerning precarity and precariousness, which seek to address the issue of security in ways that go well beyond the issue of job tenure to encompass matters of housing, debt, affective relations, and even the vulnerable ontological condition of the human animal itself (Neilson and Rossiter, 2005). Indeed, it is in the context of the current precarity movements that some of the most interesting efforts to create new institutional forms have taken shape.<sup>7</sup> There is, however, a tendency among some actors in these contexts to appeal to the state to address (and resolve) their precarious lives and working conditions. This can reinforce expectations that the modern state can and should intervene to provide stability (through policy initiatives that seek to shore up the current uncertainties of labour and life against some Fordist or Keynesian norm). Such expectations could even bolster the dominant ‘terror’-reactive (and ‘terror’-perpetuating) security rhetoric, which certainly promotes the fiction that the state adds stability and continuity to contemporary lives, if not carefully articulated with respect to issues of war and global conflict. There is thus a need to separate the question of security from the modern institutional environment or, at least, from the notion that this environment is the only or most effective one in which to address issues of precariousness and instability.

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6 Our comments here are guided by the remarks on institutions by Sandro Mezzadra in Bojadžijev and Saint-Saëns (2006).

7 We are thinking of the radical investigations carried out by groups such as Precarias a la deriva, <http://sindominio.net/karakola/precarias.htm>, visited 10 October 2006, or the precarity webring, <http://www.precarity-map.net/>, visited 10 October 2006.

This leads to our second reason for raising the question of institutional form. What concern us are the diminishing opportunities for political expression within institutional settings where power intervenes to control the potentiality of thought. The situation we face is one that can no longer be fully analysed using concepts like hegemony or governmentality. We are in the midst of a general anthropological transition where the species-being of human beings, which is without any function and always open to change, is appropriated and subordinated to the specific tasks and aims of a particular historical period. What is at stake is not an attempt to censor individuals or deprive them of a voice, but rather the establishment of power over minds and the collaboration of minds. Power, in this context, operates through moods and sentiments, through the creation of shared beliefs and common opinions. Its point of application is no longer simply the body and the biological processes of life. It operates not on the level of acts or products but rather on the level of possibilities. And thus it cannot be questioned or opposed through a politics focused on outcomes or ends. If, under these circumstances, we seek to create new ways of being political, it is in the struggle for the direction of this transition (Virtanen and Vähämäki, 2005). And this means intervening in the present, searching for new institutional forms, and constructing alternative networks of political association. Moreover, it means addressing the all too often sidelined problematic of governance within transdisciplinary networks (Rossiter, 2006).

Perhaps then it is no accident that we turn to the work of two thinkers who wrote in a time and place where the operation of power over thought was pronounced (if of an altogether different quality and register to that we confront today). Both Arnold Gehlen and Günther Anders wrote in the Germany of the 1930s and, while both developed the brand of ‘philosophical anthropology’ initiated by Max Scheler and Helmuth Plessner, they negotiated the political demands of their day in different ways. Gehlen was an opportunist who gained certain academic advantages from the new constellation of power in Germany after 1933. Indeed, in the summer semester of that year, he took over the chair of Paul Tillich in Frankfurt, who had been removed from his post by the Nazis and forced into exile. Anders, by contrast, was an outsider: a student of Heidegger and Husserl, who, like his cousin Walter Benjamin, was shunned by the Frankfurt School mandarins. Originally named Günther Stern, he changed his name to Anders (meaning different), fled the country (first for Paris and then for Los Angeles), divorced his wife (Hannah Arendt), and spent the war working in a Hollywood costume shop. If Anders is best known for his efforts to develop a non-Heideggerian approach to technology in *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen* (1956) – still untranslated in English – and his work in the antinuclear movement, it is his earlier work, which developed in startling parallel to that of Gehlen, we want to remember here.

The starting point for both thinkers is an attempt to develop an ‘anthro-biological’ conception of the human being. Departing from the ‘philosophical anthropology’ of Scheler and Plessner, Gehlen sought to develop a distinctive approach by arguing that the contemplation of ‘human nature’ is itself part of ‘human nature’. He saw a problem fundamental to human existence that he expressed, in a phrase borrowed from Nietzsche, by describing the human as the ‘not yet determined animal’. Gehlen’s anthropology is thus concerned with the determination of the human in a dual sense: on the one hand, based on the human need for self-interpretation; on the other, this ‘deficient being’, who has been denied a secure existence guided by instincts and who

lacks innate forms of adaptation to the environment, is determined by means of lifestyles that provide a secure orientation. The human is a threatened and vulnerable being who establishes a basis for long-term survival by creating interlocking systems of order – primarily institutions.<sup>8</sup>

Gehlen's anthropological orientation thus focuses right from the start on a program of social stabilisation. And, while he wanted to present his work as 'objective', it clearly has political implications. But there is no reason why Gehlen's vision of the human being, who on the motor level is so inventive and versatile, must necessarily lead to a conservative theory of stabilisation. Gehlen was compelled in this direction because of the one-sided nature of his own premises and findings, since, based on his anthropological theses alone, one could also identify possibilities for the emancipation of the human being. Indeed, this is the path taken by Anders, who starting independently from the human/animal distinction as outlined by Scheler, develops in two texts published in the 1930s under the name Günther Stern – 'Une interprétation de l'*a posteriori*' (1934) and 'Pathologie de la liberté' (1937) – a theory of freedom.

Like Gehlen, Anders begins by arguing that the human, unlike the animal, is 'world-open' (not adapted to any particular environment or without a world that comes with it). And he then poses, as the basis of his understanding of liberty, the question of the posteriority of the world (in tension with the Heideggerian problematic of being already installed in the world). The issue thus becomes how to position liberty within the tension between being-in-the-world and creating a world (or, if you like, between the *a priori* and *a posteriori*). A position that Anders then complicates by arguing that *a posteriori* experience is included in the *a priori* essence of the human. The point is not to elaborate the details of this argument, which like that of Gehlen, is an artefact of intellectual history. Rather, it is to emphasise the possibility of an approach that stresses dynamic tensions between stability/fixing and basic human vulnerability rather than the urge to completely trump that which is uncontrollable or unorganizable through the establishment of security.

In a way, these approaches could be characterised as peculiarly early 20<sup>th</sup> century rehearsals of a perennial thematic: order versus chaos. Still, the departure from the question of the human animal has a peculiar relevance in the contemporary situation, if only because one way of describing the shift to post-Fordist modes of capitalist organization is to say that they involve the putting to work generic human capacities: intellect, perception, the linguistic-relational abilities, the general adaptability to environments, etc. Many will recognise in this way of understanding contemporary capitalist development a central feature of Italian *postoperaista* thought as developed by figures like Christian Marazzi (2002) and Paolo Virno (2003). But we want to extend the arguments of these thinkers by suggesting it is no longer possible to uphold Gehlen's claim that the institution is the cultural form that protects against the brute precariousness of life. This is because existing institutions are no longer the providers of stability. Rather, in the current neoliberal environment, they have become the loci of

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8 These arguments are most developed in Gehlen (1988).

insecurity and precariousness, and not only in the ways in which they organize labour power.

Institutions, in this sense, are no longer institutions at all. Take the example of the university, which, one might say, has lost its monopoly over the production of knowledge in much the same way that the state has lost its monopoly over the production and control of law or the factory over the production of economic value. Power no longer seeks its justification from particular institutions and their functions (the factory produces, the hospital takes care of illness, research is done in the university, the military takes care of war). Rather it operates on the bare conditions of action or the possibilities of life in general. It does not commit itself to any particular institution or task, but rather seeks legitimacy from public opinion and the ethically right: ethics and public opinion replace formal law and its institutions as the basis of legitimacy. And thus power has no fixed point of reference (like formal law, the normal state, or the specific task of an institution). Rather it seems to change from day to day. It has become arbitrary or, indeed, mad (Virtanen and Vähämäki, 2005).

All of this is played out against a situation of general precariousness, project to project, where the worker must put to work his or her entire personality, experience, feeling and abilities of communication, only to be left alone when the funding dries up. And the situation pertains not only to temporary or casual work, but goes all the way up the food chain, through systems of performance management, audit culture, as well as the ubiquitous pressures for the time of life to cede to the time of work. But far from being a situation to bemoan or spark nostalgia, this is a vista of possibility. Since, it is precisely the fact that power seeks to control the generic human capacities that should make us strong. Given the way in which everyone is driven to constantly escalating levels of activity (and the individual revolt of past generations has been integrated as a kind of autonomy of self-management), we shall not escape this fate by any return to the state bureaucracies or fidelity to the existing institutions. What must be invented instead is a kind of radically different form of institution – one that can intervene and work with this situation of precariousness rather than simply reacting to it.

One of the important things to recognise in the actual functioning of crucial institutions is that the border between the inside and the outside of the institution has become blurred. Maybe this has to do with the fact that a new institutional environment is in the making, that new kinds of relations between the environment of institutions and the environment of society can be forged. The question then becomes how to create new institutions, new political spaces and concepts, rather than simply defending the old institutions or, as some would have it, defending politics. Such institutions would need to arise in the social forms that networks and other forms of cooperation develop as part of their daily life. But, in so doing, they should never entertain the fantasy, with Gehlen, of the stabilisation of precariousness through the imposition of rigid structure. Rather, in the manner of Anders, they would have to remain open to the brute precariousness of human potentiality while simultaneously recognising that this potentiality is necessarily installed in the world. It is in this immanence that we need to become attuned to the intersections of experience and movement, as well as the ways in which they are constrained or enabled by modern institutions.

## A Note on Technics

It was Mario Tronti who, in his short but jolting essay ‘Lenin in England’, pointed most starkly to the dangers that arise when organization meets institution: “But continuity of organisation is a rare and complex thing: no sooner is organisation institutionalised into a form, than it is immediately used by capitalism” (1979: 6). Organization here seems to work at odds to institutionalization. The emergence of form is fatal or, at least, marks the moment of incorporation. But Tronti is not altogether pessimistic about the production of new institutional forms, particularly when forged under conditions of creative struggle. “[I]n place of the bureaucratic void of the general political organisation”, he writes, workers “substitute the ongoing struggle at factory level – a struggle which takes ever-new forms which only the intellectual creativity of productive work can discover” (6). Since writing ‘Lenin in England’, however, Tronti has become convinced that this struggle on the factory floor has been lost, and, significantly, he attributes this defeat to the technical dimensions of the revolution within work:

There is reluctance to confront the bitter theme of the political consequences that the revolution within work has had upon society. The fragmentation of the left social bloc begins with the loss of the centrality of the working subject. This, in turn, was effected technically. The theme of the tragic impact of technics on the dimension of being of the 20th-century was assumed only by the great conservative philosophical consciousness and by late bourgeois art. The workers movement, even from the height of its great experiences, stuttered on this, equivocated, deluded itself, and finally was left behind. (Tronti, 1998: 99, our translation)

Technics here, as in Carl Schmitt’s (1996) pronouncements concerning modernity’s reduction of politics to administration, is understood in an essentially Aristotelian sense: as that which does not contain within itself the principle of its own movement, or, in other words, that which is without origin. How does this supposed lack of determination relate to the seeming limitlessness of experience and the seeming need for determination in politics? And what might this tell us about the potentialities of technics, particularly in relation to the emergence and sustainability of networked institutional forms? In other words, how can we move beyond the negative vision of technics articulated by the “great conservative philosophical consciousness” to understand their contribution to ‘intellectual creativity’, labour and political organization in the present moment?

Such questions call for different routes into thinking technics and it is instructive here to recall the relation between technics and political form, as portrayed in Gillo Pontecorvo’s film *The Battle of Algiers* (1966). Similar to accounts of the Vietnam War, *The Battle of Algiers* is a film that depicts the guerrilla tactics of insurgency forces pitted against the initially formal technics of French colonial military apparatus as they played out during the Algerian War of Independence (1954-62). While the socialist National Liberation Front (FLN) was a party-political form resulting from the merger of smaller political groups in 1954, the FLN’s structure of communication and organization was more akin to the logic of the network. In *The Battle of Algiers* this is made most clear in a scene where the leader of the colonial military forces explains the command and attack structure of the insurgents. Lieutenant-Colonel Mathieu Philippe – previously a member of the French resistance, campaigns in Italy and Normandy, and served in Madagascar, Suez, Indo-China and Algeria – begins briefing his staff upon

arriving in Algiers, noting the military is dealing with “A dangerous enemy moving both on the surface and below”:

We have to start from zero. We know something of the organization’s structure ... It’s a pyramid organization ... composed of various sections which, in turn ... are made up of a series of triangles. At the apex is the Chief of Staff responsible to the political bureau. He nominates someone to be responsible for one sector: No. 1. No. 1 selects another two: Nos. 2 and 3. And so triangle 1 is formed. Nos. 2 and 3 each select two men. Nos. 4, 5, 6 and 7. Because of this structure, each member of the organization ... knows only three other members. The one who chose him ... and the two he chose. Contact is only in writing. That’s why we don’t know our enemy. Because, in fact, they don’t know each other. If we know him we can eliminate him. The military angle is secondary. It’s the ‘police’ side that matters. I know you dislike that word. But it’s the only one that sums up our task. We must try to reconstruct the pyramid and identify the Chief. The basis of our job is information. The method, interrogation. Conducted in such a way to ensure we always get an answer. In this situation, false sentiment leads only to ridicule ... and impotence ... we need an incident which will legalize our actions ... and make them feasible. We ourselves must create this opening. (Pontecorvo, 1966)

The military progressively incorporate the tactics of insurgents, though there is always a struggle to articulate such tactics within the form of the military apparatus. The insurgents, by contrast, are able to mobilize across the city space as a network of cells – a structure now commonly known as the *modus operandi* of anti-state and anti-colonial forms. Later in the film, as the insurgency suffers debilitating attacks, the question of governance – as detailed above – becomes secondary to the criterion of movement: “How do we move?”, asks a younger insurgent. “We change methods”, responds the senior member. With torture and indiscriminate violence directed against the FLN by the military, along with increased surveillance, body-searches and checkpoints, the insurgents fight a battle on two fronts: against the military and the waning support of civilians. Their response is not only to become indistinguishable from civilians – already an established method – but to pass as women, submerging from the field of visibility by wearing the hijab. By this stage, however, the entire civilian population is classified as the enemy, and any movement throughout the city is deemed a potential threat to colonial rule. Passing as women does not result in victory against colonial rule. The military were to claim victory of the battle. Ultimately, however, the desire for independence among Algerians was a continuum that transcended any temporary reassertion of colonial authority.

The unfolding of narrative is not our prime interest in this film. Narrative analysis, in this case as in so many others, is likely to focus on the moment of ideological closure – that moment, in other words, of restoration – rather than the propulsive energy necessary for the story to *go on*. Such analysis is also likely to get side-tracked in historical parallels and allegorizing, which cannot help but become trapped in moralizing – if not theologizing – judgements about the relative goodness of state power and networked forms of political life. Either this, or the over-familiar process of deconstructing such judgements, as if the difference between modern state forms and networked institutional forms is of no consequence.

Such deconstruction is evident in narratives such as Martin Scorsese’s film *The Departed* (2006), which, through the presence of double-agents and hybrid operators, strives to make the point that sovereign police and their insurgent counterparts cannot be easily distinguished. The same insight haunts critical commentaries on security and

terror – like Giorgio Agamben's much circulated editorial in the *Frankfurter Allgemeiner Zeitung* (2001), which remembers that “the first major organization of terror after the war, the *Organisation de l'Armée Secrète* (OAS), was established by a French general, who thought of himself as a patriot, convinced that terrorism was the only answer to the guerrilla phenomenon in Algeria and Indochina”. We cannot ignore the fact that following the events of 11 September 2001, governments of all stamps have seized the opportunity to label their anti-state dissidents and activists as terrorists. But simply to disavow this name-calling is to miss the political point. Since what distinguishes networked dissidents or activists from terrorists is not so much their organizational form as *what they do* (a difference of immense political import). It is from such *doing* that we must begin if we wish to retrieve the relation between technics and movement, or more precisely, technics and processes of subjectivisation, where subjectivisation itself is predicated on movement. Such an inquiry also calls for rethinking empirics beyond a research technique that stabilizes the world as a field of objects and, instead, engages the movement of contingencies inherent to immanence and processes of subjectivisation.

In this regard, it is crucial to remember that the Leninist imperative to action, *to do* – that all important moment of political rupture in which organization might take form – was always framed as a potentiality or a question: ‘What is to be done?’ In his dialogue with Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze links this imperative to action to a non-representative politics: “Representation no longer exists; there’s only action – theoretical action and practical action which serve as relays and form networks” (1977: 206-207). But, as with every attempt to understand how action takes place within networks, this formulation begs the political question – the question of the decision. If there are only relays and networks, how can decisions inhere in positive ways? Distribution and decisiveness seem to work in opposite directions. And this seems the constitutive condition of networks, a situation most often understood as a conflict between vertical and horizontal modes of organization. To begin to work through this dilemma, a process that may be without end, we might do better to turn to the writings of Félix Guattari (1995) than to those of Deleuze, since Guattari’s notion of ‘asignifying potential’ not only counterparts representation (in its rejection of Saussure’s notion of language as a bridge or link between two masses) but also brings action into necessary relation with potentiality – the very trigger of (spatial and temporal) movement.

This is not the place to offer an account of Guattari’s ground-breaking efforts in the organization of group experiences, articulation of collective speech and production of new cultural and material configurations. It is no longer 1968 and we realize that some readers may find this kind of experimentation just too touchy-feely. Paolo Virno’s (2005a) explorations of ‘innovative action’ offer a more rigorous account of such generative transformations in a way that, importantly, tackles some of the shibboleths of modern political thought. Here, creative action becomes associated with a kind of state of exception. True innovation, as opposed to the formally indifferent modification of the commodity, involves a distributed decision that cannot be referred to any normative condition or application of grammatical rules. Rules, as Wittgenstein observed in his *Philosophical Investigations* (1963), can never stipulate their application. For example, there is no rule that specifies how high the tennis ball can be thrown during service. To regulate this one needs another rule, and so on to infinite regress – the juridical model

of legal precedent implied by the normativity of the modern state. The creative action then is not simply one that breaks rules (simultaneously affirming them in the act of transgression) but an action that changes the grammatical system itself, operating in a space where the grammatical rule cannot be distinguished from the empirical event.

The parallel here to the political state of exception is intentional. But far from comparing the creative action to the sovereign decision, Virno conceives this action as a kind of non-sovereign decision or, if you like, an exception-from-below. Rather than an affirmation of sovereign power (with all its implications of a contractual passage from the ‘state of nature’ to ‘civil society’), the creative action is understood as an *exodus* from the sovereign bind. As Virno puts it in another essay, the creative action is the “reversed correspondent of the state of exception” (2005b: 19, our translation). In both cases a fundamental ambiguity invests the relation between grammar (the rules of a certain system) and empirical fact (the everyday events to which these rules should apply). But only in the latter is this imagined as the result of a monopolised decision.

A further insight can be gained into this difference if one compares Hobbes to Wittgenstein on the problem of the infinite regress established by any normative system of rule. In *Leviathan* (1994) [1660], Hobbes argues that such regression can only be broken by the obligation to obey that announces the exit from the ‘state of nature’ and establishment of a unitary political body. In the common interests of self-preservation and security, each subject must tacitly consent to the proposition ‘I will not disobey’ and recognise the validity of the law even before any concrete law has been laid down. For Wittgenstein, however, such infinite regress raises the problem of the uniform application of rules: “[W]hat if one person reacts in one way and another in another to the order and the training? Which one is right?” (1963: 206). To break the reference of this question back to an infinite series of norms, Wittgenstein proposes to adjudicate the matter in relation to “the common behaviour of mankind” (206). Instead of arguing, as does Hobbes, that the regress of law requires a sovereign intervention that transcends the ‘state of nature,’ he refers this matter back to fundamental (natural or biological) qualities that are generic to the human animal: the capacity for linguistic communication, adaptation to and alteration of environmental circumstances and so on. As Virno puts it: “far from anchoring the application of rules to the exit from the state of nature, Wittgenstein installs natural life in the very heart of historically determined institutions” (2005b: 20, our translation).

But what happens in an environment today when the neoliberal state undergoes a process of disaggregation, if not deinstitutionalisation? At what point, if ever, will there be an indistinguishable homology between state form and network form, a mimicry effect or elective affinity as Benjamin understood modernity? We can be sure this will never happen, since there are two key dimensions that withstand the possibility of mutual assimilation or total equivalence: time and power. In other words, the seemingly impossible tension between distribution and decision can never be overcome. There is no dialectical process that might resolve this conflict in a higher order of sovereign rule or democratic consensus. This is why it is so mistaken to conceive of networks as democratic institutions. Since democracy, at least in its actually existing forms, requires the auto-legitimizing and mystical identification of sovereign power with a bordered political subject – it has always been, and remains, the *kratos* of the *demos* (Mitropoulos

and Neilson, 2006b). Networks do not apportion membership or citizenship. They cannot be hijacked to the legislative model of the parliament or the representative model of the election. This is not to disavow the complex problem of network governance. But it is to recognise that, in conceiving the potentialities inherent in networks, we must heed the difference between law and institutions. To remember again the words of Gilles Deleuze: “The institution is always given as an organized system of means ... law is a limitation of actions, institution a positive model for action” (2004: 19).

## The Experience of Networks

Can experience function as a generative principle in the creation of new institutional forms immanent to the dynamics of social-technical networks? There are tensions if not contradictions internal to such a question. Experience as a principle would suggest the return of technics as procedure. Life, however, is never separable from technics and, as noted earlier, experience, as a source of invention and transformation, is distinct from experiment. The former holds a processual dimension, the latter a procedural rule. How, then, is technics to be understood as it subsists within the realm of experience?

The distinction between experience and experiment is most clearly embodied at the borders of what might be termed the neoliberal experiment – a program that systematically subjects and connects the triad of state-corporation-citizen to the uncertainties of the movement (migration) of finance capital and labour-power. Experience is that which accumulates, passes by and is communicated or distributed. But such a comprehension of experience also falls, partially, into the trap of a linear, developmental and historical progression of thought, as Vilém Flusser points out, where “the object was to gather one experience after another” (2003: 68). Space must also be granted to the discarding of experience, its redundancy or dirty stain on our psyche.

The experiment disavows precarity, since the experiment presupposes security – laboratory conditions. Practice (politics) is immanent to experience. How then to communicate experience? Communication is not narrative. There is no reproduction of structure that enables the semblance of order. Narrative implies a consensus. There is no consensus, hence the need to think politics in a non-representational form. Communication shares more with affect, and this, really, is so often the precondition for collaboration with others. Do you really understand what an other is saying? This is especially the case for those working across linguistic borders, where syntax is broken and recomposed by translation. So often it is a sense or intuition that one can engage another and others again in the formation of action or, as the case may be, ‘communication with ends’.

Herein lies the enormous difficulty of inventing new institutional forms. While it is possible to speak of a concept of the constitutive outside immanent to hegemonic systems, no such outside exists for experience. We are always within experience. No escape. In this sense, it is possible to say that we submit to experience. This marks another distinction from experiment, where in a world of choice one decides to be part of an experiment, engage in experimentation, or to take the option to decline (although

with the rise of practices of informed consent the borders between coercion and assent have been blurred). No such choice is possible with experience, though we would note that experience has also become an option of consumer-choice: ‘are you experienced?’

Consumer-choice, however, is not political decision. The phenomenological aspect or dimension of experience is not reducible to what Foucault, in *Society Must be Defended*, terms the “whole field of visibility” (2003: 242), commensurate with techniques and technologies of surveillance, control and consumer-motivation. If there is a counter-power to be found in experience it rests in its surfeit of expression without any continuous form – what Foucault calls the non-discursive, which we understand here as the expression of practice as it subsists in experience. The problem lies in the movement from experience in general to singular experiences, since, as Deleuze notes, “every individual experience presupposes, as an *a priori*, the existence of a milieu in which that experience is conducted, a species-specific milieu or an institutional milieu” (2004: 19). When such a milieu is a network, there will always be a multiplicity of experiences, contingent and contradictory. The difficulty lies in giving political form to this multiplicity – to determine the indeterminate, or better, to keep moving between absolute indetermination and total closure.

Here it is necessary to remember, as does Alexander Galloway (2004), that networks too have their protocols and modes of control. We live today in a world of embedded software, where our click-paths and other trafficked movements are subject to constant monitoring of which we remain largely unaware (Graham, 2005). Under these circumstances, the two poles of power so familiar to late twentieth century theorists – the surveillant assemblage and the micro-practices of everyday life – intertwine and collapse. To put it in terms familiar from Michel de Certeau (1984), strategy and tactics coalesce. Rather than sitting in opposition, strategy and tactics continually alter and work upon each other to supply a stream of data that, once collected and correlated, serves not only to exclude and marginalize but also to give privileged movement to those who obediently work and consume (or even just travel the world with the right skin colour and last name). It has become common to remark that such ‘software-sorted’ control can only be interrupted at the level of code. The hacker, or for some the ‘hacker class’ (Wark, 2004), becomes the new revolutionary subject, disrupting the smooth functioning of information-driven capitalism and searching out relations beyond the property form. But simply to intervene at the level of code is not yet to explore the limits of codified knowledge itself. The hack, as much as it is a ‘creative action’, cannot in itself give sustainable form to networked multiplicity.

“Everybody experiences far more than he understands”, writes Marshall McLuhan. “Yet it is experience, rather than understanding, that influences behaviour” (1964: 318). McLuhan’s insight is worth recalling when it comes to networks, since, as we indicated earlier, the attempt to understand networks, to turn them into objects of theory (with an attendant catalogue of terms and concepts), often displaces an investigation of their political functioning. This is especially the case when networks are conceived as wholly decentralised or horizontal structures. Apart from being technically incorrect – for instance in the case of the Internet – this assumption occludes many of the political complexities surrounding networked organization and the organization of networks. Indeed, the crucial challenge in giving a sustainable political form to networks – one that might

supersede the short-term and stay-small ethos of many exercises in free cooperation and horizontal collaboration – may not be to recognize and mobilize the vertical forms of organization that inhere in such practices but to enter and work through the horizontal-vertical opposition – a continuous process of elaboration.

After all, to continue to conceive networks in terms of horizontal-vertical relations is to remain caught in the political anthropology of modern representation, which identifies differentiated subjects along the horizontal axis only by virtue of a second identification that gathers them together and represents them on the vertical axis. Is this really how networks work? Certainly, one could remark that the power exercised by some actors in networked environments, for instance by mailing-list moderators or domain-name owners, is more feudal or proprietary than representative. But are these relations any better described by available theoretical notions such as the focal actor, problematization or the obligatory passage point?<sup>9</sup> To accept McLuhan's observation about experience and behaviour is not to indulge some anti-theoretical broadside but to recognize that the kinds of relations that subsist in networks might better be described in terms of contexts than ideas.

Experience is never pure. It is always contaminated by contingencies and errors. If we refuse to fetishize our networked relations, to turn them into concepts, but instead treat them in the particular contexts in which they may or may not be established, a whole new series of questions emerges. What kinds of relations are possible in this situation? What is the work they do? Who are the people they are working with? What are the strings attached? The questions cease to be about ideas and become instead problems that require the gathering of more information. Rather than establishing a definitive model of networked relations, we are left with the need to constantly develop new practices of organization as we move on, meet new challenges, search out points of leverage and conjunctural possibilities that link different struggles, and make decisions along the way.<sup>10</sup>

What does this have to do with political form? For a start, it forces us to understand form not as an abstraction but rather as rooted in concrete existence. At stake is neither a transcendental notion of form, as in the Kantian understanding of space and time, nor a purely technical-instrumental one: decision is not precision. Furthermore, form need not be conceived in absolute terms. Thus, in approaching networks or any other kind of institutional form, let's say universities or museums, it is unnecessary to treat them as concepts defined by certain features – for instance, hierarchy – which then either allow or disallow their linking to other kinds of institutions, defined equally in conceptual terms – say, horizontality. As regards the sustainability of networks, this is a crucial point since, while they may maintain a relative institutional autonomy, networks may also need to engage other institutional partners to facilitate their survival. This is particularly the case when it comes to issues of funding. As one of us wrote in an article with Geert Lovink: "There are no global funds for global networks" (Lovink and

9 These are all notions in circulation within the actor-network theory developed by thinkers like Callon (1986) and Latour (2005). For definitions see [http://carbon.cudenver.edu/~mryder/itc\\_data/ant\\_dff.html](http://carbon.cudenver.edu/~mryder/itc_data/ant_dff.html), visited 14 November, 2006.

10 Nunes (2005) develops a similar list of questions concerning networked pragmatics.

Rossiter, 2005). For this reason, networks have often been sustained by free labour. The provision (or diversion) of funds may be the most useful capability of the modern state that networks can redeploy. The challenge is to manage this interface in ways that neither involve the obligations of patronage nor fall into patterns of governance that fetishize outcomes and limit action and expression.

In calling for the invention of new institutional forms we do not want to perpetuate the modernist fantasy that the existing world must be obliterated before a new one can begin. Anyone who has visited ‘planned cities’ like Canberra or Brasilia will know the soulless remnants such *tabula rasa* thinking leaves behind. It is no accident that these places are the seats of parliaments and other state institutions. Nor is it a surprise to learn that the squalid high-rises of the Parisian *banlieues* are the progeny of Le Corbusier’s utopian projections. Political organization must work with the resources at hand. We cannot afford to project into the future as if we will move only when somebody else has built the new institutions for us. This is the logic of consumption: construct the new institutions and then we will decide whether they are worthy to replace the old. This is also the logic of sovereignty, as it assumes a preconstituted subject who will exercise the power of decision. To address the conditions of networked multiplicity, political action must (almost paradoxically) be partial – or partisan, to use a stronger term. The danger is that such partiality, insofar as its break from (or displacement of) the existing institutions is precisely partial (incomplete), can easily be absorbed back into a prevailing pluralism – resulting in just more governmentality and liberalism. This is the appropriation we must fight. Already we have seen many – whole political generations even – take that path. But the struggle has no clear resolution, since it involves the continual, if not interminable, working through of the relation of partiality and multiplicity, determination and indetermination. This is the difficulty of constructing new institutions. It cannot be deferred. The space and time of new institutions is *here and now*.

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# The Artistic Device, or, the Articulation of Collective Speech

Brian Holmes

## abstract

The text explores various ways in which cognitive capitalism's productive norm of creativity takes on concrete social form in specific 'devices', whether in the museum, the university, or directly in the financial markets (notably via an analysis of *Catching a Falling Knife*, a performance where the artist, Michael Goldberg, takes on the role of a day trader). It then examines the collective project *Capturing the Moving Mind* in order to ask how human and machinic assemblages are configured within and against coercive devices of the kind exemplified by the stock market. Only when these experimental assemblages are brought to a greater degree of denormalization and a higher level of expressive precision, the text concludes, will intellectuals and artists be able to exert an effective critique of the neoliberal social model.

One of the strong possibilities of art today is to combine theoretical, sociological or scientific research with a feel for the ways that aesthetic form can influence collective process, so as to de-normalize the investigation and open up both critical and constructive paths. Projects carried out in this way have complex referential content, but they also depend on a highly self-reflexive and deeply playful exercise of the basic human capacities: perception, affect, thought, expression and relation.

Multiple examples could be given. In a very formal register there is the activity of Ricardo Basbaum, where a reflection on the operative structures of what Deleuze calls 'the control society' is synthesized into installations and pictorial diagrams, which in their turn become the departure points for collective choreographies developing an expressive resistance (Holmes, 2006a). A more hi-tech version appears in the Makrolab, where groups living under conditions of 'isolation/insulation' carry out investigations into human and animal migration, climate change and the uses of electromagnetic spectrum, all within the enclosed environment of a nomadic laboratory that synthesizes a complex set of references to vanguard architectural and theatrical traditions.<sup>1</sup> Yet another case would be the e-mail forums orchestrated over the last decade by Jordan Crandall, where the unfolding of a thematic debate is used to sound out the

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1 See <http://makrolab.ljudmila.org> and Holmes (2006b).

geographically disjunctive social relations between the participants, generating a knowledge of globalizing society which in its turn contributes directly to the thematic study.<sup>2</sup> Finally – to shorten what could be a much longer list – consider the filmic exploration of the ‘Corridor X’ highway network on the southeastern periphery of Europe, carried out by the participants of the *Timescapes* project. After the initial filming of different geographical and cultural zones, they used a specially designed communications platform to link together editing studios scattered from Berlin to Ankara, so as to remain in constant dialogue and confrontation during the elaboration of a multitrack video installation, itself only a part of the broader program that culminated in the exhibition *B-Zone: Becoming Europe and Beyond*.<sup>3</sup>

In each case, the initial artistic act consists in establishing the environment and setting the parameters for a larger inquiry. And in each case, the inquiry becomes expressive, multiple, overflowing the initial frame and opening up unexpected possibilities. What emerges from this kind of practice is a new definition of art as a mobile laboratory and experimental theatre for the investigation and instigation of social and cultural change. Works in the traditional sense may be produced in the course of this kind of practice – indeed, excellent works may be produced, as any look into the above examples will show. However, these singular works are best understood not in isolation, but in the context of an assemblage in Deleuze and Guattari’s sense. They become elements of an ‘agencement’, or of what I will be calling a ‘device’ for the articulation of collective speech.

Now, it is known that for Deleuze and Guattari, the consistency of a human assemblage results from the flow of desire, involving a multiplication of the self, indeed a kind of delirium in relation to others, to language, to images and to things. It is this drifting and at least partially delirious flow of productive energies that alone can articulate a collective statement: which is the whole interest and passion of the artistic device.<sup>4</sup> But as the number of such devices multiplies, a critical question concerns the appropriation of this model of inquiry by the institutions of knowledge – and first of all, the presentation of these devices in exhibitions. The exhibition is the moment when an artistic project is valorized in our society, and therefore, when the economic conditions of its production come to bear upon its process, along with the ideologies that underlie and mask those conditions. To the point where it would be naive to discuss the artistic device without also discussing its modes of exhibition.

A paradigmatic case involving the type of work I am interested in here would be *Laboratorium*, curated by Hans-Ulrich Obrist and Barbara Vanderlinden in the city of Antwerp in 1999. The show’s ambition was to stage the relations between a network of ‘scientists, artists, dancers and writers’, scattered across the urban territory.<sup>5</sup> It included a series of videos by Bruno Latour, entitled ‘The Theatre of Proof’, experimental dance

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2 See <http://jordancrandall.com/underfire> and Holmes (2000).

3 See the ‘Corridor X’ project in Franke (2006).

4 Here, one of the most inspiring contemporary references are the radically original investigations of the feminist collective *Precarias a la deriva*; <http://sindominio.net/karakola/precarias.htm>.

5 Quote from the visitor’s brochure, reproduced in Obrist and Vanderlinden (2001).

projects by Meg Stuart and Xavier Leroi, demonstrations of scientific experiments by Luc Steels and Isabelle Stengers, visits to laboratories in the Antwerp area, and a wide range of installation pieces and video art in both a traditional display space and off-site locations. The artist Michel François displaced the museum offices into the display area, creating interactive possibilities, but also a classic post-Fordist spectacle of labour. The installation *Bookmachine*, by Bruce Mau design studio, offered visitors a similar look into the fabrication of the catalogue. But the central metaphor of the show, or its generative model, was a video performance filmed by Jef Cornelis for Belgian television in 1969 under the name of 'The World Question Center'.

The video features the American artist James Lee Byars, dressed in white robes, officiating at a studio session where live participants and telephone correspondents from all over the world were asked for their most important question. Dialing anyone with a provocative reputation, Byars would ask for "questions that are really pertinent to them in regard to their own feelings of an evolving sense of knowledge", as he explained in conversation with a prominent sexologist of the time, Eberhard Kronhausen. Using their professional status as artists, Cornelis and Byars literally created a machinic assemblage, a technical and human device for the articulation of collective speech. Obrist and Vanderlinden clearly wanted to do something similar: to create a network of scientific and artistic inquiry, and to render it both audible and visible.

In the opening pages of the catalogue, the editors ask: "If *Laboratorium* is the answer, what is the question?" The question I will ask in these pages concerns both the creative potential and the coercive force of exhibitions like *Laboratorium*: what they allow us to say, what they make us say, what they keep us from saying. I want to ask whether the experimental articulations of collective speech take place within, at grips with, against or despite a contemporary form of social power – one which could also be described, but this time in strictly Foucauldian terms, as 'the artistic device'.

In an interview carried out in 1977, Foucault offered a definition of the conceptual construct that he calls the device, or *dispositif*. The device is the "system of relations" that can be discovered between a set of apparently very different elements: "a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical and moral propositions". Foucault goes on to say that the device is a "formation which has as its major function at a given historical moment that of responding to an urgent need". And he further indicates that the device is constructed to sustain both "a process of functional overdetermination" and "a perpetual process of strategic elaboration".<sup>6</sup> In other words, the articulation of heterogeneous elements that constitutes the device is used for many purposes at once; and it's precisely this multiplicity of purpose that is guided or managed in accordance with a strategy dictated by a need, by a structural imperative. To understand how an experimental artistic project functions today, I want to ask about our civilization's seemingly urgent need for an articulation of aesthetics and thinking – about the need for an intellectualized art, or

6 Grosrichard et al. (1977), reprinted in Foucault, M. (2001). English translation, Foucault (1980). I have modified the English text, notably by using the word 'device', rather than the Althusserian-sounding 'apparatus', to render Foucault's concept of the *dispositif*.

for what might be called ‘cognitive creativity’, in the particular kinds of societies that we inhabit.

The last question implies, as a methodology, that specific artistic experiments be situated within an overarching analysis of contemporary social relations, which in turn would be able to help us comprehend the recent changes in the institutions that frame art practice and lend it both meaning and value: museums, of course, but also universities. This broader analysis could be sought in the concept of the cultural and informational economy, or of what a group of researchers in France has termed ‘cognitive capitalism’, characterized by the rise of intellectual or ‘immaterial’ labour based on cooperation and open resource-sharing, and by the commodification or ‘enclosure’ of knowledge in the form of intellectual property, which is then deployed as a source of rent.<sup>7</sup> Such an approach has the advantage of focusing on invention power and on the ownership of its products, including artworks; therefore, I will refer to it periodically as the discussion unfolds. However, the notion of the device demands greater emphasis on the material instances of power, and on the subjective conditions under which power is embodied, relayed or refracted into difference; and thus it comes closer to the kinds of specific situations that artists like to restage or transform. As Foucault explains in the interview quoted above: “To say: here’s a device, I try to find out which elements have entered into a rationality, a given set of agreements [*une concertation donnée*]”. The idea is that particular social situations, with their own toolkits, logics and behavioral norms, can be observed fitting into larger scientific rationalities and governmental systems, and thereby helping to consolidate them, or even to structure them. The device, as Foucault says, *is* the system of relations between all its heterogeneous elements. But it is also the singular instance where those relations break down, reorganize themselves, turn to other purposes.

In what follows, I will set up a relation of tension between the description of specific experimental devices, like the ones listed at the outset of this section, and the analysis of more general devices of power, like the ones identified by Foucault. The effects of this kind of tension appear most clearly in performances, where individual or group behavior is put to the test of experience within a carefully structured frame (a staged environment), itself conceived either as a reflection of social constraints, or as a response to them. To approach this tension, I will first discuss an artistic performance that analyzes what is clearly one of the key devices of social power in the contemporary period: the computerized financial markets. Here we will see, not the abstract laws of the global economy, but the highly individualized operations of a coercive structure (indeed, a ‘microstructure’) that acts to channel the basic human capacities: perception, affect, thought, action and relation. A consideration of this analytical performance in its public status *as art* will then serve as a bridge to the discussion of a collective performance with a self-organizing and autopoetic dimension, which explicitly seeks to break away from the kind of political rationality that is made effective by the device of the financial markets.

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7 The literature on cognitive capitalism, developed primarily within the orbit of the journal *Multitudes*, has not been extensively translated. In French see Azaïs, Corsani and Dieuaide (2001) and Vercellone (2003).

The second performance – which is really a kind of social experiment in motion – will offer a chance to theorize a counter-device, or self-overcoming system, even as it is placed to the test of a real situation where the conditions of life, labour and creation are all in play. At stake here are the possibilities, but also the difficulties, of realizing the promise that contemporary art has so often formulated: the promise of transforming our relations to each other, not on an ideal plane, but within the open and problematic field of social interaction in the world. Finally, the problem of publicly *representing* the operations of such a breakaway system – and therefore, of trying to generalize it as a model of dissent and contestation – will lead us back to the exhibition context, and to a direct consideration of the ways that museums and universities function as normalizing devices within the rule-sets of a financialized economy.

## Trading on the Double Edge

One of the weaknesses of the Left is an inability or an unwillingness to come to grips with capitalist culture in its most sophisticated forms. The place to look for the mainsprings of behavior in this society is at the heart of the production process. But the leading edge of contemporary production is the lightning-fast circulation of mathematical figures in the financial sphere. And who actually knows what stock, bond and currency traders really do? The simplest answer would be this: the millions of people who have been enticed into online trading, and especially, the hundreds of thousands who use the Internet to plug into the world financial exchanges every day. So-called ‘popular capitalism’ is directly modeled on the whirlwind trades of institutional speculators – with indirect effects on culture that go further and deeper than most of us would care to admit.

The anthropologist Victor Turner gives an insight into what a performance can reveal: “Performative reflexivity is a condition in which a sociocultural group, or its most perceptive members acting representatively, turn, bend or reflect back upon themselves, upon the relations, actions, symbols, meanings, codes, roles, statuses, social structures, ethical and legal roles, and other sociocultural components which make up their public ‘selves’” (Turner, 1987: 24). Michael Goldberg, an Australian artist of South African origin, has carried out exactly such a reflexive performance. In October of 2002 he made a series of decisions that would allow him to “behave as a day trader” while simultaneously analyzing the underlying *dispositif* of the computerized financial markets. With an initial capital of AUD \$50,000, lent by a so-called ‘Consortium’ of three veteran day-traders whom he won over to his project through conversations in a specialized chat room, Goldberg set out to deal artistically in derivatives of a single stock: News Corp., the global media empire of the right-wing billionaire Rupert Murdoch.

The performance took place over a period of three weeks at the Artspace Gallery in the city of Sydney in Fall 2002.<sup>8</sup> It extended onto the Internet via a website featuring art

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8 The original website, <http://www.catchingafallingknife.com>, has been taken down; but various documents are available at the artist’s site, <http://www.michael-goldberg.com>.

and market information, daily balance sheets and an IRC channel for conversation; there was also a dedicated call-in line to the artist in the gallery. The title was 'Catching a Falling Knife' – financial jargon for a risky deal. In effect, the context of the piece was a market still battered by the failure of the new economy and the collapse of giants such as Enron, WorldCom and Vivendi-Universal. The use of derivatives, rather than actual News Corp. shares, allowed Goldberg to play on either a rising or a falling value, with the latter appearing much more likely in the bear market of 2002. Here is how he describes the set-up in the gallery:

The viewer enters a space devoid of natural light. Three walls reflect the glow of floor to ceiling digital projections – real-time stock prices, moving average charts and financial news. The values change and the graphs move, unfolding minute-by-minute, second by second in a sequence of arabesques and set moves. They respond instantly to constantly shifting algorithms pumping in through live feeds from the global bourses. A desk light and standing lamp in the viewers' lounge reveal a desk and computer, armchairs, and a coffee table with a selection of daily newspapers and financial magazines. Opposite, high on a scaffold platform another desk lamp plays on the face of the artist as he stares at his computer screens. He's talking into a phone, placing or closing a trade. Below him there's the continual sweep of the LED ticker declaring current profit and loss. In the background the audio tape drones. The voice of the motivational speaker, urges you 'to create a clear mental picture of just how much money you want to make – and to decide just how you will earn this money until you are as rich as you want to be'. (Goldberg, 2003)

By projecting software readouts and Bloomberg news flashes on the walls, Goldberg sought to immerse the visitor in the pulsating world of information that constantly confronts the trader on his screens. The decision to use a phone-in brokerage service rather than online orders allowed for vocal expression of the fear and greed that animate the markets. Daily reports to the consortium of lenders – who had contractually agreed to take all the risk, but also the potential profit – added the pressure of personalized surveillance and obligation, analogous to what a professional trader confronts in a major financial institution. The real-time charts served to graphically translate the market volatility that is technically known as 'emotion'. In an earlier performance, Goldberg even undertook to paint such graphically rendered emotion on the gallery wall, thus underscoring the link between individual expression and market movements.<sup>9</sup> This aspect of price-fluctuation has nothing to do with the fundamentals of brick-and-mortar industry, but results instead from the shifting positions taken by untold thousands of short-term speculators, all of them seeking to embrace the mainstream movement of the crowd when a share price swings up or down – and then to define that movement's leading edge, by pulling out just before it reverses direction. By reflexively performing his real role as a day trader within this exaggerated gallery environment, Goldberg made a public event out of the intimate interaction between the speculative self and the market as it coalesces into presence on personal computer screens.

What's at stake in such an interaction? The Swiss sociologists Karin Knorr Cetina and Urs Bruegger (2002a) define the global financial markets as 'knowledge constructs' which arise by means of individual interactions within carefully structured

9 Entitled *NCM open/high/low/close*, the performance staged the fluctuating values of Newcrest Mining corporation stocks, but without any real-time trading. It was part of the show *Auriferous: the Gold Project* at the Bathurst Regional Art Gallery, New South Wales, 22 April – 10 June, 2001; documentation in the 'Projects' section at <http://www.michael-goldberg.com>.

technological and institutional frames, and which always remain in process – forever incomplete, forever changing. The constant variability of these ‘epistemic objects’ makes them resemble a ‘life form’, one that only appears on the trader’s screens, or more precisely, via his full equipment set which, for the professional currency traders that they study, includes a telephone, a ‘voice broker’ intercom, two proprietary dealing networks (known as the Reuters conversational dealing system and the EBS Electronic Broker), and various other news sources and internal corporate databases, including time-charts displaying the evolution of each individual’s recent positions. These are the material elements of the device through which currency traders interact with their peers. Interestingly, the first networked price-display screen, the Reuters Monitor, was introduced in 1973 – exactly when the Bretton-Woods fixed-rate currency system was scrapped and floating exchange rates were introduced, leading to the tremendous volumes of trading that now prevail (on the order of \$1.5 trillion *per day*). Today “the Reuters dealing community consists of some 19,000 users located in more than 6,000 organizations in 110 countries worldwide having over one million conversations a week”.<sup>10</sup> As the sociologists stress, “the screen is a building site on which a whole economic and epistemological world is erected” (Knorr Cetina and Bruegger, 2002a). And it’s a world that you can plunge into, that you can manipulate, that you can emerge ‘victorious’ from. The responsive flux that appears on the screens makes possible what the two researchers call ‘postsocial relationships’.

The term ‘postsocial’ is obviously a provocation – one with huge implications, given the continuing multiplication of screens in both domestic and public space.<sup>11</sup> However, Bruegger and Knorr Cetina do not consider the postsocial relationship as humanity’s total alienation to an electronic fetish. They demonstrate how the flux of the currency-exchange market is constructed, at least in part, by relations of reciprocity between traders, notably via email conversations over the Reuters dealing system. They also observe how individuals working at great spatial distances come to feel each other’s copresence through temporal coordination, since everyone is simultaneously watching the evolution of the same indicators. And at the same time as they illustrate the relative autonomy that traders enjoy within their field of activity, they show how the chief trader controls and carefully manipulates the parameters, both financial and psychological, within which each individual on the floor makes his deals. In these ways, the interaction that animates the global market is ‘embedded’ in an expansive tissue of social relations, composing a ‘global microstructure’.<sup>12</sup> Nonetheless, what the researchers claim is that the paramount relationship of the trader is with the flux itself, that is, with the informational construct, or what early cyberpunk theory called the ‘consensual hallucination’. This is what they call the postsocial relationship: “engagements with non-human others”. The key existential fact in this engagement is that of ‘taking a position’, i.e. placing money in an asset whose value changes with the market flux. Once you have done this, you are *in* – and then it is the movements of the market that matter most of all.

10 See <http://about.reuters.com/productinfo/dealing3000/description.aspx?user=1&>.

11 Cf. ‘Urban Screens: Discovering the Potential of Outdoor Screens for Urban Society’, special report in the online journal *First Monday* (February, 2006); [http://firstmonday.org/issues/special11\\_2](http://firstmonday.org/issues/special11_2).

12 For the concept of ‘embeddedness’, see Knorr Cetina and Bruegger (2002b).

Goldberg's performance displays exactly this anxious relation to an ungraspable object, something like a jostling crowd of fragmentary information, its movements resolving at times into patterns of opportunity, then dissolving again into panic dispersal. In an interview, he explains that real day traders have little concern for so-called fundamentals, but constantly seek instead to evaluate each other's movements: "They'd rather be looking at what the charts are telling them about how punters are behaving on the market each day, each minute, each second. Get an accurate picture of where the crowd is moving and you jump on for the ride – uphill or downhill – it doesn't matter" (Lovink, 2002). He uses an image from a popular film to evoke the plunge of taking a position, then closing it out for a profit or a loss, with all the attendant emotions of fear, greed, and panic desire: "I'm reminded of a scene in Antonioni's *Blow Up* where the character played by David Hemmings mixes in with rock fans as they fight over the remains of a guitar, trashed on stage at the end of a concert and flung into the waiting crowd. He emerges the victor, only to discard the prized relic moments later as so much trash – the adrenalin rush of the pursuit having been the only real satisfaction to be gained".

Similarly, the two sociologists reflect on the intensities of an ultimately void desire, claiming that "what traders encounter on screens are stand-ins for a more basic lack of object". To characterize the postsocial relation, Knorr Cetina and Bruegger recall Jaques Lacan's concept of the mirror stage, where the speechless infant is fascinated by the sight of its own body as a whole entity, and at the same time disoriented by the inward perception of a morcellated, untotalizable body-in-pieces. They stress that "binding (being-in-relation, mutuality) results from a match between a subject that manifests a sequence of wantings and an unfolding object that provides for these wants through the lacks it displays" (Knorr Cetina and Bruegger, 2002a). The rhythm of the market on the screens is a way of capturing and modulating the subject's desire. Yet once again, this postsocial tie is not portrayed as total alienation, but as a reflexive culture of coping and dynamic interchange, extending beyond the simple goal of money-making toward what the anthropologist Clifford Geertz, in a discussion of Balinese cock-fighters and their high stakes gambling, called 'deep play'.<sup>13</sup>

Could Goldberg's piece be taken as a celebration of this 'deep play' in the finance economy – a fascinated exploration of the actions and gestures unfolding within a global microstructure, without any regard for the macrostructures on which it depends? The baleful presence of a wall-sized portrait of Rupert Murdoch at the entryway to the performance space argues against that reading. The artist's earlier work had been primarily about the institutions of the British empire in Australia. Here, by speculating exclusively on the value of News Corp. stock, he situates the interactions of a small-time day-trader within an arc of power that extends from Australia to the United States, via Murdoch's extensive holdings in Italy and England. In America, Murdoch is the owner of the bellicose Fox News channel, but also of the *Weekly Standard*, the insider publication of the neoconservatives in Washington. He is a direct supporter of the Bush-Blair war coalition, and a transnational entrepreneur who stands only to gain from

13 'Traders not only confront lacks, they turn 'lacking' into a sophisticated game or practice, a domain of shifting, increasing, decreasing, predicting, hiding, delaying, and trying to live with lack' (Knorr Cetina and Bruegger, 2002a). For the concept of 'deep play', see Geertz (1973).

further extensions of American-style capitalism. As a key player in the construction of satellite TV systems with global reach, he has helped build the infrastructure of a new imperial politics. The billionaire mogul is the master of a postsocial relationship writ large: the relationship of entire populations with the proliferating media screens that structure public affect, through a rhythmic modulation of attention that is orchestrated on a global scale.<sup>14</sup> The reference to Murdoch therefore situates the gallery device within an overall imperial power structure, adding implicit meaning to the military vocabulary that the artist affects when speaking of the day-traders (he calls them “battle-hardened veterans of the tech-wreck”, and notes that he prefers this kind of expression). The critique here is tacit, deliberately understated; but it is clear nonetheless. The performance conveys a brilliant analysis of the ways that the microsocial structure of the financial markets is shaped and determined by the overarching constraints of the imperial macrostructure, even as it opens up new spaces for the manifold games of everyday life. And in this way it reveals the electronic market, with its relation between face and screen, between desiring mind and fluctuating information, as the fundamental device of power in the economy of cognitive capitalism.

However there is a more telling question to ask about the work and its intentions. Was Goldberg just hedging his bets with this tacit critique, which in the worst of cases could always serve as a kind of blue-chip value on the intellectualized end of the art world? Because it was clear that in the best of cases, a dazzling string of profitable trades would generate media attention, draw crowds of visitors and create a *succès de scandale*, allowing the artist to win on both the intellectual and commercial levels. And Goldberg was definitely not in it to lose (even though, as mentioned, any monetary profit would go to his backers). An Australian critic described *Catching A Falling Knife* as a “two-edged” proposal, because of the ethical contradiction it staged between the worlds of finance and art (McNeill, 2003). Yet it could also have marked a bid to take two strong positions, to occupy the leading edges of both worlds. What arises here is the question of the artist’s political role, of the way his or her own production orients collective desire. How to confront the link between art and finance, without succumbing to the latter’s attraction? How to engage a relation of rivalry or artistic antagonism within the most fascinating capture-devices of contemporary capitalism?

At this point – precisely when we could begin to speak about the operations and limits of the artistic device – the performance seems to fall silent and to withdraw into its analytic dimension. Goldberg may have wanted to answer exactly the questions I have asked, seeing them as the highest challenge. Or he may not have seriously considered them. We can’t be sure, because reality offered no opportunity to put the matter to the test. He lost money on the sequence of trades – due quite ironically to the fact that instead of falling, the News Corp. stock tended to rise. And so we can only judge his intentions from his final word, which to his credit he issued *before* the outset of the performance itself: “I believe that the real value of the project will emerge in the form of interrogations from the dark recesses of its implausibilities and not from the spectacle of successfully meeting its expectations” (Lovink, 2002).

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14 For the modulation of affect through the use of screen technologies, see Thrift (2004).

## Cartography off the Rails

By retracing the links between everyday life and the complex operations of the financial markets, Goldberg's performance exposes the basic device of power in cognitive capitalism. But as we have just seen, it almost literally begs the most important questions where artistic practice itself is concerned. First, how are the microstructures of art affected by the 'urgent need' of power in our time – namely, the need to integrate productive populations to the globalizing economy? And second, how to articulate an *implausible event* within, against or despite the operations of the artistic device?

These questions become far more important when you consider the degree to which aesthetic environments can now be manipulated, for reasons of behavioral control. To get an idea of the techniques in use, just open a manual like *Experiential Marketing*, by Bernd Schmitt (1999). It compares traditional advertising based on product features and benefits to what the author calls a "framework for managing customer experiences" (xiii). This holistic framework requires the skillful targeting of "sensory experiences, affective experiences, creative cognitive experiences, physical experiences and entire lifestyles, and social-identity experiences that result from relating to a reference group or culture" (60). Schmitt quotes management guru Peter Drucker: "There is only one valid definition of business purpose: to create a customer". With this phrase, the rather abstract notion of biopower becomes concrete. Biopower is achieved by establishing the psychological, sensorial and communicational horizons of the customer's experience: by producing the customer. But even more remarkable is Schmitt's suggestion for building a corporate culture able to carry out such advertising. He calls for an "experience-oriented organization", based on "Dionysian culture, creativity and innovation, taking the helicopter view, attractive physical environment, experiential growth for employees, and integration in working with agencies" (234). Biopower at this level is the attempt to orchestrate the vital creative energy, or invention power, of the managerial labour force. At stake in this creation of the manipulatory agency, and of its products, are the basic human capacities, which figure in the subtitle of Schmitt's book: 'SENSE, FEEL, THINK, ACT and RELATE'.

What Jon MacKenzie calls 'performance management', or what Maurizio Lazzarato describes as 'creating worlds' for corporate employees and consumers, is in fact a highly codified set of aesthetic practices for the management of our minds, of our collective sensorium – practices that are in operation today throughout the middle and upper socioeconomic strata of the Western societies, the strata where such experience management can be profitable (MacKenzie, 2001; Lazzarato, 2004). In the language of Félix Guattari, we could speak of an 'overcoding' of experience. What Guattari designates with this word is the establishment of abstract models of collective behavior, and the use of these models as guidelines for the creation – or if you prefer, the 'coding' – of real environments, which are expressly made to condition our thinking, our affects, our interactions. The encoding of such environments draws on the basic insights of cybernetics, which always conceives of human actors as they are inserted into matrices of equipment and information, offering possible choices whose nature, range and feedback effects themselves exert a decisive influence on what can be perceived, felt,

said and done.<sup>15</sup> In response to such environmental and informational manipulations, Guattari continuously tried to engage in collective experiments, where groups consciously structure the contents of their own sensorium, creating interactive, confrontational milieus whose parameters can be transformed as the process of experimentation unfolds. Part of the game was to let codified knowledge encounter its own limits, as in the paradoxical case, first outlined by Gregory Bateson, of a cybernetic system that goes beyond simple feedback to change its own functional rules. The practice of institutional analysis sought to throw a calculated but irreducible grain of madness into the cybernetic rationality of contemporary societies, in order to help people abandon formalized constraints – including those of the analytic process itself, when they no longer serve any purpose.

In his late work, and particularly in the books *Chaosmosis* and *Cartographies schizoanalytiques*, Guattari sought to build up ‘meta-models’ of the self-overcoming process that had been tried out in the experiments with institutional analysis. He sketched diagrams showing how people on a given existential territory come to mobilize the rhythmic consciousness of poetic, artistic, visual or affective fragments – the refrains of what he called ‘universes of reference (or of value)’ – in order to deterritorialize themselves, so as to leave the familiar territory behind and engage themselves in new articulations. These would take the form of energetic flows, involving economic, libidinal, and technological components (flows of money, signifiers, sexual desires, machines, architectures, etc.). He explained how these machinic flows are continually transformed by contact with the abstract phyla of various symbolic codes, including formalized juridical, scientific, philosophical and artistic knowledge.<sup>16</sup> The point was to suggest how a group can act to ‘metamorph itself’, to escape from the overcoding that tries to fix it in one position, and to produce new figures, forms, constellations – in short, original material and cultural configurations that are inseparable from collective statements. This is what Guattari calls an *agencement collectif d'énonciation* – the phrase which I have translated as ‘an articulation of collective speech’.

Now I want to examine an ambitious attempt to carry out this kind of experiment with the edges of knowledge, organized by a medium sized group in September 2005: a conference and art-event on the rails between Moscow and Beijing, in the corridors, berths and dining cars of the Trans-Siberian train. Some forty individuals – philosophers, artists, technologists and social theorists – came together to put their discourses and practices to the test of a movement beyond familiar borders. The journey was framed by an analysis of the system of constraints that weigh on human collaboration at the biopolitical level, i.e., the level where the elaborate processes of cognition, imagination, speech and affect all come to mesh with the sensory-motor capacities of the living body. Traversing the Eurasian continent – one of the great theatres of contemporary geopolitical struggle – in a small, intensively communicating

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15 On cybernetics as a general theory for the social sciences, see Heims (1991); for ideas about the contemporary applications of this social science, see esp. the last chapter, ‘Then and Now’, 273–94.

16 Cf. in particular the diagram entitled ‘Discursivité et déterritorialization’ in Guattari (1989). The term ‘universes of reference (or of value)’ is from a similar discussion in Guattari (1995).

group would be a way to explore the nature and the limits of those constraints. In such a framework, the faculty of *poiesis*, that is, of making, doing, creating, form-giving, applies not only to materials and to speech, but above all to the energetic and relational potentials of life itself.

The project, whose partners included university departments and an art museum, was made public through the web-journal of the *ephemera* group, devoted to ‘theory & politics in organization’. One of the ways to understand the experiment is as an attempt to theoretically model and artistically replay the self-organization processes at the origin of the great counter-summits and social forums which have marked the horizons of contemporary politics (and to which *ephemera* has also devoted a very interesting issue). But it could also be understood as a very deliberate subversion of the way the university produces knowledge – a paradoxical *dérive* along the fixed curves of the railway line, a kind of ‘continental drift’ toward unexplored possibilities. The title of the event was *Capturing the Moving Mind: Management and Movement in the Age of Permanently Temporary War*. I quote from the initial call for participation:

In September 2005 a meeting will take place on the Trans-Siberian train from Moscow via Novosibirsk to Beijing. The purpose of this meeting is a ‘cosmological’ one. We would like to gather a group of people, researchers, philosophers, artists and others interested in the changes going on in society and engaged in changing society as their own moving image, an image of time.<sup>17</sup>

This ‘organizational experiment’ begins from the state of existential anxiety and ontological restlessness that inevitably ensues with any suspension of the control structures and production imperatives that normally act to channel the hypermobility of flexibilized individuals. What would happen to the mobility of a multiple mind inside the long, thin, compartmentalized space of a train snaking across the Siberian wasteland? What forms of intellectual discourse and artistic practice might arise between the members of a linked and disjointed group? And what would happen at the stoppages, in Moscow, Novosibirsk and Beijing, where conferences were organized with stable university colleagues? By trying to embody the contemporary sense of life’s precariousness, while infusing it with a poetics of mobility and flight, the project sought to generate an imaginary of the encounter. Two participants, reflecting on the “explicit and hidden hierarchies” of the different forms of precarious labour, expressed this imaginary in directly political terms: “One of the most urgent tasks is for these different types of precariat ... to come together in a real meeting. What is needed is a class consciousness among all precarious labour that lets all the precariat see their mutuality and inter-dependence” (Böhm and Fernández, 2005: 787).

The question is, how to begin moving toward such a goal? How to launch a *movement of the mind*, within the multiple constraints of cognitive capitalism? The framing of the project – the way it is announced, the way its problematics are formulated – is one of the keys to the entire endeavour. It seeks to establish the horizons that an improvisational practice will explore and ultimately deconstruct, in the course of a transformational experience. At the centre of this effort is a ‘position paper’, which

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17 ‘Call for abstracts and proposals’, <http://www.ephemeraweb.org/conference/call.htm>.

reinterprets the major ideas of the last fifteen years concerning the flexible, mobile, non-hierarchical character of post-Fordist labour. The paper focuses on the ways the collaborative process is guided, channelled and instrumentalized through the control strategies of media modulation. This ‘capture of the moving mind’ is situated within the context of endlessly temporary warfare: a conflict characterized by the Bush doctrine of the pre-emptive strike, seen here as the maximum expression of an attempt to control the wellsprings of human possibility.

The analysis culminates in the definition of a “new form of control and organization” which is fundamentally *arbitrary*: “It operates without institutional legitimization or its logic and foundations seem to change from day to day: it is power without *logos*, that is, arbitrary power or pure power, power without any permanent relation to law, to norm, or to some particular task”.<sup>18</sup> And this contemporary form of power is linked to currency fluctuation: “Whereas discipline was always related to molded currencies having gold as a numerical standard, control is based on floating exchange rates, modulations, organizations of the movement of currencies. In short, it tries to follow or imitate movements and exchanges as such, paying no attention to their specific contents. The knowledge economy is the continuance of capitalism without a foundation, and arbitrary power is its logical form of organization”.

This is an explicit critique of the very device that Goldberg analyzed in his performance. Arbitrary power exists as a coercive threat to subjective mobility: that is the ‘position’ of the paper. But its *disposition* is performative, it seeks to produce “a performance of movement”, it is oriented to a “theatre of the future”. The conclusion of the text refers to an extraordinary passage from *Difference and Repetition*, where Deleuze contrasts the philosophical mobility of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche to the ‘mediation’ and ‘false movement’ of representation in Hegel: “It is not enough”, Deleuze writes, “for them to propose a new representation of movement; representation is already mediation. Rather, it is a question of producing within the work a movement capable of affecting the mind outside of all representation; it is a question of making movement itself a work, without interposition; of substituting direct signs for mediate representations; of inventing vibrations, rotations, whirlings, gravitations, dances or leaps which directly touch the mind” (Deleuze, 1995: 8).

All the elements of the framing apparatus seem to come together in this ambition to go beyond representation in order to affect the movements of the mind, to shape the unfolding of a process which will effectively be captured on the rails of the Trans-Siberian line, but will nonetheless remain uncertain in its outcome. And the same ambition, or the desire to confront the same destabilizing paradox, can be seen in the proposals for the trip itself – ranging from conceptual experiments in the social sciences to artistic projects and performance events, by way of technological inventions such as an in-the-train radio channel and a ‘Mobicasting’ platform for the live transmission of digital images to a distant site in a Finnish museum. At stake here is an experiment in *counter-modulation*: an attempt to seize the potential that is overcoded and channelled by the monetary sign, and to release it into freely ranging movement. Yet it is precisely

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18 ‘Capturing the Moving Mind: An Introduction’, available at <http://www.ephemeraweb.org/conference/intro.pdf> (the text is anonymous, but largely the same as Virtanen and Vähämäki (2005)).

with respect to this ambition that the deepest anxiety arises: “But what was actually the difference between our experiment and so-called reality TV shows like *Big Brother*? Or were we just imitating the model of Post-Fordist production where mixing different roles and competences, arts and sciences, is the basic method for putting to work not this or that particular ability, but the faculty of being human as such? Or were we engaged in a spectacle, a pseudo-event, a false event of marketing movement and crossing borders without, or separated from, a real capacity to experience and engage with it” (Virtanen and Böhm, 2005: 662-663)?

In the face of this anxiety, the attempts to address the contradictions of the trip seem to gravitate toward spontaneous performance-events, recorded and interpreted by the participants. The first was a moment of spatial wandering on the railway quays at the Russian frontier-post of Naushki, in answer to the rigid discipline of the guards patrolling a sovereign borderline. While awaiting the call to go back into the train, members of the group traced abstract paths on quays in front of the customs house, as a sublimated form of resistance. “Together, they created a kind of pattern generator, fabricating curves and interruptions, relations of proximity, distance and touch, illegible to the techniques of the border but somehow enabled by its very being”, wrote two of the participants (Neilson and Rossiter, 2005: 747). The theatrical ambitions of the project resurface here, along with the images of the text by Deleuze: “vibrations, rotations, whirlings, gravitations, dances or leaps which directly touch the mind”. The desire is to encounter a self-transforming experience. But the participants themselves are suspicious of this desire: “At stake was a kind of encryption. But one that begs for no decoding, as if in retrospect it could be revealed and labelled as an act of transgression” (*ibid.*).

The location at the border, the urge to denormalize the experience of crossing it, the notion of transgression, all evoke the ‘liminoid’ states described by the anthropologist Victor Turner. Luminoid behavior is defined by Turner as a kind of modern rite of passage, a flow unanchored from the *communitas* of traditional experience, tending instead toward invention, disruption, even revolution. This was the great dream of performance in the 1960s, epitomized by The Living Theatre.<sup>19</sup> But such overt drama, of the kind that can be enacted at a political protest or counter summit, is precisely what eludes the group on the train. Instead they turn to a typically postmodern resistance, formulated linguistically as a momentary breakdown of grammar, inseparable from an immediate restoration of the rules.<sup>20</sup> This forced restoration was underscored by the severity of the guards about half an hour further down the line: “To cross the border, as became clear in Sukhbaatar, the Mongolian border town, one must stand and say who one is. And so the group chose to rise and face itself as at once highly mobile and free to move, even as each stood before the guards as an individual and a citizen” (Neilson and Rossiter, 2005: 748). The declaration marks an awareness that the mobility of the collective mind cannot erase or even overtly defy the individualizing discipline and the ritualized surveillance of the nation-state. The words ‘individual’ and ‘citizen’, in this context where the would-be multitude holds out their identity papers to the gaze of the

19 See the chapter entitled ‘Liminal to Luminoid, in Play, Flow, and Ritual’ in Turner (1982).

20 For the notion of ‘postmodern’ or so-called ‘resistant’ performance, see Carlson (1996).

border guards, is something like an admission of defeat. The question, at this point, was how to continue.

The next performance attempts to answer that question – but through an appeal to the very transgression that the first refused. The action took place in Beijing, at the Factory 798 art complex. One of the travellers, Luca Guzzetti, a sociologist at the University of Genoa, entered what normally should have been a closed studio space, featuring the exhibition *Rubbishmuseum* by the Korean artist Won Suk Han. Among the exhibits was a toxic sandbox of dead cigarette butts, piled over a foot deep. “Often when you go to a contemporary art exhibition you have the problem to find out whether the piece of art in front of you is supposed to be touched and used, or just watched”, reflects Guzzetti. “It happens that being uncertain, you stand watching something with which you should bodily interact or, seldom, that you touch something which should just be looked at. In that studio in Factory 798, I was sure about the use of the cigarette pool, and I jumped into it” (Guzzetti, 2005: 684).

Two other travellers convinced Guzzetti to redo the jump for pictures and videos, transforming a spontaneous action into a deliberate performance, and setting off a heated argument between different factions of the group as to the proper kind of behaviour toward art. The controversy continued into the night and evoked what some said were repressed feelings surrounding the exclusion of a participant at the outset of the journey, due to drunken behavior and a missing passport. It’s worth noting that Guzzetti himself considers the argument to have been worthless, while the author of the *Rubbishmuseum*, Won Suk Han, found Guzzetti’s jump to be an excellent use of his work. He says this: “I would not have left him alone to jump in the maggots but we would have done some performances on my work together. I would have liked to talk with him more, for I think that him and I, we could become the ‘best friends’” (2005: 686).

‘The Jump’ and the ensuing argument appear as the sought-after moment of liminality, the inevitable act of transgression which ends up furnishing the representational material for the entire experiment. The Finnish art magazine *Framework* contains three articles devoted to it, and the issue of *ephemera* contains no less than six, including a complex essay by the artist Bracha Lichtenberg-Ettinger (2005), who sees the act as an occasion for the group to enter what she calls a “matrixial borderspace” where they can engage in “copoiesis”. Videos of the event reveal how she provokes an embodied confrontation: as though responding to a collective desire for existential truth-production. From the outside, however, the entire sequence of events appears as a kind of psychodrama, with the intensity but also the limits that the word suggests. Indeed, one can wonder what this kind of truth produces, or how it contributes, through its public status as art, to the broader orientation of collective desire. This was Michel Foucault’s question: “At what price can subjects speak the truth about themselves” (1988: 30).

The way that the story of ‘The Jump’ and the representation of the entire project comes to revolve around the motif of *copoiesis* suggests the power of what Foucault, in *The History of Sexuality*, called “the will to know”, reconfigured here beneath the specific conditions of the post-Fordist era. This contemporary ‘will to know’ takes the form of

an almost obsessive preoccupation with subjective energies, focused on the productive mysteries of cooperation and creativity. In other words, the ‘price of truth’ – at least within the art and academic circuits – becomes a concern with evaluating the sources, expressions and uses of a group’s vital energy. But what tends to disappear, in this process of evaluation which becomes the group’s self-representation, is the vast topography of the journey itself: an entire continent, the crumbling ruins of the Soviet project, the crucial geopolitical territory of Central Asia, and the encounter with the new productive forces of China. Has all that been forgotten in the focus on group dynamics?

The representational material can give you that impression; but it also depends on who you ask, on which works you see or which texts you read. The destiny of *Capturing the Moving Mind* was to be at once collective, and irrevocably multiple. Beyond each point of concentration, the project reveals other bifurcating paths, other geographies, other possible interpretations.

## Conclusions

In its most intriguing, most vital, most compelling definition, art has become a complex ‘device’: a mobile laboratory and experimental theatre for the investigation and instigation of social and cultural transformation. In the same movement, what was formerly called criticism has abandoned its outmoded role of describing and evaluating singular works, and seeks instead to join in project-flows, where at best it can exert deterritorializing effects, through the evocation of elusive images and the application of sharply delineated analytic codes. At stake in the new art are framing decisions which set boundaries around productive groups (by constituting relational structures with unique parameters) and at the same time provoke displacements (by engaging processes of self-reflexion and intervention on those constitutive structures). In this way, groups respond experimentally to the forceful attempts, now so common in society, to set the psychological, sensorial and communicational horizons of life for manipulative ends.

Experimentation of this sort involves a drifting uncertainty, which is not diminished but augmented by the sophistication of the technological, discursive, artistic and scientific resources that are called on to structure the projects. It was Guattari’s contribution (or more broadly, that of institutional analysis) to reveal the multiple symbolic components at work in these complex versions of the *dérive*, freeing up the tools of an expanded cybernetics for deviant use by modern-day constructors of the ancient *Narrenschiff* (the allegorical ‘Ship of Fools’, narrated by Sebastian Brant, illustrated by Dürer, painted by Bosch and filmed by Fellini at the close of the twentieth century). But at every sandbar or change of the wind, those who would cut all ties to the norms of society have to ask which larger or more agile devices may be at work, channelling the currents and guiding the flows. How can emancipatory experiments be captured in the productive nets of the contemporary economy? How should we understand the relations of tension that almost invariably arise between the catalysts of collective speech and two major institutions of cognitive capitalism, the university and the museum?

The classic figure of the Foucaultian *dispositif* is Bentham's Panopticon. Everyone will recall its elements: a ring-shaped building with a tower in the centre; long, thin cells with windows at each end; prisoners revealed clearly in the light. The tower itself is fitted with venetian blinds, so the prisoner is never sure that the guardian is present; therefore he always conducts himself as though beneath the watcher's gaze. Like all social devices, the Panopticon was functionally overdetermined: it could be used as a prison, a madhouse, an army barracks, a hospital, a factory, a school. It could serve to isolate dangerous or useless persons, to banish them from society; but it could also serve to shape its disciplinary objects into a productive force, to integrate them as soldiers, workers or bureaucrats. Its function was to resolve the confused, communicative, contagious mass of the crowd into distinct, knowable, controllable individuals. Foucault underscores this point: "Each individual, in his place, is securely confined to a cell from which he is seen from the front by the supervisor; but the side walls prevent him from coming into contact with his companions. He is seen, but he does not see; he is the object of information, never a subject in communication" (1978: 200).

The description of the Panopticon inaugurates the notion of the device, in *Discipline and Punish* (published in French in 1975). The book marks the culmination of Foucault's long effort to distinguish the normalizing techniques of disciplinary power from the juridical decisions of the sovereign. Now consider the second, startlingly different use of this same notion of the device, in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* (whose French title is *La Volonté de savoir*, 'The Will to Know'), published just one year later. Here Foucault discusses the 'device of sexuality': a vast set of discourses, technologies, literary figures, corporeal practices, scientific concepts and medical interventions, extending far beyond the pleasures of the body. The device of sexuality is conceived as that which makes us speak, as that which makes us subjects in communication. Or rather, it is what makes the privileged subjects of the bourgeoisie speak about the best uses of their own vital energy, whether to the Christian director of conscience in the sixteenth century, or to the eighteenth-century psychiatrist.

Foucault challenges what he calls 'the repressive hypothesis'. He observes that when restrictive forms of institutional control finally were imposed across the spectrum of the social classes, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, psychoanalysis almost immediately emerged to offer the bourgeoisie a new tolerance for their own practices, and a fresh release of sex into language. What he analyzes in *The History of Sexuality* is less a coercive structure than a guided transformation. The figure that we glimpse no longer has the sharply delineated form of a circle with a central axis and radiant spokes, indeed it is no longer a figure at all: it appears instead as a continuously unfurling mesh of discourses, gazes and relations. Yet this relational device is still productive. It corresponds to "that epoch of *Spätkapitalismus* in which the exploitation of wage labour does not demand the same violent and physical constraints as in the nineteenth century, and where the politics of the body does not require the elision of sex or its restriction solely to the reproductive function; it relies instead on a multiple channeling into the controlled circuits of the economy – on what has been called a hyper-repressive desublimation" (Foucault, 1978b: 114).

Obviously, I was thinking of this passage at the very beginning, when I referred to James Lee Byars' telephone call to the sexologist Kronhausen. In the first extensive conversation to be reproduced in the pages of the *Laboratorium* catalogue devoted to *The World Question Center*. Kronhausen says this: "Well, instead of offering you a question, I can tell you that you are calling us, my wife and I, on a very special day. Because today we presented for the second time our film *Freedom to Love*, which we shot in Holland last June, to the German censorship board, and they were very liberal, very generous, fair-minded, and they passed the film, which has very strong erotic content but only very minor threat". This absence of threat from a newly unbridled sexuality is exactly what Marcuse, in *One-Dimensional Man*, had identified as the control mechanism of repressive desublimation.

Now, the idea is not to suggest that the exhibition *Laboratorium* was somehow secretly obsessed with sex, because that's not the case. And it's also true that Foucault never again pointed to a device of power with the architectonic precision of the Panopticon – not even Freud's famous couch, which still seems to haunt the introductory volume of *The History of Sexuality*. Nonetheless, for an epoch genuinely obsessed with the immaterial productivity of its unbridled creative energy, I believe that the laboratory-museum could well serve as an exemplary device of power, precisely to the extent that it achieves a multiple channelling of that creative energy into the controlled circuits of the neoliberal economy. And what is more, it appears that a large-scale version of this device is being constructed right now, in Great Britain, at University College London. One just might wonder how Foucault would have reacted, upon learning that this device of power for the late-capitalist or post-Fordist era has been conceived under the direct intellectual patronage of Jeremy Bentham, and that it is called The Panopticon Museum?

For the readers of *Discipline and Punish*, the reference is almost macabre – like Bentham's skeleton dressed in casual clothes and a hat, still preserved with its wax head in the famous 'Auto-Icon' on the grounds of University College London. But there is no irony in UCL's proposal. Its principle is human productivity: "The name of the building, which derives from Greek and means 'all visible', encapsulates the bold public vision that UCL has for its future and the future of its unique collections.... Visitors will be actively encouraged not only to engage with the exhibits and themes but also to engage with the scholars, researchers and conservators as they work to reveal the historical relevance of artefacts and conduct essential preservation work.... Scholars, too, will greatly benefit from the modern facilities of the lecture theaters, study rooms and the conservation laboratory, enabling the detailed examination of many rare and valuable items".<sup>21</sup> And the description ends on a fabulously optimistic note: "Seeing people at work is an excellent ideal!"

The Panopticon Museum is exemplary of the destiny of cultural practices under the regime of cognitive capitalism. Indeed, the entire college has been turned into a value-adding machine, traversed by private-public partnerships, oriented to the production of intellectual property. Education is now a speculation on human potential, where the

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21 'Panopticon at UCL – Welcome', <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/panopticon>.

conduct of students and professors is scrutinized as closely as currency values on the charts and screens of the postsocial traders. Of course, the emphasis here is not on restrictive control, but on innovation and invention, developed in open networks by the exploitation of what management theorists like Ronald Burt call ‘structural holes’. What we are allowed to say, what we are forced to say, what we kept from saying: all that changes under these conditions.

In his course at the Sorbonne in 1978-79, Foucault shifted the focus of his inquiry from the normalizing procedures of the disciplinary regime to the characteristically liberal mode of governance, where power is exerted “not on the players, but on the rules of the game”. This led him to study the Chicago-school economist Gary Becker and his theory of human capital, which holds that individuals always calculate the potential economic value, not only of their education, but also of marriage, childrearing, crime, altruism, etc. Foucault saw this model of the economic subject as the foundation-stone of a political rationality, around which new kinds of institutions could be built. At the close of the long recession of the 1970s, and at the outset of what would come to be known as globalization, he recognized that this care for the value of the self could be instituted as a series of *markets*, replacing the traditional forms of the welfare state and forming the core of a growth policy no longer centred on investment in fixed capital and management of physical labour, but one that instead “will be precisely centered on exactly the things that the West can modify most easily... [i.e.] the level and form of the investment in human capital” (Foucault, 2004). A far-ranging transformation of the developed world’s institutions – a transformation generally referred to as ‘neoliberalism’ – becomes the ultimate price of speaking one’s subjective truth in Becker’s econometric terms.

The results of this shift can be seen in the seemingly endless development of procedures to identify productive potential in the workplace, ranging from the early ‘quality circles’ of Japanese factories in the 1980s, to the American techniques of ‘Total Quality Management’, or a more recent practice like the ‘360-degree evaluation’, or ‘panoramic evaluation’, where an entire organization subjects itself, via Internet, to reciprocal critique from all its collaborators. These techniques represent a deep transformation or ‘transvaluation’ of the panoptic device, eliminating the central tower and the asymmetric power of the hidden eye, and releasing the evaluating gazes for circulation within an all-channel network. The Panopticon becomes panoramic, as discipline fades away in favor of self-motivation according to liberal principles. Indeed, the UCL Panopticon Museum is the Benthamite utopia of a perfect society, where even minor threats have been removed, where corrective discipline is no longer needed, where vital energy has become integrally productive, not just in speech, but in all the activities of intellectual creation.

How can artists and intellectuals exit from such a device, which has come into perfect sync with the operations of the computerized financial markets? What seemed most promising, in the Trans-Siberian project, was the ambition to leave the integrated circuits of the conference-exhibition-festival economy, in order to seek out sites of resistance to the three major forms of power: sovereignty, which excludes and takes the sacrifice of bare life; discipline, which normalizes docile bodies for hierarchical command; and finally the liberal mechanisms of incitement, which encourage the

individual to constantly speculate on his or her own value in monetary terms. Clearly, the three forms (which correspond to the three major phases of capitalism: primitive accumulation through slavery; the exploitation of salaried labour in the factory system; the channelling of cognitive potential in the informational economy) are all at work in the contemporary world. Today, these different forms of power are simultaneously enmeshed in the operations of a financial-industrial-war economy which has become increasingly threatening, whether in the battlefields and ambuscades of Iraq, in the endlessly exploitative factories of contemporary China, or within the rarefying perimeters of Western ‘knowledge parks’, struggling to regain their competitive advantage by grooming citizens for the invention of intellectual property. Perhaps what is most ‘arbitrary’ about the arbitrary power that seems to guide this disjointed triple dance, is its ability to blind its subjects to the seemingly inexorable set of determinisms that make them all participate in the minutely controlled flux of a journey toward disaster.

The concept of ‘deep play’ – or the quality of artistic excess that Bruegger and Knorr Cetina wanted to transfer from Clifford Geertz’s Balinese cock-fighters to their own postsocial traders – was itself, as a kind of intellectual fate would have it, an invention of Jeremy Bentham.<sup>22</sup> He used it to describe the irrational activity of inveterate gamblers, whose speculative excesses could not be resolved into any calculus of individual pleasure, and should therefore be outlawed. Geertz sought to go beyond Bentham’s shallow moralizing by portraying the deep play of Balinese gamblers as an arena for the meeting of self and other, an affirmation of the social tie. But in a further turn of the screw, it is now this speculative irrationality that lies at the heart of a self-denying and ultimately self-destructive tie, in the age of a fully realized post-social Benthamite utopia. And this is what we are being taught to calculate, this is what we are being encouraged to create in the cultural field.

What has to be understood, expressed, and then dismantled and left behind in the movement of the artistic experience, are the specific modalities whereby the planetary middle-managerial classes share, through our work, our labour, in the concrete deployment of sovereign, disciplinary and liberal devices of power, and in the depths of systemic madness they together configure. I have focused on the relations between the cultural and financial spheres as a key articulation that permits, structures and at the same time hides this deployment of power over the movements of both body and mind. It is precisely this articulation that should be challenged, questioned in its legitimacy and its very sense, so that the entire communications machine of cognitive capitalism can be used to open a debate on the crisis of the present. The systemic ‘device’ must be confronted by deliberate and delirious processes of social experimentation, which can dismantle it, derail it, while opening other paths, other modes of production and self-production. This is the counter-urgency of our times.

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22 See Geertz, (1973: 432): “Bentham’s concept of ‘deep play’ is found in his *Theory of Legislation*. By it he means stakes which are so high that it is, from his utilitarian standpoint, irrational for men to engage in it at all”.

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# Outside Politics/Continuous Experience\*

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## abstract

The political potencies of experience are alternately cherished and repudiated in cultural studies and social theory. This paper explores different possibilities for considering the role experience plays in political change. Firstly, drawing on John Cassavete's (1978) film *Opening Night* and W. G. Sebald's (1997) book *The Emigrants*, we examine how the imposition of clichéd renditions and normalising discourses of experience is refused and reworked. We introduce the concept of continuous experience to gain purchase on modes of everyday existence which are fluid, dispersed and never unified. Continuous experience interrupts and tarries with time; things, people and situations are affected by continuous experience not as it is interpreted or represented but as it materialises. The concept of continuous experience allows us to consider the unrepresentable excess of everyday sociability, an excess which materialises as sociability in the making. Secondly, we investigate how these imperceptible modes of sociability operate against and beyond given modes of political representation, such as state-politics, identity politics and micropolitics. We use the term 'outside politics' to discuss strategies of political engagement after representation; that is, strategies of dis-identification and imperceptibility. Outside politics fuel the emergence of plural historical actors who circumvent the ascription of both identity and subjectivity, and who resist univocal integration into emerging hegemonic forms of political sovereignty.

Attempts to think political action in the 1990s were dominated by debates over identity politics or by melancholic discussions about the demise of the left, the seeming impossibility of resistance and hesitation over the efficacy of micropolitics which targets everyday life. Hence, for many, the 'new modes of political engagement' which emerged in the wake of Seattle appeared as a surprise – startling people out of their familiar tone of lament. There is a contingency and unpredictability to current modes of political engagement, and inquiring into their specificity is an important endeavour. This paper attempts to rethink this contingent articulation of new social movements from a very particular perspective: we consider how everyday experience contributes to and promotes forms of political activity, forms which question prevalent ways of

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\* This paper is based on a common work with Vassilis Tsianos. Furthermore, we would like to thank the Centre for Cultural Studies at University of California, Santa Cruz for providing an inspiring environment for the development of these ideas – in particular the supportive engagement of James Clifford and Chris Connery and Gail Hershatter. We gained important insights from the comments offered about this paper when it was presented at the Centre for Contemporary Art & Politics, University of New South Wales and from the comments of two anonymous reviewers.

thinking political organization today (Papadopoulos, Stephenson and Tsianos, forthcoming, 2007). We will focus on modes of engagement which harness and work with dis-identification, or what we call ‘outside politics’. Our purpose is not to offer a genealogical account of outside politics, but to delineate a conceptual tool for talking about and working with something which lies at the core of outside politics, something familiar yet much overlooked: continuous experience.

## Policing and Outside Politics

Because the *demos* have no apparent wealth, skills, or experience, Plato saw democracy as a way of including people who otherwise have nothing to offer to the work of governance. Inclusion on the basis of an egalitarian principle acts as a paradoxical reminder that some parts of the society really have no role to play in governance. Plato’s critique of democracy illuminates how opening possibilities for egalitarian principles and practices can effectively be a means of erasing those very possibilities (Rancière, 1998, 2001). This form of exclusion is not a matter of denying possibilities for political representation: it occurs prior to representation. It functions at the level of perception, rendering some people invisible. Each society is demarcated and entails different communities or groups of people. The capacities of some are simply imperceptible to others, meaning that there are always those who are accorded no proper place in the normalising organization of the social realm. Efforts to challenge this invisibility are easily captured and recouped into disputes over rights or representation, disputes which actually contribute to the exclusion of the imperceptible. Politics happen only when imperceptible actors emerge within the realm in which they already exist, but to which they are not thought to belong.

Whilst questions of representation and rights are often mistaken for politics, they in fact provide the terrain where the normalising functions of inclusion and exclusion – practices of policing – are enacted. Policing is blind to the excesses or absences of normalised existence (Rancière, 2000). Dis-identification breaks from this logic, enabling intervention in the appearance that society is made of up of identifiable, self-evident groups or people who occupy the space that has been allocated to them and no other. Now, doing politics involves refusing who one is supposed to be, refiguring the perceptible and making the incommensurability of worlds evident. Doing politics means foregrounding the incommensurability of principles of equality and rights and the inegalitarian distribution of bodies. Politics, in this strict sense, amount to the refusal of representation: politics works with imperceptible experiences and immanent transformation.

## Imperceptible Experience

To speak of outside politics may seem paradoxical, or it may even appear to be a glorified account of a failure to intervene in contemporary social- and geopolitics. Outside politics is easily misrecognised because, as it works on the level of everyday life, it entails processes which are imperceptible; hence it cannot be grasped by familiar

ways of conceiving of socio-political change. We suggest that in order to consider the significance of outside politics we need to explore the specific ways in which it affects everyday experience and works through continuous experience. This paper is devoted to interrogating how outside politics functions in everyday life. The concept of continuous experience is not being put forward in the attempt to designate what experience *is*, but as a tool to analyse the inner workings of modes of socio-political engagement which are being harnessed in moments of social and geopolitical exclusion. Whilst the notion of outside politics provides an observer's view of radical political action today, the concept of continuous experience explores the immanent emergence of these forms of political engagement.

In this sense, the politics of continuous experience is distinct from other prevalent forms of political engagement and the ways in which they harness experience. Firstly, political activity which takes the state as its object is underpinned by an idea of experience as universal – a notion which casts experience as the property of a given entity (i.e. a subject) and amplifies the experience of some actors, ignoring that of others (Chakrabarty, 2000; for an in depth discussion see Stephenson and Papadopoulos, 2006). Universal experience privileges political strategies which address the institution of the state as *the way to do politics* (Calhoun, 2002). Secondly, identity politics target the state with calls for recognition of multiple and different forms of experience. Experience is cast as the end product of regulation and subjectification. Identity politics attempt to insert the experiences of excluded positions into state governance and public discourse. Yet, these strategies are easily recouped when, in place of redistribution, they result in the colonising recognition of difference (Santos, 2001; Brown, 1995; de Lauretis, 1988). Importantly, there is another dimension of identity politics; to the extent that it works in social and cultural domains it can challenge the status of the state as the ultimate arbiter of socio-political transformation. This shift has given rise to a third form of intervention: micropolitics. Micropolitics takes the limits of the state as its point of departure and works with experience as the site of regulation and of transformation (Foucault, 1998, 1990; Warner, 2002). It involves putting experience to work as the substance of aesthetic cultivation (Connolly, 2002). Micropolitics fractures the ongoing processes of capture entailed in state-politics. Yet, seen historically, micropolitics have also been one of the means through which the neoliberal state (and post-Fordist regulation) has reinvented itself and continues to disseminate into social and cultural life. There is a need to respond to the ever-present risk that the aesthetics of freedom not only overlooks, but reproduces, the privileged positioning of those who cultivate it (Spivak, 1999). Because each of these three positions ends up either solidifying a subject or privileging subjectification, they cannot elucidate dimensions of experience which subvert policing. It is impossible to grasp this subversion without the tools to elucidate how people escape the seizure of immanent experience as it unfolds.

## Dis-identification and Migration Politics

The political possibilities of dis-identification can be illustrated if we consider theories of the autonomy of migration which attempt to intervene in public discussions of, and policies formulated in response to, migration. Much political activity around migration

seeks to control (or counter the control of) border-crossing, detention and the legislation of residency and visas. Migrants are commonly cast as either threats to a nation-state's integrity or victims of the state's punitive policies. But both of these positions approach migration from the perspective of an observer. They focus on people's points of departure and arrival. What becomes impossible to grasp is the journey itself.

When we cease taking the observer's perspective and engage with theories of the autonomy of migration, it is possible to approach migration as constitutive force in current social transformation (Bojadzijev, Karakayali and Tsianos, 2004; Karakayali and Tsianos, 2005; Mezzadra, 2001). Theories about the autonomy of migration no longer focus on how migrants become integrated into the societies in which they reside (of course this happens), but on how people move and change these societies *de facto* – by integrating and rearranging the given restrictions and conditions into their mobility. Migration's weapon of imperceptibility is not the only tool in use. Neither is it the case that imperceptibility always succeeds, it is a route without guarantees, it involves pain, suffering, hunger, desperation, torture, even the deaths of thousands of people in the sunken ships into the oceans of earth. But neither of these details can justify ignoring the journey and forces of migration. Hence, the autonomy of migration is concerned with how migrants themselves organize their mobility, their informal social networks, their employment opportunities, and their participation in the institutional policies of a certain country.

When we turn to the inside story of migration, the dynamic and contradictory trajectories being opened, crisscrossed and closed again and again as people travel, we can see that border-crossings are effected by becoming imperceptible. Instead of being perceptible, discernible, identifiable, current migration puts on the agenda a new form of politics and a new formation of active political subjects who refuse to become a political subject at all (rather than strive to find a different way to become or to be a political subject). Sir Alfred Mehran (the man who existed as Mehran Karimi Nasseri in 1988 when he got stuck in Terminal 1 in Charles de Gaulle airport in Paris) refused to use his original name when in 1999 he was offered a UNHCR passport which rendered him identifiable by the assimilationist logic of liberal-national administration. Many of the migrants in the border camps of the EU, instead of waiting for a decision regarding their asylum status, escape the camps and dive into the informal networks of clandestine labour in the metropolises. The migrants waiting on the North shores of Africa to cross the Mediterranean in floating coffins burn their documents and enter the life of 'Herraguas,' or burners, which *de facto* puts them outside of any politics of rights (Kuster, 2006a; Kuster and Tsianos, 2005). Visibility, in the context of illegal migration, belongs to the inventory of technologies pertaining to the regimes of control which police migrational flows. Becoming imperceptible is an immanent act of resistance because it makes it impossible to identify migration as process which consists of fixed collective subjects. Becoming imperceptible is the most precise and effective tool migrants employ to oppose the individualizing, quantifying, policing, and representational pressures of contemporary regimes of migration control (Papadopoulos, Stephenson and Tsianos, forthcoming 2007). Outside politics are the means through which migrants finally engage in processes of de-representation and dis-identification in order, not simply to enter into the game of policing, but to break the

rules of representation and integration, transforming the game into a political dispute over their ‘right to be’ (Papadopoulos and Tsianos, 2007a).

Dis-identification is not primarily a question of shifting identitarian ascriptions; it is a material and an embodied strategy of ‘de-humanisation’, it breaks the relation between your name and your body. A body without a name is a non-human human being, an animal which runs. It is non-human because it deliberately abandons the humanist regime of rights. The UNHCR convention for asylum seekers protects the rights of refugees on arrival, but not when they are on the road. On the road, migrants are accompanied by traffickers; the coyote of the US-Mexico border, the British sailors who operate as sharks, the ‘korakia’ or ravens of the Greek-Albanian border, the Chinese ‘*shetou*’ or snakehead (cf. Papadopoulos and Tsianos, 2007b). In the sovereign public imaginary, migration is an illegally organized scandal with only two players: lawbreaking migrants and criminal smugglers. But the criminalization of border-crossing and the reduction of the complex and polymorphic networks which sustain migrational movements as a one act/two actors piece hides the common elisions made between the alleged sovereign humanitarian doctrine ‘save the people’ and violent fixations on the politics of ‘save the borders’ from unchecked intrusion. Migration is not a unilinear individual choice process; it is not an effect of the push and pull mechanics of supply and demand for human capital. Migration adapts differently to each particular context, changes its faces, links unexpected social actors together, absorbs and reshapes the sovereign dynamics targeting its control. The unruly, transformative force of migration is primarily sustained by cooperation, solidarity, the usage of broad networks and resources, shared knowledge, collective anticipation (Kuster, 2006b). But to understand the political efficacy of this kind of cooperation (which functions without reference to a *fixed* collective subject), we need to elucidate the way in which it works with everyday experience.

## **Immanent Struggles in the Terrain of Experience**

One might think that with working the immanent and contingent planes of experience would unleash all the creative and subversive potentials which are connected to a non-essentialist, anti-foundational, non-binary political way of engaging with life. And while this is certainly the case – many critical thinkers in the field of Science and Technology Studies have stressed this (Bowker and Star, 1999; Hess, 1995; Schraube, 1998; Winner, 1986) – it seems that this form of activity simultaneously fails to interrupt a mode of capturing of experience which is deeply embedded in current structures of postliberal domination.

Consider for example, the concept of hybridity which has been so central for undoing racial, cultural and nationalist essentialist practices (Ang, 2003; Anzaldúa, 1999; Bhabha, 1994; Hall, 1994; Papastergiadis, 2005; Santos, 2001; Werbner and Modood, 1997; Young, 1995). Now, notions of ‘rhizomatic hybridity’ (Wade, 2005: 606), are entering into discussions of hybridity. One might think that this engagement with life would intensify the subversiveness of these ideas in our current conditions. But the business of hybridity seems to have rather ambivalent effects. They range from

normalising hybrid identities by including them into shuddering multicultural societies (as discussed by Hage, 1998) to the aestheticisation and “ambivalent coupling between racism and sexualized desire for the Other” (Sharma and Sharma, 2003: 5). And Sanjay and Ashwani Sharma continue:

Contemporary Orientalism appears less troubled with the danger of going native (and even miscegenation) in its relation to otherness, which may account for the ‘frisson’ of difference being harder to sustain now. Moreover, the encounter with the Other is no longer only one of a distant place or mediated through Orientalist representations; it has become an everyday occurrence in the Western multicultural metropolis. Nevertheless, while the racism of Orientalism has shifted towards a differentialist inclusion, we find that an assiduous preservation of ‘the proper distance’ from the ‘Other’ has become portentous. (2003: 6)

The immanent and situated transformations taking place on the level of everyday practices are easily absorbed into an all encompassing system of representations, a system which then re-enters and pervades the everyday. We understand this absorption of the subversive potentials of emergent experience as a process where a transcendent, optic trajectory struggles against and finally dominates over the continuous experience of situated actions. That is, regimes of control are established by transforming one mode of everyday existence into another. The immanent unfolding of life exists in tandem with an optic order marked by its transcendent vision and representational mediation.

We could draw on Benjamin’s work on phantasmagoria (whose origins are always hidden from those who are drawn into it) to analyse the ascendancy of the optic mode of existence (Benjamin, 1999; Buse et al., 1999: 59-70). Equally, we might turn to Debord’s (1994) work on the spectacle, characterised in part as “the common ground of the deceived gaze and of false consciousness” (1994, thesis 3). Despite their importance for cultivating our imagination, there is however a problem with these concepts: they invoke the optic as something external to what people do, as something which is added to people’s actions as a means of subjugation and coercion. In these approaches, the representations and images which dominate and subjugate immediate sensual experience and material action seem to have their provenance in the notion of ideology. A top-down reality appears to dominate people’s daily actions and experiences.

But dominance does not function through the imposition of external images, ideologies and representations over people’s ordinary lives. With Foucault, we can say that people are not duped, they “know perfectly well ... and they are certainly capable of expressing themselves”; but what they are contesting is a “system of power which blocks, prohibits, and invalidates” some discourses and knowledges by “subtly penetrat[ing] an entire societal network” (1977: 207). This suggests that optic, transcendent trajectories circulate *in* emergent life, in everyday action and experience. That is, at least two very different trajectories are carved out in this immanent terrain of experience. It may seem that the terrain of experience is an ensnared space where familiar and new modes of cooption and policing proliferate. Another trajectory needs to be identified before the politics of experience breaks with policing. Daily action, transformations in life, everyday experience are immanent, non-totalisable, haptic, material and situated (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 492-500; Haraway, 1991).

## Working with Experience as a Question to be Addressed

In this paper we consider that other trajectory, continuous experience, and the political strategies of imperceptibility and dis-identification as the means through which outside politics are effective. Outside politics work with the excess and indeterminacy of continuous experience. Through readings of Cassavetes' film *Opening Night* and Sebald's book *The Emigrants*, we suggest that this excess is neither mystical nor extraordinary. This excess is carried with experience as it circulates amongst people, things and situations (Irigaray, 1985; Santos, 2001). It travels in continuous experience, materialising and moving people, allowing them to connect with, instead of repudiating disparate and unexpected trajectories. Working with continuous experience entails refusing clichéd subject positions in the absence of alternatives, anticipating and orientating towards non-existent, contingent possibilities which may or may never come about.

In working with these texts, we approach them as neither representations nor evidence of particular forms of experience but as opportunities to work with experience as a problem to be explained (Scott, 1991). We have selected these texts because they both evoke characters who exist and are sustained by realms beyond those organized and regulated by optic, transcendent trajectories of experience. In different ways the audiences of Cassavetes' film, *Opening Night*, and the readers of Sebald's fictional biography, *The Emigrants*, encounter a break with normative representations of experience. As they live out their lives, Sebald's migrants seem to bypass normative accounts of the Holocaust and of survival. Cassavetes' character Myrtle Gordon is immersed in an active struggle over others' normative understandings of the role of her own experience in her performance of a stereotypical character on stage. Hence, both Cassavetes and Sebald prompt questions about how it is possible to work with experience as anything other than an ensnared space of policing. In addressing this question we introduce the concept of continuous experience, and we develop this concept through our readings of the texts. We do not claim that continuous experience exists in these texts, but simply that the questions raised by Cassavetes and Sebald can be addressed by bringing the concept of continuous experience to a reading of them.

### Opening Night

Myrtle Gordon (played by Gena Rowlands) is a star. This is not the first time she has been cast by Manny Victor, nor is it her first encounter on stage with the lead actor Maurice Adams (John Cassavetes), a past lover. *Opening Night* (1978), observes the play in the week leading up to the Broadway premiere. They are using a short run in New Haven to fine-tune the production. But it would help if the director, playwright, cast and crew first shared a common vision of exactly what they will be producing. Myrtle seems to be disturbing the cooperation required to get there. Manny and Myrtle both know that the power of Myrtle's work stems from her capacity – not just to represent a role – but to be *in* the play, to move with the part, straining and opening new possibilities in the script, to put her vision into motion in the connections between actors, to allow it to emerge in the performances of others even in the scenes in which

she herself is absent. But now the star's capacity is being tested. The script represents a woman's experience of aging as the gradual loss of one's ability to have an effect on the world, on others. Not only does Myrtle find the character alien, but if she is convincing in the part she will always be damned to play despairing, aging women. To connect with the rest of the cast over the truth of the play as she sees it, she has to break with their misconception that the script is a vehicle for the amplification of her own personal experience of aging.

Cassavetes contests the illusion that experience can be represented in a linear cinematic narrative. Instead of telling a story of this or that experience, he explores the mechanics of experience in ordinary life (Carney, 2001). It is no coincidence that Cassavetes' films were improvised, emphasising the weight of the actors' role (Cassavetes, 1976; Charity, 2001). His films are anti-narratives which attempt to reveal how our familiar narratives of everyday life are nothing more than clichés – ready to break down any moment, to become incommensurable, to move in unexpected directions, or simply to disappear. Cassavetes moves from representation to improvisation, from narrative to experience. *Opening Night* considers the suffocating treatment of experience as something reified and readily representable. Into this, Cassavetes introduces the attempt to render experience continuous.

The playwright's clichéd representation of aging does offer something insightful about a woman's experience of being subjected to this hegemonic discourse. What is awry is that the play presents only what can be said about experience when we look from outside of the lived moment; it only examines experience which has been folded onto the subject from the perspective of a self-reflexive, over-arching 'I'. It does not offer any sense of a person being in the midst of the immanent unfolding of experience. But Myrtle tries to refuse the imperative to first interiorise the character and then to struggle with the experience of ageing in a reflexive way. Instead, she tries to perform this experience as a shared and continuous mode of relating to the others involved in the production. Myrtle does the experience of ageing as something which drifts through indivisible terrain, working at the level of deep linkages (Lovink and Rossiter, 2005) that allow for new connections with others, new forms of intimate relations, a new feeling of one's own position in the world.

## Experience After Representation

It might be possible to read Myrtle as engaged in a struggle over the articulation of experience as she tries to counter and resist a normative mode of subjectivation to aging. But such a reading imposes an overly-narrow understanding of socio-political change as the result of acts of resistance and articulation (Frow and Morris, 1999; Hall, 1986a). Myrtle is in the games of neither articulation nor resistance, she attempts to introduce the players to another game altogether. She does politics by introducing what is outside of politics, by bringing the fundamental indivisibility of experience into play. Nor is Myrtle seeking others' affirmation of her own unique experience. Rather, she emits signals which might fire shared experiences of the continuous and contradictory nature of aging. She tries to invoke a common space where the singular threads of

experiences of aging running between herself and the others can be activated and connected, rendering a new play.

By cultivating a space for interaction, continuous experience contests the idea that each person owns his/her experience, reflects on it and negotiates its meaning. There are only common experiences on which different actors work taking different points of entrance. And this is not individualisation, but *individuation* (Virno, 2004). Starting from fluid, fragmented, imperceptible, common experiences individuation involves tracing singular paths, paths which often collapse again into each other, sometimes diverge, develop in parallel, or connect up with other unexpected paths. The stuff of individuation is continuous experience moving through individuals rather than belonging to them.

It is only after the work of demarcation that we can speak of ‘an experience’ or ‘my experience’; that is, ad hoc impositions made from the transcendent perspective of normative discourses of social life. From this transcendent perspective experience is cut, continuous experience is rendered divisible, scattered and distributed across individuals (Barad, 2003). Each individual experience mirrors this normative and transcendent perspective of social life: universal experience. An additional step, the constitution of individuals as having reflexive interiority, sustains the picture of experience as an essentially private realisation of universal experience. The question of universal experience is a question of power. It normalises and calibrates individual action. In terms of politics it achieves the exact opposite of outside politics’ goal: it performs a colonising inclusion of individual experience. Continuous experience challenges this approach to experience by exceeding the normalising and inclusive regulation of universal experience, and it does this through materialisation and tarrying with time.

## Materialisation of Experience

“I don’t want to argue about this, we’ll rehearse it”, Manny says to Myrtle. It is 4.30 in the morning and she has rung him to insist that the play is not working. She cites the moment in the play where a couple realise that their relationship is over, and her character is slapped. The following day the rehearsal falls apart. Manny first tries to introduce another slap: Myrtle’s character hits back at Maurice’s character. Manny mistakenly reduces Myrtle’s aversion to the scene to her struggle with heteronormativity. But Myrtle is challenging the despair she is being asked to portray.

The others at the rehearsal intensify the imposition of normalising discourses by becoming increasingly assured that Myrtle has personal problems with aging. The situation is saturated with endless negotiations of discourses which simply have no purchase on Myrtle’s concerns, it cannot absorb new efforts to put experience to work. Myrtle has to act. She simply has to redo the situation. When Manny asks her to rehearse the slap scene she does not argue or refuse, but she simply does not go with it, she falls to the ground and starts shouting. She stays there, Maurice is forced out of his role, he cannot say his lines to a body on the ground. Without negotiation, Myrtle inserts a new fact. At this point the others can no longer close this act with a reading

that seals Myrtle into her personal dilemma. Having introduced a rupture, now the hegemonic reading figures as a *reaction* to a new fact, a new possibility. Myrtle's doing continuous experience has affected the situation. It can no longer continue as it was. Manny is forced to retreat to act 1, scene 1 – and Myrtle and Maurice leave the stage. The efficacy of action without negotiation stems from the fact that the potency of continuous experience lays its materialisation, not in its narration, in its performative power to change things, not its capacity to represent them.

Continuous experience materialises – in two ways. Firstly, although experience can be understood as constituted through interpretation (Vattimo, 1997; Taylor, 1971) or – alternatively through discourse (Scott, 1991) – this is not all there is to experience. Materialisation means to act both on the inside and outside of existing meanings and discourses: it is the objective making and remaking of the world in ways that may not be representable in given discourses. That is what Myrtle does, for example, when she stops the 'normal' flow of the rehearsal.

Secondly, continuous experience flows not only through people but also through objects. Elements of the material world become artefacts of experience. Objects and material structures are far more independent, more real, more durable than any discourses. And discourses have meaning to the extent that they interact with these material, interobjective worlds – not the other way around (Barad, 1998, 2003). In the words of Bourdieu there is a 'still pedagogy' which a social field – that is comprised of social interactions, objects, practices – exercises on people participating in it (Bourdieu, 1987: 128). Things and objects are constantly incorporating and producing other objects (and therefore the world we live in), 'objects are thirsty,' as Anders says, for more materiality and for more action (Schraube, 2005).

Continuous experience is neither the result of narrative nor of discourses, but exists in actions carried out in material worlds. Other people, things, material spaces, situations – all these actants – participate in the unfolding of experience. Experience is not primarily a matter of thought. Things and spaces are carriers of experience, which becomes ours. The common space of individuation is not just an intellectual representation, it is not merely a symbolic construction, it is matter: structured through objects, artefacts, landscapes, buildings. Individuation harnesses the experience things carry with them as it passes from things to people to things to situations and so on.

This has implications for the politics of everyday life. When experience materialises it transforms our conditions of visibility and action in a specific field, it comes out of the everyday and transforms it (Debord, 1981). And it does that by bypassing the very basic legitimising foundations of those fields' hegemonic discourses. Experience which was previously dismissed, or was simply invisible, is inserted into a new matrix of legitimacy. Myrtle already knows that her attempts to gain others' understanding will necessarily be captured, tamed and reinserted into the framework of the situation. She has to affect the situation in a different way. She cannot negotiate. She is forced to do politics from beyond, outside politics: that is, to act from outside of the normalising discourses at work both in the script and being repeatedly imposed on her by the others' misrecognition of her efforts to intervene in the play. And finally she does by appearing drastically drunk for the opening night performance. It is not simply Myrtle, but a relay

between Myrtle and a vast amount of alcohol which together trigger people's participation in a different play – the other actors and most importantly the audience. The performance moves people. Her politics are effective.

## Tarrying with the Event

Although continuous experience unfolds through people and things it is not only a spatial phenomenon. It also flows through time, departing from the logic that experiences are discrete points on the timeline of individual's life story (Adam, 2004). *Opening Night* has a linear time frame: the highly-pressured week leading up to the premier on Broadway. The expectation is that each day will bring the production closer to the dazzling success they all want to perform in New York. But, Myrtle retreats from this chronology. And, instead of becoming increasingly tight as the days pass, the production becomes progressively looser, open and more unpredictable. The rule-breaking, moving performance is not a result of the play's progressive refinement. It is idiosyncratic and contingent, and could have easily failed. Myrtle anticipates and invests in a shift which may or may not have occurred. She tarries with time (Theunissen, 1991). The imposition of normative discourses over experience occurs in time, structuring time and controlling the flow and the figurations of everyday activities (Elias, 1978). Myrtle moves against this regulation of time, but without intention. Myrtle cannot articulate an intention – even to herself – because what she is trying to evoke is already outside, unrepresentable. She could never have intended the event of the opening night, but at the same time, she engages in a process of change which is orientated towards it (Badiou, 2001). Tarrying occurs before intentionality and entails the dissolution of the reflexive subject. It expands the present, creating a moment of slowness, a moment where desire unfolds. Immanent experience unfolds in space and time without constituting a coherent subject (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). Continuous experience does not produce intentionality: it produces action as part of the social field in which it unfolds. Tarrying involves a mode of being which is inextricable from others and from the situation – a move beyond the self, enabling the permeation of experience with the world. Tarrying is intentionless and targetless: it has no object.

But perhaps tarrying is passivity masquerading as activity. To claim, as we are, that an objectless mode of being can be involved in doing effective politics involves a move away from familiar ideas of active political engagement. Effective political strategies are commonly thought to be underpinned by the capacity to adopt a transcendent view of the situation, work out what is happening and, from this detached perspective, figure out the most promising means of intervention. Of course, such an approach has been criticised on the basis that it cannot take account of situatedness (Haraway, 1991). But there is an additional problem: political action involves working not with what is already present and identifiable in its existence, but what is imperceptible, unfolding, with possibilities which may or may not be realised (Patton, 2000). And, in overlooking this, transcendent accounts of politics exclude what is becoming.

Myrtle is captured in the incessant circulation of normalising discourses, any attempt to introduce an excess is recuperated into an optic, transcendent trajectory. Retreating

from this transcendent position, without guarantees Myrtle inhabits a space outside of these discourses. She works with unrealised trajectories, possibilities which do not yet exist (not even in the symbolic, nor the imagination), potentials which may never manifest. And yet, she is driven by these non-existent possibilities. Myrtle could never have intended this event, but at the same time, she engages in a process of change which is orientated towards it (Badiou, 2001). And the non-existent event of the new play could not have come into existence without this unfolding of continuous experience.

Continuous experience is necessary to outside politics in a double sense. Firstly, it reconstitutes a situation as a space which is transformable through drifting, movement and the recombination of actants. This first dimension is connected to the immanent materialisation of experience. Secondly, through tarrying, continuous experience breaks with the regulated time and order of a situation opening it to non-present possibilities. Continuous experience is both immanent and full of potentialities. It is incorrigibly present, mesmerised by suddenness (Bohrer, 1998). This is political action from within, an active mode of being which prepares and evokes a change in the unfurling present.

## Everyday Sociability in the Making

It might be argued that continuous experience is really something exceptional, something only a minority of privileged actors can tap into (Rich, 1980) or which only exists at special points of rupture and transgression (e.g. Bataille, 1986). Against this, we argue that continuous experience is simply there; it is particular neither to special actors nor to extraordinary moments of transgression. It is an ordinary, ongoing, largely overlooked aspect of being. Whereas already captured modes of connecting may be easily identifiable, it is harder to see sociability in the making.

Cultural and social theory has been deeply involved in both the turn towards experience as an object of research and in contesting this broad shift. On the one hand, experience is valued as a foundation for articulations which evidence subjection or resistance to hegemonic discourses (Hall, 1986b; Slack, 1996). On the other, such promises are contested when experience is recast as the end-product of discursive assemblages (Scott, 1991; Rose, 1996). At the extreme ends of these debates, experience is either irrelevant to or identical with socio-political regulation and change. Continuous experience is grasped by neither of these poles. It operates at the level of everyday sociability; it is a mode of doing everyday politics which interferes with hegemonic politics by creating connections between actants which circumvent the normative terms or relating (Hardt and Negri, 2000). Unlike current hegemonic forms of sociability which are already captured by neoliberal governmental rationalities, the potential of continuous experience lies in the fact that it is sociability in the making.

## Dispersal in the Everyday

Sebald's *The Emigrants* (1997) evokes figures who are being pushed out of history: people who, because of the passage of history, are limited in how they can represent

their experience in the present. Yet they can still act in accordance with their experience and work through it. They can forge a different understanding of history without representation. Hegemonic discourses – of survival or loss, for example – cannot be avoided, but *The Emigrants* circumvent such discourses' reinstallation as central principles which order the trajectories of their lives. Sebald's emigrants travel with history without ever making it their point of departure or arrival. It is dispersed, unevenly distributed in the times and spaces of people's lives.

Max Ferber's life is not given meaning by the Holocaust. He is fifteen in 1939 when his parents arrange for him to leave Munich for England. Their plan is to follow. He lives in, what he describes as, an anarchic boarding school populated by boys who wear brightly coloured school uniforms – at times Ferber feels like he has become one of a flock of parrots. He receives fortnightly letters from home. After two years the letters stop. Only later he learns the reason: his parents had been deported to Riga. One might think here that his parents' disappearance will steer Ferber's course in life, an experience which will become memory, a memory which will become the most crucial principle endowing meaning in Ferber's life. But as Ferber ashamedly says, he was relieved to stop receiving the letters. Only later did he gradually grasp the fact of what happened, but he never grasped the meaning. There is no meaning. The moments when the Holocaust enters Ferber's experience are black holes in his life. The Holocaust is unspeakable, beyond meaning, and beyond representation. It is dispersed in Ferber's ever-present: "There is neither a past nor a future" (Sebald, 1997: 181), only a present. The Holocaust is dispersed in situations, encounters, things, people, Ferber's artwork, the way he lives as a hermit artist. History disseminates in the most unexpected corners of one's existence. It is not possible to collect dispersed moments of continuous experience into the one crucial, divisible overarching experience of the Holocaust.

Sebald evokes this dispersal of experience in Ferber's life and beyond. The account we read is written by a raconteur who, after a period of close friendship, has lost touch with Ferber. Twenty-five years later, the raconteur chances upon a story in the Sunday paper about a now famous artist, Ferber. For the first time he learns about Ferber's parents' disappearance. He goes to rekindle their relation and is warmly welcomed. Ferber gives him the diaries his mother, Luisa, wrote between 1939 and 1941. Luisa writes, not about present events, but about her childhood, her early love affairs, her marriage to Ferber's father. This is how Luisa experiences the Holocaust, she knows her fate and actively moves towards it bringing the depth of her engagement in life, in the community of which she is a part. The trajectories of Luisa's life run through her son, to his friend, who is entrusted to write about Ferber's life. The friend writes what we read. But first he writes, deletes, rewrites, deletes and writes again, concerned not only about doing justice to Ferber, but about "the entire questionable business of writing" (1997: 230). When Ferber gets emphysema the friend visits him on his deathbed; he never gives Ferber what he has written. The text makes up the fictive biographical account that we read. Sebald works with dispersed experience, not by giving it a coherent return to a person to whom it might be thought to belong but, as it circulates, by tracing its course through bodies, time and place.

In *The Emigrants* experience is a unified whole, but without a centre of gravity, without a central historical reference point. Like Woolf's Mrs. Ramsey, their experience is only

held together by innumerable scattered pieces of historical events (Woolf, 1997). As Luisa writes in 1941, “when I think back to those days’ between the wars, the winter days of ice-skating, I see shades of blue everywhere – a single empty space, stretching out in the twilight of late afternoon, crisscrossed by the tracks of ice-skaters long vanished” (1997: 217-8).

When the friend returns to Kissingen to search for traces of Luisa’s family, the elderly Germans he encounters appear as George Grosz caricatures living out their lives against the stage-set of a spa town. The city officials give him instructions to take 1000 paces south from the town centre and keys to the cemetery, keys which do not fit the locks on the gate. Clambering over the high walls he finds a neglected wilderness, and finally the gravestone of Luisa’s mother. In one sense, this grave is what he has come for, but now before it he does not know what to think. He marks his presence with a stone and leaves. Although the cemetery has not been completely destroyed, the space it is allocated in the town’s life is sealed and discrete, history never moves beyond the walls of the cemetery, never flows into the everyday life of Kissingen. The friend breaks the seal by participating in the dispersal of the Holocaust, its manifestations in seeds which have fallen and grown unnoticed outside of the cemetery’s walls. But also in seeds which have never really grown, but which just appear as bearers of the passage of historical time (Améry, 1964/1980).

Sebald conveys this dispersal of continuous experience by refusing the imperative to present ‘the Holocaust experience’ in the form of a coherent and cogent story. He deals with (fictive) biographical material, but without allowing it to be captured by the logic of narrative. There is no climax, no resolution, no dawning realisations about the meaning of experience. The point when the friend stands in front of the Ferber family grave is not illuminating. He simply says he does not know what to think, and leaves.

Dispersal is more than an attribute or quality of continuous experience. It is the process through which experience escapes capture and travels, destabilising clichéd renditions of events, crisscrossing space, releasing details of existence from their neutralised designation. The dispersal of experience is the means through which continuous experience flourishes and opposes any attempt to allocate a proper place to history’s leftovers. The friend leaves Kissingen deeply disturbed by the efficiency with which a generation of Germans have cleaned-up history. It is not that they have extinguished all evidence of the past, they have just tried to control its dispersal by tidying everything up and now they no longer need to actively remember it. They have made the move against which Jean Améry (1964/1980) rails: you cannot relegate the past to memory, it is always active everyday experience, even when it is elusive (Middleton and Brown, 2005). Dispersed experience is anti-memory: “And the last remnants memory destroys” (Sebald, 1997: 1).

## Fluidity and Imperceptibility

*The Emigrants* is populated by neither heroes nor anti-heroes, but by imperceptible characters. Although their everyday existence has been touched by the Holocaust, the

migrants' lives are not dominated by the trauma of survival. Their exclusion in the cleaned-up version of history does mark their lives, but they are not driven by the felt necessity to live as a response to it. They live arbitrary lives, which are no more and no less exceptional than most. But in doing this, they let history emerge and flow through many different unconnected, small incidents of life.

Sebald evokes this proximity to life through a series of unrelated figures who, as they age, forsake exceptionality, enter into ordinary life and embrace a mode of being unmediated by the clean-up of history. Their intimate relation to the Holocaust is not placed outside of their lived everyday existences; nor is it super-imposed on them, condemning them to permanent states of loss and anxiety. *The Emigrants* is not a book about loss, or about potentials unrealised. It deals with the individuation of the experience of the Holocaust.

Continuous experience is fluid (Irigaray, 1985). It is most closely connected to the surroundings, the vicinities, to the habitats of everyday life. After assimilating into his new country, Dr Henry Selwyn pursues a career as a doctor in England and in his later years devotes himself to his garden. In the last decade of his life, Paul Bereyter lives with a French woman and still retains a connection to his home town in Germany, where he had worked as a primary school teacher. Ambros Adelwarth leaves Austria and becomes an exclusive butler; he travels throughout the world accompanying the extravagant American, Cosmo Solomon. Max Ferber pursues his art in a corner of Manchester's abandoned docks, completely retreating from the normal business of the art world. In the crisscrossing paths of their migrations, Sebald's figures encounter death by making life. The Holocaust is carried with them, in them, in their lives. They dive into the realm of imperceptibility (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987).

The migrants retreat from the world without spurning it; they slip into the fissures between clichéd modes of everyday exchange, opening new ways of connecting. They are not hostile to others, they forge singular connections with those crossing their paths. The relations Sebald evokes are striking for their warmth, the openness of the curiosity which flows between people, the quality of the affections which emerge, the care taken – not out of a sense of obligation, but because people appreciate, are implicated and curious about the possibilities being cultivated in each others' trajectories of individuation.

Doing imperceptibility means retreating from the invitation to connect to others along terms dictated by the need for recognition of an individualised, divisible experience. For example, it involves refusing the interpellation of oneself as a 'survivor', an identity which always risks constraining experience. Imperceptible experience can act as a force which interrupts the representation of selves and the affirmation of identity. Instead of relating to others on the basis of a common interest, connections emerge from a shared search for a viable way to change the very conditions of existence. Such connections can contest the constraints of hegemonic identities, expanding the terrain on which the experience of the Holocaust can be lived out in radically different ways.

But here, possibilities for relating are not structured by the imperative to bring difference into play, nor does doing imperceptibility necessitate denying difference.

Imperceptibility starts from difference but involves a continuous drift away from the identities which are related to different subject positions. Hence, imperceptibility is a process of dis-identification; it works with singular, continuous experience. In this sense, outside politics do not aim to amplify either pole of the identity-difference axis (Butler, 1997): the migrants are liberated from the terms of this axis. This allows for new forms of inclusiveness in political disputes. By becoming imperceptible, actants without legitimacy can insert themselves into the political field, changing the architecture of the discourses in play.

## **Continuous Experience and Political Change**

Although the mode of engagement we are describing here does not involve a final, unified agenda, it would be a mistake to conclude that continuous experience and imperceptible politics are purposeless. By contesting exclusion through inclusion they generate alternative means for doing politics. In our current socio-political conditions state-politics, identity politics and micropolitics provide the necessary terrain for the proliferation and functioning of new hegemonic forms of transnational, postliberal sovereignty (Papadopoulos and Tsianos, 2007a; Balibar, 2004). What we are witnessing is not so much the demise of the state, the rise of transnational powers, or cultural political struggles, not even a new alliance between these actors. In postliberal sovereignty the state ceases to represent itself in its actions; it splits itself, and certain parts of it participate in broader social aggregates articulating interests, wills and political views from many different bits of social classes, social groups, associations of civil society (such as trade unions, customers organizations, pressure groups), local businesses, TNCs, NGOs, international governing bodies, transnational organizations (Sassen, 1999). What are emerging are vertical aggregates of power which use cultural politics to help maintain the coherence of postliberal power formations.

In this field, state-politics, identity politics and micropolitics all fail to establish a break with these emerging aggregates of sovereignty. For example, micropolitics were introduced as an answer to the limitations of state-politics. The intention was to counter everyday normalisation, to counter the effacement of subjectivities, the codification of otherness and Fordist immobility (Massumi, 1993; Connolly, 2002; Moulier Boutang, 1998). But as the state splits itself and disseminates into the finest fissures of society micropolitics (or the aesthetic cultivation of experience) have become necessary elements for its functioning and for its effective transformation into a postliberal mode of governance. Postliberal conditions require more than self-regulating individuals to proliferate. Networked subjects are needed, subjects who, by assuming responsibility for creating connections between disparate actants, actively forge new vertical aggregates of power (Sassen, 2004).

However, in situations where postliberal sovereignty recuperates the production of experience into a crucial moment of its own reproduction, there is still an excess of experience which infringes on and ruptures the new logic of control. The political relevance of this excess, of continuous experience, is that it creates new forms of sociability which operate in the everyday and outside of the inclusive strategies of

postliberal aggregates. Continuous experience fuels the engagement of those who are excluded from the logics of representation in current forms of sovereignty. We are not proposing that continuous experience is inherently subversive of hegemonic political rationalities (Bove and Empson, 2002). Rather, we are suggesting that if there is one form of politics which *can* be subversive in the current configuration of the everyday it is this. Through the creation of sociabilities, outside politics make apparent in everyday activity a world which is neglected or silenced by the dominant discourses of contemporary power.

*Opening Night* depicts the struggle over a move from identity politics and micropolitics to the politics of imperceptibility in the everyday. Continuous experience materialises – not through the resolution of tensions between all those involved in staging the play – but as a fact with which all have to contend. A new play is there. Unburdened by others expectations of their success, or even failure, Sebald's characters simply move imperceptibly. The migrants take up the dispersal of continuous experience and in so doing they reveal the social relations which are being forged in the neglected spaces between hegemonic discourses of tragedy and loss – modes of sociability which rework our sense of the everyday lived experience of the Holocaust and the futures such experience makes possible. Their everyday experience is the place where history unfolds. Rather than moving towards futures which are determined by their pasts, the migrants navigate without ever puncturing the “mist that no eye can dispel” (Sebald, 1997: 25). Moving deeper into the immanence of the present entails a refusal of clichéd subject positions, a retreat from the self. This is the subjectless condition of outside politics. Policing proliferates through the capacity state-politics, identity politics and micropolitics have to evoke subjects through processes of representation. In contrast, outside politics refuse representation, harnessing everyday sociabilities which exceed the constitution of today's subjectivities. In this paper we argued that it is through continuous experience that these sociabilities operate and *de facto* change the world we live in. They create an imperceptible world, World 2 (Papadopoulos, 2006), which has the power to challenge the political constitution of post-liberal societies. Outside politics insist that another world is here.

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# The Auto-Destructive Community: The Torsion of the Common in Local Sites of Antagonism

Marina Vishmidt

## abstract

The text considers some issues arising through an experience of local activism contesting gentrification, and relates this to some formulations in Jean-Luc Nancy, Giorgio Agamben and Karl Marx on the politics and ontology of ‘community’ as an articulation of common being, or the impossibility thereof. There may be a correlation between Marx’s precept of the proletariat as the class that exists both to annihilate itself and class society as such in the social relations engendered by communism, and Nancy and Agamben’s variously ‘political’ and ‘post-political’ iterations of ‘community’ as a horizon of being-in-common that is sundered from the contingencies that create communal identity (nation, religion, ethnicity) and that proposes an unfounded community based on contingency and a common experience of dispossession and fragmentation in social life, the ‘such’-ness of singularities not individuals. These axes collide and diverge incessantly, and the text embarks on an initial encounter with their implications for a ‘potential politics’ that is neither tied nor divorced from history and the created facticity of social life in capital, and also declines to naturalise a structurally-derived political agency, in an analysis which also departs from some of the more aporetic moments of Paolo Virno’s attempt to theorise multitude or immaterial labour as a site of negative as well as revolutionary potential.

## Introduction

Invocations of community – spectral, tactical, conservative – have inhabited countless attempts to articulate collective subjects of resistance (‘the Palestinian community’) or ethnic belonging in nationalist discourses. It also often comes up as an uncontroversial abstract referent (‘the programmer community’, ‘the business community’, ‘the academic community’, ‘community art’). The referent of ‘community’ has also played a pivotal role in the articulation of communitarianism by ‘Third Way’ sociologists, consultants and ideologues of every stripe in the Anglo-American context of the last decade or so. The Blairite discourse of ‘rights and responsibilities’ blooms in the rich topsoil of communitarian platitudes to deliver such prize vegetables as the indiscriminate use of ASBOs (Anti-Social Behaviour Orders) and delineate its social vision of self-policing ‘communities’ that work and consume in an orderly fashion.

The use of ‘community’ for aggregates of people, whether in everyday speech or in sociological analysis, in the West, both underlines and espouses a notion of society as a collection of individuals contingently bound together either by lifestyle, professional status or geographical locale, in the case of the average subject of media scrutiny, or immutable cultural ties, in the case of ‘ethnic communities’. The iteration of ‘community’ would now appear to have become so universally administered and vague, beholden both to what is received as outmoded identity politics on the left and communitarian sophism on the centre-right, as to downgrade it from any utility at all, prompting many activists to turn to less monolithic arbiters such as ‘affinity groups’, ‘networks’, ‘multitude’, and a host of other context-driven designations. Moreover, this problematic has been recognized and negotiated at different levels for a couple of decades now, ever since ‘community’ came to prominence as a widespread signifier, one that marked the obsolescence of ‘class’ as a category of sociological and economic analysis *pace* a notional neoliberal consensus.

On an ecumenical level of generality, ‘community’ is a way to subsume alterity and conflict, a way of managing and mediating social contradictions in the register of the collective. But even at this level of generality, distinctions obtrude. Depending on the stakes and the actors, it is an ideology dissembling the absence of anything like this evoked co-presence in an atomized and consumption-oriented present, or an oppositional claim on its revival. The spurious use of community in the communitarian rhetoric of policy-makers and think-tanks or in the marketing of residential developments has important asymmetries, while occluding key commonalities, with the concept of community at work in yesterday’s ‘utopian’ and today’s ‘intentional communities’ with their paradoxical principles of retreat and collective engagement, and the diversity of social, religious, cultural and political profiles across, if not within, such formations. The community of happenstance, of attachment to *habitus* or shared daily experience, is different of course from the community of volition, which may depart from principles of dissatisfaction and exit from, rather than attachment to, the status quo. And again a community incited by shared lifestyle and economic status to be found in a ‘gated community’ is a very different affair from an anarchist or a religious commune, although both exhibit a comparable response to the politics of fear in contemporary society.

For all its complex genealogy, the notion of ‘community’, without being juxtaposed with the previously-cited ‘network’ or ‘multitude’ experiences of organization and action, seems to still offer a salient category for looking at the composition of local movements around local issues that are immediately systemic and global. The dimension of ‘place’ and ‘habitus’, as well as the immediately problematic character of organization among diverse and at times incompatible agendas is present in even the most perfunctory instance, or analysis, of ‘community activism’. A local focus often provides the most concrete illustrations of the confluence of class, race, property and power relations obtaining in an area that spurs certain campaigns, and guards against the benign abstractions of ‘multitude’-style theorizing and the insularity of ‘activist’ culture, as well as developing a specificity that can subsequently inform broad-based resistances of reinventions.

Here what has been referred to as the ‘movement of movements’ can be deemed an instance, but not a definitive form. Similarly, ‘networked’ organizing need not be fetishized beyond the modes of communication and the complex and variable political articulations it makes possible, lest it become a spectacularized and insurgent example of the organization theorist’s pet paradigm of ‘the strength of weak ties’.<sup>1</sup> ‘Community’ is such a refractory term because of the unsustainable number of contradictions it is called upon to manage, and it is these internal differences that lend a hectic and a mobile aspect to what at first seems to indicate a static, habitual state. It can function as a limit of possibility and a point of capture. It can emerge as a tangible hub for praxis that would otherwise be defeated by the immensity and complexity of the issues, even after critical analysis has done the preliminary ground work of exposing connections and continuities. It can also be an act of pacification that divides up restive local populations into the ‘community’ and its ‘others’, into subjects of regeneration and objects of policing.

## **‘Community’ in Urban Social Movements: The Return of the Site-Specific**

What has so far been termed ‘community activism’ should first be located decisively on the terrain of ‘urban social movements’ – a claim on the city. Such a claim proceeds by countering not only the global logic of capital in its address to the specifics of place, but in reacting against the close and abrasive inequities generated in specific place by specific actors and identifiable tendencies. Such inequities are propagated in cities where ‘international competitiveness’ is honed by the withdrawal of even the equivocal social rights of the welfare state era, leading to active displacement of low-income populations by middle-classes in the state and privately-subsidized pursuit of higher land values and more uniform exploitation. Resistance to these tendencies, and the creation of other subjective and social possibilities, is the aim of those who organize and take action in their own backyards. Such struggles for local self-determination may fall under the heading of ‘community politics’ that become articulated as urban social movements. We can refer to the concise definition of ‘urban social movements’ found in Stephen Lanz’s (2006) ‘Capillaries of Emancipation: Substitute economies and urban movements in Rio de Janeiro and Buenos Aires’: “urban social movements are collective actors organized in an urban territory and independent of political parties struggling for fair collective consumption and the utility value of their city, for cultural autonomy and neighbourly life.... A reaction, namely, to the logic of capitalism that transforms cities into commodities, to the logic of an authoritarian etatism that prevents cities from becoming democratic communities, and to the logic of a standardized mass culture directed against the cultural autonomy of individual groups of the population”. Lanz concludes, however, that the prospects for such popular mobilization at present seem more viable in the South American cities where the social movements discussed in the article have been underway and have made remarkable (and, for Western

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1 A recent and very cogent discussion of the myriad inflections of the ‘network’ is the Geert Lovink call for the New Network Theory conference to be held in Amsterdam in June, 2007.

commentators, easily romanticized) inroads into the social and political structures of the general population and the acutely impoverished alike.

However, in this case, it is the experience of collective self-organization in Western European urban milieus that seems to pose the most open questions, compromised as it is both by illusory affiliation with an increasingly phantom social guarantees of the welfare state and the concomitant mediating organs of centre-leftist parties and unions, and the resignation produced by approximately 30 years of defeat for progressive or radical politics across the board, not to mention the growing severity of the exigencies of daily survival that has been one of its results. There is also the experience of institutionalization and bureaucratization of what were once grassroots campaigns without the emergence of viable popular alternatives, leading to unedifying face-offs between the co-opted and ‘reasonable’ rhetoric of inclusion used by ‘community partnerships’ and the critique of anti-capitalist factions, where the only common ground is the alienation of broad swathes of the people affected from the terms of the argument that is supposedly taking place in their name. Even this level of antagonism is largely cosmetic, as local social movements, for example in London, are too marginal to command the level of support that would be required to seriously contest the operative logic of profit in city management, now catalysed by the impending Olympics. Also, local issues are only sporadically of concern to them.

With the ‘creative destruction’ of the lower-income neighbourhoods operating on a scale of impunity that requires only defeat and distraction for its semblance of consensus, if any, what is the lookout for modes of organization that would have some purchase on the yawning divides not solely among anti-capitalist activists, liberals, and ‘normal people’ but precisely on those ‘normal people’ presumed to lack political agency because too deeply enmeshed to the problematics of survival? Widespread bitterness but pragmatic queiscence becomes the order of the day in those neighbourhoods which have experienced rapid and cumulative defeats – not solidarity and not combativeness, at least not in the majority of situations here in London. Is a politics that “emphas[izes] the circumstances of power – the circumstances of property – the circumstances of violence” just one extra unneeded worry for those thus demoralized, even and especially when such a politics is unbearably urgent?<sup>2</sup>

The fragmented and inauspicious terrain described so far admits of other considerations, considerations vital to extracting any sense of possibility from the self-fulfilling prophecies of capital. This may be that a fragile and difficult alterity, the plurality and opacity of social relations in today’s ‘deprived’ urban area, can itself be a ground for action. The common experience of work, of poverty, of submission, compulsion and frustration is the banality that fixes the horizons for most, and this common horizon may be a catalyst, however ephemeral and awkward, for alliances that do not cement an identity but are produced in struggle. The struggle may be against specific circumstances, specific abuses, a range of political experiences or none may be brought to bear, but this common horizon, of difference and dispossession, of splintered and tenuous constellations, may be one way of thinking ‘community’ beyond either the

2 Ulrike Meinhof, quoted in *Ça sera beau (From Beyrouth with Love)*, a 2005 short film by Waël Noureddine about illicit life in Beirut.

bromides of ‘communitarianism’ or the oppositional ‘strategic essentialism’ posited by Spivak. The thought of such a provisionality needs to be articulated with an older idea of a ‘circulation of struggles’, in order to find out how struggle located in specificity and locality is instantly communicable due to its ubiquity as a phenomenon; for example, culture-led regeneration in Western metropolises. Each situated struggle, moreover, is already transversal, as a critique of urban re-structuring takes in a critique of authoritarian power structures, privatization, racism, ecological damage and deliberate blight, to name just a few.

The intention here of invoking ‘community’ as a term of analysis is its proximity to de-politicization, and the conceptual potential to re-define politics. A thinking of ‘community’ with and beyond its current instrumentalities can help formulate a notion of struggle rooted in mundane and proximate issues that can afford to be more rigorous than the ‘social factory’ as a way to re-situate struggle from the workplace to the whole of social production in all its particularity. These reflections arise from a period of engagement (ongoing) with a local campaign that organized around the ‘regeneration’ of a poor, ethnically mixed, socially polarized but increasingly gentrified borough of East London, and what such market-driven policies have meant for housing and social services provision to the mass of lower-income and migrant populations who are being ‘class-cleansed’ from an area where survival is increasingly beyond their reach. The campaign succeeded in highlighting these processes through a focus on two long-term local resources – an Italian cafe proprietor and a Caribbean groceries merchant – who had been evicted or were under threat of eviction due to local and central government’s support of real-estate speculation, which frequently entailed mysterious fires and the abandonment of whole city blocks to rot until a higher bidder came along.

The tactics of the campaign were fairly unequivocal, including occupation of contested spaces like the evicted cafe and boisterous neighbourhood assemblies, which prompted much attention and documentation from all levels of the media. But the political direction was not always so clear, with a liberal and populist rhetoric eventually coming to define the campaign’s communications and long-term planning, if not its aims and inspirations. This was less than surprising, considering the incredibly diverse and ad hoc composition of the campaign. Political experience ranged from local party politics to none, with the resulting divergencies in ideological commitments. This also drew on and contributed to the concertedly pragmatic tone of the mobilization, which never acquired the reflexive dimension that would have allowed it to adapt and expand to changing circumstances. Rather it dwindled to purely instrumental and/or de-politicized goals, i.e. fundraising for a remaining leaseholder’s legal campaign and writing incessant indignant letters to local councillors, on the part of one campaign member.

It was through this involvement that notions began to coalesce around the effect and affect of differences in instances of political activism that would initially seem to feed off the unity of the local or take the ‘community’ as a referent. This seemed to have further ramifications in the sense of whether differences could be most fruitfully interpreted as productive in theorizations of social change that pivot on the dialectic, e.g. Marx. Or whether capital can be retained as an axiomatic in the potentially more open-ended and destabilizing ontological vectors exemplified by post-Heideggerian writers of political philosophy like Giorgio Agamben and Jean-Luc Nancy – vectors

that however, especially in Nancy's case, still seem to have some contiguity with the frictional productivity of *a* dialectic, with his discussion of 'non-relation' as key to the limit-praxis of 'the inoperative community'. There is also a register in which we can speak of 'disappearance' as integral to both such an intricate re-/unworking of community as a form of co-existence and belonging and Marx's articulation of the proletariat as the class that realizes itself via the abolition of class society. Both seem to imply the movement of radical self-questioning or dissolution in order to bring about a future – a future that is immanent in the conditions and practices of the present.

With such provisional co-ordinates, using premises ever open to revision, I set out on the following course, making no premature claim to a definitive encounter with any of the thinker's deployment of 'community' but hoping to insert what I have managed to gather into an immanent critique-in-progress of a specific political experience.

## All That Is Communal Melts Into Air

The task of reformulating a concept of 'community' that would extend this affective and critical precision and at the same time vitiate the reification of historically contingent relations implicit in the thought of community as a given and ahistorical entity, one that would project it as a site of resistance and production of forms of life, is an interesting one for contemporary political theory. It entails an investigation into community as a type of praxis whose principle is its own dissolution, and its existence at all as a facticity to be mediated, altered and perhaps undone. This seems to instigate a fertile junction with Marx's thesis that a fully human existence will only develop on the condition that the working class eliminate itself as a working class, triggering the disappearance of class society as a whole, and the economic delimitation of people's lives that such arrangements enforce.<sup>3</sup> A community constituted by its separation from the means of production (the proletariat) has to eliminate its own conditions for existence – private property – before existence as such can be generalized.

This very Hegelian movement of sublation, preserving-by-overcoming, can appear schematic and totalizing, especially for the contemporary topology of marginal, incremental and largely reactive contestations of political or corporate will. But even without due care to dialectics, antagonism is plainly the basis of grassroots political activity. Groups coalesce with the agenda of negating a set of circumstances. The moment of constitution precedes formalization – over its duration, an informal group may link to others in circulation and escalation of the struggle, or it may turn into a more structured organization. Both imply going beyond the original set of circumstances that the group came together over the desire to negate, whether it's in organizational logistics or scope of action. But the constitutive moment of antagonism,

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3 See Marx (1845): "The proletariat, on the contrary, is compelled as proletariat to abolish itself and thereby its opposite, private property, which determines its existence, and which makes it proletariat. It is the *negative* side of the antithesis, its restlessness within its very self, dissolved and self-dissolving private property". See also Holstein (1979): "The worker must destroy him or herself as a wage-earner in order to become a producer".

however subsumed in pragmatic adjustments or simple entropy, is the motor that drives the operation of the group and keeps it in oscillation between tight accord and unravelling, as objectives, results and perspectives shift. The ‘community’ in this instance becomes a double movement between eradication and preservation: the eradication of the bases of its coming-together and a preservation of the being-in-common that has been produced. Further, this movement clarifies the provisional, frail and quotidian structures of being-in-common, with the lack of a telos precisely its most radical premise:

Community . . . is ordinary being-together, without any assumption of a common identity, without any strong intensity, but exposed to banality, to the ‘common’ of existence: it is egalitarian in the sense that our existences are all equivalent, thus making the existing inequalities even more salient. (Nancy, 2005)

This appropriation of banality and facticity as the ‘common’ of existence seems to reverse the earlier-cited ubiquity of ‘community’ as a neutral(izing) designation for situated persons and interests – a community oriented to the ‘common’ is neither in thrall to an external set of determinants that forces a collaboration to happen as a means to other ends, as workplace teamwork might exemplify, nor the weekly convocation of a local football team, but a converging over the conditions of daily existence, held together *by* the conditions of daily existence – this might be the genesis of a political community. Nancy’s speculation holds just as true, evidently, for a non-political community; the political consequences would consist in inhabiting this banality as open to intervention, the materialist approach signalled in the awareness that the ‘common’ is at stake. What is materialist about it is the erosion of the boundary between subjectivity and necessity, the self-cancelling shuttling between ‘external’ compulsion and ‘inner’ freedom that characterizes everyday life. The participants in a ‘community of resistance’ can briefly find the possibility of short-circuiting this dialectic (through direct action and other types of mobilization) while remaining circumscribed by it. The ‘ordinary being-together’, ‘without any strong intensity’ carries on as before, albeit charged with the experience that banality and politics happen in the same place, and are made of the same ingredients.

The constitutive experience of banality as the ground for a reformulation of ‘community’ could also draw an analogy with Marx’s elaboration of the shift from in-itself to the for-itself of the proletariat in the revolutionary context. It also solicits a close parallel with Paolo Virno’s (2004: 42) discussion of the ‘right of resistance’ in *A Grammar of the Multitude*, where it is defined as a practice belonging to a community assembled to defend either certain elements in common or its existence as such from attack by a centralized power. The ‘right of resistance’ here, as elsewhere in theorizations of the ‘multitude’, is structural rather than ideological: a ‘right of resistance’ may be deployed by the workers of a recuperated factory or by a Christian fundamentalist cult, for instance, as both could legitimately assert their defence of ‘practices already rooted in society’, marking the ‘ambivalence’ of the multitude that Virno also writes about. But those practices, because so inscribed, are deemed banal and nondescript until the point when they are threatened, and the threat conjures forth a community that was formerly content in the ‘low-intensity’ being in common – it is the threat which conjures forth a collective subject of resistance, the subject did not pre-exist the threat. If the community arises as part of a campaign to protect or preserve

practices or institutions, to expand possibilities of life for those marginalized by urban ‘revitalization’ or to maintain autonomy *per se*, then its existence as a community is predicated on negation – the elimination of the threat would in the same stroke eliminate the community. That is, unless, retaining Nancy’s hypothesis, the sheer facticity of ‘equivalent’ (albeit situated and drastically unlike) existences is revealed as the only possible, if utterly vulnerable, means whereby community can not only come into existence but can only exist at the perpetual risk of dissolution.<sup>5</sup>

The ‘being-in-common’ of a community is defined by antagonism not merely to the pretexts of its coming together, but to the privatization of social experience. The community produces itself (it cannot be produced) as antagonistic in its collectivity, in its posing of another measure, yet it does not produce communal being, a substantive ground for being-together. Its togetherness is an excess, a byproduct of its antagonism. The relations that traverse it are embedded in banality, but not simply generated by proximity or contingency – they suspend proximity as found and imposed and craft relation out of non-relation and in reverse, just as all communication implies a gap, and the mode of the political is the production of what does not yet exist (Heditch, 2004).<sup>6</sup>

Such an iteration of community, with its problematic connection to the notions of ‘autonomy’ or ‘self-sufficiency’ often considered attributes of communal formations, seems at this stage to be avoiding questions of organization. The movement of antagonistic constitution, the fluctuation between cohesion and dissolution marking the equivocal unity premised on antagonism, does not yet provide insight into how a community, even a community of non-relation, is organized or how the mode of organization affects its praxis – although the mode of organization can also be considered praxis. The implication of a community conceived and experienced in its absences, disjunctures and the mundanity of ‘equivalent existences’ without a notion of organization is that it is presented with a couple of routes to entropy: either accelerating internal divergences resulting in fissure or a crystallization that necessarily sets aside or erases the haphazard nature of its (antagonistic) moment, eventually ossifying and becoming irrelevant. The splintering of entropy is something different again from the ‘rupture with proximity’ spurring the moment of antagonism – it is a rupture with the ‘non-relation’ relations precariously established after this rupture, in the praxis of the community, a return to things as they were as other options start to seem untenable.

‘Community’ becomes a possibility that rests on a certain relationship to banality, fragmentation and powerlessness; the relationship is one of cognizance of these deficiencies *as* the ‘common’ – to be inhabited, mediated and worked upon to produce other forms of life. But this is a possibility that can always crumble. It can disappear back into the ‘common’, this time as indifference, or be channelled into institutional parleying and procedure that unmoores and exhaust the tentative articulation of community as a practical critique of the relationships that sustain it, a positive critique

5 “The structure has no other existence besides the movement of its own loss, and each term of the contradiction reflects this transitory mode of existence by its division in its being-for-the structure and its being-for-the-dissolution-of-the-structure” (Badiou, 1975, ‘Theorie de Contradiction’, cited in Bosteels, 2005).

6 On the gap implied in all communication, see Nancy (2005).

in antagonism. For a community to gain ‘inclusion’ could describe a ‘vertical’ factor gaining an advantage in this transversality of relations that unbalances the tendency to diffuse and expand, an influence of constriction and consolidation that marks the ceaseless operation of power relations.

Such a thinking of community as the production and alliance of singularities that do not lend themselves to representation can prefigure a ‘potential politics’ that stem from an engagement with immanence, with dailiness, as a striated and situated ‘common’ that produces singular beings and the relations/non-relation between them. This ‘common’ is also, to a large extent, an anomic condition that is the pretext of community formation – as a spur to antagonism, and the limit that it is perpetually facing. The ‘being such’ enlarges the potential field of communication and action, as it does not imply a preliminary ideological sifting in order to accede to community membership; it establishes difference as not simply the object of tolerance, but as a material condition of action and mobilization that does not subsist to be incorporated into the ‘pluralist’ homogeneity attendant on representational politics beholden to the market. The power of this irreducibility also signals a limit to a mobilized community, which, while appropriating its own ‘being thus’ is nonetheless planning to be effective in some particular context, which entails a broad commitment to a set of normative or strategic objectives that usually does, minimally, result in subsumption of difference to an overriding goal or framework of goals. Here the community can abolish itself by default, as it defers thematizing those relations until they dissolve in individual agendas or are displaced into the techniques of representation. With a view towards contemporary anti-capitalist campaigns and skirmishes, these are for the most part enacting the ‘right of resistance’ and/or a pure transformative impulse towards the intolerable. However, the political terrain is heterogeneous to the extreme, and the actual margin of change so small that numerous ‘communities of action’ are defeated by the temporal scope and reticence of wider support for their activities and dissolve back into the anomie that produced them. They may seek to abolish themselves (in the sense of abolishing the circumstances that bring them together), but without a strong local infrastructure of support and collaboration, or an appropriate political situation more broadly, the circumstances can take the initiative in the end.

## Contort Yourself

Here is also a question of production. What is the community of singularities, the ‘whatever’ community, capable of producing? It is only capable of producing itself as a mobilization of its own anomic conditions so long before it lapses back into reproducing that anomie passively, either in dispersion or representation. It is acknowledged that Marx’s call to the working class to abolish themselves as a working class, thereby laying the foundation for the first emergence of humanity, was a universal call. Each member of the category ‘working-class’, each ‘working-class’ group or circle has limited resources and cannot make the revolution on their own. In today’s conjuncture, the thoroughly networked and communicative collective subjects of resistance can only make the smallest intervention in the state of things globally, albeit there are more significant transitions locally. Yet the self-abolition of the working class

seems more remote than ever, not counting its eradication in the formulae of immaterial labour theorists. There is no contemporary usage of this term that is not problematic. The ‘working class’ is a category that, at baseline, simply includes all those who are compelled to exchange their labour for survival. And yet from the start the degree of autonomy in the terms of the exchange, and the measure of surplus value produced, inscribes a lot of analytical and practical complexity in the contemporary use of this term. There is also the discussion of debt and credit that prevails to exert discipline over and maintain the contours of the working-class once it’s been shorn of any political or cultural connotations, which is explored well in see Loren Goldner’s writing on ‘fictitious capital’. For our purposes here, however, the problematic status of ‘working-class’ may point to transformations in capital, and in the constitution of struggles against it, but it does not point to its obsolescence.

What sort of collectivity, and what sort of temporality, is envisioned or assumed in working class self-abolition? Does it include the cognizance of anomie ‘being-in-common’ as the working-class condition, the salient condition that needs to be appropriated in the drive to refuse work, refuse value and create other relations, or, a different ‘being-in-common’ that can only be projected by utopia until it becomes praxis? Inasmuch as this ‘being-in-common’ does not accede to any extraneous or natural determinants, it also presents itself as socially and culturally produced, and as such, always political, and always the ground of contestation.

The ‘common’ is a ground of potential politics, while the community in relation to this ground cannot guarantee, or exist towards, a politics – its constitution is simply a movement of appropriation of this ‘common’ in all its unpredictability and occasional futility. The self-abolition of the working-class is a determinate objective realized through working-class self-activity. Yet the self-activity of a community mediated by the facticity of what Giorgio Agamben calls ‘whatever being’ is also performing a movement of dissolution, but along a different axis, a movement of dissolution oscillating between the ‘not-yet’ and ‘never-was’ of its anomie circumstance. Just as the horizon of self-abolition is the existence of a ‘truly human community’ (this at a level of abstraction of course which is rhetorical, hence cannot account for the internal differentiation of the movement of change or the instigators of it), the premise of a ‘truly human community’ impels the formation of a ‘whatever community’ internally, a premise that sustains internal variation and drift even as it pits itself as a conflictual unity against something in particular.

However, the precept of self-abolition and the auto-destructive tendencies of the ‘inoperative community’ in action (such an understanding of community applied to groupings in other situations may yield other analyses) may seem to be incompatible. Whereas the former presupposes an operative unification at the level of class interests and an agreement on the necessary preconditions to make a revolution in order to render those interests obsolete, the latter can only generate ephemeral agreements in the oscillation between mobilization and acquiescence to its anomie state. The contradictions of a community based on the incommensurability of ‘being thus’ can be incredibly productive, but can likewise act to thwart a reflexivity in response to questions of organization and the exercise of power, as well as triggering a reverse momentum that can either dissolve the community or overdetermine it vis-à-vis

established political channels. It also enacts the limitations implicit in the clarion call of Marx's discussion of self-abolition: the eradication of the grounds of unity (exploitation) does not necessarily prompt a negative dialectic of unity, particularly when this unity is seen sceptically in the first place.

It is difficult, at least in the present day, to imagine a group organizing around the elimination of the conditions of its existence, i.e. capital; they could, more plausibly, organize around certain objectionable facets of those conditions, and perhaps, in this way, acquire enough momentum to start interrogating the structural supports of those conditions more profoundly. That this rarely happens without shifting the whole endeavour to a level of abstraction that is simply ineffectual has been observed regularly. But it could also be argued that this is a risk that the systematic and broad level of contestation that any approach towards 'self-abolition' must assume, an escalation in the face of impossibility and irrelevance. It may be the crucial difference between a slow and emergent movement that de-legitimizes local power structures while gradually inventing modes of co-operation less mediated by money/the state and an isolated minority holding local power structures to a democratic standard those structures themselves have long de facto abandoned.

But the apparent incompatibility may have different implications in practice. The Marxian dialectics of 'self-abolition' offers the grounding political dimension of 'circumstances of power – circumstances of property' earlier cited to the very nuanced and generative level of abstraction where Nancy and Agamben operate, and to mitigate their more aporetic tendencies in the elaboration of a 'potential politics'. Working in this intersection could develop a materialist account capable of encompassing both struggle and the banality and vulnerability-in-common of an 'inoperative community'; how it is powerful, how it is weak; how it may be resistant and how it may be reactionary. It would also examine the economic and social circumstances that block the possibility of catalyzing forms of social production relying neither on identity nor the ambiguous resistance of being-in-common. This is perhaps the secret thought of the 'self-abolishing' community.

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# Erasing the Line, or, the Politics of the Border

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## abstract

In this collective effort, which follows our participation in the autonomous and borderless think-tank of the *ephemera* conference held on the Trans-Siberian train, we propose a politically efficacious way forward to create new forms of resistance. We attempt to test the power of the demand ‘No borders!’ by looking at a few key ways borders demarcate mobility and immobility today: in relation to the operations of contemporary capital; the control over migration and nation-state sovereignty; the patrolling of cultural borderlines; and the collapse of labour and leisure into a time of perpetual production. Our argument is that a specific political action to eliminate borders would mean a radical challenge, not only to the capitalist system, but, to our old views on a range of issues.

## Introduction

In ‘The Politics of Utopia’, Fredric Jameson highlights the continuing practical-political possibilities of utopian thinking by putting forward what he takes to be “the most radical demand to make on our own system... the demand for full employment, universal full employment around the globe” (Jameson, 2004: 37). What such a demand reveals starkly is the shape and character of the contemporary political and economic structures that render any such demand unrealizable. The possibility for all individuals to engage in productive social labour simply cannot happen because of the structural need for a reserve army of labour, a need which takes distinct forms in different parts of the world. Such a direct, utopian demand creates productive political openings. By showing how so basic a right cannot be realized, the political returns as a general demand for a “society structurally distinct from this one in every conceivable way, from the psychological to the sociological, from the cultural to the political” (Jameson, 2004: 37).

In light of our journey from our home countries to Moscow and back from Beijing, as well as the collective trip taken by all those involved in the ‘Capturing the Moving Mind’ project across the Russian/Mongolian and Mongolian/Chinese border, we wish to articulate a similar demand with a similar aim: unfettered mobility for individuals and collectives, the dissolution of all borders that separate, isolate, contain, limit, enable

violent forms of extraction and injustice, and impede political imaginings and futures. In an era dominated by the discourse of mobility, the organization of movement and space through an older technology – that of border line, an entity as abstract and full of metaphysical subtleties as any other in the lexicon of human thought – remains essential to the smooth operations of capital. Without the border, there would be no differential zones of labour, no spaces to realize surplus capital through the dumping of overproduction, no way of patrolling surly populations that might want to resist proletarianization, no release valve for speculative access. The demand for free movement challenges not only the logics of contemporary economics, but also the operations of the political, which have long been premised on the establishment of zones of inclusion and exclusion, control over the legal status of citizen-subjects, practices of demographic accounting and management, and the mobilization of bodies for use in territorial expansion and war.

No borders! Or just as well: free movement! What insights does such a demand produce with respect to the key forms through which power and social control are exerted today? And what kind of political possibilities do these insights generate in turn? It is clear enough that the possibility of unfettered movement – a world without border controls, identity papers, fictions of national belonging, death and destruction over abstract geographies – would necessitate a social order radically different from every one hitherto imagined. The physical remnants of what we call ‘history’ are marked by the long human drama of the production and patrol of borders: cathedrals, castles, city walls and gates, districts, patrol towers, checkpoints – even the physical geography of rivers, bodies of water, and mountain ranges, transformed by their role as dividing markers. The streetscapes of modernity, pathways for the dreamy wanderings of the *flâneur*, are also designed with the aim of enabling the quick and efficient deployment of men and military equipment, both to manage unruly internationalists at home (communists, postcolonials, and the like) and to face the incursion of foreign armies across the sacred line dividing one nation-state from another. So we would also need new vernacular architectures, new cities, new modes of labouring, new economies, new cultures – a great many new things, and this just to begin with. One way forward might be to try to put everything on the table all at once and so participate in the kind of utopian constructions that Jameson suggests emerge whenever political energies are blocked. We propose a more politically efficacious way forward, testing the power of the demand ‘No borders!’ by looking at a few key ways borders demarcate mobility and immobility today: in relation to the operations of contemporary capital; the control over migration and nation-state sovereignty; the patrolling of cultural borderlines; and the collapse of the labour and leisure into a time of perpetual production.

## 1. The Myth of a Borderless Capitalism

In one of his last works, the Spanish sociologist Josetxo Beriain (2005) argues that human beings are constantly searching for meaning in a world where everything seems mixed up and in a total chaos. Things lack natural limits: it is the human mind that must create them. Beriain argues that, since the beginning of history, there have been attempts to explain everything that surrounds us, so our perceptions have to be

rationalized in one way or another through the use of limits. We can call something a ‘tree’ because we can separate its form, its shape, from the field in which it stands. Every human being does this with everybody and everything, even with his own body parts. Thus we divide reality into ‘islands of meaning’ which help to identify oneself, others and the things in the world. This division lies on principles of classification, which help us to build definitions. The verb *to define* derives from the Latin word *finis*, limit: to define something means to establish its limits. In the world, those limits are not solidly established before human beings specify them. All divisions are created by human minds to help to comprehend what surrounds us. Otherwise, everything would exist in an epistemological magma of confusion. Lines are necessary to divide, to define, to classify. We introduce a rationality that puts some control over our perception of the world, simplifying its information. But these limits are not simply part of us as individuals, but are established socially. Most of these lines, Berain explains, represent other invisible lines that separate social and mental entities. There are limits in time, but also in space – limits in space built to avoid a mix with Others. Therefore, limits are essentially social constructions, and are not given by nature.

This perspective can be criticized from perspectives that highlight the indeterminacy of meaning: nonetheless, these theories forget about how meanings have been reached historically and imposed through different social struggles. Some authors have also emphasized that modernity has repressed that indeterminacy through the needs of the productive system (Rullani, 1998). Borders seem to be the clearest example of a social construction that helps to create order in the world out of primigenous chaos. It is a pure social institution, in which open fields are suddenly turned into closed spaces. From the border I can define myself and the Other – a code of ownership and belonging. Borders were born alongside the ancient agrarian empires and became stronger with the rise of the nation-state. The philosophy lying behind borders has been developed in different socio-historical formations throughout history and has performed very different roles. But within capitalism borders have carried out specific functions – connected to processes of domination and exploitation – that have nothing to do with a rationalization of the world. Whereas in the origins of capitalism borders were essential to unify the national markets, today they are used primarily to prevent movements of the multitude. Once stability is reached and free trade takes place, there is no need for borders between traders. Nevertheless, it is compulsory to develop a barrier against those who have nothing to trade. This strategy is directly linked to the bureaucratic forms of identity developed by nation-states to stop the possibility of free movement (passports, *declaratsias*, visas, etc.). In the post-modern age of information technologies and knowledge economies, borders continue to perform a key role in the capitalist system. But is it possible to think about a borderless world when borders are so deeply embodied socially?

There is at present a significant debate on what modernity is and if we have moved beyond it to a new age called post-modernity, in which borders might play a different and minor role. While it is not easy to fully explain which phase we are in (isn’t there here the hint of another border – that of time?), it is clear that capitalism looks stronger than ever and that new phenomena within it must be taken into account. Capitalism has been stable in the sense that it has always been defined by the way capitalist enterprises obtain profits through the selling of goods and services in the markets. It has always

depended on labour to do the work, rewarding it with salaries (however minimal), and obtaining surplus value to invest in new business and to increase capital. But we can also say that there has been a huge transformation of the character of capitalism during the past century, especially in the last decades. We are speaking here of what has been described as ‘postmodern’ capitalism, which has been described in classical works (Lash and Urry, 1987, 1993; Offe, 1985; Appadurai, 1996; Bauman, 2003). We can argue that there has been an historical transition from a stable corporate model of an organized capitalism to a sort of a disorganized one that exists in a ‘liquid modernity’ where the rules of rationality do not appear to work anymore, and where borders would seem to vanish due to the intensification of trade plus capital and labour movement. Societies today would be under siege: globalization has arrived. Markets are boisterous and in permanent state of change. Enterprises must become extremely adaptable. Governments prepare the conditions for their own loss of power: now international capital directly arranges economies through new global economic institutions in order to extend capitalism to every field of the world (Alonso, 2001). New information technologies have been decisive in accelerating these processes. Companies extend their customs and accepted business standards to most places in the world, as capital flows roam the world, rationalizing it in an instrumental way (and not in a critical-emancipatory way, as we can see: the standard shipping container, accounting practices, etc.) even as they disorganize it in other ways. Work occupied a central place in the phase of organized capitalism associated with solid modernity, but in liquid modernity it has become a commodity again in a new, intensified way. *Today we are living the real capitalism of which previous forms could only dream.*

Deterritorialization is one of the central trends in the (post)modern world: it moves a multitude of workers from their fatherlands to wealthier societies. The new discourse of capitalism also focuses on the power of new information technologies and the mobility of the new high-skilled workers. Freedom of capital is also supposed to be accompanied by the freedom of movement of workers. According to these discourses, this would be the reason why people from certain places of the world travel to Western capitalist countries: there are better opportunities and they are also required. Nevertheless, this freedom of movement is restricted, and borders still perform their classic function.

The interesting issue here is that both deterritorialization and information technologies would seem to require a borderless world to achieve the best results. Mass media and the Internet are supposed to reach the global village and connect everybody in a network of networks. A new space is created. It is a global space – a space of transits, transparent and virtual (Serres, 1995). There is also an interesting discourse on the new nomads, people who try to find new experiences and projects (Maffesoli, 2004) as well as project-seeking knowledge workers (Toffler, 1971). In a certain way, these discourses that emphasize the nomadic dimension of the global present seem to rely on the absence of borders: they are the proof of the crises of the nation-state. However, these discourses are in contradiction with what is truly happening. We have a discourse on movement, but the practice is radically different. There is freedom of movement, but with a clear restriction: only with respect of the needs of capital. The masses of low-skilled workers, the hungry ones, cannot pass through the border. And if they pass through, the border will still be present in one way or another. It still stands, and maybe it is just as strong as capitalism itself. Just as every social formation establishes its

limits and exclusions, capitalism produces its own. It acts essentially as a producer of separations. It reifies endlessly and transforms both labour product and workers into commodities. It introduces a social structure with clear barriers between those who have and those who do not, using anything possible to build hierarchies: education, skills, income, race, gender. Finally, it needs political borders to increase competitiveness among groups of workers and to obtain capital surpluses. The demand ‘No borders!’ can thus be seen as an attack on the very heart of the capitalist machine.

## 2. Sovereignty and Migration

Not many animals are put into cages in Australia, so why are these human beings kept so long in cages? Do they have less value than Australian animals? Once we asked this question from a DIMIA [Department of Immigration] manager. Her answer was that they [the animals] have not illegally migrated to Australia. Then we said although we have illegally migrated, we are still human, so we should have the right to get protection in a country under the United Nation conventions. (Message from Baxter immigration detention centre, Australia, in Baxter Detainees, 2003: 5)

Any discussion of borders today cannot ignore the existence of the increasing numbers of people who cross these borders without state authorization and the pressures this movement brings to bear not only on the ‘capitalist machine’ but also on the very sovereignty of nation-states.<sup>1</sup> In Australia, the connection between unauthorized migration, border control and national sovereignty became a key political issue in 2001 when the conservative government won a landslide election with the slogan “we decide who comes to this country and the circumstances in which they come” (see Bennett, Newman and Kopras, 2001-2002). The election victory followed mounting political hysteria over the asylum-seeker issue, which culminated in the government’s decision to use the military to prevent the *Tampa*, a ship that had rescued 433 asylum seekers, from entering Australian waters (Select Committee, 2002). What is the relationship between national sovereignty – and the exclusive right to determine cross-border movement as a key indicator of this – and unauthorized migration? In asking this question, we seek to situate the question of borders, and the possibility of a world without borders, in the realm of current human practice, rather than conceiving of the abolition of borders as a demand on the state or as a utopian scenario in a projected future. By examining the current significance of unauthorized migration – that is migration without state sanction – we suggest that the increasingly repressive nature of border controls is a reflection of the diminishing ability of such controls to secure for the state the ‘monopolization of the legitimate means of movement’. To do this, we will examine the work of Hannah Arendt and Giorgio Agamben on the refugee, and interrogate the extent to which the human who moves without state authorization

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1 Given the illegalized condition in which many unauthorized migrants live, and the undocumented nature of their movement, it is difficult to provide precise figures for the numbers of such migrants. However, the International Organisation for Migration estimates that unauthorized migration represents a third to half of all new entries to developed countries, and has increased by 20% in the last ten years (IOM, 2003).

challenges human rights discourses by revealing the dependence of such discourses on the sovereignty of the nation-state.

The primary response to the existence of people who exist outside the frame of national citizenship, and therefore cannot rely on the rights available to citizens, has been to inscribe biological life itself in the realm of state power, through the assertion that inalienable rights are attached to the human in and of itself. In Australia – where all unauthorized boat arrivals are detained in desert internments' camps while their claims are processed – the vast majority of public and academic opposition to mandatory detention has utilized a human rights framework to justify its condemnation of this repressive policy (see RCOA, 2002 and McMaster, 2002). Yet a stark theme emerging from inside the detention camps is puzzlement at the lack of human rights that adhere to the human as such, and a desperate reassertion, to no avail, of a biological humanity, reminiscent of Antelme's statement "the negation of our quality as men provokes an almost biological claim of belonging to the human species" (Agamben, 1995: 58). "Is this human rights?" asked one detainee. "Is this Australia country's proud? Do they think we didn't make from meat, skin, bone?" (Anonymous, 2002: 7). As Arendt points out, "the conception of human rights based on the assumed existence of human being as such, broke down at the very moment that those who professed to believe in it were for the first time confronted with people who had indeed lost all other qualities and specific relationships – except that they were still human" (Arendt, 1976: 299).

Arendt, and thinkers writing after her, have suggested that human rights are, in actuality, the rights of citizens, and that without the protection of a state, human rights cannot be assured. This reveals the first limitation of human rights as applied to the refugee: human rights require enforcement. In a world defined by state monopolization of the legitimate means of violence, refugees who have been expelled from, or lost the protection of, 'their own' nation-states and have found that no other nation-state will take up this role of enforcement, are left without rights. However, for Agamben the problematic nature of human rights doesn't stem only from their lack of enforceability, or the hypocrisy in their application. Rather, "declarations of rights represent the originary figure of the inscription of natural life in the juridico-political order of the nation-state" (Agamben, 1995: 127). Nowhere is this inscription of life in the order of the nation-state through declarations of rights clearer, as we shall see, than in the right to asylum and the system of refugee determination established in the wake of World War II.

The United Nations Refugee Convention was established in 1951 to regulate cross border movement by establishing a common definition of the refugee, and criteria for determining eligibility for asylum. In a context in which the Convention, and the right to asylum it grants, is being undermined throughout the world, it is often forgotten, by those who seek to oppose the exclusionary practices of nation-states, that the refugee determination system was developed not to facilitate free movement, but to constrain it. In an essay entitled 'Beyond Human Rights', Agamben suggests that "each and every time refugees no longer represent individual cases but rather a mass phenomenon (as was the case between the two World Wars and is now once again), these organizations, as well as the single States – have proved to be absolutely incapable not only of solving the problem but also of facing it in an adequate manner" (Agamben, 1996: 158).

In evaluating the success or otherwise of these humanitarian organization however, “we cannot, assume that the crucial task of the international refugee regime is simply humanitarian assistance” (Lui, 2002: 13). We believe, in fact, that these organizations *did* produce a solution to the problem of human movement, which, for many decades, was relatively successful in its aim of individualizing the grounds for human movement, and thus enabling this movement to be re-inscribed within a statist framework. In response to the existence in the political sphere of humans who had “lost all other qualities and specific relationships – except that they were still human” (Arendt, 1976: 299), humanitarian organizations worked to provide a mechanism to ensure the containment of such people within the order of the nation-state. “The refugee regime”, as Lui points out, “is a form geopolitical humanitarianism that has as its ‘core business’ the preservation of the value of the nation-state form and the institution of national-citizenship” (Lui, 2002: 14). In its most recent form, this core business is conducted primarily through the work of the UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and through the refugee determination system, which established a state-sanctioned demarcation between legitimate and illegitimate human movement. As the IOM describes, its mission is “to facilitate and control the number and composition of persons crossing international borders and the conditions under which entry is authorized or denied” (IOM, 2004).

Agamben argues that humanitarian organizations are unable to deal effectively with refugees at the point when they become a mass phenomenon. In reality the refugee determination system works to *foreclose* any understanding of human movement as anything other than an individualized phenomenon. The UN Refugee Convention defines a refugee as someone with “a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion” (UNHCR, 1951: 16). While such a definition implicitly recognizes the collective and social determinations of persecution, in providing for individual assessments the determination system complicates the possibility of viewing human movement as a political phenomenon by treating refugee determinations as incapable of generalization. Further, the convention specifically excludes economic grounds for refugee status, thus de-legitimizing, and so effectively illegalizing, movement that is motivated by great economic inequality and the devastation produced by the globalisation of neo-liberal capitalism.

While the refugee determination system was successful for decades in mitigating the pressures on nation-states brought about by unauthorized migration, since the early 1990s this framework has been threatened by the increasing scale of unauthorized migration – “by far the fastest rising single form of migration during the past 10 years” (Papademetriou, 2002: 5) – which is at least in part a direct response to the ravages produced by neo-liberalism (see Colatrella, 2001). The increasingly repressive nature of state responses to unauthorized migrants reflects the diminishing ability of humanitarian organizations to produce a ‘solution’ capable of containing this movement within the framework of the nation-state. Insofar as national borders have traditionally existed to enable the state to maintain this very ability to demarcate its citizens from those of other states, unauthorized migration serves to undermine these borders by challenging the state’s ability to act as the final arbiter of the right to move. Behind the anxiety, expressed in the Australian election slogan about the ability to “decide who comes to

this country and the circumstances in which they come”, is the realization that this slogan is only a populist representation of the established principle that controlling migration is a crucial indicator of national sovereignty – or as Australia’s immigration department puts it “in terms of national sovereignty, the state determines which non-citizens are admitted or permitted to remain and the conditions under which they may be removed” (in O’Kane, 2002: 5).

By challenging this exclusive right of the state to determine entry, unauthorized migrants reveal the reliance of humanitarian organizations, and human rights discourses, on the sovereignty of the nation-state, with its assimilation of birth into nation and of nation into citizen. Agamben quotes the French ‘Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen’ as an example of the ambiguity that surrounds the question of whether man has rights only to the extent that man is a citizen. The location of sovereignty in the nation, he argues, politicized immediately the question of birth, and necessitated the ability to decide who would and would not be considered as part of the nation. For Agamben, then, national sovereignty and declarations of rights were only the beginning of a process that would find its logical conclusion in the Nazi state, where life was entirely politicised and the question of nationality “coincides immediately with the highest political task” (Agamben, 1995: 130). In contrast, the refugee represents the severing of this link between birth and nation. Agamben argues that “the refugee must be considered for what he is: a limit concept that radically calls into question the fundamental categories of the nation state, from the birth-nation to the man-citizen link” (Agamben, 1995: 134).

By challenging the unproblematic location of sovereignty in the life of a national people, the refugee becomes a problem, not just for the nation-state from which she seeks protection, but for the stability of the nation-state system. In the words of the *Noborder Network* “the political power of exodus and refusal is subverting the sovereignty of both the nation-states as well as the new regimes of hyper-exploitation on a global level” (Noborder Network, 2004: 1). Hence the response of the state to the refugee, who has not only disrupted the link between birth and nation, but attempts to enter a new nation without state authorization, must necessarily be brutal. Far from extending human rights to such people, the state’s primary concern is to maintain control over the construction of ‘the people’ upon which its legitimacy is grounded, by retaining the right to exclude. The declarations of rights, which apply to, and are enforced only for citizens, are therefore the flipside of the camps. Both play a crucial role in the construction of a people and the maintenance of the sovereignty of the nation-state.

In order to exist as a sovereign entity, the nation-state must maintain the ability to control its borders and determine the composition of its population. ‘No borders’, *as a demand on the state*, would thus effectively be a demand that the nation-state give up its own condition of possibility, and is thus a demand that can only be effectively utilized if the nation-state is assumed to be suicidal. Instead, those who wish to resist the regime of inclusion and exclusion produced by national borders should orient to those practices that are bringing pressure to bear on these borders by refusing to allow them to determine the limits of human movement. “Human mobility is developing a life of its own”, acknowledges the IOM, and this, again in the words of the IOM, is “curtailing

nation-state autonomy" (IOM, 2003: 4). To some, this is proof that, as the *Noborder Network* proclaims, "the autonomy of migration cannot be stopped" (Noborder Network, 2004: 1). Certainly it is true that people are, and will continue to, cross borders without state authorization. But as long as these borders exist, whether they are policed by a nation-state intent on constructing a 'people' in which to ground its legitimacy, or by organizations like the IOM in the interests of the segmentations and separations which are still crucial to global capitalism, they will be sites of violence and brutality. The essential counterparts of borders, as the migrant network Caravan reminds us, are the "countless thousands who drowned in seas en-route to Europe [and Australia] every year, who suffocate in containers of perishable goods that is on the roads for weeks, who died and are never reckoned (and are still dying) in North African deserts and forests, with Spain in view as a gateway" (The Caravan, 2004: 6).

### 3. Does Culture Need Borders?

Does culture need borders? Is it defenceless without them? Millennia of cultural interactions, borrowings, and transmutations, and a globe populated with hybrid forms whose real origins are likely impossible to map, suggest that culture is constantly on the move, always undergoing changes and transformations, happiest when it finds itself twisted into new shapes and practices. It is safe to say that culture *always already* exceeds those borders in which some have hoped to confine it – whether these are national borders or aesthetic ones (like the delimitations called 'genre'). To talk about culture in reference to globalization – a time, we are constantly told, when movements of cultural ideas, forms, and practices have become if not more common then more rapid and extensive – would thus seem to require only the unlearning of the conceptual legacy of the past two centuries. It was during this time that 'culture' came of age as a modern concept (Williams, 1985) and was also partitioned off into the discrete, definable entities with which we still associate it – primarily into 'national cultures', but also into the spaces so diligently explored by anthropologists: the tribe, the village, the region, etc. "Every nation is one people", Herder writes, "having its own national form, as well as its own language" (Herder, 1800: 166). We know that such sentiments, which continue to haunt our ideas about the proper space of culture, emerged less as a scholarly or taxonomic response to 'real' cultural divisions and more out of the need to lend support to the emerging political *techne* of the modern state (no doubt in conjunction with the limits on movements of peoples that we have been tracking thus far.) After all of the disasters wrought by the fictions of national belonging, we global moderns are more likely to heed Adorno's warning about the borders erected around culture: "The formation of national collectivities ... common in the detestable jargon of war that speaks of the Russian, the American, surely also of the German, obeys a reifying consciousness that is no longer really capable of experience. It confines itself within precisely those stereotypes that thinking should dissolve" (Adorno, 1998: 205).

And yet: even as new technologies (like the Internet) make it all but impossible to patrol the spaces of culture, the idea that culture needs borders has been given new life. The especially harsh and unforgiving climate of the global economy has created conditions that seem to require that culture be sheltered if it is to survive at all. In the era of neo-

liberalism, the strain to make every dollar multiply has forced cultural practitioners to consider turning to the state for assistance – even if the state is well past the point of believing in ‘art for art’s sake’, or in viewing the university ideal as one of ‘ideal curiosity’ as opposed to envisioning it as an institution where knowledge is produced as a “merchantable commodity” (Ross, 2000: 3). Contrary to what one might expect at a time when financial borders have all but disappeared, national cultures and nationalisms are being taken out of the closet, dusted off and once again worn about proudly and without embarrassment, either as a supposed shield against a global neo-liberal cultural market that is assumed in advance only to produce cultural garbage, or, more recently, as a defence of the values of Enlightenment civilization against the Islamic hordes threatening to engulf North America and Europe (best exemplified by Huntington’s grotesque ‘clash of civilizations’ thesis.) Even in Germany, a nation that has developed an understandable wariness toward nationalisms of all kinds, it has become possible to openly discuss *Leitkultur* (dominant or hegemonic culture) and the need to ensure that immigrants absorb the ideas and ideals that (supposedly) define Germanic culture. Intellectual debates about globalization and cultural belonging might focus on cosmopolitanisms or a global ‘multitude’, or look to the myriad ways in which forms of alternative cultural productive have pushed the unlearning of the cultural borders we spoke of above. Everywhere else, it appears that not only has the nation-state survived globalization, but so too has the idea of the nation representing a people and a culture. And while such national-cultural-ethnic borders may not inhibit physical movement, they are certainly meant to block ideas, to define the formation of subjectivities, and to shape the identities and commitments of those contained by them.

An essential political act is to assert again and again and again that culture is and should remain unbounded. Cultural practices and forms have no ‘natural’ and ‘unnatural’ spaces: the idea that they do is conceptually specious and, inevitability, politically dangerous insofar as it plays a key role in enabling and legitimating the politics of inclusion and exclusion so central to operation of state sovereignty. And yet (once again): though it might be easy to challenge the regressive character of ‘cultural’ tests of citizenship (Gumbrecht, 2006), or of right-wing demands that immigrants of necessity assimilate appropriate ‘cultural’ values and traits (of the kind circulating in France, the Netherlands, Denmark, Hesse in Germany, and elsewhere), the idea that cultural expression needs protection and support in the age of globalization can nevertheless be a tempting one. The same nation-states that are running scared about the threat posed by the immigrant populations that they desperately need (for demographic and economic purposes) are also re-asserting the need for policies to foster and support cultural expression within their borders. In October 2005, member states of UNESCO voted overwhelmingly to support the ‘Convention on the Protection of the Diversity of Cultural Contents and Artistic Expressions’. The convention allows states to exempt cultural products from trade agreements and permits them “to maintain, adopt, and implement policies and measures that they deem appropriate for the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions on their territory” (UNESCO, 2005). The real intent of this convention is (to no one’s surprise) to put a break on US dominance of the international trade in the products of the mass cultural industries (film and television in particular). It also seeks to affirm the relative autonomy of ‘cultural expressions’ from the larger trade in goods, a separation that other US-led trade agreements, such as the North American Free Trade Agreement, have actively sought to

undo (Szeman, 1998). Can't we affirm the (apparently) productive impulses of the state to safeguard culture from the market, while rejecting and criticizing the uses to which national culture and its politics of belonging are being put? Can't we erect cultural borders in some places, while resolutely taking them down in others?

For those critical of the dominance of economic relations to the exclusion of all else in the world – something which neo-liberal globalization has achieved *par excellence* – it is hard to resist the idea that cultural expression and cultural autonomy need protection from the ravages of the market. And if not the state, then who? In the context of our current neo-liberal governments, the idea of the beneficent Keynesian or social democratic state casts a long political shadow out of whose darkness it has become difficult to move. But move out of it we must. There are numerous assumptions embedded in the idea of state protection of culture – which is to say: the establishment of borders for culture – that need to be carefully disentangled and assessed. Right off, the notion that the state that is intent on patrolling and maintaining existing forms of national culture should be charged with the task of protecting and promoting 'cultural diversity' is, at a minimum, problematic. 'Diversity' is a slippery word. The celebration of diversity against encroaching Americanism or market culture is one thing; enabling diversity within national borders quite another. The defense of Enlightenment values against outsiders and the protection of culture from the market seamlessly fold over into one another: the diversity named here is, for the most part, that of already established forms of national 'high' culture – opera, classical music, museums, the fine arts – which have long had an essential role in legitimating the sovereignty of the state over its borders. As both Roberto Schwarz (1992) and Malcolm Bull (2001) have shown in different ways, anxieties about the protection and promotion of forms of 'authentic' national culture are ones that emerge out of the interests of ruling and intellectual elites, and not from the broad masses, who have little investment or interest in safeguarding the link between culture and state sovereignty. Increasingly, even the impulse to support non-market cultures is done with economic goals in mind: the support of an essential aspect of the affective labour market; the creation of conditions for so-called 'creative classes' to flourish (Florida, 2004); and the establishment of cultural distinctiveness in order to fuel tourist economies organized around encounters with managed difference.

It is one thing to be critical and anxious about the impact of the market on culture; it is quite another to see the state – the funding source for the so-called 'public sector' – as heroically intervening to enable non-market social and cultural forms to flourish. The two impulses need to be disengaged. The dangers of giving states the moral authority to protect and promote culture outweigh the potential benefits, which might include strategic use of state funds by arts, cultural institutions, and so on, to engage in efforts to shatter cultural borders instead of assisting the state in reinforcing them. Documents such as the UNESCO Convention pretend to take on what Guy Debord described as 'the spectacle': that haze of mediation which has placed representation and abstraction at the centre of social life. In reality, they do nothing substantive to get at the heart of social drama of accumulation and 'separation' that Debord's concept of the spectacle is intended to capture. Remember: "The spectacle is not a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images" (Debord, 1995: 12). To no one's surprise, what is at issue in contemporary anxieties about cultural borders are political ones, whose real object is the maintenance of existing forms of power at all

costs. Culture has no borders, it never has. Why then respond to the threat of the market by giving into the fantasy of national-cultural borders, a fantasy which, as Adorno writes, goes against the impulses of cultural practice to attack and dissolve the stereotypes that contain us?

Every border erected for culture claims ‘diversity’ (from the market) or Enlightenment (against the unbelievers). We must refuse to operate within these borders and the easy stereotypes they offer, and direct ourselves to understanding and contesting the global political circumstances that continue to make such forms of reifying consciousness politically viable. No borders for culture! Such a call doesn’t cause the threat of the neo-liberal market to culture to fade; it does, however, push us away from the false solution of cultural borders and returns us to the task of culture: the undoing of all borders, maybe even especially that singular psychic border of commodity culture, which transforms creative labour into dead things without origin.

#### **4. To Free Time! Drawing the Line or Moving Beyond Borders of Production**

It is well known that the anti-globalization movement – which we could just as well call the global movement against capitalist proletarianization – has, in recent years, demanded an end to transcendent borders such as those produced by nation-states. This demand is twofold: it calls for an end to the threats of a ceaseless spread of capital across extant spatial borders, while at the same time positing a new collective drape within and over this expansion.

Primarily, the discourses of globalization, on both the Right and the Left, are couched in terms of spatial demands. The former employs a strategy of strengthening laws against border crossings so as to maintain unsanctioned and non-remunerated labour flows in the service of capital. At other times, the Right demands an end to borders to open up an unfettered frontier for free market domination. From the Left, we hear a call to legalize and compensate labour that crosses borders without sanction. There is also a Leftist impulse to do away with any borders altogether, including that of the law, which often stands as a border against the potentialities of non-exploitative production. Thus, it could be argued that the discourses of globalization are predominantly based on addressing what are viewed as potential spatial hazards – either to Empire or the Multitude – produced by the growing and impending irrelevance of geopolitical borders.

These are real threats, albeit threats with generative openings both for and against capital. They are present today and growing larger with unprecedented speed. We have clearly entered a new historical era in which the call for ‘No borders! Free movement!’ in spatial terms has become increasingly urgent. However, by declaring ‘No borders!’ in relation to our post-Fordist (political) economy, we run the risk of overlooking the effects of a border that has *already* ceased to operate in the realm of *temporality* – the division between labour-time and non-labour time.

With the end of this temporal border, zones of differential labour and the realization of surplus-value remain intact, yet through a new model of overproduction that we might as well call reproduction. We now have a ceaseless ‘production time’ that includes ‘non-labour time’, unhinging qualitative differences in social time and refusing compensation for the free temporal movement that capital demands.

Time, for the contemporary worker, is no longer delineated along the lines of when we are working and when we are not. This is not because all jobs are characteristically the same. There remain clear differences between today’s occupations. For example, the work of the professional never ends because of the constant need to reinvent herself as a malleable ‘profile’. The factory worker’s work time is still delineated by wage hours but depends on social cooperation outside of the workplace to produce opportunities for advancement. Academics, scientists and information technologists must always be working to produce the material results of their immaterial thought. Let us not forget, also, that immigrant labour finds itself working unthinkable hours in the most unregulated economic sectors – agriculture, construction, the service industry, etc. – precisely because *geopolitical borders* restrict easy entrance into the western world. As such, juridico-political borders of the nation-state continue to work in the service of capital – that is, according to an inclusive-exclusionary logic whereby the transgression of these borders is in its very interest. And while we might point to a general trend of labour mobility from the migrant worker to the multi-national C.E.O., we need to bear in mind that the fruits of this increased mobility are spread unevenly and unjustly.

The actions performed in these various forms of labour are very different. However, within real subsumption, these occupations have become qualitatively identical: as ‘productive labour’, they each serve to reproduce the society of capitalism as opposed to *directly* producing capital itself. That is because, as Antonio Negri notes, production has been ‘subsumed within circulation’ (Negri, 1996: 157). Additionally, in earlier stages of capitalist development, the social cooperation necessary for capital was produced by capital in the workplace. Today, as productive social cooperation is necessary *a priori* to production, the ‘social worker is the producer...prior to any commodity’ (Negri, 1996: 165). This form of social cooperation depends on what Marx termed the ‘general intellect’ – general human faculties that produce technological innovation and ‘social combination’.

With capital now relying on a system of production that includes not only ‘work time’ but also the time that precedes and follows it – the time of social cooperation – the borders between time, life, labour have become irrelevant and the terms tautological. Measure in real subsumption now takes place in the *flow* between life and labour (Negri, 2003: 27). This flow also bears the name: life. If surplus-value is what results from surplus-labour, then the totality of life becomes surplus.

In *A Grammar of the Multitude*, Paolo Virno writes:

This evidence drives us to reformulate, in part or entirely, the theory of surplus-value. According to Marx, surplus-value springs from surplus-labor, that is, from the difference between necessary labor (which compensates the capitalist for the expense sustained in acquiring the labor-power) and the entirety of the working day. So then, one would have to say that in the post-Fordist era, surplus-value is determined above all by the gap between production time which is not calculated

as labor time and labor time in the true sense of the term. What matters is not only the disproportion, inherent in labor time, between necessary labor and surplus-labor, but also, and perhaps even more, the disproportion between production time (which includes non-labor, its own distinctive productivity) and labor time. (Virno, 2004: 105)

Virno's characterization produces a series of paradoxical questions: If afforded the opportunity, should we take on salaried jobs, which are in fact wage jobs that do not remunerate 'non-labour' time? Or should we stop producing altogether and thus devalue the very production of life that is now inherent in the tautology of labour-life-time? Are we all now 'unemployable', if "unemployment is non-remunerated labor and labor, in turn, is remunerated unemployment?" (Virno, 2004: 103). And finally, if biopower is now the force that makes time a fluid movement and allows capital itself to regulate the production of labour-power – the potential to produce – is there any sense in demanding an end to *all* borders and free movement?

We are at war, a war without borders. To utter a definitive answer to these questions draws a fixed line, a new border, to the battle already beyond borders that we face. We need not forget that our enemy – capital – seeks to confuse by simultaneously eliminating the need for borders and utilizing a rhetorical practice that is premised on regimes of inclusion and exclusion. Should we do the same by demanding an end to borders while casting ourselves as something fully inclusive or exclusive to capital? That, too, is confusing. In the words of Bartleby, '[We] prefer not to' – not to answer these questions, that is.

Rather, here we want to reframe and rename the global war that we face in a way that positions the demands of capital and its opponents as indistinguishable. We call this war 'The War To Free Time!' Each side requires time to be free by putting an end to abstract borders that differentiate the time of labour from non-labour time. Capital needs this line to crumble so as to abstract unfettered surplus-value from free time. We want our time to be freed from the regulatory mechanisms that capital uses to privatize not only our labours, but also the totality of the time of life.

To win this war, do we draw a line in the sand to re-instate this boundary whose dissolution now oppresses? Or can we today imagine a call to the political 'To Free Time!' that would stand in absolute opposition to the bygone terms of 'labour-time' and 'non-labour' time? If so, we would be required to unleash a hidden meaning to the term *production* – a meaning containing the freedom of movement to allow us to 'waste time' so that capital does not waste our time.

## **5. No Borders and the Possibility of New Political Forms**

Our argument is that a specific political action to eliminate borders would mean a radical challenge not only to the capitalist system, but also to our old views on a range of issues. It comes as a constant shock to discover the limits of our political thinking, even when we set out to overcome them. When we imagine new ways of being and acting, ways that we hope will open up the all too-quickly foreclosed possibilities of the human, we often stop short at the barrier of this or that political concept, and most often

at those whose long existence have allowed them to engage in the always suspect change from concept to reality. The border is one such concept: an idea given physical, social, legal and cultural reality in such diverse forms as border crossing, citizenship laws and ethnic identifications. When dealing with such a concept-reality, politics must understand itself as attempting a process of sublimation: the direct passage of solid back into gas, reality into concept, without the intervening liquid moment of uncertainty, insecurity and instability. But exactly how is this to be accomplished?

Let's start again: No borders! The action to bring about the end of borders implies not separation, but inclusion. Our view of the world is hugely influenced by our existing understanding of the social, which includes that social formation known as capitalism. Whether we like it or not, capitalism shapes our views, including the view that makes inconceivable a truly borderless society. Dominant discourses give several excuses to the maintenance of borders: the survival of our cultural identity; that too many immigrants would destroy our economic and social welfare; that there is no room for everyone. But we need to think beyond the prism offered by capitalism. Borders are essential for capitalism to exist as such. It is the only way to increase competition among workers: countries try to offer a pacific and cheap workforce to attract capital flows. For the world's poorest subjects, borders mean a cruel destiny: the acceptance of low salaries and economic exploitation, or the necessity of leaving their countries in order to become illegal immigrants in western societies, where they suffer just as much, if in a different way. The process of primitive accumulation that kicks off capitalism and which has returned with such force in globalization can operate only by sealing off and distributing the commons as property.

As a social formation, capitalism traces limits everywhere. Borders are one of its most important weapons. They are necessary to the division of the multitude. What we want is democracy and inclusion of all – not in a nation, a state or an identity that always presupposes exclusion – but in a *life in common* (Hardt and Negri, 2004). Inclusion in this common life demands the elimination of borders and the possibility of total movement. Not just movement, it has to be said, on the ground, across those invisible little lines that demarcate spaces of political force and economic hegemony, but total movement – movement across all those borders at the multiple levels that are required in order to enforce (physical, political, psychic) enclosure. For this reason we have paid attention to the multiple ways in which borders function. We have explored how they maintain capitalism – the now fully realized form of capitalism that has emerged within globalization – through the division of the labour force, in spite of discourses on free mobility of capital and knowledge workers. We have highlighted the issues raised by migration and sovereignty through the refugees' situation in Australia, encouraging resistance to the state's tendencies to determine the composition of their populations and the limits of human movements. We have criticized those state interventions to reinforce borders in order to protect and promote culture, arguing that we must refuse to operate within these borders and the stereotypes they offer. And we have also described the new war on free time that we are facing against the capitalist efforts to obtain higher surplus-value through the privatization of the totality of our time – the time of our lives.

The new political form at work here might appear to an old one: the surpassing of borders, which is exemplified even in this collective work, which required overcoming

geographical borders, academic disciplinary borders, and the borders of intellectual belonging and separation. What we hope we've shown is the productivity of putting into question a political concept such as that of the 'border' across multiple registers that are often treated as distinct and separate – the migrant, for instance, crossing a border in search of the kind of labour that we reject as itself a border-limit, and thus having to manage the cultural borders on which we also want to cast suspicion. Let us hope that efforts like these may lead to a major dissolution of every separation and erase every line.

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# Train of Thought: Movement, Contingency and the Imagination of Change

Helen Grace

## abstract

This paper reflects on the Capturing the Moving Mind conference/event, which took place in September 2005 on the Trans-Siberian Railway, between Moscow and Beijing. The paper follows the structure of a two-screen new media work, entitled Train of Thought, composed of five short episodes: 1. Movement, 2. Biopolitics: Landscape of Prisons, 3. Stationary World, 4. Borderline and 5. 'This intense radiation of energy and thought'. The overall piece is structured by an image of the train's moving shadow cast on the landscape of the Gobi Desert, a register of our presence but also of our hypermediation of the experience, from the relative comfort of first-class carriages, viewing a world through a window, moving through a landscape, imagining movement and change, but also in a sense, not touching (or being touched by) the places through which we passed. This assemblage (part paper, part text animation, part moving image) focuses on three aspects of the journey: firstly the affective register of inactivity, inaction or boredom; secondly, a sense of animation as an aspect of what might be called the market's organicism (its 'biopolitics'); and thirdly an encounter with violence and the phenomenon of coercion (the protection racket). These instances are framed through a combination of what Deleuze calls the perception-image, the affection-image and the action-image.

All things considered, movement-images divide into three sorts of images, when they are related to a centre of indetermination as to a special image: perception-images, action-images and affection-images. And each one of us, the special image or the contingent centre, is nothing but an assemblage of three images, a consolidation of perception-images, action-images and affection-images. (Deleuze, 1986: 66)



MOVIE CLIP 1: Train of Thought: Title - 5-7 secs



## Before moving...



TEXT ANIMATION 1

This paper reflects – in a reflexive way – on the *Capturing the Moving Mind* conference/event, which took place in September 2005 on the Trans-Siberian Railway, between Moscow and Beijing. The paper follows the structure of a two-screen new media work, entitled *Train of Thought*, composed of five short episodes: 1. Movement, 2. Biopolitics: Landscape of Prisons, 3. Stationary World, 4. Borderline and 5. ‘This intense radiation of energy and thought’.<sup>1</sup> The overall piece is structured by an accidental image – or rather, by an image which I could not have predicted in planning to make a work about the experience. This image presented itself as we crossed the Gobi Desert, towards the end of the trip, one late afternoon with the sun low in the sky, causing the train’s moving shadow to be cast on the landscape itself, a register of our presence but also of our hypermediation of the experience, from the relative comfort of first-class carriages, viewing a world through a window, moving through a landscape, imagining movement and change, but also in a sense, not touching (or being touched by) the places through which we passed.

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1 This work was shown as part of the *Capturing the Moving Mind* exhibition opening, held at the Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art, Helsinki on April 20th 2006, in the museum’s Rear Window space, 20 April – 2 July, 2006. My thanks to Tuula Karjalainen, Marja Sakari, Akseli Virtanen and Jussi Vähämäki for organizing the exhibition and seminar, which accompanied the opening and to Anna Wartiovaara and to Esa Niiniranta for their assistance in the installation of work.

Part 1 sets movement into play, via a series of images and movie clips (in particular a clip about time – or the relative meaning of time and the disorientation produced on a journey through seven time zones with a time-table set according to the time of the journey's origin: Moscow time. Movement is also thought via the dynamism of capital and the disorientations it also produces). Part 2 reflects on the historical landscape of Siberia, brought into existence as a particular landscape of exile in the nineteenth century, from the Decembrist exiles of the early nineteenth century to the expansion of the prison system, in the repression which followed the assassination of Alexander II in 1881. An image – indeed a whole imaginary – of this landscape arose in this period – well in advance of the Russian Revolution (and, we can say, necessitating it). There are parallels which might be drawn between this historical experience of a ‘war on terror’ and the more contemporary world of ‘permanently temporary war’. Additionally, the enforced labour of this earlier period established a landscape of mines and mining, which is now intensified in massive resource developments since the end of the Soviet Union and the landscape is re-marked by the deep scarring of post-industrial ecological waste and social/cultural dislocations of populations, already deeply marked by traumatic experience and memory.

Part 3 (‘Stationary World’) further touches on the ecologies of place in the micro-economies built around the train’s stopping – both in general and in the particularity of stopping during *this* journey – occasions which meant ‘work’ (meetings, performances, etc.) as well as play. The train-stop also brought us into direct contact with the brutalities of control, of ‘protection rackets’ and of ‘predatory man’ (Veblen), a generally hidden aspect of the emergence of market economies and of state formations within them. Part 4 hotlinks to the discussion of a performance on the border between Russia and Mongolia, entitled ‘Action without Reaction’, directed by Bernardo Giorgi, an ongoing project on borders. The intertitle of Part 5, ‘This intense radiation of energy and thought’, is a description of the conference *mood*, given by one of the participants at a certain stage of the journey, but it might also be applied to a sense of generalised dynamism encountered in China at the end of the journey, which some expressed as a sense of ‘entering the future’.

This assemblage (part paper, part text animation, part moving image) reflects briefly on three aspects of the journey: firstly the affective register of inactivity, inaction or boredom; secondly, a sense of animation as an aspect of what might be called the market’s organicism (its ‘biopolitics’); and thirdly an encounter with the phenomenon of coercion (the protection racket).

The *Capturing the Moving Mind* conference/experiment was motivated by the challenge to think change and its effects from within its immersive materiality, demanding an engagement which is therefore both reflective and reflexive. The challenge of writing in the era of what Vilém Flusser (2002) has called the ‘technical image’ requires a rethink of what it means to write and to be ‘written’. Moreover, there is a sense in which we seem increasingly composed of/by images – in a time of the dominance of graphic user interfaces. Deleuze’s proposal of three types of images – perception-images, action-images and affection-images – seems also a good way of thinking the particular experiences of this journey, between perception, affection and action.

In a very interesting article exploring the ways in which work on materiality in cultural and social geography is enriched by what might be called the ‘affective turn’, Ben Anderson (2004) surveys a particular history of boredom as suspension of the body’s capacities to affect and be affected. His approach attempts to refigure boredom beyond its characterisation as alienation or anomie, within the model of disenchantment, in which critical theory has contained it. This is a good place to start because boredom opens out thought to the imaginary space of non-thought – the “restlessness of a vacant mind”, as Samuel Johnson saw it, a place of dread for all who subscribe to the language of utilitarianism and instrumentalism, a place of radical non-productivity, of no ‘research outcomes’, of idleness and purposelessness: the place of losers, of failures, and today of the unemployed and of refugees. And, in a word: the sphere of the precariat. But there we were, all sitting around for days with nothing to do except think up new thoughts and actions – or encounter the failure of doing so.



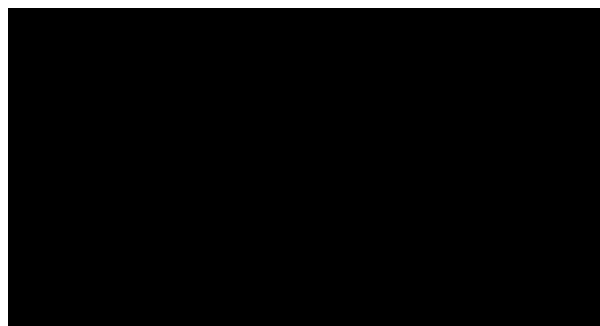
There is relatively little support for boredom in philosophy – though a number of philosophers deal with it. Kierkegaard is ambivalent in *Either/Or*, vacillating, in the imaginary dialogue between A, the aesthete and B, the older, wiser and more earnest judge, between praise for idleness and condemnation of boredom ('demonic pantheism') (1987: 290). In this 1843 'lifestyle' manual, a familiar choice is presented: the life of pleasure (A's 'aesthetic' worldview and lifestyle) or the ethical life (B's purposeful existence). It's pretty clear that the 'aesthetic' life is to be avoided finally because it presupposes a subject who refuses the responsibilities of independent selfhood, preferring the instinctual and infantile pursuit of (more or less choiceless) pleasure and novelty. Such an uncontrolled libidinal economy leads inevitably to boredom, despair, melancholy – the malaise of commodified modern life as Simmel and Kracauer later find – while the pursuit of true happiness – in this somewhat grimmer version of Hillsong – involves the adoption of the moral life, not exactly of the renunciation of pleasure, but of its ordering and control.



Although Kierkegaard liked to travel,<sup>2</sup> I don't know whether he ever travelled by train – I imagine A & B's dialogue to have developed in a horse-drawn carriage<sup>3</sup> rather than a train compartment, since, as Schivelbusch (1986: 73) tells us, the U-shaped design of the coach compartment represented a communicative form of seating, a specifically bourgeois idea to precipitate conversation.

The train compartment on the other hand presented a new anxiety for the bourgeois traveller: having to face strangers in relatively close proximity for hours at a time, resulting in a new form of behaviour – reading while travelling, necessitated by both the development of the train carriage's spatial arrangement and the railway's annihilation of space by time. Between the internal intensities of intimate contact with strangers on the one hand and on the other, the emergence of a 'panoramic' vision and an accompanying numbing of the senses in the experience of mobilisation, an embedded, localised pre-industrial geography is replaced with the non-fixity of a passage through time as much as space, a passage which blurs the sense of 'reality'.

Referring to Schivelbusch in a recent book on boredom, Elizabeth Goodstein suggests that "boredom was the fate of those who could not modernize their ways of seeing in the enforced idleness of the compartment" (2005: 178).



MOVIE CLIP 2: RealTimeElly duration: 16.17



TEXT ANIMATION 3:

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- 2 He acquired a taste for it, when he went to Berlin in 1841 to attend lectures by Schelling at the University of Berlin – also 'audited' by Jakob Burckhardt and Friedrich Engels. See Hong and Hong (1987: viii).
- 3 It is in fact imminent carriage travel which leads to the discovery of the papers of A & B, as 'Victor Eremita' tells us in the preface. And we also know of Kierkegaard's general sociality: 'The fact is he walks about town all day, and generally in some person's company.... When walking, he is very communicative' (Hong and Hong, 1987: xiv).

It was, then, this space between boredom and idleness which also preoccupied some *Capturing the Moving Mind* fellow travellers in formulating some new post-Kierkegaardian questions about the experience. As the ‘Call for Papers’ for this issue puts it, in a direct challenge, demanding an affective approach:

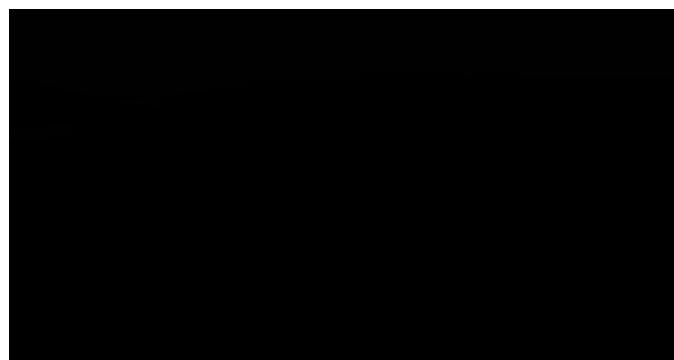
How might the sensual, the sensitive, and the aesthetic contribute to the creation of new political forms? And how might feelings of restlessness and boredom (feelings of being without any task or function – the experience of what it means to be ‘human’ in the most generic sense) be decisively understood not as a weakness but an asset, a political power not to be given up?

Here, I want to explore some thought processes involved in *imaging* this particular experience of imagining change. This experimental activity (conference/event) put into circulation a desire to imagine new ways of being political beyond the forms of party or stultified ‘direct action’ as knee-jerk *reaction*, as well as responding to a generalized contemporary *movement* (of peoples, of action and of thought) and the necessity to think *within* movement, to mobilize thought so that a refreshed action can occur, both as event and as ‘way of being’, engaging affective energies and intensities – generic human capacities – directed towards collaborative forms of creation and resistance.

Well, that was part of the idea, anyway. But there was also the hint of a movement away from this talk of collaboration and unity towards a kind of group or even animal isolationism:



TEXT ANIMATION 4:



MOVIE CLIP 3: Train projected on Gobi Desert (10 secs)

My problem to solve in this experiment was how to realize it as a *production* under circumstances in which its self-organizing principle mitigated against the type of organizational intervention a film or videomaker would engage in, (directing ‘action’ and re-enactment, composing scenarios), in order to encourage the emergence of an event which could form a recordable narrative in the absence of a script (and in this case, the absence also of a budget) – the usual dilemma facing ethnographic filmmakers in particular (with the difference in this instance that an anthropologically-inflected practice of observational detachment could not exist, since this would have implied non-engagement in the experiment itself and engagement was really a condition of participation, necessitated as much as anything by the very principle of immersion in *movement* which the experiential nature of the event – and ordinary sociality – required).



#### TEXT ANIMATION 5

And then there was the reality of ‘self-organization’, which, more often than not, turned out to mean the individualized ‘care of the self’, a small version of *Either/Or* – the cultivation of the self in meditative and ethical activity (reading, ‘making work’, engaging in productive political discussion or planning of actions) versus pleasure-seeking, drinking, dancing, time-wasting, ‘fucking around’, daydreaming, (or aimless ‘being there’) – and crossing these extremes, simply living (attending to personal care, eating, washing – and the challenges these activities presented and the anxieties to which they gave rise).



#### TEXT ANIMATION 6

This ordinary living *space* of the ‘non-event’ occupies the *time* between the desire to undertake significant actions – to ‘make history’, to participate in important events, to enter cosmic time (always the territory of self-importance as much as real importance). Here I want to distinguish the ‘non-event’ as everyday reality and the non-event as failed occurrence, precipitating disappointment – the difference consisting in the absence or presence of active expectation. And I want to say that it is the ‘non-event’ (in the former sense) which holds most interest for me, since this is precisely the space in which the sensual, the sensitive and the aesthetic exist as a *potentially*, as possible *assets* in the emergence of new forms of political life.

The space of the non-event, the time when ‘nothing is happening’ remains a location of profound freedom, separate from the over-organized life (where ‘free time’ is regarded as a – non-productive – ‘waste of time’). This is the true space of ‘self-organization’ in which the power of time as excess – as waste – acquires value of a non-market kind.

## 1. Movement



MOVIE CLIP 4: ‘BernardoDance’ sequence



TEXT ANIMATION 7

Two particular instances of the *movement* of economy recently presented themselves, underlining the context of mobility and rapid change in which our thoughts of movement also occur. The Hong Kong Stock Market recently announced that companies no longer need to buy newspaper advertisements to declare market-sensitive information and nor are they any longer required to suspend trading in such announcement periods. Instead, reporting requirements will allow companies to electronically distribute information without disruption to trading, bringing the exchange into line with other markets (Yiu, 2006). Noting this shift in the register of official announcement, I also recall, a couple of weeks earlier on a plane flying across the world (in *movement*, in a zone of indeterminate time), a paragraph in the business pages of the *International Herald Tribune* announcing that certain market information will shortly cease to appear in the print form of the newspaper but will henceforth only appear in the on-line version.

What becomes obvious in these small shifts is that all those pages of the public announcement of prices of stocks, of managed funds, of exchange rates and of different indices in world stockmarkets, so neatly tabulated, organized in an ordered way and the staple of the business pages for so long – and of newspapers’ advertising revenue, in the case of compulsory reporting – can simply no longer provide the kind of information able to register the actual movement – the *pulse* as it were – of the market. This is because economic *knowledge* (once barely distinguishable from *information*), which used to be *solid* and in print (the very solidity of the printing process guaranteeing the accuracy of the information, which itself would have been carefully checked in a slow, double proofreading process) has itself become fluid, and in constant movement. (And the double proofreaders, working in carefully balanced pairs in printeries for centuries disappeared about twenty-five years ago.)



#### TEXT ANIMATION 8

It is therefore no longer the printed page which can handle the required immediacy and ‘liveness’ of economic information, since a logic of quoting prices at the close of trading no longer works for global markets in which there is simply no close of the market, since somewhere, it is always open for business (a new version of the older nineteenth century demonstration of imperial power – of the sun never setting on the British Empire – which always, in the colonial context, produced a sense of being under

the control of some panoptic order. Now it is the empire of capital upon which the sun never sets, though in the darkness in front of the screen, observing the subtle, barely perceptible shifts in information, it's hard to know if anyone notices whether the sun has set or risen).

So the dizzying scroll of teletext becomes a more appropriate means of apprehending economic information and market dynamism – the screen proving more capable of registering movement than the printed page in the demand for ever more ‘live’ information, though even the screen may be too slow in its refresh rate and in the delay between the registration of sales and purchases and the impact of sales volume on price.

A desire has arisen for the absolute immediacy of the point of sale, a desire for the ‘absolute real’, an imperative to be immersed utterly ‘in the moment’ – the ‘here and now’ of the market, in order to feel its pulse and mood, to be able to predict its subtle shifts, to be completely *immersed* in its actual nervous system in order to gain the smallest margin of advantage (worth millions in high-volume transactions).

Maybe there are some Kantian aspects of this immersive desire, some residues of *das Ding an sich* as it has become transformed by economics (remembering Kant’s interest in economics).<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, something else is happening. *Economy* itself has acquired *life* – as a result of new technological forms of communication; we can say that it is ‘alive’, partly in a monstrous sense, in acquiring a measurable ‘pulse’ and ‘nervous system’, in having ‘moods’ and ‘jitters’, the rhythms and patterns of a perverse organicism.

This new ‘liveness’ – this new ‘sense of the real’ – targets not only stock traders but becomes a generalised aspect of the visual space of daily life: the multi-track scrolling of news services on television, LED displays of scrolling stock prices, alongside those other realms of the immediate – news and weather – appearing on buildings randomly distributed through cities, TV screens appearing increasingly in shopping centres, airports, hospital waiting rooms etc., registering the ‘latest’ information (which, ironically turns out often to be a repetition of what has already occurred).

This new market animation as a visual phenomenon is not systematically studied, but technological registers of its arrival can be identified (though the technological is itself partly an effect of larger changes) – in, for example, the development of teletext from the late 1970s, and we begin to see a greater visual awareness of the presence of economic information in the 1980s, most notably around the 1987 stockmarket crash.<sup>5</sup>

The surfeit of information, this apparent excess which is the most visible aspect of economic movement, a constant flow, indeed overflowing into every conceivable space, is itself a surface which masks, in its frenzied activity, a fundamental absence or lack. In writing of the mimetic turn of economy, Vähämäki explains this phenomenon in the following way:

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4 See in particular Derrida (1981).

5 I’ve written elsewhere on the visual/aesthetic dimensions of these shifts in value. See Grace (1991, 1993 and 2002).



TEXT ANIMATION 9

This scenario of information deficit is part of what has become a generalised deficit economy especially affecting what is called (in already negative terms) the sphere of the ‘not-for-profits’ to which is necessarily attached a sense of *loss*, in the absence of *profit*. Deficit itself is in movement – as anyone in a university observes, when departments are declared to be in deficit; negotiations occur, solutions are established and then the deficit moves onto another department as attention shifts and policies change. Non-profitable thought – ‘wasteful’ thought – comes into being in the supercession of various ideas, as if they are like old clothes, still completely serviceable but those who wear them are located immediately in a particular conceptual – and time – frame, in need either of complete renovation or of demolition.

How then to imagine and create new political forms? The first thing we might notice is that in the period in which a particularly dynamic efficacy was attached to radical political thought, it was always perceived to be *in movement* as opposed to the *stasis* of conservative societies – and this sense of movement then became attached to embodiments of thought in mass forms – in the labour *movement* or the women’s *movement*, for example, before a kind of *settling* began to occur in formerly loose and more nomadic groupings and then mass movements fragmented into various identities and were called *communities* (the gay community or the indigenous community, for example). In a slow sense, stasis began to appear in those movements, which had been marked by dynamism at one moment while an energetic and frenzied dynamism began to appear in those spaces formerly characterised by solidity (the sphere of cognitive capitalism, for example – and certainly in the visual space of capitalist operation, in new images of the market and new forms of expression of the market’s movement).

What shape will new political forms take in meeting this challenge? A couple of examples suggest some shifts – and although these instances depart noticeably from the revolutionary desire of a political imaginary established in the middle of the nineteenth century and maintained ever since, regardless of its historical specificity, the examples I cite here represent noticeable strategic shifts which empower, in an admittedly restricted sense, new political subjects formerly excluded from such activity/activism. Firstly, environmentalist groups and others have taken a leading role in the movement of shareholder activism which rises to the challenge of capital’s greater penetration of

personal life (in, for example, the necessity – or, perhaps, false choice – to be directly engaged in ‘investment decisions’ in relation to compulsory superannuation payments – made in lieu of extra wages in what we might call ‘compulsory capitalism’, a kind of wage-hijacking). Secondly, a new ‘non-registered union’ has emerged in New Zealand, specifically targeting young non-unionized workers, working in, for example the casualised fast food industries – workers whom the union movement has failed to recruit over many years, in spite of professed interest in doing so. In March the group, Unite, (registered as a business rather than a union) successfully negotiated a pay increase for 7000 low-paid workers employed by Restaurant Brands, New Zealand’s biggest fastfood service chain, in Starbucks, KFC, Pizza Hut and the Restaurant Brands 0800 call centre). Unite has just launched in Australia – to the concern of other unions (Carbonell, 2006).

## 2. Biopolitics: Landscape of Prisons



TEXT ANIMATION 10

The Trans-Siberian experiment was an exercise in mobilizing thought and in moving through a landscape which itself had been mobilized and developed through successive wars on terror from the Decembrists to the expansion of prisons in the repression which both preceded and followed the assassination of Alexander II in 1881 (which George Kennan documented, setting down in his images and descriptions the very terms and attitudes which would become the language of the Cold War somewhat in advance of even the Russian Revolution).<sup>6</sup> (I refer to these historical precedents since general

6 Kennan's two volume *Siberia and the Exile System* (1891) is accessible at <http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&cd=3884474> (Vol 1) and <http://www.questia.com/PM.qst;jsessionid=G15FJDq5f32WwFZPMvv6RKC0cmKLZsp5GR11M5byhzPYz262nKb!850685124!1712085583?a=o&d=89543786> (Vol 2). The photographs he took are accessible through the Library of Congress at the following site: <http://frontiers.loc.gov/intldl/mtfhtml/mfdigcol/aboutkenph.html>. Kennan's initial anti-Tsarist project puts in place the principle, structure and mentality of the defence of 'freedom & democracy' which remains to this day. Initially supportive of the idea of revolution in Russia, he opposed its actual practice (on the grounds that the Soviet government lacked the necessary knowledge, experience and education to solve the problems resulting from the overthrow of the Tsar. Kennan's anti-Bolshevism was taken up and extended with spectacular success by his far

Western knowledge of this landscape is still locked in a conventionally anti-Soviet Cold War time-warp, as numerous conversations on the train revealed).

For some, there was a sense of timelessness as if we were in the land of fairytales, of small dark villages, unconnected to the twenty-first century. But in fact our passage was not so much through beautiful nature, corrupted by the ruins of industrialisation (a cross between Tolstoy and Tarkovsky's Zone) but through an entire landscape fuelled by natural resource developments on the one hand (in Russia) and by industrialisation on the other (in China), in this intensified re-run of the European nineteenth century and simultaneously something we've never seen before.<sup>7</sup>

### 3. Stationary World



MOVIE clip 5: MARIA



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better known second cousin, George F. Kennan, principle architect of the Truman Doctrine of Soviet containment – and major Cold War warrior. See Kennan (1947).

7 On the pristine shores of Lake Baikal, new developments are rapidly appearing. See Boykewich (2005). See also Khodorkovsky. More generally, see Belton (2005). For a Chinese perspective see Runping (2006). For developing links between Russia and China see Xuequan (2006). For an expensive view (directed at would-be investors), see Houlleberghs and Zaslavsky (2004). For a more critical view of the nature of entrepreneurial capitalism in Russia today see Volkov (2002).

When the train stops another world is entered, another set of movements; intricate small-scale negotiations, a delicate ecology of subsistence, reliant upon time – the duration of the stop, the minutes, the distance between platforms, the time of service and the organization of the market. The train too requires fueling. At one stop, touristic photography is brought to a halt by a man brandishing a small hand-gun – bringing into stark relief a truism of the power of the image and of photography:

Susan Sontag had famously said:

Like guns and cars, cameras are fantasy machines whose use is addictive. The camera-gun does not kill, so the ominous metaphor seems to be all bluff.... Still, there is something predatory in the act of taking a picture. To photograph people is to violate them by seeing them as they never see themselves. By having knowledge of them they can never have. It turns people into objects that can be symbolically possessed. Just as the camera is a sublimation of the gun, to photograph someone is a sublimated murder. A soft murder, appropriate to a sad, frightened time. (Sontag, 1977: 14)

In the face of a gun, the photograph collapses into irrelevance – its ‘violation’ seeming insignificant in competition with the violation of a petty ‘wielder of force’, controlling platform trade in this face-to-face encounter with an example of Veblen’s ‘predatory man’.<sup>8</sup> Here, an example of ‘violent entrepreneurship’ requires us to rethink the nature of state formation and market building.

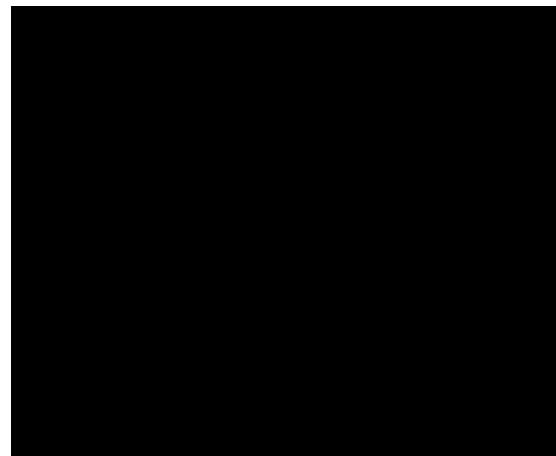
Far from regarding the presence of violence as a particular aspect of the collapse of the state in Russia today, Volkov argues that it is an inherent feature of state formation more generally (especially state formations in the service of free-market economies.) He argues that “it is precisely in state formation and in the creation of institutional structures of economic exchange that the role of wielders of force (or violence-managing agencies) is most prominent” (Volkov, 2000: 709). Legitimacy is always, in a sense, forced (following Weber’s definition of the state as “territorial monopoly of legitimate violence” (Weber, 1970: 77-78)):

Coercion allows force to be saved while violence requires its expenditure. So the costs and effects of the two modes of force are different. Still, there is an intrinsic connection between them: violence has to be employed at least once if coercion is to be effective. Coercion always implies violence – but as memory or potentiality. (Volkov, 2000: 709)

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8 Veblen cited in Volkov (2000: 709).

#### 4. Borderline



MOVIE CLIP 6: Action Without Reaction excerpt

<http://www.ephemeraweb.org/journal/5-X/border.htm>

#### 5. This Intense Radiation of Energy and Thought



MOVIE clip 7: MARTIN

In recording the experience of this experience/experiment, beyond images and memories, the desire is to actively work with materials and thoughts and to re-imagine forms of life, action, politics and economics and to immerse audiences more energetically in the experience, so that we are not simply presenting documents but pathways which lead beyond the text and into a world where action makes a difference.

As part of this process, it is necessary to register ‘a sense of the real’,<sup>9</sup> but to acknowledge today that the real no longer resides exactly in that sense of realism or presence that Bazin (1967) identifies in his famous essay on the ontology of the photographic image, which inaugurates *What is cinema?* and which provided a certain manifesto of neo-realism in the post-war period. Rather, today the real resides not in the stillness of physiognomic intensity which fixes on a point of perfect classical harmony (‘the decisive moment’ as Henri Cartier-Bresson called it) but on all the indecisive moments in a general animation of life – on movement, on the seizure of an instant, which is no longer the decisive moment but ‘any moment whatever’. Melissa McMahon nicely condenses this shift in a short essay on beauty:

Deleuze, following Bergson, traces the genesis of modernity to the analysis of movement into equidistant points. This flattening of movement means that a moving body can be intercepted at ‘any-moment-whatever’ in order to yield information, as opposed to the ancient *synthesis* of movement into *privileged* moments (Origin, Telos, Apex, etc.). (2002: 3)



#### TEXT ANIMATION 11

To edit is to assemble a series of ‘any-moment-whatever(s)’ and to find within these instants the best rhythm which is able to capture the body and mind of a viewer recognising some aspect of the scene. Such an assemblage might be simultaneously a piece of home movie, a diary entry, a slice of reality TV or a sequence of ethnographic cinema (acknowledging that what has become the banality of reality TV began in the intricate and slow intimacy of ethnographic cinema, before the speed of perception was increased by the overstimulation of visual signals to attract the attention of attention-deficit audiences. An assemblage of the kind I have in mind is also a statement of

9 *Sense of the Real* was the thematic title of the ARS06 exhibition at Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art, Helsinki in the context of which the *Capturing the Moving Mind* exhibition was held. Works in the *Sense of the Real* exhibition explored – within the language of international contemporary art’s managed circulation of artists – practices which we might say, simulated the real (for example, in the visceral hyperrealism of the Chapman Brothers, the ‘virtual reality space’ of AES+F, using fashion models, Gerda Steiner & Jörg Lenzlinger’s fantasy spaces of nature.) For more on the artists, see <http://typo.kiasma.fi/index.php?id=493&L=1&FL=1> and for a curatorial statement, see <http://typo.kiasma.fi/index.php?id=511&FL=1&L=1>.

concepts rendered in images and the purpose of this montage activity is to mobilize thought through the assemblage of spatio-temporal elements which can embrace the body, immersing it in the feelings of an experience, whether or not the depicted event has been experienced.

And in order for concepts to become real, we need to understand what exists between perception and action: what is it that exists in this interval? Let's agree with Deleuze that what lies within this interval is affect, expressed, embodied let's say, in image, in sound – in other words in components which directly touch the body.

So you have to take expression seriously and not regard it as mere *illustration* or *supplement* to theoretically elaborated concepts where thought is considered to be grounded. Unless expression embodies thought, theoretical concepts are empty, dry and lifeless and you cannot expect them to be transformed into action, so you are left lying paralysed in elegant and articulate inactivity, tucked away in your compartment, while the world moves and changes around you.

In animating thought in this space (remembering that thought is always located, always formed by place, however much it moves around and beyond the place of its origin) we have a technical problem to solve: how to estimate the duration of the 'any-moment-whatever' in order to create an after-image which activates the energies of the experience both for those who participated directly in an event and for those who create the event for themselves from their own mental assemblages of images and connections presented here in a structure of (what I want to loosely call) 'open-source editing' – by which I mean, the opening out of image sequences, text animations, audio and video clips to the possibilities of a more dynamic reassemblage.

But these possibilities are necessarily limited by techno-economic constraints. The 'Call for Papers' for this issue of *ephemera* threw out a challenge to imagine alternative forms of presentation – even though the technical limit of a structure of downloadable PDFs restricts to some extent the interactivity and animated potential of on-line rather than off-line options. (In this case, it's probably more accurate to describe the hypertextuality here as 'on-off-on-line'.) And there always remains the tantalising promise of the unrealised – in this case, the unrealised 'secret diary' of the journey, based on a set of 'Thought Logs', which a group of participants produced for me and which only exist so far as a 'Thought Spreadsheet' – transcribed text awaiting animation in a dynamic database form – and as fragments ephemerally appearing in this text. There is, then, a potential space, a virtual form in which the movement will begin again. Once more Deleuze has something useful to say about this:

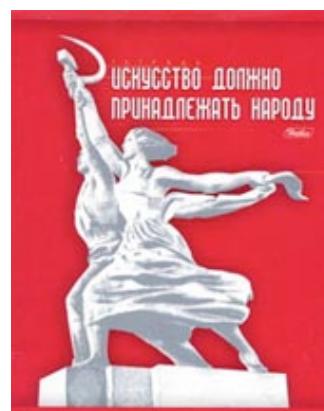
And how can movement be prevented from already being at least a virtual image and the image from already being at least possible movement. (Deleuze, 1986: 56)



#### TEXT ANIMATION 12

As the experience of movement becomes memory<sup>10</sup> and reflection of success and failure becomes possible, a few things seem clear in *this* memory at least, to the extent that they have become embedded as persistent images for me, recurring subsequently in a new awareness of technological possibilities not fully appreciated at the time. In spite of technical difficulties the most imaginative part of the journey was the concept of mobcasting, an innovative technological experiment, tested under circumstances which underline what some have called the ‘digital divide’, clearly demonstrating the limitations of technophilic fantasies of global connectivity which the business management model of globalisation takes as its norm. The mobcasting form provides the most interesting model of future political form (Kim, 2003).

The disappearance of the archive as an accessible repository where images, sounds and texts would be located for subsequent re-mixing of the experience is a loss. And yet, the *idea* remains tantalising and the dream of reconnecting to this material lives on. After all, it has not itself disappeared, but has become temporarily unavailable, as often happens with things these days – and it’s not the first time an archive has become inaccessible. In time the material may resurface and then other memories and secrets will emerge, other thoughts on this radical experiment, which imagined change by mobilising bodies in a dynamic space. And traces are left upon the space itself via ephemeral connections made – by radio and by artworks as much as by thoughts still circulating in bodies and potentialities still alive.



10 Recalling Bergson: ‘Memory – between perception and image – utilizes past experience for present action, seeking in the past those representations which are best able to enter into the present situation’ (Bergson, 1991: 137).

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## Taking Over the Asylum

Nick Butler

**review of:**

Michel Foucault (2006) *Psychiatric Power: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1973-1974*, trans. G. Burchell. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan. (HB, pp.408, £19.99, ISBN 1403969221)

Once, it was possible to say that Foucault's work could be split into at least two phases: 'archaeology' in the 1960s and 'genealogy' in the 1970s (leaving aside, for the time being, 'ethics' in the 1980s) (see e.g. Burrell, 1988; Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982). Of course, to insist on this crude 'break' in Foucault's oeuvre would have meant neglecting a number of factors which pointed to the contrary (for example, the archaeological description of rules of formation in *Discipline and Punish*). Even so, it was still possible, with a little imagination, to identify archaeology and genealogy as two distinct methodological phases.

With the ongoing publication of the entire set of lecture courses held at the Collège de France between 1971 and 1984, this characterisation of Foucault's oeuvre is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain. In *Psychiatric Power*, the fourth volume to be published in a series of thirteen, we find Foucault in constant dialogue with his own work from the 1960s, particularly the *History of Madness* and, less explicitly, the *Order of Things*. What strike us are not only the thematic similarities but also the methodological continuities which distinguish Foucault's work.

To a considerable extent, *Psychiatric Power* – covering the period from November 1973 to February 1974 – may be read as the sequel to the *History of Madness*, originally published in 1961. Foucault says in the opening lecture that he would like to take things up where the *History of Madness* broke off, roughly from around 1800 (p.12). But he does not make this transition from the classical age to the modern period without first returning to his earlier work to revise his previous analyses and re-evaluate his research objectives. What modifications does Foucault make? In the first place, he considers the *History of Madness* to lay undue emphasis on representations, perceptions and images of madness in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Now he says he is more concerned with the 'apparatuses of power' and the productive role they play in discursive formations (p.12-3). Secondly, where Foucault did speak of power in the

*History of Madness*, he admits that it was in terms of unregulated physical violence. In *Psychiatric Power*, he stresses that he is more interested in a “meticulous, calculated power” at a capillary, ‘microphysical’ level (p.14). It is clear, in any case, that Foucault is making adjustments to his earlier archaeologies rather than seeking to recant them. Archaeology and genealogy are not mutually exclusive approaches, with ‘discourse’ on the one hand and ‘power’ on the other; they are, as Foucault tells us here, two indispensable sides of the same historical method (p.239).

Having passed comment on his earlier work, Foucault spends the duration of the twelve-week course at the Collège de France examining the shift from ‘proto-psychiatric’ practice to psychiatric practice proper. This covers most of the nineteenth century, from Pinel to Charcot. Although his primary focus is the asylum, Foucault is at pains to emphasise that he is concerned less with a ‘rule-governed institution’ than with the “regulated distribution of power”, the “tactical functioning of power”, between the doctor and the patient (p.2-12). He goes to some length in explaining that such relations of power are anterior to the institution and, more importantly, constitute the very grounds on which the institution is based (p.26).

What is at stake in *Psychiatric Power* is the way in which a *cure* for madness is possible. In the time of Pinel and Cox, during the first few decades of the nineteenth century, madness is conceived of as an ‘error’ or false judgement. In this case, the cure is based not on the demonstration of this error to the madman but on the transformation of reality by the doctor, a reality now adapted to the erroneous judgement of the mad person so that his or her error is taken temporarily as true (p.130). For example, it is possible to cure a delusional man who thinks he is being persecuted by actually staging a mock trial and acquitting him (p.129).

Beginning in the 1830s, from the time of Leuret, a new form of psychiatric power develops: instead of the problem of truth being posed as an open battle between doctor and patient, as is the case for Pinel and Cox, the medicalisation of psychiatric knowledge permits the question of truth to be posed entirely within this same psychiatric knowledge. The doctor’s reality is no longer ‘smuggled into’ the patient’s delirium; instead, the mad person is forced to confront his or her own madness and to recognise it as such, and to locate it “in a particular administrative and medical reality constituted by asylum power” (p.161). To bring about a cure, treatment is now based on a series of technical procedures relating to obedience, isolation, sedation, drilling, deprivation, punishment, the management of needs, the practice of confession, the regulation of times of work and sleep, etc. While psychiatry now aligns itself with the models of clinical nosology and anatomical pathology, Foucault emphasises the fact that therapeutic practice in the asylum does not put these medical discourses to use as forms of classification or aetiology; rather, they serve as ‘scientific guarantees’ for the disciplinary operation of psychiatric power (p.134). The power of psychiatry, and hence the power of the doctor as ‘master over truth’, is intensified by the institutional support of the clinic (p.187).

As well as elaborating on and extending his analyses in the *History of Madness*, Foucault also returns in *Psychiatric Power* to the *Order of Things*, his 1966 book on the sciences of life, labour and language. Foucault attempts to realign this study with his

analysis of power relations. In a few brief but suggestive pages, Foucault argues that the taxonomic structure of the empirical sciences in the classical age is replaced at the beginning of the modern period by a non-classificatory mode of distribution: the temporal vector of ‘discipline’ (p.72-3). Foucault’s examination of Order in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and History in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries – the key mutation in Western knowledge detailed in the *Order of Things* – is thus revisited in *Psychiatric Power*. These comments serve to remind us once more of the futility of speaking about an ‘archaeological period’ and ‘genealogical period’ in Foucault’s work; what we see, rather, are his earlier analyses reappearing, above or below the surface, in his lectures throughout the 1970s.

As one would expect, there are several points in *Psychiatric Power* where Foucault discusses themes which would come to be developed in his future work, notably *Discipline and Punish*. For example, Foucault examines the ‘disciplinary apparatuses’ which took shape in late medieval religious communities, such as the Brethren of the Common Life in the fourteenth century, and which were soon put to use in an entire set of institutions. The most famous of these apparatuses, perhaps, is Bentham’s Panopticon, on which Foucault offers an extended commentary (p.73-9). These themes have been massively influential within the field of management and organization studies over the last twenty years (see Jones, 2002; McKinlay and Starkey, 1998); for this reason, the lengthy descriptions of disciplinary techniques and mechanisms cover by now familiar ground.

Less familiar than his discussions on discipline, however, is Foucault’s analysis of the figure of the hysterical woman, the ‘true militant’ of anti-psychiatry (p.254). No doubt parts of this section would have ended up in the fourth volume of Foucault’s original, abandoned *History of Sexuality* project, which was to be entitled *The Woman, the Mother and the Hysteric* (see Elden, 2005). This is noteworthy in itself, but the real significance of Foucault’s description of the hysteric lies in its relation to the theme of ‘resistance’ (although importantly he does not mention the word here). Throughout the 1970s, Foucault asserts that power always immediately implies resistance, which is to say, there is no ontological opposition between power and resistance (see Foucault, 1980: 142; 1996: 260). However, despite (or because of) Foucault’s lengthy elaboration on this topic in the *Will to Knowledge* and elsewhere, his conception of power and resistance has caused as much consternation as it has provided clarification (Foucault, 1998: 92-102; see Brown, forthcoming). In *Psychiatric Power*, Foucault’s description of the relation between the doctor and the hysteric demonstrates the practical implications of this isomorphism between power and resistance: it is a relation which is to be understood “in terms of battle, confrontation, reciprocal encirclement, of the laying of mirror traps, of investment and counter-investment” (p.308).

At issue is the status of hysteria. Either it must be determined as an illness proper, an organic illness, in which case it can be diagnosed *differentially* (i.e. whether it is *this* or *that* form of disease); or it must be determined as a ‘mental illness’, in which case it can only be diagnosed *absolutely* (i.e. whether it *is* or *is not* madness) (p.305-6). If the hysteric displays stable symptoms to the psychiatrist, then hysteria can be placed within a nosological schema of differential diagnosis; the consequence of this will be that the hysteric is no longer identified as mad but as ill (p.310). The hysteric, here, exerts a

certain hold over the doctor by permitting him to be recognised as a neurologist – a ‘proper doctor’ – rather than as a mere psychiatrist (p.311). This is the first of several ‘manoeuvres’ which Foucault discusses.

Another manoeuvre involves the doctor (in this case, Charcot) attempting to determine a pathological framework for hysteria on an aetiological level, to regain his hold over the patient. ‘Trauma’ emerges as a medical concept and is identified as the *cause* of hysteria, which necessitates the requirement for hysterics to recount to the doctor their childhood memories and sexual history. The counter-manoeuvre from the hysteric is to continually re-enact her traumatic memories and sexual life within the space of the psychiatric hospital, to the extent that even Charcot is made to blush, as it were, and obliged to turn away (p.323). In response to this counter-manoeuvre, however, sexuality now becomes an object of medical discourse:

By breaking down the door of the asylum, by ceasing to be mad so as to become patients, by finally getting though to a true doctor, that is to say, a neurologist, and by providing him with genuine functional symptoms, the hysterics, to their greater pleasure, but doubtless to our greater misfortune, gave rise to the medicine of sexuality. (p.323)

A new body thus emerges from the struggles between the doctor and the hysteric, a body which is no longer the body of psychiatric discipline, clinical neurology or anatomical pathology; it is the ‘sexual body’, colonised by medicine, psychiatry and psychoanalysis (p.323).

Foucault’s description of these manoeuvres is significant for the way in which power relations are conceptualised in the context of the asylum, taking the form of an unstable play of forces between adversaries rather than a strict opposition between ‘bad’ power and ‘good’ resistance. It will hopefully serve as an important point of reference for those seeking to further elaborate on the concept of ‘power’ as it is found, in various forms, throughout Foucault’s work.

In sum, *Psychiatric Power* provides an invaluable resource for Foucault scholars and anti-psychiatry activists to draw upon, particularly in light of the recent publication of the unabridged *History of Madness* in English translation (see Foucault, 2006). The 1973-1974 lecture course offers innumerable insights into Foucault’s conceptual and methodological apparatus in the mid-1970s as well as a detailed description of ‘proto-psychiatric’ and psychiatric practices from Pinel to Charcot. By inviting us into the asylum, where the distribution of bodies is regulated by a panoptic power, Foucault seeks to demonstrate how psychiatric knowledge formed the basis for this institution and, moreover, how it came to be inserted into other institutions such as the family and the school. If Marx leads us into the hidden abode of production, on whose threshold hangs the notice ‘No admittance except on business’, so Foucault draws us into the hidden abode of psychiatric power, on whose wall hangs the sign ‘You don’t have to be mad to live here – but it helps’.

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## Toward A ‘Pro-biotic’ Study of Organizing

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**review of:**

Anshuman Prasad (ed.) (2003) *Postcolonial Theory and Organizational Analysis: A Critical Engagement*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. (HB: pp.320, £42.50, ISBN: 0-312-29405-0)

[M]ore than two decades after the publication of Edward Said's masterpiece, *Orientalism* (1978), management and organizational scholarship mostly continues to ignore the postcolonial framework. How do we account for such indifference toward postcolonial theory? (Prasad, 2003: 287)

Perhaps, I began thinking as I reflected on this book, we should add a second hyphen to the term ‘de-colon-izing’ when speaking of organizational knowledge. The colonic metaphor resonates with a theory one of my mentors once espoused as the ‘Pampers theory’ of organizational knowledge production (Calàs, 1990). I will not go into that theory beyond noting in passing that Pampers is the trade name of a popular disposable nappy. Into a field ready for rigorous de-colon-ization, Prasad et al. have produced a valuable resource for developing more, well, ‘probiotic’ organizational knowledge, one contributing to better (post)colonial health. I encourage organizational theorists of all perspectives to make *Postcolonial Theory and Organizational Analysis* a part of their libraries.

Although I have been aware of postcolonial theory for well over a decade, I am excited by this book because previously I have known of no readily available starting point with an organizational/ managerial focus in this area. As a result, I have failed to incorporate it into my work. This has been less a matter of indifference, as the leitmotif above suggests; more a dilemma: On the one hand, I agree intellectually that to omit this area of critique from organization studies is unacceptable. On the other hand, I have seen far too many organizational phenomena trivialized as ‘panoptic’ by weekend Foucauldians, too many critiques called ‘deconstruction’ by analysts ignorant of Derrida, too much unquestioning reification of the questionable, for example, Rosenau’s (1991) binarizing ‘affirmative and sceptical’ post-modernisms – the list can be extended. Even in the area discussed by Prasad et al. it is already possible to find studies claiming to be ‘postcolonial’ in which both the object of analysis and the theorizing are connected only tenuously to the central theorists or notions of postcoloniality (e.g., Styhre, 2002). It

would be sad were postcolonial theory to join every other radical insight since ‘qualitative research’ in becoming ‘colon-ized’, a necrotic testament to the peristaltic neutering power of the dominant discourse (cf., Stager Jacques, 2006). That this is its likely fate in any case does not excuse us from trying to prevent such colonization. What has been needed, then, for the interested novice, is an introduction that walks a fine line; summarizing, but not trivializing, highlighting without dogmatizing, analyzing while resisting cookbook methodolatry.

Prasad et al. are largely successful in achieving this. *Postcolonial Theory and Organizational Analysis* does not completely substitute for a rigorous introductory treatise on this subject; I would still welcome one [hint, hint, Dr. Prasad] – but it serves as a very useful introduction. The book is a collection of chapters by different authors and, as such, has certain limitations inherent in that genre. An introduction to the theoretical area is reduced to a single chapter when it deserves far more elaboration. There is a certain amount of introductory repetition ('Edward Said was...') and the chapters vary in quality and depth. However, this collection minimizes these limitations. Unlike the majority of collected editions, this will not be a book you begrudgingly keep for those one or two key chapters surrounded by unread filler. The quality of the contributions varies, but only in the range of adequate to excellent, with a skew toward the latter. Repetition has been minimized through apparently careful editing; only the repetition necessary for each chapter to stand as an autonomous piece remains. The collected-edition form also has some benefits. The variety of authors permits more range of topic and approach than would an introductory treatise and the form of a collected edition means that an instructor can more readily use one chapter out of context without doing violence to its conceptual integrity.

Postcolonial theorizing is deeply embedded in continental critical thought of the last several decades, so the reader unfamiliar with this material will have to do a bit of homework before trying to work with postcolonial thought. The reader new to this area of theory will find the editor's introduction and the concluding chapter by Prasad & Prasad helpful. Without introducing dogmatism, these chapters clearly outline and interpret some key concepts and theorists. Caution: The fact that Prasad et al. do not formulate a canon or dogma does not mean that one cannot be formulated based on their work as has, sadly, happened all too regularly in our field. It would be unfortunate if this volume were to be used to propagate simplistic analytical categories that facilitate calling oneself ‘postcolonial’ at the expense of doing anything that is in the spirit of postcolonial theorizing (a là Fairclough's (1989) colon-izing of Foucault).

Beyond the introductory chapters, the reader will find a rich sampler of contributions to this book. The chapters vary considerably in their degree of theoretical engagement; the strongest are chapters 1, 2, 4, 6, 7 and 12. Overlapping with these, however, are the chapters which engage with an empirical issue, demonstrating ways that postcolonial theorizing can be applied to organizational thinking. Chapters 2, 8, 9, 10 and 11 demonstrate ways that postcolonial perspectives might be utilized to differently understand applied topics as varied as: imperial banking practices and microcredit as a form of resistance, the ‘banal’ colonizing power of financial reporting, the colonizing effects of information and communication technologies, and the socio-politics of uranium mining on aboriginal land in Australia. One theme uniting these articles is the

observation that ‘globalization’ is neither a benign nor a natural process, but a specific set of situated intentionalities which can be questioned and resisted.

For instance, the more case-oriented chapters were especially helpful to me in considering a situation I first learned about a few years ago when working as a vendor of Fair Trade coffee. As part of Viet Nam’s economic ‘recovery’ from French and American imperial wars, the World Bank – a putatively banal ‘aid’ institution – encouraged the government of Viet Nam to promote coffee production. In recent years, Viet Nam has moved from being a negligible coffee producer to being the second largest producer in the world. The result has been a potentially endless glut in a formerly stable market. Prices have plummeted. Producers who were previously living economically marginal lives have been further impoverished, while coffee’s Big 5, such as Nestlé and General Foods (each of which is larger, not only than Starbucks, but than the entire North American specialty coffee market) have reaped windfall profits.

How does one frame such a situation? Clearly, Viet Nam’s production of coffee has contributed to both great hardship and great profit. Demonstrably, those bearing the hardship are those who were not especially well off to begin with and those enjoying the profit are the relatively privileged. These facts are not greatly in dispute. The question is whether what happened was justifiable or not. The argument of coffee’s Big 5 has consistently been that prices are simply the result of impersonal market forces and that it is not just acceptable, but ethically incumbent on management to leave these forces undisturbed while seeking the lowest purchase price (invisible hands and all that). If one is not satisfied by this view, how does one frame a rebuttal? Marxian theory offers some relevant insights, but it is unsatisfyingly incomplete. Postcolonial theory, which is receptive to Marxian insights, offers a much richer basis for analysis. In order to actually write such an analysis, I would have to go well beyond the resources in Prasad et al., but this volume would be a valuable starting point.

Another strength of this book is the variety of ways it engages with extant bodies of theory in organization studies. These include organizational control (ch.2), culture (chs.3, 5), workplace resistance / resistance to change (ch.4), ethnography (ch.6), financial reporting (ch.8), the teaching of management (ch.9), enterprise technology in information systems (ch.10) and stakeholder theory (ch.11). This engagement underscores the broad applicability of postcolonial thought. Were one completely disinterested in the postcolonial world, this de-colonoscopy of organization studies is valuable as a means of illuminating assumptions and limitations of the field. Even if one rejects the critique of these authors, one will be likely to leave the engagement with new insights. For instance, after reading P. Prasad’s chapter discussing the embeddness of ethnography in relationships of colonization, I still affirm that there can be emancipatory potential in ethnographic approaches to research (as, I believe, would she), but I no longer assume that such approaches are inherently emancipatory or even inherently progressive.

Another important connection between postcolonial and other bodies of organizational theorizing is its inherently historical orientation. The chapters in this volume vary in the degree to which they discuss historical data explicitly, but a foundational assumption of postcolonial theory is that phenomena which today seem natural, real or inevitable seem

so only because of the sedimentation of past values and practices. This suggests synergy between postcolonial theorizing and the ‘historic turn’ in organization studies (*Management & Organizational History*, 1(1); Clark & Rowlinson, 2004). In chapter 3, Cooke takes this in an unexpected, yet productive direction, applying a postcolonial lens to the legacy of Kurt Lewin. In this chapter, the colonized are not indigenous people subject to an overt colonial regime, but African Americans colonized by knowledge practices, apartheid and oppression within a country where they are simultaneously indigenous and alien.

It should not pass without comment that Cooke is a Caucasian Englishman appropriating theory in which the experience of colonization is a source of authority. ‘Can a white man sing the blues?’, as the question was once framed in American musicology? There is no simple answer to this question. We have learned from men in feminism, straight people in gay and lesbian studies, white people in race studies, and others in analogous situations, that to speak as the Other is probably impossible, but, to exclude such ‘compagnons de route’ (Jardine, 1987) from having a voice is equally problematic. What, then, is the appropriate relationship between identity and authorial privilege? To ask this question of Cooke, raises it of the other contributors. To what extent should one be validated to speak authentically of the colonial experiences of ‘Indians’ simply because one was born in India? How much can a Chinese author speak for ‘the’ Chinese experience of Western colonization? The authors represented in this volume offer a breadth of experience that goes beyond the boundaries of Anglo-American scholarship; this should be a source of some authority, but how much? All write to an Anglo-American reader from a position of some privilege. I would have been appreciative of more reflection by the authors on their positioning as speakers with multiple, ambivalent identities within and without the colonizing discourses. My fear is that, without active dialogue on this point, we run the dual dangers of making experience and identity irrelevant – which is one kind of problem – or of according the truth of the matter only to those with membership in certain demographic categories – which is equally problematic.

The preceding underscores an important boundary of postcolonial theorizing. Several of the authors in this volume address the fact that postcolonial theory is not external to modernism, capitalism or the colonizing discourses, but is, rather, a part of them. Like early considerations of postmodernity or poststructuralism, the analytical tools and techniques of postcolonial theorizing come from within the epistemic systems being critiqued. They use the system against itself in order to show the limitations of the system, to show the system as a system and not as reality *per se*, possibly to suggest, faintly, alternatives to the system (even here, one must be mindful of Foucault’s warning that “to imagine another system is to extend our participation in the present system” (1971: 230)). Just as postmodernism, even when it had vitality, was more able to show the exhaustion of modernity than to represent whatever might be succeeding it (cf., Huyssen, 1984), postcolonial theorizing works from within the legacy of colonization. It cannot and should not be expected to offer a successor epistemology. This is yet another point at which this volume offers a useful way to reconsider other issues within organization studies. As several of the authors sought to reflectively engage with the limits of postcolonial theorizing, I was reminded how relevant it would

be to revisit these points relative to post-analytic feminisms, Marxisms and poststructuralisms.

Although I agree with Calás & Smircich (1999) that it is time to be ‘past postmodernism’ in the sense that an ‘ism’ of the postmodern is probably fruitless, the seismic shifts in social reality which gave rise to speculation about the end of modernity have not disappeared just because ‘postmodernism’ is now a soiled Pamper. Among these is suspicion of Western analytical knowledge, with its realist ontology, binaristic either/or logic, universalizing typologies, hierarchies of knowledge and scientistic faith in ‘the data’. Poststructuralism and postmodernism demonstrated at least the possibility that such knowledge was not value neutral, inevitable or inherently superior to that which preceded it within the Western tradition. Postcolonial thought demonstrates analogous points relative to other knowledge traditions. Both approaches are allies in the sense invoked in Foucault’s essay ‘What is Enlightenment?’:

I wonder whether we may not envisage modernity rather as an attitude than as a period of history. And by ‘attitude’, I mean a mode of relating to contemporary reality...And, consequently, rather than seeking to distinguish the ‘modern era’ from the ‘premodern’ or ‘postmodern,’ I think it would be more useful to try to find out how the attitude of modernity, ever since its formation, has found itself struggling with attitudes of ‘countermodernity’. (1984: 39)

By engaging with postcolonial thought and its valorization of ambiguity, hybridity, multiply-laden meanings and heterotopic identities, we might both give such thought the attention it deserves and rejuvenate other antiessentialist strands of thought which have become somewhat ossified. If postmodernism and critical realism represent, as I suspect they do, two sides of one coin signifying the exhaustion of a certain intellectual moment, the ‘strategic essentialism’ advocated by Prasad (with due credit to Spivak’s critique of “essentialist/constructionist binarism” and encouragement of post-analytic theorists to take “the ‘risk’ of essence” (1989:1)) might suggest a way to find new energy and new direction for critiquing and dealing with the crumbling of a certain form of modernity and the we-don’t-yet-know-what that is replacing it.

My dissatisfactions with this volume are minor and centre on the largely-absent critique of postcolonial theorizing itself. It may be unfair to ask that an introduction to a perspective also contain critique of that perspective, but such connections are integral to developing this strand of theorizing. As mentioned above, the authors spend little time reflecting on the ambivalence of their own positions. Prasad & Prasad express the desire to, “not reduce non-Western peoples to the status of passive bystanders, but...as active agents” (p.284). This goal is laudable, but we must remember that the Other has no greater agency in these postcolonial representations than in Western poststructuralism, behavioural science, ethnography or popular media. The subject of postcolonial theory may be a construction with different boundaries than these other subjects, but s/he is still a construction. When the aboriginal Australian is represented by the ethnically Indian, American educated, postcolonial theorist whose ability to observe is contingent upon privileged relationships of employment and funding within the institutions of the colonizer (ch.11), he or she may be represented more sympathetically or more knowledgeably, but he or she will still be known to the reader only indirectly, through the interpellation of Banerjee, the privileged representer. I do not mean anything so crude as to suggest merely that this critique is not the final Truth of the matter, a charge

inevitably levelled at deconstructive analyses. That is true; it is also trivial. My concern is that postcolonial theorizing not be reduced to a romanticized nativism which can be sealed into a hermetic bubble exogenous to 'real' organizational theorizing.

By analogy, in my country, Aotearoa/New Zealand, there is an emergent stream of research called kaupapa Maori (Smith, 1999) which is an attempt to develop a methodological approach to social research which is congruent with the traditional values and beliefs of the country's First Peoples. While the attempt to honour and respect the traditional values of this social group is important, it is also problematic in ways kaupapa Maori has yet to systematically engage. A majority of people of Maori ethnicity live within the dominant, postcolonial culture where they may find many values of their ancestors as alien as do their fellow citizens of European origin. The link between traditional values and traditional ways of living, has been increasingly eviscerated for a century and a half. What do traditional fishing rights mean when the fish in the river are trout imported from Europe, when the oceans are exploited by Maori companies using diesel-powered trawlers – where objects from the colonizing culture are inextricably bound up with today's lived experience of the formerly colonized? Simply because one is ethnically Maori, it does not follow that one does (or can) speak for 'the' Maori. Postcolonial theorizing has much to offer kaupapa Maori theory and vice versa, but the relationships of power which permit the postcolonial theorist to represent the Other must become part of this dialogue. I expect that the contributors to this volume would agree with this observation and I am confident they have not overlooked the problems I note. There is, after all, only a certain amount one can include, even in a dense, three hundred pages. I am simply suggesting ongoing, critical dialogue in a spirit well represented by one of the contributions in this book.

I conclude this review with consideration of chapter 7, contributed by Esther Priyadharshini, because this chapter illustrates themes which run strongly through the entire volume. Priyadharshini performs a discursive reading of popular business press representations of 'tiger economies'. Rather than discrediting the perspective she critiques, Priyadharshini engages with it both critically and appreciatively. One might contrast this with Gibson Burrell's widely quoted dismissal of this literature as 'Heathrow organization theory' (Clark & Rowlinson, 2004: 333). While Burrell's dismissal has its own uses, Priyadharshini's critical engagement seeks to use this literature as a source of knowledge, albeit knowledge its producers may not have intended. After all, as she notes, whatever the quality of this information,

One of the most convenient ways of obtaining the 'latest' knowledge...is through published secondary sources like that of business journalism – the genre contained in business and economics magazines and newspapers...This genre is ubiquitous...The increasing importance of this source can also be attested by their prominent appearance on approved and reading lists for students...In some cases they fashion academic debate...lending credence to the idea that "such texts create not only knowledge but also the very reality they appear to describe." (p.173)

Despite this degree of influence, she observes, "Thus far, academic communities seem to have paid little attention to the content or construction of texts in this genre" (p.173). Rather than dismissing this genre – a more common CMS strategy – Priyadharshini engages in a critical exploration of its structure, linking rather than separating, mainstream and critical knowledge practices. She offers this engagement to inform

teaching, a linking of theory to practice. She is reflective about the role of the postcolonial subject in the postcolonial subjugation, linking rather than opposing the dominant and the marginal. In her argument for postdisciplinary knowledge practices which lessen “academic compartmentalization” (p.188), she attempts to link often fragmented critical theoretical fiefdoms. While postcolonial theorizing might seem at first to be one more intellectual ghetto in a highly fragmented field, such theorizing might constitute one source of linking without homogenizing the now bewildering array of epistemological, ideological and methodological outposts within the terrain of organization studies.

Prasad & Prasad state that postcolonial theory is addressed to critique of, “three monumental and overlapping phenomena of great relevance to us today, namely, Western colonialism and neo-colonialism, European modernity and modern capitalism” (p.284). In that the industrial organization and management as it is taught in the business school is, in its entirety, a product of capitalist modernity and colonial administration, it would be wrong to view postcolonial theorizing as a specialist area. It is, rather, an integral facet of the central phenomenon we wish to understand. To consider postcolonial arguments in an informed and reflective manner, then, should be incumbent upon everyone claiming even mere competency as an organization theorist. If one needs to do a bit of homework in that regard, I know of only one well-developed, introductory source, *Postcolonial Theory and Organizational Analysis*.

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## Creativity and Class

Craig Prichard, Bronwyn Boon, Amanda Bill & Deborah Jones

**review of:**

**Richard Florida (2003) *The Rise of the Creative Class: and How it's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life.* Christchurch, New Zealand: Hazard Press. (PB: pp. 26, £9.99, ISBN 1877270571)**

**Richard Florida and Irene Tinagli (2004) *Europe in the Creative Age.* London: Demos. (pp. 48, ISBN: n/a, available for free at: <http://www.demos.co.uk/publications/creativeeurope>)**

**Richard Florida (2004) *The Flight of the Creative Class.* New York: Harper Business. (pp. 326, £14.24, ISBN 006075690X)**

**Richard Florida (2005) *Cities and the Creative Class.* London: Routledge. (PB: pp. 198, £9.49, ISBN 0415948878)**

### Introduction

In March of 2006 New Zealand's dominant internet auction site, the eBay equivalent, Trade Me was sold for a staggering NZ\$700million (£235m/€342m) to the country's dominant newspaper group, Australian-owned, Fairfax. This internet site, which opened for business in 1999, netted its owner, 30-year-old kiwi Sam Morgan, a colossal NZ\$230million (£80m) fortune. The remaining NZ\$470m was shared among just eleven other investors. In the days that followed the sale New Zealand's media crowded about the transaction. It was evidence, they mostly said, of the creativity and tenacity of the site's founder, and the inability of 'old' media to understand the nature of new economy businesses (O'Sullivan, 2006; Gaynor, 2006; King, 2006). Among the commentators was one Gareth Morgan.<sup>1</sup> Morgan is a prominent New Zealand economist, investment analyst and newspaper columnist. He is also Sam Morgan's Dad, and \$47m richer from the Trade Me sale.<sup>2</sup> While evidently proud of his son's achievement, Morgan senior used his newspaper column in the week of the sale to

1 This is not the same Gareth Morgan who authored 'Images of Organization' (Sage, 2006).

2 As an investor in the site Morgan senior became a beneficiary of the sale. He has subsequently announced that he doesn't need the money and will give it to charity (Chalmers, 2006).

identify the lessons that the development and sale of Trade Me offered. Firstly he claimed the sale sent a message to young New Zealanders that they did not have to travel to London or Sydney or elsewhere to do creative and subsequently valuable things. It proved there were openings in the New Zealand economy for creative people including those who did not fit-in as ‘functionaries’ in corporate ‘Dronesville’. He said his son had opted out of his university study to avoid just such places. Trade Me

offers a beacon of hope that the contemporary New Zealand economy is not the preserve of State and Foreign owned corporates that have vacancies only for journeymen (sic) and which, by their very nature, choke innovation and certainly self-determination. (2006: 2)

Morgan’s column carries his by-line. But his claims about the value of creativity, the importance of retaining it in a particular location, and the challenges it poses for traditionally managed workplaces, are almost identical to the economic advice of American creativity and regional development guru Richard Florida. As far as we are aware Morgan and Florida have never met. But this isn’t necessary. What they share is a form of knowledge with a particular degree of political and cultural cache. In this essay we offer a critical review of this form of knowledge as elaborated in Florida’s key thesis and we use the *Trade Me* sale to illuminate some of the problematic features of Florida’s work. Here we focus largely on the original book, *The Rise of the Creative Class*. Florida’s follow up texts – *Flight of the Creative Class*, *Cities and the Creative Class*, and the DEMOS pamphlet *Europe in the Creative Age* – are largely appendices to the original work. Each extends in empirical and prescriptive directions Florida’s original thesis. In particular these texts explore the location and distribution of the creative class across the US, Europe and around the World.

## Why is Florida’s Work Engaging?

Richard Florida is no stranger to the question of the mobility of labour and capital. Trained as an economic geographer his earlier books address the threat of Japanese capital and production processes to US superiority in manufacturing in the 1990s (Kenney and Florida, 1993; Florida and Kenny, 1990), and the failure of some US companies to capitalise on high tech ideas (e.g. Xerox). This work does address the mobility of elite forms of labour, particularly between firms. The ‘creative class’ thesis throws this theme wider and explores the mobility between cities, regions and countries.

A key difference between the *Rise of the Creative Class* and the earlier works is the style. Florida’s recent work has had a ‘best-seller’ make over (Fursten, 1999). The earnest closely argued text of the first books has been replaced by a folksy, storied and prescriptive style similar to other popularized academic authors [compare for example Shoshana Zuboff (1988) and Zuboff and Maxim (2002)].

What is Florida’s ‘problem’? In broad terms it is the economic impact of a group of mobile high value workers he labels the creative class and how nations, regions and cities can maximise the impact of this group. His advice – stripped to its barest elements – is the need to develop social and cultural environments that attract and retain this class in countries (see *The Flight of the Creative Class*), cities (see *Cities and the Creative*

*Class)* and regions (see the *Europe in the Age of Creativity*). So why might this work be of interest to *ephemera* readers? For one thing Florida addresses the relationship between social and cultural environment, and global flows of work and labour. And secondly Florida offers a contemporary and popularized form of ‘class’ analysis.

On the first issue we ourselves were drawn to Florida’s work because we found it flowing effortlessly into the texts of policy makers, politicians and commentators in our location – Aotearoa/New Zealand. Our Minister for Economic, Regional and Industry Development described Richard Florida as “one of the most influential people in the world in economic development right now” (Anderton, 2004). Florida himself has visited New Zealand, spoken at various government orchestrated ‘talk-fests’ and featured Kiwi *Lord of the Rings* film maker Peter Jackson in the opening to his *The Flight of the Creative Class*. For Florida the Jackson case demonstrates neatly his creative class thesis. On the back of an extraordinarily profitable movie deal Jackson and his chums have built a state of the art film-making complex in suburban Wellington and drawn swathes of high tech ‘creatives’ from around the planet – particularly California – to work there. According to Florida they come not only to work with each other, but to live here. Place plays a role in their migration and retention. It is, in other words, an independent variable in the distribution of labour and capital. The Jackson case is, we might suggest, a rather more complex story but it nevertheless seems to make sense to policy makers, politicians and business spokespeople in our place at least. But how does Florida’s advice work? How does it work to make sense of what is going on? It seems to us to work by taking a seemingly enormous and intractable problem – the global mobility of work, labour and capital – and presenting it in a way that is amenable to concrete solutions. This seems to make a lot of sense particularly for those responsible for some very material and immovable resources e.g. nation states, regions and cities. The solution, create a culturally diverse, tolerant, and simulating local environment that aligns with the cultural and political identifications of this high value group of workers, is to some degree achievable (symbolically at least). But how does Florida frame this seemingly intractable problem? How does his approach make sense of global mobility of labour, work and capital? He does it primarily through a form of ‘class analysis’ and it is with this that we have some problems.

In the preface to *The Rise of the Creative Class* Richard Florida boldly identifies the creative class as ‘the dominant class in society’. Why are they dominant? Well, because they are the ‘purveyors of creativity’ (simple!). Despite this rather circular logic, his claim is that a new, economically important, class of individuals is emerging whose call on resources and/or ability to create surpluses comes down to their particular creative abilities. On the face of it this seems like a perfectly reasonable claim. Before we discuss some of the problem with this let us first note how Florida’s use of ‘class’ works rather nicely.

As a device for presenting his thesis, Florida’s use of ‘class’ allows him, rhetorically at least, to locate this new group in a history of dominant ‘groups’. In his view such groups include the feudal aristocracy and the bourgeoisie. Thus ‘class’, as a term, allows him to dabble in a series of literatures that not only carry significant persuasive weight. They have also, for various reasons let’s say, fallen into disuse. This ‘disuse’ means that some of the negative connotations of ‘class’ have fallen away. But the key

problem here is that for Florida ‘class’ is, largely, a form of social and cultural identity while the economic relations and processes that form or contribute to the formation of these identities is not presented. Florida’s take on class is, in other words, rather narrow.

We can illustrate this neatly with Florida’s celebration of the founders of *Google*, *eBay* and *Amazon* (like Morgan Senior with respect to *Trade Me*). Like Morgan Senior, Florida seems to be at a loss to explain just how the extraordinary quantities of value these businesses have accumulated are actually produced, let alone discuss the basis upon which this value is distributed. What both commentators offer instead is a claim that attributes the value embedded in these firms to a magic, precious, mysterious and extraordinary quality they call ‘creativity’. Instead of a discussion of how *Google*, *eBay* and *Trade me* are off-spring (but in a different space) of older industrial value production and distribution formulas, Morgan and Florida attribute the success of these businesses to personalized attributes and dispositions that include an impatience with bureaucracies, non-conventional social and cultural behaviours and extensive use of new technologies. In place of discussion of the complex set of social, political and economic processes involved we get simply ‘creativity’. Creativity seems to be inserted into the gap between assembling a certain group of workers, users and customers together and the wealth that seems to miraculously accrue from this formation.

So how is the extraordinary wealth that the likes of *Google*, *eBay* and (locally) *Trade Me* (that Florida lauds as expressions of the work of the creative class) realized, appropriated and distributed? The fact is that the economic returns from these firms is largely due to their ability to reproduce *on the internet*, and thus on an internet scale, business practices that bricks and mortar companies pioneered. Furthermore, much of the value of *ebay*, *Google* and *Trade me* is a function of the internet activity we produce as users, traders, visitors and webpage builders. So just as supermarket owners charge grocery producers for space on their shelves (because they have been able to assemble an audience of ‘passers-by’), market square owners charge traders for space to sell goods, television companies charge advertisers on the basis of the number of watchers they have assembled into an audience, and press barons get rich filling newspapers with small ads, these new economy businesses have found cyber-spatial ways of appropriating value from the activity of others (those that once watched, now ‘click’). Of course, doing the ‘same again’ in a new space isn’t easy. There is a lot of hard work to do and some very difficult problems to solve but there’s nothing particularly mystifying about this. If you read Florida’s books, and Morgan’s column, such processes seem to be regarded as ‘magic’!

What we might suggest is that Morgan and Florida are simply doing a particular kind of job here. They have been seduced by a cloud of ‘creativity’ (see for extended discussion Bill, 2004; Prichard, 2003) that makes the rather more mundane economic relations at stake more engaging. And then, for good measure, they put themselves in the position of arbiters of truth about these ‘magicians’. In both cases they then also go a little further and offer guidance to politicians, policy makers and business analysts on how to pander to the seemingly idiosyncratic life-styles of these new receivers of surplus.

This is not to say that Florida’s presentation of the ‘creative class’ and his guidance on how to woo or keep them to one’s city, region or nation is not without novelty. For

Florida the ‘creative class’ is a reincarnation of the bohemian spirit of ‘subversion’. This is not bohemian depravity or debauchery however. It is the subversion of established institutional processes (functionaries in ‘Dronesville’, as Morgan noted) and the ‘evils’ that these create. For the creative class “(t)he real enemy was not the oppressive capitalist economic order but the suppression of key elements of the human spirit by the prevailing culture” (2003: 194). With the enemy identified the tools for combating it are clear. In his three books Florida advises managers and policy analysts to build into their cities, regions and nations a subversive, bohemian ethic that mirrors the same bohemian style of economic production. “The Big Morph [change]...encompasses the sphere of work and involves an interpenetration of new work forms with new lifestyle forms” (Florida, 2003: 192). The aim then is to create cultural and physical environments where there is greater continuity between economic and social identities. Florida offers the same kind of advice for managers. But this is rather more humdrum. It amounts to support for familiar calls for the dismantling of the boundary between work and home (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; du Gay, 1991; Kanter, 1990).

Our next problem is with Florida’s ‘class structure’. In staking out the rise of the creative class Richard Florida puts himself in a position of having to delineate the shape of the new class society. His typology includes three categories: the super creative core (SSC), the creative professional (CP), and non-creative class (NC). The latter is the service (or servant) class. They take out the Creative Class’ rubbish, make them their coffee, iron their collarless shirts, and generally supply the labour necessary to keep them in place. Meanwhile Florida’s creative class is divided into two. At the top of the heap is the elite ‘Super Creative Core’ (SSC) of scientists, engineers, novelists and those that supply the ‘thought leadership of modern society’. These super creatives owe their position to their ability to

produce new forms or designs that are readily transferable and widely useful – such as designing a product that can be widely made, sold and used; coming up with a theorem or strategy that can be applied in many cases; or composing music that can be performed again and again. (2003: 69)

Second tier ‘creative professionals’ (CP) are those in business, finance, law, health care and related fields that make the Super creative core’s work possible and valuable. Florida suggests their subordinate positioning is due to their *lower* levels of useful (meaning ‘surplus’ realizing) output. The line between super creatives and the (average) creatives is fuzzy. But the line between the creatives and the non-creatives is more indelible. Non-creatives are in manufacturing, construction, transportation and the myriad of service industries e.g. personal care, food service and clerical occupations who seemingly do, compliantly, what the creatives ask. As a corollary to this typology Florida also offers some notes on mobility between classes. One form of mobility is clearly downward. Many fall through the creative gaps and into the service/servant class, he says. Not only are certain jobs continuing to be de-skilled, or as he puts it ‘de-creatified’, the rise of the well paid but busy creative class has created a demand for a service/servant class who will “take care of them and do their chores” (Florida, 2003: 71).

What about mobility into the creative class? College students or highly educated immigrants get a mention here but for those without access to the privileges of

education and/or creative social networks, the opportunities for being recognised as (and rewarded for) being creative are extremely limited. “At its minimum-wage worst, life in the Service Class is a gruelling struggle for existence amid the wealth of others” (Florida, 2003: 71).

Florida’s ‘class structure’ is effectively a simple delineation between those who ‘think’ and those who ‘do’. But how does ‘thinking’ (or rather ‘creating’) translate into wealth? Florida’s answer is that ‘thinking’ amounts to a reinvention of craft work. Unlike the low cost Scientific Management/Fordist response to competition, Florida claims that the new era of competition *reinvests* the creative worker with craft knowledge and this offers control over their means of production. Through creative craft knowledge “more workers than ever control the means of production because it is inside their heads; they *are* the means of production” (2003: 37). Of course to a point this has always been the case. Some groups of workers do at certain points and under certain circumstances manage to extend their control of the production process and successfully exercise a claim on the surplus value they have produced. It is clearly ludicrous to suggest that Peter Jackson and his chums are not without control over their production processes and through this extend their claim over the value produced by their work. But this is some way short of control of the means of production of the film industry or, in the case of the whole creative class’, of economic activity in general. In Jackson’s case for instance he continues to wrestle NewLine Cinema (a subsidiary of Time-Warner) via legal means for his share of returns from the first Lord of the Rings movie (Johnson, 2005). Time Warner financed the movies and did the distribution and marketing. Jackson’s argument is that Time Warner manipulated the movie’s total value figure (upon which Jackson’s share is based) by selling movie rights at discounted rates to Time Warner subsidiaries. In other words, the creatives might control the production processes but this matters for little if they are unable to extend control to those moments and spaces where value is realized. This issue leads us to question Florida’s claim that the rise of the ‘creative class’ is akin to the rise of the bourgeoisie or feudal aristocracy. There is a significant qualitative difference between the rise of a certain group of high value labourers, such as Florida’s creative class, and the position of being primary or first receivers of the surpluses produced and realized from that work.

What Florida gains from using terms like ‘means of production’ and the ‘bourgeoisie’ is some rhetorical leverage on his claims while ultimately class for him is found in the cultural and social identity of particular groups and he distances himself from discussion of the economic relations at stake. For example he writes:

I am not talking here about economic class in terms of the ownership of property, capital or the means of production. If we use class in this traditional Marxian sense, we are still talking about a basic structure of capitalists who own and control the means of production, and workers under their employ. But little analytical utility remains in these broad categories of bourgeoisie and proletarian, capitalist and worker. (Florida, 2003: 68)

In other words, Florida wants it both ways. He leverages the rhetorical appeal of a Marxian approach to class in general (‘means of production’ etc) and then says that traditional Marxian approach to class has little remaining utility. One could simply see this as shoddy scholarship. We would prefer to see it as opting for a singular form of class analysis when, in fact, there are others that might have been considered. Contrary

to Florida's claim, the Marxian tradition includes many more forms of class analysis. 'Class' can refer to 'ownership', of course, but it can also refer to 'consciousnesses', or to 'struggle', or to a particular group or to the positions in relations of distribution (of surplus value). In other words class is not a noun, but an *adjective* as well (Resnick and Wolff, 1987). It describes things and names things. It can describe different forms of 'ownership', 'consciousnesses', 'struggle' and practices and positions in the distribution of value. At best Florida has simply ignored these other ways of understanding 'class'.

This is not to claim that Florida's work lacks some ethical or political sensibility. Despite his celebration of 'creativity', and his celebration of the group he ascribed it to, Richard Florida criticises his favoured class for its lack of direction and sense of purpose. The creative class is not doing enough to help others or to realize its social mission. This might be the case. From our perspective this 'tub thumping' is however a poor substitute for some critical commentary on the economic processes that help produces this group in the first instance.

## Relations of Meaning and Relations of Distribution

The key problem is that Florida has confused the appearance of a certain cultural and social identity with change in the economic processes of value distribution. It is certainly true that Sam Morgan's *Trade Me* articulated a certain cultural logic: no-collar workplaces full of young workers with little respect for bureaucratic rules and traditional organizational practices. But we should not then assume that the rules of economic exchange followed from these new norms and identities. *Trade me* was also constituted in such a way that a certain group, when the time came, were able to assert their claim over and privatise a significant quantity of economic value sourced to the activity surrounding the *Trade Me* web environment. The staff might have never gone to work in a tie, but when the time came Sam Morgan and his business angels (as the press called his fellow investors) were securely in position to take possession of a truly handsome fortune. The point is that we should not confuse the social and cultural norms, behaviours and dispositions of a group of intellectually able workers with the class practices of asserting a claim on and receiving the economic value from the activities of others.

The final problem, and perhaps what finally sinks Florida's claim to have spotted the emergence of a new class to challenge the bourgeoisie, is the continuity of big business. Florida notes that "companies, including very big ones, obviously still exist, [and] are still influential and probably always will be" (Florida, 2003: 6). He also writes that

our money is managed not by upstarts but by large financial institutions. The resources that power our economy are similarly managed and controlled by giant corporations. (Florida, 2003: 27)

What Florida is observing here is little or no change in the core institutionalized formations. Big business (Microsoft, Intel, etc.) and finance capital not only continue to exist but are actually very important, as Florida admits, to the creative class. They provide useful services; bring creative products to mass markets faster and most

importantly make the creative class materially rich with their acquisition strategies. So, one has to ask, just what has changed?

## Concluding Points

Ultimately Florida is a geographer who confused the appearances and dispositions of a social group with the relations and processes that produces them. The likes and dislikes, cultural and social identities, expectations and global mobility of a particular swathe of intellectually able workers is certainly a feature of contemporary capitalism. But this grouping has in no way changed the core relations and processes involved. Far from rivalling the bourgeoisie, as Florida claims, some members of this group have simply taken up positions as the new receivers of surpluses and thus are heir to established relations. Of course the particular social and cultural characteristics (and how they orchestrate productive relations) of this group may well differ to some degree from those who populate ‘Corporate Dronesville’ (to quote Gareth Morgan). Also the above normal surpluses he identifies are being appropriated from quite different sites e.g. software and internet real estate. But this is an empirical feature. The core distributive mechanisms, those that give some a living (or less than a living) and make others the beneficiaries of very serious fortunes, have changed little. Ultimately the likes of Sam Morgan and his eleven ‘angels’ are just the next generation of beneficiaries of the social formation that funnels extraordinary wealth into the pockets of those who by comparison with the numbers involved in actually producing this wealth – can (almost) fit on the head of a pin.

Of course Florida’s work doesn’t entirely ignore wealth appropriating mechanisms. *The Rise of the Creative Class* includes a few pages on the importance of a vibrant venture capital system (2003: 48-52) to the creative economy. But Florida’s discussion of these mechanisms is disconnected from the problems they help to create. Late in *The Rise of the Creative Class* Florida worries that the “worsening divides in our society” will “eventually limit our long-run economic growth and development” (2003: 321). He calls on everyone to “create new mechanisms for building social cohesion” (2003: 323). Sadly Richard Florida himself seems unable to see any connection between the need to connect these mechanisms and the already established mechanisms of wealth distribution.

We could regard Florida’s failure to connect these mechanisms as a weakness of the text. But it is much more than this. It is a systematic fault-line in this and other texts like it that link wealth and identity, but keep these features disconnected from the particular mechanisms of wealth production and distribution. But then is this where we find the value of Florida work? Maintaining this ‘fault-line’ allows his texts to flow effortlessly into the speeches of politicians, the programmes of policy makers and the column inches of economic journalists who, arguably, are in the same business of creating mystifying forms of knowledge (like the one named ‘creativity’) without attending to the particular mechanisms and processes that surround them.

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