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Managing the present

Kristin Ross

The problem with the past is that it is unpredictable. This may be one reason why French president Nicolas Sarkozy has recently generated a series of bizarre decrees – the precise legal status and implementation of which are uncertain, if not unimaginable – that attempt to manage the memory of the recent past. French schoolteachers must now read aloud to their pupils each year, on the same day, the emotional letter written by Guy Mosquet, martyred hero of the Resistance, to his mother on the eve of his execution – but without providing any contextualization that might reveal the fact that Mosquet was a Communist. In February, Sarkozy proclaimed that each ten-year old in France must ‘adopt’ the memory of a child who died in the Holocaust and become the official caretaker of the dead child’s biography.

The outrage that greeted this initiative (nicknamed by some in the United States ‘No Dead Child Left Behind’, after George Bush’s ill-fated reform of primary-school education, ‘No Child Left Behind’) was perhaps best expressed by film-maker Chantal Ackerman. She vehemently did not, she wrote, want Sarkozy rooting around in the coffins of members of her family – coffins they didn’t even have – stirring up their ashes and then obliging children to become the official bearers of those ashes. For Ackerman, the problem with asking kids today ‘to hold hands’ with a little Jew who died sixty years ago is less the concern expressed by many commentators anxious about the mood in the *banlieues* (that of duelling or competing memories of oppression) or the concern voiced by mental health professionals that such an ‘adoption’ might prove traumatic to the new caretaker; it was rather Sarkozy’s penchant for getting the media to instrumentalize memory to create a kind of Disneyland or ‘Snow White’ effect. Waking up in France these days, she concludes, is like living in a pop dictatorship.¹

The president who now takes it upon himself to impose rigid methods for the transmission of history was the candidate who staked his claim to the presidency on a pledge to ‘liquidate’ the most unpredictable episode in recent history: May ’68. Sarkozy’s heroic role as president, he announced, would be definitively to ‘turn the page on May ’68’ and kill the beast once and for all. Sarkozy’s motivation for targeting what is now a rather distant event has been much debated in the French press. But his statement was easily the best thing to happen in recent times in the battle for the political memory of May. It issued a challenge, and it has potentially lent some unpredictability to the most ‘predictable’ of those rituals that make the past their business: the commemoration.

The commemoration industry is in full gear. One can still see and hear Daniel Cohn-Bendit everywhere one turns, announcing that he had intended to keep silent for the fortieth anniversary, but nevertheless taking every opportunity he can find to congratulate himself and his old comrades again for having had the foresight to lose the battle they fought with the state. Television, for its part, seems to have taken Sarkozy’s desire to put an end to ’68 to heart; the talk shows are staging the fortieth anniversary with an obfuscation and media moralism all too familiar to those who recall the twentieth and

thirtieth anniversaries. The cast of talking heads is predictably small and predictably situated. A recent ‘debate’ on the television show ‘Riposte’, entitled ‘68/2008: What Revolts?’ featured, on the one hand, two men who had opposed the movement from the outset, Alain Madelin and Alain Finkielkraut (and who now saw it as a juvenile exercise of letting off steam), versus two repentant former militants, Daniel Cohn-Bendit and Henri Weber, on the other. Yet, despite these predictable reprisals of the tropes of anniversaries past, the commemoration is also potentially carving out a space for more concerted efforts to ‘reappropriate’ May and its political aspirations: a website, www.mai-68.org, has been set up to try to track the various colloquia, publications and events that fall within that project. Every campus in the United States, and every town or city in Europe – Naples, Athens, Lisbon, Leeds, Seville – feels compelled to stage an event devoted to ‘68, sometimes from an international perspective, but frequently focusing on French May alone. The *Nouvel Observateur* reports that some eighty-five books on ‘68 are scheduled to appear in the next few months. Most of these will be made up of tired recyclings of graffiti and slogans in fresh new covers. But occasional books like Xavier Vigna’s *L’insubordination ouvrière dans les années 68: essai d’histoire politique des usines* (Rennes, 2007) show a new level of effort on the part of researchers to ascertain, for example, a whole terrain of militant experience, insubordination, and practices and ideas about equality that flourished in factories throughout France in the years immediately preceding May – ideas and practices that cannot now be integrated into the liberal/libertarian paradigm embraced by many of May’s former actors. Work like Vigna’s is, of course, important not only because it allows the force of labour to come into focus, but because it reframes the event geographically and chronologically, effectively wresting control of the narrative from the Quartier Latin spokesmen whose repentant voices continue to dominate the commemorations.

The Americanization of the French May

The tactic used by Sarkozy to try to erase all traces of the memory of May was a little different from usual, and confirms what I have come to think of as a progressive ‘Americanization of the memory of French May’. For some time, the dominant tendency on the part of self-proclaimed memory functionaries in France was to transform the political dimensions of the movement into artistic or poetic ones. At the peak of the concerted assault on a political memory of May, the twentieth anniversary in 1988, for example, the only textual evidence cited by books claiming to be somehow ‘about’ ‘68 (*La Pensée* ‘68 and *L’Ere du vide*, to name just two) was the graffiti. Graffiti, it seems, was the absolute condensation of the *esprit* of ‘68, while boxes and boxes of militant tracts of all tendencies at the BDIC at Nanterre, testimonies from activists, or footage of frontal violence by the police simply disappeared from view. Under the guise of celebrating an expansive liberation of personal expression, this emphasis was of course geared towards flattening or reducing the significance people might attribute to, say, the largest labour strike of modern times in France.

May 1988, which functioned as a kind of preview to the commemoration of the Bicentennial of the French Revolution the following year, was also the culmination of ten years’ work on the part of New Philosophers and other *ex-gauchistes*, seeking to apologize for their illusions and delusions in the service of *maîtres penseurs*, Stalin or Mao – delusions that led them to fight for systemic change, a fight that they by then saw only as leading ineluctably to the Gulag. In 1988, the nadir in the history of May’s memory, so many aspects of the political climate of the ‘68 years had become invisible (the general strike of some 9 million people, the labour unrest in French factories in the early 1960s, Vietnam, Third Worldism, police riots, the aftermath of the Algerian War) that what remained was nothing much more than a pleasant, poetic festival of liberated self-expression, a countercultural vision much more reminiscent of England

or the United States – countries with a weaker militant tradition than the one sustained in France during those years. And countries that had a more creative counterculture as well!

But now even that festival of hedonistic individualism and unlimited desire (*jouir sans entraves*) is under attack as seedbed to the moral degeneracy, unwillingness to work, and general national decline Sarkozy claims to have taken it upon himself to eradicate. Writing in *Le Monde diplomatique*, Serge Halimi saw Sarkozy as a masterful tactician, borrowing from the United States, after careful study, and particularly from presidents like Nixon and Reagan, the strategy of associating '68 with themes of moral decay and national weakness in order to focus voters squarely on moral values and distract them from thinking about economic inequality. Thus, it seems, they would be prepared for the hard necessities and economic 'shock treatment' he was intent on putting into place after the election. This all seems accurate. But another factor is at work. Once upon a time, what I'm calling the 'festival' or 'countercultural' aspect of '68 was seen as the most easily commodified aspect of the movement, the most implicated in, and the least capable of offering resistance to, the workings of capital. Now, however, that same hedonistic consumerism, narcissistic subjectivity or individualistic desire has merged for many on the Republican Left with the threat posed by minorities: a *foulard*-wearing schoolgirl, a call for gay rights, an immigrant coalition. In the new configuration, these minority figures are indistinguishable from the deluded shopper who inhabits the pages of the commodity-panic literature of a Baudrillard or a Debord: they are all a symptom of the democracy that emerged during the upheavals of the 1960s – democracy that must now be curbed for the survival of the Republic, the family, and the correct transmission of history.

The filter of Israel

The fact that some of Sarkozy's cabinet members and sycophants, as well as much of the intellectual avant-garde of political reaction in France – those responsible for the new 'hatred of democracy', in the words of Jacques Rancière – are ex-'68ers, is not too surprising. Kouchner, Glucksmann, Bruckner, Lévy, Milner – their trajectory in the 1980s has been heavily documented, by myself among others. But the fact that some of these primarily Jewish and extremely vocal media figures have in more recent years gone on to popularize a synonymy between anti-Americanism, anti-imperialism and anti-Zionism, on the one hand, and anti-Semitism on the other, conveys something of the current asphyxiating political and intellectual climate in France. According to the *Grand Larousse* dictionary, 'anti-Americanism' made its debut into the French language in 1968, amidst the napalm bombings of Vietnam. Yet now anti-Americanism is, in the words of Bernard-Henri Lévy, 'a metaphor for anti-Semitism', while Alain Finkielkraut sees in America the inverted image of Auschwitz and in the Statue of Liberty the incarnation of its memory.²

May '68's detour through the filter of Israel presents a distinctive new chapter in the afterlives of the 1960s' insurrections – and one that perhaps someone outside of France would be best situated to analyse. The recent book by Daniel Bensaïd, *Un nouveau théologien: B.-H. Lévy* (Lignes, 2007) marks an excellent first step in confronting and analysing the audacious inversions that have solidified into a 'centre-left' consensus which, at its most insidious, casts the radical Left as nothing so much as the embodiment of a threat against Jews. But we would not, I think, be guilty of fetishizing May '68 if we traced the contemporary inversions Bensaïd discusses back to the grand Thermodorean inversion that set in circa 1976, when many of the same cast of characters took a distance from the political disappointments of the end of May through a massive spiritual rewriting of their experience. Since then they have seen their role as that of supervisors and managers of the present, enunciating norms and interdictions:

‘This is what you should think’, ‘This is what you shouldn’t think’, ‘This is what’s possible or impossible, old or new, relevant or irrelevant.’

It is within this murky inverted present and swamp of bad memory that the various social movements that make up the slow reassertion of the radical Left in France have had to find their way. The strikes and demonstrations of winter 1995; the hefty score of votes for the two Trotskyist candidates in the April 2002 election; the *altermondialiste* movement; the protests against retirement reforms and the CPE (*contrat première embauche*); the ‘no’ vote on the European constitution; the labour and student movements of this past winter – all these events and projects that have unfolded in the last fifteen years bear a relation to the incomplete process opened up by the 1960s’ insurgencies. And they give a very different kind of testimony to the somewhat unbelievable persistence of the question of ’68. An event on the scale of ’68 revealed the contingency of the social order and of authority in general – that is, its lack of foundation and the chaos at its core. Precisely because of its excess, it continues to serve, in an unscheduled and unpredictable way, as a powerful historical trope, capable of generating panic among the elites, as well as offering a way to understand and reframe the political currents, trajectories and movements that have followed it. For it is precisely the excess of an event that makes it outlive its own immediate chronology, destabilizing those histories or political agendas that make no room not only for events such as May ’68, but for any questioning of the status quo at all.

Notes

1. Chantal Ackerman, *Les Inrockuptibles* 638, 19 February 2008, p. 16.
2. Bernard-Henri Lévy, *Ce grand cadavre à la renverse*, Grasset, Paris, 2007, p. 265; and Alain Finkielkraut, cited in Daniel Bensaid, *Un Nouveau théologien: Bernard-Henri Lévy*, Nouvelles Editions Lignes, Paris, 2007, p. 55.

Mexico 1968

The revolution of shame

Bruno Bosteels

On 2 October 1968, violent repression put an end to 123 days of student–popular militancy that had raged through the streets of Mexico City. Tanks invaded the Tlatelolco neighbourhood around the ‘Plaza de las Tres Culturas’ (named for its combination of pre-Columbian ruins, colonial church, and modern apartment buildings); soldiers stormed the plaza and, quickly occupying combat positions, started shooting in what would later be justified as a legitimate response to ‘sharpshooters’ firing from rooftops. By nightfall, over two hundred students, bystanders and residents had been killed. Ten days later, President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz inaugurated the Summer Olympics, just a stone’s throw away from the university where everything had begun.

‘October 2’, or ‘Tlatelolco’, as the massacre is commonly referred to, also put its stamp retroactively on any interpretation of the events leading up to the brutal repression. Because of the deaths and detentions that followed, the history of the afterlives of 1968 in Mexico is unlike that of France. Whereas May ’68 in Paris almost immediately

received a (now-canonical) series of interpretations from academic disciplines both old and new, in Mexico it seems as if the experience of 1968 had, by force, to pass through more experimental means, including dozens of poems, novels, testimonies and memoirs. Only recently, with the release of new documents, have the facts at long last begun to dissipate the rumours and uncertainties that for decades continued to surround the watershed year of 1968 in Mexico. We might even argue that, despite Nicolas Sarkozy's recent attacks against May '68 in France, attacks that perhaps do little more than flatter the nostalgics, it is in Mexico that the legacy of '68 is still open. How – aside from the historical facts – are the events of that year lived at the subjective level? And to what extent is the current disarray of the Left in large parts of the world preinscribed in the way events such as 2 October were subjectivized forty years ago?

Paz with Marx

We can gauge this response at a well-nigh psychoanalytical level in the poem that Octavio Paz composed the day after the massacre in Tlatelolco, titled 'Interruptions from the West (3)'. At the time Paz was living in India as Mexico's ambassador. From this voluntary exile, he reflected upon the revolutionary myth in a series of four poems, as so many 'intermittencies' from the West into the East: two about the revolutions in Russia and Mexico, and two about 1968 in Mexico and France. The third poem is based on a letter Karl Marx wrote to Arnold Ruge, five years before the uprisings of 1848. In this period the soon-to-become co-author of *The Communist Manifesto* was likewise living in exile, but even from the Netherlands he felt shame for the dismal state of Germany. 'The mantle of liberalism has been discarded and the most disgusting despotism in all its nakedness is disclosed to the eyes of the whole world', writes Marx, before anticipating the scepticism of his correspondent:

You look at me with a smile and ask: What is gained by that? No revolution is made out of shame. I reply: Shame is already revolution of a kind.... Shame is a kind of anger which is turned inward. And if a whole nation really experienced a sense of shame, it would be like a lion, crouching ready to spring.¹

History, no doubt, repeats itself, but after tragedy now comes the time not of comedy or farce but of melancholia. What in Marx's letters is still a subjective wager to revolutionize shame against the brooding scepticism of philosophers such as Ruge becomes in the hands of Paz an ambiguous act of introspection regarding the possible shame inherent in any revolution.

Paz sent his poem to *La Cultura en México*, a cultural supplement of the magazine *Siempre!*, where it was not published until after the closing ceremony of the Olympic Games. At the same time, he submitted his letter of resignation as ambassador to president Díaz Ordaz.

Interruptions from the West (3)

(Mexico City: The 1968 Olympiad)
for Dore and Adja Yunkers

Lucidity

(perhaps it's worth
writing across the purity
of this page)

is not lucid:
it is rage

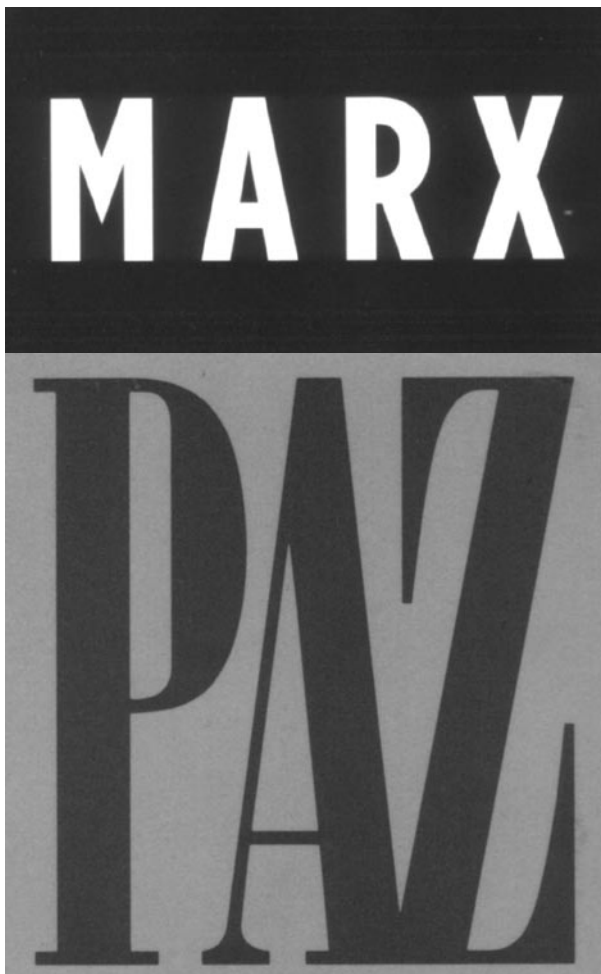
(yellow and black
mass of bile in Spanish)
spreading over the page.
Why?

*Shame is anger
turned against itself:*

*If
an entire nation is ashamed
it is a lion crouching
ready to spring.*
(The municipal
employees wash the blood
from the Plaza of the Sacrificed.)
Look now,
stained
before anything worth it
was said:
lucidity.²

Various tendencies are present at once in this poem, structured around a parallel in which the blood on the public square corresponds to the ink thrown onto the white page. In between, there appears bile, at once yellow and black. Together with rage or fury, shame is the text's circulating term, the one that subjectively articulates politics and writing. As opposed to the blood and the ink, however, the bile has no place to go except inwards, marking the moment of the lion's crouching. It is the moment when shame becomes rage, or when rage turns inward, back upon itself, so as to double into shame. The question then becomes whether this turning inwards produces a resource sufficiently powerful to give way, after all, to a leap. A leap of faith that will have been, precisely, a leap into the void, since it has no ostensible place at its disposal, no foothold either on the public square or on the poet's white page.

However, the poem also seems to draw a comparison between the official policy of erasing the traces of violence and the general poetic procedure of what Paz, in another poem ('Letter to León Felipe') from the year before, about the death of Ernesto 'Che' Guevara, calls 'to erase the written'. Here, as elsewhere in his work, Paz follows what



is a quintessentially Mallarméan procedure, based on a principle of erasure or subtraction.³ To write means to subtract one word from another; it means forever to precipitate oneself towards the fugitive moment when the already written vanishes and presence becomes absence or lack. As a result of such abolition, the real never fully manages to represent itself; on the contrary, it erupts in the interstices of the representable. This is where the poetic operation appears to be uncannily analogous to a political process. The disappearance of Che Guevara, for instance, surely marks the site of a possible political event, but if this possibility appears in a poem, it is because the process gives rise to a vanishing term, similar to the unachievement, *el inacabamiento*, that is proper to poetry according to Paz. Politics, too, would intervene in society according to a principle of delinking comparable to the writing of poetry, when the latter undoes the links between words so as to establish itself in the very space of the tearing apart.

Yet the ease with which these texts affirm their own metapoetical principles should alert us to the fact that we are faced with a purely structural approach. Such a perspective may very well

expose the lack intrinsic to any given system of representation, but without exceeding the limits of a mere recognition of this lack. The process, in other words, may well lay bare the site of a possible event, but the latter is nowhere sustained by a subsequent fidelity. The void is a pathway to what we unconsciously already are, by indicating that which we lack from the origin, but nobody dares to take a leap to affirm what we will have become.

In Paz's poem there also appears a formal complicity, if nothing more, between clarity or lucidity, *limpidez*, and purity or cleanliness, *limpieza*. Thus, the shame that is conjured up can be read in a variety of ways. The most obvious attributes shame to the ambassador, if not to the Mexican people as a whole, over the government's despotic intervention. Another reading would link shame to the very task of the poet who has been unable to say anything worth the effort, *algo que valga la pena*, whereby *pena* also means shame in Mexican Spanish. Words themselves would provoke in the poet a sensation of being superfluous, as if all of a sudden it was he who felt inept. Finally, even this poem, which is so often quoted as the poet's last claim to fame on the side of the Left, could also be read as if to say that it was the student movement itself that did not have a chance to say anything worthwhile.

The same ambiguity reappears in the short poem dedicated to May '68 in France (written originally in French):

Interruptions from the West (4)

(Paris: The Lucid Blind)

In one of the suburbs of the absolute,
the words had lost their shadows.
They traded in reflections, as far
as the eye could see,
and were drowned
in an interjection.

Paz's poems about 1968 thus already allude to the limits of student activism. Perhaps the students said nothing that was worth the effort; perhaps they drowned in mere anarchical outbursts and agrammatical graffiti. We are already in the midst of the critique of the revolutionary myth that we find in so many later essays by Paz.

In fact, if we confront these poems with the analysis of 1968 in 'The Other Mexico', which Paz added as a postscript to *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, it becomes increasingly difficult to grasp the exact sense of his outlook. The essayist never stops pointing out the typical impudence of any desire for justice to right the wrongs in this world. For the poet, the lucidity of the youth is inseparable from a certain blindness. Innocent, ambitious, even audacious, the integrity of the students should also show a bit more modesty and shame. Paz puts it thus in the thinly veiled autobiographical poem 'San Ildefonso Nocturne':

The boy who walks through this poem,
between San Ildefonso and the Zócalo,
is the man who writes it:
this page too
is a ramble through the night.
Here the friendly ghosts
become flesh,
ideas dissolve.
The good, we wanted the good:
to set the world right.
We didn't lack integrity:
we lacked humility.

Hamlet's cursed cause, to right the wrong of a time out of joint, would also have been the ideal of the student movement: not to let justice haunt the country as an

intangible ghost but, on the contrary, to animate the spectre so as to break the wrongs of a truncated modernity. For Paz, though, the desire to incarnate justice in action carries within it the seeds of its bureaucratic deformation. For this reason, the poet will ever more openly support the cause of political liberalism, as in his speech upon receiving the Alexis de Tocqueville Prize a few months after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

It is the rejection of this fatal temptation within the revolutionary myth that explains Paz's veiled critique of 1968 in his poems and essays. The students lacked modesty or shame; they had been sinfully disingenuous, as though the excess of innocence constituted proof of heightened guilt. In 'San Ildefonso Nocturne', Paz adds:

The guilt that knows no guilt,
innocence
Was the greatest guilt.

Only one option then remains open: to combine critical thinking in the liberal tradition with a revitalized vision of modernist art. 'True, criticism is not what we dream of, but it teaches us to distinguish between the specters out of our nightmares and the true visions', Paz concludes. 'Criticism is the imagination's apprenticeship in its second turn, the imagination cured of fantasies and determined to face the world's realities.'⁴ By comparison, we can only infer that the student movement, or 1960s' radicalism in general, is the apprenticeship of the imagination in its first round: innocent, fantasizing, and sickly.

In 1970, the same year in which Paz's talks on 'The Other Mexico' were published in Mexico, Jacques Lacan taught a very similar lesson to his students in his seminar *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*. Also seemingly familiar with Marx's correspondence with Ruge, Lacan addresses the *soixante-huitards* with a typical provocation:

You will say – Shame, what for? If this is the other side of psychoanalysis, it amounts to very little. To which I respond – You have more than enough. If you don't know it yet, get yourselves analysed a bit, as they say...

He finally adds:

The point is to know why the students feel superfluous [*de trop*] with others. It does not at all seem as though they see clearly how to get out of all this. I would like for them to realize that an essential aspect of the system is the production – the production of shame. This translates itself – into impudence.⁵

Both Paz and Lacan suggest that the reverse side of the subversive project is the desire for a new absolute. A truly lucid analysis or criticism, by contrast, would broach the topic of shame without fear of touching upon a point of the impossible; that is, without fear of discovering in shame a welcome hideout – perhaps the only one after anxiety – of truth. The other side of psychoanalysis must be an inescapable shame.

Politics remains

These early readings of 1968 give us insight into the melancholy itinerary of so much radical political thinking today. The ghost functions as the analyst along this itinerary, revealing the sinister presence of a void in the midst of the social order. About the apparition of despotism in the supposedly liberal German society, Marx had written to Ruge:

That, too, is a revelation, although one of the opposite kind. It is a truth which, at least, teaches us to recognise the emptiness of our patriotism and the abnormality of our state system, and makes us hide our faces in shame.⁶

For Marx, of course, the analysis cannot be limited to a recognition of the emptiness of power, nor is it enough merely to blush or cover our faces; it is also necessary

to revolutionize shame itself, to exceed the empty place of power through a radical transformation of the structure as such. To take the lion's leap. But if the emphasis falls on lack as the essential point of the entire system, then the new radical politics-to-come will consist in keeping steady in shame, without giving in to the impudence of wanting to fill the empty place of power; that is, without giving in to the metaphysical temptation to give body to the ghost of effective justice. Such is the answer with which Ruge actually anticipates today's critics of Marx:

It is sweet to hope and bitter to give up on all chimeras. Despair demands more courage than hope. But it is the courage of reason, and we have come to the point where we no longer have the right to keep fooling ourselves.⁷

Today, the only courage of reason, for large parts of the Left, would seem to consist in persevering heroically in despair – or in euphoria, which is but the other side of the same melancholy process. As Slavoj Žižek writes: 'Enthusiasm and resignation, then, are not two opposite moments: it is the "resignation" itself, that is to say, the experience of a certain impossibility, that incites enthusiasm.'⁸ The lion should never take the leap, but this does not keep him from roaring. With the aim of keeping the place of power necessarily inoperative or empty, it calls radical that which is only the crouching down or the retreat of politics in its essential finitude. Turned back upon itself, shame indeed hides many corners where it can accumulate the reserve of an inexhaustible radicalism. This is not rage accumulated before the attack; it is shame as the rage of defeat put in the service of a new philosophical lucidity, foreign to all wagers except the interminable critique of its own spectres. Let me quote one more time from 'San Ildefonso Nocturne':

Rage
Became philosophy,
Its drivel has covered the planet.

Once yellow, the bile turns black. According to the theory of four humours, it does not produce rage but melancholy – that is, etymologically, black bile. Did not Freud already highlight this tendency in the melancholic to become philosophical, by splitting its consciousness into a critical instance capable of representing as object that other part of it that suffers the loss – whether real or imaginary? This process aptly describes the philosophical trajectory of so many ex-enthusiasts of 1968. From observing defeat after the fact, it seems to be only a small step to proclaim the original inexistence of the lost cause – or to assert that only lost causes are ever worthy of our defence.

Giorgio Agamben, also writing from exile about the scandals of corruption and repentance in Italy in the 1990s, felt the need to revise Marx's optimism. 'Marx still used to put some trust in shame', he recalls: 'But what he was referring to was the "national shame" that concerns specific peoples each with respect to other peoples, the Germans with respect to the French. Primo Levi has shown, however, that there is today a "shame of being human", a shame that in some way or other has tainted every human being.'⁹ If, after Auschwitz, shame points to an insuperable human condition, and if, furthermore, those who in the past might have turned shame into a stepping stone – nations or peoples – are absent today, then it appears that the only conclusion to be drawn for any politics-to-come is a retreat, or exodus, from the very idea of revolutionizing shame.

Paz's poem not only tracks the melancholy path followed by many now-retired '68ers; it also announces the possibility of a different response, summed up much later in the collection *The Tenacity of Politics*, also published in Mexico. 'To call upon the tenacity of politics refers to resistance both in theory and in political practice in the face of the various attempts to declare its dilution, if not its end', the editors explain. 'Because despite the diagnostic or the desire of its extinction, politics remains, tenaciously.'¹⁰ If we want to avoid the complicity of the empty page with the false cleanness of the official

story, this will involve not so much a figure of subtraction as one of forcing. Instead of unwriting the written, the injunction would be to write the unwritten. Perhaps this is how the Mexican students understood one of the culminating moments of their movement when, on 13 September, hundreds of thousands marched through the capital during the so-called 'silent march', their mouths taped up with adhesive so as to show the degree of contained rage and self-control. 'This march of silence is the answer to the injustice', one of the speakers finally proffered: 'We have begun the task of making a just Mexico, because liberty is what we are gaining every day. This page is clean and clear.'¹¹

Even the utopia of the student movement cannot avoid the truth glimpsed with special lucidity by the melancholy trend of political philosophy: namely, that the leap takes place in the void. A political subject has no ground to stand on, no stable identity or social link; instead, the lion's leap takes off precisely from anxiety, even shame, provoked by the delinking of society itself. The subject exceeds melancholy, however, by twisting shame into rage so that something else may take place. Disorder, or the lack of the order in place, produces *coraje*, in the double sense of the expression: both rage or anger and also courage or tenacity. 'Anxiety means lack of place, courage means assuming the real by which the place splits into two', Alain Badiou writes. 'Courage positively realizes the disorder of the symbolic, the rupture of communication, whereas anxiety calls upon its death.'¹² By uncovering the emptiness of the symbolic order, shame always runs the risk of falling in the opposite extreme, which consolidates the unchanging necessity of the structure of lack itself as part of the human condition. Tenacity, by contrast, consists in the wager for a different order.

This means writing history not from the perspective of the state but from the subjective principle of equality that universally resists the excessive power of the state. This makes all the difference between those who fatally privilege the massacre of Tlatelolco and those for whom the vitality of the movement, during the three months prior to 2 October, was able contagiously to traverse the rest of Mexico City.

Notes

1. Karl Marx, 'Letters from the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*', in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 3, Lawrence & Wishart, London/International Publishers, New York, 1975, p. 133.
2. Octavio Paz, *The Collected Poems of Octavio Paz (1957–1987)*, ed. and trans. Eliot Weinberger, New Directions, New York, 1987, pp. 225–7, translation modified. Subsequent poems cited also appear in this edition.
3. See the readings of Mallarmé in Alain Badiou, *Théorie du sujet*, Seuil, Paris, 1982, pp. 69–128.
4. Octavio Paz, 'The Other Mexico', *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, Grove, New York, 1991, p. 325.
5. Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XVII: L'Envers de la psychanalyse (1969–1970)*, ed. Jacques Alain Miller, Seuil, Paris, 1991, pp. 211, 220. See also Jacques-Alain Miller, 'On Shame', in *Jacques Lacan and the Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, Duke University Press, Durham NC, 2006, pp. 11–28; and Joan Copjec, 'May '68, the Emotional Month', in Slavoj Žižek, ed., *Lacan: His Silent Partners*, Verso, London and New York, 2006, pp. 90–114.
6. Marx, *Collected Works*, Vol. 3, p. 133.
7. Arnold Ruge, quoted from the Spanish edition of Marx, *Escritos de juventud*, trans. Wenceslao Roces, Fondo de Cultura Económica, Mexico City, 1982, p. 442. This is one of the few editions containing the complete exchange between Marx and Ruge.
8. Slavoj Žižek, 'Beyond Discourse-Analysis', in Ernesto Laclau, *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time*, Verso, London and New York, 1990, pp. 259–60. See also Žižek, 'Melancholy and the Act', in *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism? Five Interventions in the (Mis)use of a Notion*, Verso, London and New York, 2001, pp. 141–89.
9. Giorgio Agamben, 'In This Exile (Italian Diary, 1992–94)', in *Means without End: Notes on Politics*, trans. Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2000, p. 132.
10. Nora Rabotnikov, Ambrosio Velasco and Corina Yturbe, eds, *La tenacidad de la política*, UNAM, Mexico City, 1995, pp. 8–9.
11. Quoted in Ramón Ramírez, *El movimiento estudiantil de México*, vol. 1, Era, Mexico City, 1969, p. 314.
12. Badiou, *Théorie du sujet*, p. 177.

'Liberate socialist eminences from their bourgeois cocks!'

Women '68ers, marching on alone

Lynne Segal

It is hardly news that history has its blind spots, hidden even from those attentive to its most neglected byways. These are often within emancipatory struggles that are swiftly disregarded once their fervour fades. When disputed legacies originate in confrontational, often anarchic challenges to the prevailing order of just about everything, systematic accounting tends to dull precisely that chaotic and confused excitement which it presents as emblematic of the rebellions in question. Most historical texts on the 'long sixties', encompassing the twenty years of popular protest movements from 1956 to 1976 – and even those on its flashpoint, '1968' – readily encompass the diversity and distinctiveness of the engagements and revolts of its varied activists. Yet there is one cluster that once again tends to fall beneath their radar: women's struggles. The historical narratives and the familiar memorabilia of the 1960s – and even more so of 1968 – all continue to place men, definitively, at their centre.

As this year's commemorations and condemnations kick off (with Sarkozy suitably making a fool of himself by adopting Thatcher's former role as chief scold), we see all over again the significance of the decade reduced to the student graffiti adorning Parisian walls. These once imaginative but now rather tired and untroubling slogans direct us into gardens of earthly delight, on the back of tigers of wrath: 'Demand the Impossible', 'Don't Live with Dead Time', and all the rest of it. There is, however, still neglect of that group which was there in almost equal numbers alongside, but clearly distinct from, the angry and rebellious young men whose names reappear in scholarly and popular restaging of those years alike. What were they doing, what were they thinking, those without the raggedy beards – long-legged in their mini skirts, spinning to the drumbeat of 1960s' rock; soon visible marching in step with male comrades, listening just as eagerly to those leaders of the Left, hurling their passionate words from formal platforms, at barricades, astride the bonnets of overturned cars?

These images bear some relation to the stripped-down, prone and servicing shapes in the sexist litter then saturating much of the 'underground' or alternative press – its nadir, perhaps, one long and tedious cartoon strip from Paris, May '68, which concludes: 'Some comrades from the *council for maintaining the occupations* are going to come and fuck me violently. Judging by their practice, their theories must be truly radical.'¹ Radical, indeed, in that the graphic display of so much infantile braggadocio, with its predatory intent no longer hidden behind syrupy sentimentality, was already helping to generate its own comeuppance.

Surely women's presence during those antinomian flashpoints, when some declared madness the new sanity, amounted to more than these depictions of them in under-

ground magazines and outlaw manifestos as masturbatory aids and sources of male bonding. For even as so many male militants were already worrying that their revolution was over before the decade itself was out, scores of women were suggesting that the spirit of the 1960s was crucial for them. 'Freedom Now! We Love You!', young women in the US Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) concluded their statement addressing their male comrades in the summer of 1967. Given that their main concern was the destructive impact of what they newly identified as 'male chauvinism', it was a love that for many years went unrequited – mocked and rejected by those to whom it was proffered. Whisper it softly in today's culture of blame and victimhood, but such defensive derision would eventually rebound, for it was women who can in the end, perhaps, be seen as that decade's most decisive victors. Something in the 1960s' air, as well as that small package in their handbag or by their bedsides, was giving women a new-found energy. It was the spirit some took with them into the 1970s, still marching (by then, more confidently) along many of the same pathways they had trod during the previous decade, albeit with one or two critical new swerves.

Sexual-political slippage

If there is any agreement about the 1960s, it is that this was a time of sexual challenge to the prudery, hypocrisy and stolid family conservatism dominating the postwar world of the 1950s. But it was only women's determination to seek sexual pleasure outside marriage, and to flaunt it, which was actually new (and soon, too, that of other sexual dissidents). Double standards had long made straight men's engagement in sex outside marriage an activity that was tolerated, if not encouraged. That 1960s' women were far from the mere passive objects of men's desire (notwithstanding the surrounding priapic iconography) was affirmed by various feminist writers when asked to commemorate '1968', twenty years ago now, in 1988. Angela Carter, for one, rejoiced that this was a time when sexual pleasure was suddenly not only divorced from reproduction, but also from women needing to use it for 'status, security, all the foul traps men lay for women in order to trap them into permanent relationships'.² Sheila Rowbotham described how she and her friends struggled throughout the 1960s 'with all the contradictory versions of sex, morality and what being a woman was meant to be about', determined to outwit the conspiracy of fathers, teachers, ministers and dons, trying to keep them chaste.³

Women fought to establish that it was possible, if certainly still often perilous, to leave home, have sex and much else besides (though not yet to obtain a mortgage or other basic financial backing), free from dependence on any one man who had authority over them. The cultural impact of these intrepid sexual pioneers is evident in the research of that meticulous historian of the 1960s, Arthur Marwick. He provides figures from West Germany, where he grew up, on shifting attitudes to cohabitation: while 65 per cent of single German women still disapproved of cohabitation in 1967, a mere six years later only 2 per cent of women had any such objections. On a somewhat different playing field, the figure for single men dropped somewhat less precipitously, though also significantly, from 43 per cent to 5 per cent.⁴

Furthermore, women working alongside or within the various civil rights, anti-racist, anti-imperialist and, eventually most importantly of all, the anti-Vietnam War movements of the 1960s, had also been learning how to organize, how to work politically, and how to bond with each other – if at first rather hesitantly. The direct action involved in such political work often combined with at least some attachment to the various avant-garde stirrings of the alternative cultural scene, while women were already especially prominent in some of the grassroots community projects. 'I find myself happier than I ever dreamed I could be', Alix Kates Shulman begins her semi-fictionalized memoir of women's political awakening in the 1960s, *Burning Questions*.⁵ It is this harnessing of energy among women, a time when for many the space between



suddenly desiring change and believing it could happen was shrinking, that slips out of the prevailing 1960s' accounting – although it is obvious when women write their own accounts, such as Sheila Rowbotham's excellent memoir of the decade.⁶

Symptomatic of the slippage is the most recent scholarly overview of the 1960s by Gerd-Rainer Horn, *The Spirit of '68: Rebellion in Europe and North America, 1956–1976*.⁷ Horn attempts a far-reaching coverage and assessment of the political and cultural achievements, defeats and thwarted aspirations from those years, while pondering whether some of its lost causes might ever be regenerated. He begins with the restless desires of cultural rebels, outcasts and dropouts discarding bourgeois respectability in the late 1950s and early 1960s, highlighting especially the detached, ultra-libertarian, anti-capitalist disdain enlivening the Situationist texts of Guy Debord and Raoul Vaneigem. From there, he ranges broadly across the rebellious 1960s' landscape, encompassing the cross-class and cross-race civil rights alliances, black liberation and student struggles in North America, as well as the various workers' struggles, anti-war movements and student insurgencies that sprang so vibrantly to life across Europe.

As we know, the eyes of the world fixated on the emblematic uprising of May '68, when students held their ground against the excessive police violence used against them, building barricades and fighting back, while millions of French workers soon took to the streets, triggering three weeks of extensive strike action that both paralysed the state and almost toppled de Gaulle. Horn, however, draws our attention back to other working-class struggles, such as that of the Italian labour movement, where from '68 onwards industrial struggles continued right up until 1976, making Italy's unionized workforce the best protected and most democratically organized in Europe. Rejecting the authoritarianism, cultural conservatism and extreme moderation of the Old Left (whether nominally communist or social democratic), Horn appropriately identifies the 1960s' spirit in the commitment to direct action, to participatory democracy and above all to the autonomy of diverse struggles, thereby aligning support for collective struggle with respect for individual resistance. Women's presence, however, receives little more than *one page* in his penultimate chapter, which is somewhat surprising since their organized movement had already peaked before his end-date of 1976.

The 'spirit of the sixties' was the cradle of feminism. Women's liberation did not emerge merely as a reaction against the supposed 'male' priorities of that decade; women were already there, already fighting, organizing, and beginning to think collectively, both with and without men. Although it was the movement politics in the USA that, in the early years, served as the main inspiration for women's movements around the world, there were already feminist stirrings everywhere. The diverse Marxist currents in the forefront of the radical workers and student uprisings in Europe were, for sure, usually less open to prioritizing women's perspectives, but within them women were transformed simply by the struggles themselves. In Britain, Juliet Mitchell wrote the influential feminist text 'Women, the Longest Revolution' for *New Left Review* in 1966. This was followed a few years later by the articles Sheila Rowbotham published in *Black Dwarf*, heralding 1969 as *The Year of the Militant Woman*. Hunting for ideas on how to bring women's personal issues to politics back then, Rowbotham interviewed sewing machinists on strike at Ford factories and other militant working-class women who, alongside female guerrilla fighters in Vietnam, provided early role models for Women's Liberation.⁸

The sardonic Situationist-inspired slogans that have settled into the memory of the 1960s were racing around the world at the same time that a few other, more sharply combative, ones were first uttered – though these were rather quickly actively repressed, almost never to reappear in the memorializing of that time. 'Liberate socialist eminences from their bourgeois cocks!' was the slogan unfurled at the German SOS (Socialist German Student Organization) in 1968, as Helke Sander and other women addressed their male comrades, only to be rather more swiftly buried, especially as this poster was accompanied by dire graphic representations of how this could be done.⁹ Hidden from history such slogans may remain, yet they expressed one of the more lasting revolts of '68, if one that would be, mercifully, somewhat tamed as the decades rolled on.

Inside a women's sign

Women crossed class and race barriers to stand up for each other. As Barbara Epstein recalled in *The Feminist Memoir Project*, white women such as herself gained strength from supporting black women when involved in voter-registration campaigns in the southern states of the US in the mid-1960s:

I lived with local families, often at some risk to them ... I had a lot to observe. Black women ... seemed stronger. More important ... They occupied more social space than white women ... In effect the Black women I saw and worked with provided a different model of what it meant to be a woman in our society.

This opened up a whole realm of possibilities.¹⁰

Later, white feminists participated in the rallies held in support of jailed Black Panther sisters, such as Joan Bird, and raised the huge sum of money to pay her bail, at the close of the decade. Here, too, women fighters in Vietnam provided other models for women in the 1960s, as lifelong feminist and anti-war activist Leslie Cagan recalled, when describing the electrifying impact of meeting some of them in Bulgaria in the spring of '68.¹¹

Strength was necessary for women to withstand the heckling some received when they rose to speak at student meetings, as Ellen Willis, a member of the New York Redstockings collective, reported in early 1969:

This isn't the protest against movement men, which is second on the agenda, just fairly innocuous radical rhetoric – except that it's a good looking woman talking about women. The men go crazy. 'Take it off! Take it off the stage and fuck her!' They yell and guffaw at unwitting double entendres like 'We must take to the streets.'¹²

Sheila Rowbotham similarly found herself an object of derision when speaking at a British student rally in 1968, recalling

It was like a living nightmare. Stubbornness kept me in front of the microphone ... Somehow through the whistling and laughter I managed to speak about [the underfunding of] further education.¹³

Amy Popkin has commented on the ‘second-level’ chauvinism evident at that time, which meant that women would not be taken seriously when they reported on anything other than the problem of men’s sexism. No matter, women were getting on with their activism anyway, with the rhizomatic spread of feminism throwing its shoots right across the USA. It was in 1968 that Jo Freeman published the first US national newsletter, *Voices of the Women’s Liberation Movement* in Chicago; *No More Fun & Games: A Journal of Female Liberation* appeared some months later in Boston; the movement staged its first widely reported protest (at the Miss America pageant in Atlantic City); Shulamith Firestone published ‘Women and the Radical Movement’; Adrienne Rich wrote her poem ‘Planetarium’, which began ‘A woman in the shape of a monster/ a monster in the shape of a woman/ the skies are full of them.’¹⁴ And so they were.

‘WOMEN OF THE WORLD UNITE, WE HAVE NOTHING TO LOSE BUT OUR MEN!’ was yet another banner unfurled in 1968. Unite they surely did, continuing many of the old struggles, but losing some of the men they had fought with, who dropped faster by the wayside. As Joan Baez addressed her old comrade and lover Bob Dylan, in 1972: ‘You left us marching on the road and said how heavy was the load/ The years were young, the struggle barely had its start/... And we’re still marching in the streets with little victories and big defeats/ But there is joy and there is hope and there’s a place for you.’¹⁵ Bobby, however, like many men from those years who did not make their way into the sprouting and fragmenting Leninist groups, had long since left it to the women to march on alone – for a while still hoisting that clenched fist, but inside a women’s sign.

Notes

1. Peter Stansill and David Zane Mairowitz, *BAMN: Outlaw Manifestos and Ephemera 1965–70*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1971, p. 141.
2. Angela Carter, in Sara Maitland, ed., *Very Heaven: Looking Back at the Sixties*, Virago, London, 1988, p. 214.
3. Sheila Rowbotham, ‘A Muggins Twice Over’, *New Statesman & Society*, 10 June 1988, p. 26.
4. Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy, and the United States, c. 1958–c. 1974*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1998, p. 805.
5. Alix Kates Shulman, *Burning Questions*, Knopf, New York, 1978.
6. Sheila Rowbotham, *Promise of a Dream*, Penguin, London, 2000.
7. Gerd-Rainer Horn, *The Spirit of ‘68: Rebellion in Western Europe and North America, 1956–1976*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2007.
8. Rowbotham, *Promise of a Dream*, p. 209.
9. Reported in Renny Harrigan, ‘The German Women’s Movement and Ours’, *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media* 27, July 1982, pp. 42–4.
10. Barbara Epstein, ‘On the Origins of the Women’s Liberation Movement from a Strictly Personal Perspective’, in Rachel Blau DuPlessis and Ann Snitoe, eds, *The Feminist Memoir Project: Voices from Women’s Liberation*, Three Rivers Press, New York, 1998, p. 175.
11. Leslie Cagan, ‘Something New Emerges’, in Dick Cluster, ed., *They Should Have Served that Cup of Coffee*, South End Press, Boston MA, 1979, p. 237.
12. Ellen Willis, reported in Amy Popkin, ‘The Personal is Political’, in Cluster, ed., *They Should Have Served*, p. 198.
13. Rowbotham, *Promise of a Dream*, London, Penguin, p. 188.
14. Adrienne Rich, ‘Planetarium’, www.americanpoems.com/poets/adrienne_rich/7091, accessed 25 March 2008.
15. Joan Baez, ‘To Bobby’, *Come from the Shadows*, A&M Records, May 1972; www.lyricsdownload.com/joan-baez-to-bobby-lyrics.html, accessed 25 March 2008.

Art and immaterial labour

'Art and immaterial labour'... the conjunction is at once innocent and presumptuous. As Adorno suggested, if the general problem with using the word 'and' in titles is that it 'permits everything to be connected with everything else and is thus incapable of hitting the mark', in some instances it nonetheless conveys a strange inevitability. 'Art' and 'immaterial labour' seem to belong together – even if we don't know why.

In such instances, there is a literalness to the conjunction, highlighting the aconceptual aspect of titles, which marks their closeness to names, and hence to things, and in particular to those most peculiar of things, works of art. Adorno agreed with Lessing about 'the stupidity of conceptual titles', and he agreed with Peter Suhrkamp's 'taboo on "and"'. But he had to admit that in some cases 'the colourless word "and" sucks the meaning up into itself' when it 'would have turned to dust if it had been conceptualized'. Yet conceptualize it we must.

The 'rightness' here derives, I think, as much from the conceptual oddity of the connection as from the self-evidence of its expression. The identification of art with immaterial labour has become so strong that it is not so much affirmed as problematized – thrown into doubt – by the assertion of a connection. The connection functions to separate the terms – to assert their difference – when placed against the background of the presumed identity. 'Art and immaterial labour', then, is not the description of a topic; it is the name of a problem: the problem of the identity and non-identity of art and immaterial labour, not merely with each other, but with themselves.

But why the presumption of identity? It derives, on the one hand, from the recent history of art – or at least a particular canonical (mis)description of it – and, on the other, from the promiscuousness of the concept of immaterial labour itself. It is from the conjugation of these contexts and their ramifications within the internationalized discourse of theory that the problematic of 'art and immaterial labour' arises.

In 1973, the US art critic Lucy Lippard famously declared the six years from 1966 to 1972 the years of the 'dematerialization of the art object', by virtue of the primacy of 'so-called conceptual art or informa-

tion or idea art' (having previously expounded the dematerialization thesis in a more restricted context, in an essay co-authored with John Chandler, published in *Art International* in February 1968). In 1996, in 'Immaterial Labour' (expanded in the as-yet-untranslated book, *Lavoro immateriale: Forme di vita e produzione di soggettività*, 1997), Maurizio Lazzarato extended the autonomist expansion of the concept of productive labour into unwaged activities, through the notion of 'informational content'. Thus, one might say, nearly thirty years later, post-Marxist economics caught up with contemporary art. However, things are not quite as simple as this picture suggests.

According to these two narratives, at least, conceptual art 'dematerialized' the *object* (specifically, the *art* object), while information technology made *labour* 'immaterial'. There is a disjunction here between object and act, which restages the classical modern philosophical antinomy of the subject. And it makes the identification between art and immaterial labour appear differently depending on one's starting point. From the standpoint of a 'dematerialized' art object, it is the immateriality of the new forms of labour that establishes the connection with art, tracking the dematerialization of the object back to the immateriality of its source (thinking as art labour). From the standpoint of immaterial labour, on the other hand, this 'immateriality' has the alternative function of generalizing the concept of labour beyond the 'economy' to all spheres of life, within which 'art' is included, indifferently, like any other. There is no specificity to art labour here. It is not clear that these problematics are compatible, or indeed that each is individually coherent. Hence the transformative potential of their crossing, at the point of reflection on the purported becoming-labour of art and becoming-art of labour – a point at which each risks 'turning to dust'.

The essays that follow were presented to the conference 'Art and Immaterial Labour', organized by *Radical Philosophy* at Tate Britain, London, on 19 January 2008. They are preceded here by the introduction given on the day by Éric Alliez on behalf of the French journal *Multitudes*.

PO

A very different context

‘Art and Immaterial Labour’ and *not* ‘Conceptual Art and Immaterial Labour’. I want to state this at the outset to echo the ‘disquiet’ voiced by some of our speakers before confirming their participation in this ‘Italo-French’ day, which follows the ‘German’ day organized at Tate Britain at the end of 2005. On that occasion, we were already dealing with ‘art and politics’, and with the link between these two terms proposed by what we called, with no tongue in cheek, the Karlsruhe School of Peter Sloterdijk, Boris Groys and Peter Weibel (see the dossier ‘Spheres of Action: Art and Politics’, *RP* 137, May/June 2006). I say this in order to put our participants entirely at ease, as they belong neither to the ‘artworld’ nor to the Anglo-Saxon ‘cultural’ sphere, which in this respect are largely dominated and driven by a debate articulated in terms of Art ‘after Philosophy’ and ‘after Conceptual Art’.

The brief for this conference begins with a reminder of the ‘fierce debate since claims about the “dematerialization” of art were made in New York at the end of the 1960s’, or, one might say, *How New York Stole Conceptually the Idea of Contemporary Art*. But this is juxtaposed straightaway to ‘the very different context of libertarian political debates in Italy and France, [where] claims have been made about the “immaterial” character of labour processes based on information-technology, and of the cultural and intellectual content of commodities’. So, if the hope that this event might

bring these two discourses together is realized, it will be because we are here, at Tate Britain, ‘to stage a debate about contemporary art, “immaterial” labour and new modes of production of subjectivity’. It is the centrality of this last issue – new modes of production of subjectivity – that ‘gathers’ our speakers, here and elsewhere; for instance, within the orbit of the French journal *Multitudes*, with an ‘s’ at the end, which opens up an entire play of differences and differentiations. But it can do this only by distributing their differences with regard to the *historico-politico-philosophical* analysis (the clunkiness of this expression conveys the complex implications of what is at stake) of the aforementioned ‘immaterial’ labour – where the putting into quotation marks of ‘immaterial’ refers back to the ‘s’ of *Multitudes*.

The context of political debates in Italy and France is a very different one indeed with regard to the aesthetic (that is, the *in-aesthetic* or *an-aesthetic*) questions elicited by the dematerialization of art in its conceptual/contemporary environment. For we can justifiably imagine that the different meanings given to the quotation marks around ‘immaterial’ will determine the plurality of positions on art and the ‘new aesthetic paradigms’ called for by the new social or biopolitical constitution of labour/non-labour and of life in our societies of control (following Deleuze), of security (following Foucault), or in the Empire of cog-



nitive capitalism (following Hardt and Negri). This is a context for which the Anglo-Saxon linguistic sphere provides only the all-too-generic term 'libertarian', in which I'm sure none of our speakers will recognise themselves.

In spite of this semantic obstacle, I am not enough of a Martian not to know that the great tendencies of this 'continental' debate are today well-known *Outre-Manche*, beyond the channel as the continentals say (who aren't lucky enough to live on an island, man's dream according to the young Deleuze). So I will not here present the differences that, in a sense, constitute the very principle of this meeting: the quotation marks around 'immaterial' may serve to problematize the two (falsely) common notions at stake, art and labour. Rather, I would like to improvise a homage, less to our three Italian 'theorists' than to the *revolution in theory and in practice* whose major exponents they are.

For me, as a good Frenchman and a good (or bad) Deleuzo-Guattarian with Foucauldian leanings, everything commences or recommences with *Anti-Oedipus* – this book unlike all others that came before it, this book that should be approached, following Foucault's suggestion, as an 'art' of living and thinking, rather than as a 'philosophy'; this book that was able to articulate the reality-conditions of 1968 at their most disruptive by (in Foucault's words) 'using political practice as an intensifier of thought', to unfetter selves from the negative in order to invest the revolutionary force of desire's connections into a reality that is no longer dissociable from it, and its 'machines' of production and anti-production. None of our Italian friends will contradict me. But one would not have known how to take leave of structuralism *à la française* in order to invest the plane of insistence of 'becomings' – or to break with the primacy of the logic of sense over the power relations and minoritarian logics of the assemblages of desire – without investigating and investing *from within* the mutations of contemporary capitalism. Such an investigation and an investment renews the link between 'theory' and 'practice' through the study of new forms of labour and new types of 'molecular' struggle in all domains of life, in a manner that is both 'critical' and 'clinical', as well as 'historical'.

Let us recall – in the after-'68 of a May that would be prolonged and intensified in Italy for ten years, to culminate in the '77 Movement – the Copernican revolution produced by the Italian *Autonomia*: 'Marx beyond Marx'. 'Marx beyond Marx' effectively meant undertaking the most violent passage possible from the socialist and post-socialist critique of capitalist valorization to the communist affirmation of a self-

valorization that could no longer be ascribed to the 'worker' alone (think of the movement of *emarginati* and students, the women's movement, etc.). Capital would then be presented as an 'apparatus of capture' proceeding by means of a 'machinic enslavement' of the 'processes of subjectivation' that it puts to work. 'Apparatus of capture', 'machinic enslavement', 'processes of subjectivation' – these are the key locutions in the emphatically Franco-Italian pages of *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), swarming with direct and indirect references to Tronti, Negri and Bifo. It is surely a curious 'Marxism' that overturns the capital-labour dialectic by *opposing* to the self-valorization of capital the self-valorization of social forces. Yet this is a Marxism to which Deleuze was nonetheless laid claim to the very end, while Guattari would end up 'deterritorializing' the Marxian reference so absolutely in his *permanent molecular revolution* (the collection of articles entitled *La Révolution moléculaire* appeared in 1977) that it vanished completely as a literal reference.

But can an analysis of Integrated World Capitalism really do without a beyond *Marx*? In real time, the time in which this notion was elaborated, the article that I wrote with Guattari in 1983 ('Capitalistic Systems, Structures and Processes', www.mdx.ac.uk/www/crmep/events/TheGuattariEffect.htm), just like the book he wrote with Negri in 1985 (*Communists Like Us*, Semiotext(e), 1990), suggested the opposite, even though, as Lazzarato puts it, 'it is the dynamic of forces that explains the economy and not the reverse'; even though work would become the capture of force-invention 'as the dynamic of the cooperation among brains'. In any case, the notion of labour comes out so utterly transformed that Deleuze and Guattari, still under Italian influence, were able to propose that the reality of labour explodes in two directions: 'that of an intensive surplus-labour *that no longer even passes through labour*, and that of an extensive labour which has become *precarious and floating*'.

To conclude this archaeology of the present in a deliberately abrupt manner, I propose that the analysis of what announced itself at the beginning of the 1980s carries with it the immediately political stakes of the differences and convergences between our speakers. Furthermore, what is today spoken of in terms of 'immaterial' labour entails a relation to art that problematizes in the extreme the most 'sensitive' notions on the basis of which, for a long time, not *politics* but 'the political' has been defined. Needless to say, this does not mean speaking of aesthetics as a *surrogate* politics.

Éric Alliez

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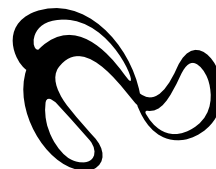
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Metamorphoses

Antonio Negri

To begin with, let us try, from a materialist standpoint, to situate historically the concept of plastic and figurative art – in other words, the definition of its historically determinate link, if there is one, to the development and structure of modes of production. Can this be done? Obviously, once we're obliged to speak of art and immaterial labour, this is a useful thing to do; in fact, its 'immaterial' character does not strip 'labour' – not even in its relationship to artistic production – of its historical centrality, and does not drain labouring activity of that economic energy and ontological power which must indeed exist in order for labour to be exploited under capitalism. So is such a definition possible? I think so. In fact (notwithstanding the superficiality and flimsiness of art markets – that is, of artistic phenomena tied to the circulation of capital), we can outline a somewhat crude but nevertheless effective correspondence between the different epochs of artistic activity ('styles' and 'poetics'), on the one hand, and the forms of capitalist production and organization of labour, on the other. In what follows, I would like to sketch out the figures taken by this relation.

Let us go back, then, to the period that witnessed the increasing centrality of working-class struggle to capitalist development. From 1848 to 1870, this centrality expresses itself with vigour in the massive growth and concentration of working-class labour in all its materiality. Does the 'realism' of artistic expression (between Courbet and Cézanne, for instance) display this new historical condition of work? I think it is possible to answer affirmatively if we consider the force with which the denaturalization of the real and the structural materiality of the subject begin to appear in this realism, precisely in correspondence with the first great episodes of industrial and metropolitan centralization in the exploitation of labour-power.

The period of 'impressionism', between 1871 and 1914, corresponds instead to policies on the side of the bosses that deepen the division of labour and its specialization – policies to which there corresponds, on the workers' side, a subversive project aiming at the self-management of production. We witness a first great episode in the 'emancipatory overdetermination' by the professional worker of the conditions for the accumulation of capitalist production. Labour becomes aware of the fact that its enemy, the capitalist world,

may be dissolved and possibly reconstructed if one grasps (that is, if one reappropriates) the key to production: labour itself, within the 'mode of production'. It is in labour that the world is dissolved and reconstructed – and possibly the artworld too. This is the slogan of this first phase of artistic transformation in the history of the present: creation consists in dissolution.

Then comes the October Revolution. As the tsunami of revolutionary thought and subversive action spreads around the world; as capital, in order to respond to the challenge, finds itself obliged to enforce further proletarian growth and concentration in the productive base, to establish new norms of worker consumption (welfare), to push abstraction to the highest level, and to introduce 'scientific management' into the organization of labour – well, it is then that, in the aesthetic field too, the 'abstract form' of artistic production prevails. This abstraction is at one and the same time the representation of the abstraction of labour and – from the workers' standpoint – the material for an alternative imagination. What, in fact, is socialism if not the project autonomously to organize the abstraction of labour?

From 1917 to 1929, from the storming of the Winter Palace to the Great Crisis, this is an 'expressionist' abstraction, in the sense that it heroically defies the real and current determinations of exploitation while violently anticipating, aggressively advancing and seeking to overturn its degree of abstraction. This abstraction traverses the figurative, destroys and reconstructs it, experiencing revolutionary passion and the desire for a constructive aesthetics in epic excess.

Then, having been led back to the market and the circulation of commodities, abstraction takes ever more analytical forms – forms that remain abstract, but are precisely analytical, multifarious, sometimes ephemeral, often open to experimentation and to each of the innovations that the crisis (and the ensuing renewal of the capitalist mode of production) makes possible, and which the development of proletarian struggle demands. After 1929, the only artistic production is the one expressed by the mass-artist, embodied in his constructive capacity, as though artistic production constituted the form of this capacity. And this is the story which, amid constant experimentation, leads us all the way to '68. This is the period in which abstraction and production are intertwined: the abstraction of

the current mode of production and the representation of possible worlds; the abstraction of the image and the use of the most varied materials; the simplification of the artistic gesture and the geometric destructuring of the real, and so on and so forth. Picasso and Klee, Duchamp and Malevich, Beuys and Fontana, Rauschenberg and Christo: we recognize in them artists sharing the same creative experience. A new subject and an abstract object: a subject capable of demystifying the fetishized destiny imposed by capital.

And then? What can we draw from this? '68 comes and we reach a moment when contemporary art confronts new questions. How does the event arise? How can passion and the desire for transformation develop *here and now*? How is the revolution configured? How can man be remade? How can the abstract become subject? What world does man desire and how does he desire it? What are the forms of life taken by this extreme gesture of transformation?

Let's sum up. First, we have the phase of reappropriation and self-management (1848–1914), dominated by the development of the 'professional worker', his struggles, his utopia and his revolution. Following the Paris Commune, this phase splits, in what concerns artistic trends, into the two directions of 'realism' and 'impressionism'. Then comes the revolutionary phase beginning in 1917 and ending in 1968, all of it internal to the abstraction of labour-power, which in turn divides after 1929 into 'expressionism' and abstract experimentation; this is a period during which the mass worker comes forward as the hegemonic subject over/against the abstraction of labour and undertakes the project of its socialist management. We then arrive at a new period – the *constitutive* period of the 'social worker' and 'cognitive labour-power'. But constitutive of what, when, where?

Immaterial?

It is worth asking ourselves right away if the phrase 'immaterial labour' is apposite. Today, paradoxically, saying 'immateriality' no longer means saying abstraction, but rather concreteness; no longer vision and spirituality, but rather immersion into bodies, expression of the flesh. Immaterial labour constructs material products, commodities and communication. It is socially organized through (very material) linguistic, electronic and cooperative networks and through multitudinous movements and associations. This is a fleshy immateriality, that is to say a mobile and flexible materiality, an ensemble of bodies. Here, then, (from the artistic standpoint) is the final paradox of this story: artistic development transforms the abstraction

of the social relations in which we are immersed into corporeal figures, releasing the vitality of the flesh into images that move and inflect themselves, in a process of continuous transformation. From Bacon through Warhol to Nam June Paik, the artist imagines a thick space, a molten turmoil, and looks fearlessly to a world freed from its internal architecture. Artistic development now takes place not so much in immaterial as in biopolitical terms. The attempt to traverse social communication, to catch one of its figures on the wing, is accompanied by an immersion into the chaotic and productive tumult of forms of life. Today's artistic paradox consists, intensively as well as extensively, in wanting to produce the world (as well as bodies and movements) otherwise, from within a world that refuses to recognize any worlds other than the existing one, and in knowing that this outside to be constructed must be the other of an absolute inside.

Obviously, what I've said up to now does not intend to be a new narration of the history of art. It suffices for us to establish the fact that *artistic activity* always takes place within the (existent) mode of production and reproduces it – that is, it either produces or challenges it, endures or destroys it. Artistic activity is a mode, a singular form of labour-power. Not by chance, every product of artistic activity can thus become a commodity, just as, conversely, the selfsame product can be elevated by presenting itself as an invention – or in any case as a *sui generis* production and an irreducible singularity. Like every object of production in the era of capital the artwork is two things: a commodity and an activity. It is on the basis of this twofold character of productive activity that we can grasp what I would like to identify here as the internal reality of the artistic relationship, current and/or contemporary: not only, therefore, that mode of producing art which comes under the production of commodities, but that mode of producing art which is nothing other than the figure, the power of being creative in the world. Labour-power as a free bird in the forest of life.

In this regard artistic labour gains the *ontological relevance* possessed by all forms of labour in their creative facet. This is all the more so to the extent that artistic labour, through the very evolution of modes of production, becomes indistinguishable from cognitive labour. Artistic labour takes on the characteristics of cognitive labour: leading the production of commodities back to the circulation of commodities, the linguistic analysis of reproduction, virtual valorization, networks and cooperation, and so on and so forth. This ontological relevance has long been emphasized in studies on art. Particularly important in my view is

the contribution of the ‘Vienna School’, at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century, when, analysing along with Alois Riegl late Roman and/or Byzantine artistic *industry*, its authors delineated the set of forces and social models involved in artistic doing, and were thus able to grasp its ontological overdetermination: *Kunstwollen*; that is the singular will of art-making, the turning of every technique back on the one who uses it, as well as the blurring – through production – of subject and object in the historical process. In other words, we are dealing with an overdetermination of labour: *Kunstwollen* animates industry and industry breathes in *Kunstwollen*. Now, in every one of the eras we’ve mentioned what was experienced in the late-romantic period lives again. It is also worth underlining that the *Kunstwollen* is, on the one hand, of comprehensive significance for the era it describes and, on the other, singular in terms of the form through which it combines materials, the modes of production it employs, and the needs and tastes it mobilizes. *Kunstwollen* is an intentionality which in its realization does not lose its spatio-temporal impact, but instead renews it. It develops it, here and now, in a cognitive manner, showing work to be the ‘formative form’ of the living. The technical medium is spiritual, and vice versa.

Let’s take two more references from the history of art criticism, from the works of Wilhelm Dilthey and Michel Foucault, respectively. The uses of this discussion will become clear as we proceed. Now, in Dilthey the relationship between the mode of production and artistic experience initially seems to be articulated in a very different manner from the Vienna School: the artwork is the product of an individual *Erlebnis* and artistic experience has strong psychological connotations. Little by little, however, Dilthey’s aesthetics – or, better, his analyses of the singular ‘poetics’ of romantic and post-romantic authors – develops the concepts of historical structure, expressive technique and the singularity of artistic perception, concepts which issue into a vision that is very close to that of the Vienna School. But Dilthey goes further: in artistic production, the exchange between the agent and what is acted upon becomes ever deeper and serves as the motor behind the ontological transformation of agents.

As for Foucault, he offers the *episteme* as the linchpin of the interpretation of an era, but at the same time he exposes the development of the era itself to the edge of innovation and the rhythm of discontinuity. He insists especially on the hybridization and interface processes within which the transformations of the *episteme* take place. To the question, ‘What is an author?’, Foucault already replied in 1969: *qui importe*

qui parle! (‘who cares who’s speaking!’). In 1971, with reference to Manet, Foucault sets down the forms taken by the metamorphosis of the artistic gesture: Manet – *tableau-objet* – ‘the fundamental precondition in order one day to be freed from representation itself and to allow for the play of space with its pure and simple properties, its own material properties’.

Why, then, are these authors, Dilthey and Foucault – who represent a before and after vis-à-vis the shift that introduces us to postmodernity and the hegemony of immaterial labour over the artistic scene – so important? Because here ontology and history are intimately tied together. The biopolitical is announced at this crossroads.

Biopolitical labour

Let’s return to where we began this reflection; that is, at the point where we stopped tracking the course of art history, around 1968, in terms of that turn which we identified in the end of the era of the mass-worker. Let’s now enter the new phase that opens up here. Dominated as they are by globalization and the saturation of the experience of life under capitalism, both art and labour, as we saw, have become abstract; nevertheless, subject and object refer back to one another in the play of production, where every ‘outside’ has vanished. But how can we identify the emergence of the beautiful in the passage from modern to postmodern? How can the will to make art allow us to traverse its abstraction? In order to reopen the discussion we will need to underline that a mutation has already taken place, perhaps even an anthropological *metamorphosis*. In this existence of ours, creating has likely lost all links to any kind of nature, and leaving all ‘preconceptions’ aside it is no longer even a sublimation: rather, it is something *beyond measure*, an *excess* that discovers forms for a surplus of productivity. When labour-power is cognitive, the desire for artistic expression is to be found everywhere; when the mass of workers is transformed into a *multitude* of *singular* producers, artistic activity affects the forms of life and these forms become the flesh of the world.

Bernard Stiegler, following in the footsteps of Leroi-Gourhan and Simondon, has depicted this shift very effectively. He captures the tendency towards a unification of anthropogenesis and technogenesis, as the world exposes itself to a veritable machinic turn. Cognitive labour produces objects that modify the subject. No longer in metaphysical (Heideggerian) terms but in critical (Kantian) ones, cognitive labour illuminates or ‘unveils’ through technology that ‘secret of truth’ which subjects produce through constant interrelation. ‘Depth’

is discovered when it is introduced into the circle of inside and outside, constitutive and constituted. Ultimately, the Kantian schematism – the definitive impasse of modern philosophy around which the ‘death of man’ ferments and is eventually recognized – does not issue into the sublime but rather into the circle of constitution. It is played out between the subject and the technical object, and the latter also posits itself as subject. Following Stiegler, human becoming, through man’s prostheses, constitutes the ultimate fate outlined by cognitive labour. Metamorphosis is a figure for the ontological relevance of artistic action.

But we need to introduce a further element. We have begun to perceive the efficacy of immateriality and cognitive labour with regard to art. We identified this shift in the postmodern turn, and in its unification of anthropogenesis and technogenesis. But (for a number of reasons which we won’t go into here) today the situation has been stabilized. We are no longer moving towards the postmodern, or rather, we have already moved beyond every post-. We exist in contemporaneity and this contemporaneity has further intensified the transformation of labour. From being immaterial, cognitive, affective, it is becoming ever more *bios*: it is *biopolitical labour*, an activity that reproduces forms of life. Labour is thereby infused with a series of new attributes.

First, it presents itself as *event* – that is as a vital excess beyond measure. The event detaches itself from the continuity of life’s customary horizon, but it is simultaneously internal to it, dwelling at its centre. It exists in that artificial depth which characterizes every immersion into the world of immanence; that is, in a thoroughly constructed world where nothing natural exists any longer. The event is not an ‘outside’, but an explosion in the ‘inside’, where the impossibility-of-an-exit announces a creative excess.

Second, biopolitical labour presents itself as a *multitudinous* event. We have already spoken of the ontological relevance of artistic labour and of how this ontological relevance was always marked by the *Kunstwollen*, overdetermined by an *episteme*. But the event that we identify and interpret in the production of biopolitical labour has the same collective and cultural characteristics within contemporary industry. The multitudinous character of cognitive labour is thus reconfirmed. However, this multitudinous character does not simply express a concept of interactive cooperation. The various hermeneutic schools (from Gadamer to Jauss, passing through Eco) have insisted on this effect; Simondon’s interindividual or transindividual approach described its figure and movements in the

very constitution of ‘technical objects’. But all of this does not suffice to understand and grasp the peculiar consistency of the artistic phenomenon produced by cognitive labour. In effect, it reveals itself to be something that goes beyond itself, which transcends (in this world that knows no ‘outside’) the independence and autonomy of its own production. In other words, it is given as a *multitudinous excess*.

So, third, still seeking that ontological relevance which the Vienna School had already so powerfully presented as the interpretive mark of the artistic phenomenon, we find ourselves specifying the *multitudinous event* as an excess open onto the *common*. Artistic production traverses industry and constitutes common languages. Therefore, every production is an event of communication, and the common is constructed through multitudinous events. Consequently, this is how the capacity to renew the regimes of knowledge and action that – in the era of cognitive labour – we call artistic is determined.

There’s a final point that is worth dwelling on. By insisting on the biopolitical we are reminded, retracing the history of ancient ‘poetics’, of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. I suggest rereading them: you will find yourselves immersed in a mythical configuration of life which destroys all of its parameters of necessity; you will be lost in a labyrinth of animal figures, of human and divine vicissitudes, of natural and technical prostheses that fill every space in the narrative. That is what cognitive labour (and every mode of production linked to it) manages to do. Every mythical resonance that this doing had in Ovid has vanished. Consequently, in this disenchanted world in which we find ourselves we frequently come up against things which are, as it were, too real: this world of ours sometimes fills up with monsters, and we end up trembling. We would like this not to be true, but it is: that is the contemporary. We recognize this each and every time we deal with the monsters that our action and work produce and that relations of domination cause to proliferate. And the monster – as we saw when we reflected on the ‘reversibility’ which is always created in the relation between machinic subjects and objects – the monster lives inside us, or is one of our prostheses, and it can turn back on us and partake in our metamorphosis. This is all the more reason for us to recognize the danger, every time we highlight the physical character of immaterial labour, the flesh of cognitive labour – in brief, the common of life, the biopolitical, which constitutes us. Yet another paradox? Of course. In effect, moving within abstraction and immateriality, confronted by monsters, we are

increasingly required to determine testing criteria that will have a bearing on corporeality – that is, on the vital modalities of *existential critique*.

Artistic production today

The discovery that contemporaneity, and the mode of production that prevails within it, unfolds in danger, in contact with the monster, makes a reflection on the common obligatory: a *decision on the sense of being* – that is, on the direction that the event and the multitude must take in order to give meaning to the common. The aesthetic gesture (when it is interpreted in the form that we have done here) finds *ethical decision* on its path. We live in the midst of transformation, of the metamorphosis of space and time determined by the contemporary accumulation of work and civilization. Bodies are at stake within the process of transformation. Crises constantly break out which allow of no external solution. That is where we are, and we cannot go elsewhere. But we have this astonishing speech that we are capable of expressing, this creative capacity that we can put forward. By recapitulating the productive and the ontological, the event and the common, art thus could (perhaps it simply must) give ethical meaning to this predicament, helping us to construct that multiple paradigm in which being for the other, being in the common, triumphs.

Can we draft prescriptions for a *style* that would be infused by an ethics? Asking oneself this is like asking oneself if it is once again possible to have access to a grand narrative on being. Or, better, whether it is possible to get close to a concrete utopia. I think so. And I would like to propose, coherently with what we have critically constructed up to this point, a three-stage approach, through which a style of artistic production may be defined today.

The first stage consists in the *immersion* into the infinite movement of the bodies and events that surround us, from images of life to expressions of knowledge; or, better, to undertake that work of *deconstruction* of the real that immersion as such demands, when it is driven by a critical desire. Bare life and clothed life, poverty and wealth, critical desire and construction of the real – this always constitutes the section of the diagram of immersion into true reality. We find ourselves partaking in the composition of the *swarm* of singularities. These singularities want to converge in the common while keeping their freedom.

The second stage is reflexive. It presents itself as the moment of the *recognition* of the common. Here we act as a reconstituted swarm, not merely as a multitude but as a swarm that organizes the figures of flight and

movement, the manner in which it is delineated as a viable and/or volatile direction, the materialist *telos* that surges up from below, from each and every one of its singularities. Thus the impoverished immersion (of the lone singularity) into the multiplicity of the swarm finds here the direction and cohesion of love. Through love – that is, through that force which Spinoza saw as forming itself out *conatus* and *cupiditas* – the solidarity of bodies and decisions of the spirit is constructed. A veritable *metamorphosis* thus takes place within the complex multiplicity that constructs the swarm. Immaterial labour has finally found an ethical legitimacy that is structurally bound to the way it reinvents itself as form of life. Art defines itself as form of life, characterized by poverty at its base, and by revolutionary will at the apex of the becoming-swarm.

We have now reached the third stage of this movement. Some time ago, Paolo Virno, anticipating many of the insights and concepts that were later expressed with respect to immaterial labour, defined the performances of this labour in terms of the *masterwork* (*capolavoro*). This hermeneutic anticipation by Virno should be given its due. But it should be developed further, once the homology between the formation of the multitudinous swarm and the operability of immaterial labour (as well as cognitive and affective labour) is recognized. The common that has developed within artistic forms must now be embodied in a collective decision, in a common government. Or, better, it should be organized by a governance of/on/in the forms of life that have been constructed. The highpoint is to be found in this construction of the ethico-political limit of the common, in this internal government of agency; that is, when the experience of the common – in opposition to any illusion of community – expresses free and rich forms of life.

To take up again the image of the beautiful which, as we recalled above, the Kantian schematism began to formulate, we could say that beyond a sublime that organizes itself at the limit of the mathematical infinite and a second model of the sublime that is elevated by the immensity of nature, there is a third model which hinges on ethical action, on the constitution of the multitudinous *telos*. This third model of the sublime takes shape at the limit constructed by *amor* (in Spinoza) as it completes the movement of *cupiditas*. The common as ethical sublime, the common as aesthetic sublime: against every spiritualist mystification there stands here that intersection of anthropogenesis and technogenesis identified by Stiegler and which we had considered with reference to the constitution and disclosure of the common.

Translated by Alberto Toscano

Art, work and politics in disciplinary societies and societies of security

Maurizio Lazzarato

According to Michel Foucault, for some time we have been leaving disciplinary societies in order to enter into societies of security that, unlike the former, ‘tolerate a whole host of behaviours that are *different, varied, or even deviant and antagonistic* toward one another’.¹ These societies lead us beyond disciplines, because they put in place policies regarding the government of conducts that are exercised through the management of heterogeneities and the ‘optimization of systems of differences’ – that is, through the differential administration of inequalities (disparities in situation, income, status, knowledge, and so on).

Again according to Foucault, in societies of security the function of liberal policies regarding the government of conducts is ‘to produce, instigate and enhance freedoms’, ‘to introduce a surplus of freedom’, but to do so ‘through a surplus of control and intervention’. The government of conducts, Foucault says, ‘produces freedom, but, in the same gesture, implies that limitations, controls, and coercions are set in place’.

Following Félix Guattari, we can make these statements more precise. While contemporary capitalism produces a ‘generalized control, it is nevertheless forced to preserve a minimum of degrees of freedom, creativity, and inventiveness in the domain of the sciences, technologies and the arts, without which the system would collapse in a kind of entropic inertia’.² Just like the production of disparities or inequalities, the production of freedom is differential. Depending on the situations, activities, social groups and balance of forces at stake, there will be what Guattari defines as absolutely heterogeneous ‘coefficients of freedom’. The government of conducts will then be exercised through a modulation of coefficients of heterogeneity and coefficients of freedom.

In order to grasp these modalities of the government of contemporary capitalism, it is perhaps useful to analyse what modernity regarded as the very paradigm of freedom, heterogeneity, difference and deviance:

art and the artist. To the passage from disciplinary societies to societies of security there corresponds a transformation in artistic practices and techniques, in the conception and function of art, artists and publics, in the relationship that the latter entertain with society, the economy and politics. In order to analyse this passage we will make use of Jacques Rancière’s ‘aesthetic regime of the arts’ – which in my view makes perfectly explicit what we no longer are – alongside the work of Marcel Duchamp, and freely interpret a novella by Kafka, which will allow us to grasp what we are in the process of becoming.

The practice and anti-dialectical thought of an anartist

In Rancière’s ‘aesthetic regime of the arts’, art is a specific activity that suspends the customary connections and spatio-temporal coordinates of sensory experience, which is marked by the dualisms of activity and passivity, form and matter, sensibility and understanding. These dualisms, which Rancière defines as a ‘partition of the sensible’, are political in the sense that they separate and hierarchize society according to relations of domination that organize the power of men of ‘refined culture’ (activity) over men of ‘simple nature’ (passivity), the power of men of leisure (freedom) over men of work (necessity), the power of the class of intellectual labour (autonomy) over the class of manual labour (subordination).

This conception of art as a heterogeneous and ‘specific sensorium’, opposed to the sensorium of work qua domination, harbours the promise of the abolition of the separation between ‘play’ and ‘work’, between activity and passivity, between autonomy and subordination, in accordance with two different modalities which are in effect two politics of aesthetics. According to Rancière, these two modalities inform the politics of art to this very day. The first (the becoming life of art) does politics by suppressing the separation

between art and life, and therefore by suppressing itself qua separate activity. The second (resistant art) does politics by jealously safeguarding this very separation, as a guarantee of autonomy from the world of commodities, markets and capitalist valorization.³

This partition of the sensible that distributes places and functions in society, the economy and politics, as well as in art, is one we have been in the process of leaving behind ever since the end of World War II. Under the conditions of contemporary capitalism, all these dialectical oppositions no longer represent alternatives. They have become mere options for capital.

Play – which Rancière, following Schiller, treats as the prerogative of humanity, since it consists in a gratuitous and non-finalized activity, grounding both ‘the autonomy of a proper domain of art and the construction of the forms of a new collective life’⁴ – no longer constitutes an alternative to work as domination. The dialectical opposition between play and work has been transformed into a continuum, of which play and work are only the two extremes. Between the two, it is possible to arrange in a thousand different ways the coefficients of work and play, autonomy and subordination, activity and passivity, intellectual and manual labour, which nourish capitalist valorization.

Marcel Duchamp invites us to insert into the intervals of dialectical oppositions a third term which acts neither as a mediation nor as an agent of overcoming, but as an operator of disjunction that dispels the oppositions which structure not only our aesthetic principles and tastes but, more generally, our ways of saying and doing. The spread of this artistic practice and thought, which in the main came together at the beginning of our century, is strictly tied to the growing power and consolidation of that government of conducts which was deployed starting at the end of World War II and which experienced a strong acceleration from the 1960s onwards. In the interval between the artwork and the industrial object, Duchamp inserts his best-known invention, the readymade. The readymade instigates the flight of the use-value both of the industrial object (its utility and functionality) and of the artwork (a non-utility which has its function, a non-finality which has its place in capitalist society and valorization).

The readymade short-circuits and problematizes the worker’s manufacture, but also the talent and virtuosity of the artist. It comes after Rimbaud’s ‘century of hands’ – the hands of the artist’s craftwork as well as of the worker’s manual labour. The readymade does not involve any virtuosity, technique or particular know-how, so it ‘desacralizes’ and deprofessionalizes the artist’s function, making it possible ‘to lower his

social status’. Anyone can become an artist, anything can become a work, all that is needed is for each to find its public (and the institution’s visibility and statements).

In the interval between play and work, we can introduce choice. The readymade is not fabricated, but chosen. ‘The difficulty for me was to choose.’ But for Duchamp this choice is neither intentional nor conscious; it expresses neither the interiority nor the taste of the artist. He chooses to choose, instead of fabricating something with his own hands. Duchamp will even say that ‘one doesn’t choose a readymade, one is chosen by it’, so that the choice dispels the opposition between determinism and free will. In the interval between activity and passivity, we can insert the ‘doing nothing’, which is the refusal to accomplish what is asked of you, whether it be the passivity of the worker or the activity of the artist (or the immaterial labourer). ‘Acting at the minimum’, rather than allowing oneself to be trapped by the alternative between artistic creation and waged labour. For Duchamp both are functions, occupations to which one is assigned. On the one hand, ‘now artists are integrated, commercialized, too commercialized’. Ever since there has been a market for painting, painters ‘no longer make painting, but cheques’. On the other, ‘to be forced to work in order to exist is a kind of infamy’. ‘Doing nothing’, ‘acting at the minimum’, means subtracting oneself from the distribution of competencies in contemporary capitalism.

We could continue having fun exploding dialectical oppositions. For reasons of time, I will just mention another one, without developing it further: in the interval of the opposition between the sensible and the intelligible we can, following Duchamp, introduce ‘belief’.

Duchamp explains himself very clearly concerning the false heterogeneity represented by dialectical oppositional couples. In fact, if two things are opposed to one another, it is in favour of their very homogeneity.

If I am against the word ‘anti’, it’s because it’s a little like ‘atheist’ as compared to ‘believer’. An atheist is almost as religious as a believer, and an anti-artist is almost as artistic as an artist.... ‘An-artist’ would be a lot better, if I could change the term, than ‘anti-artist’.⁵

With his customary humour, Duchamp uses a readymade to undermine the dialectical logic of exclusive disjunction of the type ‘either/or’, and to allow the logic of inclusive disjunctions of the ‘and’ to function.

I lived in Paris in a tiny apartment. In order to use this meagre space to the utmost, I decided to use



a single door panel which shut alternately on two frames. I showed it to some friends, telling them that the proverb according to which 'A door must be either shut or open' was thereby caught in a flagrant crime of inexactitude.

The door at rue Larrey, simultaneously open *and* shut, is an example of the 'co-intelligence of contraries' whose closest counterpart in the domain of philosophy seems to me to be the disjunctive synthesis.

The readymade does not testify to the dialectical passage from the prosaic world of commodities to the proper world of art, nor to the blurred boundary between art and non-art; nor indeed does it constitute a simple amalgam (or clash) between heterogeneous elements. In Rancière's dialectical logic, modern and contemporary art is this very passage, this blurring, this clash. With the readymade, the manufactured or fabricated industrial object does not move into the aesthetic domain but, on the contrary, introduces us to a 'completely empty domain, if you will, empty of everything to the point that I have spoken of complete anaesthesia'. This empty region 'where neither time nor space reigns' is the place from which simultaneously to problematize the modes of constitution of the artwork and of the commodity, interrogating the forces, principles and *dispositifs* that institute them and consolidate them into values.

Art does not represent a promise of the overcoming of domination, as in Rancière's aesthetic regime of the arts, because Duchamp's gesture not only suspends the preconditions for the exercise of this regime, but also suspends aesthetic values and tastes as such. What interests Duchamp in the 'creative act' is not so much

the artwork as such, but 'the subjective mechanism that produces an artwork'; that is, the process of social production that institutes art, the artist, the work and the public. Duchamp's techniques are not exclusively artistic techniques, but rather 'mental techniques' (Jean Philippe Antoine) or 'techniques of subjectivation' (Félix Guattari). Duchamp's techniques amount to a method for extricating oneself from all established values, not just aesthetic ones. Given a thing, a word and the relation between the two, how can we be rid of the social clichés borne by this relation?

We are confounded by an accumulation of principles and anti-principles which generally cloud our minds with their terminology.

The void, the 'freedom of indifference', and complete anaesthesia are not the bearers of some kind of post-modern nihilism, but rather techniques to suspend the prefabricated sensations, habits, judgements (or prejudices) which are crystallized in tastes as well as in words.

Taste confers a sensual feeling, not an aesthetic emotion. Taste presupposes an authoritarian spectator who imposes what he loves or does not love, and translates into 'beautiful' and 'ugly' what he finds pleasant or unpleasant [a translation of the unknown into the known, the already-there – ML]. In a completely different way, the 'victim' of the aesthetic echo [who is forced to think and feel despite himself – ML] is in a comparable position to that of a man in love, or a believer, who spontaneously rejects the demands of his ego and who, now deprived of supports, subjects himself to a pleasing and mysterious constraint. By exercising his taste, he adopts an attitude of authority, whilst

when he's touched by aesthetic revelation, the same man, in a quasi-ecstatic mode, becomes receptive and humble.

The dissociation of art and taste leads to the openness of the 'idiot' who falls in love, to the innocence of the idiot who believes in God, of which the Dadaist idiot is but one embodiment. By rejecting prejudices, conventions and established values – among which we must include the self – the idiot returns to this 'point of emergence of the production of subjectivity', which for Guattari constitutes the specific task of the artist.

'Shock has been one of the principal themes of modern art, its material.' But in Duchamp shock does not simply have the 'critical' function of uncovering the world of commodities, and it does not represent the occasion for a possible gain in awareness. The suspension of established values which shock is capable of producing is the precondition for mobilizing, in the 'creative act', not the consciousness of the author and the public, but their affects (as might be done by a medium or shaman), non-verbal semiotics (the inert materials which become expressive), and non-sense (the a-signifying, non-discursive and asocial 'existential function' which sets in motion a process that will produce sense, discourse, significations, sociality). Shock is the precondition for openness to a process of transformation of subjectivity.

The plays on words that accompany all of Duchamp's works and *dispositifs* express the modalities of rupture of discursive formations. In order to express oneself artistically and in general within societies of security it is necessary to interrupt communication, to neutralize the signifying power of language. Words are wielded as weapons to open breaches in consensus and in the semiotic pollution that besets us. By short-circuiting dialectical oppositions, Duchamp opens up an 'undecidable' process. Duchamp's practical artistic propositions are undecidable because – to translate this concept from Deleuze and Guattari into Rancière's dialectical categories – autonomy and heteronomy, activity and passivity, freedom and domination are not already assigned to specific and different sensoria (those of art and of work as domination), but are distributed across a continuum in which the coefficients of freedom and domination, activity and passivity, traverse art as well as work.

Shock in Duchamp, like conflict for us today, issues into undecidable propositions, since neither the philosophy of history nor the dialectic of class struggle can serve as a standard and guide for action, or serve as guarantor for its evolution. These propositions are undecidable because their fate depends entirely

on their immanent becoming. This is a situation of absolute immanence, for there is no model – either positive ('play' in art) or negative (domination in work) – to which we can refer in order to combat it or realize it.

The aim of these practices and techniques which it would be difficult to define as exclusively aesthetic, of these undecidable propositions, is the production of subjectivity, the production of a *modus vivendi*. They are ethico-politico-aesthetic techniques, as in Félix Guattari's aesthetic paradigm or Foucault's production of subjectivity. Art does not entirely pass into life, nor does it hold itself in splendid autonomy, as the avant-gardes dreamed, because between art and life there is always a gap that cannot be filled. But it is on the basis of this gap, by installing oneself in its interval, that a production of subjectivity may take place.

I wanted to make use of painting, make use of art as a tool to establish a *modus vivendi*, some way of understanding life, that is probably to try and make my life itself into an artwork, instead of spending my life making artworks in the forms of paintings. ... The important thing is to live and have a conduct. This conduct governs my painting, my plays on words and everything I've made, from the public point of view, at least.

To reduce these techniques of subjectivation to the individualism of Stirner, whom Duchamp read assiduously, would be as reductive as equating Foucault's practical and theoretical ethos with dandyism. It is more interesting to see in these *modi vivendi* a political problem which the failure of the relationship between the political and aesthetic avant-gardes has bequeathed to us: the impossibility of separating political revolution from the revolution of the sensible, macro-political revolution from micro-political revolution, the question of politics from that of ethics.

Kafka, art, the work, the artist and the public

During the 1990s and since in the struggles of the *intermittents du spectacle* (precarious media and entertainment workers in France) an out-and-out contest was unleashed among the forces of the Left (political parties, unions, intellectuals, artists) to find out who best conformed to the disciplinary attribution which defines the functions and the roles of art, the artist and the work – whose pitiless dissection at Duchamp's hands we have just examined. A 'holy alliance' was formed to defend the neo-archaism of art as exception (a French cultural exception) and of the artist as the

professional of the profession (in terms of a defence of full-time artistic employment).

To interpret the deep transformations in artistic and cultural practices under the sign of 'great art', in order to condemn it for anti-proletarian elitism, like Boltanski & Chiapello or Bourdieu, or to celebrate its 'revolutionary' force as Badiou (another defender of dialectical thought) envisages, is a testament to the impotence of critical thought. Badiou's advocacy of a 'great art' for the workers and the people is just as reactionary as the separations between 'artistic critique' and 'social critique' made by the sociologists who authored *The New Spirit of Capitalism*.

In order to grasp our current predicament it is better to turn to Kafka, who in his very last story, from 1924, engages in a dialogue at a distance with Duchamp. In 'Josephine the Singer, or the Mouse Folk'⁶ we encounter two poles of art-production. If, with Duchamp, we had witnessed the point of view of the artist confronted with the impact of industrialization, the birth of the art market and the transformations of the public, with Josephine and the mouse people it is the latter that is at stake: a public that coincides with the people.

The mouse folk are a 'people of workers', endowed with a 'certain practical cunning', fearing neither adversities nor 'work'. Josephine the singer, as the narrator informs us, belongs to this people; that is, she works to earn her living like every other 'worker' and sings to enchant the mouse folk. In other words, she exercises two professions. The race of mice does not love music and is not musically talented. The mice, busy with their everyday worries, cannot 'rise to anything so high and remote from our usual routine as music'. Only Josephine knows how to elicit the love of music in the people. Where does this power of her singing to deeply affect its listeners come from? Where does the passion for this art originate? And, as the narrator asks himself, what kind of art are we dealing with, since the people do not love music?

Evidently, we are not dealing with the classical principles of aesthetics, since Josephine's art is not 'so great that even the most insensitive cannot be deaf to it; her singing does not 'give one an immediate and lasting feeling of being something out of the ordinary', and what the people hear is not 'something that Josephine alone and no one else can enable us to hear'. 'Among intimates we admit freely to one another that Josephine's singing, as singing, is nothing out of the ordinary. Is it in fact singing at all?', the narrator asks. Josephine's singing 'hardly rises above that of our usual piping – yet perhaps her strength is not even

equal to our usual piping, whereas an ordinary farm hand can keep it up effortlessly all day long'.

Piping is the 'real talent of the people' of mice. 'We all pipe, but of course no one dreams of making out that our piping is an art.' So there's nothing exceptional, no genius, no sublimity, no technique and no talent in Josephine's art, since the capacity to pipe is shared by all, and requires no virtuosity. It is not just the 'anyone' (even the vulgar farm hand pipes whilst working) and the 'anything' (a piping so feeble that it is difficult to tell it apart from the silence surrounding it) which seem to define her art, but also the 'anywhere'. Josephine's 'concerts' are prey to the fortuitousness of circumstances, as well as her whim. 'She can do this where she likes, it need not be a place visible a long way off, any secluded corner pitched on in a moment's caprice will serve as well.'

Were this true it would certainly deny Josephine her claim to the status of artist. The fact that her status 'has never been quite defined' is indeed what makes her nervous and uneasy. To resolve the enigma of this 'mediocre' art the narrator multiplies the questions and suggest several avenues. All these questions will be left unanswered, which leaves the public of readers – as well as Duchamp's 'posterity, that pretty bitch' – with a total freedom of interpretation.

The first avenue we encounter in the story is given by the readymade. The effects of Josephine on the public are perhaps due to a new 'form of singularity', the fact that someone makes 'a ceremonial performance out doing the usual thing', 'usual workaday piping'. Here the narrator provides an extraordinary definition of the readymade – whose existence Kafka himself almost certainly ignored – by inventing a form that Duchamp had not envisaged: readymade quotidian action, an action that, like that of piping, everyone is able to reproduce.

To crack a nut is truly no feat, so no one would ever dare to collect an audience in order to entertain it with nut-cracking. But if all the same one does do that and succeeds in entertaining the public, then it cannot be a matter of simple nut-cracking. Or it is a matter of nut-cracking, but it turns out that we have overlooked the art of cracking nuts because we were too skilled in it and that this newcomer to it first shows us its real nature, even finding it useful in making his effects to be rather less expert in nut-cracking than most of us.

As in Duchamp, the readymade is a mental technique that forces one to think, that obliges one to interrogate the 'real', since, after having experienced this strange piping, the mice can affirm that 'we admire in her what we do not at all admire in ourselves'.

But there are numerous avenues available in order to try and grasp the sources of Josephine's art. The mouse folk is a people of workers which, because of their practical spirit, basically have no childhood, since they become adults very rapidly, precisely in order to work. By suspending the space-time of everyday banality by means of techniques that are neither beautiful, nor extraordinary, nor sublime, Josephine's art opens onto the innocence of childhood, onto its pre-linguistic and pre-cognitive world, before the latter is fixed into words, tastes, opinions and judgements.

Piping is our people's daily speech, only many a one pipes his whole life long and does not know it, where here piping is set free from the fetters of daily life and it sets us free too for a little while. We certainly should not want to do without these performances ... [since, into the people's dreams] Josephine's piping drops note by note ... [and] something of our poor brief childhood is in it.

But perhaps the effects produced by Josephine's art are also due to the specific techniques she employs. Josephine's singing, 'a mere nothing in voice, a mere nothing in execution', is not the product of any technique. Were she to use techniques of musical virtuosity, she would not exercise any fascination over the mouse folk: 'A really trained singer, if ever such a one should be found among us, we could certainly not endure at such a time and we should unanimously turn away from the senselessness of any such performance.'

The effects that she produces are thus perhaps due to the fact that 'her means are so inadequate'. Non-virtuosity and the weakness of materials are 'democratic' techniques to neutralize the authority of tradition, the author and the work over the public. But perhaps the force of her singing comes from something else. Josephine does not measure herself up to the history of art and its traditions, but she plugs into the outside, into what happens. She makes art as much with small events as with large ones.

Among the mouse folk, 'a certain tradition of music is preserved, yet without making the slightest demand upon us'. On the contrary, 'every trifle, every casual incident, every nuisance, a creaking in the parquet, a grinding of teeth, a failure in the lighting incites her to heighten the effectiveness of her song... So all disturbance is welcome to her; whatever intervenes from outside to hinder the purity of her song' contributes to 'awaken the masses'. But Josephine 'likes best to sing just when things are most upset', in the midst of great contemporary events, and it is here that a different politics is opened up between Josephine's art and the people.

The relationship between Josephine and the people (the community of mice is coextensive with the public) is a problematic one, since it involves the relation between individual and people, community and singularity, freedom and equality (one of the main themes that also preoccupy Duchamp's oeuvre).

No single individual could do what in this respect the people as a whole are capable of doing. To be sure, the difference in strength between the people and the individual is so enormous that it is enough for the nursing to be drawn into the warmth of their nearness and he is sufficiently protected. To Josephine, certainly, one does not dare mention such ideas. 'Your protection isn't worth an old song', she says then ... she believes it is she who protects the people.

When she rebels against the people's communal grip, when she tries to evade its 'stable mass', its collective 'protection', Josephine is equated with an infant and the people with a father. (For Foucault, patriarchy is the aspect of the regime of sovereignty which reproduces itself within the disciplinary regime, and without which the latter could not function.)

It is true that 'whenever we get bad news ... she rises up at once' and sings, but it is not she who saves the people, 'who have always somehow managed to save themselves'. Boltanski and Chiapello might well share the narrator's viewpoint, since 'social critique' does not need 'artistic critique' in order to save itself. The events of '68, as they say, are an 'exception'. The workers' movement has always saved itself. It doesn't need Josephine. Nevertheless,

in emergencies we hearken better than at other times to Josephine's voice... It is not so much a performance of songs as an assembly of the people ... yet to be only an incidental, unnoticed performer in a corner of the assembly of the people ... she would certainly not make the sacrifice of her singing.

The singer nurses other differends with the people-public, and the main one concerns the economic status of her activity. She exercises two professions (working and singing) and she wages a veritable fight for recognition – even of an economic kind – of her singing-piping.

Josephine has been fighting for exemption from all daily work on account of her singing; she should be relieved of all responsibility for earning her daily bread ... which – apparently – should be transferred on her behalf to the people as a whole.

She lays claim to something like a guaranteed income, or at least she would like to be assured of

some continuity of income since what she demands is not a direct wage, but an income drawn from the sum of the incomes of the mice. Josephine seems to be soliciting here what she refused earlier, namely the (social) ‘protection’ of the people, of the community. But perhaps we should not view this as a contradiction, but rather as the need to establish a new relationship between (social) ‘protection’ and ‘individual freedom’, community and singularity, freedom and equality.

On the basis of the singer’s claim, it is the very status of work that becomes undecidable, since according to Josephine the strain produced by singing is greater than that of the work necessary to earn her daily bread:

Josephine argues, for instance, that the strain of working is bad for her voice, that the strain of working is of course nothing to the strain of singing, but it prevents her from being able to rest sufficiently after singing and to recuperate for more singing...

We can understand, then, why Josephine’s status is never clarified. If art in disciplinary societies is defined in opposition work, when Josephine struggles, in various guises, for the ‘recognition’ of the strain of her singing, it is this very opposition that no longer makes sense. It is the status of both art and work that must be clarified. This would lead to the invention of a new system – at once economic, political and aesthetic – whose conditions cannot even be envisaged within the theoretical framework of the present-day Left.

It is striking that the questioning of the category of work comes – as it does in France today with the *intermittents du spectacle* – from artists.

The labouring mouse-folk are not ready, like the reformist and revolutionary Left, to ask what work has become today. The caricatural version of this attitude can be found in the self-styled ‘new radicalism’ of Alain Badiou, who wants to advocate both ‘great art’ and the ‘revalorization’ of the figure of the worker and the factory as a political place, while three-quarters of the workforce today (90 per cent in the USA) will never cross the threshold of the factory gates. We are still within the art–work opposition, great art and workers – that is, within a world that has been completely turned upside down both on the side of art and on that of work.

In Kafka’s story, Josephine’s stubborn struggle and the working people’s utter refusal of her claims will lead to her disappearance: ‘The people listen to her arguments and pay no attention. Our people, so easily moved, sometimes cannot be moved at all. Their refusal is sometimes so decided that even Josephine

is taken aback.’ In an entirely arbitrary way, these pages of Kafka evoke for me the relationship between political and artistic avant-gardes in the Soviet Union. Josephine has come up against the ‘authoritatively sovereign’ people, just as the futurists and constructivists hit up against the ‘stable mass’ and ‘sovereignty’ of the working class-turned-state. This evocation in turn makes me think of a remark by Duchamp, according to which he does not believe in the universal and eternal ‘essential aspect’ of art. For Duchamp, ‘one could create a society that would refuse art, the Russians got close. It’s not funny, after all, but it’s something that can be considered.’ For the narrator ‘Josephine’s road ... must go downhill’, she will be ‘forgotten’, while the ‘authoritatively sovereign’ people ‘continue on their way’.

Prolonging our interpretation, we could affirm that the refusal of the people/class to integrate these new aesthetic practices and their new economic and political conditions in turn leads at first to the decline and then to the disappearance of the people/class.

To conclude: there is no politics of art as such, just as, moreover, there is no politics of politics as such. The transformations of aesthetic, political and economic practices are the elements of a single assemblage traversed by a single problem, of which work, art and politics constitute the different facets or viewpoints. A politics capable of confronting the capitalist government and management of differences implies not only a strategy that articulates political revolution with the revolution of the sensible, the macro with the micro, but also a politics transversal to the separate orders of the economic, the political, the social and the cultural artistic – a politics whose outlines are sketched in Kafka’s story.

Translated by Alberto Toscano

Notes

1. Michel Foucault, ‘La sécurité et l’état’, in *Dits et écrits*, vol. 2, Gallimard, Paris, 2001, p. 386.
2. Félix Guattari, *Chimère* 28, p. 18.
3. Jacques Rancière, *Le partage du sensible: Esthétique et politique*, Le Fabrique-Éditions, Paris, 2000; translated by Gabriel Rockhill as *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, Continuum, London and New York, 2004.
4. Jacques Rancière, *Malaise dans l’esthétique*, Galilée, Paris, 2004.
5. All Duchamp quotations are from Bernard Marcadé, *Marcel Duchamp, la vie à crédit*, Flammarion, Paris, 2007.
6. All quotations are taken from Franz Kafka, ‘Josephine the Singer, or the Mouse Folk’, trans. Willa and Edwin Muir, in *The Complete Stories*, Schocken Books, New York, 1971, pp. 360–76.

The materiality of the immaterial

Foucault, against the return of idealisms and new vitalisms

Judith Revel

For some years, philosophical thinking has seemed to revolve around themes and terms whose centrality merits consideration – so much more so, probably, in that this debate has been formulated from positions and questions that are moreover very heterogeneous. I am especially thinking of a whole series of considerations found at the crossroads of two fields of enquiry that the tradition of the history of philosophy has nevertheless sought to oppose: on the one hand, an extraordinary renewal of problematics arising not so much from aesthetics as from artists and art critics themselves; and, on the other, paths opened up by a reformulation of categories of political economy and the sociology of work. At the intersection of these two spaces of reflection are to be found a certain number of notions – ‘art’, ‘creation’, ‘invention’, ‘production’, ‘technique’, ‘work’, ‘materiality’ and ‘immateriality’ – which undoubtedly merit attention. To participate in this day devoted to ‘Art and Immaterial Labour’ is in this sense to seek to problematize something which cannot be taken for granted and which represents for so many among us the heart of our own thinking and practice.

I would like to begin with the different meanings Michel Foucault successively gave to the notion of ‘art’ in order to try to show the extent to which the concepts of creation, innovation, production and work can be seen as linked together and how far they also imply, in their way, at once a relation to the powers and strategies of resistance. I will equally try to show an essential element of Foucauldian analysis, namely that what is produced – the production of value or the production of subjectivity, the production of forms or languages or the production of political action – totally deconstructs the old metaphysical opposition between the ‘material’ and the ‘immaterial’, or more exactly that it displaces and reformulates their criteria. For

Foucault, as we know, the challenge is to describe ‘a history of systems of thought’, to recall the title of his chair at the Collège de France; but it is also, in an immediate and inseparable way, the will to say and put into practice possible resistances to historically determined systems of knowledge/power.

There is a strong temptation to imagine that the only conceivable resistance would be from an *outside* of powers, forms of knowledge or history itself. This is what I will call the new metaphysical ‘temptation’, which is precisely that: the idea that an ‘outside’ is possible, that there are at least margins in which to take refuge. In the end, it is the idea that materiality – that of bodies and signs, of work and suffering, of conflict and desires, in sum of the life of men and women in history – is the sign of our confinement and subjection. Against this, I will try to show that for Foucault it is from within the materiality of life – as a historical production, within the very meshes of power – that resistance is possible. Freedom is not a ghostly *outside* but the material concretizing of ‘inside’, reconstituted as weapon of war – in other words, as a creative, incommensurable, excessive (*excédante*) matrix.

Consequently, it will be a question of avoiding the dangers of a fascination for ‘archaeological’ materiality – for example that of the old Fordist paradigm of work, or that of a direct opposition between technique and art – just as it will also be a question (and here there is no doubt a polemical element which I absolutely maintain) of avoiding, due to new theorizations of ‘immateriality’, being reduced to recycling a certain ‘idealist temptation’, residues of metaphysics or that vitalist irrationalism, which as we know was so historically powerful a century ago on the intellectual scene; or, more generally, a whole series of theories which would forget that nothing escapes history and

its material, social, economic and epistemological determinations. It will then be necessary to ask in what manner it is today possible to think at once of creation and historical determination, immateriality and materiality, resistance and powers, resistance and capitalism, art and labour, the production of value and the production of the self; and in what ways this stake probably represents the essential element of all political and aesthetic thought.

The problematization of art

In thirty years of research, Foucault developed three different formulations of the question of art. The first, which is important even if not greatly thematized, corresponds to the omnipresence (in particular in the texts of the 1960s) of references to literature and painting, as well as, to a minor extent, music. Depending on the case, the reference to art can be used in a strategic way, either as the example of an act of resistance against the devices (*dispositifs*) of established power – by accentuating the critical dimension of the creative act, as is generally the case in the analysis of the ‘speech’ (*parole*) of certain authors, a sort of war-machine flung against notions of the work and the author, of which Raymond Roussel is the clearest example – or, on the contrary, in order to show how the *épistémè* of an age is concentrated and rendered tangible (and by that fact made readable) in it – as for example is the case of the analysis of *Las Meninas* by Velásquez which opens *Les Mots et les choses*¹ or, later, by way of Manet’s *Bar des Folies-Bergères*, during a memorable conference, given in Tunisia in 1971.² Let’s call this first formulation ‘linguistic’ in the widest sense, to the extent to which it works on expressive forms – in other words, those which reveal signs and produce meanings.

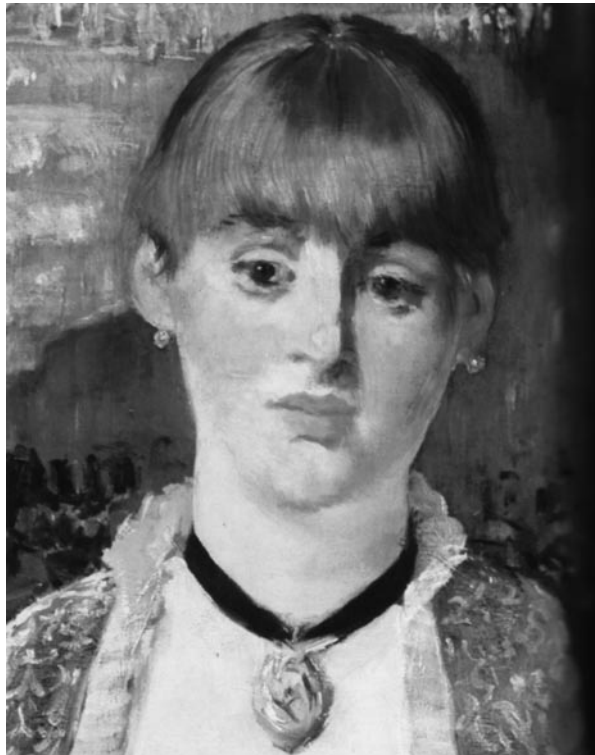
What is immediately striking, when one looks at these texts, is the omnipresence of materiality. There is in Foucault a reflection about art as, at once, a registration of instituted signs and forms and a resistant counter-production of signs, or rather a counter-signifying or hetero-signifying production (I am here borrowing the beautiful expression Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari uses in *Mille Plateaux*³). It is thus really a question for Foucault of describing the spaces of dominant representation and intelligibility characteristic of a given period (for example, the painting by Velásquez as a representation of the space of intelligibility of the classical age; or that of Manet as a figuration of the emergence of a new epistemic space in the nineteenth century); but there is *also, still*, a question of imagining the forms that ‘regimes of counter-signifying signs’ could take; in other words, of

posing the question of the conditions of the possibility and modalities of a resistance which would choose as its battlefield heterodox expression, what Foucault still sometimes called ‘structural esotericism’. What is fascinating is that Foucault considered this resistance only because it was given as a strategy of displacement in the direction of the materiality of signs.

I will give only one example, in the literary field, since it was there that, at the beginning of the 1960s, Foucauldian discourse found its most resonant formulations. In Raymond Roussel, as well as (to various extents and with some differences) in Louis Wolfson or Jean-Pierre Brisset, literary production and resistance to the instituted order of language were assessed in accordance with the extraordinary capacity to invent, from the very interior of language, an innovating language. I stress: not another language outside of that which is ours, but rather a distortion of the existing language, a bending, an unveiling, an endless return of language. This twisting, which turns the reassuring stability of language inside out, like a glove, is possible only because Roussel, Brisset and Wolfson (and before them, Foucault said, were Nerval, Baudelaire, Mallarmé and so many others) displaced the privilege of meaning towards the very substance of the sign. They reconstituted the linguistic link (the account arising from it) beginning with the homophones, assonances, wonders of echoes and sonorous mimesis, the rhythms and acoustic mirrors, and from this ‘speech’ (*parole*) rendered in its pure materiality, brought to life the most powerful of war-machines against the old idea of language as signifying representation of (and, if possible, truth to) the existent. Here, then, literature and poetry paradoxically found their creative impetus – their possibility for invention, for divergence, for difference: in short an exit from the institution of signs – to the extent that they chose to play matter against the hegemony of meaning. And it produced meaning only because they unpacked the exorbitant privilege beforehand. If we did not today have among us one of the most brilliant Matisse specialists, and if I did not risk making a fool of myself, I would refer you to another image: one of the collages of Matisse – directly cutting into the blue of the matter so as not to have to trace (in other words, to divide) the signs from what precedes their signification. This is another way of saying that matter does not always flow into categories of meaning – as though the materiality of the world should always be overdetermined by the immateriality of the mind – but that, at times, it produces exactly the opposite effect. It is matter, how we work it and bend it to our desire, to our imagination and to our

power of creation, which innovates the meaning of the world. It can thus be seen, from Foucault's work in the 1960s, how strongly the direct opposition between materiality and immateriality is at once at the centre of Foucauldian thinking and at the same time entirely rearticulated, in order to allow resistance to be thought as a creative difference.

The second problematization of the notion of 'art' concerns, from the time of *La volonté de savoir*, the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* (1976),⁴ the opposition Foucault effected between *ars erotica* and *scientia sexualis* as two different modalities of organizing the relations between power, truth and pleasure.



As Foucault introduces it,

two principal regimes can be distinguished. One is that of *art érotique*. Its truth is extracted from pleasure itself gathered as experience, analysed according to its quality... and this refined knowledge is, under the seal of the secret, transmitted by magisterial initiation to those who have demonstrated that they are worthy of it... Western civilization, for centuries in any case, has barely understood *art érotique*: it has entered into relations of power, pleasure and truth, in a completely different way: that of a 'science of sex'.⁵

The opposition, structured at the start from what was placed between the Greek world and pastoral Christianity, interests us because it does not simply involve a division into periods. Or, rather, behind such a division there is, on the one hand, an art, in other words, as Foucault tells us, at once a practice (in the case of *l'ars erotica*, a practice of the body), an

experience (of pleasures) and a relation to truth; and, on the other hand, knowledge, codes and conduct. In the first case, it is really a question of an aesthetic, and one that is inseparable from an ethic (since I take it to myself, or decide to follow rules of behaviour). In the second case, it is a system of forms of knowledge that are inseparable from a prescriptive morality – in other words, also from a codification of the fair and the unfair, the licit and the illicit, of good and bad, whose source must not only be external to the individuals over which it legislates but transcendent and immaterial.

I do not want to return here to the detail of Foucault's analysis. Let us limit ourselves to mentioning that the fundamental difference between *ars* and *scientia*, between art and knowledge, holds to the fact that if knowledge is a 'thing', an 'object', art in contrast is a practice, an experience, an action in movement. And where knowledge is an established discourse, experience implies on the contrary a transformation – of this 'self' that Foucault began at the time to think of as an unceasingly revived production, as experimentation of ways of life (*modes de vie*) and as subjectivation. If there is resistance, then, it is in the disproportion which appears between the institution and the movement, between morality and ethics, between objectivation and subjectivation, between reproduction and invention, and between the transition to the outside and the enfolding of the inside.

The third problematization arises out of the analysis Foucault developed in the second half of the 1970s, in particular with the course at the Collège de France in 1977–78, of the 'arts of government': the way in which the pure transcendent singularity of power – that of Machiavelli's *The Prince*, for example – is transformed into a complex economy of forms of government, which, in its turn, was the object of reformulations between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. That could perhaps appear to be far from what we are concerned with, were it not the occasion in which Foucault stressed two points born of his two preceding explorations, to which we would like in our turn to return.

The first point is that there exists no 'outside' if this is understood as something external to history, or to the epistemic, economic and social determinations which cause us to be what we are, or to the relations of power in which we are entangled and engaged, no matter what we do. There is no exteriority to the powers, just as there is no exteriority to history: this might be a dreadful statement of impotence and despair, but on the contrary for Foucault it is the occasion to redefine completely what can be understood

by resistance. The ‘arts of government’ and the possibilities of resistance to new strategies of government are given together, in a connected way: some relate to others that are themselves echoes of the first. To pose the question of knowledge, power or resistance, what comes first is really of no significance: the question of origin and foundation is a metaphysic which does not in fact interest us very much. On the other hand, it seems to us rather more important to underline that the ‘arts’ *also* play a role among the relations of power and the techniques of government.

The second point is that the appearances of the ‘arts of government’ correspond to the passage from an idea of power defined by its transcendence and uniqueness to one of multiple and immanent relations and defined by their mastery and efficacy over the material conditions of people’s lives, or over those, also completely material, of the production and accumulation of wealth. What counts from then on is no longer so much the foundation of authority as the manner in which it is used.

I insist on these two points because they seem to me essential both to rethinking completely what an artistic act can be and to restore content to the very idea of resistance. In the first case, if there is also an ‘art’ (in other words, skill, shrewdness and innovation) at the side of power, it is necessary to ask ourselves what distinguishes the arts of government from an ethical and aesthetic relation to the self: what is the difference between the arts of government and the project of producing oneself in relation to oneself and others, as the Greeks sought to do? To create oneself as subject – what, with reference to both Baudelaire and Walter Benjamin, Foucault sometimes called ‘dandyism’ – is ‘to make one’s own life a work of art’, in other words to delineate the space of a subjectivation, an invention of the self by the self and a freedom, within the systems of knowledge, methods of subjection and relations of power. But, inversely, to apply oneself to developing the arts of government is to include the management of these processes of subjection in the new economy of powers, seeking not to deny or prohibit them but to control and guide them. This is what Foucault called ‘governmentality’: at once the idea of a subjectivation defined as an action of creation (of the subject by itself), and that of a new rationality allowing the governing of this process. Far from directly opposing it, intransitive freedom (of subjectivation extended as creation and as *ars*) and the determinations of knowledges/powers thereby intersect in a complex and intimate way.

If it is not, then, possible to oppose power to resistance in the name of another, more profound, oppo-

sition, between transcendence and materiality; if power has become material, effective and multiple, and is deployed in an infinity of ways, how can it be imagined that something like a resistance, a torsion, can emerge at the heart of this very material, in the very meshes of power? In short, how can materiality and creativity be taken into account if they have in their turn become the ground for the deployment of power?

The vitalist temptation

On this point, thinking in both political economy and the sociology of work can be useful for us. In descriptions of how the production of the value and organization of work have changed during the past twenty-five years, or in the passage from ‘Fordism’ to ‘post-Fordism’ that some describe, we find the same questions. To say today that the production of value is no longer founded so much (as was the case in the past) in the value of trade goods – in other words, on a logic which sought to augment the number of goods produced while reducing their costs of production – but in the innovative and creative character of this production, or to say that what had been excluded by the process of economic development – the subjectivity of the worker, his life – is rediscovered, not just included in the process but at its very centre, is, in a certain way, to pose the question of difference, of the dissymmetry between art and production, or, if you like, between subjective resistance and its inveiglement by capital. I intentionally leave aside, for the moment, the question of materiality on which I would like to end my account.

What is the dissymmetry between art and capital, between the subjectivation of matter, and the way in which capital itself today uses this subjectivation to produce value, between resistance and the relations of power, between the ethical invention of ways of life and forms instituted and constrained by the dominant morality? This is, I believe, the question that haunted the final years of Michel Foucault’s research. It is also, to a great extent, the question that traverses the work of many of us today. The response is undoubtedly not easy: in proportion that the relations of power have invested in what used to be unimportant and external for them (subjectivity, life, desires, languages, art); in proportion that they have finally integrated and ‘devoured’ what, for centuries, represented an area of recess, refuge and resistance, then the question of the space of possible resistance has recurrently been raised in more forceful ways. Today, if powers have become bio-powers and the economy a bio-economy – in other words, if the paradigm of work is henceforth founded

on the inveiglement of processes of subjectivation and the innovation of life itself to produce value – what space remains for resistance? What difference can resistance still offer?

It is in response to this question, I believe, that some people have given way to a kind of neo-metaphysical idealist or vitalist temptation. It was necessary to find a difference. They thought they could locate it in a return to something that would mark its divergence in relation to the materiality and historicity of relations of power. I will take a couple of examples, among many others, in a very cursory way.

My first example is the way Giorgio Agamben uses the concept of 'bare life'. 'Bare life' is never clearly defined by Agamben, except as what remains once power has totally invested, subjected and destroyed the lives of individuals. And the context in which Agamben places himself is then a 'saturated' context, that of the Nazi concentration and/or extermination (the point is quite ambiguous in Agamben's thought) camps. What remains is not a surplus, not an affirmative and positive difference in relation to power, but a remainder. And again: if power seeks to destroy our subjective singularity, then, Agamben tells us, what remains and resists is necessarily what is most impersonal and inappropriate within us, in other words paradoxically what carries in itself a universal value, what renders universal resistance for all people. And, as it is only with great difficulty that this impersonal universality can be defined, and good that Agamben carefully distinguished at the beginning *Bios* and *Zoè*, political life and biological life, and that he chose from the beginning to place his own thinking in the field of *Bios* (*bio-politique*), he ends by defining what resists in its impropriety as natural life, biological life. *Bare* life. Resistance is no longer a political and social construction of strategies of struggle, but a withdrawal into naturalness, life delivered up to its own improper universal and biological nature. It is a process without subjects or subjectivation, without conflict or antagonism. It is what remains: the remains of a process of subtraction. It is in some way 'human nature', the foundation, the essence and quintessence, the substratum of a desingularized humanity. And when one has at hand the tremendous pages Foucault devoted to the way in which power in the nineteenth century entirely reinvested the field of pseudo-naturalness to make it an instrument in the management of populations, one feels one's blood run cold on reading the pages of Agamben... The resistance of life cannot be the naturalness of life. Resistance is always already political because life is always already within history, because

it is the product of determinations which make it what it is. Bare life does not exist.

In my second example, the illusion consists in saying that it will be possible to resist power to the extent that we would be capable of finding a way out of its range. It is then necessary to seek an 'outside' of power and, if this 'outside' cannot be found, to be content with the margins. Theories of the margins, of marginality, of the remainder, moreover ignore precisely what is most characteristic of the bio-political configuration: the relations of power have from that point invested the whole field of existence. Ideas of 'outside' or 'margins' are fantasies, at least unless, once again, a way out of history is found. I have an immense admiration for – and a fundamental debt to – the work of Jacques Derrida. But I also believe that his entire thought is made possible by the exclusion of history – a refusal of history which he not only does not conceal but openly demands. To come out of history in order to find a way out of power, this is what all thought of the margins is founded upon. This is as true for Derrida as it was in the past for Blanchot – the former having become a metaphysician even while trying to destroy metaphysics; the latter as the reactionary he was, the aesthetic providing him with a flight outside politics, something undoubtedly also the case today for Agamben, who is good at thinking about the time to come and the breathtaking messianism of Walter Benjamin, but who does so only because it paradoxically allows him not to think about history – in other words, about the materiality of the relations of power.

Against this, how can we remain in history and in the political field in order to define resistance? The dissymmetry we seek must be played out elsewhere, and otherwise than has been suggested by Agamben and Derrida. And I believe Foucault himself has supplied the response. In Foucault, there exists a very simple definition of what relations of power are. A relation of power is, Foucault says, 'an action over the action of people', which means that the relations of power are the inveiglement, the management and the directing of people's free activity. This means at least two essential things. The first is that power is the management and exploitation of freedom. It is not opposed to freedom, since it has a need for it, but exploits it. As Foucault quite rightly commented, when the relations of power are glutted, there is no longer power but domination. There is thus no power without freedom. This is the first element of dissymmetry.

Second, power is *action over action*: thus it always comes second – logically, ontologically and chronologically. Freedom is intransitive but power is not.

The transitivity of power is the necessity for it to apply itself to something that is, from the beginning, heterogeneous. In this sense, power nourishes itself on its other, upon which it is dependent. Power does not invent anything but applies itself. It does not create but manages. It does not produce but reproduces. From this double finding, the dissymmetry we seek undoubtedly begins to take shape. If resistance is possible, it is precisely through the intransitivity of freedom, from its capacity to create, invent and produce, from its *potentia* (English possesses only one word for the two distinct terms of *potentia* and *potestas*. I will therefore use the Latin terms). *Potentia* supports the innovation of the world, not its reproduction. It supports a political ethic conceived as an aesthetic of existence: remember the beautiful incitement Foucault underlined on many occasions, ‘To make oneself a work of art’, in other words literally to make one’s life the ground of one’s own resistance. It thus supports subjectivation, desires, languages and ways of life, quality and not forced objectivation, claims to universality, the order of discourse, quantity and economic moderation. Resistance is a creative development of life, art understood as a political paradigm as it puts its stake on the invention of existence against the reproduction of goods, the intransitive affirmation of freedom against the transitive management of subjection and exploitation. Resistance is an ontology.

The immaterial

There remains the question of the immaterial, and I would like to close on this point. Remember the three fields in which Foucault successively deployed his own use of the notion of art: invention of languages of resistance (the counter-signifying semantics), the invention of the self (the aesthetic of existence), and the invention of modalities of resistance within the meshes of that other art which is the art of government (biopolitics). In all three cases, it is a matter of inventing what is at once extraordinarily impalpable and concrete, immaterial and material: signs, structures and expressive forms; singular and common subjectivity; desires, pleasures and ways of life; strategies of struggle, of conflictuality and antagonism. In all three cases, nothing can resist without *potentia*, without an innovation, without an opening up of being (*ouverture de l'être*); in other words, without an affirmation of the ontological dimension of political acts of resistance. And yet this ontology is completely material: it is *in* history and is the product of a history in which it sinks its own incommensurability; it works bodies and relations, desires and actions, life understood

as social and political life, struggle and institutions, practices and discourses. This immateriality is that of matter itself. Inversely, the very matter of resistance is its immaterial capacity to produce: an ontological creation of new being. In this respect, no doubt, art has opened the way to philosophical and political reflection: plunging its hands into the world to knead its flesh, because only materiality paradoxically allows the invention of new horizons on the edge of being – what Antonio Negri described some years ago both as *kairòs* and as *désutopie*: political resistance as the only possible ontology for our present, and the will of better worlds, here and now.

Translated by Michael Richardson

Notes

1. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences* (1966), Tavistock, London, 1970.
2. Michel Foucault, *La peinture de Manet*, Seuil, Paris, 2004.
3. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1980), trans. Brian Massumi, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1987, ch. 5.
4. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, Pantheon, New York, 1978.
5. ‘L’Occident et la vérité du sexe’, *Le Monde*, 5 November 1976, p. 24; reprinted in M. Foucault, *Dits et Écrits*, vol. 3, text 181, Gallimard, Paris, 1994, p. 104.

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(T)error and poetry

Franco Berardi

1. The century of the future

Ninety-nine years ago Filippo Tommaso Marinetti published the first *Manifesto of Futurism*; the same year, Henry Ford opened his first automobile factory in Detroit. It was the beginning of the century that believed in the future. The Manifesto asserted the aesthetic value of the machine – that is, the ‘external machine’, not to be confused with the internalized and recombining machine of the bio-info era. Futurism exalted the machine as an external object, visible in the city landscape, but now the machine is inside us: we are no longer obsessed with the external machine. Instead, the ‘info-machine’ now intersects with the social nervous system, the ‘bio-machine’ interacts with the genetic becoming of the human organism.

The *Futurist Manifesto* declared the aesthetic value of speed. The myth of speed sustained the whole edifice of the imaginary of modernity, and acceleration played a crucial role in the history of capital – that is, the history of the acceleration of labour time. Productivity is the growth factor of the accretion of relative surplus value determined by the speed of the productive gesture and the intensification of its rhythm.

Ninety-nine years on, speed has been transferred from the realm of external machines to the information domain. In this process speed became internalized and transformed into a psycho-cognitive automatism. In the century of the future, the machine of speed accomplished the colonization of global space; this was followed by its colonization of the domain of time, lived experience, the mind and perception, which thus sanctioned the beginning of the century with no future.

The question of the relationship between an unlimited expansion of cyberspace and the limits of cybertime, of the time of the mind, and of social attention opens up here. At the point of the virtual intersection of the projections generated by countless issuers, cyberspace is unlimited and in a process of continuous expansion. On the contrary, cybertime, that is, the ability of the mind to process information in time – is anything but unlimited: its limits are those of the human mind and are thus organic, emotional and cultural.

Subjected to the infinite acceleration of the info-stimuli, the mind reacts with either panic or desensitization. Sensibility is the faculty that makes empathic understanding possible, the ability to comprehend what words cannot say, the power to interpret a continuum of non-discrete elements, non-verbal signs and the flows of empathy. This faculty, which enabled humans to understand ambiguous messages in the context of relationships, might now be disappearing. We are now witness to the development of a generation of human beings lacking competence in sensibility, the ability to understand the other empathically and decode signs that are not codified in a binary system.

2. Deregulation

Futurism and the avant-garde set themselves the task of violating rules. *Dérèglement* was the legacy left by Rimbaud to the experimentation of the 1900s. *Deregulation* was also the rallying cry of the hyper-capitalism of late modernity, paving the way for the development of semio-capital. In the totalitarian period of the external machine and mechanical speed, having previously used the state form to impose its rule on society, capitalism decided to do without state mediation as the techniques of recombination and the absolute speed of electronics made it possible for control to be interiorized.

In the classical form of manufacturing capitalism, price, wages and profit fluctuations were based on the relationship between necessary labour time and the determination of value. Following the introduction of microelectronic technologies and the resulting intellectualization of productive labour, the relationship between different magnitudes and different productive forces entered a period of indeterminacy. *Deregulation*, as launched by Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, marked the end of the law of value and turned its demise into a political economy. In his main work, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, Jean Baudrillard intuitively infers the overall direction of the development of the end of the millennium.

The principle of reality coincided with a certain stage of the law of value. Today, the whole system has precipitated into indeterminacy and reality has been absorbed by the hyper-reality of the code of simulation.¹

The whole system precipitates into indeterminacy as all correspondences between symbol and referent, simulation and event, value and labour time no longer hold. But isn't this also what the avant-garde aspired to? Doesn't experimental art wish to sever the link between symbol and referent? In saying this, I am not accusing the avant-garde of being the cause of neoliberal economic deregulation. Rather, I am suggesting that the anarchic utopia of the avant-garde was actualized and turned into its opposite the moment society internalized rules and capital was able to abdicate both juridical law and political rationality to abandon itself to the seeming anarchy of internalized automatisms, which is actually the most rigid form of totalitarianism.

As industrial discipline dwindled, individuals found themselves in a state of ostensible freedom. No law forced them to put up with duties and dependence. Obligations became internalized and social control was exercised through a voluntary albeit inevitable subjugation to chains of automatisms. In a regime of aleatory and fluctuating values, precariousness became the generalized form of social relations, which deeply affected the social composition and the psychic, relational and linguistic characters of a new generation as it entered the labour market. Rather than a particular form of productive relations, precariousness is the dark soul of the productive process. An uninterrupted flow of fractal and recombining info-labour circulates in the global web as the agent of universal valorization, yet its value is indeterminable. Connectivity and precariousness are two sides of the same coin: the flow of semio-capitalist production captures and connects cellularized fragments of depersonalized time; capital purchases fractals of human time and recombines them in the web. From the standpoint of capitalist valorization, this flow is uninterrupted and finds its unity in the object produced; however, from the standpoint of cognitive workers the supply of labour is fragmented: fractals of time and pulsating cells of labour are switched on and off in the large control room of global production. Therefore the supply of labour time can be disconnected from the physical and juridical person of the worker. Social labour time becomes an ocean of valorizing cells that can be summoned and recombined in accordance with the needs of capital.

3. Activism

Let us return to the Futurist Manifesto: war and the contempt for women are the essential features of mobilization, which traverses the whole parable of historical vanguards. The Futurist ambition really consisted in mobilizing social energies towards the acceleration of the productivity of the social machine. Art alimanted the discourse of advertising as the latter fed into mobilization. When industrial capitalism transposed into the new form of semio-capitalism, it first and foremost mobilized the psychic energy of society to bend it to the drive of competition and cognitive productivity. The *new economy* of the 1990s was essentially a *Prozac economy*, both neuro-mobilization and compulsory creativity.

Paul Virilio has produced important works that show the connection between war and speed: in the modern forms of domination, the imposition of war onto the whole of social life is an implicit one precisely because economic competitiveness is war, and war and the economy share common ground in speed. As Walter Benjamin wrote: 'all efforts to render politics aesthetic culminate in one thing: war.' The becoming aesthetic of life is one aspect of this mobilization of social energies. The aestheticization of war is functional to the subjugation of everyday life to the rule of history. War forces the global masses to partake in the process of self-realization of the Hegelian spirit, or, perhaps more realistically, to become part of capitalist global accumulation. Captured in the dynamics of war, everyday life is ready to be subjected to the unlimited rule of the commodity. From this standpoint, there is no difference between fascism, communism and democracy: art functions as the element of aestheticization and mobilization of everyday life. Total mobilization is terror, and terror is the ideal condition for a full realization of the capitalist plan to mobilize psychic energy. The close relation between Futurism and advertising is an integral part of this process.

In his *Art and Revolution* (Semiotext(e), 2007), Gerald Raunig writes of the relationship between the artistic avant-garde and activism. His work provides a useful phenomenological account of the relation between art and political mobilization in the twentieth century, but it fails to grasp the absolute specificity of the current situation – that is, the crisis and exhaustion of all activism.

The term 'activism' largely became influential as a result of the anti-globalization movement, which used it to describe its political communication and the connection between art and communicative action. However, this definition is a mark of its attachment

to the past and its inability to free itself from the conceptual frame of reference it inherited from the twentieth century. Should we not free ourselves from the thirst for activism that fed the twentieth century to the point of catastrophe and war? Should we not set ourselves free from the repeated and failed attempt to act for the liberation of human energies from the rule of capital? Isn't the path towards the autonomy of the social from economic and military mobilization only possible through a withdrawal into inactivity, silence and passive sabotage?

4. Lenin's depression

I believe that there is a profound relationship between the drive to activism and the male depression of late modernity, which is most evident in the voluntaristic and subjectivist organization of Leninism.

Both from the standpoint of the history of the workers' movement in the 1900s and from that of the strategic autonomy of society from capital, I am convinced that the twentieth century would have been a better century had Lenin not existed. Lenin's vision interprets a deep trend in the configuration of the psyche of modern masculinity. Male narcissism was confronted with the infinite power of capital and emerged from it frustrated, humiliated and depressed. It seems to me that Lenin's depression is a crucial element for understanding the role his thought played in the development of the politics of late modernity.

I have read Hélène Carrère d'Encausse's biography, *Lenin*. The author is a researcher of Georgian descent, who in the 1980s also published *L'empire en miettes*, where she foresaw the collapse of the Soviet empire as an effect of the insurgence of Islamic fundamentalism. What interests me in Carrère d'Encausse's biography of Lenin, more than the history of Lenin's political activity, is his personal life, his fragile psyche, and his affectionate and intellectual relationships with the women close to him: his mother, his sister, Krupskaya, comrade and wife, who looked after him at times of acute psychological crises, and, finally, Ines Armand, the perturbing, the *Unheimlich*, the lover whom Lenin decided to neutralize and remove, like music, apparently.

The framework of the psyche described in this biography is depression, and Lenin's most acute crises coincided with important political shifts in the revolutionary movement. As Carrère d'Encausse writes:

Lenin used to invest everything he did with perseverance, tenaciousness and an exceptional concentration: such consistency, which he thought necessary in each of his efforts, put him in a position

of great superiority over the people around him.

... This feature of his character often had negative effects. Exceedingly intensive efforts would tire him and wear down his already fragile nervous system. The first crisis dates back to 1902.²

These were the years of the Bolshevik turn, of *What Is To Be Done?* Krupskaya played a fundamental role in the crisis of her comrade: she intervened to filter his relations with the outside world, paid for his therapy and isolation in clinics in Switzerland and Finland. Lenin emerged from the 1902 crisis by writing *What Is To Be Done?* and engaging in the construction of a 'nucleus of steel', a block of will capable of breaking the weakest link in the imperialist chain. The second crisis arrived in 1914 at the height of the break-up of the Second International and the split of the Communists. The third crisis, as you might guess, occurred in the spring of 1917. Krupskaya found a safe resort in Finland, where Lenin conceived *The April Theses* and the decision to impose will on intelligence: a rupture that disregarded the deep dynamics of class struggle and forced upon them an external design. Intelligence is depressive, therefore will is the only cure to the abyss, to ignore it without removing it. The abyss remains and the following years uncovered it, as the century precipitated into it.

I do not intend to discuss the politics of Lenin's fundamental choices. I am interested in pointing out a relationship between Bolshevik voluntarism and the male inability to accept depression and develop it from within. Here lies the root of the subjectivist voluntarism that produced the setback of social autonomy in the 1900s. The intellectual decisions of Leninism were so powerful because they were capable of interpreting the male obsession with voluntarism as it faced depression.

5. The next wave

By the beginning of the twenty-first century the long history of the artistic avant-garde was over. Beginning with Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* and resulting in the Dadaist cry to 'Abolish art, abolish everyday life', the history of the avant-garde culminates in the gesture of 9/11. Stockhausen had the courage to say this, whilst many of us were thinking the same: terrorizing suicide is the total work of art of the century with no future. The fusion of art and life (or death – what difference does it make?) is clearly visible in the form of action that we might call 'terrorizing suicide'. Let us take Pekka Auvinen as an example. The Finnish youngster turned up to his class at school with a machine gun,

killing eight people, himself included. Printed on his T-shirt was the sentence 'Humanity is overrated'. Wasn't his gesture pregnant with signs typical of the communicative action of the arts?

Let me explain: I am not inviting the young readers of this article to go to a crowded place with an explosive belt. I am trying to say, pay attention: a gigantic wave of desperation could soon turn into a suicidal epidemic that will turn the first connective generation into a devastating psychic bomb. I do not think that this wave of suicides can be explained in terms of morality, family values and the weak discourse used by conservative thought to account for the ethical drift produced by capitalism. To understand the contemporary form of ethical shipwreck we need to reflect on the transformations of activity and labour, the subsumption of the time of the mind under the competitive realm of productivity; we have to understand the mutation of the cognitive and psycho-social system.

6. Conjunction/connection

The context of my understanding of the present historical and cultural dynamics is the transition from a realm of conjunction to one of connection, with a special focus on the emergence of the first connective generation, those who learn more words from a machine than from a mother. In this transition, a mutation of the conscious organism is taking place: to render this organism compatible with a connective environment, our cognitive system needs to be reformatted. This appears to generate a dulling of the faculties of conjunction that had hitherto characterized the human condition. The realm of sensibility is involved in this ongoing process of cognitive reformatting; we see aesthetic thought as being inserted at a juncture. Ethical and political thought is also reshaping its observational standpoint and framework around the passage from a conjunctive to a connective form of human concatenation.

Conjunction is becoming-other. In contrast, in connection each element remains distinct and interacts only functionally. Singularities change when they conjoin; they become something other than they were before their conjunction. Love changes the lover and a combination of a-signifying signs gives rise to the emergence of a meaning that does not exist prior to it. Rather than a fusion of segments, connection entails a simple effect of machinic functionality. In order to connect, segments must be compatible and open to interfacing and inter-operability. Connection requires these segments to be linguistically compat-

ible. In fact the digital web spreads and expands by progressively reducing more and more elements to a format, a standard and a code that make different segments compatible. The segments that enter this rhizome belong to different realms of nature: they are electronic, semiotic, machinic, biological and psychic; optic fibre circuits, mathematical abstractions, electromagnetic waves, human eyes, neurons and synapses. The process whereby they become compatible traverses heterogeneous fields of being and folds them onto a principle of connectivity.

The present mutation occurs in this transition from conjunction to connection, a paradigm of exchange between conscious organisms. Central to this mutation is the insertion of the electronic into the organic, the proliferation of artificial devices in the organic universe, in the body, in communication and in society. Therefore, the relationship between consciousness and sensibility is transformed and the exchange of signs undergoes a process of increasing desensitization. Conjunction is the meeting and fusion of rounded and irregular forms that infuse in a manner that is imprecise, unrepeatable, imperfect and continuous. Connection is the punctual and repeatable interaction of algorithmic functions, straight lines and points that juxtapose perfectly and are inserted and removed in discrete modes of interaction. These discrete modes make different parts compatible to predetermined standards.

The digitization of communication processes leads, on the one hand, to a sort of desensitization, to the curve and to the continuous flows of slow becoming, and, on the other, to a becoming sensitive to the code, to sudden changes of states and to the sequence of discrete signs. Interpretation follows semantic criteria in the realm of conjunction: the meaning of the signs sent by the other as she enters in conjunction with you needs to be understood by tracing the intention, the context, the nuances and the unsaid, if necessary. The interpretative criteria of the realm of connection, on the other hand, are purely syntactic. In connection, the interpreter must recognize a sequence and be able to perform the operation required by general syntax or the operating system; there is no room for margins of ambiguity in the exchange of messages, nor can the intention be shown by means of nuances.

This mutation produces painful effects in the conscious organism and we read them through the categories of psychopathology: dyslexia, anxiety and apathy, panic, depression and a sort of epidemic of suicide are spreading. However, a purely psychopathological account fails to capture the question in its depth,

because we are in fact confronted with the effort of the conscious organism to adapt to a changed environment and a readjustment of the cognitive system to the techno-communicative environment. This generates pathologies of the psychic sphere and in social relations.

Aesthetic perception – here properly conceived as the realm of sensibility and aesthesia – is directly involved in this transformation: in its attempt to interface efficiently with the connective environment, the conscious organism appears increasingly to inhibit what we call sensibility. By sensibility, we mean the faculty that enables human beings to interpret signs that are not verbal nor can be made so, the ability to understand what cannot be expressed in forms that have a finite syntax. This faculty reveals itself to be useless and even damaging in an integrated connective system. Sensibility slows down processes of interpretation and renders them aleatory and ambiguous, thus reducing the competitive efficiency of the semiotic agent.



The ethical realm where voluntary action is possible also plays an essential role in the reformatting of the cognitive system. Religious sociologists and journalists lament a sort of ethical lack of sensitivity and a general indifference in the behaviour of the new generations. In many cases, they lament the decline of ideological values or community links. However, in order to understand the discomfort that invests the ethical and political realms, the emphasis needs to be placed on aesthetics. Ethical paralysis and the inability to ethically govern individual and collective life seem to stem from a discomfort in aesthesia – the perception of the other and of the self.

7. Dystopian poetry

The arts of the 1900s favoured the register of utopia in two forms: the radical utopia of Mayakovsky and the functional utopia of the Bauhaus. The dystopian thread remained hidden in the folds of the artistic and literary imagination, in Fritz Lang, expressionism, and a kind of bitter surrealism that underlies the field of vision that connects Salvador Dalí to Philip K. Dick. In the second half of the twentieth century the literary dystopia of Orwell, Burroughs and DeLillo flourished. Only today, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, does dystopia take centre stage and conquer the whole field of the artistic imagination, thus drawing the narrative horizon of the century with no future. In the expression of contemporary poetry, in cinema, video art and novels, the marks of an epidemic of psychopathology proliferate.

In her videos, Elja Liisa Athila (*Wind, If 6 was 9, Anne Aki and God*) narrates the psychopathology of relations, the inability to touch and to be touched. In the film *Me and You and Everyone We Know*, Melinda July tells the story of a video artist who falls in love with a young man and of the difficulty of translating emotion into words and words into touch. Language is severed from affectivity. Language and sex diverge in everyday life. Sex is talked about everywhere, but sex never speaks. Pills accelerate erection because the time for caresses is limited.

A film by Jia Zhang-Ke, entitled *Still Life* (*Sanxia haoren*) and produced in Hong Kong in 2006, shows an unfolding devastation. This film is extraordinarily beautiful and tells a simple story, with the background of a sad, desolate and devastated China, as both the scenery and its soul. The predominant colour is a rotten, greyish, violet green. Huo Sanming returns to his place of birth in the hope of finding his wife and daughter, whom he had left years earlier to go and find work in a distant northern mine. His village, along the riverbank of the Yangtze, no longer exists. The construction of the Three Gorges Dam had erased many villages. Houses, people and streets were covered by water. The building of the dam proceeds, the destruction of villages continues and the water is going to keep rising. Huo Sanming arrives in this scenario of devastation and rising water and is unable to find his wife and daughter; so his search begins. He looks for them as groups of workers armed with their picks take walls down, as explosives demolish buildings in the urban centre.

After long searches he finally finds his wife; she has aged and been sold by her brother to another man. They meet in the rooms of a building as it is being

demolished and talk about their daughter in whispers, with their heads down, against a dark green spaceship background of bricks and iron spattering onto a shit-coloured sky. In the last scene of *Still Life*, a tightrope walker walks on a rope from the roofs of a house towards nothingness, against a background that recalls the dark surrealism of Dalí's bitter canvas. *Still Life* is a lyrical account of Chinese capitalism, acted inside out, from the standpoint of submerged life.

The Corrections, a novel by Jonathan Franzen published in 2001, speaks of psychopharmacological adjustments as the corrections used by a humanity devastated by depression and anxiety to adjust to an existence that must pretend to be happy. Corrections are the adjustment to a volatile stock market to avoid losing the money invested in private pension funds that might suddenly disappear. Franzen recounts the old age of a father and mother, a couple of oldies from the Midwest who have gone nuts as a result of decades of hyper-labour and conformism. Corrections are the small and unstoppable slides towards the point of turn-off, the horror of old age in the civilization of competition, the horror of sexuality in the world of puritan efficiency.

Franzen digs deep into the American psyche and describes in minute details the pulpification of the American brain, the depression and dementia resulting from a prolonged exposure to the psychic bombardment of stress from work, the apathy, paranoia, puritan hypocrisy and the pharmaceuticals industry around them, the psychic unmaking of men who are encapsulated in the claustrophobic shell of economic hyper-protection, the infantilism of a people which pretends to believe, or perhaps really believes in the fulsome Christmas fairy tale of compassionately liberalist cruelty. By the end of the long-awaited Christmas dinner, as the psychopathic family happily gathers together, the father tries to commit suicide by shooting himself in the mouth. He is not successful.

Yakizakana no Uta, an animated film by Yusuke Sakamoto, starts with a fish in cellophane wrapping on a supermarket shelf. A boy grabs it and takes it to the till; he pays, leaves, puts it in the bicycle basket and cycles home. 'Good morning Mr Student, I'm very happy to be with you. Do not worry, I'm not a fish who complains', the fish says whilst the student briskly pedals home. 'It's nice to make the acquaintance of a human being. You are extraordinary beings; you are almost the masters of the universe. Unfortunately you are not always peaceful; I would like to live in a peaceful world where everyone loves one another and even fish and humans shake hands. Oh it's so nice to

see the sunset, I like it ever so much.' The fish becomes emotional and jumps in the cellophane bag inside the basket. 'I can hear the sound of a stream ... I love the sound of streams, it reminds me something from my childhood.' When they get home the boy unpacks the fish and puts it on a plate, throws a little salt on it. As the fish gets excited and says 'Ah! I like salt very much, it reminds me of something...' the boy puts it on the grill in the oven and turns the knob. The fish keeps chatting: 'Oh Mr Student it's nice here, I can see a light down there ... I feel hot ... hot...' until its voice becomes hesitant. It starts singing a song, more and more feebly and unconnectedly, like AI in *2001: Space Odyssey* as his wires are unplugged.

Yakizakana no Uta is perhaps the most harrowing animation I saw in June 2006 at the Caixa Forum of Barcelona, during the *Historias Animadas* festival. Yet I perceived a common tone running through all of the works presented at the festival, one of ironic cynicism, if you will allow me this expression. *Place in Time* by Miguel Soares recounts millions of years from the standpoint of an improbable bug, an organic insect, as the world changes around it. *Animales de compañía* by Ruth Gomes uses ferocious images to tell the story of a generation of well-dressed anthropophagi, young beasts in ties; they run and run to avoid being caught by fellows, colleagues, friends and lovers who wound, kill and eat them as soon as they fall into their grip, with terrorized smiles and dilated eyes.

This art is no denunciation. The terms 'denunciation' and 'engagement' no longer have meaning when you are a fish getting ready to be cooked. The art of the twenty-first century no longer has that kind of energy, even though it keeps using expressions from the 1900s, perhaps out of modesty, perhaps because it is scared of its own truth. Artists no longer search the way to a rupture, and how could they? They seek a path that leads to a state of equilibrium between irony and cynicism that allows them to suspend the execution, at least for a moment.

Is art the postponement of the holocaust?

All energy has moved to the war front.

Artistic sensibility registers this shift and is incapable of opposing it.

Translated by Arianna Bove

Notes

1. Jean Baudrillard, *L'échange symbolique et la mort*, Gallimard, Paris, 1976, p. 12; *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, trans. Ian Hamilton Grant, Sage, London, 1993.
2. Hélène Carrère d'Encausse, *Lenin*, Fayard, Paris, 1998, p. 78; *Lenin*, trans. George Holloch, Holmes & Meier, Teaneck NJ, 2002.

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The Maoist march through the institutions

Julian Bourg, *From Revolution to Ethics: May '68 and Contemporary French Thought*, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal and London, 2007. 488 pp., £19.99 hb., 978 0 77353 199 4.

Julian Bourg's rich study of the fallout from May '68 in French political and intellectual life seeks to move beyond the narrative of fidelity or betrayal that has shaped much recent scholarship on the subject. Refusing the notion that the 'ethical turn' of French thought is best understood as a reactionary surge against the forces unleashed by the May events, Bourg signals his provocation with his title: *From Revolution to Ethics*. Ruptures and folds notwithstanding, the bedrock of history is continuous in Bourg's view, and the challenge to historians of postwar France is to explain how an explosive obsession with revolutionary transformation gave way to (or, better yet, itself *transformed* into) a variegated and extensive rumination on ethics. Though Hegel receives scant mention in this work, it is clear that Bourg grants all manner of cunning to history and its transformative powers. Also evident is the conviction that betrayal, though political or personal, is not a historical category. To borrow a keyword from the period, the revolutionary fervour of May '68 set in motion a profound *épanouissement* (blossoming). A renewed fascination with ethics was the result.

Bourg traces the transformation in question over four loosely connected episodes, or case studies, all taking place primarily within the 1970s: (1) the relationship between French Maoism and debates over prison conditions; (2) the institutional roots of the 'philosophy of desire' and its supreme expression in *Anti-Oedipus*; (3) disputes with feminist 'moralists' concerning sexual rights; and (4) the New Philosophy phenomenon. In addition to forming the larger narrative arc of the 'ethical turn', each case stands on its own as an example of contestation on the ground in the heady collision of ideas and practices, impulses and barriers, or – to use a key distinction for his interpretation – desires and limits. Bourg's claim is that the essential impulse of May '68 was antinomian – that is, against *nomos*, against *law*. By implication, this antinomianism could not but lead to a consideration of *ethos*, the quality of being together, and the attendant challenges of how that being together ought to take place in the absence of a transcendental guarantor. Bourg writes, 'The rhetoric of revolution often

concealed non-revolutionary, democratic substance.' The assumption that 'revolutionary' and 'democratic' are oppositional categories is revealing. Is not the 'substance' of most revolutions democratic, at least in their initial impulses? German historians have referred to Bismarck as a 'white revolutionary' and to the Nazi 'revolution from above'. These qualifiers are added to the core term 'revolution' precisely to distinguish these historical developments from the redundant concept of 'democratic revolution'. One of the signal virtues of Bourg's study is to restore the emphasis on the democratic impulse of revolution in a singular historical context and to show that this impulse is not fleeting, but endures. This move is all the more valuable today, when partisans of either concept – democracy or revolution – tend, for reasons more polemical than persuasive, to disparage the other as its nominal opposite.

Bourg's effort to link revolution and democracy under the banner of 'contestatory spirit' is a rejoinder to the recent attempts of Mark Lilla and others to uncover a 'native' French liberal tradition that is at the very least concordant with, if not assimilable to, an anglophone model of liberalism. (It is not coincidental that Bourg is Claude Lefort's most recent translator.) On this score, Bourg's penchant for punchy phrases serves him well; the main title of the book's penultimate chapter is 'John Locke Was Not French'. Bourg distinguishes the French idea of democracy from its English counterpart, where it is often conflated with liberalism, and the autonomies of negative liberty (to borrow Isaiah Berlin's concept) are given pride of place. The specificities of the French concept of democracy are to be found, by contrast, in the *faux ami* of the French word 'institution'. The value of this term for Bourg's analysis is that it unites his two primary concerns in one concept: the revolutionary phenomenon of bringing into being, of instituting, and the ethical phenomenon of being together as part of a shared space, or institution (or *association*, to use another French term whose English equivalent is closer in spirit). Bourg argues that the phenomena of 'bringing in' and 'being with' should not, and cannot,

be considered apart from one another. The brilliance of the argument is that it presents this mutual implication as above all a *historical* phenomenon.

As a result of this conviction, Bourg tends to bracket political judgements in favour of historical ones. Indeed, a dogged ambivalence on political questions persists throughout, which is not without its own value for Bourg's scholarly enterprise since it is at the level of isolated historical processes in specific institutional contexts that his talents really shine. This is particularly apparent in his discussion of Maoism (addressed below). Bourg bristled his reviewer Patrick ffrench (see *RP* 134) when, in the introduction to his edited volume, *After the Deluge*, Bourg likened historians of postwar French intellectual life to janitors sifting the rubble after a huge ballroom party. In addition to being condescending (intentionally or not), the metaphor seems curiously self-defeating in retrospect. Bourg narrates an explosion of energy and activity infused with a seriousness that transcends the frivolities of a shindig. And yet, in a way, the party metaphor is apt for Bourg's account in that his bird's-eye view of the period in question locates various cliques and clusters of intellectual activity often interconnected by means of one or two interlocutors who travel between them.

In this regard, Michel Foucault is the belle of the ball. He channels the forces of the Maoist 'investigation' (*enquête*) into an institutional and structural assessment of the modern prison, a process that brings him into closer working contact with his Vincennes colleague Gilles Deleuze. Foucault's exposure to the

machinations of immanent power in the prisons will colour his later endorsement of *Anti-Oedipus* as 'the first book of ethics to be written in France in quite a long time'. Maurice Clavel, 'uncle' of the New Philosophers and a curious figure in his own right – an erstwhile Resistant, close to de Gaulle, who swung to the far Left after his Catholic conversion and then devoted his scholarly energies to Kant – would laud Foucault precisely because he killed 'man', who had been unduly divinized since the prematurely declared 'death of God'.

In addition to the ethical turn, Foucault becomes implicated in the theological one as well. To take another example, Bourg ties some of Guy Hocquenghem's more distasteful disparagements of French feminism to the desire-without-limits of his colleague Deleuze. For all of the thematic connective tissues, not to mention shifting personal allegiances, there remains something speculative about the larger narrative links that Bourg forges between sections of his book, from the desire unleashed by *Anti-Oedipus*, to its channeling through the intermediary of Hocquenghem's 'dark homosexuality', and ultimately to the limits it faced in the French courts when feminists strove to have rape taken more seriously by the judicial system. But the question concerning desire is in this case more one of milieu than of the content of a specific volume, as Bourg himself concedes. Indeed, readers interested in grappling with Deleuze's philosophy more generally are advised to look elsewhere. Bourg is exclusively interested in *Anti-Oedipus* and its gestation.



And here Bourg has a fascinating story to tell, one that puts the emphasis on Félix Guattari and not merely for the sake of equal opportunity. Guattari's experiences at the La Borde clinic were formative for his creative relationship with Deleuze. Bourg traces a royal road from the shattering of subjective autonomy manifested in the experiments of institutional psychotherapy, to the nomadic lines of flight of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. The emphasis on the institution here, and all of the attendant questions of relationality that inhere in an institution, is absolutely essential, as is the dissolution of the institutional context that takes place once Guattari teams up with Deleuze. If anything, Bourg reads Deleuze as the corrupting influence in the partnership. Though cursory and schematic, the assessment of Deleuze's 'Spinozist ethics' in this section is largely consistent with a critique that has been gaining traction. Bourg contends it was Deleuze's 'covert naturalism', derived from a Spinozist infinite, that exploded the provisional limits that ebbed and flowed within the 'transversal' institutional settings that Guattari had theretofore seen as essential.

The next section of Bourg's account, on 'French Feminist "Moralism" and the Limits of Desire', should be required reading. The shift from an emphasis on reproductive rights to judicial recourse for victims of rape was tantamount to a shift from an antinomian position 'outside the law (abortion was illegal) to a feminist position operating *within* the law (rape should be criminalized and punished)'. In other words, a critique of external regulation gave way to an effort to elaborate more viable modes of internal regulation and participatory inclusion. The radical Left decried this position as complicit with a statism that subjugates us all. Guy Hocquenghem led the charge against the 'moral rearmament' of 'Mao-feminism', claiming that this feminism was merely the latest form of a regressive humanism. Hocquenghem condemned the 'transcendental qualities of the vagina' which fortunately were not bestowed upon 'the anus of the gay man'. 'Because', Hocquenghem wrote, 'who in the end has ever seen a fag complain about being raped?'

Such deliberately provocative remarks are even more disconcerting in their context, here following the conclusion of a rape trial in 1977 wherein efforts to exculpate the accused turned on the 'sexual misery' that resulted from his being an Egyptian student in France. Several years earlier, a flurry of debate had been set off when a student identifying himself as 'Mohamed' wrote a letter to the magazine *Tout!* to inveigh against the racism of French women who wouldn't sleep with him. Mohamed inveighed again

in the same pages of *Libération* where Hocquenghem offered his two cents. Race, sex, and class politics all collided in these debates over the criminality of rape. Bourg negotiates a tight position here. His point is not to deny the institutional racism and prejudice in France at this time, but instead to show here the plural values of institutions as such. Where some would use the institution (of racism, of bourgeois interests...) as an alibi for unchecked desire, others would use the institution (of legality) to develop a broader concept of participation, in this case, a woman's claim to participate in decisions about her own body. Bourg is



hesitant to paint his own position into a statist corner, and he hedges his position as a result. Citing Cathy Bernheim's own citation of Jean-Marie Domenach's call for an 'ethics [morale] without moralism', Bourg writes, 'Where such a challenge touches upon desire and power in the form of violence ... *it seems* that *at some point* ethics must involve the state and politics in a mundane sense' (stress added).

Anti-statism is a key theme of the book's final section, on 'the Main Event' of the New Philosophers. Here Bourg laments: 'We are faced with the historical significance of tedious books.' His precautions notwithstanding, Bourg's discussion of Christian Jambet and Guy Lardreau's efforts in *L'Ange* and its quasi-sequel *Le Monde* is particularly stimulating. Equally given to flights of fancy, it seems, there is still a rigour and seriousness that clearly separates the efforts of these scholars from the bombast of a Bernard-Henri Lévy. Just as Bourg took the spiralling out of control of *Anti-Oedipus* as the synecdoche for the philosophy of desire, each of the texts examined in this final section (which, in addition to those cited, include those from Clavel and André Glucksmann) serves as a stand-in for Bourg's larger claim about the historical significance of New Philosophy as the resurrection of Jansenism in French thought. The rejection of the state as worldly and thus compromised is the common idea linking the seventeenth-century theological cohort with the twentieth-century media phenomenon, as is the related notion that, given the state's worldly bankruptcy, it is in the name of something completely beyond the world and inaccessible that we must stake our claim – that is, *decide* or *wager* in the here and now. Bourg's own

claim for a 'revival' of Jansenism in the 1970s (only cited as such by participants through scattered references to Pascal) is a stroke of heuristic genius. The gesture forward to the 'discovery' of Levinas in the 1980s hardly needs to be stated.

Like much else in his study, the quality of New Philosophy as philosophy interests Bourg less than its historical significance on the level of collective intellectual activity. More interesting than its impact is its genealogy. Here we will conclude where Bourg begins, with French Maoism. An intellectual history of the meaning of Maoism in the French context remains to be written. Suffice it to say that the concept masks a plurality of French attempts to rethink the Marxist project following the collapse of the vulgar (Stalinist) base to superstructure model. We would venture here that what goes by the name of Maoism in France signals the paradox of a new privileging of the political above all, coupled with the very infusion and diffusion of the political throughout all aspects of social life. The 'betrayal' model of May '68's afterlives sees the erstwhile Maoists of the *Gauche prolétarienne*, such as Jambet and Lardreau, and their fellow-travellers, such as Sartre and Foucault, turning their backs on this moment in their personal political history in favour of a lukewarm, domesticated version of politics. But Bourg's aim is to show (and precisely *show*, for he only once says it) that Maoism was a democratizing impulse in France.

French Maoist political violence had a peculiar character, Bourg argues, in that it was defensive, largely directed against property, and, in a word, selective. There was no French equivalent to the Red Army Faction. The emphasis on the selectivity of 'political' tasks among Maoists jibed with the Maoist injunction that every situation required an 'investigation' (*enquête*) into that situation. The local and the specific were thus privileged. On the other hand, the expansion of the domain of the political – essential to Maoism – meant a consequential diminution of class as an economic category, and a resultant broadening of the sites of contestation. This broadening came to include prisons, as we have noted, but this move was not theoretical, for many Maoists found themselves in prison as a result of their activities. Through a smart contrast between Sartre's and Foucault's responses to these developments, Bourg affirms the transition from an emphasis on the plight of the autonomous prisoner to the wider view of a more general situation that includes each prisoner. For Sartre, 'the lives of *prisoners* were unbearable; whereas for Foucault it was *prison conditions* that were "intolerable".' Foucault would break with

the Maoists over the issue of popular justice, but it is Bourg's ironic point that it was Foucault's impersonal emphasis on conditions, on situations, that was in its way closer to the essence of French Maoism. The word 'intolerable' appears often throughout Bourg's account, but it is important to bear in mind the moment when it is connected to the Maoist principle 'it is right to revolt'. Foucault's position at this moment, immediately preceding the ethical turn of his own work, is of the utmost significance as it resonates with this injunction. The revolt is in the name of nothing; the judgement of 'intolerable' requires no yardstick external to the situation at hand, turning nowhere for its justification.

This recognition of the 'intolerable' is a theme that reaches its apex at the 'wager' of the new Jansenism in the book's final section, with the caveat that 'nothing' is now deemed insufficient as a yardstick and the criteria of 'another world' take its place. And yet there is a line of continuity here in the nomination of the intolerable without recourse to discernable criteria of judgement at hand. Its value as an ethical judgement draws from two sources: its very impersonality, and, concurrently, its institutional mediation. Again, here institution does not refer to the state on high and its apparatuses, but to the association of individuals who discover through an experience of impersonality (or heteronomy) the foundations for a provisionally viable and interminable ethical discourse. Bourg is wise enough to note at his book's end that, though necessary, ethics is a 'thoroughly insufficient condition for social and political life'. But it is curious to find him still brokering such a distinction this late in the game, when his own powerful analysis has done so much to compromise the notions of ethics and politics as potentially exclusive historical categories.

But this is merely the final appearance of an ambivalence running through Bourg's larger account of the *institution* of Maoism in France, which is at times frustrating, but is by and large understandable. This ambivalence draws largely from the vacillation between *nomos* and *ethos*, the poles of Bourg's analysis, and the conviction that this vacillation is interminable. But one senses too Bourg's hesitation to alienate his own readers, even as he persuades them. Making manifest, as he does, the link between 'Maoist revolution' and 'democratic ethics' is a gesture likely to antagonize constituents of both parties, who are also among the most likely to read his book. They should. The political ambivalence lingering in Bourg's voice is also the mark of his study's quality as a valuable work of historical scholarship.

Knox Peden

The communist hypothesis

Alain Badiou, *De Quoi Sarkozy est-il le nom? Circonstances 4*, Nouvelles Editions Lignes, Paris, 2007. 160 pp., €14.00 pb., 978 2 35526 003 2.

A few weeks before Nicolas Sarkozy was elected president of France in May 2007, Alain Badiou gave a lecture in Paris, reminding his listeners of the reasons why he has always refused to participate in the 'irrational', 'passive' and 'impotent' ritual of popular vote. Ten days after some of his compatriots' votes had been counted, Badiou gave a further lecture in which he consoled those dismayed by the outcome by arguing that it promised, at least, to put them out of their misery: the long-moribund parliamentary Left had now collapsed beyond hope of repair, along with the whole political order that had prevailed in France since the end of the Second World War. Sarkozy was elected, Badiou explained, because he successfully presented himself as the defender of French wealth and privilege against a diffuse global threat. He had won the election on the basis of paranoia and fear. He had waged a campaign based on a dread of foreigners, workers, immigrants, youth, terrorists, outsiders of all sorts, coupled with a ruthless determination to use whatever force might be required to keep them at bay. His politics of fear had prevailed because his rival, the Socialist Party's Ségolène Royal, could offer nothing more than a 'fear of this fear' – a tepid reluctance to sanction the development of an overtly belligerent police state. Since the traditional Left had long abandoned any attempt to formulate an emancipatory project based on the direct mobilization of the exploited or oppressed, Sarkozy's election marked the end of a politics oriented by the old opposition of Left and Right, in favour of a disorientation manipulated by the rich in their assault on the poor and their exclusion of the oppressed.

The short book *De Quoi Sarkozy est-il le nom?* develops the text of these lectures, along with a more general diagnosis of the current political conjuncture in France and a welcome call to renew a 'communist' alternative. For the first time in over thirty years, Badiou's political views have struck a chord with a substantial current of national opinion. His *Sarkozy?* sold more than 25,000 copies in its first three months in print. Horrified by the apparent resurgence of an 'unreconstructed Marxism' in the midst of the French philosophical establishment, over the last couple of months commentators from both sides of the traditional political spectrum have lined up to denounce the book in the mainstream press.

It's easy to see why Badiou's book has gone down well with its domestic audience. Badiou mastered the art of the political pamphlet a long time ago. Like most of his polemical writing, *Sarkozy?* is a rhetorical tour de force. To those demoralized by the prevailing disorientation it promises trenchant clarity and conviction. It offers a compelling and beautifully distilled assault on everything that Sarkozy stands for. It denounces his government and the political moment it represents as the summit of reactionary cowardice and corruption, and it opposes these faults with a ringing affirmation of the 'incorruptible' virtue and courage of the French revolutionary tradition.

The most effective section of the book situates Sarkozy as the most recent variation on a deeper configuration whose roots go back to Thermidor and the Restoration of 1815. Badiou calls this reactionary configuration the 'Pétainist transcendental'. As Badiou explains at length in his *Logiques des mondes* (2006), the transcendental regime of any given world is the set of operations that serve to govern and order the way its elements generally appear, the way they appear as more or less in keeping with the dominant state of things. In its various historical incarnations, the Pétainist transcendental has enabled a situation of defeat or retreat to appear instead as a glorious victory for a threatened status quo. Pétain or his avatars intervene so that 'capitulation and servility' might be presented as 'invention and regeneration'. Pétainism redescribes collaboration with external powers – the triumph of European monarchy in 1815, of the Nazis in 1940, of US hegemony today – as the most honourable strategy of national self-defence. Bolstered by racism and jingoism, Pétainist profiteers seize upon political disorientation as an opportunity to preach a return to traditional moral values, a return to 'the virtues of hard work, discipline, and the family'. Drawing on foreign example (Pétain's emulation of Mussolini, Franco or Hitler; Sarko's admiration for Blair and Bush), they combine recognition of property and 'merit' with criminalization of the poor or excluded. They justify repression of the latter by associating them with the disastrous legacy of a past event, condemned as the immediate cause of the current crisis (the revolution and regicide, for the ultras of 1815; the Popular Front and the threat of a general strike, for the collaborators of 1940; the anarchic disruption of May 1968, for Sarkozy himself).

It is Sarkozy's artful manipulation of this ingrained set of right-wing political reflexes, Badiou suggests, that has allowed him to present measures that are anti-worker, anti-immigrant, anti-foreigner and anti-poor as essential to the restoration of a 're-energized' France to its rightful place of privileged influence in the world.

Badiou opposes the neo-Pétainist reaction point by point. To its brutal distinction of us against them, Badiou proposes a tolerant acknowledgement that there are infinitely many different ways of belonging to 'just one and the same world'. To Sarkozy's demand that immigrants 'must love France', Badiou insists that 'everyone who is here is from here'. Against the politics of resentment and fear, he formulates a brief series of purely affirmative 'points' concerning work, art, science, love, health, politics, the media and the world. In response to Sarkozy's call to have done with May '68, Badiou applauds it as the 'epicentre, as far as political novelty is concerned', of the whole revolutionary decade that began in China in 1966. Above all, to Sarkozy's right-wing nationalism, Badiou urges the renewal of what he calls the 'communist hypothesis'.

It is the way that Badiou formulates the contemporary moment of this hypothesis – starting with this very decision to present it as a *hypothesis*, rather than as a project or prescription – that is likely to divide readers who may otherwise agree with his assessment of Sarkozy and Bush. What is at stake is Badiou's general conception of politics as 'organized and principled collective action that aims to develop, in the real, the consequences of a new possibility repressed by the dominant state of things.'

Drawing on the canonical texts of Marx and Engels, Badiou defines the communist hypothesis as a wager on the possibility of action that might overcome 'the fundamental subordination of labour to a dominant class'. To act in keeping with this hypothesis is to pursue the 'withering away of the state', in accordance with principles that oppose any inegalitarian division of labour or wealth.

In the last chapters of *Sarkozy?*, Badiou distinguishes between two great historical moments or sequences in the development of the communist hypothesis. The first marked its establishment as a viable hypothesis. It develops, with and after Marx, as a disciplined theory of political practice linking the organization of a 'popular mass movement to the seizure of power, through the insurrectional overthrow of the existing order'. According to Badiou, this first sequence stretches from the radical turn in the French Revolution (1792) to the defeat of the Paris Commune in 1871. After several

decades of disastrous reaction and counter-revolution, Badiou dates the second sequence from 1917 to 1976, from the Bolshevik Revolution to the end of the Cultural Revolution. This second moment

was dominated by the question: How to win? How to hold out – unlike the Paris Commune – against the armed reaction of the propertied classes? How to organize the new power so as to protect it against the onslaught of its enemies? It was no longer a question of formulating and testing the communist hypothesis, but of realizing it: what the nineteenth century had dreamt, the twentieth would accomplish. The obsession with victory, centred around questions of organization, found its principal expression in the 'iron discipline' of the Communist Party.

According to Badiou, however, the Leninist solution to the Communards' problem created further problems which eventually turned victory into defeat. The triumphant communist parties morphed into a new and newly repressive form of state, and their brutality facilitated the consolidation of a second counter-revolutionary interlude (which Badiou dates from 1975 to the present). Hence today's need for a renewal of the hypothesis.

Now you might have expected, from an author committed to a 'materialist dialectic', an initial articulation of this third sequence that in some sense retains and moves beyond the previous two. Instead Badiou seems to argue that it's now more a matter of neither... nor... 'Our problem is neither that of the popular movement conceived as the vehicle of a new hypothesis, nor that of the proletarian party conceived as leading it towards victory.' Rather than rework and strengthen central aspects of the previous sequences, Badiou seems to abandon them in favour of an axiomatic principle explicitly conceived on the model of a Kantian regulative idea. The price Badiou appears willing to pay for this move is exorbitant.

Marxism, the workers' movement, mass democracy, Leninism, the party of the proletariat, the socialist state – all the inventions of the twentieth century – are not really useful to us any more. At the theoretical level they certainly deserve further study and consideration; but at the level of practical politics they have become unworkable.

Instead, Badiou hints, communism's reinvention may depend on 'a new relation between real political movement and ideology'.

Few readers are likely to argue with Badiou's critique of Stalinism, but his sweeping conflation and rejection of most actually-existing forms of popular mobilization and mass democracy is another matter.

Badiou doesn't explain how this approach might help to understand and strengthen recent mobilizations in countries like Venezuela, Haiti, Palestine, South Africa or Bolivia. He doesn't explain why political militants working in such places should abandon electoral politics and control of state policy to their adversaries. He doesn't explain why other militants, battling to affirm the rights of immigrant workers in places like California or Dubai, should embrace the hostility to trade unions and state intervention typical of Badiou's own post-Maoist Organisation Politique. He doesn't explain what is new about today's relation between politics and ideology or hegemony. More generally, he doesn't explain why political militants should approach

our global present in terms of its purportedly obscure and experimental novelty, rather than in terms of a more conventionally mediated dialectic – a dialectic that grounds the invention of newly suitable ways of pursuing clear and intelligible demands for justice and equality in a strategic confrontation with equally clear constraints inherited from the past.

Of course, Badiou's little book is primarily a pamphlet, written for a specific purpose and intended for a specific audience. As a local polemic, *Sarkozy?* is brilliantly effective. As a contribution to a more general reconceptualization of politics it leaves many questions unanswered, and it reads as both parochial and abstract.

Peter Hallward

Smash and grab

Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, Allen Lane, London, 2007. 558 pp., £25.00 hb., £8.99 pb., 0 713 99899 3 hb., 0 141 02453 4 pb.

Shortly before the election of Salvador Allende in 1970 Richard Nixon famously told Jesse Helms, the director of the CIA, to make the Chilean economy 'scream'. Of course, the economy was not the only thing that screamed in Chile in the years following Pinochet's coup. Indeed, it is this close relationship between physical torment and economic disruption that constitutes one of the dominant themes of Naomi Klein's *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*.

Klein is of course the author of 2000's enormously successful *No Logo*, a veritable manifesto for the so-called anti-globalization movement. That book peeled back corporate logos in order to expose the slums and sweatshops of the free-trade zones in Indonesia, China, Vietnam and elsewhere, as well as the preponderance in the First World of low-paid and non-unionized labour. It sketched in the connections between the goods enjoyed by Western consumers and, say, child labourers in Sumatra or the environmental catastrophe of the Niger Delta. The arguments in Klein's latest book heed *No Logo*'s concluding argument that, in addition to asserting what it is against, the anti-globalization movement needs to think through what it is actually for. And if it is against privatization and exploitation, then it should be resolutely for 'reclaiming the commons' – that is, dispersing power through participatory forms of democracy more accountable

than state or corporate institutions. The alienation from transnational corporations and from global financial institutions is, she claimed, a symptom of a broad crisis of representative democracy, of an enormous disjunction between people and power. It is the task of activists to make that disjunction known, to explain the nature of that power and its effects, and to suggest alternatives. Another of the movement's tasks therefore is to designate its adversaries with much greater clarity; it needs, particularly in the wake of the American occupation of Iraq, to augment its critique of financial institutions and multinational corporations with an equally cogent analysis of the system as a whole and of its innate propensity for violence.

The Shock Doctrine is therefore a sequel to *No Logo* that expands and enriches the earlier work's arguments. Specifically, it investigates the way in which capitalism orchestrates raids on the public sphere after catastrophic events. Publicly owned industries, democratic institutions and local traditions and forms of ownership are all fair game in the wake of disasters like the Indian Ocean tsunami, after which uprooted villagers found their coastal communities supplanted by foreign tourism. According to Bob Woodward's *Bush at War* even the terrorist attacks of 2001 were described by Donald Rumsfeld, at a meeting of the National Security Council on the afternoon of 12 September, as an 'opportunity': to settle scores with Saddam certainly,

but also to privatize Iraq's state-heavy economy, to expand the corporate security complex at home and to transfer hundreds of billions of dollars of public money into the hands of private corporations via colossal hikes in military spending and no-bid reconstruction and supply contracts in Iraq. Similarly, in the years after the bloodbath in Tiananmen Square special export zones were opened across China, which, as Slavoj Žižek has observed, became at last, and ironically, a true workers' state: a nation of drudges by dint of its low taxes, wages and tariffs, its corruptible officials and enormous returns. Klein argues that Iraq was invaded and occupied not – or at least not just – to corner its oil and enrich Halliburton, but in order to restart its economy from scratch. This was the goal of the politicians who hatched the invasion, as well as of the consultants, contractors and Republican Party hangers-on who descended on the 'green zone' in its aftermath. They viewed Iraq not as a large, complex and multifarious society with an autonomous will and with a history of its own, but as a static and helpless backwater, or else as an enormous laboratory in which to undertake an experiment in corporate expansion. What Klein calls 'disaster capitalism' does not just *exploit* disasters therefore; it is dependent on them and works to bring them about. Capitalism prepares for and even creates disasters in order to swoop on the victims and privatize their public assets before they come round.

The term 'disaster capitalism' is strictly speaking a tautology; capitalism is by its nature disastrous. Hence Bertolt Brecht's belief that it is not socialism but capitalism that is revolutionary, with its history of periodic crises and its need ceaselessly to uproot settled traditions and forms of production. In the same spirit Klein proves the connection between affliction and accumulation, or, put differently, between violence and capitalism. First in the laboratories that were Chile, Argentina and Bolivia, then in the UK under Thatcher and the US under Reagan, in Russia and Eastern Europe after the fall of Communism, in post-apartheid South Africa, in China and now in Iraq, the introduction of unfettered free markets has invariably required the violent restriction or prevention of democratic liberties. Obstacles to the new order have been removed to make way for economic policies that are very far from being, as neoliberalism's creation myth asserts, popular alternatives to failed and discredited models of social protection. Because only a browbeaten population will tolerate avoidable recessions and structural unemployment, neoliberal policies must be brought about by chicanery and, if necessary,

by military force and political terror. 'Klein's theory fits well', as Michael Hardt has observed in *New Left Review*, 'with a long theoretical tradition on the intimate link between capital and violence'. Just as *No Logo's* critique of corporate branding re-enacted Marx's analysis of reification at the start of *Capital*, so *The Shock Doctrine* reprises the study of 'primitive accumulation' undertaken in *Capital's* final section. It recalls Marx's view that 'conquest, enslavement, robbery, murder, in short, force, play the greatest part' in turning peasants and small artisans into a landless proletariat, and also in quelling the resistance offered in the colonies by modes of production based on the independent labour of the producers. Capital comes into the world 'dripping from head to toe, from every pore, with blood and dirt'. For Marx this process of expropriation constitutes capitalism's prehistory; for Rosa Luxemburg's *Accumulation of Capital*, however, as well as for *The Shock Doctrine*, capitalism's violence is intrinsic and ongoing: 'Force is the only solution open to capital', according to Luxemburg; 'the accumulation of capital, seen as an historical process, employs force as a permanent weapon, not only at its genesis, but further on down to the present day.' The infliction or exploitation of shocks and crises in Iraq and New Orleans are not the whims of a particularly reactionary White House, but the latest manifestations of capitalism's reckless and insatiable drive for accumulation.

So-called shock therapy is a specific method of disorientating 'patients' with electric charges developed by Ewan Cameron in the labs of McGill University in the 1950s. It was funded by the CIA in the hope that it might unearth a method for rebuilding prisoners' personalities, then outsourced to Latin American juntas who used it to torture communists and trades unionists, and recently inflicted on detainees at Guantánamo Bay, Abu Ghraib, and other stockades and 'black sites' around the globe. Klein calls shock therapy 'a metaphor for the shock doctrine's underlying logic'. Economic and bodily shocks both aim to addle their subjects, before sapping their resistance and remaking them. It was Milton Friedman who first used 'shock therapy' as a metaphor to describe the attempt to galvanize economies with the abrupt privatization of public wealth. Klein adduces texts in which Friedman, the ideologue who led the intellectual counter-revolution against the Keynesian ambition to combine capitalism with spending on social welfare, sets out his view that the free market is the basis of political liberty. Governments intent on removing restrictions to the market's unhindered operation should, Friedman

argued, see disasters of various kinds as opportunities to privatize the functions of the state and to slash taxes and welfare spending. Though they might be painful in the short term, such shocks would serve to jolt sluggish economies out of their lethargy. This for Klein is the shock doctrine. Its central irony was pointed out by Orlando Letelier, the Chilean dissident who was killed in Washington DC in 1976 in a car bomb planted by the Chilean secret police. It is, to say the least, curious that in the mid-1970s Friedman, the author of *Capitalism and Freedom*, should act as an adviser to a fascist regime that was crushing every type of democratic freedom. (The so-called Chicago Boys, graduates who had studied at that university under Friedman, also occupied key positions in Pinochet's government.) On reflection, however, and as Letelier recognized, this combination of unbridled capitalism and unbridled oppression is perhaps not so curious after all; despite Friedman's bluster about the free market being the central arena in which political liberty is exercised and therefore working to undermine political centralization and control, the introduction of sweeping free-market measures has everywhere required a cowed, distracted or traumatized population. Indeed, if freedom for the Chicago School is exercised solely in the marketplace, then it follows that political freedoms are incidental, even unnecessary. While the Chicago Boys sent shocks through the Chilean economy, the army and secret police administered them with electrodes in the regime's torture cells.

Klein's real targets therefore are not the abominations perpetrated at Abu Ghraib, which are a symptom of the problem and not the problem itself. She is not even taking aim at the world-encircling (albeit, as Michael Mann and Immanuel Wallerstein have both shown, limited) political and military supremacy of the United States. The true target of her ire is an entire economic system that compels depredations such as those inflicted on Chile and Iraq. *The Shock Doctrine* bears comparison with Ellen Meiksins Wood's insights into the global economy's dependence on military power, with Luxemburg on the violent accumulation of capital, with Samir Amin on unequal development, with Giovanni Arrighi on the connections between capital and state hegemonies, with Andre Gunder Frank on the underdevelopment of Latin America, and with David Harvey on 'accumulation by dispossession'. What distinguishes Klein's book from theirs, however, are its popular method and circulation. This journalistic approach need not, I suspect, involve any slackening of analytical rigour. Nor does her book's reliance on the metaphor of shock entail any mystifica-

tion of the true nature of capitalism and its dependence on violence. On the contrary, I would argue that the metaphor of shock in particular, and Klein's popular approach in general, actually serve to illuminate this connection and make investigation of it more rather than less likely. *The Shock Doctrine* challenges the rarefied idiom and restricted audience of academic and Marxist scholarship about economic globalization. Less a theoretical exposition than a series of vivid journalistic accounts, *The Shock Doctrine* is impelled by a belief that when it comes to explaining economic globalization, readability and making contact with a large audience are at least as important as comprehensiveness, purity of execution or conformity to the argot of Marxist economic analysis.

The use of electric shock to encapsulate the workings of the global economy is as much a metonym as a metaphor. That is, it employs one part of capitalism's intrinsic violence to exemplify the whole. Yet it is mainly as a figure of speech used to describe the way in which capitalism disorients and terrorizes men and women into quiescence that shock is deployed in Klein's work. The utility of that figurative approach demands reflection. Metaphor, needless to say, is not an optional stylistic device. That is, we cannot choose *not* to use metaphors or to reject them on account of their tendency to distance us from the true nature of things. Rather, metaphor is something like a basic principle of human understanding; it operates in all forms of symbolic communication including, of course, in language. Thought and meaning, in other words, are not possible without metaphor and therefore without some degree of alienation or abstraction from the subjects of one's thoughts and meanings. One conclusion that can be drawn from the inescapably figurative nature of language is Nietzsche's: that there is no longer knowledge just metaphor, that so-called truths are just metaphors fixed by time, habit and forgetfulness. Another and more enabling conclusion is reached by Paul Ricoeur in his classic *The Rule of Metaphor*: because all representations are second-order imitations of another object they are all unavoidably but, crucially, not equally distanced from the objects they seek to describe. The first part of this formulation is uncontroversial, for if a representation was no different from the thing it seeks to represent then it would actually *be* that thing; a perfect description of an apple, for example, would be an apple. In other words, a representation that could collapse the gulf between the cryptic reality of things and the distancing, figurative abstractions of language is inconceivable. The second part of Ricoeur's claim is more controversial because it entails a conviction that

metaphors can enhance our descriptions of the world. Ricoeur rejects Nietzsche's theory that all language is dead metaphor, just as his book contests Jacques Derrida's contention in 'White Mythology' that language, because inevitably metaphorical, constitutes an insurmountable barrier between mind and world. Metaphors for Ricoeur are capable of suspending our ordinary ways of describing their referents in order to provide imaginative and refreshing ways of experiencing them. Metaphors, in other words, can regenerate meaning; fresh metaphors encourage new and inventive ways of perceiving their referents. Intrinsic to metaphors is the obligation they place on one to interpret them. The reader of *The Shock Doctrine*, for instance, is compelled to ask him- or herself how global capitalism resembles shock treatment. Thus the creative use of metaphor goads us into reflecting in new ways upon our world; in Ricoeur's words, it 'forces conceptual thought to *think more*'.



Joseph Stiglitz's accusation in the *New York Times* that Klein's popularizing approach is guilty of 'oversimplification' strikes me as unfounded. Likewise Michael Hardt's worry that *The Shock Doctrine* suffers from 'a significant divide between journalistic methods and theoretical argument' is uncalled for. Hardt is concerned that a focus on relationships between individuals such as Friedman and Pinochet, though it may make Klein's tale more gripping and comprehensible to the common reader, contradicts the book's central theoretical insight that the violence of neoliberalism is not the result of a conspiracy hatched by powerful men but an intrinsic feature of capital accumulation. But I am arguing that we should see *The Shock Doctrine* as an invitation to its readers to reflect

on capitalism's propensity for violence and not as a definitive exposition of that propensity. It encourages us to 'think more' about the relationship between capitalism and violence, even though an authoritative account of that relationship cannot be found between its covers. Hardt is also anxious that the absence of an extended theoretical analysis of the inseparability of accumulation and coercion leaves the reader unsure whether one should be opposed to capitalism per se, or just to particularly brutal variants of it. Admittedly Klein fails to clarify whether capitalism is unavoidably coercive and whether therefore the alternative to 'disaster capitalism' is a more virtuous form of capitalism or an entirely different form of social and economic organization. Yet this reluctance to decree an alternative path is less an omission than an expression of the book's deliberately open-ended character, since one of the central principles of the movement Klein's work inspires is that thought, initiative and authority should all be local, democratic and uncoerced.

Klein is at pains to point out the ineffectiveness of the shock doctrine. Alternatives to it, one infers from her account, are germinating in the recalcitrance and ultimately the indignation and resistance of populations subjected to this trauma and pillage. The minds of Dr Cameron's victims were not erased and begun anew, but mangled and fractured; his experiments were a total failure. Similarly, those societies assailed by the shocks of neoliberalism were definitely not made over into peaceful and profitable adjuncts of the global economy but subjected to ever greater poverty and inequality.

Moreover, the effects of shock eventually wear off. Klein is evidently thrilled to be able to document the persistence of memory and self-confidence as well as the increasing manifestation of popular efforts at reconstruction from the ruins and scorched earth left in capitalism's wake.

The case of Iraq exemplifies the shock doctrine's failures. The closure of state-run factories, the firing of hundreds of thousands of state employees, the rewriting of Iraqi law to favour big business, the repatriation of profits by American firms, the inhibition of trade unions and the exclusion of Iraqis from reconstruction contracts were all intended to bring about a free-market utopia in Iraq. Instead, this litany of mismanagement, all of which is contrary to the

Fourth Geneva Convention's expectations of an occupying power, has triggered unemployment and scarcity. Combined with the casual violence of the occupying forces, it has served only to fuel the resistance. Israel's recent history is also instructive. Huge increases in military spending, cutbacks in social services, the specialization of Israel's export economy over the past decade and a half in armaments, counter-terrorism and security products, have brought only a superficial prosperity restricted to elites and dependent on fear and continual conflict. We should be forewarned, Klein argues, by this image of a high-tech fortress protected by fences from the surplus humanity of the disinherited and disposable poor.

It is capitalism's spectacular failure and destructiveness, as well as the almost miraculous vitality and ingenuity of its victims, that ultimately frustrate every effort to remake our societies into neoliberal utopias. From the ruins of neoliberalism have sprung campaigns against privatization in India, South Africa, Latin America, even China. They are testament to recently shocked societies' powers of endurance and

recovery. The war in Iraq has made obvious the violence of capitalism, just as our increasingly gated and inequitable world has exposed the myth that the wealth hoarded by elites eventually trickles down to their dependants.

Klein writes eloquently in conclusion of the need to combat this colossal privatization of public space by encouraging democratic organization and self-determination, as well as more far-reaching coalitions of resistance. Currently democracy means little more than profitable corporations, a tightly circumscribed range of permissible debate centred on personalities rather than fundamental choices, as well as a limited role for the state in social provision, but ever more tasks for it to perform in criminalizing dissent, maintaining 'security', surveilling citizens and underwriting corporate profits. The message of Klein's book is that democracy actually entails a popular rethinking of our social and economic priorities. *The Shock Doctrine* is a work that pleads for the democratic initiative that its popular circulation enables and that its thought-provokingly figurative approach engenders.

Robert Spencer

A Duchamp for the Left?

John Roberts, *The Intangibilities of Form: Skill and Deskilling in Art After the Readymade*, Verso: London, 2008. 256 pp., £60.00 hb., £16.99 pb., 978 1 84467 163 2 hb., 978 1 84467 167 0 pb.

The Intangibilities of Form is an important and ambitious book that rewrites the history of twentieth-century art through a concern with work. As the title suggests, this vision of a 'labour theory of culture' for modern art revolves around the work of Marcel Duchamp, with Lazlo Moholy-Nagy holding a subsidiary spot. However, these figures are principally deployed to account for contemporary art. Roberts elaborates on skill and deskilling in art and their relation to deskilling in wage-labour; why the demise of craft skills do not amount to the end of skill in art; 'copying after copying' (mimesis without craft skill) and its inverse, the 'craft of reproducibility' (work with automatic copying devices); the role of prosthetics and surrogacy in contemporary art; the 'mongrelization' or 'miscegenation' of art; amateurism as aspiration for encultured artists and expanded conceptions of authorship or composite artistic entities (the artist-as-engineer or technician, the artist-curator, the surrogate-artist, collective authorship, etc.). It is a central claim of this book that Duchamp's readymades make visible the

mutual imbrications of autonomous and heteronomous labour (though I'm still unclear how it does so, or for whom it does this). It also offers a fine account of 'Situational Aesthetics' (although, oddly, there is no reference to Victor Burgin, who developed the idea); one of the best available dialectical descriptions of the role of the contemporary museum; powerful critiques of conservative defences of the aesthetic; an important reworking of aesthetic autonomy beyond Adorno, and much more besides.

This superabundance of ideas comes as no surprise to anyone familiar with the author's work. Roberts is one of the most inventive writers on contemporary art working today, and he has an uncanny knack of picking up on art trends and coining a telling phrase-cum-concept to pin them down. Much of this perspicacity stems from having made it his business to stick close to the intensive critical talk of the studio (or post-studio). It may not be immediately apparent to many readers just how much of the current book draws on ideas that have emerged from debates within, or on,

the expanded network of *Art & Language*: amateurism, blindness, collaborative practice, deflation, deskilling, mistakes (botching), surrogacy, ventriloquism.... Roberts is a kind of non-embedded critic of *Art & Language*: he uses their practice as a 'think-tank' and employs their insights to account for radically different forms of avant-garde practice.

In mapping these concerns onto an engagement with Adorno's aesthetics and contemporary Marxist theory, Roberts breathes new life into the idea that art should be seen as a prefigurative form for the free ('ecstatic') labour of the communism to come. As he asks on the first page: 'Why is it that artistic labour is taken to be an exemplary form of human activity and, as such, is judged by some writers to be the basis for the emancipation of all labour?' While he does not mention alienation and carefully avoids reference to 'creative labour', *The Intangibilities of Form* involves a reworking of some old debates on art as non-alienated work. Principally, this is achieved by holding together Adorno's vision of autonomous art with the concern – developed in Italian Operaismo and later Autonomism – with building active spaces and practices of (worker) autonomy from capital. In this way, he gives Adorno an activist turn and applies autonomy to contemporary anti-visual art, rather than Adorno's tired high-modernist canon. In this book, autonomy and heteronomy face each other as mutually determining forms of *labour*. There are clear echoes of Jacques Rancière's recent aesthetic writings here, but Roberts insists that autonomous art carries its critical charge as a way of continuing to imagine the refashioning of work beyond capitalist subsumption. This utopian claim for autonomy – the insistence that art's critical power emerges when it is confronted with wage-labour – is the book's most important achievement. However, the argument is somewhat impaired by the use of concepts from *Capital* as a kind of rhetorical glue. In particular, Roberts doesn't seem entirely certain if art can be described as a commodity. To be fair, there is a great deal of confusion and conceptual slackness in the debates on the commodity-status of art. Roberts certainly can't be blamed for this: we need much more work in this area and detailed reflection that doesn't just fall back on the known axioms of Lukács, Benjamin and the Frankfurt School. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that, as an orthodox exponent of the labour theory of value, the account he offers is contradictory. At points he recognizes this is difficult terrain, citing Marx and I.I. Rubin, but then continues to speak of art as a commodity, deploys Adorno on art as 'absolute commodity' and refers to the infant's

drawings in Mary Kelly's *Post-Partum Document* as a form of commodity exchange.

It is not at all clear that this book required an anthropology of the hand to cement its argument. Roberts presents an account of the phylogenetic development of the human hand as the basis for a 'labour theory of culture' drawn, via Charles Woolfson's book of that title, from Engels. It is quite possibly the case that the development of the opposable thumb played a decisive role in the emergence of human tool use over 2 million years ago, but I'm not sure how this helps with a labour theory of culture under advanced capitalism. It probably makes more sense just to say that work is a collective human power. Roberts tends to follow current debates on digital circuits of production and immaterial labour and thus demotes the sheer physical graft involved in much labour today. The muscles of the human back are surely as important for work as opposable thumbs; the same might be said about binocular vision. This leads to all manner of complexities as he attempts to reinsert the hand into immaterial labour practices. However, the key problem is that 'the hand' figures in *The Intangibilities of Form* as a kind of metaphoric shorthand allowing Roberts to sidestep the need for detailed analysis of historical labour processes.

Roberts draws his account of the labour process from 'anti-technicist Marxism' (Marx, Harry Braverman and Raniero Panzieri, though he misses other sources for this argument in the journal *Radical Science* and the myriad studies written by social historians). His coordinates supply useful and suggestive theoretical pointers, but he leaps from Marx to Braverman without pause, providing no description of the actual transformation of work that Duchamp might have known in France, Argentina and America, or the labour processes that Moholy-Nagy might have encountered in Hungary and Weimar, or, for that matter, the organization of labour in the USSR (Kevin Murphy's work would have helped with the last). Work in these places was highly differentiated and in transition. In some of them it is questionable whether real subsumption had been achieved. The account of the contemporary museum as a site of production is admirably dialectical; in contrast, the modern artist's outsourcing of manufacture is viewed from a single perspective. The readymade, Moholy-Nagy's 'telephone paintings', and so forth, are deemed to represent a site of 'rendezvous' with heteronymous work, so as to bring it to the fore and challenge it with the autonomous labour of art. But this needed to be set against the inverse image of the artist as gaffer, technocratic manager or suited

executive. Roberts does considerably better with recent labour practices, though the sources are familiar and, as I have indicated, despite the caveats, he exaggerates the role of immaterial labour in the current global economy.

As this suggests, the central weakness of this book is the tendency to rely on cultural-theoretical generalization rather than detailed and carefully sustained conjunctural analysis. Moholy-Nagy and the Soviet Constructivists/Productivists are seen as followers of the readymade – Moholy-Nagy's 'telephone paintings' are said to 'register the trauma of the readymade' – but it is doubtful whether these artists could have known Duchamp's readymades, which were hardly public until the 1950s. Here, Roberts accepts too much of the Duchamp myth circulating in art theory, or rather he remodels the myth for his purposes. Here, a little of *Art & Language*'s scepticism would have helped. For Roberts, the readymade is a concept and not a historical practice, but this introduces problems into his argument when he does engage, in limited fashion, with historical interpretations.

I find Roberts's account of Duchamp unconvincing. He notes that he does not want to recast Duchamp as a radical Productivist, but effectively proceeds to do so. Duchamp emerges here as *the* critical intellectual of art and work in the first half of the last century. This is a Duchamp for the Left, but it requires overlooking the cool detachment at the core of his work, particularly as he moved among the aloof ironists around Arensberg. Roberts dismisses Molly Nesbit's argument on Duchamp's games with the emergent culture of consumption in France, and doesn't refer to her work on Duchamp and 'the language of industry', or her insistence that Duchamp was looking for a way out of art. Similarly, he goes out of his way to distance himself from Jeffrey Weiss's account of Duchamp as *blaguer*. However, Nesbit's *Their Common Sense* and Weiss's *The Popular Culture of Modern Art* strike me as the best interpretations of Duchamp's work; certainly they seem more credible than Duchamp as a strategic theorist of capitalist work (though this is just as credible as Thierry De Duve's Duchamp as practitioner of aesthetic modernism in the face of 'generic art'). Roberts would have been on altogether stronger ground had he argued that the readymade is one incarnation of 'copying without copying' rather than the reverse. In any case, the question of what generated the turn against authorship *across* the avant-garde is left unaddressed. In this regard, we still very much need an account of the labour of avant-garde art then and now.

This inclination to stretch arguments is part of Roberts's tendency to ventriloquism. He throws his voice onto others as well as making, or at least bolstering, trends in support of an argument. Topics of discussion are projected onto Benjamin or Habermas, and artists are routinely attributed unlikely forms of critical awareness and self-consciousness. It is not that the claims are wrong, but they tend to be overextended on the basis of the evidence supplied. In one discussion of collaboration he suggests that in the mid-1970s the 'opening up of the circuits of authorship to social and familial relations in which the self is intersubjectively embedded was important for a second generation of feminist artists'. Mary Kelly is the artist in question here and the argument seems convincing until we ask: who besides Kelly would this description fit? Perhaps it could be extended to Martha Rosler and Alexis Hunter, possibly to Susan Hiller's '10 Months' or *Riddles of the Sphinx* (though the section in question again turns on Kelly), but candidates soon run thin on the ground. The same point applies to the suggestion that Moholy-Nagy was a radical practitioner of 'second technique' as a critique of the capitalist labour process, which I find singularly improbable; ditto the idea that the Soviet avant-garde belongs solidly in the anti-technicist camp. Once you try to supply determinant content for the argument it often seems to dissolve before your eyes.

The Intangibilities of Form is a pioneering book and in its way is even a brilliant one. Its real strength is in revitalizing questions that have been off the intellectual agenda for too long and in opening new avenues to critical thought. The sheer theoretical inventiveness of the argument compensates somewhat for the lack of detailed analysis, but only somewhat. This book desperately needed a sustained analysis of the labour process both inside the studio and beyond its walls. It is significantly under-referenced, and a less emphatically declarative tone would have lessened the impact of some jarring errors and misreadings (the date for the first unassisted readymade, the account of the 'haptic'). But perhaps this is the wrong way to engage with Roberts's work. We probably shouldn't look to *The Intangibilities of Form* for a history of art and labour, but for ideas that might help to spark the development of such a history. In this sense, in spite of its shortcomings, this book provides a much-needed impetus to re-release the critical charge of avant-garde art from the straitjackets imposed by its current detractors, as well as by quite a few fans. Roberts demonstrates that this task will require an encounter with labour.

Steve Edwards

A real surprise

Matthew Beaumont, Andrew Hemingway, Esther Leslie and John Roberts, eds, *As Radical as Reality Itself: Essays on Marxism and Art for the 21st Century*, Peter Lang, Bern, 2007. 473 pp., £45.00 pb., 978 3 03910 938 8.

Andrew Hemingway, ed., *Marxism and the History of Art: From William Morris to the New Left*, Pluto Press, London and Ann Arbor, 2006. 276 pp., £60.00 hb., £19.99 pb., 0 7453 2330 8 hb., 0 7453 2329 4 pb.

The phrase ‘as radical as reality itself’ was a response to a provocation. It derives from the meeting between Valeriu Marcu and Lenin which took place during the First World War while the latter was in exile in Zurich and the former, like most of the artists and poets congregated around the Cabaret Voltaire, was seeking to evade call-up and refuse the warmongering ideologies of their nation-states. The young Dadaist poet, full of the urgency of taking revolutionary positions, accused the Bolshevik leader of not being radical enough. ‘I do not know how radical you are’, Lenin is supposed to have replied. ‘I am certainly not radical enough. One can never be radical enough; that is, one must always try to be as radical as reality itself.’ Their discussion had turned on the position to take on the war: Marcu advocated pacifism; the Bolsheviks argued for turning the guns against the bourgeoisie. In the hands of today’s theorists of a politicized aesthetics, this friendly debate around a Swiss café table in 1917 is pregnant with the problems of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. It figures the conjunction of art and politics, of poetic with revolutionary praxis; the problem of the avant-garde’s desire – and much-reported failure – to bridge this divide; the efforts of later artists to make good that failure, and the struggle of many art activists today to generate practices of collectivity or sociality.

The title of *As Radical as Reality Itself* should not be read as claiming to match contemporary social materiality. Rather it is best understood as articulating an intellectual (and political) challenge to be faced. It is a provocation to those who would evade that challenge, sidestepping it by self-complacently appealing to the critique of ‘the master trope’. The collection of essays, which has its origin in the conference ‘Marxism and the Visual Arts Now’ held in London in 2002, is a rejoinder to the prevailing orthodoxies in contemporary art and cultural theory, especially when they parade decked out in the robes of emancipation. Each of the four editors (also the conference organizers) contributes his or her own introduction to the volume. The sense of the overarching project is best grasped through these pieces. Esther Leslie deploys

Marxism against contemporary ‘cultural studies’ and its degeneration into an advisory role for New Labour public policy; Matthew Beaumont dispatches with the tired remnants of postmodernism; John Roberts, with the ‘Marxism of the old binarisms’ and ‘liberatory textual Marxism’. The desire of *As Radical as Reality Itself* is to move on from the (now not so) *nouveau mélange* and to escape the trappings, complacencies and political dead ends of the post-New Left. As Roberts neatly puts it, the inheritances of various intellectual tendencies of the late twentieth century, including some associated with Marxism, ‘no longer quite fix what needs fixing, or unfix what is fixed’.

The sixteen contributions to the volume are highly varied in choice of object, approach and tone; the authors including artists, historians of art, literary theorists and scholars of aesthetic theory. Topics addressed range across a number of subjects, including the recent developments at Chicago’s Millennium Park; the promotion work for Soviet state enterprises designed by Alexander Rodchenko and Vladimir Mayakovsky in the 1920s; the figure of the Watts revolt for the Situationist International; recent theorizations of digital software; and a critical assessment of the role of cultural difference. ‘State and Revolution’, ‘Communist and Post-Communist Aesthetics’, ‘Situationist Thought and the Ends of the Avant-Garde’, ‘Subjectivity and the Commodity Form’, and ‘Politics and the Problems of Contemporary Practice’ provide the sub-theme around which the collection is organized. The absence of section introductions – not least for themes of this sort, carrying as they do some highly charged histories – could have been a severe drawback for the collection. However, the essays in each section manage to convey a comprehensive (if not exhaustive) map of their terrain, and to evidence distinctive methodological approaches to, and constitutions of, their objects of study. That the reader is not left disorientated by the various voices and topics, but instead emerges with a strong sense of the terms of current debate, is quite an achievement.

Whether it all adds up to ‘Marxism and Art for the 21st Century’ is premature to say. Indeed, one

sincerely hopes that it does not; that is, that the book does not so much serve summative findings as offer paths for explorations in what for far too long has been something of an intellectual wilderness. Despite its off-putting price tag, *As Radical as Reality Itself* deserves a wide readership. It is indicative of, and a contribution to, the revival of interest and growing confidence in forms of Marxist theory that has been a feature of the past decade, although the editors remain anxious not to be caught defending 'dead concepts' or advancing theoretical 'purity'. (Interestingly, the contributing essays are remarkably free of such self-conscious hang-ups.) To an extent such worries are inevitable in a field where debates have, to say the least, been intense, and where this intensity has often degenerated into the debilitating effects of sectarianism. Today's Marxists are hypersensitive to this history and to Stalinism. (Leslie's introduction alludes to some of the conference's internal political tensions.) The concern is to build an open Marxism (recall Sartre, 1960) and to emphasize its heterogeneity as an intellectual tradition. I sympathize and agree, but there is a nagging doubt left unaddressed: that however well-intentioned the desire for openness, it figures a

distance from engagement; the utopian truce depends on not addressing serious and troubling questions, such as how to organize resistance, how to sustain struggles through setbacks, or how to constitute a working radical democracy – issues that present themselves, if not always consciously in these terms, as pressing for the anti-capitalist movement, for microtopists no less than for vanguardists.

'Nostalgia' – that is, a nostalgia for intellectual 'relics' – is what Andrew Hemingway also hopes to avoid, in his introduction to *Marxism and the History of Art*, and again the ambition expressed is for Marxism's 'critique and renewal'. This opening is unnecessarily apologetic. 'Nostalgia' itself (or, more precisely, what is accused of being nostalgic) is neither always, nor necessarily, retrograde, and is often a charge laid at the door of those who refuse the dominant present, who choose not to forget alternative historical possibilities. In this sense, it can be a force for maintaining critical distance and future ambition. Moreover, one might reasonably expect a book on the history of the history of art to be looking backwards – if not wistfully, then perhaps with an eye to the historical, with the intention to work over its 'relics' actively and to seek out their

contretemps with our moment. But this collection's objects of study become, unexpectedly, peculiarly prescient for today's concerns.

The bookends of the volume – William Morris and the New Left – have a certain currency. Even Morris – for so long taken as the bearer of a specifically English breed of pastoral socialism, and of simple nostalgia for artisanal labour – has been reworked as a critical-aesthetic lever for our era of global finance capital. Meanwhile, looking around today, one would be easily forgiven for thinking the New Left is the new black. Renewed attention to the radical politics of the 1960s and 1970s – or at least to the recent pronouncements of figures that emerged as key players at that time – has emerged with the shakiness of the neoliberal agenda and a renewed politics of resistance. Historically, the New Left figures as an important hinge: encompassing the dissolution into *nouveaux*



philosophes at its one end and, at its other, the recovery not only of Marx as a philosopher of social praxis and a political critic of the value form, but also of Lukács, Luxemburg, Korsch, Rubin, and, easy to forget, Lenin. Three thematic essays on the impact of the New Left, its role in the anti-fascist campaigns in postwar Germany, and the Warburgian turn in the academy of the DDR, form the book's concluding chapters (although, within this book, these chapters seem to open up another programme of research).

The essays in *Marxism and the History of Art* are varied in mode and in degree of sympathy for their subjects' politics. Nine of the twelve chapters are monographic, addressing intellectual figures whose projects are decidedly 'Old Left', and, with the exceptions of those on Walter Benjamin and Henri Lefebvre, they would seem far less promising material for those readers seeking out contemporary relevance. Indeed, the work of Mikhail Lifshits, Frederick Antal, Francis Klingender, Max Raphael, Meyer Schapiro and Arnold Hauser might seem to be of little interest even to specialist scholars in the intellectual history of Marxism; and, Schapiro aside, still less to those in art history. They seem to be little more than historical curiosities for those interested in the history of Marxist approaches to art (a topic that not all Marxist art historians value). Whether one thinks of the orientation, typical of art history until the 1960s, around the category of style, or of the particular political histories within which many of these figures were caught (such as the machinations of the Comintern, the resistance to Lysenkoism or to the philosophy of the Second International) one might expect that such factors would set these figures in the permafrost of their respective moments. That this does not happen is the real surprise of *Marxism and the History of Art*.

Intellectually nimble and politically inquisitive readers will not only find a history of political and aesthetic ideas, but will also encounter material of relevance to debates on philistinism in contemporary art, relational aesthetics, post-relationality, activist models of art practice, through to recent photography and video work where realism and form are brought together as significant critical projects. The essays address expected themes, such as the reflectionist theory of class belonging and the correspondence theory of truth – and realism emerges as far more heterogeneous an idea than ever imagined. They also work through the various efforts to move from a contemplative to an active and critical philosophy (also a move away from philosophy per se); tensions between dialectical and naturalistic understandings are explored, as are those

between seeing the aesthetic as an ideology or as a cognitive or critical category (whether transcendental, historical or social in constitution), and between seeing art history as an aesthetic or philological endeavour, or in terms derived from the philosophy of history. The reader can glean the different ways of conceiving and responding to aesthetic autonomy; of what might be constituted by materiality and materialism: all extremely pertinent to current radical discussions in aesthetics and politics. Prism-like, each case study distinguishes the components that make up a complex intellectual and political biography.

Without intending to, *Marxism and the History of Art* provides one of the most accessible and incisive outlines of the type of art history generated in central Europe in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by Gottfried Semper, Aloïs Riegl, Heinrich Wölfflin and Max Dvořák. It is the filtering of these approaches through the critical perspective and direct concerns of specific Marxist intellectuals that brings to life and illuminates the distinctive projects of the discipline's 'founding fathers'. The discussions of Hauser, Antal and Benjamin, for example, address their efforts to develop means of studying art whilst resisting both the overwhelming influence of neo-Kantianism and the underpinning vulgarized versions of Hegelian philosophy of history. They share this project, as they share an engagement with Lukács (as do many of the other figures addressed in this book) and commitments to historical materialist analysis. But it is the differences in the approaches each advances for the study of art that are particularly instructive.

There is a current vogue to dispatch with the social-historical approach to art by identifying it, mistakenly, with Ranke's 'how it really was'. *Marxism and the History of Art* paints a much more complex picture. The emergence of a social-historical conception of art history, for example, can be situated with respect to the earlier art historians' resort to *Weltanschauung* or *Geist* as a means to historicize their subjects, and, more specifically, with the extension and revision of Dvořák's contribution by Antal and Hauser. The 'second wave' of the Marxist social history of art – that associated with the New Left – found the approach of Antal and Hauser to be far too generalizing; yet this is exactly what Antal said of Dvořák, what Dvořák had said of Wölfflin, and what even Wölfflin himself had claimed to be criticizing. Reaching for the usual binarisms clearly won't help establish the shifting ways of constituting art's sociality and historicity. Place into this history Schapiro's engagement with both the Central European tradition and Deweyan pragmatism,

his frustration with the Frankfurt School exiles, or Hauser's own increasing emphasis on contingency (a similar trajectory that, incidentally, could be tracked in Siegfried Kracauer's writings), and the tensions between broadly 'historical' and 'philosophical' approaches to art become compelling challenges to thought rather than the stuff of routine stand-offs. It is not as if, for example, Hauser was unversed in aesthetic thought and did not appreciate what might be at stake in making transcendental claims for art; quite the contrary. But his rejection was for determinate reasons, and his promotion of the 'sociological approach' cannot be dismissed as 'mere sociology'. Indeed, the whole question of contingency and its confusion with historical specificity, and, in turn, the confusion of historical specificity with a narrow historicism, needs much more intelligent handling than the nostrums of debates on the relation between the social and aesthetic allow.

I have posed the problem from the side of social history, but equally we might consider, say, Lefebvre's fears that his aesthetics had failed adequately to capture art's universality. Or we could reflect on the tension between Benjamin's sense of the historical permeability of the fragments of culture, by way of 'blasting' out of the false continuum and constructing constellations, and his monadological conception of the artwork, closed to 'external' influences, irreducible to its 'historical context'. Even when considering the singularity of the artwork, the projects of the individuals addressed in *Marxism and the History of Art* invariably lead us to consider broader social questions. To press the point further: even when insisting on the empirical facticity, materiality, sensuous particularity, radical nominalism, monadic nature or singularity of the artwork (terms that cannot simply be treated as interchangeable), or worrying that this itself might constitute no more than 'mere facticity' or 'abstract particularity', these discussions open onto questions of social totality. Marxism not only enables such issues and difficulties to come to the fore, but insists that they do, demanding a dialogue between what is often considered irreconcilable.

Those readers seeking neatly delineated philosophical heroes to emerge from the volume will be disappointed. Those interested in how philosophical engagements are made into and through active intellectual and political histories, how they are put into productive relationship with actual objects and events, and how, even in the act of addressing the Quattrocento or the Romanesque carvings at Moissac, they are thought as pressing, as present, will be fascinated.

Gail Day

Switzerland

Joanna Hodge, *Derrida on Time*, Routledge, London and New York, 2007. 256 pp., £60.00 hb., 978 0 415 43091 3.

How can one address time? How can one write on time? At one point in her book, Joanna Hodge quotes Derrida's own acknowledgement of the problem. On the one hand, there is a will to name time, a determination to think it, and, on the other, there is the very activity of thinking time, the time spent articulating time. There is, then, according to Derrida, a 'gap between, on the one hand, thought, language, and desire and, on the other hand, knowledge, philosophy, science... a gap between gift and economy'. Now what interests Derrida in this gap is neither an adoring abdication to what exceeds the limits of experience, knowledge, science and economy, nor to dwell in an astringent philosophical logic about time unconnected and unconcerned with the body that desires, names and thinks this logic. On the contrary, his aim is at once to give and to know. As he says: 'Know still what giving wants to say, know how to give, know what you want and want to say when you give, know what you intend to give, know how the gift annuls itself, commit yourself even if commitment is the destruction of the gift by the gift, give economy its chance' (*Given Time*, 1992). What is then Hodge's gift? How has Hodge managed to bridge Derrida's gap? How has she managed to involve her body, her desires, and the logic of her and Derrida's articulations in order to achieve an unexpected and yet logically conclusive articulation of, or on, time today?

Derrida on Time is an exploration of Derrida's understanding of time as a series of responses to Kant and Husserl. This exploration also highlights other sources in Derrida's thinking of time: Freud, Heidegger, Levinas, Blanchot, Benjamin, and so on. These references are not classified or analysed individually; they are understood as chance encounters in Derrida's continual reading of Kant and Husserl. Hodge's analysis is therefore a way of revealing how these other sources have helped Derrida to block, deflect and reroute more conventional interpretations of both Kant's and Husserl's work on time. Overall, this attention to Derrida's reading of Husserl and Kant aims to show that he spent a surprisingly large amount of time erasing their very significant influence on his own understanding of time. In doing so, Hodge shows that these previous philosophers often remain a 'scarcely erased trace' in Derrida's writings.

In order to give an idea of the complexity of Hodge's undertaking, I shall focus on three particular issues, which I feel are crucial to her book. These should be seen as three arguments or questions to Hodge, a way to invite her readers to reflect on how she has explored Derrida's understanding of time.

First, one of Hodge's main claims is that, with Husserl and Derrida, 'time is to be thought no longer as linear, but as curved, and ... matter and its materiality are organized in accordance with asymmetrical relations arising from such curvature.' Now what can 'curved' actually mean and should we not reflect further on the meaning of this curvature?

The idea that time is no longer understood as a surmised line of continuous development from some notional beginning to some equally notional end point is not contentious. Husserl's phenomenology has helped us understand that no thinking, and therefore no thought content, can take such a form. We are always already thinking by making loops, hesitations, precipitations, reversals, and our thoughts not only have to follow these unruly turns, they also have to take into

consideration chance encounters and contingent events. One of the best-known characteristics of Derrida's writing is precisely how it follows these loops, hesitations, swerves, changes of speed, and u-turns; and that any attempt to reconstitute his work without them is futile. The issue is therefore: how can one characterize Derrida's notion of time as being singularly curved? What does it mean that time has now a rounded or bent shape, instead of a linear strategy based on a before and an after and a transitory 'now'? Even curved, does thinking still follow a 'before' (before Derrida), an 'after' (after Derrida) and a middle point (Hodge) from which one can contemplate a curve?

The issue is a difficult one and Hodge tries hard to make sure that the syncopation of non-simultaneity characteristic of Derrida's work never returns to a linear figuration that would undermine her carefully constructed arguments. But the question remains. Are we not now finally at a stage where we should really be asking whether Derrida's strategy of loops, changes of speed and u-turns is not in desperate need of deconstruction? Do we still need another repetition of

Derrida's textual strategy? Should we not think of a radical reinvention that would prevent us from thinking time simply as curved, precisely in order to remain faithful to Derrida's deconstruction of time?

My second argument or question to Hodge: the title of her book is *Derrida on Time* without comma, hyphen or colon between proper name and topic. This is not a book about the timeliness of Derrida's views on time, but about Derrida's views on time. The scope is thus enormous. Not only does it bring together Derrida's work, it also puts forward his many predecessors' attempts to make sense of this topic. The question is simply this: isn't 'Derrida on time' an impossible task?

This is not a textbook or a book suitable for undergraduates. The complexity of the prose, the difficulty of the arguments, the subtlety of the articulation remains inaccessible to most non-Derridean/Husserlian scholars. As such, it does not claim to be a comprehensive and accessible account of such a complex topic. It therefore can only claim to reconstitute Derrida's views on time in one interweaving set of arguments bound in a small black book. Derrida's extraordinary textual proliferation on such a diverse topic is thus reduced to various



distinct domains of entities (mostly grounded in interactions with previous philosophers) that aspire to be fully retrievable from Derrida's finite articulations on this topic. The title and Hodge's undertaking therefore put forward the idea that there is in Derrida's work, and indeed perhaps in the wider philosophical remit of deconstruction, an eidetic structure of time that is potentially comprehensible by all.

Should we not, then, here raise certain doubts about the possibility of thinking Derrida on time? Does anyone have the capacity to coordinate the divergent strands of Derridean thought that open up a different understanding of time and its mode of presentation? This does not mean that the corpus of Derrida's work is infinite and unaccountable. This simply means that there must be a fundamental impossibility of thinking Derrida on time, not because of its diversity, its incoherencies, its betrayals, or its unacknowledged sources, but because his work stands opposed to the very possibility of pinning down what 'on time' might actually mean. At one stage of her mediations, Hodge rightly quotes Heidegger's famous reflection on the impossibility of addressing the essence of time in his *Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*:

All these descriptions of time, known both to the common as well as the philosophical understandings, cannot have been simply arbitrary fabrications and inventions. The essence of time must itself make these kinds of conceptions possible and even plausible. Yet none of them touches exactly the metaphysical essence of time.

Is Hodge not trying to do exactly what Heidegger feared: writing and thinking in terms of an eidetic reduction of time to an essence: on Time? Hodge is obviously aware of this problem. The quotation itself is proof enough. However, her solution remains questionable. Although it is true that Hodge is not claiming completeness or comprehensiveness, there is still under the naming function of 'Derrida on time' a desire for totalization, even if this totalization is deliberately structured in an open and non-finite series of redeployments and rereadings.

My third argument or question: Hodge's tacit conclusion appears to be that, in his work on time, Derrida always sought a middle ground, 'a neutral position', between all his predecessors' moves to make sense of time. This conclusion comes back with an insistent regularity throughout Hodge's book, but is never developed – understandably – in an overarching conclusion. Now, is it fair to reduce Derrida to such neutrality?

The accusation of neutrality is common among detractors of Derrida, especially when it comes to

politics. The litany is, without fail, that Derrida remains merely neutral between the religious and non-religious, between Judaism, Christianity and Islam, and, worst of all, between various philosophical engagements and arguments. So when it comes to his account of time, this generally accepted view of his neutrality is on well-prepared ground. Hodge writes:

It is the refusal to choose between these three accounts of time, which positions Derrida's notion of time and impossible possibility, as neither that of Heidegger nor that of Levinas, nor that of Blanchot; neither *Dasein*, nor *Ereignis*, nor infinity, as an intimation of the divine, nor writing as a death, revealing the impossibility of dying.

The problem with such a view is that it reduces Derrida's work to an attempt, not so much to neutralize opposites, but to bridge all these contradictory positions. Derrida thus ends up being understood as the philosopher who attempted to bring together, through deconstructive moves, both literature and philosophy, theology and Marxism, Judaism and Negative Theology, and so on. The rationale for such neutrality is obviously that deconstruction and its 'themes' (undecidability, *différance*, etc.) prevent the very possibility of a demarcation between these traditional classifications, leaving us stranded, if not in a dead end, at least in a no-man's-land of abstract neutrality.

However, is this accusation or this use of the term 'neutral' by Hodge justified? Should this term not be prone again to reinvention? If neutrality is the end point of deconstruction, and specifically of Derrida's work, then it cannot mean not belonging to any side in a war, dispute or controversy. It must mean something else. Neutrality must be about overturning the cycle of opposites; it must actively pursue an exteriority that would be transcendent but without relation; it must be able to invent that which puts economy in motion. In other words, it must remain a gift – that is, something which cannot be confused with presence or its phenomenon. Only when neutrality stops being negative will it make sense of Derrida's notion of time. And in this way, neutrality will indeed allow us to understand Derrida's contradictions, disaffections and escapist gestures, not as a refusal to take sides or as a desperate attempt to bridge the unbridgeable, but as the gift of invention, the pure act of giving unconditionally. So if Derrida does not try to make or evade connections between negative theology and political theory, between messianism and Marxism, between time and history, then is it really fair to say that he remains 'neutral' like Switzerland, or that he is only a 'mediating instance' like Kofi Annan between the philosophers he reads?

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