

cross currents in culture ●

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Contents

Editorial	4
Letters	5
Mr Hebbly (Not a Golfer) Metaphrog	7
They <i>all</i> belong to Glasgow Conversation with Ahmed Khan	8
From Precarity to Precariousness and Back Again Labour, Life and Unstable Networks Brett Neilson and Ned Rossiter	10
Guardians of Power Interview with Media Lens, by Gabriele Zamparini	14
Comic & Zine Reviews Mark Pawson	17
Constructing Neoliberal Glasgow The Privatisation Of Space Friend of Zanetti	19
At the Crossroads Tom Jennings	23
Hatred and Respect The class shame of ned ‘humour’ Alex Law	28
Political Islam’s Relation to Capital and Class Ardeshir Mehrdad and Yassamine Mather	31
Cover Metaphrog	

Editorial

Nothing ever happened

“... Political language, as used by politicians, does not venture into any of this territory [the exploration of reality] since the majority of politicians, on the evidence available to us, are interested not in truth but in power and in the maintenance of that power. To maintain that power it is essential that people remain in ignorance, that they live in ignorance of the truth, even the truth of their own lives. What surrounds us therefore is a vast tapestry of lies, upon which we feed.

As every single person here knows, the justification for the invasion of Iraq was that Saddam Hussein possessed a highly dangerous body of weapons of mass destruction, some of which could be fired in 45 minutes, bringing about appalling devastation. We were assured that was true. It was not true. We were told that Iraq had a relationship with Al Quaeda and shared responsibility for the atrocity in New York of September 11th 2001. We were assured that this was true. It was not true. We were told that Iraq threatened the security of the world. We were assured it was true. It was not true.

The truth is something entirely different. The truth is to do with how the United States understands its role in the world and how it chooses to embody it.

But before I come back to the present I would like to look at the recent past, by which I mean United States foreign policy since the end of the Second World War. I believe it is obligatory upon us to subject this period to at least some kind of even limited scrutiny, which is all that time will allow here.

Everyone knows what happened in the Soviet Union and throughout Eastern Europe during the post-war period: the systematic brutality, the widespread atrocities, the ruthless suppression of independent thought. All this has been fully documented and verified.

But my contention here is that the US crimes in the same period have only been superficially recorded, let alone documented, let alone acknowledged, let alone recognised as crimes at all. I believe this must be addressed and that the truth has considerable bearing on where the world stands now. Although constrained, to a certain extent, by the existence of the Soviet Union, the United States’ actions throughout the world made it clear that it had concluded it had carte blanche to do what it liked.

Direct invasion of a sovereign state has never in fact been America’s favoured method. In the main, it has preferred what it has described as ‘low intensity conflict’. Low intensity conflict means that thousands of people die but slower than if you dropped a bomb on them in one fell swoop. It means that you infect the heart of the country, that you establish a malignant growth and watch the gangrene bloom. When the populace has been subdued – or beaten to death – the same thing – and your own friends, the military and the great corporations, sit comfortably in power, you go before the camera and say that democracy has prevailed. ...”

Extract from Harold Pinter’s Nobel Lecture, ‘Art, Truth & Politics’

<http://nobelprize.org/literature/laureates/2005/pinter-lecture-e.html>

The winter’s passed, The summer’s here. For this we thank Our party dear!

On January 19th the Scottish Parliament’s Culture Minister Patricia Ferguson delivered their response to the Executive’s £500,000 Culture Commission’s 131 recommendations. [See Variant, issue 24 editorial for an appraisal.] The statement that the Executive aims to “support plans to nurture the best creative and cultural talent while cutting back on unnecessary bureaucracy” has been treated as a dismissal of the Commission’s seemingly overly-complex proposals, but will instigate some of its lesser recommendations.

Spelled out by the Minister in a procedural



and distancing vernacular, they will legislate for “a legal framework for delivering rights and entitlements”, while “local authorities will develop plans to ensure every person in Scotland is entitled to access cultural activity, reflecting the needs and wishes of local people and communities” within Community Planning—following Best Value, Community Planning is another oxymoron for extending the involvement of private sectors in public services.

As expected, the Scottish Arts Council (SAC) and Scottish Screen are to be merged creating “a new cultural development agency called Creative Scotland [...] with the key task of developing talent and excellence in all branches of the arts, and the creative and screen industries.” However, it will not oversee the National performing companies as the Executive is to now do so directly, with former Scottish Arts Council staff transferred to an Executive unit responsible. There is also to be another review, this time of the National Institutions’ collections. The SAC in response have stated: “The impact on staffing and other resources following their transfer is expected to be minimal.” While the Centre for Cultural Policy Research at Glasgow University believe, the “proposed changes are more about tinkering with structures than making a radical shift.”

Predictably, there is to be a Scotland-the-Brand “recognition scheme for Scotland’s creative sector”.

Blanket ‘Cultural spend’ by 2007-08 is said by the Minister to “rise to £234 million per annum”, but only once “contribution to local authority cultural expenditure is included”. Such heightened emphasis on Local Authority involvement is what many suspected and raises the spectre of increased tiered political bossing—that such a plan to rationalise “unnecessary bureaucracy” will in fact increase the bureaucratisation of culture.

The widely reported “plans to invest an extra £20 million per year from April 2007” relate to the Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport’s entire brief: from National Companies (and their deficits) to fitting out libraries, Sports Scotland, Cultural Portal, Scotland’s Cultural Resources Access Network, Scottish Schools Digital Network, and all the Schools’ curriculum pursuits including reading and music programmes... Not to forget the reshuffle to be Creative Scotland with the likely redundancy-fixes to ensue, office relocations, redesign and rebranding sinks, and the marketing of a needless celebrity award.

“Proposals for a National Box Office”—“a ‘one-stop-shop’ for culture and sport ticketing”—“will be scoped by the Executive and its national cultural and tourism agencies”. Given their history of waste in this area with fiascos like VisitScotland (an internet gateway set up to promote tourism), we wait to see if this will be another over-priced PPP IT contract, preceded by publicly paid for private consultation out of the Edinburgh finance district.

With the Executive, and McConnell in particular, having recently been embarrassingly chastised by Westminster for posturing on immigration issues [see: ‘They All Belong to Glasgow’ in this issue], is unnecessary legislation on the vagaries of ‘cultural entitlement’ the kind of distraction from hard politics that the people of Scotland intended for a Scottish Parliament? Is this not really a means of unburdening responsibilities for delivery onto local government with Parliament being seen to be doing something akin to a legislative programme? Regardless, the reported financial increase is deemed not to start

before 2007/8, and the third general election to the Scottish Parliament will be held on May 3, 2007, so no one should feel obliged to keep any vague promises made now with all the competing pressures in an election year.

With the media diversion on how ‘the Arts’ as a category-of-their-concern will supposedly benefit, we also have to know how the reported increase relates to Glasgow’s 2014 Commonwealth Games

bid, if successful—the winning city is announced in 2007, though its bid will have to be shored up now [see: ‘Constructing Neoliberal Glasgow: The Privatisation Of Space’ in this issue]. To say nothing of Scotland’s spend on the 2012 London Olympics.

So how has the alleged £20m increase been calculated? For example: The Executive “will make available £400k per annum over the next two years to enable a new match-funding sponsorship initiative proposed by Arts and Business. Arts and Business will use our support to incentivise private sector sponsorship. That way, we aim to deliver over £700k in additional support for the arts each year, through a mix of public and private sector finance.” Has £400k been sexed-up as a possible future £700k, as it looks that way.

Really there needs to be an accurate assessment of the current deficit in funding across the board for any sum to have any meaning in the overall context of what it’s being applied to. Then, once we know what it’s to cover exactly, a statement of how these time-limited increases (if they are) have been calculated and what they are going to have to cover in terms of stand-still funding now and thereafter given inflation (an announced £20m today is not going to be of that value if it kicks-in in a couple of years time and then eight years down the line). And, importantly, any expansion of the Minister’s brief or usage in support of other policy areas, as expressed in McConnell’s St. Andrew’s Day 2003 Speech—it’s no secret that the Executive needs the excuse of Culture to redirect funding into major taxation areas together with using it as a tool to extend the involvement of private sectors into public services. Is this really what we want?

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/News/Releases/2006/01/19093710>

The Comedian’s Comedian

François Matarasso of new Labour think-tank Comedia is the new Chair of the Arts Council England, East Midlands and therefore a member of the national Arts Council England governing body. Described on their web site as “a freelance writer and arts researcher, specialising in community-based cultural activity and its role in people’s lives”, worryingly there is no mention of his more prominent position as a private consultant going up and down the country promoting a very polite description of government control of the arts—Matarasso’s “research was designed to add a dimension to existing economic and aesthetic rationales for the arts by looking at their role in social development and cohesion.” His influential 1997 justification for social inclusion programmes, ‘Use or Ornament’, has been damningly critiqued in *Variant* by Paola Merli for its shoddy methodology and for the role of private sector consultancies and freelancers in promoting the social inclusion agenda.

For further reading, see:

‘Evaluating the social impact of participation in arts activities: A critical review of François Matarasso’s Use or Ornament?’, Paola Merli, *Variant* issue 19

<http://www.variant.org.uk/19texts/socinc19.html>

“When the going gets weird, the weird turn pro”, William Clark, *Variant* issue 11

<http://www.variant.org.uk/11texts/Clark.html>

Beyond Social Inclusion: Towards Cultural Democracy

<http://www.culturaldemocracy.net/>

Letters

The Faction that Fools the World

Mike Small, Variant issue 24

Dear Editors,

For years I subscribed to *Living Marxism*, until it ceased publishing. I noticed the magazine’s libertarian turn and it published a number of letters I wrote, criticising articles which were becoming increasingly bizarre, at any rate in an ostensibly left-wing publication.

Mike Small is correct to say that the LM group are right-wing, but his suggestion that a clique is conspiring to enter the media is not correct. LM may or may not have an agenda, whatever that means, but there it is no secret that rightwingers and establishment supporters are welcomed by a media only too willing to offer them space. Ever since Thatcher the political scene have moved steadily right. Frank Furedi and Claire Fox enthuse about this. LM are not going to subvert anything and conspiracy is unnecessary: they are part of a ruling establishment.

When Mike Small says that the Moral Maze is the apogee of British broadcasting intellectualism, I hope he is being ironic. The Moral Maze, Any Questions, Thought for the Day (are no thoughts expressed outside this 4-minute sermon on the Today programme?), all are products of a narrow, philistine, querulous middle-class for whom preserving the status quo is a paramount aim. Besides, since when has Radio 4 usurped Radio 3 to become the intellectual station?

Mike Small complains that it is disingenuous of LM to present themselves as beyond left and right. No, it is not disingenuous: it’s the age-old, transparent argument of the right. Perhaps too, it was not naive of the book festival organisers to invite LM to its platform. It might have been exactly what they wanted and now they too, can bask in the reflected glory of the right.

Yours,

René Gimpel

Mike Small replies:

After writing the piece I have heard many more examples of LM members co-hosting radio programmes with fellow members of LM front-groups. René Gimpel writes: “Mike Small is correct to say that the LM group are right-wing, but his suggestion that a clique is conspiring to enter the media is not correct.”

It is quite correct. I was not advocating conspiracy but describing a clear and evident process, being tracked and researched by Spinwatch amongst others.

Most disturbing perhaps is their infiltration of key posts in areas of ethical debate and policy. For example Juliet Tizzard is not the only Furediite embedded in the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA), the government body which, amongst other things, licenses and monitors all human embryo research conducted in the UK.

Ann Furedi, wife of Revolutionary Communist Party founder Frank Furedi, used to work at HFEA (before she went back to direct the abortion lobby group BPAS), and Ann’s good friend Vishnee Sauntoo moves between HFEA and BPAS. Ann Furedi (also known as Ann Bradley and Ann Burton) is director of communications at the British Pregnancy Advisory Service.

Then there’s Emily Jackson who is a member of the HFEA committee itself. She co-authors with Dr Ellie Lee on abortion rights and is part of the ProChoice Forum network. Both Lee and the ProChoice Forum are closely associated with Furedi, Tizzard, et al. As I described, at a conference at Kent University Jackson publicly endorsed human reproductive cloning.

As well as contributing articles to LM, Tizzard has also contributed to the LM network’s later fronts: Spiked, and the Institute of Ideas (I of I).

She also wrote a chapter for the I of I publication, ‘Designer Babies: Where Should We Draw The Line?’ (Hodder and Stoughton, 2002).

Then there’s Dr Ellie Lee the co-ordinator of the ProChoice Forum and lecturer in Social Policy at the University of Kent, cosily enough where Ann’s husband Frank Furedi works. Lee was on the Moral Maze last year (funny that eh?) where she stated her mantra that “abortion should be available as early as possible and as late as necessary”. She was asked: suppose a mother gave birth to a baby at full term, and then just as the umbilical cord had been cut, found that the infant repelled her. Should she be allowed to have the baby killed? “I think so, yes,” replied Dr Lee.

These people aren’t trivial. We have a pro-cloning lobbyist in charge of regulating cloning.

I have no problem with Gimpel’s argument that: “LM are not going to subvert anything and conspiracy is unnecessary: they are part of a ruling establishment.” Accept that they are presented as being iconoclasts, critical theorists, the cutting edge of post-left thinking.

I would suggest that they be opposed when given platforms and the organisers or broadcasters should be forced into acknowledging these connections. I have no fear of their tired and repetitive ideas—and so do not advocate censorship—but we should demand transparency and integrity from those who host these people.

Gimpel is weakest when writing: “LM may or may not have an agenda”. This is a highly charged, well resourced professional network actively pursuing a radical right-wing agenda through the media and political organisations who repeatedly use front-groups and false identities in promoting their ideology.

Notes on Watching Human Rights Watch

Macdonald Stainsby, Variant issue 21

Open Letter to Kenneth Roth, Executive Director Human Rights Watch
from Gabriele Zamparini

Dear Mr. Kenneth Roth, Executive Director Human Rights Watch,

On December 2, 2005 the *New York Times* published an article with the title ‘Rights Group Lists 26 It Says U.S. Is Holding in Secret Abroad’. The article quotes Marc Garlasco, Senior Military Analyst at Human Rights Watch (HRW):

“One thing I want to make clear is we are talking about some really bad guys,” Mr. Garlasco said. “These are criminals who need to be brought to justice. One of our main problems with the U.S. is that justice is not being served by having these people held incognito.”

Mr. Garlasco said, “Our concern is that if illegal methods such as torture are being used against them,” trials may “either be impossible or questionable under international standards of jurisprudence.”¹

On December 4, 2005 I wrote to Mr. Garlasco, asking:

1. Did the *New York Times* quote you correctly?
2. If not, will you ask for a formal correction to the NYT?
3. If yes, don’t you think your words are quite bizarre for a HRW’s representative? Did we get to the point that even HRW doesn’t care for the presumption of innocence? Is that really HRW’s concern about torture?

In my e-mail I also wrote:

I had the opportunity to interview HRW’s Reed Brody and Hanny Megally just a few years ago. Also because of those interviews I have great esteem and respect for the work of your organization. I fear that your words – as reported by the *New York Times*’ article – will damage HRW’s image and the trust many people have for its work. ²

Since I haven’t received any answer, I have now

decided to write you an open letter to reiterate my questions and also to ask you if someone who “*recommended thousands of aimpoints on hundreds of targets during operations in Iraq and Serbia [and who] also participated in over 50 interrogations as a subject matter expert*” fits a senior position at Human Rights Watch.

Mr. Garlasco’s biography reads:

“Before coming to HRW, Marc spent seven years in the Pentagon as a senior intelligence analyst covering Iraq. His last position there was chief of high-value targeting during the Iraq War in 2003. Marc was on the Operation Desert Fox (Iraq) Battle Damage Assessment team in 1998, led a Pentagon Battle Damage Assessment team to Kosovo in 1999, and recommended thousands of aimpoints on hundreds of targets during operations in Iraq and Serbia. He also participated in over 50 interrogations as a subject matter expert.”³

According to *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Mr. Garlasco also had an interesting role in damaging a study “published in *The Lancet*, a prestigious British medical journal, concluding that about 100,000 civilians had been killed in Iraq since it was invaded by a United States-led coalition in March 2003.”⁴ *The Chronicle of Higher Education* writes:

The Washington Post, perhaps most damagingly to the study’s reputation, quoted Marc E. Garlasco, a senior military analyst at Human Rights Watch, as saying, “These numbers seem to be inflated.” Mr. Garlasco says now that he hadn’t read the paper at the time and calls his quote in the Post “really unfortunate.” He says he told the reporter, “I haven’t read it. I haven’t seen it. I don’t know anything about it, so I shouldn’t comment on it.” But, Mr. Garlasco continues, “Like any good journalist, he got me to.”

Mr. Garlasco says he misunderstood the reporter’s description of the paper’s results.⁵

Marc Garlasco, Senior Military Analyst at HRW also had an interesting role in a BBC’s Editorial Complaints Unit’s investigation following a series of Media Lens’ Alerts on the BBC’s reporting on Fallujah.⁶ The BBC reports:

In its verdict that the NewsWatch report was not misleading, the Editorial Complaints Unit — which investigates complaints independently of journalists — cited the evidence given to it by the HRW spokesman: “I find nothing inaccurate in what Paul stated. I think the issue is with the choice of the word ‘investigation’. As Paul noted, we did not have a full-fledged investigation with testimony from eye-witnesses, etc.

“What we did have, and I communicated to him [BBC’s defence correspondent Paul Wood, who was embedded with the US marines in Falluja at the time] was an investigation more on the lines of what I would term an inquiry. We had folks try to get into Falluja but were unable, and we had folks talk to people in Baghdad who had left Falluja.

“But the information was not of the quality for us to do any reporting. Beyond that, we made inquiries to the US Government, and other press. To the best of our knowledge no banned weapons were used during either battle of Falluja.”⁷

Dear Mr. Roth, I would kindly ask you to re-read that last paragraph. Why didn’t the best of Human Rights Watch’s knowledge include:

1. “Some artillery guns fired white phosphorous rounds that create a screen of fire that cannot be extinguished with water. Insurgents reported being attacked with a substance that melted their skin.”

‘U.S. Forces Battle Into Heart of Fallujah’, by Jackie Spinner, Karl Vick and Omar Fekeiki, *Washington Post*, November 10, 2004

2. ““The US occupation troops are gassing resistance fighters and confronting them with internationally-banned chemical weapons,’ resistance sources told Al-Quds Press Wednesday, November 10.”

‘US Troops Reportedly Gassing Fallujah’, Islam OnLine, November 10, 2004

Letters
(continued)

3. “The U.S. military has used poison gas and other non-conventional weapons against civilians in Fallujah, eyewitnesses report.”

‘Unusual Weapons Used in Fallujah’, by Dahr Jamail, November 26, 2004

4. “I saw cluster bombs everywhere, and so many bodies that were burned, dead with no bullets in them. So they definitely used fire weapons, especially in Julian district.”

‘An Eyewitness Account of Fallujah’, by Dahr Jamail, December 16, 2004

5. “White Phosphorous. WP proved to be an effective and versatile munition. We used it for screening missions at two breeches and, later in the fight, as a potent psychological weapon against the insurgents in trench lines and spider holes when we could not get effects on them with HE. We fired “shake and bake” missions at the insurgents, using WP to flush them out and HE to take them out. [...] We used improved WP for screening missions when HC smoke would have been more effective and saved our WP for lethal missions.”

“The Fight for Fallujah,” a “memorandum for record” by Captain James T. Cobb, First Lieutenant Christopher A. LaCour, and Sergeant First Class William H. Hight, published in the March-April 2005 issue of the US Army’s *Field Artillery* magazine

6. “Bogert is a mortar team leader who directed his men to fire round after round of high explosives and white phosphorus charges into the city Friday and Saturday, never knowing what the targets were or what damage the resulting explosions caused. [...] “Gun up!” Millikin yelled when they finished a few seconds later, grabbing a white phosphorus round from a nearby ammo can and holding it over the tube. “Fire!” Bogert yelled, as Millikin dropped it. The boom kicked dust around the pit as they ran through the drill again and again, sending a mixture of burning white phosphorus and high explosives they call “shake ‘n’ bake” into a cluster of buildings where insurgents have been spotted all week.”

‘Violence Subsides for Marines in Fallujah’, by Darrin Mortenson, *North County Times*, Saturday, April 10, 2004

I am not making any charge. I am just asking questions. Is it still possible to ask questions in these dark times of pre-emptive wars? After embedded journalists, shall we have embedded human rights organizations? Shouldn’t Caesar’s wife be above suspicion?

Kind regards,

Gabriele Zamparini

info@thecatsdream.com

Notes

1. ‘Rights Group Lists 26 It Says U.S. Is Holding in Secret Abroad’, by Ian Fisher, *The New York Times*, December 2, 2005
2. ‘Questions for Human Rights Watch’, Gabriele Zamparini’s e-mail to Marc Garlasco, Senior Military Analyst HRW and Kenneth Roth, Executive Director HRW
<http://www.thecatsdream.com/blog/2005/12/questions-for-human-rights-watch.htm>
3. Bio of Human Rights Watch’s Mark Garlasco, Mother Jones, October 2, 2005
http://www.motherjones.com/radio/2005/10/garlasco_bio.html
4. Lost Count. Researchers rushed a rigorous study of Iraqi civilian casualties into print. Is that why it was dismissed as pure politics? by Lila Guterman, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, February 4, 2005
<http://chronicle.com/free/v51/i22/22a01001.htm>
5. Ibidem
6. Rapid Response Media Alert: Doubt Cast On BBC Claims Regarding Fallujah, Media Lens, April 18, 2005
http://www.medialens.org/alerts/05/050418_doubt_cast_on_bbc.php
7. NewsWatch complaint not upheld, NewsWatch, BBC News, 3 August 2005
http://news.bbc.co.uk/newswatch/ukfs/hi/newsid_4740000/newsid_4741400/4741431.stm

Mr Hebbly (Not a Golfer)

Metaphrog

Poetry was his interest (a sort of secret hobby). Highlighting a sensitivity that his outward appearance belied. He had been an electrician, was an electrician; but work was hard to come by and now he was sleeping later. He'd even written a poem for the bin men after they had woken him several weeks in succession:

The urge to sing is great we know
The tenements close the walls echo
But spare a thought for those who keep
Some different hours and need their sleep

Neatly typed on Peter's word processor he had affixed the poem in purple ink to the inside back door of the close. That Thursday morning would henceforth in his mind be thought of as the laughter morning: the guffaws and groans of hysteria resonating well into the weekend. He hadn't shown his work since but was proud of some fragments he had guarded in a small black spiral bound notebook that still smelled faintly of malodorous damp storage. And another little piece of paranoid poetry (as he referred to it privately thus, with gentle irony, and no small amount of thinly veiled angst):

Didn't know how long he had been observed.
Followed. Hadn't seen them at the garden fence.
Under surveillance; electrically dense.

Interestingly, he couldn't explain just how, precisely, he had written this. It seemed to ooze forth from the ozone one Saturday morning as he sat ruminating breakfast. The fridge had felt nice and cold to his head at first that morning. He'd almost wanted to hold a bottle against his scapula and then drink coolly, but on trying this the temperature had gradually increased and then the slow water trickled smelly towards the floor.

Of course, he did not attribute his verse solely to himself but rather ascribed to the somewhat cosmic view that inspiration was, relatively speaking and without religious overtones, divine. His muse had been the clothes pole standing slightly obliquely in the back garden closest to his window. Proud holder of knotted blue twine and rotting remains of Indian weave peg bag. It was while gazing upon this pole that he had seen the bush twitching. True bird watchers, twitchers, in the vernacular, would mutter and mumble to themselves or, more accurately, to microphone and cassette devices discretely secreted about their persons or hidden in their hats. These men were, it appeared, actually watching him (with binoculars). At least two of them were; one was reading a copy of *Understanding Alchemy* and occasionally giggling to himself attempting to muffle his mirth with the back of a rather large and hairy hand.

A sign snapped neon in his mind: Mr Hebbly (Not a Golfer). Insipid figures drifted along the pavement, limp clothing over bent frames, horizontal rain washing everything grey. Somewhere a dog barked, distant metallic sounds coming from over the trees across the park. He'd wanted to walk there, get some green air and escape the incessant traffic noise, but now he wasn't so sure. Maybe better to take the bus, with its don't-lick-me sticky poles. Interesting to observe people sometimes, not eavesdropping but listening to the musicality of their language; the pathos of the situations they found themselves in. His own situation was pathetic he realised, the world simply mirroring what he was. He was late and he actually didn't care. The precise nature of the trouble he would find himself in if he missed



the appointment, or made a poor impression by tardiness, sweatiness or general untidiness, was still a mystery. A place of unpleasant ideas he preferred not to visit, but which he knew would involve further penury. Grinning, bounding figures danced past the window, then began banging and kicking, throwing stones; stopping the bus in its tracks. So much for speeding things along nicely. I'm so sorry I'm late we were attacked and then almost swallowed by zombies. They were drooling. Oh man it was crazy. You should have seen them. A chipped cup, emblazoned with the tired slogan: you have to be crazy... welcome to the world of grey cubicles and desk tidy tedium. He didn't want a job but was not sure how long he could continue without electricity or gas. Cold beans. Slowly the bus restarted and crossed the little painted circle that designated a roundabout. "Circle the wagons", the driver had said. Hannah hadn't found it funny picking glass out of her head; for weeks tiny particles migrate outwards to the skin surface. Bus then tube, a real commuter today and a suit to boot. Cute. He suddenly remembered BANG for no BANG apparent reason his last formal interview. Where BANG. His late arrival had been celebrated with a photograph. Not a modern digital job but strangely film, left to develop as he awaited their bidding in a small overly hot antechamber. Do you have any faults? Sunshine somehow seemed to stultify and strangle the air in the office. His mouth biscuit-dry and gummed shut. Faults?! He was a veritable tapestry of faults: it was what held him together. He tried humour. "I

get stress incontinence." BANG BANG
Three dull grey faces clouded over in lack of amusement BANG you bastards. "I'm not usually late," he essayed. Too late. BANG.

They *all* belong to Glasgow

From a conversation in early January with Ahmed Khan, who has been peacefully protesting the dawn raids and forced removals of asylum claimants in Glasgow.

Ahmed Khan: I'm a consultant psychiatrist. I've been doing the solitary protest at Glasgow's Brand Street immigration removal centre since June 2005, when I was the only one there. There are now groups protesting, especially on a Saturday, although I'm not a member or affiliate of anything.

The Home Office building at Festival Court on Brand Street, Ibrox is where asylum seekers are forced to sign on every week with their family, and whenever else they're called. They only get 70% of the minimum social security. It's where the immigration snatch squad is based that conducts dawn raids on asylum families, forcibly removing them from their homes. When the families walk in to Brand Street to report they are very, very scared as they don't know if they're coming out again. People go in to sign on and some leave handcuffed in a van, taken to one of the immigrant prisons like Dungavel or Yarls Wood, before being deported. It's very unpredictable but the families have been saying that if they know there are people outside supporting them it makes them feel better. When you go to Brand Street, especially on a Saturday, you see families with children, toddlers, babies forced to queue up from early in the morning to report. If the general public were made to stand outside and see this they wouldn't tolerate it. They wouldn't be able to live with it.

I'm not there as a political agitator, I'm there from a humanist point of view. The first time I protested I had a placard I found in the street that said, "No To Detention", and the police tried to arrest me—they regularly harassed and intimidated me. The authorities are so upset about the weekly Saturday protests that they're telling families not to come to report on that day any more. The trade union for immigration staff in Brand Street (Public and Commercial Services Union) are panicking, apparently Glasgow has become the most difficult city in the UK for the immigration department to work in. "Group 4 Securicor Justice Services were awarded a five year contract, which began in April of 2005, by the Home Office to provide escort and removal services for the Immigration & Nationality Directorate." A couple of months ago in front of witnesses, Securicor threatened to kill me and have been charged with threatening behaviour—obviously they still stand and growl at me. I put up with abuse every single week, but like I said one person can make a difference. Now there's lots of us and we're causing them to run scared.

We blockade the dawn raid vans at 4am every

morning. Since we've been there they haven't been able to carry out a single dawn raid. The dawn raids are carried out by immigration—about fifteen of them turn up, wearing balaclavas, black helmets and full body armour, and they kick your door down at 4 or 5am and storm in. There are also police attached to Brand Street to arrest anyone who physically tries to stop a deportation. Instead, when they suddenly open the gates at Brand Street and a raids van drives out at maximum speed we jump out in front of it, and if you've got your back turned to them hopefully they'll think twice before running you down.

In contrast, the local Helen Street police have actually been very sympathetic—they're the ones that form the big lines of police when we attempt to stop the raids vans leaving. I've seen the police in action many times, and this is the most sympathetic I've seen them. Initially they would actively voice their sympathy but about a month ago they stopped, but their faces are still saying this is disgusting, we don't want to be here.

You could say in general we live this stupid ignorant life, coming to coffee shops, doing what we're told. But when you go to Brand Street you see control at its most raw and physical, then you can see it in terms of the propaganda war being carried out by the government against essentially the weakest, most vulnerable people in this society, because they have no rights. All we're doing, one way or another, is fighting to give them basic human rights.

When the changes to asylum legislation came into force in 2004, it seemed they were detaining everyone at random. And because many didn't have access to legal representation it was difficult to know how many. It's still unclear how anyone is selected—people have been detained before their cases have even been processed! Immigration go out early morning, they grab people and take them. The government uses the phrase "administrative removal" for deportations. According to the UN: "the methods employed to effect removals should be consistent with human rights requirements and failed asylum seekers should be dealt with humanely" and that "specially designed return programmes for children should be established which incorporate the necessary safeguards".¹ So, someone bursting into your house at 4am in the morning, dragging you out in your night-clothes, handcuffed, leaving the door wide open with all your possessions inside, dragging away your children, putting you into vans, driving you four to five hundred miles to Yarls Wood on the outskirts of Bedford (because we made such a fuss about Dungavel)... essentially it's terror tactics.

"On 22 September, the First Minister spoke out on dawn raids on Scottish asylum families like the Vucaj family. On 13 September, this family was subjected to a terrifying dawn raid by a sixteen strong immigration snatch squad. Mr Vucaj and 17 year old Elvis were handcuffed and Saida, 13 years old, thought she was still dreaming.

"Despite condemnation from every section of Scottish society, the immigration raids have not stopped.

"On 14 October 2005, the Kupeli children, Suna (9) and Yagmar (6), pupils at Blackfriars Primary School, Gorbals, were dragged from their beds at dawn by a twelve strong immigration snatch squad. Their mother and father were both handcuffed and the family was taken separately in caged vans to Brand Street Immigration Office and then to Yarls Wood Removal Centre, Bedfordshire. (The family were bailed on the 9th November, making it very questionable as to why they were detained in the first place.)

"Two days after this shameful behaviour, Tony



McNulty, Immigration Minister went onto BBC Newsnight (16 October) and defended the tactics of dawn raids, despite widespread condemnation—including protests by executive ministers and the Children's Commissioner, Kathleen Marshall. Mr McNulty went onto say that "We are not knocking down doors at four in the morning". He claimed that most of the removals took place between 0530 and 0700 am, as if this made any difference to the terror felt by families too scared to sleep in this city."

Robina Qureshi, Director, Positive Action In Housing (PAIH)

In the Red Road flats in the north of the city to which a number of families have been "dispersed", the women wake up at four every morning and put their coats on (so at least they'll have a coat). Everything's packed, everything's by the door ready to go. And that's why we're setting up unions to mount early morning watches—at least people will know what's happening to each other. Things will get more organised with the passage of time, but an issue is that it's actually against the law for asylum seekers to resist and oppose what's happening to them. If they get politically involved they could be deported just like that.

Tom Harris, the Glasgow South MP, has taken it upon himself to mount a campaign of persecution of asylum seekers, seeking to cut off money from charities working with them, such as PAIH, by saying they are carrying out a political act in helping them. This would be against the rules governing their charitable status. Meanwhile the Charity Commission has actually placed greater positive emphasis on the campaigning activities that charities can undertake.² The problem is they deliberately keep the law vague, and if ever it's tested they change it very quickly. They have this point about how you've got to declare you're an asylum seeker when it is "practicable", which is there as a tool to discriminate.

"Say the Vucaj family they deported, maybe things might have changed a wee bit now. But when these people left that country seven or eight year ago, that was the position they left the country in. They fled for their lives and their children's. If you look at the Vucaj family, particularly the younger ones, half of them can't speak the language of the country they're being deported to. Especially the young lassie, the only schooling she's been through is here in Drumchapel. And with her school mates she was integrated into Scottish society, culture; her music, her dress, this is what she knew. I think it's very, very unfair, and inhumane... Here's another sad aspect: in respect to the armed forces the recruiting level has dropped drastically in the last few years, yet the young fella there was going into the army next year. He was already signed up for it, that was his ambition, to become a soldier in a Scottish regiment... We're crying



Brand Street protest images: Gareth Harper photoecosse.net

out for qualified people at all levels and yet we're throwing these people out. It defies common sense and logic. Bureaucracy gone mad."

Paddy Hill, Miscarriages of Justice Organisation (MOJO)

The whole refugee issue is surrounded by ignorance. Essentially what the government has been doing the last couple of years is making you scared of things you shouldn't be scared of, and not telling you about things you should be scared of. The general public are ignorant of what's going on and even the existence of Brand Street. Secondly, it's ignorance of racism—what motivates the system here is out-and-out racism. I don't see any white faces going in to report at Brand Street. You don't meet any Australians or New Zealanders. Scotland's First Minister Jack McConnell has recently gone to the US and Canada on this 'Fresh Talent' tour to try to increase the number of people coming to live and work in Scotland, while they're detaining and deporting the people who want to be here!

Variant: In January the NHS Employers' organisation voiced concern at confirmed poaching of staff from other countries for the health service.³

AK: The so-called brain drain. For example, with my job they actively go out to countries and offer them jobs here, security, money... Sub-Saharan Africa has one psychiatrist per million people. Nigeria has two psychiatrists, when there's something like 2,000 Nigerian psychiatrists working in the UK. They're trying to take away talented people who can help those countries, bring them here, put them into dead end jobs; they're doing the donkey work here. New Labour claim they've issued more work permits than ever before.⁴ On the other hand they don't want refugees from underdeveloped countries, even though many are university educated.

Another recent problem is the removal of the right to work; forcing people into destitution and making them homeless. This is just a way of demoralising and destroying people. I met a man a week ago who's been living in Glasgow for seventeen years. Suddenly twelve months ago they told him they were deporting him, and they made him homeless and jobless. Now he is absolutely destitute. But because he's lived here so long he has social contacts and support, unlike most refugees. An effect of this policy that really saddens me is that in the early morning in a couple of a south side streets there are illegal labour markets.

In 2000 the government claimed that the cost of supporting asylum seekers, including legal aid, welfare benefits, housing, health and education was £597 million, or 0.17% of total Government spending (Hansard, 12 April 2000, 227W)—while in 2002 immigrants contributed £2.5 billion more to the state than they receive in benefits and state services (Gott & Johnson 2002).

The most recent problem is, for a six month period, offering people who claimed asylum before the end of December up to £2,000 to withdraw their claims or appeals and to leave. This "cash" would somehow be paid in instalments over twelve months. The picture of a further £1000, possibly funnelled to NGOs, for "education, job training or setting up a business", gives a false impression of an overall situation that holds no danger for anyone. "Incentivising" people, as they call it, does not make them safe, and the term "voluntary" becomes meaningless if they are returning to danger. We've been trying to tell people don't think of this—our concern is the moment you give them your details it will be treated as acquiescence.

Just now we're organising the Red Road flats into unions and attempting to organise Pollokshaws. They are already organised in Knightswood, where there's the Glasgow Girls, who won the Scottish Campaign of the Year Award at the Scottish politician of the year ceremony. They're a group of young women aged about 14 to 15 from Drumchapel High School who came together to campaign against the deportations of their friends and neighbours. They organised



Knightswood into a refugee union, formed a database of everyone there, and the kids in school formed support groups so when the Vucaj family were detained they responded immediately.

"Mr McConnell wanted to have a private meeting with us. So we started talking to him and expressed the issues. I looked in his eyes and I begged him, 'Please help us.' He said he would see what he could do. He looked like he understood. He gave us so much hope and we had so much faith in him. But after that we went to the parliament again because the Vucaj family were taken away. That time Mr McConnell did not meet us. Saida Vucaj wanted to talk to him. I was upset. She is just a 13-year-old girl and she was saying please help us. It was a horrible feeling. We've pictures of us crying from then.

"I really thought he would help us. But obviously there's no help from him. He didn't just let me down, he let me and all the other asylum seekers down."

Sunday Herald, Dec 11 2005, Amal Azzudin, aged 15, Glasgow Girls

The Girls went to a meeting at the Scottish Parliament with Jack McConnell and said to him you lot are all talk, what are you actually going to do for the right of all young people to stay in Scotland, and against deportations? Since they were a group of youngsters who basically put McConnell on the spot they got a lot of publicity. McConnell publicly agreed with them that the dawn raids were outrageous... blahdeblah... what everyone wanted to hear. And when it looked like the Scottish Parliament might act the Immigration Minister Tony McNulty was dispatched from Westminster and McConnell stopped talking like that. The parliament's political impetus to deal with this situation stopped, but more and more people are organising.

"Today the immigration officers came in my house at 6am. First they knocked on the door, then someone said 'open the door now, I am from the Immigration Service'.

"I am not that sure how many of them there were at my front door but it looked like 15 to 17 of them. When my dad opened the door all of them split up. About four women came into my room, some went in with my dad, some with my brothers.

"They handcuffed my dad and my big brother. They never let me and my mum see my brother and dad. The immigration officer told us to pack. I saw my mum crying. At the same time I was crying too. I was shaking. I was tired. I was scared when I saw them because they were telling us to get up and one of them told me to tell my mum that we had to leave the UK that Friday.

"When they came [referring to dawn raid] I just jumped up, thinking what are these four people doing in my room? I was dead scared, you know, I was not thinking, all my good clothes are in my house, I forgot, I left my new clothes and took my old ones, just tired, never expected it, they just said get up. I was shaking, I was tired, I wanted my mum. But my mum was crying in the other room. Here, my mum says I get scared in the middle of the night, I wake and scream some nights ... As soon as I wake up I can't remember why I'm scared, but I feel scared.

"Life in Yarl's Wood every single day is becoming more boring. It is. I'm here three weeks and it's like brain

damage, because you're trapped inside.

"It feels like I've done something wrong to be in a prison. I can't hardly eat, only once a day, because, honest, I'm very, very depressed.

"My mum's depressed, crying in bed all day, but she's hanging there. I'm not joking, I'm scared if my mum get's sick, she was already sick with worrying about our case in Glasgow for five years. My dad, he is the same as my mum, very depressed. His eyes are red, his head is pure thumping. But we just have to hang on there, keep strong.

"I heard about my girls meeting the First Minister. Is he helping? I haven't been to the Scottish Parliament, but I could go one day. Have you been there?

"If I saw the First minister, I would just say: 'Hi, how you doing? I hope you and your family is very well. And if you help me and my family, I would thank you so much.'

"How could I forget life in Glasgow? I love my Glasgow, I remember going shopping with my friends, having fun, listening to music in my own room, not worrying, having my own space.

"If we come back to Glasgow, I want to finish the book, 'The Ragged Boy', with our teacher Mr Turnball. Anyway, I'm writing my own book now in here—I don't know how my book finishes, but I'll see tomorrow what's gonna happen.

"The government might say that Kosovo is safe, but if only they lived there for just two days they would change their minds. Two days there feels like five years. The British government just don't understand. That's why I am angry. But what can I do? I am just a child."

Saida Vucaj, aged 13

Saturday morning vigils at the Brand Street Immigration Centre: Immigration and Nationality Directorate office, Festival Court, 200 Brand Street, Glasgow G51 1DH. Nearest Underground, Cessnock.

Notes



1. UNHCR: 'UK White Paper on Asylum and Immigration: "Secure Borders, Safe Haven"' UNHCR London 18 March 2002, www.unhcr.org.uk/legal/positions/UNHCR%20Comments/comments_WP2002.htm
2. www.charity-commission.gov.uk/publications/cc9.asp
3. www.guardian.co.uk/uk_news/story/0,3604,1677505,00.html]
4. www.scottishlabour.org.uk/freshtalentspeech/

No Border Network Glasgow
www.openborders.org.uk
Positive Action in Housing
www.paih.org
National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns
www.ncadc.org.uk
Stop deporting children
www.standup4children.org
Scotland Against Criminalising Communities
www.sacc.org.uk

From Precarity to Precariousness and Back Again: Labour, Life and Unstable Networks

Brett Neilson and Ned Rossiter

In Florian Schneider's documentary *Organizing the Unorganizable* (2002), Raj Jayadev of the DE-BUG worker's collective in Silicon Valley identifies the central problem of temporary labour as one of time. Jayadev recounts the story of 'Edward', a staff-writer for the Debug magazine: "My Mondays roll into my Tuesdays, and my Tuesdays roll into my Wednesdays without me knowing it. And I lose track of time and I lose hope with what tomorrow's going to be". Jayadev continues: "What concerns temp workers the most is not so much a \$2 an hour pay raise or safer working conditions. Rather, they want the ability to create, to look forward to something new, and to reclaim the time of life". How does this desire to create, all too easily associated with artistic production, intersect with the experiences of other workers who engage in precarious forms of labour?

With the transformation of labour practices in advanced capitalist systems under the impact of globalisation and information technologies, there has arisen a proliferation of terms to describe the commonly experienced yet largely undocumented transformations within working life. Creative labour, network labour, cognitive labour, service labour, affective labour, linguistic labour, immaterial labour; these categories often substitute for each other, but in their very multiplication they point to diverse qualities of experience that are not simply reducible to each other. On the one hand these labour practices are the oppressive face of post-Fordist capitalism, yet they also contain potentialities that spring from workers' own refusal of labour and subjective demands for flexibility – demands that in many ways precipitate capital's own accession to interminable restructuring and rescaling, and in so doing condition capital's own techniques and regimes of control.

The complexity of these relationships has amounted to a crisis within modes of organisation based around the paranoid triad: union, state, firm. Time and again, across the past fifteen years, we heard proclamations of the end of the nation-state, its loss of control or subordination to new and more globally extensive forms of sovereignty. Equally, we are now over familiar with claims for the decline of trade unions: their weakening before transnational flows of capital, the erosion of salaried labour, or the carefully honed attacks of neoliberal politicians. More recently, the firm itself is not looking so good, riddled with internal instability and corruption for which the names Enron, Worldcom, and Parmalat provide only the barest index. Clearly, the 'networked organisation' is not the institutional form best suited to the management of labour and life within information economies and networked socialities. But it is not these tendencies themselves as much as their mutual implications that have led to the radical recasting of labour organisation and its concomitant processes of bargaining and arbitration.

Within the ambit of social movements and autonomous political groups, these new forms of labour organisation have been given the name precarity, an inelegant neologism coined by English speakers to translate the French *precarité*. Although the term has been in circulation since the early 1980s, it is really only over the past two



or three years that it has acquired prominence in social movement struggles. Particularly in the Western European nations, the notion of precarity has been at the centre of a long season of protests, actions, and discussions, including events such as EuroMayDay 2004 (Milan and Barcelona) and 2005 (in seventeen European cities), Precarity Ping Pong (London, October 2004), the International Meeting of the Precariat (Berlin, January 2005), and Precair Forum (Amsterdam, February 2005).¹ According to Milanese activist Alex Foti (2004), precarity is "being unable to plan one's time, being a worker on call where your life and time is determined by external forces". The term refers to all possible shapes of unsure, not guaranteed, flexible exploitation: from illegalised, seasonal and temporary employment to homework, flex- and temp-work to subcontractors, freelancers or so-called self-employed persons. But its reference also extends beyond the world of work to encompass other aspects of intersubjective life, including housing, debt, and the ability to build affective social relations.

Classically, the story told about precarity is that it was capital's response to the rejection of 'jobs for life' and demands for free time and flexibility by workers in the 1970s. Thus the opposite of precarity is not regular work, stable housing, and so on. Rather, such material security is another version of precarity, consuming time, energy, and affective relations as well as producing the anxiety that results from the "financialisation of daily life" – to steal a felicitous phrase from Randy Martin (2002). Among other things, the notion of precarity has provided a rallying call and connecting device for struggles surrounding citizenship, labour rights, the social wage, and migration. And importantly, these struggles are imagined to require new methods of creative-social organisation that do not make recourse to social state models, trade union solidarities, or Fordist economic structures.

The political challenge is to determine

whether the uncertain, unpredictable condition of precarity can operate as an empirical object of thought and practice. Precarity would seem to cancel out the possibility of such an undertaking, since the empirical object is presupposed as stable and contained, whereas, the boundaries between labour, action, and intellect appear increasingly indistinct within a post-Fordist mode of production. Can common resources (political organisation) be found within individual and collective experiences of permanent insecurity? Furthermore, is there a relationship between the potential for political organisation and the technics of communication facilitated by digital technologies? In sum, what promise does precarity offer as a strategy and why has it emerged at this precise historical moment as a key concept for political thought and struggle?

In order to address these questions, we first outline the distinction between 'precarity' and 'precariousness'. In surveying the various ways in which these terms have circulated, we wish to establish a framework within which questions of labour, life and social-political organisation can be understood. The various uncertainties defining contemporary life are carried over – and, we argue, internal to – the logic of informatisation. Our aim, however, is not to collapse respective differences into a totalising logic that provides a definitive assessment or system of analysis; rather, we seek to identify some of the forces, rhythms, discourses and actions that render notions such as creativity, innovation, and organisation, along with the operation of capital, with a complexity whose material effects are locally situated within transversal networks. Where there are instances of inter-connection between, say, the work of migrants packaging computer parts or cleaning offices and that of media labour in a call centre, software development firm or digital post-production for a film studio, we see a common expressive capacity predicated on the dual conditions of exploitation and uncertainty.

Yet to cast the experience of informational labour as exclusively oppressive is to overlook the myriad ways in which new socialities emerge with the potential to create political relations that force an adjustment in the practices of capital. Such collectivities are radically different from earlier forms of political organisation, most notably those of the union and political party. Instead, we find the logic of the network unleashed, manifesting as situated interventions whose effects traverse a combination of spatial scales. The passage from precarity to precariousness foregrounds the importance of relations. It makes sense, then, to also consider the operation of networks, which above all else are socio-technical systems made possible by the contingency of relations.

Uncertainty, Flexibility, Transformation

To begin to grapple with the sort of questions sketched above it is necessary to acknowledge that the concept of precarity is constitutively doubled-edged. On the one hand, it describes an increasing change of previously guaranteed permanent employment conditions into mainly worse paid, uncertain jobs. In this sense, precarity leads to an interminable lack of certainty, the condition of being unable to predict one's fate or having some degree of stability on which to construct a life. On the other hand, precarity supplies the precondition for new forms of creative organisation that seek to accept and exploit the flexibility inherent in networked modes of sociality and production. That the figure of the creative, cognitive, or new media worker has emerged as the figure of the precarious worker *par excellence* is symptomatic of this ambivalent political positioning. Some commentators have gone as far as to suggest that the collaborative processes and affective relations that characterise artistic work reveal the inner dynamics of the post-Fordist economy. By questioning the boundaries between social labour and creative practice, for instance, Brian Holmes (2004) follows one of the central themes of Italian *post-operaista* thought, arguing that creative linguistic relation (the very stuff of human intersubjectivity) has become central to contemporary labour regimes.

No doubt there is some truth to the claim

that the dynamic relationship between material production and social reproduction converges, under contemporary capitalism, on the horizon of language and communication. This argument, as developed in the work of thinkers like Christian Marazzi (1999) and Paolo Virno (2004a, 2004b), has been redeployed in any number of contexts to question the boundaries between creative action and social labour. It would be foolish to underestimate the utility of these interventions. But implicit in this tendency to collapse otherwise disparate forms of labour into the containing category of creativity is an eclipse of those forms of bodily, coerced, and unpaid work primarily associated with migrants and women (and not with artists, computer workers, or new media labourers).

In this sense, it is probably not a good thing that precarity has become the meme of the moment. Proclamations of the epoch-breaking character of contemporary labour market transformations, while doubtless augmenting the rhetorical force of the struggles surrounding precarity, inevitably occlude two important facts. First, the current increase of precarious work in the wealthy countries is only a small slice of capitalist history. If the perspective is widened, both geographically and historically, precarity becomes the norm (and not some exception posed against a Keynesian or Fordist ideal of capitalist stability). With this shift in perspective the focus also moves to other forms of work, still contained within the logic of industrial or agricultural production, that do not necessarily abide the no-material-product logic of so-called cognitive, immaterial, or creative labour. Without denying that neoliberal globalisation and the boom-bust dot.com cycle of information technology have placed new pressures on labour markets in the wealthy countries, it is also important to approach this wider global perspective in light of a second fact: that capital too is precarious, given to crises, risk, and uncertainty.

Labour, Communication, Movement

Importantly, capital has always tried to shore up its own precariousness through the control of labour and, in particular, the mobility of labour. It is the insight of Moulrier-Boutang’s *De l’esclavage au salariat* (1998) to identify the subjective practice of labour mobility as the connecting thread in the history of capitalism. Far from being archaisms or transitory adjustments destined to be wiped out by modernisation, Moulrier-Boutang contends that labour regimes such as slavery and indenture are constituent of capitalist development and arise precisely from the attempt to control or limit the worker’s flight. In this perspective, the figure of the undocumented migrant becomes the exemplary precarious worker since, in the current global formation, the entire system of border control and detention technology provides the principal means by which capital controls the mobility of labour. Because the depreciation and precarisation of migrant labour threatens to engulf the workforce as a whole (and because the subjective mobility and resistance of migrants tests the limits of capitalist control), their position becomes the social anticipation of a political option to struggle against the general development of labour and life in the contemporary world (Mezzadra, 2001; Mezzadra, 2004).

A similar argument can be made regarding the un- or under-paid labour of women, both as regards the status of the patriarchal family as the locus of the reproduction of labour power in capitalist societies and preponderance of women in precarious sectors such as care-work, house-work, or call centres (Hardt and Negri, 2000: 292-293, 2004: 110-111; Huws, 2003). Indeed, the Madrid-based group Precarias alla Deriva, which has always resisted the temptation to use the term precarity as a common name for diverse and singular labour situations, has devoted much of its research to the feminisation of precarious work. And the sheer proliferation of women in contemporary labour migration flows means that there is a great deal of convergence between approaches that emphasise the role of border technologies in capital’s attempts to minimise its precariousness and those that focus on the ongoing marginalisation and undervaluation of women’s

work (Anderson, 2000; Gill, 2002; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001; Parrenās, 2001; Huws, 2003).

The point is not to replace the figure of the creative worker with that of the migrant or female care-worker in the discussions and actions surrounding precarity. Nor is it to collapse these various types of labour practice into a composite category, such as the much circulated term *precariat* (which combines the words *precario* and *proletariat* in a single class category). Equally, it is insufficient to subordinate these very different labour practices to a single logic of production (which is the tactic followed by Hardt and Negri when they argue that all forms of labour in the contemporary world, while maintaining their specificity, are transformed and mastered by processes of informatisation). In terms of political practice and strategy, we believe there is something to be gained by holding these labour practices in some degree of conceptual and material separation but articulating them in struggle.

For instance, the fight for open architectures of electronic communication pursued by many creative workers cannot be equated with the subjective practices of mobility pursued by undocumented labour migrants. While these actions might be conjoined on some conceptual horizon (through notions such as exodus or flow), they have distinct (and always highly contextual) manifestations on the ground. There are clearly important differences between copyright regimes and border control technologies, even if both are ultimately held down by the assertion of sovereign power, whether at the national or transnational level. Recognising this, however, does not mean that the struggles surrounding free software and the ‘no-border’ struggles surrounding undocumented migration cannot work in tandem or draw on each other tactically. As the editorial team of *Makeworld Paper*#3 writes: “the demand to combine the freedom of movement with the freedom of communication is social dynamite” (Bove et al., 2003).

Precarity, then, does not have its model worker. Neither artist nor migrant, nor hacker nor housewife, there is no precarious Stakhanov. Rather, precarity strays across any number of labour practices, rendering their relations precisely precarious – which, is to say, given to no essential connection but perpetually open to temporary and contingent relations. In this sense, precarity is something more than a position in the labour market, since it traverses a spectrum of labour markets and positions within them. Moreover, the at best fleeting connections, alliances and affiliations between otherwise distinct social groupings brings into question much of the current debate around the ‘multitudes’ as somehow constituting a movement of movements. Such a proposition implies a degree of co-ordination and organisation that rarely coalesces at an empirical level beyond the time of the event.

There is little chance, then, that a coherent political opposition will emerge from the organised activities of civil society. Rather, what we see here is a further consolidation of capital. More disconcerting is the likelihood of civil society organisations becoming increasingly decoupled from their material constitution – that is, the continual formation and reformation of social forces from which they were born. This is a predicament faced by activist movements undergoing a scalar transformation. The system of modern sovereignty, which functioned around the dual axiom of representation and rights, cannot encompass these new modes of organisation. Nor can the postliberal model of governance, which rearranges vertical relations into a horizontal order of differentiated subjectivities. Nonetheless, the problem of scale remains. In the case of social movements that begin to engage with what passes for global civil society, this can entail an abstraction of material constitution that is often difficult to separate from the histories and practices of abstract sociality vis-à-vis capitalism. Such a condition begins to explain why there is a tendency to collapse the vastly different situations of workers into the catch-all categories of the multitudes and precarity. This, if you will, is the logic of the empty signifier. And here lies the challenge, and difficulty, of articulating new forms of social-political organisation in ways that remain

receptive to local circumstances that are bound to the international division of labour.

We suggest the emergence of precarity as a central political motif of the global movement relates not only to labour market conditions but also to the prevalent moods and conditions within advanced capitalist societies at a time of seemingly interminable global conflict. Once again this brings the doubled-edged nature of precarity to the fore. For while precarity provides a platform for struggle against the degradation of labour conditions and a means of imagining more flexible circumstances of work and life, it also risks dovetailing with the dominant rhetoric of security that emanates from the established political classes of the wealthy world. This is particularly the case for those versions of precarity politics that place their faith in state intervention as a means of improving or attenuating the worsening conditions of labour.



Ontological Insecurity in the USA

Undoubtedly, current perceptions of insecurity are complex and cannot be traced to a single source such as global terrorism, precarity at work, environmental risk, or exposure to the volatility of financial markets (say through pension investments and/or interest rates). At the existential level, these experiences mix or work in concert to create a general feeling of unease. And the conviction that the state (whether conceived on the national scale or in terms of some more extensive sovereign entity like the E.U.) can provide stability in any one of these spheres is not necessarily separable from the notion that it can eliminate risk and contingency in another. Not only does this imply that the struggle against precarity, if not carefully conceived, may bolster and/or feed off state-fueled security politics, but also it suggests that there is something deeper about precarity than its articulation to labour alone would suggest – some more fundamental, but never foundational, human vulnerability, that neither the act nor potential of labour can exhaust.

This is certainly the sense in which Judith Butler, in *Precarious Life* (2004), confronts what she calls *precariousness* (which should be distinguished from *precarity* intended in the labour market sense). For Butler, precariousness is an ontological and existential category that describes the common, but unevenly distributed, fragility of human corporeal existence. A condition made manifest in the U.S. by the events of 911, this fundamental and pre-individual vulnerability is subject to radical denial in the discourses and practices of global security. For instance, Butler understands President George W. Bush’s 921 declaration that “our grief has turned to anger and our anger to resolution” to constitute a repudiation of precariousness and mourning in the name of an action that purports to restore order and to promote the fantasy that the world formerly was orderly. And she seeks in the recognition of this precariousness an ethical encounter that is essential to the constitution of vulnerability and interdependence as preconditions for the ‘human’.

Key to Butler’s argument is the proposition that recognition of precariousness entails not simply an extrapolation from an understanding of one’s own precariousness to an understanding of

another's precarious life but an understanding of "the precariousness of the Other". Her emphasis is on the relationality of human lives and she sees this not only as a question of political community but also as the basis for theorising dependency and ethical responsibility. Rather than seeking to describe the features of a universal human condition (something that she claims does not exist or yet exist), she asks who counts as human. And with this reference to humans not regarded as humans, she seeks not a simple entry of the "excluded into an established ontology, but an insurrection at the level of ontology, a critical opening up of the questions, What is real? Whose lives are real? How might reality be remade?" (2004: 33). At this level, the theorisation of precariousness impinges on fundamental ontological questions and, to this extent, it suggests a means of joining some of the actions and arguments surrounding precarity to a more philosophically engaged encounter with notions such as creativity, contingency, and relation.

As noted above, Butler's argument, while claiming to affect an ontological insurrection, takes shape above all in the post-911 United States. A passionate appeal for the necessity of critique under circumstances where popular energies have rallied around the executive branch of government, *Precarious Life* understandably focuses on the progress of global war and the transformations of life within the U.S. polity. But it also presents precariousness as a general principle of the human (and who counts as such). And while it emphasises the uneven distribution of this basic human fragility, it does not analyse the workings of this unevenness in detail (as if they were merely given, coincidental and outside the realm of fundamental ontology). In other words, Butler does not explore the whole problematic of global capitalism and its relations to the current conflict.² Certainly these relations are of a complex order and cannot be reduced to the simple formula ('no blood for oil') that would have war working always in the service of capital and vice versa.

In a world where the operations of the global market (by which any object, regardless of location, can be valued and ordered) do not necessarily accord with the logic of strategy (by which spatially fixed resources, subject to calculation and command in the aggregate, are brought under control by state actors), there are likely discrepancies to exploit between the workings of capital and the enterprise of security (Neilson, forthcoming). For instance, the effort to block the flow of laundered money that funds terror networks requires a tightening of regulation on that very institution that lies at the heart of global neoliberal enterprise, the deregulated financial market (Napoleoni, 2003). Indeed, it may be in these gaps, where security and capital come into conflict, that the motif of precarious life receives its most radical articulation, where precariousness meets precarity, and the struggle against neoliberal capitalism that dominated the global movement from Seattle might finally work in tandem with the struggle against war. Such a realisation must be central to any politics that seeks to reach beyond the limits of precarity as a strategy of organisation.

Innovative Capacities and Common Resources

Key to understanding the human capacity for innovation is the recognition that such change is not the norm but the exception, something that occurs rarely and unexpectedly. Virno (2004b) pursues a reading of paragraph 206 Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, concerning the impossibility of applying rules, in an attempt to understand the conditions of such an exception and their radical difference from organisational models that aim to extract an economic value from creative practices. Crucial for Virno in Wittgenstein's understanding of normative or rule-governed behaviour is that the rule can never specify the conditions of its application – e.g., there is no rule that specifies how high the tennis ball can be thrown during service. For such a specification to be made, another rule about the application of rules would have to be instituted, and so on to an infinite regress, just as in the normative legal system of judicial precedent.



Creative innovation, however, requires a mode of action that escapes this formal space of regulation.

Whatever the current possibilities for desertion or exodus, it is hard to escape the observation that the corporate-state nexus increasingly asserts a sovereign command over the very matter of our bodies. With the informatisation of social and economic relations, intellectual property is the regime of scarcity through which control is exerted over the substance of life. Think of the rush to patent recombinant DNA sequences or the pressure placed upon agricultural industries and government representatives to adopt genetically modified organisms. Despite the dot.com crash of 2000, stocks in biotech industries are again yielding substantial profits – a phenomenon fuelled in part by aging populations anxious to invest in narratives of security and technologies of arrested decay. This revival of biotech stocks can also be seen as a response to the affective economy associated with the shift of venture capital into the business of bio-terrorism and a move from what Melinda Cooper (2004) calls the irrational exuberance of nineties speculative capital into an era of indefinite insecurity and permanent catastrophe within a post-911 environment.

Yet where resides the space of commons exterior to both the state and the interests of the market? Indeed, is it even possible to invoke this sense of exteriority within an ontological and social-technical field of immanence and political economy in which capital interpenetrates the matter of life? It is no longer feasible to draw a homology between the commons and the notion of the public – a social body too easily assumed as co-extensive with the citizen-subject. Both the citizen-subject and the public are categories that refer particularly to European and North American political legacies that have long since declined as constituent powers of democratic polities (see Montag, 2000 and Nowotny, 2005).

If 'the public' has become a non sequitur vis-à-vis the informational state, there is nonetheless a persistence of social desires to create "modulations of feeling" whose logic of expression is antithetical to the strictures of control set forth by the informational state. The widespread practice of file-sharing within peer-to-peer networks is routinely cited by many as an exemplary instance of resistance to the closure of the commons by IPRs. The increasing adoption of open source software and Creative Commons by governments and businesses across the economic spectrum is another example of a kind of reverse engineering of the super-structure by the educative capacity of civil society and informational social movements. Certainly, we would not want to underestimate the positive potential of such transformations and redefinitions of information societies. Yet just as it is clear that such activities endow networks with an organisational force, so too is it uncertain whether substantive change will eventuate in the material situation of precarious labour and life.

Communicative Networks and Creative Expression

It is one thing to think innovation as a common resource outside the phantasm of total market control; it is another to consider the operation of such a resource. Here we find it necessary to engage the materialities of communication in order to illuminate further the exceptional quality of innovation. In so doing we introduce the political concept of the 'constitutive outside' and proceed to an analysis of the creative industries. Our interest is to discern the ways in which the ontology of precariousness is immanent to networked systems of communication. How, we wonder, do the internal dynamics of social-technical communication constitute an ontology that oscillates between uncertainty, fluctuation, and fleeting association on the one hand, and moments of intensity, hope, and exhilaration on the other? In what ways are global information systems embedded in singular patterns of life? Is it possible for the pre-individual, linguistic-cognitive common – or general intellect – to operate as a transcendent biopolitical force by which living labour asserts a horizon of pure virtuality (unforeseen capacity to create and invent)? How might an ontology of networks be formulated, and does creative potential subsist in networks of social-technical relations?

Much creative industries discourse in recent years places an emphasis on the potential for creative clusters, hubs and precincts as the social-urban arrangement or model that is supposedly the conduit best suited to the establishment of cultural economies. Along with 'mapping documents' that set out to demonstrate 'value-chains' of innovation based on the concentration of a range of cultural activities and stakeholders, this focus points to the inherent fragility of cultural economies.³

In short, there is little empirical correspondence between the topography of 'mapping documents' and 'value-chains' and the actual social networks and cultural flows that comprise the business activities and movement of finance capital, information and labour-power within creative economies. Such attempts to register the mutual production of economic and creative value are inherently reductive systems. Capital always exceeds regimes of control, inevitably destabilising the delicate balance between determinacy and indeterminacy, regulation and inherent precariousness. And for this reason we maintain that capital is a force whose dynamic is shaped considerably by cultural and social inputs whose register, while largely undetected, comprises a common from which new social forces and modes of creative organisation may proliferate.

The implication for creative expression as it manifests in the variegated patterns of labour within informational economies can be summarised as follows: the regulation of labour-power is conditioned by the dual regime of scarcity and border control. Scarcity consists of that which is perceived and constructed as finite and inscribed with economic value (e.g., the logic of IPRs). Boundaries confer the expressive form of creative labour and its concomitant networks with either discursive legitimacy and economic value or disavowal and the suspension of movement. The governance of networks, however, is not so straightforward or easily defined. If the ontic of networks is underscored by interpenetration and disequilibrium – as evidenced, for example, in the fragile life of mailing lists, prone as they are to rapid destruction, irrelevance and closure if actors such as 'trolls' are unchecked (Lovink, 2003) – then it becomes much harder to generalise about the expressive capacity of social-technical life as it subsists in a state of permanent construction.

For all the talk in creative industries policy and analysis of unleashing the creative potential of cultural workers, what comes to pass is the reproduction of the same. Such an economy is, after all, exercised through the model of clusters. Who ever said Feudalism was eclipsed by the modern state system? Despite the pervasiveness of creative and cultural networks within government policies and academic literature, one is hard pressed to find evidence of networks in any operative sense. Projects that assemble a range of actors or stakeholders within a cultural precinct

or business park are simply not the same as networks. For our purposes, networks consist of social-technical relations that are immanent to the media of communication. The collaborations that ensue within communicative networks are frequently promiscuous, unlike the ‘old boys’ style of partnerships developed in what is much better defined as the cluster model of the creative industries.

Freedom without Security

It is worth recalling that the precondition of surplus-value is cooperation. In this sense, the potential for alternative modalities of organising creative labour is inseparable from the uncertain rhythms, fluctuations and manifestations of global capital. Indeed, it is precisely this relation between labour-power and capital that defines the immanence of socio-technical networks. Given these mutual dependencies, it is not beyond reason to imagine that variations of living labour might, as Jayadev noted at the start of this essay, “reclaim the time of life”. Such interventions are not as radical as they might sound. But they nonetheless involve transforming precarity as a normative condition precipitated by the demands of capital.

In the case of creative labour, a reclaiming of the time of life entails a shifting of values and rhetoric away from an emphasis on the exploitation of intellectual property (and thus labour-power) and reinstating or inventing technics of value that address the uncertainties of economic and ontological life. Engaging rather than sublimating the antagonisms inherent to such experiences is, in part, a matter of rethinking networked modes of relation. The many accounts, events and analyses on precarity documented earlier in this essay begin to tell the story of social-political networks seeking to institute creative projects responsive to situations of living labour. The communication of such efforts begins to comprise a history of networks as they subsist within an informational present. Moreover, we find here a common resource from which lessons, models, and ideas may be exchanged and repurposed as transformative techniques.

Such processes, however, are by no means straightforward. By posing the question of the unstable ontology of networks alongside that of migration and border control, we are forced to think together the precarity that invests the labour relation and the regime of border reinforcement, which is one of the primary registers of the current ubiquity of war. Earlier we cited the creators of a free newspaper and collaborative filtering project who described as “social dynamite” the attempt to combine freedom of communication with freedom of movement. But the effects of this social dynamite are disparate and, in their very multiplicity, inflate the tendency to treat these phenomena as separate moments. Such a disconnection again poses the question of commonality and the resources it might supply for the imagination of alternative forms of life.

The ongoing tussle between those who cast the creative worker as the precarious labourer *par excellence* and those who assign this role to the



undocumented migrant is one symptom of this divide. Such a debate is certainly worth having, but it also misses the point: that being, to alter the circumstances in which capital meets life. All too often the precarity struggle revolves about the proposition *life is work*. But the challenge is not to reaffirm the productivism implicit in this realisation but rather to take it as the basis for another life – a life in which contingency and instability are no longer experienced as threats. A life in which, as Goethe wrote in *Faust II*, many millions can “dwell without security but active and free”.

Notes

- * This is a shorter version of an essay that was first published in *Fibreculture Journal* 5 (2005), http://journal.fibreculture.org/issue5/neilson_rossiter.html.
- 1. Over the past year there has been a proliferation of magazines, journals and mailing lists exploring the theme of precarity and the associated problematic of labour organisation. These include *Greenpepper*, *Mute*, *Multitudes*, *republicart*, *ephemera*, *European Journal of Higher Arts Education*, *Derive* *Approdi*, and *aut-op-sy*.
- 2. While more expansive on the global dimensions of this problematic, David Harvey (2003) also remains primarily within a U.S. political imaginary. See also Arrighi (2005a, 2005b).
- 3. While a recent UNCTAD (2004: 3) policy report notes that ‘too often [creative industries are] associated with a precarious form of job security’, such observations remain the exception within much policy-making and academic research on the creative industries. A recent issue of *The International Journal of Cultural Policy*, edited by David Hesmondhalgh and Andy C. Pratt (2005), tables some of the most sophisticated research on cultural and creative industries to date. See also O’Regan, Gibson and Jeffcutt (2004), Gill (2002), and Ross (2003).

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Guardians of Power

Gabriele Zamparini interviews *Media Lens*’ editors

‘Guardians of Power: The Myth of the Liberal Media’¹ is a new book by David Edwards and David Cromwell, the two editors of Media Lens, an internet-based watchdog “correcting for the distorted vision of the corporate media”.

According to Noam Chomsky,

“Regular critical analysis of the media, filling crucial gaps and correcting the distortions of ideological prisms, has never been more important. Media Lens has performed a major public service by carrying out this task with energy, insight, and care.”

Edward Herman wrote,

“Media Lens is doing an outstanding job of pressing the mainstream media to at least follow their own stated principles and meet their public service obligations. It is fun as well as enlightening to watch their representatives, while sometimes giving straightforward answers to queries, often getting flustered, angry, evasive, and sometimes mis-stating the facts.”

John Pilger thinks that,

“The creators and editors of Media Lens, David Edwards and David Cromwell, have had such influence in a short time that, by holding to account those who, it is said, write history’s draft, they may well have changed the course of modern historiography [...] Not since Noam Chomsky’s and Edward Herman’s ‘Manufacturing Consent’ have we had such an incisive and erudite guide through the media’s thicket of agendas and vested interests. Indeed, they have done the job of true journalists: they have set the record straight. For this reason, ‘Guardians of Power’ ought to be required reading in every media college. It is the most important book about journalism I can remember.”

But not everybody agrees. After he was recently contacted following Media Lens coverage of the *Guardian*, its Readers’ Editor Ian Mayes described them as “an electronic lobby group”. Expressing his views about the *Guardian*’s readers, his job and the very idea of democracy, he also said:

“I did not engage with or respond to this lobby, whose members poured several hundred emails into the *Guardian*. I did not read more than a tiny sample of the emails directed at me. I consider organised lobbies in general to be in effect—whatever the rights or wrongs of their position—oppressive to put it mildly.”²

Mayes also happens to be the President of the Organization of News Ombudsmen.

I asked David Edwards and David Cromwell to tell me more about their book and their work at Media Lens.

QUESTION: Why the title (and the subtitle) ‘Guardians of Power: The myth of the liberal media’?

ANSWER: The title is obviously a not very subtle reference to the *Guardian*, but it also refers to the media in general. The sub-title is intended to indicate that the liberal media—the best media, like the *Guardian*, the *Independent*, the *Observer* (as it used to be) and the BBC—play a really crucial role in protecting power. In a totalitarian system it doesn’t matter what people think—if they get out of line, you can hit them on the head, drag them away in the middle of the night. Thanks to centuries of popular struggle, violence of that kind is no longer an option for Western elites. Instead, in our society, control is primarily maintained by controlling what people think.

It’s ironic that we tend to associate this kind of thought control with Soviet-style systems, but in fact it’s far more important in an ostensibly democratic society like ours. If you are to convince people in our society that they are free, you can’t just censor everything as they did in the Soviet Union, because then everyone knows they’re living in a kind of prison. In our society people are bombarded with business and political propaganda

that shapes their assumptions about the world. But they also have access to some honest ideas in comparatively small circulation newspapers like the *Guardian* and the *Independent*, and primarily through one or two honest writers like John Pilger and Robert Fisk. This acts as a kind of vaccine—tiny doses of dissent that inoculate people against the idea that they are subject to thought control. But the reality is that this dissent is flooded and overwhelmed by propaganda that keeps us thinking the right way, keeps us passive and in line. By the way, we don’t intend to suggest that this is the result of any kind of conspiracy. It happens as a kind of side-effect of the media’s pursuit of maximised profits in a state-capitalist society.

QUESTION: What is Media Lens? When did it start? How does it work?

ANSWER: Media Lens is an attempt to subject the mainstream corporate media to analysis uncompromised by personal hopes of employment, payment or status within the media system. We do this by comparing the media’s versions of events with what we believe are honest versions based on rational arguments, verifiable facts and multiple, credible sources. We provide references and links for all of these, so that readers can evaluate for themselves whether we are distorting the facts in some way. We then invite readers to judge for themselves which is more reasonable and accurate, and to send their opinions to both journalists and ourselves. It is vital for us to provide an accurate account of the media version because we are not ‘selling a line’—we are encouraging readers to make a rational judgement on the basis of the facts. This is why we think it is wrong to describe us as a “lobby”, as often happens. The tobacco lobby, for example, is not motivated to provide the public with the facts it needs to make an informed judgement. The goal of the tobacco lobby is to subordinate truth to maximised profits. Their goal is to manipulate the public, to persuade them of their version of the truth. Our goal is to empower the public to establish their *own* version of the truth based on their *own* evaluation of the arguments. The world needs self-confident, critical thinking, empowered human beings, not Media Lens drones.

Our readers can check the media version of events for themselves, so we have every reason to be accurate and honest in describing these. Our readers can also easily check out the credibility and accuracy of the facts and sources we give because, as discussed, we provide references for all of them. As Noam Chomsky has noted many times, dissidents challenging the corporate status quo are automatically subjected to intense and relentless attack regardless of the honesty and accuracy of their views—our arguments have to be extremely accurate and reasonable if they are to stand a chance of being taken seriously.

Also, unlike, say, corporate lobbies, we are not motivated by profit, nor status or power. Our goal is to provide the facts so that people can draw their own conclusions.

QUESTION: Please, give us a couple of concrete examples of your work?

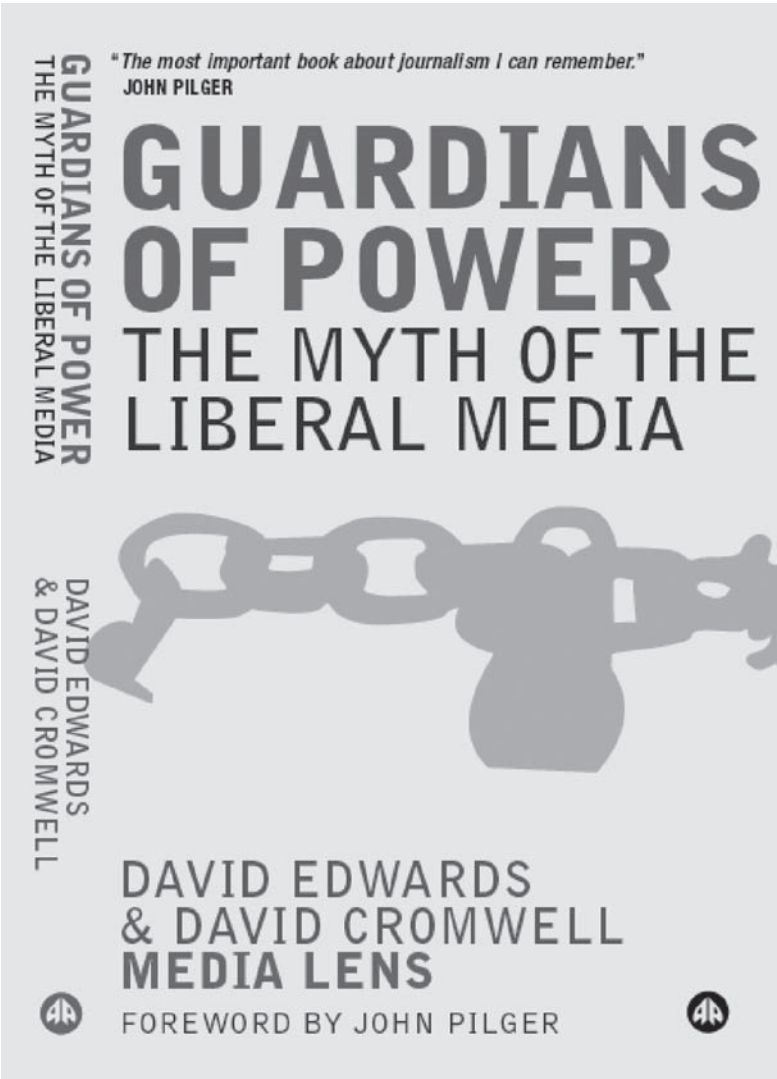
ANSWER:

Example One - Climate Change and Advertising

An editorial in the *Independent* on December 3, 2005 entitled ‘Global warming and the need for all of us to act now to avoid catastrophe’, declared:

“Governments must demand greater energy conservation from industry. And action must be taken to curtail emissions from transport. That means extensive investment in the development of alternative fuels and the taxation of air flights.”

The editors concluded:



“But it is not just governments that have a responsibility. Individuals must act too. By opting to cycle or walk, instead of driving everywhere, we can all do something to reduce emissions. If more of us turned off electrical devices when not in use and recycled our waste properly, our societies would be hugely less energy inefficient... A failure to act now will not be forgiven by future generations.”

As though these words had not appeared, the rest of the paper returned to adverts, consumer advice and financial news (“bet on easyJet to fly higher”). The *Independent*’s holiday supplement, *The Traveller*, urged readers to climb on fossil fuel burning planes and visit Paris, Brussels, Syria, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Aspen, Chamonix, Mallorca, Australia, Dubai, New Zealand, Lapland, Spain, North America, Austria, Germany, the Maldives, and on and on.

Advertising industry sources told us that between January 1st and October 7th, 2005, Independent News and Media PLC—owners of the *Independent* newspapers—received the following revenues from advertisers:

BP Plc: £11,769

(this figure has risen substantially since October 7 as a result of the ‘Beyond Petroleum’ campaign)

Citroen UK Ltd: £418,779

Ford Motor Company Ltd: £247,506

Peugeot Motor Co Plc: £260,920

Renault UK Ltd: £427,097

Toyota (GB) Ltd: £715,050

Vauxhall Motors Ltd: £662,359

Volkswagen UK Ltd: £555,518

BMI British Midland: £60,847

Bmibaby Ltd: £12,810

British Airways Plc: £248,165

Easyjet Airline Co Ltd: £59,905

Monarch Airlines: £15,713

Ryanair Ltd: £28,543
(Email to Media Lens, December 12, 2005)

It is enlightening to compare these figures with the *Independent* editors’ suggestion:
“Individuals must act too. By opting to cycle or walk, instead of driving everywhere, we can all do something to reduce emissions.”

At the same time, the *Independent* is hosting adverts specifically designed to disarm dissent and pacify the public.

The point is that the media are structurally obliged to remain on square one. What has a corporate business like the *Independent* to say about the impact of its own corporate advertising on environmental collapse? What has it to say about the remorseless activities of its business allies working to bend the public mind to their will over decades? What has it to say about their determination to destroy all attempts to subordinate short-term profits to action on climate change? What has it to say about the historical potency of people power in challenging systems of entrenched and irresponsible power of this kind, of which it is itself a part?

Example Two: An Exchange With Newsnight Editor, George Entwistle

In researching a *New Statesman* article, Media Lens co-editor David Edwards interviewed George Entwistle (March 31, 2003), then editor of the BBC’s flagship current affairs programme, Newsnight. Part of the interview involved asking Entwistle if Scott Ritter had appeared on Newsnight in recent months. Ritter, a UN weapons inspector in Iraq from 1991-98, described how Iraq had been ‘fundamentally disarmed’ by 1998 without the threat of war, and how any retained weapons of mass destruction would likely have long since become harmless ‘sludge’. He was almost completely ignored by the mainstream press ahead of the war. In 2003, the *Guardian* and *Observer* mentioned Iraq in a total of 12,356 articles. In these articles, Ritter was mentioned a total of 17 times.

David Edwards: ‘Have you pitted Ritter against government spokespeople like Mike O’Brien and John Reid?’

George Entwistle: ‘I can’t recall when we last had Ritter on.’

DE: ‘Have you had him on this year?’

GE: ‘Not this year, not in 2003, no.’

DE: ‘Why would that be?’

GE: ‘I don’t particularly have an answer for that; we just haven’t.’

DE: ‘Isn’t he an incredibly important, authoritative witness on this?’

GE: ‘I think he’s an interesting witness. I mean we’ve had...’

DE: ‘Well, he was chief UNSCOM arms inspector.’

GE: ‘Absolutely, yeah. We’ve had Ekeus on, and lots of people like that.’

DE: ‘But why not Ritter?’

GE: ‘I don’t have a particular answer to that... I mean, sometimes we phone people and they’re not available; sometimes they are.’

DE: ‘Well I know he’s very keen, he’s forever speaking all over the place. He’s travelled to Iraq and so on...’

GE: ‘There’s no particular... there’s no sort of injunction against him; we just haven’t had him on as far as I’m aware.’

DE: ‘The other claim is...’

GE: ‘David, can I ask a question of you at this stage?’

DE: ‘Yes.’

GE: ‘What’s the thesis?’

DE: ‘What, sorry, on why you haven’t...?’

GE: ‘No, I mean all these questions tend in a particular direction. Do you think that Newsnight is acting as a pro-government organisation?’

DE: ‘My feeling is that you tend to steer away from embarrassing the government [Entwistle laughs] in your selection of interviewees and so on, they tend to be establishment interviewees. I don’t see people like Chomsky, Edward Herman, Howard Zinn, Michael Albert, you know—there’s an enormous amount of dissidents...’

GE: ‘Well we’ve being trying to get Chomsky on lately, and he’s not wanted to come on for reasons I can’t explain. What’s the guy who was the UN aid programme guy...?’

DE: ‘Denis Halliday?’

GE: ‘Yeah, we’ve had him on. I think our Blair special on BBC2 confronted him [Blair] with all sorts of uncomfortable propositions.’

DE: ‘The other thing is that UNSCOM inspectors, CIA reports and so on have said that any retained Iraqi WMD is likely to be “sludge”—that’s the word they use—because, for example, liquid bulk anthrax lasts maybe three years under ideal storage conditions. Again, I haven’t seen that put to people like John Reid and Mike O’Brien.’

GE: ‘Um, I can’t recall whether we have or not. Have you watched every... episode, since when?’

DE: ‘Pretty much. This year, for example. Have you covered that?’

GE: ‘Um, I’ll have to check. I mean, we’ve done endless pieces about the state of the WMD, about the dossier and all that stuff.’

DE: ‘Oh sure, about that, but about the fact that any retained WMD is likely to be non-lethal by now, I mean...’

GE: ‘I’ll, I can... I’ll have to have a look.’

DE: ‘You haven’t covered it have you?’

GE: ‘I honestly, I don’t know; I’d have to check. I genuinely can’t remember everything we’ve covered.’

DE: ‘Sure, but I mean it’s a pretty major point isn’t it?’

GE: ‘It’s an interesting point, but it’s the kind of point that we have been engaging with.’

DE: ‘Well, I’ve never seen it.’

GE: ‘Well, I mean, I’ll endeavour to get back to you and see if I can help.’

Following this conversation, Entwistle wrote to Edwards by email. He provided what he considered powerful evidence that Newsnight had in fact challenged the government case for war on Iraq. He cited this exchange between Newsnight presenter Jeremy Paxman and Tony Blair (Blair On Iraq – A Newsnight Special, BBC2, February 6, 2003):

TONY BLAIR: Well I can assure you I’ve said every time I’m asked about this, they have contained him [Saddam Hussein] up to a point and the fact is the sanctions regime was beginning to crumble, it’s why it’s subsequent in fact to that quote we had a whole series of negotiations about tightening the sanctions regime but the truth is the inspectors were put out of Iraq so -

JEREMY PAXMAN: They were not put out of Iraq, Prime Minister, that is just not true. The weapons inspectors left Iraq after being told by the American government that bombs would be dropped on the country.

(The rest of the transcript followed, March 31, 2003)

We responded to Entwistle:

‘You mention Paxman raising the myth of inspectors being thrown out. You’re right, Paxman did pick him [Blair] up on the idea that inspectors were “put out” of Iraq, but then the exchange on the topic ended like this:

TONY BLAIR: They were withdrawn because they



couldn’t do their job. I mean let’s not be ridiculous about this, there’s no point in the inspectors being in there unless they can do the job they’re put in there to do. And the fact is we know that Iraq throughout that time was concealing its weapons.

JEREMY PAXMAN: Right.

Right! Paxman let Blair get away with this retreat back to a second deception.’

(David Edwards to Entwistle, March 31, 2003)

In fact the remarkable truth is that the 1991-98 inspections ended in almost complete success. As we have discussed, Ritter insists that Iraq was ‘fundamentally disarmed’ by December 1998, with 90-95% of its weapons of mass destruction eliminated. Thus, Entwistle’s chosen example of Paxman powerfully challenging Blair is in fact an excellent example of him failing to make even the most obvious challenge.

QUESTION: How have the liberal media reacted to your work? Any examples?

ANSWER: Reactions have changed over time. Initially, the reaction was disbelief and open contempt. When we challenged the BBC’s John Sweeney on child deaths in Iraq, he wrote:

“I don’t agree with torturing children. Get stuffed.”

(Email to Media Lens Editors, June 24, 2002)

A typical response has been to suggest that we and our readers can’t possibly have read what has been written, or that we can’t have watched what has been broadcast:

“I wonder—from your email—if you actually read the Guardian, or whether you are responding to a suggested form of words on a website?”

(Email from Alan Rusbridger to Media Lens reader, February 7, 2003)

ITN’s head of news gathering, Jonathan Munro, wrote:

“It would help if the correspondents had actually watched the programmes. Most are round-robins and refer to pieces published in newspapers or in other media.”

(Email to Media Lens, February 17, 2003)

Observer editor Roger Alton here once again follows the customer-friendly protocol familiar to all who have engaged with the press:

“What a lot of balls ... do you read the paper old friend? ... “Pre-digested pabulum [sic] from Downing Street...” my arse. Do you read the paper or are you just recycling garbage from Media Lens?

Best

Roger Alton”

(February 14, 2003)

It may be that the media are becoming less complacent about internet-based criticism. *The Guardian* Readers' Editor, Ian Mayes, noted recently:

"Immediately after what everyone involved took as the resolution of the complaint, the editor of the *Guardian* sent an email to about 400 of the people who had emailed the *Guardian* on the subject of the Chomsky interview. He took the opportunity to reject conspiracy theories claiming that senior journalists at the *Guardian* had colluded in targeting Prof. Chomsky with the object of discrediting him. I believe he was right to do that. Nothing emerged in my interviews to support the idea."

(Mayes, 'Open door,' December 12, 2005)

Previously, the media has simply ignored even large numbers of emails. On this occasion, even the editor of the *Guardian* felt compelled to respond to the huge numbers of people who had written in.

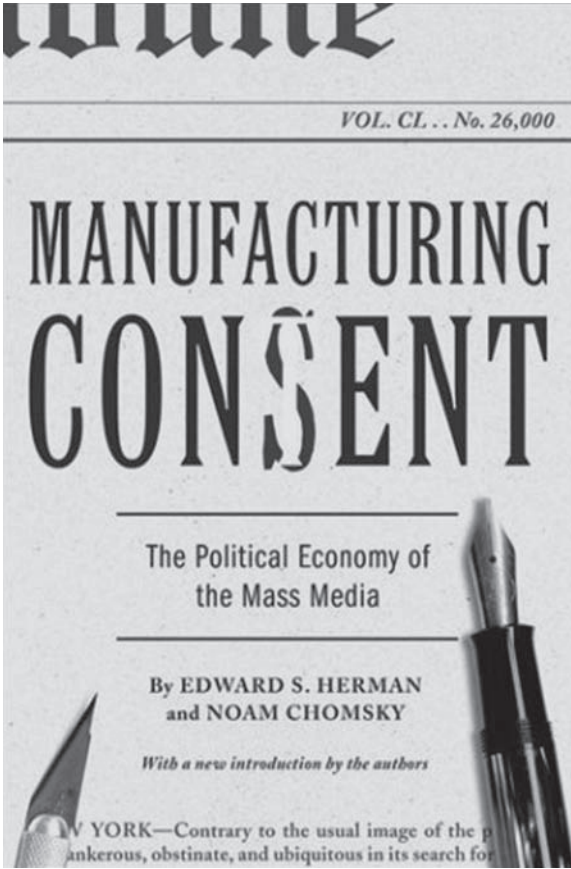
We are also beginning to receive (comparatively) positive comments *from* the media. The BBC's Newsnight editor Peter Barron³ has begun inviting us and our sources (on our suggestion) to appear on the programme, and has even written:

"One of Media Lens' less ingratiating habits is to suggest to their readers that they contact me to complain about things we've done. They're a website whose rather grand aim is to 'correct the distorted vision of the corporate media'.

They prolifically let us know what they think of our coverage, mainly on Iraq, George Bush and the Middle East, from a Chomskyist perspective.

In fact I rather like them. David Cromwell and David Edwards, who run the site, are unfailingly polite, their points are well-argued and sometimes they're plain right.

For example, Newsnight hasn't done enough on the US war on insurgency in Western Iraq. The reason is we don't have a presence there because it's too dangerous and pictures and firm evidence are hard to come by. But that shouldn't be an excuse, and this week we managed to get an interview with a US Marine colonel on the front line to raise some of the points Medialens



and others are concerned about."

QUESTION: Why should someone who already knows s/he can't trust the corporate media read your book?

ANSWER: We have read every one of our Media Alerts over and over again. When we took the nuggets out of the alerts, updated them, added material and mashed it all together in the book, we assumed the result would be very familiar to us. But when we read through the result something quite remarkable happened. The combined impact of all this concentrated, damning material and evidence was to open our eyes to just how obviously corrupt and compromised the corporate

media system is. It actually opened our eyes to what we're dealing with!

This points to an interesting feature of media propaganda. It operates by a kind of mass hypnosis—when you're exposed to it day in day out, it infiltrates the way you see things; it makes even complete absurdity seem serious. The illusion is attenuated somewhat when you read an honest article or two. But when you read a really concentrated blast of powerful evidence, it seems to have a different order of effect on the mind. That's the conclusion we've come to because it was very surprising to be educated by our own book!

To know more, please visit MEDIA LENS

<http://www.medialens.org/>

Notes

- 1 http://www.medialens.org/bookshop/guardians_of_power.php
- 2 To know more, please read an oppressive email by an electronic lobby group's member:
<http://www.thecatsdream.com/blog/2005/12/guardians-readers-editors-strange-idea.htm>
- 3 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/newsnight/4426334.stm>

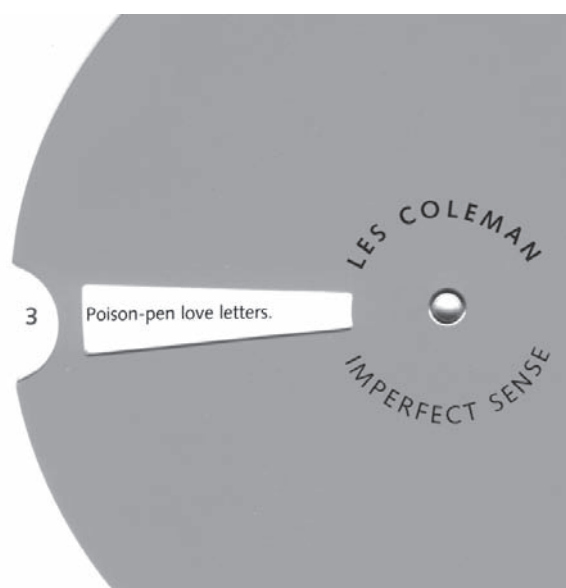
Gabriele Zamparini is an independent filmmaker, writer and journalist living in London. He's the producer and director of the documentaries 'XXI CENTURY' and 'The Peace!'; and author of 'American Voices of Dissent' (Paradigm Publishers). He can be reached at: info@thecatsdream.com <http://TheCatsDream.com>

Comic & Zine Reviews

Mark Pawson



KAREN magazine is an antidote to the current glut of mind-numbingly inane celebrity/gossip/showbiz/soap obsessed magazines cluttering up newsagents' shelves across the land. KAREN steps out of her front door and wanders around her village asking the people she meets, "What are you doing tonight?", "What are you having for tea?" and "Who lives on the Green?". Their answers to these mundane questions are recorded verbatim in the pages of KAREN magazine, accompanied with colour snapshots of the people and places. KAREN has a clean, restrained, minimalist approach to layout, using a single typeface throughout and devoting plenty of space to each article. Included are eight pages of beach hut photos accompanied by brief comments from the people who own or rent them, and the correspondence between a granny in residential care and her granddaughters, where she asks them to make a sign for her door saying "This door sticks. Please knock or push", together with a photo of it in situ. In other contributions, 'Neil' writes up his food/beer diary for a full eight pages before getting bored of it, and there's stuff on home improvements, a small ads section and a comments book. KAREN explores the fascinatingly familiar ground of ordinary, everyday life. My copy will find its place on the bookshelf next to The Caravan Gallery's recent WELCOME TO BRITAIN book and Daniel Meadow's NATTERING IN PARADISE (1988). I'm looking forwards to KAREN magazine issue 2 which will be out by the time you read this.



Les Coleman's IMPERFECT SENSE takes the form of one of those rotating card discs where text appears in a small window as you turn the circle around. These curious cardboard constructions—often used for presenting astrological information, handy hints or cocktail recipes—actually have a proper name; *Volvelles*. Examples of presenting information in this way date back over four hundred years. IMPERFECT SENSE is a beautifully produced dial-a-poem device, containing one-liners like "A slim volume of poverty" and "Her mascara ran away". This too-nice-to-send postcard is an ambitious new format for presenting succinct wordplays, one of Coleman's favourite subjects.



Typocrat press have dedicated themselves to producing english translations of outstanding european graphic novels. Their second publication is the oversized, modestly priced SIX HUNDRED AND SEVENTY-SIX APPARITIONS OF KILLOFFER. It's a neurotic jet-lagged drunken chaotic whirlwind journey through the depths of self-loathing which demands to be read in a single sitting. KILLOFFER arrives back home after a foreign trip and is repulsed by the fetid mass of dirty dishes in his overflowing kitchen sink which greets him. Escaping the confines of his apartment, he hits the street and finds himself accompanied by a steadily growing horde of *homunculi* KILLOFFERS who doggedly follow him from bar to bar causing trouble and getting into fights. Failing to shake them off, they follow him back home and take over his apartment for the sole purpose of satisfying their voracious appetites for alcohol and sexual gratification. Eventually KILLOFFER resorts to extreme measures to get rid of his other selves. SIX HUNDRED AND SEVENTY-SIX APPARITIONS OF KILLOFFER starts with words and images intertwined, but as the story gets more hectic and convoluted the words get pushed off the page completely as the action takes it up entirely. Cover quotes from Charles Burns and Ivan Brunetti attest that SIX HUNDRED AND SEVENTY-SIX APPARITIONS OF KILLOFFER should be an essential purchase for connoisseurs of self-hatred.

SALAMANDER DREAM by HOPE LARSON is a beautifully drawn tale of a young girl growing up. Eight-year-old Hailey lives just on the edge of town where she can run barefoot into the woods to play alone; chasing butterflies, following tracks of deer footprints and sometimes finding her (imaginary?) friend Salamander—a human-proportioned, mask-wearing salamander. They explore the woods, telling each other stories and sharing their dreams. Printed in black and a bright pastel green, many pages in SALAMANDER DREAM are given over

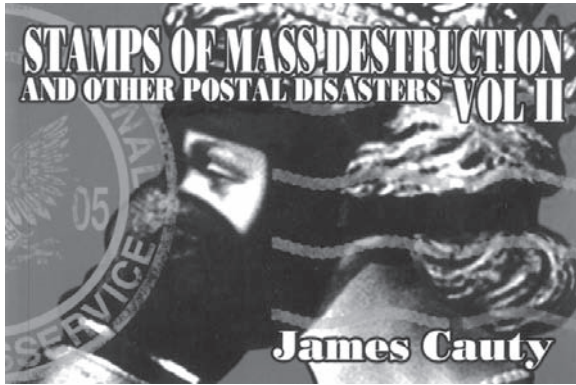


entirely to showing the natural activity of the flora and fauna of the woods and the movements and sounds of the insects and birds that inhabit them, often accompanied with species names. Exploring the woods in this way is just as important a part of the story as the relationship between Hailey and Salamander. Hailey gradually grows up, finds other friends to play with in the woods, encounters Salamander less often. Eventually, as she nears the end of her teenage years and is about to move away to college, she returns to the woods to see Salamander one last time, ensuring that she'll treasure her memories of childhood exploring the non-scary woods for ever.



FILMS IN AMERICA 1929-1969. Working from a second-hand book of the same title, long time zinester LADY LUCY has drawn 41 images for 41 iconic films spanning 41 years. Her drawings are quickly executed, stripped down versions of film stills—maybe they're done in the dark?—which often just show the main characters together with the year and a single-sentence description of the plot. Occasionally they're accompanied by anecdotes describing associations or memories that the film has for the artist. The initial source material is filtered by LADY LUCY's choices of what to include in her drawings, resulting in a sort of through-the-decades classic film quiz book. But don't worry if you can't identify them all, the titles are given at the end.

Jimmy Cauty's 2003 antiwar postage stamp depicting the Queen in a gas mask resulted in legal action from the Royal Mail, and appeared on the front cover of *The Times*. As an ex-member of the KLF and K Foundation it's no surprise that Cauty thrives on press coverage and



controversy. He enjoyed the kerfuffle caused by his gas mask stamps so much that he's gone into creative overdrive and produced fifty more stamp sheets and accompanying first day covers with all the requisite rubberstamps, logos and cancellation marks. They're all included in **STAMPS OF MASS DESTRUCTION AND OTHER POSTAL DISASTERS VOL 2**. The predominant topics explored on the stamps are environmental and antiwar themes, continuing a long tradition of subversive postage stamps by artists—including William Farley's 1971 anti-Vietnam War protest stamps which were keenly collected by the US Secret Service. The book is accompanied with a greatest hits sheet of perforated and gummed stamps where his best designs are featured: a gigantic crucifix being used as a mobile phone mast; Big Ben with a 9-11 style explosion ripping through the clock tower; and a clever follow-up to the gas mask stamp with the bust of a Queen-like figure wearing a haz-mat suit, gas mask and crown! Some themes are explored repeatedly to no great advantage, which Cauty seems to acknowledge with his 'Running Out of Ideas for Stamps Day' design.



WE ARE THE TARGET PEOPLE and **THEY QUICKLY RAN FROM THE ENORMOUS FINGER** are the most recent titles in illustrator Andy Smith's series of hand silkscreened books. They're a set format of twelve page, 14 x 14 cm booklets, silkscreened in two or three colours in editions of 300, which sell for a modest £3. Basically they're produced from a single A3 sheet of paper printed both sides then stapled and trimmed. It's a fun, winning formula which reminds me of those 1970's greetings cards with images on all four 'pages' rather than just the front of the card. **THEY QUICKLY RAN FROM THE ENORMOUS FINGER** is a one-line visual gag. An enormous finger stretches across the entire space of the first eight pages, only revealing itself to be a finger when you come to the fingernail and the very sensibly fleeing crowd of Lilliputian figures. Balancing illustration, handwritten and typeset text and printing methods perfectly, Andy Smith's books successfully combine the qualities of an artist's book, greetings card and mini-comic.

Can you get an ASBO for drawing? Can you get an ASBO for publishing a book? I don't know but it seems like Jody Barton is trying to find out with **EMBRYO BOY**. **EMBRYO BOY** is evicted prematurely from his original home and tries unsuccessfully to find a suitable one with/inside a surrogate mother. Homeless, the tiny, cigarette smoking **EMBRYO BOY** tries to make his way in the world and optimistically explores several career paths including strongman, cocktail waiter and grave digger. But being only a couple of inches



tall, life's not easy for this minuscule malcontent. As he says, "Popping out for cigarettes is not easy when you live in a womb." Guaranteed/intended to offend just about everyone who sees a copy, **EMBRYO BOY** is printed in duotones of black and a sludgy pinky-brown colour which looks like it's a mixture of all the leftover bits of ink the printers had lying around.



As someone who has bought flowers about three times in the last fifteen years, who has never been to east London's famous Columbia Road Flower market, which is only a few minutes from where I live, and who feels contemptuous each time I cycle past a local 'Floristry school', I'm surprised to find myself writing about a book called **THE FLOWER SHOP**. The reason I bought a copy is that it's by Leonard Koren, whose 13 **BOOKS** I've previously reviewed. My collection of Koren's books has grown recently with the addition of abe/ebay-ed copies of 17 **BEAUTIFUL MEN TAKING A SHOWER** (1975), **WET MAGAZINE** (1979-81), **NEW FASHION JAPAN** (1984) and **HOW TO TAKE A JAPANESE BATH** (1992). **THE FLOWER SHOP**, subtitled 'Charm, grace, beauty, tenderness in a commercial context', is an unobtrusive study of the avant-garde Blumenkraft—"Possibly the most beautiful flower shop in the world". Through 110 pages Koren follows the shop from Conception (when owner Christine decides to set up her own shop) to its Birth (choice of location, architect, the design of displays and lighting), Life (the roles and personalities of the staff, presentation and packaging of flowers, customer relations) and sort

of Death (the careful and caring preparation of flowers for funerals). The layout of the book—with each page taken up with a single, functional photograph taken by the author—reflects the aesthetics of the shop; where attention to detail and keeping things fresh and stimulating extends as far as having the whole shop completely rearranged twice a week. I wouldn't be surprised if **THE FLOWER SHOP** becomes a cult bestseller in business bookshops.



Indie comix stalwart James Kochalka's new series is a superhero title—has he finally sold out and gone all commercial and bigtime? Well, with a title like **SUPER F*CKERS** (that's how it appears on the cover) and the exhortation, "Hey, Kids! Take your dicks out of the Playstation 3 for one god damn minute and read some fucking comics", I think we can safely assume not. The **SUPER F*CKERS** are a mismatched bunch of foul-mouthed, electrotrash club kids and ineffectual science geeks stuck together in a Big Brother style club house. When they should really be figuring out how to rescue their team mates from, 'uh, like, some other dimension', these misfits are preoccupied with bickering, ripping the piss out of each others' lame superpowers, finessing their bad attitudes and getting stoned out of their tiny minds on improvised drugs. All the while a queue of hopeful wannabe superheroes line up outside, desperate to join the team. (Maybe there's a place for **EMBRYO BOY** with the **SUPER F*CKERS**?) Kochalka's artwork is in ultra bright acid colours, with some photo backgrounds and even a strip shot with a plasticine model of one character. V. stupid, v. juvenile and v. reprehensible, **SUPER F*CKERS** is v. enjoyable. Issue #2 is out already and #3 is on the way—at last an indie comix series that comes out with something approaching regularity, so you don't have to scratch your head trying to remember what happened in the previous issue that came out over a year ago.

<http://www.mpawson.demon.co.uk/>

Contacts

KAREN magazine. £5.00. ICA bookshop, the Mall, London. www.karenmagazine.com

IMPERFECT SENSE. £5.00. Available from bookartbookshop, 17 Pitfield Street, London, N1 6HB.

SIX HUNDRED AND SEVENTY-SIX APPARITIONS OF KILLOFFER. £16.95. www.typocrat.com Available from MAGMA, Manchester & London.

SALAMANDER DREAM. \$15.00. From good comic shops, if you can find one. www.adhousebooks.com www.hopelarson.com

FILMS IN AMERICA 1929-1969. Available from Cube Cinema, 4 Princess Row, Bristol, BS2 8NQ. www.perplexed.cubecinema.com

STAMPS OF MASS DESTRUCTION AND OTHER POSTAL DISASTERS VOL 2. £8.99. Available from the Aquarium, 10 Woburn Walk, London, WC1H 0JL. www.CNPOnline.com

WE ARE THE TARGET PEOPLE and **THEY QUICKLY RAN FROM THE ENORMOUS FINGER**, £3.00 each, from Playlounge, Gosh and Best (all in London) www.asmithillustration.com

EMBRYO BOY. £4.00. www.jodybarton.co.uk

THE FLOWER SHOP. \$19.95. leonardkoren.com. Blumenkraft, Schliefmühlgasse 4, 1040 Vienna.

SUPER F*CKERS. \$7.00. www.topshelfcomix.com

Constructing Neoliberal Glasgow: The Privatisation Of Space

Friend of Zanetti

Of all the arts, architecture is the closest constitutively to the economic, with which, in the form of commissions and land values, it has a virtually unmediated relationship. It will therefore not be surprising to find the extraordinary flowering of the new postmodern architecture is grounded in the patronage of multinational business, whose expansion and development is strictly contemporaneous with it.

Frederic Jameson¹

The current amazement that the things we are experiencing are ‘still’ possible ... is not the beginning of knowledge – unless it is the knowledge that the view of history which gives rise to it is untenable.

Walter Benjamin²

Introduction

This article attempts to describe the emergence and prosecution of neoliberalism in Glasgow as it impacts on the urban realm. Central to this is a critical attempt to define some of the key components of neoliberalism in the city. Drawing on urban and social theory to outline some of the contours of the debate, I suggest Glasgow conforms to a model of urban land revaluation whereby discourses of ‘blight’ and ‘obsolescence’ are mobilised to justify wholesale redevelopment and capitalist accumulation strategies based primarily on rent extraction. Finally, I employ a recent critical model of analysis for flagship urban development projects throughout Europe to provide the framework for a closer look at neoliberalism in Glasgow, concluding by questioning the possible extension of urban strategy in the city.

The Neoliberal City

We need to influence business to stimulate our economy.

River Clyde project director of Scottish Enterprise (*The Scotsman*, October 27, 2005)³

The new religion of neoliberalism combines a commitment to the extension of markets and logic of competitiveness with a profound antipathy to all kinds of Keynesian or collectivist strategies.

Peck and Tickell⁴

Peck and Tickell see neoliberalism articulated in the city through a combination of market ideologies and forces. For them, neoliberalism embodies a growth-first ideology, backed by a pervasive naturalisation of market discipline. Neoliberalism operates through and alongside active state partners, scanning the horizon for investment opportunities in an increasingly competitive urban environment. Neoliberalism locks-in public sector austerity and growth-oriented investment. A symbolic language of innovation—“dynamic”, “pioneering”, “daring”, “entrepreneurial”—obfuscates a familiar cocktail of state subsidy, place promotion and local boosterism (talking up or promoting a locale), and suppresses the opportunity for genuinely local development. Neoliberal policy in the urban framework is characterised by uneven development, creating massive social polarisations in and between cities as highly mobile capital seeks profit unhindered by a regulatory framework. So we should be aware that the new urban developments in Glasgow do not take place in a vacuum and cannot escape history.

Space as Privileged Instrument of Neoliberalism

In business, few things say as much about you as your address: and few addresses in the world say as much

about your business as Pacific Quay. As the city’s most ambitious development of the last decade of the 20th century, it is where Glasgow will welcome the world into the new millennium.

Pacific Quay business brochure, 1988⁵

Neoliberalism represents a strategy of political-economic restructuring that uses space as its “privileged instrument.”⁶ Glasgow’s large-scale urban development projects (UDPs), such as those at Pacific Quay, Glasgow Harbour, Tradeston, SECC and Clyde Gateway, reflect “...the material expression of a developmental logic that views mega-projects and place-marketing as a means for generating future growth and for waging a competitive struggle to attract investment capital.”⁷ Current attempts to symbolically position Glasgow in the neoliberal order mean a strict adherence to the rules of the game, “re-imagining and recreating urban space”⁸ primarily for the investor, the developer, the business person or cash-laden tourist. The uneven social trends of this ‘competitive’ urban environment have been consistently mapped out elsewhere, as other cities have sought to: “Align local dynamics with the imagined, assumed, or real requirements of a deregulated international economic system.”⁹ A consequence of this activity has been to render a certain degree of uniformity to all cities.

There is already strong developer interest in the Clyde, but intervention is needed in order to create the conditions for success, including investment in transport, river engineering and the public realm.

Clyde Waterfront Working Group, June 2002

Neoliberalism and Geo-bribes

For the geographer Neil Smith, the neoliberal imperatives of private profit and place-marketing replace, “The demand for an urban life based upon grassroots participation and the satisfaction of social needs.” A cogent example from New York in 1998 illustrates his thesis. Responding to threats that the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) might relocate to New Jersey, Mayor Giuliani announced a \$900 million taxpayer subsidy to keep the stock exchange in the city. City and state officials referred to the deal as a “partnership”: Smith termed it a “geo-bribe”. Smith contends that there was never any pretence that financial need was an issue, the question was one of whether the NYSE would stay in New York; or leave, taking its capital with it, potentially damaging the symbolic reputation and place-bound value of New York as an international finance centre.

For Smith this is a paradigmatic example of the public-private “partnership”: “Rather than modulating the track taken by private investment, the local state simply fitted into the grooves already established by market logics, becoming, in effect, a junior if highly active partner in global capital.”¹⁰ Guiliani’s treatment of the poorer sector of the New York population three years prior revealed the ugly flip-side of state largesse. Guiliani announced major service and budget cuts, admitting at the time, and making transparent his real purpose, that he hoped to encourage the most dependent on social services (the city’s poorest people) to move out of the city: “This would be a good thing” for the city, he said. “That’s not an unspoken part of our strategy”, he added, “that is our strategy.”¹¹ (My italics.)

Gentrification

For Smith the role of gentrification is paramount to this strategy throughout the global economy, writ large as a central part of urban strategy and productive capital investment; “an unassailable



capital accumulation strategy for competing urban economies.”¹² Gentrification underpins large scale UDPs as urban strategy weaves a phalanx of global finance players together, including real-estate developers, local merchants, property agents and brand name retailers, all lubricated by state subsidy. Official rhetoric presumes beneficent social outcomes will be derived from “trickle-down” benefits borne from development. However, this doesn’t hold true and never has “... in a context characterised by an absence of regulatory standards or income redistribution systems at the national or EU level.”¹³

Gentrification is now misleadingly called “urban regeneration” in a deliberate attempt to obscure its true meaning: “Precisely because the language of gentrification tells the truth about the class shift involved in regeneration of the city, it has become a dirty word to developers, politicians and financiers.”¹⁴ This deception has helped increase immiseration for low-income groups, and benefited social elites: “The victory of this language in anaesthetising our critical understanding of gentrification in Europe represents a considerable ideological victory for neo-liberal visions of the city.”¹⁵

The Return To The River

The effects of gentrification on marginalised groups can be seen in prime city centre locations like the “new” Gorbals where apartments and duplexes kick off at £125,000. Meanwhile, the adjacent riverside high-rise blocks of “old” Gorbals at Stirlingfauld and Norfolk Court, perfectly located for access to the amenities of the city centre, await demolition after years of disinvestment. Tenants anticipate news of their removal anxiously: “The area has million pound potential for redevelopment [...] So how long will I, and my neighbours, be allowed to live in Norfolk Court?”¹⁶ Another local critic was clear-minded in his appraisal of developer strategy: “Make no mistake. This is a land grab.”¹⁷

This “land grab” should be seen in the context of Glasgow City Council attempting to improve their (Council) tax base — an explicit goal of all UDPs “via socio-spatial and economic reorganization of metropolitan space.”¹⁸ After criticism regarding the price of apartments in the Glasgow Harbour development, former Council leader and current river project leader, Charles Gordon, said: “I don’t care if they are yuppies or middle class professionals they will be most welcome in this city.”¹⁹ This cordial invite, however, doesn’t extend to the urban poor in any of the regeneration literature. The “return to the river” rhetoric employed by Council leaders masks a symptomatic silence which obscures the brutal class politics involved in the re-ordering of urban space.

The Rent Gap

For Smith, the physical deterioration and economic depression of the inner city are “a strictly logical, ‘rational’, outcome of the operation of land and housing markets.”²⁰ Deterioration and abandonment are the result of identifiable private and public investment decisions, and as such are far from neutral. Structured disinvestment is a normalised procedure designed to produce economically “rational” outcomes, regardless of social impacts. Buildings, like those in the Gorbals, are not always abandoned or left to deteriorate because they cannot be used meaningfully, but often *because they cannot be used profitably*.

Central to Smith’s analysis of gentrification is the rent gap theory: “The rent gap is the disparity between the potential ground rent level, and the actual ground rent capitalised under the present use.”²¹ According to Smith, the ideal investment opportunity for developers and landlords arises when the rent gap is sufficiently wide: “that developers can purchase structures cheaply [...] and can then sell the product for a sale price that leaves a satisfactory return to the developer.”²² Low prices in land and rents are central to a developer’s ambitions as is a renaissance in land values in adjacent areas, as the rent gap will then be sufficiently wide to return a large profit.

As gentrifying developments along the river at Oatlands, Crown Street, Laurieston and Tradeston gather pace, the rent gap at Gorbals is at an optimum level and demolition seems assured. This has not gone unnoticed by locals who have little power to shape development strategy but hope to remain by the river: “I just hope they ensure that the new homes they build are homes at reasonable rent and not like the expensive homes for sale in Crown Street.”²³ For developers with ambitions to gentrify, the central location and riverside frontage of Govan make it an obvious attraction. The conditions are ripe: “local people have for long complained that the area has been starved of investment as is evident from the large areas of derelict land that scar the landscape.”²⁴ The developments at Pacific Quay and the Glasgow Harbour development just across the river create potent rent gaps with enormous potential for anchoring gentrification strategies. Locals already desperately short of affordable housing claim a focus on commercial development “is eating up scarce housing land and killing the community.”²⁵

Meanwhile, 2,000 tenants in the Fountainwell high-rises at Sighthill await demolition in deteriorating homes without capital investment since 2003. While they consider their fate they have to listen to place-marketing cheerleaders offering Sighthill’s environment up for sale to provide temporary quarters for athletes as part of the city’s Commonwealth Games bid. The houses would then be put up for sale, rather than offered back to the community at affordable rents. The rent gap between current land values and post demolition new build on the back of the Games is likely to be considerable.²⁶

‘Blight’ and ‘Obsolescence’: Stigmatising Space

Rachel Weber (Associate Professor, Urban Planning and Policy Program, University of Illinois at Chicago) argues that state practices have increasingly mobilised discourses of blight and obsolescence against buildings and areas seen as appropriate for redevelopment—the Gorbals and Govan are prime examples of this. She goes on to argue that these discourses have become the ideal neoliberal alibi for Schumpeter’s notion of “creative destruction”, whereby “capital’s restless search for profits requires constant renewal through gale-like forces that simultaneously make way for the new and devalue the old.”²⁷

In contrast to other commodities the built environment exhibits remarkable durability. This presents a problem for the circulation of capital as it becomes locked into steel beams and concrete. A building is stuck with a long economic turnover time and the momentous force of creative destruction falters. To counter this problem the invocation of blight, with its

quasi-scientific allusions to unhygienic sanitary conditions, has been continually invoked by planners and developers to justify massive urban renewal schemes in post-World War II US and Britain on the basis of public health and social care measures.²⁸

Locating blight in the urban framework is one method in which wheels can be set in motion to destroy fixed property and rebuild anew. Weber quotes Friedman (1968), who fought the legal and scientific basis of blight: “Finding blight merely means defining a neighbourhood that cannot effectively fight back, but which is either an eyesore or is well-located for some particular construction project that important interests wish to build.”²⁹ One million people, mostly low-income, were *evicted* from US inner cities between 1949 and 1965 in the name of eliminating and containing this blight. Notwithstanding the shock of these momentous upheavals, the evictions and massive state-planned renewal projects followed, at least rhetorically, paternalistic paths. This is rarely deemed necessary now.

In the era of neoliberalism the old notion of obsolescence has been added to that of blight. Obsolescence differs from blight in that it is not generally associated with health and safety issues, but primarily with concern for loss of potential profitability. All that is required to justify regeneration is the developer’s ability to demonstrate an objective loss of exchange value in a building or locale. Weber argues that obsolescence presents itself as a technical managerial tool emphasising the economic imperatives whilst appearing “... morally and racially neutral, as if the social has been removed from an entirely technical matter.”³⁰ Little need then to feign municipal concern for health and safety. The argument is more often purely economic, citing concern with place rather than people.

These discourses have proved compelling in the traditionally industrial city of Glasgow, where a series of large scale urban development projects, often built on formerly industrial land, and characterised as blighted and obsolete by developers, are reformulating the urban space along the Clyde Corridor.

Large Scale Urban Developments – The Model

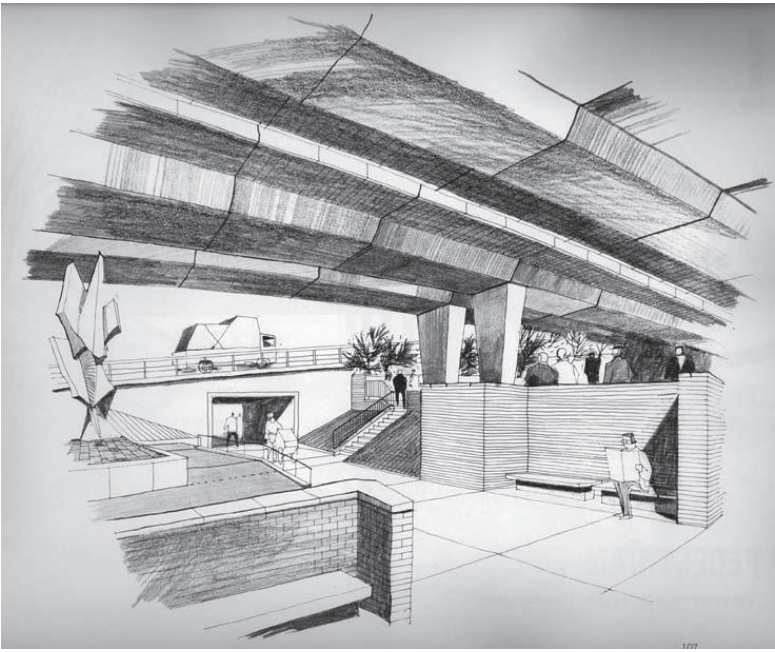
Erik Swyngedouw (Professor of Geography and the Environment, Oxford University) *et al*, recently conducted in-depth research on 13 large-scale Urban Development Projects (UDPs) throughout Europe, namely Berlin, Copenhagen, Dublin, Athens, Rotterdam, London, Lisbon, Vienna, Bilbao, Birmingham, Brussels, Naples and Lille. The researchers found, in contrast to a mythos of daring entrepreneurial activity, that the UDPs are almost without exception state-led and very often state-financed. Despite the rhetoric that accompanies these projects, they are marred by processes of social exclusion and marginalisation. Overall, the common theme in all UDPs is that their success ultimately depends on rent extraction from the built environment.

Four of the main points of confluence emerging across the 13 UDP examples are:

1. ‘Exceptionality’ measures: large-scale UDPs have increasingly been used as a vehicle to establish exceptionality measures in planning and policy procedures.

The £500 million, five-mile long, six lane M74 extension was recently consented despite the chief reporter of an independent public enquiry recommending against its authorisation. Business leaders considered the road to be a vital component in wider regeneration plans.

Key catalyst agencies for the road had argued that it would “support the place competitiveness” of the west of Scotland and help “some of the poorest areas in Scotland” through “a process of renewal, integrated with other regeneration activity”. In particular, they argued, the M74 should lead to the “reduction of [...] vacant, derelict and contaminated land”, an “increase in land and property values to help address market



failure constraints”, and “improved viability of future property development, through making development of key sites more attractive to the private sector...” In addition they argued the project would “promote tourism” and the “international image of the Glasgow and Clyde Valley area”.³¹

Jam74 (a coalition of community, environmental, and sustainable transport groups) had objected to the publicly subsidised road’s construction on the grounds that it would be incompatible with Scottish Executive policy objectives on climate change, traffic stabilisation, urban regeneration, social inclusion, and commitments to environmental justice overall. Jam74 also argued that PPP or PFI financing would likely come into play, potentially increasing the cost to £1 billion.³²

The chief reporter agreed. His summary concluded: “... the public benefits of the proposal would be insufficient to outweigh the considerable disadvantages that can be expected”, the road “would cause community severance; would be of little use to the local population who have low levels of car ownership; and would have an adverse effect on the environment of the local communities without providing local benefits”. “[T]he conclusion is that this proposal should not be authorised, and that the compulsory purchase order should not be confirmed.”³³

Despite this highly critical summary ministers gave the road the go-ahead. The Scottish Executive’s head of roads maintained, in face of the enquiry’s evidence, that it had a number of “clear advantages”, including “social inclusion benefits” and “significant wider economic benefits [...] which have not been given sufficient weight in the [enquiry’s] conclusions.”³⁴ Arguments in favour of the road strongly emphasised the rhetoric of blight and obsolescence; how “vacant”, “derelict”, “contaminated” land would be revalued; and pointed to the role of the road in increasing land and property values. The full range of exceptionality measures were employed, including: “the freezing of conventional planning tools, bypassing statutory regulations and institutional bodies, the creation of project agencies with special or exceptional powers of intervention and decision-making, and/or a change in national regulations.”³⁵

Jam74 had always argued the planning process was inherently flawed. The developer, the planning authority and the planning enquiry process were all led by the Scottish Executive, leading to a pronounced democratic deficit. Their fears were well-founded, as reflected in First Minister Jack McConnell’s decision to ignore the enquiry’s findings. The narrative of growth-oriented regeneration, supported by discourses of blight and obsolescence requiring regeneration strategies, was central as justification for the overthrowing of the report’s decision. Undeterred, Jam74 will now fight a £10,000 legal case in an attempt to rectify Ministers’ flagrantly undemocratic decision.

2. Local democratic participation mechanisms are not respected or are applied in a very ‘formalist’ way, resulting in a new choreography of elite power.

Three years ago, in tandem with government

housing policy and as part of the wider regeneration effort, Glasgow City Council undertook the policy of stock transfer to Glasgow Housing Association Ltd (GHA Ltd) of all 81,000 Council homes. The full weight of blight and obsolescence discourses were mobilised to justify what was effectively a privatisation of public-owned housing.

An article of the period, ‘Misery Key to Housing’s Future’, encapsulates the mood. Sighthill tenants looked out on a “world of blight and decay” and a “landscape of graffiti and windblown rubbish”, from which there is “no prospect of escape”. The day before, however, a ballot form dropped through their letter box with (according to *The Guardian*) “the pledge of a refurbished home in a transformed neighbourhood — if only they would tick the box marked ‘Yes’.”³⁶ It was on the basis of discourses like these that regeneration proposals were accepted.

The transfer was excitedly described as: “the largest public sector modernisation project in Europe.”³⁷ A central argument was that “tenant participation” and “community empowerment”³⁸ would be fundamental to the move: “It will be the people of Glasgow who are the architects of this proposal. Their voice will be heard during every part of this development, their hopes and aspirations accommodated and their fears and worries answered. This is for the people. This is by the people.”³⁹

GHA Ltd is made up of 64 tenant-led Local Housing Organisations, designed to become individual, fully fledged Housing Associations through a process known as second-stage transfer: “Choices will be available to tenants in exercising greater devolved management and opportunities for community ownership. In terms of devolved management, tenants will move to a local management arrangement *immediately* after city-wide transfer.”⁴⁰ (My emphasis.) Nearly three years on, second-stage transfer has yet to begin, with no sign of immediate development. Meanwhile, the small amount of tenants who do make it onto Housing Association boards “...are bound by company law and, even if elected, will not be able to represent the tenants who elected them”. As board members, they are duty bound to work for the “interest of the organisation.”⁴¹ Housing once held universally and in commonwealth is now private and unaccountable.

These developments were predictable. Neoliberal models for urban regeneration show, “a significant deficit with respect to accountability, representation, and the presence of formal rules of inclusion or participation”⁴², and “Post privatisation, the priorities will be based around bottom-line accounting and not the wider social needs of the community.” (*Glaspaper: Glasgow Letters on Architecture and Space*) Concurrently, an initial five-year rent guarantee is under threat, and the pattern of post-transfer cities in England shows rent increases of up to 56.65% between 1997-2004 (DCH). Moreover, tenants in 30,000 GHA properties, denied of capital investment since 2003, await their homes’ demolition and removal to peripheral estates while a sufficient rent-gap opens up to justify profitable investment.

The discourse of blight and obsolescence played a significant role in clinching the privatisation measures: “The local state’s dependence on its own property base and its willingness to subject that base to market rule accounts for the renewed zeal with which it stigmatises space”, “Neoliberal development policies amount to little more than property speculation and public giveaways to guide the space and pace of the speculative activity”.⁴³

In “the biggest regeneration programme in the whole of Europe”, *our* public assets were deliberately run-down and undemocratically bargained off (through a £1 billion debt write-off and continued state subsidy) as part of a continuing shift from public to private lubricated with state finance. Tenant groups in Sighthill and elsewhere continue to fight for a decent deal as the transition takes place.

3. UDPs are poorly integrated at best into the wider urban process and planning system.

The 28 hectare Pacific Quay site hosts a digital media campus and business park with housing, hotel and retail facilities alongside the landmark Glasgow Science Centre. The developers trump its location at the “heart of Glasgow” with views down the river “to die for”; “Pacific Quay’s central location ... brings all the choice of a modern, cosmopolitan city within reach.”⁴⁴

The Pacific Quay site’s claim to social integration is meagre, beyond the usual Thatcherite “trickle-down” nonsense, and seems to rest primarily on Festival Park, a leftover from the 1988 Glasgow Garden Festival, “where they literally airbrushed out from the publicity material the communities behind the site itself.”⁴⁵ The park will at one and the same time provide an amenity for white-collar workers, “the perfect spot for lunchtime jogs, a stroll around the park or an alfresco lunch”⁴⁶, and the working-class residents of nearby Govan and Kinning Park. It’s revealing that this notion has been on the table since 1998, yet in a clear indication of the marshalling of ‘public realm’ space, no entrances to the park exist on the Govan side at Govan Road. The gates are situated for entry from the riverside where Pacific Quay, and its phalanx of professional and managerial workers, reside.

This small indicator of exclusion points to a much broader exclusionary process behind the gleaming frontage of the Pacific Quay. According to the *Evening Times*: “Streets of tenement housing have been razed to the ground and little but unemployment, crime and drugs have thrived since industrial decline hit. Shops lie empty, schools have closed and large tracts of waste ground blight the area.”⁴⁷ This hyperbolic description (reflecting the tendency towards narratives of blight and obsolescence characteristic of right-wing tabloids) is not without grounding in reality.

Community activists believe that local people are being left behind and shut out from any benefits from regeneration: “Govan is supposed to be prospering from high-profile developments with the regeneration of the waterfront. But the population has fallen by more than 20% in the last 10 years alone and 51% of adults in the area are out of work. This is more than double the Glasgow average [...] Instead of repopulating the area with affordable housing, Glasgow City Council and Govan Initiative Ltd have secured considerable amounts of European development cash to build industrial units and offices ...”⁴⁸

Govan has been designated as a ‘Core Economic Development Area’ by planning authorities, and several residential areas razed to make room for industrial units. This strategy has created a vast industrial estate, which is transforming Govan into a poverty-stricken ghetto. Activists point to a chronic lack of decent housing in the area, and the potential for utilising Govan’s central, riverside location for community-led rather than business-led regeneration. Meanwhile, public subsidy for the highly contested £20.3 million Finnieston Bridge across the Clyde was confirmed to ensure the BBC’s conditions were met for moving to the Pacific Quay.

What’s remarkable about Pacific Quay is not that it is breaking promises on social integration, but that it never bothered to make them in the first place. It was always a fantasy that a science and media cluster development would create jobs for the de-skilled, benefit-dependent, ageing population of Govan. The Pacific Quay site is designed as a prime tourist site, a media quarter and high-class business centre. The best the marginalised people of Govan can expect under current proposals is a fight over work in low-paid industrial units, which divide and fragment the landscape.

However, local groups like The GalGael Trust⁴⁹ and Govan Workspace⁵⁰ among others, continue to challenge this state of affairs. David Robertson and Pat Cassidy summarise the conflict: “The city’s interest is simple: Govan is strategically placed for industrial and warehouse development and has an important riverside frontage. The community’s case is more complex: Govan is a living community of people; the more industrial development encroaches on that space, the less sustainable becomes that community.”⁵¹

4. Most UDPs accentuate socio-economic polarization through the working of real-estate markets [...] and the restructuring of the labour market.

The significance and scale of the £500 million riverside Glasgow Harbour site — “an integrated mix of high-quality commercial, residential, retail, leisure and public space” — shouldn’t be doubted: “Glasgow Harbour is one of the largest waterfront regeneration projects within the UK”. According to the website, the recipe is simple; the creation of “The ultimate modern urban community”, in an “entirely new district within the west end of Glasgow.”⁵² Apartment’s start at £220,000 and go up to £495,000.⁵³

Despite the racy rhetoric, there are those who question what type of urban community Glasgow Harbour is becoming: “We see what is happening in our area in the name of ‘development’ as being an anti-poverty issue.”⁵⁴ There are deep concerns about exclusionary, rocketing house prices in the area. Prices in the Harbour development will ensure it remains a “wealthy ghetto”⁵⁵, while its presence has stimulated gentrification nearby. In a process akin to the Highland clearances, “People are usually either forced to move away from their families or move into private rented accommodation in desperation. The days when people were forced into the arms of a private landlord are back with a vengeance.”⁵⁶

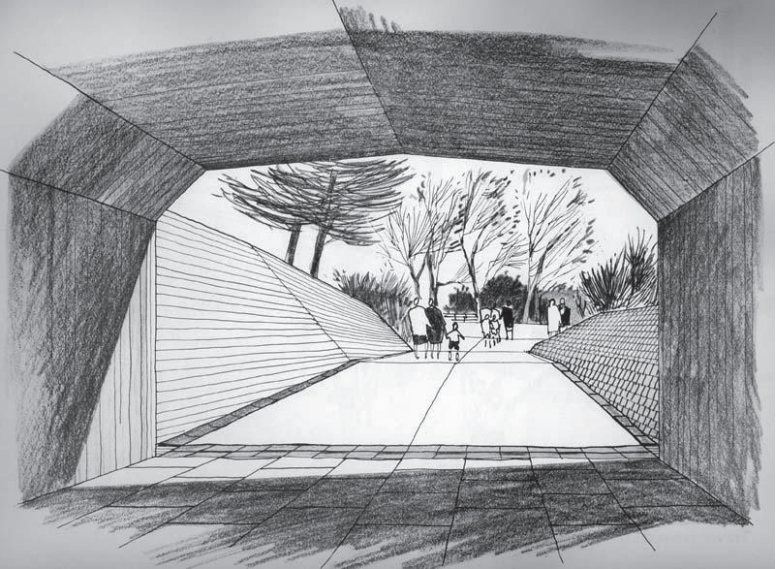
There is also evidence of two-tiered service provision and a form of apartheid consumerism: “Shops for the ‘poor’ and shops for the ‘rich’ are springing up side by side.”⁵⁷ The poor have 99p shops and charity shops while the wealthy have shops “selling Spanish holiday homes.”⁵⁸ Meanwhile Council Tax continues to rise, increasing the already potent benefit trap whereby people cannot afford to come off benefits due to wage constraints and the cost of living.

The shift from a productivist- to a consumer-led economy, epitomised in the shift in the Glasgow Harbour area from industrial use to property-led regeneration, is marked strongly by a widening income and opportunity gap between professional and managerial workers and those at the lower end who lack the skills for the new economy. The Glasgow Harbour Employment Team, with European and Government funding support, was set up to provide recruitment training and support to the Glasgow Harbour project and is responsible for bridging this gap and providing the social inclusion agenda for the development. Two hundred and seventy unemployed workers have been employed through workfare in this way.

The reality of changing labour market structures, however, means low-paid jobs in ‘elementary occupations’—construction, manufacturing and low-end service jobs. Construction, for instance, is characterised by highly contingent, deregulated structures, and marked by very low levels of unionisation and training: “Given current government policies and practices, are people going to be forced off benefits to work on minimum wage in shops we can’t afford to buy anything in? [...] Are we going to be servicing the rich and their lifestyle?”⁵⁹

The welfare to work agenda comes with “a strong element of compulsion and a retreat from the principle of universal rights to benefits and a decent income.”⁶⁰ In very few cases do these courses provide meaningful training and opportunity: “These programmes have limited value in providing skills training as their main rationale is to deliver the unemployed into work.”⁶¹ Service sector work, and subsidised labour programmes to produce amenities for the rich do not betoken a serious effort to provide meaningful, non-alienated work for the low-income and unemployed groups of the west end of Glasgow.

On the evidence of this brief and partial survey, urban developments in Glasgow mirror those of other European cities with exclusionary decision-making processes, speculation of land for urban rent, exceptionality measures in planning procedure, and social fragmentation with vast differentials in income, quality of life, and life expectancy. If Glasgow’s development model continues on its present course, what might we expect from the future?



A Revanchist City

Finally, the neoliberal city, as a site of social polarisation and resistance, develops a corpus of disciplinary procedures including surveillance, welfare cutbacks, and punitive institutions to deal with the fall-out from its policies.⁶²

In reference to the 1870 Paris Commune, Neil Smith terms this the “revanchist city”⁶³. The 1870 uprising encountered military tactics bolstered by a moral discourse of public order on the streets which combined in a violent revenge (*revanche*) against the radical socialism of the Commune, and led to the killing of 20,000 people in Bloody Week alone. Smith’s point is that control of the city streets is often synonymous with control of its population. For Smith, the revanchist city pertains to a vicious reaction against minorities, the working-class, the homeless and unemployed. It is a place where the reproduction of social relations has gone disastrously wrong, and yet the oppressions and indignities that created the problems are ruthlessly re-affirmed. The revanchist city is at war with its poor, creating the kind of city acutely described by Mitchell: “The city as landscape does not encourage the formations of community or urbanism as a way of life; rather it encourages the maintenance of surfaces, the promotion of order at the expense of lived social relations, and the ability to look past distress, destruction, and marginalisation...”⁶⁴

Charles Murray, infamous author of *The Bell Curve*, takes a positive view of all this. Arguing for the “advantages of social apartheid” in a *Sunday Times* article last year, he wrote: “The underclass [...] is no longer even a topic of conversation in the United States.”⁶⁵ This is not because the underclass has disappeared in the US, rather: “The underclass is no longer an issue because we successfully put it out of sight and out of mind.”⁶⁶ To a large extent this has been achieved by a spatial fix: “Increased geographic segregation has facilitated social segregation”⁶⁷, with the underclass firmly ensconced in “decrepit neighbourhoods on the periphery that need not be on the travel route of the rest of us.”⁶⁸ Clearly, by “us” he means the people who now inhabit reclaimed inner city areas, with “glitzy shops and gleaming offices.”⁶⁹

In addition to this, Murray’s chief theoretical baby is the notion of “custodial democracy”⁷⁰ whereby the ‘underclass’ would be imprisoned both through institutional frameworks such as prisons, and by increasingly segregated ghettos “we seal away from the rest of us.”⁷¹ Moreover, Murray guesses that should a City Council leader or Mayor arrive in Britain who would adopt these practices openly, “... He would find the same surge in popularity that Rudy Guiliani experienced in New York.”⁷² With the odd exception, Government and City leaders refrain from stating strategies like these outright, but even a cursory glance at Glasgow’s urban developments show how segregation is more or less explicitly embedded and articulated in the construction of social space.

Conclusion

The limits of theory, however, should warn us of certain pitfalls. In constructing such a closed and controlling vision of an over-determining machine (such as large-scale urban developments) we run the risk of theorising our own defeat, where the “impulses of negation and revolt”⁷³ are seen as

vain and trivial in the face of an overwhelming system of power. In order to counteract this, existing and emergent groups from (to use a Zapatista phrase) “below and to the left”⁷⁴ must continue to challenge “growth-oriented” urban development with the voices, desires and actions of grass-roots organisations to the fore, in order to counter official hegemony and claiming their right to the city.⁷⁵

Recent anti-globalisation movements in Scotland, while welcome, need look no further than their own cities for sites of contestation. The wealthiest suburb in Scotland has a life expectancy of 87.7 years, while a boy born in Calton, in the east end of Glasgow, can expect only 54 years of life.⁷⁶ Starting from an analysis of the production of space, and the ownership of key functions within this production, we can begin to chart and challenge the uneven power relations that affect all of us wherever we are. Maybe we can then begin to visualise a world where the needs of all to engage in creative activity, play, imagination, physical activities, knowledge and art are given their rightful place, and urban space is constructed to facilitate these needs, rather than fostering a prolific extraction of profit from land as part of a monolithic economic rationalism which presents us always with a choice already made. It should be clear by now that we can dispel any notion of assistance from mainstream political organisations in this project, firmly embedded as they are in the neoliberal order.

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At the Crossroads

Tom Jennings

The concept of “the crossroads” has been a staple of US blues traditions. It refers to an oscillating state of paralysis when faced with equally unedifying moral choices concerning the personal directions to be taken in life – with the emotional resonance of “feeling the blues” lying in its poignant acknowledgement that pain inevitably accompanies any chosen action. The quintessential concept of the blues crossroads contrasts selling one’s soul to the devil in exchange for earthly gain, with the deferred satisfaction of piety promising heavenly reward. Beyond the religious overtones, of course, far more prosaic existential and ethical dilemmas fit the model thanks to its metaphorical economy of memory and biography, social imbrication, fantasy and individual agency, and the sense that the profound complexity and intransigence of the world never permits simple or perfect solutions. So, now that the cutting edge of globalising capitalism concentrates on squeezing profit from its colonisation of culture, even the most belligerently oppositional genres and forms of production find themselves indentured in its dream factory. Short of abject submission, those in the mesmerising matrix of this most secular of crossroads must thus also distinguish lines of flight from dead end postures in avoiding the sacrifice of autonomy.

During the past decade hip-hop musicians, performers and entrepreneurs have transformed the profile of the contemporary popular music industry in an unprecedented invasion of commodified cultural space on the part of largely lower class Black people (with considerable multiracial involvement at all levels and stages). Starting from organic community responses to the social and economic circumstances of mid-1970s New York, hip-hop’s immensely innovative compositional, discursive and productive formations spread like wildfire across the US, then worldwide. Mobilising and infecting other media and musical genres on the way, as well as the sports and fashion fields, so-called ‘urban’ style is now accepted to be the most profitable framework for cultural production. But success brought not only continual hostility from external gatekeepers, policers and arbiters of taste, and repeated backlashes against its vulgar profanity, but also dissent from within – so that all commentators now foresee no solution to the grave crisis of authenticity arising from the music’s dislocation from its grass-roots origins and the apparently inexorable primacy of commercial agendas. Through a survey of trends in last year’s urban recording releases, this review of the state of hip-hop asks whether the cultural and political movement pursued for three decades really is finally at a standstill in the cul-de-sac of the spectacle.

Roads to Nowhere New



In a series of articles in *Pop Matters* magazine entitled ‘Rhythm & Bullshit?’,¹ Mark Anthony Neal details the market consolidation of US recording and radio sectors in the 1990s, and its severely constricting effects on the range of music coming from blues and soul traditions reaching

the public. Crucially, the cultural neo-colonialist recuperation of independent local production systems under monopoly control coincided with the clout of hip-hop’s younger Black audiences who rejected the yuppie 1980s MOR and disco R&B styles. Ironically, the subsequent overdue return of soul to the maturing hip-hop spectrum reflected both the business success of entrepreneurs like Sean ‘Puff Daddy’ Combs whose upward mobility masterminded the move, and major label rap’s rapid tumble into vapid bling. The outcome now, according to Neal, is that the promotion of R&B only through affiliation with superficial hip-hop has effectively evacuated the human heart of the genre.

This analysis accounts for the present preponderance of teenage R&B karaoke acts visibly lacking genuine feeling. However, R&B’s traditional opposition of big money and individual essence is as problematic as any simple model of alienation. Both musically and performatively, hip-hop aesthetics specifically counterpose grass-roots collective experience and personal biography, thriving on the contradictions and ambivalences thrown up which the transcendent emotionality of a single isolated voice could never resolve. The contemporary challenge, then, is to find renewed expressive potential within a landscape of broken beats and fractured subjectivities without sticking with the busted flushes of spiritual uplift, liberal civil rights and bootstrap economics promising fortunes for tiny fractions. Hence thug soul² thematics grapple forcefully with the fallout of class struggle in a neoliberal age, while exploratory R&B musical innovation is only intermittently apparent,³ as it has serious trouble resisting corporate sanitisation due to its dialogue with hip-hop.

The paucity of significant major 2005 releases largely bears out the story of the suffocation of soul. Flashily fashionable new pop tarts with varying degrees of talent but utterly unoriginal material abound, whereas commercially-proven stars trot out more (or less) of their same. The respective vocal strengths of Mary J. Blige (*The Breakthrough*) and Faith Evans (*The First Lady*) retain considerable evocative power, but the excessively smoothed-out retro ‘80s production and minor tinkering with signature styles contain only flickers of their key contributions to hip-hop soul – an affiliation whose receding substance justifies the album titles in the narcissistic sense of resting on laurels.⁴ In contrast, Jon-B’s fifth album, *Stronger Everyday*, marks a minor advance due to the greater freedom given by a smaller independent label to combine songwriting, vocal, instrumentalist and production prowess with a wider range of subjects than hitherto allowed, with much darker and edgier material accompanying accomplished romantic balladeering.⁵

Rising stars signal little forward movement either. John Legend’s earnest soulman anthems in *Get Lifted* sparked mendacious marketing well beyond self-important moniker and pretentious title.⁶ Meanwhile the great black hope of neo-soul also risks premature greyness. So there’s no doubting the sincerity and sweet soulfulness of Dwele, but second album *Some Kinda ...* virtually recapitulates his debut.⁷ And although scarcely musically adventurous, Jaguar Wright’s *Divorcing Neo 2 Marry Soul* is far grittier and more energising in plumbing depths of frustrated desire.⁸ Anthony Hamilton’s still longer journey from North Carolina saw his debut *Soulife*⁹ followed this year by *Ain’t Nobody Worryin’* – both classic documents of empathic soul detailing the manifold hurts and hopes in life spoiled by economic, emotional and social dysfunction. Hamilton’s voice conveys such generosity of spirit despite repeated heartbreak that questions of sentimentality seem superfluous – especially when his breakthrough required hired hook singing for tired radio rap, mirroring the payoff for perseverance of recuperation familiar in

hip-hop.

Paths of Least Reminiscence



If R&B authenticity appears possible only in nostalgic reference, hip-hop’s disputed golden ages are too recent to mythologise so effortlessly. From a rich field of hip-hop realism and representation, the only transcendence of pain and struggle yet yielded is a handful of moguls marching into mansions and boardrooms remixing the American dream. The celebration of such unlikely riches without any disavowal of origins may be an instructive demystification of continuing race and class aristocracy, but no political phoenix has yet risen (as anticipated by rap’s cultural visionaries) from the ashes of civil rights and Black power’s encounters with the late-capitalist state. Instead commercial ascendancy has attenuated the potential down to cartoon caricatures of toxic ghetto freaks and monsters, as exemplified by Eminem and 50 Cent¹⁰ and sundry similarly tawdry seductions into the wild goose paper chase. Nevertheless many refuse to resign themselves to a social death of enslavement to repressive commodification – preferring a tactical retreat into harnessing the strengths of early 1990s styles but retrospectively questioning the logics of assimilation and accumulation leading to the present impasse.¹¹

North Carolina’s Little Brother have no doubts about the status of mainstream rap. *The Minstrel Show* mimics the format of a television talk show, simulating comic interludes, cabaret and comment interspersed among tracks which excoriate the guns, sex and cash obsessions of radio rappers as no more than contemporary stereotyping and justifying racial subordination.¹² But the equal appeal of progressive rap to both white and Black youth as well as the class affiliations of gangsta rap paint a more complex picture, which is probably why Little Brother offer no analysis or prognosis to back up the bald mantras. More nuanced is *Black Dialogue* by the Perceptionists, drawing on more hardcore conscious antecedents to experiment with a wider range of personal and political orientations in confronting present circumstances.¹³ Heavier still are *The Black Market Militia*, recalling the awesomely dark ghectocentric mysticism of the Wu-Tang Clan collective combined with the programmatic ambitions of Public Enemy, Paris and Dead Prez in calling the disenfranchised to arms on their own behalf.¹⁴

Unlike many rap luminaries critiquing the degraded state of the music who need distance from commercial imperatives to speak out, Common continues his sophisticated co-articulation of blues, soul and rap in the consistently excellent *Be*. The occasional preachy superciliousness of this wordsmith is here more than compensated for by his imaginative identification with the ordinary guy on ‘The Corner’ (the first single) mulling over constraints on agency and community and striving to make

honourable sense of a dishonourable world. Whereas on *Version 7.0: The Street Scriptures*, Guru swaps the hip-hop royalty status he shared with DJ Premier in Gang Starr for the hands-on difficulty of a small label. This gives further authority to his insistent stress on how the double binds of inner-city hardship threaten to overwhelm integrity – where maintaining a capacity for ethical reflection is even more hard-won and essential than in the music business. And Kazé's Spirit of '94: Version 9.0 renders explicit rap's inherent intergenerational conflict with 9th Wonder's evocative beats enclosing perceptive lyrics intimately connecting family history to individual and communal futures.¹⁵

Steadfast on the independent underground New York scene, talented lyricist J-Live is a real original in his use of the elements of hip-hop. Preferring live shows with real bands and unusually capable of rhyming whilst scratching, he's also an excellent producer. If that wasn't enough, *The Hear After* oozes with intelligence and insight into the contradictions of the music and its social environment. Mobilising the banality of religious themes and concepts, their meanings are translated into everyday secular contexts of personal meaning and collective ramification with tentative conclusions woven back into a questioning of the purposes of cultural practice. On a similar level of artistry and commitment, Talib Kweli has made steady inroads into the mainstream, but, it seems, enough is enough – and *Right About Now* revels in the refreshing lack of constraints a small label imposes. This "mixtape" is "sucka free" in that no pretence of conceptual singularity inveigles the audience into passive consumption. Instead this exuberant collection of raw hip-hop expertise, energy and lust for life shines precisely due to the absence of overweening promotional hyperbole corrupting strategic bragging into the tactics of the brand.¹⁶

Trade Routes and Branches



Despite the seeming stasis of soul, and the stultifying pressures towards conformity required by major labels packaging rappers as brands rather than artists, as always in hip-hop seeds of renewal are being sown, responding to and mobilising technical developments in other genres and emerging from the fertile dynamics of competition and imagination in hip-hop itself. All sorts of musical and lyrical innovation are bubbling under mainstream radar, even if the most obvious examples achieve prominence not from grass-roots pressure but a commercially-driven need to appear fresh – widening audiences without threatening the existing corporate status quo. So production team the Neptunes (Pharrell Williams and Chad Hugo) started in hip-hop but thanks to their unparalleled range and mastery of digital composition can deliver compelling arrangements in any genre. However, without the vision or project of, say, a Dr Dre, all they've aimed for is the celebrity and wealth that gangsta rap ended up with once a depoliticised Black nationalist agenda

of business development obliterated, in practice, other political or cultural tactics.¹⁷ Here, selling (out) seems the only agenda.

A more interesting template is Outkast's incorporation of big beat and disco rhythms to appeal to the pop sensibilities of younger mainstream white audiences¹⁸ – bringing Atlanta's southern soul to new listeners without compromising its status as rap music. André 3000 and Big Boi employ innovations in sound to stretch to the limits some of the oldest African-American cultural themes (the trickster's boasting and posing, plays on words and appearances, etc) that energised hip-hop from the beginning. Other new US production collectives similarly blur boundaries, such as the Sa-Ra Creative Partners' soul, funk and ambient-tinged extensions of orthodox hip-hop beats – and Kanye West is attempting something similar without venturing so far from accepted formulae. *Late Registration* chronicles the distractions and affectations of the black lower middle classes at the bottom of the greasy meritocratic ladder, nervously (or longingly, depending on the mood) looking over their shoulders at what they're leaving behind. The similarly schizophrenic musical accompaniments mix wistful melodic arrangements from indie-rock producer Jon Brion with West's powerful beats laced with killer vocal hooks and unexpected sampled concoctions. Many of the lyrics deal with the psychological and social consequences of daily practices of consumerism among those with at least some disposable income, rather than extremes of utter poverty or ghetto fabulous fantasies favoured elsewhere. This is especially pertinent given that a significant minority of hardcore rap icons have more comfortable backgrounds than their performance personas suggest, and also signifies the socio-economic status of increasing numbers employed in the industry itself.

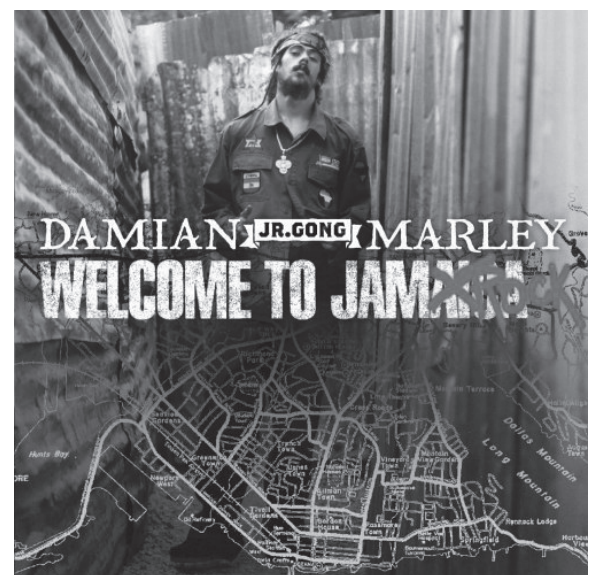


Kanye West's balancing of compositional artistry with a contemporary thematic spin allows him to maintain subcultural hip-hop credentials, as in his production for Common's *Be*. Missy Elliott's strategy is bolder still. *The Cookbook* moves further away than before from Timbaland's lush multi-layered polyrhythmic production paradigm towards stripped down digital beats – simulating a bygone party aesthetic for a CD-buying MTV audience. Gone too is her video portrayal¹⁹ of a monstrous gothic-futuristic female trickster flouting the rules of pop femininity. Now conforming to acceptable conventions of beauty, her early career in routine R&B harmonising also echoes through several tracks which are otherwise entirely out of place. The overall effect is to reference her previous incarnations and questioning of gender stereotypes, but with the associated ambivalence, irony and depth no longer integrated into the music.

Missy is certainly unusual in sidestepping the past 20 years of hip-hop and in jettisoning the styles that made her name. Nevertheless

anchoring her new image in the mythic history of rap parallels the trend noted above among today's maturing MCs and DJs for retrenching within hip-hop's cultural and political strengths as a defence against the theft, trivialisation and symbolic murder they observe in the corporate takeover (i.e. of both the music and society generally). But of course the appropriation has always been a two-way process, where hip-hop's key compositional breakthroughs stemmed from cultural guerilla raids – on the commodified history of Black music and electro's manipulation of found material for dance beats, which in the 1990s extended to digging in the crates of all regions of contemporary popular music. And whereas the most commercial producers go straight for the pop payoff in incorporating the most abject teenybop chart-topping material, smaller hip-hop labels and their rosters of independent artists specialise in venturing beyond easily available musical resources, giving other media and genres of youth subculture an urban twist.

Esoteric experimentation may be conceived as art among independent hip-hop aficionados as well as in electronic and dance genres. This elevation sometimes manifests itself in apparently elitist ambitions to stake a claim in modern classical music, where Stockhausen *et al* can be cited as inspirations alongside more recent digital wizards. Short of such pomposity, the 'concept album' is a common phenomenon, often drenched in futuristic cod-mysticism. A good example is Princess Superstar's intriguing sci-fi themed *My Machine*, hybridising fashionably explicit cyborg erotica to ironically critique and/or celebrate virtual desire. In addition to the obvious allure of science fiction narratives for generations reared on computer games and virtual reality hyperbole, many other artists plunder cult horror and comic book back catalogues. A superior and thoroughly conceived example of hip-hop superhero animation is Dangerdoom's *The Mouse and The Mask*, with characteristically clever and subtle lyrics supported by equally skilful and original beats.²⁰ In contrast, those associated with the Def Jux label often combine rock music samples and references with the orchestral pretensions of 1970s prog-rock, or trade in the individualist indie currency of art-school existentialism and fashionable depressive angst rather than the collectively-oriented passions of other hip-hop subgenres.

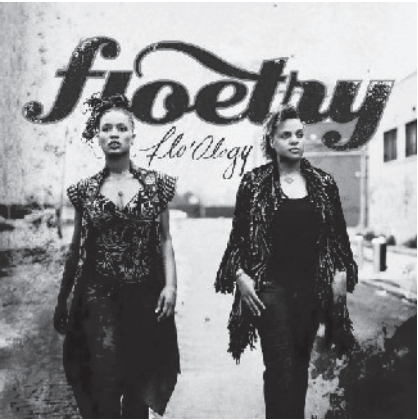


Meanwhile – refracting the other end of the guitar music spectrum – all those dreary white metal bands trading on urban cool with desultorily clueless pseudo-rapping are counterpointed by pre-eminent performance poet Saul Williams pissing away his blistering political spoken word with 1980s NY thrash-style backing.²¹ Utilising a rather different conception of Black punk rock, the Ying Yang Twins' exuberant *The United States of Atlanta* celebrates the rowdy, lower-class crunk aesthetic of the southern state's party scene, digitally synthesised using elements of Miami bass and reggae dancehall, with its relentless slackness watered down (though not much) to

widen the appeal. But whereas Lil’ Jon and other “dirty south” heavyweights are quite clear about their indebtedness to Jamaican vocal, musical and performative traditions, well-established hip-hop superstars struggle to do more than blatantly rip them off. So Lil’ Kim’s latest release *The Naked Truth* milks the most unimaginative and tediously commercial contemporary chart rap, tacking on generic roots reggae beats to avoid looking so utterly stagnant.²²

Further south, hip-hop and reggae styles are proliferating and mixing with local traditions.²³ Younger Jamaican performers blend different dance rhythms into basic dancehall beats to present themselves as more radio-friendly and commercially viable,²⁴ while international rock stars makeover anodyne muzak with pale ragga imitations.²⁵ In a rude awakening to this sanitised travesty, Damian Marley (Bob’s youngest son) offers an invigorating blend of styles prevalent in actual Jamaican clubs (including R&B, hip-hop, roots and dancehall). Though designated as crossover material, he characterises *Welcome To Jamrock* as “the whole mix” from Kingston – where jamrock encapsulates a grass-roots version of reggae’s history. Then, in a simple but highly effective rhetorical move, the magnificent title song²⁶ reinterprets jamrock as the “real” Jamaica spiralling into escalating poverty, violence and social division disguised as the superficial hedonistic paradise pimped in tourist brochures – implying that the island’s most profitable cultural export colludes in this tragic dishonesty. In a parallel manoeuvre, the album’s random changes of tempo²⁷ refuse the structural conventions inherited from Western rock music’s pretensions to high art, since the privatised consumption of this commodity could never accurately convey the experience which makes its creation possible – the dancehall party where the selector’s sensitivity to audience reactions determines content and sequencing. Unlike other bland attempts at populist contemporary reggae,²⁸ *Jamrock*’s multidimensional double vision and breadth of themes, sounds and attitudes (conservative, raging, patronising, caring, self-critical and/or radical) simultaneously looks backward, sideways and forwards. This fully realised and unflinching statement of the present forecloses on none of the possible futures – for culture or society; for better or worse – and that’s a rare achievement.²⁹

Following Beaten Tracks



This side of the Atlantic the familiar MTV/radio-friendly patterns are also readily apparent. Big record companies oscillate between their traditional indifference to indigenous output inspired by Black traditions and packaging new acts as little more than pop idols with street-cred peddled as short-term novelties. In 2005 the usual sorry litany of incompetently marketed bands most obviously lacked soul. So Lemar’s R&B-lite, Joss Stone’s fake funk and half-baked singer-songwriting from Kevin Mark Trail, for example, squeezed out attention for the new album from Lynden David Hall—easily the most significant British soulman since Lewis Taylor refused to toe the blue-eyed line.³⁰ *In Between Jobs* summarises Hall’s vocal strength and musical

dexterity, alternating mature funk and blues themes and riffs to rival any nu-soul don. And if his album contained nothing particularly new, that was not true of Terri Walker, whose quirkily sassy attitude and powerfully sultry voice had already demonstrated a knack for conveying pop songs with real depth. But, in addition to framing her —completely inappropriately—as a British answer to the new American R&B teen pseudo-divas, Mercury also managed to suicidally botch the content, promotion and launch of her second effort, *L.O.V.E.*

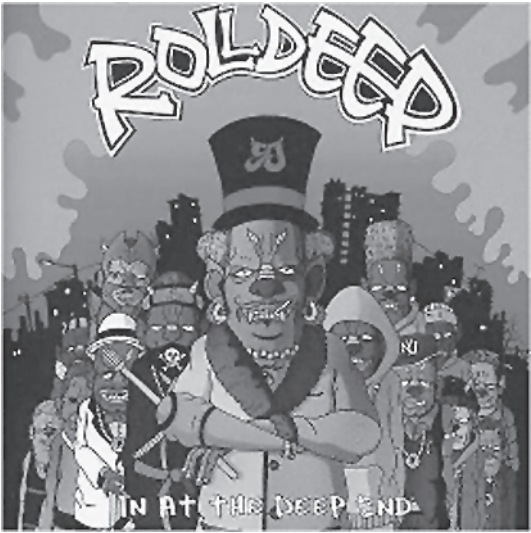
Moving from farce to tragedy, another second album to promise far more than it delivered is *Judgement Days* by Ms Dynamite—a textbook case of an MC fooled by her own bragging; a biblical arrogance no doubt encouraged by media adoration and industry sycophancy. The slickly superfluous pop-R&B production here might sell CDs in suburbia, but exchanging wicked rapping for weak whingeing singing two-fingers her underground origins in UK garage and hip-hop. Worse, the unforgiving tenor of her arguments snootily equates the moral inadequacies of rich and poor – as if ghetto pressures are comparable to the preoccupations of her new pals in the celebrity charity world.³¹ Fortunately, redemption songs were at hand from South London duo Floetry, in *Flo’ology*’s gorgeous blend of Natalie Stewart’s skilfully ironic spoken word and songstress Marsha Ambrosius’ searing gospel-tinged voice floating over the best Philly velvet jazz alchemy. True, only the Roots’ Black Lily performance poetry venue rescued Floetry’s intelligent womanist sensuality from a lack of UK recognition for the real deal.³² Conversely, their surprisingly unusual synergy testifies to the rarity of Lauryn Hill’s or Est’elle’s dual melodic and rapping expertise – and embarrasses those who flop like damp squibs between stools.



Maintaining its cool distance from corporate nonsense, straight-up homegrown hip-hop received even more pitiful mainstream profiling than R&B. A perfunctory boost was reserved for south Wales underclass comics Goldie Lookin’ Chain, whose *Safe As Fuck* affectionately and shamelessly sends themselves up without a trace of Pitman’s bile or Ali G’s contempt.³³ Elsewhere, horizontal distribution self-clarified by small labels insulates the old-school clarity of MCs-plus-DJs from 21st century sullyng.³⁴ Nevertheless, even in grass-roots production a wider range of sonic options is now being explored by those who appreciate Timbaland, Dre and the Neptunes but are confident enough to follow their own courses. So Derby’s Baby J expertly combines judicious sampling, compositional simulation and meticulously crafted percussive structure to synthesise downhome and decidedly British moods and atmospheres – showcased in the subtly effective nuances for various artists in his mixtape demo, F.T.P.³⁵ Also taking a cue from American R&B/hip-hop crossovers is Doc Brown’s impressive *The Document*, managing to echo lyrically and musically the ambivalence of streetwise love and pain from 1990s US blueprints, but without sounding old, tired, naff – or remotely American.³⁶

For really exciting advances in British urban culture, though, the many-faceted Jamaican connections are finally coming to fruition in a compelling pincer movement of vocal flows and bassline rhythms.³⁷ Least unconventionally, *The Rotton Club* – the fourth album from Blak Twang (aka Tony Rotton) – combines a skewering cockney rudeboy swagger with sharply conscious blue-collar decency in deeply personal lyrics. The reggae influence surfaces in the musical tempos too, but this is first and foremost prime UK hip-hop from one of its pre-eminent and most consistent exponents. Considerably more idiosyncratic is *Mixed Blessings* by Lotek Hi-Fi, which has a refreshingly ragged DIY feel thanks to its unpolished hip-hop magpie aesthetic chopping pure Caribbean ingredients. Roots and dub collide with soca bounce and dancehall minimalism, with English patois running through benevolent gruffness, decisive intonation and sweet harmonising. These folks clearly enjoy their music – and it’s infectious.³⁸ Nonetheless, the most accomplished, self-assured and satisfying UK reggae/rap crossover vibe belongs to Roots Manuva, whose third album *Awfully Deep* goes further towards syncopating British dub’s bastard offspring into a seamlessly sensual complement to his easygoing, humorously intellectual lyrical mischief.³⁹

New Directions Underground



Apart from the direct lineage audible in the sounds produced by those of recent Jamaican descent, reggae’s beat structures and performance conventions have had a more circuitous influence on contemporary British music ever since prominent Kingston producers relocated to London in the 1970s, supplying the sonic impetus for trip-hop, bhangra and various UK electronic innovations. The prime movers of the rave revolution may cite Detroit techno and Chicago house precursors, but subsequent developments regularly counterposed vacuously inclusive artistic or philosophical elitism with dangerous grass-roots populism. However, despite the empty escapism of acid house ecstasy, student partying in a global Ibiza or the yuppie new jazz of drum’n’bass, there has always already been an abject ruffneck antithesis blaring out from the nearest sink estate down the road. Originally dubbed “jungle”, chopping and screwing dubplate 45s at 78rpm, the ambivalent clarion calls of its MCs hype up the assembled massive into a mobile frenzy while urging communal coherence in the face of the dog-eat-dog misery the rave offers refuge from.⁴⁰

Using new computer tools for sophisticated digital invention, pioneers of the drum’n’bass paradigm quickly superseded crude sampling, while mainstream acclaim and huge sales for Goldie, Roni Size and LTJ Bukem made it clear that CDs could be sold by stripping away the ghetto dancehall appeal. Successive generations of UK garage producers and promoters have oscillated between nourishing the hardcore underground where MCs cut their teeth, and commercial soft-peddling to middle class

consumers. Until recently mainstream airplay necessitated revision to mirror R&B and rap genres reluctantly tolerated thanks to US global dominance, but now all of these boundaries are beginning to blur in the catch-all category of 'grime'. After the fits-and-starts of garage's So Solid Crew, the pop crossover of The Streets and prompt defections of stars like Craig David and Ms Dynamite, two successful albums from Dizzee Rascal and excellent debuts from Shystie and Wiley have definitively signalled the arrival of a new urban broom sweeping away the snobbery.⁴¹

Grime vocalists pace themselves to match rapid-fire multiple beats, but lyrically emphasise neighbourhood social networks and collective expression. Naturally this includes all the tiresome petty beefs and macho melodramas of youth gangs in poverty-stricken environments, translated into battle rhymes and party anthems just as in early hip-hop. Staying closest to junglist rabble-rousing mode, Lethal Bizzle of More Fire Crew/Fire Camp acknowledges debts to rap braggadacio but makes no attempt to copy any hip-hop style. After several underground smashes and even Top 20 hits, his ferocious *Against All Odds* peppers crowd-pleasing chorus catchphrases with nascent narratives of desperate hope. Rival East London collective Roll Deep's eclectic *In At The Deep End* strays much further musically from the trademark sparsely synthesised bleeps and squelches of the 'eski' production style by mobilising all their pop reference points from the 80s onwards – from Asian, Latin, Caribbean, American, and, most of all, UK sources – held together with a dozen MCs in tight-knit breakneck freestyle formation.⁴²

If the lyrical content so far leaves something to be desired for those of a poetic streak, and frantic articulation in the heat of the rave satisfies only speed freaks elsewhere, Bristol's K.Ners flexes expert delivery from a hip-hop apprenticeship around cutting edge digital percussion in *K In Da Flesh*. Meanwhile Manchester sextet Raw-T (with 4 MCs and 2 DJs) blend prodigious rap technique and posse sensibility with grimy ease in *Realise And Witness*, with a naturally uninhibited outlaw flow any studio gangsta would covet. Backed by a startling and brooding bricolage of up to the minute UK garage and US hip-hop sonic inflections, this has a much fuller, more multilayered sound than anything coming out of London, incorporating judicious samples in synthesised breaks plus some mind-boggling scratching and juggling. Together with lyrical depth and quality unexpected from 15 to 20-year-olds, Raw-T fully deserve wide recognition and appreciation irrespective of subcultural pigeonholes.

Back in London, Lady Sovereign rules the east end underclass party roost like a miniature pearly queen. The deceptive simplicity of the *Vertically Challenged* EP and singles like 'Hoodie' mix lazy ease, wicked humour and pointed everyday relevance into basic but rousing beats – and a possible US album release next might catapult her freewheeling chutzpah to global attention. Content with parochial belonging, Mike Skinner's first signing with The Streets' profits are the Mitchell Brothers, ducking and diving to some effect in *A Breath of Fresh Attire*'s alternately affectionate and fractious multicultural makeover of Cockney geezers. More ambitious and introspective in referring to rites of passage from underground rave (via football trials) to kosher music career, Kano's emotive *Home Sweet Home* nobly fails to bind together the schizoid strands of grime with the lyrical cohesion of hip-hop. Sway, on the other hand, threatens to do just that – not just through sheer lyrical brilliance, but from a facility to project episodic fragments of personality and experience to chime with compelling beat structures at any frequency. As with Skinnyman, Sway's flow maintains an unerring balance in never overriding a rhythm – and, like the best hip-hop originators, any underground genre may be embraced as grist for his mill, provided mutual respect accompanies the ability to rock a grass-

roots party. Finally, and most spectacularly, Sri-Lankan born and London raised M.I.A. explodes the precious small-mindedness of national and generic divides—whether in music, culture or politics—suggesting an incipient consciousness in dancehall. Her sensuous MC cadence confuses insurrectionary zeal and street aesthetics with an ironic wayward vulnerability appropriate to the awkward contradictions in multiple-rooted postmodern identity, reinforced sonically by the eclecticism of Diplo's towering, swirling and discomfiting electronic production.⁴³

Streets Ahead



So, as in other sectors, new cultural enclosures across the globe imprison previously autonomous forms and practices under multinational control. Media conglomerates build on production and distribution patterns formed in the corporate co-optations of jazz, blues and soul and honed in the homogenisation of disco and contemporary R&B/hip-hop. Here, individual artists can realistically only play with permutations of existing elements, with room to manoeuvre depending on the degree of contractual independence negotiated on the promise of safe profitability. In mainstream R&B, market share consolidation shuts out practitioners who reject the hip-hop gloss over styles perfected in the mid-1990s – in the process ignoring innovative work which offers renewal. Likewise, stateside rap flouts its fanciful irrelevance or retreats to the prideful consolations of the past. Occasionally, genuine grass-roots developments – accompanied by changes in local patterns of involvement – still provide leverage for established stars to simulate growth while opening doors a crack for new talent. If the latter already organise on the basis of the social nature of the scene that nurtured them, rather than offering themselves up in vulnerable isolation, the more of a challenge they are to commercial predictability—with the strength of their home environment providing an edge, a base and a safety net.

Major labels then filter in a few representatives of emerging trends, pressurise flagship artists to copycat, offer branded pop acts the surface stylistics (to contaminate them with credibility), and/or flood the market with manufactured clones. However, with little understanding of the source they may also be powerless to prevent relatively unadulterated expressions of vernacular lower-class culture gaining exposure. This probability is enhanced by the UK majors' abiding obsessions: combating US commercial threats with legions of middle class guitar bands, and endless permutations of the bubblegum pop formula optimising a combined appeal to younger children and indiscriminating adult markets. Contemptuous of this packaged froth, urban youth nevertheless increasingly refuse the superiority complexes of their predecessors so that the desires to develop their art and engage wider audiences while earning some kind of living are not felt as remotely contradictory. Aspirations to purity make no sense for those growing up with the complex social reality of a multiracial Britain, in a media

environment saturated with commodified Black culture, where the stark subsistence alternatives for the young poor are crime or slave-labour McJobs as the welfare safety net subsides into the historical sunset.

Amid the usual adolescent bluff and bluster and the heightened agonies of self-destructive negativity in many of the lyrics, a genuinely fresh social consciousness is manifesting in the manic cross-pollinating grime of reggae, jungle and hip-hop. The call of shared influences and a common plight yields collective responses in a music widely but unofficially performed and enjoyed in raves and on pirate radio. Grime's practices face the full panoply of repression, occasioning a chorus of condemnation from outside of the milieu – running the gamut of class-based hatred and moral panic to New Labour's fascistic fantasies of social order. The aesthetics of grime also occasion a cacophony of sneers – particularly ironic when its primary poetic and compositional textures are unapologetically half-inched from hip-hop and drum'n'bass. These may be the most sophisticated new musical movements to emerge for decades, but the respective complacencies of subcultural hubris and mystifying technobabble among many proponents tend to render the blood and guts of ordinary audiences irrelevant.

Instead, grime celebrates the dirty commonness of degraded humanity, anchoring hopes and fears in an exhilarating self-organisation of its elements, shrugging off predictable self-serving opprobrium from elders and betters. An organic and pragmatic promiscuity of form and content, grime wrenches the new technology of sound from computer nerds to fit the needs of the urban wasteland—reflecting its dark and conflictual lived reality while bucking the apparent inevitability of despair endemic there. Enlisting the everyday enthusiasm for R&B, hip-hop, and reggae—rather than flogging the frantic pace of the rave—is thus a natural cultural advance as well as a strategic career move. It facilitates grass-roots networking among open-minded practitioners of established forms who are sick of incestuous backbiting among those protecting their imaginary status as big fish in small ponds. Most significantly, grime's expansiveness hints at a sense that the sublimeness of soul, the social survivalism of reggae and the political potential of rap promise most in passionate interaction – rather than in the false consciousness of pure essence, whether based on the cult folklore of chemicals, electronics, individual genius or divine purpose. Living at the crossroads is a problem only for those clinging onto the wish-fulfilment of such magically cleansing solutions – and the fellow-travellers of grime peer through the fog of such devilish auras, emphatically mobilising from the bottom up the profound and profane advantages of the mundane mongrel, impure in signposting ways forward.



www.tomjennings.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk

Notes

1. Mark Anthony Neal, ‘Rhythm and Bullshit? The Slow Decline of R&B’, *Pop Matters*, June-July 2005 (www.popmatters.com).
2. Such as by Dave Hollister, Mary J. Blige, Jaheim or Angie Stone.
3. For example in the work of Me’shell Ndegeocello, D’Angelo, Erykah Badu, Bilal and Lina.
4. In command of their own recording destinies; but with apparently little idea of what to do with the freedom.
5. In an album of consistent quality throughout, including collaborations with 2-Pac and Dirt McGirt (aka Ol’ Dirty Bastard) (both now deceased) and Scarface (ex-Geto Boys).
6. Even extending to ridiculous comparisons with Marvin, Donny and Stevie. No wonder little is expected of R&B, even if this particular Legend should last well past lunchtime – not least if ‘get lifted’ is uncharitably interpreted to refer to endorsement from Kanye West. Comparably inflated claims for greatness are now routinely applied to competent but scarcely original songwriters – another recent example being Alicia Keys.
7. With new words and melodies, even more exquisite sonic crafting ... but nothing to rouse listeners from its hypnotically complacent cul-de-sac.
8. Paralleling the personal travails of ordinary women and the professional pitfalls facing extraordinary female artists – convincingly galvanising anger into strength and solidarity.
9. Shelved by Atlantic in 2001 but now released after the eventual acclaim for 2004’s *Comin’ From Where I’m From*.
10. See my ‘Br(other) Rabbit’s Tale’, *Variant*, No. 17, 2003, for further discussion.
11. For a pungent and condensed statement of this awareness, see the interview with M-1 from Dead Prez in Josephine Basch, ‘New Year Revolution’, *Hip-Hop DX* magazine, January 2, 2006 (www.hiphopdx.com). A detailed and thought-provoking analysis of the relationship between hip-hop artistry and cultural politics can be found in Imani Perry, *Prophets of the Hood: Politics and Poetics in Hip Hop* (Duke University Press, 2004).
12. Little Brother are MCs Phonte and Big Pooh and producer 9th Wonder, and the name refers to ‘older brother’ Afrocentric precursors like De La Soul and Tribe Called Quest. *The Minstrel Show*’s thesis is also echoed by one of the most forthright hip-hop writers tackling these issues – former *Source* editor Bakari Kitwana. Ironically, his *Why White Kids Love Hip Hop: Wankstas, Wiggas, Wannabes and the New Reality of Race in America* (Basic Civitas, 2005) effectively undercuts its own oversimplifications, for example conceding that Black and white hip-hop interaction outside of the corporate context – but enouraged by the latter’s youth subcultural hegemony – has the capacity to generate fruitfully progressive social and cultural exploration.
13. And layer Mr Lif’s and Akrobatik’s emphatically sharp vocal delivery with a slew of interesting production styles. These variously recall a spectrum from past Bomb Squad glories to Pete Rock’s smooth soul, but are always forward-looking and as intricately interwoven with the lyrics as the two MCs themselves aim for in their sparring.
14. The Black Market Militia comprises Tragedy Khadafi (aka Intelligent Hoodlum), William Cooper and Wu-Tang affiliates Killah Priest, Timbo King (of Royal Fam) and Hell Razah (of Sunz of Man).
15. With the ‘soul dojo’ hip-hop space metaphorically unifying body and spirit for battles to come.
16. See my ‘Beautiful Struggles and Gangsta Blues’ (*Variant*, No. 22, 2005) for more on Kweli. The new album shies away from outright political messages in favour of playful lyrical brilliance underscored with suggestive implication – supported by the subtly conscious force of guests like Mos Def, Jean Grae and MF Doom – reaching a crescendo in ‘Ms Hill’s barbed love letter to Lauryn operating on half a dozen levels at once.
17. Dre is the Neptunes’ most obvious precursor musically, in marrying the ‘hard’ thematics of inner city violence and desperation with the ‘soft’ melodies and rich textures of California soul and funk – see Eithne Quinn’s intelligently illuminating account of the development and significance of gangsta in *Nuthin’ But a “G” Thang The Culture and Commerce of Gangsta Rap* (Columbia University Press, 2005).
18. Most recently in *Speakerboxxx/The Love Below*, 2003.
19. As fashioned by renowned director Hype Williams.
20. From the collaboration between legendary MC/producer MF Doom and producer Dangermouse – the latter also responsible for remixing the Beatles in *The Grey Album*.
21. On his self-titled album – see my review in *Freedom* magazine (Vol. 66, No 13, July 2005).
22. Trumping rival Foxy Brown’s longer-term project – stymied for the past three years by record company wrangles – of working with prominent dancehall vocalists and producers. Astonishingly for women MCs trading on their ‘bad girl’ hypersexuality – and

- presumably symptomatic of the disrespectful nature of their appropriations – neither Kim nor Foxy seem to have picked up on the specific challenges to traditional male supremacy inherent in contemporary ragga (see Carolyn Cooper’s fascinating *Sound Clash: Jamaican Dancehall Culture at Large*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).
23. In some cases taken up by major labels – for example, reggaeton (a Spanish-Caribbean blend of hip-hop/ dancehall/neo-soca) and the worldwide success of Daddy Yankee’s *Barrio Fino*. Brazil also has particularly fertile scenes and a widespread love of reggae – see Patrick Neate, *Where You’re At: Notes from the Front Line of a Hip-Hop Planet* (Bloomsbury, 2003).
 24. E.g. singing duo Brick & Lace, who recently toured the UK with ‘Queen of Roots’ Marcia Griffiths and dancehall’s Lady G.
 25. Such as No Doubt’s Gwen Stefani in her solo rebranding.
 26. Easily the best single release of 2005.
 27. Which most critics saw as a major flaw. *Jamrock*’s guestlist also summarises the male vocalist’s multiple roles in reggae, such as revolutionary prophet (e.g. Nas in ‘Road To Zion’), condescending patriarch (The Roots’ Black Thought in ‘Pimpa’s Paradise’), or loverman (Bobby Brown in ‘Beautiful’) – as well as the pivotal historical inspiration of US Black music.
 28. And despite claims by those like Sean Paul to be speaking on behalf of the ghetto poor, but whose heavily-promoted material displays only a fraction of the energy and imagination the latter routinely demonstrate (given half a chance).
 29. Also true of my choice as 2004 ‘album of the year’ – *Gangsta Blues* by Tanya Stephens (again from Jamaica; see ‘Beautiful Struggles and Gangsta Blues’, note 16).
 30. See Mark Anthony Neal, ‘Rhythm & Bullshit’, note 1.
 31. See my review in *Freedom*, Vol. 66, No. 23, November 2005.
 32. Reflected in multiple Grammy nominations for their 2002 debut and writing for big hitters like Michael Jackson and Styles P.
 33. Nor, sadly, either of the latters’ political nous; but certainly with periodic novelty single appeal, given the precedent of Mike Skinner’s lovable lad schtick for The Streets.
 34. Notable releases emphasising original skills include UK Hustlerz’ *The Return*, with a sizeable posse of the finest underground rappers flexing their vocabs to Disorda’s capable soundtrack. Also, a significant 2005 milestone was the breathtaking display of visceral instrumentation in Killa Kela’s *Elocution* – human beat-boxing being a live art notoriously resistant to studio recapture. Finally, Jehst’s *Nuke Proof Suit* (Altered Ego) displays both prodigious lyrical skills and engaging self-produced beats.
 35. Standing for ‘fuck the police’ or ‘for the people’, etc. Baby J enhanced his rep no end last year with the soundtrack for Skinnyman’s social realism on *Council Estate Of Mind* (see ‘Beautiful Struggles and Gangsta Blues’, note 13).
 36. Despite evoking humbler London parallels to Biggie’s storytelling, 2-Pac’s passion, and the observation of Nas – the 2004 mixtape *Citizen Smith* having already proved Doc’s penchant for convincing local personae. *The Document* also benefits from excellent production and first-rate guest verses from the other Poisonous Poets as well as the scintillating Yungun.
 37. Thankfully not via humdrum Bob Marley covers, such as those trotted out by Ms Dynamite and Floetry (among others) ... or even interesting adaptations like Damian’s.
 38. The group comprise Wayne Lotek (producer/MC), Aurelius (aka Dazzla, MC) and Wayne Paul (MC/singer). Guests adding to the chemistry include ex-member Earl J, long-time collaborator Roots Manuva, and rising star Sandra Melody.
 39. For an enjoyable review of *Awfully Deep* celebrating Roots Manuva’s unique style, see Stefan Braidwood, ‘He got mad style, he strictly Roots’, *Pop Matters* magazine, February 2005 (www.popmatters.com). Also look out for *The Blacknificent Seven* – Sannie T’s posse album with producer Skeme and fellow MCs Rodney P, Roots Manuva, Karl Hinds, Estelle and Jeff3, which may well be the most exciting UK hip-hop set to date.
 40. Exactly the same ambivalent role of the DJ in reggae dancehall: see my ‘Dancehall Dreams’, *Variant*, No. 20, 2004.
 41. The persistence and popularity of pirate radio stations have undoubtedly been as important as local rave scenes for grime’s emergence, as documented in BBC3’s *Tower Block Dreams* (2004) and Channel 4’s so-called interactive fiction *Dubplate Drama* (Luke Hyams, 2005). The latter stars Shystie and also features cameo appearances by umpteen grime stalwarts as well as hip-hop and garage heavyweights like Skinnyman (also featured in the former) on fine form and Ms Dynamite’s superb spitting schizophrenically split off from her official output. See ‘Beautiful Struggles and Gangsta Blues’ (note 13) for more on Shystie.
 42. See Derek Walmsley’s excellent blow-by-blow account at www.playlouder.com. Former Roll Deep members include Dizzee Rascal and producer/MC Wiley – both

- abandoning safety in numbers to follow up personal peccadilloes.
43. Most keenly felt in the mixtape *Piracy Funds Terrorism*, Volume 1 before sample clearance problems bedevilled the more austere *Arular*. Their tour with Roots Manuva early last year was followed by supporting Gwen Stefani stateside, and M.I.A.’s next album will be recorded in Jamaica and produced by Timbaland.
- Discography (released 2005 unless stated)**
- Baby J, *F.T.P.* (Hall or Nothing/All City)
- Black Market Militia, *Black Market Militia* (Nature Sounds/ Performance)
- Blacknificent Seven, *The Blacknificent Seven* (Dark Horizon, 2006 [forthcoming])
- Blak Twang, *The Rotton Club* (Bad Magic/Wall of Sound)
- Mary J. Blige, *The Breakthrough* (Geffen)
- Common, *Be* (Geffen)
- Daddy Yankee, *Barrio Fino* (Mercury)
- Dangerdoom, *The Mouse & The Mask* (Lex)
- Dangermouse, *The Grey Album* (self-released, 2004)
- Doc Brown, *Citizen Smith* (2004), *The Document* (Janomi)
- Dwele, *Subject* (2003), *Some Kinda ...* (Virgin)
- Missy Elliott, *The Cookbook* (Atlantic)
- Faith Evans, *The First Lady* (Capitol)
- Floetry, *Flo’ology* (Geffen)
- Goldie Lookin’ Chain, *Safe As Fuck* (679)
- Guru, *Version 7.0 The Street Scriptures* (7 Grand)
- Lynden David Hall, *In Between Jobs* (Random)
- Anthony Hamilton, *Comin’ From Where I’m From* (Arista, 2004), *Soulife* (Rhino/Atlantic), *Ain’t Nobody Worryin’* (So So Def/Zomba)
- Jehst, *Nuke Proof Suit* (Altered Ego)
- J-Live, *The Hear After* (Penalty/Ryko)
- Jon-B, *Stronger Everyday* (Sanctuary)
- Kano, *Home Sweet Home* (679)
- Kazé & 9th Wonder, *Spirit of ’94: Version 9.0* (Brick)
- Killa Kela, *Elocution* (BMG)
- K.Ners, *K In Da Flesh* (Cristal City)
- Talib Kweli, *The Beautiful Struggle* (Rawkus / Island, 2004), *Right About Now: the Official Sucka Free Mixtape* (Blacksmith / Koch)
- Lady Sovereign, ‘Get Random’, ‘Hoodie’, *Vertically Challenged* [EP] (Chocolate Industries)
- John Legend, *Get Lifted* (Columbia)
- Lethal Bizzle, *Against All Odds* (V2, orig. 2004)
- Lil’ Kim, *The Naked Truth* (Queen Bee/Atlantic)
- Little Brother, *The Minstrel Show* (Atlantic)
- Lotek Hi-Fi, *Mixed Blessings* (Big Dada)
- Damian Marley, *Welcome to Jamrock* (Island)
- M.I.A., *Piracy Funds Terrorism, Volume 1* (mixtape with Diplo, Hollertronix, 2004), *Arular* (XL)
- Mitchell Brothers, *A Breath of Fresh Attire* (The Beats)
- Ms Dynamite, *Judgement Days* (Polydor)
- Outkast, *Speakerboxxx/The Love Below* (Arista, 2003)
- Perceptionists, *Black Dialogue* (Def Jux)
- Princess Superstar, *My Machine* (K7)
- Raw-T, *Realise & Witness* (F4)
- Roll Deep, *In At The Deep End* (Relentless)
- Roots Manuva, *Awfully Deep* (Big Dada/Banana Klan)
- Skinnyman, *Council Estate Of Mind* (Low Life, 2004).
- Sway, *This Is My Promo Volumes 1 and 2, This Is My Demo* [forthcoming, 2006] (DCypha/All City)
- UK Hustlerz, *The Return* (Suspect Packages)
- Terri Walker, *L.O.V.E.* (Mercury)
- Jaguar Wright, *Divorcing Neo 2 Marry Soul* (Artemis/Ryko)
- Kanye West, *Late Registration* (Roc-A-Fella)
- Ying Yang Twins, *United States of Atlanta* (TVT)

Hatred and Respect: The Class Shame of Ned ‘Humour’¹

Alex Law

According to the people licensed to talk on our behalf, Scotland suffers from a love of ‘failure’. It celebrates the culture of urban decay and poverty and is apologetic for the anti-social behaviour of knife/drug/wine/gang/hoodie/‘ned’ culture. In policy terms this chimes nicely with New Labour’s ‘Respect’ agenda and the use of publicity spectacles to enforce orderly conduct on unruly young people. In response to accusations in 2005 that the Scottish First Minister, Jack McConnell’s ‘ned crusade’ was failing due to the insufficient issue of anti-social behaviour orders (ASBOs) it became necessary to develop a public profile for the crackdown. In February 2005 a £684,000 campaign called ‘Standing up to Anti-Social Behaviour’ was launched by the Scottish Executive.¹ Then, in December 2005, the otherwise unremarkable West Lothian village of Mid-Calder became the first place in the UK to issue a community-wide anti-social behaviour order.² This allows police to disperse any groups of young people found outdoors. If they refuse, they face the threat of an anti-social behaviour order (ASBO) and up to five years in jail. Hence the Scottish Parliament were proud to announce that a ‘record number of 210 ASBOs were granted across Scotland in 2004/05 - the highest figure since their introduction in 1999 and a 42 per cent increase in the number granted in 2003/04’.³

With all the fanfare of a marketing campaign, Blair’s Respect agenda re-defines the terms of the populist value wars as being between the drunken hooliganism of young people and the upright respectability of orderly communities. ‘Respect is about every citizen working together to build a society in which we can respect one another and communities can live in peace together’.⁴ While such right-thinking has won the plaudits of conservative thinkers like Roger Scruton and the right-wing press it presents as a new threat to social order a recognisable problem of much longer vintage – the disreputable urban youth. As the sociologist Richard Sennett put it: ‘Is it any surprise that a politician who elicits less and less respect from his public thinks that the public has a problem with respect’.⁵

Beyond the platitudes of the Respect agenda, another way to exorcise the cultural demon of the urban poor has been to send it up humorously. Humouring the poor was evident in the 1990s with the popular situation comedy *Rab C. Nesbitt* and, in the 2000s, with the sketch show, *Chewin’ the Fat*. In both cases the urban poor were sympathetically drawn, living by their own codes, speaking in their own voices, and outwitting and defying characters representing social and cultural authority. If these portrayals could sometimes be a bit too laudatory they nevertheless demonstrated an insider’s understanding of lives of the urban poor.

But by the mid-2000s these soft insider representations of urban subcultures hardened into hateful, shaming representations of the white

poor and the areas where they live. As ‘chav’ or ned culture, these are the backward subjects of the Respect agenda, their abject whiteness a sign of cultural hopelessness and an embarrassment to the new forward-looking agenda of multicultural neo-liberalism.⁶ As Bev Skeggs argues, “The white trash cultures that signify too authentic and too primitive (or too noisy or too sexual) can be put to work as a source of realistic and fantastical menace to the middle class, as the ‘Chavs’ and ‘hen party’ menace demonstrate”.⁷ Vulgar and exuberance are to be displaced and modernised by a middle class imaginary, itself dazzled by the promise of multicultural consumership in a classless neo-liberal utopia. In this discourse of class-based derision middle class representations of the white urban poor, especially the youth, transform them into an object of hatred and shame.

Shame cultures depend on the external negative attribution of personal disgrace and demand conformity with public judgements about good conduct, dignity and taste. Hence the poor become negatively stereotyped as an undifferentiated, disgraceful, tasteless social group upon whom middle class fears of social disintegration and poverty can be projected and the ideological legacy of ‘whiteness’ can be offloaded. As the geographer Chris Haylett put it, “The contemporary racialisation of the white working class is most apparent in underclassing processes which have cast the poorest sections of that group as a group beyond the bounds of ‘the British nation’”.⁸ This process was evident in the 2001 riots in northern English towns where the white working class was depicted as hopelessly racist and backward by a middle class that conspicuously embraces the trappings of multicultural neo-liberalism.

Humour and bigotry

While the new ideology of class-based hate continues an older tradition, most obviously the underclass discourse of the Conservatives in the 1990s, it is now bolstered by humour. This helps to legitimise hateful talk about the poor from counter-attack since it is, after all, ‘only a joke’. But just as Blair’s populist Respect agenda has little to do with mutual respect anti-poor joking represents more than ‘merely’ humour. This appeal to the conventions of humour is an insidious method of licensing hateful discourses against the poor and other oppressed groups. The social psychologist Michael Billig examined the way that appeals to humour is used to justify extreme racist bigotry on Ku Klux Klan-related websites.⁹ Predictably these sites display violently racist humour. But by deploying website disclaimers that it’s all ‘just a joke’ anti-racist objections are somehow thought to be cancelled out. Billig argues that there is a certain pleasure to be had

in humorous displays of hatred, what Sartre called the ‘joy of hating’, whenever it transgresses what is deemed acceptable by established social codes.

Humour allows the bigot the opportunity to displace the symbolic violence of hate discourses by denying that social groups are really the object of hateful laughter at all. Instead, it is the shared recognition of the ‘cleverness’ of the joke format that supposedly generates the opportunity for hilarity. Thus, when challenged the bigot can readily shift their justificatory ground from the hateful content of the joke to the intrinsic social acceptability of humour in the manner of ‘I was only joking’, ‘it’s just a joke’, or ‘take a joke’. Here small, unnoticed words – ‘only’ and ‘just’ – diminish the right to challenge and critique hateful patter.

In other words, it is less how the joke works through its ‘clever’ inner structure than how it is socially and politically situated. By disguising its symbolic violence against the real object of its attack the bigoted joke dissembles and misleads. Class-based bigotry gets coded over in a way that would be disallowed by other types of social communication. Jokes acquire a transcendent quality that puts this special kind of social communication, when it is appropriately signalled to its audience as ‘funny’, as somehow standing outside the bounds of moral or political judgement. In this way the social damage of bigoted joking is both excused and permitted.

‘Ned culture’

This is clearly the case with racist, negative ethnic stereotypes that are otherwise socially taboo and outlawed. In the case of the young, impoverished, white working class the object of attack is a socially marginal group against which there are no public prohibitions on class hate discourses. In fact, venomous rhetoric against precisely this group is the staple of journalists, politicians, and the criminal justice system. In its demonisation of white trash culture, as with much else, the UK is merely catching up with the US.

Public discourse in the UK has been awash recently with denunciations of ‘hooligans’, ‘yobs’, ‘hoodies’ and ‘chavs’. In Scotland (which always has to have its own terms for more general phenomena) this circulates as a vicious discourse of neds. ‘Ned culture’ has become the object of middle class fear and fascination. Seemingly living by their own social codes, neds have dropped out of the respectable, peaceful and hard-working society. Neds lack basic social skills or any kind of a work ethic, and are hell-bent on creating mayhem and misery, especially in the most deprived housing schemes (with ‘schemies’ in some places substituting for neds as the catch-all term). Ned culture is blamed for Scotland’s unenviable crime, rates rather than being seen as a symptom of extreme social polarisation and

inequality. Glasgow, with its long history of gang culture stretching back to the eighteenth century, remains the heartland of ned culture. Despite current fears, a reporter for *The Herald* covering a near fatal stabbing in a gang fight in the Cadder area of Glasgow claims that ‘gang trouble is not believed to be any worse now than it was in the past’.¹⁰

Neds are only the most recent manifestation of a historical middle class discourse about the debauched, hooligan sections of the working class. In his celebrated study of ‘Wine Alley’ in Govan, Sean Damer charts this discourse of class derision from nineteenth century ‘paupers’ to the 1980s ‘underclass’, or what local people in Govan in the 1970s called the ‘riff-raff’ and Glasgow Corporation called ‘anti-social tenants’.¹¹ But, as Damer argues, this was never true for all or most people in the impoverished working class or living in the housing scheme itself, just as it’s not the case today that a single homogenous object - ‘ned culture’ - can be blamed as the source of contemporary society’s problems.

Today, however, the ned discourse of class derision circulates extensively in the daily rhetoric of the mass media. As it does so it has taken on a more spiteful, hateful character than the almost charmingly romantic portrayals of the recalcitrant poor in *Rab C. Nesbitt* and *Chewin’ the Fat*. One example of this is the spoof book, *Nedworld*. Published in 2005, this book satirises ‘ned’ culture under the pseudonyms ‘Kylie Pilrig’ and ‘Keanu McGlinchy’.¹² It attempts this in the vernacular of the Glaswegian working class but fails to maintain anything like a consistent narrative voice, standing as it does far outside the stereotyped milieu it claims to so humorously depict.

From start to finish a torrent of stereotyped class hatred is unleashed in *Nedworld* that would be legally impossible against any other minority group in the UK. It purports to shed humorous insight into ‘the outrageous lifestyle of the ASBO generation’. In fact its clichéd jokes merely repeat the typical race hate jokes so common to British society in the 1970s. Let this one example stand for the hundreds similar in tone and structure:

A ned died pure poor and many local shops donated money to the fund for his funeral out of sympathy. The manager of the jeweller’s was asked to donate a fiver. ‘Only a fiver?’, he asked. ‘Only a fiver to bury Brad-Pitt Mackenzie? Here’s a cheque. Go and bury one hundred of them.’¹³

Here the reader is invited to share the genocidal desire of the joke teller for the physical elimination of neds in their hundreds. It may be objected that ‘it’s only a joke’ but recall the manner in which hate jokes dissemble in their enmity towards less powerful stereotyped groups. In the case of this joke we are asked to identify with the sentiments of someone speaking from a particular class standpoint, that of a middle class businessman, who we are also to assume has justifiable cause for his homicidal hatred of the ‘pure poor’ and neds as an entire social group. As Ewan Morrison astutely put it in his review of the book for the *Sunday Herald*, the book is an index of middle-class fears about the underclass [sic]. It had to be written sooner or later and is, in some perverse way, timely. It flies in the face of politically correct ideas about representing the long-term unemployed, the urban poor, the non-educated and delinquent.¹⁴

In contrast to the ‘ultimate race hate word’, the



N-word, which as Billig notes, “announces hatred without semantic constraint”,¹⁵ ned (or ‘chav’ or whatever local term is used) is a word that can be invoked over and over again because it gives a name to something unmentionable in society: the most impoverished, reviled, humiliated and dominated sections of the working class. As Ewan Morrison further notes in his review of the book, “It dares to say the name, to give the fear a name, more than 2000 times. It exposes not just fear but hatred towards those that carry that name”.

‘Tinkies’ and ‘Gadgies’ as Dundee Neds

The ned discourse of class derision is mainly targeted at working class male youth in the greater Glasgow region. But the hateful discourse of class derision is not confined to Glasgow or young men. Elsewhere in Scotland, other derogatory terms are used to name the same phenomena. Schemie, tinkie or gadgie are east coast terms, the former referring to living on a housing scheme, while the latter two are derived from terms for impoverished itinerant travellers, typically dispossessed Highlanders or Romanies, peddling cheap goods door to door. ‘Tink’ is defined by the *Scots Dictionary* as a ‘contemptuous terms for a person, specifically a foul-mouthed, vituperative, quarrelsome, vulgar person’, though even the *Scots Dictionary* fails to mention poverty as a defining characteristic of the tinkie. That such terms continue to resonate in Scottish society means that they carry the marks of past periods of anti-Highlander and anti-gypsy racism into present day discourses of bigotry.

Tinkie is the term commonly used in Dundee and the surrounding area of Angus. Dundee as a city has struggled against a poor reputation for, on the one hand, the couthiness of the *Sunday Post* and, on the other, being the poorest, most concentrated working class city within Scotland. City planners have actively been trying to discourage negative images of the city and to boost city centre regeneration through education, science and culture.¹⁶ While this provides jobs and consumer distractions for the middle class professionals who commute into the city centre to work and who populate its galleries, theatres and wine bars, the local working class, who have suffered from decades of industrial restructuring and factory closures, are visible only as an army of labourers, appearing to service the affluent before trailing back to the hidden housing schemes dotted around the city’s periphery.

However, the young urban poor make their unwanted presence felt in Dundee city centre, hanging around the public and commercial spaces of the city centre, congregating in the shopping centres, bars and clubs, on the street, at

bus stops, and in car parks. They may have little purchasing power but they possess an unwanted visibility. Unusually, where fears of prole-youth are typically reserved for young men, most venom is reserved for young women in Dundee, a city with a reputation for the highest level of teenage pregnancies in Scotland. Just as women formed the combative backbone of the Dundee working class, first in the jute mills and later in the manufacturing factories like Levi’s and, most memorably, Timex, so young women remain the object of middle class fears.

Bigotry in ‘Dumpdee’

Websites like ‘Dumpdee’¹⁷ produce a discursive invective of class, gender and place under the ideological alibi that it’s ‘just a laugh’. One page contains a spoof news report of an earthquake in Dundee that is able to simultaneously mock the poverty of its ‘epicentre’ in the housing scheme of Whitfield, promiscuous teenage mothers, endemic criminality, dissolute lifestyles, welfare dependency, squalid environment, and a general lack of cultural taste among the poor:

Victims were seen wandering around aimlessly muttering ‘whit the ***k’ and ‘Whaurd that comfee?’ The earthquake decimated the area causing approximately £30.00 worth of damage. Three areas of historic burnt cars were disturbed and many locals were woken before their Giros arrived.

One resident Tracy Sharon Smith a 15yr old mother of five fae Ormiston Crescent said ‘It was such a shock, my little Chardonnay Levi-Mercedes came running into the bedroom crying. My youngest two, Tyler Morgan and Megan Chantelle slept through it all, as well as my great granny Lorraine. I was still shaking while I was watching Tricia the next morning’.

Apparently though looting, mugging and car crime did carry on as normal.

And so it goes on in this vein. This has striking parallels with how the black urban poor in New Orleans were callously represented in the aftermath of the devastation wrought by Hurricane Katrina and the indifference of a state that openly despises the black urban poor. A page on the site called ‘Cheryl’s Gadgie Gallery’ purports to show photographs of the poor fashion sense of Burberry and tracksuit-clad locals but includes spoof adverts for a toy, a check-clad Furby doll, bearing the legend:

Unlike any Furby seen before, the more you play with it the less it learns! In fact ...it learns nothing.

All thanks to the new ‘SCUM’ (Socially Crippled Underage Mother-board)

One page depicts a ‘birthday card’ with a check-clad teenage male surrounded by the claim – ‘Congratulations. Your Grandmother is Thirty’. A fear of racial miscegenation among the poor

is also present. In a page of ‘minutes’ from the ‘Dumpdee Gadgie Society’ an item on ‘Dress codes’ is reported from the ‘meeting’:

How to dress correctly at all times with the latest from the Burberry [sic] collection was given by Chantell Khan-Cohen. (The meeting was then temporarily suspended due to Tayside Police raiding the premises and removing Ms Khan-Cohen and her goods and the 3 models).

The name ‘Chantell Khan-Cohen’ manages to simultaneously draw upon a fear of Muslims, Jews, and the criminality and bad taste of the poor. This is the wrong end of classless multiculturalism, based as it is on hateful stereotypes rather than the everyday routines of multi-ethnic working class communities.¹⁸

Formal and informal disclaimers

Some attempt is given by the website to respond to criticisms that such material may be seen as offensive. Its homepage has the formal disclaimer of a Legal Notice. This allows the site owners to ‘disclaim all liability for such content to the fullest extent permitted by the law’. On the final page there is an informal disclaimer, headed-up by the tell-tale slogan, ‘It’s just a joke’.

We set up this website in our spare time just for a joke – we had no idea it would become so popular. It’s not meant to poke fun at anyone – it’s just for amusement and to give everyone a wee laugh – we all need that sometimes.

Is it really the case that ‘It’s not meant to poke fun at anyone’? This attempt to forestall critique by the use of disclaimers is a typical device in hate humour. Its function is to publicly dissociate the joker from the social or political consequences of the hateful content under the appeal that humour is a special sort of social communication. Yet much of the discursive effort involves attempts to definitively identify and stipulate the characteristic features of the object of attack in terms of promiscuous sexuality, multi-partner teenage mothers, violent criminality, dissolute lifestyles, idleness, squalid environment, and a general lack of cultural taste among the poor, represented, for now, by the ubiquitous Burberry check.

As a further measure of distancing the website from any responsibilities or consequences, it invites ‘Fan Mail’ supporting the site and ‘Hate Mail’ criticising it. Peculiarly then the page of ‘Hate Mail’ is actually from contributors objecting to hate discourse! Much of the Fan Mail is from people who do not live in Dundee but who typically studied at one of the Universities. All agree that its all just a laugh. However, a few fans are open about deriving vicarious pleasure from hate:

This website if f*****g magic. It just says what the rest of Scotland thinks about Scumdee. You missed out the most important thing to: the Kingsway that gets u pass scumdee without seeing proper gadgies as fast as you can.

Ripping the piss out of the neds/gadgies is in no way glorifying them.



The great tragedy is that natural selection should wipe all the gadgie f*****s out soon enough, but it won’t work – cos they breed as soon as they can walk.

This last contributor returns to the genocidal discourse against the poor, only to complain that this solution would also fail, and continues: ‘Its funny, its tragic, its all true [sic]’. This appeal to ‘its funny’ is not here qualified by ‘only’ but leads on to the claim that this is all somehow ‘true’, dropping for the moment the usual contrast between ‘just a joke’ and the more serious business of ‘reality’.

Such spurious reasoning puts into relief the more general apologetics for hateful humour – that at some point it refers, if only implicitly, to its social and political context. Discourses of class derision have real effects. They do feed into political, policy and media offensives that look for remedies for social problems in the more general project of multicultural neo-liberalism. The Respect offensive represents discernible class interests repelled by the very social polarisation that it claims to want to overcome. ‘In these offensives, poor whites function as ciphers for the offloading of a culturally shameful and burdensome whiteness, whilst the symbolic and material violence of that process, pitched both against class identities and against means of subsistence, remains largely unspoken’.¹⁹ The more explicitly hateful the discourse against the stereotyped Other the more it sanctions the use of draconian powers against the most dominated groups in society, including curfews, exclusions, postcode discrimination, arbitrary policing, punitive laws, the withdrawal of welfare benefits. It is always more than ‘just’ a joke.

Notes

The argument presented here is part of ongoing work with Gerry Mooney on class, urbanism and neo-liberalism in Scotland and the UK. Some of this will appear in the *Media Education Journal and Critical Social Policy*.

1 See <http://www.antisocialbehavioursotland.com>

2 Seenan, G. (2005) ‘Quiet Village Curbs Its Noisy Youths: Britain’s First Blanket Dispersal Order Is Being Enforced In An Unlikely Location’, *The Guardian, Society*, December 12

3 Scottish Executive News Release, ‘Record Number Of Asbos Granted’, 2 December 2005, <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/news/releases/2005/12/02100953>

4 <http://www.respect.gov.uk/>

5 Sennett, R. (2006) ‘Views On Respect: Richard Sennett’, BBC News Online, 9 January. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4589616.stm>

6 Haylett, C. (2001) ‘Illegitimate Subjects? Abject Whites, Neo-Liberal Modernisation And Middle-Class Multiculturalism’, *Environment And Planning D: Society And Space*, 19.3, pp. 351-370.

7 Skeggs, B. (2005) ‘The making of class and gender through visualising moral subject formation’, *Sociology*, 39.5, December, p. 970.

8 Haylett, p. 355.

9 Billig, M. (2001) ‘Humour And Hatred: The Racist Jokes of The Ku Klux Klan’, *Discourse And Society*, 12, pp. 291-313.

10 Laing, A. (2006) ‘Tragedy Behind Gang War’, *The Herald*, 26 January <http://www.theherald.co.uk/news/54999.html>

11 Damer, S. (1989) *From Moorepark To Wine Alley: The Rise And Fall Of A Glasgow Housing Scheme*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, pp. 136-7.

12 Pilrig, K. & McGlinchy, K. (2005) *Nedworld: A Complete Guide To Ned Life And Living*, Black & White Publishing. In the emerging hate genre see also *Little Book Of Neds* and the *Little Book Of Chavs*. The latter sold out its first print run of 100,000, an indication that these cheaply produced texts are also profitable enterprises.

13 Pilrig And McGlinchy, p. 64.

14 Morrison, E. (2005) ‘Heard The One About Brad Pitt McKenzie’, *Sunday Herald, Spectrum*, p. 32.

15 Billig, p. 278.

16 For a recent report of the Dundee city centre ‘buzz’ see Nathan, M. and Urwin, C. (2006) *City People: City Centre Living in the UK*, London: Institute for Public Policy Research.

17 <http://www.dumpdee.co.uk>

18 See Back, L. (1996) *New Ethnicities and Urban Culture*, London: UCL Press.

19 Haylett, p. 366.

Political Islam's Relation to Capital and Class

Ardeshir Mehrdad and Yassamine Mather

The last three decades have witnessed a relentless growth of political Islam to the extent that it is an undeniable reality on the contemporary world stage. From the Middle East to North Africa and South Asia, the proponents of political Islam profess themselves 'seekers of justice' and aim their propaganda at the poorest and most deprived sections of society, rivalling traditional socialism. The formulation by the left of a strategy to respond to this challenge requires an understanding of these developments; outlined here are some preliminary theses, based on a necessarily limited consideration of the characteristics and peculiarities of Islamic movements.

From the 1970s onwards, as Islamic societies of the periphery were incorporated ever deeper into the world market, the centre-periphery crisis in these societies entered a new and qualitatively different phase. The fluctuating—but overall downward—trend in the price of raw materials (including, for most of the period, oil) on which these societies depend, speeded up the widening of inequality in social, economic and cultural development, the accumulation of foreign debt and the increasing inability of such states to control and restrain the spiralling crises they have to confront. The Iranian revolution of 1979—which saw the coming to power of the first Islamic government to place pan-Islamism at the centre of its political and ideological agenda—was crucial to the spread of 'political Islam.' From the beginning the Iranian government did whatever it could to directly influence the Islamist movement and take over leadership. Where necessary, the Iranian regime called on radical factions within Islamic organisations, it involved itself in an extensive network of terrorist and jihad-like cells, and embarked on a concerted drive to shape an Islamic international. Finally, it pursued an eight-year war with Iraq which was, above all, concerned with the export of the revolution by military means. The Islamic Republic of Iran is not alone today in exporting the pan-Islamist movement. Other states, such as Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, are also making active bids to take over the leadership of the Islamist movement, to influence its policies and to spread religious illusions and superstitions.

Throughout the Cold War, one of the major weapons of imperialist powers against liberation movements in Islamic countries was religion. In using religion to stupefy the masses and to denounce the opposition, imperialism was both resourceful and relentless; it used the religious weapon to provoke splits in the working class movement, to sabotage progressive and nationalist movements, and even to destabilise anti-imperialist governments or those allied with the Soviet Union.¹ In considering the effect of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the coming of George Bush Sr's 'New World Order,' with the outright colonialist policies of the USA and its allies, legitimacy for pan-Islamist movements is found in the provision of identity, prestige and pride.

Amid the ravages of war in Afghanistan and Iraq, then, political Islam is on the rise, with its supporters portraying it as the ideology of the poor and the dispossessed. They promise a better life for the disenfranchised, less inequality, and the



end of corruption through the rule of 'sharia'a' (the religious state). Yet, in Iran, almost twenty-six years after coming to power with similar promises, Islamic government has become synonymous with greed and corruption; super-rich clerics and their immediate families have replaced the corrupt Royal court and its entourage. What, then, is the basis of the political economy of Islamic fundamentalism? What is the relation between the promises of equality in the rule of sharia'a and the real politics of Islamic governance within the world capitalist order?

In its rebellion against the hopelessness capitalism has engendered, the pan-Islamist movement splits civil society at every level while leaving state structures intact. In the first instance every type of class-based organization is divided along religious lines. Islamic labour and peasant unions and guilds stand opposed to their non-Islamic equivalents. Fissured into Islamic and non-Islamic categories, the sub-groups glare at each other across an ideological divide that causes major transformation in the social class line-up. New, fundamentally non-class, blocs are formed; labour-power aligns itself with either 'Islamic' or 'secular' capital and the potential for progressive class action is systematically eroded. By denying class difference, or at least marginalising it and removing it from the immediate agenda, such a non-class-based social bloc, based on religious cultural unity, has no other way of surmounting the class antagonisms within it; sharia'a remains firmly on the side of unity and those who rupture it are considered worse than unbelievers.

The leadership of these movements feeds on mass activity; their power becomes more concentrated and unassailable in direct relation to their ability to bring the masses on to the political scene. The appearance of the masses in these circumstances signals not the

exercise of their collective will but rather their political disrobement, where the masses are reduced to the umma (family of believers) of the imam. Pan-Islamism in power politicises the whole of society and maintains it in a state of constant mobilisation. Paradoxically, however, this permanent politicisation tends to create its own opposite—through exhaustion comes depoliticisation. Once depoliticisation spreads to both camps in a society, with an atomised class formation and political base, the longer term potential for change and progress towards democracy is seriously weakened. The future for these societies is truly dark.

The working class is powerless not only because of its relative youth and political immaturity but also because it lacks an effective ideological base. The kind of Marxism-Leninism packaged in the 'Academies of Science' of the socialist bloc, in conjunction with various theories of the 'non-capitalist road to socialism', in no way served to unite the working class. In some countries, such as Egypt, the communist and workers' parties went as far as liquidating themselves and joining with the ruling party. In others, there was an inexorable process aimed at distancing the mass of workers from worker-based political organisations and systematic police repression. At a time when conditions for opposing the bourgeoisie were at their best, the working class remained weaker and more helpless than ever. This catastrophic balance between the two main class poles in society promoted not so much political paralysis as a vacuum—both of political representation and of legitimacy. In such situations, the voice from the minarets gains an ear.

The 'revolutionary Islamic movement' is a contemporary phenomenon, attached by an umbilical cord to the form of world capitalism that has developed in the last three decades. The social roots of the 'political Islamic movements' are, essentially, the uprooted—those who, for a variety of reasons, have been waylaid on the path of socio-economic development; and, to whom the new structures have brought nothing but bankruptcies and ruin. At every level the new 'Islamic movement' is the rising of those who not only see themselves as alienated within their own national boundaries, but also of those who think they have discovered the source of their destitution and bankruptcy outside these boundaries. 'Political Islam', accordingly, cannot confine itself to national boundaries; to aspire to set up anything less than a world Islamic power would be to acknowledge ultimate defeat. This is the logic behind the rejection of the legitimacy of all the civil and secular systems that sustain nation states, and of all international treaties and agreements between nation states. The Islamic movement may occasionally support tendencies aiming at independence and even isolationism yet it is emphatic in its rejection of nationalisms that counterpose the nation against the Islamic community.

The growing crisis and steady weakening of governments increased the intervention of global capital in the internal affairs of Islamic countries. This process reached a point at which the economic ministries of many Islamic countries turned into impotent operatives for the decision-

making centres of global capital, bowing to major and crisis-provoking restructuring of the socio-political life of their countries and presiding over policies that caused massive unemployment and attendant despair; chronic inflation ravaged meagre savings, acute housing shortages led to running battles between the guardians of cities and never-ending waves of migrants, and non-existent healthcare facilities effectively transformed hospitals into morgues. The savage demands of the International Monetary Fund and the credit limitations imposed by the World Bank forced peripheral governments to turn on their own people. What little remained of state largesse dried up; millions were made destitute, unprotected against misery, famine and disease. These were the people who carried Egyptian, Tunisian, Moroccan and Algerian pan-Islamism on their shoulders.

Perhaps more than in any other field, the rise to power of the pan-Islamist movement brings the societies it governs into conflict with their own material infrastructure. If the declared role of the state in all societies, including Islamic peripheral countries, is to ‘recreate the external conditions for production’, the pan-Islamist state tends towards multi-dimensional and permanent economic crisis. In particular, the ideological Islamic state cannot fully utilise the various levers with which most states regulate the economy - the law, money and force. Ideology limits and obstructs the workings of the laws of capitalism, including its fundamental law of value. Ownership is valid so long as religious tax is paid and it has been obtained by ‘legitimate’ means. An ideological element thus enters both into ownership and into the exchange of property. A property used for un-Islamic purposes (e.g. brewing) or for which religious tax has not been paid is illegitimate and cannot be exchanged. Commerce is also affected by ideology (some commodities, such as alcohol, ‘immoral’ literature or films, videos and many articles of clothing cannot be bought or sold).

On the question of money, this vital lever of state intervention in the economy faces a similar fate. Money essentially loses its function to fulfil the needs of production and circulation. Instead, the religious-ideological state uses money to answer its political and ideological needs. The volume of money in circulation is allowed to expand at an uncontrolled rate—dictated by political considerations. Consequently the money supply is no longer a stabilising but an anarchic element in the economy. This process allows huge quantities of money to accumulate in a few private hands, creating equity that then confronts the state, vitiating its control, and even determining its actions. Money is used to offset the contradictions between the ideological state and its material-economic base and, in the process, comes to function as its own antithesis—destabilising rather than stabilising the economy.

The use of force as a purely repressive tool in a Radical Islamic government is even more obvious in the economic sphere than in others. Force is not deployed as it is in a ‘normal’ capitalist state, to suppress the conflicts and contradictions between the various sectors of the economy and to paper over cracks so that conditions for the reproduction of capital are optimised. Instead, it is used to suppress the conflicts and contradictions between the economy as a whole and the ruling political power. The result is the creation of a complex web of non-economic structures, entwined with a parasitic and unaccountable structure of capital. A powerful defensive perimeter is built around this alliance, protecting it against both the ideological-material coercion of the state and against blind economic forces. This huge, mafia-like structure has, at one extreme, bazaars and mosques, and, at



the other, armed forces and religious courts.

In these societies, both internal and external capital fight shy of investment in long-term projects; domestic investment is discouraged by the fall in the rate of capital accumulation. A huge burden is placed on the gross domestic product and value-adding activities, which hinders the possibilities of capital accumulation in line with developmental needs. The impact on the state sector is decisive and disastrous. The effect on the private sector is less, but considerable; prompted both by the most efficient pursuit of profit and by non-economic considerations, the private sector tends to eschew productive investment in favour of playing the stock market, hoarding, speculating, buying and selling, real estate and land transactions. Such societies have sunk into a lumpen, get-rich-at-all-costs mentality, glorifying both money and violence, aggressive towards the weak yet simultaneously characterised by sycophancy and opportunism. Foreign sources of investment are even less likely to be found. The deliberate use of the economic weapon, including official sanctions, by core capitalist countries to control crisis-provoking Islamic governments acts as a barrier to the entry of international finance into these countries. Where investment does take place, it is highly calculated and of a politico-economic nature. Thus, Japan and Italy have tried to ensure their future supplies of oil in Iran by investing in petrochemicals or other strategic goods. But, even here, where they are securing their supplies against present and future rivals, advance payment has been extracted in the form of oil sales, itself fulfilling the need to secure oil



stockpiles.

Human resources, this most vital of all factors in economic development, are also exhausted under Radical Islamic governments. The productivity of manpower under capitalism is intricately linked with skill levels, education and research. A secular, scientific and experimental environment encourages development which, in turn, serves to refresh that environment. But the Islamic government crushes this through pressure on secular life (including schools, universities, scientific and research centres). Its ceaseless interference in secular life even forces many of those who already have skills to flee the country or to abandon productive economic activity. The Islamic state thus not only fails to recreate a qualitatively advanced workforce, but deskills the existing labour force, hampering the ability of the economy to expand.

In short, Pan-Islamism in power is ruinous for the economy. Though retaining capitalism as the dominant mode of production, capitalist development is slowed down in certain fields without being able to resurrect some pre-capitalist forms of production. Thus, the inherited economy is faced with both paralysing contradictions and internal anarchy and with the existent unequal development of international capitalism, now accentuated to breaking point. The sad reality is that even when the religious-Islamist governments are overthrown, the future looks bleak. What progressive and stable socio-political system can take root in a society mired in uneven development, polarized and depoliticised, where public discourse is populist or demagogic? How can a society which has fallen victim to pan-Islamism throw off this massive dead weight of cultural psychological trauma? What is to be done? Our purpose here is to issue an invitation—for a dialogue over one of the most vexed questions of our time. What are we to do about a blind and reactionary revolt of the downtrodden?

A child of our time and a product of the ruinous effects of advanced capitalism in Islamic societies of the periphery, Radical Islam confronts the left with its most difficult challenge: how to respond to a reactionary, grass-roots movement, arising out of desperation—a movement which destroys class, cultural and even psycho-social potential, leaving society disarmed and ill-equipped to meaningfully confront its own ruinous state. The actual response of the left has not so far been edifying; both in the region and at a global level, it is paralysed by a phenomenon that presents a contradictory challenge to its instincts.

There have been two basic reactions to Radical Islam—the first a policy of political alliance, the second of confrontation—with the aim of bringing about its ultimate destruction. With the end of the Cold War, the first response has faded. But, at its height, both left and right followed the hallowed doctrine of ‘uniting against the common enemy.’ Radical Islam was both anti-capitalist and anti-communist, so at no stage was it short of potential allies. On the left, there were different attitudes to the potential alliance. Believers in the ‘non-capitalist road to socialism’, for example, saw it as strategic and unconditional; for others, it was tactical, dependent in the longer term on the attainment of proletarian hegemony within the revolution. But, there were also perceived advantages in an alliance for capitalism, which was itself instrumental (directly and through client states) in bringing anti-communist Islam into being and encouraging its growth as part of its policy to contain the working-class movement.

In general terms, two main trends can be discerned in the way the surviving (capitalist) bloc and its allies faced Radical Islam. The first was to liquidate it ideologically; the second to combine



pressure and threats with appeasement and aid to force it on to a path of ‘reform.’ Both strategies had been practiced by the builders of the modern state in Islamic countries earlier in the century—by Ataturk in Turkey, by Reza Shah in Iran, by Bourghiba in Tunisia, in post-war Syria, and even in Pakistan (ostensibly an ‘Islamic state’). What is new is the vigour and scale on which these policies are being pursued today.

According to sections of the Iranian left, faithful to a highly formalistic, deeply rooted economism and a crude statism, any government that increased state ownership at home, and sided with the so-called ‘socialist bloc’ abroad, was a natural ally of the world proletariat, regardless of the degree of participatory democracy it permitted or the relations of production it established. State ownership was even identified as the criterion for ‘socialist’ transformation.

An alternative view, more recently in vogue, rightly rejects such statist economism, but only to replace it with another one-sided view, this time immersed in a cultural interpretation. Culture and ideology are considered the essential elements of Radical Islam, and also the route to its negation. One such interpretation combs the past in search of anti-orthodox-religious elements in national culture. One favoured source is Islamic mysticism, but there are also pre-Islamic movements, such as Manichaeism and Mazdakism. Egalitarian and humanistic elements in mysticism are brought in to confront official organised religion, and to create an alternative to it. In contrast, there are those who declare that there is nothing in national culture on which to build. This argument, made by many prominent thinkers of the ‘new left’, claims that democracy will never take root in Iran and similar societies unless cultural backwardness can be confronted. Total secularism and modernism is their solution for a free and democratic society and economic growth. These are both intellectual movements seeing culture as central and defining the task as the creation of a new one. The latter group claims to follow Heidegger but they are not particularly faithful to him, since they propose to build a new culture from scratch, rejecting all existing culture. The effect of such a strategy is to separate the intellectual from society and, despite their claim to articulate a radical left solution, they echo the liberal cry that it is not possible to have democracy, or take steps towards socialism, in societies on the periphery of world capitalism, especially in countries where a tradition based on religion exists.

Our argument is that Radical Islam is a reaction to the effects of particular forms of modernisation, not to modernisation per se.

This is not a trivial difference. For one thing, understanding it profoundly affects the strategies needed to overcome political Islam. Radical Islam is not a response to the modern state, modern culture or the separation of the religion and state, but rather to mass unemployment, destitution and hopelessness brought about by the modern state. It is not so much a reaction to the essence of modernism but to the ravages of advanced capitalism in a part of its periphery. Those thrown on to the rubbish heap of history claw at the nearest available ideology at a time when liberalism, nationalism and known forms of socialism are all sinking in a quagmire.

It is, therefore, imperative to imagine that any project must offer a fundamental solution to the political and economic crisis that can forestall the genesis and growth of such blind and ultimately destructive movements. It is also clear that any political solution must be accompanied by a cultural renaissance congenial to human feeling, intellect and thought. This requires nothing less than a full-scale ideological spring-clean for the left. The three major planks on which the pan-Islamist movement must be confronted are: the formulation of an independent and radical economic programme, the development of a coherent political platform and a thorough overhaul of its own system of beliefs and ideas about organisation.

While advanced capitalism is polarising the world into extremes of affluence and poverty that now transcend geographical boundaries, one can only talk of an independent economic programme that challenges neo-liberalism at every level. This means confronting the so-called structural adjustment policies of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, which are bringing about the destitution of millions. It is on this ground that the left must distinguish itself from the liberals who also seek to woo the masses breaking away from Radical Islam. Key sections of the economy need to be in public control (which is not necessarily the same as state control), the most suitable form within which the labour force can be directly involved in production, with a major input into meaningful decision-making. The producers must control the means of production not just in legal but in real political and practical terms. A balance must be created between central planning and decentralised workers’ control, and a system of social security must improve quality of life. These and other economic policies are crucial if the left



is to unite with, and mobilise its main social base, the downtrodden. Only with a radical programme addressing the root cause of mass destitution can the left attract its natural class allies away from the clutches of Islamic obscurantism.

The Islamic movement filled a vacuum created by the ideological feebleness of the two main social classes—the native bourgeoisie and the young working class—and we must confront the fact that the left, as it exists in these countries today, is singularly ill equipped to lead the implementation of the programme outlined above. A major rethink is necessary if the left is to fill this ideological vacuum before those who would promote bourgeois alternatives have produced new prescriptions with their already sharpened pens. Without such a rethink, the left can entertain no hope of truly representing the interests of workers, organising working-class struggles, and becoming integral to a genuinely mass force in those societies.

Notes

- 1 An incomplete list might include the following. First, the assistance given to the rise of Ekhvane Muslemein (Muslim Brotherhood) against Nasser’s regime in Egypt and the Ba’ath Party in Syria. Second, support for the Islamic Amal in Lebanon as a counterweight to the Palestine Liberation Organisation and progressive Lebanese leaders and parties. Third, the strengthening of the Fadaayan-e Islam, and mullahs such as Ayatollah Kashani, in opposition to Dr Mossadegh’s government and the Tudeh (Communist) Party in Iran. Fourth, the massacre of half a million communists in Indonesia. Fifth, the mobilisation of semi-military parties and organisations in Afghanistan and the provision of unlimited support to their efforts to overthrow the Marxist government. In so using religion, the imperialist intelligence networks may rely on facilities provided by countries such as Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, or on their own agents sent directly, to create or to infiltrate religious groupings or parties. Their support can take different forms, but the important point is that they played a central Cold War role in increasing Islamic religious influence in Islamic societies. We see the grave consequences today.

An unedited version of this article can be found at [CRITIQUE: Journal of Socialist Theory www.critiquejournal.net/islam.html](http://www.critiquejournal.net/islam.html)

