

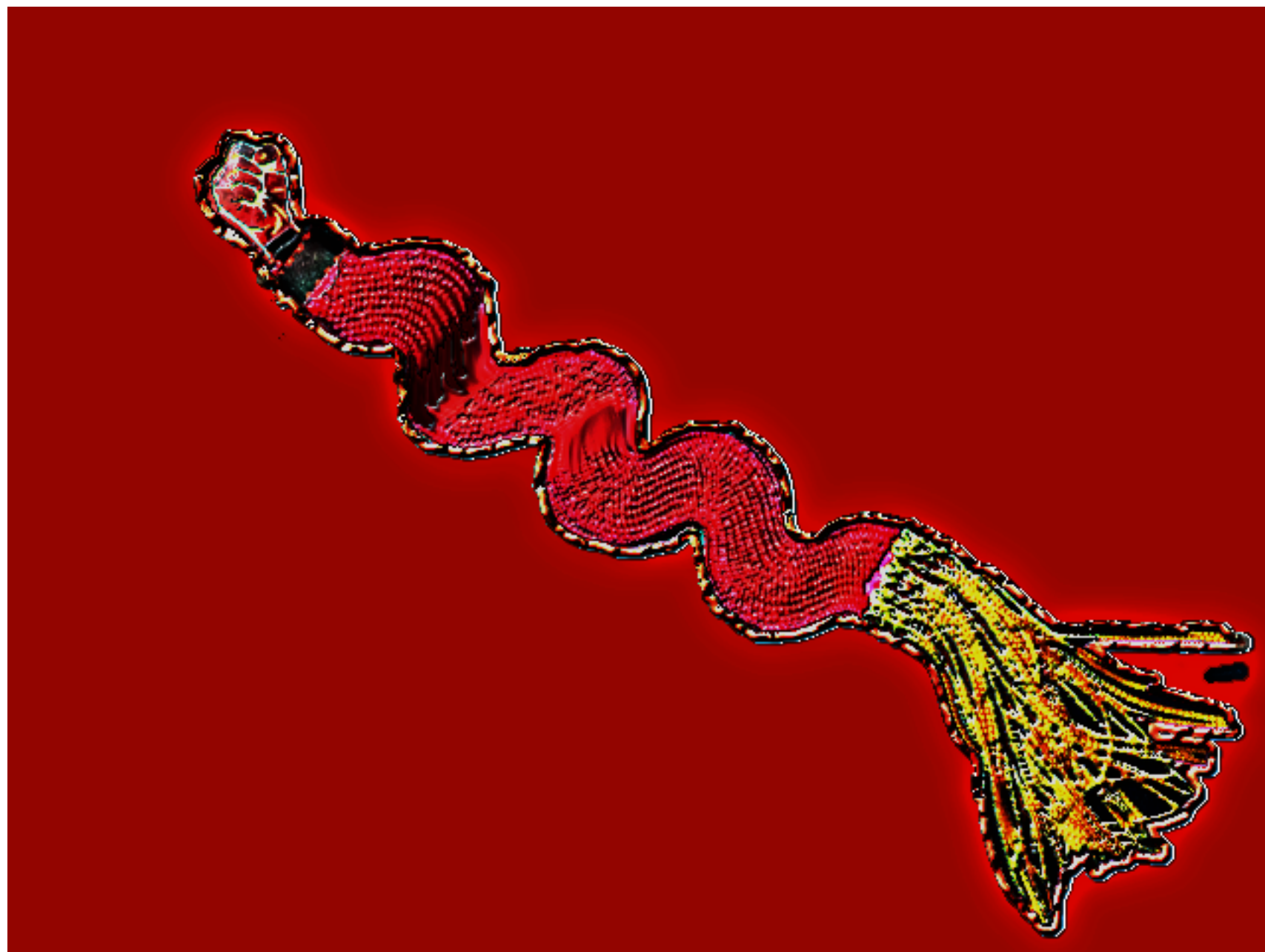
DRUGS

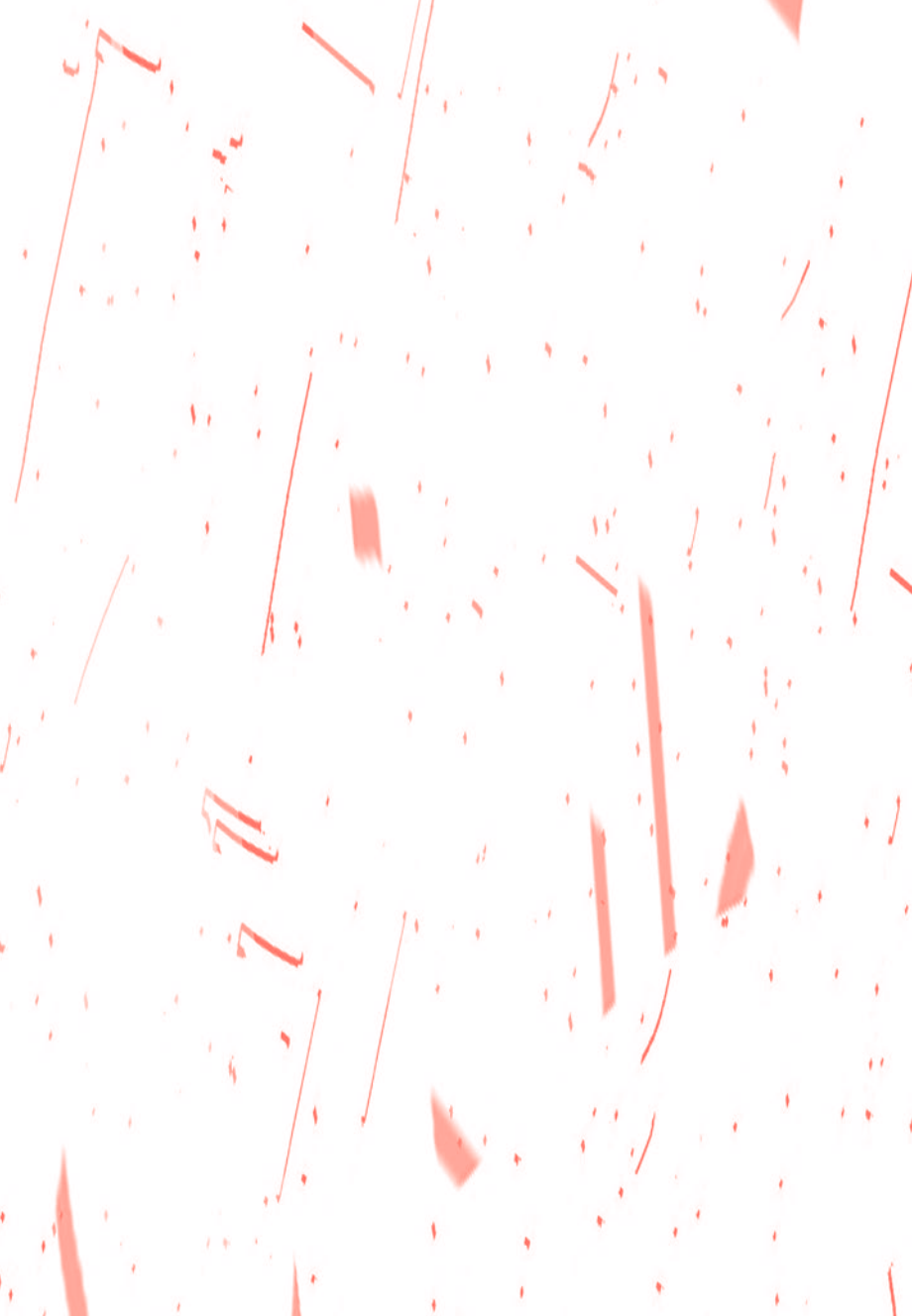
FEELINGS

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The background is a light cream or off-white color, densely populated with a chaotic pattern of thin, hand-drawn red lines and small red dots. The lines vary in length and orientation, some being straight and others curved, creating a sense of movement and disorder. The dots are scattered throughout, often appearing in small clusters or along the lines. The overall effect is that of a textured, perhaps paper-like surface that has been marked with random, expressive red ink strokes.

BAD FEELINGS

Bad Feelings

This publication has been produced by Arts Against Cuts as part of the open submission series Common Objectives, commissioned by Nina Power and Book Jerx. It has been edited, designed and typeset by Louis Hartnoll, Lucy Killoran, Robyn Minogue, and Sophie Carapetian.

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Committed to the abolition of property, we propose that the proper names attached to each piece in the collection stand only as placeholders until such time as communism exists.

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Arts Against Cuts (AAC) initially formed within the cloisters of the UCL students' occupation of the Jeremy Bentham Room and Slade School of Fine Art in November 2010, with the minimal aim of overthrowing the Conservative and Liberal Democrat Coalition Government. Since 2010 it has variously met nightly, weekly, monthly, and intermittently in order to self-organise, protest, and take action, to discuss what to do about our mutually shit situations. AAC has tried to harness our anger in precise ways, acting in the spirit of international solidarity. Most publicly, this has resulted in a series of direct actions and general organising weekends used as a base for both discussion and as a starting point for many forms of direct action.

Neither a single cohesive group nor simply a placeholder for activism, and despite its clumsy nomenclature, AAC have never endeavoured to posit Keynesian economic programmes as the antidote to conservative neoliberal policy – we do not spend time striving for a fairer and nicer capitalism. During its short history it has, amongst other things, put out statements, advanced communiqués, distributed leaflets, resisted, dropped stink bombs, thrown paint bombs, and organised action but has never held to any one, singular manifesto. Internally it has argued, disagreed, and splintered; its composition and concerns have considerably morphed. Perpetually cast along the brink of dissolution, it is not now what it once was and it will not be what it is now.

Partially obscured, partially defined. Whatever it may be, through the lens of anti-austerity struggle it has resolutely sought, and will continue to take aim, to agonistically and violently overturn the systemic structures that immiserate every element of our lives and the lives of our comrades. Should you want one defining position, this may be considered it.

This book is indelibly anchored to and must be regarded as a continuation of such histories.

INTRODUCTION

It has to be admitted that we have lost, if not quite everything, then nearly. But we were never so naïve as to think they would let us win. *The struggle continues.* But it cannot do so without the admission that we have been and continue to be hurt, time and time again. The sense of collapse that follows every high, vivid political moment (for example, the 2010 protests and occupations or the 2011 riots) leaves us bereft. And if you don't feel like you've failed enough already, there are trials, harassment and prison to remind you, to weaponise time. For some, many, every day is a continual exercise in the external construction of failure by the state: you will never win and we will remind you of this every day, every time we stop you in the street, every time we refuse your benefits, every time we push you around and make you feel even more like a loser.

I wanted to work with AAC via the Book Works Common Objectives series in this period of downtime to try to spend time understanding the implications of this failure. But also to think through form: what is political writing today? What is political writing that takes negativity as its topic? How do we describe what has happened to us? As it turns out, the recent Tory majority election couldn't have made this collection more timely, although it made a lot of sense before, too. To survive as a collective political art group that takes a stance within and against capitalism already points to a way out of the impasse. I admire AAC for their actions, their refusals and their integrity.

It is my feeling that we need to understand negative states, such as the ones described so well in this collection, all the better to make them militant where we can, and at least share them where we can't. It is not negative to dwell in the negative. And, besides, we have no choice.

– Nina Power

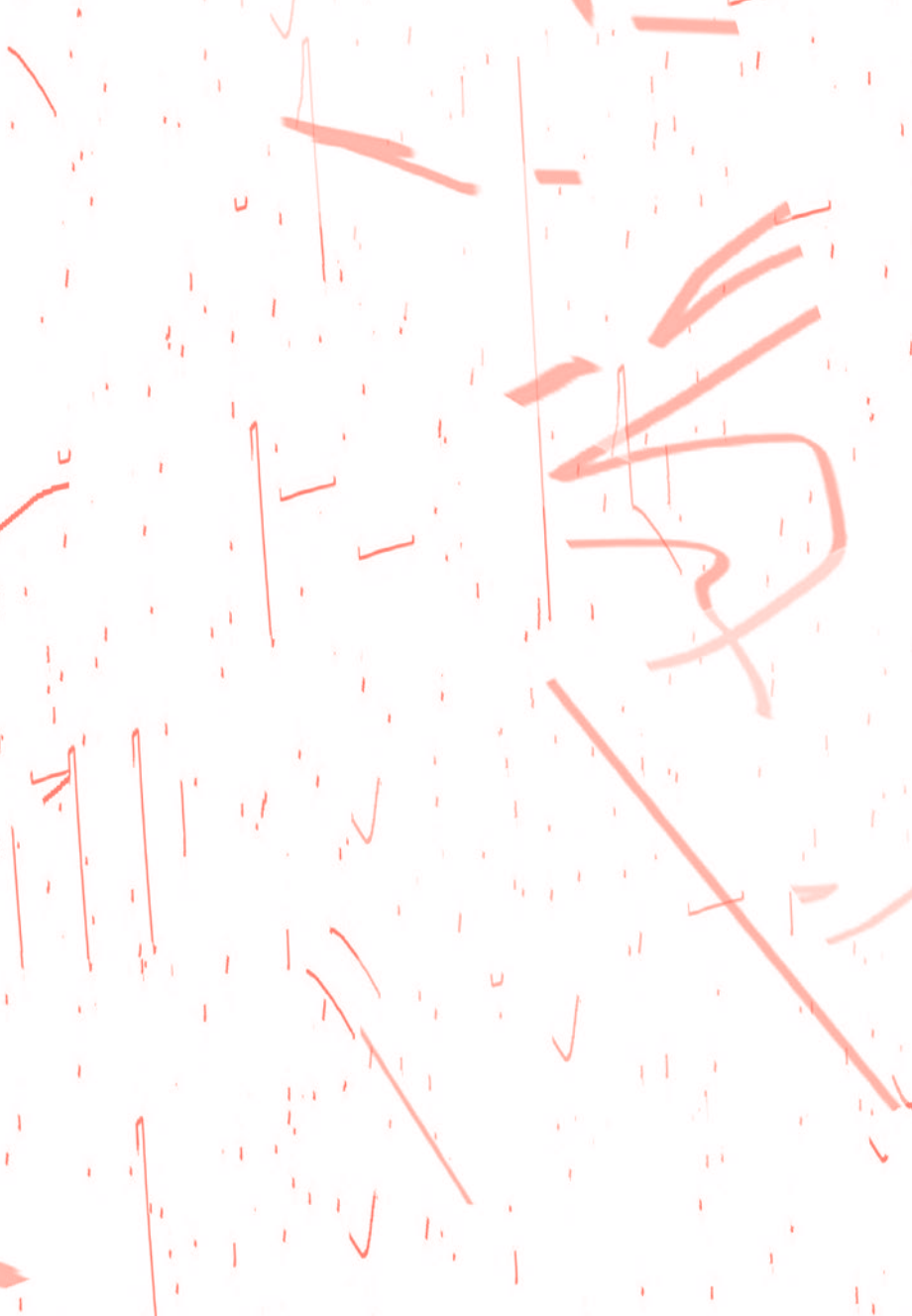
We started this book in October 2012. Throughout its production, in its drawing together of ideas, in all of the meetings, conversations, emails, edits and re-edits, designs and redesigns, drafts and redrafts, the process has been wrought by struggle and difficulty. In the two-and-a-half years that this book has taken to complete, it has contorted and misshapen itself into what it is now – however fragmentary and partial a realisation of what it is we set out to make. Without even having gone to print, it has caused hostility, fighting, frustration, fractures and breaks. Each and every minor detail, of which there are too many to stomach, owes its placement to a history of discussion and argument. Confined to the hours outside the working week for some and to the endless time of full unemployment for others, to coordinate these different temporalities was a constraint on collective production.

Taking as its starting point the current theoretical, philosophical, and political imperatives of revisiting certain bodies of thought and action, this book aims itself towards existing discussions on negation, negativity, and a bottomless catalogue of negative emotions. The specificities and approach were left to each comrade to decide, and no set or defining argument can be found to run throughout. Despite some clear thematic concerns and constellations around which the texts coalesce – hate, struggle, rage, anger, revenge, negation, resistance, destruction – we forgo asserting any coherent narrative, manifesto, or position on the subjects. The texts, the contributors, the ideas, the aesthetics, and the arguments often disagree; and so do we.

Assembled here is a set of materials for conflict and commonality; the texts run through an unstable set of linear, paratactic, conventional, academic, conversational, winding, obscure, and urgent forms. This book attempts to manifest an experimental negativity, pushing beyond a mimetic economy bound to the targets it seeks to oppose. This may not work as intended, though we won't lose more sleep over it.

It eludes, remains uncomfortable, refuses when necessary, and will never settle.

– AAC



REFUSAL

RAY BRASSIER

Since no art form generates action, the most appropriate art for a culture on the edge of extinction is one that stimulates pain.

– Howard Barker, *Arguments for a Theatre*

Wisdom is always contemporary: it enjoins us to accept the way of the world, whether through enthusiastic embrace or dejected resignation.

Acceptance is the surrender of thought.

Thought is the refusal of wisdom.

Since no thought generates change, the only thinking response to a culture of authoritarian vacuity is one that begins with refusal.

Refusal is not querulous. Querulousness is self-indulgent.

Refusal is abstemious. It is the self-abnegating affirmation of what has been deliberately excluded from the horizon of possibility.

Refusal is not capricious. It follows from the assertion of a principle that has been forcibly suppressed.

Rejecting complicity, refusal prizes open unexpected horizons of solidarity.

The acceptance of the present reduces the future to the manufacture of novelty. No future is possible without the refusal of the present and of the hope that

remains circumscribed by the horizon of the present.

Hope is reactionary: it cocoons actuality in the gossamer of the tolerable, dulling the thirst for change.

Despair is revolutionary: it grinds the knife-edge of the intolerable against the whetstone of actuality, sparking the will to change.

Whoever tolerates the present will never risk everything to change it.

Only those who realize they have no future left to lose will be willing to stake everything on the total transformation of the present; a transformation in which every envisageable future is abolished, the better to invite the facelessness of what will come.

The only appropriate mode of thinking for a culture on the edge of extinction is the thinking that stimulates pain.

LETTER AGAINST THE FIRMAMENT

SEAN BONNEY

Thanks for your letter. You think I spend too much time going after 'easy targets,' do you? Got to admit I chuckled over that one. A while ago, you recall, I admitted to you I make a fetish of the riot form, and in that admission implied I was fully aware of the risks involved, that any plausible poetics would be shattered, like a shop window, flickering and jagged, all of the wire exposed and sending sharp twists and reversible jolts into whatever it was I was trying to explain or talk about. Think about it this way. Imagine that you had a favourite riot, one that you loved. Tottenham. Millbank. Chingford. Walthamstow. I like the last one, but only for sentimental reasons. It's a stupid question, but maybe will help you to see what I mean when I use the word 'poetics,' or 'poetry.' What was Marx referring to when he was talking about the 'poetry of the future,' for example? And what use is that in thinking about prosody? Anyway. Loads of people have made maps of clusters of riots, trying to come up with some kind of exegesis based on location and frequency. And quite right too. Think of the micro-vectors sketched out within the actions of any individual rioter, of how those vectors and actions relate to those shared among her or his immediate physical group, and thus the spatio-physical being of that group in relation to their particular town / city, and finally, the superimposition of all of those relations in all of their directions and implications onto an equally detailed charting of the entire landmass understood as chronology and interpretation. Christ, you could include data about the weather-systems on Neptune if you wanted to. What would happen to this map, I've been asking myself, if we went on to superimpose the positions of riots of the past, the future too if you want to be facetious, onto the complexities we're already faced with. Sudden appearance of the Baltimore Riots of 1968, to take a random example. Or the Copper Riots of 1662. The Opera Riot, Belgium, 1830. The 1850 Squatters Riot, California. Personally, I like the Moscow Plague Riots of 1771, both for their measures of poetry and analogy,

and for the thought of them as an element of the extraordinarily minor Walthamstow Riot, of 7 August 2011. Plague is a bad metaphor, that's its accuracy, it refers to both sides, all sides, in quantitatively different ways. Hegelian 'aspects' and all that, yeh? But primarily, it's dirt simple: It runs in both directions. Means both us and them. Is a jagged rip through all pronouns. The thunder of the world, a trembling, a turbine. Cyclical desperation, clusters of walls. The first signs of plague hit Moscow in late 1770, as in a sudden system of forced quarantine and destruction of contaminated houses. Within a few months, a clock of vast scratching, fear, and anger. 15 September they invaded the Kremlin, smashed up the monastery there. The following day they murdered the Archbishop, that wormfucker, Ambrosius, they killed him, and then torched the quarantined zones. Much burning, yeh, much gunshot and vacuum. And no antidote, no serum. Around 200,000 people died, not including those who were executed. It's a grisly map. Disease as interpretation and anonymity. The plague itself as injection into certain subsets of opinion, those predominantly generated within hegemonic diagrams of running water and digital electricity. Plague sores, each basilica split open to various popular songs, calendars folded within them, recorded crackles through the forcibly locked houses, code, etc., LEDs and meth. Basic surrealism. Aimé Césaire wrote years ago that 'poetic knowledge is born in the great silence of scientific knowledge.' And science itself the great silence at the centre of corporate knowledge, its dialectical warp and synaptic negation. As in a single node of extraction made up, for example, of the precise percentage of the world's population who will never again be called by name, except by cops and executioners. Each one of those names – and we know none of them – is the predominant running metaphor of the entire culture, a net of symptom splinters producing abdominal pain and difficulty breathing, which in turn leads to a sharp increase in arrest numbers throughout the more opaque boroughs of selected major cities. OK? Now write a 'poem.' Directly after the August Riots I went to one of the big public meetings, don't know why, guess I was feeling a bit confused. Or maybe just bored. The speakers were awful, patronising, professional counter-revolutionaries, you know the type. But there was one woman who spoke, she had nothing to do with the organisation, they'd got her up there for obvious reasons, yeh, and she lived on an estate somewhere

and her boy had leapt sixteen floors from a tower block window. He'd been on curfew and the cops had turned up, without warning, at his flat. To check up or something. Anyway, he leapt sixteen floors down, and they told her he'd killed himself, 'and I know my boy,' his mother said from top table, 'and he wouldn't have jumped, he wouldn't have killed himself, not for them, not for anyone, not for the cops,' and her voice cracked a little and then she said 'and as for the riots, I thought they were fair enough, and I think there should be more of them, and more, and more,' and then she stopped and there was some applause, but it was a little shaken and a little nervous. Whatever. Here's a statistic for you, an elegant little metric foot: not one police officer in the UK has been convicted for a death in police custody since 1969. Get that? A lifetime. I think that's what she was getting at, at the meeting: every cop, living or dead, is a walking plague-pit. And that includes the nice ones with their bicycles and nasty little apples. Like some kind of particle mould. They are all Simon Harwood. They are all Kevin Hutchinson-Foster. And are running, with crowbars and wheels, year by year, strata by strata, backwards into, well, what they used to call the deep abyss, or perhaps the metamorphosis of commodities. The unity of opposites, anti-constellations cutting through chronology, an injection of three droplets of the weather on Neptune into each malevolently flashing unit of time tumbling backwards through all of written history, all sixteen spirals of it. 'Poetry,' remember, 'is born in the great silence of scientific knowledge.' What do you think that means, 'the great silence.' I ask because I'm not quite sure. Hölderlin, in his 'Notes on Oedipus,' talks about the moment of 'fate,' which, he says, 'tragically removes us from our orbit of life, the very mid-point of inner life, to another world, tears us off into the eccentric orbit of the dead.' But he's not talking about 'fate' as in myth, or the number of fatalities taking place every year in police cells and occupied territories worldwide, or indeed the home of every benefit claimant in this town. He's talking about prosody, about the fault-line that runs through the centre of that prosody, and how that fault-line is where the 'poetic' will be found, if it's going to be found anywhere. The moment of interruption, a 'counter rhythmic interruption,' he calls it, where the language folds and stumbles for a second, like a cardiac splinter or a tectonic shake. Again, just as with the plague, this is a cracked metaphor, an abstraction or a

counter-earth. Actually it's an entire cluster of metaphors, and each one of those metaphors twists in any number of directions, so that 'counter-rhythmic interruption' refers, at the same time, to a band of masked-up rioters ripping up Oxford St., and to the sudden interruption inflicted by a cop's baton, a police cell and the malevolent syntax of a judge's sentence. We live in these cracks, these fault-lines. Who was it, maybe Raoul Vaneigem, who wrote something about how we are trapped between two worlds, one that we do not accept, and one that does not exist. It's exactly right. One way I've been thinking about it is this: the calendar, as map, has been split down the middle, into two chronologies, two orbits, and they are locked in an endless spinning antagonism, where the dead are what tend to come to life, and the living are, well you get the picture. Obviously, only one of these orbits is visible at any one time and, equally obviously, the opposite is also true. It's as if there were two parallel time tracks, or maybe not so much parallel as actually superimposed on each other. You've got one track, call it antagonistic time, revolutionary time, the time of the dead, whatever, and it's packed with unfinished events: the Paris Commune, Orgreave, the Mau Mau rebellion. There are any number of examples, counter-earths, clusters of ideas and energies and metaphors that refuse to die, but are alive precisely nowhere. And then there is standard time, normative time, a chain of completed triumphs, a net of monuments, dead labour, capital. The TV schedules, basically. And when a sub-rhythmic jolt, call it anything, misalignment of the planets, radioactive catastrophe, even a particularly brutal piece of legislation, brings about a sudden alignment of revolutionary and normative time, as in the brute emergence of unfinished time into *their world*, it creates a buckling in its grounding metaphor, wherein that metaphor, to again misuse Hölderlin, becomes a network of forces, places of intersection, places of divergence, moments when everything is up for grabs. Well, that's the theory. Riot, plague, any number of un-used potentialities we can't even begin to list. The names of everyone who has died in police custody since 1969, for example. The name of every civilian who has died in Iraq since 2003. Plague. The opposite of solidarity. Or rather, solidarity itself: the solidarity of isolation and quarantine, of the bomb-zone or the ghetto. The great silence is full of noises. And that's what I mean when I talk about poetics. A map, a counter-map, actually, a chart of the

spatio-temporal rhythm of the riot-form, its prosody and signal-frequency. A map that could show the paths *not* taken. And where to find them, those paths, those antidotes, those counter-plagues. Anyway, I hope that answers your question. It's a very partial account, for sure. There are hundreds of other points of access to the metaphor cluster engaged within the riot form: think about the Portland Rum Riots of 1855, for example. Or the Zoot Suit Riots of 1943. Their trajectories through the varying intensities of official and unofficial chronology, the music of the past re-emerging as a sheet of blazing gin flowing through Chingford. Like that time we marched on Parliament, burned it to the ground. Remember that? It was fantastic.

NOTES ON RACIAL DOMINATION

R.L.

The unconscious is not only the content beyond the phenomenal consciousness of the ego; the unconscious is also the form of consciousness itself... And it is in the unconscious form itself of consciousness that the secret of the *tertium genus*, which is neither subject nor object, must be sought, but which moulds subjectivity, objectivity and domination as a blind formal constitution. The historical-social form of consciousness is at the same time both the most profoundly personal and the most profoundly foreign and unconscious; for this reason, as soon as it is systematized, it has to be understood and lived as an external and alien 'power.'

– Robert Kurz, 'Domination Without a Subject'

In order to begin to understand racial domination in its specifically capitalist form we must take into account the historical production of racial categories. We must be particularly attentive to the way in which racial categories appear as a natural-biological feature of individuals, in other words as a *fetishized* attribute. It is presupposed that racial categories are part of the natural state of being, an inherent feature of bodies, an unquestionably natural characteristic, belonging to the order of 'first nature.' This is a fundamental mystification of 'race,' where an effect becomes cause. Race in and of itself does not exist. It is a consequence, a residuum, of racism that retroactively posits race as a 'thing.' To posit race as existing in itself is to be caught in a vicious feedback loop, where the very thing to be critiqued and abolished is always already presupposed. In order to effectively abolish racism today, we must first do away with its presuppositions, namely the fetishism of 'race' as a natural-biological category.¹

1 Much of this provisional analysis is indebted to the little known South Korean Marxist from the Bay Area, Harry Chang.

How are we to understand the relationship between racial categories and capitalism? Does 'race' have its own autonomous logic separate from capitalism? Or is it subsumed under the latter? In general, we can say that 'race' is a mechanism that naturalizes inequality. It justifies inequality as something inherent to different types of people. It becomes its own self-justification. Contemporary perspectives on race tend to fall into one of two camps. On the one hand, racism is thought to be a tool used by the ruling classes to sow conflict within the working class. This view is thoroughly conspiratorial in nature, positing a conscious racial project being weaved together behind the scenes. While there is no doubt that explicit racial projects in the past had intended to racialize and therefore subjugate certain populations, the present period possesses a markedly different structure of racialization. On the other hand, more reformist perspectives focus on 'race' solely to further representational claims upon the public sphere. Lack of representation is a function of discrimination, and thus appeals to a more equal representation are demanded. Assimilation becomes the primary motive.

A proper critique of racism, and moreover of racial categories themselves, must go beyond mere ideological critique and must instead ascertain the logical premises that make 'race' exist in the first place. Racial categories are social and historical products. Their content is completely conditioned by the historically specific constellation of localities, regions, nation-states, and inter-state arrangements. Thus a further question to be posed would be whether it is conceivable that there could be a global theory of racism.

For now, we will simply try to pose a series of premises that aims to analyze racial categories as coterminous with the social forms of capitalism, focusing particularly on the principle of commodity fetishism as elaborated by Marx in *Capital Volume 1*. The concept of racialization captures the process whereby 'race' is produced. As an explanation of a social process and not a mere assumption, the logic of this activity is comparable to the production of commodities, where the 'material relations between persons [become] social relations between things.'² This oft-quoted axiom of Marxist thought sheds light

2 K. Marx, *Capital Volume 1*, 1990.

on the nature of the inversion of subject and object that occurs under the capitalist mode of production. Social relations between people become the natural properties of things; capital produced by labor ends up dominating labor. In the same vein, the social practices of racialization between people become naturalized racial attributes of individuals themselves. Racial categories attain an independent existence, as things in and of themselves.

Racial categories are the inverted reflections of objective social practices, these being largely the products of the greater social, and moreover international, division of labor. Individuals really do seem to be 'white,' or 'black,' or 'asian.' These categories are made to appear as if they are grafted onto the very skin of the individual in question. In other words, social categories are transposed as an invariant property of an individual's ownmost being. Social attributes become fixed and are subsumed under a rigidly ahistorical and naturalized identity. 'Race' appears to have an autonomous and natural existence. It appears as devoid of relation. But as we know, 'race' is fundamentally a social relation. Moreover it is subject to historical development. It is a social form that reproduces a whole series of related racial categories, e.g. White/Black, that are interwoven with economic categories. As a relation between racial categories, a constellation of social practices mediates the hierarchy of racial differentiation. These social practices are essentially exclusionary, producing a logic of separation between racial categories; ultimately these categories are based upon irreconcilable oppositions. In the case of the American situation, the essential polarization has historically been between non-Black and Black.³ This relationship has been thoroughly conditioned by chattel slavery. As a mode of production relying on unfree labor, American slavery was predicated upon a historically specific logic of exclusion. The opposition Master/Slave became displaced analogically onto the racial categories of Whiteness/Blackness when institutional slavery was abolished. The manner in which the black fraction of the proletariat became 'black' in the first place was a product of the composition

3 'Non-Black' is used here instead of 'White' as a gesture towards contemporary theorizations of anti-black racism, which focus on the changing composition and relationship between blacks and other minority racialized groupings in the United States over the past several decades.

and distribution within the social division of labor.

This historical mode of appearance of anti-blackness therefore takes the form of a distinction, a relation of inclusion/exclusion, a twofold movement: on the one hand, the parceling out of a distinct fraction of the population from others, and on the other, the abstraction of this particular fraction as a unitary and abstract subject that is interchangeable with other elements of the same type. Domination is at once both personalized and impersonal. This antithetical situation is perhaps best encapsulated in the concept of *social death*.⁴ Closely associated with the essential determinants of racial slavery, social death is a state of inclusion into society by exclusion. Orlando Patterson, a seminal sociologist who formalized the concept of social death, put forth three central aspects of slavery as a social form in general: the pervasive threat of violence, natal alienation, and generalized dishonor. Particularly, it is natal alienation that Patterson sees as principally determining the singularity of social death, defining it as:

the loss of ties of birth in both ascending and descending generations. It also has the important nuance of a loss of native status, of deracination. It was this alienation of the slave from all formal, legally enforceable ties of 'blood,' and from any attachment to groups or localities other than those chosen for him by the master, that gave the relation of slavery its peculiar value to the master. The slave was the ultimate human tool, as imprintable and as disposable as the master wished. And this was true, at least in theory, of all slaves, no matter how elevated.⁵

Despite the apparent situation of complete exclusion in the United States, the enslaved population had necessarily to be integrated and regulated by society with the abolition of institutionalized slavery. Yet this inclusion, as mentioned above, must be internally mediated. This was initially under the purview of the state and legal order, but was eventually devolved onto the spontaneous self-perpetuation and reproduction of racial categories *vis-à-vis* the relative

4 I take this term as defined by the various theorists of Afro-pessimist thought. Afro-pessimism, a theoretical current analyzing contemporary anti-black racism, has provided the basis for a lot of engagement with this concept.

5 O. Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 1990.

surplus population. Phenotypical appearance takes on its own independent existence – a process characterized by the de-socialization of large fractions of the black population through spatial segregation. Blackness becomes marked by a fundamental ‘biological-natural’ difference, ‘second nature’ is inverted into ‘first nature,’ and this difference *qua* domination is reproduced through a series of social practices that are at the same time self-legitimizing ideologies.

Late capitalist society is predicated upon the premises of post-racialist ideology, wherein racism no longer exists, or rather, all ‘races’ are said to have formally equal status before the law. Ironically enough, this ideology hits upon the key point that race is indeed not a real thing. However, it simultaneously detaches racism and the production of ‘race,’ and legitimates ‘race’ as a thing-in-itself. All ‘races,’ moreover all marginalized identities, attempt to receive fair and equal representation, recognized within the representational arena of the public sphere. The underlying premise of this formal equality within capitalist society is the self-regulating harmony of private interests. Formal freedom and equality are the bases upon which two contracting parties can begin to relate to one another. Oppositional antagonisms become submerged into the general equality of abstract subjects. One ‘race’ can relate to another ‘race.’ As abstract subjects, each subject’s interest appears as harmoniously related to all the others’. Broadly defined, the contemporary form of social death presupposes the abstract formal freedom and equality of capitalist subjecthood; in other words, the extension of the sphere of representation only further reifies ‘race’ as a thing.

The level of continuity between the status of the enslaved and the attainment of legally recognized personhood must be further examined. Racial categories are not invariant and are subject to historical development; they are a network of social relations and practices. However, it is nonetheless the case that in the United States anti-blackness provides the essential organizing principle in the differentiation of racial categories. Since the economic restructuring of the 1970s, black youth in particular have been subject to disproportionately high rates of unemployment. Historically the black populace has had unemployment rates twice the level of whites.⁶ In this way, blackness as a racial category

6 D. Desilver, ‘Black Unemployment Rate is Consistently Twice that of Whites,’ 2013.

becomes conflated with distinctive fractions of the relative surplus population: the stagnant and the pauperized.⁷ As a category of the capitalist mode of production, the surplus population forms a necessary pre-condition for capital's reproduction, figuring in as the necessary and internally mediated exclusion of capital accumulation. Through this internal exclusion, capital is able not only to differentiate itself from labor, but also to differentiate labor from itself. The wage-form rests upon this bifurcation, differentiating those who are included from those who are excluded from its parameters. It is important to note that the boundary between inclusion and exclusion is not strictly defined, since everyone needs to find some form of work in order to survive in a capitalist society. One may be employed one day, unemployed the next, and informally employed after that. For capital, it is simply a matter of the velocity, or turnover, between one function and another. An individual only ever finds herself reaching the limit of complete exclusion asymptotically. In other words, exclusion must somehow in its own way be subsumed into the class relation, for total exclusion would mean death or captivity.

We must remember that this is not a conscious mechanism, but simply an unintended consequence of a society in which work is largely allocated by the market. It is just a matter of how the discrete fractions of the surplus population are absorbed into the boundaries of the class relation. And this how is answered by ideological rationalizations of social inequality through mythologies of 'race' and the embodiment of social characteristics as simply natural. One primary variable has been the capacity for mobility. The mobility of labor, whether upward or downward in the social division of labor, is perhaps one of the more distinctive requirements of capital in the present period, especially considering the internationalization of capital. This mobility plays itself out most visibly through a spatial logic, as can be observed in the construction of the modern-day metropolis.

Intense racial segregation in metropolitan areas has persisted well into the twenty-first century. This is an historical consequence of discriminatory housing policies on the federal and state levels, alongside municipal zoning

7 See, for example, C. Chen, 'The Limit Point of Capitalist Equality,' 2013.

practices. The Federal Housing Administration (FHA), a US Government agency set up by the National Housing Act of 1934, was pivotal in developing highly racialized lending practices by evaluating the terms of mortgages according to varying levels of risk associated with specific neighborhoods. A rating system categorized different types of loans, which channeled mortgage funds to different categories of borrowers, effectively redlining those according to class and racial distinctions. Furthermore, the instatement of municipal zoning legislation in various metropolitan areas during the 1920s introduced an apparatus of land-use planning that was meant to preserve the quality of life for residential and commercial communities. While based on *de jure* non-discriminatory practices, this form of municipal regulation was invariably submitted to *de facto* practices of residential segregation. Prior explicitly discriminatory legislative policies were formally dissolved without any concomitant mode of integrating racially segregated populations.

Exclusionary practices such as these have developed in tandem with the de-industrialization and the re-composition of the labor market. We are familiar with the story of the Rust Belt, a pock-marked industrial region that spans from the Northeast to the Midwest. Since the mid-twentieth century, this region has witnessed a wave of immiseration through capital flight, de-urbanization and de-population; the ruins of Detroit stand as the penultimate symbol of the impoverished American metropole. Further to this are the contemporary dynamics of immiseration taking place in areas outside of city boundaries. As a consequence of the collapse of the housing market and subsequent property devaluation, many suburbs have been exposed to high rates of poverty. Over the past decade, suburban areas have been subject to a rise of poverty rates at more than 50 percent. With the rise of urban density and rising property values, many immigrants today increasingly move to the suburbs, sometimes inhabiting the same neighborhoods as low-income blacks.

Today relations of racial domination are enacted without the figure of a dominating subject. While there may be isolated incidences of prejudice, racism as an ideology is undoubtedly distinct from its prior historical expressions. After the consummation of the abstract equality and freedom fought for by the civil rights movement and numerous anti-racist struggles during the mid-twentieth

century, domination takes on a wholly faceless and abstract character. We face what the late communist thinker Robert Kurz theorized as ‘domination without a subject.’⁸ Racialization is in this way a series of practices inscribed in the material and technical infrastructure of the penal state and its reproduction of the social division of labor. Racial blackness is conditional upon the possibility of de-subjectification, where the real abstraction of ‘race’ bears the latent abstraction from the conditions of life altogether – ‘I shot you because you are black; you are black because I shot you.’⁹

⁸ R. Kurz, ‘Domination Without a Subject,’ 1993.

⁹ F. B. Wilderson III, ‘Gramsci’s Black Marx: Whither the Slave in Civil Society?,’ 2010.

BOYCOTT THE ZABLUDOWICZ COLLECTION!

BDZ GROUP

[The following text was written in July 2014 at the time of the Israeli assault on Gaza. It was first published on Tumblr, and then re-published the following December at www.metamute.org. It is included here, with minor changes, as the record of an intervention.]

Boycott the Zabłudowicz Collection!
No more selfies with the patrons of war!

1. Art and Art Patronage

Who are the Zabłudowiczs and why do they need to be boycotted immediately?

Answer #1: Guns + Real Estate → Israeli State = London Art World. Answer #2:

The Zabłudowicz Collection has played a central role in supporting emerging artists in London over the past few years, but their cultural 'patronage' isn't as selfless as it seems. It involves the washing of some very dirty money through the labour pool of young London-based artists. As the effective public-relations front end for what was historically a large supplier of arms to the Israeli state, as well as for the UK-based pro-Israeli lobby group BICOM, the Zabłudowicz Collection represents a direct link between the opportunities for careers in art for young people here in London and the current bombing and ongoing genocidal oppression of Palestinians in the Occupied Territories.

2. How did Zabłudowicz get so rich?

Short answer: through arms dealing and, subsequently, property development.

Zabłudowicz's fortune derives from the Tamares Group, which has large real estate

interests (including, until recently, in the occupied territories) and casinos. Earlier his activities were coordinated through Soltam, the Israeli arms manufacturer set up by his father Shlomo Zabłudowicz, who sold arms to the Israeli Defense Forces.

Via his past chairmanship, investment and interest in the pro-Israel lobby group BICOM, Zabłudowicz has played a sophisticated and possibly pivotal role in shaping opinion about Israel in both the UK media and parliamentary spheres. This has helped him to influence UK-Israeli relations. Apart from his activity with BICOM, Zabłudowicz has also been involved in making large donations to the Conservative Party.

3. What can you do? Boycott!

We call upon artists to uphold the BDS/PACBI guidelines and to boycott the Zabłudowicz Collection. We ask artists, cultural workers and producers not to sell or show their work with the Zabłudowicz Collection in the future and/or to withdraw the 'conceptual content' of their work from the Collection. We ask artists to respond to BDS/PACBI and refuse to sell their labour to the Zabłudowicz or to those institutions with which they collaborate.

We cite the PACBI guidelines and reiterate that these campaigns have called for a 'picket line' to be formed around Israeli-affiliated cultural institutions internationally. We support this demand in recognition of the fact that these institutions are 'complicit in the Israeli system of oppression that has denied Palestinians their basic rights guaranteed by international law, or has hampered their exercise of these rights, including freedom of movement and freedom of expression'. 'Cultural institutions', the guideline states, 'are part and parcel of the ideological and institutional scaffolding of Israel's regime of occupation, settler-colonialism and apartheid against the Palestinian people'. [1]

We call on artists not to scab and to act in solidarity.

This is direct solidarity with the communities under assault in Gaza, victims of state terror on both sides, and with resistance movements in both Israel and Palestine.

4. Rise of private funding in London

The decline of public funding, along with the ongoing capture of public funding by the neoliberal dogma of 'philanthropy', has the same toxic effect today that it has always had: glorifying the rich, whether directly or 'autonomously', becomes the task of art, while government cutbacks structurally and ideologically legitimate the social inequality and exploitation which makes people rich enough to 'donate' money to the arts. While neither private capital nor the state can offer autonomy to artists or anyone else, it is still possible to distinguish between sources of support.

For anyone involved in the field of contemporary art, boycotting The Zabłudowicz Collection is not a piece of moralising theatre. It is a withdrawal of labour. The Zabłudowiczys have enough friends in high places; you don't need to do their PR for them. And that's all participating in Zabłudowicz-funded projects is – PR and the desperate bleaching of some very nasty money.

5. Patronage vs Autonomy

Some people may want to shrug their shoulders and say that, in the end, it doesn't matter where the money comes from, so long as something good can come of it: art. But what kind of art? Artists need to recognise that the places where their work is exhibited, the money that makes it possible, and the interests it can be made to serve all make up a part of its aesthetic content. Even the most 'autonomous' or 'critical' artwork exhibited in the Zabłudowicz gallery instantly transforms itself into the merest piece of tinsel trailing off the back of the freight ships that even now are transporting the weapons that will be used to murder more Palestinian civilians.

Let's be clear. The Zabłudowiczs' historical involvement in the arms trade is absolutely relevant to their present role in BICOM and their white-washing through the art market. It doesn't matter that they've 'divested'; selling up and then switching the values that they 'earned' through mass slaughter into 'culture' doesn't mean that it's somehow unacceptable to accuse them of complicity in mass death.

Likewise: aesthetics and organisation are not comfortably separable. Should private patrons seek to fund the arts, then we welcome them to close their institutions and unconditionally to deliver over all their money, property and resources to artists and everyone else, who can perfectly well distribute, self-administrate and self-organise themselves: We want the money!

REMEMBRANCE

HESTIA PEPPÉ

FUCK IMPARTIALITY/ I WANT IMPERFECT TRANSLATION BASED ON
A NOT KNOWING/ THERE IS NO WHOLE BUT THE WHOLE/ OF WHICH
WE ARE ALL PARTS PLAYING/ BELOVED/ FUCK IMPARTIALITY/
GIVE ME THE PARTIAL/ THAT WHICH I FOLLOW, I CANNOT SEE
COMPLETELY/ THIS IS IMPERFECT/ A TRANSLATION BASED ON NOT
KNOWING/ THERE IS NO WHOLE BUT THE WHOLE/ OF WHICH WE ARE
ALL PARTS PLAYING/ ONE FRAGMENT RECALLING ANOTHER/ FUCK
IMPARTIALITY/ GIVE ME THE PARTIAL OR ELSE I'LL SUFFOCATE/
THIS IS AN IMPERFECT TRANSLATION IN RECOGNITION OF THOSE
WHO TAUGHT ME/ IN RECOGNITION OF THAT WHICH I COULD NOT
SEE/ THAT WHICH I FOLLOW I CANNOT KNOW COMPLETELY/ THERE
IS NO WHOLE BUT THE WHOLE/ OF WHICH WE ARE ALL PARTS
PLAYING/ BELOVED.

DEPRESSION

RICHARD B.

The wreckage of stars. If one stands on a hill to observe the stars, the distance between the horizon and one's elevated position is termed the 'depression.' The sublime has been turned into nothing more than a technology of artistry: observing the stars is functional. But in the city the stars are hidden by electric lights, one mechanical process outshining another. Contra popular moralising, computer screens can thus only distract the eye from the ambiguity of a horizon, not the now concealed starry heavens. (Distraction from the horizon replaces one depressed relation with another. The distance between the elevated position of the subject staring at an electric monitor, and the monitor itself, we can term a new 'depression.' The false economy of this metric can be offset by a drug, manufactured by the same company that provides lethal injections for death row. Ingest one each morning, just after dawn.)

A Trotskyist idea of demand rests on the assumption that wounds can be capitalised on. The world is promised in full knowledge that it cannot be gained except through total upheaval. This upheaval is to be instigated by the revolutionary vehicle. When, after the road has been only pocked rather than blown away, and the world has consequentially not been delivered, the true object of the demand, the recruit, is wounded – or rather, old childhood wounds are opened up again. *The more complete the fiasco, the sooner the people will learn their lesson.* The party member puts himself into this wound, grabs the sides with his hands and, kicking, attempts to propel the wounded into the party form, dragged along by her exposed flesh. This motion is not that of a revolutionary theory, but of an unsuccessful business model. Such groups also gain revenue through rent, which is only necessary due to the failure of this model to accumulate funds or create identity in perpetuity.

All of human emotion can supposedly be subsumed under the term 'depression.' In this the language of psychologism reveals itself as

more impoverished than even that of economics: no one is ever described as 'recessed.' The wealth of human activity which has attempted to give expression to these experiences has been eclipsed by the orations of lawyers and self-help philosophers, dressed up as the valiant crusades of templar knights. While the religious contractually promise brimstone, and the political offer up that 'organising cools the planet,' the only question to ask of Melville is whether he was pro- or anti-whaling. The phalanges of heroes of the bourgeois novel, the cast of centuries, lie in mass graves. Their twisted armour no longer serves as the crust of human thought, but instead is smelted down to act as therapeutic, congealed ointment for the shades who have banished themselves to lie in the darkness with them.

Celebrities are recognised more often than others only by their first names. This anonymity is envious because it side-steps the all-seeing eye of the state. Celebrities confront the state as private individuals. The need to create groups, to form named networks, stems from a similar desire. The strongest aspect is not branding for the sake of fame, but to finally become recognised as a subject (even self-recognition). This subjectivity is impossible because the wound which prevents such intimacy is an inherent part of damaged life. It is inherent because it results from the attempt to heal all previous damage. We remain without subjectivity because we are concerned with the wounds that precede us. The consequence of this is that the wound and the resistance are consistently confused. When 'one of us' breaks down, this can be seen as either the result of the world in which we live, or the result of resisting that world. Resistance is inherent; hence it is both. If resistance were not inherent, there would be no value in labour.

ERROR

ENDNOTES

Let's take all the crud of the world, all the material forms that bear the imprint of this society.¹ Not the social forms themselves – the historically peculiar configurations of relations between people – but all the muck and turf turned over and mangled by the relentless tread of those definite people, in their definite relations; stuff whose material form is the negative image of those people and their relations. We're not speaking about 'use value,' since what we're looking at is not reducible to the commodity; nor is it an abstract, contemplative natural form, like 'scenery' or 'the environment.' What we're concerned with, rather, is material form as correlate of definite social relations, and their attendant behavioural patterns, projects, accidents. Here objective spirit leaves its mark in the placement of hedgerows, the specific hue of an agricultural horizon, the percentage of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, just as much as in the interlacing lines of tarmac and light that straddle urban condensations and their dissipations into the countryside.

What do we have to say about the infinite concreteness of all this shit? The forms in question are part product of behavioural patterns, and part prerequisite. They lay down parameters – capacities and directionality – of activity, supplying form to it, enabling it, and lending limits. But a disused path is quickly overgrown, the form lost without the social processes that sustain it, and new paths must at some point be first trodden. And as such, these forms must be thought of as reifications of deliberate activity. The concept of 'infrastructure' overlaps this ontological field, but there are also plenty of forms here which would not normally be thought of as infrastructural, since what we're looking at is the negative image of the totality of human relations and activity as it occurs in the stuff of the world.

¹ This is a first sketch of a project that will be developed at greater length elsewhere. Fault-tolerant readers may anticipate future corrections.

In a world whose social forms are shaped by capital, it is perhaps to capital that we should look for explanation of the material imprints and patterns left by those forms – not just in the production process itself, but also in all the implications of this process as it unfolds across the globe. If capital moulds social relations to its ends and means, those relations in turn mould the stuff of the world. And if the affordances of that stuff enable and limit our activity, our own capacities must thus be seen as in part defined by capital. From this there follows a conundrum in the communist imaginary: absent the constitutive social forms of capitalist society, what will people do about all the stuff of the capitalist world and the parameters it gives to their action and behaviour? How will they be able to work with these things to reproduce themselves, without being compelled to reverse engineer the social relations that have inscribed themselves in them? This intractable question invites two troublesome answers. Either:

1. Given the depth of penetration of the effects of capital into the very material structure of the world, it will be necessary to break directly with the entire structure of things as given, since anything less than this will amount to a perpetuation or return of capitalist social relations. Or,
2. Given the general human dependence on capitalist infrastructure, it will be necessary to take a pragmatic approach, keeping this infrastructure running while we grapple with the Herculean political problem of managing and coordinating some global transitional phase.

From the standpoint of the first answer it will be said in response to the second: keeping such infrastructure running would be tantamount to keeping capitalism in general running, since such things cannot be extricated from the global capitalist system. And from the standpoint of the second it will be said in response to the first: to advocate some immediate break with the material structure of the capitalist world in general is to advocate a gigantic global humanitarian disaster, since there is no other ready means for dealing with the needs of seven billion people.

These contrary standpoints, for all the difference between a homely common sense and a rigorous principle, have at least one common implication:

insofar as the future is foreseeable on the basis of things as currently given, it is capitalism or else. If the affordances of the world are shaped by the imprint of capital, this currently gives and forecloses the horizon. Thus, at the limit of Hercules' labours there's still an inscription that says *nec plus ultra*: nothing else beyond but an ineffable negativity. And whether they liked it or not, our intransigents, for their part, would quickly be confronted with all the pragmatic problems of carving some path through all this crud. If the capital-constrained vectors written into the stuff of the world lead indefinitely towards the horizon, communism must be projected as an indeterminate, far-off break in these vectors. And as to the exact placement or character of that break: infinitesimals of sectarian fun await those who try to take up a strict position – or consign some opponent to one – on such matters.

Antinomies of Communist Thought

If we squint our eyes this problematic resembles another – the one with which Marx grapples in the section of *Capital* on 'so-called primitive accumulation.' Given that capital is a systematic inter-relation of moments which posits its preconditions as a primary result, this confronts us with a question: how could such a thing originate in the first place? This is an instance of the problem of bridging the gulf between any synchronic theory and a diachronic account of the same totality – or, more broadly, of the ancient and intractable philosophical problem of how to think becoming. Considered synchronically, given that all moments of the totality are simultaneously necessary, in all their systematic relations, the problem of origin appears absolute: capital must have sprung fully formed into the world, and it can't have existed at all a mere instant prior to this. But considered in diachronic terms this claim appears irrational: though little moments of genesis are part of the overall continuity of things, historical development doesn't produce miracles. Marx avoids this problem by reducing the question to that of the historical separation of producers from the means of production – something for which a history can be narrated, and which the synchronic analysis has demonstrated to be a fundamental prerequisite for generalised capitalist production.

In strict theoretical terms, however, this move is inadequate, since it

only sidesteps the question of the origin of the system of forms of value that mediate the separated relation of producers and means of production. This separation is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for the capitalist mode of production. Thus we can ask whether a different – non-capitalist – mode of production might have been possible on the basis of this simple separation if, for example, capital's self-valorisation had been absent as motive force. However, rather than getting caught up in such speculation, we might provisionally bracket this problem as merely an unavoidable *theoretical artefact* of a nonetheless necessary distinction. We know, after all, that capitalism did come to be, and Marx's account of this history is a plausible one. To push further on the problem might look like philosophical onanism – and, of course, it's better to attend to the actual world.

But if, on the basis of a synchronic grasp of capital as totality, the origin presents itself as a problem, or historically as a sort of 'miracle,' something similar is true of capital's demise. On the strict basis of capital's systemic integrity, its demise is unthinkable, and thus, when postulated, tends to take the abstract form of a pure rupture. And there results a strong temptation to recoil from this thought into assuming instead the concrete impossibility of anything so absolute, anything so mystical: of course, some intermediate phase must be postulated and the purity of such a rupture diminished; more pragmatic steps must be taken... Yet no amount of common-sense transitioning can bridge from what is to what is not without still implicitly posing the problem of when specifically the break takes place – the problem, if framed in this way, does not go away. The theoretical effects of the synchronic/diachronic distinction appear again, now resembling one of Zeno's paradoxes.

So, again, we might bracket such matters as theoretical artefacts, and as not necessarily referring to any literal historical truth, much as the axiomatic projection of a single infinite flat plane can occur as an artefact of Euclidean geometry without rendering that geometry useless in the face of the non-flatness of the world. And let's try to resist pictorialising this necessarily abstract concept of a pure final rupture in the concrete world of our revolutionary imaginary, for the resulting visions are guaranteed to be facile, simply depicting this abstractness. Against such imaginings, the common-sense recoil to faith in 'transition'

is understandable. Yet it will always be susceptible to the impertinent prodding of a theoretical absolutism which correctly perceives that, in itself, no amount of transition can amount to a rupture.

A Rube Goldberg Contraption

Now, let's recall that *capital itself* was the only totality at stake in all that questioning; not yet even *capitalist society*, let alone the things that bear the imprint of that society. If the simple question of thinking capital's demise on the basis of its systemic integrity leads us into metaphysical conundrums (a problem that no amount of crisis theory can solve of its own accord), it would seem reasonable to reframe the question on other bases, such that we no longer assume the very thing we want to negate. If capital's totality is restrictable to the various phases in its circuit, there's surely plenty else out there that we depend upon: can't we plant our feet in 'nature' or 'the commons' or 'the autonomy of the working class' or 'humanity,' from whence we can swivel our analytical instruments and look at capital *from the outside* as something subject to forces other than itself? From here it looks all artifice. How could we have been so foolish as to start from a position whose assumption was the eternalisation of the very thing whose demise we wanted to think?

So we marshal all our forces – nature, the commons, the autonomy of the working class, humanity, etc. A mere mode of production can never be a match for such a formidable army. But it's impossible to form battle lines when both antagonists are spread all over the place. What's more, the capitalist side is running the other's logistics... Particularistic and contingent as this totality may look – when measured up against the empty universality of such bald abstractions – if we are to take a realist survey of the forces at play, we're compelled to note that this mode of production is necessary for the reproduction of such antagonists as it meets. And thus it is easily master of the entire strategic terrain. This mere mode of production has miraculously made itself once more into the Absolute of this problematic: from the perspective of action it fills the whole horizon, and communism has been reduced again to an abstract messianism.

Thus our world appears capitalist through-and-through. We can now apply a philosophical lacquer to our new-found realism; a viscous solution of

such things as 'reification' and 'subsumption,' as is the wont of a particular kind of philosophically oriented Marxism which can be traced back at least to Lukács's reification essay. This type of Marxism revels intellectually in projecting some subsumption of the world, without remainder, into a monolithic totality, of which the essence is capital or one of its avatars. Since all is tendentially subsumed in this totality, our elementary philosophical problem of thinking becoming now takes on grander proportions – for no particularisation of a totality is conceivable when it is absolute, projected across the breadth of social being and into the depths of its material imprints. Thus revolutionary thinking is faced with a version of a theological problematic: immanence vs. transcendence. If communism is immanently produced within a capitalist world, how is it not to be just a perpetuation of capitalism? If communism transcends this world, how are we to get there, given the depth of our subsumption within capitalism? It is necessary to think the impossible passing-over of a limit, the working-through of a contradiction: immanent transcendence. It's a seductive problem that lends itself to no end of forlorn and playful manipulation. But even play gets boring eventually, and boredom is a mode of critique.

So let's retrace our steps to the beginning, and throw our thoughts again speculatively at the crud of the world. The application in which I write this was developed by volunteers. Within sight, there's a garden on wasteland reclaimed by local residents. The route that leads north-south from here has connected not just capitalist conurbations, but also medieval towns and hamlets. The kinds of vessels whose shards litter deep layers of the earth are still currently in use, with the same affordances. The spaces between these words were invented by feudal scribes. To the north, the woodless hills that roll either side were cleared not by capital, but by neolithic people. If capital is the motive factor in shaping social forms which in turn leave their imprint on all the stuff of the world, we would of course be distinctly overestimating its spread and power if we really thought that there was nothing here that was not referable to – and explicable in terms of – capital. To theoretically project capital's totalisation beyond what capital can legitimately explain is to make a false – merely imaginary – totalisation. The crud of the world, with its limits and affordances, extends far beyond capital's horizon.

Poor Miserable Heath Robinson

Yet there's a truth pictorialised in such false totalisations. While it doesn't encompass all the world's stuff, capital's self-totalisation involves an inner tendency towards expansion, and the value form it autonomises projects itself as the potential universal to all the world's particulars. Capital thus makes a claim – however spuriously – to logical universality, while it subordinates one aspect of social reproduction after another to its prerogatives. Most importantly, in this process it posits a tendentially general proletarian 'we,' with everything at stake in this reproduction. This we, whose being is immanent to the capitalist mode of production, is only insofar as capital mediates its reproduction, putting it logically at stake in any overcoming of capital itself. It is never in a state of absolute identity with the creatures it subsumes – they'll always dwell in the crud of the world prior to inhabiting capitalist society – but insofar as capital mediates their reproduction, these creatures are posited as proletarians. This seizing-hold of social reproduction by capital, and this positing of a class for whom everything is at stake in this reproduction, is the real generalisation of the proletariat. Through this process, capital takes the lives of an expanding mass of humanity under its uncertain stewardship, generalising the stakes held in a capital-mediated social reproduction. At the same time, it has a tendency to corrode such reciprocity as there is in these bonds, throwing workers into ever more dependent conditions and insecurity. And as it does so, while the stakes are raised, the odds simultaneously lengthen. Thus a whole shape of life comes to be put precariously in question.

Meanwhile, integrative processes inherent to political-economic and technical levels tie this reproduction increasingly into a unified and globally articulated system. Practical-technical vectors written into the stuff of the world gradually lose much of the 'ready-to-hand'-ness appropriate to the Robinson-like practical individual, as their globality lends them an ineffable quality, always receding over the horizon of that individual's perception. 'My' actions are decreasingly encapsulable as complete or self-subsistent, meaningful in themselves, deferring vanishingly instead down a chain of other actions. Now the 'state of nature' of the communist imaginary looks ever more remote

from that of the Lockean practical type, while Rousseauian and Hobbesian terms lose sense: abstracted from this vast reproductive apparatus the human could be reduced neither to an ignoble, primordial state of violence nor to some precorrupted condition, but only to inanimate matter. A breakdown of capitalist reproduction becomes imaginable only as a breakdown of human reproduction per se, and the communist imaginary increasingly a mere blank negativity, its most concrete forms mirroring the emptiest, merely logical derivation from the theoretical artefacts we examined above. Now the most abstract anarchisms become the common sense of struggles, while social democracy whiffs of utopia.

It would be a strange thing to advocate wilfully either for that blank negativity, or for its simple, pragmatic management as we cling on to this apparatus for dear life; and there is no obvious mediating path. Besides, at this large scale, though we are never passive, there's little straightforward choice that comes into such matters. Yet the odds continue to lengthen while the stakes are raised. And thus at some point, we can reasonably speculate, the bulk of humanity will have to find another way of reproducing itself. It is inconceivable that it could do this instantaneously, or acting merely under the most abstract kind of spontaneity. It is also inconceivable that it could simply cut the cable on its capitalist life support and head back into some rustivating bliss. However abstractly this negation presents itself on the horizon, the course of any real revolutionary struggle to escape this bind will of course be entirely concrete; rich in articulations, coordinations, mediations. And while it would be vain to think we could draw up detailed blueprints in advance, it would also be absurd to advocate for mere passivity. So in the meantime we struggle as well as we can, and in the process we strain to trace the strategic logic of things, to map the crud of the world from where we stand, and to reflect that back into the struggles themselves.

Tangent Space

So what will we do with all the crud of the world? The question does not stop asking itself. But it would be quixotic to think that we could answer it right away from some merely contemplative position, sorting all this shit into the columns of a communiser's inventory: keeps, junks, repurposes. There is stuff

with regards to which it would be pointless to speculate as to the capitalist-ness or otherwise of its affordances, and there's stuff that would be of strategic significance in any revolutionary struggle. Yet the latter is precisely the kind that is most inextricably entwined with the global reproductive apparatus; it can't be disaggregated and evaluated in abstraction from that apparatus, and the problem it poses can't be resolved into a keeping or a junking. 'Repurposing' is probably closest to what people would find a need to do, but it's also the vaguest of these terms, and hardly an answer at all to a question which can only be posed properly in practice.

It would be a case of false totalisation to take all this stuff to be irredeemably capitalist: social forms cannot be identified with the crud of the world. But we also can't assume that such stuff could be freed from those forms and their uses, capitalist operators swapped for communist ones. Imaginings of some universal managed resolution to 'the infrastructure question' are as much effects of our second theoretical artefact as are insurrectionist fantasies. Historical experience will never literalistically embody such abstractions. While capital remains to be at some point brought to a revolutionary terminus, from this angle we can't judge with any precision what might be the key moment. But it is reasonable to speculate that the infrastructure question would loom large; concretely, practically, irreducible in its complexity.

For all the abstractness of communism as it presents itself, it's still there, projected onto the horizon by a class relation which can only be insofar as it is coming to an end. Against the glare of this blank abstraction, the crud that clutters the terrain stands out in silhouette. It's impossible to say precisely how we will get there, or how long it will take: as we approach it, the horizon rolls back. But it's not always the same distance away: even if our steps have always fallen short until now, sometimes a steep gradient seems to bring it right up to our noses. And we might at least capture the falling-short with a concept: error. A cognate of the verb 'to err,' error refers to a straying, a mistake, a lapse. Thus always a relation between two points at minimum: something right, and something which deviates from it. In statistics, an error term may identify the influence of an unmeasured world beyond our model. And in mathematics, when an exact value can only be ascertained at infinity, specifiable error margins can at

least define our proximity to that value. In engineering, error is the gap between a norm of how things should function, and how they actually do. In instances of error, our means fall short of the ends we project, and the error we confront names this lack of possibility.

The delimitation of error is a key aspect of the everyday practical world; a negative specification of the space of affordances in which particular ends may be pursued. In a fragile, interlocked world whose affordances are increasingly defined by the humourless literality of logic gates, you don't have to stray far from the pre-given cowpaths to bump into error. Indeed, as soon as one attempts something not given by the affordances of the world, the state of error – as a measure of incapacity – appears absolute. But with reconstructive effort, error may gradually be pushed back to the limits, defining a space of possibility. As lived activity errs from the vectors shaped by capital's worldly movement, new paths will already be being trodden, new uses found for existing things, old uses taking new tools. Communist use, we might say, is repressed by capitalist crud, hemmed in as error. Incapacity would be the immediate condition faced by many of those erring from the affordances written into the most intricate of capitalist infrastructures. But in running up against that incapacity, lived activity will have to find ways to push the error back, carve out new affordances, such that erring becomes the path, and capitalist use becomes the error.

BRUTE FORCES

ESTHER LESLIE

Brutality

To the process of rescue belongs the firm, seemingly brutal grasp.

– Walter Benjamin, *Arcades Project*

Walter Benjamin's aphorism insists on the disruptive nature of thinking, on not having a cool head, nor a calculating one. It advocates a sudden movement – getting the hands dirty in grasping or grabbing – conceptually. Benjamin is interested in salvage, in extracting, from the jaws of doom, a better life, through a decisive and hard gesture – or at least a 'seemingly brutal' one. This idea belongs with Benjamin's idea of the 'destructive character.' In 1931 he devised, in response to what he termed the brutality of capital, a brutish figure. The 'destructive character' is a type without memory, opposed to repression in its political and psychic senses, who – causing havoc by cutting ways through, by liquidating situations – removes the traces which sentimentally bind us to the status quo; in order to make possible modes of behaving or misbehaving, which are appropriate to the conditions of the world.¹ The destructive character rejects past traces, has abolished 'aura' and with it sentimentality about things, including his own self. The destructive character is the enemy of the comfort-seeking 'etui-person,' who cossets everything in a velveteen case. 'Some people hand things down to posterity by making them untouchable and thus conserving them; others pass on situations, by making them practicable and thus liquidating them. The latter are called destructive.'²

Sometime between the spring and the autumn of 1933, Benjamin wrote a short reflection titled 'Experience and Poverty,' which considered the

1 W. Benjamin, *Selected Writings: 1931–1934*, 2005.

2 Ibid.

new reality of world war. Twentieth-century warfare had unleashed a 'new barbarism' in which a generation that went to school in horse-drawn trams stood exposed in a transformed landscape, caught in the crossfire of explosions and destructive torrents.³ Benjamin's was no lament for the old days, for those were unliveable for the propertyless, and the habits engendered by the cluttered and smothered interiors were unhealthy for the propertied.⁴ 'Erase the traces!' Benjamin proclaimed, after Brecht, in this essay, and enthused about a 'new, positive concept of barbarism.' Benjamin heralded the honest recorders of this newly devalued, technologised, impoverished experience: Paul Klee, Adolf Loos, and the utopians Paul Scheerbart and Mickey Mouse. In all of these the brutality and dynamism of contemporary existence, including its technologies, was used, abused, mocked, and harnessed.

Benjamin carried these anti-sentiments about brutal grasps and mimetic defences over into his historical theses, written under the pressure of Nazism. He wrote of breaking open the continuum of history or arresting it, of shock, of breaking through the picture of history, of a warlike, explosive assault on the state of things, of snatching an evanescent memory that flashes up at a moment of danger. Benjamin's strategy was aesthetic-political, just as his theses on the concept of history addressed the idea of the image or picture of history. These metaphors cannot be simply translated into practical action; or rather they might import themselves only at specific, charmed revolutionary moments. As he put it in one of the theses:

The consciousness of exploding the continuum of history is peculiar to the revolutionary classes in the moment of their action... in the July Revolution an incident took place which did justice to this consciousness. During the evening of the first skirmishes, it turned out that the clock-towers were shot at independently and simultaneously in several places in Paris.⁵

History is exploded as an act of 'genuine' progress, which does not move simply forward. Revolutionary time is no other time, no clock time, but rather the time of

3 W. Benjamin, *Selected Writings: 1931-1934*, 2005.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

the present, filled with the moment of acting, an acting which is then re-invoked as a conscious reflection on what brutal, disruptive act brought the new time into being. A new calendar, such as that inaugurated in the French Revolution, should mark the discontinuity that has brought it into being in its naming, its re-divisions, its spaces of commemoration – unlike the Weimar Republic, born of a compromised revolution in 1918 and 1919, and which is unable to acknowledge its own constitution as a break in time, a break in tradition, and so returns to old times, business-as-usual.

What Benjamin asserts in the essay 'Experience and Poverty' is the necessity to adopt brutal modes of thought and action not as a freely chosen strategy as such, but as a mimetic adaptation to the brutality that is the world. Through a kind of doubling, the negation is negated. Brutality as brutality in thought: a break with thinking as it has been thought to date, an assault on common sense in order to annul the thinking that justifies, by not drawing attention to, everyday brutality. Brutality in action: a brutal, critical one, in which time itself might be interrupted. The world itself might stop spinning. Such is revolutionary political action.

Extraction

Capitalism was founded on coal. Coal is extracted from the earth in ways that are brutal. Coal is a dark substance from deep in the ground, which powered factories and, in a second wind, released from itself a rainbow of colours, inaugurating a synthetic world. The coal-based chemical industries of colour synthesis develop from the middle of the nineteenth century. Predominantly, German chemistry was cooked up in the pans and glass tubes of hobby scientists with an alchemical zeal. Artificial treasures were chased, to supply burgeoning industries in a land with few colonies and without its own expansive natural resources. Hoechst, BASF, and the rest of them sought substances such as synthetic colours in red and blue, cheaply coaxed metallic matter and gemstones, or industrially produced soda ash and guano. Time's dominion was cracked too through the accelerating power of chemical reaction.

This was a different type of brutality to the colonial one of the later decades of the nineteenth century that wrested blood diamonds from the earth, but it left plenty of scars on nature, too. Lignite extraction, to recover the coal, modified the landscape. Marl, sand, clay, and gravel were shifted in an exposure of the innards of the earth in open-cast mining. More factories appeared and power stations were built, along with transportation routes to connect them to each other and to points of further circulation. Electricity circulated through cables and turned the dark of night into light. The changes went beyond visual and sonic appearances. For example, in 1876 around Bitterfeld, the first effects from the sinking of the ground water level as a result of lignite mining were seen in the death through dehydration of over a hundred oak trees.⁶ Elsewhere flora died and drinking fountains dried up.⁷ Above and below worlds were not disconnected from each other. Industrial illnesses and diseases were invented along with the new intimacy with chemical processes – sometimes those same chemicals provided the antidotes too, and the colour factories, of Bayer, for example, became pharmaceutical factories.

Industry and science combine to extract the subterranean treasures of coal. Then a second extraction extracts from that darkness a panoply of colours. This exposure to the light of day and dream of night, of a new layer of the planet, demonstrated how the ability to master nature was vastly extended, through technological rationality. Nature gave up its secrets and was compelled to become available, through modification, for social needs and wants. This inaugurates a logic of extraction that would come in time to commute human labour power too into an extractable substrate. There is a parallel between nature down there, beneath the earth's crust, that is the subject of extraction, which is then converted into riches, and the proletariat down there, who come to recover and process the chemicals, and from whom labour power is extracted. From that, in turn, there is a second conversion into profit. In its guise as coal mine, the mine is the basis of all other industrial production – coal is transformed into energy for

6 See, for example, E. Obst, 'Das Absterben der Bitterfelder Walddenkmäler', 1922.

7 See, for example, J. Hasse, *Heimat und Landschaft. Über Gartenzwerge, Center Parcs und andere Ästhetisierungen*, 1993, for thoughts on the instrumentalisation of the landscape.

further production, but it also forms the basis of chemically derived substitute products, and, in the guise of metals mine or minerals mine, it is a place where concentrated natural deposits could be wrung from an earth that gave up its riches only reluctantly, and sometimes took life in return in notorious cave-ins and explosions. Through labour, wealth is amassed and nature is transformed. Coal is the very matter of transformation, powering factories of processing. Gold and silver and gems can be collected virtually in their natural state and their beauty brought up to the upper world, where they transform into concentrated value. These are the brutal facts. Through brutishness against nature, including human nature, the world is changed from its social relations right down to its molecules.

The extraction is brutal. It is literally a product of brute force. Coal into colour – this is an emblem of the processes of capitalism, with its peculiar mode of turning something into its opposite, turning something darkly inaccessible into something dazzling, captivating, and attractive, turning human activity into private property, turning the universal metals of nature into the particular metals of money. What is an act of rationality appears, however, as its antithesis, the dialectical other of Enlightenment, an act that is variously magical, in its transmuting of substances, values, constants, energies. The rescue of this brutish knowledge lies in its seemingly perverse release of another potential. The brutality of the act runs alongside the poetic potential of what the act of extraction releases. This is the brutal grasp of something – its derailment or *dénouement* perhaps – in a way that might not be expected.

And so when black coal released the entire spectrum of colour, colour burst out of the darkness of old dead matter. As a book published by IG Farben in 1938 on the history of organic chemistry, the chemistry of carbon and its compounds, expressed it: the shiny black of coal deposits had locked inside of them a previous world of life along with all its colours.⁸ That compound inertness, dead but once upon a time teeming with original life, could release from itself – from its coal tar waste – its twinkling opposite. Extracted too in the act of chemical change is a mythic or poetic residue.

8 [Unknown author], *Erzeugnisse Unserer Arbeit*, 1938.

Splinter

A brutal act of nature abuse gives rise to knowledge – a contested one. For Adorno and Horkheimer, this digging out from the earth, using the science and technology of the day, is an act of instrumental rationality. Reason is the unreason of nature. Reason as the mastery of nature – the realm of the given – is the central core of Enlightenment thought. Nature is seen as a block to human freedom. It must be overcome, cut into. Humans are set against it, rather than recognising themselves within it. And so, argue Adorno and Horkheimer, Reason comes to be associated with abuse of nature, with positivist science, with means-end thinking, with the rise of the commodity economy, with capitalism, with the devaluation of the individual human, especially the suffering, oppressed one, and of community in favour of the mechanisms that generate profits and a streamlined life. In fact, reason turns out to forward various kinds of irrationalism and mythic thinking – the wonder of the commodity, the elevation of Hollywood superstars into gods, the worship of fast cars, the belief that one is unworthy of happiness because one is not rich.

In the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno and Horkheimer write: ‘the control of internal and external nature has been made the absolute purpose of life.’⁹ Reason is the reason of the market. The market, buying and selling, is the rationale of everything. Only that which can be bought and sold has value. Value is a monetary question. Everything – including the self – must become a commodity, bought and sold on the market. The domination of nature results in the parcelling of it up in order to be traded. This control is exercised not least by technological means to the ends of extraction, abstraction, and exchange. This is the base brutality. It predates capitalism, but it is an intensifying brutality, which reaches an apogee in late capitalism. That it matters to us is annexed to the importance of suffering, especially as articulated by Horkheimer, who never shook off his Schopenhauerian roots. The reality of human suffering must always be acknowledged, Horkheimer insists, and it is not to be dismissed – as he argues Hegel does – as a sideshow in the wider scheme of the movement of the ‘eternal

⁹ T. Adorno and M. Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, 2002.

spirit.' Life is marked by pain and pain makes us human. Suffering is eternal, but it is also historically inflected. It is the irrationality of the capitalist social order that expresses itself in our human suffering: 'the wretchedness of our own time is connected with the structure of society.'¹⁰ Horkheimer proposes, in the 1933 essay 'Materialism and Metaphysics,' that 'man's striving for happiness is to be recognized as a natural fact requiring no justification.'¹¹ Suffering motivates the desire to overcome it, to reach towards freedom. Out of misery comes the desire to end misery.

Developed in this work of the 1940s is an increasing focus on nature as the site of domination, further defined as outer nature (the trees, the air, the world around us) and inner nature (our human drives). Repression of one implies repression of the other. Instrumental reason is concerned with outer nature only insofar as it can satisfy ends that reason has defined as valuable – perhaps questions of productivity – but taken narrowly, that is to say without concern for questions of soil depletion, or the spread of diseases among intensively farmed animals that then pass to humans. But it is not enough to just reposition the self as natural and to posit the 'antithesis of technology and nature,' which Adorno calls vulgar and false. Instead he argues, in his way, for a brutal mode of thinking, a rescue of the brutal itself, of brute nature, or nature as brute.¹² To want to keep nature pure and unsullied is the thinking of the gentleman (who is usually a brutal warmonger when called upon to protect his wealth). Untamed nature is sublime. It bears no relation to the prettified nature that is the basis of its veneration by the nature lover, but which actually proves itself to be a reduced, cultivated form. What Adorno's brutalising thought achieves is to conceive of nature not through its separation and domination, but rather utopically: 'The image of what is oldest in nature reverses dialectically into the cipher of the not-yet-existing, the possible: As its appearance this cipher is more than the existing.'¹³ Nature may be that which has not yet come into being. It is the not-yet-existing, which cannot be conceptualised by human schemas.

10 M. Horkheimer, 'Materialism and Morality', 1993.

11 M. Horkheimer, *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*, 2002.

12 See, for example, T. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 1984.

13 Ibid.

Brutality Today

There is still something aesthetic in Adorno's vision of abused and extracted nature. What is the developing trajectory of the abuse and extraction and what types of brutal thinking might be needed to conceptualise it? The highly rationalised and technologised situation of farming and food production today is a site worthy of exploration.

Nature used to be killed in the city where it would be consumed. Now it is more likely to be exiled from the city and to return only once dead and under plastic. New institutions have been built for these purposes and these largely deny any form of co-habitation. Grow Finish Units is the name for unmanned pig production factories.¹⁴ They are prevalent in the Great Southern Plains of the US. Inside large featureless buildings, hundreds of pigs are fed by corn grown from nitrogen made of oil and gas. This arrives with them through automatic feeders. A brochure from the industry states the following: 'In the finishing building, pigs gain 1.5–1.7 pounds a day for approximately 20 weeks until they reach a finished weight of 260–280 pounds and are ready to be shipped to a plant/packaging operation.' At this precise point, the truck arrives to ship them to the killing zone. It is perhaps a welcome relief from the overcrowded, highly stressful barren concrete pens, where pigs become diseased and aggressive towards each other. Through the structures of such an industry, animals have become more disaggregated from humans.

That rationality is not necessarily disturbing – though the prevalence of diseases amongst these animals and the attendant use of medication, ingested eventually by us, might cause one to worry. But the issue of food production and its rationalisation is connected to the concentration and competition of contemporary food production, which has led to various crises. A window was briefly opened on them recently with the food adulteration panic around horse meat and unidentified meat in various supermarket ready meals.

The domination of nature in this hyper-technological, hyperconcentrated, hypercompetitive sense leads to sharp practices, and a separation of food source from food processor and food buyer. What emerges

¹⁴ John Gerrard has made a series of artworks reflecting on these formations.

out of that is a new type of irrationality – on several levels. It is an irrational way of organising food production – transporting carcasses and food slurry across vast distances produces an energy burden for the environment, if not also for producers. It allows ignorance to enter into the system and the opportunity for substitutions and malpractices. It lowers the nutritional content of food – which is irrational, but is not a concern for the rationality of producers who seek to sell more of less or simply inferior ingredients. There is no social reason in formation here.

There are further irrationalities. In the food adulteration crisis suddenly there was a small glimpse of the origin of the food that many of us eat. This was a potential for enlightenment about something so fundamental, but that window was slammed shut in various ways. Hysteria ruled: an irrational fixation on the horrors or otherwise of eating horse; a distracting debate on the morality of people who eat ready meals and how they deserve what they get. Then suddenly the whole issue disappeared. The next crisis hits the newspaper headlines and we all go back to doing what we were doing before: business-as-usual. That is irrational, disjointed thinking. The only winners are the newspapers. At the point where total mechanisation has set in, the point of absolute human domination has been reached. In the wake of absolute rationalisation comes absolute irrationality.

Taking Benjamin's aphorism as a starting point, it would seem that there is no option but to grasp the brutality of capital's movement through the world with a thinking that perceives the extent of the brutality, but is also itself brutally wrenched from the 'normal' patterns of understanding.

SLUMP

JOHN BARKER

I'm deep breathing. I am.

Lucky I can. With the knowhow. It stands to reason relaxing's not the easiest thing in the world otherwise there'd be relaxed people wherever you went. I was at the Facility at 2.30 and the Unit at 4 and I didn't see too many relaxed people round there. At the Annexe I didn't see any at all.

Lungs in good running order. What do you want, immaculate bodywork? It goes doesn't it?

See, I'm still deep breathing, keeping at it. Got to give it a chance, like the guvnor said to the trainee shelf-stocker.

Darren says Vegans get more out of their breathing, they relax easier. They put weight on as well. He does. That's what relaxation does for you which means he does plenty of the deep breathing, or he's that relaxed in the first place that he doesn't have to bother.

Bollox, Darren's just an overweight Vegan. And I'm keeping up the deep breathing even if I do eat fish. He's on a mission with the fish, mercury poisoning and the filth cod eat these days, but with him what it comes down to is FISH HAVE GOT FACES TOO. As it happens it's the heads I like most, I told him. Sprats, whitebait, sardines, with them, the heads. He made out I was kidding.

This deep breathing's doing me good. I wouldn't be sitting like this if it wasn't, legs bent underneath me. He'll keep on about it but what he doesn't know is I really do love fish.

You breathe in. Hold it, all the day's crap swirling about.

And out. The mind empty.

The mind empty.

I could have bought some Fresh fish today. All right not fresh fresh, I know. It's like Darren thinks he's the only one, no one else knows. But I'm not taking a packet out of chilly froth in the supermarket, I mean where you can see they HAVE got faces, stretched out on a fishmonger's sloppy marble. Breathe out, empty the mind. Yes, yes, mind empty.

I could be eating some right now, out of the frying pan and on to the plate, with a squeeze of lemon. I could, except YOU'VE GOT TO FUCKING BUY IT FIRST. Not a big job, the buying of fish, nothing in itself; see what you want, pay up; carry off the newspaper wrap, in a carrier. Only you've got to buy it first. Make time for it, remember to do it. And I didn't. I don't think this breathing lark's doing me any good. I've given it my best shot but being realistic it's not doing much for me.

Done you any good?

Not a lot.

What a poxy, useless fucking day.

There's eggs in the fridge, there's some bread. Terrific. Bring on the plaice, bring on the trout. Bring on the cod and Fuck The Toxic Consequences. Whiting if I'd found it. Now that would have done something for me whereas, let's face it, when you've got to do deep breathing to feel all right you must have got it all wrong in the first place. And still be getting it wrong.

Sprats in fact, if the choice was there, AND eaten the heads.

I could have bought a piece of fish today, squeezed it into the schedule; I could have said to myself, whatever else happens I will do one thing to improve the

quality of my life, and said it before half past five when the shops close, proper shops, fishmongers that are fishmongers, greengrocers that are greengrocers. In fact half five is when I thought I might catch him at the Annexe, half five pm. This is when I should have met him at half past nine this morning, at the Office.

I must be mental.

Give it half an hour and I'll try ringing him. Lie down till then. Lying down is real relaxation. Stands to reason it's going to be the most relaxing of all because you're doing nothing. Flat on my back. On the floor. And I'm breathing anyway. I can hear it. You don't have to do exercises, it just happens. Which is just as well. One thing you don't have to put your mind to. Otherwise there wouldn't be much time for anything else, not if you thought about every breath, each and every one.

If I looked at it exactly as it is for me right now, it'd be time for a rusty razor blade. Middle-aged man's highspot, lying on the floor. In a very humdrum drum. Darren says too many possessions are a drain on the soul but how many's too many? That's what he doesn't say.

I must be mental.

I'm at the Vortex office 9.25 sharp and her on Reception tells me he won't be in all day, something's come up but to keep in touch during the day because he's going to try and re-schedule his re-schedule to fit me in. And I don't start ranting and raving because these things DO happen.

It works, this lying on the floor business, These-Things-Do-Happen I'm saying. If I wasn't relaxed I could imagine me putting it a bit different. I was putting it very differently not 40 minutes ago when I decided to cut my losses and head home.

I didn't rant and rave even when she said Reschedule like she was on tannoy duty

at Victoria and me only three feet away. No, I said I'd ring in an hour and even then I wasn't planning on leaving that hour empty. I told myself that there were other objectives I might also achieve in that time.

These-Things-Do-Happen; what, all day? So it seems. Bob Green said to me, looking me straight in the eyes, In The Face Of Adversity, Passivity Is Hopeless. Only this morning, that's what he said. Thought for the day or he remembered it out of a Christmas cracker. And it wasn't Bob Green I was waiting to see. I hadn't thought of him at all in terms of today. His face hadn't crossed my mind, his name hadn't crossed my mind.

The floor's digging into the back of my head, where it's very boney and just how much adversity has Bob Green had to face? Not a lot, not in the last few years, not by the look of him.

Don't be passive, get a cushion.

There. Bob Green wasn't in my schedule at all, nor even my re-scheduling that resulted from the Vortex re-scheduling, and that was looking to cross paths with it, his, Vortex's. Lucky we're not aeroplanes. We might just as well have been, wouldn't have come to any grief. Traffic controllers could have been spark out and it would have made no odds.

Darren's probably never tried just lying on his back on the floor. Too simple, no following a manual involved. If I told him he'd just be suspicious. Well all right then I'm not giving it big licks, I'm not making claims for it but the fact is I'm still saying These-Things-Do-Happen, because they do, and it's something I might well forget if I was standing up.

At least – out of this poxy, useless, fucking day – I could have made the time to buy some fish. Not fish necessarily it's not like I've got obsessions, whatever Wanda says, which is her knickers; and I don't like it for the sake of winding up Darren whatever he thinks. It could have been something else, at least something;

something a bit better than handy tips from Bob Green. 'In this world there's introverts and there's extroverts,' was his next one which was the very moment when I caught a glimpse of Venue on the other side of the room, in a crowd. That's what he calls himself these days, Venue Limited.

And I was entitled to see Venue because I DIDN'T waste those hours between phone calls. I'm the man with a mission. As Wanda said the one time I wanted it simple and her taking the weight. But that's just her, the way she talks.

It was after the half ten call I saw him, when I had two and a half hours to spare, after I'd made the call and got: 'Vortex Holdings, Mr Vortex's office ... No I'm sorry he isn't but you ought to catch him at the Warehouse at One.' And to be fair she did say, Ought To. No promises. To-be-fair I'm saying, this lying on the floor really is the business. Anyone in my position who hadn't tumbled it would be ranting and raving about Injustice In This World, headbutting their decor.

I said to myself after that half ten call, I said I've a shrewd idea where Venue's schedule will be taking him right now and with a bit of effort on my part I could be in the right place at the right time, and still be at the Warehouse for One if that should still turn out to be necessary. And I made that effort. Now if I'd placed all my eggs in the one basket; if I'd said, it's a position with Vortex or nothing, then I wouldn't have the right to feel the way I did before I tried the Breathing. In fact if I was as not bothered about things as that, if I was like that, I'd have had no need to try the Breathing.

Or if I was that fanatical, which I'm not.

I don't eat red meat but I do eat fish, all right?

One fucking thing I could have done, didn't have to be the fish but just one thing just for the pleasure of it, spared five minutes to make the necessary preparations for one bit of pleasure in the day.

So I did get there but I couldn't see him in the crowd by which time Bob Green must have decided I could profit from some titbits out of his Outlook on Life; Relaxed-but-not-passive is how he summed it up. Of course he's relaxed and

whatever adversity he has seen WAS a long time ago, he's been with the Vulcan for five years and the Vulcan's a very solid outfit. Even today. And I wasn't passive, as soon as I saw Venue I made my way across the room, as fast as I could given the crowd, leaving Bob Green talking into thin air. I'd glimpsed the man, I could see him. The carpet was dark blue, his shoes were polished black. I shimmied through that crowd. None of whom I knew, nobody to say where he'd gone.

Fifteen minutes and I'll make that call. The human body, on its back, is not flat. Man or Woman. In fact Darren probably would entertain lying on the floor. Maybe he does. He'd go for that small element of discomfort like it's not doing you any good otherwise. But we're not talking about it doing you good, we're talking about relaxation. Which is a good thing in itself. What kind of state would I be in if I wasn't relaxing now. And they're all saying it these days, right across the board: relaxation's a good thing: in itself.

He wasn't fucking there. Just a space of blue carpet where he had been. That didn't last long either, another pair of black polished shoes filled it in. The face that went with them I didn't know from Adam. I looked over shoulders. I kept moving. Just the other side of the crowd was a door, a pull-up bar job, out into an alley. You can only try, that's all that can be asked of you. I didn't take Venue to be someone who had much truck with alleys but you can't rule out possibilities just like that. He might have parked his vehicle around the corner. I ran. Darren's mate says running is especially relaxing.

I've always known a lost cause when I've seen one and Vortex was due at the Warehouse at One. Ten to I was there as it turned out, I looked at my watch. At twenty past I asked someone the time because even with a digital you never know, and twenty past it was. By half past I was in another phone box. I must be mental. Twice over. Lying on the floor and I think I'm doing well when carpeting can only do so much give-wise and the human body, on its back, is NOT flat. What's the point of a lounge with a three-piece if you don't use it?

There, see. Stretch out. A cushion to the back of me, a cushion underneath. Phone within easy reach. All right, so it wouldn't look so hot in a snapshot; what do you expect, immaculate upholstery. It does the job doesn't it? See I'm relaxed, there's nothing to it. Like the steeplejack said to the rookie.

Darren's mate says runners relax easier. Not in those Fun Runs they don't, I've seen them. As for Darren he doesn't rate a three-piece, thinks they're naff.

I'd say it's odds-on this number's ex-directory but I got it off her, her at Vortex Holdings. That was the Half Six call. I had to hustle her for it but I did get it. I'll call him in a minute.

POWER, KNOWLEDGE, HATRED: NOTES ON ANTAGONISM & AUTONOMIST EPISTEMOLOGY

STEVEPHEN SHUKAITIS

The worst of Italy! Not just merely slightly disreputable, but truly the worst of Italy...

These words are, of course, not mine. They were spoken by the Italian Minister of Public Administration on 14 July 2011 at a 'Young Innovators' convention during which he was asked some questions about precarious workers, questions that apparently rubbed him the wrong way.

This really struck me when I read it at the beginning of Alice Mattoni's excellent book *Media Practices and Protest Politics: How Precarious Workers Mobilise*, in which she examines a number of recent mobilizations of precarious workers. Mattoni does quite a good job of mapping out the various dynamics that shape movements like the Euro May Day, campaigns of direct action against austerity measures, protests against university reforms, labor organizing in call centers, and spectacular media actions staged to highlight precarity in the fashion industry.

Mattoni draws from communication and media studies to come up with a useful typology of media practices employed by the precarious. Most significantly she distinguishes between what she calls 'relational media practices,' or the media practices oriented towards working with media professionals, and 'activist media practices,' or ones that are more concerned with the use of media within the cycles and dynamics of movement composition themselves. A relatively simple way to think of this would be in terms of how it breaks down into the internal and external dynamics of media use, in relationship to existing political movements and compositions.

This is all very well and good, and shows one of the better ways in which academic tools and disciplines, such as media and communication studies, can be put to useful ends in the service of autonomous politics. Mattoni describes a large portion of the cycle of movement composition, from the initial upswings and bursts of enthusiasm among the precarious that serve to create 'a composite political subject able to act at the public level to express claims and demands,' to the difficulties faced by organizers trying to mobilize precarious workers precisely because the fractalization of the labor process often means there is no shared common space of experience to work from.¹ Or, in workplaces where there is indeed a shared physical space, there could just as easily exist wildly varying contractual arrangements that serve to segment and divide the labor force.

Despite this, what strikes me is that even though there might be an ever-greater amount of accurate analysis and understanding of the cartographies and composition of precarious labor in a sociological sense, it still feels like something is missing. And that 'something missing' brings us right back to the Italian minister so rudely calling out the precarious workers of the country as the 'worst of Italy.' This is important to highlight, not just for the sheer pig-headedness of the comment, but also for the very palpable sense of the dynamics of class hatred and condescension that one can sense in such statements. And it is responses to that, at the affective level, whether of indignation or rage, which are just as important to the organization of a precarious politics as is the analytical understanding of the changing nature of precarious labor.

This quote then brings us back to the question of class antagonism, not as something to be described or theorized, or at least not just described or theorized, but rather as a key dynamic from which to build and develop understanding. In other words, antagonism not as an object of study, but rather as the intersubjective dynamic that underpins and makes the subversive analysis and comprehension of capitalism possible. Antagonism not as an affective add on, but as precondition. Toni Negri once made a claim (which came back to

1 A. Mattoni, *Media Practices and Protest Politics: How Precarious Workers Mobilise*, 2012.

haunt him through the courts) about the warmth of proletarian community felt upon donning a ski mask. Perhaps it is time to assert again 'the necessary' that responds with a raw antagonism to the class war waged from above with a ferocity that builds affective links among comrades who are struggling against it.

Mario Tronti makes very much this point in a passage from *Operai e capitale* – a book that still has yet to be fully translated into English. In the section published in essay form as 'Social Capital,' Tronti argues:

Only from a rigorously working-class viewpoint will the total movement of capitalist production be comprehended and utilized as a particular moment of the workers' revolution. Only one-sidedness, in science and in struggle, opens the way both to the understanding of everything and to its destruction. Any attempt to assume the general interest, every temptation to stop at the level of social science, will only serve to better inscribe the working class within the development of capital.²

Tronti is working from what is usually referred to as the 'Copernican Turn' of autonomist Marxism, where it is the struggles of the working class that are emphasized and understood as the primary motor of history and determinant of capital's development. But here he's making a particular claim, not just about the importance of understanding struggles, but of doing so in an explicitly one-sided manner.

What Tronti is warning against is the turning of weapons of class antagonism into social science tools. This might seem a bit strange given that the early *operaismo* comes out of a very real engagement within Italian sociology, and can largely be understood as a process wherein industrial sociology was stolen back from the toolbox of management approaches and placed into the metaphorical working-class overall back pocket to be utilized in all kinds of sabotage, factory occupations, and so forth. Here Tronti is imploring us to retain the use of sociological tools as weapons, perhaps in the same vein as Pierre Bourdieu constantly describing sociology as a martial art, as a means of self-defense.

² M. Tronti, 'Social Capital', 1973.

Tronti is certainly aware of this, more than aware of it. And that is precisely his caution, the warning he gives here: that any attempt to remove the antagonistic foundation from the analytical and political tools developed can only serve to reinscribe the working class within the development of capital. What Tronti is saying is that if one forgets the invectives of the government ministers, of the factory foremen, of the agents of class domination – the very real hatred of whom sparked our impulse of insurrection in the first place – and replaces them with sterile conceptual tools, then one loses the ‘conceptual’ class struggle, even if one appears to be carrying it on. For Tronti, antagonism, perhaps even full-on class hatred, is the affective substrate from which any sense of theoretical and political coherence will and must be built.

This is a fragment of what one could suggest is a kind of autonomist epistemology, one that understands the dynamics of class struggle and antagonism not just as historically, socially, and politically important, but also as developers of conceptual and philosophical tools. Not simply that working-class movements are just social configurations that concepts and ideas emerge from, but that they are also in their antagonistic formations precisely ideas, words made flesh in the movement of uprising against domination and exploitation. This is what Rancière gestures to when he comments that sociology, before it was an academic discipline or a denizen of universities, existed as ‘a war machine invented in the age of the aesthetic which is also the age of democratic revolutions,’ that existed as a project for the reorganization of society.³ To develop an autonomist epistemology is to maintain a certain fidelity to these origins, even if moving and adapting with the changing situation. An autonomist epistemology then is not the deployment of concepts in order to fix and sanitize this antagonism, rather it is the movement of intensifying and extending it, deepening and developing the logic of antagonism as the foundation of subversion against the nature of class society itself.

3 J. Rancière, ‘Thinking Between Disciplines: An Aesthetics of Knowledge’, 2006.

COPS OFF CAMPUS

REFUSE TO COLLABORATE

10 September 2013

Protesting Against the State of Things.

Open Letter

This is an appeal to friends, comrades, and 'organisers' of protests. In light of the mass arrest of 286 anti-fascist protestors on 7 September (and Fortnum and Mason, Critical Mass, BNP Whitehall, etc.) we appeal to all organisers of protests from whatever organisation to immediately cease from negotiating with the police in any form whatsoever and, for any protests currently being planned, that organisers withdraw immediately from communication with the police.

The police have become the protest organisers. It is they who organise what happens on the day, who goes where, what is said or not said, how the protest acts, behaves, moves, and demonstrates. We have now not only a state sanctioned but state organised protest. Be effective and you're liable to mass arrest. Deviate from this meticulous state planning and you're liable to mass arrest. We must not get used to this!

The police have evidently stepped up their intentions against street protests and demonstrations. This is a planned strategy to suppress effective protest and is part of the total policing agenda. For those who believe that effective street protests are not just about letting off steam or performing a state sanctioned role in the political system, but are one of the ways to begin to achieve radical changes in society, we cannot be debilitated by these new malign strategies of suppression – kettled, arrested, processed, released under threat of being hauled back into custody if we dare attend another protest in breach of bail conditions.

The state and the police cannot be asked to stop what they are doing or to behave more nicely towards protesters – rights are requests for permission, and it is obvious to anyone at Whitechapel last week who witnessed the officialised extravaganza of police, Unite Against Fascism, Council officials, and ‘community’ leaders all performing a protest for the cameras, exactly what that ‘permission’ to protest means.

It’s been clear for a long time that this type of state sanctioned non-protest should be ended, now it’s not just a matter of frustration at their ineffectiveness but a matter of the safety of friends and of those we don’t know who come to protest on the streets. All the while that this type of non-protest is accepted, everyone else who doesn’t think it is legitimate, or who doesn’t know the rules of the police’s game, is liable to arrest.

Negotiating with the police now means putting protestors in serious danger. Negotiating with the police is enacting a complicity in the suppression of protests and should be seen as such. Collaborating with the police implicates and endangers anyone who does not know of, or agree with, the state sanctioned plans of the march.

The action we must take is firstly to encourage and pressure all and any organisers of demonstrations, call outs, and protests, to refuse to negotiate with the police in any form. No negotiation of times, dates, rally points or routes of the march.

While this probably does not prevent mass arrests absolutely - the Critical Mass cycle ride did not liaise with the police prior to their mass arrest for ‘unlawful procession’ - they are arresting us *en masse* anyway, by the hundreds. Can they arrest us by the thousands?

Maybe they can, but what it may achieve is to unify the demonstrations in that we are all acting against the police’s efforts to suppress protest collectively. There can be no false separation of good and bad protestors, legitimate and illegitimate protestors, that is used to weaken protests and social movements. No treating those arrested as not ‘really’ part of the ‘real’ demo, or as hijackers causing trouble for not obeying protest restrictions. The complicity of the organisers in this police practice of de-legitimising genuine protest must end. Acting collectively in this way means that we will all be illegitimate together.

We know that this appeal will likely not be listened to by most organisations and bureaucracies that coordinate protests, but we must attempt to win back some space on the streets for protest ourselves.

This is a direct appeal to not be complicit in endangering those who attend by collaborating with the police on the demonstration and cease all negotiations with the police immediately.

*

TOTAL PROTEST

6 December 2013

Let's be honest with ourselves. It's not that the cops have been attacking 'peaceful' protests, it is the police who organise peaceful protests in collaboration with 'acceptable' and 'legitimate' groups. This is why they are allowed, they are completely ineffectual. What the police have been violently attacking is effective struggle and effective organisation outside of their parameters.

It doesn't matter that the occupation of Senate House was being conducted 'peacefully' when it was violently evicted by police. What's important here, and the reason violence was used against it in pre-planned collaboration with university management, is that it was linked to a struggle that is disruptive and effective and in danger (for them) of generalising.

The 3 Cosas' genuine intention to win real pay and pensions for outsourced workers, and not just lobby and protest about their unhappiness, is palpably felt by the university management. And the crackdown from the cops is an attempt to strangle this type of movement before it generalises – the type of movement they've seen generalise before in 2010, one that does not ask for permission but that antagonistically aims at improving material conditions for people. But unfortunately for the police, their strangulation efforts have backfired.

It is resonating for much wider reasons than terrible pay for outsourced workers, although it is all of course interlinked. The state's attempt at total control of all aspects of life, with the cops as the violence at the edges of this, seems

widely and deeply felt by large sections of the population. It is everywhere, you can see it and feel it, CCTV is everywhere, cops are everywhere, barriers are everywhere, and the cops are the physical barrier to resisting the suppression of wages and lives.

The police's reach intends to be 'total,' and that stretches from orchestrating pointless 'peaceful' protests on behalf of the government and arresting anyone trying to protest differently to shooting black men dead in the street. And so it is not possible, as the cops often claim in order to de-legitimise protests, for anyone to hijack this movement. Because police violence is so generalised amongst the population it is everyone's movement anyway, and, because it is against the police, it is already illegitimate.

A violent threat lies in the polite emails received by protest organisers from police liaison officers expressing 'concerns' for your safety with the threat of arrest if you do not comply. Your safety is enforced by violence, which seems strange, but what they actually mean is order. The student chants of 'You Killed Mark Duggan' as they were being violently evicted from a management building are not coincidental.

Police violence is police violence. Upholding order with sticks, punches, and guns. Whether suppressing union struggle at the University of London or shooting dead Mark Duggan in Tottenham their intention is the same, although their fatal tactics are more commonly reserved for the working class and black communities.

It is clear that removing the police from as many aspects of society as possible is necessary for any semblance of life. This is not peaceful protest; it is effective struggle and necessary resistance. Cops off campus is not so much a demand as a determination to create physical and psychological cop-free zones.

(... and right on cue, as protests are becoming effective, the courts have just granted a ban on all protests on campuses at the University of London.)

NON-COMPLIANCE CAN STOP MASS ARRESTS

Police use mass arrests to intimidate us and get our details so that later on they can maliciously prosecute an unlucky few. But this tactic depends on our compliance: walking onto the buses and into the cells, giving them our details, helping them to maintain a charade of consent.

But do the police have the resources to carry out mass arrests in the face of mass non-compliance? In the kettle, on arrest, at the station – even when we are forcibly isolated from one another, we can act with a collective spirit of resistance to shift the balance of power. In that spirit, here are some comroguely suggestions for making a nuisance of ourselves:

1) GO LIMP, a.k.a. PASSIVE RESISTANCE

- if we refuse to walk onto buses, they have to bring a special prisoner transport van for each of us – that's a lot of vans! it takes 4 cops to carry one person into a van, 1 cop to walk a person onto a bus
- at the station, we can make trouble by refusing to go where they tell us, or to put our hands on the fingerprinting machine, or to open wide for the DNA swab, or to sit nicely for the mugshots, or to take our clothes off if they attempt a strip-search
- why walk into a prison? only walk out!

2) DON'T TALK TO THE COPS

- answer 'NO COMMENT' to all interview questions – anything we say can only help them
- when cops lure us into 'friendly chats' they are usually fishing for information
- police doctors are just as bad – watch out for questions irrelevant to giving you medical help, e.g. what were you doing when you got that injury?
- plod likes to think he's nice and reasonable – our refusal to engage makes him sad inside

3) REFUSE TO DO ANYTHING YOU DON'T HAVE TO

- it's rare that we can avoid giving details altogether, but we don't have to make it easy for them – resist giving details until you have spoken to a solicitor
- 'risk assessments' at the station are for their benefit, not ours – if they aren't completed, cops have to make more regular, time-wasting checks on us
- cops love to make us sign things – it maintains the illusion of consent. Do we consent? NO!
- if in doubt, ask LOUDLY (for the benefit of the CCTV): 'am I legally obliged to do that?'

4) DEMAND EVERYTHING YOU CAN

- food, water, doctor, loo-roll, solicitor, books, pen and paper, phone call, the time, a copy of the police code of practice, more food...

5) DO IT YOUR WAY

- non-compliance is not an obligation – each of us is the best judge of our own situation
- develop a persona (or several!) which pisses them off in your own special way – individuality makes the collective unpredictable

Resistance is fruitful. Every time they say to us that we're only wasting our time, we smile, for we know that in truth we are wasting theirs. We are reducing the likelihood of mass arrest in that moment and in the future.

And we are smashing the illusion of policing by consent.

Waste their time and resources! Do their backs in! Freak them out!

communism on the streets – communism in the cells

*

ALL OUT TO TOTTENHAM

15 December 2013

After months of escalating repression at the University of London, this week saw a shift in the balance of power. Where previously a chalked slogan, a bin out of place, a placard, would prompt the descent of a small army, now we know we can smash the gates of the fortress that is Senate House, cover it in paint, make the bins blaze. We can dance on their vans while they cower inside. No longer can they saunter onto campus, propaganda in one hand and taser in the other, without fear of resistance. They know, at the very least, that we will probably steal their hats.

To pretend that the police are still in control of this is to ignore recent history. Yes, their withdrawal was strategic, but it was a strategy of weakness necessitated by our refusal to be intimidated by the truncheons and kettles which had, up until now, been their answer to everything. It does nothing to diminish the significance of this victory to also acknowledge that it is, of course, partial.

Firstly, it is partial because cops off campus today is not enough; cops off campus **every day** means telling them to fuck off and chasing them away whenever they show their faces. Police are also present in the form of pervasive surveillance. Every CCTV camera has a little cop inside. We must deal with them appropriately. If they meet this with violence, they give us the signal to escalate once more.

Secondly, we need to ask why there are cops on campus in the first place: one reason is to enforce the wage-suppression mandated by management. Those cretinous impresarios hired to induce sweat from the brows of workers – for the sake of increasing, drop by drop, the value of the degree as commodity, and of the rooms hired out to an endless queue of royals and *vol-au-vents* – for years have worked in collaboration with UK Border Agency to instil fear in the workforce. But the extent of that threat is limited, as a motley rebellion drawn from all the enraged elements of the university forms into a true physical resistance. In panic, the cretins turned to their trusty friends with the truncheons, but the escalation isn't going as planned... In other words, cops off campus

has meant disrupting the university management's ability to set the police on insubordinates, and hence their ability to enforce the immiseration on which the smooth, profitable running of these institutions depends. We must continually make it the case that management *need* to call in the police – and then we must continually drive them out. We must be unmanageable.

Finally, and most importantly, just as getting cops off campus was clearly never just about students – as if, indeed, this were a homogeneous group with no material connections with the rest of society – so it is also the case that this has never really been just about campuses. Hence the need to reject the defenders of 'peaceful protest,' who lament that punching students in the face in Bloomsbury distracts the police from catching the 'real criminals' elsewhere. For while celebrating their supposed PR coup, they are effectively endorsing police violence against less 'respectable,' less co-optable, manifestations of resistance.

The police are not the only agents of oppression, or the only perpetrators of violence. The purpose of the police, though, is neither to fight oppression nor to reduce violence, but to uphold 'public order' – which means the order of capital and private property, of white supremacy, of patriarchy. The category of 'criminal' exists for those who disrupt that order, and that category is expanding. Who could possibly deny that both the police's repression of us, and our growing resistance to them, are direct consequences of what happened on those nights in summer 2011, when a militant section of the proletariat took the concept of 'resisting austerity' out of the mouths of whiny liberals, smashed it back through their patronising nostalgia and out the other side?

Any day now the inquest jury will return a 'verdict' on Mark Duggan's murder by police – the murder which that August prompted the most significant, inspiring, and also the most monstrously repressed uprisings in recent British history. The damage inflicted upon the thousands hurriedly arrested, processed through 24 hour courts, and slammed into prisons across the country, must not be erased from consciousness.

There is no doubt that the police murdered Mark Duggan. A verdict of unlawful killing would just confirm what everyone already knows (whether or not it is in their interests to admit it) while any other verdict would be meaningless except insofar as it would reveal once again the stinking complicity

of the whole so-called 'justice' system in the murderous racism of the cops. The judge has instructed the jury that a verdict of unlawful killing can only be given if they are certain that Mark Duggan was unarmed. But it would be self-defeating for us to demand this kind of 'innocence' in order to extend our solidarity, just as it is self-defeating to continue to chant about being goodly and peaceful while the bad protesters are dragged away. The problem with the police killing people is not that it is 'unlawful.' Our solidarity is not conditional on the victims of state violence being unarmed, being meek.

Any day now, when the verdict is announced, we will be in Tottenham. We will be there as criminals, against public order, against the police.

Towards a cop-free society.

Addendum

Title: Industrial Action – June 30

From: CommunitiesTogether@met.police.uk

To: artsagainstcuts@gmail.com

Date: 20 June 2011 10:08

Sir/Madam

Further to my email below dated 14 June 2011. I am writing to you again to ask if you would be interested in meeting with members of CTSET ahead of the proposed industrial action due to take place on 30 June 2011.

I have not received any correspondence from your organisation to date and would welcome a response to my request.

If I do not hear from you I will assume that your organisation does not wish to engage with CTSET. However, I believe the opportunity for us to meet would be beneficial for all parties concerned.

Kind regards

Karen

Sir / Madam

By way of introduction, I am a Police Officer working for the Communities Together Strategic Engagement Team (CTSET) based at New Scotland Yard. My purpose in contacting your organisation is to inform you that my office maintains strategic links with community groups and assesses community tensions in London through community contacts, awareness of world events and national

incidents. I am therefore interested in making contact with individuals, and organisations that represent all sectors of the community in the United Kingdom.

The NUT, PCS, UCU and ATL are calling for a general strike on June 30 in relation to public sector cuts. In light of this proposed action it is likely to attract interest from other groups and organisations such as your own. I am interested in gauging any concerns and thoughts your organisation may have in this regard and if possible, would like to meet with representatives from Arts Against Cuts. This would also provide an ideal opportunity to encourage open dialogue between our respective organisations and discuss any issues affecting your members.

Please let me know if this is something your organisation would be interested in pursuing.

Kind regards

Karen

Karen Snoddy | Communities Together Strategic Engagement Team | NSY

Telephone 020 7230 4014

NOT PROTECTIVELY MARKED

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NEGATIVE STATES

LAUREN BERLANT

If only negativity were an 'it'!

A negative state isn't only an oppressive relation that might induce resistance; it is also a structural scene of incoherence and internal antagonism among concepts, in individuals, or among persons and worlds. Negativity is not only the heat-seeking process of congealed power that shatters, neutralizes, destroys, or repudiates an object (person/concept/locale/world); it is also expressed in the intractable antagonisms and self-differences through which relations find figuration, their shape in sociality. I am sorry to be so abstract about this.

But it matters to consider how all of the practices and resonances of negativity converge, from moods that might be sensed or displaced to structural relations that similarly can be felt as domination, liberation, or just the way things are. Some negative states do involve modes of power that produce bad lives, negative feelings, and counter-normative political self-organization; others are ongoing processes of structural and existential contraction and diffusion within normativity, and also stunning events. Negativity is so difficult to conceive, inhabit, mobilize, and transform all at once because objects themselves (including people, especially people) are so loosely, chaotically, and complexly shaped and motivated.

We are bundles of knots and shreds produced by our encounters with our own and the world's contradictory aims, desires, and motives. We only know some of why we want what we want and why we act the way we do. We barely understand the scenes that we attach to and who we are in them. We hang onto thin concepts. It is easier to project who we are for the Other than to deal with the inadequacy of reductive generalization: but sometimes a paranoid politics

that calcifies threatening processes into objects is necessary for imagining social change. Nonetheless, to lose this world radically on the way to a better one, figuring out how to be with the different negativities – of identity and force – is crucial for sustaining each other and ourselves.

So, from this view of convergent impacts, ‘relationality’ appears in the gestures we make to deal with the cleavages and antagonism within ourselves, towards each other, and the world. The issue politically, though, is not just managing this convergence of negativities but converting our non-sovereignty or out-of-controllness into an awkwardness that is affirmatively energizing for the work of transforming sociality itself.

'NO-ONE CAN MAKE YOU FEEL INFERIOR WITHOUT YOUR CONSENT:' NEGATIVITY IN WORKFARE' BOYCOTT WORKFARE

It is common sense to think that being unemployed is negative. Unemployed people are viewed as a debilitating part of society, unproductive skivers who are to be kept separate from the taxpaying majority. These lazy, irresponsible, dishonest, passive, work-shy, misbehaving, dependent, unskilled, self-sabotaging, and self-excluding people want something for nothing.

The same thought underlies more and less compassionate versions of this idea: unemployment is the fault of unemployed people and they need to change themselves.

The forced, unpaid labour involved in the Government's most recent workfare scheme, Community Work Placements, lasts 26 weeks – longer than the maximum community service sentence. Aimed at people with 'a lack of work experience, motivation or both,' this scheme reinforces two sides of the dominant negative view of unemployed people.²

It supposes, first, that people claiming social security are incompetent, undisciplined, and potentially immoral: that they are incoherent and unpredictable people, typically working class, who can't regulate themselves or time-keep and whose behaviour and attitudes are negative because they are not effective in achieving goals, which they need to be educated about in order to desire. These people need no-nonsense support, soft skills, and work discipline. They need to overcome their own irrationality and become competent, resilient, and above all

1 Ingeus, 'Positive Affirmations', 2010. Other affirmations on this sheet, handed out to participants in the 'confidence building' workshop that's part of Ingeus' delivery of the Work Programme, include: It's Always Too Soon To Quit; Yes, Now, Strong; I Still Have More To Give; Go Hard Or Go Home; The Sin Isn't Falling Down, But Staying Down.

2 Department for Work and Pensions, 'Community Work Placements', 2013.

positive people who go forward 'having the social and emotional capability to enter the labour market; understanding the importance and the social, health and emotional benefits of entering work,'³ 'prepared, enthusiastic and job-ready.'⁴

People who have rational philosophies are generally less prone to emotional difficulties, such as anxiety and depression... If you are not personally responsible for a negative event, you can still take responsibility for your emotional and behavioural responses to the event... You are empowered by focussing on your ability to influence the way you feel even if you can't control events.⁵

Secondly, it insinuates that unemployed people are criminals: deviously coherent fraudsters who pretend they're incapable and enjoy a life of ease on benefits. These people need threats and punishment in order to coerce them into reformation. This does not mean that everyone who's been criminalised and made to do community service deserves it, or that community service is a desirable institution.

Obviously we know that people of working age cannot be divided into this lump on one side and taxpaying hard workers on the other: many people in work are also living in poverty; the employers who underpay us and the landlords who overcharge us are supported by state subsidies in the form of tax credits and housing benefit.⁶

So why rest with this negativity that's so familiar from press releases, policy documents, news reports, the welfare industry, and right-wing academia?

*

3 G. Allen MP, 'Early Intervention: The Next Steps', 2011. Allen is a Labour MP who has co-authored works with Iain Duncan Smith.

4 Department for Work and Pensions, 'Jobseekers required to do more to find work', 2014.

5 Ingeus, 'Healthy Attitudes for Living', 2010. Ingeus is a major work programme contractor, and this literature is handed out as part of its 'Health & Wellbeing' course. The final question on the feedback form (possible answers: 'strongly agree', 'agree', etc.) is: 'Completing this workshop has helped me move closer to returning to work.'

6 S. Reid, 'Mythbusters: Strivers versus Skivers', 11 April 2013, and, Boycott Workfare, 'Workfare and Housing', 2014.

Do you know what it is like to receive a sanction? Have you met anyone who has been sanctioned? You might not know. People who have been sanctioned frequently feel that it must have been for something that they did. Many feel deep shame. This is far from the truth of course, but stereotypes are very powerful.

I was made redundant from my job in April 2012. By October I had applied for about 650 jobs. How I managed to be so positive in the face of this I do not know. But things changed in early November. I kept my 2pm appointment at the Jobcentre but there were no workers present. They were all in a management meeting. I was told I couldn't go so had to wait around. After an hour and a half my advisor came down. Obviously I was annoyed and I told my work advisor I wasn't pleased. After all, if I had been two minutes late I would have been sanctioned or punished in some other way. She didn't like this and she asked me for my jobs diary. I don't think she really looked at it but her face turned to thunder and she said: 'you are sanctioned.' That was it. Her grounds apparently were that I had not been looking for work in a diligent enough manner.

I was sanctioned for one month. By the first weekend I had run out of money. I started missing meals. This is very bad for diabetics like me and my health started to deteriorate. I started begging. I only did it once because I found that I'm not very good at it. I went behind supermarkets to look in the waste skips in the early hours. I went to food banks although I couldn't always stand being patronised. Mainly I just starved.

Why did they do this to me? Well, it should have cowed me and made me compliant and dreadfully sorry. I was meant to 'behave' myself. That is what sanctions are designed to do. But it didn't. I was surprised at the level of anger I felt. One of the things I did was go out and join the first campaign that would take me. I joined the Save Lewisham Hospital Campaign, then Boycott Workfare. I was determined to be as obnoxious as I could.

*

There have always been people defined as not entitled to social security; certain behaviours and beliefs have always been expected of people who receive money from the state because they can't work, aren't working, or aren't earning enough through their work to live. But the demands on people's attitudes and

emotions that follow from these expectations have never before been connected so brutally, explicitly, and directly, in policy and in practice, to their ability to afford to live. Whether you will be paid unemployment benefits rests on whether you do unpaid work for a company or charity, or attend some mandatory skills training or motivational sessions, or see a psychologist (we've heard from a number of people who've been told that either they agree to a psychological evaluation, or they go on Mandatory Work Activity (MWA) – a scheme on which one in ten people are sanctioned).⁷ Increasingly, conditions on receiving social security are not a matter of fulfilling certain restrictive eligibility criteria (like not having voluntarily left work less than 13 weeks previously), but of being able to demonstrate that you think and feel a certain way: positively, resiliently, rationally. Unpaid work and 'work-related activities' enforce these ways of being and provide arenas for their exhibition.

The consequences of failure are extreme. Over two years after 2010, the number of sanctions being applied each month rose to 73,000, on average, in 2013, from a previous level of 25,000 per month in the 2000s. As a proportion of people claiming out-of-work benefits, the rate at which people are sanctioned rose from 2.7% to 4.3% per month between 2010 and 2012 – double that figure for 18-24 year olds. Between April 2008 and March 2012, 19% of all JSA claimants were sanctioned: 1,483,760 people, with around double that number threatened with sanctions (because the rate at which people are referred for sanctions is always about twice the rate that people are actually punished with sanctions). Disabled people are more likely to be sanctioned repeatedly – and so more likely to suffer longer sanctions – than non-disabled people. People of colour are more likely to be sanctioned than white people.⁸

Most people (more than 80%) are sanctioned for 'not actively seeking work' – because to be unemployed is defined as to be looking for work. Sanctions for refusing a job seeker's direction tripled in 2013 (a JSag usually involves a commitment to apply for a certain number of jobs per week); the number of people sanctioned for failing to take part in workfare has been rising since 2004.⁹

7 Corporate Watch, 2013.

8 Department for Work and Pensions statistics.

9 D. Webster, 'Written evidence submitted to the House of Commons Work and

Cancelled and reserved decisions have risen from around 12,000 per month in 2011 to more than 50,000 per month in 2013. These are made when someone stops claiming JSA before they're referred for a sanction, or between the referral and the decision. People are being forced off benefits by the mounting threat of longer sanctions, which can now last up to three years.¹⁰

The Trussell Trust, which runs the largest network of food banks in the UK, recently surveyed its banks and found that 83% of them said that benefit sanctions have caused more people to be referred to them for three days' worth of food. Half of all referrals to their food banks in 2013–14 were caused by benefit delays (31%) or changes (17%); referrals have increased from 347,000 people in 2012–13 to 913,000 in 2014.

This situation has been legislated for. It is a consequence of the rise of 'conditionality' in welfare, which workfare's demands not to be negative are part. Without sanctions and the material hardship they entail, positivity and narrow competence cannot be enforced. It is demanded that we be coherent, purposive, aspirational and assertive in the face of deliberately engineered circumstances that make us vulnerable and precarious and have the effect of denying that, even once we act in the way we're told to act, it could just be the case that things we want to happen fail to happen.

*

Clearly, the supposedly desired outcomes (new and more positive behaviours) don't fit the means of achieving them (coerced unpaid labour). Sanction rates simply increase as unemployment increases and more people are sanctioned in areas of high unemployment.¹¹ This is not an accident: workfare is not merely a 'misguided' policy, the wrong tool for a worthwhile job; workfare is forced, unpaid work, or work-related activity, which people in receipt of social security have to do in order to continue to receive those payments. It cannot be separated

Pensions Committee Inquiry into the role of Jobcentre Plus in the reformed welfare system', 2013.

10 P. Wintour, 'Sanctions Against Benefit Claimants Soar', 6 November 2013, and, T. MacInnes, 'Are Sanctions Driving People off JSA?', 7 November 2013.

11 Webster, 'Written evidence submitted'.

from sanctions. Sanctions are the threat that make people do workfare; workfare is an excuse on which to hang sanctions. It is a simple punishment, a route to other punishments, and a means to coerce unemployed people into thinking and acting in a more compliant way, by getting them in the habit of doing something that seems like work and so 'enforc[ing] the reciprocal responsibilities' of unemployed and underemployed people.¹²

Workfare offers potential for growth to outsourcers (the welfare-to-work industry is now conscious of itself as a body of professionals) and a way for organisations to increase their profits: directly – by eliminating labour costs if they take people on workfare placements – and indirectly – by worsening pay and conditions for everyone else, and making life lived on subsistence benefits (even) less viable, so forcing people off benefits and into insecure employment that they might otherwise have refused.¹³

*

[MWA] gives those claimants identified as most in need of support an opportunity to develop skills and behaviours that we know are widely valued by employers and that can help them in seeking employment.' We've heard from people who've been referred to MWA because, having been referred to Work Experience, they questioned the idea of working for no money. Becoming accustomed to 'the disciplines associated with employment' and 'the responsibilities associated with claiming Jobseeker's Allowance' merge into one another.¹⁴

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In April 2013, on the wall of the manager's office of the Homebase in Haringey, London, there was a poster which read:

How the work experience
program can benefit your store.

12 R. Crisp and D. R. Fletcher, *A Comparative Review of Workfare Programmes in the United States, Canada and Australia*, 2008.

13 The Void, 'Shock Fall in Number of Employees as Self-employment Soars', 2014.

14 Department for Work and Pensions, 'Mandatory Work Activity Provider Guidance v.9.0', 2014.

Would 750 hours with no payroll costs
help YOUR store?

*

On the wall of my Ingeus advisor's work pod is an aspirational print-out that reads:

Serious about finding work?
Are you doing the following?
20–50 applications a week
100 spec letters per week
50 cold calling calls per week

This is the minimum level of activity
which our in-work clients were
doing before they went into work.

Obviously, this exceeds the requirements laid out in my Jobseeker's Agreement issued by the Department for Work and Pensions to receive my Jobseeker's Allowance; it also gives the lie to the notion that this Work Programme provider is adhering to the recent claim made by Mark Hoban, the Minister for Employment:

The Work Programme is designed to give two years of tailored support to some of the hardest to help jobseekers.¹⁵

It is difficult to see how this weekly level of applications can be regarded as 'tailored,' particularly when the encouragement to attain this is to issue mandatory directions to the claimant to attend a meeting then stick them in a room with three other people, a large box of envelopes, a stack of CVs, and numerous print-outs of addresses taken from the Thompson Local Directory that have been chosen by the advisor.

*

15 I. Silvera, 'Work Programme "Helps Another 62,00 People into Work"', 2013.

New Labour pushed the positive thinking schtick to the hilt and designed it into systems of social control. Emma Harrison and A4e made their first millions under New Labour. The coalition has extended Labour's vision. We see it with their 'nudge unit' and the *modus operandi* of 'welfare-to-work' profiteers, the use of psychological testing and profiling in programmes for unemployed people, exhortations to be 'positive' about finding jobs where they don't exist and to smile as we jump through state-constructed time-wasting hoops.

'Positive thinking' has polluted language with blandness and corporate obscenities: 'incentivise.' Pundits set on endless positivity very rarely laugh, and will try to stamp on anyone who indulges in genuine unproductive joy or humour.

Positive thinking rules out resistance. Those who object are told to offer suggestions as to what could be put in the place of oppressive systems. On several occasions we have been asked to contribute to surveys and asked questions like 'How would a successful welfare-to-work programme operate?'

*

Ingeus want you to concentrate on anti-catastrophist thinking. Adapting a cognitive behavioural therapy handbook, their literature argues that one 'common thinking trap' is 'catastrophising:' 'you may exaggerate or magnify the negative aspect of an event;' 'you may view the probability of disaster as great.'¹⁶ We are encouraged to '[recognise] the negative thinking error' and take 'calculated risks.'¹⁷ But the catastrophes are Ingeus's fault: they are in charge of the sanctions which are the negative consequences of risks we might want to take in the name of negativity.

Positive thinking delivered alongside workfare narrows the range of the kinds of living and thinking that are possible. It invites disrupting its framework by supporting each other at jobcentres and sharing knowledge and experiences with each other so that we know better how to challenge the institutions it is part of. At the same time it punishes us one by one for not adhering to its values.

¹⁶ Ingeus, 'Common Thinking Traps', 2000.

¹⁷ Ingeus, 'Healthy Attitudes for Living', 2010.

Workfare makes us experts in a system which, if it turns out to be unlawful, can be retrospectively rewritten.'

*

This is part of a complaint regarding the predicament of unemployed people and paid part-time workers, who have to sort out JSA constantly after every change and every mistake; who have to do the same with housing benefit, while constantly in danger of missing deadlines because somewhere something went wrong; who have to engage with the jobcentre in an exasperating correspondence around several corners before it hopefully reaches the person that actually deals with the claim. A complaint about how, with every additional link in this chain of communication, there comes an additional risk of misunderstandings, omissions, and mistakes, with each of these generating further misunderstandings, omissions, and mistakes, and each further misunderstanding, omission, and mistake causing delays, frustration, anger, and financial uncertainty and difficulty as the delays in one part of the bureaucracy build up or create delays in another, causing further frustration, anger and financial uncertainty and difficulty.

*

In the absence of any evidence that it's an effective way of finding people jobs, politicians defend the soft outcomes of workfare: it suppresses negative feelings about work and injustice, and promotes 'motivation and confidence,' 'job-seeking behaviour' and an 'understanding of the benefits of work.'¹⁸ Lack of any of these are also now reasons why you might be sent on workfare.

*

The pool of forced work options available – the number of different workfare schemes, along with traineeships, apprenticeships, and intermediate labour markets, in combination with bogus self-employment and short-term or part-time minimum wage work (participation in all of which is compelled directly or indirectly by sanctions) – creates a field within which affect becomes a major

¹⁸ Department for Work and Pensions, 'Community Work Placements', 2013.

criterion for measuring one claimant against another. An individual can shuttle between schemes, their work entirely disengaged from pay, which becomes an attribute of a mindset: a wage, if ever introduced, will 'more faithfully replicate the experience of work.'¹⁹ Being paid for the work you do is not a matter of economic justice but a matter of how it makes you feel. The benefits of work are beyond question, but they're all behavioural and emotional. The idea that you might work so that you have free time is anathema.

We don't want the right to work. We want not to be forced to do unpaid work. We refuse the idea that paid work is central to social life (except when it is made central, by depriving money, time, and the possibility of social life from people without it).

*

Each page of my address quota has about ten addresses, and every one of the items shown has at least three printed sides. None of those present were given the opportunity of including a covering letter. It was a pointless waste of resources and effort that resulted only in two telephone calls querying why I had sent particular organisations a CV.

Four weeks after entering the *black box* – that ill-defined area where many of the responsibilities for claimants are transferred from the DWP to a private provider – I was defined as a difficult client and placed on Ingeus' 'Engage' module. According to their internal documentation:

The objective of this module is to support clients who face multiple barriers to move closer to and into employment. This will be done through a range of group workshops, one-to-one advisor support and access to specialist help... providing support for specific client needs, such as drug abuse and disclosure of criminal convictions.

The paperwork states that the module should last between 12 and 30 weeks. I was automatically contracted into this module for 52 weeks, supposedly due to the length of my unemployment (which was just under two years) and my apparent indifference to finding work. In reality, I suspect it was due to my indifference.

¹⁹ G. Parry, letter dated 1 May 2013.

to being pushed about by my initial advisor, who became upset when I revealed a working knowledge of my rights within the system and refused to provide consent for Ingeus to contact the DWP or my future employers.

So now, after completing all the mandatory aspects of the Engage module within two weeks, they are reduced to harassing me with accusations of not being proactive enough, with hours of semi-supervised job searches, speculative CV mailouts, such exciting group workshops as 'How to cold call an employer,' and pseudo-psychotherapeutic courses on building up my confidence. Like I don't know how to use a telephone or lack the confidence to say 'no' to this ridiculous waste of time and money.

*

Workfare and any kind of compulsion imposed on claimants are fundamentally damaging to employed and unemployed people. From our point of view, there is no such thing as workfare that works. There is no such thing as sanctions that work. They are designed to break people's will to think for themselves, to resist. They are designed to grind people down into poverty. They are designed to starve and kill off the 'unproductive.' That is a truly successful 'welfare to work' programme. We want no part of it. We reject its model of success as no success at all.

Yes, we are negative. We aim to break the regime of forced unpaid labour and the government that imposes it.

SCATTERED SPECULATIONS ON ANGER

PRIYAMVADA GOPAL

A friend posts on Facebook. Apparently there's a relatively new diagnosable disorder in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-IV* (DSM). It's called ODD. Oppositional Defiant Disorder. Net Doctor glosses it for laypersons. It's a childhood disorder. There's a technical term that, in our times, apparently needs explaining. It is explained thus: 'Oppositional: hostile or confrontational action or behaviour [...] It's not clear what causes ODD. It may be caused by biological factors, such as the makeup of a child's temperament and possibly through a neurological imbalance in the brain. But ODD is also affected by parenting styles. A child brought up by parents who are constantly hostile, confrontational, and forceful has an increased risk of ODD.'

'Anger gets a bad rap.' These are the opening lines of a recent book by the American literary critic, Sue J. Kim. Her book is dedicated 'To the Justly Angry.' She notes a long history in the West 'of divorcing anger from reason,' the idea that a state of mind 'not subject to the passions' is requisite for clear thinking. In contrast to other emotions seen to be universal – fear, happiness, sadness, disgust – 'anger marks the feeler as pathological, dangerous, or ignorant more sharply than do the other emotions.' I remember Stéphane Hessel's unforgettable short polemic, *Indignez-Vous!* I read it again. There is clarity in his reminder: 'the basic motive of the Resistance was indignation!' Indignation is a 'precious' resource, it makes history. His own life 'presented a succession of reasons to outrage me,' he writes. Indifference is the worst. To say you can do nothing more, that you will just get by, is to lose one of the essentials of humanity, one of the elements that goes into making a human being: the faculty of indignation.

The Buddhist scholar Robert Thurman proffers a meditation on 'the wisdom of anger' to activists in the Occupy Wall Street movement. Buddhism, he says, acknowledges the insight and energy that can derive from anger. The

trick is to avoid becoming a hammer in the hands of your rage. Wield it like a martial artist, forceful and cool, undoing the violence of the enemy. Anger can be creative, but it's a confusing emotion. How do you wield it wisely? How do you harness the energy without being consumed by the helplessness that it can also foster? Use force coolly, he says, to block the violence of the oppressor. See it as a form of 'fierce love;' learn to play with fire without being burned by it, see it as a crystalline energy. The question is how to wield it wisely, without becoming destroyed or depressed by internalizing it. Here then are four closely related reflections on anger. Anger as illness. Anger treated as pathology, subjected to cultural (mis)construction and in need of recuperation. Anger as essential emotional starting point for agitation and change. Anger as a weapon that has to be wielded with care so that its transformative energies can be wielded with a cool precision, not allowing it to rebound and destroy she who wields it.

I've spent a great deal of the last several years reflecting on – and struggling with – the problem of anger. And not only when I read the news, though each day brings fresh venality to light, ancient tyrannies given new leases of life by rampant capitalism, the gamut of human degradation seemingly limitless, both in terms of inflicting degradation on others and being subjected to degradation. I find myself thinking about both anger and its puzzling opposite in our times: the seeming absence of anger or, at least, its relative weakness in relation to the magnitude of the cruelty, greed, entitlement, selfishness, and violence we see inflicted by a small number upon a much larger number. Where is it? Where is the righteous rage that should bring down this monstrous edifice that keeps growing day by day?

Where is our anger? We see it break out occasionally, sporadically, patchily, but not on a scale that would match the edifice of greed and destruction that confronts us. We see it manifest itself more often in our own stress, our own sense of disempowerment, our own depression, our illnesses, and our pain. Perhaps we are all struggling with the same questions. How to wield anger effectively, so as to destroy institutions, not human beings; how to wield it outwards, so it doesn't turn on us and corrode us instead; how to use it to illuminate, clarify, and transform. What we need, however, is to not let ourselves forget how to feel it and find ways of displacing it onto the wrong targets – the

poor, the homeless, the immigrants – because that is exactly what the powerful want. Don't let us let them medicalize and criminalize it. To collude in giving anger a bad rap is to give ourselves a bad rap. Hessel was right: resistance is motivated by indignation and to resist is to create. It is the only way to become 'militant, strong, engaged.' Without anger, we wither away, defeat ourselves, let them defeat us. Life presents us, as it did for Hessel, with a succession of reasons to be outraged. Until that changes, we cannot turn away from the claims made on us by anger. They are the claims of history.

CATASTROPHE

JACOB BARD-ROSENBERG

The concept of progress has to be founded on the idea of catastrophe. That things just go on as they currently do is the catastrophe. It is not an ever-present possibility but what is in each case given.

– Walter Benjamin

In the final moments of Wagner's *Götterdämmerung* a new generation of humans stand mutely facing into an empty future. The architecture of the old order lies in ruins; the flames of an all-consuming fire lick around a derelict world. The old laws of the gods are dissolved, their contracts unbound. The magical gold that once conferred universal sovereignty is returned to its protectors in the murky depths of the Rhine. To bourgeois revolutionaries, the appeal of such catastrophic imagery was founded on the notion that freedom would emerge from the wholesale destruction of tradition. But despite the beauty of a fire that obliterates all that exists, it illuminates only a textureless void, filled with people who have nothing left to say and no ground upon which to act.

The image betrays a secret of capitalism's own historical relations. Whilst wealth within a capitalist society might appear as an immense accumulation of commodities, such an image explains little about the tensions within the great pile. Commodities do not just sit neatly next to each other, but attempt also to destroy each other. On the market one commodity attempts to outmode another. In this sense capitalism is truly revolutionary: every production of the technically new desires at the same time a destruction of that which preceded it. Every new commodity gazes into a future emptied of the past, each imagines its power to destroy other commodities indiscriminately. Each commodity relates with abstract negativity towards others. In the bourgeois fantasy of a catastrophic revolution nothing more is played out than the perpetual process of commodity production. Capitalism's ideal commodity, its true

revolutionary, would provide its consumer with a perfect freedom, abolishing all other commodities. Catastrophe is the dream-shape of capitalism's inner history. But no commodity is a true revolutionary. In the very abstractness of its negation of other commodities, each one finds itself commensurate with the others. Capitalism's dream-image of catastrophe will always remain unfulfilled by the immanent movements of capital. Instead, through the abstractness of that negativity, its destructiveness is hypostatized into capitalism's concept of history: one of progress towards freedom in the invention of each new commodity.

The dream of freedom within the commodity will never be fulfilled because capitalism's concept of freedom through progress is coextensive with the progressive technical and intellectual domination of nature and humanity. Precisely those commodities that are supposed to provide human beings with freedom are worked up out of humans and nature. The promises of freedom are produced through the determinate unfreedom of labour in the capitalist mode and human alienation from nature, both internal and external. Is the muteness and the stillness, the inability to act, of that new generation not as much an image of unfreedom as freedom? Do they not find themselves alienated from a world dead and burnt to a cinder? And alienated too from their own history? In the bourgeois image of catastrophic revolution these two processes conjoin: It contains both the universal mortification of humans and nature, and the destruction of old capitals which were once produced out of that mortification. Capitalist progress is not merely the murder of human beings but the forgetting that they ever existed: the ripping of value from their bodies and its subsequent pointless destruction.

If these two capitalist historical relations appear in contradiction – the mortification of nature against the dream of human freedom – then they are most irrationally synthesised in the productions of capitalism in crisis. In the twentieth century, capitalism in crisis would find its resolution in world war and Holocaust, a *danse macabre* of junking, death, and industry. The capitalist dream of the destruction of the bondage of the past converges with the image of a world that is so absolutely deadened that it can be transformed into commodities without resistance. Today not even that promise remains: the age of mass-industrial warfare is over, so capitalism in crisis dreams only of universal extermination.

The shoots of recovery grow withered. We live within capitalist

crisis. Our situation in history is characterised by the tailing off of profitability and living standards over the last forty years, alongside the sudden financial quakes of the last seven years. The crisis of capitalism is identical to a crisis of labour; the crisis of profitability for the bourgeois is the reflection of a crisis of unemployment for the proletarian (although one loses only his capital, the other her life). Both capitalists who desire a return to growth and socialists who desire a return to employment demand that the progressive history of perpetual catastrophe continue ever more violently. But the contradiction of capital and labour is not to be solved by the overcoming of capital by labour. The rhetoric of crisis is understood by socialists as a moment of subjective intervention, as a cue to mount the stage composed of capitalism's self-produced rubble. Crisis has been misunderstood by socialists as a moment of weakness for capital. Certainly it is a moment of weakness for capital's constructive aspect, its need to grow and to accumulate; but crisis is at the same time a moment of strength for capital's destructive aspect. Cyclical crisis justifies the mass junking of defunct capitals. To side with either its constructive or destructive aspect is to be outwitted by capitalism's own cunning. Instead the revolutionary must struggle to transform human activity in its release from capitalist history, and to transform history in its release from capitalist activity.

If communists have rightly refused to attempt to 'fix' the crisis, they have not yet rid themselves of the notion of a purely subjective intervention. Many attempt to imagine a subject who fulfils the role of the great destroyer, a *Brünnhilde* who will set alight the world before plunging even herself into the blaze: the unemployed and absolutely subaltern who plunder the world in the last moments of its extinction. We require a conception of catastrophe as a counterpart and counterpoint to crisis in order to undermine the subjective idealism of such an image. Ultimately this idealism discovers a subject in crisis who is already free. But to this subject is left only wrecking and wandering, abandon and abandonment. Historically she is the most unfree, doomed to follow the world into darkness and oblivion, unable to act historically.

The conviction that humans may still act historically is the conviction that such free subjects do not yet exist. To imagine them is also to deludedly fantasize away the objectivity of the history of capitalism, or to imagine that

this objectivity has already fully consumed itself in crisis. The objectivity of the history of capitalism as it imposes itself as the conditions of historical action on the subject is nothing but the dead and petrified labour of the past, the wrecked and wretched attempts to master nature *in toto*. Capitalist objectivity is a ruined landscape of dominated nature. The revolutionary force that might redeem the world is the bringing to consciousness of this landscape; it is the subject's reflection of its deathly affliction, of its own objectivity, from the catastrophically already-too-late. The revolutionary subject does not confirm the fate of the past, allying herself with capital's own dream of freedom in its destruction. Instead, the revolutionary subject is to rescue the past from that fate in the recognition of her own unfreedom (which appears ideologically as her freedom from the past). Her success rests on the recognition of capitalism's own concept of history as one of catastrophe.

Walter Benjamin wrote in a fragment towards the end of his life that 'The course of history, seen in terms of the concept of catastrophe, can actually claim no more attention from thinkers than a child's kaleidoscope, which with every turn of the hand dissolves the established order into a new array. There is profound truth in this image. The concepts of the ruling class have always been the mirrors that enabled an image of order to prevail. – The kaleidoscope must be smashed.'

Every capitalist catastrophe perpetuates catastrophe. But in the truly revolutionary act, in place of a future imagined as an empty void, fragments of colour and mirror and glass fly chaotically through the air. Catastrophe is subverted in revolutionary action. Released from the bonds of 'order', and from the bounds of the concept, refracted through shards of the past – dynamic, sharp, and colourful – the world is illuminated in a new spectrum. History is redeemed in its brokenness, for its brokenness is its truth, rather than a justification for its destruction.

I'M TOO SAD TO TELL YOU ABOUT *I'M TOO* *SAD TO TELL YOU*

JULIET JACQUES

Sometimes, journalists call me and beg me to tell them about Bas Jan Ader. I've always told them it's too sad to talk about, but as time has passed, they've become more persistent, so I've decided to tell you about *I'm Too Sad to Tell You*. But this is the last time.

*

I studied with Bas Jan in Los Angeles. One day he invited me to his studio. He arrived as I did, camera in hand, and led me inside. He handed me the camera, stood against the wall and started weeping. I turned on the camera and made the lens stare at him.

After three minutes and twenty-two seconds, the 16mm film ran out. Immediately, the tears stopped, the last one leaving his cheek the moment the film finished.

I put the cap back on the lens and turned to leave. He tapped me on the shoulder, then led me to a cafe, bought me coffee, and sat down.

'Did you walk here?' he asked. I nodded. 'You saw anti-war protesters everywhere, yes?'

I nodded again.

'Why?'

'Well... they believe America has no right to be in Vietnam,' I replied. 'And they're angry about the senseless loss of life.'

'You've read the papers,' said Bas Jan. 'They've misunderstood - perhaps deliberately. The war stimulates their anger, but it doesn't generate it. Intellectually, those protestors think the war is wrong, yes; but their protest provides an outlet for emotions that they aren't allowed to express. The fundamental emotion is sadness - the most painful feeling, and the hardest to comprehend. People feel angry because they can't understand their sadness - the way society shuns those who make it explicit means they have to repress it, and it becomes anger.'

'So why isn't everyone out protesting?'

'Because people act on their anger in different ways. Some people protest against wars; some make them. Some don't express the anger at all - they feel they're not allowed to express anger any more than sadness - and they become depressed. That's why we've made this film.'

'Won't it make people more depressed?'

'No. It will make people reconnect with the raw emotion they repressed as they became adults, and force them to confront it.'

'Why not challenge them with happiness?' I said. 'The happiness we all felt in our childhood.'

'The happiness we claim to remember from our childhoods,' he replied. 'I think that before people can even contemplate happiness, they have to understand their sadness.'

'People will say the film is too much for them.'

'They will become ready.'

'You think you're Christ.'

'I'm not dying for anyone!' he declared. 'I just make films.'

'How will people know you're not faking it?'

Bas Jan stood, without looking at me, took his camera and left. I didn't call him: I heard nothing from him for several years, until I heard that *I'm Too Sad to Tell You* was screening in Los Angeles. Bas Jan's handwritten title flashed silently across the frame, then for the next three minutes and twenty-two seconds, his head rolled in genuine anguish, tears streaming down his cheeks.

I felt a tap on my shoulder.

'You're crying,' said Bas Jan.

'You made me.'

'My next work will make you happy,' he said. 'Come to my studio tomorrow.'

*

His door was open when I arrived.

'You inspired me this,' said Bas Jan as I cast my eyes upon the boat that dominated the tiny studio. 'This is the Ocean Wave. It's the only tangible part of my next project, *In Search of the Miraculous*. You think it's very small. It is – only 13ft. When I sail from Massachusetts to Falmouth in England, it will become the smallest craft ever to cross the Atlantic.'

'That's insane!'

'The project will hopefully contain elements of what some consider insanity. The

mental voyage is far more important than the physical one. Amidst the calmness of the ocean, without any distractions, my mind shall be focused purely on attacking the roots of human sadness, until it can only collapse and give way to pure happiness.'

'How do you propose to do that?'

'By focusing upon nothing else, until I've found the answer,' he said. 'The journey I record in my logbooks shall be purely psychological. When I return to land, I shall publish them. They will show the way.'

'You imagine yourself finding a universal formula for endless happiness?'

'Of course not! I hope to find happiness for myself, within myself. It's up to other people whether or not they follow my example.'

'It's too much for you. You'll go mad.'

'This is an experiment. If I fail, I fail.'

You think you're Christ, I thought, but I didn't repeat myself. I shook his hand, wished him luck and walked away.

*

The telegram arrived as I was alone in my flat, half-watching a family strive to win thousands of dollars on a quiz show.

EMOTIONAL PATTERNS ESTABLISHED BEFORE CONSCIOUS MEMORY
STOP SO THE FIRST STEP IS THE ONLY STEP STOP ACCEPTANCE OF
SADNESS IS VICTORY OVER SADNESS STOP HUMANS LOOK FOR
HAPPINESS WHEN THEY SHOULD BE SEEKING CONTENTMENT STOP
THE MIRACULOUS HAS BEEN FOUND AND THE SEARCH CAN STOP

The Ocean Wave was found drifting off the coast of Ireland, nine months and two weeks after I received the telegram. They never found Bas Jan Ader, or his notebooks. When I heard, I sent a copy of the telegram to several national newspapers, all of which said that Bas Jan was not famous enough for them to publish it, especially as its content might upset emotionally fragile readers. Since then, I had kept it in a box with the paintings I have been unable to sell, and it's too sad to show to anyone.

CORRECT OR PROPER DISTANCE

JOHN ROBERTS

Negation implies many things: removal, destruction, subtraction, reduction, disapproval, disaffirmation, diremption, denial, divorce, displacement, diminishment, rejection, refusal, *détournement*, devaluation, denaturalization. Obviously these processes can be enacted in thought or in practice; one can speak of refusing to pursue a particular line of enquiry in order to pursue another and more purposeful line of enquiry, just as one can imagine resisting the claims and outcomes of a particular practice in order to pursue the practice in a different way. Yet, whether negation achieves the transformation of a given state of affairs through the conceptual reformulation of an argument, or through the actual reshaping or undermining of the outcomes and characteristics of a given practice, a gap is opened up between the object of negation and its reimagining or reformulation. This is why it is the nature and facticity of this gap that constitutes the force and character of negation's transformative agency. For each source of negation is positioned along a chain of proximity and distance from the object of negation, that establishes the relational or non-relational character of the relationship between the object and its negation. This not only determines the form under which the object of negation will emerge in thought or practice – as modified, rejected, re-functioned – but where the position of the agent of negation stands along this chain of proximity and distance, that is, whether the agent of negation remains *immanent* to the object of negation, or becomes *exoteric* in an act of absolute refusal or rejection of the object. Hence, because negation always works either to displace or replace, reorder or remove, revalue or dismiss, it is therefore always bound up with the ambivalent demands of mensuration: what is the correct distance from or acceptable proximal reconfiguration of the object? What are the limits to rejection, dismissal, refusal, denial, disaffirmation? Is the object of negation susceptible to subtraction, *détournement*, reduction, redaction,

reformulation? Or, do these latter immanent moves mean getting too close to the object, taking on its identity and values in the act of transformation?

These kind of judgements, of course, are freighted at a fundamental level with the methodological problem of the *epoché* (stepping back) constitutive of all philosophical enquiry: if truth requires some kind of distance, what kind of distance is required of the agent from its objects of scrutiny in order for truth to emerge or be secured? *Epoché*, therefore, is not merely, in the classic Husserlian sense, a suspension of cognition, in which the agent returns to reality refreshed from this suspension.¹ Rather, *epoché* is the unavoidable primary move by which the agent of negation assesses what constitutes the acceptable distance from, or proximal relationship to, the object; that is, where the negation of the object 'stands' along the distance/proximal chain. In these terms negation operates in, and is produced from, the agent's relational-non-relational inhabitation of the gap between the object and its negation. And this is why negation is always the practice of *proper or correct distance*, and, therefore, always mounts a challenge to what is held to be those submissive or mimetic forms of relational possession of the object: immersion, involvement, consubstantiality, incorporation, subsumption, entanglement; in other words, those relations that fail to differentiate clearly enough the object of negation from the act of negation. Negation, accordingly, given its constitutive immanent/exoteric form, is necessarily a reflection on the dependent and independent conditions of the object of thought and practice. Which, of course, is why the processes of distanciation involved in negation are never far from dialectical thinking. For the absolute distanciation of negation from its object, or conversely its identity fusion with its object, are rarely satisfactory, simply because the gap between object and negation is either inflated or narrowed, rendering thought and practice non-transformative or inflexible. This is why negation as thinking-at-a-distance is itself split by the exacting conditions of dependency. If the negation of the object is invariably a move against thought and practice's dependency on its object of negation in the interests of autonomy and independence, absolute negation – dismissal, denigration, expulsion, removal – can reduce such autonomy and

1 E. Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, 1970.

independence to a condition of servitude, if the emergent forms of such autonomy and independence have no means of realistic mediation. That is, the autonomy and independence of such a move is inverted or blocked if the forms of autonomy and independence have no practical agency and transformative content. Indeed, absolute negation is easily imagined; its constructive enactment, however, is a different matter altogether. Hence the distancing strategies of negation invariably produce a reflective counter-move in the assessment of correct or proper distance. Will the negation of the dependent object reintroduce another form of dependency if the process of negation is indefatigable, without measure? Will negation weaken and isolate any further move? Or will it preserve practice and thought?

One can see, therefore, how the relations of dependency and independency of negation are of necessity played out *interdependently*, and as such, why it is extremely difficult for negation to escape the interpenetration of identity and non-identity under dialectics, for there can be no distancing without dependency. Non-relationality always reveals relationality. But this is precisely why negation is attacked in the post-dialectical tradition. If negation is entangled in the relational and as such bound to its object, then the relationship between distancing, non-identity, and the new is presumptuous, indeed, corrupted. Its would-be non-relationality is simply the dependent trace of a 'restricted economy' (Jacques Derrida).² And therefore negation always stands in a *subordinate* role to its object of negation. So the identification of truth with distance, according to the post-dialectical tradition, subjects the gap between negation and the object of negation to 'imaginary resolution,' producing a confusion of independence with dependence. Negation, therefore, needs to abandon distance as a false economy of difference and accept interdependence as the wholly positive space of the non-relational; *epoché* simply encourages subordination and fantasies of cognitive omnipotence, and ultimately, a depressive or melancholic mode of engagement (Gilles Deleuze).³ Indeed, this is the primary target of the critique of negation in the post-dialectical tradition: *epoché* is the methodology of disconnection and isolation and as

2 J. Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 1978.

3 G. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 1994.

such represents a debilitating history of philosophical 'self-conquest' as Peter Sloterdijk declares; philosophy as an ascetic 'fairy tale.'⁴ Any truly transformative negativity would, accordingly, need to affirm negation's 'dis-coordinated' place within this restricted economy, in order to *positivize difference* as a release from such dependency. That is, in positivizing negation the process of negation is freed from the mere occupancy of the gap between negation and the object of negation; non-relational dependency moves into deterritorialized flow. Consequently on this basis truth is not correlative to, or expressive of, a process of fixed distanciation at all (for this is to assume that truth can find a secure place from which to speak), but of continuous and active displacement; truth's gap is an unfolding succession of pulsions, flexions and micro-disorderings. Hence although there is no truth without distance – and no distance without the entanglements of relationality – distance for the post-dialectical tradition is essentially fractal, a deterritorializing 'trail' of singularities rather than the production of a breach or boundary (which thereby opens a transcendentalizing movement from the rear, so to speak). This is why negation in this post-dialectical form is held to be identifiable with the 'non-relational' intensities of art and literature (of play). For it is only art and literature that are to able to produce the inexchangeable singularities of truth as a deterritorializing process, and, therefore, it is only art and literature that can truly escape the restricted economy of negation⁵. For, it is only art's 'non-dependent' relationality that can provide a creative escape route from the object of negation, given that artistic practice is able to produce a new object that is qualitatively not beholden to its object of negation. Nevertheless this inflation of art as non-dependent negation produces its own 'restricted economy' and conditions of dependency, insofar as its claims for aesthetic truth dissociate negativity from labor and praxis as such, as a condition of art's would-be autonomy. As Benjamin Noys argues, this dissociation of negation from praxis valorizes negation as the emancipatory antipode to what is assumed (in the post-dialectical tradition) to be the fundamentally *failed* form of conjunction between negativity and dialectic:

4 P. Sloterdijk, *The Art of Philosophy*, 2012.

5 G. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 1994. For a critique of inexchangeable singularity see, G. Rose, *The Dialectic of Nihilism: Poststructuralism and Law*, 1984.

working-class labor power.⁶ The dialectic 'at a standstill' according to this position, then, requires a post-dialectical model that aligns negativity to the affirmative power of difference.

The attack on proper or correct distance in the post-dialectical tradition (Derrida, Deleuze, Sloterdijk) confuses dependency with passivity. In this it conflates the active disconnection of *epoché* with the passive act of contemplation. And this is why this vitalist or affirmationist model of negation as creative difference hates the identification between negation and the *transcendentalizing* language of distance: obduracy, obstinacy, and obtrusion⁷. For this is the language of non-relational delay – prefiguration, preparation, or provision – in which negation in action and thought is double-coded: that is, both transformative of the present, yet accountable to (future's) past. Truth's gap is the simultaneous *withdrawal from, and destabilization of, the actual*, as the means by which the present and truth are dissociated (though not disconnected), and, as such, the means by which truth is released from the *tyranny* of singularity and immediacy. In these terms, this is the Hegelian move of the dialectic: the empirical move of first negation as the preparatory move for the transcendentalizing move of second negation, as a process of discontinuity in continuity and continuity in discontinuity. Post-dialectical affirmationism, however, sees the second move as trapped by the antecedent and continuity, in which the present is only ever a point on the way to (an imaginary) future, and therefore wants a first negation *without delay*. As such it demands a philosophical distance that is proportionate to the critique of metaphysics, a distance without excessive expenditure, without inflation, without the Absolute. Indeed, negation and negativity in the post-dialectical tradition – across political and philosophical positions – calls for a negativity of the small margin, of first negation alone. Sloterdijk's *The Art of Philosophy* is the completed affirmation of this position; a jettisoning of *epoché* and the productive (sleeping) gap of negation, for a philosophy of practical engagement and affirmative 'life technique.' Yet, even Sloterdijk finds it difficult

6. B. Noys, 'The Recirculation of Negativity: Theory, Literature and the Failures of Affirmation', 2013.

7. For a theorization and critique of affirmationist negativity, see *ibid* and B. Noys, *The Persistence of the Negative*. 2010.

to resist the distancing move of *epoché* completely. For if Sloterdijk wants a new post-dialectical relationship of proximity for the philosopher, he also knows that the philosopher can get too close to the actual, become too embedded in 'what is at hand,' and, as such, confuse the contingent with historical destiny (Heidegger). For *epoché* is above all else under capitalism the place where distance necessitates a vigilant politics of negation.

Giorgio Agamben's work has had a long-standing relation to this question, largely through his reflection on pre-modern and religious forms of community. In *The Highest Poverty: Monastic Rules and Form-of-Life* he continues this line of enquiry, providing a model of negation that has interesting implications for our understanding of proper or correct distance. In his analysis of cenobitic techniques from the early medieval period, Agamben offers a range of insights into Franciscan monastic life of the time as a 'controlled' space of negation. This enabled various daily practices of observance and liturgical ritual that were not simply a heterodox rejection of Church law (a deterritorialization of the Church we might say), but rather acted as a productive form of life. In the Franciscan tradition religious rule (negation) and life are blurred. 'It is not a matter so much of applying a form (or norm) to life, but of living according to that form, that is of a life that, in its sequence, makes itself that very form, coincides with it.'⁸ In other words, here distance is not the delimited retraction of a restricted economy (the orthodox Christian church), but the means by which belief (negation) is lived out and given a regulated and temporal form. One doesn't have to prod too much to realize that in these reflections on early monastic practices of distancing Agamben is less concerned with recovering overlooked religious practices, than with allegorizing the lost living negative (institutional) form of the workers' labor power (of negation as a form of life). As in his earlier work Agamben has dug deep in order to recover various practices of productive distancing. Hence his turn to cenobitic communities is not a crass superimposition on his part of the past on the present. Or yet another theory of 'enclave' negationism in a world swamped by the dead languages of neoliberal community. On the contrary, Agamben facilitates a philosophy of *epoché* by

8 G. Agamben, *The Highest Poverty: Monastic Rules and Form-of-Life*, 2013.

clarifying that politics is the very practice of proper distance, of productive (interdependent) non-relationality-relationality. Thus he reminds us – however obliquely – how revolutionary politics is centrally concerned with how you practice, pursue, and produce distance, as a condition of non-relationality-relationality. Practicing distance is produced out of the space of negotiation between dependency and independency. The point, then, is that distanciation is the ground of a productive relationality, and not the dependent trace of a restricted economy. It acts in order to maintain a *living form* of non-relationality and non-compliance. This is why distanciation produces both an imaginary gap through the act of negation – a prefigurative gap, a gap of futurity – but also the actual spaces, gaps, and interstices for practice to continue. These gaps, in turn, are able to produce the political conditions for new forms of collective subjectivity that are simultaneously ‘in-time’ and ‘out of time.’ If sleep – as the negation of the world of work and reproduction – produces and sustains subjectivity (without sleep we would be disoriented, inactive, in short: ill), distanciation enables the subject of truth to produce a ‘wakeful sleep’ (second negation)⁹. In this, the production of, and negotiation with, distanciation is evidence of the very ‘highest subjectivity.’

⁹ Thanks to Alexei Penzin for our discussions on sleep and subjectivity.

INSIDE THE PUBLIC GALLERIES THAT WILL DESTROY COURTS

WAIL QASIM

The truth is obsolete

Only two positions:

Victimizer or victim

Both end up in destruction trusting this crooked system

– Lauryn Hill, *Mystery of Iniquity*

So many of us hate courts and yet can't escape them. They are violent buildings where thousands of people appear daily to face a justice that we have to recognise as worthy of hate. Of course not every single case is driven by violent intent or malice on the part of the police or Crown Prosecution Service but the means and ends of the justice system remain set viciously against human life. We see this not only in the punishments they hand out, but through the entire process of who is trusted, who is represented, and who is criminalised. Still, I want to attend the public galleries of these courts and to be joined by many others because there is no choice left in the matter. Just as defendants can't choose to be absent from their trials, the 'public' is continually invoked throughout the legal process in order to legitimate a brutality. Being in public galleries and supporting people forced into defending themselves at court means not playing along with the grossly malleable role normally assigned to the 'public' in justice, but instead providing care, sensitivity, and tenderness to those on trial. If we hate courts and want to see them destroyed I think we – their haters and eventual destroyers – have to occupy them each time they try to destroy one of us.

Already these buildings are constructed to separate those criminalised from others. In most courts defendants are locked in a dock with glass windows where the only people sitting with them, if anyone at all, are co-defendants and a security guard who holds the keys to unlock either the door to release them or the door towards the cells. On sentencing, the risk is always there that those in the

dock will have had their last contact for some time with loved ones before they entered the courtroom. But even then, that assumes they had anyone with them at the trial in the first place. Unfortunately it is far from uncommon for people to have no supporters with them in the public gallery. Worse still is when people have been arrested and brought to a magistrates' court without ever having been released only to have bail refused and be remanded in custody.

A lot of the time this isn't the situation with the cases many of us may have attended: those of political activists charged with public order offences or other specific laws used to criminalise protest. To these defendants, bail is usually given and campaigns are often set up to encourage supporters to turn out. By no means is this always the case, but the contrast between attendance at these cases and those of people arrested on a daily basis because they are black, poor, queer, a sex worker, or any of the other undesirable combinations that make arrest, charge, bail refusal, remand, and prosecution more likely is distinctly noticeable. No doubt this is because we don't hear about these cases or we find it hard to acknowledge just how political they are when weighing up our time constraints. A more fundamental reason though is that we don't attend courts in general. It becomes hard to imagine just how painfully isolating the conditions for defendants are when so few of us take the time to see or talk about what happens to people in front of judges. The smallest insight into that pain is unavailable and hidden away in places we don't think about, and those inflicting the violence of courts are glad we don't think about them. In 1932, an anonymous 'Solicitor' wrote of attendance at courts:

The working classes know of the injustice that occurs in the police courts. Not only are they told by those who are compelled to attend there, but, especially in these days of unemployment, there is nearly always a large audience of regular spectators in the public seats.¹

What happened, then, to the large audiences? Why is it that their presence in public galleries now often induces suspicion – if not worse – from the various functionaries of the court? At two of the three trials of student protesters

¹ 'Solicitor', *English Justice*, 1932.

Alfie Meadows and Zak King – who were eventually found not guilty of violent disorder during the police kettle of the 9 December 2010 tuition fees demonstration, where they themselves had received injuries from the police, Alfie's life-threatening – supporters in the packed public gallery at Willesden County Court were met by police and security who attempted to control and harass their access to the trial. At the retrial in October 2012, loved ones, friends, and supporters looking down on the room below from one of the elevated glass-fronted public galleries at the high security court were joined by several police officers. Of course no regard was paid to the fact that the defendants were victims of police violence or that many of the people who were in the gallery were no strangers to that type of violence themselves. The police claimed they were ordered into the gallery to prevent disorder, and were joined by their inspector who demanded that seats be given up for the officers to remain throughout the trial, eventually resorting to picking out people to be forcibly removed. When the trial was restarted in February 2013 access to the entire court building was barred to attendees by security in communication with the police.² Both of these refusals of access took place in courtrooms where nominally open hearings were taking place. That is, they were in spaces open to the public and therefore under the logic of public order and its policing.

Though the above descriptions sound absurd and excessive, the reality is that public galleries are at all times subject to this logic. Courts demand of those who enter them a cold passivity amenable to the manipulation – nominal and bodily – of the 'public' that justice undertakes.³ Spirits are crushed as soon as people enter these buildings to be subjected to the scans and searches of security, and the crushing continues as you are forced by judges to watch emotionlessly while police lie, a defendant worries under the strain of a prosecutor's harassment, or unjust verdicts are given. When the usual controls of the public gallery are not enough to quieten people's feelings, judges have at their disposal 'contempt of court' laws. Only a justice system that breeds its own contempt must put in place an architecture to ensure passivity from its participants. Only a justice system

2 An account of this by Petra Davis is available in *New Statesman*, 2013.

3 Nina Power has written on and discussed the role of the 'public' as a collective subject employed in the law, including a radio essay on courts.

that breeds its own contempt could require a legislative architecture to ensure passivity from its participants, aghast at such judicial violence.

Learning of the damage courts do of course ferments and fortifies our hate for them. As Engels wrote in 'The Condition of England' from 1844: 'The maltreatment of the poor and the preferential treatment of the rich in all the courts of law is so universal, is practised so openly and brazenly, and is reported so shamelessly by the newspapers that one can rarely read a paper without being filled with indignation.'⁴ The newspapers now seem closer to the 'Solicitor's' description from 1932: 'The Press is not much help. Very little space is given to reports of any but sensational or unusual cases, and, unless someone makes a scene, irregularities, and even serious injustices, pass unnoticed.'⁵ The courts continue to be open and brazen in their mistreatments while the public are absent, foreclosing the possibility of an equally open and brazen response from those who might recognise their injustices.

The riots across England in August 2011 were followed by the twilight courts that dealt an agile tragedy to communities, remanding many overnight based on no evidence. Paul Gilroy, who attended some of the riot hearings at the time, reported at a public meeting:

I was sitting in Highbury Magistrates' Court this morning, watching the magistrate giving people who had no criminal record months and months before their case would even be heard. And those young people, some of whom were not with their families but were on their own, could not have been defended successfully even by someone like Michael Mansfield. It's a sham what's going on down there. For people who've been charged with violent disorder, two out of three of them have been remanded in custody, and that is a scandal, not justice.⁶

At appeal the then Lord Chief Justice Igoe Judge praised the 'committed and dedicated'⁷ way in which the lower courts aided in the 'efficient administration of justice.' His most revealing praise, however, was noting that the coordination

4 F. Engels, 'The Condition of England. II. The English Constitution', 1844.

5 'Solicitor,' *English Justice*, 1932.

6 See P. Gilroy's speech, 'Black Activists Rising Against the Cuts', Tottenham 2011.

7 *R v Blackshaw & Others*.

of the Police Service, Crown Prosecution Service, Probation Service and Prison Service 'represents the very end of a system in which these different services have distinct and independent responsibilities.' The courts, those nights, were at the heart of maintaining public order alongside the police and they managed it largely unseen by the 'public' they claimed to be acting for. How many more nights of rioting might there have been if the state's vicious response was performed in front of full public galleries?

That question is partly answered by the conclusion of the inquest into the death of Mark Duggan in January 2014. An entire courtroom, connected by video link to the main court, had to be used to hold the large number of people that attended to hear the jury's verdict. Unlike most verdicts from inquests into deaths following police contact, the entire country was awaiting this jury's decision, and when the incomprehensibly unjust 'lawful killing' was announced many expected and speculated on the possibility of a repeat of the rioting that followed the initial killing. For whatever reason that didn't happen, but there was an unwilling recognition that witnessing such injustice might lead to disorder.

The fact that people witnessing their version of justice makes the state fear disorder so much is certainly part of the reason why we should manifest our hate for the courts by our presence in them. The state would like to act as if it were the only possible form for a collective of people, and so when the negative image of its community is demonstrated in the courts – where state law is meant to be strongest – as a capacity to support and struggle alongside one another, the threat is clear and victories can finally be had against it. Adrienne Makenda Kambana took a moment to thank those who supported her and her family at the end of the inquest into the death of her husband Jimmy Mubenga who was unlawfully killed by G4S security guards on a deportation flight to Angola. At times, the court used for that inquest was so full that the dock was opened up for members of the public to observe from. Unfortunately at other times there weren't very many people there at all. It is undeniable that juries are affected by things like the presence of supporters in court. As people co-opted by the law into playing one of the roles of a good 'public,' juries are constantly reminded to limit themselves to 'facts.' Seeing what actual people look like can remind them to go beyond this and consider who is hurt by the processes and their decisions.

In hating the state's justice and acting outside of the bounds of the positive public it creates we are being negative. The left communist journal *Endnotes* recently published an article on the 2011 riots that in part looked at justice campaigns that emerge in response to deaths in custody:

[R]esidents do not always remain passive. Indeed, the imposition of such policing can contribute to the formation of at least the negative unity of a community self-organising against the cops: some neighbourhood 'defence campaign', for example, oriented around retribution for the death in police custody of a community member, or the indifference of state and media to one or another racist tragedy. Such things have been a persistent, if often submerged, current in London life throughout the decades of capitalist restructuring – decades in which hundreds of deaths in police custody, typically of blacks, have not resulted in a single convicted officer.⁸

Where *Endnotes* misunderstand the negativity is in inscribing it at the level of the logical form of the collective and not also in the feelings that create a space for fighting for change. The feelings of those who have lost their loved ones, go to court angry, hating, and despairing and yet all the while calling for justice. To some there is nothing special about any of those feelings or even the call for justice, but when they are felt in and against the courts they represent a call for an end to the order that imposes the current conditions on us.

For so long the courts have been adept at maintaining a positive public as part of positive law. All the while we have hated them and been indignant as public order largely continued. If we want their destruction we have to take our hate and our refusal to be passive into where they feel safest inflicting their violence on us: the courtrooms.

8 *Endnotes*, 'A Rising Tide Lifts All Boats', 2013.

TACET

DOMINIC FOX

At the start of Shakespeare's *King Lear*, the ageing monarch has his daughters bid for their dowries in a contest of rhetoric. The task set before them is to speak pleasingly of their love for their father, to make a public display of filial affection. They are to show that they love their father by professing their love. Such a profession is not so much a statement of fact as a demonstration of willingness, a form of what we would now call emotional labour. In the language of speech act theory, it is not a 'constative' utterance, one which is successful to the extent that it says correctly how things are, but a 'perlocutionary' utterance, one which is successful to the extent that it persuades or impresses its intended audience. Lear is showing off his daughters to their prospective husbands, as well as showing himself off as their father and king. He has substantial gifts to bestow, and can expect to command exorbitant praise and devotion. It's a moment of regal grandiosity, in which the King indulges himself by requiring others to indulge him. Such are the perks.

I've always loved Cordelia's fatal torpedoing of this moment, her failure/refusal to play along. Is it an act of principle, or a 'performative misfire' (as speech act theory describes the speech act that fails in some way to come off)? Is she stubborn or incapable? We are supposed to feel that Lear's rage towards Cordelia, his peremptory 'unfriending' of his favourite daughter, is unjust, over-the-top, the foolish lashing-out of a wounded narcissist.¹ Yet there is something dangerously trenchant about Cordelia's stance: to borrow a formula of Lacan's, she manages to raise an incapacity ('I cannot heave my heart into my mouth') into an impossibility. Paternal, regal authority knows nothing of impossibility: one does not say 'no' to a king. Yet Cordelia finds a sticking-point and sticks to it, insisting finally on the intractable necessity of her 'nothing.'

¹ No, really: Lear later describes Cordelia to Burgundy as 'unfriended, new-adopted to our hate.'

KING LEAR

... Now, our joy,
Although the last, not least; to whose young love
The vines of France and milk of Burgundy
Strive to be interest'd; what can you say to draw
A third more opulent than your sisters? Speak.

CORDELIA

Nothing, my lord.

KING LEAR

Nothing!

CORDELIA

Nothing.

KING LEAR

Nothing will come of nothing: speak again.

CORDELIA

Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave
My heart into my mouth: I love your majesty
According to my bond; nor more nor less.

KING LEAR

How, how, Cordelia! mend your speech a little,
Lest it may mar your fortunes.

CORDELIA

Good my lord,
You have begot me, bred me, loved me: I

Return those duties back as are right fit,
Obey you, love you, and most honour you.
Why have my sisters husbands, if they say
They love you all? Haply, when I shall wed,
That lord whose hand must take my plight shall carry
Half my love with him, half my care and duty:
Sure, I shall never marry like my sisters,
To love my father all.

KING LEAR

But goes thy heart with this?

CORDELIA

Ay, good my lord.

KING LEAR

So young, and so untender?

CORDELIA

So young, my lord, and true.

Cordelia's responses here might be characterised as 'unreasonably reasonable,' as introducing rational considerations into a situation in which such considerations are decidedly unwelcome. What's wanted is 'tenderness,' complaisant willingness to keep the rhetorical ball in the air. What Cordelia instead enacts is 'truth,' or speech which sacrifices perlocutionary effectiveness to constative exactness. To love 'according to my bond; no more, no less' is to love according to a supposed objective norm of reciprocity: 'You have begot me, bred me, loved me: I / Return those duties back as are right fit.' If this seems cold, it is because the subjective exorbitance of love, its irreducibility to the performance of duty, is excluded from utterance. Cordelia's 'nothing' marks the cut of this exclusion, which separates the privately felt from that which can be constatively indicated.

Cordelia's problem is not that she is heartless – in a sense, she is 'all heart' (as her name, which puns on *coeur*, suggests). Although she has defaulted spectacularly from the public contract of femininity, she remains entirely 'true' – that is, faithful to her father – in her private affections. In this sense, she represents an idealised or spiritualised femininity, one purified of worldliness and calculation, whose purity moreover is ultimately sealed in death. We have in no sense exited the patriarchal *mythos* here: the femininity that performs according to social expectations, that does what women must do in order to get by, is condemned from the perspective of an immaculate, too-good-for-this-world ultra-femininity (as witness Cordelia's somewhat unsisterly sharpness towards Goneril and Regan). However, I'm less interested in Cordelia's doomed virtue than in the shocking intransigence with which she refuses the inducement to speak and make something of herself. She is reacting, from whatever motives, to a situation in which the genuinely disruptive act, the act which reveals and interrupts the obscenity of the proceedings, is not to 'express your feelings,' or articulate your subjectivity, but to 'love, and be silent.'

It's a very public refusal, however. Cordelia does not say nothing; she says 'nothing,' and says it loudly enough to be heard. One might think of John Cage's famous 'I have nothing to say, and I am saying it,' which announces an interruption of the thematic in music by the pure gesture: 4'33" is a performance piece, which says 'nothing,' which clears away the expressive means of music in order to allow something different to be heard in its place. In a political register, consider that one type of action undertaken by the radical AIDS campaigning group ACT UP, whose motto was 'Silence = Death,' was the 'die-in' in which members would lie down in the middle of the street and pretend to be dead. Here, a politics of visibility, of stubbornly insisting that queer bodies and experiences not be erased from public view, was expressed through the performative re-enactment of the consequences of that erasure. There is a gestural potency in silence, in inactivity, when it comes to disrupt the normal flow of speech – or of pedestrian traffic.

One of the motivating theses of Foucault's *History of Sexuality* is that the 'repressive hypothesis' concerning sexuality is mistaken. In place of a supposed conflict between the spontaneous desire for sexual expression and a

repressive authority which seeks to contain and silence that expression, Foucault posits an arrangement of power which incites expressions of sexuality and installs sexual identities – a biopolitical ‘technology’ of sex, which organises diverse ‘bodies and pleasures’ into a regulated system of meaning. From the confessional to the analyst’s couch, sexuality is held to be a matter of the greatest importance in determining the innermost being of individuals, so that the demand for free sexual expression can become confused with a demand that individuals format themselves as sexual beings, perform their sexuality intelligibly. In this system, the asexual is as much a renegade as the libertine – and possible more so, inasmuch as the libertine’s memoir (*The Sexual Life of Catherine M.*, say), however scandalous the excesses it portrays, upholds the essential link between sexual pleasure and the signification of desire. It is not difficult to know what the libertine wants; whereas the asexual is constantly under suspicion of wanting something that they are repressing or concealing – how can I know what you are, if you will not tell me how you like to fuck? (There is an old joke about sectarian religious identity, in which a person responding to the question ‘Protestant or a Catholic?’ with ‘neither – I’m Jewish’ is asked ‘yes, but are you a Protestant Jew or a Catholic Jew?’ Are you a gay asexual, a straight asexual or a bisexual asexual?)

Any politics of positive identity, of visibility, of speaking up and speaking out, will eventually find itself confronted with a Foucauldian ‘technology’ of identity, which not only tolerates but incites speech in the interests of governance. The most oppositional and transgressive speech can become incorporated into the normal flow of traffic. This is not altogether an undesirable outcome: it can be enabling to be able to ‘go with the flow,’ to entrust the articulation of one’s identity to an intelligible order of recognised gestures. The less work I have to do in order to express my wants, to be understood and assisted in the realisation of those wants, the less pressing they are. Heteronormativity relieves heterosexual persons of the burden of sexuality by routinising the public signification of their desires. To return to *Lear*: Goneril and Regan are able to confide in a public rhetoric that to some degree says what they want to say – or to be heard saying – for them. Cordelia’s ‘lack of confidence’ is as much a mistrust of this rhetoric as it is a lack of faith in her own ability to

employ it competently. When we regard 'lack of confidence' as a deficit to be made up through personal exhortation and encouragement – 'mend your speech a little / Lest it may mar your fortunes' – we are refusing to credit this mistrust, which may be better motivated than we imagine.

I want to close by considering the case of social media. Do these not constitute a new and powerful apparatus of incitation, with their continual invitation to update our public 'status' and let the world know what we are doing, how we are feeling, what's going on? The volume of traffic carried by the major sites – at present, Facebook and Twitter – is unprecedented, and has required considerable technological innovation to be sustainable: Twitter's 'fail whale,' which was displayed whenever the site was overloaded, was a constant feature of its early years. Already, schoolchildren are being instructed in the proper use of social media – initially the aim was to guard them against dangerous self-disclosure, but it cannot be long before pupils are asked to practise expressing themselves in tweets just as they were once taught how to compose letters (imagine Romeo and Juliet expressing their love via direct messages! Extra marks for creative use of animated gifs). What might it mean, in these forums, to say 'nothing,' to obstruct the flow of pedestrian traffic? We are already familiar with a few gestures: the 'flounce,' where someone abruptly deletes their Twitter account after an altercation; the more serious 'virtual suicide,' in which a person painstakingly wipes out their profiles across a range of sites, supposedly in order to recommit themselves to face-to-face human contact. But these self-deletions express the freedom to exempt oneself from social media, rather than negotiating with its unavoidable omnipresence: they don't *negate* the exhortation to share of oneself with Facebook's advertisers and government clients, but simply opt-out of it. Suppose we were prepared to 'mar our fortunes,' to be 'untender,' to damage our personal brand. How might we make our refusal public?

A KILLJOY MANIFESTO

SARA AHMED

I am willing to cause unhappiness even if unhappiness is not my cause. I am willing to cause unhappiness by not making happiness my cause.

Happiness is a heavy word, even if feeling happy can be a light feeling. It is weighed down by its association with being good, of being what follows being good. Whether in classical accounts of *eudaimonia* or in utilitarian accounts of happiness as the greatest good, happiness has most often been thought of as an end, the aim or point of an existence that we reach for, or what we should reach for. A killjoy: the one assumed to put happiness out of reach.

We know the political utility of happiness. How can we not know? When protesters were marching with angry feet, protesting austerity, protesting the manufacturing of consent for cuts, David Cameron called for a happiness index. Happiness provides a technique of distraction, a way of covering the nation with the warmth of a blanket. And then there was an announcement of a Royal Wedding. The Prime Minister said immediately 'everyone would want to put on record the happy news that was announced yesterday' and opened for public debate whether there should be a national holiday. Happiness became a gift to the nation, a way of countering a sense of national exhaustion and misery (and note even the idea of a tired miserable nation was a way of pacifying the potency of the signs of rage).¹ Those who did not participate in this national happiness were positioned as killjoys, alienated from the nation by virtue of not being affected in the right way.

Becoming Killjoys

To assemble a politics around the figure of the killjoy is to assemble around an

1 The pacification of the potency of rage has been an important part of the media and political response to the protests. The anger was typically projected onto militant outsiders, those who were intent on destroying the march for others, rather than being understood as what compelled people to march in the first place. It is almost as if the media 'willed' the marches *to be of tired rather than angry feet*.

experience of difficulty. Consider Eve Sedgwick's powerful reflections on the term 'queer.' She writes: 'it is a politically potent term... because far from being detached from the childhood scene of shame, it cleaves to that scene.'² To name ourselves as killjoys, to proceed from that name, is to cleave to that scene. The scene is not only a childhood one: there are many scenes of being seated at a table with others. Do you remember being charged? Do you remember how it felt? I remember. I write with this memory, from this memory.

One way of telling a feminist story would be to begin with a table. Around this table, the family gathers, having polite conversations, where only certain things can be brought up. Someone says something you consider problematic. You are becoming tense; it is becoming tense. You respond, carefully, perhaps. You say why you think what they have said is problematic. You might be speaking quietly, but you are beginning to feel 'wound up,' recognising with frustration that you are being wound up by someone who is winding you up. In speaking up or speaking out, you upset the situation. That you have described what was said by another as a problem means you have created a problem. You become the problem you create.

The family gathers around the table; these are supposed to be happy occasions. How hard we work to keep the occasion happy, to keep the surface of the table polished so that it can reflect back a good image of the family. Becoming a feminist can be an alienation from happiness (though not just that, not only that: oh the joy of being able to leave the place you were given!). When we feel happiness in proximity to the right objects, we are aligned; we are facing the right way. You become alienated – out of line with an affective community – when you do not experience happiness from the right things. The gap between the affective value of an object and how we experience an object can involve a range of affects, which are directed by the modes of explanation we offer to fill this gap.

If we are disappointed by something that is supposed to make us happy, we generate explanations of why that thing is disappointing. We can be disappointed without ever being happy. Think of the wedding day, imagined

2 E.K. Sedgwick, 'Queer Performativity: Henry James's *The Art of the Novel*', 1993.

as 'the happiest day of your life' before it even happens! What happens when the day happens, if happiness does not happen? In *The Managed Heart*, Arlie Hochschild explores how, if the bride is not happy on her wedding day, and feels 'depressed and upset,' then she is experiencing an 'inappropriate affect,' or is being affected inappropriately. You have to save the day by feeling right: 'sensing a gap between the ideal feeling and the actual feeling she tolerated, the bride prompts herself to be happy.'³ The capacity to 'save the day' depends on the bride being able to make herself be affected in the right way, or at least being able to persuade others that she is being affected in the right way.

You cannot always close the gap between how you do feel and how you should feel. Behind the sharpness of this 'cannot' is a world of possibility. Activism might act out of this gap, opening it up, loosening it up. Not to close the gap between what you do feel and what you should feel might begin as a sense of disappointment. Disappointment can involve an anxious narrative of self-doubt (Why am I not made happy by this? What is wrong with me?), or a narrative of rage, where the object that is 'supposed' to make us happy is identified as the cause of our disappointment. Our rage might be directed against it, or spill out towards those who promised us happiness through the elevation of such objects as good. We become strangers, or affect aliens, in such moments.

Affect aliens are those who experience alien affects. You are unseated by the table of happiness. If you lose your seat what happens? Activism is often a matter of seats. The word 'dissidence' for instance derives from the Latin dis- 'apart' + sedere 'to sit.' The dissident is the one who sits apart. Or the one would be unseated by taking up a place at the table: your seat is the site of disagreement.

Unhappy Feminists

To be unseated by the table of happiness might be to threaten not simply that table, but what gathers around it, what gathers on it. When you are unseated, you can even get in the way of those who are seated, those who want more than anything to keep their seats. To threaten the loss of the seat can be to

3 A.R. Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*, 2003.

kill the joy of the seated. How well we recognise the figure of the feminist killjoy! How she makes sense! Let's take the figure of the feminist killjoy seriously. A feminist project: to give the killjoy back her voice. While hearing feminists as killjoys might be a form of dismissal, there is an agency that this dismissal rather ironically reveals. We can respond to the accusation with a 'yes.'

The figure of the feminist killjoy makes sense if we place her in the context of feminist critiques of happiness, of how happiness is used to justify social norms as social goods (a social good is what causes happiness, given that happiness is understood as what is good). As Simone de Beauvoir noted so astutely, 'it is always easy to describe as happy a situation in which one wishes to place [others].'⁴ Not to agree to stay in the place of this wish might be to refuse the happiness that is wished for. To be involved in political activism is thus to be involved in a struggle against happiness. Just think of the labour of critique that is behind us: feminist critiques of the figure of 'the happy housewife;' Black critiques of the myth of 'the happy slave;' queer critiques of the sentimentalisation of heterosexuality as 'domestic bliss.' The struggle over happiness provides the horizon in which political claims are made. We inherit this horizon.

So, yes, let's take the figure of the feminist killjoy seriously. Does the feminist kill other people's joy by pointing out moments of sexism? Does she expose the bad feelings that get hidden, displaced, or negated under public signs of joy? Does bad feeling enter the room when somebody expresses anger about things, or could anger be the moment when the bad feelings that circulate through objects get brought to the surface in a certain way? Feminists do kill joy in a certain sense: they disturb the very fantasy that happiness can be found in certain places. Killing a fantasy can still kill a feeling. It is not just that feminists might not be happily affected by what is supposed to cause happiness, but our failure to be happy is read as sabotaging the happiness of others.

We can consider the relationship between the negativity of the figure of the feminist killjoy and how certain bodies are 'encountered' as being negative. Marilyn Frye argues that oppression involves the requirement

4 S. Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 1997.

that you show signs of being happy with the situation in which you find yourself. As she puts it, 'it is often a requirement upon oppressed people that we smile and be cheerful. If we comply, we signify our docility and our acquiescence in our situation.' To be oppressed requires that you show signs of happiness, as signs of being or having been adjusted. For Frye, 'anything but the sunniest countenance exposes us to being perceived as mean, bitter, angry or dangerous.'⁵

To be recognised as a feminist is to be assigned to a difficult category and a category of difficulty. You are 'already read' as 'not easy to get along with' when you name yourself as a feminist. You have to show that you are not difficult through displaying signs of good will and happiness. Frye alludes to such experiences when she describes how 'this means, at the very least, that we may be found to be "difficult" or unpleasant to work with, which is enough to cost one's livelihood.'⁶ We can also witness an investment in feminist unhappiness (the myth that feminists kill joy because they are joy-less). There is a desire to believe that women become feminists because they are unhappy. This desire functions as a defence of happiness against feminist critique. This is not to say that feminists might not be unhappy; becoming a feminist might mean becoming aware of just how much there is to be unhappy about. My point here would be that feminists are read as being unhappy, such that situations of conflict, violence, and power are read as being about the unhappiness of feminists, rather than being what feminists are unhappy about.

Political struggles can take place over the causes of unhappiness. We need to give a history to unhappiness. The history of the word 'unhappy' might teach us about the unhappiness of the history of happiness. In its earliest uses, unhappy referred to something that caused misfortune or trouble. Only later did it come to mean to feel unfortunate, in the sense of wretched or sad. We can learn from the swiftness of this translation from causing unhappiness into being described as unhappy. We must learn.

5 M. Frye, *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory*, 1983.

6 Ibid.

Killjoys In Feminism

A feminist call might be a call to anger, to develop a sense of rage about collective wrongs. And yet, it is important that we do not make feminist emotion into a site of truth – as if it is always clear or self-evident that our anger is right. When anger becomes righteous it can be oppressive; to assume that anger makes us right can be a wrong. We know how easily a politics of happiness can be displaced into a politics of anger: the assumption of a right to happiness can convert very swiftly into anger towards others (immigrants, aliens, strangers) who have taken the happiness assumed ‘by right’ to be ours. Emotions are not always just, even those that seem to acquire their force in or from an experience of injustice.

After all, feminist spaces are emotional spaces, in which the experience of solidarity is hardly exhaustive. As feminists we have our own tables. If we are unseated by the family table, it does not necessarily follow that we are seated together. We can place the figure of the feminist killjoy alongside the figure of the angry Black woman, explored so well by Black feminist writers such as Audre Lorde and bell hooks. The angry Black woman can be described as a killjoy; she may even kill feminist joy, for example, by pointing out forms of racism within feminist politics. She might not even have to make any such point to kill joy. Listen to the following description from bell hooks:

a group of white feminist activists who do not know one another may be present at a meeting to discuss feminist theory. They may feel bonded on the basis of shared womanhood, but the atmosphere will noticeably change when a woman of color enters the room. The white women will become tense, no longer relaxed, no longer celebratory.⁷

It is not just that feelings are ‘in tension,’ but that the tension is located somewhere: in being felt by some bodies, it is identified as being caused by another body, by those who come to be felt as apart from the group, as getting in the way of its enjoyment and solidarity. The body of colour is located as the cause of becoming tense, which is also the loss of a shared atmosphere. As a feminist of colour

7 bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margins to Center*, 2000.

you do not even have to say anything to cause tension! The mere proximity of some bodies involves an affective conversion. We learn from this example how histories are condensed in the very intangibility of an atmosphere, or in the tangibility of the bodies that seem to get in the way. Atmospheres might become shared if there is agreement over where we locate the points of tension.

A history can be preserved in the very stickiness of a situation. To speak out of anger as a woman of colour is then to confirm your position as the cause of tension; your anger is what threatens the social bond. As Audre Lorde describes: 'When women of Color speak out of the anger that laces so many of our contacts with white women, we are often told that we are "creating a mood of helplessness," "preventing white women from getting past guilt," or "standing in the way of trusting communication and action."' ⁸ The exposure of violence becomes the origin of violence. The woman of colour must let go of her anger for the white woman to move on.

Some become killjoys within feminism, getting in the way of feminist happiness. We can turn this around. If you can be a killjoy within feminism, then feminist killjoys are not always 'on the same side.' This is why we need to avoid turning the killjoy into a happy figure, or to avoid assuming she always embodies solidarity between those who are cast out from the tables of happiness. Otherwise, assembling around the figure of the killjoy would become just another happy model of community. We might also need to learn not to assume that in a given situation that we are her, even if we recognise ourselves in that figure, even if she is compelling, even if we are energised by her. In assuming we are the killjoys, we might not notice how others become killjoys to us, getting in the way of our own happiness, becoming obstacles to a future we are reaching for. Activism might require us to lose a certain confidence in ourselves, allowing ourselves to recognise how we too can be the problem. And that is hard if we have had a lifetime of being the problem.

⁸ A. Lorde, *Sister Outside: Essays and Speeches*, 1984.

In The Way

A killjoy: the one who gets in the way of other people's happiness. Or just the one who is in the way – you can be in the way of *whatever*, if you are already perceived as being in the way. Your very arrival in a room is a reminder of histories that 'get in the way' of the occupation of that room. How many feminist stories are about rooms, about who occupies them, about making room? When to arrive is to get in the way, what happens, what do you do?

We all know the experience of 'going the wrong way' in a crowd. Everyone seems to be going the opposite way to the way you are going. No one person has to push or shove for you to feel the collective momentum of the crowd as a pushing and shoving. For you to keep going you have to push harder than any of those individuals who are going the right way. The body 'going the wrong way' is the one that is experienced as 'in the way' of the will that is acquired as momentum. For some bodies, mere persistence, 'to continue steadfastly,' requires great effort, an effort that might appear to others as stubbornness or obstinacy, as insistence on going against the flow. You have to become insistent to go against the flow; you are judged to be going against the flow because you are insistent. A life paradox: you have to become what you are judged as being. You might have to become what you are judged as being to survive that very judgement.

Political histories of striking and of demonstrations are histories of those willing to put their bodies *in the way*, to turn their bodies into blockage points that stop the flow of human traffic, as well as the wider flow of an economy. You become willing not to go with the flow, to *cause its obstruction*.

Conversations are also flows; they are saturated. We hear this saturation as atmosphere. To be identified as wilful is to be the one who 'ruins the atmosphere.' A colleague says to me she just has to open her mouth in meetings to witness eyes rolling as if to say, 'oh here she goes.' My experience as a feminist daughter in a conventional family taught me a great deal about rolling eyes. You already know this. My equation is simple: rolling eyes equals feminist pedagogy. It is as if you oppose something because you are oppositional. It is as if you disagree because you are disagreeable. It is as if speaking about injustice,

about power, about inequality, is just another way of getting your own way. Those who 'get in the way' are often judged as 'getting their own way.'

If we are assigned killjoys, we can accept this assignment. Killing joy becomes an assignment in another sense: a project or task that we can take up in our everyday negotiations with the world; killing joy as homework. This does not mean we translate the killjoy into a new political ontology, by assuming we are her: I have already noted the risks of such a translation.

We think instead from the experience of being given this assignment, in the times and places we are or have been given it. We can learn so much from this assignment. And we learn in part by losing ground, by exposing the instability of the political ground. The history of sexism and racism within left activist spaces teaches us about unstable grounds. We have to enact the world we are aiming for: nothing less will do. Behind us are long histories of failed enactments, histories in which the critiques of how power is exercised within political movements have been dismissed: heard as distractions from the shared project of transformation, as causing the divisions they reveal, as being in the way of what is on the way.

It is as if we put the obstacle there by saying there's an obstacle there, as if we are in the way of ourselves. Feminism and anti-racism are thus quickly diagnosed as melancholic attachments; as if we are 'holding on' to what has 'already gone,' as if racism and sexism would disappear if only we stopped bringing them up. Our moral task is to get over it, as if when we are over it, it is gone.

I have an alternative. Let's make it a maxim. *Don't get over it, if you are not over it.* When we are not willing to adjust, we become maladjusted. Perhaps we can turn the diagnosis into a call: do not adjust to an unjust world!

THE RAGE THAT TURNS TO ACTION

CIARA DOYLE IN CONVERSATION WITH
DPAC ACTIVISTS LINDA BURNIP, KATE
CARYER, ELLEN CLIFFORD, CONAN
DOYLE, ANDY GREENE, DEBBIE JOLLY,
AND NICO PHILLIPS.

What makes us human; a strand of DNA perhaps? Or is it more; to communicate, to share ideas, to act collectively? When we take part in conversation we become more than ourselves, a part of society. We become defined by our human culture over our animal nature. But what of those who are denied the right to be part of society? Those of us who are disabled, or otherwise deemed 'unfit' to be a part of the mainstream. Are we, those displaced into the margins, somehow less than human because we are denied our voice? Or might it be that in our marginal spaces the most humanising conversations of all occur; the ones where we discuss and dissect how a new society can be created; a kinder, gentler, more humanising society, one formed from an old vision forged anew, a vision of... from each according to their abilities, to each according to their need?

This essay was written based on a series of conversations between disabled activists and supporters over the month of February 2014. Each conversation focused on the reasons for getting involved in activism, and how rage against an unjust system played a role in that process. This is not an analytical essay, but the story of how rage inspires activism in the words of those who will not be silenced or take back their human right to communicate, in whatever form that can happen.

Before the Rage... a Child First of all Sees Hurt
For Ellen, like everyone else who took part in this project, her sense that something wasn't right with the world began at a young age. She explains:

One thing I can really remember is being about four and watching the *Hunchback of Notre Dame*, the black and white version, and just being outraged at that. About how they were treating the main character, the hunchback of Notre Dame, I just remember that, and I'm sure that was probably because of my own personal experiences, like, you know, experiences as a child, and being traumatised by various things, that I identified with this character, but I just really remember thinking, 'yeah, when I grow up I'm going to make sure I'm going to change things, that people don't get victimised like that.'

Kate also recounts a very early awakening to a political awareness. She became an activist at the age of eight, following the influence of a disability rights campaigner she met in a hospital. Speaking through her mother, she explains the background to deciding to be an activist at such a young age:

When Katie was little, about eight years old, she had decided she hated special school... And, as often happens in special schools she got concussion because they are always falling over. Despite what people say, they are not supervised properly. We ended up in casualty. While there, we met a disability rights activist who introduced Katie to a more political way of thinking.

For Felix, the catalyst was an incident of racism on the bus when he was twelve, and for Linda growing up in a mining family and witnessing the miners' strikes created an early impact and awareness. All activists who took part told of being very young, and looking through a child's eyes at an unjust and hurtful world, identifying from that moment on that they would grow up to help heal the hurt, to not let this pain happen to others.

Hurt Turns to Anger

Something happened. The world turned. The world burned. The Twin Towers fell, the banks collapsed, the ConDems came to power, and Torygeddon commenced. Conan tells his story, identifying 2010 as the changeover year:

I felt rage ever since 2010. The moment the Tories took office, and the Lib Dems broke every single one of their empty promises. All of us in... education and academia just felt defeated. Then, the circumstances that led me to London left me too bitter to coherently articulate... I had had enough, and I tried to end it all. I don't think it's really possible to get more enraged,

or to rail against injustice any more desperately than by attempting to end one's own life: I knew I was starving to death as it was, just really slowly on one pack of supernoodles a day, so my last act of choice was to try to make it quicker... Rage is not quite strong enough for what I feel. I feel betrayal, the scorn of a pitiless elite, and the shame of once having hobnobbed with such elite in... Cambridge University. I think the hurt and pain I feel certainly shapes what I feel and do now.

For Debbie, there was an initial terror, a foreboding at an awareness of what was to come:

I knew even before that march that the Tories were going to slaughter us – and they have – literally! It was obvious that they were going to target disabled people, Osborne had already announced the 20% off the DLA caseload in the budget of May with no evidence of why.¹ It was a Tory divide and rule tactic that Thatcher had used against unemployed people... but even that evil Thatcher creature was an angel compared to this set of bastards. I knew it was going to be bad in 2010 but even in my most pessimistic thoughts I'd never have believed the evil they've carried out in completely devastating people's lives – with increasing deaths attributed to their so-called policies – it would have been incomprehensible then, and it's beyond comprehension now!

Nico tells of this time:

So as far as what I see happening to other disabled people and what I see happening to myself, it kind of all coalesced into a sea of injustice... and seeing the experiences of others and then the terrible experiences I have experienced recently to really bring me up to speed with all of what's going on, and be the activist that I am... I got more involved in the anti-cuts stuff after the ConDems came to power, and I got involved with extreme anger after my personal circumstances began to reflect the exact thing, starvation and terrible things that are happening to all the other crips, disabled people around.²

1 Disability Living Allowance (DLA) is a welfare payment designed to contribute towards the additional costs of having a disability.

2 The word 'crip' is used by some in the disability community as a reclaimed word and abbreviation of 'cripple' to mean a disabled person. It remains a contested word, and can still be seen as offensive depending on context, but is used as a term of identity and pride by some participants in this project.

Linda talks about:

Anger at the destruction of my welfare state and safety net by a bunch of bastard millionaires who are never going to know what it's like to go without basic things such as food, heating, and fuel and are never going to have to worry about paying for those things. The emails we get from people who have been sanctioned who feel like committing suicide and have no apparent way out of their predicament are also heartrending and make me angry. The fact that, within four years of the Tories being back in power, child poverty has soared and rickets and scurvy are coming back while we live in the seventh richest nation in the world also pisses me off. The fact that we're going to spend billions on replacing Trident and have the fourth largest (so-called) defence budget in the world makes me angry too.

Our Anger Becomes Coherent; DPAC gets Political

Anger, fear, disquiet, disbelief; an onslaught of emotions underlies an outrage at the erosion of social justice as experienced by DPAC activists. What this leads to, Andy sums up in one word, is 'Thinking:'

The thinking happened in the build up to the banking collapse. I think this is exposing the confidence to say what has been in my head for a really long time. I look around, around me. Health isn't working, education isn't working, the legal justice system doesn't work, us in the western world produce excess food, people in the rest of the world are starving, lots of other people are looking around thinking, 'something's not quite right'. And then we had the banking collapse. And suddenly: political conversations!

There was nonetheless an incredible coherence to the political conversations that took place over the duration of the project. Debbie:

The social model is tied up with a critique of capitalism—DPAC works from the philosophy of the social model.³ We did have a supportive email from a member who said why don't you just change your name to Disabled People

3 The social model of disability sees disability as arising through the structure of society. There is diversity and variety in human abilities and bodies, but our society places value on some and not others, and fails to accommodate those it deems to be pathological rather than 'normal.' Therefore, if a person in a wheelchair cannot access a building because there is a step up to the door and no ramp, the disability is created by the failure to install a ramp, not the person who is unable to climb the steps.

Against Capitalism – we all know that's the problem, and the acronym would be the same. I think most of us would accept that. A bankrupt system that makes the rich richer and the poor poorer especially under this unelected government.

Conan looks at the evolution of this standpoint from early explanations of the social model of disability to the present time:

We as a group follow the social model, which in many ways came from the nascent identity politics of the 1970s with UPIAS.⁴ I think what we've done with that model is really stretch it to include far more than men with acquired spinal injuries, etc., and in the process, I think a more socialist outlook has been a natural consequence of that broadening. Once we really started to think through the universality of disablement arising from social barriers, it seemed only natural to conclude that social barriers hold back a lot of people, and since the biggest social barrier faced by us as disabled people is poverty, a desire for the redistribution of wealth stems naturally from our desire for inclusion.

Linda is deeply critical of the established disabled people's organisations (DPOs), working within rather than against the state. She explains:

They use the term 'social model' but in my opinion wrongly and in a limited way. By that I mean they don't take it to its logical conclusion, which is that the problem is how capitalism works and excludes disabled people. So no I don't think it is all the Tories fault what is happening and I think DPOs have sat back and let it happen... their main interests are being service providers and making money. I think this was why there was a need for an independent voice against austerity for disabled people as there was no national independent voice.

The concept that disablement is an inevitable product of capitalist society was one strongly held by disabled activists in these conversations, and the ability to discuss these concepts openly was described as a 'breath of fresh air.' Ellen elaborates:

4 The Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS), founded in 1972, was the first disability rights movement to propose the social model of disability.

Social injustice! I think that this idea of a classless society was bollocks, but I think that for a while, it became 'everyone is middle class now' and I remember when I was at university anyone who said anything against capitalism was just this strange weird person. I was always completely on my own in that. And then it was really validating when the rest of the world came around to it.

However, building a self-consciously left-wing ideology of disability was not going to be easy, and obstacles would lie in the way. Ellen continues:

There were lots of tensions between the left and disabled people's rights movements and between the trade union movement and disabled people's rights movement, and I felt that we needed to break down the barriers because we should be working together. And I think that particularly when we looked at the situation around the Remploy workers, who were basically let down by the disability organisations on the one side, and on the other side by the trade unions.⁵ That was why they came to be shafted, really. So yeah, it was building a bridge, and I became very aware [that] on the left there isn't an awareness of disability equality, and things like the social model, most Marxists don't know about the social model of disability.

And so, a set of coherent policies developed and were discussed, based on concepts of fundamental human rights, to be met by democratically accountable state provision, and concepts of equality of outcome. Ellen was then able to comment:

And then it kind of felt that DPAC was what I had waited my whole life for in lots and lots of ways. Because it tied disability rights movement stuff with socialism. And I had always wanted to properly reclaim the social model from a Marxist perspective and this seemed like the right time to do it.

⁵ Remploy was an organisation run by the UK Government, which provided employment for disabled people. 29 factories were closed under the Labour government in 2008. A further 1,752 jobs were lost under the current government when they withdrew government support for Remploy and closed down half the remaining factories, attempting to sell off the last as going concerns. Their future remains unknown and looks uncertain.

Getting Organised, Setting it all in Motion

As the rage of the DPAC activists coalesced into a coherent political ideology, it equally dictated certain ways of working. Linda explains:

Of course we also work from a Rawlsian perspective in relation to his views on social justice but especially his views on peaceful civil disobedience – that if you have an immoral, corrupt government then as a citizen you have a moral responsibility to commit acts of civil disobedience until you get rid of them.

Setting this ideology in motion was not going to happen easily, nor would it happen overnight, and it was going to take significant input from a range of people. Linda tells of the first action:

I got involved with DPAC as I stupidly thought it would be a good idea to organise a disabled people's protest section at the march at the Tory Party Conference. It was in Brum near to where I live. I hadn't of course realised that would mean me having to speak to 7,000 people.

Debbie was Linda's first ally and partner. She gives a flavour of just how challenging it was to get things going, against significant obstacles and opposition:

There was some carry-on from councillors and others re: 'allowing disabled people to lead the march' which is what we asked for – to be at the front! They said stuff like we were 'too vulnerable,' what would happen if someone's tyre on their wheelchair burst, and other fucking shit... I remember getting an email out to various NGOs in Europe... we had people from Slovenia, Bulgaria, Germany, and elsewhere sending emails to the leader of Birmingham council.

From the first demo of around 50 people in the pouring rain outside the Tory Party Conference, membership rapidly grew, and strategies developed. DPAC went on to run a concerted and continued campaign. Andy identifies the year 2012–13 as a particularly busy one:

I think, kind of maybe, it got to a period between 2012, the Paralympics, Reclaiming our Futures, which was a year later, give or take, I think that's been a mad year. A mad year, we were into everything. We stopped every-

body doing everything that we wanted. We came away from nowhere beaten. We took every space we intended to. We tackled everybody. Government, corporations, our own side on the TUC, you know, government buildings, government ministers, we went to Nick Clegg, we went to IDS, as well as turning out for skills shares, workshops, conferences, doing other people's stuff.⁶ Doing speeches at loads of different things. We went to Balcombe,⁷ fuel poverty, fucking arms trade, you know what I mean, we were at fucking everything, we were ubiquitous, bedroom tax, everything.⁸

Sounds a bit exhausting really, Andy, when you list it all off like that. So, did this burn out the rage that led us all into this in the first place?

Being Empowered, from Rage to Defiance

The strongest sense that comes through all the conversations is one of a profound empowerment, a turning of rage into a sometimes gleeful and joyous fightback. At the same time, the rage remains, and settles into a conviction and determination to keep battling, now that the veil has been lifted and the injustices are clearer. All of this begins and ends, however, with a powerful need to communicate.

Ciara: So what to you do with that anger?

Kate: Annoy people on Facebook.

And a sense of what happens when people are silenced. Kate, who campaigns for communication aides to be a right for those who cannot use speech, reiterates that when people are denied the ability to communicate they become 'less than human.' Andy, on the other hand, describes the power of getting the communication through; no matter how hard the effort, the price is always worth it:

There were loads of different conversations happening, that was brilliant to see. A window had been opened. For the first time so many people could see what was happening to us. And all that shit. And suddenly, there we were!

6 Iain Duncan Smith (IDS), the current (2014) Secretary of State for Work and Pensions.

7 Balcombe was the site of an environmentalist camp protesting against hydraulic fracturing (fracking).

8 The Bedroom Tax (otherwise known as the Spare Room Subsidy) is a reduction of welfare targeting those judged to live in properties larger than is suitable for their needs.

Middle of the West End. Saturday morning... city shut down. Fantastic. It was just, you know. This is us. This is us!

A need for solidarity is also heightened through participation. Conan explains about taking part in direct action:

That was the first time I saw both the need for, and extent of, solidarity. I saw the need for solidarity, because it was the first time I had ever witnessed police racism and brutality with my own eyes. The solidarity was only natural. It didn't matter who you were or why you were there, but somehow, suddenly we were all the enemies of the state in the eyes of the police.

Debbie talks about the breaking down of isolation, which equally helps bring people together, where previously they had felt isolated and alone. She also discusses some very tangible impacts:

It had an impact in that newspapers started to increase their negative coverage of Atos, which had been minor before that, but increased massively – we had someone monitor it, and from August it has continued to increase – it got Atos on the map for the harm they were doing with public money.⁹ We also saw Atos shares drop. It made a very big dent in their credibility. John McDonnell MP said that there was never a more effective campaign against corporatism.

For Ellen, empowerment also lies in the reclamation of a tradition of direct action and watching people come together as a result:

So it was really exciting to be part of that, reclaiming our traditions, our direct action traditions, getting out on the streets, so that first action was really exciting to be doing, seeing everyone coming together, people I had known for years, new people, UK Uncut.

It is Debbie who sums it up. Rage brought us together, rage gave us back our voice, and as a result:

We are winning. There are lots of people trying to get the message out, doing different things to raise these issues, to push these issues, and we have

9 Atos is a private company which holds the government contract for carrying out the controversial 'work capability assessments,' and therefore implementing the policy of dramatically reducing the numbers of those eligible for assistance.

had a number of wins, we have got the media who were absolutely saying nothing at all in 2010 really, you know covering an amount of things. Not as much as we want them to, not with the ferocity that we need sometimes, but it is getting out there. And these are wins. And these are wins because of people's activism, because of people's passion, because of people's work. And because of the beyond comprehensible horror of what's happening. To people, in people's lives. On a day-to-day basis.

NEGATION AT A STANDSTILL

JOHN CUNNINGHAM

Imaginary Ruins

There's a game that can be played when walking through the city. Any zone of the contemporary capitalist metropolis will do but it's best played in one of the centres of accumulation, say London, than one of the less developed sectors. This rule is not absolute since decaying post-industrial cities also have their attractions. The game involves an imaginary testing of the city's buildings and neighbourhoods for their worthiness for destruction. This testing asks the question whether or not these office blocks, shops, apartment blocks, and other excrescent forms of the built environment deserve to exist in some imaginary post-capitalist future. And needless to say, whether the forms of life and social relations the contemporary metropolis helps to engender are not also worthy of a similar negation. It's a game that can be played singularly or in groups, and does not so much open up the metropolis as reduce it to a series of potentially empty spaces.

Most of the time this game is disturbingly easy, with the city throwing up future ruins at every street corner. That squat, concrete block of a police station needs to be reduced to rubble if only for the misery encrusted in its walls. The many-storied, uninhabitable financial office block deserves ruination despite the odd attraction of its well-tended atrium as a place of rest. Other husks of brick, glass, concrete, and dead labour are much less straightforward. A shopping mall, enlightened glass arcade of circulating bodies and commodities, might also serve other purposes, glass surfaces and transparencies being capable of reflecting more than the relations of exchange. The utopian potential of glass architecture, the revolutionary virtues of transparency and openness, might be realised in the midst of a wider negation of capitalism. Utopian and revolutionary thinkers such as Charles Fourier and Walter Benjamin thought that such architecture promised a break with the opacity and interior poverty of

private life. Perhaps, the game suggests, this break could be made actual if the glass cages of the present were put to use by new collectivities and subjects.¹

It's a shame that this game is little more than a way of critically passing the time walking through the shadows cast upon us by the metropolis, its structures, and apparatuses. Walking around transcribing the potentially empty spaces of the metropolis, enjoyable as it is, also traces the lack of agency that might make such a negation real. And such a lack ironically makes negation more necessary than ever. Negation and negativity as such, that inchoate combination of affects and passions such as boredom, hatred, depression, is more like a knot pulled ever tighter by this seeming lack of anti-capitalist negation in the present. Despite the rigours of a long drawn out socio-economic and environmental crisis, the actuality of the negation of capitalism seems as far away as ever. However, even if critique must operate in this suspended space it can still register the subjective and political brokenness that accumulates through the exertions of capitalist value production. The activity of the communist critic can hopefully be negative enough to find some purchase upon the contradictions of capitalism that might be valid tender in the marketplaces of negation. The stalling of negation might in itself provide the possibility of rethinking it.

Child's Play

The negative always has one slightly melancholic side turned to the waste of the world. In a suggestive fragment the deeply unorthodox Marxist philosopher Benjamin writes that through playing with the detritus of commodity capitalism children bring together 'materials of widely differing kinds in a new, intuitive relationship.' For Benjamin: 'In waste products they recognise the face that the world of things turns directly and solely to them.'² Benjamin undoubtedly means that through this these objects, assemblages of exchange and utility, are returned in play to a use that is no longer subsumed within the commodity form. A world is briefly formed wherein objects no longer confront those who use them as being composed of a value determined by time and abstract labour. This suggests

1 Thanks to DH for introducing me to this game.

2 W. Benjamin, *One-Way Street*, 1996.

that at least one side of the negative is turned towards play as well as labour. It's easy to project such a playful negation forward to the Situationists and their techniques of *dérive* and *détournement*. The former was a noninstrumentalised drifting through the capitalist city in order to find spaces to breath and the latter the subversive reuse of existing materials in both (anti-)art and life. It's worth emphasising that these were not techniques to be confined to furthering the cultural industries and aestheticising everyday life. For the Situationists, they were both pre-figurative of a broader anti-capitalist negation and a praxis in themselves that allowed a momentary respite from the rigours of capitalist subjectivity. And this playfulness is not necessarily lacking in its own intentional weight since it's difficult to imagine any negation of capitalism that would not involve the *détournement* of spaces, weapons, transport, communication networks, etc. Think of the uses things can lend themselves to in an occupation, riot, or demonstration. This being said, some care should be taken not to overstate the usefulness of such tactics. Rather than being torn out of context, things can also be sublated into art and retain only a mere trace of negation.

Perhaps the most important thing to grasp in these forms of more playful negation is the quality of time inscribed in them. Capitalist time empties out, abstracts into quantities of time and labour while inscribing value within the form of time. Time in this sense has not so much a forward linear motion as a circular one that reinvests itself as the reproduction of value. The form of negation described by Benjamin and in Situationist *détournement* attempts to puncture the time of capital through constructing a time without an overt *telos*. As opposed to more traditional forms of political praxis this kind of negation is an act in itself that constructs a more momentary, pleasurable sense of sovereignty over time as an empty abstraction.³ Perhaps it's this that needs to be retained from this more playful side of the negative, not some inherent 'creativity' in resistance but the possible violence of a momentary sovereignty over abstract time. But this

3 Though *détournement* need not be so encapsulated in the momentary act but may also constitute a strategy. Benjamin Noys conceptualises *détournement* as a far more expanded praxis that constructs a 'line of negation' that is both contingent upon a situation and allows negation to slowly attain a foothold in the present. See, B. Noys, *The Persistence of the Negative*, 2010.

does not provide any kind of answer to the question of negation at a standstill that has been posed, and it's more pertinent to further trace the shape of negation in terms of its seeming stasis.

Suspended Negation

In its classic Hegelian formulation, negation is a labour of the negative, the work that attempts the erasure of determinate objects. Such a formulation makes negation as an act in order to (re)make the world deceptively simple. Here the task, and the unhappy consciousnesses, of proletarians everywhere ought to make the abolition of value-mediated social relations possible with a determinate effort. There's a determined *telos* to this sense of negation in that there's an end or goal in sight. In the past this extended to the future plenitude of communism, a plenitude that acts of negation contributed towards. Yet, all that is experienced in the present is the seeming lack of such, as the future markets seem foreclosed to any such potentiality.

The accounting ledger of crisis has not, at least in the recent past, equalled new movements, subjects, and events that seem capable of threatening capitalism.⁴ Negation as the determinate abolition of capitalist social relations, private property, and subjects based upon class, gender, race, and nation seems to be at a standstill. That is not to reify a standstill of negation, since any such attempt is dependent upon unexpected events or developments not immediately apparent to a communist calculus that might break the stasis. But it's valuable to try to think negation from within its apparent suspension. This situation invokes for me a conceptual figure of negation at a standstill – or more accurately suspended negation – as a way of calling into question received notions of political praxis and activity. Also, it allows the activity of negation to be conjoined with a broader negativity, how negation might be turned inward and involute in an (anti-)productive way. A suspended negation is as though caught

4 That is not to completely dismiss the anti-austerity resistance in Greece and Spain, Occupy, aspects of the Arab Spring, the UK student movement, etc. All necessarily act within the limits set by the present and, whatever the overt demands or even non-demands they are associated with, might carry the seeds of a rupture with those constitutive limits of class and gender subjectivity within them.

in a freeze-frame and can be delineated clearly. The following can be glimpsed within this frozen image and might most negatively consist of:

1. A stasis that seems to demand the mutual decomposition of capital and proletariat or what Marx and Engels termed 'the common ruin of the contending classes.'⁵ As it comes apart, the disjunctive entwining of the social reproduction of the proletariat with the reproduction of capital only leads to the slow catastrophes of more brutal forms of accumulation, social conflict, and environmental collapse. The awful term 'struggle' recovers its older etymological sense of stumbling and faltering within the presently slow-moving crisis. Such would be a congested deadlock in which even as capitalism seems to decompose, the agency of those struggling within it also seems to reach the limit of their own decomposition as subjects of negation.

2. Related to this is that the socialist and communist dreams of the workers' movement, the programme of an economy and/or state run by the workers, seems irrevocably broken by the global restructuring of capitalism and the rise of new subjects of revolt less tied to workers' identity. A whole model of community-based organising, workplace agitation, and the most politically radical elements of the 'old' workers' movement are also revealed as no longer adequate to either the work of negation or the defensive struggles that sometimes accompany it. The basis for the triumph of the workers' movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was the subject figure of the worker; because this is a category of capitalism, the disidentification with it suggests a much more absolute negation of capitalism. However, this remains a wager based upon the negative truth of the decline of the 'old' workers' movement and, as with all such wagers, there's no guarantee. If this guarantee is void within negation at a standstill then this interregnum period will extend indefinitely.

3. A negative aesthetic within anti-capitalist politics that makes dire pronouncements of 'social war' sits entirely at odds with any capacity to actually enact it as such. While the poetic intensity of the pro-revolutionary⁶ imaginary

5 K. Marx and F. Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, 1848.

6 As Monsieur Dupont defines it: 'the term we give to those who are in favour of the revolutionary transformation of society but who have no means to effect that revolution.' M. Dupont, *Nihilist Communism*, 2009.

can be admirable it is similar to what the philosopher Alain Badiou has termed 'archi-politics,' a transvaluation of politics wherein event is inseparable from pronouncement, textual prophecy from a rupture with capitalism.⁷ This aesthetic shares common ground with the spectacular nature of the dreams that capitalism has of its own destruction via cultural products such as apocalyptic films.

However, none of this exhausts the conceptual figure of negation at a standstill. It also allows a questioning of negation as a project of work. There's a determined *telos* to this sense of negation as a determined project in that there's an end or goal in sight. In the past this extended to the future plenitude of communism, a plenitude that acts contributed towards. Negation-as-project presupposes that there is an agent or subject of such negation, an instrument that would make it possible. One of the paradoxes of anti-capitalist or communist negation is that such tools must be accounted for, cajoled into working, and plugged into gaps even if all of this remains at the level of a theoretical exercise. Communism was a project that seemed to require such tools. In order not to be a thing, or abstract labour, one must consent to become a thing in the service of negation. No wonder the grander schemes of us pro-revolutionaries – those with the will but not the capacity to abolish capitalism – are rarely realised. The instrumentality of much political praxis was recognised by the philosopher Georges Bataille, who wrote in 1948:

Man cannot be a thing. And it is for this reason that he is a communist. (But it must be added: communism can only initially complete, generalise the reduction of man to a thing, and it is for this reason that man must fight communism to the death).⁸

Bataille, a thinker on the margins of the revolutionary politics of the time, here highlights the convoluted dangers of viewing negation as an overt political task.⁹ Granted, this partly comes out of the specific time the text was written. The then

7 A. Badiou, 'Who is Nietzsche?', 2001.

8 G. Bataille, 'The Political Lie', 2009.

9 During the 1930s Bataille, alongside the Surrealist André Breton, was a member of the anti-fascist group 'Contre-Attaque' and, with ex-politburo member Boris Souvarine and philosopher Simone Weil, the libertarian communist grouping 'Democratic Communist Circle.'

communist project of generalised control of production by workers and – at least transitionally – the extension of workers' identity to all productive members of society ran entirely counter to Bataille's own utopia of excessive desire. Class decomposition in the advanced sectors of capitalism and the decline of the 'old' workers' movement means that such a vision of communism as being a paradise of workers' identity is no longer as valid. Bataille is also concerned with criticising the *realpolitik* of revolutionary politics that sees the end – communism – as justifying the means. The reduction of humanity to thingdom in the service of political radicalism must be one of the aspects of negation examined critically through the optics of a stalled negation. The applications of Bataille's insight are expansive. It attests to the necessity for any communist politics worthy of the name to remain attentive to the non-identity or particularities of not just that much fetishised term 'struggle' but also the proletarianised participants of such. Not to lose sight of the negative anthropology of value production that strips humanity down to the sum of time and labour but to take into account that most people don't care about anti-capitalist dreams and only resist out of necessity.

A certain attention should be paid to a negativity that is indeterminate, always on the point of withdrawal or collapse, despairing but unwilling to let go of the knot of negation.¹⁰ Such negativity, with nowhere to go and nothing much to do, was conceptualised by Bataille as 'unemployed negativity.' Bataille viewed this as an ontological 'outside' to the discipline of labour, capable of moments of anguished joy, a subject as emptied out by time and labour, but also capable of a refusal predicated upon the despair this structure inculcates. Negation has to somehow consolidate itself around this sense of anguish and brokenness, survival and limitation, without thus becoming paralysed into inactivity. In this way it might become less of a 'thing' to be instrumentalised by political organisations. Rather than being attached to a particular movement through history, or maintaining an ideological commitment to a particular politics, what is glimpsed in this is negation as possibly arising from the cynical apprehension

10 This was in the face of Alexandre Kojève's theorisation of the Hegelian consummation of history in a homogeneous state and a humanity indulging itself in empty social activity or an instinctual praxis akin to animals. See G. Bataille, 'Letter to X, Lecturer on Hegel,' 1997.

of the impossibilities of a situation as something experienced. *Realpolitik* of a much more anti-political form that includes being able to attentively wait and admit that theory does not necessarily know the answers.

However, the collapse of the notion of the political project inscribed into negation at a standstill should not be taken as necessarily leading to a decomposition of capitalism or a withdrawal from the value form out of sheer desperation. This would be an assumption that the worsening of conditions automatically leads to an empty enough space for the new to emerge. An inverse optimism of the negative can emerge that goes against a more realistic 'organisation of pessimism.' Perhaps the most communists can do in the present is examine how not to affirm the frozen state of play as immanent with possibility.

Seki

The game of Go is dominated by the imperative to ensure that the 'liberties,' the empty horizontal and vertical spaces adjacent to the stones that serve as playing pieces, are not occupied by the enemy and the stones then captured. Occasionally, a stalemate situation arises, termed 'Seki,' when neither side can capture the others pieces due to the 'liberties' being so constrained and the board so congested that neither side can make a move. Usually this is just a local stalemate since other areas of the board allow space for stones to 'live', as the game's terminology has it. Anti-capitalist critical praxis, attempting to remain immanent to capitalism and hence remove it from the board, often discovers itself in such a position of 'Seki.' Also, moves that are meant to weaken capitalism end up inadvertently bolstering it and the supposed work of negation hovers at a standstill or is elided altogether.

One such manifestation of 'Seki' in the present is what the critical theorist Benjamin Noys has termed 'affirmationism.' This is the hegemonic tendency in contemporary anti-capitalist thought – including that of Gilles Deleuze, Antonio Negri, and Alain Badiou – that valorises a politics of creativity and novelty, multiplicity or eventual exception at the expense of negation. He writes of this tendency that: '[I]t is precisely the affirmation of some positive, primary and productive point or points of resistance that first aroused my

suspicion.¹¹ Noys traces 'affirmationism' in a nuanced immanent critique of the above thinkers and other stars of the continental thought circuit. He situates them in an isomorphic relation to the defeat of the revolutionary aspirations of the 1960s and 1970s; a defeat that ironically leads to attempts to discover ever more diffuse forms of resistance. In an even greater irony, the valorisation of a positive pole of 'creative' resistance leads to an isomorphism between aspects of 'affirmationist' anti-capitalist politics and contemporary capitalist ideology. Be productive and creative, compose yourselves as active, flexible subjects and all the while the advanced sectors of capitalism will mirror this unless the imperatives of value production require workfare or a more quiescent, overtly emptied-out subject.

In lieu of the positivity of a politics based around workers' identity there's an anti-capitalist scramble for something to affirm within the existent. A relatively hegemonic concept such as the 'commons' formulated within the radical left corresponds with many 'affirmationist' traits. Shared spaces, practices, and resources become a positive pole of resistance to capitalism, 'commoning' an act that produces new collectivities, and the defence of older enclaves an anti-capitalist duty. The problem is that throughout much of the theoretical discourse of the 'commons' there is a shuffling and radicalisation of elements within capitalist reality but no real rupture with it. The 'commons' are presented within discourse as both immanent to capitalism and a potential collective wealth that is 'outside' of present-day social relations. Contrary to this, the real abstractions of capitalism – the way that abstractions such as value and money actually structure lived experience within capitalism – must also be seen as structuring the embattled enclaves of the 'commons.' The primacy of the negativity of capitalism itself, in the repetition of 'primitive' accumulation and the reduction of the world to a regime of equivalence, often gets lost. 'Seki' often leads to mistaking holding strategies – ways of surviving or making life more tolerable that are not easily dismissed for a plenitude of solutions to capitalism.¹²

11 B. Noys, *The Persistence of the Negative*, 2010.

12 It should be added that the 'commons' is also fraught with a productive tension. It attends to present-day crises of reproduction – how to live and survive – in a way that

Then again, this could also just be ultra-leftist sniping, since this posing of such a limit for much contemporary anti-capitalism does not suggest a reinstatement of negation. Unless it's as an involution of negation in terms of acting back upon the very theories, practices, and forms of organisation constitutive of anti-capitalist milieus. A primitive negative dialectic can be implemented by juxtaposing the actuality of what most pro-revolutionary activists and organisations are actually engaged in and what their aims are. The injunction to act, to do something that is heeded by activists, sets in place a temporality congruent with the frantic tempo of capitalism as well as forms of subjectivity that differ very little from those of business entrepreneurs. Organisations can become what the French ultra-leftist Jacques Camatte termed 'rackets' that perpetuate themselves at the expense of any revolutionary ideals.¹³ In itself this might also be an element of present-day 'Seki.' Might this negative apprehension of organisational forms be a way to untie the knot of negation? Such a thoroughgoing scepticism could be a way to discover sections of the board not frozen in a state of 'Seki.'

much anti-capitalist and communist theory only addresses abstractly. This concrete apprehension is the value of the theory of the commons – even if this can be sublated within existent gender relations and the unwaged reproduction of capitalism itself – but is expressed at the cost of ignoring a more wholesale negation of capitalism.

13 J. Camatte, 'On Organization,' in *This World We Must Leave*, 1995.

PAIN

FRANCESCA LISETTE

Preface

In appraising the place of suffering in both the world and human life, Simone Weil remarks in her notes on Affliction:

We have to say like Ivan Karamazov that nothing can make up for a single tear from a single child, and yet to accept all tears and all the nameless horrors which are beyond tears... We have to accept the fact that they exist simply because they do exist.¹

In Weil's understanding of affliction (any kind of pain or suffering), pain introduces us to the reality of the world, a reality which is often beyond our control. Yet as she further writes, 'pleasure and pain are inseparable companions.' She also points out that time is an essential ingredient in the production of suffering: 'Time's violence rends the soul: by the rent eternity enters.' For Weil, our inability to protect ourselves from painful experiences and the near-automatic response of suffering which succeeds them – the inevitable fact of being mortal, which binds us to time – is in fact the condition for deeper spiritual experience.

It is easy to assume that pain and suffering are inextricable, but I will propose that the two are different in crucial ways. Pain is any unpleasant sensation that we instinctively shy away from, whether physical or mental (and I do not find the distinction useful), simply because it hurts. It can be inflicted on us externally, or our bodies or nervous systems can automatically produce it, often as a learned response to an originary trauma. The cause of pain can be immediately obvious, or it can be organic and therefore mysterious. Suffering, however, is a response to pain. It is a mode of endurance that wears down the victim, precisely because it ensures pain's continuation. Suffering is a form of

¹ S. Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, 2002.

resistance (used in the psychological sense of that term), a refusal to accept the new reality pain introduces us to – that it forcibly, violently yanks us into.

To say that we suffer pain is to say that we feel it – deeply, often to the point of obliterating all other sensations – while ignoring our power to engage with the pain. This may not be our fault. There may be no way to mitigate our pain or to communicate with it, or communication with it may be impossible given the circumstances. We have been culturally conditioned to ignore pain, to make it go away, instead of allowing it, meeting with it, and finding out what it is telling us. Let me be clear – I do not believe that people are responsible for their own suffering. My point is that suffering is a state in which someone, not always the sufferer themselves, has the power to alter. Alleviating the source of the suffering, the pain itself, is often a different matter.

Dying people or those being tortured may moan or writhe in pain, and this is a brave and dignified response to pain inflicted upon one by others or by circumstances outside one's control – expressing one's anguish both as a form of relief and as a direct plea for the torment to end. However, in considering instances where the pain has no external cause or one that has long since disappeared, this moment in Tolstoy springs to mind, beautifully parsed by David B. Morris in his indispensable work *The Culture of Pain*:

All at once, after three days spent in screaming and struggle, Ivan Ilych suddenly experiences a deep calm, and his relation to pain changes once again. In effect, he passes through pain to a state of spiritual awakening. After this awakening, he is still aware of his pain – the pain has not diminished or disappeared – but now it somehow no longer matters, no longer torments him.

Pain threatens the loss of our identity, our way of life, sometimes our life itself. Yet, more often than not in the course of ordinary life, pain appears to aid us in larger transformations. Pain appears to say no – to whatever we have been tolerating, whatever we have been ignoring – and completely turn our lives upside down. As Morris also writes, physical and mental pain are inextricably bound up, and nowhere more so than in the endurance of chronic pain. The three poems that follow suggest the experience of pain and attempt to interpret

and change the sufferer's relationship to it. The final poem engages with mental anguish to address questions of suffering, happiness, love, knowledge, and peace. This final poem in particular elucidates the connection between pain and longing. Not merely for relief or cessation, but for fulfilment – which I have come to believe the experience of pain can be essential in creating.

Pain is a great motivator. As Simone Weil writes, 'If there were no affliction in this world we might think we were in paradise.' For Weil such blasphemy is a crime, and for the negative philosopher or political activist (as Weil also was), such ignorance of others' anguish – as can easily be induced by the consumerist freedoms of our life in the West – it is a moral abdication. That is why we have to feel our way through pain. Once we have addressed our own pain, we can guide others through theirs. Such experiences may form the bedrock of lasting solidarity, for we rarely recover without the assistance of those who have walked this path before us.

I.

Writing. Out of the birth inamorata that shelters me.

I : cleansed. I communicate from parallel data density socket. Eye: alright. Eye definitive K-Mart complex.

I here, touched, where technology is abandoned. I, falling aboard. Eye rope in the primacy of winter daylight. Numb wash of keen swallows pound the face.

I : citric water. I : dissolved into acid counts. Unhook the temerity of walking as matched shore to shore.

Your belly goes against me like a bruise, or garbage sack spilling. Repeat: dispenser. Repeat: the sexual gap of your mouth (a dark rose) – love/bloody spittle/vomit.

We constitute ourselves as liquid rubber running through the town's tar pits. Isolated: lassitude. Hairy numbers come crawling out with the populace's skulls between their teeth. River: rivulet. Scarlet flesh of a shell notated & hollowed by grim virgin birth itemised 1st para. Not the hole I dwell in: love-blood-vomit. Prise open the can with a gear shift & swap genitalia albeit monkey surprise glove excitement. The story's O couldn't rid me of glossolalia no matter how hard they tried. I sang on, vowels cresting a unintelligible glass. Cracked laminate: the Duchy. Failed omniscience hunts to gloss panda, we. Once were. Animals hindered by subject lines & multiple proclivities. Every time I try to be funny or clever my body screams so I have to stop. I have to sacrifice my need for love or the abuse known as interpretive approval. The body beautiful, the sunk navigator tuned to inner anchor. Now then the body flames it shrieks it hovers it blasts it's been plundered by years, animations, shit, flows. Unhindered by sustenance, attacked for entertainment, & now surfaces in the grass before a waiting smile.

[DISTANCING, objects]

...the sky unrelenting at an impasse.

The sun moved inside of her & died.

It seemed every object was a vehicle
for great tempests of rhetoric & sound.

Every second dug into her.

Plates of skin unfolded.

Faces dissolved in rage colour.

Dim clutchings at semantics would scatter.

A knife expanded with a flick of tongue.

Heart's-ease unceasing.

The gap in the muscles goes, 'POP'.

Sipping the ocean's bowl complicates each manoeuvre.

I feel sure the syntax is rusting out of use.

Minutes of recalibration wink anonymous tower essences.

Time is over a barrel.

The fish inside appear silent, but are shouting

To fortify their solitude with war.

A motivator drawing its finger across the lens.

How do you know where the sky starts.

Perhaps it is touching your skin.

22 / 4 / 13

The hunger in my chest

has a meaning.

Exonerated, clodded. Exiled.

I write to reclaim happiness

from the utter black drain

O enemy, i. thief of my solitude

& black mirror disowned.

shrug a cabal of lifelessness

kept hidden by the prosier emotions

i write to rid myself of these gods

who persecute me, violent harlequins

wearing my guise who've come to.

imprison you my lover, clean

tourmaline.

The delicious line clothed in iron

suspended above the city

i walk daily

& am now clinging on with fingertips.

Should it be right that the lyric

touch requires my own forsaking.

mouth making

noise. hurtling fwd

into the vortex of space

it is clear that potential

is isolated, wretched & lying,

wreathed in the prism of my own

callous making.

how will i claim you but in the

infinite fertility of my soil,

my soul, my closing circle of breath?

but I cannot endure the deficit

round in which happy bankers
blink mercilessly as stars
& how can it be certain the deficit is
not in me when repeated
ly dousing my face in water
doesn't bind it to truth
o glue of my feelings now
tearing the scenery APART
how many countless hours wasted
on pearls & rent when the one
thing worth having
is priceless as
a feeling, as graceless, sea-
oriented & perpetually FREE
well tell me what the meaning
of freedom is agent of my
redemption, colour-hewn eyes
glittering from all angles with
complete wisdom & suffering
the peace that is within you won't
come to me thru writing – say it
again, organ guilt. toss it out
over the water bubbling in threat
of violence, merely imagined
posture of splitting apart
no miasma or ore worth saving
unless it can be used. how to
concretely act on a feeling
instead of batting it away like
an eyelash – stop-motion neon
boy in action / why only
alchemically available to me
in questions shrouded by artful

hands. diamonds of obscurity
smashing into the future. total
happiness attained – merely
beginning it frightens me –
conscious of totality only from
without its skin, on the lucid
hurting membranes. Let me
back in, love; sighs of a broken goddess
luminous in luxury kneeling at your breast.
not knowing you have it
is the context of possession, thus i
issue its writ to an amnesiac future.
only by ignorance of bliss, the familiar
features of a stranger,
precludes entry
or is this just a golden Modernist
gateway designed to shatter / expire?
perhaps there are as many paths to love
as veins in my body
Venus-veneris, steer me clear
of the depths.

DYSPHORIA

JOSEFINE AFIYA

There is a complex system of weights keeping me taut and tense, helpless on a rack under which the cogs and ropes of this great system turn and tighten... I am crushed and stretched at once, by turns empty and overwhelmed.

‘Borderline personality disorder’ or ‘emotionally unstable personality disorder’ is a ‘personality disorder’ defined in the appropriate manuals by a combination of anger, impulsivity, loneliness, emptiness, fear of abandonment, an unstable sense of identity, and sometimes dissociative or psychotic experiences. Around 80 percent of those diagnosed *borderline* are women. The vast majority of the diagnosed, of any gender, are survivors of childhood abuse and neglect, especially sexual abuse. They frequently experience addictions, eating disorders, depression, self-harm, suicidal ideation, and suicide attempts; about one in ten will die of suicide.

The emotions of *the borderline* are so intense and mercurial that it becomes difficult to filter each of them out. But one emotional state stands singular: dysphoria, a kind of tense irritability, anger, self-destructiveness. Dysphoria is precisely the lack of an identifiable object of grievance, an unresolved feeling which cannot subside into a narrative of grief, depression, or melancholy, an anguish which may torrent into anger or implode under self-loathing. On occasion, anguish becomes panic, a flood of terror that can barely be staunched by the feeling of the presence of the other: in a state of panic, you truly cease to exist when the other turns away from you; figures on the periphery appear to murder you.

Despite these obvious indicators of suffering, those considered *borderline* are heavily stigmatized both within the psychiatric system and without: often deemed manipulative, attention-seeking, and insincere, we are frequently treated punitively by the mental health system, to the extent that the *borderline* diagnosis itself is occasionally handed down punitively by mental

health professionals in an attempt to control or get rid of a recalcitrant, unpleasant, or otherwise simply ‘difficult’ patient. Meanwhile, countless websites exist on how to train your *borderline*; it’s broadly accepted that ‘living with’ a *borderline* is a curse that far outweighs *being one*.

For some of us the *borderline* diagnosis can be a method of explanation and a basis for accessing help. But it can only be partial. The ‘personality’ of psychiatry, which is hegemonically today bio- and neuro-psychiatry, is an atom, a shell that encloses within itself all the material required to explain it. The personality is the location of a problem, rather than the site of a blow, and is thus also the location of the solution. ‘Recovery’ from the ‘symptoms’ of the *borderline* diagnosis is possible, and contrary to conventional belief, quite likely. But for some of us who remember the violence and humiliations of time and for whom obtaining distance from trauma is a kind of desertion of responsibility, simple ‘recovery’ is not enough. We desire an end to the conditions of subjection and alienation that produce us as *borderlines*. For this we need more.

There can be no positive theory of violent traumatization; that is, no schema that incorporates within a normalizing, subsuming process what is fundamentally a process of fragmentation or fracture. It can be understood only negatively, as it comes up against the inertia of a normality. Nonetheless, we understand such trauma as occurring always within and through social relations, and thus understand it only in relation to them. Sexual abuse and ‘domestic’ violence are a necessary product and part of a violent social structure, a necessary condition of its reproduction, and so remain systemically denied by it. This is the contradiction in which the traumatized find themselves, suspended in a web of mystified relations, in a permanent vertiginous nausea.

A theory of trauma, which is also an expression of this tension, is thus destructive; it does not merely ‘problematize’ the social relations in which it is embedded, but, with a scream, sends a tear through the social order. A theory of trauma will be a dysphoric theory.

Psychiatry

‘Go and make friends’ my new psychiatrist advises as I glower silently back, my contempt as transparent as a pane of glass. ‘Get yourself a boyfriend.’

In the search for an effective political notation, or the face of an increasingly faceless oppressor, critique has become crowded with 'figures.' Some of these are the barest silhouettes of workers, others rococo, fantastic; most do not attain the banal pseudo-detachment of the descriptions of the figures in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM). Tiquun's *Theory of the Young-Girl* manages all these things, and we read it with interest and, like many, a growing self-disgust. The Young-Girl, like the borderline and the similarly gendered figure of the *histrionic*, is shallow, affectively labile, anorexic, empty. She cannot tolerate aloneness, and is perpetually uncertain of her identity, which she continually attempts to paint on her face with the cosmetics of consumption. She is always bored, never satisfied. She even engages in splitting and black-and-white thinking. The fact that she fucks, or that she does not fuck, can always be interpreted as evidence of her compromised sexuality. She overshares, which is to say, she shares something I do not want to hear, in a way I do not like.

This similarity is not a coincidence, and nor is it without consequence: it stems directly from misogyny, and the figure introduces itself into a power structure which violently controls women it deems to embody this caricature. Once 'femininity' and patriarchal power are equivocated, the ways in which 'feminization' and 'characterization' have always operated as weapons of patriarchy are effaced: the borderline need not be young, or even a girl, but she is nonetheless gendered.

To the extent that they manage, inexplicably, to speak of capital's 'total war' against the body without really speaking of the ubiquity of physical violence against women's bodies, Tiquun obscures, as much as parodies, the ways that power employs the very strategies of *Theory of the Young-Girl* to produce its own descriptions of its maladaptives and discontents: when the patient speaks, she, like the Young-Girl, does not really speak, so what she says is not itself saying anything, and must be arranged in a way that produces a truth; it must be put to work by the shrink, who uses it to speak instead with an incredulous 'neutrality.' She is quoted in a way that distances her from her own words, and the space between can be filled with a fog of contempt.

For a particularly vulgar reductive psychology, empathy resides in a

set of neural 'empathy circuits,' whose function or dysfunction entirely explains any particular person's behavior. It is not interested in, and barely pays lip service to, the social determination of affects, reactions, and emotional perceptions, the emotional economy which allocates these capacities as resources. The cultural denial of rape and of misogyny elicits a disbelief of and hostility towards victims; the dehumanizing racist gaze cannot sympathize with the face of a Black other. Such power structures inculcate and depend upon the devaluation of, the lack of empathy for, those victimized.

This vulgar psychology is thus constitutively blind to its own glassy-eyed indifference to the interiority of its subjects, and the relations of power which situate any particular person's actions and reactions, including those of the 'scientist.' To the patriarchal psychologist, 'sex' is simply a more neutral, more scientific term for 'rape.' *The borderline*, on the other hand, never 'considers' suicide: she always threatens it. Perhaps this is why those in crisis are often met with a demand to 'prove it;' perhaps this is why, when we call for a nurse, we are met with the police. *The borderline*, in deployment as a construct, in eliciting a certain treatment of the diagnosed, is such a perfect synthesis of the societal hatred of the disturbed and the societal hatred of women that it is surprising the DSM does not name her the 'Crazy-Bitch.'

Resistance

The problem with my existence was that it was passive. I never fought back; I survived by doing nothing. By hiding, by staying silent. I was fundamentally *ineffective*. An eternal recurrence of memories: of hiding in this room or that, beneath duvets, behind locked doors; of crying as silently as possible, of shivering, of pretending that I am somewhere else. I feel so much that I lack that life, that energy, that consists in *action*.

The memory of an event is contained within, and as, the mental map of its location. The violent event is interchangeable with the violent place, the anxious emotional state is the anxious architecture of the home. Violence becomes the primary ordering principle of one's sense of place. Objects are imbued with violent potential. An inert piece of crockery can explode with the violence of its breaking. Violence is not merely hidden by walls but makes

itself known through their muffled whispers. The numerous everyday passing encounters with violence, eventually, have a similar kind of effect. It becomes an object within the scenery, simply one of many things, a part of existence.

Violence is destructive, but also, we know, constitutive of orders. The traumatized subject is a shattered self who *persists in the world in pieces*. The loss of the feeling of 'being at home' that Paulo Virno describes as the condition of the post-Fordist subject is a distant echo of the feeling of 'foreignness in the world' that Jean Amery identified as the burden of the victim of torture. Virno calls this feeling that which we have in common; it is a feeling that we all know and understand and thus forms a premise of a collective subjectivity. But for those of us who grew up in violence, this feeling of not being at home, of mistrust of the world, is what sets us definitively apart: the anguish of a dangerous world, the vertigo that has diffused and insinuated itself in forms of life, was always for us *the* defining condition of life. Fear and anguish are not simply undistinguished, but are experienced in absolute proximity to one another: our fear is circumscribed to the domestic threat, but this threat constitutes a self and a world.

We seek commonality on this basis, but everywhere find alienation. The society beyond the home appears predicated on a consensus of denial about the true extent, the everydayness of violence. There is never a good time to speak about abuse, except in the therapist's office: that is, in the places invented to contain and smooth over crisis. We are told to 'get over it,' to stop 'wallowing in victimhood.' We are aware of the look we elicit when we talk of the violent as others do of the mundane. For some of us, to share is *always* to overshare. 'It would be very convenient,' you say with a bitterness, 'if you were functional and happy because no one would have to confront the reality of the effects of trauma.' But, given that you were *made* by trauma, what they are really asking of you is that you don't exist. They would prefer it if you didn't exist.

It is here that calls to resist based on a kind of hypertrophied humanism begin to converge into this prevailing ideology. A human being is always a human 'in revolt;' resistance confirms the human as part of a human political community. No matter how repressed, there is a substrate of human dignity that cannot be extinguished – there is – a spark. Resistance is not only

possible – it is *always* possible, a condition of the very kind of being that a human is, and therefore certain. And so on. In this imaginary, resistance becomes celebratory, an affirmation of one's own 'humanity' and capacity in the face of some 'challenge.' Revolt happens not out of rage, it is not a sudden break, but a force among forces to be *channeled constructively*. Any 'problem' can become more palatable a 'challenge' which it is the human-in-revolt's set task to face; indeed, we can even speak now of having 'mental health challenges.'

This forced optimism is predicated, however, on the fundamental *impermissibility* of failure. Some of us know that we did not resist; some of us know that helplessness is a bottomless depth. The failure of the borderline to overcome her 'challenges,' just like the failure of the Young-Girl to be a subject who cannot become a Young-Girl, is at bottom *her failure*. But all that this decomposition of subject into victim tells us is that such an all-consuming subject *never existed*. The subject was *always* a void, always a stream of significations perpetually amenable to domination. What the radical is really afraid of is that the subject may not, after all, resist. What the victim, the victimized body, confronts is the possibility that our domination may indeed be total. Contempt for the victim who has 'learned helplessness' is sublimated shame at the possibility of being victimized, of being helpless; it is an instinctive move to avoid being dominated at the expense of those who already are, and above all a move to side with power.

Work

The thing I will ultimately fail to do in the eyes of others is be 'happy.' This is, at bottom, a moral failure. It's a restlessness and a dissatisfaction that is interpreted as obnoxiousness, a withdrawal of the same shade as arrogance. Happiness is something one owes to others.

It is by now a commonplace that contemporary work has become, characterized increasingly by the requirement to perform affective labor, work which produces feeling or emotion or, more accurately, work which involves the productive exertion of one's affective capacities. This work is also 'feminized,' not only because sectors in which these capacities are central are often dominated by women, but also because 'affective work' per se is gendered as

feminine: caring, loving, pleasing, being for others. As the strange man in the street demands that you smile, now so do the billboards, the customers, and your boss. Indeed, the line between work and abuse in these conditions is only clear because the relations of coercion structuring the former are impersonal, and ideologically obscured. They persist together, however, and begin to enable each other: a harasser, knowing you are captive at work in a way you are not in the street, understands you not only as supposed to but as paid to respond; a common-or-garden patriarch introduces himself as a psychoanalyst, asks for a pint, and then asks you about your father.

In this newly emotionally extrusive world 'affective management' is the practice of conscious accounting for, and intervention in, the 'affective experiences' of business employees, customers, and wider society. Business intervention in feelings is, of course, not a new form of manipulation, but affective management here conceptualizes affect, not as a property of neoclassical agents which influences their economic decisions, but as a social circuit, a kind of infrastructure which can be developed and utilized in the maximization of 'management performance indices' (returns). Where 'stakeholders' were once those with stocks in a company who can expect dividends, those with an 'affective' stake in a company include potentially 'customers, employees, the local community, and society in general.' And thus it is society in general's affective capacities which need to be mobilized in the service of company performance: not only are happy employees 'more productive,' customers spread good business will through 'word of mouth,' 'suggestions,' and 'complaints;' positive attitudes of 'the local community' towards a company bring it 'reputational profits' and 'increase the engagement of local customers.'

Affective management, then, is no longer simply a matter of containment, of restriction, but of urging and coaxing: affect is a force among forces to be *channeled constructively*. Nonetheless, just as some feelings must circulate, still others remain to be eradicated; obstacles must be neutralized, and stragglers must be dragged along. In a healthcare system whose outcomes are measured primarily by their 'efficiency,' and illness by how far it compromises institutionally expected functioning, therapeutic interventions for traumatized people aim ultimately at their rehabilitation as exploitable labor-power. People

who do not recover efficiently when supplied with pharmaceutical intervention are *treatment-resistant*; but people who present to mental health services as uncooperative, sullen, disagreeable, or enraged are *borderline*.

Not only must labor be exploitable, we must ask nicely to be exploited: forget that those diagnosed *borderline* are almost always abuse survivors; forget that those who present to mental health services are in crisis; forget above all the tapestry of domination woven in and through the operation of psychiatric services. Dysphoria forces itself on a body that is meant to smooth out ripples, to blend in, to care and to help, to clean and to cook, to smile, and to nod. Dysphoria is an obstacle, a blockage. Dysphoria forces itself on a world where positivity is value and circulates like money. We are sick, yes – of you.

HATE

DAVID GRAEBER

Hatred has become a political taboo. By the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first century, it is the one emotion that is considered intrinsically illegitimate. We have legal categories like 'hate speech,' 'hate crimes.' For a public figure, to profess or even publicly acknowledge feelings of hatred towards anyone – even their bitterest rival – would be to instantly place themselves outside the pale of acceptable political behavior. 'Haters' are bad people. In no sense can it ever be legitimate to base a political or social policy on hatred, of any kind. It has come to such a pass that one can barely encourage hatred even against abstractions. Christians used to be encouraged to 'love the sinner, hate the sin.' Such language would never have been coined today. Even to encourage others to feel hatred for envy, pride, or gluttony might be considered slightly problematic.

This was not always so. There was a time when hatred was assumed to form part of the essential fabric – even, to constitute the essential fabric – of social and political life. Consider the following quotations:

[The Emperor] Commodus had now attained the summit of vice and infamy. Amidst the acclamations of a flattering court, he was unable to disguise, from himself, that he had deserved the contempt and hatred of every man of sense and virtue in his empire. His ferocious spirit was irritated by the consciousness of that hatred, by the envy of every kind of merit, by the just apprehension of danger, and by the habit of slaughter, which he contracted in his daily amusements.

The honest labours of Papinian served only to inflame the hatred which Caracalla had already conceived against his father's minister...

The Persian monarchs adorned their new conquest with magnificent build-

ings; but these monuments had been erected at the expense of the people, and were abhorred as badges of slavery. The apprehension of a revolt had inspired the most rigorous precautions: oppression had been aggravated by insult, and the consciousness of the public hatred had been productive of every measure that could render it still more implacable...

The hatred of Maximin towards the Senate was declared and implacable...

The leaders of the conspiracy... rested their hopes on the hatred of mankind against Maximin.

The empire was afflicted by five civil wars; and the remainder of the time was not so much a state of tranquility as a suspension of arms between several hostile monarchs, who, viewing each other with an eye of fear and hatred, strove to increase their respective forces at the expense of their subjects.

The Emperor [Constantine] had now imbibed the spirit of controversy, and the angry sarcastic style of his edicts was designed to inspire his subjects with the hatred which he had conceived against the enemies of Christ.

What jumps out about these passages – they are all drawn from Gibbon's *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* – is, first of all, just how hatred was assumed to be part of the essential fabric of social and political life. It was only to be expected that kings and politicians should hate their rivals. Conquered people hated their conquerors, unjust rulers were detested, emperors hated the senate, senators loathed the common people, and imperial advisors and members of the emperor's family were detested by the urban mob, which would periodically try to burn their palaces. But even more remarkably to the contemporary ear, there is no sense, in the works of ancient historians or ancient moralists, that such hatreds were in principle illegitimate. They might have been. But many were entirely justified. Indeed, hatred for a cruel and unjust ruler could even be considered a civic virtue. In Medieval times feelings of ill will between prominent families, neighborhoods, and guilds were often institutionalized in relations of formal 'hatred,' considered simply the inverse form of friendship; one could also be transformed into the other by appropriate rituals. In England, for instance, it was assumed that, in the ordinary course of events, the common

people would detest the king, royalty in most places being seen as foreigners, and there would often be public celebrations at the failure of some royal project. Hatred for men of the cloth was inveterate. (As late as 1736, Jonathan Swift wrote an essay entitled 'Concerning that Universal Hatred that Prevails Against the Clergy'). Different branches of the clergy hated one other: the schoolmen hated members of the monastic orders, the lay clergy detested the priests. According to Thomas Aquinas, even the hatred of God himself was preferable to unbelief or indifference, since it was, in its own way, a form of intense engagement with the Divine.

Hatred, then, was part of the very fabric of social life. Neither did anyone really imagine things could be otherwise. Nor was this a peculiarly European phenomenon. Similar passages could easily be assembled for China, India, the Valley of Mexico, or almost any society that existed under monarchical or aristocratic rule.

So, when did hatred begin to fall into such disfavor? One might argue that there was always a strain of disapproval in Christian literature, but even the phrase 'love the sinner, hate the sin' implies that it is legitimate to hate a sin, and nowadays, things have got to such a pass that even that is likely to be considered problematic. Still, the evocation of Christian love, and the feeling that political hatred is a violation of Christian principles, only really appears in the nineteenth century, in England, in appeals against the 'class hatred' of the Chartists, which – it was held by elite politicians, middle-class reformers, and Christian socialists alike – would only lead to the violent envy and paroxysms of revenge that characterized the French Revolution. The essentially reactionary impulse here can be seen even more clearly in the common reaction at the time to any assertion of the rights of women: early feminists were invariably denounced as 'man-haters.'

All this is important to bear in mind because nowadays we tend to assume that the phrase 'politics of hate' has necessarily right-wing implications (since it is normally applied to racism, ethnic hatred, or homophobia), and as a result, that the taboo on the expression of political hatred is a triumph of essentially left-wing sensibilities. In fact, the history suggests this is far from the case.

First of all, even in the case of racism, anti-Semitism, or ethnic chauvinism, to frame these things in terms of 'hatred' almost necessarily means focusing on followers and not leaders. The great murderers of the twentieth century were not men driven by terrible passions, they were cynics who fomented and exploited the passions of others. It's not even clear whether Hitler or Stalin were personally capable of hating anyone, or were simply sociopaths incapable of genuine feelings of any sort, even if they were obviously quite capable of manipulating the feelings of their followers. There are indeed many indications they were emotionally incapable of any such deep feelings. What's more, the passions they manipulated were from every part of the emotional spectrum, their followers murdered just as much from love of humanity, or at least love of nation, family, community, as from hatred. To treat the lesson of all this as being that one should be against 'hate,' and create a category of 'hate-crimes,' is to tacitly place the blame on the dupes and simply informs would-be mass manipulators that their craft is perfectly legitimate, just, and that there are certain levers that they really shouldn't push.

In fact, if you really think about it, the universal taboo over any expression of hatred in political life actually has the effect of validating this sort of manipulation. As I mentioned, politicians nowadays (unlike those in the past) are expected to pretend that they feel no personal hatred for anyone. But what sort of person can exist within a world of constant rivalry, scheming, and betrayal, and not hate anyone? There are only two real possibilities: one would either have to be a saint, or an utter cynic. No one really imagines politicians are saints. Rather, by maintaining the superficial pretense of sainthood, they simply prove the depths of their cynicism.

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One could go further. The outlawing of hatred could be seen as the opening gambit in a move towards a world where the cynical pursuit of self-interest is the only legitimate political motive. Note how the very idea of a 'hate crime' inverts the familiar legal principle that a crime of passion should always be punished less severely than one driven by cold, self-interested calculation. It's probably no

coincidence that a wave of legislation against hate crime, in the 1990s, was soon followed by 'anti-terrorism' legislation, which, similarly, stipulated penalties on crimes driven by political passions (and the way the laws are generally phrased, these passions could include the most benevolent idealism and love of humanity or nature) more severe than those that would have been imposed on the same crimes had they been committed for economic profit or personal self-interest.

It's significant that this logic only applies on the political level. After all, the very idea of a 'crime of passion' largely exists to justify male violence against women in domestic situations. Any realistic analysis of the way that power works in our society would have to begin by acknowledging that such passions, and the fear and terror they create in their victims, are the very foundation of those larger systems of structural violence which uphold inequalities of all kinds (including those ostensibly covered by 'hate crimes'). Yet, domestic violence is never, itself, considered a 'hate crime.'

Passions only make crimes worse when they take place in an explicitly political context. At home, they are an exonerating circumstance.

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It would seem there are only two universally recognized exceptions to the taboo on hatred. These are telling in themselves.

The first is what might be termed 'consumer hatred.' It is acceptable to express hatred, even passionate hatred, for things that others consider desirable, but you do not: for Boy Bands, UGG boots, the films of Coen brothers, for mushrooms or anchovies on pizza. This of course is entirely in keeping with the general principle that passions are to be confined to domestic affairs and not to politics. The second is more ambiguous: the hatred of criminals. It is permissible to hate those who cause pain and suffering by violations of the law. But even here, perhaps because we are in an ambiguous zone moving from the personal to public sphere, it is rarely explicitly framed as 'hatred.' There often seems a kind of coy flirting with a forbidden emotion here: as in the villains in so many pulp fiction genres, whether cowboy or spy movies, superhero comic books, or above all, the endless true-crime, serial-killer literature, where the whole idea

seems to be to try to imagine a human being so extraordinarily detestable that one could be forgiven for hating them after all. In America, for instance, crime victims are granted a particular license in this regard, since they are allowed – indeed, encouraged – to express the most hateful emotions conceivable towards criminals, including sadistic desires for the suffering of others that could never be acceptable under any other circumstance. But this itself can be extended to a form of license. It might seem odd to watch TV interviewers gush with sympathy as some crime victim expresses the comfort they take in the despair and misery of their daughter's killer ('perhaps it's better he think he has a possibility of being freed, because then being locked up again will make him suffer even more!'); until, that is, one realizes that we are dealing with a kind of pornography of hatred, where the moral virtue of empathizing with one who has suffered provides an alibi for the vicarious experience of feelings one would otherwise have to treat as profoundly reprehensible.

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We would do well, I think, to learn a little from the ancient world. Hatred of injustice can be a form of virtue. Much as Aquinas wrote of hatred for God, in the face of unjust structures of power, hatred is at the very least superior to either indifference or disbelief. We need to acknowledge that many forms of hatred can be a positive social force: hatred for work, hatred for wealth, hatred for bureaucracy, hatred for militarism, nationalism, cynicism, and the arrogance of power. And that in many circumstances this will also mean hatred for individual bosses, tycoons, bureaucrats, generals, and politicians, and a rich feeling of accomplishment when one knows one has earned their hatred. To absolutely exclude hatred from politics is to rip the fiber out, to deny the main motor of social transformation, ultimately, to reduce it to a flat plane of hopeless cynicism. It is also to exclude any real possibility for a politics of redemption.

Without the existence of hatred, love is meaningless. It is just insipid idealization: idealization simultaneously of the self, and of the object of one's devotion. As such it is fundamentally sterile. Real love, the only kind genuinely worthy of the name, is a kind of dialectical overcoming. It only becomes possible

at the point where one comes to understand the full reality of one's beloved, which necessarily means encountering even those qualities one finds infuriating, loathsome, or detestable. For surely, if you know enough about anyone, you will find something in them that you hate. But it's only when one encounters that, and decides nonetheless to love them anyway, that we can talk of love as an active, redemptive, and powerful force. And some element of hatred, however small, must always remain there for this to continue to be true. Real love can only be love if it conquers hatred, not by annihilating but by containing and transcending it, and not just once, but forever.

I should add that this is not just true of romantic love – it's equally true within families, friendships, even, if in perhaps more attenuated form, within communities, political associations. There are profound lessons here, I think, for the practice of solidarity, mutual aid, and direct democracy. Traditional communities, we are often told, can come to collective decisions by consensus, or engage in forms of mutual support and cooperation, because they are relatively small, intimate groups with common sensibilities; this would not be possible, supposedly, for larger, impersonal bodies assembled in contemporary metropolises. But anyone who has spent any time in such a small, intimate community knows that they are also riven with deep and abiding hatreds. If you think about it, how could it be otherwise? Coming to a public meeting in a village means trying to come to a common decision in a group which contains everyone who has ever insulted one's mother, seduced one's spouse or lover, stolen one's cattle, or made one look ridiculous in front of one's friends. Yet they are, generally speaking, able to do it anyway. This overcoming of communal hatred is the concrete manifestation of collective love. It is far, far more difficult to achieve than an impersonal decision amongst those who know little about each other, beyond the fact that they are united in opposition to something else. A true geography of revolutionary groups would begin, then, not by imagining groups based on some perfect, idealized solidarity (and then bemoaning the fact that they don't really exist), but rather by mapping out the lines within which such webs of hatred have been, and continue to be, actively overcome, through practices of solidarity, and across which (justifiable) hatreds cannot be overcome without transforming their fundamental institutional basis – whether those be

the organization of the workplace, government bureaus, or patriarchal families. Once we stop seeing hatred as something to be ashamed of, it will simply become obvious that even the deepest, most personal, hatreds can be overcome within relations of solidarity – in fact, are overcome, on a daily basis, in any social group that isn't entirely dysfunctional – which, in turn, will make it obvious that once those institutional structures are destroyed, no human being will remain beyond redemption.

YOUR NICKNAME WAS 'WEYMOUTH'

EDWARD WOOLLARD

Words choke, in the pen. Scratched up mirrors show broken men. And sometimes, pain makes you feel alive again, sometimes, it makes you despair and go insane. But he carved a message, its meaning deep. Cries still reach me as I sleep. He thought the cure was agony when the walls were closing in.

They hid a problem, behind bricks and mortar. Flesh and bone, broken men longing for home. And you took it all, you took his heart, you took his mind, you took his soul. You took it all.

You see, when a man cries everyone hears, and no one listens.

How your smile lit up every room, every cell.

REVENGE

NINA POWER

So here we are.¹

Alfie and Zak are free, the police and courts are humiliated; the tenth of their lives that Zak and Alfie have spent on bail and on trial have been returned to them by a jury of their peers: men and women from South London who righteously and unanimously saw through the theatre of the show trial, who gasped and wept when they saw footage of what the police did that day, who looked on with compassion when Alfie was asked by his barrister to turn his scarred head towards them, who shook their heads when the prosecution attempted to smear Zak and Alfie, either by painting them as irrational thrill-seekers or as children out of their depth.

This show is dedicated to the jury, to strangers, to the power that lies in the weight of all that portion of humanity that lies outside of the police, the court and prison-systems, outside the state that did and does its best to wreck the lives of anyone who defends an idea, who tries to stop the state harming others, who refuses to accept that we should live in a world where everything gets worse for all but a vile, sociopathic minority. This show is also dedicated

¹ A version of this text was originally delivered on my radio show, *The Hour of Power*, and broadcast on Resonance FM 104.4 on 10 May 2013, two days after the acquittal of Alfie Meadows and Zak King in their third trial for violent disorder, a charge relating to the 9 December 2010, which saw the House of Lords vote through the extremely unpopular rise in tuition fees to £9,000 per year, as well as the abolition of the Education Maintenance Allowance, and funding cuts to the Arts and Humanities. Police behaviour on 9 December was violent throughout, with horses charging into static crowds, the use of shields and batons as weapons, mass kettling in extremely cold temperatures, and many arrests. Head injuries were widespread, some very serious, including the injury suffered by Alfie which required emergency brain surgery. The subsequent prosecution and imprisonment of many protesters, many very young, remains – along with the riot sentences a year later – one of the more grievous abuses of state power in British history, although it is not of course without precedent.

to anyone who has to go through the courts, who suffers and has suffered the weaponisation of time, where months and years are used as punishments in and of themselves. This show is for everyone who feels isolated and guilty because of the weight of the outside, of the world-made-prison, drained of colour and hard and fractured. This show is also dedicated to everyone who supported Alfie and Zak, and serves as a reminder of the continued need and desire for a network of court support.

The fourth wall in the theatre of the court is the public gallery: we need to flood the courts through the residual cracks in its otherwise impermeable solidity – it is no surprise that governments prefer secret courts and we lately see repeated attacks on juries: the human element that surrounds the world of the court – the world of colour, of love, of affection, of mutual aid, of support, threatens it, not because it is peaceful, but precisely because it has the power to be anything but. When we come for you, you'll see the fear you tried to put on us reflected back in our glittering eyes: teenage revenge poetry for the win.

So, this week's show is on the topic of revenge, and vengeance, and what it means to get one's own back. Of what it means to plot from a position of having been beaten back and silenced for months and years, of having to listen to the fabrications of cops and their supporters as they insinuate that you are lying, that you are mad, that the incalculably grotesque farce of almost being killed by them means that you are the one on trial, that you are arrested when you have barely recovered from the violence they perpetrated upon you. The truth and justice campaigns for those killed in police custody, for those at Orgreave and Hillsborough, for all too many people hurt and killed in all too similar ways for so many years by the same people, are weighing like a nightmare on the minds of those who live on. But what is 'truth' but another name for vengeance? What is 'justice' but another name for revenge?

My feelings of revenge are as yet inchoate, a mass of hot and cold, of violent thoughts and self-possessed plotting, but I know already that this will be a vengeance enacted across space and time, and against the way in which precisely these things have been used against us; but for now I have only a set of categories and a set of methods, which I will now try to outline. There are those things I want to burn: these include Alfie's suit, which caused him to move in

such an unfamiliar way and formed part of the set of constrictions of pre-guilt; they include the files labelled 'R v Meadows' that take up shelf after shelf in my flat; and they include every letter from the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) informing Alfie that he can't do this or that, and that he has to be in court at such and such a time and such and such a place. I want to burn them twice, a hundred times, over all the money they spent prosecuting all the protesters.

There are those institutions I want to see crumble: the police, the CPS, predictably, and there's a lack of clarity about whether they go all at once or in some sort of pre-ordained pattern, like a winning firework display. I am reminded of Edmund Burke's 1796 'Letter to a Noble Lord' where he discusses the dialectics of bricks in revolutionary situations. Of course he is hardly in favour of such a thing, but what a description:

It is some time since they have divided their own country into squares... They consider mortar as a very anti-revolutionary invention in its present state, but, properly employed, an admirable material for overturning all establishments. They have found that the gunpowder of ruins is far the fittest for making other ruins, and so *ad infinitum*. They have calculated what quantity of matter convertible into niter [potassium nitrate] is to be found in Bedford House, in Woburn Abbey... Churches, playhouses, coffeehouses, all alike are destined to be add mingled and equalized and blended into one common rubbish; and well-sifted and lixiviated to crystallize into true, democratic, explosive, insurrectionary niter.

But Burke is wrong about the shape of shapes: it is the state that operates in terms of measurability; from the size of the glass box it puts you in as it slanders you from the pulpit to the calculations of how much they can afford to lose if they lose, and how much money they can afford to spend in ruining your life before even the journalists they pay off start to feel disgusted and either cease repeating their stories or start to overturn them. The world, the real world, beyond the myriad state boxes – their kettles, their docks, their prison cells – is amorphous, amorous, queer, and kind.

There are those people I want to see exit existence – which is not the same as wanting them dead of course – and let us just say that all this discussion

takes place at the level of fantasy!!! There are those I simply want to become non-proximate, to cease being part of my world and the world of those I love. I want revenge against any residual humanism and pity I might feel for those who have none. I want a world in which people are not punished for caring and for being empathetic. I want revenge for all those who decided to devalue the love and knowledge of all those minded to help rather than get stuff for themselves.

I want revenge for the bodies and the minds of those brutalised by this. I want my skin, bad at the best of times, now ruined by the airless space of a month in the courtroom, back. I want the dark circles around the eyes of family members to disappear and I want all the psychic pain and anxiety, including that which is impossible to recognise except in the worried expressions on the faces of others, to be removed in one swift gesture, as if tearing a sheet from a bed. I want my and all our revenge to be not just cold, but crystalline.

WHITECHAPEL INTERVENTION, 5 JULY 2011 IT STINKZ

FUCK YOU – YOU STINKING ROTTEN OILY BASTARDS.¹

It is the crack of bumrise... the foul stench of elitism and hypocrisy hangs over the Whitechapel Gallery... an exhibition has plopped that gives nepotism a bad name.

Works from the publicly owned Government Art Collection will be on display (floating) from June 2011 to September 2012. They have been selected by a grimy slimy goose-brained clique of career politicians, cronies, and hangers on, including Samantha WhamBamthankyouCam (wife of David), Lord Mandybum (once minister in charge of the Millennium Dome), Deputy Prime Minister Nick Smegma, Dame Anne Pringle-Wingle (ambassador to Moscow), and malodorous spy chief Sir John Saw-arse. Perhaps the Whitechapel's management hoped to grease the wheels of Establishment patronage by endorsing the taste of this band of aristocraps (15% Arts Council England increase this year – arse sniffers). But was any thought given to the fact that right on the doorstep of the gallery is a

¹ This communiqué was written for and distributed during the private view opening of the Hiscox-sponsored 'Government Art Collection: At Work' exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery in East London. Issued inside the gallery by several unnameable persons, both the communiqué and the 60 Smiffy's Stink Bombs crushed under foot sought to heighten and unsettle the odious hypocrisy and malevolence shown alongside the sustained programme of fiscal austerity. The works displayed in the show – which included pieces by Zarina Bhimji, Michael Landy, L.S. Lowry, Bridget Riley, and Cecil Stephenson, amongst others – had been guest curated by the following: Lord Boateng, a former government minister and British High Commissioner to South Africa; the Prime Minister's wife Samantha Cameron; Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg; Lord Mandelson, former Business Secretary; Dame Anne Pringle, British Ambassador to Moscow; Sir John Sawers, Chief of the Secret Intelligence Service; and the Culture Minister Ed Vaizey. The intervention led to no arrests.

borough which is suffering more than most from vicious government spending cuts.

This is an area where the first language of many residents is not English. In the past, such people could rely on ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) courses to improve their language skills. No more: last year, the government pestilentially slashed funding to these courses, cutting off a vital educational resource from thousands of Tower Hamlets residents.

Just across Whitechapel High Street from the gallery is one of the main buildings of London Metropolitan University, which has the highest intake of working-class students of any university in the UK. London Met is in the process of implementing cuts that will see an astonishing 70% of its courses, from Performing Arts to Caribbean Studies, eliminated. And, of course, fees for the few courses that do remain will double or perhaps even triple as a result of government education policy.

London Met's students have little in common with the materially privileged and narcissistic knights, dames, lords, consorts, and turds being invited to play at curating at the Whitechapel. These students have no interest in gisting along the corridors of power shrouded in ermine; few will spend much time sipping champagne, gobbling canapés, and kiss kissing at private views. And now, because of the education cuts, countless people from places like Tower Hamlets will never even have the chance to study the arts and humanities. In this context, the Whitechapel's decision to play host to these dilettante grandees is not just tactless and inappropriate, but mocking and grotesque.

The Whitechapel's show reeks of sycophancy. It is a sad truth that these powerful pampered parasites get used to flattery and as a result lose any self-awareness. Thus the spymaster Sir John Saw-arse had this to guff in the show's catalogue about his choice of Claude Heath's Ben Nevis: 'I recall a negotiation on Iran I chaired sitting under this picture. When the going got tough between Americans, Europeans, Russians, and Chinese, we took a break for tea and reflected on the

art work. Agreement was reached an hour later.' La-di fucking-da! How hollow and rotten this proud boast is about art's ability to bring people together against the backdrop of the impact of the Coalition's education policies!

When putrid people and infested institutions get lost in a smug bubble – when they parade in designer clothes at inebriated private views just metres away from a working-class university in the process of being destroyed – when the art world in effect shows its sheer, misguided contempt – it becomes necessary to bring all concerned to their senses, that is, if they have any at all? Perhaps the whiffing Whitechapel and its guest-star curators will stop to think now that they have a better idea of how much this show is the closest you'll get to crapping whilst standing up.

MWAH MWAH with lulz, kisses, and hugs.

THESES ON REVENGE: KNEE-JERK NIETZSCHE & ABSTRACT MARX

BENJAMIN NOYS

– The knee-jerk Nietzscheanism of the present might be summarised as ‘Revenge is a dish best served not at all.’ We have so internalised Nietzsche’s critique of revenge as reactive, as the ‘power’ of the weak that vampirically attaches itself to the strong, that revenge automatically equals *ressentiment*.

– ‘[*Ressentiment*] thus designates Nietzsche’s “ascetic priests,” the intellectuals par excellence – unsuccessful writers and poets, bad philosophers, bilious journalists, and failures of all kinds – whose private dissatisfactions lead them to their vocations as political and revolutionary militants.’¹

– My kind of people.

– This Nietzschean trope is often dressed in Marxist clothing. The fact that capitalism is the supreme force of abstraction, that capitalists are mere masks or personae of capitalism as the true subject, is used to argue that revenge, which tries to strike back, can only ever fatally miss its target. To try to render the real abstractions of capitalism real is an error at best or, at worst, leads to a violent and crypto anti-Semitic substitution of real people (bankers, CEOs, politicians, cops, etc.) for the true target: the form of value. This conveniently omits the question of class and the question of the bearers (*Träger*) of capital.

– On the other side, revenge, it’s claimed, supposes the compact class of those enacting revenge: the working class or proletariat. If that compactness is lost, if we are ‘all’ the 99%, then we merely create one abstraction to fight another.

¹ F. Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, 2002.

Revenge is not only reactive, but it has no basis. A spectral capitalism and a spectral proletariat circle each other, while the true aim is to exit into the paradise of affirmative power.

– This spectral logic is redoubled in the admiration for ‘concrete’ instances of revenge: from workplace sabotage and ‘suicidal struggles’ to riots and insurrection. Refused at the theoretical level, revenge returns in unmediated practice. This revenge still never, of course, strikes the real target, but it can be gazed upon as the failed attempt by others to understand this fact: ‘all very good, a “natural” rebellion, if only they really understood capitalism they’d know better.’ Revenge is treated as an option to be exercised, undesirable but understandable; ‘and, at least, they are doing something!’ So the images turn and return, another failed but beautiful iconoclasm. If Massimo Cacciari advised the working class to read Nietzsche’s *The Will to Power* rather than *Capital*, then today’s advice by the ideologues of affirmation and autonomy would be to read *Twilight of the Idols*.

– What if we could learn the lessons of abstraction and the lessons of revenge together? Instead of revenge as a choice or an existential act, revenge is the day-to-day need and reality that responds to the violence of abstraction, which is all too real and inflicted on us. Abstractions are real, and they are violent. We revenge ourselves on them out of necessity, not out of choice. There is no other way. Revenge is not something out there or over there, it is here and now, it is everywhere.

– Revenge doesn’t suppose some unsullied innocence, which, once violated, revenges itself. It is not the fault of the proletarian sheep who fail to grasp the soaring power of the capitalist eagles. Neither does it require ending in some affirmative power ‘beyond good and evil’ to redeem revenge from being mired in the world; neither ‘beautiful soul’ nor ‘overman.’ Revenge is the recognition that we are sullied from the start. Revenge is the recognition that there is nothing to affirm as unsullied, in the beginning or in the end.

– The ‘unsullied’ are those who claim to dispense with revenge. But these Nietzschean prophets enact their own revenge disguised as the affirmation of their own autonomous power. They revenge themselves on the ‘herd’ that doesn’t understand them. The ‘active’ distinguishes itself from the ‘reactive’ only by constantly separating itself from the herd that won’t give-up reacting, and failing. ‘If only they’d stay in their place, be happy with their lot, then, finally, revenge would disappear.’ This is the fantasy of the ruling class. We are not only responsible for our suffering, but for their suffering as well. Our revenge is denied and condemned in the name of their superior revenge, which supposedly is not even revenge.

– ‘[T]his ostensible “theory” is itself little more than an expression of annoyance at seemingly gratuitous lower-class agitation... the theory of resentment, wherever it appears, will always be the expression and product of resentment.’²

– Kill the Nietzsche in our head, or at least this Nietzsche. This Nietzsche, which is not so much the ‘New Nietzsche’ as the ‘Old Nietzsche,’ or even ‘Original Nietzsche,’ denies abstraction in the name of the concrete affirmation of life. Revenge is rejected, although also encrypted, in the phantasm of a superior force that flies high; the eagle not the old mole.³

– ‘Ressentiment is the primal class passion.’⁴

– The primacy of revenge indicates its inescapability, as well as the necessity to think through what revenge might mean. If revenge is a given then that is where we must start, not in positing a past or future innocence to salve our bad conscience. Revenge is not to be celebrated, but grasped and thought. A reflective consideration of revenge as necessity, rather than choice, is the task. In that way we can revenge ourselves on abstractions.

2 F. Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, 2002.

3 G. Bataille, ‘The “Old Mole” and the Prefix Sur in the Words *Surhomme* [Superman] and *Surrealist*’, in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings 1927–1939*, 1985.

4 F. Jameson, ‘Marx’s Purloined Letter’, 1995.

STUPOR, OR, AFFECT AT A STANDSTILL

MARINA VISHMIDT

This age of ours is incontrovertibly one of stupor. Stupor before geophysical calamity, social misery, economic shakedown. We hebetate before technical objects and insolently real abstractions, reverting to a pre-modern superstitious awe, practically indistinguishable from apathy when not abjected further by affirmation. Dissolved mobilisations swathe us in contemplation. It's not that nothing is happening; it's that what is happening binds us to a practical stupor hardly distinguishable from our practical criticism. And yet attention to affect has never been more lively, every inner modulation, every hairline fluctuation is of interest to us and our others no less than to political soothsayers in the academy or in the behavioural unit. Art is contemporary; it is at one with the times that are suspended in a benign fellow-feeling of stupor.

Is stupor an affect or a lack of affect? Is a lack of affect to be considered as coextensive with a void, given the void's propensities to perverse plenitude in many philosophical tendencies. If it is a lack, and that is not the same as a void, then we cannot address stupor as stupor in the hope it will respond with negativity. Stupor is reproductive and homeostatic, there is nothing within it which would precipitate it to a break – it is not full of a nourishing void. It is much more like a traumatic repetition in the aspect of life 'being basic.' In his lecture on Spinoza's concept of affect, Deleuze talks about affect as 'a kind of continuous variation,' a philosophy of encounters in the street or contingency. As a 'take on things,' it's through this axis aligned with the reflexive negativity of Hegel and Marx, in the idiom of speculative being (becoming) as the decisive mark of being that thinks, that changes the context in which it acts. This materialist mutability seems to presuppose a history, whereas the quantified self of affect-tracking as the meat of social life, as a micro-modulated attitude to what one might buy, or make in a process of consumption of identity (hello 'makers'), seems to presuppose

nothing more objective than the flatline of Facebook. Affect now becomes a way of justifying staying in the infinity of the present without anything needing to be different because it is actually always different, at each moment – the infinite variation of gamespace or a constantly updating page. Stupor, here, is the well-being of the asymptomatic.

But this type of criticism is itself an emblem of the autopilot that a criticism foreclosed from practical, affective, and cognitive negativity must fall into. It then establishes itself as the extensive and public, no less than intensive and private, means to manage the stupor that it cannot but compound through its efforts to highlight the bad present in all its sinuous curves. All criticism is symptomatic, this is maybe the one practical effect it hasn't lost, but perhaps what it has is the power to redefine what constitutes the practical. We do not witness the spectacle of our destruction with aesthetic pleasure, contra Benjamin's once-troubling apothegm. Inasmuch as it's witnessed, it's witnessed with stupor.

