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Mute Vol 2 #5 - It's Not Easy Being Green

Mute Vol 2 #5 cover

The new issue of Mute includes a special section on climate change and capital with texts by Will Barnes, George Caffentzis, Tim Forsyth and Zoe Young, Anthony Iles, Kate Rich, James Woudhuysen, Chris Wright and Samantha Alvarez. In addition there are articles on a range of issues by Anthony Davies, Paul Helliwell, Howard Slater and Peter Suchin

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Editorial

By Josephine Berry Slater

By and large the writers in this issue of *Mute* accept that climate change is a reality. Earth's rising temperature can no longer be attributed solely to natural fluctuations produced by solar and volcanic activity, it is instead the result of man's massive consumption of fossil fuels. There are those who contest the science that underlies this idea, claiming that levels of CO₂ in the atmosphere follow rather than determine temperature – man's activity is irrelevant. Clearly this claim should be taken seriously, and not least because the outrage it provokes indicates the economic and political stakes of man-made climate change. Rather than the ultimate causes of global warming, however, our focus in this issue is the way its spectre is put to work by the developed world.

As George Caffentzis points out in these pages, the traumatic effects of climate change will not be felt by capital but by those it commands. It seems that this is already the case. While the fundamental imperatives of the global economic system with its market (mis)managed allocation of energy resources remain unaltered, individuals in both the North and South are instructed to change their behaviour, while less powerful States must reorient their economies to dubiously 'greener' production.

The world's poor will pay most dearly for what James Woudhuysen calls the 'micro-action' of governments, bearing the brunt both of what they do and do not do in response to the (ecological) crisis: the cost of maize, a basic food stuff, spirals as a result of the growth of the biofuel industry; green taxes and tariffs push up energy prices and the cost of movement; basic services such as refuse collection are cut. Meanwhile, nothing is done to address the threat of rising sea levels that will ravage coastal communities. As Zoe Young, Tim Forsyth, George Caffentzis and James Woudhuysen all argue, the new green order uses the threat of climate catastrophe to pursue other agendas. Climate change gives the developed world licence to check and restructure development in the South, impose austerity measures on domestic populations, or to break its own dependency on oil-producing nations that won't, despite military intervention, toe the neoliberal line.

A bleak picture to be sure. But there is hope in the recognition that global warming is not an inevitable consequence of human behaviour but rather the result of capital's inhuman drive to accumulate at any cost. In short, global warming is not made by man but by the capitalist mode of production. Perhaps arch-Thatcherite Nigel Lawson was right when he recently identified climate change as the left's anti-capitalist vehicle of choice in the wake of the Soviet Union's collapse. While insecurity of employment impairs the willingness and ability of labour to organise against capital, climate change is potentially a globally unifying lever for resistance. On the other hand, as capital pits whole regions against each other in the battle over development and control of energy resources, much of the left has pioneered (and recycles) the now dominant Malthusian moralism regarding behaviour modification and the need to limit consumption. If climate change is going to provide a focus for anti-capitalist struggle it must be seen for what it is – a problem of capitalism, not 'man' per se.

Artwork for Mute's Climate Change issue - by Nils Norman

By Nils Norman

A commission for the Mute Vol 2 #5 - It's Not Easy Being Green edition, Summer 2007.

Nils Norman - part one

image two

Nils Norman - part two

image 3

Nils Norman - part three

Capital Climes

By Will Barnes

Liberal critics assume that climate change is a 'man-made' process, not a natural phenomenon. Against this view, Will Barnes argues that global warming does indeed have an inhuman agent behind it – not nature but capital

Capitalist Criminality

With invaluable assistance from modern science and technology, capital is perpetrating a crime for which there is no name, the enormity of which has hitherto been and, apart from the literary holocausts of anti-utopian science fiction, largely remains unimagined.

Capitalist development, whether expanding or contracting and crisis-ridden, merely intensifies and exacerbates ecological degradation. The mindless and extraordinarily destructive disregard for the ecological consequences of the profitable pursuit of exploitable 'natural resources' has led, for example, to the consumption of hydrocarbon-based fossil fuels that are producing a warming of the earth that is melting the ice caps and raising sea levels, thus threatening the vast seaboard populations of the world. It has produced specifically the denuding of tropical forests, which, in the end, will deprive humanity of incalculable medicinal wealth. This pursuit has produced the strip mining and clear cutting of vast tracts of land – which have, in turn, created desertification rendering potentially agriculturally productive lands depleted. It has created a biotechnology centred on genetic engineering

that has introduced transgenes transmitted through natural interspecies crosses which, in turn, have allowed emergence of resistant superweeds and superpests, which, in their turn, demand the application of further chemical poisons, i.e., herbicides and pesticides, that end up in groundwater, waterways and oceans and poison the food chain. The profitable pursuit of exploitable 'resources' of nature has further led to industrialisation of poultry and livestock production that, in the interests of a greatly enlarged worldwide markets for meat consumption (chicken, beef, pork), has generated life threatening strains of antibiotic resistant bacteria (E coli, Campylobacter, etc.) and highly pathogenic, potentially pandemic viruses. It has led to the massive and criminal termination of animal species and micro-biotic life forms, an extraordinary contraction in the very basis of life itself. More precisely, the pursuit of exploitable 'natural resources' for capitalist production on a world-scale has created a geological and biological regression reversing thousands and millions of years of natural evolution.

Indeed, species, new ones, comes into being and they disappear: Human beings, abrupt climatic changes, and even the occasional (by geological standards) natural calamity originating from beyond the earth in the solar system bring about extinctions, even the rare mass extinction. Yet, if the Arctic polar bear dies out (as a consequence of its inability to gain access to food sources as global warming melts the ice fields it uses to traverse distances and as a result of the early death of its young as PCBs, the product of industrial emissions that fall in their greatest concentration to earth in the Arctic, lodge in milk of lactating mother bears), it is an unnecessary loss of a majestic creature, one that is final. Extinct species do not make evolutionary reappearances. Nonetheless this loss, unintended and undesired, is not of the same order or magnitude as that at which bourgeois civilisation unknowingly takes aim. The problem is that specifically capitalist social transformations are borne along by an objective logic whose outcome is necessarily the very destruction of the natural world in its autonomy, cohesion, and otherness, that is, in its abiotic coherence, as living, and as a presupposition of specifically human life: It is the natural world as the totality of earthly nature (earthly nature as a totality and in its totality) that capitalist social transformation takes as its object.

The grand sweep of capital's movement at the beginning of the 21st century can only portend a future in which nature, because for capital nature is raw material for commodity production, at the very least undergoes continuous and ever greater homogenisation. Homogenisation means in the most minimalistic sense the ongoing destruction of ecological diversity, of species-specific ecological niches and, accordingly, species destruction. It entails, first, the loss of nature as an aesthetically beautiful setting and context in which human and other life forms live. Second, homogenisation of nature is characterised by the emergence and proliferation of a limited number of dominant species (e.g., coyotes, rats, starlings, cockroaches) that, highly adaptable to disrupted habitats, will be increasingly unsettling to life practices of other species. Third, it means the gradual disappearance of real, organic foundations of human (and generally animal) health and medicine as centres of biodiversity (such as the Amazon forests) disappear or collapse. Fourth, produced in and through the movement of capital, homogenisation of the earth will tend toward the creation of nature existing at two poles, uglified raw material basins (denuded forests, open mines, desertified grasslands, etc.) at the start of a cycle of commodity production and toxic wastelands and garbage cesspools (wetlands turned into landfills, decaying urban centres, vast stretches of ocean densely littered with plastic refuse, etc.) at the end of that cycle, i.e., with commodity consumption. Human beings acting and interacting in nature in this form will tend over several generations to become organically, physiologically, and perhaps even anatomically and morphologically a degenerating species.

The presupposition of homoeostatic, biospheric nature (i.e., nature as a self-regulating totality capable of internally modifying and adjusting its moments to maintain stability and equilibrium in the face of external changes, e.g., increases in ultraviolet radiation) is sufficient internal diversity. This diversity includes, among other things and relations, a variety of different climatic regimes and zones, a multitude of regional landscapes, and, centrally, a huge assortment of different life forms. Thus, it is

precisely this internal diversity that the movement of capital is destroying and destroying independently of climate change, and, accordingly, it is the self-regulating character of nature, and life as it has developed over tens of thousands of millennia, that is disappearing.

Climate Change

What is important to recognise here is that the criminality of capital goes beyond the vast and potentially catastrophic problems that climate change has introduced. Even if societies of capital at the level of the world come to grips with ongoing climate change in a manner that allows them to maintain the 'achievements' of capitalism (densely populated reserve industrial armies and objective substance, i.e., built environment, means of production and the mass of circulating commodities) on capitalist terms, generalised ecological collapse as described above is encompassed by capitalist development itself, that is, by the practical reduction of surrounding nature to raw materials for capitalist production.

Let us, here and now though, consider climate change. The earth as we immediately apprehend it, what we call the biosphere, is a unitary phenomenon, its various partial systems (weather, oceans, atmosphere, abiogenic matter, organic life including 'man') are fully integrated and mutually dependent. It is a self-regulating 'system' whose internal diversity (precisely that which capital without regard to climate change is destroying) provides its own coherence and guarantees the preservation of life on earth. As the 'external envelope' of earth, it orders the constant energy inflow from space (solar energy) on which it is dependent. The constitution of earth's biosphere has qualitatively changed over geological time, meaning its composition, hence its structure (or the 'laws' governing its 'behaviour') has also changed. For any evolving, real totality such would have to be the case. What is basic for the earth as self-regularity is comprehended physically: The earth, from this perspective, is grasped as an energy system that makes 'self' adjustments to maintain an energy equilibrium (inflow of solar heat equals its outflow over time). Climate change is the mechanism of this adjustment, and climate is the immediate expression of this constitution of earth's biosphere.

To understand climate, and climate change, we must consider reconstructions of the earth's geography on a geological time scale. While the earth, at some 3.8 billion years of age, is estimated to be nearly as old as the solar system, geological dating begins in earnest 570 million years ago with the emergence of truly complex, highly developed life forms (fish, insects, reptiles). For the entirety of this vast sweep of geological time down to the present, we can designate 'cool' and 'warm' climate modes on earth. A simple determination of a climate mode is offered, namely, the presence of ice ... ranging from periods of intense glaciation (emanating from the poles covered with permanent ice caps) to phases in which the high altitudes have been seasonally cold. Tectonic activity, because it is capable of shifting continental-sized landmasses, has played the largest role in making possible intense cold, especially glaciation. For the latter only occurs when there are landmasses very near or over the poles. It should be obvious that over this simply enormous stretch of geological time, there were periods when landmasses were near or at the poles, and periods when they were not.

Antarctica split off from the ancient, gigantic continent known as Gondwana (encompassing present day Australia, Antarctica, South America, Africa and Asia Minor and Arabia) and arrived at its current locale over thirty million years ago. But by the time it reached what we identify as the southern pole it had already begun to glaciare (in response to tectonic changes, to plate uplifting and volcanism). The formation of the Southern Ocean, as an open waterway (with accompanying winds) sweeping round the earth, isolated Antarctica creating an atmospheric barrier against weather systems beyond this continent. Until recently, Antarctica has largely made its own climate, one very cold and dry, which, in turn, has helped cool an earth that hitherto (prior to its separation and drift) was warm and wet, Gondwana largely a temperate rainforest. Some twenty million years ago, tectonic activity entered a

period, still ongoing, of considerable diminution (after the continents as we know them today formed), lessening, for the geological time being, its determination in the formation of climate. (Continental drift has brought large landmasses near to the poles thus allowing the earth's orbital eccentricity to cyclically create ice ages.) These cooler, drier conditions were particularly noticeable in Africa. And, under these newly forming climatic conditions, species, especially some of the truly large species (ancestors to many of today's large mammals who to them stand only as dwarf instances), died off and new ones appeared. Among the latter group were hominid lines, including the larger brained hominids who appear to be *our* ancestors.

Beginning about two and half million years ago, the dynamic climatic structure ('laws') characterising the most recent geological epoch stabilised. So what does our geologically 'contemporary' climatic structure look like?

For an answer to this question we must consider physical theory aimed at solving the problems of recurrent ice ages (glaciation). Today, our understanding of glaciation in the geological time frame we live in (it more or less slowly began fifteen million years ago) has largely been resolved into three great cycles that drive the earth's climatic variability. The earth's orbit around the sun is elliptical completing a cycle every 100,000 years. At its greatest as opposed to its smallest distance from the sun, a determination of the earth's eccentricity, there is a 20-30 percent reduction in the amount of radiation (heat) that reaches the earth. At that eccentricity, it is this relation (of sun to earth) that has produced ice ages at regular intervals over the past two thousand millennia. The second cycle concerns the tilt of the earth on its axis, its obliquity. Tilt determines where the most radiation from the sun will fall on the earth. A full cycle occurs every 42,000 years. As the earth revolves around the sun, tilt produces seasons. The last, shortest cycling, periods of 19,000 and 23,000 years, turns, so to speak, on the earth's wobble (called precession). Created by the magnetic mass distributed unevenly and off-centre between the earth's inner core and mesosphere, wobble creates a shift on average every 21,700 years in its 'true (celestial) north' (north determined along its axis in contradistinction from the Geographical North Pole) from Polaris to Vega. This shift affects seasonal intensity (e.g., hot summers, frigidly cold winters). In the case of all orbital cycles, the changes in radiation that reach the Earth are amplified by the amount present (more or less) of those gases, especially carbon dioxide, that trap solar radiation in the atmosphere.

We note that once the current warming synonymous with the last interglacial (the end of the last ice age ended roughly 11,600 years ago) was under way, 'archaic', stateless communities first began to form. Early on during this interglacial (effectively extended by the greenhouse gas emissions warming of the last century and a half) the rudiments of agricultural, sedentary social life, the state and civilisation emerged for the first time.

Relative to over two million years of 'contemporary' geological time, historically constituted patterns of weather, such as the regularity of seasons each with its own predictable structure, are today disappearing. Instead, weather patterns that have existed over millennia are vanishing, and based on these vanishing patterns 'the weather' itself is losing its predictability. Similarly, climatic 'regimes' characteristic of specific geographical regions (e.g., a temperate region with mild summers and cold winters) are losing their defining features as these regimes become much more 'elastic'. Destabilised, under conditions of global warming induced climate change, the occurrence of weather at its extremes becomes more and more frequent (increased intensity of hurricanes in the Gulf and El Niño effects) because warming radically increases the moisture content in the atmosphere and thus produces extreme weather. (The unpredictability and extremism of global warming is perfectly consistent with instances of 'normality' by historical standards, e.g., frigid cold such as in Moscow last winter. It should be added that those extremes are not fixed. What is an extreme today may be 'normal' five years from now, and what is extreme then might very well hardly be conceivable today. In an abstract

way, the only requirement for such warming is that over time the average annual temperature rapidly rises for the planet as a whole.)

Consequences – a ‘New Nature’?

Climate change and in particular warming, as we now understand it, can be abrupt, occurring over years or decades and not over millennia (or hundreds or maybe thousands of millennia). Abrupt climate change has certain ‘tipping points’ that ‘force’ change. Under geologically current conditions, there are three components of the self-regulatory system of the earth that are crucial for the constitution, if you will, of a ‘new nature’, that is, a different regime of climate, seasonality and weather. They are a shut down of thermohaline circulation in the North Atlantic (the Gulf Stream as it warms Europe, a shut down of which would be disastrous for Britain and North Europe), the destruction of the Amazon rain forests, and the release of gas hydrates (clathrates, ice crystal trapped methane, a carbon-based gas) from the ocean floors. All three are threatened by warming as it is generated by capitalist activity on the scale of the world. For example, sufficient warming (say, by no later than 2080) would melt enough of the Greenland ice sheet to shut down the Gulf Stream in the North Atlantic (melting of which pushes fresh water into the Stream’s current – a vast conveyor of hot water from the Gulf, diluting the heavier because saline Gulf water, thus, preventing it from dropping toward the ocean floor in the area of Iceland, further preventing it from pulling more warm water in behind it, i.e., effectively shutting it down). The shut down would induce cooling which, in turn, would bring a halt to ice sheet melting that, in turn, would eventually restart the current and start a re-warming, all of which could go on for centuries until the ice reserve had reached a reduced threshold at which point it could no longer add enough fresh water to stop the circulation. Climatic see-sawing of this sort is one possible, under current conditions likely, outcome of warming. Climatic see-sawing is not, however, a lawful creation of a ‘new nature’, for example, a ‘warm’ or ‘cold’ mode, or better, as long as see-sawing continued, a new mode would not be firmly established, as climate at least in some parts of the world alternated between the two. (On the other hand, a massive release of clathrates premised on sufficient warming of the oceans, leading to species extinctions on the order of the Permo-Triassic extinction event, is another, this time abrupt, shift that could usher in a new climatic regime in just decades.)

Suspending consideration of the shape of a ‘new nature’, let us briefly reflect on the some of the features of warming as it is now occurring. These include, among others, increasing frequency and intensity of extreme weather (ice storms, hurricanes or cyclones, tornadoes spun from hurricanes, etc.), rising sea levels, and, possibly, the cooling of northern Europe (not to mention elsewhere the shift northward of subtropical seasonality and temperature into temperate zones).

To even the casual observer here in the United States, the incidence of extreme weather has qualitatively been on the upswing since the 1980s. For example, in 2005 the North-West experienced a severe winter drought; western states had a record heat wave in July; in the South-West, a marked increase in winter storms included record rain and snow; the central states had a major drought worsen throughout the summer; the South and South-East experienced a record number of hurricanes, fourteen, seven of which were major; and, the North-East had flooding in April and record precipitation in October... In two decades, rising sea levels will flood as much as a quarter of the land mass of Bangladesh; Dhaka, now on average 137 miles (221 kilometres) from the sea, will front the Bay of Bengal at 60 miles (97 kilometres); and, thirty million people will be displaced, countless others dead. Today, the freshwater wells immediately south of Dhaka have become increasingly saline, the water nearly undrinkable. Or, again, in two decades parts of Sydney, Australia, beginning from its harbour, will be underwater... As we write (28 February 2007), the temperature in London (latitude 51.52 °N) reached 47° F (8 °C); in the region of Moosonee (latitude 51.31 °N) in eastern Ontario at the southern tip of James Bay temperatures ranged from 9 to 14 °F (-13 to -10 °C). Both are roughly

seasonal averages. And while London may generate 10F/6C degrees of its temperature as a consequence of its concentration of built environment, Moosonee is London's fate under conditions of a shut down of the thermohaline circulation in the North Atlantic.

'Man-Made' Climate Change?

The overwhelming consensus among scientists and spokespeople of capitalist states in the world today (and even in the U.S., Australia and Bangladesh among the most recalcitrant of states, there is grudging acceptance) that, in terms of causation, 'man' is responsible for warming induced climate change.

While the evidence is straightforward, the attribution both of culpability *and* the liable agent are effectively ideological, masking real agency and responsibility. Consider, first, the evidence.

From the outset of the current interglacial some 11,600 years ago down close to the end of the 18th century, average global surface temperatures have risen slowly, very slowly, but steadily. This increase, it should be noted, is relative. Plot the average from the peak of the last ice age (last glacial maximum) 22,000 years ago, and that incremental increase (circa 9600 BC to 1760 CE) is not noticeable. But plot average global surface temperature from 1760 to 1870 and the line of temperature approaches a positive 15° angle of incline. Plot it from there to the present and the angle of incline rises to roughly 45°. Back up and plot it from 8000 BC to the present, and those last 235 years present a nearly straight vertical rise.

Note the dates: As suggested earlier, circa 8000 BC is the point at which we mark the beginnings of sedentary agriculture, social division and the rise of the state. And 1760 marks that point at which we can date the commencement of the mechanisation of industry in the West (i.e., in capitalist England). In the former case, initial sedentary life and, with it, rising population began to generate a human input, methane (CH₄) and carbon dioxide (CO₂), into the atmosphere, nothing that before 1760 might delay a glaciation, but incrementally in the short view, noticeable. The development of capitalist industrial production after 1760, however, has indeed transformed the chemical make-up of the atmosphere. How?

On a geological time scale, atmospheric CO₂ has ranged from lows of 200 parts per million (ppm) during major glaciations to highs of 280-300 ppm during warm interglacials. Today, atmospheric CO₂ concentration stands at marginally more than 380 ppm, and is rising in geological terms at an extraordinary and unprecedented rate with, at this moment, no end in sight. Best estimates put a tipping point (qualitatively hastening ice cap melting) as low as 480 ppm, reachable with even modern emissions reductions before 2080. This, then, is the major piece of evidence for anthropocentric based warming.

Second, consider the attribution of agency and, accordingly, responsibility for climate change. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change tells us 'man', 'his' activity, is altering climate. In one sense, a very crude argument can and has been made (though not explicitly by the IPCC) that sheer human numbers, a global population of six billion, and the outputs that result from the volume of activity of so many people, bear direct responsibility. While the quality of human (animal and plant) life may well be grounds for limiting population growth, global warming does not result merely from the activity of masses of humans at any level of development: Today, an Indian child (the Indian subcontinent being one of the most densely populated regions on earth, India having the second largest population in the world) consumes 1/90th of the annual energy that her American counterpart does. The problem is forms of consumption, energy inefficient consumption not to mention profligate consumption, and the type of development that underpins that consumption.

If we have raised ourselves to the level of an understanding at which it is intuitively obvious that human population, either in the contemporary sense or the historical sense (going back some 10,000 years) or both, is neither the agent nor, accordingly, responsible for climate change, we have dissolved one mystification. 'Man' (here, human population generally) as such is a merely formal concept without a determinately real referent. Perhaps, then, the 'industrial system' is at issue. Or, perhaps, it is a question of 'man' in the 'industrial system'. In either case, we are dealing with empty abstractions. The issue is the historically specific configuration of groups of living men and women working within that 'industrial system', i.e., capitalist production. More precisely, the issue is the group which dominates that production. We refer, here, to those personifications of economic categories, capitalists (as well as the bloc of classes they have in tow). Capitalists (and states that unify otherwise disparate or competing capitals) make decisions concerning the allocation of monies and capital, concerning what and the manner in which 'natural resources' are exploited and utilised, and concerning the technologies on the basis of which those activities are carried out. Still, it is not just those decisions, but the entire system of social relations, that is at issue in climate change. In this sense, it is the subject of society (a part of nature, yet confronting it as raw material for the production of commodities) that is the agent responsible for climate change. It is not 'man' that is remaking, as it were, the biosphere; that remaking is a product of 'his' own objectified and alienated power. This power is capital: Capital is the real subject of human society under conditions of capitalist production (real domination).

At the 'price' of cataclysmic human and social costs abrupt climate change could transform the geography and sociology of social life: Over the period of decades, a qualitative increase in regimentation and repression of domestic populations to insure compliance with draconian restrictions on energy consumption; drought and starvation, massive, unnecessary death; depopulation of coastal areas around the world, forced dislocation, creation of huge frontier zones and camps of displaced persons along national borders, refugees in the tens of millions living in squalor without hope, resource wars between states, ethnic cleansing and genocides as a regular feature of daily life. Nonetheless, while capital *cannot* stem the ecological collapse which its very movement is engendering and within which climate change is situated, it can and, in our view, will meet the warming-induced, climate crisis. Whatever else, the social relations of capitalist production will neither disintegrate nor disappear in the maelstrom of climate change.¹ The real question is whether capital, at unimaginable human cost, will set the terms on which this change is confronted, or whether we shall.

FOOTNOTE

[1]

In the imperialist centre of global capitalism, governed by that most backward, obstinate of regimes, capital has begun to weigh in. As we write, TXU Corp., a Texas-based energy conglomerate is being sold to a group of finance capital-based private investors in the largest ever private equity deal. The new investment group promises not to build eight out of eleven proposed coal-fired power plants, and to double its investments in wind power and the creation of internal efficiencies qualitatively reducing emissions; at the same time, independently of the American State at the national level, five western state governments including California have signed an agreement to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Biog

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Act Macro: Technological Alternatives to Green Austerity

By James Woudhuysen

The emerging capitalist War On Global Warming concentrates on adapting technology and behaviour – particularly other nation-states – to mitigate environmental damage. Transformative technological and social innovation is better than meddling micro-action, argues James Woudhuysen

Angela Merkel is chancellor of Germany, a Christian Democrat and a physicist. She also believes in 'outreach'. Germany's outreach programme with China, India, Mexico, Brazil and South Africa, she says, allows it to sound out these nations about their 'general readiness to act' about climate change. Merkel warns Beijing not to put economic growth ahead of climate change, she warns Russia to let EU energy firms get firmer roots on to its soil. She insists that globally tradable emissions trading certificates are the 'most sensible instrument' to cut CO₂ and 'a very-market friendly one'. She wants a December 2007 UN conference in Bali to begin the 1-2 year process of drawing up a treaty on climate change to succeed the December 1997 Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change – the Kyoto Protocol, which will expire in 2012. Invoking the Stern report on the economic impact of climate change as her 'main paradigm', she argues that 'whatever happens', the cost of 'inaction' on climate change will be higher than just muddling through.¹

woudhuysen01

It is nice to know that nation states' invention of a market for a particular kind of molecule is a market-friendly move and a fine example of the 'action' that is now required on climate change. It is also nice to hear Germany and the EU lecture the developing world about how they should develop. But in fact lectures come very easily to Greenish governments. Even environment minister David Milliband, relatively an extremist among ministerial carbonistas, has felt called upon to warn Greens – and perhaps himself – not to be 'bossy'.

In fact all-round economic development and all-round technological innovation are the only actions that can deal properly with mankind's problems – of which global warming is one among many. The actions that Merkel proposes are about clipping coupons and austerity, especially in what used to be called the Soviet bloc and the Third World. If Germany gets its way, coal-dependent Poland and China will both suffer. Indeed, Clean Green Angela wants Europe to export, to these countries, the Clean Green technologies in which Germany specialises, and which it believes will be Good For Them.²

To raise the share of renewable resources in Europe's energy mix to 20 percent by 2020 is now the EU's highest goal. Yet the innovations with which the Brussels Commission proposes to meet that goal are not very ambitious. Its Energy Policy for Europe mentions wave and tidal power just once: the costs of photovoltaic, solar thermal power, and wave and tide power are, it opines sagely, 'projected to decrease from currently high levels'. It believes that all new coal-fired plants in the EU should be fitted with CO₂ capture and storage, and that 'existing plants should then progressively follow the same approach'. When by? Oh, maybe by 2020 again.³

There is some money going into Green innovations. Not just the Toyota's hybrid Pious car, but also cars made by Ford and other major manufacturers, are becoming ever more energy-efficient. But generally Merkel's oh-so-activist, insurance-policy approach to climate change can only make commitments to high-tech environmentalism falter. If Battersea is ever revived with all-green technology, Greens would still object to the scale and urban location of the endeavour. We should, equally, never imagine that restrictions on car and airline use – road pricing, taxes on those stag-night

flights to Tallinn – will lead to more investment and technology in public transport, and in particular, on the railways. After all, Mike Mitchell, the director-general of the Department for Transport's rail group, has told the House of Commons public accounts committee that peak-time rail commuters should expect to stand on their journeys for up to 30 minutes at a go.⁴

woudhuysen02

The evidence is that corporations and governments are only belatedly, and in a very narrow and leisurely manner, investing in relatively small projects to advance Green technologies; technologies that are more about raising awareness and controlling consumer behaviour than they are about fulfilling the world's need for more energy and less carbon. But there is a wider perspective that is needed here. If modest, behaviourist technological development – metering your every use of energy every minute of the day, for example – eludes the capitalists, how much more tentative will they be about the comprehensive programme of technological innovations needed to raise Africa from famine and Indonesia from disasters? Solve those truly colossal problems in a spirit of adventure rather than insurance, and global warming will be solved in the process.

What are the main outlines of such a programme? What we need is progress across both the energy sector and beyond.

In energy, we need to give up on micro-generation – the subject of a princely £50m from Gordon Brown in his March 2006 Budget – and instead move toward macro-generation. That means large-scale wave, tidal and off-shore wind. It means large-scale cultivation of biofuels, and perhaps genetically modified biofuels, too (though we all know someone who has died because of these). It means city-wide schemes for Combined Heat and Power. In the longer term, we need to make fewer sneers about the possibility of nuclear fusion: an international budget 10 times the Iiter organisation's £7bn for demonstration fusion in the south of France shouldn't be too much to ask. And right now, we need a 'can do' attitude to nuclear power and nuclear waste.

Wind, solar, wave and tidal energy are intermittent sources of power, and need clever geographical dispersal, mutual complementarity and large-scale back-up power sources if they are to provide energy on any kind of reliable basis. As the science writer Joe Kaplinsky points out, it is true that other scale technologies generate more energy – Drax, the largest coal power station in the UK, makes four Gigawatts of electricity, and the Itaipu dam in Brazil and Paraguay boasts 11 Gigawatts. But at 1 GW, a typical nuclear power station easily beats the 310MW of electricity made by the largest solar installation in the world (over seven sites in the Mojave desert, California), and also exceeds the 735MW racked up by the largest wind farm in the world (Horse Hollow Wind Energy Center, Texas).

Nuclear power isn't a silver bullet. No doubt it will take its place among other energy technologies, old and new. But in terms of output and in terms of familiarity, it has a lot going for it. The next ('Generation IV') nuclear systems may, too, finally prove fully economic to run.

Turning now to nuclear waste: The UK has a historic legacy of high and intermediate level nuclear waste that, in volume terms, is estimated to total 475,000 cubic metres of the stuff.⁵ But how much is 475,000m³? Take the cube root of that, and it's 78 metres. In other words, all the existing bad and really bad nuclear waste in the UK, generated over more than 50 years, occupies a volume well under 100x100x100 metres.

And the new waste that an ambitious nuclear programme would generate is pretty modest too. Modern nuclear plants produce significantly less waste than earlier types. The UK's official Committee on Radioactive Waste Management suggests that if the current level of nuclear capacity were replaced with new-build, existing waste stocks would increase by about 10 percent by volume. The UK would have to add a 36x36x36 metre cube of nuclear waste – divided up, to be sure – on top of its existing 78x78x78 one.

To store this very modest amount of nuclear waste should not be beyond even British engineers. Are we saying that, in the 21st century, handling these amounts of waste is beyond the wit of man? And there are other possibilities. At Ruhr University in Bochum, Germany, Professor Claus Rolfs has begun experiments in cooling the products of fission in metal, so as to encourage them to accelerate their rates of radioactive decay, and so lower radioactive half-lives.⁶

Beyond energy, we need to tackle the root causes of backwardness around the world, and not get hung up on how climate change supposedly makes them worse. Was it really climate change that led to massacres in Darfur, or the plight of the Palestinians? Or are there more fundamental injustices at stake here, which an obsession with carbon will do little to relieve?

In agriculture the starving countries need mechanisation, not what junk-mail inserts in British magazines tell us they need – ploughs, donkeys, hand-drawn wells. In hydrology we need to save more than Venice, and do it with more than a charitable donation at Pizza Express. Among older people we need to build on the way the US firm iRobot has sold more than two million floorcare robots. We need to think about how today's manufacturing techniques, which allow Boeing to make planes on a moving assembly line, can also help meet the UN's estimate of the 100,000 new homes the world needs to build every day to meet popular demand.

woudhuysen03

Image: iRobot's floor care robot

By thinking big and having faith in our talents, a programme of transforming the planet in the direction of humanism could do much for energy supply and carbon reduction. But can US, Chinese or Indian capitalism really deal with this kind of challenge?

The evidence is that they cannot. In fact, as we have seen, they have taken a cautious, gingerly attitude even to Green technologies, let alone transformational ones.

Since the end of the Cold War and 9-11, the capitalists have lost their nerve. But that's their problem, not ours. Mao Tse Tung's dumbed down slogan, 'Serve the people' has been transformed into 'Slave for the planet' – walk everywhere, consume less, don't overpopulate the land, reduce your footprint, bend over and grow your own food. Everywhere in energy innovation there is minimal impact and maximum regulation.

These are dark days. Happily, though, it will be up to us, not governments and imperialist NGOs, to do the big stuff that tomorrow's youthful billions will demand.

Footnotes

1

'German chancellor lays out roadmap to follow-up treaty on climate change', Financial Times, 7 March 2007.

2

'Merkel to press for EU deal on climate', Financial Times, 7 March 2007.

3

Brussels Commission, 'An Energy Policy for Europe', 10 January 2007, on http://ec.europa.eu/energy/energy_policy/doc/01_energy_policy_for_europe_en.pdf

4

Robert Wright, 'Row as commuters told: don't expect a train seat', Financial Times, 18 January 2007.

5

DTI, 'Energy Review: the Energy Challenge', 11 July 2006, p.118, on <http://www.dti.gov.uk/energy/review/index.html>

6

Institute of Physics, 'Cool Solution to Waste Disposal', Press release PR22(06), 1 August 2006, on http://www.iop.org/Media/Press%20Releases/press_6762.html. Professor Rolfs: 'We are currently investigating radium-226, a hazardous component of spent nuclear fuel with a half-life of 1600 years. I calculate that using this technique could reduce the half-life to 100 years. At best, I have calculated that it could be reduced to as little as two years. This would avoid the need to bury nuclear waste in deep repositories — a hugely expensive and difficult process.'

Biog

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Climate Change CO2lonialism

By Tim Forsyth and Zoe Young

In their tango with grassroots green activists, inter-governmental policy makers are taking the lead. Tim Forsyth and Zoe Young analyse the 'new green order' and the carbon offset colonialism that accompanies it

According to Tony Blair, the climate change debate is 'finally over.' Who can dismiss the economic arguments of the *Stern Report on Climate Change*? Only a Channel 4 controversialist or two, perhaps, and a few (mainly oil-funded) scientists. The bigger policy debate, about who should carry the burden of tackling the problem, should now begin. Instead, however, there seems to be consensus among global elites about where to start (be afraid, be very afraid ... but always trust the government), how to address the challenge (change development patterns in the South to 'offset' carbon emissions produced by business as usual in the North), and who is responsible (mainly you and me). Real doubts and arguments are suppressed while market-friendly 'solutions' are served up on a nice, glossy plate. Last time western Greens had the ear of their governments it led to the creation of the World Bank's

Global Environment Facility (GEF). Today, this ‘new green order’ is still evolving before our fearful, blinkered eyes.

This ‘order’ limits space for collective rethinking of energy, production or consumption policies. There is no room to challenge the political assumptions that inform them nor the pattern of investment in public energy infrastructure. Mainstream ‘climate’ discourse focuses instead on marginal interventions such as switching to more efficient light bulbs and expanding pine plantations. For as long as the ‘logic’ of capitalist economic expansion remains unchallenged, it seems hardly possible for high energy-consuming societies to adapt in time to escape a grim Malthusian fate. But Malthus wanted to be proved wrong, and if brave, we still could be.

According to the first assessment in 1990 by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the scientific body responsible for assessing recent research into climate change, Green House Gas (GHG) emissions had to be reduced by 60 percent below then current levels in order to prevent dangerous climate change. In 1999, Greenpeace said that only about 25 percent of declared fossil fuel reserves can safely be burnt; the New Economics Foundation noted in 2006 that the demand reduction required in the oil sector is now five or six times that resulting from the OPEC oil price hike of the 1970s. Even the Stern Report, with its ‘old economy’ rationale, noted this year that

the stocks of hydrocarbons that are profitable to extract [under current policies] are more than enough to take the world to levels of greenhouse gas concentrations well beyond 750 parts per million of carbon dioxide [a ‘safe’ level has been set as 450ppm].

If governments were to follow the advice of these experts they might work less from the premise of what big business wants today than from a calculation of how much oil, coal and gas *can* still safely be burnt, and then allocate the remaining energy across our species’ basic needs: food, shelter, warmth, fresh water, health care, sanitation, security and a minimum of entertainment and travel for all.

Instead, the Kyoto Protocol is the main international agreement to address the threat of anthropogenic climate change. If you read the BBC News website or *The Independent* newspaper, you would think that supporting Kyoto is an acid test of green credentials. But what would Kyoto achieve, were it fully implemented? Signed in 1997, it came into force in 2005, and committed the world’s industrialised countries to reducing greenhouse gas emissions just 5.2 percent by 2012. Now the USA and Australia have pulled out, and only a few European countries are likely to achieve their target.

Debate about how to achieve even these minimal reductions is barely off the starting blocks. We now know it is up to us to use alternative light bulbs, green energy companies etc., or even to offset our emissions on the carbon market. Meanwhile, tax and subsidy incentives for big companies to shunt ever more goods around the world in pursuit of comparative commercial advantage remain in place, and publicly funded international financial institutions such as the World Bank still invest billions of dollars in oil and gas development – many times more than they devote to energy efficiency measures or renewable energy technologies.

Radicals have no effective space other than the streets in which to challenge the elite’s preference for economic growth at all costs. Interim mechanisms designed to ‘do something’ and yet still maintain the political status quo are constantly renewed and re-advertised. Each is shown to be as empty as the last (for example, the GEF, inaugurated at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, is underfunded and now almost forgotten – despite its claims to the contrary) while ever more glossy ‘solutions’ emerge.

The latest of these is the market in emissions ‘indulgences’ for the energetically sinful. The ‘flexible mechanisms’ of the Kyoto Protocol include so called ‘Emissions Trading’ between industrialised countries that have agreed to set targets for reduction. In this system, Russia and the Ukraine were allowed 0 percent growth on their 1990 levels. At present, these countries now emit about 25 percent less CO₂ than in 1990 because of deindustrialisation following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Under ‘Emissions Trading’, Russia and Ukraine can ‘sell’ this 25 percent reduction to governments who continue to pollute, as if it reflected genuine energy saving and reduced emissions. Critics call this the ‘hot air’ problem, the exchange of certificates for reductions that would have happened anyway. Overall energy use – and hence GHG emission – is not reduced thanks to this highly flexible mechanism.

Other ‘climate-friendly’ investments are available under schemes called Joint Implementation (JI) and the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM). These allow industrialised countries to achieve some emission targets by investing in renewable energy or plantation forestry abroad. (JI is investment between industrialised countries; CDM involves investment from North to South).

The idea is that policy should encourage emission-reducing investments wherever they are cheapest. This logic is valid on some levels, but can be criticised for picking the ‘low hanging fruit’.

Unfortunately, many such projects are also not properly monitored, and who knows what happens to the ‘benefits’ once the initial, publicly advertised phase is over. Fixing carbon into soil and forest plantations is not straightforward and requires fast-growing trees with little disturbance; usually monocultures, requiring high water, fertiliser and pesticide inputs to survive, with all the social and environmental consequences implied.

Some critics suggest that offset forestry’s ability to absorb carbon can be exaggerated because protecting, or planting, forests in one region may displace deforestation to other regions. It is also not always clear that the companies involved have full rights to the land – in Brazil for example, ownership of much of the land used for plantations is contested since the time of the dictatorships, if not the original conquistadors. Executed cheaply by companies who make a business out of pulp or charcoal, such plantations tie up land into a forest monoculture that would otherwise be wild nature with all its joys and benefits, or used for vital agricultural development.

These topics have provoked intense emotions, and popular resistance. One climate change negotiator from an African country angrily told participants at a London meeting, ‘Our countries are not toilets for your emissions!’. Farmers, ecologists and trade unionists in South America have formed the ‘Alert Against the Green Desert’ network and take action to counter conversion of large areas of land to plantations.

Some political intentions underlying carbon-offset forestry are fairly clear. The environmental writer, Larry Lohmann, reported a US Department of Energy official as saying ‘tree planting will allow US energy policy to go on with business as usual out to 2015.’ Rightly or wrongly, these statements create fear that more industrialised countries are not interested in addressing climate change, or in encouraging ‘development-friendly’ investment in the South. Various critics say carbon forestry is ‘CO₂lonialism’. Some southern governments, notably Costa Rica, have welcomed forestry-based projects; their potential for creating rural livelihoods, or playing a part in a climate policy portfolio, should not be dismissed. But forestry in itself is not going to bring about real change.

At the end of Al Gore’s film *An Inconvenient Truth* he lists ten simple action points. These include using less hot water, recycling more, driving less, and planting a tree, with the advice that ‘a single tree will absorb a ton of CO₂ over its lifetime.’ But some wise elders in Britain may remember the phrase, ‘Plant a tree in ‘73’ – and if it didn’t stop climate change back then, why should it do so now?’

Lester Brown of the Worldwatch institute said in 2005:

If [China] consumes paper at the same rate we [in the US] do, it will consume twice as much paper as the world is now producing. There go the world's forests. If the Chinese then have three cars for every four people – as the US does today – they would have a fleet of 1.1 billion cars, compared to the current world fleet of 800 million.

Clearly, policies adopted in China will be crucial. But portraying this country as the problem seems to give credibility to the belief that industrialisation is a club only for the richer world.

Western governments' climate change policy should probably stop evaluating success in terms of reducing the level of GHG in the atmosphere. Seeking to reduce hypothetical concentrations without understanding the local impacts of these projects will simply undermine the political accord necessary to move forward together.

The same problem occurs with the Stern Report which, like many economic projections, uses a 'discount rate' to calculate the cost of future damage from climate change today. This assumes a conformity in the effect of climate change on different populations, and overlooks the way that palliative projects may create problems of their own. Powerful figures such as Nicholas Stern might be advised to stop treating climate change as a universal risk, addressed by general reductions in energy use or emissions generation, and instead seek more equitable solutions that reduce real people's risk of living a degraded existence.

The Executive Board of the CDM has often argued that investments in industrial technology are preferable to simply sequestering CO₂. For example, many companies have sought financial support under the CDM for flaring methane gas from landfills (methane has a global warming potential 23 times the value of CO₂, and so flaring may mitigate climate change by effectively converting methane to CO₂). But critics suggest that flaring misses the opportunity to use this gas for local heat or electricity generation. Under the Kyoto Protocol, there are no obvious incentives for such moves. Rather, all CDM projects have to pay 2 percent of profits towards an 'Adaptation Fund', money for long-term developments such as reducing vulnerability to sea-level rise. Some critics consider this fund too small; others see it not as an incentive to make CDM projects more development-friendly but as a tax on CDM investment.

Finally, realism about the role of national targets for reducing emissions is important. Many green supporters of Kyoto feel the treaty is useful because it legally binds governments to reduce emissions. But some governments – notoriously the USA under George Bush – have pulled out, ostensibly because the targets are not applied to all countries. Under Bill Clinton, the US had been central to negotiating targets that were too weak anyway, and the 'flexible mechanisms' that undermine measures to reduce emissions at source. Most importantly, rapidly industrialising countries such as China and India may well not agree to limit and reduce emissions.

Many companies and NGOs still entertain romantic visions of a carbon offset forestry replacing lost rainforests; and treat politically – rather than scientifically – agreed national targets as the only effective means to reduce emissions. But rather than idealising these, perhaps governments should impose targets for industry and consumers to seek a safe proportion of their energy from renewable sources, and to improve energy efficiency. Such targets would encourage innovation and new investment, which reduces the costs of safer technologies in the longer term. In a context of imminent (or recently passed) 'peak oil' production, a member of the UN Climate Change Secretariat noted privately that 'climate change is like god – if it did not exist, it would have to be invented'. This reflects the urgency of the shifts in energy policy and investment which the threat of climate change

could, or should, be provoking.

Why should governments, supposedly working for the good of the people, perpetuate economic analysis and environmental policy that assume and play to the brutish, marketised and greedy side of our nature, and avoid the major changes needed to adapt our societies in the face of the depletion of finite resources? Where is the faith that humans can work together to adapt and seek more equitable solutions to collective problems?

Rather than devising ‘solutions’ to climate change that work only inside the very same market system that got us into this hole, a better approach may be to stop digging altogether. As a species we certainly have the ingenuity to make our governments adopt responses that do not impose new problems on poorer, less adaptable countries while maintaining big business’ record profits. Rather, assisting all citizens to live more sustainable and comfortable lives would mean accepting that the debate about collective responses to the threat of climate change is not ‘over’, but still only just beginning.

Further information

http://www.tyndall.ac.uk/media/news/beyond_stern.shtml <http://www.carbontradewatch.org>

<http://www.sinkswatch.org>

<http://www.newgreenorder.info>

Biogs

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Promised Lands

ByKate Rich

It’s not just the founders of hippy communes or artists like Amy Balkin who are looking for ‘a breathing space from the State’ in which to experiment with freedom and free-time. Big IT companies like Google apparently share their ideals. With a commitment to ‘me time’, the production of ‘universal access’, and (energy) sovereignty, corporates are leveraging the dream of the commons

Public Domain

This is the Public Domain is a real-estate undertaking by San Francisco artist Amy Balkin: the attempt to create a permanent, international commons on American soil, free to everyone in the world to access, use and modify, in perpetuity. Land shared by anyone who chooses to participate. In order to take this proposition off the high prairie of pure speculation and confront the infrastructural issues it raises head on, a piece of land was purchased by the artist in 2003. The land was visited, documented and, at the time of writing, is in holding for the legal process to transfer perpetual ownership to all humans. An ambitious task, strategies for which are published on the project website [www.thisisthepublicdomain.org]. It is interesting to consider *Public Domain* in the light of a couple

of other property developments that sprang from the fertile northern California soil.

Google Land

In 2006 Google, a California-based company, quietly went and bought a 35 acre chunk of former farmland in the Dalles, Oregon, an industrial and agricultural outpost 80 miles east of Portland. Google will not speak on record, but general understanding has it that the land will be used to site a data centre (server farm). Local amenities include various coffee houses and an array of recreational facilities such as kayaking in the cool Colorado River.

To trace the lovable search giant back to its roots, Google came to be in a landscape orientated around kinship networks, the close-knit corporate community of Silicon Valley, CA. The company was incorporated there in 1998 in the gift-ecology of a friend's garage in Menlo Park, out of whose humble dimensions it burst forth like Tetsuo to occupy its current HQ – the Googleplex corporate campus in nearby Mountain View.¹

The Oregon acquisition sees Google expand into territory unlinked by kith or kin. The Dalles is previously only famed for the first 20th century bio-terrorist attack in the USA. In 1984 followers of the Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh cult attempted to control a local election by infecting 10 restaurant salad bars with salmonella and according to some sources locals from the area are famously hostile to incoming Californians. However, as well as the ample sporting opportunities to keep Google engineers tired yet happy, the location is noted for a steady excess of cheap, local electricity in the form of bulk-buy hydro-electric power from the town's own dam; and lashings of fibre optics brought to the area by a forward thinking councillor. Overall, a grounded ecological land move, indicating that in its attention to self-sustainability and energy security, Google may be well ahead of the pack.²

Just like Google, *Public Domain* found itself guided to land in a location which makes little sense in terms of neighbourliness. A limited acquisition budget (and staff) made for a purchase in landscape of least use-value and hence real-estate resistance. 2.5 acres in Antelope Valley in the California High Desert 125 miles east of Los Angeles was purchased by Balkin via public internet auction in 2003. The site can be seen as a pure distillation of land as commodity – the grid-like layout of property lines in the California desert clearly not attenuated to any coordinates of ecology or use, an artefact of pure speculation. The land is fully landlocked: no public roads access it, there are no antelopes, and its survivalist potential even on a day trip is minimal (low scrub, snakes, 40+ mph winds, desert temperatures, no water). The local sports opportunities are hard to interpret. However the point is not what the land has, but what it can act as.

Public Domain is conceived as 'breathing space from the state'. A place that you can't be hounded off of, like public parks where you often have to pay or there are drastic time and behavioural limits on use – for example, subsistence of any kind. It is ironic that this breathing space should, in this first attempt to materialise it, be functionally blocked by the Tehachapi wind farm (the world's second largest!) that surrounds the Public Domain land on all sides, in its awesome toil of commodifying the air's movements.³ The concept of open land as refuge from the law was inspired in part by another Bay Area landholder, Morningstar Ranch.

Open Land

Morningstar Ranch was established by comedian-academic Lou Gottlieb who set up a hippy commune in Marin County near San Francisco in the 1960s. In 1969, facing a state-ordered injunction against letting people live on his 31 acre holding, Gottlieb signed over the title of the property to God. When taken to court in 1971 for running an 'organised camp', he embarked on an attempted defence of his constitutional right to deed his land to God (which failed, although interestingly).⁴ Lou Gottlieb

described Morningstar as a pilot study in survival for a time when leisure is compulsory.

Google as Organised Camp

The affinities between Morningstar and Google are uncanny. Both emerged from the verdant San Francisco hinterlands, and are characterised by their experimental tendencies. At Google, a culture of campus fun reigns, with free snacks and 20 percent ‘me time’, in which all Google engineers are encouraged to spend 20 percent of their work time on projects that interest them, which interestingly seems to be inventing new Google products such as Gmail. It’s not unlike the production ethos of free/libre and open source software (powered by social recognition and the curiosity for creation), although underwritten in Google’s case by the heavy collateral of salaries, stock options, and an increasing amount of infrastructural resources.

Like many a California collective, Google’s corporate philosophy is littered, throw pillow like, with many casual principles, for example, ‘You can make money without doing evil.’ Their Mountain View HQ is also decorated with lava lamps, exercise balls, washer-dryers, video games and snack rooms stocked with various cereals, yoghurt, gummy bears, toffees, cashews. Founder Larry Page said in an interview with *Playboy* magazine, ‘We think a lot about how to maintain our culture and the fun elements, we think it’s important to have a high density of people. People are packed together everywhere. We all share offices.’ Google’s ‘about’ page confirms this, adding that high-density offices is a great way to save on heating bills.

A search for more energy issues on Google Blog (‘googler insights into product and technology news and our culture’) reveals that Google is planning to install solar panels to decorate the outside of its Mountain View HQ; although a Google Blog search on the Dalles comes back empty. Home grown Dalles online chatter yields more background info, like that the combination of the Dalles Dam (a 1.8 million kilowatt generating facility), and the Columbia River’s cooling capacity, has long attracted mega-energy users such as aluminium smelters to the region.

The Searing Heat of Data

In fact, Yahoo, Google, and Microsoft are all building new data centres in Oregon and Washington, near hydroelectric power plants selling cheap electricity. With the vast concentration of energy needed to run the megaservers – and equal and opposite megawattage needed to remove the excess heat – power and cooling have surfaced as critical issues in the expansion of global IT.⁵

On Blogger.com, another service owned and operated by Google, the typically taciturn search engine let slip, in March 2005, that ‘New machines are not an issue because here at Google we can add them quite smoothly as needed. The real issue is power – actual electricity, if you can believe it’. Further delving finds the company browsing for more land in South Carolina: 520 acres purchased from the state electricity company at Goose Creek; 466 acres with their own electrical substations near Blythewood; 300 acres of wetlands close to a nuclear power station in Columbia. Perhaps Google is bunkering down for some kind of mini-apocalypse where power supply will be intermittent, parochial, fraught; but where being the world’s search engine will still be super-lucrative and handy.

Something for Everyone

Google’s mission statement is ‘to organise the world’s information and make it universally accessible and useful’.⁶ Universal access and use is just what *Public Domain* has in mind. The artist has proposed a number of possible strategies to enact this, such as creating a public land trust to protect endangered forms of social space and donating the land to it (a real property law based strategy); or via a Public Domain Sharing Licence adapted from the Free Software Foundation’s GNU GPL (a

copyright law bending approach).⁷ This license is designed to guarantee your freedom to share land (that you receive directions to the land, that you can occupy or modify the land) and forbids you to deny these rights to others.

In transplanting open source principles to the great outdoors, *Public Domain* highlights an action-gap of Evil Knievel proportions between current discourses around digital and material rights – in particular the broad non-transference of popular interest in implementing an information or knowledge commons, onto the more tufty surface of common ground.⁸

Transfer of protocols across the immaterial-material border can be tricky. Richard Stallman, author of the GNU GPL, claims to be against appropriation of the GPL for other things, insisting that the licence doesn't make sense beyond software.⁹ Stallman argues that the GPL is based on copyright law and as physical objects don't have source code or copiers for them, the 'four freedoms' of free software (freedom of use; freedom to study how it works and adapt it; freedom to redistribute it; and freedom to make and publish improvements) don't apply. This raises rapid questions about 3D printers (which enable the automatic construction, reproduction and transmission of physical objects using solid freeform fabrication over data networks), and further the problem of securing software freedoms without acknowledging computer hardware. Without the same ferocity and community safeguarding the infrastructure and knowledge around material resources (circuits, minerals, electricity), the free software utopia might cease to have anything to run on.¹⁰

Back to the Land

At a recent panel discussion organised by Amy Balkin in San Francisco to explore how common land can be created and safeguarded, Ramon Sender, one of the original Morningstar ranchers and the custodian of its archives noted that emparkment (national parks) makes land public thereby criminalising communities who had derived their subsistence from it.¹¹ He positioned open land as a critique of private property and the extinction of use rights inherent in state-owned public land.¹²

Balkin herself found it more poignantly oppressive that the actual borders of the windfarm, while creating immediate physical and legal barriers to land access and use, are lesser impediments to total access and use than the physically more remote borders of the State. However to say that *Public Domain* will fail due to the world's people not having access to Antelope Valley is beside the point. To continue the analogy with free software, it is the *use* of free software (or open land) that activates the rights attached to it – the conditionality of *being there* is built-in.

Meanwhile, self-searching Google for more on Google Dalles, results bring up not a lot: one *New York Times* story from June 2006; a few derivative stories; and some others about being unable to file a story because Google wouldn't provide any information, and some blog chatter about all this. The most recent material is from the jobs section: 'Hardware Operations Team Manager – The Dalles. Solid understanding of supporting infrastructure for server and network gear, such as but not limited to, power and cooling requirements.' As well as, 'Technicians – The Dalles. Excellent understanding of Computer Room Air Conditioners (CRAC units), HVAC, Uninterruptible Power Supply (UPS), cooling and ventilating data, humidification/dehumidification, chillers' plus 'Temps with Linux knowledge, ability to work on ladders or under raised floor as needed and ability to lift/move up to 40 lbs equipment on a daily basis.'

Energy, Security and Space For All

Patri Friedman, a current Google employee, probably in his ‘me time’ writes of himself in his biog: ‘Having investigated the various options, he’s decided that floating cities are the most realistic path towards true liberty. He believes that sea and space will be conducive to liberty, and is writing a book about Seasteading, or homesteading the high seas.’¹³ Although that idiot savant Hollywood has already captured all these libertarian, extra-terrestrial escapist themes in 2007’s *Astronaut Farmer*, where another mad rancher Charles Farmer builds a rocket in his barn and intends to send himself into space. When he buys a bunch of rocket fuel, the FBI finds out and threatens a loan foreclosure on his ranch, Farmer fights back: ‘if we don’t have our dreams, we have nothing.’ If Google can see the importance of sorting out the physical as well as the infrastructural, where does this leave the rest of us dreamers? Back on the ground, *Public Domain* continues its search for real-world frameworks to implement a legal solution for sharing the land. Juridicial expertise and precedents welcomed.

Footnotes

1

The Bureau of Inverse Technology’s bit plane flew over and photographed this and many other seminal garages, including Hewlett Packard’s birth garage, in its pioneering aerial sortie over Silicon Valley real estate in 1998. <http://bureauit.org/plane>

2

Although most of this is highly speculative, this reporter, not having the resources to physically get to Oregon, and with Google’s policy of not answering questions, information is largely gathered from Google through searching on Google.

3

Commodifying the air is also of interest to Amy Balkin in her Public Smog project which constructs an international clean air park in the atmosphere via buying carbon offsets and retiring them from the emissions market, thereby making them inaccessible to polluting industries. <http://www.publicsmog.org>

4

The court case was recently re-encated in San Francisco from original transcripts, details at <http://uo.twentiethcentury.com/index.php/FacultyReenactment>. More on Morningstar Ranch at http://www.diggers.org/home_free.htm

5

<http://www.opensparc.net/news/2007-02/union-tribune-going-green-at-your-data-center-building.html>
Artist Heath Bunting’s project Computer Dried Fruit deals with similar core issues.

6

Google founders Sergey Brin and Larry Page explain in a letter to Wall Street ‘Searching and organizing all the world’s information is an unusually important task that should be carried out by a company that is trustworthy and interested in the public good.’

7

A widely-used free software licence, more at <http://www.gnu.org/copyleft/gpl.html>

8

Eben Moglen, FSFs chief lawyer points out that the GNU GPL ‘creates a contractual commons, to which anyone may add but from which no one may subtract.’ Which neatly reverses the common land problem with endless legal variations for subtracting land from common ownership, but few means by which to restore it. http://emoglen.law.columbia.edu/my_pubs/anarchism.html

9

Cube-Cola has been developing, modifying and distributing a physical cola drink from an open source recipe at the Cube Microplex Bristol, since 2004. <http://sparror.cubecinema.com/cube/cola>

10

See HowStuffIsMade (a visual encyclopaedia that documents the manufacturing processes, labour conditions and environmental impacts involved in the production of contemporary products, [<http://xdesign.ucsd.edu/howstuffismade>]), Instructables.com (step-by-step instructions for making things you never knew you wanted, [<http://www.instructables.com>]), Materials & Applications (a research centre dedicated to pushing new and underused ideas for landscape and architecture into view, [<http://www.emanate.org>]) and NASA (we explore and discover, [<http://www.nasa.gov>]) for rare exceptions to the highly proprietary culture of fields such as industrial design, engineering and architecture.

11

This panel was part of the Wattis Institute’s exhibition Radical Software, curated by Will Bradley, <http://www.wattis.org/exhibitions/2006/software>

12

<http://www.raysender.com/morningstar.html>

13

<http://seastead.org>

Thank you for sharing: research and advice from Amy Balkin, Jenna Didier, Oliver Hess, Lucia Sanroman and Josephine Berry Slater

Biog

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Apocalypse and/or Business as Usual? The Energy Debate After the 2004 US Presidential Elections

By George Caffentzis

Since 2004 the rhetoric of Bush's republican party has turned curiously green, integrating climate change as a legitimisation for neoliberal imperialism. At the same time the unintended consequence of America's unsuccessful adventures has been to enrich an 'anti-neoliberal' class of oil rentiers in Africa, Latin America and Asia. George Caffentzis plots the changes in the US energy policy as it turns from eco-naysayer to ecowarrior

The 2004 Presidential Election was in part a referendum on energy policy in the US. The Bush campaign expressed scepticism about both the Global Warming and Peak Oil hypotheses and claimed that the unleashing of the free market (including the lifting of some environmental restrictions) is the proper path for dealing with the energy problems of the US and the planet. In other words, there are no problems concerning energy that a dose of neoliberal privatisation and globalisation can't cure. The Bush 'Deal' with the US working class was that if workers supported his policies (including financing and staffing the required imperial military), the bulk of the costs of the new energy regime will be borne by the proletarians in the oil producing countries of Africa, Latin America and Asia. An important corollary to the 'Deal' was that there would be no need for a drastic wage decrease (caused by high oil prices) in the US. This was a call for the continuation of neoliberal business as usual. The Kerry campaigners took both Global Warming and Peak Oil seriously and proposed an approach to energy that would emphasise conservation and alternative energy production. Such policy, they claimed, would strengthen 'national security' without resort to war (the assumption being that if the US imported less oil, there would be fewer enticements to be drawn into 'resource wars' like the invasion of Iraq in the future). The Kerry 'Deal' being proffered to the US working class would require in exchange for 'national security' tolerance for high oil prices (to incentivise alternative energy production) and hence a dramatic reduction of the real wage in the US. It was a strident call to avoid an energy apocalypse. I criticised the Kerry campaign/ Democratic Party/ Environmentalist NGO position in a previous article in *Mute* (*Mute* Vol.1, Issue 29, Winter/Spring 2005). In this article I will discuss some of the twists and turns of this energy debate among global capitalist 'deciders' since 2004 and the causes of these changes.

After the election, Bush continued to push ahead on the effort to increase oil drilling in the US (especially in the Arctic and the Gulf of Mexico) and to apply military pressure on oil producing nations to neoliberalise their oil industry, with Iraq being at the centre of the strategy. However, over the last two years there has been an evident change in the Bush Administration's rhetoric. In the 2006 State of the Union Address Bush unveiled his 'Alternative Energy Initiative' with these words: 'America is addicted to oil, which is often imported from unstable parts of the world.' In the 2007 State of the Union Address Bush held out hope that the research into new energy technologies his administration is supporting 'will help us confront the serious challenge of global climate change.' Neutral or even positive references to the reality of Global Warming and Peak Oil have begun to appear in official administration documents. This should not be surprising, if one looks at what has transpired in the last two and a half years concerning the class politics of global energy. The neoliberal effort, supported by the guns of the US military, to overturn the nationalisation of energy resources (especially oil and natural gas) has met reverses across the planet. Let me list a few of the more spectacular ones:

- the failure of the US invasion of Iraq to impose a neoliberal regime on the nation’s oil production;
- the renationalisation of the natural gas industry of Bolivia;
- the electoral triumphs of Chavez that have given his government the legitimation to use oil revenues to create a ‘socialism for the 21st century’ in Venezuela;
- the successful ‘stealth renationalisation’ of the Russian oil industry by President Putin’s government;
- the oil companies’ and Nigerian government’s inability to crush the armed resistance of local Niger Delta groups demanding property rights in the oil reserves and reparation for past environmental damage.

This is not a pretty picture for the Bush Administration’s neoliberal globalisation plan. When these reversals are summed up across Africa, Latin America and Asia, a remarkable phenomenon can be observed: the formation of a new ‘rentier’ class that is in opposition to neoliberalism. A rentier is someone who lives off rents and returns from investments, in other words, someone whose revenue arises from the transfer of surplus value from other parts of the capitalist system. In early modern Europe, the landed rentier class was made up of aristocratic families that rented out their land to capitalist farmers. The problematic part of the contemporary oil rentier class is made up of governments (e.g., mullah-ruled Iran, ‘21st century socialist’ Venezuela) and ethnic organisations (the U’wa of Colombia, the Ijaw of the Niger Delta, and the indigenous West Papuans) that are demanding the right to use the rents and transferred surplus value they receive (or ought to receive) in a non-, or even an anti-capitalist manner (to the point that the U’wa would ban all drilling into the flesh of mother earth!).

This part of the oil rentier class worries the Bush Administration more than the apocalyptic scenarios Peak Oil and Global Warming activists delight in telling. In fact, much of the Bush Administration’s newly found attraction to Peak Oil and Global Warming is part of the effort to justify the failure to deliver on the promises of cheaper oil and a threat to troublesome oil rentiers. For after all, there are only two major threats that can be used against the rentiers: (a) direct military force threatening to dispossess them of their resources; (b) the development of alternative non- oil/natural gas energy sources threatening to devalue their resources. The failure of the Iraq invasion to lead to either increased oil production or even a legal change opening up the oil industry to foreign company control has shown the limits of the military effort. Consequently, the Bush Administration, even as it continues to surge ahead in its occupation of Iraq (and threatens to bomb Iran in the bargain), must develop the other threat so openly described by the Saudi oil minister, Sheik Ahmed Zaki Yamani in 1981:

If we force the Western countries to invest heavily in finding alternative energy sources, they will. This will take them no more than seven to ten years and will result in their reduced dependence on oil as a source of energy to a point which will jeopardise Saudi Arabia’s interests.

Capitalist concern over the anomalous behaviour of the landlord or rentier class is not new. Rentiers affect the struggle between capitalists and workers in complex and often problematic ways. In Britain, for example, the rentiers sided with the capitalists for the most part during the rise of capitalism (with occasional violent falling outs in the 17th century). But by the 18th century, capitalist thinkers were debating the negative consequences of ‘absentee’ landlords’ ‘luxury’ consumption and by the early 19th century political economists like David Ricardo argued that rents reduced profits because of the high price of grain that the working class consumed. If the price of grain went down, wages would fall and profits would rise. But the only way for this to occur was to open up the importation of grain by reducing or eliminating the tariff on cereals. The Corn Law (so called because in England ‘corn’ refers

to any ‘cereal grain’) legislated this tariff and so Ricardo called for its repeal. He urged his fellow capitalists to end their alliance with the rentiers, since the flourishing of the latter would threaten the survival of the former. Ever since this period, ‘rentier’ became a synonym in economics for a lazy, obstreperous and parasitic being. ‘Rent’, when it was not the object of opprobrium, was barely mentioned in the economics text books. But like it or not, rents and rentiers have played an important role in capitalism down to the present, especially in the oil industry.

The oil industry also has another kind of transferred surplus value besides rent that arises because oil production is technology intensive and almost labour-less. Hence the oil industry creates very little surplus value. On the other side, the oil industry is quite profitable. Where does this profit come from? It arises from other parts of the system that create much surplus value while requiring relatively little technological investment. This leads to the owners of the oil companies receiving transferred value and if these owners are landlords who own the oil resources as well, they can receive two kinds of income.

Until the early 1970s the oil rentiers (the recipients of both these transfers of value) were relatively amenable to capital’s desires, but since then and especially in the last couple of years many rentiers have become dangerous to the neoliberal accumulation of capital. The most visible example is the political movement that brought Hugo Chavez to presidential power in Venezuela, of course, but there are many other actual political and social movements that are rejecting the neoliberal claim that the best way to maximise everyone’s utility is to denationalise the oil industry and return it to the hands of the global energy companies. In fact, they are using oil revenues to increase wages and invest in the reproduction of workers. For example, the Chavez administration is financing a major land redistribution drive to benefit the slum dwellers of Caracas using the oil revenues.

The true worry of the Bush Administration is that these troublesome oil rentiers will unite with each other and form an alliance with the working classes of their territory that will harm the exploitation of workers across the planet. After all, what concerns Bush’s class is a shortage of value, not a shortage of oil or natural gas. Workers should be politically concerned by ‘Peak Oil’ scarcities and by ‘Global Warming’ apocalypses, but we must remember that capital is not. Scarcity and apocalypse are capitalist business as usual. In capital’s history thousands of scarcities have been created in order to impose work and make a profit. It has destroyed ecologies and human populations time and again to preserve and extend its rule. What we should be concerned about is that this new turn in the class struggle that brings together working classes in Latin America, Africa and Asia with rentier governments and ethnic organisations in the oil producing regions will be attacked using ‘Peak Oil’ or ‘Global Warming’ as an ideological cover in the same way that nuclear non-proliferation has been used to invade Iraq.

Biog

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Heavy Opera

By Anthony Iles

John Jordan and James Marriott’s operatic audio tour set in London’s Square Mile is intended to awaken city workers to the impact of financial systems on climate change. But not only does *And While London Burns* misgauge how much the suits already know, its hysterical tone also harmonises too easily with the coming new eco-order

Heavy Opera 1

Image: activists cool off under a burst water mains during the Carnival Against Capital, June 1999

A fountain of water from the river Walbrook shoots up above my head, drums are pounding, a sound system's bass rumbles. I hear cheers but I can also hear the clatter of police shields and batons around the corner. Seven years after London's Carnival Against Capital, when protesters outside the LIFFE exchange broke a water mains sending a thirty-foot jet of water into the air, I am walking just a half a mile north of the same spot. Now I can hear the Thames rushing up the valley the Walbrook follows, bursting its banks, laying waste to the tall glass-fronted buildings as some of the most expensive real estate in London collapses around me. I'm swept up in a sonically induced fantasy driven by the tracks on my MP3player. I am taking part in *And While London Burns*, an operatic guided walk written by John Jordan and James Marriott, set to music by Isa Suarez and produced by the cross-disciplinary art and education group Platform.¹

John Jordan has played a role in both these participatory dramas, firstly as a member of Reclaim the Streets – one of the anti-capitalist groups that coordinated the Carnival Against Capital in June 1999. This time around as an artist commissioned by Platform – an interdisciplinary arts, campaigning and research group committed to longer term, less partisan approaches to transforming the activities of the financial institutions and corporations with head offices in the Square Mile. The walk is an attempt to dramatise the research Platform has conducted into climate change. James Marriott, its co-founder, explains:

Heavy Opera 2

'It's a way of dramatising and humanising these systems [the role of multinationals and financial systems in fuelling climate change]. It's over-dramatised like all opera, which is why we chose the medium.'²

The walk begins at 1 Poultry. At a Starbucks opposite the ruins of the Roman Temple of Mithras our attention is drawn to the multinational's logo with its allusions to paganism and older gods. The audio tour's protagonist remembers that before Starbucks went global its logo (designed after a 15th century print by Seattle hippy entrepreneurs) bore nipples and 'a pair of provocatively spread fishtails'. The mermaid allegorises both allegiance to, and fear of, the sea. She is exotic and, like the valuable cargoes on which the City's wealth was originally founded, unattainable for those doing the shipping. The City is still resplendent with powerful iconography from the 18th and 19th centuries, pineapples and other exotic objects appear frequently as architectural ornaments advertising the City's plunder. Today, retail spaces and spaceship architecture adorned with surveillance cameras predominate. At the Royal Exchange (now a luxury shopping mall) our protagonist remembers:

Heavy opera 3

I used to work here in 1989, when it was the Futures Exchange ... the place was a permanent carnival, traders in bright coloured jackets shouting and gesturing to each other ... it couldn't be more different now.

The new City outwardly tells little about where it draws value from and it is this occultation of money the walk confronts by whispering its secrets in your ear.

As its website explains:

For over 20 years, PLATFORM has been bringing together environmentalists, artists, human rights campaigners, educationalists and community activists to create innovative projects driven by the need for social and environmental justice.³

Platform has gone some way beyond the statements required to declare oneself a corporate entity in the art world. Operating more like an NGO, Platform sought autonomy from the dependencies of art, eschewing support from established galleries or art spaces. Instead the group concentrates upon building relationships between environmentalists, artists and employees of the core financial and carbon-extracting institutions which, at the same time, are the objects of their research and criticism. Since art has taken a relational turn, Platform's dialogic practice has been somewhat vindicated and is gaining the interest of institutions with a commitment to engaging with 'public issues' outside the institutional safety zone.⁴ The group has often employed organised walks, 'walking as a research tool, as a ritual, as performance, as intervention, as a political tool'.⁵ Here, in the Square Mile that demarcated the original Roman settlement of Londinium, Platform taps the rich network of influence and accumulation they call the 'carbon web' – 'the web of institutions that extract oil and gas from the ground'.

Heavy opera 4

Walking, I am accompanied by three voices or groups of voices. The protagonist, a disillusioned City worker, drifts, trying to throw off the pressure and hypocrisy of the city in an anguished monologue. The guide, a softly spoken, reassuring female voice, tells me when to cross, to 'be careful', 'look left and right at the lights', as well as offering information about BP, the financial groups and investors who support it (Morely, Deutsche Bank, Royal Bank of Scotland). The third voice is a chorus which echoes the protagonist's monologue and riffs eccentrically on it, singing 'They stole her nipples', 'look up, look up to the sky', and, in the Royal Exchange, chants: 'More, more and more, give us more money, give us more and more ...'.

The carefully guided walk sometimes becomes a gallop as I realise I have taken a wrong turn or when the voices urge me to speed up. As I am led under and through the City's architectural machines of accumulation, the opera emphasises its status as a principal node processing the world's financial flows. Later, I am spun around Bank station and the Swiss Re tower as the chorus and music builds to a crescendo prefiguring a portentous end to the narrative and the walk.

Heavy opera 5

The accompanying music first appears to me as corporate muzak, like the sound of distilled comfort and class played as one waits for the bank's outsourced operatives to process your phone call. Later, the strings dramatise my rush around the city while street noise blends in as I lurch across streams of

commuters and traffic. Once I accept that my route is programmed, I find myself caught up in what feels like the soundtrack to a live video game, gleefully aware that no-one else is conscious of my directed path.

And While London Burns is really an ‘experience’ – in the sense that a trip to Disneyland is. The walk deploys four dramatic elements: the narrative of personal crisis; the music; the information about the Earth’s decline under capitalism; and the sounds and sights of the City itself. As the slew of information about the Earth’s rising temperature builds to a picture of crisis, the protagonist becomes more erratic – we supposedly take on the burden of his self-realisation as our own. But then our ‘own’ crisis over climate change’s destructive potential is experienced as adventure.

And While London Burns shares this array of simple mechanisms for dramatising the present really impending apocalypse with two recent films, *Apocalypto* and *Children of Men*. The latter plays out anarchist fantasies of a biopolitical neofascist state in the UK, presenting us with:

Heavy opera 6

Image: still from *Children of Men*

a world one generation from now that has fallen into anarchy on the heels of an infertility defect in the population ... Set against a backdrop of London torn apart by violence and warring nationalistic sects, *Children of Men* follows disillusioned bureaucrat Theo (Clive Owen) as he becomes an unlikely champion of Earth’s survival. ⁶

Mel Gibson’s *Apocalypto* draws a clumsy comparison between the internal breakdown of Mayan civilisation prior to Cortez’s conquest of their lands and the demise of the US as a global hegemon:

Throughout history, precursors to the fall of a civilisation have always been the same It was important for me to make that parallel because you see these cycles repeating themselves over and over again. People think that modern man is so enlightened but we’re susceptible to the same forces – and we are also capable of the same heroism and transcendence. ⁷

These films, like with *And While London Burns*, indulge a reactionary millenarianism apparently appropriate to our times characterised by anxiety over reproduction, environmental devastation, migration and wars over resources. Each locates a subjective response to ‘objective conditions’ in a male subject, and we see an awakening to the real conditions of the societies in which they live.

For *And While London Burns*’ authors one gets the feeling that it is something of a stretch of the imagination to place themselves in this character’s shoes, that some under estimation of the ignorant and complacent ‘suit’ is operating. The dynamic between the identification of the listener with this disaffected conservative and the more ‘radical imagination’ celebrated through historical references was, for me, unconvincing.

I struggle with the opera’s construction of experience (the listener’s as well as the conditions they ‘objectively’ face) as consensus reality without challenge. It seems that after so long working at the margins of artistic practice, Platform have finally conceded to the monoform. There is no transcendental subject, no lone saviour of civilisation. Although *And While London Burns*’ authors are the first to admit that they are self-consciously playing with clichés to dramatic effect, this walk is the very opposite of psychogeographic practice. ⁸ The work engenders the opposite of an active, critical subjectivity.

Heavy opera 7

If there is a dialectic to be found in *And While London Burns* it is that of flight versus contestation. The audio guide points to the irony of the City as both a centre of research into the causes and effects of climate change (in particular Swiss Re, whose reinsurance business is predicated upon the mediation of threats to profitability) and the self-satisfied ignorance of continued irresponsible plunder. As the opera's story unravels we are informed that the protagonist's partner, Lucy, has left to live 'off-grid'. This response to the threat of environmental devastation is the conceptual equivalent of self-organising nuclear bunker drills at the height of the cold war – a duck and cover strategy, internalising the nuclear state's imperative that we be afraid, that we submit to pointless rituals in the face of death. At the opposite pole, the rich shoring up their wealth and access to unadulterated leisure and consumption in Dubai are playing a similar end-game with equally futile consequences. As if, in the context of a global emergency, anyone will be safe in either a low impact woodland home with its own energy supply or in a glass tower surrounded by the best defenses petro-dollars can buy. Both visions indulge in the fantasy that in the globalised world there is some escape or autonomy, a form of denial which hopes to obscure all ties between that secure haven and the reality of ongoing surplus value extraction from a landless, illegalised, starving (sub-) humanity.

And While London Burns puts this contemporary meme of millennial conservatism to work in a locale that is synonymous with unsustainable economics, personal debt and risk-taking. The work chooses to reinforce the personalisation and internalisation of a crisis for which capitalism itself should be paying the costs. Its dramatisation of the Earth's climactic instability hinges on a predicted four degree rise in temperature that we are now almost certain to reach according to the IPCC's recent report. The facts relayed during the course of this walk tend to confirm these projections. I am not in a position to challenge these facts. Without even trying to challenge these facts, it is still possible to object to the terms in which the urgency of change is being framed. The injunction of climate change is literally 'change'; through crisis, capital is reorganising itself and this has immediate social impacts. What is being proposed is a series of small adjustments for capital and many dramatic shocks for us. There appears to be very little going on in terms of large projects to actually reverse this situation, instead there is a confluence of self-righteous self-flagellation at a consumer level and government programmes to bully workers, small to medium-sized businesses and new home owners.

Platform have a background of deeper engagement with these issues and access to research that should allow them to analyse the joined up system of capitalist 'wealth creation' and its affect on the social environment. However, as the UK and other governments worldwide absorb green and environmental discourse and re-spin it as command – to eat less, work more, pay extra for energy and waste – some engagement with this instrumentalisation of ecological threat would be useful, rather than continuing to pursue an alarmist politics fuelling the fires of eco-fascism in becoming.

Heavy opera 10

Image: still from *Apocalypto*

From apocalyptic predictions of dramatic climate change down to fashion tips for the greening of lifestyles, we experience exactly the same 'terrorism of conformity that underlies all the publicity of modern capitalism'.⁹ The trouble with this work and almost all public discussion of climate, is that rather than critically evaluating the role of this ecological threat as part of the ongoing deterioration of living standards dictated by capital in most of the world, there is a tendency to exaggerate the threat, to

rationalise it as a natural fact, and thus approve and provide training for the modification of behavior urged by capitalism.

Footnotes

1

Available for download at: <http://www.andwhilelondonburns.com/download/>

2

Anna Minton, 'Down to a Fine Art', *The Guardian*, 10 January

3

Platform website, <http://www.platformlondon.org/aboutplatform.asp>

4

Anna Minton, op. cit.. This celebratory piece highlights a new movement of artists fusing post-conceptual art and environmental art under the aegis of the Royal Society of Arts whose director, Matthew Taylor, was formerly head of the Prime Minister's policy unit. It would seem that relational aesthetics is rapidly emerging as the idiom by which artists speak to policy makers on behalf of the public.

5

Platform website, op. cit..

6

Children of Men website, <http://www.childrenofmen.net>

7

Mel Gibson on *Apocalypto* from the film website, <http://apocalypto.movies.go.com>

8

As one definition would have it: 'The theory of the combined use of arts and techniques for the integral construction of a milieu in dynamic relation with experiments in behavior'. Situationist International, 'Preliminary Problems in Constructing a Situation' in Ken Knabb, *Situationist International Anthology*, Bureau of Public Secrets, <http://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/1.situations.htm>

9

'Geopolitics of Hibernation', *Situationist International* #7, April 1962, <http://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/7.hibernation.htm>

Biog

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Guttural Cultural

By Howard Slater

During a career spent in virtual obscurity, Ghedalia Tazart's whittled away at the coherence of musical identity, moving through modes of articulation as a guttural nomad. Now a box-set collates his multiple voices. Howard Slater raps uvular, in prose and notation

A box set that gathers together and reissues the three previous Ghedalia Tazart's releases on Alga Marghen, throwing in the usual bonus tracks, is par for the course in the music industry's ordinary sale of things. But that's where the similarities end. The form of the product may be pretty acceptable and collector-inducingly obsessive, but what's contained in it openly and, it could be chanced, unknowingly, defies categorisation. If you've not come across Tazart's before you'll be in a majority, but, getting outside the mirror-scene a bit, your ears will become noisily whispered into by a minor voice. A voice so minor, yet layered, that it operates at the unpredictable level of molecular switchpoints; switchpoints of alterity without the border controls of introjected censorship. It's a voice that's been left alone enough (his first LP was released in 1979) to become a population of multiples, of 'vitality affects', but it's also a voice that wields and is embedded in a variety of machines.[1] From grimy electronic loops to mock opera, from world-music to found sounds, from guttural sonorous inarticulacy to the lyrical flushes of Mallarmé and Daumal, from an improvisatory nonchalance to a textured choreographic plan, the 'music' that opens out here has taken twenty-five years to gain even this small level of exposure (Alga Marghen is hardly a label that people rush to Myspace to research!).

In eluding the taxonomy tax (a tax I feel I've tried to levy in even attempting to describe the music) Tazart's has been effectively seceding from all but a local popularity. At one level his other recent CD releases have been issued by very small-run French labels such as Demosaurus, Jardin Au Fou and Gazul, but the localness of Tazart's is there in the intimacy of risk across all his records; a kind of invite to share in all the dislocation of impromptu passion. We are made congruent in listening to Tazart's as he actively works with the material of his 'self', with personified emotions made dissemblingly sonorous, putting us in mind of Nietzsche's shocking challenge to the identitarians: 'finally you are no more than an imitation of an actor'. [2] The centre, the locus has been removed, diffused, and subjected to a continual deferral of its stultifying and inhibiting taunt to unity. It is this focus for self-regard that, as he whines and whimpers like an exposed 'fake' or one at the limit-point of verbal expression, Tazart's implicitly maintains is the fiction. As controversial philosopher André Glucksman states on the sleeve notes to *Diasporas*, 'Ghedalia Tazart's is a nomad'. A much overused term should not detract from its accuracy when applied to this music: Tazart's not only wanders, *sui generis*, through the many musical categories and delimited locales that instill a self-affirming unity, he is lovingly in internal exile. Like a latterday Rimbaud he is an alchemist of the very local affects that he brings into voice and thereby discovers; affects that are both audibly inspired and reach-out to a taped militant chant, a city square ambience, a tango refrain, a broken organ, a synthesized rhythm, his daughter gurgling or a massified cathedral bell.

This localness, this locale of a porous psyche in an admixed place, is further contradicted with the overall sense of transports and movement we get when listening to these records. On Diasporas the overall thematic seems to be the aping of a North African way of singing which, these days, leads to all sorts of musings about cultural pillage rather than cultural inter-penetration. As there's very little biographical information on Tazart's we can hardly know for sure he's not of North African descent nor whether or not he once worked at General Motors. But, this seems to be a decoy kind of response to a bogus question that leads back to the essentialisms and non-becomings of a cultural homogeneity, to a respecting of the boundaries and financially beneficial closed markets that are enforced by cultural commentators and treaty-makers alike. Tangiers is now in Paris via Istanbul. On Diasporas, a track with the Ubuesque title of 'La Vie et la Mort Legendaires du Spermatozoide de Humuch Lardy' (The life and legendary death of the sperm of Humuch Lardy), we hear Tazart's singing to an accordion-like instrument underpinned by a steady beat on a djembe. Yet Tazart's changes his vocal style continually throughout the three minutes of this track from vaguely islamic to vaguely jewish to vaguely sioux indian to vaguely feminine to explicitly cutting into the melody by ha-hack-laughing like a temporarily mad man. The temptation would be to say, here in Tazart's, we have someone articulating what it is to be a species-being, or, here, in Tazart's, we have the first pre-articulation (outside sci-fi) of the push to form a world government headed by conformed intellectuals. Both responses would be undermined by the self-effacingness of this very idiosyncratic, self-exposed and disorientating music; a music that the Musearecords website [<http://www.musearecords.com/>] tells us began when Tazart's started to sing, at 12 years old, in the Bois de Vincennes, just for himself, after his grandmother died. Grief is unlocalisable as is the plurality of worlds that Tazart's presents; a redistribution of the sensible (to adapt Ranciere's phrase).[3]

Whether Tazart's assimilates or disseminates, comes together or openly unfolds, is not a choice we, as listeners, have to make. He does all these things. He is not national, but differentiated and relational. Layering the bass timbre of his own voice into a chanted drone, adding a synthesized note, overdubbing a murmured refrain, goading himself into declamations of parodic or justifiable anger, he assembles sketches that have the impact of concertos. He multiplies himself into a contradiction of unedited tensions, colliding the disparate times of feeling with a minimum of respect paid to song structure that makes Glucksman's description of him as 'an orchestra and pop group all in one person' entirely fitting. On 'Merci Stephane', Tazart's recites, body and soul, a poem by Mallarmé (in French) as a disco loop, complete with Chic-style rhythm guitar, slowly rises to the foreground of the track. We don't get the message as such, we get, more provocatively, the enigma. Akin at times to the later recordings of Luc Ferrari, who also did not shy away from the use of popular forms, Tazart's similar use and magnification of the incidental, when coupled to his overdubs, summons up, as with Ferrari, a very real sense of temporal thickness: not just our experiencing of music but our experiencing in general can be polyphonic and polytemporal. The key to this thickness may lie not just in the way Tazart's can have us seemingly at the origins of language with a totemic incantation being accompanied by a buzzing cellular network sound, but in the way that this thickness is intimately relayed across these twenty-odd year old recordings by timbre, dirty timbre.

It's timbre that's outernational. Timbre is the grain, the rasp, the fricative, the aural visceralisation of an unfurling emotion, a vitality affect. It is fitting and fits with an attempted expression, not a well rehearsed one. When it's alloyed to the incidental and the impromptu (for all Tazart's tracks may be layered but each layer comes across as being put down with no second takes) it amounts to a pre-articulation, an indication of a struggle, a none-too easily won means of expression, a means without precedent but not individual, singular instead, a group's pre-articulation, the group of the multiple self dissolving the boundaries of the overly identified who want to win you over for lessness. So, in some ways we are talking, thanks to Tazart's, of something more vital and communicative than language; for across these tracks there are words (in French) many will not be able to understand. But this does not detract from our understanding. Quite the opposite; it tempers our understanding

with enigma and leads us to put trust in the unspoken meaning of the timbre, be it of the voice or the variegated musical backing, applying to it a sincerity of intent and giving to us the image of an unthought known[4], of something happening to the side of consciousness in a duct, a quiver. This is in stark contrast to a more recent and much acclaimed album by Scott Walker. Presented as a similarly heady mix of voice and unfamiliar musical backing, *The Drift* comes across as firmly implanted in the majoritarian culture of High Art Darke; a monotonal operatics with tracks as long as the last days of drum and bass. Here we can fully understand the lyrics they are an hermetic appeal to englishness graduates. Maybe it'll be Ghedalia's gypsy-band with their partially unwilling responses that'll be visible on the horizon at the next Meltdown.

Audio Clip à *Une Éclipse Totale de Soleil*

Distorted drum box.

Bass blurs in a pumped semitone

Birds.

A child unspeaks.

Sings as if alone, straining to reach the high notes.

Another voice yodels to a repeated syllable.

Its throat becomes a cavernous auditorium.

Other voices rise, desperate and yearning.

Voices of ecstatic protest.

Voices of an affective class.

Notes from an oud or a one stringed violin enter.

Still the repeated syllable.

Is this the desert, a drawing room, an agora?

Some inviting schizo demos?

It's not a studio.

But the window is open:

birds again.

Pots and pans are struck nonchalantly as if trying to

keep to a rhythm or establish its semblance.

A high note held becomes sweet watery feedback.

Meanwhile Sioux surround the wagon train as

the strumming of a stringed box keeps pace.

A manâs voice: gravelly and chkchkchking,

scrapes its own voice box for musical mucus,

hears its own gradial tones in a different part of

its disaggregating body.

Then, seamless of âthenâ, quick fire slightly agitated chatter.

Cha-cha drum box trills as the voice tries to keep pace

with desperate glottals not glossaries.

Tunes and rationality are trying to break through

as the beaten box sounds in a cave near to a bird cage.

A layering of electrifying groams give inspiration

to a distorting low-end organ as another

improvised punk-folk ditty unassumes itself into

the forefront of a newly compounding emotion.

Slower now the beat box, almost whistling with

cymbal hiss as another hand-assisted vocable wavers

repeatingly, its join of loop obvious and hiatus-rough.

The voice now sings risingly to crescendos as if unaccompanied,

as if alone and beckoning an audience years and years away.

No threat of external evaluation in this 'studio', this minaret,

this intensified polis, this afternoon.

Ghedalia Tazart's, *Les Danseurs de la Pluie*, Alga Marghen Box Set. Includes the albums *Une Éclipse Totale de Soleil*, *Diasporas*, *Tazart's*, *Tazart's Transports & Les Danseurs de la Pluie*

[1] 'vitality affects' is Daniel Stern's phrase. Daniel N. Stern, *The Present Moment In Psychotherapy And Everyday Life*, Norton, 2004.

[2] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight Of The Idols*, Penguin, 1974.

[3] Jacques Ranciere, *The Politics Of Aesthetics*, Continuum, 2006.

[4] Daniel Stern, op cit.

For more on Guttural:

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guttural>

For David Fenechâs interview with Ghedalia TazartÃ's (in french):
http://demosaurus.free.fr/demosaurus/ghedalia_TazartÃ's/ghedalia_tazartes_interview.htm

For distribution of TazartÃ's box-set:
<http://www.lingering.co.uk/>

Zombie Nation

By Paul Helliwell

As the scarcity essential to the cultural commodity is undermined by digital abundance and social networking, social relations and the unique 'live' performance are all that's left to sell. Mass market music increasingly resembles relational art with its dream of waking the 'zombies' of consumer culture, but are the citizens of Web 2.0 society born again or undead? Paul Helliwell shuffles through the mall

That which determines subjects as means of production and not as living purposes, increases with the proportion of machines to variable capital... its consummate organisation demands the coordination of people that are dead.

– Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia*

I thought that beauty alone would satisfy. But the soul is gone. I can't bear those empty, staring eyes.

– Charles Beaumont in *White Zombie*

Too often people are happy drawing up an inventory of yesterday's concerns, the better to lament the fact of not getting an answer.

– Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*

Zombie 1

Artwork by The Chinchilla

In my previous article for *Mute*, 'First Cut is the Deepest' (*Mute* Vol2 #4), I talked about a panglossian enthusiasm for the social in art, courtesy of Nicolas Bourriaud's relational aesthetics. This enthusiasm for the social is not confined to art – where Adorno describes it as the means by which art expresses its own uncertainty – but has become the motor of modern capitalism, one example of which is Web 2.0. For this reason music is thrust centre stage both as a means and a metaphor for unproblematic sociability and communication – from a recent mobile phone ad selling its music player by insisting 'there will be one song that will get you to phone home', to the opportunity to listen to music inspired by the abstract minimalism of Donald Judd at the Tate Modern. In the same room as this event, we are moved along the curatorial time-line from Ad Reinhardt's stripped down modernism (that Adorno

would recognise), to the dawn of relational aesthetics, with the mirrored surfaces of Robert Morris incorporating you the viewer in the work. 'You' can also be seen in the mirrored cover of last year's Christmas issue of *Time* magazine, declared person of the year for your sterling unpaid work on Web 2.0. But sociability, even the kind produced by music, has never been unproblematic for power, as the essentially disciplinary nature of the discourses around the crowd and music reveal. At least until now. So what do art, music and Web 2.0 have to say to each other and about us?

Zombie 2

In commercial TV, wealth is circulated in two subsystems – one that produces the programmes and sells them to TV companies, and the second where TV companies sell the viewers watching them to the advertisers. Web 2.0 dispenses with the first subsystem; you provide the content for free, leaving only the second need to 'monetise eyeballs' in MySpace co-founder Chris deWolfe's parlance. These eyeballs are doubly monetised because they also provide the basis for the stock market values of companies currently sucking in the dumb money (preparatory to rinsing it out). Several Wall Street finance houses encourage the reading of Charles MacKay's *Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds* with its histories of Tulipomania and the South Sea Bubble, so that staff recognise the system is irrational and unstable. It creates profits because it is irrational (as long as faith is high the value remains high) and unstable (as soon as it goes value collapses), it is a pyramid scheme (the smart money takes the difference and later the dumb money pays). If it were only the value of the work of western 'creatives' being rinsed out (and more and more of the work of the West is in these unstable intangibles – brand, goodwill, design) it would not be such a tragedy, but capitalism is a global system.

This new sociability of Web 2.0, hosted on big corporate owned servers, is the defeat of an arguably better working and more democratic ideal – peer-to-peer, strangled in its musical infancy by the not so invisible hand of copyright. Napster may be back from the dead and charging, but the music industry's worst nightmare – free music – is still on the prowl, its defeat is partial and temporary. In the long run, with digital copying and distribution effectively free it is difficult to see how it can be otherwise. It is no surprise to find that MySpace is a direct response to peer-to-peer's 'defeat' and the changes a new format has brought about in the music industry. Indeed it may be the prototype for further strategies of control for software, films etc.

Chris DeWolfe says the following:

Tom [MySpace co-founder number 2] ... [understands] ... what emerging musicians go through. He understands the frustration. I understood the macro trends of the music business. Labels were signing fewer acts, giving them less time to prove themselves and spending less money on marketing. We saw a need to develop a community for artists to get their music out to the masses ... In the early days, there were a lot of bands signing up ...

Deepening the work of Jacques Attali, Michael Chanan shows music as a constellation of antagonistic technologies, markets, commodities and services repeatedly pulled apart and remade by new technologies (from musical notation and printing, to analogue recording and broadcasting). The combination of music software, peer-to-peer and MP3 (going beyond radio and cassette before it) threatened to unleash a world of free music, by uniting the recording, promotion, distribution and consumption of music in one machine (the home computer). This led to a fight between the large multinational electronics companies producing the computers and MP3 players, and their subdivisions marketing the recordings, owning the copyright or managing the artists. The record companies lost and

are fighting a rearguard action. Unlike the vastly profitable days of CDs, when record companies could be subsidised with new money made by re-releasing old material in the new formats, profits have fallen drastically and more bad news may be on the way.

Zombie 3

As with many new technologies, the founders have not understood the transformation they are unleashing. Bands were actively recruited by MySpace as 'early adopters', they chose it as a promotional tool (into the music industry) but also because they claimed to want a more direct relationship with their fans outside of the record companies' control. MP3, by calling into question the economics of the music industry, has revealed the chronic dissatisfaction of artists, songwriters and producers. A dissatisfaction of which they will be doubly free, for soon this relationship will be all that bands have left to sell to their fans. The apparent defence of copyright by the music industry masks its relaxation – on MySpace, on YouTube. Paying for the right to make a copy is what makes music a commodity – fans demanded an extension of the right to make a copy as 'fair use' and they got it.

Recently at MIDEM, the music licensing conference in Cannes, Jacques Attali joked that other than playing gigs soon all that bands will be able to sell is the right to attend a rehearsal or go to dinner with them. He was immediately handed a business card for a scheme enabling just that [www.artistshare.com]:

[participate in] the one thing that cannot be downloaded ... that the artist can hold on to ... the creative process [sic].

The demand to pay for music is being resituated as active consumption – if you love your band you'll pay. Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the future of the music industry, it is, in its lack of anything material to sell, relational aesthetics, and the institution that will enable this is not the record companies or the art galleries but Web 2.0. The moral of the story is be careful what you ask for.

A fetish for 'liveness' pervades recorded music's last hours as commodity, from the downsized calculated naiveté and acoustic instrumentation of new folk and singer-songwriters, to the live show – formerly an expensive means to advertise the CD, but now the one means bands have to earn money. Music fans habits have been conditioned by scarcity, the need to collect – what happens when this era is over? A whole industry has fossilised round this habit, it will take time to go whether it fights or not. The surplus of recorded sound on the computers of the world cannot be potlatched because to make a digital copy does not destroy the original or reduce its value. Music cannot even be given away because nothing is lost, it can only be shared in the weakest sense of the term. The CD is beginning to look like so much landfill, and has already been pronounced dead by the departing head of EMI. Why even download anything when you can stream it? Recorded music is dematerialising beyond even the MP3 on your hard drive.

The relationship of music and art affects the light they throw on each other. Both have their origin in magic and in cult and have separated themselves (by becoming commodities and developing formal autonomy) and become the autonomous discourses that we currently know. During the 20th century, music, through recording, embraced reproduction and thus became mass culture, seemingly stripped of its autonomy; merely a commodity. Art defined itself in opposition, insisting on its aura, on its autonomy, its commodity nature hidden. At the same time, art, in denial of its commodity status, tried to free itself from its autonomy with conceptual art, performance art, relational art, all leading to the evaporation of the art object into the one-off happening (but this was no barrier to the documentation

being successfully commodified).

Recorded music is most often consumed a-socially (via the CD played in privacy, the walkman, the MP3 download), but its logics of consumption continue to be social (the Top Ten, pirate radio shout outs, the distorted MP3 on the phone on the bus). Web 2.0 is no different in its logics of consumption. It is awash with counters, Top Tens, customers who bought this also bought, algorithms designed to predict what would appeal to you, a need to affirm some kind of community, to introduce the possibility of a chance encounter or a serendipitous discovery.

Zombie 5

Zizek has written on the psychological dangers of blurring real and virtual identities, but perhaps another danger lies in online counters functioning as pecking orders. MySpace (a place for friends) just IS a giant popularity contest (Rank User – has no one seen *Carrie*?); this is the sole criterion and validation. Indeed this extends to news stories about it which are nothing but ‘so-and-so is becoming very popular’. The actual experience of MySpace is of slow uploading, fending off the advances of strangers with 970 friends (surely that’s enough?), Truman-show style viral advertising (this week I’m listening to...), kudos counters to help you fine tune your product, but above all social anxiety (only 5 hits – I must persuade my friends to join). The thin line between this and vanity publishing risks the exposure of our ignoble motives. All this encourages self-reification with a Skinnerian thoroughness.

Social networking websites are experiments, like the relational art Jacques Rancière identifies as the invitation/encounter, the use that will be made of the site cannot be predicted. One of Bebo’s [<http://www.bebo.com/>] founders describes the problem as like inviting people to Welwyn Garden City – it’s artificial so it won’t grow unless it is ‘seeded’ and ‘nurtured’. Almost all will emphasise that they don’t want to be ‘over-controlling’, yet these are family malls, almost all ban pornography (before music, the motor of Web 1.0). James Wales of Wikipedia likens its constitution to the unwritten one of the UK that evolved over time, and fellow developers insist they build what the users ask for. What people ‘ask for’, even for themselves, is made over in the image of the commodity, and every click is marketing information. Given the fink link on each photo – ‘report inappropriate image’ – it is a more controlled environment than any shopping mall.

When Jaron Lanier calls Wikipedia and much of Web 2.0 ‘Digital Maoism’ we know we are into a rerun of modernist disdain for the masses. Jaron attempts to hook us in by presenting himself as wronged by Wikipedia which persists in describing him as a film maker, when he has repudiated his Maya Deren phase and would prefer to be known for his term ‘virtual reality’. He changes it, someone changes it back (an ‘edit war’ but, though he doesn’t say it, he’s being ‘cyber-bullied’). To my friends, however, Jaron is the man who beheaded Sony’s robot cat at the ICA by picking it up by the scruff of the neck. This is Gombrowicz’s ‘interpersonal form’ (see ‘First Cut is the Deepest’, *Mute* Vol2 #4), the extent to which we are created by others, which Bourriaud claims as the substrate of relational art. Despite this Jaron is unhappy to be misrepresented and allowed no recourse, as was Gombrowicz. He is clear the ‘collective intelligence’ harnessed in Web 2.0, the counters, the meta-searches compiling ‘best-of’ lists, just generates stupidity, that having large sites visited by everybody just generates traffic jams on the internet.

In comparison cyber-theorist John Brockman is the Elias Canetti of this generation of crowd theorists pointing out that crowds can (sometimes) be good. In his version ‘Here Comes Everybody’, the masses do not simply invade the net, they are also changed by the experience. But this is no more to the taste of the digerati (with their evolutionary systems, algorithms, positivism, signal processing

metaphors and fetish for salons of ‘smart’ people) than it was to the 19th century intellectuals (ditto...) at the birth of mass culture. John Carey in his *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice Among the Literary Intelligentsia, 1880-1939* points out in this steampunk version that the masses were symbolised by tinned food (a crowd metaphor that Canetti would recognise), and this image recurs in the digital age as spam. Monty Python’s song echoing in the sound of senseless repetition clunking onto your hard drive. Indeed, like the fertile text of Gogol’s *Dead Souls*, the new blogging tools enable the creation of fictitious people with fictitious opinions – splogs or blams. It seems that no sooner has man created a new digital environment than it starts to be swamped like some re-run of the magic porridge pot (and, again, the moral of the story is ‘be careful what you ask for’). In digitally reproduced excess even human opinion becomes toxic.

In his introduction to *Intellectuals and the Masses*, Carey surveys modernist theories of the mass (José Ortega y Gasset, Friedrich Nietzsche, and more narrowly on crowds – Gustave Le Bon and Sigmund Freud) and finds them overwhelmingly hostile – so hostile in fact that he can only read Canetti’s enthusiasm for the crowd as inconsistent rather than oppositional. For Canetti, the desire to become a crowd is something fundamental to humans (perhaps their species being), and is often achieved through music, from the symphony orchestra to the Maori’s Haka war dance. Canetti’s autobiography reveals two things that encouraged him to think about crowds *as if they had a will of their own*. One was being part of the mob that burnt down the Vienna Palace of Justice on 15 July 1927, (fire – another great crowd metaphor), the other was Pieter Breugel’s painting *The Triumph of Death* in which thousands of skeletons, formed into armies and churches more vital than the living, pull them over into death. This is where we first meet the modern crowd metaphor par excellence – the crowd of the dead, the legions of the damned, the humble zombie, – and yet until recently they were a sluggish lot.

The term zombie entered the English language as a result of slavery, in Robert Southey’s *History of Brazil*. William B. Seabrook’s book *The Magic Island*, a first-person account of Haitian voodoo rituals (like Maya Deren’s much later *Divine Horsemen*), inspired *White Zombie*, 1931, the first zombie movie. In this we see a sugar plantation owned by Bela Lugosi and staffed by zombies. One of the shambling beasts falls into the grinding machinery and becomes at one with the product. This images anxiety about stolen labour on the part of both producer and consumer embodied in what at once unites them and keeps them separate – the commodity. By 1968 and George Romero’s *Night of the Living Dead*, filmed in de-industrialising Pittsburgh, their passivity was the passivity of the mass non-violent resisters campaigning for civil rights. They lumbered because they were inevitable, the mass in human flesh to be sadistically destroyed, interested only in increasing the number of zombies – apocryphally by eating their victim’s brains. By *Dawn of the Dead*, 1978, their very existence is overproduction: ‘When there’s no more room in hell, the dead will walk the Earth’ – zombies were the *proletarian dead proletarian shopping*. ‘But why have they all come to the Mall?’ asks one of the living, ‘I don’t know... I guess it must have meant something to them in their lives.’ For Web 2.0 users, like the human survivors in *Dawn*, incarcerated by the zombie hordes in a shopping mall where everything is free, this anxiety of stolen labour can only increase (despite the muzak). Beneath the glossy reflective surface of the commodity is putrifying zombie flesh – humanity is not superfluous in the age of globalised production but only its ‘creative’ part is recognised (leading to its haunting by the latest in a long line of unquiet Marxist spectres).

From *White Zombie* onwards film makers unerringly return to music to suggest the lost echo of humanity (as if there were a song that could bring the dead back to life) – the scene from which I quote in the epigraph of this article, like its equivalent scene in *Blade Runner*, is of a man and a woman at a piano. In *Day of the Dead*, a later Romero movie, the remnants of humanity are hidden underground trying to train the zombies to do useful work by means of conditioning à la B.F. Skinner’s fictional behaviourist utopia in *Walden Two*. The zombies are often left unattended listening to classical music

on their walkmans – one perks up and begins to sing along, but then loses the signal and is a zombie again.

Movie by movie the zombies are getting more like us, or at least faster and smarter. In exile from Hollywood, zombie maestro George Romero is in Ontario filming a straight to DVD release with a hand-held DV camera – *Diary of the Dead*. Yes, there is a MySpace page, but the one prediction I'd make is that by the end of the film the zombies will be filming it (and posting it up like the cannibal happy slappers they are).

Zombie 7

It is important to move our understanding of zombies out of ritual denunciation. There is pleasure in zombiedom and it lies in an infantilisation, in a Svejikian resistance, in an inability to respond fully to the social imperatives of advertising and shopping: a zombie's eyeball may be in or out but it cannot be monetised. Indeed there's even a variety of flashmob called a zombie walk. In the largest of these to date, on 29 October, 2006, 894 participants gathered at the Monroeville Mall in Pittsburg, one of the first big malls and the set of *Dawn of the Dead*. The flashmob, an activity originally intended to satirise crowd stupidity has, in succumbing to its undoubted pleasures, become a critical practice.

I started in an art gallery so I'll finish there (they're getting to be popular places as the fetish for creativity spreads). In Windsor, Ontario, the locals are embarrassed that their town gallery is in the mall. They shouldn't be, for the art we now possess is entirely made over in the image of the commodity, the only model for cultural life we have left. And yet, as Adorno also argues, Art's Autonomy remains irrevocable. All efforts to restore art by giving it a social function – of which art is itself uncertain and by which it expresses its own uncertainty – are doomed. In the mid-1990s, at Bank's show *Zombie Golf*, plaster cast zombies of the artists wandered round the exhibition space demanding brains. Dave Beech and John Roberts regarded them as simultaneously standing for both the spectre of a repressed aesthetic ideology haunting art and its negation. Art may attempt to finish with it, but aesthetic autonomy has not finished with art.

For Adorno, art in its autonomy reveals its character as surplus labour, produced to meet no real need at all. What is good about art is that it is useless, it is exchange value without use value, it is an 'absolute commodity'. Thus, unlike any other commodity in capitalism, it does not pretend to be of any use and so reveals the excess of products and services round us as likewise useless. Many find this autonomy, or uselessness, deeply disturbing, and wish to get rid of it and give art a use. They do not see this autonomy arising from art's heteronomy (as Adorno does) but as sealing off art within itself – hence art's embrace of non-art is regarded as more hopeful than it really is. For Adorno the production of a work of art cannot be outside capitalism, thus it cannot be produced to meet true needs (as in an artisanal model of production), for no theory of true needs yet exists. Modern art became abstract because of the waning of experience under capitalism (commodification, the dialectic of enlightenment) and cannot directly compensate for these losses. However, art is nothing if not historic material, it is not enough to abstractly negate relational aesthetics as a category and so wish it away, it must be dealt with on its own terms.

For Bourriaud, autonomy and sovereignty are simply 'yesterday's concerns', they have been 'wound up'. Relational aesthetics claim to be heir to an irrationalist tradition (dada, the surrealists, the Situationist International) that resists instrumental rationality's occupation of the social – the dialectic of enlightenment. That rationality is so successful it destroys all cultural practices constitutive of the human, reducing us all to zombiedom. For Bourriaud in considering the place of artworks in the

overall economic system, ‘the work of art represents a social interstice’, a place where the normal laws do not run, explicitly in resistance to this occupation, an art that does not respond ‘to the excess of commodities and signs, but to a lack of connections’ by ‘performing small services in an attempt to restore the social bond.’

What about relational aesthetics? Can it actually do what it claims? Is it a critical practice or merely an aesthetics and an art for the service economy.

Look at the Tate’s *State Britain* exhibit which is poised on this precise point. Peace campaigner Brian Haw’s Parliament Square protest was begun in June 2001 against the economic sanctions in Iraq. Parliament’s ‘Serious Organised Crime and Police Act’ banned unauthorised demonstrations within a one kilometre of it (ah, that evolving British constitution...) and the majority of Haw’s protest banners were removed by the police on 23 May 2006. Mark Wallinger has recreated the demonstration in Tate Britain. For Adorno, the police need not come (again) precisely because it is art and its autonomy remains irrevocable. Yet in Adorno’s work, perhaps, the heteronomy from which autonomy derives is a regulative concept, something he’s not really interested in. For Jacques Rancière there are heterogeneous logics between the forms of art and the forms of non-art, between the two opposed politics of aesthetics; that art either becomes life by not being art (perhaps the political art of the banners themselves), or it does politics by explicitly not doing politics (perhaps the other art in Tate Britain within the 1km zone). For critical art, the realignment of these logics between the art of politics and art with neither side sacrificed is achieved by this collage/juxtaposition. If *State Britain* did not cross the line into the 1km exclusion zone, this recreation of politics would be no more a critique of power than Fischli and Weiss’s recreation of their own studio – only troubling to the extent it is an uncanny double, a zombie. But in crossing the 1km exclusion zone line the artwork may have been sacrificed to politics. And yet even as it is denied or questioned art’s autonomy is being relied upon to create political meaning.

The juxtaposition that is relational art itself has become problematic even to its supporters. Claire Bishop wants good works of art rather than feel good/do good works, to prevent sacrificing the aesthetic to the relational. Conversely Grant Kester seems to want this sacrifice, he wants out from under the aesthetic of art criticism.

The founding of the Arts Council at ‘an arms length’ from government shows that there was a time when the autonomy of art was explicitly required. Yet, if Bishop and Kester agree on only one thing it is that what the Arts Council requires of art now is ‘social inclusion’ and ‘value for money’ – a much more clearly instrumental role for art in delivering government policy – and that relational artists have become complicit in this, drawn in by the shrinkage of both real and discursive public space, by the deficit of politics. In its need to incorporate ‘you the public’ in the work, relational art makes itself useful by attacking the autonomy of the public, driving them into the arms of institutions for funding. Relational art sells its audience to power as crowd control. Kester’s group, Littoral arts still think there is mileage in relational aesthetics through more collaboration, surrendering more to politics – to trade union funding for instance. The people who sell you, ‘the variable capital’, to capital.

In her article ‘The Ethics of Aesthetics’ (*Art Monthly*, March, 2005), Sarah James critiques Bourriaud’s thesis for ‘its complicity with the dominant political status quo’, and also notes a return of Aesthetics as a concern of art. But is this return ‘acquiescence to political entropy’? Just a return to the demand that art produce something beautiful (for sale)? Art has been at war with its autonomy, but its status as absolute commodity (exchange value only) has gone unquestioned and this contains its own dangers – that it may become the model for the rest of the economy. Just as art is heading out of relational aesthetics it seems music and capital are piling in.

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Edward Halperin, *White Zombie*, 1931, is out of copyright and downloadable for free at: <http://www.archive.org/detail/WhiteZombie>

Biog

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Mistaken As Red

By Peter Suchin

With political art now celebrated in galleries and museums all over the world what happens when practices tied to specific struggles and places are institutionalised? At the recent retrospective of textbook political artist, Lorraine Leeson, Peter Suchin uncovers the remains of an earlier discussion

initiated by Art & Language to propose a radical reconsideration of Leeson's art and the terms of the debate

The recent retrospective of the work of Loraine Leeson at London's SPACE studios, *Art for Change*, throws up a number of questions about the efficacy and even the desirability of something one might term, for the sake of convenience at least, 'political art'. This is an issue to which I will return below. Based on a much more substantial exhibition organised by the New Society of Visual Artists in Berlin, 2005, the London show focused upon a number of key projects organised and executed by Leeson in collaboration with her former partner and colleague Peter Dunn. Extracts from and documentation of five periods of work were presented at SPACE: Leeson and Dunn's involvement in the Bethnal Green Hospital Campaign (1977-78), that concerning the East London Health Project (1978-81), the Docklands Community Poster Project which ran for ten years from 1981, 'The Art of Change' (also 1981-1991), and cSPACE, Leeson's still current concern, an organisation she founded in 2002. 'The exhibition', according to the accompanying leaflet, 'celebrates Loraine Leeson as an artist whose work has influenced and supported social change for over thirty years. Leeson's practice, the text tells us, 'is underpinned by a collaborative process which has involved health workers, trade unions, tenants associations, action groups, young people, schools and institutions, as well as other artists and professionals.'

Lorraine Leeson *Art for Change*, Space, London, 2007

Image: Installation view, Loraine Leeson: 'Art for Change', SPACE 2006

A dense and detailed book, similarly celebratory in tone and intent, accompanied the display, its several essays predictably emphasising Leeson's importance as an artist whose practice foregrounds discussion and collaboration over the apparently selfish idiosyncrasies of the artist working in the splendid isolation of the private studio.[1] Grant Kester, in his 'Aesthetic Enactment: Loraine Leeson's Reparative Practice', certainly one of the most perspicacious essays in the volume, emphasises that 'for Leeson the work of art only comes into existence through a process of consultation and reciprocal interaction with collaborators.' Leeson's work...', Kester continues,

has been consistently produced in conjunction with activist groups'schools and, by and large, displayed outside of museums or galleries (on public billboards, in hospitals, community centres and other locations)'her work is unembarrassed by its alliance with broader struggles for social justice, and she views the complex negotiations involved in creating these alliances as an important part of her practice as an artist.[2]

What's 'political' about Leeson's practice then is not only its left-leaning subject matter such as working class struggles against hospital closures and the Thatcher government's deracination of London's East End, but also its very form of production as an acutely collaborative venture, its left-wing credentials being further bolstered by its repeated presentation outside non-art exhibition contexts.

Poster from Bethnal Green Hospital Campaign

Image: Peter Dunn and Loraine Leeson, Exhibition Panel from Bethnal Green Hospital Campaign, 1977-78

In his *Postmodernism, Politics and Art* John Roberts supplies a useful summary of one of Leeson and Dunn's most renowned series of works, the Docklands Community Poster Project, claiming that these large scale photographic montages made in response to the Thatcher government's plans to radically restructure and gentrify an immense tract of East London subsequently known as 'Docklands' had

a clear base in the struggles and experiences of the local working-class community. Working with various resident groups, the local borough, political pressure groups and individuals, Dunn and Leeson mapped out a shared knowledge of what were felt to be the most important issues affecting the community in its struggle against the development ... Measuring 18 ft by 12 ft and constructed from large photographic sections â the photo-murals combined various drawn and photographic elements representing various scenes from the labour history of the area and of the social consequences of the development â Unlike conventional hoardings or community murals â the posters were completed on a gradual basis so as to establish an active narrative interest in the workâs progress. As such the hoardings functioned as both an information board and as a symbolic site of resistance to the unbridled development.[3]

What this work showed, Roberts goes on to observe,

is how one of the most successful ways of building cultural alliances between artists and workers is to ally photographic practices with specific long-term political struggles. ... by bringing the skills and competences of many people into common focus, a raising of the real political differences within the community is brought into play ... [developing] in classic socialist democratic terms, organically from the constituency which it sets out to serve.

Lorraine Leeson and Peter Dunn, *Big Money is Moving In*, Docklands Community Poster Project, 1981â89

Image: Peter Dunn and Lorraine Leeson, *Big Money is Moving in* Docklands Community Poster Project, 1981â91

Roberts, an obvious supporter of the Docklands poster campaign, further notes that, irrespective of the apparently communal nature of this practice, it was Dunn and Leeson who âactually produce[d] the images and who invariably set the agendas for discussion.â He sees one of the most important results of the project as being the deployment of photography as a âpedagogical community resourceâ, arguing that

if consumerism destroys other knowledges, or rather the cultural spaces where they might be produced and exchanged, the active creation of a context where learning politically in the face of art might begin is genuinely progressive.

Robertsâ remarks point to several noteworthy features of the Docklands work, including its close alignment with the values of the people it was intended to serve and support and its emphatically didactic nature. His point about how it was Leeson and Dunn who physically made the posters and influenced their final formal disposition (as well as their thematic content) raises, however, various problems around the themes of the authorship and ownership of this practice. Whilst it is one thing for SPACE studios to present a range of works largely instigated by Leeson and Dunn over a 30 year period, it is quite another to contextualise the show with material that insists on its collaborative nature but then only place Leesonâs name on the wall in any prominent way. Many of the individual labels in *Art for Change* bore Dunnâs name too, but adjacent to the exhibitionâs title at the entrance to the gallery was Leesonâs name alone. Similarly, although Dunn is represented in the publication his (I would think extensive) contribution is very much played down, his main presence there â apart from via the images he most certainly co-authored â being in the form of a four-page interview, and even this is ominously titled âCuts of a Conversation with Peter Dunnâ. Not only does there appear to have been an act of erasure involved in terms of the apparently considerable number of collaborators with Leeson who were mostly not named in any of the literature related to the exhibition, but the chief co-producer of the photographs, videos, posters and pamphlets *Art for Change* purports to represent

received only the most minimal of billings.

Loraine Leeson and Peter Dunn, *Whats Going On? Docklands Community Poster Project*, 1981-89
Image: Peter Dunn and Loraine Leeson, *Whats Going On? Docklands Community Poster Project*, 1981-91

This foregrounding of Leeson over all other participants seems most curious for a practice that heavily trades on its implicit critique of the conventional ideology of celebrity and the too often extant self-importance of the artist. At least in the book Leeson has the good grace to point out that when it came to working with a number of schoolgirls on a project that utilised Stanley Spencer's painting 'The Resurrection, Cookham' (1924-27) as a point of departure for a major communally-executed work it was she, Dunn and Colin Grigg, the then head of the Tate Gallery's education department, who selected the work without consulting their co-collaborators. Leeson was relieved, reports Carmen Morsch, 'when the students accepted the painting for themselves.'^[4] It was also Morsch who revealed, during a gallery talk at SPACE on the 19th of January, that about 90 per cent of the Berlin version of *Art for Change* had not been included in the London show due in part to lack of available room, but also because it was felt that in Leeson's home territory of London much of the contextualising material presented in Berlin would be superfluous. But this was not the case; rather, a greater showing of the contextualising documentation from Leeson's complicated and extensive practice would have made the practice itself look more like a series of interventionist strategies whose common thread was the visual image and its relation to text, instead of putting an artistic emphasis upon the works presented. As *Art & Language* (hereafter A&L) accurately stated in their seminal commentary upon socially-concerned art and its implications and ideologies, Art teachers may achieve quite a lot qua art teachers but not while they are pretending they are Artists, somehow determined in art history, not as society's alternative ideologists, 'imagists', determined by the bureaucratic restrictions of their jobs 'Exhibitions of art-for-people, love-the-people curators and help-the-people critics must be seen as essentially revitalisers of bourgeois subjectivist or idealist 'disciplines' 'The result of socially progressive art ought to be less not more exhibitions, less not more experts on socially progressive art.'^[5]

Installation view, Loraine Leeson: 'Art for Change', SPACE 2006
Image: Installation view, Loraine Leeson: 'Art for Change', SPACE 2006

This comes from an amended version of a paper given at the Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, in 1978 addressing various 'socially-concerned' exhibitions of the time, including *Art for Whom?*, held at the Serpentine Gallery, London, curated by Richard Cork, and in which Leeson and Dunn participated. Indeed A&L must be directly alluding to their work when they write

No verbal exchange, no horror-shock art work, no imitation of Heartfield, and a fortiori no smug managerial distribution of culture to the people will substitute for historical processes.'^[6]

The influence of John Heartfield can be clearly recognised within Dunn and Leeson's work of this period and Leeson herself cites him as one of several German artists whose work was important for her when she moved to Berlin in 1975.'^[7]

Loraine Leeson and Peter Dunn, *Housing Sequence*, Docklands Community Poster Project, 1981-89
Image: Peter Dunn and Loraine Leeson, *Housing Sequence* Docklands Community Poster Project, 1981-91

As A&L also comically but pertinently point out in 'Art for Society',

Britain is full of teachers pretending to be 'artists', 'Artists' pretending to be French Philosophers, curators pretending to be revolutionaries, etc., etc. Now bourgeois art teachers pretend they are socialist artists! It is the same recurring problem: the historical conditions they are really in are ignored in favour of the historical conditions they want, need, believe, feel intimidated into supporting, feel as though they ought to be in. [8]

A&L call the kind of people they are thinking of here 'agents of bourgeois legitimisation' and it is not difficult to see why. [9] To make interventions (to use Leeson's own term) into the dominant practices and conventions of art-making may have far-reaching effects but not if these are carried out as artistic acts which by definition retain the established hierarchies of expert and non-expert, artist and non-artist, 'representor' and represented. 'One thing that is needed', as A&L again acutely observe, 'A A A

is a workable, explicit distinction between the curatorial sphere of legitimation and the dialectical process of developing competence in the course of the class struggle. [10]

'Art is marginal, to say the least, to active politics', they add. Art for Change is an exhibition and publication that constructs an account of Leeson's activities as being those of a significant artist, when her importance is in fact much more that of an influential teacher. [11] This is not to suggest that either she or Dunn are the 'bourgeois art teachers' described by A&L, but it is to emphasise that some kind of political and artistic readjustment was carried out in and around the exhibition Art for Change. Notwithstanding the importance of A&L's critique of Cork's 1978 show and the points it raised in direct opposition to the claims of critical purchase made then and in 2006 for practices such as that of Leeson and Dunn, no mention of this short but critically far-reaching text is made in the pages of the Leeson volume. Nor is much space given to other very relevant cultural operations such as that of constructivism in post-revolutionary Russia, when a number of artists began to think of themselves not as artist-individuals so much as workers skilled in the visual arts who could deploy their highly-developed technical abilities and intellectual interests in the service of a post-revolutionary culture.

Docklands Community Poster Project, People's Plan Launch poster

Image: Docklands Community Poster Project, People's Plan launch poster 1981-91

A third elision enacted by the Leeson publication involves Walter Benjamin's famous essay in defence of 'The Author as Producer' (1934), in which Benjamin is at pains to stress not only the importance of the socialist artist acting within their practice in a manner involving an act of commitment to socialist principles, but also the transformative role of such a practice. [12] 'What we must demand from the photographer', Benjamin proposes,

is the ability to put such a caption beneath his picture as will rescue it from the ravages of modishness and confer upon it a revolutionary use-value. [13]

He goes on to state that contemporary writers (who are the central subject of his paper) should themselves take photographs, thus progressively breaking down the established categories of 'photographer', 'writer', and 'artist'. To destroy bourgeois categories of expertise is in Benjamin's view itself a radical act. But in the latter-day context of Leeson and Dunn's Docklands work the expertise and status of the 'producers' of the visual work offered in the service of socialist action against Thatcher and her agents is ultimately retained, and, in the display and publication connected with SPACE, more or less given back to these very authoritative 'authors'. The work in question either was or was not collaborative and communal; if the former then to celebrate Leeson, and to a lesser degree, Dunn's contribution is to enact a kind of oxymoron, a false claim of attribution and

expertise.

Celebration is in any case itself problematic, notably when applied to visual practices. In their 1988 essay 'British Political Art at Coventry' Susan and Terry Atkinson raise a series of issues which bear more than a passing relevance to Leeson's practice and career.[14] For one thing, they note, with respect to the already-cited spate of 'political art' exhibitions, that 'It was predictable as long ago as the 'Art for Whom' exhibition that 'dissent' would become a pretty dull but useful commodity in capitalist culture in the late eighties.'[15]. This is because, as the Atkinsons elsewhere in their text explain:

Consumer society requires an acquiescence to established political authority - this is a truism, but one often overlooked by the self-regard and heated speechifying of conventional political dissent. Even as part of its consumer spectacle the politically established authority must have its managed dissenters as part of its cover for its own determination to resist any challenge to the maintenance of its sovereign power. Political artists, affirming and acclaiming their dissenting roles, are some of these delectable items of consumer cover.[16]

And also:

If the category 'political art' ever did have any critical function it should have been 'to attempt to state the impossibility of affirming the political world in which we live. This would have required some cognitive competence, not to mention ingenuity. It seems obvious then that such disaffirmation will include the art world, and especially include the category 'political art'.'[17]

What is being argued for by Susan and Terry Atkinson is, then, not 'political art' but a practice that disaffirms the very culture that places art in a position of importance:

Criticising capitalism with the critical grounds that capitalism willingly and knowingly yields is neither here nor there. The minimum condition required is a critique that capitalism is strategically sufficiently unsure of as to have to make the effort, develop a new strategy, to appropriate the work.[18]

So-called political art is part of the problem of how one might develop a genuinely political practice involving 'art', not any kind of solution or answer to this 'predicament'. [19] The pointing-up of the necessity of developing a critique that causes capitalism something of a rupture or substantial awkwardness, requiring it to develop new strategies of incorporation, is of interest when considering the formal status of Leeson and Dunn's Docklands montages, which draw heavily on works issued 50 years before by John Heartfield. Such pseudo-Heartfields may have been easily legible to the workers who were involved in the protests against redevelopment but this ease of reading, the non-innovatory mode of address, is itself non-transformative. In adopting an already-established and uncontroversial visual convention it does nothing to extend the parameters of meaning within or around the visual work of art. Perhaps the 'collaborators' with whom Leeson and Dunn worked in the 1980s learned something about the history of art - about Berlin Dada and the political affiliations of some of the artists involved in it - but what was assembled and presented by Leeson and Dunn lacked the implicitly radical formal innovation that was one of Dada's most important traits.

Installation view, Loraine Leeson: 'Art for Change', SPACE 2006

Image: Installation view, Loraine Leeson: 'Art for Change', SPACE 2006

In her essay in Art for Change on Leeson's work as a teacher, 'to take all that learning and put it together with all that art', Carmen Morsch is keen to indicate that

After the change in government in 1997, the culture politics changed as well â [Today] the potential of art as a means for education and social inclusion has become the most important criteria [sic] for public funding of a project â What was in the â90s still unique [i.e. Leesonâs position as an avant-garde teacher] â now belongs more and more to the daily business of English art institutions, which today, can gain artists with an international reputation as collaborators for their educational projects.[20]

The passage is clumsily translated but its import is clear: artist-teachers such as Leeson are no longer in opposition to the official channels of education and culture but now operate in line with established models of induction into high culture. There is a perverse reading of Leeson and Dunn as avant garde artists here. I call it perverse because, although the concept of the avant garde is very much to do with instigating practices which are only later taken up within the mainstream, with therefore being in an important way âahead of oneâs timeâ, that term is also closely indexed to socialist values and to going against the grain of the established order, an order that is, in the literature of the avant garde, implicitly right wing. The paradox and perversion here is in the fact that the present Labour government is itself largely void of conventional leftist intentions. Though it may relentlessly prattle on about constructing an egalitarian culture, such a thing is precisely the opposite of what it in reality seeks to achieve. It is rather unfortunate, then, that Loraine Leesonâs current alignment with New Labourâs lip-service socialism can only serve to smooth â and indeed consolidate â Labourâs false image as promoters of equality, access and integration. Encouraging schoolchildren to make âartâ about their experience of disenfranchisement and exclusion is, intentionally or not, nothing less than the neutralising of dissent in advance of its potential manifestation.[21]

Lorraine Leeson: Art for Change SPACE Studios, London, 11 November 2006 â 20 January 2007

FOOTNOTES

1. Loraine Leeson, *Art for Change: Works from 1975 â 2005*, Neue Gesellschaft fur Bildende Kunst, Berlin, 2005. Although Leeson is given as sole author on the bookâs cover it is in fact an anthology of writings and interviews by diverse hands (hereafter referred to in the notes as *Art for Change*).
2. *Ibid.*, p.76.
3. John Roberts, *Postmodernism, Politics and Art*, Manchester University Press, 1990. This and all other quotations from Roberts in the present essay are from pp. 97 â 98 of this volume.
4. *Art for Change*, p.124.
5. *Art & Language*, âArt for Society?â, in *Art-Language*, Vol. 4, No. 4, June 1980, p.9.
6. *Ibid.*, p.7.
7. *Art for Change*, p.10.
8. *A&L*, pp.8-9. One does not wish to belittle the role of teaching as a means of interrupting received ideas about culture or about the meanings to which specific works are attached. One way of doing this might be to look in detail at how specific visual works are assembled, unpacking, in discussion with oneâs students or pupils, the various devices utilised in the making of the work. Roland Barthesâ essay âRhetoric of the Imageâ (1964), included in his *Image-Music-Text* (Fontana, 1977) is paradigmatic in this respect, as is Judith Williamsonâs *Decoding Advertisements* (Marion Boyars, 1978).

9. Ibid., p.9.
10. A&L, p.1.
11. Ibid., p.3.
12. Walter Benjamin, "The Author as Producer", in Walter Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht*, NLB, 1973.
13. Ibid., p.95.
14. Susan Atkinson, Terry Atkinson, "British Political Art at Coventry", in Terry Atkinson, *Mute 1*, Galleri Prag (Copenhagen), 1988.
15. Ibid., p.18.
16. Ibid., pp.17-18.
17. Ibid., p.18.
18. Ibid., p.18.
19. Ibid., p.18. See also Terry Atkinson, "Predicament", in Terry Atkinson, *Brit Art*, Gimpel Fils (London), 1987.
20. *Art for Change*, p.128.
21. For a discussion of the neutralising of dissent with respect to the broader sphere of philanthropic and charitable institutions, see Demetra Kotouza, "Lies and Mendicity", *Mute*, Vol. 2, No. 3, 2006, also available at <http://www.metamute.org/en/lies-and-Mendicity>

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Take Me I'm Yours: Neoliberalising the Cultural Institution

By Anthony Davies

While talk of precariousness is rife in cultural and political forums, "progressive" institutions do not always practice what they preach. Anthony Davies looks behind the scenes of "radical reformism"

In March 2006, the Museum of Contemporary Art, Barcelona (MACBA), flagship "progressive art institution", staged the second part of *Another Relationality*, a conference and workshop project examining the legacy of institutional critique and the new social and political functions of art. The event included presentations from sociologist Maurizio Lazzarato, critic-activist Brian Holmes and economist Antonella Corsani - all broadly associated with debates on the role of creativity, knowledge and subjectivity within contemporary capitalism.

[IMAGE]

Image: MCBA subvertisement by ctrl-i

Just prior to a conference workshop in which they had been invited to participate, local activist collective ctrl-i issued a public declaration of withdrawal, accusing the museum of complicity with the very neoliberal imperatives it purported to critique. On the surface at least, their statement – including the trenchant line – ‘Talking about precariousness in the McBa is like taking a nutrition seminar at McDonald’s’ – had the hallmarks of a typical struggle against institutionalisation. But there was one key difference: ctrl-i is partly made up of temp workers formerly employed by the museum and not, as might be expected, an unaligned or ‘autonomous’ body resisting co-optation. It was moreover their knowledge and critique of precarious labour conditions and cultural neoliberalisation in Barcelona that was to form the basis of their contribution. The collective had been born in direct response to an earlier MACBA event, El Precariat Social Rebel, where, under the auspices of activist network The Chainworkers, they spoke out against the museum’s dubious employment practices and later gave up their jobs in circumstances that remain largely unclear.[1] While ctrl-i’s unique status as temp workers and local activists may have prompted the invite from MACBA, it also gave the group licence to dramatise ‘Another Relationality’s’ underlying themes in an emphatic act of withdrawal.[2]

To understand the context for this signal act of protest on the part of a group of culture sector workers, and to give a material basis to the discussions on institutionalisation currently taking place in publications such as *Art Monthly* and *Mute*, we need first to look at the uneven process of neoliberal restructuring as it courses its way through cultural and educational institutions.[3] According to Marxist geographer David Harvey, neoliberalism’s trademark rhetoric that human wellbeing is contingent on developing individual entrepreneurial freedoms – chiefly the freedom to operate in the market – should be contrasted with the unprecedented ‘creative’ destruction that accompanies neoliberal reform. In *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, Harvey describes how this process results in an erosion of existing social relations, ways of life and thought, as the market gradually penetrates and puts to work the ‘common sense’ way that many of us live in and engage with the world. The state’s role becomes principally that of ensuring the proper functioning of markets, setting up institutional frameworks which ultimately guarantee the ‘maintenance, reconstitution and restoration of elite class power’. It is difficult to track these developments across different regional and national contexts, however, and this is exacerbated by the multifaceted, hybrid and localised manner in which they unfold, another symptom/condition of the process Harvey terms ‘uneven geographical development’.[4]

[IMAGE]

Image: subvertisement by ctrl-i

Where do state-funded cultural and educational institutions fit into all this? What role do they play? At a point where many have been set to work by capital in ever more ‘innovative’ (read: commercialised) ways, a host of contradictions and antagonisms have surfaced. While some now openly promote the liberating capacity of new revenue streams linked to consultancy, outsourcing, business incubation and enterprise activities, others seek out more tactical models of engagement, looking to new constituencies and standards of practice to offset the crisis of legitimation which opens up as institutions are subjected to neoliberal agendas.

An attempt to address some of these issues in the European cultural sector can be found in *European Cultural Policies 2015: A Report with Scenarios on the Future of Public Funding for Contemporary Art in Europe*. [5] This publication acted as the cornerstone of the International Artist Studio Program in Sweden’s (Iaspis) contribution to the Frieze Art Fair, 2005. Against the backdrop of an earlier

rejected proposal to the Frieze Foundation, state-funded Iaspis decided to pursue a more general enquiry into the cultural and political questions opened up by their compromised participation in the fair, focusing specifically on its exemplary and problematic identity as a 'public-private partnership'. [6] In collaboration with the European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies (eipcp) and London-based design group 'Åke, Iaspis went on to commission reports from eight local experts on key social, political and economic determinants of cultural policy in seven regions across the EU. The reports integrated hypothetical scenarios of what the cultural landscape might look like in 2015 as well as introductions by Iaspis director Maria Lind and eipcp director Gerald Raunig. These latter two texts illustrate the grand ambitions of the project: to influence and possibly reform European cultural policy, and to strengthen radical-reformist elements of the cultural-political discourse in Europe. [7]

[IMAGE]

Image: diagram by Nils Norman and Dismal Cartographics, November 2006

In spite or rather, because of its political ambitions, European Cultural Policies 2015's focus on the meshing of the state, its institutional apparatus, and the market elides any significant debate on class power within art institutions themselves and across the commercial sectors with which they interact. This makes the underlying economic disparities and antagonisms associated with neoliberalism's specific mode of 'uneven development' impossible to gauge. It also obscures the interests of those whom the report's findings ultimately serve.

Along with the policy minutiae, however, we do get an insight into the inter-institutional faultlines opening up across Europe. The report's account of the breakdown of Frieze/Iaspis's earlier collaboration and the subsequent soul-searching undertaken by Iaspis director Maria Lind and her colleagues is symptomatic of such conflicts. 'Progressive' institutional voices, mostly those in the upper echelons (directors, key administrators and curators), in conjunction with a new type of defector academic/activist communication consultant to the prince look for new operational models to open up a critical engagement with the institution's complicity in cultural neoliberalisation. [8] Lind's introduction to 2015 registers Iaspis's discomfort regarding the 'collaboration' with Frieze while the report itself atones by disclosing the financial details of the project. It's a characteristic deflective move. Frieze Art Fair's enthusiastic adoption of corporate values, dramatically high turnover and audience figures, together with the generally porous membrane separating its commercial and non-commercial activities, become the anti-model of neoliberal institutional practice, the vanguard of the 'almost completely instrumentalised' cultural/art dystopia for which we are notionally all destined in 2015.

The 2015 report contrasts this nightmare vision of neoliberal cultural lockdown with a wet dream of agile, socially responsible and responsive transnational infrastructures - something like eipcp's ever-expanding network of 'Co-organisers', 'Associated Partners', etc. [9] Behind its critical reflections on cultural policy there lies a bid for future state funding. The report's not so tacit conclusion is that the European Commission should reconsider its priorities and shift monies away from the big players and richer member states (read: UK plc., Frieze & Co.) and over towards 'responsible actors' (read: Iaspis/eipcp) and smaller self-organising networks.

This goes some way to explaining the absence of any debate in the report on wage and labour relations within art institutions themselves. It also throws up other questions. For instance, given the EU's aim of promoting the transnational dissemination of culture as a catalyst for socio-economic development and social integration, and its funding of both Frieze and eipcp, which of the two operational models

delivered the most 'European Added Value'?[10] The introduction to 2015 threw up a series of binaries: Iaspis-eipcp versus Frieze Art Fair; public versus public-private partnership; self-organised versus instrumentalised; institutions acting as 'responsible actors' versus institutions as mere 'facilitators'. However, these alternatives should not be read as divergent paths but as coexistent forms of neoliberalism, evolving at uneven rates and in different phases perhaps, but all moving in the same direction. Each leads towards the same future 'one with a human face, the other without' as various institutional actors become the unacknowledged legislators of neoliberalism and work to pioneer a socially acceptable form of its hegemony.

[IMAGE]

Image: MACBA Barcelona

This process sees a proliferation of transnational infrastructures connecting art institutions up with self-organised (activist) networks. As a tendency it can be tracked back at least as far as the earlier institutional incorporation of activist strategies in the late 1990s-early 2000s with MACBA frequently being cited as one of the first institutions to spearhead this with their Direct Action as One of the Fine Arts workshop in 2000 and Las Agencias (The Agencies) in mid 2001.[11] However, the consolidation of left radical-reformist agendas and coalitions at the first European Social Forum in Florence in November 2002 provides the more obvious ideological blueprint for the type of 'critical' policy alternatives found in 2015. Around this time, eipcp also launched its 'Republicart Manifesto', setting the tone and operational parameters of a three-year, EU-funded programme of events, web essays and conferences. This hauled a range of micro-institutional programmes and discourses into its investigation of the 'development of interventionist and activist practices of public art'. The manifesto also claimed to pose a corrective to the dialectical cul-de-sacs and 'revolutionary pathos' characterising '90s political art. It explicitly rejects 'reforming a form of state', but nevertheless lays out a road map that would later enable state-funded institutions to harness some of the provisional overlaps between their activities and those of social and political movements.[12]

Eipcp continues to function as the project leader in a transnational cartel of institutions and individuals, all of whom feed into its web portals Republicart (2002-05), Transform (2005-2008) and Translate (2005-), and back out, to conferences, symposia, exhibitions and workshops (see diagram). The network is now positioned at the institutional epicentre of a number of European cultural debates on progressive and radical reformist cultural strategies.

The phrase 'progressive art institution' for example can be tracked back to eipcp and, as a generalised catch-all, has proven itself particularly adaptable to the kind of concerted effort the network makes to generate a coherent theoretical framework. This project starts to take shape in the run up to the conference Public Art Policies: Progressive Art Institutions in the Age of Dissolving Welfare States, in 2004. An open discussion on web platform Discordia between the organisers, participants and other interested parties offers an insight into some of the general confusion, disputes and problems associated with the term 'progressive'. According to eipcp's Raunig, it should be read as 'becoming' not 'being' progressive:

this becoming progressive happens between the two poles of movement (micropolitical actions etc.) and institutions (political organisation, etc.). the abstract negation of one of these two poles would lead directly into myths of freedom (which I also suspect behind notions like 'open cultures' or 'free networks', especially if in connection to the art field) or reformist reductions.[13]

While key figures in the eicpc network continue to promote various modes of non-dialectical engagement, any claims to new forms of resistance and political action should be tested by their effect on the core of the (art) institutions in question. If they simply serve to insulate and insure these neoliberal cultural nodes against attacks on their legitimacy or provide ideological cover for a process of economic restructuring, how progressive are things becoming?

In addition to its pioneering approach to outsourcing, MACBA, according to its website, is economically supported by a foundation of thirty-eight sponsoring members and thirty-three founding businesses including multinational financial and consultancy services groups like Ernst and Young, Deloitte and scandal-hit Banco Bilbao Vizcaya Argentaria (BBVA).[14] As state-funded cultural and educational institutions pass through the eye of the neoliberal storm, it's hardly surprising that a conspicuous self-reflexivity about their inner contradictions has become the stock in trade of progressives and radical reformers alike, broadcasting consciousness of the problems but holding their resolution in abeyance. With uneven rates of movement and development between states, regions and cities, the institutions in which these professionals work are now bogged down in an erratic process of 'catch up' as the state at once withdraws public sector support and economically mobilises culture and education.

This can be seen in the plethora of strategies for public sector reform and outsourcing. On the one hand, new models of efficiency and standards of assessment are introduced, on the other institutions are given the task of attracting inward investment, contributing to cultural tourism, urban regeneration and the Creative Industries. Cultural and educational institutions, then, are in the midst of various forms of neoliberal enclosure and the concomitant restructuring is seen by competing individuals, networks and agencies to offer openings for a range of agendas seeking to gain purchase on institutional structures/bureaucracies. Referring to the market for higher education and universities for example, academic Ned Rossiter has argued that,

just as NGOs and CSOs have filled the void created by the neoliberal state's evacuation from the social, so too must organised networks seize upon the institutional persona of the 'external provider' [15]

At the other end of the scale, the many and varied external providers linked to finance capital are also busy at work. At the inaugural conference of the British Venture Capital Association in September 2006, for example, companies referred to a 'land grab' as they rushed to secure stakes in the future output of university departments.[16] This activity is mirrored in the University of the Arts London's (UAL) Innovation Centre and wholly owned subsidiary company UAL Ventures - a part of a dozen or so other schemes set up at UAL since 2002 to capitalise on staff and student enterprise initiatives, develop company spin-outs and build up IP portfolios.[17]

In response to this rapid proliferation of new enterprise zones in the cultural and educational sectors, some leading progressives advocate a rearguard challenge to neoliberalisation with the aid of what MACBA's head of public programmes, Jorge Ribalta, has called his 'trustees from below' (e.g. displaced, dispossessed and previously excluded constituencies).[18] With uncanny echoes of Blairite sociologist Anthony Giddens's earlier totem 'the state without enemies', these art institutions without enemies no longer recuperate resistance or institutionalise critique but claim to operate as its facilitators - partners in its very construction. And herein lies a principle contradiction: the content of the institution's discourse can be utterly inverted in the institutional form. While formally affirming the fight against precarious labour, for example, institutions continue to maintain high levels of labour insecurity among their workers. Ctrl-i's act of refusal brought this to wider attention, but it was already the subject of earlier critiques from activist network The Chainworkers at El Precariat Social Rebel (November 2003) and Spanish Indymedia activists at EuroMayDay Barcelona (2004). All these

critiques actually occurred 'within' MACBA and, to varying degrees, at the behest of the museum itself (Indymedia Barcelona for example, is said to have grown out of one of its workshops). MACBA not only 'commands' criticism but lays down the terms and conditions in which it can take place. It does it by offering its facilities and expertise, by inviting the big international celebrity activists to further politicise their 'trustees', and generally help to integrate anti-capitalist and social movements into its programme. As Gerald Raunig puts it:

A productive game emerges here in the relationship between activists and institution, which is neither limited to a co-optation of the political by the institution, nor to a simple redistribution of resources from the progressive art institution to the political actions.[19]

This then begs the question whether, for all the autocritique conducted by institutional directors, curators and activists, for all the talk of transnational networks linking up radical reformist elements, what tangible 'progressive' change has occurred within art institutions? Or indeed, for all those on temporary, fixed term contracts, in Spanish and other European (non-art) contexts?[20] Are we just looking at institutions looking at institutions looking at institutions 'churning self-reflexivity as they oversee the creation of the EU's socially conscious variant on UK/US neoliberalism.

If two earlier phases of institutional critique broadly located in the '70s and '90s have been integrated into cycles of legitimation and further disabled by the ongoing privatisation of culture and education, should we take these more recent state-funded institutionally led initiatives seriously as a 'third phase' as some have argued? Of all the interpretations put forward by eicpc 'correspondents' and associates at the 2005 conference *The Future of Institutional Critique* and in the first issue of the web journal *Transversal*, filmmaker Hito Steyerl is perhaps the most plausible though by no means unproblematic.[21]. She notes the integration of cultural workers into the flexible, temporary and exploitative labour conditions ushered in by neoliberalisation and claims that there is a 'need for institutions which could cater to the new needs and desires that this constituency will create'.

It's necessary here, when talking about needs, desires and constituencies, to acknowledge class struggle in these new enterprise zones/progressive art institutions and maintain clear lines of antagonism in any proposed 'third phase' of institutional critique. As ctrl-i have shown, we could start by directly confronting in-house disparities and inequities and ask why radical reformers avoid debating ongoing and often intensified labour market segmentation (i.e. the differential between permanent and temporary workers) within their own 'exemplary' cultural and educational institutions? Why do those at the top of the institutional pile and their army of new consultants continue to promote self-reflexivity and claim to facilitate dissent while acting as a buttress to elite class power? The question then is not so much whether 2015's call for the EU 'to invest in long-term basic funding for transnational infrastructures' should be met (eicpc's continued funding suggests that it has been, in their case) but the manner and extent to which these infrastructures function in the service of capital.

Editor's note

Anthony Davies's concluding question will be further explored in a forthcoming text for *Mute* on the neoliberalisation of education

Footnotes

[1] Email correspondence with ctrl-i, August 2006. According to ctrl-i's account of their relations with the museum's Temporary Employment Agency, Serveis Educatius Ciutat, SL, some of those who had spoken out against the museum were removed from their contracted positions in the 'guided tour' programme and placed in other, less publicly engaged, roles. Within two months all had left the museum. As temporary workers none had recourse to claiming 'constructive' or unfair dismissal. In UK law constructive dismissal is where an employee is moved to resign due to their employer's behaviour (and this can range from the interpersonal, harassment etc., to the structural, where the nature or description of the job changes), see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constructive_dismissal. For an online account of ctrl-i's relation to MACBA and their withdrawal letter see <http://www.metamute.org/en/node/7469> and i-manifest at http://sindominio.net/ctrl-i/invert_and_subvert.html

[2] The invitation to ctrl-i to participate in the Another Relationality (part 2) workshops was made by MACBA and Marcello Expósito on behalf of the now disbanded 'Faculty for Radical Aesthetics', an offshoot of the European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies (eipcp). See the call for applications, <https://lists.resist.ca/pipermail/aut-op-sy/2005-June/004311.html>

[3] This article is based on a text originally commissioned by Art Monthly, where debate on institutionalisation and so-called 'New Institutionalism' has been developed through Dave Beech's 'Institutionalisation For All', No. 294, March 2006; Peter Suchin's 'On Institutionalisation', No. 295, April 2006; Lisa Le Feuvre's 'The Institution Within', No. 297, June 2006 and Jakob Jakobsen's 'Self-Institutionalisation', No. 298, July-August 2006, as well as the conference Worlds Within Worlds: the Institutions of Art, July 2006: <http://www.artmonthly.co.uk/institutions.htm>

[4] David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, Oxford University Press, 2005, pp. 87-119

[5] European Cultural Policies 2015: A Report with Scenarios on the Future of Public Funding for Contemporary Art in Europe was commissioned as part of Frieze Projects and distributed free of charge at the Frieze Art Fair in October 2005. The report is also available as a pdf-file at: <http://www.iaspis.com> and <http://www.eipcp.net>

[6] Maria Lind, introduction to 'European Cultural Policies 2015': The previous year Iaspis had an artists-commission project proposal rejected by Frieze Foundation. The Foundation is supported by Arts Council England and the Culture 2000 programme. The 2005 Frieze Projects were commissioned in association with Cartier and supported by Arts & Business and Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation.

[7] Gerald Raunig, '2015 [Introduction]', <http://eipcp.net/policies/2015/raunig/en>. For Maria Lind's introduction, see <http://eipcp.net/policies/2015/lind/en>

[8] Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant have identified such consultants' role in granting a veneer of legitimacy to projects of the new state and business nobility. Their prototypical example was Anthony Giddens, British sociologist and ideological architect of the Third Way. See Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant, 'Neoliberal Newspeak: Notes on the New Planetary Vulgate', *Radical Philosophy*, 108, January 2001, http://www.radicalphilosophy.com/default.asp?channel_id=2187&editorial_id=9956

[9] They are listed in the 'cooperation' section of eipcp's website and stand at around 50 organisations as of March 2007, <http://eipcp.net/institute/cooperation/cooperation>

[10] 'European Added Value' is outlined in the 'Award Criteria' section of the European Commission, Culture 2000 Specifications document, http://ec.europa.eu/culture/eac/how_particip2000/pract_info/appe1_2006_en.html

[11] See Discordia exchange on progressive institutions: 'more than one shining institution', <http://www.discordia.us/scoop/story/2004/2/10/191433/396.html> and Jorge Ribalta, 'Mediation and Construction of Publics. The MACBA Experience', April 2004, http://www.republicart.net/disc/institution/ribalta01_en.htm

[12] Republicart manifesto, September 2002, http://www.republicart.net/manifesto/manifesto_en.htm and eipcp 2002 intro, <http://eipcp.net/institute/reflectionzone/eipcp2001/en>

[13] See Discordia, <http://www.discordia.us/scoop/story/2004/2/10/191433/396.htm>

[14] According to the MACBA website the objective of the Foundation is to 'actively contribute to the creation and development of the Contemporary Art Museum through the growth of its permanent collection.' The MACBA Consortium on the other hand (which consists of two public administrations) contributes the resources to maintain the museum's basic functions. See MACBA Foundation http://www.macba.es/controller.php?p_action=show_page&pagina_id=24&inst_id=15175 and for BBVA see: 'A Widening Probe in Spain', *BusinessWeek Magazine*, 22 April, 2002

[15] Ned Rossiter, 'Organised Networks: Transdisciplinarity and New Institutional Forms', <http://transform.eipcp.net/correspondence/1144943951>

[16] 'Jon Boone, 'University Spin-Outs Turn the Heads of Venture Capitalists'', *Financial Times*, September 28, 2006 and venture capital firm Quester's commentary/report into 'Building University Spin-Outs: A VC's View on Three Key Ingredients to Success', October 2006 http://www.quester.co.uk/pdfs/Building_viable_university_spinouts.pdf

[17] The University of the Arts, London is at the forefront of this debate in the UK and in addition to the rapid growth of business incubators and enterprise initiatives it has recently set up Creative Capital-World City. This state funded initiative been developed in conjunction with a number of London based 'partner' universities (including Kings College London, London Business School and the School of Oriental and African Studies) to open up key world markets for the UK Creative Industries. See: http://www.arts.ac.uk/docs/Creative_Capital_-_World_City.pdf and <http://www.arts.ac.uk/business/about.htm>

[18] Jorge Ribalta, 'Mediation and Construction of Publics. The MACBA Experience', April 2004, http://www.republicart.net/disc/institution/ribalta01_en.htm

[19] Gerald Raunig, 'The Double Criticism of parrhesia. Answering the Question 'What is a Progressive (Art) Institution?''

http://www.republicart.net/disc/institution/raunig04_en.htm

[20] Spain accounts for 31 percent of temporary workers in Europe and has more temp workers than Italy, the UK, Belgium and Sweden combined. See Sebastian Royo, 'The European Union and Economic Reforms: The case of Spain', <http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/documentos/243.asp> An OECD survey from 2005 noted labour market segmentation between permanent workers protected by high severance payments and the growing army of temp workers with little employment stability as a 'harmful feature' affecting productivity growth. See:

http://www.oecd.org/document/10/0,2340,en_33873108_33873806_34585738_1_1_1_1,00.html

[21] Debates on a third phase or wave of institutional critique can be found in Simon Sheikh's Notes on Institutional Critique, Hito Steyerl's Institution of Critique and Gerald Raunig's Institution Practices: Fleeing, Instituting, Transforming. All can be found at <http://transform.eipcp.net/transversal/0106/raunig/en>

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Expropriate, Accumulate, Financialise

By Chris Wright and Samantha Alvarez

David Harvey is an influential academic theorist of the spatial, cultural and economic forms of neoliberal capitalism. Chris Wright and Samantha Alvarez contrast his analysis with that of Michael Hudson, whose *Super Imperialism* exposed the fiscal foundations of neoliberalism some 30 years earlier

Recent global restructuring of capital accumulation has pulled millions into the abyss, leaving them wasted, silenced and politically disoriented. Nationalism, religious irrationalism, and populism have seemingly overwhelmed any reinvigoration of communist practice and theory. In *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, David Harvey describes a transnational class strategy developed over the last 30 years. It begins with the policies imposed on Chile in 1973 by US economic advisors, repeated in 1975-6 in New York City by the state and federal governments and in England by the IMF, and finally generalised and enshrined as ideology with Reagan's and Thatcher's elections. After a lengthy and informative discussion of the history, signs and symptoms of today's global state of affairs, Harvey identifies 'accumulation by dispossession' as the neoliberal mode of accumulation (p.159-164).

What does this term describe? First Harvey depicts a pattern of privatisation and commodification as cities, states and nations sell off their assets and open their domestic markets for purchase by outside capital, the diminution of transfer payments including unemployment insurance, supplementary income programmes, and health care, and the monetisation of services such as child care, and the replacement of public spaces with shopping malls. Critically, Harvey notes how China and the US government and corporations are exceptions to this pattern, refusing to sell off of their own major national assets. A national currency as universal mode of exchange, global military dominance, a repressive state and autarchy seem to be key to this exceptionalism.

Secondly, Harvey introduces the process of financialisation – the massive expansion of financial instruments and speculative mechanisms. In order to account for 'the \$40 trillion annual turnover [in financial transactions] in 2001 compared to the estimated \$800 billion that would be required to support international trade and productive investment flows', Harvey also lists mechanisms such as raiding company assets and retirement funds, expanding of international credit and debt mechanisms, speculating on currencies and the proliferation of hedge-funds (p.161).

Thirdly, Harvey refers to the management and manipulation of crises such as the use of debt to strip wealth from vulnerable economies and send it to the more powerful. The IMF, the World Bank, the US Treasury department policies, and the mechanisms of financialisation restructure the weaker economies by privatising state-owned industries, abolishing social welfare programs, and removing tariffs and other protections of national markets. The US and other wealthy states provide emergency funding, and the vulnerable states turn their military power inwards to undermine and repress popular revolt, calling on military assistance from the US and its peers as necessary.

Lastly, Harvey uses the term ‘state redistribution’ for the elimination of programmes that support the social wage, the reduction or abolition of taxes on wealth, the investment in (indirectly, usually through military spending, and directly through subsidy) corporations, and the expansion of police and juridical power over the population.

Accumulation by dispossession is the flight of capital from its productive form to its money form. Instead of investment in means of production which raise productivity, corporations transfer production to regions where the wages are lowest and the working day is longest. This ‘race to the bottom’ is the increase of absolute surplus-value, as opposed to the increase of relative surplus-value through raising the productivity of labour.¹ Capital, relying on profits from the increase of absolute surplus value, has avoided investing in productivity increases. Hence vast amounts of money lie about enabling speculation; capital takes the form of massive movements of money.

Harvey furthermore identifies accumulation by dispossession as primitive accumulation. However, primitive accumulation, separating people from their means of production and driving them into wage labour, is characteristic of capitalism in general and is not the same as neoliberalism’s extraction of absolute surplus-value. Harvey fails to notice how capital’s avoidance of re-investment in the means of production provides the necessary connection between reliance on absolute surplus-value and the speculation characteristic of neoliberalism.

Harvey counterposes US/British accumulation by dispossession to the accumulation by export-led growth and productive exploitation of Japan, West Germany and the so-called Asian Tigers. These nations opposed neoliberalism because they relied on the coordination of banking, industry and the state to promote investment in productive capital. They either had a politically influential and entrenched social democratic tradition or a very strong link between the capitalist class and the state. Harvey discerns the same neoliberal forces working at the level of cities, regions and nations. The US/British practices of financialisation of world markets, increasing geographical mobility of capital, and the coercive opening of other nations to these practices by the World Bank-IMF-Treasury department complex, however, has ensured neoliberalism’s ascendancy. Although Harvey discusses thoroughly the mechanisms by which cities, states and debtor nations are kept in bondage to the US, he fails to emphasise the importance of the relationship as the source of absolute surplus value profits. Neoliberalism has been effective precisely because it can be applied both micro- and macroscopically. Indeed Harvey gives a good sense of the presence of neoliberalism in varying geographic magnitudes:

Competition between territories as to who had the model for economic development or the best business climate was relatively insignificant in the 1950’s and the 1960’s ... [after 1970] successful states or regions put pressure on everyone else to follow their lead, leapfrogging innovations put this or that state ..., region ... , or even city ... in the vanguard of capital accumulation, but the competitive advantages all too often prove ephemeral introducing extraordinary volatility into global capitalism.(p. 87-8)

Only describing contingent historical episodes of national disintegration or asserting that the stock market favoured neoliberal states, Harvey does not outline the structural necessity of the productive nations’ failure of economic self-sufficiency. This failure was the result of the US’s role as importer, debtor and lender of last resort, a role which maintains the dollar as the universal currency. The world’s largest debtor, the US, effectively holds its creditors – the world – to ransom.

Harvey portrays neoliberalism as a policy choice. He does not see its necessity resulting from the crisis of accumulation in the 20th century due to the active resistance of labour.² Financialisation, which shifts from investment in production to the casino economy of speculation on currency, debt, and stocks, displaces the destruction and depreciation of capital onto labour by disinvestment in urban

neighborhoods, regions, nations and entire continents, the precariousness of employment, environmental destruction, generating unrest, and subsequent armed conflict. Excluding billions as criminalised, stateless, invisible in refugee camps and slums and economically redundant, or indebted and over-worked, financialisation has been necessary for the continued reign of dead labour over the living. Passive indifference to work and labour discipline has emerged as one of the unintended consequences of financialisation. The problem of labour's passive resistance adds to neoliberalism's lack of productivity. Expensive concentration camp factories in free trade zones and the increasing militarisation of the state apparatus do not compensate for this lack. Meanwhile, today's employers find labour inscrutable, like Melville's *Bartleby the Scrivener*; they do not know what to expect.

As an alternative to neoliberalism, which policymakers themselves will no doubt soon want to read about, Harvey conjures Roosevelt's 'entirely reasonable conceptions' (p. 184) of the role of the state in moderating the 'excessive market freedoms that lay at the root of the economic and social problems of the 1930's' (p.183). He seems to long for an accumulation that creates wealth and income - a 'good' accumulation associated with relative surplus-value production. However, the old means of production must be destroyed or sufficiently depreciated, as they were by World War II, in order that investment in labour and new, more productive, means of production is forced to take place. Harvey downplays the violence of productive exploitation in his expressed desire to 'redeem capitalism':

Paradoxically, a strong and powerful social democratic and working class movement is in a better position to redeem capitalism than is capitalist class power itself. (p.153)

Harvey's ennobling of the social democratic state stands in stark contrast to Michael Hudson's account of the roots of the US welfare state in his book *Super Imperialism*, first published, appropriately, in 1972 to bad reviews from the financial press, but recently reprinted because of its relevance to contemporary developments. Hudson blames the French invasion of the Ruhr in 1923 and the rise of fascism in Europe on the US's policy regarding the repayment of European war debt. He points out that the US state, regardless of administration, pursued the repayment of war debts irrespective of the damage done to Europe. Another face to Roosevelt shows itself when Hudson argues that his administration's policies played a key role in generating the nationalism and economic isolationism that led to World War II. (p.79) Hudson makes clear that Roosevelt, far from reining in the excessive power of the market for the good of the people, ensured the survival of capital by means of an international policy of dollar circulation based on gold siphoned from Europe. Instead of crisis as a gap in distribution, Hudson describes an imperialism of circulation.

After World War I, Europe was immiserated and the US followed suit after 1929. Only war, turned inward by means of bureaucratic administration and outward as imperialistic aggression, destroyed capital and allowed the restoration of the rate of profit through investment in production. 40 million deaths, not Keynesian pump-priming and social democratic redistribution, created the grounds for the order of the post-World War II period. The decline of this order is the source of anxiety today.

After World War II the US was not forced by circumstance to allow dollars to proliferate, as Harvey would have it, but instead, according to Hudson, used dollar proliferation and the Marshall Plan to control accumulation. The US was the main beneficiary of this, yet, in time, its military interventions led it to become the world's largest debtor. It used currency control to insulate itself from its creditors and even to force them to finance its debt. Debt and aid become means of coercion:

The world is now rich enough to afford the economic bondage of entire nations, whose vested interests are supported by donations from the wealthier countries. (*Super Imperialism*, p.202-3)

Hudson further asserts that any attempt to address inequality as a problem of distribution, as Harvey argues, is a means for the promotion of a deadly uneven development because no matter how the money is re-allocated, as dollars it must all flow back to the centre, to the United States.

Hudson's emphasis on circulation as a means of power challenges Harvey's emphasis on neoliberalism's last ditch effort to extract surplus value without investment and his consequent call for the resuscitation of the productive capitalism of social democracy. In spite of critiquing 'embedded liberalism', the politics of rights and NGOs, Harvey goes on to advocate a programme of positive rights. He makes a distinction where there is none between a good (social democratic) and a bad (neoliberal) state. For him the state is a neutral instrument, one which can be wielded in any class's interests. Characteristically, he lauds the coming to power of centre-left coalitions in Latin America, the victory of the Congress Party in India, and the development of opposition to neoliberalism within academic and professional economic circles as in themselves positive developments, rather than as possible indicators of increasing popular radicalisation (p.186-7). Harvey favours 'not only reversing the withdrawal of the state from social provision but also confronting the overwhelming powers of finance capital.' (p.187)

His penultimate paragraph clearly expresses his sympathies with the social democratic project:

Roosevelt's arguments are one place to start. Within the US an alliance has to be built to regain popular control of the state apparatus and to thereby advance the deepening rather than the evisceration of democratic practices and values under the juggernaut of market power.

Popular control of the state apparatus is, however, an oxymoron; as a rule, the state only eradicates radical popular will and re-establishes its legitimacy by coercion, co-optation and concessions.

One might reply to Harvey's calls for democratisation and a downwardly re-distributive state in the spirit of Hudson by noting that a social democratic state at home does not preclude the enslavement of nations abroad, the recipe for increasing isolationism and nationalism that precipitated World War II. Harvey's opposition to neoliberalism ends up being an apology for exploitation. The task is not to defeat neoliberalism or any other model of accumulation, but to deny accumulation itself.

Footnotes

1

Absolute surplus value is created by expanding production through lengthening the working day; relative surplus value is created by increasing production through the application of technology.

2

We need only mention the May-June events in Paris and the Prague Spring in 1968, the massive wave of wildcat strikes and urban riots in the U.S. from 1963-73, the Hot Autumn in Italy in 1969, the overthrow of military dictatorships in Portugal and Spain in 1974-6, Solidarity in Poland, to highlight a few of the overt moments of this active resistance, one which rejected with equal force capital and the labour apparatus, the whole post-World War II institutionalisation of the relationship between labour and capital.

Biogs

Chris Wright <wright666 AT comcast.net> is some kind of a man... What does it matter what you say about people?

Samantha Alvarez does not exist