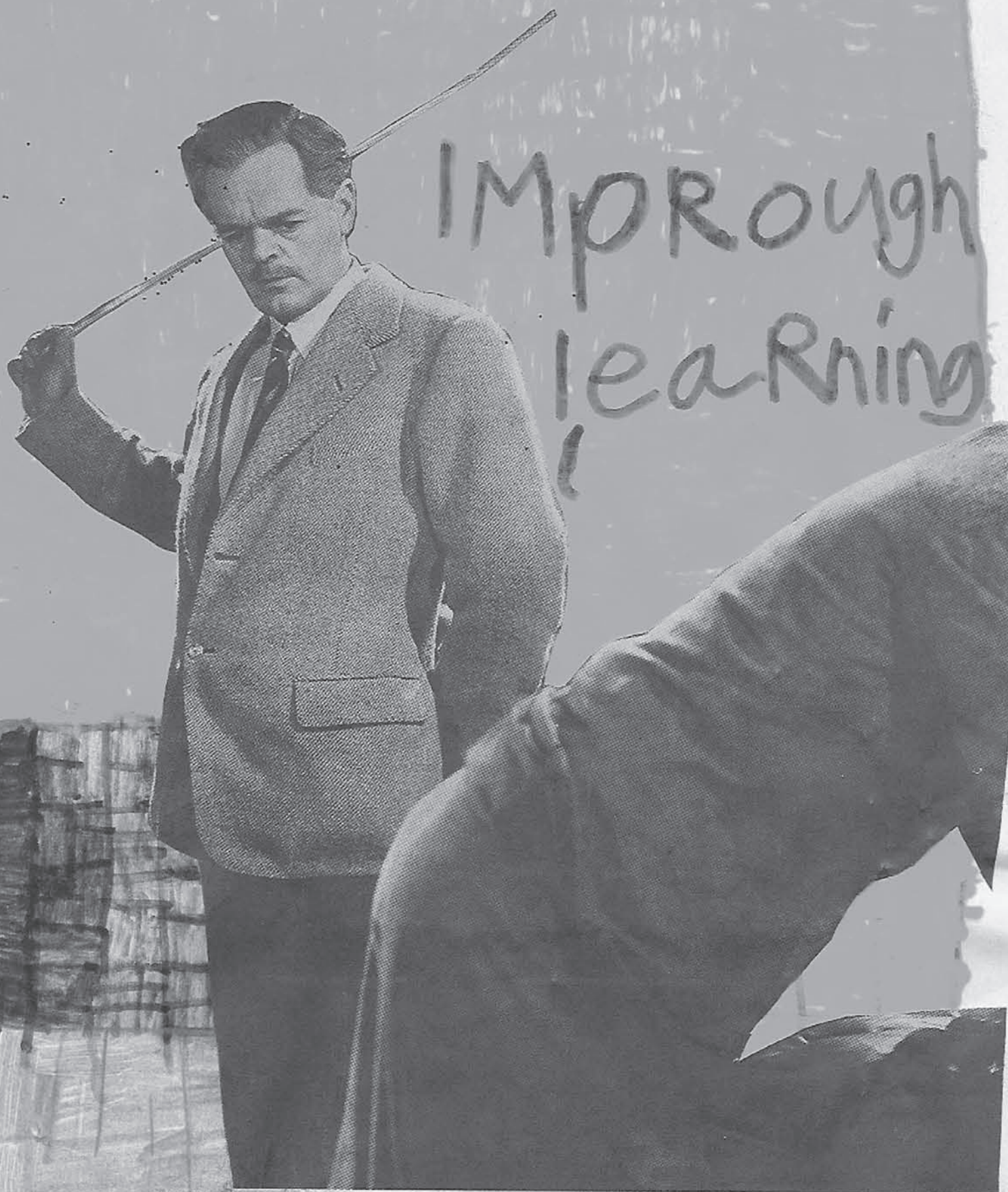


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Who Are You to tell me to Question Authority?

Radical education in a 'proto-fascist' era

Benjamin Franks

Against the New Authoritarianism: Politics after Abu Ghraib

Henry Giroux

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Winnipeg, Canada

2005, pp. 198

ISBN: 1894037235

Henry Giroux is a highly prolific radical educationalist who has authored over 40 books. Many of his works apply the analytical insights of Critical Theory (a synonym for the Frankfurt School of unorthodox Marxists such as Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer and Herbert Marcuse) to highlight the impact of the cultural industries on children's learning. In *Against the New Authoritarianism*, Giroux returns to one of the central concerns of the Frankfurt School: the rise of fascism within liberal democratic societies.

The book has two main hypotheses, which are interrelated. The first is that under the Presidency of George W. Bush, the United States is approaching a proto-fascist state; the second that a critical education is a vital strategy for resisting such developments. The first thesis is by far the most controversial, for the classification of states into particular categories has had far-reaching policy implications. The academic Jeanne Kirkpatrick, a policy advisor to Ronald Reagan, divided non-democracies into two types, those acceptable 'authoritarian' states who the US should support and unacceptable 'evil' / 'totalitarian' states who must be actively undermined.¹ Underneath the rhetoric, the only difference between the two was that 'totalitarian' states had an official policy of 'communism' or 'socialism' and a more redistributive economy, whilst the merely 'authoritarian', whilst having no better human rights records (and in many cases worse), were favourably disposed towards US investment. However, this division between acceptable 'authoritarian' and unacceptable 'totalitarian' regimes not only sought to justify the military and diplomatic manoeuvres of the US in the 1980s, but also helped to shape them. A similar if more simplistic division shapes Bush's foreign policy, with similarly calamitous consequences.

So when Giroux uses the terms 'proto-fascist' and 'fascism', he is not merely employing them in the lazy rhetorical way to stand for something merely 'objectionable'. Giroux is well aware of the political ramifications of these descriptors for the current US regime, and defends their application against likely critics from the right and soft-left. In order to pre-empt these replies, Giroux clarifies that in using the term he is not

suggesting that the United States is literally akin to previous historical examples of fascist regimes. The new authoritarianism is not arriving in swastika emblazoned brown shirts; instead, it uses the discourse of democracy, even when it undermines it. Thus in the acknowledged footsteps of novelist-activist Arundhati Roy, political theorist Sheldon Wolin and American former Middle Eastern journalist Chris Hedges, Giroux sees the new fascism as embodied within democratic institutions, rather than burning them down. So too the new fascist state has a different relationship to the economy: instead of the state incorporating private business (Mussolini), or subordinating industries to the will of the party-state (Hitler), private institutions have taken over the democratic apparatus of government (pp. 17-21).

The economic developments within the United States since the initial rise of fascism in the early twentieth century, and its now unique position

The pictures were framed like pornography – that individualised, commodified version of sex – and as such the images from Abu Ghraib provide Giroux with a significant set of proto-fascist texts for discussing the wider social processes that produced them.

in late-modernity as an unchallenged military power, means that the old checklist characteristics of fascism, such as that employed by Zbigniew Brzezinski (former policy hawk to the Carter administration) no longer apply. Originally, the characteristics of fascism included an official ideology; a single mass party – typically led by a single person; a system of terror, organised through a political party; monopoly control of communications; sole control of weapons and central control of the economy. These seem absent, or at least underdeveloped, in the US. Giroux acknowledges this, and persuasively argues that instead proto-fascism is formed by a different set of conditions, but shares at least one core element of traditional fascism – a concentration in the hands of the dominant class and away from the broad mass of people (pp. 34-37).

Giroux draws out eight central elements of the new authoritarianism: first, *reactionary modernism*, in which an alliance of free-marketeers, extremist evangelical Christians and neo-conservatives build a sustained social order based upon, and perpetuating, class, gender and ethnic hierarchies (pp. 37-38). The second feature is the *corporatization of civil society*, in which the democratic social spaces where people create their own social relationships are instead placed into service for the business sector and the administrative arm of the state. Without these spaces, "it becomes more difficult for individuals to imagine themselves as political agents or to understand the necessity for developing a discourse capable of defending civic institutions" (p. 39). As a result of this enclosure of communal fora, there are fewer avenues for constructing alternative values and social practices to those laid down by the dominant class (pp. 37-40).

The third feature of proto-fascism is the developing *discourse of patriotism and nationalism* and the culture of fear that supports it. A continual battery of jingoism on the news media, which includes the fluttering flags of the media idents, the label badges of the TV newscasters, and the marginalisation or silencing of governmental critics as 'unpatriotic', are indicative of the strong current of nationalism used to bolster domestic and foreign policy (pp. 40-42). This incessant promotion of a militarised, chauvinistic discourse goes alongside a fourth characteristic: that of *control of mass media* through a combination of oligarchical corporate ownership and significant state regulation. Giroux accuses G. W. Bush's executive of going further than any previous government in intertwining his administration with the mass media and manipulating the *Fourth*

*Estate.*² The current leadership have altered legislation to create unchallengeable media conglomerates whose interests and values are inevitably those of economic liberalism, paying journalists to appear objective whilst promoting government policy; hiring actors to pretend to be news reporters to ask prepared questions of officials and creating fake news programs that carry government propaganda and distributing them to unwitting local television channels as video news (pp. 43-46). This deterioration in journalism has an impact on the fifth element – *the rise of an Orwellian version of Newspeak.*

Critical discourse is altered such that policy impacts are disguised, their intentions concealed and rigorous evaluation discouraged. Amongst the examples Giroux identifies are the deliberate misuse of terms such as ‘reform’ and ‘compassionate’, the packaging of policies which allow industries to freely pollute as ‘Clear Skies’ legislation, calling estate tax on multimillionaires ‘death taxes’ and describing supporters of redistributive taxation as akin to the ‘Nazis’. Other Orwellian techniques include the fabrication of the historical record: for example denying that assertions made prior to, and in support of, the Iraq War were ever stated (pp. 47-51). In such circumstances the ability to hold the actions of the powerful to account, or even conceive of a contrary position, becomes restricted.

The sixth element of US proto-fascism is the *collapse of the separation of church and state.* Rather than the tenets of democracy justifying governmental decisions, appeals are made to unknowable deities and their institutional supporters. The growing use of faith-based institutions in state provision further lessens critical thinking and democratic discourse (pp. 53-61). The lessening of democratic guarantees in order to pursue millennial goals is also responsible for the overt governmental approval of torture in the war against terrorism (p. 117).

The final two features are the ones Giroux spends greater time on discussing – *Militarization at home and abroad and the replacement of democratic institutions by neo-liberal ones.* Militarization begins to shape every area of public life, and acts as cause and justification for the maintenance of entrenched hierarchies, the intensification of labour, a cultural politics based on machismo and the entry of military structures into civil society. The extent and influence of the armed forces in the United States is exemplified in George Monbiot’s quoted findings: “[the US is] now spending as much on war as it is on education, public health, housing, employment, pensions, food aid and welfare put together” (p. 65). It is no wonder, with such enormous sums of money available, that universities prioritise research for defence departments over social research and productive learning for students (p. 68). Nor should it be thought that the US is unique in this regard: Glasgow University for instance, like many other HE institutions, has spent more in recent years on promoting its Aerospace, Defence and Security Markets programmes (thanks to investment by Scottish Enterprise) than it allocated to specialist student recruitment for (its now threatened) Liberal Arts Campus in Dumfries.³

This intercession of militarized practices into other aspects of state and society, along with the closure of critical thinking and the concentration on patriotic discourse, is viewed almost entirely positively by broad sections of US society, in which the armed services can be seen to do no wrong (p. 66). Whilst John Kerry and John McCain’s candidatures for Office were not explicitly mentioned, would be indicative of the movement of a militarized ideology gaining precedence. Much of Kerry’s original electoral appeal was, supposedly, his war record, a record that the Republican campaign felt would resonate with the electorate unless it was systematically traduced, whilst absurdly promoting Bush, as a war hero. Thus, being a loyal member of the military engaged in a disastrous, destructive imperial adventure is presented by the US’s two main parties as a positive electoral asset.

Militarization with its corresponding social practices based on hierarchy, unquestioning obedience, uniformity and security inform the social practices in other state institutions. The limited constitutional rights guaranteed in a classical liberal democracy are overturned in favour of detention without trial, military courts and suspension of civil liberties. Cultural activities, such as fashion, video-games and children’s toys are embedded with militaristic values, and used from an early age to enamour youth to joining the armed forces (pp. 76-80). Greater stress on security, and fear of any abhorrent behaviour, has led to harsh punishments even for minor infractions. Schools, in particular, now prepare pupils for the proto-fascist future with draconian policing and ever greater surveillance, such as the “early morning drug-sweep at Stratford High School [in which] when the police arrived, they drew guns on students, handcuffed them and made them face the wall. No drugs were found in the raid” (p. 69).

The final feature of Giroux’s eight point characterisation of US proto-fascism is the replacement of democratic practices with neo-liberal economic structures. Welfare state provision is dismantled in favour of support for large corporations, and spaces in civil society not primarily based on extraction of surplus value are encroached upon by corporations. The end result is that “Neo-liberalism empties the public treasury, privatizes formerly public services, limits the vocabulary and imagery available to recognize anti-democratic forms of power, and reinforces narrow models of individual agency” (p. 91). Capitalism encloses the economic commons, whilst restricting individual imagination to desires based on commodity consumption.

Whilst the descriptions of the closure of critical space in the US in the years immediately after the Iraqi invasion are convincingly distressing, there are a number of areas where Giroux’s analysis is questionable. Some are easily dealt with – such as the criticism that there is little explanatory grounding as to why these eight characteristics rather than those of Brzezinski, or indeed the ten selected by Naomi Wolf,⁴ are the pertinent measures of proto-fascism. Are these features not just an arbitrary selection of traditional gripes about a successful conservative, democratic society? A reply might be that the features Giroux highlights individually not only represent the concentration of power such that creative non-hierarchical social relations are harder to achieve and imagine, but collectively they represent a set of almost impenetrable apparatuses of domination. The horrific amalgamation of these elements seems to be collectively embraced in Iraq, and in particular the torture of detainees at Abu Ghraib, which are now immortalised in the “now-infamous photos” (p. 111).

The construction of the images reflects the composers’ values – a glorified militarised western supremacism, humiliating in the name of security the non-Christian enemy. Acts are carried out in some instances, not by military personnel, but their neo-liberal surrogates, private contractors (or mercenaries) who therefore evade even the few military legal structures on the treatment of prisoners (pp.117-21). The mainstream US media’s initial Orwellian response was to ignore or excuse the torture of suspects (p. 123). The pictures were framed like pornography – that individualised, commodified version of sex – and as such the images from Abu Ghraib provide Giroux with a significant set of proto-fascist texts for discussing the wider social processes that produced them.

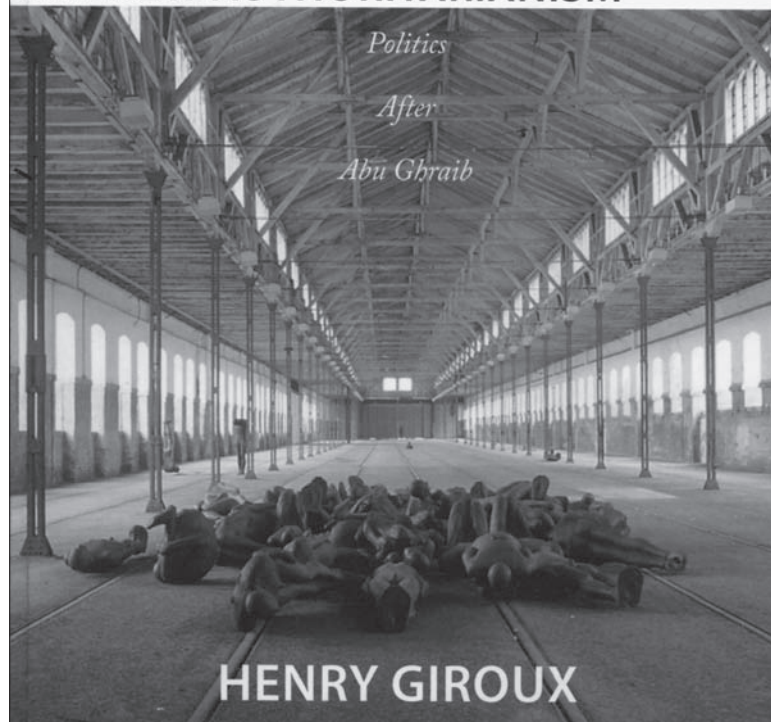
Another likely avenue of criticism is that Giroux identifies neo-liberalism as not only being compatible with fascism, but a necessary feature of the new authoritarianism. This is highly controversial, as the orthodoxy of conservative and liberal opinion, propagated by influential theorists like Kirkpatrick, Ludwig von Mises, F. A. Hayek, Karl Popper and Roger Scruton, is that the determining feature of totalitarianism was state intervention in the economy.⁵ These opinion-formers regarded the institution of private property as a bulwark against the

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excessive concentration of powers in the state. Economic liberalism is represented as the true freedom and thus presented as the polar opposite of authoritarianism. Yet economic liberalism provides no such defence against state power. It is predicated on enforceable contracts, which require state functions – and rather than distributing power, neo-liberalism moves towards monopolisation of the economy.⁶ Further, the values of the market economy, as Giroux points out, become increasingly dominant, thereby excluding all other principles based on different, more humane, models of productive, dignified social relationships.

Potentially stronger criticisms of Giroux's text lie precisely in his underlying hypothesis concerning the totalising power of neo-conservatism. Giroux shares with the members of the Frankfurt School, who he approvingly cites, a pessimistic and almost wholly determined account of future social developments, in which the prognosis for alternatives to dominant powers looks bleak. Giroux, like Adorno and Marcuse, fears that we are approaching a one-dimensional future composed of intellectually stunted individuals, who are manipulated by the cultural industries, endorse militarised social hierarchies and engage in relationships conceived of only in terms of market-values. This grim dystopia is subject to continual monitoring by an evermore technologically-equipped police and legitimised by an increasingly subservient, partisan and trivial media. However, whilst Giroux's account of growing authoritarianism is convincingly expressed, it is potentially disempowering, as it would suggest little space for opposition.

It is not simply wishful thinking to suggest that the existing power structures are neither as complete nor as impervious as Giroux's account would suggest. Whilst the old media of radio, film and television are increasingly dominated by a few giant corporations (p.46), new technologies have opened access to dissident voices and created new forms of communication and organisation. Whilst the military are extending their reach into greater areas of social and political life, and intervening in greater force throughout the globe, resistance to military discipline is also arising, with fewer willing to join the army in both the US and UK.⁷ Bush's long term military objectives look increasingly unfeasible as Peter Schoomaker, the former US Chief of Staff, told Congress on December 15, 2006 that even the existing deployment policy is looking increasingly 'untenable'.⁸ The 'overstretch' of military resources is matched by an economy incapable of fulfilling its primary neo-conservative goals of low taxation, sound national finances and extensive military interventions. Whilst this is not to suggest that the US is on the point of financial implosion, the transition to a fully proto-fascist state is unlikely to be seamless or certain.

Giroux's preferred form of resistance is *radical education*. The photographs from Abu Ghraib were iconic not just in their encapsulation of proto-

fascism, but in their public pedagogic role. Their prominence highlighted the many different sites of interpretation, as Giroux rightly stresses, there is no single way to interpret a photograph, however potent the depiction. The ability to interpret an image requires an ongoing process by a critical citizenry capable of identifying the methods by which a picture's meanings are constructed (p. 135). Giroux's critical pedagogy overtly borrows from Adorno's essay 'Education After Auschwitz', and proposes "modes of education that produce critical, engaging and free minds" (p. 141). But herein lies one of the flaws with the text: Giroux never spells out what sorts of existing institutions and social practices are practical models of this critical pedagogy. Thus, he does not indicate what methods he finds appropriate in resisting the proto-fascist onslaught nor how merely interpreting images critically would fundamentally contest hierarchical power-relationships.

Questions arise as to the adequacy of his response to the totalising threat he identifies in the main section of the book. Clearly existing academic institutions in the US are barely adequate given the campaigns against dissident academics led by David Horowitz (p.143). Giroux recounts in the final chapter, an interview conducted by Sina Rahmani, his own flight from the prestigious Penn State University to McMaster University in Canada because of managerial harassment following his public criticisms of Penn's involvement in military research (p. 186). But whilst Giroux recognises that education is far wider than what takes place in institutions of learning there is no account of what practical forms these take. Nor does Giroux give an account of why a critical pedagogy would take priority over informed aesthetic or ethical practices. Such a concentration on education would appear to prioritise those who already have (by virtue of luck or social circumstance) an already existing expertise in critical thinking, risking an oppressive power-relationship in which the expert drills the student into rigorous assessment. This lapse into the role of the strident instructor demanding the correct form of radical response, occasionally appears in Giroux's text: "within the boundaries of critical education, students have to learn the skills and knowledge to narrate their own stories [and] resist the fragmentation and seductions of market ideologies" (p. 155). Woe betide the student who prefers to narrate the story of the person sitting next to them, or fails to measure up to the 'educators' standard of critical evaluation.

These are, however, minor problems. *Against the New Authoritarianism* is a highly readable, passionate and well-researched polemic against the nexus of hierarchical institutions that have formed in the United States. It addresses the multifaceted interactions between military, media, government and education that constitute much of modern North America and bravely identifies the threat of authoritarianism.

Notes

- 1 Kirkpatrick, J. (1979), 'Dictatorships and Double Standards', *Commentary*, November 1979, available online at <<http://www.commentarymagazine.com/cm/main/viewArticle.aip?id=6189>> last accessed 26 April 2007.
- 2 The term *Fourth Estate* refers to the press, both in its explicit capacity of advocacy and in its implicit ability to frame political issues.
- 3 With admirable openness Glasgow University's 'ADS Programme: Your Key to the Aerospace, Defence and Security Markets...' is available online at <<http://www.gla.ac.uk/ads/>>, last accessed 25 April 2007. Information on the Save Glasgow University at Crichton campaign is available at <http://www.geocities.com/glasgow_at_crichton/>, last accessed 25 April, 2007.
- 4 N. Wolf, 'Fascist Steps', *The Guardian*, G2, April 24, 2007, pp. 4-11
- 5 K. Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism* (Routledge: 2002); R. Scruton, *Thinkers of the New Left* (Claridge: 1998); L. von Mises, *Human Action* (W. Hodge: 1949); F. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (Routledge: 2002).
- 6 For instance one company, Tesco's, provides 31% of all groceries bought in the UK, collectively the main supermarket chains account for nearly 80% of Britain's total grocery spend. 'Tesco set to unveil £2.5bn profit', Sunday, 15 April 2007, <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/6557187.stm>>, last accessed 24 April 2007; J. Blythman, *Shopped: The shocking power of British supermarkets* (Harper Perennial: 2005): p. 16; pp. 303-04; see too Corporate Watch, *What's Wrong With Supermarkets*, fifth edition (Corporate Watch: 2006).
- 7 C. Myrie 'US recruitment hit by Iraq effect', BBC Online, Wednesday, 27 July 2005 <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/4722445.stm>>, last accessed 25 April 2007; 'Recruitment age for Army raised', BBC Online, Saturday, 6 January 2007, <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/6236345.stm>>, last accessed 25 April 2007 and 'Military "faces retention crisis"', BBC Online, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/6233989.stm>, last accessed 25 April, 2007.
- 8 D. Lyon 'How the US plans to "retake" Baghdad', BBC Online, Thursday, 8 March 2007, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/6370109.stm>, last accessed 25 April 2007.

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Closed Circuit Tunnel Vision

Tom Jennings

Red Road, 2006, United Kingdom / Denmark, 113 mins
Director, Andrea Arnold; Producer, Carrie Comerford

Concern over the use of information gathered by governments about their citizens has a long history, and the increasing sophistication of surveillance that matches the complexity of state and private institutions has been fertile ground for a variety of artistic, philosophical and political projects. The most prominent theme is the state's proclivity for interfering in everyday life, purportedly in the public interest of social cohesion and stability but in practice for the benefit of those with power seeking more of the same. The cinema of paranoia grossly oversimplifies such scenarios, including Fritz Lang's *Dr Mabuse* films of the 1920s, Hitchcock's *Rear Window* (1954), *1984* (dir. Michael Anderson, 1956), *Winter Kills* (William Richert, 1979), a 1984 remake (Michael Radford, 1984), *Enemy of the State* (Tony Scott, 1998), and now the tired bourgeois triumphalism of *The Lives of Others* (Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, 2006). Recent experimental films such as *Unrequited Love* (Chris Petit, 2005) and *Hidden* (Michael Haneke, 2005) develop the phenomenology of persecution to some extent, but a naïve belief that in the virtual omnipotence achieved by cumulative observation is still the rule – so that individual resistance to oppression means seeking out loopholes, weak points and blind spots in the blanket coverage of objective data.

Given that independent and arthouse cinema-makers claim to be deconstructing the voyeuristic fantasies masquerading as reality in mainstream cinema, it may seem surprising that the effectiveness of surveillance technology itself in delivering truth is rarely interrogated. An exception here is Coppola's *The Conversation* (1974) that notably achieved this, despite restricting itself to the conspiratorial recording of voices and professional, expert and elite agendas. However, fictional treatments have failed to imagine the wider social and cultural significance of developments that may well lead to the current proliferation of high-resolution cameras that loom over urban areas across the UK becoming progressively integrated with ID card systems and comprehensive national databases (which will be hawked around for corporate scrutiny and input). Worse, despite the saturation coverage already offered by one-fifth of the world's CCTV units trained on us in the UK, some local councils already fit ex-military employees with headset versions to roam dodgy areas – yet the local

opposition to this creeping authoritarianism goes little further than queasily rehearsing outdated Orwellian pieties or lofty liberal abstractions concerning privacy.¹

In this context, perhaps Andrea Arnold's *Red Road*, a Glasgow-set suspense thriller, was awarded the Jury Prize at the Cannes Film Festival last year partly in recognition of its nerve in attempting to transcend cliché and liberal platitudes. It can't have hurt that it is also an immensely impressive, ambitious, intelligent and idiosyncratic film, with a complex structure, taut pace, powerful script, convincing characterisations, evocative design, vivid photography, astute direction, and compelling performances. *Red Road* originates in Lars von Trier's post-Dogme Advance Party project, which involved Lone Scherfig and Anders Thomas Jensen (undeterred by the failure of a similar concept in Lucas Belvaux's *Trilogy*) outlining a set of characters to be played by the same actors in three low-budget DV features in different genres by novice writer-directors. *Red Road* depicts Jackie (Kate Dickie), a widow in her thirties working as a low-paid CCTV operative alerting emergency services to incidents in the north of the city. Shunning family and friends since her bereavement, her drab, hermit's life seems to provide no pleasure beyond an occasional flickering smile when the quirks of ordinary folk on-screen interrupt her scanning for stabbings and muggings.

Her robotic routine is disrupted when she spots the man responsible for the deaths of her husband and young child. Clyde (Tony Curran) has been paroled early for good behaviour, and Jackie's subsequent grim, single-minded, remote pursuit soon turns to stalking. He shares a high-rise flat on the run-down Red Road with disturbed youngsters Stevie (Martin Compston) and April (Natalie Press), with whom Jackie cultivates relationships after blagging her way into a party there. After several meetings she has sex with Clyde, whereupon her plan is revealed as she leaves, rips her face and clothes and accuses him of rape. However, Stevie tracks her home and confronts her but then accepts her explanation. Also now aware of Clyde's efforts to connect with his own teenage daughter, Jackie's demonising hatred dissolves along with her own character armour, and she drops the charges. Together they visit the accident site where his regret, combined with a determined positivity – despite worse prospects than her – leads her to reconcile with the in-laws, scatter the loved-ones' ashes and at last contemplate a future.

In Full View

Arnold has consistently emphasised her intention to question the ramifications of surveillance in Britain (having wanted to make a documentary on the subject before being offered *Red Road*). She explains the apparent acceptance of the state's intrusiveness in terms of "our national psyche" – a reference point which, beyond hysterical hyperbole, has been absent from debate on the subject on current affairs programmes.² Similarly, the critical reception of the film tended to emphasise Jackie's personal psychological and social trajectory and her individual pathology – with the paranoid snooping seen only as convenient metaphor and instrument for its expression. But interpreting this film as a tale of the neurotic armed with the power of a million eyes is to miss the point of this story's deconstruction of the unglamorous, supposedly benign perspective of those trying to pre-empt street violence. Juggling conventions from several film genres, the theme here is the inherent unreliability of suspicious monitoring as a mode of understanding that can lead to action and power.

The Advance Party character sketch limited itself to describing Jackie as "cool and aloof because of a terrible loss she has suffered ... The world has been insanely unfair to her". However, while the camera shadows her claustrophobically when not taking her point of view, information about her subjectivity, motives and backstory is scrupulously withheld (reminiscent of the contemporary cinematic naturalism, for example, of Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne). Forcing viewers to guess who she is and what she's up to mimics the process of interpreting CCTV images, using only sequences of trivial, isolated or arbitrary visual clues. Prior experience in similar contexts naturally inflects and colours any conclusions drawn, and expectations and predictions will further depend on resonances with our personal preconceptions, prejudices and predilections. Deep-seated anxiety or biographical trauma predispose us to associate victims with our own pain and suspects with fear or anger – but when feedback from direct interaction is not available, reality cannot be tested against the attributes unconsciously projected on to others, because they derive from one's own preoccupations.

So, this damaged protagonist is far from proactively powerful at the hub of the panopticon. She is functionally impotent – moved only by an occasional remote compassion (for example, for



a bloke with a sick bulldog or a dancing office-cleaner), prompting isolated expressions of human warmth which establish our sympathy for her numbly repetitive existence. A similarly mundane event triggers the unfolding drama. Noticing the possibly sinister pursuit of a girl on to waste ground, Jackie's anxieties turn to mild arousal once consensual sex ensues, quickly followed by shock at recognising Clyde. Then, galvanised by imagining that her privileged gaze promises mastery over him, exposing herself to danger in his real world eventually proves to be a hollow victory. Revenge is redundant once its quarry is humanised by the yearning for intimacy they share and now that her anguish need no longer be suppressed. By implication, the detached overview of everyday life actually prevents development, and offers protection only by sustaining a safe, habitual alienation.

However, while the surface content of the narrative surely echoes the process of dealing with loss – from grief, fixation, anger, and melancholy to re-engagement with the world – there is no straightforward submission to a simplistic counselling formulae: this mourner's pain is certainly not “managed”. Instead, she compulsively dismantles her own depressive defenses, casting off vulnerability for and overconfident recklessness and moving from self-hatred to the brink of self-destruction. In the process, hitherto dormant energies of aggression and libido are mobilised which couple capriciously to propel Jackie towards a variety of climaxes. The denouement, nevertheless, may seem a little anti-climactic, and too comfortably tidy (perhaps relating to the need to leave the characters intact for the next two Advance Party efforts). Even then, that Jackie's manic brazenness culminates in an uplifting, redemptive ending is as counter intuitive for her as it is for us. The narrative seams mined on the way seduced us into expecting the worst (as in the CCTV orientation), so that evidence of caring, empathy, or collective goodwill is easily discounted or uneasily misinterpreted in the inexorable gravity of violent or tragic destiny.

Precedents here for *Red Road* are furnished by cinema subgenres, such as rape revenge thrillers and recent, more sophisticated explorations of women's autonomy and sexual agency, like Carinne Adler's *Under The Skin* (1997), Jane Campion's *In The Cut* (2003) and Catherine Breillat's post-feminist brutalism from *Romance* (1999) to *The Anatomy of Hell* (2003). But while *Red Road's* tantalising plot flirts with exploitation, and stylistic flourishes both encourage and thwart cod-psychoanalysis, a thoroughgoing ambiguity built into imagery and character undermines the temptation towards universalising mythology in favour of social-realist specificity. So Jackie's reluctant contact with family establishes her traditional working-class background – her pursuit

of Clyde into a seedy world was not slumming it: she is neither excited nor disgusted, nor daunted by a bit of rough (linguistically or sexually). The affair conducted fortnightly in the vehicle of a married van driver reinforces her lack of prudishness, and counterpoints her repulsion from and attraction to Clyde. His feral, expressive, uninhibited sexuality embodies an honest, generous curiosity that belies the squalor of his situation, and which, on intimate knowledge, helps bring about a re-orientation toward her misery as those in his milieu also strive to kick-start stalled lives in a collaborative, open-hearted, and raw sociability.

Behind the Scenes

Jackie's journey, moreover, implicates far wider regimes of truth than local authority crime prevention schemes. It yields a convenient scapegoat in alignment with government policy and dominant popular media rhetoric that exaggerates under-class dysfunction as a cause rather than a symptom of society's ills. In this case his name is Clyde, living on Red Road, Glasgow – home to a proud libertarian-socialist heritage of a militant Red Clydeside that challenged historic political and social divisions whose descendent faultlines CCTV systems help paper over and mystify. When the politics of narcissism, envy and resentment poison the traditions of mutual aid already shattered by deindustrialisation, the human fallout breaks into discrete strata of hopelessness frozen in antagonism, ordered by hierarchies of precariousness, abjection, and, most of all, aspiration. Then, refracted by the cold gaze of neoliberal information management structures into a visibly classifiable lifestyle, those able to maintain a veneer of respectability institutionalise their marginal distinction by servicing and policing the rest.

But Jackie's solitary emotional confinement leaves no space for affection, as she observes Clyde trying to go straight as a 24-hour locksmith, his wounded, caring, rogue spirit provides the key to her prisoner's dilemma, softening the tough exterior of her obsession. Their fluid negotiation of the normally gendered ascriptions of initiative, desire and sensibility then facilitates a reciprocal altruism which supersedes hypocritical truisms of moral conformity. The site of this revelation gains additional poignancy from the knowledge that Red Road's actual eight tower-blocks now house asylum-seekers and refugees as well as ex-convicts and *Red Road* accordingly hints at renewed cycles of solidarity that are required for struggle in the global village taking shape outside of official structures, which are maintained by power-holders too busy dispassionately parading a matrix of superficial details across soulless monitor screens to take part. Their statistical correlations of



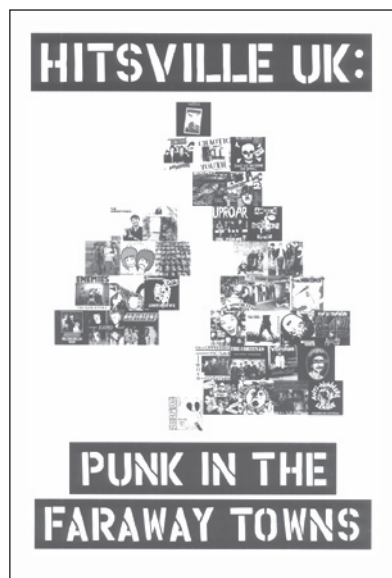
our everyday lives give an aura of authenticity to the pseudo-scientific justifications of our elected rulers, whose policies allow those lives to be shrouded in persistent acts of surveillance, simulating the self-aggrandising need of those in power to tame and regiment human entropy.

Notes

1. The shortcomings of which are spelled out in the excellent *Defending Anonymity*, published by the Anarchist Federation (available at www.afed.org.uk). Meanwhile two national groups are gearing up for a concerted campaign against ID cards: the 'No 2 ID' coalition focusses on the usual respectably pointless lobbying – but is gathering very useful information, including from countries where similar schemes have been roundly defeated (see www.no2id.net); whereas the more truculent and pragmatic 'Defy ID' network (www.defy-id.org.uk) anticipates the need for action on an anti-Poll Tax scale.
2. An exception being *Observer* columnist Henry Porter, whose *Suspect Nation* (Channel 4, November 2006) comprehensively rubbishes the supposed necessity, desirability, workability, trustability and affordability of the government's present plans as regularly peddled in transparent and fallacious spin. For valuable observations on the broader cultural context, see also James Horrox, 'When the Clocks Strike 13', and 'Surveillance as a Way of Life', in *Freedom* magazine, 16th December 2006 and 16th January 2007 respectively.

Comic & Zine Reviews

Mark Pawson



Hitsville UK: Punk in the Faraway Towns is an examination of the UK's punk music boom from 1976 to 1984 which avoids the usual clichés and stereotypes. Instead of concentrating on the Sex Pistols, The Clash and The Damned triumvirate as recent publications have tended to do, old punk, lecturer and graphic designer Russell Bestley aims to focus attention on the groundswell of punk bands, including all the uncelebrated provincial punks and none-hit wonders. This booklet and three-poster package examines punk via 7 inch picture sleeves. At the time most chart singles came in plain sleeves with record company logos. Picture sleeves were initially a sales gimmick, but punk bands quickly seized the opportunity to create bold, colourful, eye-catching sleeve designs giving a flavour of the exuberant music inside and picture sleeves quickly became *de rigueur*.

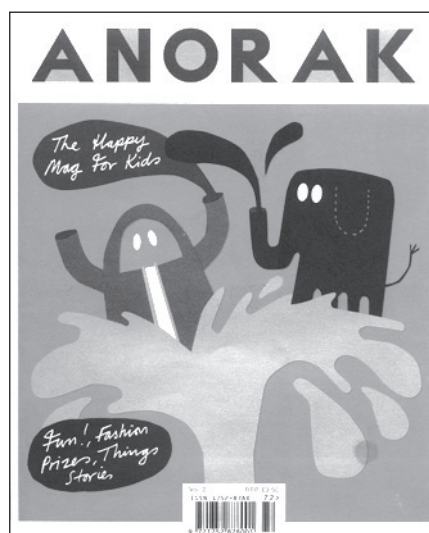
One side of the posters has a gallery of singles' sleeves; put these up at home and you'll instantly recreate the atmosphere of a late-'70s/early-'80s independent record shop. You'll be transported back to Saturdays spent gazing up at walls festooned with record sleeves knowing you wanted all of them but had enough pocket money for just one single and the bus fare home. The reverse side of these posters joins up to make an enormous punkiodic table: a graph with tiny pictures of hundreds of single sleeves mapped out by release date and geographic location. Most 40-/50-somethings will find this completely absorbing, poring over the posters for hours mentally ticking off all the bands you saw and records you bought. The wealth of information on the posters (the result of many hours of research and scouring eBay) is accompanied by a booklet which covers all possible categories of UK punk, with succinct articles on each: Proto Punk, Pub Rock, New Wave, Novelty Rock, DIY, Post Punk, the Avant Garde, Oi, Street Punk, Real Punk, New Punk, Hardcore and Anarcho Punk – labels which might seem blurred and irrelevant now, but which were fiercely argued and fought over at the time.

This is an excellent package of nostalgia-inducing historical research, all for the doing-it-for-the-kids price of £3.50 – echoing the “pay no more than 99p” slogan that certain punk bands always printed on their records.

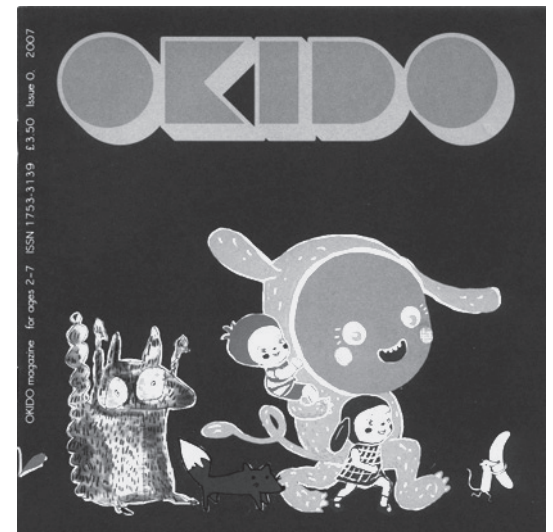
Hitsville UK: Punk in the Faraway Towns accompanied an exhibition in May at Millais Gallery, Southampton, but Russell Bestley is looking for other venues for the exhibition to tour to, particularly in faraway towns.



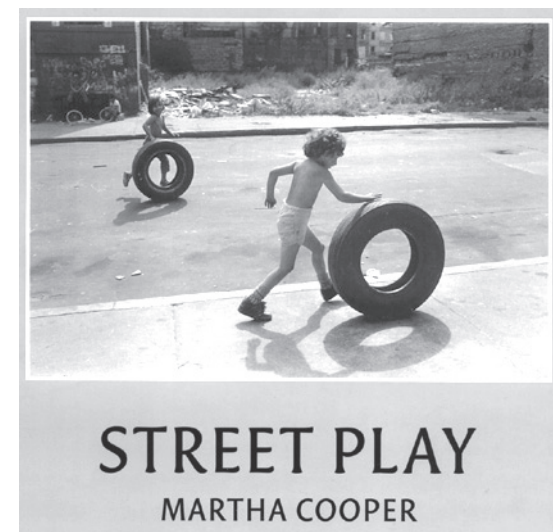
Duke is a glossy, full-color, lifestyle magazine – if your chosen lifestyle is that of an '80s obsessed Australian charity shop addict! Put together by the hyperenergetic duo of Raquel Welch and Emily Hunt (yes, really), it's a 64 page glimpse into their world of glamour on a budget, outrageous dressing up, dance-offs, crazy theme parties and extreme devotion to duty in the cause of scouring Sydney's charity shops. There's interviews with extreme hoarders; chats with grannies in the street; a scary article on stoner style; Raquel & Emily's A-Z of collecting, a four page guide to their museum-like apartment which I can personally very strongly identify with; a “We live here so you don't have to” guide to every shop and restaurant in their local scuzzy neighbourhood of Parramatta Road; and a feature on Lady Di's hats, frilly frocks and pregnancy dresses! Plus plenty of contributions by their artist and illustrator friends, and an all too familiar guide to “Things that ruin our lives in opshops” (trans. ‘charity shops’): the endless who-would-ever-even-wanted-that-when-it-was-new items that pointlessly clutter up charity shops creating obstacles and making the hardcore thrifter's mission to find the good stuff harder. After reading **Duke** I was exhausted and needed a little rest. There have been charity/thrift shopping zines before, but with **Thrift Score** and **Cheap Date** both now defunct, Raquel & Emily have inherited the ill-fitting, slightly scratched charity shopping zine queen crown.



There's a new wave of magazines for kids around. I picked up bright, eye-catching copies of **Anorak** and **Okido** recently. They're both crammed full of things to make, do, draw, colour, eat and read/get your parents to read to you. These two independently produced mags are refreshingly free of any TV series spin offs or licensed characters. **Okido** is completely advert free. **Anorak** which is the same price with twice as many pages has lot of ads, but they're aimed at parents rather than kids themselves and there's several competitions with good prizes, so that kind of balances things out.



Neither is overtly educational, worthy or preachy, and they don't even say “After you've finished enjoying this magazine please recycle it”. Perhaps kids just recycle things automatically these days? I prefer the clearer layout of **Okido**, which is aimed at ages 2-7. **Anorak** is aimed at older children, more like 6-11, and at times gets a bit too illustratory (artists not software) for my liking (sorry Rob). Beware: there's a photo-strip story in **Anorak** about a stuffed toy bear pissing himself with excitement!



Martha Cooper is best known for her photographs capturing the very early days of the New York Hip Hop and Graffiti scene. As a staff photographer for a New York newspaper in the late '70s she spent all day criss-crossing Manhattan to cover news stories. In quiet moments whilst waiting for assignments to come through she headed down to photograph everyday life in the squalid Lower East Side. **Street Play** is a collection of her previously unpublished photos of kids playing in the streets of New York – tiny, scruffy, kids making the dirty sidewalks, debris-strewn empty lots and abandoned buildings their playground: building dens, racing go-carts, cobbling together customised bikes from scavenged parts, and improvising fairground rides. It's a fascinating and fun document of a New York that no longer exists, and two seemingly opposite, incompatible elements of big city and small kids interacting free of any adult supervision. Sesame Street it is not! A few of my favourite photos: a small boy and girl concentrating intently on the task of catching flies in pop bottles, making their own mini zoo of imprisoned insects; a group of young entrepreneurs setting up their own ‘bar’ on the pavement using empty beer bottles and playing at being drunk; a gang of pre-teen Latino lads defiantly posing, displaying their rifles made out of broken pieces of wood and bits of string. Meeting these street kids was Martha Cooper's introduction to the emerging Hip Hop/Graffiti culture, and her work documenting that world are acknowledged classics, but for me **Street Play** is a much more interesting and enjoyable book. File next to Nils Norman's **An architecture of Play: A Survey of London's Adventure Playgrounds**.

Tour De Fence is a different approach to using the city as your playground. Heath Bunting and Kayle Brandon took a map of their home town, Bristol, and drew a large circle on it. Then, having remapped the city to suit themselves, set out to walk through Bristol following the circle as precisely as possible, going over underpasses, scaling walls and walking along fences where necessary. **Tour De Fence** is a book and set of too-

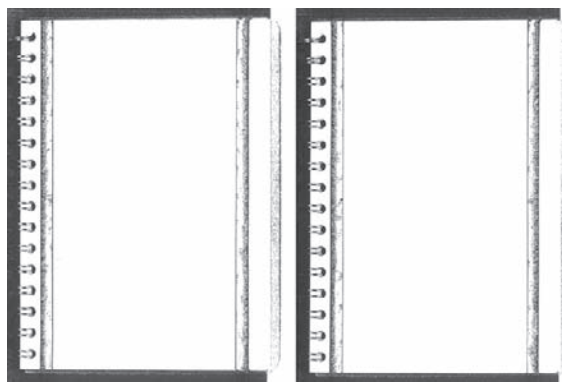
nice-to-tear-out postcards documenting this action which successfully blends urban exploration and civil disobedience. The kids in **Street Play** don't need any encouragement to make up their own games, but as adults we forget how to play purely for its own sake. **Tour De Fence** encourages us to start playing again by turning the city into a free playground and playing with no particular goal or aim in sight. Simultaneously, it engages with pertinent issues of increasing surveillance and control of public space, and the policing and control of state borders. I'm reviewing a printed publication here but should mention that Heath Bunting's projects exist both online and on the streets of the real world; both spheres feeding into and informing each other.



I picked **Tour De Fence** up at **Here** in Bristol. **Here** is a small, collectively run shop with a gallery downstairs. They sell a great selection of carefully chosen, independently produced magazines, zines, comics, books, cards and badges from the UK and US, together with gig tickets, prints by Bristol artists, and handicrafts from local Craft Rebels. They've even managed to squeeze in a sofa to encourage comfy browsing and are just round the corner from the Cube Cinema Microplex, forming their very own cultural hub.



Foie Gras by Edie Fake is a psycho-sexual, pumpkin-carving, gender-reassigning, (s)witch-hitting, castration-fantasizing, fox-fucking, fairytale-cookbook, complete with an invitingly tactile screen printed cover which is perforated front and back with inviting openings.

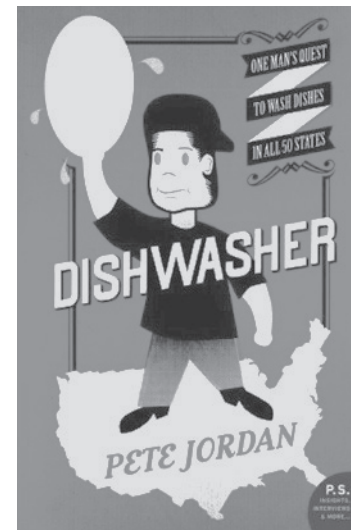


An envelope crammed full of nearly-impossible-to-describe comic booklets is a reviewer's nightmare – thanks go to Malcolm Duff for making this bad dream come true. **I Can't Draw** is a graphic meditation in which the artist repeatedly re-draws a set of goal posts in his notebook. Each successive drawing improves incrementally in quality and detail. Throughout this task he's repeatedly interrupted by a teacher towering over him, chiding "You're holding your pencil the wrong way" and offering helpful sounding but useless advice, such as how to hold a tennis racquet correctly. The artist gradually emerges from under his protective mane of shaggy hair and using the pencil as his weapon nullifies this overbearing authority figure by redrawing and reducing him to a simple diagram.



I discovered **Your Mum** buried in a slush pile of gig and club flyers in a branch of FOPP! It's a pocket-sized freebie crammed full of unfeasibly stupid stories: Noel Edmonds to buy Buck House; Winners Thinner ('Michael' and 'paint'); and updated personalised number plates (SUV TW8T, BL1NG SP4Z, F4T 2 J4G5). It's a pisstake of all those supermarket sleaze sheets and mid-market celeb-filled tabloids which everyone reads but nobody admits to buying; fertile sources for satire which have been well explored by **Viz**, **Bugs'n'Drugs** and **Hate**. Yes, it's still very silly. Yes, it's still very funny. **Your Mum** thoughtfully includes the list of your rights when arrested – maximum stupidity with helpful legal advice! I assumed **Your Mum** was just another one of those pseudozines that's really trying to sell alcohol/sweeties/clothes/

entertainment industry product to 18-25 yr-olds, but, unless I've been completely fooled, there's no product placement, not even a subtly placed website address. Maybe all those recent 'viral' marketing campaigns have infected each other with a deadly advert-flu and wiped themselves out?



Dishwasher Pete's classic **Dishwasher** zine combined his tales of dishwashing wanderlust and menial job madness together with articles on labour history and reviews of dishwashing in books and movies. It's long been out of print and unavailable, so I was excited to find out yesterday that his book **Dishwasher: One Man's Quest to Wash Dishes in All Fifty States** has just come out. I haven't seen a copy yet, but I'm sure it's good and will be indispensable. Published by Harper, it should be quite easy to get hold of. File next to other classic zine compilations: **the Temp Slave Book**, **Thrift Score book** and **Beer Frame book**.

Notes

Hitsville UK: Punk in the Faraway Towns – £3.50+postage; russwyd@hotmail.com

Duke – www.huntandwelch.com

Anorak – £3.50; www.anorak-magazine.com

Okido – £3.50; www.okido.uk www.myspace.com/okido

Street Play – £19.99; www.fromheretofame.com

Tour de Fence – £5.00; www.irational.org/fence

Here – 108 Stokes Croft, Bristol, BS1 3RU; 0117 942 2222

Foie Gras – \$2 + postage; ediefake@hotmail.com

I Can't Draw, and many other titles – malcyduff@hotmail.com

Your Mum – ???

Dishwasher: One Man's Quest to Wash Dishes in All Fifty States – Pete Jordan, Harper Perennial

'Reframing the Poverty Debate' the New Labour Way

Gerry Mooney

New Labour and the Politics of Aspiration

Speaking at a one-day conference of the Social Market Foundation in London on April 30, 2007, Jim Murphy, New Labour MP for East Renfrewshire and Minister of State in the Department for Work and Pensions talked of the need to 'reframe the poverty debate'.¹ In this speech and in a related pamphlet and newspaper article² Murphy strives to forge a distinction between what he terms 'conservation' on the one hand and 'aspiration' on the other. Aspiration, he claims, is the key to forging a new era of social progress and political change. Further public services 'reform', the promotion of 'choice' and developing 'personalised' services are all pinpointed as key elements in this process. For Murphy this politics of aspiration is key to developing New Labour's approach to poverty which, to use his terms, must replace 'the politics of charity' which he sees as dominating the discussion of poverty in the UK today.

We will return to Murphy's arguments a little later but it is highlighted here to draw attention to some of the ways in which the question of poverty is being reconstructed by New Labour and an assortment of journalists, academics and social and political commentators today. Without wishing to give this reconstruction a sense of coherence and organisation that it hardly merits, nonetheless it is increasingly evident that poverty is back on the agenda, but back on it in particular and very worrying ways. Of course at one level poverty has, with the exception of the period of Tory government during the 1980s and 1990s, rarely been removed from the political agenda – even if this is overtaken under New Labour with an emphasis on 'social exclusion'. In addition, arguably there is little that is new in this the latest 'rediscovery' of, and rethinking around, poverty. 'Poverty' is one of those issues that is always present, even if it often takes the form of an 'absent presence', that is an existing reality but one that does not always merit the attention it deserves. Despite repeated efforts by some anti-poverty campaigners, activists and academics,³ the question of poverty did not feature prominently in the recent Scottish Elections for example, largely sidelined along with many other important social and economic issues by the overwhelming and at times stifling debate on the question of 'the constitution'.

Poverty has long been an 'essentially contested' notion provoking numerous debates, arguments, controversies over definition, measurement and meaning as well as around the policy responses to it. Running through all of these debates one maxim tends to stand out: how poverty is defined, understood and talked about says much about the shape and nature of any policy and political response to it. And there is mounting evidence, both at UK and at Scottish levels that there is a coming together of some very regressive ideas and arguments which are helping to 'reframe' the poverty debate today in ways that should concern all of us who are interested in pursuing a more socially just agenda in contemporary Scotland. By this I mean not the New Labour neo-liberal vision of social justice premised on a celebration of the market but an entirely different conception and understanding of social justice that argues for social and economic equality through an attack on wealth and vested interests.

'The Poor' as a 'Problem Population'

The assumption that many readers of *Variant* will surely share – that discussions of poverty and inequality should start from questions of social justice, of fairness and of compassion – is often far removed from the tone and approach that some academics, social commentators and politicians (and not always right-wing politicians at that) bring to the debate. Alongside campaigning groups from the poor, activists, trade unionists, academics and socialists have long had to battle the idea that the poor are a 'problem' population, a population that is in some way out of step with the 'mainstream' of UK society. Such sentiments have long featured in accounts and explanations of poverty and, arguably, since the 1980s in particular, there has been something of a shift in political attitudes to poverty, both across different countries and at a global level, which regards poor people in some way as deficient, as contributing to their own precarious situation. While the nature, extent and intensity of such views vary between place and over time, we do not have to look far to find claims that 'the poor' represent a 'danger' not only to themselves, but also to 'wider' society. In each period over the past century and a half, when poverty and inequality has increased, as since the late 1970s and early 1980s not only is poverty *rediscovered*, but this is accompanied by attempts to construct 'the problem' not as one of poverty but of poor people, their behaviours, lifestyles, cultures and inadequacies of a multitude of differing kinds. How the question of poverty is understood and how poor people are talked of and labelled says everything about the policies that will be developed in response. Seeing the poor and disadvantaged as 'at risk' or as 'vulnerable', requiring (more) state support stands in sharp contrast to viewing the poor as some kind of 'problem' group or 'underclass' that necessitates strict management.

It is important to be aware that the history of the study of poverty is characterised by the use of a language that has tended to describe 'the poor' often in the most condemning and derogatory of ways. From a concern with the 'dangerous' and 'disreputable' poor in the nineteenth century through to 'problem families', 'dysfunctional families/communities' and the 'underclass' and 'socially excluded' of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, poor people have all too frequently been talked *about* (and rarely talked *with*) in the most derogatory of ways.⁴ Labels such as 'underclass', 'hard to reach', 'welfare dependent' as well as some uses of the notion of 'the socially excluded' are stigmatising and mobilise normative ways of thinking of poverty and inequality that constructs 'the poor' and disadvantaged almost as a distinctive group of people living 'on' or 'beyond' the 'margins' of society. In the process this language works to distance 'them' from 'us', the 'mainstream' of society, 'normal', 'hard working', 'responsible' citizens.⁵ Such language has become a stock in trade for many New Labour and Conservative politicians today – and not a few academics and journalists also!

The Re-emergence of 'Culture'-Centred Explanations of Poverty

There are a number of different ways of thinking of poverty that rely on what we could generally term a culture-centred perspective, that is an account that starts from and revolves around the



individual and or which focus on the production and reproduction of particular cultural and behavioural norms and ways of living that work in some way to keep poor people in poverty. Among the most well known of such ways of thinking are explanations which focus on 'cultures of poverty' or 'cycles of deprivation'.⁶ Culture, in this context, is being used to refer to a system of values, norms and attitudes that are regarded as normal for a particular group. The culture of poverty thesis claims that a set of values are being passed through families and across generations that prevent poor people and poor families 'escaping' from poverty. This approach became influential among both politicians and policy-makers in the United States during the 1960s and early 1970s as a means of explaining the persistence of poverty among black Americans. But it is a discourse that has travelled far and wide, albeit with some modification. It was popularised in the UK as a 'cycle of deprivation' in the 1970s by the Conservative politician, Keith Joseph, who argued that the persistence of poverty in the context of general economic growth, as in the 1950s and 1960s, was the consequence of the 'dysfunctionality' of the poor family. In an argument that was to foreground much of the Conservative thinking that was to emerge later in the 1970s and 1980s such poverty, Joseph claimed, would not be addressed through increased benefits, but by a transformation in the values and behaviour of the poor. Such thinking has also been developed and further popularised by the American social commentator, Charles Murray,

in his account of 'welfare dependency' and a developing 'underclass' in the United States and in the UK during the 1980s and 1990s. While the idea of an underclass has been around for some considerable time in the UK, having been used in the mid-1960s and early 1970s to refer to poverty among ethnic minority groups in some of Britain's urban areas, it re-emerged in a new and more potent form in the 1990s thanks largely – though not exclusively – to the work of Murray. When visiting Britain in 1999 as a guest of *The Sunday Times* to investigate if an underclass existed in this country, Murray left readers in no doubt of the 'problems' that the underclass posed for UK society:

"I arrived in Britain earlier this year ... a visitor from a plague area, come to see whether the disease is spreading and (my) conclusions were as dramatic as they were predictable: Britain has a growing population of working-aged, healthy people who live in a different world from other Britons, who are raising their children to live in it, and whose values are now contaminating the life of entire neighbourhoods."⁷

While widely criticised during the 1990s and to some extent overtaken by the idea of social exclusion, the ideology of an underclass has not disappeared without a fight and indeed has re-emerged of late in different contexts. Following the impact of Hurricane Katrina on New Orleans in late August 2005, for instance, Murray once more takes the opportunity to highlight what he sees as the most pressing 'social problem' in the contemporary United States, the 'underclass':

"Watching the courage of ordinary low-income people as they deal with the aftermath of Katrina and Rita, it is hard to decide which politicians are more contemptible – Democrats who are rediscovering poverty and blaming it on George W. Bush, or Republicans who are rediscovering poverty and claiming that the government can fix it. Both sides are unwilling to face reality: We haven't rediscovered poverty, we have rediscovered the underclass; the underclass has been growing during all the years that people were ignoring it, including the Clinton years; and the programs politicians tout as solutions are a mismatch for the people who constitute the problem. ... Other images show us the face of the hard problem: those of the looters and thugs, and those of inert women doing nothing to help themselves or their children. They are the underclass."⁸

In this one quote many of the recurring features of underclass explanations are laid bare: a distinction is drawn, in a language not too dissimilar from Blair and New Labour, between the 'hard working' and the 'inert'; crime and disorder are flagged as particular concerns; inadequate parenting (on the part of mothers if not fathers) is given attention and implicit here, if not in other responses to Katrina that mobilised underclass ways of thinking,⁹ state policies (and in particular welfare policies) are viewed as an important part of 'the problem' in that they contribute to the 'growth of the underclass'.

Reframing Poverty in Scotland Today

While explicit references to the existence of an underclass rarely feature in discussions of poverty in Scotland today, we should not be mistaken in believing as a result that the influence of such thinking has completely waned. Indeed, as highlighted at the outset of this article, we can only too quickly locate 'underclass' and other cultural-based ways of thinking. To illustrate this let us first of all return to Mr Murphy and to his politics of aspiration and his view that we need to 'reframe the poverty debate':

"If we are to continue to make real progress we need to reframe the debate on poverty. We should also reflect on whether government should approach poverty differently. In the past we sometimes spoke of the politics of aspiration as though it was distinct from the politics of poverty, but the politics of aspiration



and the politics of poverty are two sides of the same coin. There has been real and significant progress in tackling poverty in our society. *Despite this improvement, entrenched pockets of deprivation still undermine the progress we have made.* We have not yet managed to *crack the cycle of intergenerational poverty.* Inequalities in aspiration of parents drive inequalities in attainment for their children at schools. *The aspirations of poorer children differ from those who are better off – from the presents children ask for on their birthday, to the careers they want when they grow up.* If a boy's parent is convicted of a criminal offence, he is twice as likely to be convicted himself. Relative generational mobility has fallen over time. Today we are paying the price for the policy failures of previous decades. *The cycle of mobility, even as its peak, has been painfully slow.*" (emphasis added)¹⁰

Elsewhere he argues that the task for New Labour is to anticipate

"...the almost limitless aspirations of the many and *lifting the near-fatalistic intergenerational poverty of aspiration of the few.* We should also have a renewed confidence in eradicating poverty by transforming and reframing the consent to go further. And we must not falter at the thought of further transformation of public services." (emphasis added)¹¹

I hope that readers will forgive the inclusion of a lengthy extract from Murphy here¹² but these do show in stark terms some of the important ways in which poverty is now being approached by the emerging post-Blair new New Labour leadership. Murphy proceeds here to talk of the need to develop a 'modern form of social solidarity' 'based upon a renewed sense of progressive self-interest'.¹³ There are some significant pointers here to the likely future direction of New Labour policy-making in relation to poverty. 'Traditional' (for which read Old Labour/post-War social democratic) approaches to social solidarity are immediately ruled out in favour of a 'modern' approach that focuses on 'aspirations' and attitudes. In turn any sense of redistribution as a means of addressing poverty and inequality is also ruled out. The idea that we can have something called 'progressive self-interest' (or even 'growth with fairness') must surely compete with 'competition and cohesion' for the top slot in New Labour's ever lengthening list of contradictory 'buzz-phrases'. But this must send a shudder through those who are campaigning to have poverty, understood in relation to wealth and inequality, at the centre of social policy making.

Murphy's arguments might be dismissed as mere pamphleteering, as blue (as opposed to red!) -skies thinking, ideas that will not be reflected in policy outcomes. But there are two responses to this which means that we should take his ideas seriously. The first is that New Labour is already processing apace with 'personalisation' agendas which are increasingly informing social and public services delivery across the UK now.¹⁴ In other words further 'reforms' of public services and the even-greater emphasis on the consumer ('progressive self-interest!') and on choice is happening *now!* The second reason for being cautious in simply dismissing such thinking is that it shares in important respects what I would call

here 'ways of thinking' about poverty, disadvantage and inequality which are emerging in other social commentary in Scotland today; ways of thinking that echo in some respects the cultures of poverty theories of the 1970s and other 'culture-centred' explanations. These overlap to some extent with the growth in socio-psychological explanations of 'well-being'.

Regular readers of *Variant* will have come across critical examinations of the growth in the 'happiness' industry and emerging 'therapy' culture in Scotland in previous articles by Alex Law and Colin Clark in 2005 and 2006.¹⁵ Among other developments Clark notes in particular the growing influence, at least on the ex-First Minister Jack McConnell and the previous Scottish Executive, of ideas generated from the Scottish Centre for Confidence and Well-Being which would have us believe that it is a 'crisis of confidence' (reflected in the prevalence of a 'dependency culture' across parts of Scottish society) which is holding ordinary Scots 'back' from achieving their potential and therefore from prospering like the 'rest of us'!¹⁶ In such thinking any idea that inequalities of wealth, income, power and life chances play a role in shaping people's lives is immediately kicked into touch. As Law has powerfully argued, this reflects the neo-liberal agenda which is being rolled out in the devolved Scotland.

It would be mistaken to think that there is no awareness at all on the part of New Labour and among politicians of the other main political parties in Scotland that structural factors contribute to the production and reproduction of poverty. However, in some respects these are acknowledged but then immediately dismissed or at best 'sidelined' as factors 'beyond' the control of politicians and of the government (both in Scotland and at UK level), such as long-term social, economic and demographic change or, more often, 'globalisation'. A focus on individual deficiencies, family 'dysfunctioning' and assorted behavioural traits of one kind or another immediately becomes central. Adopting a structural approach of the kind that locates poverty in the context of class inequalities, exploitation and oppression does not even begin to feature in many of the dominant understandings of poverty.

Some examples of the way in which structural factors are recognised but simultaneously relegated have emerged in recent months each privileging 'non-material' factors! Reflecting on a Report from the Office of National Statistics that showed Glasgow men to be twice as likely to die from the effects of alcohol compared with anyone else, broadcaster and journalist Lesley Riddoch in a commentary in *The Scotsman* in February 2007 speaks of the "problems of working-class Glasgow" and of a culture of excess enjoyed by "a demoralised underclass."¹⁷ Again in February at conference on 'Transcending Poverties' in Glasgow, organised by the Royal Society of Edinburgh (and supported by the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland), previewed in a special edition of *The Herald's Society* supplement which was entirely devoted to the theme of poverty, there is repeated references to the need for the poor to take 'responsibility' for their own well-being, to spend their money on things other than cigarettes and alcohol. Prominent Scottish historian Tom Devine captured the thrust of this conference arguing that,

"This conference is important because it moves outside the orthodoxy of improving aspects such as employment, area regeneration or health campaigns and tries to look at the extent to which there must be cultural and indeed even spiritual underpinnings for this malaise."¹⁸

He continues:

"We can examine why the majority with means are unwilling to be taxed. If you are dealing with a straightforward transfer of surplus from the better-off

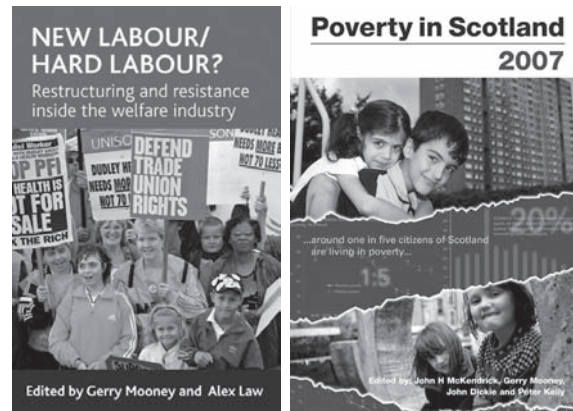
to the less well-off there is always the possibility of dependency. Redistribution of wealth in itself might not be the cure and simply perpetuate the malaise. I don't think the old methods of taxing the rich to help the poor will really work."¹⁹

In a related article on February 23, *Herald* journalist Alf Young, alongside castigating what he termed the 'poverty industry', chimed with Devine's arguments by claiming that: "Redistributist fiscal policies have their part to play. But we also need to rebuild the non-material pathways that were open to people like me nearly half a century ago. Otherwise the poor will always be with us."²⁰

Another Kind of Reframing is Possible – and Urgently Needed!

It is deeply worrying that after decades of important research and much debate around the underlying causes of poverty that anti-poverty campaigners across the UK today find themselves once more facing deeply regressive ideas and thinking, some example of which have been highlighted above. Claims of a 'malaise' (and why is it that the poor are regarded as a malaise – are the rich not a 'malaise?') – or of suggestions that 'the poor will always be with us' echo 19th century commentary on poverty; ideas of 'dependency' (again of the poor not of the wealthy) as well as reflecting cultural and underclass thinking. However, this shift to a more explicit individual and cultural focus fits well with the renewed claims of New Labour Ministers that "only work ends poverty" and that "benefits do not lift people out of poverty in this country, and it has never been the case that they do."²¹ And such thinking also finds a ready home in the celebration of the market that lies at the centre of the entire New Labour project. Jack McConnell, in his final weeks as First Minister spoke of his "top 10 challenges" to "accelerate progress to end poverty." There will be no prizes for guessing what was number one on the list – "we must continue with a stable environment for business to prosper... We need a stable, growing economy, with minimum risk, for business to flourish!"²²

The challenges facing poverty campaigners are arriving from different directions as we have seen and these are coming together in a queasy mix of neo-liberal, individual, cultural centred and pseudo-psychological ramblings. Against this we do need to reframe the poverty debate, yes once again, by emphasising the structural factors that generate poverty and disadvantage; by highlighting at each and every opportunity the class inequalities and unequal and exploitative social relations which so permeate Scottish and UK society today. This also involves 'moving upstream' in both our focus and analysis to concentrate more on the reproduction of wealth and power among a privileged minority of the rich. It is shameful that in a period when the gulf between rich and poor is reaching levels unsurpassed for well over a century that so little attention is devoted to the activities of the rich. This means, above all, analysing the class dynamics of society today,²³ challenging the uncritical celebrations of market-based economic and social policies and fighting for a more socially just Scotland.



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Notes

- 1 For speech access www.jimmurphy.labour.co.uk
- 2 'Jim Murphy, 'Progressive Self-Interest – the Politics of Poverty and Aspiration', in Social Market Foundation, *The Politics of Aspiration*, London, SMF, 2007 available at www.smf.co.uk see also James Purnell and Jim Murphy, 'The battle lines are aspiration versus conservation', *The Times*, March 26, 2007.
- 3 See for example John McKendrick, Gerry Mooney, John Dickie and Peter Kelly (eds) *Poverty in Scotland 2007*, London: Child Poverty Action Group.
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- 8 Charles Murray, 'The Hallmark of the Underclass', *The Wall Street Journal*, October 2, 2005, www.opinionjournal.com (accessed January 16, 2007).
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- 10 'Jim Murphy, 'Progressive Self-Interest – the Politics of Poverty and Aspiration', in Social Market Foundation, *The Politics of Aspiration*, London, SMF, 2007, p.14-15.
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- 12 An extract which contains some very contentious claims regarding New Labour's success in tackling poverty and addressing inequality. See McKendrick, Mooney, Dickie and Kelly, 2007 op cit, for a more 'measured' assessment.
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- 17 Lesley Riddoch, 'A City Revelling in Denial and Altered Reality', *The Scotsman*, February 26, 2007.
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- 21 Jim Murphy, speaking at a DWP organised international conference on welfare reform, London, March 26, 2007. See Nicholas Timmins and Andrew Taylor, 'Only work ends poverty, says minister', *Financial Times*, March 26, 2007.
- 22 Jack McConnell, Speech on Poverty in Scotland at the Launch of *Poverty in Scotland 2007*, Glasgow, March 2, 2007.
- 23 See for example Alex Law and Gerry Mooney, "We've Never Had it So Good": The 'Problem' of the Working Class in the Devolved Scotland', *Critical Social Policy*, 26, 3, 2006, pp.523-542.

The Agreed Truth & The Real Truth: The New Northern Ireland

Liam O'Ruairc

The 'historic' restoration of devolution in Northern Ireland, on 8 May 2007, has been hailed by the media as marking the symbolic end of the conflict there.¹ Like most aspects of the peace process, the opening of the Assembly was "carefully stage managed to present a positive and progressive image."² This is in line with news reports about the North being dominated by the 'success story' of the 'New Northern Ireland'. "There is an optimism and realism in Northern Ireland today that is dissolving ancient prejudices and boosting business confidence, the essential underpinning for growth and prosperity. Belfast and Londonderry have been transformed by peace: business parks are springing up in place of derelict shipyards, while restaurants and cafés cater to a more relaxed public culture, and the walls of Derry are attracting tourists who no longer have need to be nervous."³ Northern Ireland has been tipped by Lonely Planet as one of the must-see countries to visit in 2007. "There is no better time to see Northern Ireland than now. Freed from the spectre of the gun by cease-fires and political agreement; it's abuzz with life: the cities are pulsating, the economy is thriving and the people...are in good spirits." Belfast is also mentioned in another part of the book as one of the top ten "Cities on the Rise."⁴ "Many UK cities have been regenerated in recent years but it is doubtful whether any have been transformed as dramatically as Belfast. Its image in the 1970s was of a city dominated by the threat of terrorism; its streets at best bleak and grey, and at worst reduced to rubble after another bomb attack. Today, however, Belfast is emerging as a shiny new metropolis of head-turning galleries, museums, restaurants, luxury hotels – and exciting new property developments."⁵ The Belfast skyline is now dominated by schemes such as Lanyon Place, with its £20m Hilton Hotel; £35m BT Tower and £30m Fujitsu building; and the Odyssey Complex, a £91m entertainment, leisure and education centre; alongside such massive regeneration projects as Europe's largest commercial and residential waterfront development, the Titanic Quarter. The 'Troubles', as they were known, seem to be over. The IRA has destroyed all its arms. The UVF has stated its intention to go out of business. With a few exceptions, so-called 'paramilitary prisoners' have all been released on licence between 1998 and 2000, and HMP Maze is being demolished. The security landscape in Belfast, Derry and South Armagh has changed. By 1 August 2007, British troops will be reduced to 5,000 and the number of sites where they are stationed will be reduced from 64 to 14, while most watchtowers will be demolished, bringing the 35-year-old Operation Banner – the longest in British Army history – to an end. "The moves are part of the government's security normalisation plans."⁶ But is Northern Ireland really "reaping the dividend of peace, stability and, it is to be hoped, impending prosperity" as the media is assuring us?⁷ And if so is it going to last?

Economic Performance

Impending prosperity is unlikely as the state of the economy is poor and unsustainable on all indicators. Northern Ireland has the lowest household incomes in the UK, with GDP per head of population almost 20% below the UK average. As to economic performance, the province scores 80 in terms of productivity for a

UK national average of 100.⁸ The province is on life support from the British government: in a recent editorial, *The Economist* characterised the North as a "subsidy junkie" that receives every year from Westminster £5bn more than is raised locally in taxation.⁹ Compared to the 720,000 at work, there are 530,000 'economically inactive' in the workforce (the term 'economically inactive' covers anyone neither employed nor receiving unemployment-related benefits, including the long-term sick and disabled, students, carers and the retired. In Northern Ireland, only 8% of the economically inactive claim to want work). The proportion of people of working age who are economically inactive is 26.9% – the highest percentage of the 12 UK regions, and well above the UK average of 21.2%, which makes a mockery of the 'historically low' unemployment figure of 4%.¹⁰ About 36% of the workforce are employed in the public sector and the state is responsible for 68% of economic output – figures double that south of the border and substantially higher than the rest of the UK.¹¹ No wonder that we find Lord Trevor Smith of Clinton remarking that the North has "an economy more collectivized than Stalin's Russia, more corporatist than Mussolini's, and more quangoized than Wilson and Heath's United Kingdom governments."¹² The performance of private enterprise is dismal. More than 95% of the North's private sector is made of small businesses. 90% of companies employ fewer than ten people and only 0.5% have a workforce of more than 200. There are fewer than ten PLCs; the largest is the privatised electricity board. Entrepreneurial spirit is low. Between 1996 and 2004, the number of VAT-registered companies in the six counties rose by 10% while the south swelled by 76%.¹³ The North has the second-lowest level of business start ups in the UK. Inward investment is negligible. A third of *Fortune 500* companies have a base in the south, but none have one in the North, and less than 800 of the 90,000 companies conducting business in the six counties are foreign owned.¹⁴ The North's infrastructure is woeful. The two main cities are not even connected by a motorway and experts calculate that the province has a £14 billion infrastructure deficit.¹⁵ With few quality jobs being created, the province still suffers from a brain drain. Nigel Smyth of the CBI in the North says that despite having some of the best A-level results in the UK, the province loses a third of its students every year to universities elsewhere with only a quarter of those returning. "We have not been able to create enough high quality jobs," he says. Graham Gudgin, who has acted as economic advisor to the Northern Ireland Assembly and to David Trimble, has pointed out that job creation in the North has predominantly been in the public sector and in low skilled private sectors such as retail, call centres and tourism.¹⁶ On top of that, private sector wages are around 80% of the UK average, substantially lower than down south, and have been slipping further behind.¹⁷ For all those reasons, we find Conservative writer Alan Ruddock concluding in a *Management Today* article that almost ten years after the Belfast Agreement, "the much-longed-for dividends of peace remain an elusive dream for the province."¹⁸ As a recent *Belfast Telegraph* editorial puts it: "Peter Hain long ago observed that the Northern Ireland economy is unsustainable as presently constituted. We lag behind Britain in terms of economic activity, productivity and wealth. With public sector cutbacks taking effect, it has been

Notes

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- 3 Editorial, 'Ulster moves forward', *The Times*, 5 October 2006. See also Editorial, 'A sign of rising confidence', *The Independent*, 3 February 2007
- 4 Lonely Planet Blue List: The Best in Travel 2007, pp.150-151
- 5 Ben West, 'Belfast's ship comes in', *The Observer*, 8 October 2006
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Normalisation has been a British state strategy since the mid-1970s. Today is less a post-conflict situation than a successful normalisation. From a Republican perspective, this is hardly a gain. As an IRA leader concluded as early as 1975: "Suppose we get the release of all detainees, an amnesty and withdrawal of troops to barracks, we are still back where we started in 1969." Paul Bew and Henry Patterson, *The British State and the Ulster Crisis*, London: Verso, 1985, p.84
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- 19 Editorial, 'Business tax cut is the key to prosperity', *Belfast Telegraph*, 12 March 2007
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estimated that a total of 140,000 new jobs will be needed in the next 10 years. Constrained as it is, the private sector is unable to provide the sort of economic boost which is required.¹⁹ And with government plans to slow down public spending over the coming years, economists have warned that Northern Ireland's financial future could be even bleaker.²⁰

Property & Housing

Despite these structural problems, there are claims that Northern Ireland's business growth is booming and employment is rising at a record rate, according to research from the Ulster Bank. The bank found that business activity has gone up for 46 months in a row.²¹ The reason for this apparent growth is construction and the housing market. The construction industry is now the driving force of the Northern Ireland economy, according to a report from the Ulster Bank.²² Figures from the Nationwide Building Society show that average house prices rose by 58% in the last year, the fastest rate of growth seen in any region of the UK since the Nationwide started compiling figures in 1973. The average price of a house in the North is now £203,815, which compares with a UK average of £175,554. The North, which used to be one of the cheapest places to buy property is now the third most expensive region in the UK behind London and the south-east of England. Fionnuala Earley, Nationwide's chief economist said: "House prices have increased by 281% since the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, compared to the UK average of 179%."²³ This is especially true of areas once synonymous with the conflict, which are now becoming property hotspots. For example, a property on Alliance Avenue in north Belfast – a street on which 14 people were murdered between 1971 and 1998 – went on the market for £285,000 in early March and sold for over £800,000. "Malone Road prices on a notorious North Belfast interface are a sure sign that the Troubles are over and peace is taking hold."²⁴ Spurred by property investment returns, the number of landlords in Northern Ireland has jumped as banks have offered rental property investment loans, or 'buy to let' mortgages. 48% of private landlords in Northern Ireland acquired their properties in the past five years, according to a 2005 Housing Executive study, and the number of homes they own has more than doubled since 1991.²⁵ A study by the University of Ulster revealed that the buy-to-let sector has grown by 120% over the past 15 years.²⁶ With the rise in house prices, homeowners have built up over £58bn in equities in their properties over the last ten years. The average homeowner has made £134,000 and many people have become millionaires.²⁷ This accounts for the growing numbers of new bars, cafes, restaurants, shops and car dealerships. But the property boom is unsustainable and leads young people and first-time buyers into debt and danger. According to Sir John Semple, who was appointed by the Government to look into the housing crisis: "The very sharp rise in house prices in Northern Ireland has created a new situation here. The market here has changed from a relatively stable one to one where house prices in some areas are ahead of the UK – in a province where earnings are 20% lower." He said the latest Council of Mortgage Lenders' figures show the number of first-time buyers has halved from 60% to 30%. First-time buyers are being outbid by investors – 70% of new homes are now bought by investors.²⁸ Rising interest rates and spiralling house prices have already left thousands of homeowners struggling to make repayments with the number of home repossessions hitting record highs last year. Almost 3,000 people were served with writs for unpaid mortgages in 2006. Since 2003 the number of homeowners forcibly evicted from their property has more than doubled. Meanwhile nearly 10,000 of the 127,000 housing debt problems brought to Citizens Advice Bureaus last year concerned threatened repossession, while 2,000 related to

actual repossession.²⁹ The negative effects of the housing boom reinforce research that proves that Northern Ireland "is one of the most unequal societies in the developed world."³⁰ If people further up the social ladder have done well out of the peace, the gap between rich and poor is even larger than in the rest of Britain.³¹ The poorest members of society in Northern Ireland, both Catholics and Protestants, are worse off now than ten years ago.³²

Parity of Esteem & Identity Politics

One of the most visible signs of the 'new Northern Ireland' has been the radical change that has taken place within areas which suffered most from the conflict; Republican areas in particular. David McKittrick describes this transformation: "These days, the Jeeps on the Falls Road no longer contain helmeted British troops swivelling their rifles in the direction of potential IRA sniper hides: instead, as in any other major city, the 4x4s are driven by mothers ferrying children to school. Where once military surveillance installations were perched on top of flats, now modern apartment blocks with hefty price tags are going up everywhere. The massive army barracks, for decades a target of bombs and bullets, are gone. No longer do youngsters indulge in that west-Belfast sport of hijacking buses and setting them ablaze. An hour on the Falls, once one of Europe's most notorious districts, is enough to confirm it: the Troubles are over. Welcome to the new Belfast, and a transformed Northern Ireland. The middle classes are richer than ever. And this time, the Catholic community is benefiting strongly."³³ The last sentence is particularly significant. To a large extent, British counter-insurgency strategy, by creating a new Catholic middle class dependent upon public sector jobs and state subsidies for the 'community sector', has 'killed Republicanism with kindness'.³⁴ Rising house prices have also significantly contributed to the creation of a whole class of conservative property owners and small shopkeepers. There is currently an average of eight people bidding on each available property in Nationalist West Belfast. Houses that sold for £40,000 fifteen years ago are now going for over £200,000.³⁵ The *Andersonstown News*, a large-circulation community newspaper in the Sinn Féin heartland of west Belfast, originally the official voice of the Andersonstown Central Civil Resistance Committee, now celebrates the local entrepreneurial spirit and has an extensive property supplement. Such a shift reflects the transformation of material conditions in the Nationalist community. Relying on a revisionist account of the history of the last 30 years, where the IRA campaign becomes one for civil rights and equality rather than for traditional Republican objectives, apologists for the Provisional strategy, such as Laurence McKeown and Jim Gibney, argue that the peace process has made life better for Nationalists in the North, and that the struggle was successful to the extent that never again will Nationalists be second-class citizens, young people in particular.³⁶ It is significant that at a public meeting in January 2007, "the Sinn Féin president relied heavily on the post-ceasefire, feel-good factor for Nationalists. Things had changed, he said: it was wonderful to see young folk 'wearing their county ganzies, speaking an Gaelige'. Just because the previous generations had it rough, didn't mean their children and grandchildren had to."³⁷ It is undeniable that the educational, economic and cultural indices for the newly emergent Catholic population are rising. For example, in the early 1970s, 70% of QUB students were Protestants, whereas today some 60% of Queen's University undergraduates and 55% of University of Ulster undergraduates are Catholics.³⁸ The 1998 Belfast Agreement copperfastened partition, yet it also involved the advancing of Nationalist communal interest within the North itself. As Suzanne Breen points out: "There has been undeniable advancement



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- 23 James Stinson, 'Average price now above £200,000', *The Irish News*, 5 April 2007
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- 32 'Poor "worse off now than in 1996"', BBC 14 September 2006, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern_ireland/5347392.stm
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- 34 Kevin Bean, *The New Politics of Sinn Féin 1985-2007*, Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2007. This is an allusion to the British state's strategy to kill home rule with kindness by means of agrarian reforms at the turn of the century.
- 35 Roisin McManus, 'West house prices soar', *The Andersonstown News*, 08 February 2007
- 36 Jim Gibney, 'Spirit of '69 still hindered by obstacles', *The Irish News*, 21 July 2005
- 37 Suzanne Breen, 'Militant republicans shout surrender but unionists should say "well done Gerry"', *Sunday Tribune*, 28 January 2007
- 38 Tom McGurk, 'Power-sharing in North must not be stopped by minority', *The Sunday Business Post*, 25 February 2007
- 39 Suzanne Breen, "'I'll jail McGuinness any day soon", jokes Paisley', *Sunday Tribune*, 6 May 2007

in many areas for Catholics in the North, but within existing constitutional arrangements.³⁹ The Nationalist community may be dynamic, however “it should be noted that the celebration of a community spirit is not discouraged by the British government. It is part of the process of transforming political aspirations into cultural ones.”⁴⁰ It is in the shift towards identity politics that a collapse of political consciousness is most evident. Politics are now about the recognition of the Nationalist ‘identity’ and ensuring its ‘parity of esteem’ within the North.⁴¹ With the principle of consent accepted and Republicanism defeated, Nationalists have concentrated their attention on culture, marches, flags and symbols. For example, Sinn Féin calls for equality at Stormont, no longer for its abolition: statues of Irish Republican icons should be placed at Stormont to make it more welcoming for Nationalists, the party has stated. Assemblyman Paul Butler said there needed to be Irish cultural symbols at the devolved parliament to help make the building more attractive to all sides of the community: “It is Sinn Féin’s view that where British cultural symbols are involved in public life, equivalent symbols should be given equal prominence. The display of the Union flag at Stormont and other emblems wholly associated with Unionism do not promote mutual respect for both traditions,” Mr Butler added.⁴² “It’s because some Nationalists are uneasy at their own acceptance of Northern Ireland that they feel they have to make a show of rhetorical opposition to it. It is because, in practical terms, they have endorsed the legitimacy of the Northern Ireland State that they denounce symbolic representations of it all the more loudly. The campaign to obliterate Northern Ireland having halted, they turn to battle on who’ll rule the roost within it.”⁴³ This does not fit well with Republicanism, but chimes with the Provisionals’ Defenderist roots. Loyalism has also found new legitimacy thanks to the shift towards identity politics.⁴⁴ It is now a legitimate identity which needs ‘parity of esteem’ rather than a form of political supremacism that needs to be fought. Orange marches can now be rebranded as an aesthetics of percussion rather than sectarian intimidation. The twelfth of July is allegedly the largest carnival in Europe. Rebranded in the language of cultural studies, Loyalism has even proved to be very popular with ex-leftwing publishers in Britain like Pluto Press. Paradoxically, those who have been politically defeated think that they are winning, while those who have won are convinced that they are losing everything. Republicanism has been defeated but Nationalists are growing in confidence. The Belfast and St. Andrews Agreements have strengthened the Union, but levels of unemployment and social deprivation in Unionist working class areas are higher than any time since the Second World War, and figures for working-class Protestant involvement in third level education suggest that they are now lower than they have ever been.⁴⁵ Many feel treated worse now than the Catholic working-class, and if looking for somebody to hit out at, the only people below them are ethnic minorities. It is estimated that Loyalist death squads are behind 90% of hate crime.⁴⁶

Process of Peace & Partition

But is the current political set up likely to bring peace and stability? Central to the peace process is the idea that the conflict is one ‘internal’ to Northern Ireland the state should recognise and respect the ‘identities’ of the ‘two traditions’, and ensure parity of esteem between them; politics should be a sectarian balancing act to ensure that they are given equal worth. Sectarianism is supposed to be solved by a system that institutionalises it.⁴⁷ Therefore it is not surprising that research has shown that the North is more segregated, polarised and sectarian since the start of the ‘peace process’. A report issued in 2002 by the Royal Geographical Society found that

sectarian divisions have worsened since the peace process began in Northern Ireland.⁴⁸ Prompted in part by the Northern Ireland Office’s denials that sectarianism was on the increase, Dr Peter Shirlow of the University of Ulster interviewed 4,800 people in 12 Belfast estates, six Catholic and six Protestant. The results are damning. Believing the hype about the peace process many, mostly Catholics, moved house to areas not dominated by their own religious denomination. The Housing Executive report that 3,000 moved between 1994 and 1996 but sectarian intimidation forced a reverse movement of 6,000 in the following five years. Two-thirds of the population now live in areas which are either 90% Catholic or 90% Protestant. In predominantly Protestant areas companies have a Catholic workforce of only 5% while in Catholic areas only 8% of the workforce is Protestant. Only one in five people would take a job on the other side of the peace line. 62% in areas separated by a peace line think community relations have got worse. 68% of young people between the ages of 18 and 25 claim never to have had a meaningful conversation with someone from the other religious denomination, and 62% say they have been the victim of physical or verbal sectarian abuse since the 1994 IRA ceasefire. Of those surveyed, 88% said they would not enter an area dominated by the other denomination, even by car, and 58% would not use shopping or leisure facilities in areas controlled by the other religion, even if they were better. “Such attitudes are not a relic of the 20th century that will die as memories of the civil war fade, but a dynamic force,” argues Nick Cohen. “A bus ride through Belfast should convince doubters that the Good Friday Agreement created partition and called it peace.”⁴⁹ Another official report based on statistics from the PSNI, Housing Executive and other research shows that levels of low-level sectarian violence are higher than before the ceasefires.⁵⁰ An average of 1,378 people a year seek rehousing because of sectarian intimidation. About 500 people a year formally complain of religious discrimination at work. 19% of Catholic and 10% of Protestant workers say they experience sectarian graffiti, jokes, songs, ostracisation or threatened or actual violence. Up to 60% of complaints are not formally reported. There are 37 peace walls across the North; none have been removed since the ceasefires, while 18 new ones have actually been built. 42% of Protestants and 33% of Catholics prefer to live in unmixed religious areas, while 48% of young Catholics and 42% of Protestants want separate schools. The financial costs of segregation are high: public spending alone is £1.5bn more per year in the Province than in Wales because of the additional problems caused by sectarian conflict, such as duplication of services.⁵¹ If sectarian attacks continue, many fear the Troubles may reignite. Peter Shirlow has predicted as much. “I don’t think we have the circumstances to take us back to conflict yet,” he says, “but in 20 to 30 years’ time, with constitutional uncertainty, the same pattern could emerge.”⁵² This is why we find *The Independent* recently concluding that despite all the hype about the ‘historical’ deal between Adams and Paisley, there is ‘a structural problem’ with the peace process: “While our politicians have been patiently mending Northern Ireland’s ceiling, the foundations have been cracking even further. The classic liberal assumptions – that the sectarian divide would slowly close up with rising prosperity and on-going peace have turned out to be false. Things are getting worse.”⁵³

Journalists Against Journalism

If things are getting worse, why does the media keep hammering the message of ‘Northern Ireland reaping the dividend of peace, stability and, it is to be hoped, impending prosperity’? A major reason for this according to Bernadette McAliskey (née Devlin) is that with the complicity of the

- 40 Mark Ryan, *War and Peace in Ireland*, London: Pluto Press, 1994, p.135
- 41 Bean passim. See also: Mark McGovern, ‘Irish republicans and the potential pitfalls of pluralism’, *Capital and Class*, 17(2), 133-162 and ‘The old days are over: Irish republicanism, the peace process and the concept of equality’, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 16(3) pp.622-645.
- 42 ‘SF calls for equality at Stormont’, UTV 10 May 2007, <http://www.u.tv/newsroom/indepth.asp?pt=n&id=82142>
- 43 Eamonn McCann, ‘Rooting for England’, *Sunday Journal*, 11 September 2005
- 44 Cllr Mark Langhammer, ‘State Funded Sectarianism and Pandering to Paramilitarism’ <http://www.qub.ac.uk/csec/docs/Langhammer%20paper.pdf>
- 45 Note that despite all the reforms, Catholics still experience substantially higher unemployment and poverty rates than Protestants. While Catholics make up 48.1% of the total population of working age, they make up 55.7% of economically inactive population of working age. Equally, while Protestants make up 51.9% of the total working age population, they make up only 44.3% of those economically inactive population of working age. Based on NIHE figures, Catholics are spending on average almost one and a half times as long on the housing waiting list as Protestants. While the absolute numbers of those on the waiting list has increased for both communities, the increase for the Catholic community has been almost double that for the Protestant community. See: CAJ report ‘Equality in Northern Ireland: The Rhetoric and the Reality’ (September 2006). The ‘Indicators of Social Need for Northern Ireland’ published by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (<http://www.research.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/publications.htm>) show as well that Catholics are still suffering considerable economic disadvantage. See also: Jim Smyth, ‘Towards Equality of Misery?’, *Fortnight*, November 2006
- 46 Henry McDonald, ‘Loyalists linked to 90% of race crime’, *The Observer*, 22 October 2006
- 47 Peter Shirlow and Brendan Murtagh, ‘Entrenching Sectarian Goals’, *Fortnight*, September 2006. The idea that the conflict in Ireland is between ‘two traditions’ and ‘ethno-national’ in nature, rather than about the British state’s denial of the right of the people of Ireland to self determination as a unit is currently the dominant paradigm in academia.
- 48 Paul Brown, ‘Peace but no love as Northern Ireland divide grows ever’, *The Guardian*, 4 January 2002. See also: Peter Shirlow and Brendan Murtagh, *Belfast: Segregation, Violence and the City*, London: Pluto Press, 2006 and Sam Lister, ‘Divided by 57 peace lines: shocking extent of apartheid in Ulster’, *Belfast Telegraph*, 26 April 2007
- 49 Nick Cohen, ‘Stop this drift into educational apartheid’, *The Observer*, 13 May 2007
- 50 Neil Jarman, ‘No longer a problem? Sectarian Violence in Northern Ireland’, Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, August 2005. http://www.community-relations.org.uk/document_uploads/OFMDFM_-_Sectarian_Violence.pdf
- 51 Ben Lowry, ‘Sectarian divisions are “costing Ulster billions”’, *Belfast*

media and through spin and choreography, peace has been bought by “perjury, fraud, corruption, cheating and lying.”⁵⁴ The 1998 Belfast Agreement was a prime example of what Chomsky would call the ‘manufacturing of consent’: promoting the idea that a ‘No’ vote was a vote for violence, while a ‘Yes’ was a vote for peace, while manipulating opinion polls and relegating dissenting voices to the margins; many of whom agreed with the peace but not with the process. *Information Strategy*, a British government document written by Tom Kelly, formerly of the BBC and Director of Communications at the Northern Ireland Office at the time of the Agreement, outlines the government’s strategy for getting the right result through a campaign of blatant media manipulation designed to flood Northern Ireland with positive stories about the peace deal.⁵⁵ The ‘Yes’ Campaign also called in the assistance of top advertising agency Saatchi & Saatchi, who designed their billboard campaign free of charge. Government spin has been reinforced by the reluctance of the media to ask critical questions. The media has been accused by award-winning journalist Ed Moloney of covering up the truth to protect the peace process and being reluctant to report events unhelpful to the peace process.⁵⁶ Reporters and editors sympathetic to New Sinn Féin strategy branded journalists who asked awkward questions (such as Ed Moloney or Suzanne Breen) ‘JAPPS – Journalists Against the Peace Process’. It would be more accurate to say that the peace process has in fact produced Journalists Against Journalism. More generally, former hunger striker Brendan Hughes is on solid ground when lamenting the fact that “the process has created a class of professional liars.”⁵⁷ At a recent conference, both

McAliskey and award-winning playwright Gary Mitchell (who was forced to leave Belfast with his extended family due to Loyalist hostility at his plays) expressed strong criticism of the media’s coverage of the peace process. In Mitchell’s view there is a ‘real truth’ and an ‘agreed truth’, and when the “agreed truth becomes accepted, the real truth becomes a lie.” The media is reporting the agreed truth and the real truth “doesn’t get a look in” he argued.⁵⁸ The agreed truth of the ‘New Northern Ireland’ has been actively promoted by the Blair administration in order that he might go down in history as the one who brought peace to Ireland rather than war to Iraq. The real truth, however, is that Blair is no Gladstone. “Some would suggest a more appropriate comparison would be with Lloyd George, who brokered the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921 by telling lies to both sides and who left office in a scandal about the sale of peerages.”⁵⁹ And whether Blair has succeeded in bringing peace is open to question. Recent political agreements were in essence “a triumph of top-down politics, not bottom-up social change.” The majority of the population “certainly wanted peace, but they do not appear to have sought reconciliation.”⁶⁰ With people today being divided as ever, the evident conclusion is that Northern Ireland remains a fundamentally dysfunctional entity.

Telegraph, 4 May 2007

- 52 Olga Craig, ‘Are the Troubles really over for Northern Ireland?’, *Sunday Telegraph*, 8 October 2006
- 53 Johann Hari, ‘Blair may have finally seduced Paisley - but that still leaves an Ulster as divided as eve’, *The Independent*, 26 March 2007
- 54 Lorna Siggins, ‘Peace in NI bought by “fraud and lying”’, says McAliskey’, *Irish Times*, 30 April 2007
- 55 Full text of the document: <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/peace/docs/nio26398.htm>
- 56 Ed Moloney, *The Peace Process and Journalism, in Britain & Ireland: Lives Entwined II*, London: The British Council, 2006. Jim Gibney criticises the media for asking “questions which are negative, which instil pessimism and could undermine the public’s hopeful mood” such as whether Republicanism has been defeated. (Jim Gibney, ‘BBC journalists have responsibility to the public’, *Irish News*, 3 May 2007
- 57 Interview with Brendan Hughes, *Fourthwrite*, Issue 1, Spring 2000
- 58 Lorna Siggins, op.cit.
- 59 Stephen Collins, ‘Prospect of deal in North dominates US celebrations’, *The Irish Times*, 17 March 2007
- 60 Adrian Hamilton, ‘We can learn from Stormont. So why don’t we?’, *The Independent*, 10 May 2007

Multiple Agendas, Impossible Dialogues: Where Irish Studies and History of Art Meet

Lucy Cotter

In an article entitled ‘Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities,’ Stuart Hall describes how we think of democracy as “a nice polite consensual discussion” whereas when it really takes place, it sounds more like an unending row. He writes: “That row, that sound of people actually negotiating their differences in the open, behind the collective program, is the sound I am waiting for.” The purpose of that row is the possibility of one group taking on the agenda of the other. “It has to transform itself in the course of coming into alliance... It doesn’t mistake itself that it becomes it but it has to take it on board.”¹ Art History and Irish Studies do not share a collective programme but given the overlap of their discourses, it was with this kind of face-to-face negotiation of agendas in mind that I convened a conference session reflecting on the potential for interdisciplinary dialogue. ‘Irish Studies and History of Art: Impossible Dialogues?’ was one of twenty-two strands in the Association of Art Historians 2007 conference, which was hosted by the University of Ulster in Belfast this April.² The one-day session consisted of nine formal papers, a panel discussion reflecting on the papers and an open floor discussion, which I will look at here in brief. I apologise in advance for not being able to do justice to the full contents of the papers or to the complexity and diversity of the discussions that arose.

Firstly, I would like to quickly put the overall dialogue in context. Over the past ten years some individual art historians of Irish art have considered Irish art’s relationship to broader cultural discourses – Fintan Cullen being an obvious example – while a small number of Irish Studies academics (such as Colin Graham, David Lloyd and Luke Gibbons) have dealt specifically with Irish art. These writings have often been criticised for using art as an illustration of theory and not in terms of its particularity as a medium and discourse. Unlike many in the Irish art world, I see this as grounds for *more* interdisciplinary dialogue. This dialogue might in turn offer Art History resources and methodologies for further negotiating Irish art’s relationship to wider cultural discourses. The main point of tension in such an interdisciplinary dialogue is the function and status of the national – which is central to Irish Studies and often seen as reductive in Art History.

These tensions were borne out most strongly in a paper by Gavin Murphy. Entitled ‘Unsanctioned Transgressions: The Limits of Irishness in the Works of Willie Doherty and Gerard Byrne,’ the paper asked what the role of the national might be in the context of two artists working in a global arena, as much informed by private and corporate concerns as by Irish culture. This question was examined in relation to the three intertwining contexts in which the artists worked – the Venice Biennale, the context of local representation and the blurring of the terrain, not only between the local and the global, but between state-funded art infrastructures and the commercial interests of private galleries. His paper might have been read as an illustration of the fact that national structures and processes are now secondary to

and cannot be defined in isolation from broader global pressures. However Murphy himself concluded that the national had become an irrelevant referent within this scenario as Byrne’s and Doherty’s works were not “bound by notions of Irishness” and “to acknowledge international market forces at play...[was] also to recognize the limits of Irishness as a marker of value in contemporary circumstance.” For Murphy, to acknowledge the nation as a significant unit of study was to be ‘bound by Irishness’ and to see Irishness as a ‘marker of value.’ This conclusion made it clear that Irish Studies needs to define its contribution at what is widely conceived to be a postnational moment. It also demonstrated an implicit tension between long-term associations of the national with strategic essentialism and fixed notions of identity, and what some see as the potential for renegotiating the national as a point of intersection of a multiplicity of subject positions and social, economic and technological relations.

Many other disciplinary questions were raised by this interdisciplinary encounter – such as the relationship between Visual Culture and Art History, competing definitions of Area Studies and methodological questions regarding the use of cultural theory in history, to name just a few. The first three papers were intended to directly address these kinds of questions. Fintan Cullen reflected on some of the more pragmatic reasons for art historians’ branching into wider cultural reflections – not least to represent the visual within the literary and media-studies dominated domain of area studies and to carve out a bigger public for Art History. Using his own trajectory to date, he mapped out how an art historian’s research might develop in light of those motivations and how this process might open up new areas for further research. James Elkins’ paper considered the current make-up of art history curricula in Ireland, based on his tenure at

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the University College Cork, and reflected on how such curricula might transform should art history be seen as part of visual culture. His enthusiasm for visual culture was tempered by what he saw as the narrow remit of the discipline of ‘Visual Culture’ to date, which he felt was dominated by a sort of unofficial canon of theorists and subjects. Elkins pointed out that Visual Studies implicitly stands for politics or what he called ‘a neo-liberal mouthpiece’ and asked what the (political) ends of such critique might be.

Kerstin Mey opened her informal paper by commenting that art had to show its awareness of its privilege, a comment that seemed to consolidate Cullen’s appeal to the importance of making the interest of art understandable to a broader audience, and Elkins’ situating art within a more mainstream array of visual culture. Mey went on to point to some of the different levels that might be negotiated within the session and productively named a problem at the root of area studies more generally – whether they refer to a geopolitical unit or whether they refer to identity discourse. These competing definitions of Irish Studies underpinned a number of the subsequent discussions. It appeared that many non-Irish Studies speakers considered Irish Studies research to necessarily focus on Irishness as a fixed identity, whereas Irish Studies academics present mostly referred to how Ireland was engaged in global cultural and political orders and the relevance of such in readings of Irish cultural production.

Luke Gibbons offered one such reflection, proposing that to consider the Irish identity of a writer or artist was to do more than name a nationality, but to inscribe them within an alternative modernism. He answered his opening question, ‘Is there something about the image that eludes the national or indeed all cultural boundaries?’, with a quote from Arthur Danto: ‘What we see is determined by what we don’t.’ Gibbons went on to propose an aesthetic dimension to ‘millepsis’ – the constant search for what is beyond the frame – which he associated with Irish modernism. He criticised Rosalind Krauss’ reluctance to engage with James Coleman’s Irishness, suggesting that rather than ‘looking down the wrong end of the telescope,’ it was important to consider whether certain formal devices might have had provenance in peripheral modernities. David Brett, a recurrent voice from the floor, added that Gibbon’s argument was interesting in relation to Jack Yeats’ uneasy figure/ground relationship. Liam Kelly commented on how politics was inscribed in the land in the Channel 4 documentary *Picturing Derry*, visible only to those who had inside knowledge.

In a later paper by Fionna Barber on Francis Bacon, there were interesting parallels between Gibbon’s reflection on millepsis and Bacon’s use of spatial devices. Barber examined how the construction and regulation of Bacon’s interiors with figures could be seen to evoke the uncanny spaces of the lost Big House, a recurrent trope emerging in Irish Gothic literature. She discussed the threatened safety of the Bacon family during the Civil War and how Anglo-Irish domestic space might be seen to be both a site of

traumatic memory and an anachronistic cultural formation. The subject of sexual orientation in relation to Irish identity came up in the brief floor discussion on Barber's paper. However, the issue was explored in more depth in a later paper by Riann Coulter that focused on suppressed homosexual narratives in Gerard Dillon's images of Connemara. As it traced the conflict between Dillon's self-proclaimed nationalism and his covert homosexuality, Coulter's paper drew on Colin Graham's call for a rethinking of Irish Studies along subaltern lines. Coulter also raised the question of belonging, mapping out Dillon's increasing sense of being at home in London.

The issue of suppressed cultural traumas, explored in different ways by Coulter and Barber, was brought to the fore by Niamh Ann Kelly's subsequent reflection on the difficulty of representing the Irish Famine. Kelly focused on the gap between historical remembrance in curated exhibitions and cultural memory. She situated the Famine within wider post-trauma discourses and considered how time-lags affected the representation of the Famine during the centenary events of the 1940s. Having sketched out disciplinary frameworks and looked at these research papers, the final formal paper was to have been Yvonne Scott's reflection on the current place of Art History in Irish studies. Unfortunately she fell ill the night before the conference, leaving the session at the loss of a serious analysis of the status quo.

In the subsequent panel discussion Karen Brown identified some of the recurrent areas that had come up during the day, which might productively point to areas for further research – especially post-trauma discourse, the issue of framing and gender and sexuality discourses. It was observed by a member of the audience that while the construction of male identity had been an important aspect of the day's discussion, the role of women artists and the question of Irish female identity had not even been broached. Nor for that matter had feminist re-readings of Art History even been mentioned and the case studies had centred on male artists throughout the session. Picking up on Kerstin Mey's comment that Art History had to show its awareness of its privilege, panellist Vera Ryan also raised the issue of the class bases of Irish art academies. She alluded both to the class make-up of art academy students and the profile of the staff, which had in the 1980s been dominated by British staff due to a government rule that staff must hold a B.A. in Fine Art – a qualification not available in Ireland at that time. While Pierre Bourdieu may have analysed the sociology of the discipline in theory, these observations suggested that it would be beneficial to analyse how specific class and cultural relations underpin the everyday workings of Irish academic institutions.

Much later in the day, I raised the practical issue of publication opportunities hinted at in Fintan Cullen's paper. Due to time constraints, the issue was never developed which I regretted as so much serious interdisciplinary visual research in Ireland has remained in the box under the bed. It seems to be caught 'between a rock and a hard place' given that non-art journals will not cover colour illustration costs and art journals have little space for academic essays. One of the panellists, Eoin Flannery, has plans to launch an Irish Visual Culture journal at the University of Limerick in the near future, which I hope will partly redress the current situation, yet he was modest in not suggesting the significance of this endeavour during his panel participation. Rather, he 'admitted' to his outsider status in Art History and openly expressed his admiration for the rigour of contemporary art discourse. Flannery also brought up an important aspect of Irish Studies – namely how the discipline had become globally recognised through its engagement with postcolonial and minority discourses, particularly in the US. Panellist Victor Merriman further discussed this role. One audience member intervened to

support their observation of Irish Studies' broader appeal by describing how, as a Chicano woman based in New York, she had felt drawn to study Irish Studies. Merriman went on to discuss how Ireland's growing importance as a global player had prompted a sort of 'policing' of Irish Studies discourses, which one might imagine would have implications for this aspect of Irish Studies. These observations raised many issues which were not elaborated on – including the racial construction of Irish identity and the relationship between ethnic minority discourses, race and citizenship in the aftermath of Celtic Tiger prosperity. Time constraints aside, it is worth speculating on why fundamental issues like these seemed to remain 'between the lines' of discussion.

In the open-floor discussion that followed the papers and panel reflection there was a continuous flow of observations and much cross-referencing to individual papers and earlier comments. There were also critiques of specific aspects of individual papers and suggestions for further research and reflection. However, the session was closer to 'a nice polite consensual discussion' than a row where people were openly negotiating their differences. Karen Brown criticised how the framing in my abstract on the session made Irish Studies seem synonymous with postcolonial methodology, which was a fair observation, given internal debates within the discipline. However, this internal contestation within Irish Studies, together with the dominant contestation of Ireland's postcolonial status with Art History, did not prompt discussion within the session. Rather, potentially controversial observations – such as Victor Merriman's reference to contemporary Ireland as neo-colonial – met with no response. Perhaps when one feels moments of resistance to what one hears, it takes more time than was available to negotiate what exactly is at stake. As an artist in the audience suggested after the session, there was little to be said at such moments that would not have been viewed as entirely reactionary and oppositional. In this sense, it appeared that the paradigms of thought worlds did not always come close enough to negotiate; that the dialogue *was* perhaps an impossible one. It was certainly the case that passing comments often revealed entire systems of thought that could not adequately be engaged with in a spontaneous oral engagement. This left me wondering about the best means of establishing such a deeper dialogue, which the conference format could open but not fully contend with.

An art historian in the audience, who had remained silent for the most part of the discussion, confided afterwards that she felt outnumbered as an art historian. Given the context of the session within the Art Historians Association conference, this might seem an odd comment, but in retrospect it made me reconsider the make-up of the session. I was conscious that Yvonne Scott's absence had meant the disciplinary bases of the discussion were not represented from a purely Art History perspective, which silenced issues that were not redressed by the subsequent discussion. In my selection of papers, I had tried to maintain a balance between speakers with Irish Studies and Arts History backgrounds. However, this observation made me more aware of the fact that all of the art historians who had presented papers were already engaged in some way with interdisciplinarity to a level that is not the norm within the discipline of Art History in Ireland. This might look like a strategic selection of papers, but no papers had been submitted which contended an interdisciplinary approach. Perhaps this meant that art historians who do not consider interdisciplinary research of benefit found no reason to engage in the discussion. One can only speculate on how Yvonne Scott's contribution might have altered or engaged with this situation. The presence of a number of highly engaged Irish Studies academics was also not representative of the fact that my call for papers to Irish Studies departments had largely been left unanswered.

However, the marginality of art within Irish Studies was a recurrent topic of discussion during the session.

At the end of the day, I received a lot of positive feedback about the level of engagement, the interest of the subjects being discussed and the value of the session as a whole. Response from various participants and audience members suggests that the coming together of so many engaged voices generated food-for-thought and grounds for further critique. A number of individuals intended to follow up on issues raised in subsequent research and writings. I look forward to that ripple effect and hope that the sound of people negotiating their differences in the open keeps growing.

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Notes

1. Stuart Hall, 'Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities,' *Culture, Globalization and the World System*, ed. Anthony D. King (London: Macmillan, 1991), pp. 41-68, 65.
2. The session abstract, names and affiliations of speakers and their paper titles can be found in the AAH conference on-line archive at <http://www.aah.org.uk/conference/2007session03.php>

Loving Art

Tim Stott

“The function of criticism should be to show how it is what it is, even that it is what it is, rather than to show what it means [...] In place of a hermeneutics we need an erotics of art.”

Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation*, 1964

The primary directive of Irish art criticism at present seems to be to launch artists, works, and critics onto the high seas of legibility, legitimacy and exchange. This puts interpretation in the service of promotion and general arts management, certainly, but rather than seeking to counter this with belaboured wrangling over meaning, the time is ripe for a little love, perhaps. Insofar as it stakes a claim to meaning, criticism continues to engage in the broadly hermeneutic process of recovering and disclosing for an interpretive subject the latent meaning of a complex of significant qualities. The task of interpretation is to cast a net across these qualities, then to describe and decipher what is brought ashore. Such a method of intellectual labour, whatever the flag under which it ventures out, finds meaning only in the depths.

Some time ago, Susan Sontag lamented “the revenge of the intellect upon art”, for laying siege to the sovereignty of the sensuous and immediate: hence, her call for an erotics of art, which would begin with “a really accurate, sharp, loving description of the appearance of the work of art ... [revealing] the sensuous surface of art without mucking about in it”. Writing must therefore become *transparent* so that through it we might experience “the luminousness of the thing itself, of things being what they are.”¹ Otherwise, the assimilation of Art into Thought would only further atrophy our sensory correspondence with the world.

Sontag rightly objects to interpretation that chases after some originary experience from which to proceed, but her own recommendations remain entangled both within her phenomenological prejudice for the “luminous” origins of things, and the more general hermeneutic project of resuscitating “the living spirit from the tomb of the letter”², which most often entails the reconfiguration of a dissolute subjectivity irreversibly detached from and through writing. Nevertheless, however confused and reactionary her case against interpretation might be, her call for erotics is germane to the problems of artwriting in its encounters with the current array of art pleasures.

But first, transparency. To demand transparency of writing, to demand that it become merely a deficient conduit for the evidence of the senses, and that it encounter something latent to which it does not and cannot contribute, is once again to assume that the world already murmurs with meaning that our statements about it make more or less audible, as well as to further corral the movements of writing within the propositional and descriptive. However much these latter might more vigorously attend to sensuous surfaces, it would be foolish to imagine that such operational and vehicular uses of writing could be anything but inadequate to the intricacies and intense peculiarities of the sensory. But the statements of which writing consists are also speculative, agitating what is unwritten.³ Agitation is not the same as criticism, and much more like those crises upon which criticism nourishes itself, a crisis being, after all, neither more nor less than a moment of decision.

Such a demand also suffers from an aversion to a number of rather important things about writing. Firstly, as much as it compels, and courts authority, writing is anarchic and duplicitous, inescapably so. Secondly, writing too is a sensuous surface of inscription: when Sontag calls for the writer’s body to become an open, yielding

surface for the inscription of sensory data, she simply transfers the origin from artwork to body, thereby disavowing those more or less automated operations that constantly inscribe upon this body and distribute its sense-making functions across a multitude of technological sub-systems, writing being one of them. Thirdly, writing dramatises knowledge, making it festive.⁴ As writing wriggles away from the grip of legislation and power, it approaches theatre, and so too approaches the object of its musings and desires, its beloved, so to speak, with a performance – parades of masks and gestures, games of hide-and-seek:

“*Larvatus prodeo*: I advance pointing to my mask, but with a discreet (and wily) finger I designate this mask. Every passion, ultimately, has its spectator ... no amorous oblation without a final theatre ...”⁵

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, whilst there is no homology between the sensible and the articulable, whilst visibilities and statements, for example, are heterogeneous, both exceed the conditions from which they derive: as Gilles Deleuze suggests, one cannot open up words without visibilities emerging in response, and vice versa.⁶ This opening up and proliferation of statements is precisely the literary quality of writing from which the guardians of transparency seek to distance themselves, in order to strike the pose of criticality.

The previous points are by now almost poststructuralist commonplaces, of which, of course, Sontag can have been only dimly aware, if at all. But again, Sontag is not really the target here: transparency, interpretation and criticism remain inseparable for many. An aversion to literariness – often conflated with the belle lettriste – prevails, still, even where aspirations surpass the lacklustre treadmill of promotional stock. The demand for transparency is persuasive, and commonly a default option. It is timely and efficient. It works to deadlines. It uses predictive text formations, but in doing so makes language redundant at the moment of writing. Whatever declarations such texts might make concerning their exegetic function, they foreclose the movement of text, measuring out the rhythms of syntax according to representational dictates. The generally muddled thoughts and grouchy admonishments that accompany this hangover from the politics of representation seem unwilling to entertain the possibility that art is representative only in a weak sense, if at all, and as a means by which society represents itself it is largely irrelevant.⁷ If this is the case for the presumed objects of criticism, then why attempt to institute representation at the level of the text? This seems a rearguard action, a commitment to circulate words according to the Law, and not according to the perversities of writing itself.

The demand for erotics is more difficult, and strictly incompatible with the demand for transparency, implying as it does the perverse act of making what is intimate public, with all its inexplicable associations and pleasures intact. It has found its most sustained response, so far, in various appeals to beauty.⁸ However, such appeals continue to depend uncritically upon a hermeneutic subject (as well as an uncomplicated distinction between the ‘truths’ of the body and the tall tales of the text); and besides, erotics begins in the vicissitudes of pleasure, not in the placatory certainties of beauty.

Lovingly following the contours of the body that arouses its desire, allowing its pleasure to accumulate upon the body’s surfaces until it becomes visible, writing approaches intimacy with that strange, chimerical body. The “thing itself” is a fantasised origin that is just a place from which to begin. It is already dense with words, a glut of quotations, but reading and writing this surface is quite unlike the linear conventions of the page:

“It starts at any point, skips, repeats itself, goes backwards, insists, ramifies in simultaneous and divergent messages, converges again, has moments of irritation, turns the page, finds its place, gets lost.”⁹

So again, it is not a case of poetic evocation, of chasing language away from that phantom thing called “immediate experience”, or of laying down a text before the non-conscious, and piously backing away. This is where the merchants of beauty have it wrong, of course, allowing no prospects for writing other than as the allegory of its own failure – “the beautiful and maddening ... failure of language in the face of anything but itself.”¹⁰ At the irregular limit where blind words encounter mute visions, a lover’s discourse does not respect the integrity of bodies. Instead, it takes its failure for the beginning of an affair, elaborating another sensuous surface and forming statements comparable in intensity and singularity to the enigmatic rhythm that holds it captive, impatient to move towards and prolong the intensity, if not the primacy, of such an encounter. It takes the singularity that emerges from a breakdown in communications as the only reliability; “everything else is deceptive”, K is told in Kafka’s *The Castle*. Such is its catastrophe, and the scandal of its pleasures: that it is constantly disturbed and impassioned by singular, irrevocable encounters that haunt it but which it fails to address directly. It finds only uncommunicative traces of other bodies inscribed within its own, and thereby becomes a stranger to itself.

However, writing’s failure becomes fatal at those points where it seeks to be representative of something quite foreign to it or where it functions only to signpost the proprietary rights of meaning. These are both acts of possession quite inimical to those of love.

Without doubt, there are obligations for artwriters, but beyond these, they should risk greater ambition, and greater intimacy, than the narcissism of magnificent failure: this only leads each party to fall back into itself, whereas erotics, after all, requires the opening of two bodies to each other. It requires a gift, and the “right density of abandonment” that entrusts one body to another and vice versa, and that animates both outside any particular frame of interpretation, “as if the [erotic] image launched desire beyond what it permits us to see.”¹¹

Writing not contracted to the laborious recovery of meaning might engage instead in something akin to an overseas correspondence. As Maurice Blanchot famously wrote long ago, if there were not this interval, the remoteness and enigmatic silence of one correspondent to another even as they face each other, nothing would pass between them.

“We should renounce knowing those to whom we are bound by something essential ... the movement of understanding in which, speaking to us, they reserve, even in the greatest familiarity, an infinite distance, this fundamental separation from out of which that which separates becomes relation.”¹²

The generosity of such an attempt to exchange addresses is a consequence of writing’s aforementioned failure to reach its address. There never is an amorous encounter through writing: hence, for Barthes, there can be no “amorous” text, only writing “amorously.”¹³ But, failure is the source of generosity, as it sends writing beyond mere autoeroticism and into the mutual vulnerability of erotics: masturbation, the augmentation and bringing to climax through writing of a previous encounter is much too authoritative – it short-circuits erotics and introduces some retrograde voluntarism into affairs. One does not choose to love, one falls in love: love is something we are in rather than something we do, a by-product of our well-laid plans. A lover’s discourse gets carried away in the

movements of Eros:

“Straining towards something different from ourselves, we had been penetrated by something we already carried within us. But it was also as if it were only by entering us that the work could know itself ... These are hardly attributes of a personality; we are pregnant with what doesn’t exactly belong to us, and self-delivery (self-reproduction) turns out to have nothing to do with self-expression.”¹⁴

To conclude, a few requests. Firstly, that artwriting attempts not to recover some present prior to writing but to live restlessly in the present *through* writing. Secondly, that it transcribes the incomprehension that engenders love. Thirdly, that it takes its motivation from the voluptuous density of relations between lovers and seeks knowledge neither in the lover nor the beloved but only in what passes between them. And lastly, that it does not engage in gossip: loving consists of believing that one knows the secret the loved one holds back, even as one knows that such secrets only come into being in response to one’s probing. Can we think of a writing that keeps that secret rather than attempts to spread it around? For how can we love if we cannot keep a secret?

“And this secret that we take by surprise, we do not speak of it; we keep it. That is to say ... we do not touch it ... we leave it intact. This is love.”¹⁵

Similarly, one should not write *of* an encounter, for fear of betraying its secret, or worse, revealing

that it has no secret. One can write *to* this encounter, but at the expense of clarity for those who are not party to it. Hence the use of opaque jargon, the distribution of the vernacular in the midst of the vehicular, which lacks clarity only to those who perform the ablutions of legitimate and/or critical discourse.

If artwriting cannot trade in silences and secrets then it can only trade, i.e. become a mere function of logistics; and it certainly cannot love.

Notes

- 1 Sontag, Susan, ‘Against Interpretation’, in *Against Interpretation and other essays*, London: 1987; reproduced in Eric Fernie (ed), *Art History and its methods: a critical anthology*, London: 1995, pp.214-222
- 2 Wellbery, David, ‘Post-Hermeneutic Criticism’, *Foreword* to Friedrich Kittler, *Discourse Networks 1800/1900*, translated by M. Meeter and C. Cullens, Stanford: 1989
- 3 Nicholas Davey, J.R., ‘Writing and the In-Between’, *Word & Image*, volume 16, number 4, October-December 2000
- 4 Barthes, Roland, ‘Lecture in Inauguration of the Chair of Literary Semiology, Collège de France, 7th January 1977’, *October* 8, spring 1979
- 5 Barthes, Roland, *A Lover’s Discourse: Fragments*, translated by Richard Howard, London: Vintage, 2002, p.43
- 6 Deleuze, Gilles, *Foucault*, translated by Sean Hand, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988, pp.66-67
- 7 This point is made by Jean Fisher in ‘The Work Between Us’, *Vampire in the Text: Narratives of Contemporary Art*,

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- 8 See Perling Hudson, Suzanne, ‘Beauty and the Status of Contemporary Criticism’, *October* 104, Spring 2003
- 9 Calvino, Italo, *If On a Winter’s Night a Traveller*, translated by William Weaver, (London: Everyman, 1993, p.151
- 10 Morton, Tom, ‘Critical Timing’, *Frieze* 106, April 2007
- 11 Barthes, Roland, *Camera Lucida: reflections on photography*, translated by R Howard, London: Vintage, 1993, p.59
- 12 Blanchot, Maurice, *L’Amitié*, Paris: Gallimard, 1971, cited in Derrida, Jacques, *The Politics of Friendship*, translated by George Collins, London: Verso, 1997, pp.294-5
- 13 Barthes, *A Lover’s Discourse*, p.78
- 14 Bersani, Leo, and Dutoit, Ulysse, ‘The Pregnant Critic’, *Artforum*, November 1999, pp.124-5
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Art School and the Old Grey Cardigan Test¹

Mick Wilson

“The art school has been a subject of fascination for the past decade.”²

“Living with contradictions is difficult, and, especially for intellectuals and artists employed in academic institutions, the inability to speak honestly and openly about contradictory consciousness can lead to a destructive desire for ‘pure’ political positions, to militant posturing and internecine battles with one another that ultimately have more to do with individual subjectivities and self-images than with disciplined collective struggle for resources and power.”³

“The last twenty years have seen enormous shift in the role and potential of educational environments in relation to visual culture. Shifts in the status of art education within the broader pedagogical context have been taking place. [...] This has moved us towards a situation where the artist-teacher is merely one element within a matrix of expectations and institutional aims within established educational models. This perceived shift is, paradoxically demanded by both university art schools – which must create neo-academic justification for all their departments – and by some independent-minded artists who are increasingly unsure that it is relevant to insert themselves as the sole providers of ideas within schools. We therefore face a new set of dilemmas, for the shift is not complete or well planned; it is taking place as I write and we still face many differing art school models.”⁴

“To be a teacher is my greatest work of art.”⁵

“The market is making inroads on education. The annual student presentations are hunting grounds for gallerists and curators who are tripping over each other in their insatiable craving for talent. The question is whether the transformation from place of freedom to marketplace is good for the quality of the art academy.”⁶

“For aspiring and practising designers and artists out there who may feel a little intimidated by your client’s or manager’s fancy business degrees, take heart. Your art and design background is the future of the new economy [...] It’s not hard to see how out-sourcing to India could lead to the next great era in...enterprise [...] Send maintenance to India and, even after costs, 20 per cent of the budget is freed up to come up with the next break-through [...] What comes after services? Creativity.”⁷

In recent years there has been a significant growth in national and international debates about the future role and nature of teaching, learning and research in art and design education at third level. From *Manifesta*’s ‘Notes for an Artschool’⁸ to *Frieze*’s ‘Art schools then and now’⁹ there is a clear and current topicality to the question of art education even within the mainstream of the international art world. Throughout the 1990s a variety of publications, emanating from the art and design education centres of the UK and the US, already signalled the beginning of a process of re-addressing the 1970s dispensation for art and design education.¹⁰ Throughout the

last decade, European art and design educators have been engaged in a sustained consideration of the relationship between inherited forms of art and design education and the emergent emphases on multiple fronts: harmonisation across Europe; the rapidity of technology change; cultural diversification, social transformation and the question of access; the call for sustainable research cultures; quality metrics and quality assurance measures; various imperatives for civic engagement and economic rationalisation; and the fast displacement of Europe’s manufacturing bases and the ambivalent rhetorics of ‘creative cities’, ‘cultural industries’ and so on.¹¹ Concomitant with these shifting patterns of debate there is a widely felt and keenly articulated sense of apprehension about the future of art and design education.

By contrast one is often tempted to see in the actual lived practices and behaviours of many art and design institutions and educators – and I am especially thinking of those in the south of Ireland with which I am most familiar – a pattern of self-regarding conservatism disguised through theatrical self-presentations of radicalism, accompanied by all those well-worn posturing performances of critical attitude (which, of course, spare only the critic). There appears in the conversations and behaviours of educators a distrustful resistance to change processes and accountability measures: processes which inevitably present a threat to the established comfort-zones of art school teachers and which are gingerly and summarily dismissed as “*more* bureaucracy.” Indeed, there is a pervasive tendency among art and design educators to refuse to even acknowledge critique (immanent or otherwise), never mind the manifest unwillingness to embark upon the process of self-critique. The unsettling irony here is that art school presents itself as the space within which the practice of auto-critique is to be acquired and realised by student artists or designers as they progress towards professional autonomy.

These are quite strong criticisms of art and design educators, and there is inevitably a certain risk of circularity in as much as I am writing precisely as an art educator: I must surely be a target of my own self-cancelling criticism. More importantly perhaps, this criticism, formulated in this manner may in itself be structured – or may at least be symptomatic – of a conflict process integral to the art and design educational scene, which pits the newly arrived, the (relatively) youthful staff member or indeed the casualised part-timer against the long-tenured bearer of ‘tradition’. It would seem that there are within art education institutions established patterns of low-level conflict which fail to pass over into open and critically accountable debate, dialogue or exchange.

On the one-hand I want to say that many of the self-avowed bearers of the art school ‘tradition’, who so often imagine themselves as the bearers of

a radical potency and critical culture – first proved in something like ‘1968’ or ‘the seventies’ – seem to have long ago been absorbed into an *old grey cardigan* kind of comfortable though miserable institutionalisation. The painful irony here is that wanting to express this criticism in this combative and somewhat noxious way is already to operate within the theatre of (relatively inconsequential) conflict endemic to art schools and its associated posturing. Even worse, rehearsing matters in this way risks closing down the very discussion one is demanding. This way of presenting affairs risks simple rudeness and succumbs to the rather petty game of hurting colleagues’ feelings, especially when all our feelings have been finely tuned and heightened to exquisite sensitivity by the relentless exposure to the day-to-day petty cruelties and one-upmanships of the institutional scene. To say these things may not then really help to move the situation forward, but not to say them seems to preserve the institutions and their protagonists in their frozen and un-interrogated self-regard. The oxygen of some form of public dialogue seems to be demanded but the problem of how to secure this on a productive footing faces a number of challenges.

The first challenge is to move beyond the well worn fault-lines of an us-and-them scenario and try to imagine an educational scene which is not immediately already always polarised between factions; between arrogant *young Turks* and tired *old grey cardigans*; between casualised and tenured employees; between craft and concept; between teachers and technicians; between management and staff; between practitioners and theorists; between elitists and populists; between respective discipline fiefdoms or media cults or departmental territories; and so on. The challenge then is to move our imaginations beyond these polarised tensions and clichés and find a new framework for thinking our potentials and our purposes as art and design educators.

The second challenge is to recognise the common core activity that is the engine of the art school experience and that pervades all the various fiefdoms, institutional territories, and generational dispensations that inhabit the art school world. There is a key mode of engagement for all of us who land there – whether as teachers or students; whether as technicians or administrators – and that common activity, that single point of convergence for all participants in the art school scenario is some form of conversational practice: all day long in art schools people do things and they talk about doing things. Indeed the thing we in art-school-world do most is perhaps simply that: we *talk*. Tutors talk with students; students talk with students; tutors with each other; some people talk in one-to-one situations and some in gatherings; some in tutorials and some in meetings; some in lecture halls and some in libraries; some over coffee and some over pints; some formally

and some informally; some behind closed doors and some behind backs; some in anger and some in enthusiasm. This talking can be both an exhilarating and an exhausting process. It can often be confounding and mind-boggling as when we find ourselves talking about talking and talking on *ad infinitum*. In these endless eddies of conversational exchange our identities, our status, our reputations swim – and sometimes we must fear that they might also drown.

In imagining possible future ways of talking with each other and achieving the oxygen of open public debate, one is asking: Is it possible that we could have new conversations? Have we other things to say to each other? Have we other ways to speak to each other? What is to be the ethos of our speaking with each other? Are we constrained to remember and repeat only so much as we have already said to each other? What kinds of silences might we listen for amid all this talk?

The third challenge to constructing an open-ended assessment and debate in respect of the current state – and future potential – of art and design education is to acknowledge and reflect upon the agency of art and design education and its institutions, which in the context of a relatively underdeveloped market for art and design is especially important. The most dramatic lesson that the recently graduated students of art and design education give us is the (somehow always unexpected) demonstration of their exceptional agency: their amazing ability to get things done, to get things started, to keep things moving. There is some paradox at work in the apparent ability of art education to facilitate the agency of students and at the same time the tendency towards a disavowal by art educators and art schools in respect of

their own powers to make things better, different, and perhaps even more humane within their own immediate world of work.

It is clear that the rampant technocratic reconstruction and rationalisation of education-in-general as training, not for civic participation, but rather for economic production-consumption, threatens to undermine meaningful provision of third level art and design education. It is also clear that, as in the general culture of the university, the failure to provide a critical, dynamic and vital vision for the art school – but rather to appeal instead to the un-interrogated and uncritical valorisation of earlier dispensations – will fail to provide meaningful resistance and opposition to crude econometric policies and restructurings. The art school needs some critical interrogation and some creative vision. It is perhaps alarming that this drive for a creative renewal of vision is apparent in the commercial art press and the notoriously faddish biennale scene but relatively undisclosed within the actual art schools themselves.

Notes

- 1 This article is based on a position paper circulated in advance of the *Irish Art & Design Research Network's* '2020 Visions: Imagining The Future of Art and Design Education', held at the National College of Art & Design, Dublin, in March 2007.
- 2 Okwui Enwezor (2006) 'Schools of Thought' in *Frieze*, no. 101 p. 142.
- 3 George Lipsitz (2000) 'Academic Politics and Social change', in Jodi Dean (ed.) *Cultural Studies / Political Theory*, Cornell University Press, pp. 80-94
- 4 Liam Gillick (2006) 'Denial & Function: A history of disengagement in relation to teaching', in Abu El Dahab et al. (eds.) *Notes for an Art School*, p. 46.

- 5 Joseph Beuys in conversation with Willoughby Sharp (1969) *Artforum*, no. 4, p.44.
- 6 Willen de Rooij and Simon Starling (2006) 'Freespace or Marketplace' in *Metropolis M: Expanding Academy*, No. 4 Aug./Sept. pp. 104-6
- 7 A blogger's ironic aside cited in Ronald Jones (2006) 'The Art Market' in *Frieze*, no. 101 p. 39.
- 8 Mai Abu ElDahab, Anton Vidolke and Florian Waldvogel (eds.) (2006) *Notes for an Art School*, Amsterdam: Manifesta.
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- 10 Howard Singermans's (1999) *Art Subjects: Making Artists in the American University*; Paul Hetherington's (1994) *Artist's in the 1990s: Their Education and Values*; and Nicholas de Ville's and Stephen Fosters (1994) *The Artists and the Academy: Issues in Fine Art Education and the Wider Cultural Context*.
- 11 For example, these developments are evidenced in the shifting thematics that structure the biennial conferences of the European League of Institutes of Art. See www.elia.org

The Critique of Everyday Life and Cultural Democracy

Alex Law

John Roberts, *Philosophizing the Everyday: Revolutionary Practice and the Fate of Cultural Theory*, (Pluto Press, 2006).

Wither Cultural Democracy?

An important study of the possibilities for cultural democracy has arrived in our midst. In his noteworthy short book, *Philosophizing the Everyday*, John Roberts pins down with all the forcible precision of a nail gun sixty years of critical theorising between 1917 and 1975 about everyday life and a conflicted reality.

Against the triumph of the 'creative consumer' and the inflation of representational politics in cultural studies, Roberts returns us to questions of political agency, technological possibilities and a critical hermeneutics of the everyday. His premise is the recovery of a tradition of thought from Marx, Georg Lukacs, Walter Benjamin, Antonio Gramsci and Henri Lefebvre. For them, trivial objects like commodities and everyday banality conceal complex and contradictory realities. They broke with the pragmatic conception of an empirically given 'reality' and advanced a 'philosophy of praxis' to emphasise the ways that self-conscious practical activity mutually transforms both the world and people active in it.

From this side of critical hermeneutics, cultural technologies like film and photography disclose meanings routinely obscured by everyday life. A hermeneutic requirement to interpret submerged meanings in concrete objects prevents any straightforward assimilation of cultural objects directly into immediate political practices or theoretical systems. Instead, it requires getting close to the object at hand in order to learn from it. Intimate attention to the trivial and the banal opens up a critique of everyday life, a critique, that Roberts argues, furthers utopian possibilities by conjoining them with the real.

By adopting a lofty disdain for the everyday as the realm of 'inauthentic' triviality, philosophers neglected to notice that everyday life is lived as a series of knotty entanglements rather than a uniform zone of conformism, boredom and tedium. Everyday life conceals a secret that eludes weighty philosophical categories and systems. It produces an excess, a surplus – what Robert's main interlocutor Henri Lefebvre called 'a trace and a remainder' – lying behind or standing beyond whatever conceptual system is raised to enclose it or, more usually, to bracket it out. The everyday possesses its own double helix of banality and boredom and, at the other edge, something left over in the possibility of breaking out of taken-for-granted routines and habits.

Roberts registers the contradictions of everyday life as unending struggle against suffocating conformism. Cultural politics can only be re-energised by restoring the philosophy of praxis to the everyday, to re-load culture with a transformatory, democratic and, above all, political charge. That this is no easy matter is not simply down to the fetishistic collusion of cultural mediators with commodified consumption. The revolutionary content that Roberts looks to is contained in the largely forgotten world of what was once called 'cultural bolshevism'. At the post-revolutionary moment the collision between western Marxism, modernity and the avant-garde responded to and helped define post-Romantic cultural democracy.

But, a sincere cultural mediator might object, cultural democracy has surely been placed off the agenda, at least for the time being, by a triumphant neoliberalism. Yet, here again, things



are not so simple. Once the hidden surplus of the everyday and the source of its production are considered, culture is already being reconnected with politics, even behind the backs of the category-mongers. This has nothing to do with the vacuous forms of cultural democracy where governing elites pretend to be up-to-date and cultural mediators tackle 'social exclusion' by re-branding their merchandise as 'entertaining' and not too challenging either politically or artistically.

There are precursors here, perhaps the greatest being *The Salaried Masses*, Siegfried Kracauer's study of the culture of white collar workers in 1920s Berlin. In his review of Kracauer's stunning essay, Walter Benjamin saw it as 'a landmark on the road to the politicisation of the intelligentsia'. Benjamin might have been talking about today's cultural mediators when, taking his cue from Kracauer, he described reportage and *die neue Sachlichkeit* (the new objectivity) as 'the radical fashion-products of the latest school' who exhibit 'a horror of theory and knowledge that recommends them to the sensation-seeking of snobs'.¹

Everyday people

Roberts trawls the wide expanse of this more activist sense of everyday life. He pulls out freshly wriggling bait on which to hook a democratic cultural politics for today. In the course of this, Walter Benjamin is placed at the crossroads of clashing perspectives on the relationship between culture and the everyday.

One side is represented by the functionalist approach to cultural form of the Productivists and Constructivists in revolutionary Russia. Productivists embraced industrial technology as a means to liberate labour, rather than subordinate it under bureaucratic managerial regimes of control and domination. Some Productivists like Aratov even saw in the democratic control of

industrial technology the utopian dissolution of art into everyday life.

On the other side, Georg Lukacs identified the domination of culture by the objective force of commodity fetishism, through what he called 'reification'. Reification was understood by Lukacs as an objective relationship rather than a subjective or random feeling of alienation. Reified reality could only ever be overcome, Lukacs concluded, when workers rose to the level of class consciousness ascribed to them in advance by the revolutionary Party.

Both the functional folding of art into everyday life and the bracketing out of everyday life as the reified site of commodity fetishism posit the relationship between culture and everyday life in a rather schematic, one dimensional way. While Benjamin learned from each he felicitously refused to endorse either. This enabled him to produce a more expansive vision of the everyday. At the same time, by the 1930s, his was also a more catastrophic vision, with Fascism, Stalinism, and warfare trampling everyday life underfoot.

Despite the straightening of the everyday under such conditions, the new cultural technologies of photography and film helped to recover the trauma of catastrophe of the everyday. In an enlarged and heightened form, photography and film unintentionally brought images forward for critical examination and visceral response, what Benjamin called the 'optical unconsciousness', of what would otherwise escape or be denied in the new authoritarian everyday.

Benjamin has enjoyed an after-life in the western academy. In part this is a career-strategy to help authorise the de-politicisation of an ever-new/ever-the-same culture industry and its study through an appeal to a tragic hero who may have been naively political (Benjamin committed suicide while fleeing the Nazis). Thankfully, Benjamin's political gutting, especially of his

'naïve' Marxism, by cultural mediators has begun to be reversed by the work of more recent critical thinkers like Terry Eagleton, David McNally and Esther Leslie.² Roberts continues and deepens the excavation work previously done in this rich seam by relating Benjamin to an even more deeply submerged figure, at least for cultural politics, that of Henri Lefebvre.³

Dadaist Taxi Driver and Critic of Everyday Life

Lefebvre's life spanned the turbulent events of the twentieth century. Born in 1901 and dying ninety years later, he became radicalised as the bloody carnage of the First World War opened up. He joined the French Communist Party (PFC) in 1928. Inside the PFC he fitted rather awkwardly with its thoroughgoing Stalinism, finally leaving in 1958, as he put it, 'from the left', though drifting back towards it in the 1980s (presumably 'to the right').

Like so many of his generation, he stuck with the Stalinoid PFC even after it had shown itself repeatedly to be politically and intellectually bankrupt. It lived for a time on the moral authority it pilfered from the October revolution. No party hack, Lefebvre fought in the Resistance, drove a taxi – 'that really was a laugh'⁴ – worked in a factory and became a teacher.

Although employed in post-war France as a sociologist, Lefebvre was never a conventional academic. He associated with the Modernist avant-garde, falling in with first Tristan Tzara and Andre Breton of the Surrealists and, later, Guy Debord and the Situationists. Needless to say, both relationships ended tempestuously, with the Situationists ironically denouncing Lefebvre for plagiarism!

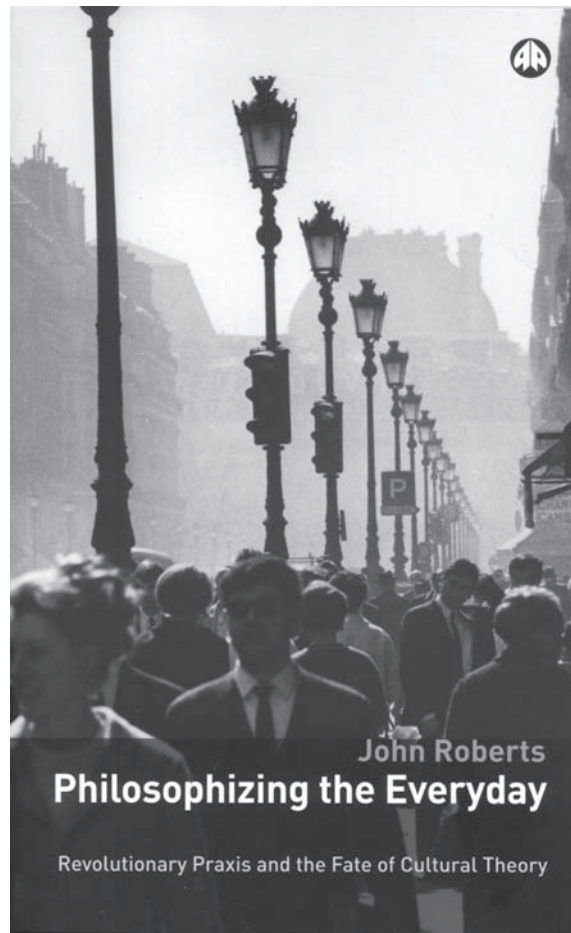
All in all, Lefebvre's critique of everyday life covers the three numbered volumes bearing that title, appearing between 1947 and 1981, as well as *Everyday Life in the Modern World* in 1971 and *Rhythmanalysis* in the mid-1980s.⁵ The first volume is marked by the optimism that everyday life could be radically changed in the first flushes of euphoria following the Liberation of Paris. Later volumes cover the transition and limits to consumer capitalism.

Lefebvre does not celebrate everyday life, banality or 'ordinariness' in their own terms. *Critique* for Lefebvre means identifying the possibilities that are present in everyday life rather than simply confirming as unalterable what already appears to exist. In this interventionist sense, 'critique derives not from theory but from praxis'.⁶ Unlike praxis, a purely empirical consciousness isolates the shards of life in the form of commodities and money, sundering them from historical and dialectical relationship to society's development. Such fetishism and utilitarianism are the very hallmark of everyday life.

Praxis has both a repetitive side and a creative side which are brought together in everyday life. Repetition across time and habit typify the subject in everyday life as an absent-minded one. Repetition is only alienating under certain conditions. Unmindful repetition and habit do not return to exactly their starting subjects. They also contain discontinuities and differences through moments of disruption, or presence.

A simple definition of everyday life would limit it to an isolated, immutable chunk of reality or abstractly substitute the part for the whole. 'Sometimes the everyday appears to be the sole reality, the reality of realists, dense, weighty and solid. At other times it seems that its weight is artificial, that its denseness is insubstantial: unreality incarnate'.⁷ Both aspects one-sidedly hinder the effort to identify and act on the inner movement of everyday life. This involves uncovering what is not yet fully realised but can become possible, converting what is 'virtually' present into an 'actuality'.

So the everyday is something less than totality,



society in its entirety, and something more than any isolated practice like work, culture, leisure, domesticity, technology, consumption, and so on. Lefebvre calls it a *level* since the everyday mediates between the whole of society and the varied fragments of life.⁸ At this level, material necessity in the form of social and natural needs and desires enter into perpetual conflict with the alienated means for satisfying them.

Against the 'positive' endorsements of and collusions with immediate reality, Lefebvre adopted Adorno's 'negative dialectic' as the critical moment in praxis.⁹ Because it is dialectical Lefebvre's appeal to negation avoids falling into the 'gaping world' of nihilism in the absolute fetishisation of nothingness.¹⁰ But something like nihilism was becoming a governing principle of consumer capitalism. Lefebvre argued that everyday life was increasingly degraded by the penetration of technological objects into every nook and cranny of existence, even personal intimacy.

The Society of Programmed Consumption

In the course of the past half century everyday life was 're-privatised', Lefebvre claimed, not least because of the waning of transformatory possibilities of the Liberation and, later, 1968. Needs were met by an industrial apparatus whose focus was the privatised family and the individual subject. Technology developed apace, relieved many tedious and time consuming tasks and created new needs in its users. But this liberation from one form of tedium only exposed the vacuum at the heart of capitalist modernity. Instead of being lived in its full dramatic possibilities it reduced living to a mere 'life-style' that simply papers over the constant return of banality, tedium and monotony.¹¹

Where current cultural theory sees ambiguity as one of its most priceless discoveries, Lefebvre was already on its trail in everyday life, not to celebrate it but to reveal how it stifled and blunted contradictions. Even before the revival of feminism in the 1960s Lefebvre was alive to the specific ways that women within and outside the home were ensnared in the ambiguities of everyday life. Lefebvre argues that since women have to live ambiguously with contradictions and moral hypocrisy, they represent the 'active critique' of everyday life.¹² In women's 'romantic' magazines Lefebvre finds represented the ambiguity of everyday life in the mixing up of the banal with the imaginary. Such ambiguity in practice offered a mutual critique and a mutual support for both aspects. Any attempt to isolate the 'feminine condition' from the analysis of totality ran the risk of creating a metaphysical, occult object out of

'the feminine', a risk that became more apparent with later idealist currents in feminism.¹³

Post-war capitalism evolved into what Lefebvre described as a society programmed for controlled consumption. In the process, a further layer of alienation from the practical, sensuous social self is encrusted onto everyday life. It functions like a closed circuit of 'production-consumption-production', creating atoms of (dis)contented consumers being sold happiness for their enjoyment alone. This is bolstered by a specialised social science now complicit with the organisation of programmed leisure and domesticity.

Town planning, for Lefebvre, shows the shortcomings of a programmatic theory that aggressively identifies its own abstract representations with the real. It leaves no space for play, whose open-ended principles cannot be accommodated by the overweening seriousness and gravitas of the isolated specialisation of professionals: 'every town planning scheme conceals a programme for everyday life'.¹⁴ Today this programme is replayed up and down the country in the planning for 'defensive space', an elaborate security apparatus and remoralised proletarians. Everyday life is thoroughly calculated in terms of functional efficiency and the lowest cost of construction and maintenance and, above all, accumulation. It is life stripped down to basic needs and no more.

Everywhere signals dictate to consumers how to adapt to this life. When traffic comes to dominate the city, the points of transition – the street, the café or the station – become more absorbing than the houses people live in. All the fetishised marvels placed in shop windows or in the rows of superstores express unfulfilled desires. In contrast to this splendour, working class estates express the repetitive functions of labour that put such wondrous things into circulation.¹⁵

Privatisation and privation are intimately related conditions. In private life at least some mutual recognition of our existence is possible, especially where it is denied elsewhere by 'an overcomplex social reality which oscillates between innuendo and brutal explicitness'.¹⁶ Both 'innuendo and brutal explicitness' are played out in the mass media's fixation with celebrity, a symptom of the deep sickness of alienated living. Television can take anything at all, including the most trivial episodes and dull personalities, and manage to play their anodyne familiarity back repeatedly as something to fill in the gaps.

For Lefebvre, this unmediated repetition of the identical, 'the everyday recorded as the everyday – the event grasped, pulverised and transmitted as rapidly as light and consciousness' was 'still a long way away'. But what he could not contemplate in 1961 has now been perfected:

It would be a closed circuit, a circuit from hell, a perfect circle in which the absence of communication and communication pushed to the point of paroxysm would meet and their identities would merge. But it will never come full circle. There will always be something new and unforeseen if only in terms of sheer horror.¹⁷

Unfortunately, we have since seen both the 'circuit of hell' replayed in countless reality TV shows and the 'unforeseen sheer horror' broadcasts of state and private terror.

The Irreducible Remainder

However, social programming does not represent a completely closed circuit. Something 'irreducible' – desire, love, reason, play, rest, poetry, justice, the city – escapes programming. Outside of a social crisis, people learn to ignore fundamental and contentious problems and issues by resorting to conventional banalities, pieties and pleasantries. So long as taking sides is not made a pressing issue contradictions are evaded or wished away by the ambiguities of everyday life. Everyday discourses, where trivia is exchanged about the

weather, family, friends, workmates, neighbours, bus timetables, the price of things, are conventions that express a longing for social intercourse and dialogue. At moments of crisis the irreducible forces its way to the forefront of consciousness.

The circuit does not constitute a finished system but contains 'irreducible remainders', constantly active as a reflective process in the search for self-knowledge. Discontinuous 'moments' are experienced intensely as limited in duration, punctuating taken-for-granted routines through the defence of irony and the mad euphoric moments of breakout like festivals, carnivals, and revolution, from the Paris Commune to 1968. These activate the possibilities of the everyday as a discrete moment of self-identity in time and space. Such moments leave their 'trace' as the mark of the event that temporarily broke with habit and repetition.

Programmatic realism purifies space and leads to cultural stasis and so, paradoxically, it needs what it disowns – the practical, active, sensuous side of reality. In contrast to stultifying theory, dysfunctional disruptions create, innovate and transform. Hence the idea of a programmed 'creative industry' would be anathema to Lefebvre who claimed that the public sphere is already corralled by the programmed society to further inhibit democratic, collective demands.

Alienation therefore does not have it all its own way; the world of things must confront the class-ridden human content of everyday life. The content of everyday life always eludes complete capture by formal structures of institutions, ideologies, culture, art and language. For Lefebvre this excess becomes available as 'a moment of presence'.

Yet there is a sense in which the 'moment of presence' can be hyper-inflated and in other ways utterly trivialised. Roberts dates the decline of the inflationary moment of presence from around 1975. At that point the upswing of industrial militancy gradually came to a halt and a new micro-politics of self-representation supplanted the philosophy of praxis. For all his emphasis on the narratives of subalterns and the 'tactics of the weak', Michel de Certeau's work on the everyday emptied out larger political questions of democracy and the state.¹⁸ Worse was to follow with postmodernism as the modalities of the insignificant and the banal became infinitely preferable to the harsh judgements of active political critique. Hermeneutics was broken from critical praxis and dissolved into facile interpretative strategies of smart-assed consumption. Crisis-ridden neoliberalism left theories of the cultural economy dicing-up superfluities as it stumbled chaotically onwards.

Punk Marxism

As late as the 1940s Lefebvre could still acknowledge that the uneven development of capitalism in France meant that many areas of life were not yet subjugated fully to its priorities. Family life and rural festivals preserved their own 'cyclical' rhythms. These stood apart from the capitalist production of an everyday life based on 'linear time' in the endless growth of mechanically-organised time and the accumulation of commodities. But by the 1980s even the round face of the wristwatch had given way to the numbered clock faces. Today, digital technologies bear down upon cyclical time to install linear, literally 'online' time, as an over-riding priority. Cellular phones and handheld electronic gadgets, as Andy Merrifield put it, are swamping cyclical time and filling in 'free time' more completely without the promised liberation from the 'compulsory time' of waged work:

The gadget has permeated new millennium daily life, filled in the unproductive pores of the working day, created human personalities permanently online, addictively tuned in, programmed to perform, and terrified to log off.¹⁹

Public space begins to resemble an open-

planned office, where the banal routines of productive subjects network in a frontal display of busy-ness.

Yet cyclical time, based as it is on material processes of planetary, biological and physiological life, cannot be readily eliminated by the linear time of capital accumulation and digital technology. Subordination to linear time is necessarily incomplete. We need to rest and enjoy inactivity from time to time. Moreover, we also stretch periodically against repetitive time. Lefebvre makes a special point of identifying discontinuous 'moments of presence'. These intensified points are reached when the contradiction between cyclical time and linear time approaches breaking point. Roberts might have pushed the musical analogy with rhythmical time further and noted, as Greil Marcus did in his book *Lipstick Traces* (where he paints Lefebvre as some kind of a Punk Marxist), those moments of presence that erupted with the first flushes of punk.

Like music, circadian rhythms rise from their depths to reveal the possible within the real of linear time. Out of the real emerges the 'virtual', a possibility that requires practical action against the inadequacy of existing reality. For Lefebvre, only by connecting with everyday life can praxis open space for de-alienated existence as grounded transparently in mutual recognition of social relations. On the other hand, there is no pure, unmediated 'authentic' life already waiting to be unveiled. Instead, there is a living struggle to realise the possibilities contained in the contradiction between the repetition and routine of a banal everyday life and the rupture and contingency of the moment of exceptional events.

Functional dysfunctions

In shifting the argument from a narrow concern with aesthetics and the politics of representation to one of critical practice, Roberts' invocation of Lefebvre performs an important service against the inanities of de-historicised cultural mediators immersed in the permanent present. This doesn't mean that cultural democracy will fall from the branches of neoliberalism like a gift. Nor does it mean that the solutions are already there in Lefebvre's work. His approach to the everyday changed as both the everyday changed and ideas about it changed. At the risk of over-simplifying, Roberts identifies a number of lacunae in Lefebvre as recurring problems for any sense of cultural democracy based on a philosophy of praxis.

First, while he may restore a sense of agency, intervention, commitment and politics, Lefebvre could be notoriously inconsistent. For instance, he struggled to formulate an aesthetic theory that placed consciousness rather than praxis at the heart of cultural democracy. He also became ambivalent about the role of the working class in the 'new realism' and social change more generally.²⁰ In contrast to Lefebvre's uneven emphasis on consciousness, Roberts returns to that other disgraceful figure, Karl Marx, and his emphasis on 'the rich, living, sensuous concrete activity of self-objectification' as emerging through the living tradition of social groups.

Second, Lefebvre took up a problematic relationship to technology. Because capitalist social relations fail to realise the possibilities inherent in technology, everyday life remained underdeveloped. Here 'a backward everyday life would coexist with a highly developed technology'.²¹ Even the most advanced forms of communications technology can be used to shore up the most archaic forms of moral and social life.²² Such instances for Lefebvre would diagnose a reality one-sidedly colonised by technology rather than interrogating the contradictory nature of technology and everyday life. More enamoured by the legacy of Romantic culture, Lefebvre lacked Benjamin's grasp of the enervating possibilities in socio-technical relations.

Third, Lefebvre overstates the unmediated absolute moment of spontaneity and festivity,

and tends to neglect the mediating role played by technology, collective organisation, and the labouring body. Here the danger identified by Roberts is that of fetishising affective spontaneity in 'moments of presence', where 'festivity becomes the tyranny of the spontaneous particular in some hideous compulsion to enjoy'.²³ Lefebvre, like the Situationists, was prone to short-circuit the 'moment' (the 'situation') as the euphoric point of clarity and self-knowledge. This can lead to two dead-ends. On the one hand, in the aftermath of 1968 it became clear that something like a theory of moments/situations could produce disastrous forms of voluntarism like the Red Brigades. On the other hand, as I have stressed, cultural democracy came to be equated with the 'creative consumer' cleverly reinterpreting commercial culture in localised settings.

Still Roberts is rightly generous to Lefebvre. A continuous thread in Lefebvre is the struggle to open-up the possible, to realise the possibilities in a new actuality, to reinstate the necessity for a philosophy of praxis as the basis for cultural democracy: 'Whatever is produced or constructed in the superior realms of social practice must demonstrate its reality in the everyday, whether it be art, philosophy or politics'.²⁴ All must be returned back to everyday life with the aim of transforming it. As Lefebvre put it: 'Utopia today is the possible of tomorrow'.²⁵

Notes

- 1 Walter Benjamin, 'An outsider attracts attention - on the *Salaried Masses* by S. Kracauer', in Siegfried Kracauer, *The Salaried Masses: Duty and Distraction in Weimar Germany* (Verso, 1998), p. 113.
- 2 Terry Eagleton, *Walter Benjamin: Or Towards a Revolutionary Criticism*, (Verso, 1992); Esther Leslie, *Overpowering Conformism: Walter Benjamin*, (Pluto, 2000); David McNally, *Bodies of Meaning: Studies on Language, Labor and Meaning*, (State University of New York Press, 2001).
- 3 A number of introductory studies have begun to appear in English. These include Rob Shields, *Spatial Dialectics: Lefebvre, Love and Struggle* (Routledge, 1999), Andy Merrifield, *Henri Lefebvre: A Critical Introduction* (Routledge, 2006) and Stuart Elden, *Understanding Henri Lefebvre: Theory and the Possible* (Continuum, 2004).
- 4 Henri Lefebvre, 'Retrospections', in *Key Writings*, edited by Stuart Elden, Elizabeth Lebas and Eleonore Kofman, (Continuum, 2003), p. 7.
- 5 Lefebvre had begun preliminary work on everyday life in the early 1930s. See Henri Lefebvre and Norbert Guterman, 'Mystification: Notes for a critique of everyday life', in *Key Writings*. A final book on the rhythms and routines of everyday life was published 70 years later, *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life*, (Continuum, 2004).
- 6 Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life, Volume II: Foundations for a Sociology of the Everyday*, (Verso, 2002), p. 137.
- 7 *Critique II*, p. 194.
- 8 *Critique II*, pp. 118-125.
- 9 Elden, p. 66.
- 10 *Critique II*, p. 263.
- 11 *Critique II*, p. 217.
- 12 *Critique II*, p. 223.
- 13 *Critique II*, p. 14.
- 14 *Critique II*, p. 79.
- 15 *Critique II*, p. 312.
- 16 *Critique II*, p. 92.
- 17 *Critique II*, p. 77.
- 18 Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (University of California Press, 1984).
- 19 Merrifield, p. 13.
- 20 Marc James Leger, 'Henri Lefebvre and the moment of the aesthetic', in Andrew Hemingway, editor, *Marxism and the History of Art*, (Pluto Press, 2006).
- 21 *Critique II*, p. 316.
- 22 *Critique II*, p. 146. Against the hype of the Information Society, see Francois Fortier, *Virtuality Check: Power Relations and Alternative Strategies in the Information Society* (Verso, 2001) for an argument that ICTs, far from being vectors of democracy are polarising power relations and accentuating exploitation.
- 23 Roberts, p. 111.
- 24 *Critique II*, p. 45.
- 25 Cited by Elden, p243.

Killing Culture (Softly)

Stephen Dawber

As this journal goes to press the fate of the draft Culture (Scotland) Bill remains uncertain. Released into parliamentary dead time late last December, it has lain around like an unwanted Christmas present, the product of a drawn-out and dispiriting process of maladministration. The consultative response appears to have been overwhelmingly hostile, whilst wider reaction to the Bill has been marked by political apathy and intellectual withdrawal.¹ Whether Scotland's new SNP minority administration can revive public enthusiasm for such a tarnished object seems unlikely. But in a fractured parliament they may try, perhaps by rewrapping the Bill in a thicker fold of tartan paper.

Apathy breeds bad government and this is a dangerous moment for Scotland's artists and arts administrators. The draft Culture (Scotland) Bill was not negligible; indeed, it marked a dramatic repositioning of the relationship between the Scottish state apparatus and its cultural agencies. Or rather it represented a stark formalisation of tendencies well-developed since devolution: stronger centralised state control of cultural policy; mounting bureaucratisation across the sector; the branding of national culture for promotional gain; an insidious instrumentalisation of cultural practice and erosion of creative freedoms; and a commitment to declining state funding and increased privatisation. Such processes are by no means clear-cut, but they do point to a renewed wave of neoliberal reform aimed at maintaining and reconstituting elite class power. The Culture Bill, then, marked a decisive turning of the Thatcherite screw in Scotland.

As all but the most compromised of Blairite hacks could tell, the draft Bill was a much reduced version of James Boyle's Culture Commission published in June 2005.² At a cost of nearly £½ million this had been a more widely consultative process which nonetheless ably performed the neoliberal trick of blurring the boundaries between public and private sectors, much to the latter's advantage. A technocratic fantasy writ large, Boyle's model of a top-heavy cultural development agency was both too costly and too distant from Whitehall's priorities for a timid New Labour Executive; it promptly thrust the Commission offstage. But whichever troupe has been employed, the general direction of cultural policy has, since devolution, remained the same. Culture in Scotland has been exposed to an enhanced corporatist settlement, increasing the authoritarian (that is anti-democratic) intervention of the state and opening organisations up where possible to exploitation by the private sector.

In its immediate detail the draft Culture Bill concentrated on three core administrative functions. First, the formation of a new funding agency out of the ruins of the Scottish Arts Council (SAC) and Scottish Screen, to be named (in one of those priceless formulations that quite gives the game away) Creative Scotland. Second, a shaking up of the nationally-funded institutions, most notably by collapsing them further into the state through the abolition of the 'arm's length-principle'. And third, a rolling out across local authorities of the then First Minister's pet policy, an advisory programme of so-called cultural entitlements. A mealy-mouthed agenda with little developmental ambition and largely dependent on existing structures, the draft Bill nonetheless performed one vital task: it would cost very little in either political or expenditure terms. Any route back to the social-democratic compromise of the post-war era was closed off definitively: no longer would expanding public sector cultural provision offer a margin of freedom at the fringes of commodity expansion. The politics of social democracy – including the possibility of tax-raising powers for culture – now has no place for any of the major parties in post-devolution Scotland.³

Instead, we have a soft neoliberalism in the

culture sector, firmly attached to an accelerating politics of what the geographer, David Harvey, has described as "accumulation by dispossession": a plundering of public assets for private gain.⁴ Here the protection provided by the public sector – our common wealth – is raided and its value confiscated by private capital at the expense of public services, including increasingly cultural services. This amounts to a substantial erosion of collective freedoms, embedded in almost every policy feature of the draft Culture Bill: in the creative industries agenda underpinning Creative Scotland; in the shared services provision now threatening the national institutions; in the top-down delivery of cultural entitlements; and in the relentless, demeaning positioning of Scotland's artists as either service providers or creative entrepreneurs. Ever quick to quibble over minor details, it is alarming that leading arts administrators should either be too dull to recognise, or (more likely) privately complicit with, this neoliberal turn. Despite the criticism delivered up by the consultation process, the wider cultural politics of the Bill has remained substantively – and even perhaps deliberately – submerged.

Beyond its administrative edicts, three key features structured the politics of the Culture Bill, each an emerging feature of neoliberal cultural policy in Scotland. First, it was defined by a suffocatingly narrow conception of culture (something inherited from Boyle's Culture Commission) in which the major mechanism of cultural transmission – the mass media – was for the most part set aside. Not only is this to ignore the manner in which a majority of Scots engage their imaginative lives, but it is also to dodge tough questions of how equality in communication is to be achieved in a global media sphere now subject to powerfully anti-democratic forces.

Substantial broadcasting powers may still be reserved to Westminster, but this should not stand in the way of a national debate about a definition of culture premised on the threat posed to democracies by monopoly media control. The poor state of public service broadcasting in Scotland and the ongoing erosion of the Scottish press – significantly degraded since devolution – make the urgency of this debate abundantly clear. It was characteristic of the draft Culture Bill that when it did turn its attention to broadcasting it did so primarily in promotional terms, freeing up local authorities to advertise their services (a mechanism in the wake of the attempted housing stock transfers in Glasgow and Edinburgh that is unlikely to be benign). The desire of Scottish politicians to sidestep questions of accountability and ownership in the media sphere points to its political priority over other aspects of cultural provision. As anyone struck by the vacuity of much Scottish art criticism will know, there is unlikely to be transformation in other areas of public culture until the organs of neoliberal propaganda are brought to heel.

A second defining feature of the draft Culture Bill was its contempt for the relationship between culture and democracy, a deficit that reflects the wider hollowing out of mass politics across Europe linked to the neoliberal turn. Electoral entropy fuels cynicism, political volatility and, as Peter Mair has recently argued, poor administration, as the energy of collective decision-making is replaced by the vapidness of managerialism and presentational style.⁵ That Scotland leads Europe in voter apathy – the turnout in this year's 'exciting' parliamentary elections was 51.7% – seems to be of little interest to cultural leaders.⁶ Their supposed "unleashing of creativity" is conceived in primarily economic, rather than more traditional civic terms.

Thus the draft Culture Bill presented an unimaginative, top-down model of cultural provision, placing delivery onto existing

bureaucratic structures with little new money, and in the case of local authorities with no legislative authority attached. Above all, nothing – absolutely nothing – should be enabled to generate from below. Here, in the Orwellian language we have come to expect of New Labour, is the Bill's definition of cultural entitlements, superficially at least its most progressive aspect:

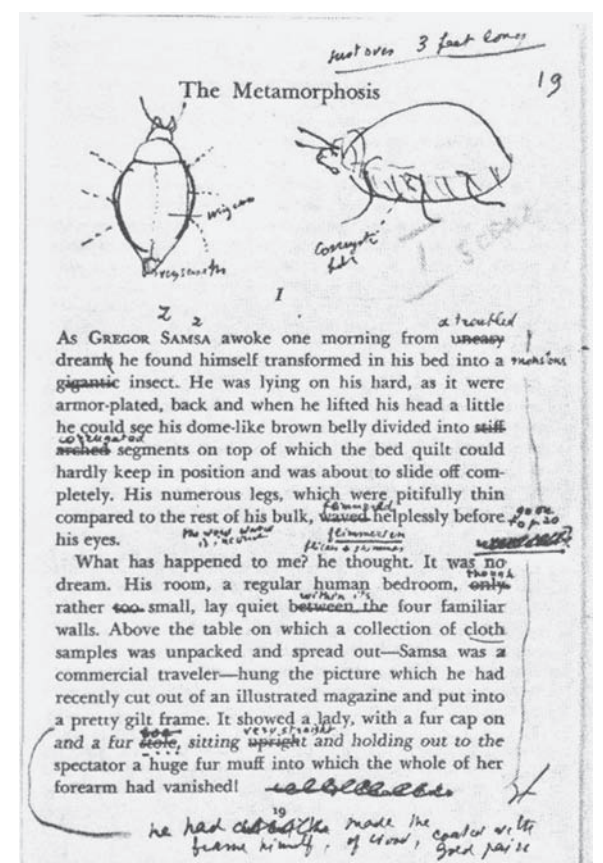
We have decided to call the new style of provision entitlements because we hope this will encourage more people to enjoy and participate in cultural activities. There is a general entitlement to adequate cultural services for the inhabitants of each local authority area. Local authorities will also seek to make available each of the activities and services they announce as entitlements, but entitlements will not represent a guarantee of access to any particular service.

We will not, it seems, be entitled to our entitlements after all.

All this fuels technocracy, the idea that the realm of culture is best directed from on high by technical specialists.⁷ If the draft Bill was anything, it was a bureaucrat's wet dream, with all its rhetoric of "partnership", "cultural planning", "capacity building", "enterprise networks" and "quality assurance". Nowadays, this is largely the administrative art of making less go further; it involves delivering the policy objectives of business, the voluntary sector and other areas of (often failing) government provision. (This was cheerfully described in the Bill's guidance notes as "the application of creative skills to the development of products and processes".) Under the increasingly authoritarian direction of the neoliberal state, cultural provision is both rigidly economic and ruthlessly instrumentalised; cultural policy is no longer really about culture at all.

One effect of this methodologically dubious world of targets and monitoring is the opportunities opened up for New Labour's corporate friends: it may well be that the greatest scandal in the realm of culture since devolution is not the stage fright of unrehearsed ministers, but the ushering in of private sector consultancies backstage. By taking consultants seriously cultural workers are colluding in the destruction of the complex apparatus that has helped sustain their work over the last fifty years. Their parasitic relationship to the public sector erodes even further the possibility of democratic renewal.⁸

So this now is the soft neoliberal route for Scottish culture: delimiting the realm of culture to the non-media sphere; and denuding the public sector of its history of collective ownership and (limited) accountability. Both enable the third and central 'innovation' of the draft Culture Bill: the redirection of the intricate edifice of culture



to more narrowly promotional ends. Thus we are informed in the very first paragraph of the Bill's guidance notes that culture "is a defining feature of a successful and confident nation. It is a vital ingredient in our success, here and abroad". The unconscious repetition provides the key: "success" is to be defined reductively, a codeword for Scotland's enhanced economic competitiveness under capitalist globalisation. Profit is to be derived from the unique qualities of Scottish culture and the exploitation of what might be termed its monopoly power. National culture is to be harnessed more assertively to the goal of capital accumulation, and public money redirected to bolstering commodity exchange.

Central to the draft Bill was the boosting of the so-called creative industries, a key plank of New Labour economic policy since 1998.⁹ According to this new orthodoxy, culture is a form of symbolic capital, offering distinction grounded in history and place, and therefore competitive advantage in a global market. For those who promote the creative economy, the state's cultural patronage must also be appropriated to accumulative ends. However, the enhanced monetization of culture generates both contradictions and dangers. These include the disneyfication of heritage and the possibility (perhaps well underway) that artists will follow the marketeers' agenda and bend their practice to suit the commodification of place. It also encourages local authorities to abandon democratic accountability in order to intensify their embrace of the private sector, seen (as reported elsewhere in this journal) in the recent transfer of Glasgow City Council's Cultural and Leisure Services department to a charitable trust.

Even in its own terms the economism of creative industries is a high risk strategy. Commodification threatens the very qualities of originality and uniqueness that make locations attractive to investors in the first place, values historically sustained by the public sector. Furthermore, the policy inevitably benefits those areas best able to compete for collective symbolic capital (city centres mainly), generating opposition in the regions and poorer suburbs.¹⁰ Indeed, creative industries policy may well forge a localised cultural politics of resistance which might then be mobilised to ground international solidarities. The SNP has already signalled its interest in bringing creative industries more firmly into the heart of the cultural policy process, a strategy that is likely to prove divisive. Promotional culture may well become the canker that consumes Creative Scotland from within.

All this raises the crucial question of what cultural workers might do now. The consultation response to the draft Bill hints at a surge of antagonism as arts workers – often in discretely technocratic terms – mobilise to defend their slender autonomy against the pincer movement of privatisation and the authoritarian state. However, that collective expression lacks both principled leadership and defined tactics. Scotland on the whole is not well served by its cultural leaders; since devolution the field has become increasingly populated by political placemen, accountants, mock-radicals and managerialists. Most have little conception that their role is to defend culture in the public interest, sometimes within, but also crucially *against* the state. Furthermore, few, if any, seem concerned to define that interest, let alone offer up a definition to public scrutiny.

Neither should we hold out much hope for the Scottish universities, sites of cultural production now arguably more compromised than any other area of public life. Although open in the past to hosting collective discussion, the Centre for Cultural Policy Research (CCPR) at Glasgow University has long positioned itself as a glorified consultancy for the Executive and its cultural agencies. Whether it can recover its intellectual integrity under its new Director, Philip Schlesinger, is open to question (he at least is an advocate of an "open Scotland"). So far, however, the omens do not look good.¹¹

But perhaps the area of greatest concern for readers of this journal is the future of the SAC. Unprotected by any heritage status or the accountability of local government, it is the agency that will most easily be degraded by the neoliberal strategy of accumulation by dispossession. If, as the draft Bill suggested, Creative Scotland takes

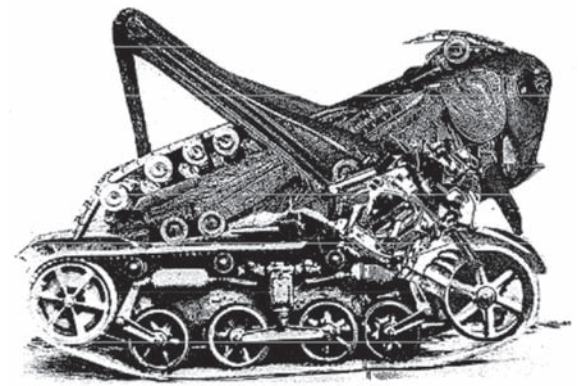
on the role of promoting a creative industries agenda, then it will become impossible to maintain the traditional public sector patronage function of the SAC. Scotland's artists should be hammering at the door of Manor Place day and night to prevent this happening. At a debate hosted by the Royal Society of Edinburgh in February 2007, the current Chairman of Creative Scotland, Richard Holloway, offered an abject defence of the draft Culture Bill, alongside the Edinburgh University sociologist, David McCrone. Indeed, it may well be that a sociology of post-devolution establishment complacency is precisely what is required, including comment on the disabling teleology of nationalist identification. How else to explain the fact that those vitally involved in keeping Thatcherite values at bay in the 1980s should now (perhaps even without realising it) be settling back and beckoning them in?

If this is a dispiriting prognosis, it puts a burden on cultural workers to organise themselves and build on the momentum of their response to the Bill. The rapidity of the decline in the margin of freedom under neoliberal cultural policy is troubling, to say the least. But amidst the caution of bureaucratic positioning there are some signs of resistance: the trade unions are more active in the field of cultural policy than ever before (Unison, Prospect, Equity, the Musicians' Union and the Scottish Artists' Union all expressed principled hostility to the Bill). In the absence of any serious political alternative unions are a vital presence; they must now help fill the leadership vacuum by devoting resources to critical policy research. At a workplace level, cultural workers should be doing all they can to defeat the logic of managerialism: its political caution; its negation of democratic contest; its casual subservience to processes destructive of cultural value. If the response to the draft Bill amounts to anything, it is a crisis of legitimacy for Scottish culture's administrative elite. Small acts of resistance may now take on greater weight.

Finally, the key task for cultural workers is to recover cultural policy from the miasma of technocracy in which it has become lost; or to put it another way, to replace governance with cultural politics. Currently amongst Scottish arts managers it is fashionable to express sneaking admiration for the cultural policy of Venezuela's Hugo Chavez, although it is unlikely that our *bien pensant* administrators will develop much of a taste for "Poder Popular" (popular power). But, unwittingly perhaps, they might just have a point: that the resources of a renewed cultural policy in Scotland today lie outside the boundaries of Europe – amongst the new social movements of Latin America, or buried in the writings of Mariátegui, Fanon, Cabral and Freire. Here is a real research programme for the CCPR, one truly in the public interest and, in the long run perhaps, a programme with less self-destructive consequences.

If, indeed, the Scottish Arts Council is to fold, then it might with its last vital shudder empty its coffers by commissioning a grand public art project. The world's poets would be invited to pen emancipatory *aides memoires* which could then be tattooed on the all-too-frail flesh of our arts administrators. Here by way of a coda is one for the torso of the Chairman of Creative Scotland: Bertolt Brecht's great poem, 'On the critical attitude', from 1938:¹²

The critical attitude
Strikes many people as unfruitful.
That is because they find the state
Impervious to their criticism.
But what in this case is an unfruitful attitude
Is merely a feeble attitude. Give criticism arms
And states can be demolished by it.
Canalising a river
Grafting a fruit tree
Educating a person
Transforming a state
These are instances of fruitful criticism
And at the same time
Instances of art.



Notes

- 1 The 212 consultation responses to the draft Bill are available at www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/05/1154331/0. Documents relating to the original Bill are available at www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/12/14095224/0.
- 2 The Report can be found at www.culturalcommission.org.uk.
- 3 It is worth recalling how significantly that margin of freedom was dependent on a more egalitarian taxation regime. Prior to a series of Thatcherite tax cuts from 1979, the basic rate of income tax was 33% (it is currently 22% and about to drop to 20% in April 2008), whilst the top rate has fallen even more sharply from a peak of 83% in the mid 1970s to the current rate of 40%. Crucially, the banding system for higher earners was abolished in 1979–80 and has not been reinstated by New Labour, meaning that there is no distinction between middle earners and the filthy rich. In the devolution referendum of September 1997, 63.5% of the Scottish people voted for the Scottish Parliament to have tax-varying powers, a statistic that has conveniently been forgotten by the mainstream parties.
- 4 David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, (Oxford, 2005).
- 5 'Ruling the void? The hollowing of western democracy', *New Left Review*, 42, November/December 2006, pp. 25–51.
- 6 Turnout was 51.7% on the constituency vote and 52.4% on the regional vote, an increase on the constituency vote of 2.3% over 2003. Low turnout seems to be significantly a symptom of working-class disenfranchisement: the constituency turnout in the Glasgow region was just 41.61%. For immediate post-election analysis see 'Election 2007', Scottish Parliament Information Centre briefing, available at www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/research/briefings-07/SB07-21.pdf.
- 7 The takeover of arts administration in Britain by technocratic procedure has yet to be properly explored. But for a vital first attempt at such an analysis see Paola Merli, 'The organization of culture between bureaucracy and technocracy: an agenda for the humanities', *International Journal of the Humanities*, vol. 3, 2005/2006.
- 8 For a jaw-dropping account of the influence of consultancies under New Labour see David Craig and Richard Brooks, *Plundering the Public Sector*, (London, 2006). A detailed study of the cost to the public sector of consultancy work amongst arts organisations in Scotland is long overdue.
- 9 For latest DCMS material relating to what is now titled Creative Economy Planning see www.cep.culture.gov.uk. This appears to represent an intensification of the creative industries agenda and is due to be published as a Green Paper in June 2007.
- 10 For a brilliant exposition of some of the issues raised here see David Harvey, 'The art of rent: globalization and the commodification of culture', reprinted in his *Spaces of Capital: Towards a Critical Geography*, (Edinburgh, 2001), pp. 394–411.
- 11 Philip Schlesinger, David Miller and William Dinan, *Open Scotland? Journalists, Spin Doctors and Lobbyists*, (Edinburgh, 2001). The first publication of the CCPR under Schlesinger's leadership is a briefing document, 'Public support for the creative industries in Scotland' (April 2007). It examines "the level of support and expenditure for the creative industries sector in Scotland", but offers no critique of the policy or commentary on the political aspects of the creative industries agenda.
- 12 'Über die kritische Haltung', translated here by John Willett and reproduced in Bertolt Brecht, *Poems 1913–1956*, (London, 2000), p. 308.

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O Rose, thou art sick!

Outsourcing Glasgow's Cultural & Leisure Services

In December 2006, in the wake of the new Charities Act, Gordon Brown announced a £30 million fund to support partnerships between "community-led third sector organisations and local authorities", taking over the management or ownership of local assets. Presented as increasing community engagement, this compact was the launch of a so-called "public services action plan" setting out a long-term goal for the "greater role for the third sector in delivering public services".

At the same time, councils are under increasing financial pressure as a consequence of various initiatives including the Best Value and Efficient Government regimes, which provide the imperative for councils throughout Scotland to examine the provision of their services. As a result, public services are increasingly taken out of council control and thereby democratic accountability is inevitably compromised, but with councils still providing funding for the new forms of organisation. These have included the setting up of independent charitable trusts to take over the running of public services such as libraries, museums, theatres and sports and leisure centres. This is based on a belief that there will be substantial savings on rates and VAT, as these trusts can take advantage of tax benefits offered to charities; and on the expectation that a charitable trust is more likely to attract private donations than a council department, thereby freeing-up or attaining additional money to deliver services.

While the museums sector has been discussing the benefits and disadvantages of devolving museums for many years, and museum and leisure trusts have been in place for some time, there has recently been a surge in the number of trusts being set up. The Museums, Libraries and Archives Council in England recently commissioned a detailed report¹ into museum trusts in England and Wales suggesting that the reasons given for this expansion are seldom to improve efficiency or services. Instead, the procedure is often a response to funding difficulties, pressure from the Arts Council, a Best Value Review, or rationalisation of services. However, there is little evidence that the savings and improvements promised have actually materialised.

Findings show that many such trusts suffer funding problems as council support is phased out, while private donations either fail to materialise or do not consistently deliver the funding required to maintain services. Most additional funding is coming from public sources already available to museums. And even when looked at in the terms of the 2004 Gershon review of public sector spending, the process of moving museum services to trusts cannot generate substantial financial benefits as savings tend to be "non cashable" efficiencies: museums are not particularly well funded so there is little scope to make savings.

In Scotland, while many of these trusts initially performed satisfactorily, they appear to have come up against a similar set of problems: stagnation of core funding with savings and extra funding being slow to materialise; pension liabilities; as well as dealing with the costs of audit, internal and external regulation and reporting structures. The trusts also appear to have problems attracting and/or keeping good managers and trustees, which mean they also have great difficulty in managing both their day-to-day running and dealing with crises when they occur.²

As in England and Wales, trusts have limited options to make cash savings and so are introducing lower wages and poorer terms and conditions. In particular, many are increasing the use of casual staff. This means money can be saved on actual wages, sick pay, holiday entitlements

and pension contribution. The public sector workers' union, UNISON, in its Renfrewshire local government branch in December 2006 had 15 employment tribunals lodged under the Wages Act following changes in management at the Leisure Trust.

Robbing Peter to Pay Paul

In September 2006, in an unprecedented move, Glasgow City Council proposed to transfer the entirety of its Cultural and Leisure Services department to a private charitable trust. This includes all the Community Libraries, museums and art galleries; its leisure centres, swimming pools, golf courses and other sports facilities; parks and 'events'; community centres and facilities; 'social renewal' programmes; and 4,214 staff. This would be the first time that all these services, in particular libraries, had been hived off. What's more, the proposals were rushed through the Council with little or no public consultation in order to set up the huge charity before the 2007 Scottish parliamentary and local elections. Consultation meetings with the trade unions on the transfer were subsequently arranged. Crucially, however, these meetings were only to discuss the mechanism of the transfer. As far as the Council and the Department were concerned, the principle of the transfer had already been established, and it was merely a matter of consultation with the trade unions on aspects which would affect the terms and conditions of members.

UNISON – representing the majority of public sector workers affected – went to court just days before the proposed transfer to seek a judicial review of the decision and an interim interdict to prevent it, believing the Council's proposals potentially breached the 1887 Public Libraries Act which indicates that they have a duty to manage the public libraries, museums and art galleries.

In failing to consult with the people of Glasgow on the transfer, UNISON also believe the Council has acted in a manner that is contrary to both the spirit and the letter of democratic accountability. Since this proposal was first announced, there have been no public meetings held by the Council to discuss the proposal with the people of Glasgow. With such an important measure being proposed it would surely be expected that some form of public consultation exercise should have been undertaken. Reasons for rushing it through could be due to the negative publicity it would attract given the rising tide of opinion against the results of stock housing transfer and the prohibitive cost of yet another PR exercise in its wake.³

Another major concern is that this is little more than a glorified tax-avoidance scheme – the financial advantage being in establishing the trust as a 'charity' and then claiming the tax and rates exemptions that apply. Whilst the Council were pushing through the transfer, the Scottish Labour Party belatedly acknowledged this and made a policy commitment for this year's Scottish parliamentary elections that the legitimate incentives that apply to charities are not used as vehicles for outsourcing by local authorities. The reason being that this could mean increased financial pressure on the services that remain if it became the norm, as a loss of business rates would surely lead to less money being passed on to councils. So an attempt to avoid their own party's policy commitment before it became legislation could well be the dominant motivating factor for the speed with which the Council rushed this through.

UNISON is openly challenging the transfer to the new trust, arguing that it is detrimental not

only to the interests of its members, many of whom are Glasgow residents and council tax payers, but also to the people of Glasgow. Yet, despite the obvious objections to compromising the democratic accountability of public services, there appear to be no sound service delivery reasons for such transfers. UNISON argues that trusts often behave more like arms-length companies rather than traditional charities, with an agenda geared towards the 'disposal' of services in areas of social deprivation, eroding standards and cost-cutting. It is also aware of examples of leisure trusts attempting to delay or even stop wage rises to staff and to cut national pay and conditions.

It is no coincidence that this agenda is being pursued when Glasgow City Council is attempting to deal with the issue of equal pay and its associated costs.⁴ Clearly, this proposal is not about improved service provision, but about doling out services and saving an estimated £8 million which will fund part of the cost of the Council's failure to deal with equal pay. This contradicts Harriet Harman who, during the Labour deputy leadership contest in May, admitted that the government is failing to get a grip on how to handle the £3bn bill facing local government due to equal pay claims, and that the government needs to take stock of the impact of contracting out services in health, social care and local government as it is "one of the key factors driving continued unequal pay".⁵

Elected Members will have little or no influence in the running of cultural and leisure services unless they happen to be the 'lucky' six on the new Trust's board. With the transfer the Council will effectively remove democratic accountability from a large range of services and lose control and ability to direct them, with the knock-on effect of not being able to meet its own objectives and key priorities. Things like the expansion of centres like Scotstoun Stadium and its use for events will be removed from effective democratic accountability. Likewise what happens in Glasgow's parks, with the pressure to sell-off open space for development by predatory business, as well as the land sales in expectation of the Commonwealth Games, will be down to the Trust not the Council. One of Glasgow's proud boasts is that of the free access to museums. How long will that last if the Trust gets into financial difficulties? Currently Glasgow's schools get free trips to the museums and free access to leisure facilities. This is arranged by a cross-charge system between two Council departments. Will this remain when one is no longer a council-run service?

Huge 'pseudo-charities' cut from existing council services are not charities in the accepted sense. Because they are created simply to exploit the legitimate incentives offered to existing charities, they give legitimate charities a bad name. They offer massive and unfair competition to grassroots projects for the limited funds available from local Councils for cultural services as well as other charitable and cultural funds such as the National Lottery. Their impact is not unlike the effects of the London Olympics' raid on the National Lottery and Arts Council England and its impact on good causes. In addition, grant giving powers for culture will also be transferred to the Trust. What does this mean for diversity and equality in terms of having control over distribution of funds in a diminished field, the Trust set up to soak up resources that would otherwise be available to grassroots organisations?

There is a lot of publicity about trusts' increased ability to raise private donations and become involved in joint partnerships with the private sector. However, the experience of previous 'outsourcing' both in England and Scotland has

produced little evidence that more private money is coming in – most additional funding to museum trusts comes from public funds. To rely on such donations and grants to run our services puts them in the high risk area of the voluntary sector, who rightly complain about the uncertainty that such funding entails.

Staff are the people who do badly out of these transfers, with no long term guarantee regarding their pay and conditions. The loss of the ‘economies of scale’ in things like human resources, maintenance or procurement often means higher operating costs. There is no evidence that management improves. This means increasing financial crisis, which in turn leads to appeals to the council to ‘bail them out’ and cuts in staff wages and conditions. Many trusts have cut jobs, increased casualisation, and reduced opening hours.⁵

The giving away or leasing of Glasgow’s physical Common Good Assets is of dubious morality and legality. Many of the collections in Glasgow’s Museums and Libraries were given to the people of Glasgow, e.g. the Burrell Collection. To give (or even to lease) these away to a non-accountable body with no consultation with the people is ethically (if not legally) wrong. In case you were wondering exactly what’s held in Common Good in Scotland, so is the Scottish Parliament. David Harvie in his ‘Culmination of Public Petitions Process on Common Good Assets’, delivered to the Scottish Parliament, writes that:

“It is accepted that, over a very long period, proper accounting has been slipshod and inconsistent, and that many millions of pounds worth of assets – buildings, land, rentals, art collections, and other artefacts – may have been disposed-of, misapplied or otherwise lost to their rightful owners – the people of Scotland...[D]ue to mis-accounting and deliberate under-valuing, the claimed total value of Scotland’s Common Good Assets of £180 million might more appropriately amount to £1.8 billion.”

As recently as March 2007, the Scottish Parliament’s Local Government & Transport Committee was still deciding its approach to the widely admitted problems relating to ascertaining Common Good assets held by local authorities.

On Glasgow’s proposed transfer, Harvie writes: “Many assets should be included on the Common Good Fund Register but Glasgow’s Chief Executive states that he has now asked that this ‘be reviewed and updated’ after the transfer to the Charity/Trading Company. The legal risk assessment for the new Charity/Trading Company states that ‘the legal due diligence process is less comprehensive than it might otherwise have been due to the relatively short timescales available’, while ‘leases for the properties require interim licenses to be put in place’, and notes the ‘risk that Trustees of major trusts and major donors might decline to sanction Collections’ agreement’.”

April Fool

In February 2007, Glasgow City councillors voted and on 1st April removed the City’s entire Cultural and Leisure Services and staff out of the control of the people and delivered them into the hands of bankers. The Charitable Trust and Trading Company ‘Culture and Sport Glasgow’ is controlled by ten unelected Trustees. These comprise of six members from the Council, headed by The Lord Provost, Councillor Liz Cameron, and four Independent Directors: Lord Stevenson of Coddanham, Chair of HBOS; Sir Angus Grossart, Chair and Managing Director of the merchant bank, Noble Grossart Limited; The Rt Hon The Lord Macfarlane of Bearsden KT, former director of Clydesdale Bank plc; George Reid MSP, former



Presiding Officer of the Scottish Parliament. Keith Baldassara, then a SSP Councillor, said of it:

“Culture and Leisure is not only a service provider, but a major procurer of goods and services, and these fat cats will be making sure that the companies they have their fingers in will be benefiting.”⁶

One of the first things the Trust did was to create and advertise for the new post of ‘media manager’ with the “enthusiasm and energy to ensure a positive media profile for Culture and Sport in Glasgow” – otherwise known as ‘spin’. The position went to James Doherty, former BBC soap writer for River City and former senior press officer at Glasgow City Council, at an additional cost of £51,952-a-year. When part of the Council, this function was carried out by the Council’s press office, no doubt overseen by Doherty himself. Now that Culture and Sport is independent, the Trust has to spend additional money on important support functions – rather than on direct public services. The same will apply to personnel, finance, administration, maintenance and much else. How efficient and accountable is such a duplication of resources, especially as we will now not be allowed to find out how the private organisation spends our money as board meetings are to be held in private and it is not subject to the Freedom of Information Act?

In March, UNISON applied for an interim interdict against the Council’s proposals at the Court of Session. However they were not successful, but crucially the judge agreed that there were concerns in relation to the legal obligation on the provision and management of Libraries, and aspects of the Common Good and gave UNISON leave to seek a judicial review of the entire process which will be concluded in early June 2007.

What’s more, the European Commission is investigating Culture and Sport Glasgow over alleged breaches of state aid rules and anti-competitive tendering under European Law. The complaint is that the Council should have put the services out to tender, allowing other companies to compete to run the services, with fines and massive job losses in the pipeline if the Commission rules against them.

Hopefully the new Scottish Executive will want to re-evaluate their investigations based on such ‘new’ and emerging evidence.

Primary material sourced from UNISON. With thanks to John Devine and Bob Hamilton.

Notes

- 1 ‘Moving to Museum Trusts’, http://www.mla.gov.uk/resources/assets/M/museum_trust_report_part_1_9297.pdf
- 2 For example: In June 2006 Annandale and Eskdale trust had to ask Dumfries and Galloway Council for a handout of £40 000 for its financial crisis. They were not

prepared for the rise in fuel costs. They also threatened staff with job cuts and reduced opening hours at its facilities. Aspire Trust, which had a contract to run East Hertfordshire’s Leisure services, was £500,000 in the red in its first year. They had predicted savings of £980,000. The council only saved £50 000 in the first year while the trust has a projected shortfall of £278,475. Also see: <http://www.unison-scotland.org.uk/briefings/leisuretrusts.html>

- 3 Ironically, a Glasgow City Council (GCC) spokesperson recently confirmed libraries could not display any material which could be regarded as ‘political’. ‘Save Our Homes’ campaign which has been challenging Glasgow Housing Association over home improvement bills on behalf of dozens of families, tried to put a poster up in a library to advertise the demo and was told to take it down. According to the Local Government Act 1986, a council must not publish material which “in whole or part appears to affect public support for a political party”. Twenty years after Thatcher brought this in as part of her assault on the GLC, in particular its support for cultural activities, GCC have suddenly decided to interpret this in a way that they designate all Cultural activity and institutions as coming under the rubric of the activities of Council ‘publicity’ – which perhaps says more about how GCC see ‘Culture’.
- 4 See: ‘Equal pay compensation claims cost £117m ... and counting’, *Sunday Herald*, 17th March 2007, <http://www.sundayherald.com/misc/print.php?artid=1267757>
- 5 ‘Harman warns of £3bn equal pay timebomb facing councils’, *The Guardian*, May 26, 2007, <http://politics.guardian.co.uk/deputyleader/story/0,,2088639,00.html>
- 6 *Scottish Socialist Voice*, issue 295

Links

www.glasgowLOST.org
www.unison-scotland.org.uk
www.glasgowcityunison.org.uk
www.citystrolls.com
burghangel.wordpress.com
www.glasgow.gov.uk

Adult Educators, Adult Education and Progressive Social Movements

Gordon Asher interviews Stephen Brookfield

Stephen Brookfield, Distinguished University Professor, University of St. Thomas, Minneapolis, is one of the pre-eminent writers and thinkers in the field of adult and continuing education. Having worked in England, Canada, Australia and the United States, he is an author of books on adult learning, teaching, critical thinking, discussion methods and critical theory, most recently 'The Power of Critical Theory for Adult Teaching and Learning'. He was recently in Glasgow giving a lecture and seminar on 'Adult Education as Political Detoxification', where Gordon Asher caught up with him.

GA: What has been your involvement and roles within progressive social movements?

SB: I've never been involved with a long term social movement that has had a major structural transformation as its success. But that's probably what 99.99% of people involved in movements would say, as there has been no major structural transformation of capitalism or white supremacy or other targets.

GA: If we were to define social movements as only those that made that kind of impact we might not be left with too many? Perhaps we have to consider their cumulative effects over time and the good that they may well have achieved – the broader impact made across society? Which movements have you been involved with?

SB: It's varied depending on where I've lived. For the last twenty years I've been in the States – in New York for ten years and now in Minneapolis. In New York where we lived was historically the main street in Harlem and so there were lots of community-based movements – mostly, at least for an adult educator – which grew out of work in literacy, some of which were sponsored by the Board of Education, others of which were run by community members themselves. That fitted in very well with what I saw as the history of American adult education, where so much of the early activism came through teaching Blacks to write in order to register to vote – Myles Horton, St. John's Island and all that kind of work. Also in Harlem, and I think up in the Bronx too, there was a lot of community organising around health issues because in the States there's over 48 million with no health insurance, not to mention the under-insured – it's incredible! To me it seems like the best hope for some kind of revolutionary transformation because it's so clearly connected to capitalism – and it's something that touches everybody at a very deep level, if not in themselves, in someone they love deeply and who may be dying in front of them. So I was interested in the way some local things were going on in the

Bronx where you have the best teaching hospital in New York, Columbia Presbyterian (which was associated with the university I was working with) and then some of the worst actual conditions in terms of infant mortality and other figures.

Then, when I was in New York in the eighties, the whole pressure to demonise illegal aliens was a little bit under the radar then compared to now when it's a full blown, blatantly explicit moral panic of the Right. Ironically, Bush is getting grief from his own party for being too soft on illegals and for, in their eyes, offering amnesty. That was another area I saw as important, where demos, marches and such actions could make a real difference.

GA: A point that seems to be being borne out by recent actions when we've seen massive demonstrations of millions in the American streets – of a size that only the anti-war in Iraq ones have exceeded in recent years.

SB: That's why it's so interesting, it's potentially very powerful. We've seen a direct alliance between immigrant communities and all kinds of academics. There seems to be a readiness for academics to take a stand there, where in other areas perhaps they would not have been. Part of that comes from the personal connections of having seen, certainly if you work in literacy classes or adult education – that's who your students are mainly. So the immigration debate has had some success in attracting support from academics.

In terms of a broad movement, climate change is now becoming much more acceptable as a mainstream rallying point. But I think it's still tending to break the connection between individual action and collectivisation, because a lot of the campaigns are about how each house can individually recycle and do all these other good things – it doesn't really take on global capitalism. However, health care almost inevitably does. That's where you can make the link clearly for people. What's also been interesting for me has been to work with those on the inside of the system: people who benefit from it in terms of being practitioners. I'm thinking how do I have some influence here, or is there any possibility of having influence on those who benefit so much more from it; financially or in terms of their ego and their power?

I do think if you take early Marx on alienation and how we can analyse that as not just shop-floor worker alienation but also, through Fromm, management alienation – that there is a way of reaching that group. If I work with a group like that, I start out talking about power and the times

when you feel the use of power and when you feel decisions have been made that are out of your hands yet which very much effect how you live – how you realise who you are in your work and how the conditions of your work are set for you.

GA: Are we talking about administrators and management or about other health professionals such as doctors?

SB: Yes, administrators, but I'm also talking about others: I do work with surgeons. I've been brought in to do some work on 'critical thinking', to come in and reorganise residency training, the training of medical students, and to do professional development for surgeons, who you'd think would be the hardest audience to connect to. I use these experiences because it shows how health care is such a potential rallying point. If you have to look for hope in terms of a radical social transformation then I would say in the States it's around health care – it really is so screwed up, such that even those who benefit the most from it I think come to that awareness themselves.

You know there is a remarkable ahistorical aspect to America, a kind of making pop culture generalisations. It does seem like America forgets history more easily than others – at least white America forgets it more easily.

GA: I heard an eloquent exposition of the tendency in Ireland, when this activist said our culture and education is designed increasingly to encourage living in this perpetual present, therefore we don't learn the lessons of history and we don't envision possible alternatives either, that we need to realise the past and envision possible futures.

SB: When you talk about Eugene Debbs or the Wobblies or any historical event in American socialism, or the fact the Communist party had six million members, it's a matter of total astonishment to most people. It's not like America has always been a Klu Klux Klan, lynching, protectionist country. I think there have generally been some admirable democratic impulses. There's a great textbook I use in class called 'Lies my Teacher Told Me' by James Loewen, which does an analysis of ten high school textbooks that shows how history really has been written by the victors.

GA: When you have been involved with movements has it been as an educator.

SB: Yes – well sometimes it's just been as a rank-and-file member. My feeling always has been – and I come from a community development background, that's where I began – I was never going to be a university academic. I absolutely



promised myself I never would, because they were removed from real life. It only happened because I lost my job in the early eighties and needed to pay the bills and got offered a temporary study post in a university in Canada. I realised that in the States universities had an atmosphere – and explicitly a mission that was written for them to fulfil – that was much more congenial and expansive than universities in the UK.

The Land-Grant System, as it's called in the States, is an attempt to deliberately democratise higher education. It's more along the lines of thinking of the polytechnic, where there is one class of universities for arts and humanities which will take the opinion leaders, the civil servants, the military leaders, the future leaders of capital, and then there is the other, which would be the engineers and the scientists who will be working at the behest of capital and the military and so on. But those Land-Grant universities have a strong commitment to having as broad an access as possible which I think is admirable, irrespective of the curriculum – which is a whole other issue.

Whether I'm involved in movements as an educator would really depend. In terms of immigration work or the peace movement – which has really been massive since 2003 and the invasion, that really did galvanise a hell of a lot of people – then I'm working just as an activist in whichever ways are most helpful. It's easy to get involved with the immigrants' rights movement or the anti war movement for instance. I mean, there is no call to think am I going in as an educator, you clearly go in as a private citizen, someone that is just enraged. But, sometimes you're going in to something like the creation of a group, like in the Minneapolis schools recently where I've been working with three women who want to set up a charter school, which is grounded in an afrocentric perspective on the world. The whole curriculum comes from what they regard as African-centred values and the classroom practices will be grounded in methods and techniques from those values. A charter school is a school which is funded publicly but has a great degree of control over its operations and it's a way of giving local parents' communities more control over the format of their children's education – at least that's the theory of it.

So with them, they have come to me and asked me just to give them whatever best advice that I could, and it's a whole area of work I'm really interested in for one reason or another. So I was able there to work in an explicit way both as an educator but also as a political strategist. Again that is where the distinction between educator and activist blurs or breaks down, because I don't think you can be a successful activist without a willingness to be critically reflective, to realise when your assumptions or analysis has led you into a wrong direction and to be more alert for that possibility next time. On the other hand, I don't think you can be an educator and do anything before bumping up against political realities within about 30 seconds, if what you're doing is in any way challenging to whatever norms are around at the time. So I'm working with them on how do you negotiate the school system, bureaucracy etc. because some of this is going to be very contentious, such as using material from Black nationalism, someone like Malcolm X – in the history of activism in the States Martin Luther King, now, is a beloved, paternal figure, whereas Malcolm X in a lot of whites' imaginations is still a rabble rouser who will rape our women and string up all whites. So if you're working to give them some control over that initiative that's where my expertise with the system (what I've learned, the instincts I've developed in having taken various initiatives through levels of bureaucracy) can be put at their disposal. They will come and say

“What do you think we should do? What do we need to watch out for?” and so on. So I think there are some times when, in a situation like that I'm clearly being asked to work as an educator, and then there are other times where, following my community development background, you just kind of hang out and you pitch in wherever its seen as something needs to be done and you think you can do it, so you volunteer or you get told that's what you're doing. You don't come in and say I am this or I am that so here's how you use me, that's death. To me, you have no credibility, you may as well not bother. So I do think it depends on the contexts within which you find yourself.

GA: Is it not just another means of privatising education?

SB: Well this is the question. I think it's an example of oppressive tolerance in one way, but on the other hand it can give you a space to do some constructive work. It gives you a contested and a contradictory space. That's always the question, do you take it or do you say “No, this is so potentially compromised I don't want to get my hands dirty”? Seems to me like getting your hands dirty is what it's about.

GA: The latter examples suggest that your work in the state sector has a clear relevance to your work with the movements. Is the opposite true as well, is your work as an educator in the state sector affected by your work with social movements – and do you find there are serious conflicts and tensions there?

SB: Yes and that's basically the name of the game – conflict and tension. So there is no resolution, there is no way of working where you are not constantly in tension. If you choose to have anything to do with the system you're always in tension. This probably seems naïve, but I always think of the work within education as a way of (and I often frame it this way due to our dominant ideology) people being able to agree within the system, creating a little bit more democratic space. Now no-one can argue with that phrase: “creating a democratic space”. If you use that to frame what you are doing, you can get quite far before any warning signs to people are registered. But when you create democratic space, which means that you as the teacher are not the sole source of authority, you're starting to question the power of certain individuals in the college or the university to make judgements, or accreditation bodies from outside to make judgements, about whether the learning is valuable or not. Then you come right up against the issue of power and who has the right to make these judgements, which brings you up against the issue of social structure. So just by the question of ‘What grade am I going to get?’, which every student has, it's a very quick analysis back to social structure. So what we're doing by me giving you this grade is actually the ideas and reality made flesh in this moment and you can link this back to the fact that we were accredited last year by this body, that this body has laid down these standards of accreditation, and ask who are the main members of the site team that visit, who are the paymasters of this particular body, how is the federal government involved – so you just trace it back and there is some real political education there. If you are going to democratise a space, to start opening things out for discussion and votes (or even not allowing votes on something) and start talking about democracy as not being the tyranny of the majority, and the students say “This is very difficult, we don't want to do any critical thinking, we just want you to tell us what we need to know and don't ask us to read ‘communists’ – like Marx”, that's when I would say “No I'm not going to back off on that, because this is an incredibly rich, many would say the most accurate, world view that can

help you understand what you're experiencing in your lives. So we are not going to back off on that, but maybe you would like to spend a whole third of the course telling me all the reasons why this is a stupid thing to do or why Marx is so wrong."

So when I think of my practice within education I do think a lot of the democratic turmoils that I've experienced outside in social movements, and that really helps me understand what's going on in this context and helps me understand the nature of power and the importance of being explicit about my own power. One of the things that most pisses me off in community settings is when someone pretends that they don't have power and we are all in this as equals – and everybody knows that is not true.

GA: It goes back to the notion of mythical or false neutrality? Neutrality as neither possible or desirable.

SB: Yes, I think I'm much more comfortable being naked and fully transparent about my use of power these days. A lot of times I'll reach the stage when I say to the students: "I'm going to reserve a third of the curriculum to do what I think is crucial. You can have a third and you can essentially be in control of that and if you want to just totally push back against it that's fine, and the final third we're going to negotiate."

GA: Do you use your experience with social movements, your autobiographical material as illustration in your teaching?

SB: Yes, very much so, the autobiographies of myself and of my students, because most of my students are educators and in order to get them to be open, to give them ways of thinking about what they do, all I need to do is talk about power. Say, how the last staff meeting they were in was run and what decisions were made and by whom. How would they know who were the most important voices and what influence they would have over decisions and, when you try to get things to run a little bit more humanely or in a way that is more ethically responsible, what happens when you do that. What happens when you spoke up on behalf of someone being treated badly or unfairly by the organisation. As soon as you get into any of that territory one has a myriad of examples that you can bring out of what they regard as instances of power.

It's very easy for me to use experience in social movements and link it directly to what my own students are experiencing. Reasonably early on I may say to my students, "Well you know there are times in my work outside this particular classroom, I lie, I withhold information because I know that if I'm transparent about what I'm trying to achieve it's just playing into the hands of the enemy who would forestall me or shunt me off into a corner, so that part of being a responsible professional is developing a theory of ethical manipulation". At that point they sort of gasp, "Ethical manipulation, isn't manipulation by definition bad?" I draw a lot on the work of Ian Baptiste in America, he's a Trinidadian. He's developed, or is developing, a full pedagogy of ethical coercion and a theory of ethical manipulation broadly based on community work in Chicago. He has some case material concerning how, when you play the role of neutral facilitator attempting to create spaces for all voices to be heard, that often really creates space for the dominant agenda to reinforce itself and kills any real chance of openness and fairness. So I talk a lot about when lying or when the withholding of information is morally, absolutely the correct thing to do – and the students will all have done this, they will all have been in situations



where, in order to make some change within their organisation that they felt was for the better, they had to outwit someone who was in charge of policy or finance, and to do that they had to play their cards close to their chest. So everyone's probably got some experience of it and it's very easy to then make the connections, drawing in various work from outside that is of relevance to their lives.

GA: The distinction is that values and objectives are not the same thing as tactics and methods, though we might wish them to reflect and prefigure or foreshadow our values and aims as much as is possible, for in the long run the ends may well justify the means. It's a realisation that we have to make decisions all the time, based on the evidence in front of us, in that particular context – that much to many people's disappointment there's no set of easy ready-made answers. It's not a simple 'yes' or 'no' but a matter of using our evolving judgement and discretion every time rather than blindly following rules – though we can through experience and critical reflection give ourselves better guidance?

SB: That's what our calculations need to be based on. For me, getting students to use terms like "the enemy" and to introduce them to Gramsci's notion of a war of position or Foucault's notion of specific intellectuals, and that organic intellectuals or specific intellectuals always come from specific contexts, specific movements. That there's a need to understand the internal dynamics of it in a war of position. These kinds of antagonistic ways of speaking are very uncomfortable for a lot of colleagues as well as students, because it just doesn't fit with the supposed democratic ethos that if we just talk out our differences long enough everyone can feel respect and everyone can feel included. A lot of places in America have centres for conflict resolution.

GA: It assumes conflict is seen as a pejorative term

– that it's viewed only as a negative?

SB: Absolutely – and I never felt that over here. The whole idea that conflict can always be resolved through dialogue, a very liberal, humanist idea, is very strong in the States, so you have to find a way quickly to challenge that. But for me it's never really difficult if you start with people's own experiences of trying to make change in their organisation, or trying to stop the worst excesses of the way a patient is treated, or their kids are treated, or the way their family is treated – that one of the easiest things is to bring lived experiences into the classroom as illustration.

The harder one is when negotiating skilfully within the broader context of an organisation to make some structural change. Thinking along structural lines, I would much prefer to see long-term grassroots programmes and ways of assessing what professionals can bring to put structural changes in place which are much harder to undo just at the whim of an individual or administrator's preference. So I always – given that I don't have that much energy or that many years left on the planet, and I think we all do this in making internal decisions – question as to where I'm going to put my effort. It's always an issue of 'What is the likelihood of this leading to long term structural change?' So working with the students towards a sphere of democratic possibility and for long term structural change can be really energising.

Will social movements in some way lead to establishing this, will movements within health rights lead to some structural change in the health system, will working within the peace movement? : The peace movement experience has been incredibly disappointing. You had every city with hundreds of thousands of people out on the streets, and we still do regularly as on the 4th anniversary of going into Iraq. There's still massive street demos in Minneapolis, New York, San Francisco, but nothing happens with that. It doesn't lead to

structural change or even to a party organisation or anything like that.

GA: Is that partly because it's so broad in nature? For instance, it includes people whose stance is only against this war waged in this particular manner, 'the one with my son in it', and much that it's a good thing they are marching together this is a completely different analysis to many others' in the movement.

SB: Yes, and in the States linking it to capitalism is the hard part, and talking about it as imperialism. It seemed like people had really forgotten the notion of imperialism and American imperial expansion. The way this is often presented in America is in individualistic, psychological terms, even quite sophisticated ones. It's never really linked to markets or capitalism, and it seems that introducing a structuralised political economy analysis is the biggest educational challenge – and the reason it's really hard to form a party.

I think this is why the best way to focus on political economy in the States is more through health than through war, because health care is in massive crisis – that clearly always disproportionately hits the uninsured and under insured and the working class generally. But, it also hits a lot of middle-class Americans whose security of employment is much, much less than it used to be and many middle-class Americans are holding two or three jobs to meet a middle-class lifestyle. For instance, a lot of teachers in my kids' schools, their teaching salary is in no way enough to keep up and pay all their bills etc. and teaching contracts are notoriously bad – in fact it's just accepted that you will probably only have your first post for a year. I suppose statistically young teachers are probably pretty healthy, but mums, dads, uncles and aunts, grandparents and family might not be and thus they are intimately affected by the shambles that is the health system.

John Holst and I have talked a lot about where the chance is for the development of a revolutionary party or movement in the States and that, skilfully framed, health is where education can have a role. That's the kind of access point into a structuralised, collectivised world view where you can say, "Well we need to make decisions here that are clearly based in the interests of the many rather than the few." The health care system is where naked global, monopoly capitalism is so clearly evident that the link is easier to make than in many other areas, such as the war, or rights for immigrants, the need for a minimum wage, or much of the reform agenda.

GA: Do you think there is a lot more radical academics can offer social movements, and is that reciprocal? That neither is fulfilling the full educative potential that exists to forward the cause of social justice?

SB: Movements have a lot more to offer us than we have to offer them. But then I think the very nature of movement work is that you can't do it unless you're in the movement – you can't just come in. It's like a Blairite external consultant that someone hires to come in and say "Ok how can we mobilise more people in our community, how can we become more effective in achieving the results that we want, how can we get our message across." There must be constructive ways in which a movement can bring in radical intellectuals. I do think there can be a real issues of trust here though. I remember one day being at a Teamsters union meeting who were running a workshop in New York and had Paulo Freire there as a speaker. They were absolutely damning about Freire as they viewed him as knowing nothing about what

it meant to negotiate with petrochemical or steel industries and their representatives. I've had evaluations about things I've done sometimes that have said, basically: "Why are you bringing in this guy, he's just a university teacher, he's done nothing and has got nothing of worth to tell us?" So I think there can be a genuine issue of trust and credibility. They need to know you're on our side and have something to offer us. That can require a long period of immersion and being willing to do anything that needs done that the movement wants you to. Which anyway you should – just anthropologically – as how on earth can you offer advice from the outside? That was always Myles Horton's point. It can take a long period of immersion or trust building for a movement to accept an educator seriously. It's necessary for the educator to realise and to see where they can perhaps make a contribution. For me, just trying to concretise it in my own experience, I can't know how best to build wide movement loyalty with the constituency that the movement involves because I don't know that constituency. But sometimes I can see that the pressure of time and tactics is pushing people immediately to work in one way, into thinking that we need to respond to this situation like this. We need to spend a few minutes stepping back, saying, "Let's just be clear why are we doing this, what assumptions are we operating under and what's the evidence we have for these assumptions", which is a very traditional critical thinking model that can pay real dividends.

GA: That tendency for movements to easily become overly reactive and insufficiently proactive can lead to a situation where you're following others' agendas.

OL: What was the fate of the practical ideas put forward in your 1997 essay 'Changing the Culture of Scholarship to the Culture of Teaching'?

SB: What I was saying in there was that my experience of community development has always taught me, my whole inclination is, to work from the ground upwards. You build a movement, you build energy, one neighbourhood, one house, one block at a time, and that's the way social movements develop. My whole orientation then leads me to say when I look at a hierarchical organisation such as a university just as a unit, there is also a role for those who have had some kind of 'consciousness change', to use a very hackneyed term. That they can model a way of working that, I hate to say it for its connotations, trickles down. There is a way that if senior public figures within an organisation behave, and draw attention to that behaviour, and say consistently "We're trying to model a different way of doing things around here", that is the other end of a movement to structural change. The grassroots thing becomes a lot easier if there is some consistency of modelling by those who are in senior positions. This is so utopian and unrealistic but I was playing around in that essay with the question of what would it look like if those up there were committed to the same kind of change.

Pretty much every place I know gives prizes for the best teacher of the year: students nominate them, other lecturers nominate them, they win the award, there's a presentation and they give a speech about their own philosophy of teaching. Those prizes usually go to the most charismatic teachers who use the most innovative participatory styles of teaching, and some of them are often very good. If you're trying to collectivise teaching then one of the things you would need to do is get rid of those prizes and merit pay, which is a very common feature in the States. It's a way of privatising and dividing the labour force and stopping any kind of

development of collective interests.

This is very much in tandem with how things have happened in the UK: the control of the education agenda through, for instance, the Research Assessment Exercise. In the US school system we have the 'No Child Left Behind' legislation which, if we can look at it in terms of grudging respect for your enemy, is a beautiful example of the way that the Bush administration uses language in such a skilful Orwellian way – it's a thing of fascistic beauty. 'No Child Left Behind' basically means no child left untested. That is what it amounts to. There is testing, testing, testing, and of course all curriculum, rewards and budgets become geared towards that: which schools get the highest budget and thus the better teachers its now dependent on league tables based on testing. This is now moving more and more into higher education – research assessment is the same song with a different tune.

GA: From my experience of the system, this de-emphasises the importance of teaching. Without radically changing the system, we could press for a change in roles such that those who want to do research and publish but not teach do so, those who wish to do both can, and others are employed purely because they are good teachers – everyone, especially the students benefits?

SB: In the States there was a big initiative in the '80s and early '90s from the Carnegie Foundation on teaching to reframe 'the scholarship of teaching'. There was an attempt to develop a professional avenue or track where people just focused on the scholarship of teaching and became better and better teachers, introducing students to inherently difficult materials, and then there were others who were more traditional researchers who wrote the books. Mind you, if you're trying to get someone into understanding critical theory you need a certain scholarship of practice to do this. Despite these ideas being so accurate and so helpful in explaining what everyone experiences, the way that they are written and talked about is often completely incomprehensible, highly alienating and makes those struggling to understand them feel like an idiot. So I think in terms of leftist scholarship we need a lot of good scholarly teachers, in the sense of teachers who know their students' worlds and who are good at making connections, knowing what are the entry points between students' experiences and inherently complex ideas.

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