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Ker-Plunk!

Daniel Jewesbury

In February of this year the Arts Council of Northern Ireland (ACNI) withdrew all their funding for the Ormeau Baths Gallery, Belfast's main contemporary arts venue, forcing the gallery to close and making the staff redundant with immediate effect. The closure came as a shock to the arts community in Belfast, who had no intimation that something of this kind could be about to happen. Throughout 2005, ACNI had been lobbying artists and arts workers to support their own continued existence, in the context of the North's Review of Public Administration (the central pillar in the ongoing devolution of powers to the Northern Ireland Assembly, away from the hundreds of quangos set up under direct rule). ACNI argued that their combination of expertise, advocacy and promotion of artistic autonomy represented the best deal for the arts, the best value to the taxpayer, and the most politically transparent solution. Artists, faced with the alternative of funding being the gift of Northern Ireland's exceptionally parochial local politicians, accepted ACNI's arguments and supported their case. No sooner was the consultation completed than the doors closed on the OBG, alienating ACNI's new friends and undermining what good work they might have done.

What particularly stuck in the throat was the ACNI's presentation of the closure. Two accusations were levelled at OBG's board and management: long-term financial mismanagement, and non-compliance with an ACNI-initiated review of governance and staffing structures that had been made a condition of further funding in 2005. Effectively, the first claim, unaccompanied by any further detail, amounted to a smear; the second was simply inaccurate. Moreover, ACNI's insistence in their statements that the OBG board themselves had decided to close the gallery was dissembling, at the least: faced with the immediate withdrawal of nearly all their funding, the board had no legal option other than to cease trading, as ACNI would have known when they took their decision. ACNI Chief Executive Róisín McDonough's mantra-like insistence on how 'deeply saddened' she was by the closure sounded not just hollow but deliberately patronising, the more information was discovered about the manner of the closure, and the probable reasons behind it.

The trail of events leading to the closure takes us back to 2004 in the first instance; however, discord first arose between ACNI and OBG a little earlier than this, and ultimately, it may be that the closure of the gallery and the sacking of its staff was little more than the settling of old scores and the wielding of unaccountable power.

OBG had been investigated in 2004 following a mistake in the drawing down of Lottery funds. The first investigation was by ACNI themselves; following this a forensic audit was commissioned from Belfast accountants Goldblatt McGuigan. OBG were cleared of any financial impropriety and the incorrectly drawn funds were repaid to ACNI within a few months. This didn't satisfy the Arts Council, however, who proceeded to commission further consultancies on aspects of OBG's functioning: at the taxpayer's expense, a 'Value for Money' report was carried out by BearingPoint between November 2004 and April

2005. Research on contemporary arts provision in Belfast, and the future viability of OBG, was also carried out by Deloitte. Following the first report, ACNI devised a series of demands in September 2005 as conditions for further funding. These included the reconstitution of the gallery's board, a review of staffing structures, and a timetable for implementation. Correspondence between the board of OBG and ACNI, between September and December 2005, shows that the gallery immediately suggested a 'best option' for restructuring, and that ACNI was in support of the steps that had been taken; one letter from Nóirín McKinney, Director of Creative Arts Development at ACNI, to the board of OBG states that ACNI "is completely behind your restructuring plans and welcomes the approach you are proposing".

All of ACNI's demands regarding the gallery were being addressed by the board of OBG – and apparently to the satisfaction of ACNI – when ACNI made its summary decision to withdraw funding in its meeting in January this year (a decision not communicated to the Chair of OBG for a further month). A serious question of probity is at issue here. Can it be appropriate to spend public money forcing the closure of a gallery, paying off creditors, advertising for, employing and training new staff at some undisclosed point in the future, when the conditions for the existing gallery's continuation clearly and incontrovertibly already existed?

The third report, carried out by Deloitte, looked into the future of arts provision in the city, and the long-term viability of OBG in particular. Based on the poor research and inadequate methodology that seems to characterise all such efflorescences of public largesse, the report decided that OBG was not the 'flagship' that New Happy Belfast needs in order to meet the demands of its future. This assessment seemed largely to be based on the absence of a café (such a notable godsend when the fate of Glasgow's CCA was at stake) and a dedicated, separate education space. On the evidence of these deficiencies, and notwithstanding such tedious and largely unquantifiable details like the standard of the gallery's programme, the breadth of its educational and outreach projects, or its international standing thanks to the work of its director, it was recommended that Belfast would need a new gallery, somewhere else in the city. Furthermore, given that OBG is located in such a backwater, directly opposite the BBC, two minutes' walk from City Hall and the city centre, and close to other arts venues, it was recommended that the new flagship gallery should be much more conveniently located – where better, then than the Cathedral Quarter, Belfast's thriving new cultural hub, centred on some wasteground next to a dual carriageway. (The city centre has miraculously moved recently, whilst OBG has stubbornly remained stationary; it was discovered by ACNI's consultants that it is therefore no longer conveniently located; coincidentally, the new city centre is on land owned by private developers and speculators, in a district that has been largely uninhabited for sixty years, since it was razed in the Blitz, but which is now to be most grandly appointed in a neo-Venetian style! This is a little

ironic, given OBG director Hugh Mulholland's role in curating Northern Ireland's first exhibition at the Venice Biennale in 2005.)

Even the poorly executed Deloitte report – any of the artists now working in Belfast could have done a more thorough job – concluded that whatever future decisions may be taken about contemporary arts spaces in the city, there should be no break in provision. In other words, if it was decided to concentrate future provision in the Cathedral Quarter, to assist the private property development which ultimately drives the regeneration of Belfast, the plug should not be pulled on the Ormeau Baths until such provision was actually already established. But then that's the prerogative of the unaccountable public body; having spent around £20,000 on a consultancy, you're not actually under any obligation to act on its recommendations.

This is most interesting when one considers that ACNI has made much of the fact that, over a period of five or so years, OBG had accumulated a deficit of approximately £80,000. This deficit had accrued year-on-year at a roughly even rate, clear evidence not of mismanagement but of the gallery's continued structural underfunding in terms of its very intensive annual programme. Set against the £60,000 (at the very least) that ACNI has spent on audits, consultancies and reviews of the gallery in the last two years, the figure is brought into some kind of relief; and given that provision had to be made for all outstanding creditors on the wind-up of the gallery, and also to pay rent on an empty space for the last three months, we return once again to the question of ACNI's use of public funds.

At the time of writing, ACNI has just announced that it plans to re-open the gallery under its own management, on June 9th. In the long term, ACNI are to constitute a new board to run the gallery, with the Royal Ulster Academy (RUA), Northern Ireland's Sunday painters' club, as the majority stakeholders. Again, how this represents good value, or a commitment to independent contemporary arts provision, or even a passing resemblance to the internationally-recognised programme that OBG had been pursuing, is not made clear. A recent round of 'consultations' with clients over the future of the gallery was less an attempt to engage in frank dialogue and more a cynical public relations exercise: ACNI has said that it "doesn't want to rake over the past", and is clearly hoping that the matter will now go away. As they've demonstrated with their approach to other consultancies, you don't engage in the exercise to begin with unless you know the answer you want to hear. A few artists suggesting that the RUA aren't equipped to programme a contemporary art gallery, or maintaining that they don't want to discuss future provision until the details of the closure are all in the public domain, are unlikely to deflect ACNI from its chosen course. One jester at ACNI even suggested that a few canisters of Zyklon-B might be an appropriate way to deal with persistent whingers.

The opening exhibition at the re-opened gallery includes work from the collection of the Northern Ireland Civil Service. It's lauded by McDonough as exciting contemporary art, which must rank as

yet further evidence of the gulf in understanding between ACNI and those actually practicing contemporary art in the city (Nóirín McKinney said recently on a community TV station that Belfast “doesn’t have the luxury” of the kind of contemporary arts programming that defined OBG; so that’s it – we’re just *not ready* for it! Presumably this includes the work of those artists now finding success overseas but unable to present their work in a mainstream gallery in their hometown). Following this, in July, ACNI are spending £15,000 to bring in a touring exhibition of Magnum photography. This use of funds to buy in some good PR, in what is the quietest month of the year for art galleries, surely can’t be justified. The previous management of the OBG, with all their accusations of financial impropriety, would never have spent such a sum of money on a touring exhibition at this time of the year; for one thing, the Arts Council wouldn’t have let them.

Artists continue to call for the real reasons behind the gallery’s closure to be made public. The mendacious statements so far issued by ACNI have only given inaccurate and misleading information, and freedom of information requests regarding ACNI minutes are expected to shed little further light (particularly if it’s true that the Council were not even presented with a written report to vote on by senior executives). Amongst artists in the city, distrust of ACNI is now widespread. It’s becoming clear that the closure had nothing to do with ACNI’s stated reasons. If it’s been decided to wind down OBG over time, in favour of a recently-announced new arts centre in the Cathedral Quarter, we have to ask whose needs this addresses: the arts community’s, the citizen’s, or the private developer’s (again). The board of OBG decided, in December 2003, not to continue with discussions about moving the gallery to this new arts centre, causing some upset to ACNI plans and apparently occasioning great inconvenience and political embarrassment for the Chief Executive herself. (Purely by coincidence, this was shortly before OBG was subjected to the first of its perpetual evaluations the following year.) If ACNI policy is now being made subservient to the instrumentalised ‘cultural industries’ rhetoric that has been a driving force in our post-Troubles redevelopment, then their claim to be the advocates of autonomous art practice are no longer tenable. And if, as has been suggested, the whole sorry business is simply the final settling of a petty vendetta, arising out of OBG’s jilting of ACNI at the altar of regeneration back in 2003, then the judgement of the Chief Executive herself is called into question.

Also warranting some examination is the composition of the Arts Council. Unlike its counterparts in the Republic of Ireland, Scotland, Wales or England, the Northern Irish Council has no representative with any practical expertise in contemporary visual arts. The local politicians, minor public servants and assorted professionals who shape cultural policy for the North are thus not equipped to assess contemporary art according to its needs and on its own merits. In the absence of this expertise the administration of arts policy is made to fit with political and economic imperatives that have been defined

elsewhere; instead of scrutinising the proposals of its own executive, as it is intended to do, the Council merely rubber-stamps them on the basis of inadequate information. Rather than giving this body the power to lay waste to Northern Ireland’s cultural provision according to its ill-advised whims, the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure in the North needs urgently to restructure the Arts Council, and make it at least potentially capable of fulfilling its own stated remit.



Irish Connections

Immigration and the politics of belonging

Bryan Fanning

Let me tell you about a conversation I had in Israel with a prominent political personality who was defending the (in my opinion disastrous) non-separation of religion and the state in Israel. What he said – I am not sure of the exact words anymore – ran something like this: “You will understand that, as a Socialist, I, of course, do not believe in God; I believe in the Jewish people.” I found this a shocking statement and, being too shocked, I did not reply at the time. But I could have answered: the greatness of this people was once it believed in God, and believed in Him in such a way that its trust and love towards Him was greater than its fear. And now this people believes only in itself? What good came of that? Well, in this sense I do not “love” the Jews, nor do I “believe” in them; I merely belong to them as a matter of course, beyond dispute or argument.¹

It is something of a cliché to describe the past as a foreign country. To some extent everyone can be a foreigner in their country of origin, citizenship or domicile. The nation states that emerged in the West were somewhat like the retail giants which have homogenized high streets and squeezed out many idiosyncratic small shops. Like other nation states the Republic of Ireland was preceded by the emergence of mass ideas of identity and belonging. These were sustained by mass literacy and education. It became possible to conceive of an identity that was shared with someone living on the other side of the country. People that would never meet came to define their Irishness in the same way. At the same time, they could label those ‘others’ they actually lived alongside as not really Irish. Human beings in all their diversity can become subordinated to dominant idealised formulations of national citizenship, of religious denomination, of ethnocentric tribe or of rule-bound social movement. They may be judged and found wanting by the Platonic ideals of ‘real’ nationalism, ‘real’ religion and ‘real’ cultural authenticity. Ideals of belonging encroach like the shadows in Plato’s cave on the flesh and blood world of day-to-day existence. Such ideals may well shelter some within the cave but also insist that others are not really British, not really Irish, not really a feminist or not a true believer in a particular religion. Identity imposes orthodoxies enslaved to ideals of belonging.

Phillip Larkin’s famous line about parents – “They fuck you up, your mum and dad” – can hold for fatherlands and motherlands. The Irish nation state was forged out of violence. “We may,” Patrick Pearse wrote in *The Coming Revolution*, “make mistakes and shoot the wrong people; but bloodshed is a cleaning and a sanctifying thing, and a nation which regards it as the final horror has lost its manhood.” During the late 1970s, intellectual nationalists of different shades of green interrogated what Richard Kearney influentially described (with no grasp of social science) as the Irish Mind: an atavistic collective unconscious depicted in Jungian terms as somehow intrinsically authentic and distinctive.² Identity so understood is strong stuff, if not quite monolithic; a family quarrel with no place for outsiders, intellectual or otherwise, and no room for disloyalty or dissent. Thirty years later, in the belligerent post-9/11 world of homeland security, wars of terror and wars on terror, the relationship between identity and intolerance has become everyone’s urgent business. The result of this so-called clash of civilisations has been to classify and

incarcerate people within rigid conceptual boxes, as recently noted by Amartya Sen in *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny*.³

This ethnocentrism, the tendency to look at the world primarily from the perspective of one’s own tribe, is what we have to confront, along racism or sectarianism. The writers who would engage with the flaws of their own nation or ethnic group – be it Orhan Pamuk today or Sean O’Faolain in the 1940s – might find themselves censored or censured at home then readmitted, like James Joyce – posthumously, after outside recognition – as iconic proof of the greatness of the people from which he sprung. A willingness to engage with the capacity of one’s own tribe to exclude or discriminate is crucial to addressing problems such as racism and discrimination. All peoples, all nations and all societies – whatever their own histories of being oppressed – are capable of oppressing those they define as others. It is not possible to paper over the cracks by saying that your own people’s history of oppression means they cannot oppress others. Claims of mutual solidarity between different post-colonial societies with a history of oppression play well as ideological politics but when tested – say, by the presence of migrants – reveal the racism and discrimination of one’s own society.

The Republic of Ireland as a nation state can be seen to have many attributes in common with those of other nation states. Dominant ideas of social membership emerged at a cost to minorities. Those perceived as deviant from the norms of the dominant imagined community – and from the constitution and laws that institutionalised these – were required to choose between assimilation (the surrender of visible difference) or rejection. To look at the social history of the Republic of Ireland from this perspective is to challenge comfortable orthodoxies. A focus on the Republic’s specific history of excluding minorities might well be labelled as revisionist. Accounts, for instance, of the murders of Protestant and Traveller civilians in West Cork by IRA fighters during the War of Independence and Civil War pose considerable challenges to romantic myths.⁴ Studies of the experiences of Jewish refugees before, during and after the Holocaust, as distinct from the invented experiences of Joyce’s imaginary Irish Jew, demonstrate that Ireland was by no means exempt from the anti-Semitism common in other European nations. These studies suggest that ethnic nationalism, anti-colonialist or otherwise, can be at odds with anti-racist aspirations or, at the very least, will have a hard time reconciling a real Irish society in all its diversity with an imagined Ireland rooted in the past and the legacy of real sectarianism.

Joyce’s *Ulysses* contains a definition of a nation as “the same people living in the same place.” The reality is that nation states have tended to subordinate difference to national ideals of homogeneity. Small minorities might have found themselves written out of history, swallowed up in the nation-building of modernity. It is important to understand the mechanics of such exclusions in coming to terms with the challenges of integrating new immigrants. In 1904 Fr Creagh urged a boycott against the Limerick Jewish community. Creagh combined the then-prevalent secular European anti-Semitism, which depicted Jews as enemies of nation states, with religious anti-Semitism. He portrayed the Jews as oppressors

of the Irish people. Under Creagh’s Catholic nationalist formula, anti-Semitism was represented as contributing to the emancipation of the ‘Irish’. He cast the Jews as oppressors of the Irish ‘worse than Cromwell’. In post-independence Ireland Jews became officially defined as a threat to the state before, during and after the Holocaust. For instance, a Department of Justice memorandum, dated 28 February 1953, noted a policy of official anti-Semitism: “In the administration of the alien laws it has always been recognised in the Departments of Justice, Industry and Commerce and External Affairs that the question of the admission of aliens of Jewish blood presents a special problem and the alien laws have been administered less liberally in their case.”⁵

A key plank of racist politics is the proposition that vulnerable minorities somehow oppress the dominant group. Anti-Semitism within Irish nationalism drew on the language of anti-colonialism. Irish anti-colonialism no less than ‘imperialism’ can play host to nativism, ethnocentrism and racism. Overt racism is often piously despised within the political mainstream yet the old sour wine has been poured into the new bottles, labelled West versus the rest, Fortress Europe, allowing Irish distinctions between ‘nationals’ and ‘non-nationals’ – rooted in stereotypes of despised asylum-seeker mothers and their ‘non-Irish’ Irish-born children. The concern remains that anxieties about social change become exploited by populist politics which mobilise racism and ethnocentrism to offer simple answers to complex questions.

Ethnocentrism has acquired a new credibility in the wake of 9/11. Multiculturalism has been attacked from the left and right. Public intellectuals such as David Goodhart, editor of *Prospect*, tell us that ‘ethnic nepotism’ is natural and that welfare solidarities do not work in diverse societies. Multiculturalism has to some extent been supplanted by a new muscular liberalism that proposes that the big Western tribe must (again) become intolerant of the rest. An American advocate of this muscular liberalism, the philosopher Richard Rorty, in 1994 described his position as one of anti-anti-ethnocentrism.⁶ It scorned efforts by liberals to extend pluralism to include those who do not share their beliefs. Rorty argued that Western liberals should “accept the fact that we have to start from where we are, and this means that there are lots of views which we cannot take seriously.”⁷ He argued that Western liberals get themselves into a bind because their beliefs pull them in two incompatible directions. On one hand they possess no doubts about human equality. On the other, they become aware that most of the world does not share their values. They cannot, as he puts it, stick up for their beliefs without getting in a muddle or without choosing to be ethnocentric.⁸ An early definition of ethnocentrism offered by Theodor Adorno defined it as a tendency to regard one’s own group as normal and others, by comparison, as strange and inferior.⁹ It is often suggested that ethnocentrism is natural because human societies tend to be suspicious of outsiders.¹⁰ However, the stereotypes that sustain ethnocentrism are often implausible, whether they are applied by nationalists to the presumed enemies of nations or by liberals to presumed enemies of freedom.

Isaiah Berlin has offered a liberal understanding of pluralism that contrasts with Rorty’s ethnocentric solidarity. Berlin argued that it is important to acknowledge the existence of a plurality of human ideals and values. He considered that their pursuit is part of what it means to be human. Multiple, but finite, values are seen to be objective, part of the essence of humanity rather than arbitrary creations of mankind’s subjective fancies. Berlin was no relativist. He argued that we may well find a particular way of life intolerable but we must never forget to recognise it as a human pursuit: “If I am a man or a woman with sufficient imagination (and this I do need), I can enter into a value-system



Connections, film installation by Jackie Doyle at Belfast Exposed, 2006.

unwillingness ever to forget that other values are, for those who hold them, objective expressions of their humanity.¹² Solidarity is inconceivable without empathy. Empathy sometimes amounts to understanding some connection between one's own fate and those of others or, at least, perceiving others from some recognisable vantage point. Here art can have a powerful role. This article was prompted by a film installation by Jackie Doyle which was commissioned by the Belfast Film festival in 2005. *Connections* consisted of a bank of television screens typical of an airport departure lounge. Information on flight destinations gave way to short overlapping films where forced migrants told stories of torture, persecution and consequent trauma. The central device of Doyle's installation was simple. Actors with Northern Irish accents narrated the testimonies of forced migrants from other countries and visa versa. Foreknowledge of the punch-line – human stories of oppression and exclusion can be interchangeable – in no way lessened the visceral impact of the piece. At the time of writing 41 'asylum seekers' and 'failed asylum seekers' from Afghanistan had just ended a hunger strike in St. Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin. Their protest was timed to coincide with the 20th anniversary of the IRA hunger strikes in the North. It too could be seen as a conscious effort to create an Irish connection; to penetrate the Irish Mind, so to speak. However, making such connections is never easy for racialised groups.

This, for me, was Jackie Doyle's point and what is missed by Isaiah Berlin's liberal humanist bonhomie. The strikers' problem, one shared with the real forced migrants whose stories were presented by Doyle, is that recognition of their humanity is mediated by nation state politics of belonging. For Hannah Arendt the big practical problem with human rights was the absence of a 'right to rights'.¹³ Arendt understood that empirically (what *is*, rather than what *ought*, to be) rights spring from membership of a nation state rather than from the human condition. She argued that those exempted from citizenship, in one way or another, found no protection in the abstract nakedness of being human. As she put it, drawing on Edmund Burke in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*: "The survivors of the extermination camps, the inmates of concentration and interment camps, and even the comparatively happy stateless people could see without Burke's arguments that the abstract nakedness of being nothing but human was their greater danger."¹⁴ Human rights depend, as such, upon what states (and their citizens) will or will not do about them.

The Republic of Ireland must begin the business of integrating or otherwise coming to terms with the one in 10 living in Irish society who were not born there. It must do so in the knowledge that an unwillingness or inability to integrate immigrants sets up big problems for the future. It must do so in the knowledge that the efforts of other countries have often been flawed. It must do so knowing that integration cannot be bought off the shelf, but must be grounded in local effort. Engagement with the local rules of belonging is required. Existing national ideas of belonging are a necessary starting place but so too is recognition of how past and present rules of Irishness have failed indigenous minorities.

To date, the integration of immigrants has been for the most part restricted to the economy. The grocer's republic, to borrow loosely from Yeats, now exists within a globalised economy that brings large numbers of workers with scant thought about where they will fit within Irish society. Everything we know about human migration leads us to expect that many will be here for good. Everything we know about the experiences of other immigrant societies tells us that we have a vested interest in their success. To paraphrase John Rawls, our fates are intertwined; the fates of their children and our children even more so. For this reason alone ethnic nepotism – excluding emigrants from social rights and entitlements – makes little practical sense. However, the experiences of other countries tell us that even when rights are extended to immigrants

all sorts of dangerous institutional barriers can persist. These have everything to do with culture and identity. Difference is all too often portrayed as deviance from dominant cultural norms and this in turn gives license to discrimination.

In Ireland, as elsewhere, a reckoning with dominant ideas of belonging cannot be avoided. Engagement with these seems to be crucial if projects for securing the integration of immigrants are to have any political legitimacy. Yet in the Republic of Ireland, no less than in the United Kingdom (where there has been a Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain), the precise national identity with which immigrants are required to engage is somewhat unclear. In France, a republican ideal of equal citizenship erroneously represents the state as culturally neutral. It has become all too clear that this republicanism is ethnocentric and that its project has been the assimilation rather than the integration of immigrants. In the Irish case the big question is whether republican notions of equal citizenship can transcend an ethnic nationalist past. As has been noted, Martin McGuinness has spoken of the need to persuade:

'our people' of the unionist tradition 'that they are a cherished part of the Irish nation' who 'will not have to give up anything they cherish in what will be a multicultural, multiracial, multilingual secular society.'¹⁵

The problem here is that one person's inclusionary republicanism is another person's ethnocentric monoculturalism. For the Irish there is more to the business of integrating immigrants than convincing them to get in touch with their inner Irishman or Irishwoman; and that you can have any colour of multiculturalism so long as it's green.

Bryan Fanning is the author of Racism and Social Change in the Republic of Ireland and the forthcoming Immigration and Social Change in the Republic of Ireland, both by Manchester University Press.

Notes

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- 14 Ibid, p.299
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which is not my own, but which is nevertheless something I can conceive of men pursuing while remaining human, while remaining creatures with whom I can communicate, with whom I have common values – for all human beings have common values or they cease to be human, and also some different values else they cease to differ, as in fact they do."¹¹

The essence of Berlin's pluralism was not a willingness to surrender one's own values but an

Nobody has to be vile

Slvoj Žižek

Since 2001, Davos and Porto Alegre have been the twin cities of globalisation: Davos, the exclusive Swiss resort where the global elite of managers, statesmen and media personalities meets for the World Economic Forum under heavy police protection, trying to convince us (and themselves) that globalisation is its own best remedy; Porto Alegre, the subtropical Brazilian city where the counter-elite of the anti-globalisation movement meets, trying to convince us (and themselves) that capitalist globalisation is not our inevitable fate – that, as the official slogan puts it, ‘another world is possible.’ It seems, however, that the Porto Alegre reunions have somehow lost their impetus – we have heard less and less about them over the past couple of years. Where did the bright stars of Porto Alegre go?

Some of them, at least, moved to Davos. The tone of the Davos meetings is now predominantly set by the group of entrepreneurs who ironically refer to themselves as ‘liberal communists’ and who no longer accept the opposition between Davos and Porto Alegre: their claim is that we can have the global capitalist cake (thrive as entrepreneurs) and eat it (endorse the anti-capitalist causes of social responsibility, ecological concern etc). There is no need for Porto Alegre: instead, Davos can become Porto Davos.

So who are these liberal communists? The usual suspects: Bill Gates and George Soros, the CEOs of Google, IBM, Intel, eBay, as well as court-philosophers like Thomas Friedman. The true conservatives today, they argue, are not only the old right, with its ridiculous belief in authority, order and parochial patriotism, but also the old left, with its war against capitalism: both fight their shadow-theatre battles in disregard of the new realities. The signifier of this new reality in the liberal communist Newspeak is ‘smart’. Being smart means being dynamic and nomadic, and against centralised bureaucracy; believing in dialogue and co-operation as against central authority; in flexibility as against routine; culture and knowledge as against industrial production; in spontaneous interaction and autopoiesis as against fixed hierarchy.

Bill Gates is the icon of what he has called ‘frictionless capitalism’, the post-industrial society and the ‘end of labour’. Software is winning over hardware and the young nerd over the old manager in his black suit. In the new company headquarters, there is little external discipline; former hackers dominate the scene, working long hours, enjoying free drinks in green surroundings. The underlying notion here is that Gates is a subversive marginal hooligan, an ex-hacker, who has taken over and dressed himself up as a respectable chairman.

Liberal communists are top executives reviving the spirit of contest or, to put it the other way round, countercultural geeks who have taken over big corporations. Their dogma is a new, postmodernised version of Adam Smith’s invisible hand: the market and social responsibility are not opposites, but can be reunited for mutual benefit. As Friedman puts it, nobody has to be vile in order to do business these days; collaboration with employees, dialogue with customers, respect for the environment, transparency of deals – these are the keys to success. Olivier Malnuit recently drew up the liberal communist’s ten commandments in the French magazine *Technikart*:

1. You shall give everything away free (free access, no copyright); just charge for the additional services, which will make you rich.



2. You shall change the world, not just sell things.
3. You shall be sharing, aware of social responsibility.
4. You shall be creative: focus on design, new technologies and science.
5. You shall tell all: have no secrets, endorse and practise the cult of transparency and the free flow of information; all humanity should collaborate and interact.
6. You shall not work: have no fixed 9 to 5 job, but engage in smart, dynamic, flexible communication.
7. You shall return to school: engage in permanent education.
8. You shall act as an enzyme: work not only for the market, but trigger new forms of social collaboration.
9. You shall die poor: return your wealth to those who need it, since you have more than you can ever spend.
10. You shall be the state: companies should be in partnership with the state.

Liberal communists are pragmatic; they hate a doctrinaire approach. There is no exploited working class today, only concrete problems to be solved: starvation in Africa, the plight of Muslim women, religious fundamentalist violence. When there is a humanitarian crisis in Africa (liberal communists love a humanitarian crisis; it brings out the best in them), instead of engaging in anti-imperialist rhetoric, we should get together and work out the best way of solving the problem, engage people, governments and business in a common enterprise, start moving things instead of relying on centralised state help, approach the crisis in a creative and unconventional way.

Liberal communists like to point out that the decision of some large international corporations to ignore apartheid rules within their companies was as important as the direct political struggle against apartheid in South Africa. Abolishing segregation within the company, paying blacks and whites the same salary for the same job etc: this was a perfect instance of the overlap between the struggle for political freedom and business interests, since the same companies can now thrive in post-apartheid South Africa.

Liberal communists love May 1968. What an explosion of youthful energy and creativity! How it shattered the bureaucratic order! What an impetus it gave to economic and social life after the political illusions dropped away! Those who were old enough were themselves protesting and fighting on the streets: now they have changed in order to change the world, to revolutionise our lives for real. Didn’t Marx say that all political upheavals were unimportant compared to the invention of the steam engine? And would Marx

not have said today: what are all the protests against global capitalism in comparison with the internet?

Above all, liberal communists are true citizens of the world – good people who worry. They worry about populist fundamentalism and irresponsible greedy capitalist corporations. They see the ‘deeper causes’ of today’s problems: mass poverty and hopelessness breed fundamentalist terror. Their goal is not to earn money, but to change the world (and, as a by-product, make even more money). Bill Gates is already the single greatest benefactor in the history of humanity, displaying his love for his neighbours by giving hundreds of millions of dollars for education, the fight against hunger and malaria etc. The catch is that before you can give all this away you have to take it (or, as the liberal communists would put it, create it). In order to help people, the justification goes, you must have the means to do so, and experience – that is, recognition of the dismal failure of all centralised statist and collectivist approaches – teaches us that private enterprise is by far the most effective way. By regulating their business, taxing them excessively, the state is undermining the official goal of its own activity (to make life better for the majority, to help those in need).

Liberal communists do not want to be mere profit-machines: they want their lives to have deeper meaning. They are against old-fashioned religion and for spirituality, for non-confessional meditation (everybody knows that Buddhism foreshadows brain science, that the power of meditation can be measured scientifically). Their motto is social responsibility and gratitude: they are the first to admit that society has been incredibly good to them, allowing them to deploy their talents and amass wealth, so they feel that it is their duty to give something back to society and help people. This beneficence is what makes business success worthwhile.

This isn’t an entirely new phenomenon. Remember Andrew Carnegie, who employed a private army to suppress organised labour in his steelworks and then distributed large parts of his wealth for educational, cultural and humanitarian causes, proving that, although a man of steel, he had a heart of gold? In the same way, today’s liberal communists give away with one hand what they grabbed with the other.

There is a chocolate-flavoured laxative available on the shelves of US stores which is publicised with the paradoxical injunction: Do you have constipation? Eat more of this chocolate! – i.e. eat more of something that itself causes constipation. The structure of the chocolate laxative can be discerned throughout today’s ideological landscape; it is what makes a figure like Soros so objectionable. He stands for ruthless financial exploitation combined with its counter-agent, humanitarian worry about the catastrophic social consequences of the unbridled market economy. Soros’s daily routine is a lie embodied: half of his working time is devoted to financial speculation, the other half to ‘humanitarian’ activities (financing cultural and democratic activities in post-Communist countries, writing essays and books) which work against the effects of his own speculations. The two faces of Bill Gates are exactly like the two faces of Soros: on the one hand, a cruel businessman, destroying or buying out competitors, aiming at a virtual monopoly; on the other, the great philanthropist who makes a point of saying: ‘What does it serve to have computers if people do not have enough to eat?’

According to liberal communist ethics, the ruthless pursuit of profit is counteracted by charity: charity is part of the game, a humanitarian mask hiding the underlying economic exploitation. Developed countries are constantly 'helping' undeveloped ones (with aid, credits etc), and so avoiding the key issue: their complicity in and responsibility for the miserable situation of the Third World. As for the opposition between 'smart' and 'non-smart', outsourcing is the key notion. You export the (necessary) dark side of production – disciplined, hierarchical labour, ecological pollution – to 'non-smart' Third World locations (or invisible ones in the First World). The ultimate liberal communist dream is to export the entire working class to invisible Third World sweat shops.

We should have no illusions: liberal communists are the enemy of every true progressive struggle today. All other enemies – religious fundamentalists, terrorists, corrupt and inefficient state bureaucracies – depend on contingent local circumstances. Precisely because they want to resolve all these secondary malfunctions of the global system, liberal communists are the direct embodiment of what is wrong with the system. It may be necessary to enter into tactical alliances with liberal communists in order to fight racism, sexism and religious obscurantism, but it's important to remember exactly what they are up to.

Etienne Balibar, in *La Crainte des masses* (1997),

distinguishes the two opposite but complementary modes of excessive violence in today's capitalism: the objective (structural) violence that is inherent in the social conditions of global capitalism (the automatic creation of excluded and dispensable individuals, from the homeless to the unemployed), and the subjective violence of newly emerging ethnic and/or religious (in short: racist) fundamentalisms. They may fight subjective violence, but liberal communists are the agents of the structural violence that creates the conditions for explosions of subjective violence. The same Soros who gives millions to fund education has ruined the lives of thousands thanks to his financial speculations and in doing so created the conditions for the rise of the intolerance he denounces.

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“The Scottish Executive is open for business”

The New Regeneration Statement, The Royal Bank of Scotland & the Community Voices Network

Chik Collins

Introduction: “Ministers felt the need to say something about regeneration”

The language of civil servants can be provocatively obscure. So it was when Alisdair McIntosh, head of regeneration in the Scottish Executive, came to Glasgow University at the beginning of March to speak about the latest “regeneration statement” – *People and Place*.¹ He said it had been produced because ministers had “felt the need to say something about regeneration”, and that they had felt this need as early as 2003.

This seemed curious. Firstly, ministers had at that time just made an explicit statement on the matter – in *Better Communities in Scotland: Closing the Gap*.² This heralded the move from Social Inclusion Partnerships (SIPs) to Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs), subsequently legislated as part of the 2003 Local Government in Scotland Act. Why the need to say something else so soon? Secondly, even if ministers had felt the need to say something, then what would make figures who had recently seemed to be on the left of the Labour Party, like Malcolm Chisholm and Johann Lamont, the Minister and Depute Minister for Communities, want to say what this new statement was saying? For McIntosh told us that the central message of *People and Place* was that “The Scottish Executive is open for business”. So what has been happening?

The suggestion here is that there are some significant developments afoot. A concerted

effort is being made to intensify the application of the neo-liberal agenda across Scotland. But the strategy adopted means there are particular implications for the poorest communities – thus ministers’ curious “need to say something about regeneration”. *People and Place* is not more of the ‘same old regeneration partnership stuff’, but a key part of a broader agenda for a step change in opening up Scotland’s communities to private sector penetration. This agenda can do immense damage across Scotland – but with particularly unsavoury implications for the poorest communities in the shorter term.

What follows is not intended as any definitive statement on these processes – which remain very much live. Rather the intention is to focus attention on them, and to make them an object of further critical discussion among those who understand that neo-liberal policies do *not* help with ‘closing the gap’ or with ‘community regeneration’. The suggestion is that there is a need to grasp this new situation quickly – before the intended pace of events leaves us behind. So, what is happening?

‘Is the manager in?’ Why those ministers felt that need

It will help to begin with the recent *Red Paper on Scotland*. The chapter by Baird, Foster and Leonard on “Ownership and Control in the Scottish Economy” is of particular importance.³ It critically analyses a report from the Royal Bank of Scotland – *Wealth Creation in Scotland*.⁴ This report is crucial to understanding the situation.

Wealth Creation is a response to the economic strategy of the Scottish Executive as laid out in 2001 in the first edition of *A Smart, Successful Scotland*.⁵ The latter emphasized the importance of entrepreneurs and business start-ups for Scotland’s future. But, for the Royal Bank, this is “not the whole picture”. We need also to be aware that: “Large, globally focussed companies are key components in a successful economy”.⁶

The report argues that for a small nation Scotland has a relatively high number of such firms. Many of these emerged in the 1980s and early 1990s. But since then we have stopped “growing” them. This is what the Royal Bank would like to have changed. The key, it is suggested, is to refresh the drive towards privatisation and liberalisation that “grew” our global competitors in the earlier period.

“Several of Scotland’s major firms have a strong public sector heritage. Within the top 20 firms, the recent background of 14 could be argued to be significantly influenced by the public sector. This influence has been either directly through a privatisation (e.g. Scottish Power), or indirectly, through the liberalisation of a sector that previously had a strong public sector involvement (e.g. oil, gas and transport). One of the firms, TotalFinaElf (UK), is still partially owned by the French government, while others, (e.g. British Energy, Stagecoach, First Group) continue to receive direct or indirect public subsidy for some of their activities.

“Scottish Water, if privatised, would rank high up on the list. Further liberalisation in other sectors (e.g. health, education) could also provide significant

growth opportunities for Scottish firms, such as service providers, in the future”.⁷

So, as is the philosophy in the Royal Bank, the message is very clear. The public sector can influence company growth through privatisation and liberalisation – with health and education high on the list. The aim is to ‘grow’ a Stagecoach or two in these sectors. Public sector failure to positively ‘influence’ this process will undermine the nation’s competitiveness in the global economy.

From a more critical perspective we might say that here we find something very reminiscent of Marx’s condemnation of ‘vampire’ capitalism – increasingly recognisable in the era of ‘globalisation’. We find accumulated, ‘dead labour’ (capital) which can apparently only survive by sucking the ‘life-blood’ of the living – the resources which are vital for community well-being (its oil, its gas, its transport system, its water, its health care, its education system, its social services ...). And it is known that nowhere on the planet has such a process ‘closed the gap’ or brought about ‘community regeneration’ – quite the reverse.

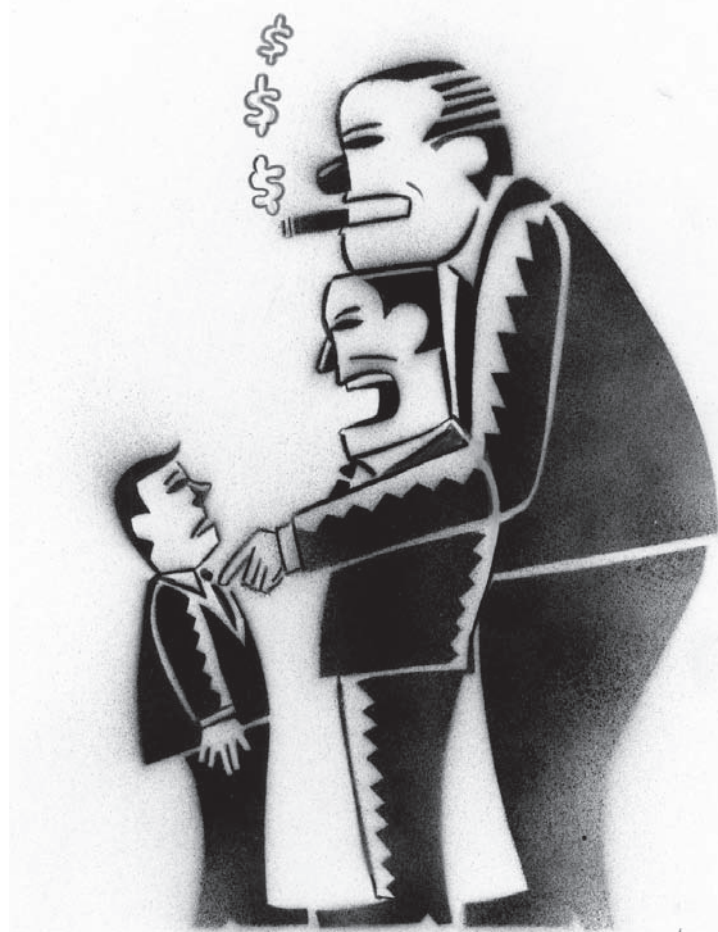
The preface to *Wealth Creation* was provided by Jim Wallace – at that time the Depute First Minister and Minister for Enterprise in the Scottish Executive. It explicitly recognised the need “to increase the number of globally competitive companies”. Thereafter, it seems, ministers “felt the need to say something”, for within six months of its publication a revised edition of *A Smart, Successful Scotland* had appeared – reflecting precisely this shift in emphasis.⁸ The other need ministers felt to “say something” about around the same time – ‘regeneration policy’ – seems to have been closely connected.

And what they actually said ...

Reading *People and Place* in this light the connection seems very clear. The second paragraph in Chisholm’s Foreword begins with a sentence which otherwise looks very curious: “Regeneration is a crucial part of growing the economy ...”. One might have expected the causality to have been the other way round – economic growth being crucial to regeneration objectives. But we are told that regeneration policy is crucial to achieving the Executive’s *economic* objectives – which now involve ‘growing’ globally competitive firms. The intention is to target the ‘regeneration’ areas to get this newer ‘firm growing’ agenda moving.

There is an obvious precedent. The New Life for Urban Scotland programme was conceived along somewhat similar lines in the late 1980s – to get Thatcher’s third term ‘public services reform agenda’ moving.⁹ Now, as then, the argument will be that something ‘radical’ needs to be done finally to tackle the problems of the poor areas – that people need to leave aside ‘ideological’ objections and ‘do whatever is necessary’. In practice this will mean accepting a growing role for the private sector as ‘leading partners’.

However in practice, the private sector has until now never been sufficiently persuaded that it has



been worth its while fully to play the role allocated to it. *People and Place* is at pains to make it clear that the Scottish Executive is now going to ensure that this changes. Henceforth, 'regeneration' will be "about creating value".

"Our approach to regeneration will seek to act as a catalyst, or lay the foundations, for private sector involvement ... regeneration is about creating value ... This statement ... is a statement of intent; and it is a statement of our determination to step up the pace in transforming Scotland ..."

"active encouragement of private sector participation ... means providing private sector partners with clarity and certainty about the sustained commitment of the public sector ... and lifting barriers to private sector involvement".

"Scotland has one of the longest-established and respected financial and advisory sectors in the world. And we have long experience of Public Private Partnerships (PPP) on which to build potential regeneration solutions for the future. Yet much more needs to be done to ensure that private sector players, such as developers, banks and the construction industry, view Scotland as 'open for business' on regeneration; and that they are fully aware of the opportunities available".

"Above all, it is our job ... to ensure that the public sector is alive to both to regeneration opportunities and the needs of the private sector. ... we want to talk with and listen to those involved in regeneration – with financial institutions, developers, house-builders and businesses ... (we) will ensure that our approach addresses the needs and concerns of those at the sharp end."¹⁰

It could hardly be clearer: "The Scottish Executive is open for business". The Executive, that is, will ensure that Scotland's *communities* – with their many 'development opportunities', but also with their health and social services and their education services – are "open for business", and that their potential to fuel the growth of large "service provider" companies is realised. But how is that to be done *in practice*?

Implementation: From *Better Communities* to *People and Place*

People and Place states the problem very clearly. National agencies – particularly Communities Scotland and Scottish Enterprise – can be given their remits:

"Yet it is first and foremost at the regional, local and neighbourhood level where regeneration initiatives actually happen; where communities, local authorities, Communities Scotland, Scottish Enterprise, Highlands and Islands Enterprise (and their Local Enterprise Companies) and others lead, plan and deliver programmes, where developers, the construction industry and other businesses make regeneration real; and where the private sector invests and takes risks."¹¹

The problem, in the 'new public management' jargon, is how to 'join it up', 'roll it out' and 'deliver' across Scotland's localities. *People and Place* offers some broad indication of how this is to be done.

Broadly the approach is to use the implementation apparatus set out around the 2002 *Better Communities* statement – in particular the Community Planning Partnerships. The 2003 Local Government in Scotland Act obliges all local authorities to "initiate, facilitate and maintain" CPPs, and requires other public bodies to participate in them. They are intended to have a particular focus on the needs of the poorest 15% of areas as identified by the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD).

Better Communities reflected the significantly different economic perspectives of 2002. It also had, again reflecting that period, a stronger emphasis on social justice and 'closing the gap'. While these aspects have changed, the implementation apparatus associated with it is being retained. This is because the perspective of *Better Communities* was that previous partnerships – notably the SIPs – exhibited *local*

implementation failure, rather than *central policy* failure.¹² The CPP framework was intended to deal with this – to ensure "a more defined link between national, local and neighbourhood priorities" and to ensure that implementers would provide "clearly articulated rationales for their work which make explicit links between national and local priorities".¹³ These "rationales" would then provide the basis for more thorough monitoring and rigorous 'accountability' from implementers.

This implementation perspective means that the CPPs retain their functionality. In "bringing together key participants to act as a bridge to link national and local priorities better", CPPs remain central to the Executive's refocused attempt to "step up the pace in transforming Scotland".¹⁴

A key role in making this link is played by the Regeneration Outcome Agreements (ROAs) produced by CPPs. These are used in the allocation of funds to CPPs through the recently created Community Regeneration Fund. This process 'encourages' CPPs to frame their activity in the terms set by the centre, before submitting them for approval by the centre, receiving funds linked to them, and then being, much more rigorously than hitherto, monitored and held accountable for their overall performance. Thus, the Executive promises to:

"Use the ROAs ... now in place in all local authority areas ... as the foundation stone for effective joint working on community regeneration by Community Planning Partnerships ..."¹⁵

"Political commitment" and Urban Regeneration Companies

All of this, however, will need to be underpinned by "clear political commitment from key players" – otherwise "the technical, financial, economic and legal complexities" posed by the new agenda "may prove insurmountable". The aim is to

draw upon, and extend, existing experience in dealing with such "complexities". The experience of Public Private Partnerships in "delivering improvements in public services", and of the Community Ownership Programme in "delivering housing investment", are highlighted. Both have required, and received, *sustained* political commitment. Also highlighted are public-private Joint Venture Companies (like the EDI group in Edinburgh), and "other financial instruments for leveraging private sector investment, such as bond issues, land trusts, and Property Investment Limited Liability Partnerships" which are "already being used in a preliminary way ... across Scotland and the rest of the UK". And there is mention of further movement towards a "mixed economy of investment" and more "dialogue with the private sector on new forms of financial instrument".¹⁶

There is also significant emphasis on the creation of Urban Regeneration Companies (URCs) – in the key areas in which the 'new ways' will initially be developed. These are related to the infamous Urban Development Corporations of the 1980s, which, it is euphemistically acknowledged, "did not always fully capture the economic benefits for local communities". In 2004 three such URCs were established (in Clydebank, Craigmillar in Edinburgh and Raploch in Stirling) as "special purpose vehicles, bringing together the public and private sectors, to drive forward the delivery of complex, tightly focused urban regeneration initiatives". In these areas it is intended that "clarity of purpose" combined with "efficient use of public funding to kick-start initiatives" will facilitate a "plan to lever over £400m of private sector investment".¹⁷

These URCs were established as "pathfinders", and *People and Place* announces a further three that follow. The first is for the "Clyde Gateway" project, along the planned M74 extension. Here the "scale and complexity" of the project requires



a URC “to drive the project forward and provide the long-term certainty needed by investors”.¹⁸ The others are in Inverclyde – the Riverside Inverclyde URC – and on the Ayrshire coast – the Irvine Bay URC. Together with the Clyde Waterfront Strategic Partnership in west Glasgow (not a URC), these areas provide the “geographic priorities” for *People and Place*.

Overall there is perhaps more detail on property development in the particular geographic priorities than in relation to other concerns. Yet, as Alisdair McIntosh made clear when he spoke at Glasgow University, this could mislead. These areas will certainly be a principal focus for experimentation and development, but the document is “a statement of intent” and the intent is to disseminate the results as “best practice” across the rest of the country – via the CPPs. Moreover, the ambitions are much wider than just property development. Another key concern is “public sector reform”. One significant passage comments on this that:

“The relationship between regeneration, renewal and public sector reform is a complex but critical one: we will bear it firmly in mind in the context of the forthcoming debate on the future of public services in Scotland.”¹⁹

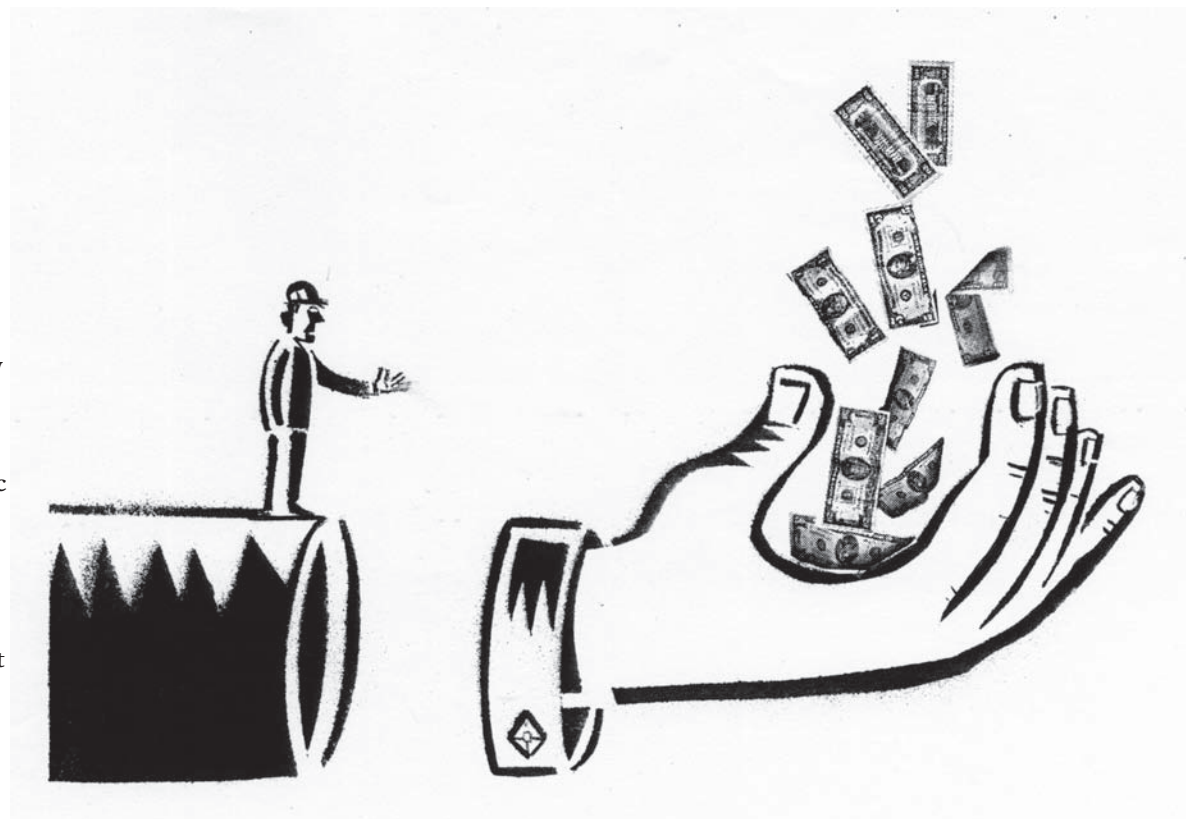
Thus the ‘fit’ between the latest regeneration statement and the economic perspective laid out by the Royal Bank seems quite apparent. ‘Regeneration’ policy in the late 1980s and 1990s was used to establish and disseminate a centrally driven neo-liberal agenda in relation to property development and public services. This is now seen as a time when Scotland was at the ‘cutting edge’ of ‘regeneration’ in the UK – a position it has since lost. *People and Place* indicates a desire to recapture that ‘dynamism’, and to similar, neo-liberal, ends – only now with ends increasingly set by private sector interests, and with specific aspirations the kind of which the Thatcherite ‘bogey men’ of the earlier period (the Riddles and Forsyths) were only able to dream.

The ‘forces of conservatism’ and the Community Voices Network

This, then, is the broad framework for rendering Scotland’s communities “open for business” – URCs at the ‘cutting edge’ and CPPs as the more general vehicles through which the new (“best”) practices get disseminated (with Communities Scotland’s “Scottish Centre for Regeneration” playing a key role in that dissemination).

Implementation, however, is typically also a *political* process. On entering the New Labour mindset one must remember the special role accorded to “the forces of conservatism” – those public servants who oppose “modernisation”. It is understood that the latest agenda challenges the interests of many who will be charged with implementing it much more pointedly than hitherto. As one well-connected journalist observed in March, “each layer of government and quangocracy is currently digging its defences”.²⁰ It is in this light that we should see much of what has been going on in the institutional landscape recently – most obviously in relation to local government, Scottish Enterprise, and the future of the health boards. At the moment it looks less likely that this will lead to wholesale reorganisation in the short-term than seemed probable a few months ago. But there has been at least some significant ‘softening up’. This in itself might be sufficient to get the compliance needed to get the agenda moving (results in Glasgow point in this direction²¹), with more substantial change perhaps coming after the 2007 Scottish Parliament elections. This would not necessarily require the return of a Labour-Liberal coalition. It is clear that within the other main parties, including the SNP, there is equal, if not greater, sympathy for the ‘radical reform’ agenda.

Moreover, there is another angle from which the “forces of conservatism” can be attacked.



Communities Scotland has been seeking actively to recruit local communities to this task. Under the heading of ‘community engagement’ they have set about creating their own national community organisation across the SIMD areas. It is called the “Community Voices Network”. The organisation had its first conference in Glasgow in March of this year. At the conference it became apparent that the remit of the CVN is not simply to co-opt and manage local communities to *allow* the implementation of the neo-liberal agenda, but to recruit their active participation in the task of *bringing it about*.

Curiously, communities are now being encouraged to speak in a kind of language of protest – after having being told for twenty years that this was against the spirit of ‘partnership’. The latter means that there is a potentially useful reservoir of frustration and resentment in these communities, waiting to express itself. The Community Voices Network is seeking to gather it up and direct it, in a controlled way, at the ‘forces of conservatism’. Significantly, the Local Authorities and others were actively excluded from attending the founding conference – with the justification being that members should be able to express themselves freely without their (intimidating?) presence. Only the Scottish Executive, Communities Scotland, and the CVN members were allowed in. The underlying assumption in all of this is that the Scottish Executive and Communities Scotland are the friends and allies of the poor communities – and pose no obstacle to their free expression. They, like the poor communities, are fed up and want to see radical change – and don’t want any more to tolerate local bureaucrats who have been doing well for themselves over the years while failing to listen to their concerns and to deliver on their ‘regeneration’ promises.

Thus, in the language of *People and Place*, the CVN is part of the process of “lifting barriers to private sector involvement”. As if to demonstrate this, the task of running the Network has actually been given to the private sector – a firm called Paul Zealey Associates.

Symptomatically, the term “community engagement” is itself an import from the corporate world. In the words of a prominent business academic, it denotes “one of two broad approaches” corporations can take “to help them steer a safe course” when investing in “difficult political environments”. The “enclave strategy” – ring-fence your investment and pay the local military to provide security – should always be judged against a potentially better alternative. This is the “community engagement” strategy – where companies “go local” by “embedding themselves deeply in the local communities in which they operate”. In “the developing world” this might involve a local company in helping to build schools, hospitals and local infrastructure, so as to become “an indispensable neighbour that has the political support of the whole region in

which it operates.” But this is not just a strategy for “the developing world”. It “makes good sense in developed world markets as well”. Here too: “The more that companies can win local community support for their operations, the more politically secure they will be”.²²

And here in Scotland companies are to be involved in the provision of education, health, local infrastructure and much more. But in this case they will not so much provide resources for community well-being, as *dispossess* local communities of the resources won by previous generations of struggle – through privatisation.

Conclusion

The Royal Bank of Scotland is, since its take-over of NatWest in 2000, the 5th biggest bank in the world.²³ What we are seeing is, perhaps unsurprisingly, the devolved institutions of ‘the new Scotland’ being pervaded by its perspectives. Its growing confidence in these institutions can be seen in its endorsement of the Liberal Democrats’ Steel Commission on the powers of the parliament – an endorsement which stressed the importance of getting the power to vary corporation tax.²⁴

People and Place bears some of the hallmarks of the approach of The Royal Bank to change – or more specifically that of its recently retired former Chairman, Sir George Mathewson, who led the bank through a “very radical reorganisation” in the early 1990s.²⁵ Firstly, the message of change should be clear – perhaps something like “The Scottish Executive is open for business”. But, secondly, the message should be translated into action *quickly*. Again the desire to achieve this is very apparent in *People and Place*.

Of course changing Scotland is not the same as changing the Royal Bank, but the intent is clear. Whether the aims are achieved or not, there can be little doubt that their pursuit will do significant damage, particularly to our most vulnerable communities. There is a need to grasp the dangers of this significantly new situation, and to respond quickly – before even greater momentum is established. The experience of previous generations of partnerships was that by the time opponents ‘got up to speed’ it was often already too late. It is important that this is not repeated now that the stakes are higher still.

In particular, there is a vital need to connect to, and work with, local communities – so that the frustration and resentment they rightly feel about their experience over twenty years of ‘regeneration partnerships’ is directed at those institutions and ideologies which *really have* driven their underlying neo-liberal agenda, and which today seek to drive it at a new level of intensity. As in the later 1980s, partnerships hang their legitimacy on ‘community’, and this remains, now as it was then, a great potential weakness – not just for the ‘partnerships’, but for the broader neo-liberal agenda which they seek to develop and promote.

Postscript

After completing this article the author received news of a recent conference on “Delivering the Scottish Infrastructure Investment Plan through Effective Partnerships”. The Executive’s Infrastructure Investment Plan “sets out detailed investment plans in schools, hospitals, housing and transport projects” for the 2005-2008 period. In order to “grow the economy and provide better public services”, it “provides a longer term vision of the investment plans to enable the private sector to plan ahead and take advantage of the opportunities”.²⁶

The conference, organised by a private firm (of course!),²⁷ was addressed by Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform, Tom McCabe – as well as by a broad swathe of speakers from across the public and private sectors. The audience was largely from the private sector. McCabe spoke of the “need to speed up the pace and widen the scope of reform and change” and of the need for the public sector to improve the timing and processing of “deals” to meet expressed concerns of the private sector.²⁸

Reports on the language of the event are revealing. As well as the above “deal flow”, civil servants spoke of the market’s continuing “hunger” for PFI assets, and of health in particular as providing a “continuing feast”. There was also a clear indication of the focus moving towards service provision. Informally, some from the private sector spoke of the abundance of “low lying fruit”. In ordinary language those would be ‘easy pickings’. Significantly, the minister’s speech stressed the centrality of *People and Place* to the progress of all of this.



Notes

1 *People and Place*: Regeneration Policy Statement, Scottish Executive, 2006.
2 Scottish Executive, 2002.
3 S. Baird, J. Foster, and R. Leonard “Ownership and Control in the Scottish Economy”, in Vince Mills (ed), *The Red Paper on Scotland*, Glasgow: Research Collections @ Glasgow Caledonian University, 2005.
4 *Wealth Creation in Scotland: A Study of Scotland’s Top 100 Companies*, Edinburgh: Royal Bank of Scotland, 2004.
5 Scottish Executive, 2001.
6 *Wealth Creation*, p.4.
7 Ibid, p.11.
8 Scottish Executive, 2004; see also Baird, Foster and Leonard, op. cit.
9 See the articles by Collins and Lister (Vol. 6, No.2, 1996) and Collins (Vol. 1. No. 2, 2001 & Vol. 14, No. 3, 2004), in *Concept* (The Journal of Contemporary Community Education Practice Theory).
10 *People and Place*, foreword, ps. 15, 22 & 49.
11 Ibid, p.21.
12 See Cambridge Economic Associates, *Developing a Transition Framework for Social Inclusion Partnerships: Interim Programme Review*, Edinburgh: Research from Communities Scotland, Report 19, 2003.
13 Communities Scotland, *Integrating Social Inclusion Partnerships and Community Planning Partnerships*, Edinburgh: Communities Scotland, 2003, p.16.
14 *People and Place*, p.18 & foreword.

Desire Lines of Traffic - 1990, Glasgow

15 Ibid, p.25.
16 Ibid, ps. 14, 23, 22 & 18.
17 Ibid, ps 52 & 23.
18 Ibid, p.33.
19 Ibid, p.54.
20 D. Fraser, “The Quest for Joined-Up Government”, *The Herald*, 10th March 2006.
21 D. Fraser, “Glasgow to launch £1bn public service revolution”, *The Herald*, 7th March 2006.
22 E. Kapstein, (2006) “Avoiding Unrest in a Volatile Environment”, in *Mastering Uncertainty*, a four-part weekly supplement to *The Financial Times*, Part 1: “Seeking Shelter from the Storm”, 17th March 2006.
23 Baird, Foster and Leonard, op cit.
24 D. Fraser, “LibDems urge tax powers shift”, *The Herald*, 7th March 2006.
25 K. Symon, “When George Mathewson took over ...”, *Sunday Herald*, 30th April 2006. Mathewson has since been appointed a non-executive director of Stagecoach, where the finance director of RBoS (Bob Speirs) is already the chairman (see *The Herald*, 9th May 2006).
26 See: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/News/Releases/2005/02/25104436>.
27 Called *City and Financial* – see: <http://www.cityandfinancial.com/aboutus/>
28 McCabe’s speech is available at: <http://www.cityandfinancial.com/conferences/?sector=7&id=63>.

Turning Things Around

Peter Suchin

Down with the Fences!: Battles for the Commons in South London – no author given, Past Tense, 2004

Nine Days in May: The General Strike in Southwark – Jordan Brown and others, Past tense, 2005

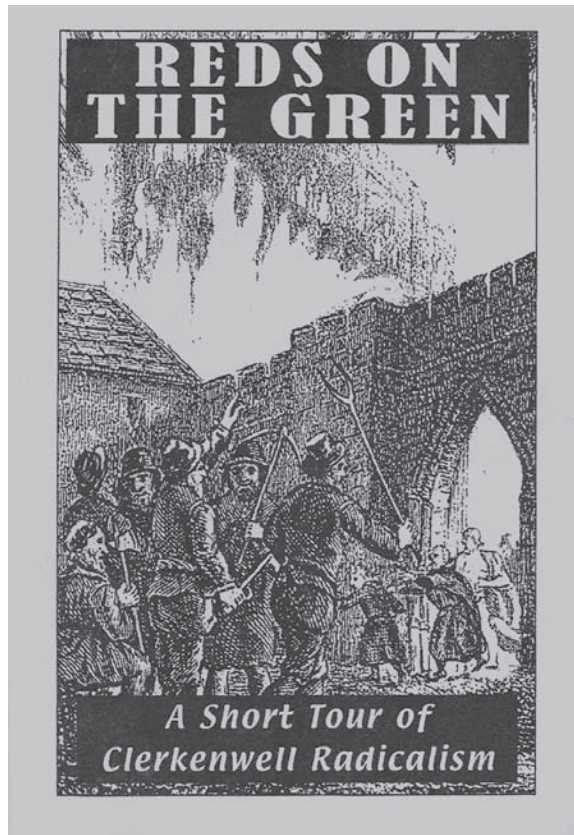
Poor Man's Heaven – The Land of Cokayne: A 14th Century Utopian Vision – Omasius Gorgut, Past Tense, 2005

Reds on the Green: A Short Tour of Clerkenwell Radicalism – Fagin, Past Tense, 2005

These four pamphlets have been published in connection with the South London Radical History Group, which describes itself on the inside cover of *Down with the Fences* as a “self-organised, anti-hierarchical open forum”. As such they might be regarded as essentially polemical – or at the very least didactic – in intent. Being in part the revised texts of talks given by the SLRHG, and partly written especially for a non-specialist audience, the range of topics itself suggests the necessity of a critique of the contemporary political scene in the UK. One's impression is of an attempt to retain the memory of, or otherwise bring into circulation various historical moments, themes and ideas. Three of the publications focus upon London, the fourth, *Poor Man's Heaven*, looks at the geographically (and historically) wide-ranging desire for a utopia that is the sole province of the poor and the enslaved, an anti-Christian “land of plenty” as expressed in numerous poems, stories and songs.

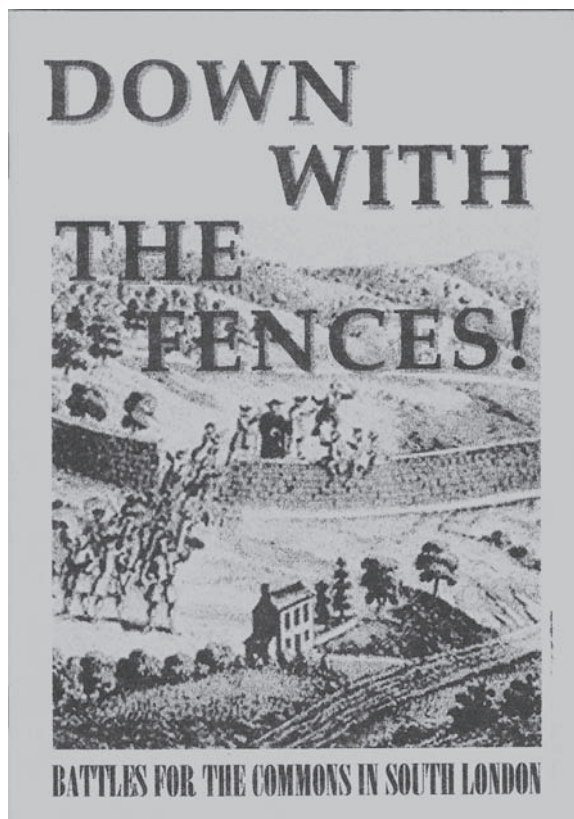
If London is, however, the place to which most attention is given within these works, much of what's discussed here is at least potentially transferable to other territories. An account of attacks upon the Enclosure movement in South London will in all likelihood hold some correspondence with disruptive action that occurred in other quarters. But there will also be, since the booklets aim to provide geographically specific histories, substantial differences. Not only will the particularities of the locales under discussion need to be attended to but London's specificity, as capital city, seat of government, and full-to-bursting metropolis will require consideration too. It would be churlish to point out that a series of publications whose titles clearly indicate the area under examination are in a sense rather restricted or misleading, though at least one of this quartet, in its account of the General Strike of 1926, is precisely the latter, insofar as an otherwise uninformed reader would hardly, I suspect, recognise from their imbibing of this text that the General Strike was a national – and not a merely “London located” – affair.

Although the authors do not always deem to give us their names – raising in the present reader questions pertaining to authorial responsibility rather than communal anti-individualistic, pseudo-democratic research – although the names aren't always supplied, the tone of each text is quite distinct. *Reds on the Green* and *Poor Man's Heaven* are the most scholarly of the group, though source material is, particularly in the case of *Reds...*, not always supplied. *Poor Man's Heaven*, in contrast, appears to cite the majority of its author's sources, also providing a short bibliography for further reading. *Nine Days in May* is in fact a reprint of a work first published in 1976, consisting of an 18 page survey of the main events of the Strike, followed by passages by several people who were actually involved in organising resistance against the government and its supporters fifty years before. *Down with the Fences!*, directly based on a talk presented in March 2003, is the weakest of the four volumes. It's more or less an annotated list of occurrences given in chronological order,



and as such is too condensed and fragmented to do the job it seems its author – or authors – are apparently striving towards: the mapping out of a tradition of revolt against the enclosing and consolidating of land by the rich, to the detriment of the poor and the person of “ordinary” means.

As I have noted, these booklets do not purport to what would in any case be a false neutrality or zero-degree tone. They are engaged and educative tools designed to aid those opposed to the nether world of advertising and consumption that is today so uncritically accepted as merely the normal order of things, the way society is and must be. In their best passages these texts are convincing and clear, informative without being over-technical or avidly academic; at their worst they are woolly and sarcastic, lefty rantings rather than exercises in the intelligent conveying of occasionally complicated information. Finding the



most pertinent pitch of exposition can't be easy, but its important to remember that an audience that has probably not attended university need not necessarily be lacking in intellect or the ability to process complex nuggets of information. One might in any case claim that today university attendance does not guarantee that those who occupy such institutions emerge from the experience mentally more perceptive than when he or she first entered into it. But then perhaps it never did.

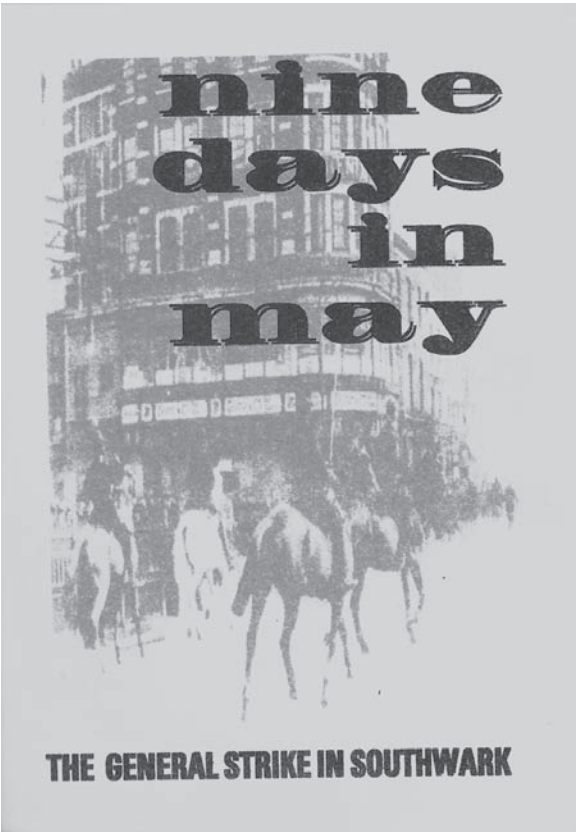
At just over 70 pages in length *Reds on the Green* is long enough to grant the elusive Fagin space to touch upon a wide range of material in a way that allows an elaborate series of internecine actions and passionately-held views – the “Radicalism” to which the pamphlet's subtitle refers – to get a good airing, the length of the text allowing Fagin to go into detail where appropriate, and to situate these moments of dissent within a broader context. Clerkenwell, a place once plentifully supplied with wells, rivers and streams, takes its name from the phrase “clerk's well”, so-called because clerks once gathered in this part of the city on public holidays to perform plays comprised of Biblical scenes. “It has been said”, writes Fagin, “that the history of Clerkenwell is a microcosm of the larger history of London. It's certainly true that whenever there has been major social change and/or unrest in London it has been reflected by events in Clerkenwell, and the unrest often manifested and organised itself here throughout its long history as a radical centre.” (Pp. 5-6) The first instance of insurrection cited is the Peasant's Revolt of 1381, an uprising largely stimulated by the imposition of a poll tax being imposed on all people over 14 years of age. Fagin follows this with a section on the Plague (1665) and the Great Fire of London (1666), the latter disaster having led to a vast influx of tradesmen into the city, their skilled labour necessary for the immense task of its rebuilding once the flames had finally died down. Many of these craftsmen settled in Clerkenwell, laying the basis for its eventual development as an area closely associated with the production of luxury goods for the rich. Such workers operated in cramped conditions and lived on low wages, despite the highly skilled work they carried out. Clerkenwell had plenty of open spaces where workers might meet to hold protests against their poverty and their “containment” within the slum areas in which many of them spent their lives. Access to printing technology (one of the borough's major trades) meant that material critical of the existing order might be reproduced and distributed – this too was a key factor in Clerkenwell's development as an area known for its history of dissatisfaction and dissent.

Following on from the passages on great disasters *Reds on the Green* considers “The Conquest of Measured Time and Space”, wherein Fagin points out that the products made by Clerkenwell's skilled workers were not always to their own advantage. The eventual expansion within the borough of the clock and watch trade, and of the making of sophisticated locks and keys, might well be considered an example of workers constructing the devices of their own oppression. The development of reliable clocks and navigational devices greatly aided the expansion of the British Empire while such clocks were also used as a means of marking out and controlling workers' time. The possession of sophisticated locks and keys (also produced by Clerkenwell employees) controlled access to gateways, doors, cupboards and boxes, dividing up property and space in a manner paralleling that of

the division of time. “Clerkenwell’s watchmaking and locksmithing trades were the motor for the conquest and privatisation of time and space”, Fagin observes, “the technology that defined and measured the new social relationships of capitalism.” (P. 15)

Later sections of the booklet consider in some detail the area’s labyrinthine slums (known as “The Rookeries”), subsequently covering famous local criminals such as Jack Sheppard, Bridewell house of correction, instances of Irish political activity within Clerkenwell, the Chartists, and the resident mavericks Dan Chatterton and Guy Aldred. The concluding section is an attack on the area’s recent gentrification and upon overly fashion-conscious people “who appear to take pride in defining themselves only by how they look, where they are seen, how they make their money and how they spend it.” (P. 65) Such deviations away from factual reporting are not always welcome, even if conveying valid points. It’s as if the writer feels s/he must keep reminding the reader of their author’s radical disposition. There’s a brief dig at Peter Ackroyd’s over-romanticising of London and then a couple of pubs are recommended to the reader – as though these are the last authentic “drinking holes” in England. It’s a rather silly note on which to end after having explained at length just how historically significant a place Clerkenwell once was.

Mysteriously lacking in pagination, *Down with the Fences!* is in fact 32 pages long. It starts off well, with a fair amount of information packed into it, but the writing weakens as one progresses through the text. Jokes and would-be-clever or smug asides replace rigorous research. The unnamed writer’s comments on the Spencer family’s link with the enclosing (i.e. stealing) of erstwhile public or common land is followed by a rather pathetic piece of “wit”: “A concrete pillar celebrating these struggles against the Spencer family was later erected in a tunnel in Paris.” There doesn’t appear to be any reason for this oblique reference to the death of lady Diana Spencer except as an attempt at comic



effect. But the *actual* effect is one of rendering other parts of the text unconvincing, making the overall narrative, insofar as one can find one here, look rather thin. Duff comic assertions are no substitute for clarity of exposition or relevant deviations, by which I mean the expansion of the issue at hand, not pointless mockery that tells us nothing new. Wouldn’t the reader be better served by the supplying of coherently-displayed information than by signifiers of solidarity with the imagined anti-royalist audience of this fairly disappointing piece of prose?

I like the “horse’s mouth” approach utilised in *Nine days in May*. The balance between the survey section and that comprised of recorded remarks from people involved in organising the Councils of Action – there were 131 in operation in 1926 – is good. One gets a lively but, one feels, non-fictitious outline of the central events of the Strike, including descriptions of police violence, the bringing in of tanks and troops, and the generally chaotic relations between the strikers and the powers that be. As with the other pamphlets here discussed, this one is little more than an introduction to the subject at hand, but one that is quite successful within its stated area of concern.

One of the themes included in Omasius Gorgut’s *Poor Man’s Heaven* is “the world turned upside down”, an all too often temporary situation in which what is mainly achieved is the letting off of steam, the relieving of tensions that might



otherwise bubble over into concentrated dissent, in time perhaps becoming a sustained reversal of power.¹ The 1926 General Strike was an unplanned moment of interruption, a proto-revolutionary point of conflict that turned into one more failed battle against the bosses. But the moments of overturning cited by Gorgut are in the main of a different order insofar as they are an intrinsic part of the system that they purport to refute. Gorgut – a Rabelasian name if ever there was one – goes into the matter in some depth, carefully distinguishing between near-universal accounts of a land wherein the poor shall live like royalty unrestrained, and the Christian myth of a glorious afterlife populated only by those who ‘behaved themselves’ (whether rich or poor) whilst on Earth. The imaginary land of Cokaygne is open only to the poor – no rich person may enter therein. Gorgut tracks the Cokaygne legend through its various mutations and modifications, beginning with a version from the fourteenth century and ending with the twentieth-century American song “The Big Rock Candy Mountains”. On the way he delves into Thomas More, Sir Philip Sidney and William Shakespeare, amongst others. The contradictions of the Catholic Church are emphasised, especially its attempts at suppressing itinerant preachers who travelled the country encouraging a reading of the Bible that clashed rather uncomfortably with official accounts. “After the thirteenth century, under the influence of St Thomas Aquinas,” Gorgut notes, “theologians and philosophers increasingly began to argue that private property and class divisions were the natural order of human society.” (P. 21) The unofficial preachers opposed this, directing their listeners to those parts of the Bible wherein the message was not a defence of hierarchy and power but of equality before God.² *Poor Man’s Heaven* concludes on an optimistic note, its author realising that although stories of the land of Cokaygne are inherently idealistic, they also sustain and provoke a desire for the radical transformation of everyday life.

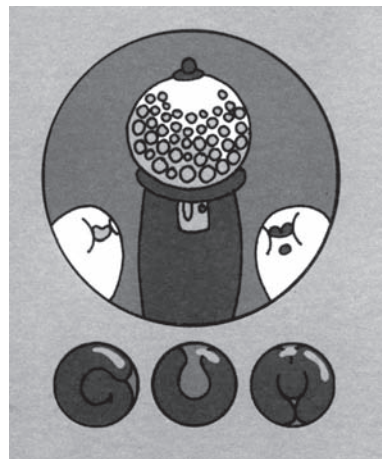
Notes

1. For extended discussion of this and related issues see Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, Indiana University Press, 1984, and also Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down*, Penguin, 1975.
2. See the section on “Religious Wayfarers” in J. J. Jusserand, *English Wayfaring Life in the Middle Ages*, T. Fisher Unwin, 1889.

Comic & Zine Reviews

Mark Pawson

Two interesting zine-related events held in London recently provided me with the opportunity to pick up an armful of publications that I hadn't come across previously. Firstly, in April I went to **London Zine Symposium**, which for its second year was held in a big squat building on the north side of Russell Square. The twenty or so stalls were a lively mix of good ol' subversive anarchist literature and omnipresent punkness, together with comix/cs, graf/street art and personal zines, with anyone who turned up on the day able to find space to put their zine on display and several people walking around giving out free copies of their zines. There was a steady flow of interested visitors passing through the doors all day, some familiar faces I hadn't seen for a few years, and a couple of people who I'd corresponded with but never met who came up and introduced themselves. The stalls were accompanied by a programme of workshops, films, a cafe and bands playing on into the night – all good stuff.



So what did I take home from all of this? To begin with there was **Gum** by **Matilda Tristram**, a bubblegum-powered, wordless, psycho-sexual odyssey. **Gum** features two curvaceous characters, one male, one female, their faces featureless apart from their mouths, who meet by a bubblegum dispenser and start flirting and taunting each other by blowing big soft bubbles, which rapidly become overtly sexual as they take turns to blow pink breast- and penis-shapes before finally assaulting each other using the moist, pink genitalia-balloons. **Gum** ends in glorious release with an enormous pink bubble popping and spurting all over the page! It's beautifully printed in three shades of pink, with nice subtle touches in the illustrations such as a copyright symbol appearing as a reflection on a bubble. I always thought that the reason we weren't allowed to have bubblegum in our family as kids was because it would stick to hair and carpets – but now I'm

wondering if maybe that wasn't the real reason at all...



Nervous System 01 is an impressive debut zine, the crisp clean layout housing a curious mix of interesting photography-based articles alongside some tedious comic strips. There's a photo-diary piece covering Anthony's 38-hour journey from London to his mum's house in Canberra, Australia, which is nicely balanced by photos recording 64 seconds of Hachiko Crossing in Shibuya, Tokyo, the world's busiest pedestrian crossing. Also included is Gimme Shelter, an account of a Peterborough man who lived for almost 20 years in a small suburban wooden bus shelter. This local character, who continued playing golf on the local course, was nicknamed Nobby and gradually became a minor local celebrity. Over a generous seven pages in newspaper format, a series of identically-sized photos explore Nobby's growing reputation and eventual 'disappearance'. The overall subtlety of the layout of **Nervous System** and the careful observations of its chosen subject matter remind me of **Karen**.



Babylon by Bike by Negomi is a one-person diary of the anti-G-8 bike ride/adventure from Brighton to Gleneagles last year. Over the course of the 12-day journey Negomi examines her

personal and political reasons for taking part in this pollution-free protest action, which is unlike anything she's ever done before. Written on a good old-fashioned typewriter, not just using one of those ersatz typewriter computer fonts, and illustrated with watercolours, **Babylon by Bike** features memories of travels through the countryside and overnight stays hosted by sympathetic local bookshops alongside Negomi's nights alone in dark forests. The diary parts of **Babylon by Bike** are interspersed with bike maintenance tips and an article on Critical Mass Cycle Protests – which reminded me how much fun it was to go on early London Critical Masses. There's no contact details or price, so it must be meant to be left surreptitiously on bike carriers or handed out at Critical Mass events. **Babylon by Bike** ends with Negomi having her bike confiscated by the police who slap an 'I've met the Met' sticker on her coat! Please tell us if you got your bike back Negomi.



Savage Messiah by Laura Oldfield Ford is now up to issue #4, is an ongoing psychogeographic drift through a godforsaken arse-end of East London that remains beyond the regenerative power of Olympic millions. Illustrated with sketches for Laura's paintings and punctuated with quotes from Vaneigem, Genet and Baudelaire, it's a psychogeographic journey through bad boozers, legions of Ketamined-up skinheads, rave-scene drug-dealing treachery and shitty squats. I ran into Laura at a gallery opening last week and when she mentioned going for a drink afterwards I suddenly had visions of spending the evening in a Savage Messiah-style pub brimming with menace, cheap pills and fighting, lagered-up locals. I was glad that I'd already arranged to share a bottle of wine with some jewellery designer friends in the recently poncified Royal Oak.

Paul Petard's comics have always been modest black & white print



jobs but with **Paul's No Good Comics** his production levels have increased amazingly. The contents are still the same daft doodles and political ponderings as always, but this time around they're fancily printed in two colours and come wrapped in a black cover embossed in silver.

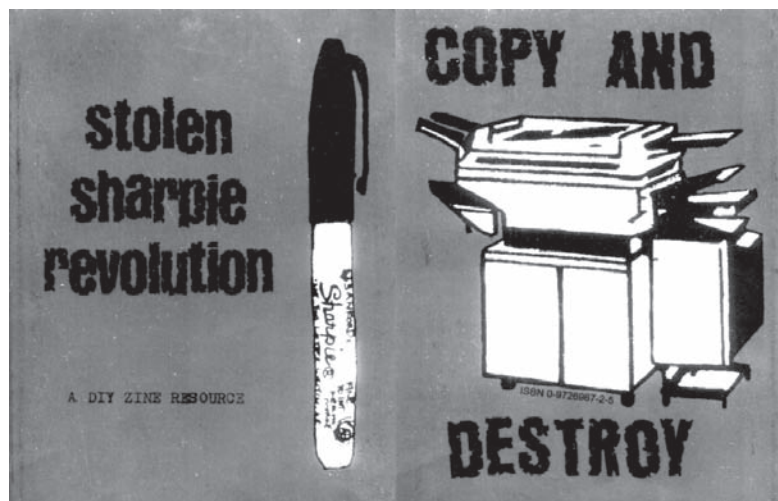


At some point during the Symposium someone thrust into my hands a copy of **Beat Motel**, an energetic upbeat punk zine straight outta Ipswich, crammed full of zine/gig/festival/record reviews, interviews, personal columns and a few barely forgivable reprints of internet gags. Columns include 'Tour Diaries', 'Confessions of a Till Monkey', instructions on 'How to give a cat a pill', and a continuing discussion of the clean-living straight edge punk lifestyle. **Beat Motel** combines coverage of the local Ipswich band scene with plenty of active input from contributors, giving it a bit of a *Maximum Rocknroll* feel, and at £1.50 for 80 pages it's a bargain as well.

For twelve years the indefatigable Chloe Eudaly has run **Reading Frenzy** – Portland, Oregon's premier zine & small publication emporium and venue for innumerable readings and exhibitions. Chloe was over in London recently for a well-deserved break, and hosted an evening of readings, videos and a viewmaster slideshow at the Chamber of Pop Culture/Horse

Hospital. Time-served zinester Dishwasher Pete, currently living in Amsterdam, came over especially to do a reading (fans of his much-loved *Dishwasher* zine and even some of you young uns who've never seen a copy should be pleased to know that a compilation book is due out later this year). Chloe brought over a suitcase full of publications from Portland and here's a few of the things that caught my eye: Moe Bowstern leads an interesting existence, straddling two very different worlds. She spends each summer as an artist/activist in some big American city while in winter working on commercial salmon fishing boats off the small Alaskan island of Kodiak, and the main theme of her **Xtra Tuf** #5 is the 2002 Kodiak fishermen's strike. After accepting the steadily declining salmon prices being offered by the local canneries for years, at the start of the 2002 fishing season the Kodiak fishermen refused to go to sea until they were offered a decent price for their catch. Moe looks at how this strike was organised and the difficulties it involved in reaching a consensus amongst the small, close-knit community of fisherman whose individual livelihoods are directly tied to their boats and the limited salmon fishing season. She attends meetings and produces posters, interviewing union workers, fishermen and strikebreakers, and her exhaustive 190-page account is backed up with historical information, a helpful glossary of fishing terminology and diary pieces by Moe which clearly show how much she loves the salmon fishing lifestyle and the salt-of-the-earth (sorry) characters she works alongside. **Xtra Tuf** is \$5.00 to you and me, free to commercial fishing women, and it's an objective, fascinating, thoroughly researched and well written glimpse into another world/lifestyle. I'll definitely pick up the next issue, and I hope there's more about what Moe gets up to in summer, and I'm not just



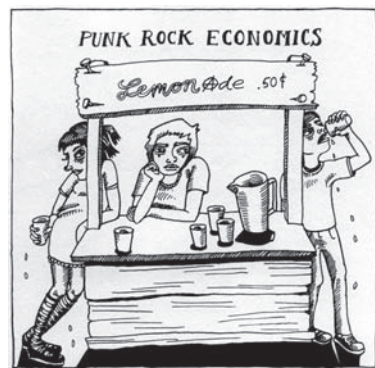


saying that after seeing the video of her naked urban cycling performance at the Reading Frenzy evening!

Stolen Sharpie Revolution – A DIY Zine Resource by Alex Wrekk is a good ‘start here’ guide to making your own zine. It’s the same size and colour as *The Little Red Schoolbook*, and starts off with the real basic, Doh! stuff of artwork, layout, photocopying and stapling your publication, before moving on to slightly more advanced techniques like papermaking, screenprinting, stencils and basic bookbinding, followed by the essentials of selling, exchange and networking and ambitious projects such as zine tours, libraries and resource centres. I was impressed that it includes a section on the essential but oh-so-often omitted stage of revising and editing your publication. There’s a 50-page resource section, which isn’t a great deal of use unless you live in the USA, but which does effectively give some idea of the scope and scale of this type of publishing activity currently taking place. I even learnt something from **Stolen Sharpie Revolution** and will have a go at bookbinding with (unused) dental floss. Does anyone know where I can get cinnamon red or minty green floss? Oh, and if you’re wondering what a *Sharpie* is, it’s a ubiquitous brand of American permanent felt-tip pen.

DIY in PDX, a compendium of current do-it-yourself activity in Portland, is just the right balance of encouraging practical information, inspiring interviews

and thoughtful pieces about the motivation behind the DIY ethic. It’s all quite grown-up, mutually supportive, community-minded DIY activity with thankfully very little of the dull indie-punk scene/ghetto stuff. As well as the *de rigueur* zines, clothing, and records, **DIY in PDX** details Portland’s anyone-can-join choir, community radio, recording studios, home film processing, ‘how to start your own public



computer centre’, hipster craft fayres, scrap re-use projects and an Independent Publishing Resource Centre. Editor Iris’ approach to compiling **DIY in PDX** is: ‘I’ll jump on my bike and cycle round and talk to all the interesting people I know’. It’s completely DIY, but for as long as I’ve known (25+ years) Portland has been a bolthole for interesting persons and activities, such as mailart pioneers ‘Blaster’ Al Ackerman and David Zack, so it would have been interesting to have an article tracing this lineage. Hmm, somehow I can’t help thinking that maybe there’s just a little bit too much of all this zines/DIY/self-publishing activity going on in Portland?

Mark Beyer has absolutely nothing to do with Portland, but was a regular contributor to *Art Spiegelman*’s seminal avant garde 1980s comic anthology *Raw* magazine. His **Beyer’s Beasts** stationery set features some of the characters that populated his Amy & Jordan strips in *Raw*. Even without any text or dialogue, the primitive yet detailed designs on these envelopes and notepaper still manage to convey the tetchy, neurotic weirdness of Beyer’s comics. You won’t be using these to write thank you letters to your Nana! Dark Horse Deluxe have put out a series of stationery sets by other cartoonists and illustrators, which are OK but not really impressive. However, this set goes the extra mile with small touches such as Beyer’s obsessively drawn patterns being used inside the envelopes. Reviews of writing paper – whatever next? As comic shops rapidly turn into toy and merchandise emporia with just a couple of racks of comics downstairs, maybe in the next *Variant* I’ll be reviewing action figures, lunch boxes, shot glasses, drinks coasters, blank journals and CD wallets, all of which feature in the Dark Horse Deluxe product line.

Publish And Be Damned self-publishing fair grew from 30 stalls in 2004 to 60 in 2005 and will be even bigger and better this year – I’ll certainly be there. **Publish And Be Damned** takes place in London on Sunday 30 July, free admission. Check website for the location.

London Zine Symposium
londonzinesymposium.org.uk

Gum, Matilda Tristram, £4.00,
www.afootbooks.com

Nervous System 01, Anthony,
£2.00, www.myspace.com/
mynervoussystem

Babylon By Bike, Negomi,
28pages, no price,
no contact details given.

Paul’s No Good Comics,
Paul Petard, £2.00(?),
ppetard@hotmail.com

Savage Messiah,
Laura Oldfield Ford, £2.00,
savage.messiah@hotmail.com

Beat Motel, £1.50,



www.beatmotel.co.uk

Reading Frenzy, 921 SW Oak St,
Portland, OR 9725, USA.
www.readingfrenzy.com

Xtra Tuf #5,
Moe Bowstern, \$5 (free to
commercial fishing women),
microcosmpublishing.com

Stolen Sharpie Revolution,
Alex Wrekk, \$4.00,
microcosmpublishing.com

DIY in PDX, ed. Iris Porter,
\$15.00, 112pgs + CD,
tincansound.com

Beyer’s Beasts stationery set,
Mark Beyer, www.darkhorse.com

Publish And Be Damned
www.publishandbedamned.org

Social Capital and Neo-Liberal Voluntarism

Alex Law and Gerry Mooney

The Voluntary World of Social Capital

‘Social capital’ is one of those wonderful terms that provide think tanks, academics, journalists, politicians and policy-makers with a way to speak as if something meaningful is under discussion. It has had a rapturous reception from those who are paid to think, propose and act to reproduce existing social relations. Talk about ‘the social’ is permitted so long as it is accompanied by an orthodox emphasis on ‘capital’. Its appeal circulates freely from the World Bank to Blair and all points in between. However, notwithstanding the near hegemonic use of the neologism, we argue that in its very vacuity lies the widespread ideological appeal of social capital.

Moreover, social capital provides a highly circumscribed way to think and act in terms of social and political mobilisation. Its dominance has had, and is having, worldwide repercussions. Where the state is forcibly prevented from direct intervention in less developed countries, social capital enables the blame for indebtedness and elite corruption to fall on the imputed internal characteristics of ‘society’ rather than on the global structuring of neo-liberal capitalism through its main institutions. Joseph Stiglitz, former Economic Advisor to Bill Clinton, Chief Economist to the World Bank and Nobel Prize winner, has had a major influence on the popularity of the concept among policy thinkers. For him the maintenance of social capital is critical to the smooth transition from state command economies to market economies:

“Market economies entail a host of economic relationships – exchanges. Many of these exchanges involve matters of trust. An individual lends another money, trusting that he will be repaid ... Economists often refer to the glue that holds society together as ‘social capital’.”¹

Where this trust breaks down the state intervenes in the form of a legal system to enforce contracts and property entitlements.

But, we would argue, the introduction of the ‘social glue’ of civic voluntarism into the analysis of Stiglitz and the World Bank is a diversionary tactic. Social capitalists complain of the erosion of social trust and the hardening of competitive egoism. Such appeals merely mask the scent of an unchallenged economic orthodoxy which demands the erosion of state responsibility for welfare and wealth redistribution. Such an agenda is denied by leading advocates of social capital like Robert Putnam, who claims that “nothing could be further from the truth” that social capital is “an argument for shutting down the welfare state and relying on civil society to solve problems.”² But this is exactly the attraction of social capital for the governing institutions of neo-liberalism, both nation-states and supra-national bodies like the World Bank. A study for the World Bank of the need to target development projects only on those selected by ‘high’ social capital criteria put the new priorities for privatization as clear as daylight:

“The most important implication of our work is that the introduction of public-private partnerships or self-help schemes is more likely to be successful in neighbourhoods in which the level of social capital is high. Social capital proxies or determinants can thus be used as predictors of success when targeting neighbourhoods for different social or public good-oriented interventions.”³

Even though the World Bank is aware of the many criticisms that are made of the concept of social

capital, such as the way that it is made to justify acute material inequalities, they still insist on its necessity for economic development.

Social capital is also given a determining role in deciding what constitutes a ‘viable’ or a ‘failing’ state, as the basis for the wars of pre-emptive intervention in the re-arranged geo-politics of the post-Cold War world. A new western triumphalism argues that states like ‘us’ have the right kind of civic virtues and social capital unlike the internal social capital deficiencies arising from supposedly endemic ethnic hostilities of the new adversarial states.⁴ ‘Post-conflict’ states like Rwanda and Mozambique⁵ need to generate social capital as a matter of life and death: “As new governments struggle to earn legitimacy and popular support in countries such as Afghanistan, Palestine, Iraq and Ukraine, they must consider how they will stimulate trust among their populations.”⁶ Some development theorists argue that the stakes are too high to simply dismiss social capital out of hand and “for all involved to be modest, reflexive, self-critical and, on these bases, creative.”⁷ If only critics struck a nicer, more polite tone some influence might be exerted over those agencies of neo-liberalism like the World Bank who want to advance a social capital agenda.⁸

But this is at odds with the real purpose of social capital: the more effective enforcement of market dependencies for social reproduction by the formal and informal associations of capitalist society. Social capital is not therefore the moderation of neo-liberalism but its consummation, which, we argue, constructs a new political and social conformism with the aim of demobilising oppositional organisations and activity. It encourages a fatalistic and conformist notion of social action by confining voluntarism to safe, de-politicised channels. Hence part of its attraction for New Labour and the New Democrats in the US has been its conservative emphasis on the norms of social integration while neglecting the structural basis of social dis-integration in neo-liberal capitalism.

Social Capital and the New Economics

It is perhaps easy to deduce the attractiveness of social capital’s popularity for the new moralism that splits the world’s impoverished masses into deserving and undeserving recipients of the beneficence of their rulers. Something can be seen to be done, or at least something can be debated over and measured, allowing grandiose claims to be made about channelling scarce resources efficiently where social capital has the most potential to translate into ‘human capital’ and market capital. As one critic put it:

“It legitimates the intervention of the ‘haves’ in the lives of the ‘have nots’, promising them not money, but to help them build social capital. It is not hard to explain, therefore, why this argument appeals to academics, elites and international development organizations. It confirms their centrality to world affairs, something that most other frameworks ignore.”⁹

Perhaps. But there are deeper reasons for this than simply an inflated sense of importance amongst bourgeois technocrats. After three decades, hard-line market individualism has begun to seem anachronistic. Social capital is also being driven by a concern to re-introduce the ‘social’ to economic analysis in response to the critique of its past (and failed) asocial economism.¹⁰

Attention should be drawn to changes over

the past decade in the approach to global ‘development’ advanced by the World Bank – particularly as it has retreated from the more individualist rhetoric of early neo-liberalism. In this social capital has been identified as the ‘missing link’ for globalised economic development. In turn, addressing ‘the social’ is seen as key to economic progress in the old heartlands of capitalism, the US and Europe.

Evidence for the beneficent role of social capital is sorely lacking. Yet a lack of conceptual clarity or empirical verification does not prevent social capital from determining public policy. World social capital expert, Robert Putnam simply urges a cavalier approach to this: “policy-makers should not have to wait for a couple of decades of detailed research before asking whether attentiveness to social capital might be worth their while.”¹¹ In other words, “trust us, we’re social capitalists”. Some of the attractions of social capital in these terms for New Labour (and the ‘New Conservatives’) ought to be apparent. Social capital promises to mediate some of the worst ravages of neo-liberalism while, at the same time, taking advantage of the economic opportunities afforded by cohesive, stable social conditions. In this way the existence of a reserve army of labour is kept under moral regulation and social control, ever-ready to embrace their own future capitalisation.

Social Capital in the UK

A further attraction of social capital is that it provides a rationale for reducing the scope of the welfare state despite the persistence of market failure. Just as President Clinton had already done in the US, Tony Blair eulogised Putnam’s muddled conception of social capital in almost identical terms in his vision of the good community:

“As Robert Putnam argues ... communities that are inter-connected are healthier communities. If we play football together, run parent-teacher associations together, sing in choirs or learn to paint together, we are less likely to want to cause harm to each other. Such inter-connected communities have lower crime, better education results, better care of the vulnerable.”¹²

Blair repeats the same quaint, worthy ideas of Putnam’s conformist voluntarism about PTAs, choir-singing and painting that will prevent people from harming each other. This is evidence of either incredible naiveté or cynicism. Britain, alongside the US, has been characterised as a society that has traditionally developed dense networks of voluntary association. Unlike Putnam’s complaints about the deterioration of social capital in the US, these seem to have been maintained and renewed in Britain in the form of charitable activity, service organisations and informal sociability. Hall argues that this is because Britain has become more ‘middle class’ and less ‘working class’.¹³ As an increasingly ‘professional society’ it has the necessary preconditions for the acquisition and maintenance of social capital, although the social capital of the working class has been eroded. Until recently, working class social capital was ensured by, on the one hand, the deferential culture of the conservative worker towards traditional sources of authority and, on the other, “solidaristic working class communities that looked to collective vehicles, and class-based organizations in particular, such as the trade union movement and Labour Party, for improvement in their social situation.”¹⁴ Hall therefore dismisses the resilience of trade unionism through an era of generalised

labour movement retreat as an ‘instrumental’ form of working class ‘social capital’:

“Similarly, the working class draws its organizational affiliations disproportionately from trade unions and workmen’s clubs, and so recent declines in trade union membership have taken an especially heavy toll on the associational life of the working class.”¹⁵

Yet since they express fundamental social cleavages trade unions are not a form of ‘social capital’ in the same way that youth groups, the St Johns Ambulance Society or even a visit to the pub are. For all the emphasis placed on the consensual social capital of the middle class Hall registers the deepening erosion of ‘social trust’ in Britain but explains this in terms of social isolation, increasing levels of individualism, a decline in deferential forms of social solidarity, increased moral relativism and the rise of instrumental, membership services associations. ‘Social exclusion’ is therefore not only politically unacceptable and socially immoral but it is also economically inefficient, while the ‘social inclusion’ engendered by social capital is seen to be economically efficient, as well as politically useful and ethically just.

There is little sense here that capitalism itself shatters and breaks apart local social networks around long established workplaces and, as it reconstitutes the world working class and the welfare state, it depletes traditional kinds of social capital so lamented by Putnam and others.¹⁶ Indeed, far from eroding social capital as neo-liberal ideologists claim the welfare state played a crucial role in sustaining it.¹⁷ This is a distorted recognition of the historical calamity routinely visited on the working class by capitalist restructuring and the unsuccessful defensive class struggles of workplace and welfare services.

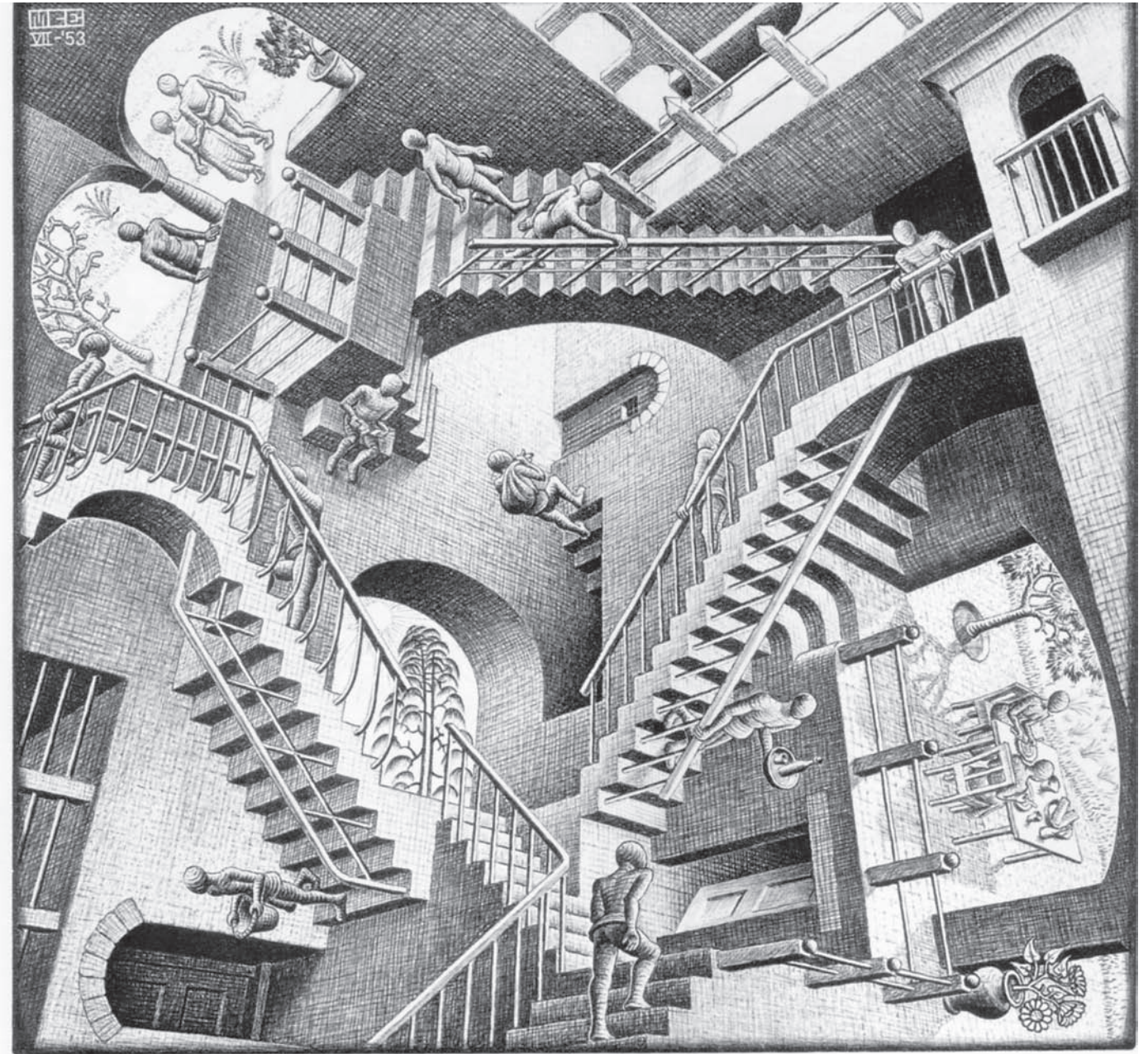
Within social capital such voluntary integration, reciprocity and connectedness is set in a contradictory relationship to the more dominant moment of market enforced competition, mutual antagonism and disconnectedness. Wider structures of capital and state are thereby absolved of responsibility for the predicament of the poor.

Social Capital as the Good Community

Civic renewal through the building of social capital is thus presented by New Labour as a key to neighbourhood regeneration and to the redevelopment of disadvantaged communities. This involves strengthening the hand of civic conformism against the bureaucratic welfare state. As such, social capital has become central to Tony Blair’s vision of the good community:

“A key task for our second term is to develop greater coherence around our commitment to community, to grasp the opportunity of ‘civic renewal’. That means a commitment to making the state work better. But most of all, it means strengthening communities themselves....Indeed *the state can become part of the problem*, by smothering the enthusiasm of citizens...The residents’ association that started with enthusiasm but disbands at their inability to convince the authorities to act on their problems.”¹⁸

Here the argument is that the socially excluded, disadvantaged and poor working classes have either ‘fallen out’ from civil society (or are likely to do so) and fail to participate or engage, primarily with work, but also with other forms of activity such as voting or volunteering. Much of this is put down to the state, which has raised the



expectations of welfare rights at the expense of social obligations. Thus the impoverished working class simply lack the right kind of social glue. It is not clear if worsening social polarisation is an effect or a cause of unequal social capital distributions. In play also are the enduring legacies of the disreputable ‘underclass’ discourse: the poor and disadvantaged fail to engage with those activities – employment or citizenship activities – that the ‘rest of us’ would consider to be ‘normal’.

A culture of poverty supposedly reproduces low social capital inter-generationally. Lacking positive role models the poor languish passively in isolated deprivation, disengaged and disaffected. Failing to tackle this, it is further claimed, creates a potential threat to social cohesion and social order. But the New Labour twist to this is that social capital will re-connect individuals to authority structures all the more effectively through their own activity in morally inoffensive pursuits. At work here is an idealist psychologisation of the working class and the reductive erasure of structured class inequalities. Politics and economics are reduced to socio-cultural networks of association, which, in turn, are reduced to an idealist social psychology. In such ways, social capital helps the poor to help themselves in the same manner that Baron von Munchhausen managed to drag himself and his horse out of the mire by his own hair!

An erosion of social networks is typically associated with impoverishment. But rather than poverty being caused by low social capital it is poverty itself that is the independent variable and ‘social capital’ the dependent one.¹⁹ As much research has demonstrated, the less income people have the more difficult it is to engage securely in routine leisure networks, blocked at the point of sale from participating, made vulnerable to an ever-present risk of social humiliation and shame in routinely commodified life.

None of this – the correct, economically-derived relationship between poverty and voluntarism – enters into the Third Way miasma about the virtues of social capital. Social pathologies and environmental deterioration are put down to a failure of abstractly conceived ‘citizens’ to communicate effectively with each other in order

to overcome market inequalities and inefficiencies.

To enforce the new orderly ideal of good, respectable communities there are also, somewhere, bad communities. It is these places, typically council estates, constructed as ‘dangerous places’, that need to invest in (officially sanctioned) social capital. Social capital is being increasingly valorised in relation to crime prevention, community safety and as a means through which communities themselves can be self-policing to voluntaristically tackle anti-social behaviour. Ironically, if they fail to self-build social capital the implied threat is that something more punitive will be imposed on them. Indeed, at the same time as emitting moral injunctions to acquire social capital New Labour are criminalising poor communities. An imposed moral order, by definition, expresses low levels of trust or reciprocity on the part of the politicians, who are at the same time withdrawing the welfare function of the state while maintaining or expanding both the repressive function of the state and the coercive force of market priorities.

Social Capital and the Management of Dissent

As measured by indices of voting, newspaper reading or trust in political leaders, and voluntary activities, in the local PTA, the Elks, the Rotary Club, the Red Cross, and so on, social capital focuses idealistically on a de-politicised, de-classed ‘civic’ consciousness. Putnam’s favoured metaphor is the decline of bowling leagues in the US, which were only briefly popular in the 1950s while many other group sports, such as golf or martial arts, have flourished since. These have very little direct significance for political activism – attending football matches in the UK is not a revolutionary deed (regardless of the attention heaped on it by supposedly radical cultural studies). But the focus on such archaic institutions, values and activities has a pronounced class bias to it. These kinds of associations are dependent on socio-economic relationships not the other way round. In the US voluntary groups traditionally tended to have a cross-class basis to them, which helped diminish class antagonisms.²⁰ It is well known

that professionally-led advocacy groups tend to be oligarchical in nature. Moreover, why should low levels of trust in politicians or a rejection of stale social institutions be seen negatively as civic disengagement rather a class-based refusal of self-serving, status-obsessed conformism?

Putnam arbitrarily focuses on what might be labelled ‘conformist voluntarism’ and neglects or dismisses other forms of activism, what might be called ‘recalcitrant voluntarism’, as evident in campaigns to defend services, jobs, and amenities, environmental and anti-capitalist protest against systemic inequities, as well as ‘the dark side of social capital’ found in reactionary militia, patriarchal and racist social movements. Conformist voluntarism attends to the apparently innocuous activities that pose no threat to the powerful. This can include providing charitable services to the disadvantaged as much as participating in sports clubs. Since no challenge to structural interests is involved it evinces no direct political implications.

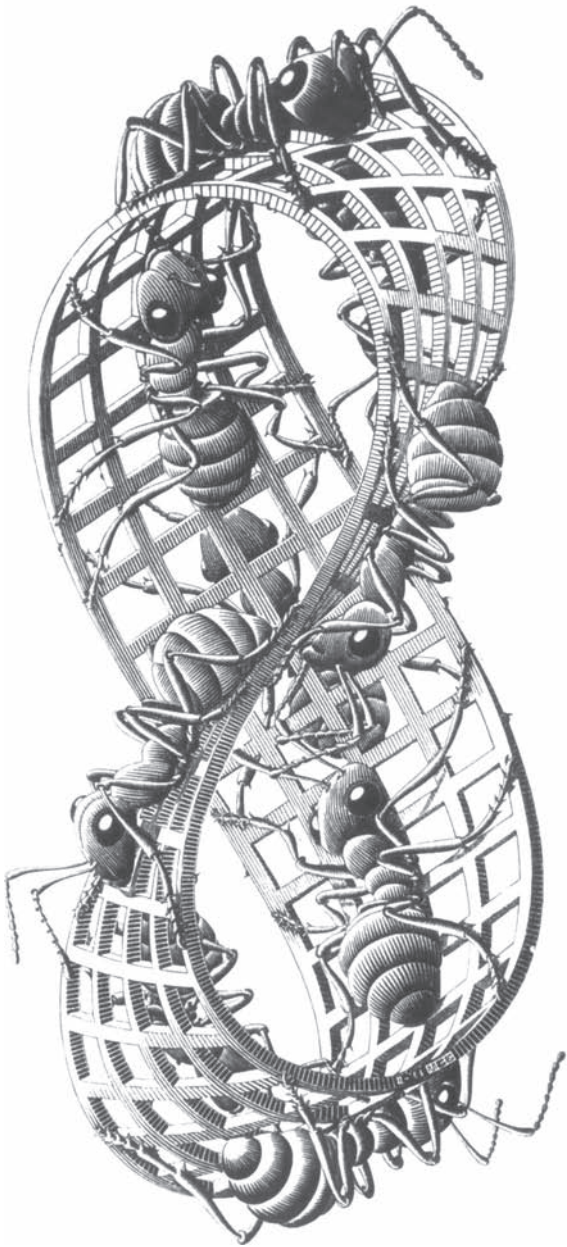
Earlier incarnations of social capital activism were much more explicit about the need to manage the permissive ‘effects’ of democracy in order to protect ‘democracy’ from itself. Just as US society was moving into political crisis in the 1960s the influential cross-national study, *The Civic Culture*, argued for the necessity of managed political participation and social manipulation: “Politics must not be so instrumental and pragmatic that participants lose all emotional involvement in it. On the other hand, the level of affective orientation ought not to become too intense.”²¹

Such candour is rarely encountered these days in the pseudo-democratic rhetoric about social capital but it nevertheless forms its unspoken assumption. Similarly, *The Civic Culture* made explicit the nationalist goal of social integration while allowing for modest levels of dissent: “In general, this *management of cleavage* is accomplished by subordinating conflicts on the political level to some higher, overarching attitudes of solidarity, whether these attitudes be the norms associated with the ‘rules of the democratic game’ or the belief that there exists within the society a supraparty solidarity based on non-partisan criteria ... The result is a set of political orientations that are balanced or managed. There is political activity, but not so much as to destroy government authority; there is involvement and commitment, but they are moderated; there is political cleavage, but it is held in check. Above all, the political orientations that make up the civic culture are closely related to social and interpersonal orientations. Within the civic culture the norms of interpersonal relationships, of general trust and confidence in one’s social environment, penetrate political attitudes and temper them.”²²

This is not simply of historical interest. Nor is it some anachronism from bygone days of ruling class manipulation. It remains the unannounced dream of social capitalists. Of course, the unbridled confidence in the management of dissent and the production of conformism through ‘the civic culture’ the US in the later 1960s was soon to experience seismic labour unrest and social protest movements.

Resisting Conformist Voluntarism

As with ‘the civic culture’ then so, perhaps, with Third Way ‘social capital’ today. Social capitalists as manglers of dissent and protest remain concerned to moderate and divert voluntary but oppositional movements from below. Such was the case in 2005 with the celebritisation of the anti-G8 campaign by Make Poverty History and G8 Live. While such mass voluntarism brings people together for consensual dialogue to redress the injustice of world poverty, it diverted conflict away from the established forces of legitimate authority. In contrast, recalcitrant voluntarism exposes the conflict of structured interests at stake. Since the enshrined rights of structural interests, including capital and state, are being



challenged, recalcitrant voluntarism necessarily is or becomes politically contentious.²³ Recalcitrant voluntarism is unavoidably adversarial, unpleasant and polarising. It comes to recognise the division of society and state into unequal, competing interests.

In contrast, conformist voluntarism demands bloodless struggles over a de-politicised, moral high ground of private preference choices, say of selfless compassion over self-centred amenity, rather than democratic matters of struggle.²⁴ Social capitalists seem oblivious to the transformation of everyday life under the gigantic growth of global corporate power that prevents engagement in the public sphere, inhibits dissent, and attempts to channel social meaning into lifestyle consumer choice. Even in this situation resistance is present, as can be witnessed at protests from Seattle to Genoa, and at Gleneagles in 2005, only not in the prescribed, orderly forms that social capitalists are looking for.

In local neighbourhoods alternative forms of voluntarism are being posed as was demonstrated recently by the local campaign to prevent the closure of a swimming pool in Govanhill, Glasgow.²⁵ This represents a type of social capital without official virtue, what we have termed recalcitrant voluntarism. This voluntary local campaign ostensibly had many of the hallmarks of social capital so lauded by New Labour.²⁶ Present throughout were community networks, co-operation, and civic engagement. Nor was this an insular mobilisation, confined to some homogenous idea of the bounded community. It involved people of different age groups, men and women, black, Asian and white, from difference religious and cultural backgrounds, cemented in a class-based campaign to defend an important, publicly provided amenity. However, the Govanhill Campaign/South Side Against Closure was not legitimated as such. It was not ‘approved’ or sanctioned as genuine community protest, we would argue, because as an active movement from below it transgressed the notion that social capital is dependent on conformist voluntarism, under the leadership of responsible authorities, whose actions are sanctioned by local or national elites.

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A longer version of this paper will appear in the journal *Critique*: www.tandf.co.uk/journals/titles/03017605.asp

Prison Radio versus Panopticism

Tom Allan

I do not have my own keys. As a volunteer I'm part guest, part worker and, from the point of view of the guards, something of a nuisance. The idea that someone would work in a prison for free is such an unusual concept for them that when Officer Hunt finds out later his only response is to slowly call me a "fucking stupid cunt", in tones somewhere between admiration and disbelief. So for my three months working at Wandsworth Prison I am a constant hitchhiker dependant on the good grace of the initiated to lead me through. I am, if anything, glad not to be invested with this responsibility and symbol of authority.

The radio station is located at the end of D-Wing. To get there – to get to anywhere in the prison – one must pass through the central chamber, the huge, hexagonal room that dominates the prison. Six wings housing 1,400 prisoners radiate outwards from this hub like the spokes of a wheel. From the simple wooden desk in the centre one officer can view any prisoner who leaves their cell. It is a potent symbol of authority and control.

The radio station, far from that watchful eye, has a feeling of freedom, of energy. The guys in the radio unit are invariably already working when I get there (they start at about 8:30am) – peering intently at sound waves on computers, or heads buried in scripts and written work.

The radio project has two main parts: a training unit that teaches prisoners a BTEC in radio production, and a broadcasting unit staffed by prisoners who have completed the course. 'Radio Wanno' informs the prison population about the services that are available to them: training and educational courses, advice and support, and interviews with prisoners and staff about everything from drug addiction, to religion, to maintaining contact with families.

The emphasis on informative programming reflects the ethos and approach of Radio for Development (RFD), the NGO that set up the radio project two years ago. RFD began operating in Africa, using radio as a cheap and effective way of reaching isolated communities with public service and educational information. However, as RFD's Director James Greenshield explains, there are many such isolated communities in the UK too – elderly people for example. Prisoners, with lower literacy rates than the overall population and poor access to written information, were another obvious choice.

Today there is a heightened feeling of stress in the unit. In about an hour the BTEC students begin their final examination in the form of a half-hour live show. It's the culmination of four months of intensive work, learning how to record, interview, edit and present radio. The subject for discussion, "Does prison really work?" is hardly unusual in itself. Until you remind yourself that the guests, the presenters, and pretty much the entire audience are prisoners themselves.

The presenters, Warren and Trevor, introduce three guests: Anderson Charles, Wayne Morrel, and Charlie Ugunasu. All, apart from Warren, are black – West Indian, African, and British voices mingling. The general prison population, like the guests on the radio show, are disproportionately from ethnic minority groups.¹

"I don't see the Government being interested in making it work for prisoners themselves," says Wayne Morrell, the most outspoken of the guests, the most combative. "It's just a way to get people off the street."

"If the prison system focused on why people were committing offences in the first place, then

maybe people could be rehabilitated. Why did I do those robberies? Because I needed the money. If I was able to go out there, and get a job and earn the money that I need to support my kind of lifestyle, there would have been no reason for me to do that. You know what I'm saying?"

Soft-spoken Charlie Ugunasu disagrees: "This is my first time in prison. Being here made me think more about what I was doing out there. When I come out I might be willing to be a different person to what I was before I got arrested."

But Anderson Charles doesn't think he'll get a job either: "Given all the resources and facilities inside the prison – even though someone here have the chance to make amends and turn around their life – when they go back out into the street and into society, not everyone want to accept them because they have been to prison."

The debate comes to a close, with few firm conclusions. Perhaps before we can ask whether prison is working, we should ask ourselves, "What is prison actually *for*?" Is it to punish? Is it to reduce crime? Is to rehabilitate?

Seventy percent of prisoners are reconvicted within two years of their release. Relational statistics tell us having a job reduces the likelihood of re-offending by between a half and a third.² But the stigma of imprisonment prevents many prisoners from becoming employed, despite educational and training opportunities in prison.³ Only a quarter of prisoners find paid work after release.⁴

Yes, social and economic disadvantages play a major part. Two thirds of prisoners are unemployed at the time of their conviction, and the majority have no qualifications.⁵ A third are homeless. Many prisoners come from troubled homes – half ran away from home as children, and more than a quarter were taken into care. Add to that a high incidence of mental health problems, drug addiction and alcohol abuse.⁶ It is no coincidence that ethnic minority groups, the poor, those with mental illnesses, and the addicted are so over-represented in the prison system.

The reality is that modern prisons were never conceived to 'solve' these *social* problems – they were conceived to isolate them, to control and to punish. Rehabilitation and reintegration are the result of slow and painful reforms that have seen the institutions modified, but never really transformed. Prisons have a strong history, one which has been resistant to transformation. Nowhere is that legacy clearer than in the architecture of Wandsworth, in the central chamber, the panopticon.

The Historical Developments of the Panopticon

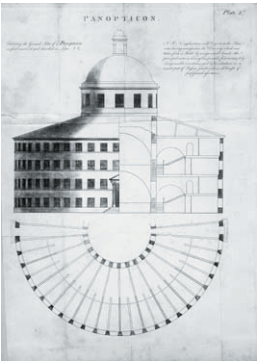
Few of our institutions are as unquestioned as prisons in the public sphere. Granted, there is a continual, low level debate about prison reform, about hard and soft approaches to dealing with crime, about sentencing – all fuelled by the latest tabloid tale of early release. But prison's role as the essential recourse to "dealing with people who break the rules" is rarely, if ever, challenged. One gets the impression that they have always existed. But prison as we know it is a distinctively modern institution, its development intimately linked to the rise of the state and industrialisation, and to the ideologies that went along with these developments, most notably the protestant work ethic and enlightenment rationalism.

Until the end of the medieval period prisons

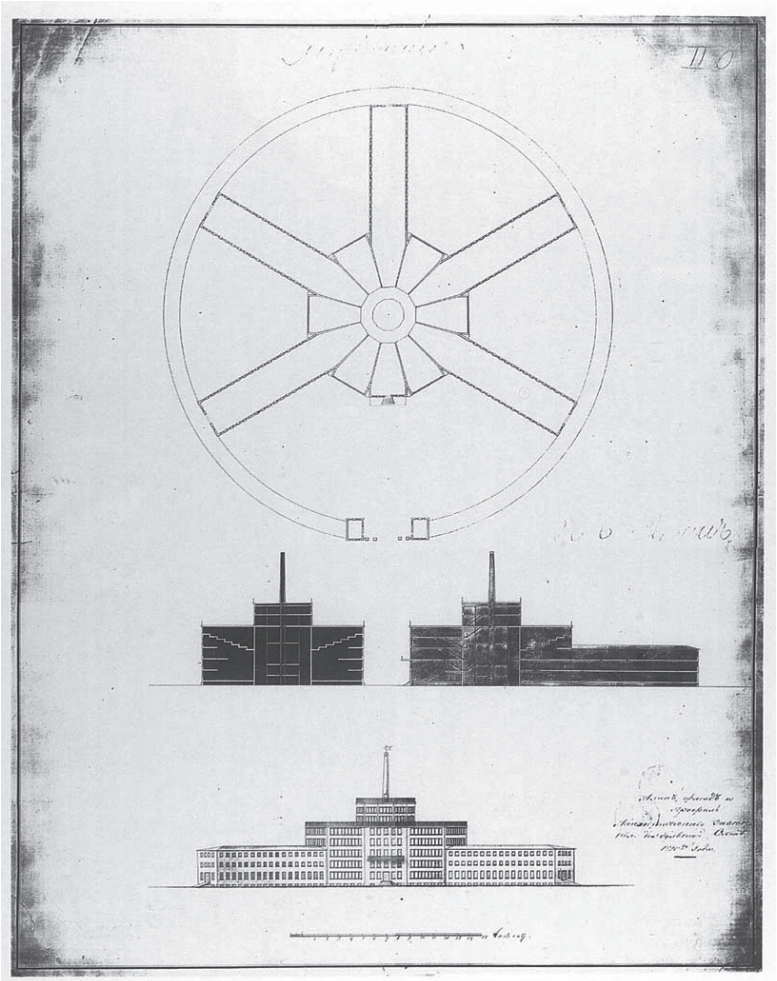
were small, local institutions, designed to hold prisoners awaiting sentence or until debts were paid – not long-term holding facilities. The deprivation of liberty for some specified period of time was not the punishment *per se*. European monasteries provided inspiration for an alternative model. There, punishment for religious infractions was penance: the private expiation of guilt until repentance is achieved. This evolved into "confinement in a monastery for a set period of time"⁷, often accompanied with solitary confinement and strict silence.

But the development of mass incarceration came with urbanisation and the great land enclosures of the 15th and 16th Centuries. The rural poor fled the harsh conditions in the countryside and flooded into the cities; "the dispossessed now became the mass of the unemployed – beggars, vagrants, and in some cases, bandits."⁸ Early prison institutions were set up in response. Their inmates were an undifferentiated mix of old and young, men and women, petty criminals and prostitutes, and those merely unable to work. The lines between poverty and criminality were so blurred that these groups became labelled as "criminal types" – a legacy we still live with today.

The concern of the ruling classes was both to employ and discipline this unruly mass. The workhouse was their solution. The first model, the Amsterdam 'rasp huis', saw prisoners reducing logs to sawdust by hand in order to produce dye.⁹ The work was gruelling and monotonous, reducing the individual to an obedient machine. The fearsome reputation of these institutions served to discipline the working classes into accepting employment on any terms. However, with increasing use of machines during the 18th and 19th Centuries, they became loss-making propositions. At the same time, enlightenment reformers such as Jeremy Bentham



In Bentham's design the prisoner is constantly exposed to scrutiny. Wandsworth, however, was a modified version that allowed prisoners some privacy in their cells – more like the design below.



Photography by Miguel Ciriza

were seeking new and more humane ways to control “errant” social groups. So was born the panopticon:

“‘PANOPTICON’ or, the inspection-house containing the idea of a new principle of construction applicable to any sort of establishment, in which persons of any description are to be kept under inspection; and in particular to the penitentiary houses, prisons, houses of industry, work-houses, poor-houses, manufactories, mad houses, lazarettos, hospitals and schools.”

Jeremy Bentham, 1791, In a series of letters from Crecheff in White Russia.

Bentham’s vision was a huge circular building with an observation tower in the centre. The cells, forming the outer wall, each contained an isolated inmate. A window in each cell made a silhouette of the prisoner, or other subject – their every action observable from the tower. By contrast, shutters prevented the prisoner from ever seeing the watching guards. Never knowing if one was observed or not, the prisoner assumed they were watched at all times, and behaved accordingly. The ever watching god of monastic imprisonment was replaced by the authority of the state, the warden, the factory manager, the doctor, the adult. The recalcitrant individual – whether child, worker, poor, insane or criminal – was deemed to be incapable of ruling themselves. They therefore had to be ruled. They had to be watched.

Bentham’s architectural vision may have dispensed with the whip and the treadmill, but it also dispensed with prisoners’ humanity. By isolating them, it cut them off from their peers, their families, even the guards. It was thus intended to prevent the “cross-contamination of criminal, insane, or rebellious tendencies”. The only relationship that remained was between the prisoner and the state. For Michel Foucault, the French philosopher renowned for his studies of social institutions, this architectonic ideal represented a turning point in social control – the point at which it became a highly refined science. It allowed the one to view the many – it allowed effortless control. It was a laboratory where ‘deviants’ could be observed in detail and ultimately changed, altered, formed or *reformed*.¹⁰

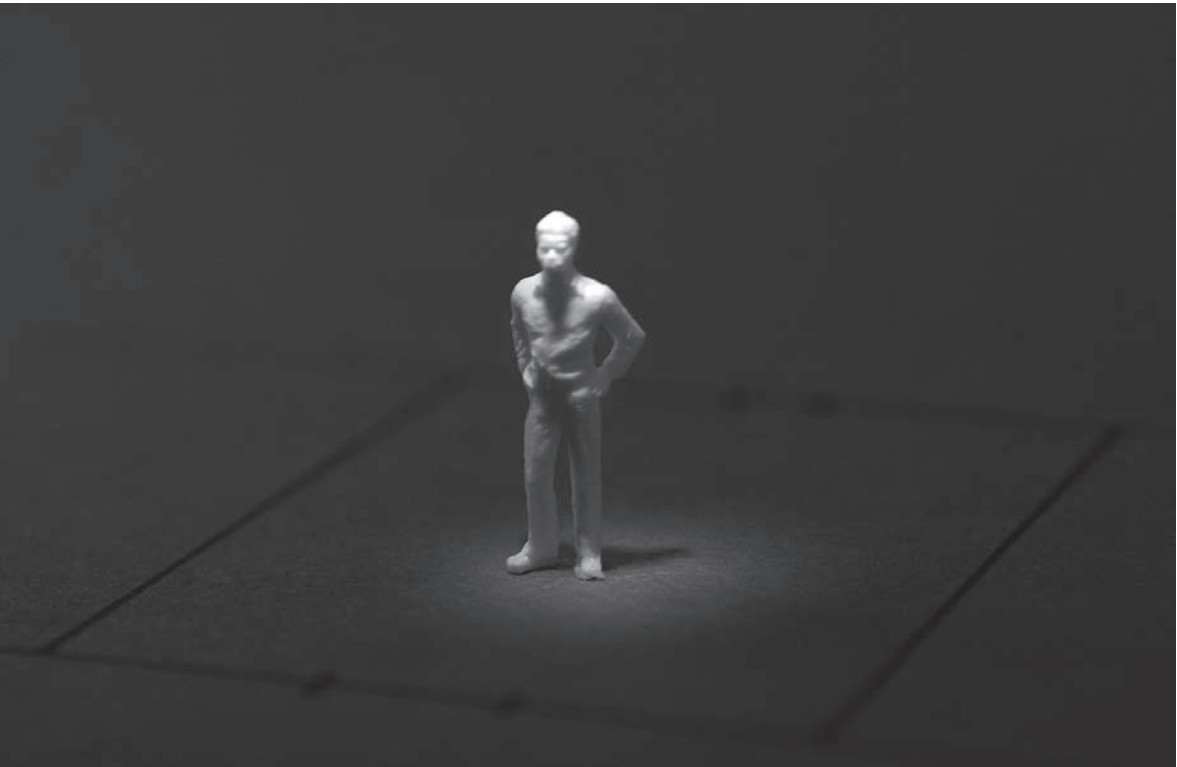
The 20th Century saw much reform of the view of the prisoner; notably the popularity of the idea that the prisoner was “psychologically sick”. A functional divide saw the wardens responsible for guaranteeing security, whilst an army of specialists – psychiatrists, criminologists, social workers – treated the prisoner.¹¹ The techniques became more sophisticated, more humane, but the prisoner was still regarded, in the final analysis, as an institutionalised deviant.

Inverting the Panopticon

Is the radio project just another experiment in remoulding this deviant individual? The buzz words of the project sometimes reflect the more traditional concern of prison and state to retrain and reform the prisoner – improving literacy and communication skills, and learning to work to deadlines are meant to ready them for the discipline of the market and employment.

“When I come to the radio station I don’t really feel like I’m in prison”, Richey Euphori, a member of the broadcasting unit tells me. His powerful build contrasts with his manner – quiet, affable, and constantly smiling. “You can create things... the time runs so quick. It doesn’t give you time to think about negative things, so you’re always thinking positive all the time, about creating something, doing something with your life.”

Yes, the project is about changing people, but through opportunity, not compulsion. They are given access to technology, to high quality teaching, and the creative freedom to explore ideas and issues that matter to them. Whilst I was there I heard programmes about poverty and economics in Africa made by George and Immanuel (from Nigeria and Ghana respectively) and about reggae and raga music by Trevor (from the West Indies). Ben explored the subject of forgiveness, and Mike crafted an atmospheric



programme about the history of the death penalty in Wandsworth.

For me the project’s greatest achievement is that it inverts the philosophy of the panopticon. Prisoners, those constant objects of scrutiny, of examination, are instead empowered to look about them, to look at their world and their place in it. They are given both the personal and technical skills to project their point of view to people. Only a few of them may make it in the competitive media sector, but impact of just one eloquent individual upon the homogenous mainstream media could be striking. A handful of ex-prisoners are well on their way – several are studying broadcast media at Goldsmiths College, and one, Mark Williams, won a national award for his audio diary about leaving prison.

“When you’re in the crime spree zone, the money is so easy”, Warren tells me. He’s one of the youngest on the course, and one of the most ambitious. He’s applying to study journalism and film, and has already lined up some work experience with a TV production company. “Let’s say I’d have done a bricklaying course” he says. “I know for a fact that I’d have done bricklaying for a couple of years and then gone back to crime.” The money, he tells me, wasn’t for survival, but for status – for the clothes, the lifestyle and the image it could buy. Now he talks about wanting to leave something tangible behind, to influence people – for example, he’d like to make a documentary about the graffiti gangs he used to be in. In exchanging a can for a camera, he is, I feel, showing the same interests, the same desire for self-expression and recognition.

The idea of empowering prisoners and giving them opportunities is controversial. Part of the fundamental purpose of prison, after all, is incapacitation – partly to protect the public from potential harm, and partly to punish. But this blanket approach can be harmful, not only to the prisoner but also to society, suggests ex-prison governor Stephen Pryor. While it removes the potential for the prisoner to be irresponsible it also removes the potential for him to be responsible. They are trained to be good prisoners – obedient, cowed and institutionalised – but not to be able to make responsible decisions after release. Responsibilities are taken away from them – family, work, the maintenance of a home – sometimes with good reason, but usually without thought.¹²

Indeed, Pryor argues, the idea that they might be responsible is largely discounted from the moment sentence is passed: “It is the adversarial process of proving guilt beyond a reasonable doubt that makes the court seem to condemn the whole person. The offender may be a highly responsible person in other respects.” But the presumption is that they are *criminal characters*, rather than people who have committed a limited criminal act.¹³ The actual experience of prison – the isolation from society, the severing of family ties, and the damage to any prospect of legitimate employment – risks making this categorisation binding and permanent. It’s important for

prisoners to hold on to outside roles. Michael McDermott, one of the most conscientious of the radio students, stays in touch with his family by writing and phoning regularly. Visits are harder. “I told one of my daughters on the phone the other day that I’ve got my key skills in literacy,” he says. “I told her about this university course, and on the phone she goes, ‘Dad, I’m really proud of you.’ She’s only 13. Those words are so strong.” He goes on, saying: “It takes them two hours to come and go, and they only see us for about 45 minutes. By the time I’ve gone back to my wing and lain down, they haven’t even left the building. It must be really stressful for them, especially for my daughters – at first they were always crying.” Michael feels frustrated at not being able to keep an eye on his teenage daughters – anxious about them getting boy friends, and choosing jobs over studying.

Though the prison regime is inherently disruptive to the parental process projects like ‘Family Man’, based next door to the radio project, help to mitigate the separation. As well as offering support and advice about parenting fathers can record bed time stories for their children to listen to. It’s another way in which human relationships are being recognised as the solution, rather than isolation.

The relationships between prisoners and prison officers, problematic as that may be, is equally important. Unsurprisingly, the relationship is open to abuse – prisoners, having transgressed the law, do not enjoy *de facto* the same legal protections as other citizens. But both Pryor and Murton argue that many humane officers enter the service for altruistic reasons and that they should be encouraged not to exercise all their power over prisoners – in other words, not to view control as the goal. Instead, they should give increased responsibility to prisoners – in work opportunities in the prison, as elected prison representatives, and even in managing their sentences.

However, the idea that prisoners should have some responsibility and with it rights does not currently enjoy popularity. For example, the Government has so far resisted a European Court of Human Rights ruling last year that the UK ban on prisoners voting was a breach of their human rights.¹⁴ Working forms of participative approaches can be found as early as the 19th Century, such as when Captain Alexander Machonochie, the father of the modern parole system, became the superintendent of Norfolk Island penal colony off the coast of Australia in 1840. Machonochie rejected the violent and brutal regime he found on the island, replacing guards armed with cutlasses and pistols with selected prisoners armed with staves. Prisoners were organised into groups of six, responsible for each other’s conduct and ultimate release. They participated in court hearings and disciplinary matters. They were allowed plots of land to grow food to sell to the free islanders, and were allowed to keep their earnings. Once they had earned 12,000 marks they were paroled to the mainland. Here we see the very antithesis of the panoptic model of control. We see them

encouraged into supportive mutual relationships with each other, rather than isolated. We see them given control over their own productive powers, rather than being exploited as free labour. In his four years as superintendent, only three percent of released prisoners were reconvicted, while there was only one killing and three escapes.¹⁵

Many of the prisoners who will leave Wandsworth will find themselves with neither savings, work, nor accommodation. When I first met the irrepressibly positive Richey Euphori he was due for release. He had successfully completed the radio course, as well as a physical education course to tackle drug addiction. He was, as he put it, “fit for the road.” But months later he was still in prison, because he couldn’t demonstrate that he had somewhere to live. He had lost his house while in prison, and applications to organisations like the St.Giles Trust for emergency accommodation were rejected. “Their policy does not allow them to re-house anyone who has done a sentence of more than 12 months,” he says. “Which leaves people doing more than a year out. And I was under the assumption that when you’re doing more than a year, obviously you lose touch with the street. So to come out and not have a home to go to, it can be very difficult.”

Richey remains optimistic. He has applied to study building service engineering and will have the support of a PROP mentor: a volunteer on the outside who will give him careers advice and help for six months. “The most effort must come from me – where there’s a will there’s a way. But sometimes in life you face closed doors, where you try on your own and the doors are shut. That little extra help, where they can pull strings, that will help.” But this level of support is unusual. The mentor is provided through the prison radio project, not the normal prison resettlement department. Why? Cost might be a factor, but it is more likely that this reflects the general level of antipathy towards prisoners in the UK. In Sweden, for example, where prisoners are still regarded as citizens, volunteers are used extensively in the probation service.¹⁶

There remains much debate about how to reform prisons. Murton and Pryor, both ex-governors, argue that privatised prisons can be more humane and participative, because they are free to innovate, to break away from the authoritarian tradition of the state. Yet moves towards competitive private involvement in the UK prison systems have already led to concern about cost cutting, lack of accountability, and the ethics of profiting from prisoners.¹⁷ In the US, large-scale private involvement in prison construction and management shows alarming results, with companies like Wackenhut lobbying state legislatures for more prisoners. They want filled cells, not reformed and released prisoners.

Innovation and change are important, but we don’t have to look to private companies for it. The penetration of small NGOs and civil society groups

into prisons, such as Radio for Development, can bring a different ethos and approach to rehabilitation, one that understands the social and economic background to crime.

The different approaches outlined – the radio project, prisoner participation, voting rights, and employment opportunities – all seek to strengthen the positive bonds that connect prisoners to society. Whilst the panopticon isolates the prisoner, severing all relationships except that with the state, these initiatives seek to build human relationships between prisoners, families, and prison officers.

Within the prison there remains a tension between a history of authoritarian control and dehumanisation, and a modernity that sometimes demands, with moral and legal force, that prisoners’ human rights be protected. The reality of what prisons are and do lies somewhere between these influences. They satisfy the ancient public hunger for visible retribution; they guarantee the dominant social order and the state by disciplining disaffected social groups; but they have also partially adopted a modern mission to remake and reintegrate their charges into law abiding citizens. I sometimes suspect that these efforts are doomed, and that they constitute, primarily, a sophisticated method of legitimating the basic original remit of the institution – however unpalatable to a modern democratic society. It’s a schizophrenic position: we are unwilling to fully accept ex-prisoners back into society, but also unwilling to reject them completely. Thus we offer them training, but not homes or jobs.

Prisons do not cause crime and are therefore in no position to bring about solutions. Crime is a *social* problem, a part of our society, not a separate aspect of it. But the terms of the debate still indicate that people are, as Foucault suggests, being separated into binary opposites; normal and abnormal, safe and dangerous, legal and illegal. This is a two-fold deception: it creates the illusion that “we” are free from tendencies to be sexual, violent or avaricious, while at the same time creating the corresponding illusion that all those in prison possess these tendencies exclusively. It comfortingly denies our own imperfections, depositing the dark side of human behaviour in the few.

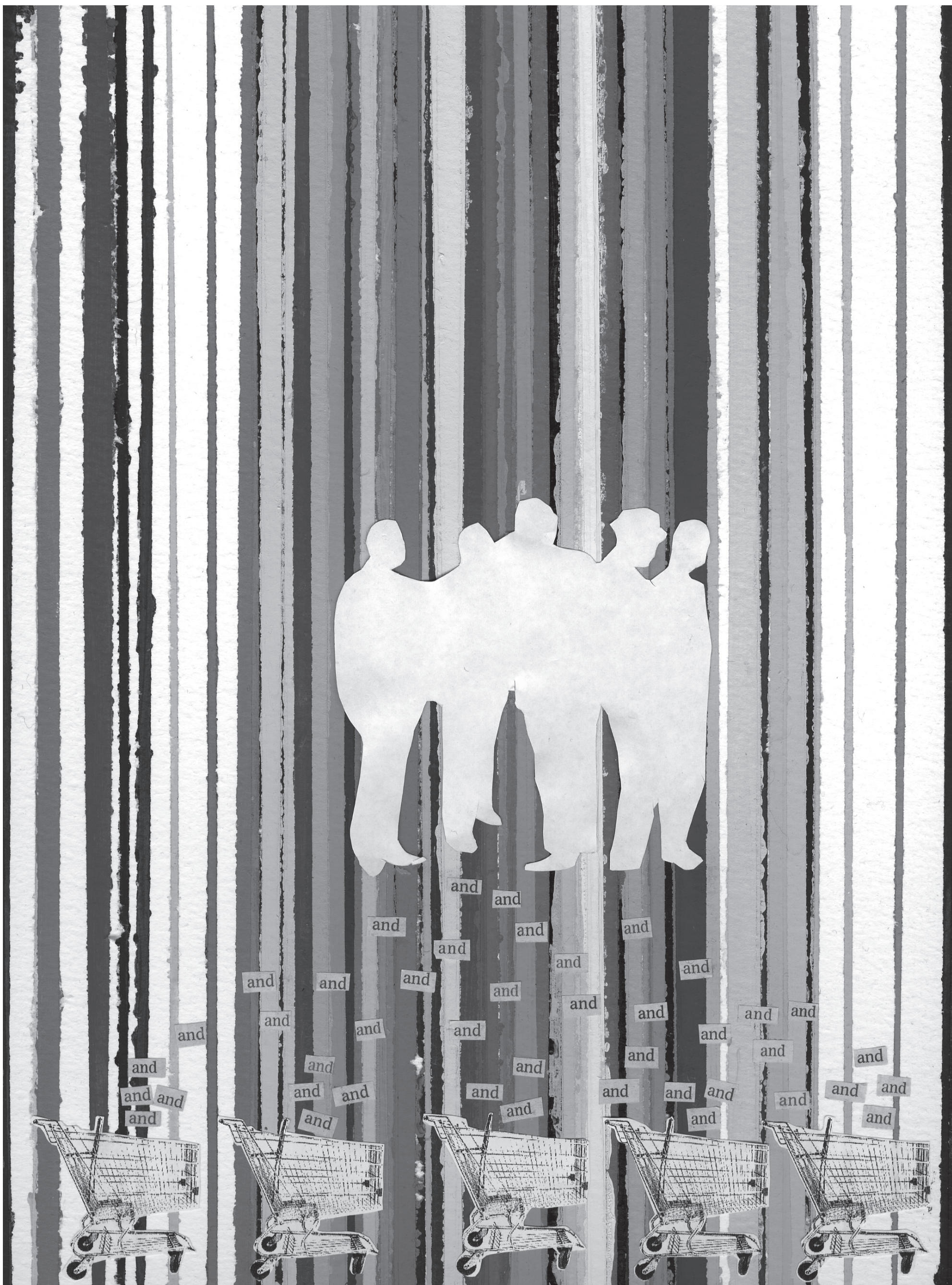
Nowhere is the dichotomy clearer in the public domain than in the media. Sexual deviance and crime are both condemned, while the public’s vicarious appetite for them sated at the same time. Fantasies of theft and violence are glorified through film, while simultaneously denounced. Murder brings celebrity status, fascination and horror.

The radio station and the words and thoughts of the prisoners remain confined behind the walls of Wandsworth prison, the signal absorbed by the stone.¹⁸ Would the public be willing to listen to those views? Would it silence them in anger,

or ignore them? The radio station offers the possibility of a discourse between those different people, a conversation that would reveal prisoners in all their complexity, in their individuality, rather than the mere isolated silhouettes of the panopticon.

Notes

- 1 At the end of June 2005 a quarter of the prison population, 19,366 prisoners, were from ethnic minority groups – compared to one in eleven of the general population. 35% of these were foreign nationals. *Prison Reform Trust, Bromley Briefing* – 2005. p.23
- 2 F Simon and C Corbet, ‘An evaluation of prison work and training’, (1996) Home Office Research cited in *Prison Reform Trust, Bromley Briefing* – 2005. p.34
- 3 Of course, we should not pretend that everyone is in prison for economic reasons. Sexual and violent offences account for a third of the prison population. But at least another third of all prisoner offences are in some way economic – theft, robbery, burglary, fraud – and over half if we include drug offences, many of which will be dealing or smuggling. *Prison Reform Trust, Bromley Briefing* – 2006.
- 4 Niven S and Stewart D, (2005) *Resettlement outcomes on release from prison, Home Office Findings* 248. – cited in *Prison Reform Trust, Bromley Briefing* – 2006.
- 5 ‘Through the Prison Gates’, Home Office 2001 – cited in *Prison Reform Trust, Bromley Briefing* – 2006.
- 6 Various sources – see *Prison Reform Trust, Bromley Briefing* – 2006, p.19
- 7 Melossi & Pavarini, ‘The Prison and the Factory’, (1981) p. 4
- 8 Melossi & Pavarini, ‘The Prison and the Factory’, (1981) p.12
- 9 *Ibid*, p.21
- 10 Michel Foucault, ‘Discipline and Punish – The Birth of the Prison’, (1977)
- 11 ‘Prison: Present and Possible’, Edited by Marvin E.Wolfgang, (1979) p.10
- 12 Stephen Pryor, ‘The Responsible Prisoner’, (2001) p.1
- 13 *Ibid*
- 14 James Erwin, ‘A Vote for Human Rights’ – *The Guardian*, 06/02/2006. Note that the ban dates from the 1870 Forfeiture Act – yet another indication that the prison institution remains heavily influenced by 19th Century ideas.
- 15 Thomas Murton in ‘Prison: Present and Possible’, edited by Marvin E.Wolfgang, (1979) p.27.
- 16 Gilbert Geis, Epilogue, ‘Prison: Present and Possible’, Edited by Marvin E.Wolfgang, (1979).
- 17 The recent *Prison Reform Trust* report ‘Private Punishment: Who Profits?’ “acknowledges that private sector innovation has, in some cases, improved regimes but it raises questions about efficiency savings and the need for private companies to achieve economies of scale”, and it also goes on to point out the private sector’s many “failings to meet targets on serious assaults, drugs and purposeful activity [for prisoners]” and to question the “ethics of large companies profiting from the incarceration of thousands of people.”
- 28 It is not impossible for material to be broadcast outside the station – I am currently making a show with some of the members of the Broadcasting Unit that will be broadcast on the US show *Making Contact*. But, as you might expect, all material must be checked by the prison administration and the Home Office prior to broadcast.



The Internet and Democracy: Beyond the Techno-libertarian Rhetoric

Ann McCluskey

Enthusiasts of early computer culture regarded the new technology as being politically empowering and therefore a means of undermining prevailing hierarchies and power structures. Ted Nelson and Harvey Rheingold were part of 1960s US Californian counter-culture, who were aligned with early proselytisers. In 1974 Nelson's proselytising had him claim, in *Computer Lib/Dream Machines* that: "the purpose of computers is human freedom"; they would provide an environment "which will enhance and nourish our minds and their capabilities, taking us not only to former levels of literacy, but far beyond, to new levels of understanding and literacy". The technology was therefore seen as a conduit to a utopian future. Rheingold¹, for his part, was by 1985 espousing a virtual community and citing the "potential importance of cyberspace to political liberties." This meant that cyber community campaigning was possible via email and electronic bulletin boards, greatly reducing the organisational complexity of traditional citizen activism – attracting sufficient numbers, keeping groups informed, organising meetings. Problems of locating and orchestrating the like-minded in 'meat space' were overcome, with a potential increase in political, social and intellectual leverage. Rheingold's only caveat was fear of corporate infringement on cyber open space. Nelson qualified his enthusiasm in a plea for user-friendly software and applications. So far as they are concerned, the only impediments to freedom are technical and economic.

IT evangelism has a contemporary expression in, among others, the Free/Libre and Open Source Software movements (FLOSS)² who do much besides alleviating fears of technical clunkiness and commercial displacement. "Free software" does not mean no payment required, but is instead technologically predicated, it's "free as in speech, not beer"³. These not-for-profit organisations develop programs operating under different licensing regimes to proprietary software. Unfortunately, a schism erupted between the two camps in a drive for business-friendliness. Open Source advocates considered the Free Software camp's emphasis on ethics, freedom and social impact to be impediments to engaging successfully with the business community. As a consequence Free/Libre maintains two criteria that differentiates the respective positions: users are free to use the program for any purpose; and users are free to distribute the software to others. Both make source code available for examination and tinkering by other techno-enthusiasts. The founding principle of the free software philosophy is that the sharing of programs – which are for the public good, in whatever form – engenders a spirit of altruism and neighbourliness. Those espousing this philosophy consider themselves to be in essence a social movement.

Richard Stallman, founder of the Free Software Foundation, fears restrictive licensing will "damag[e] social cohesion". Freedom to distribute programs to others and use them for any purpose underpins Stallman's ethos. Failure to share is harmful to wider society causing psychosocial harm in the shape of a diminished sense of the public spirit and the public good. For the free software movement 'freely' available virtual produce is an essential cog in the

functioning of a benevolent society. Its pivotal place is defacto, and within this logic, necessary for the literacy and liberation so valued by Rheingold and Nelson. The idealism typified in Nelson and Rheingold pervades the contemporary FLOSS ethos, which seems to be that freedom is realised by operating outside the stifling bind of copyright law. But however liberating this may be in a creative sense, how liberating is on a social level?

In 'Change of the century: free software and the positive possibility',⁴ Martin Hardie examines the 'licence fetishism' of FLOSS, which seeks alternatives to copyright law and notions of intellectual property. Hardie unpacks the copyleft/General Public License models used by FLOSS. For him, these licences are alternative laws, invoking the globalising tendencies of US imperialism – rather than an alternative *to* law. So we have the rather less liberating impetus toward a cyber implementation of American notions of law that are based on free speech. The extension of thinking in the legal arena morphs into virtual applications of freedom:

In the popular narrative, "social movements" such as the Free Software Foundation (FSF), and its relations, the Creative Commons and the Electric Frontier Foundation, act as "patriots" and guardians of "our" law and freedom. This freedom is bound intimately with the logic of open democracy and with free and open markets.

The logical outcome of liberal democratic models of governance is the libertarian nature of FLOSS, whereby the right to freedom includes the freedom to own property. Radicalised elements among FLOSS users⁵, however, want to see notions of property-owning overcome, as these movements prefer property-free communism rather than accommodate capitalism. But can the idealistic claims for software technology bear scrutiny in the 21st Century's informatic capitalism? The spectrum of thinking within FLOSS includes anti-capitalism as well as moderated or tempered capitalism. These ambiguities harbour the undoing of some of the principles so dearly held in cyber communities. Questions arise in relation to the role of cultural and communication produce in a market-driven economy, especially while these renegade producers make claims for a resistant or radical stand in the face of the law and the market.

If computer technology is to have meaningful political or democratic application, how is this to be achieved in the spheres of media and governance? Widespread Internet uptake in consumerist societies has established its place as a popular medium of information and communication. But uses are diverse. FLOSS ideals do not author the technology (even though programs devised under these licences provide the infrastructure for much Internet use and content). Techno-libertarians may imbue the computer with an 'intentional' meaning, determining what it's supposed to be simply by how they describe it. But describing it as liberating falls short of it being so. For instance, how liberating, or intellectually expanding, is watching porn or shopping on the Internet? As the progeny of technical evolution, the Web and Internet are still genetically framed by their provenance in computer culture. If computers' purpose is freedom, its technological offspring

by inference have the same liberating DNA. The claims for liberation or freedom percolate into popular discourse. Only when censorship kicks in – Google removing links to politically sensitive sites in China – is the tip of the apolitical iceberg glimpsed, and the contradictions manifest themselves.

This technological determinism forecloses a debate which tackles the Internet's role in the messy, material world. Potentially, this can play into the hands of the less-democratically minded. If engaging with a computer enables 'liberation' and by extension, democratic good health, then no-one and nothing else need struggle to maintain a polity. (However, a geographical community still needs to be engaged with⁶.) But beyond the rhetoric of freedom, and in light of its commercial as well as social applications, what are the real possibilities for Internet technology in a democratic realm? A meaningful relationship between information communications technologies (ICT) and politics requires more than just rhetoric and wishful thinking.

Early enthusiasts eulogised over new technology prior to the present multimedia use of computers. Convergence is now upon us as TV, radio and newspapers all move to sharing a single outlet and go online⁷. The implications of this for road-to-nirvana claims in a contemporary media landscape set new challenges at the interface of ICT and democratic governance. So we must ask ourselves what histories of technology reveal in terms of democratising hopes? "Utopian archaeologies" have been examined by John Dovey⁸ in relation to video technology. The advent of video in the late 1960s precipitated revolutionary hopes of usurping centralised media and aspirations of generating democratic participation framed the utopian discourses. Here was a counter-attack to the debilitating impact of television, which had contributed to the "imperialization of the intellect"⁹ and whose technology lay beyond the access of many, if not most, due to its institutional and technical opacity. The 'liberating' capacity of video was inscribed in its technical specification. It possessed attributes of access (technology was no longer the sole domain of the expert) and also allowed editorial control and interactive feedback (no messing with "the truth"). And it was a technology affordable to, and used by, wage-earners. As a consequence, it was perceived as a medium enabling mass participation – there was no limit to who could film, nor what could be recorded. Its putative place in a decentralised media signified its techno-libertarian credentials. Sadly, for the techno-libertarians, it did not realise its revolutionary potential. Centralised media was not only maintained, but it has also since been elevated to even greater privilege in the contemporary neo-liberal atmosphere. As Dovey unveils, the tale of technological determinism is fraught with unfulfilled prophecies and misguided futurology.

Contemporary claims for the empowering potential of the World Wide Web and the Internet share similar aspirations. Once again, attributes of accessibility outside centralised media and interactive feedback – think blogs and wikis as the latest examples – are equated with ideas of freedom and the ability to be intellectually engaged/empowered. But, can the Internet with its infrastructure of Web pages¹⁰ overcome the

shortcomings of video culture? The distribution capacity of the Internet addresses issues of reception and audience which remained the obstacle for video output in the 1970s. There is a potential audience of billions for Net produce. But do numbers alone ensure its capacity to undermine centralised media? And is democratic participation merely about numbers? What about content, or patterns of audience reception?

Democracy and the Public Sphere

Before examining these issues, firstly, it is necessary to establish a workable concept of democracy. In doing so, the potential scope and limits of technologies in a democratic sphere can be fleshed out. Exploring initiatives that provide the Net with a place in the democratic process illustrates its role in a functioning polity. Iris Marion Young in *Inclusion and Democracy* (2000) states that:

Democracy is better thought of as a process that connects ‘the people’ and the powerful, and through which people are able significantly to influence their actions.

In complex mass societies these processes operate via the mechanisms of representative democracy. In order to be politically represented a citizenship needs to be informed. This is the part the media plays in a polity. Concerns from personal experience, or those expressed for the ‘imagined community’, can then be made known to politicians. This is the point of connection. There is not space here to explore the shortcomings of parliamentary systems. Suffice to say, issues of privileged access and lobbying undermine the connective aspect of this model. However, barriers to influence and engagement notwithstanding, the Internet does have a place in a *deliberative* democracy. Properly configured it has a role to play in enabling an informed citizenship: “the point of the deliberative process is to allow people to form opinions, rather than just express them.”¹¹ This foregrounds its role in the public sphere – a site of debate, contest and opinion forming. Nevertheless, these democratic processes are complex. Certain aspects of techno-libertarian thinking appear to invoke the less involved and negotiated forms of government found in self-regulation, dispensing with the need to engage with the complexities of a society where differing opinions exist. Perhaps there is a yen for the state-free direct or delegative democracy of the Commune which Marx envisaged¹². Here, I can only address the Internet’s role in deliberative democracy, as presently exists which, argues John Street¹³, produces “better decisions... in the face of social problems”. In acknowledging the gap between the claims and the realities of representative democracy, it is perhaps helpful to invoke David Held’s notion of an “ideal normative agreement” in relation to our adherence to democratic models. This agreement

... follows rules and laws on the grounds that they are the regulations we would have agreed to in ideal conditions, with, for instance, all the knowledge we would like and all the opportunity we would want to discuss the requirements of others.

However, before addressing the challenges facing the Internet’s capacity to function as a cyber public sphere in a deliberative democracy, let’s examine contemporary claims made for Internet culture in the form of ‘Web 2.0’ and its implications for notions of ‘freedom’. As the most recent technological evolution in Web culture its enthusiasts once again promote a popular and idealised discourse. New cultural forms are being forged, often in the potentially fortune-making world of entrepreneurial culture. But in a neo-liberal economic environment what is being overlooked is that the role of the citizen in a functioning polity is conflated with that of the consumer in a free-market. And the freedoms

sought are not necessarily political, but economic.

Cultural Forms and Libertarianism

In discussions of Web 2.0, its function is detached from instrumental political process. Liberty, freedom and empowerment are implied, but more in the name of escaping or circumventing the inaccessibility of state-regulated media or corporate power. It is less “connecting the people and the powerful” and more putting two fingers up to the powerful in acts of rebellion. It is no revolution. There is an emphasis on undermining the consumer/producer distinction, i.e. the consumer is *producer*, but the identity refracted through the prism of individualism is that of consumer.

The ambits and forms being disrupted and reconfigured by the Internet are entrepreneurial and business models. This is especially evident in the areas of retail, promotion, distribution and copyright. As online buying grows exponentially, the high street is hit and the economic bite is felt, most recently by music retailers HMV.¹⁴ Costs calculated to ensure viability in a limited, and costly, square-meterage of city-centre prime real estate are undercut by the cyber-stocked online suppliers.¹⁵ Consequently, exigencies of economies of scale no longer apply. Subcultural, non mainstream CDs or books are in abundant supply in the long tails of cyber listings. The stranglehold of the conglomerate suppliers loosens and niche markets are no longer the risk factor of before. In other words, there’s more choice, and so more to consume.

Meanwhile, the intermediary-laden world of promotion is romantically sidelined as singer/songwriters’ and bands’ websites and webcasts replace agents, managers and PR machines. The Arctic Monkeys gained a reputation via the web and eventually signed up for a recording deal with Domino, whilst Sandi Thom captured live performances from her flat on a humble webcam. She began with an audience of 70 which soon grew to 100,000 across Europe. The Internet as an open forum for distribution has a capacity to circumvent the niche marketing of big business, and in doing so snubs the exclusive promotion processes of major record labels. These shifts may be alternatives to promotion and distribution, but musicians still sign contracts with the transnationals. Thom, for example, signed to RCA/Sony BMG once established through a free source, again giving more choice to consumers. However, the claim for free consumption belies computer and broadband costs even if it does provide a broader cultural landscape. But the corporates still win in claiming the talent they see profits in.

Building audiences from the interpersonal to a global fan base is now achievable via social networking. This is a ‘Web 2.0’ application and the term alludes to the “architecture of participation”¹⁶ lauded by the techno-enthusiasts. Everybody gets to join in and be a producer as well as a consumer. In another display of techno-communitarianism Aleks Krotoski writes in the Guardian that this social software “elevates the Internet from a simple tool into an interpersonal phenomenon connecting people in a meaningful way.”¹⁷ By tagging favourite articles, videos or images, like-minded souls can locate cultural products to their taste. It takes the bookmarking function of a browser, creating a classification system of data which can be accessed by others with a similar online profile – a “folksonomy” rather than a taxonomy. Other Web 2.0 applications have enabled blogs and wikis – salient and, undoubtedly, instrumental additions to participation culture in terms of political spheres, as well as those that are purely commercial. But this cosy world of cyber friends enriching the cultural landscape has significance beyond the merely emotional and interpersonal realms.

Claims made for social networking are also

premised on empowering users: data is elicited from a social source rather than a corporate-owned search engine. Google, once the epitome of the Web’s egalitarian principle, prioritises its listings via sponsored advertising rather than being user-generated. It is now regarded with compound distrust in the aftermath of its acquiescence to the Chinese authorities. In other words, participation is government permitted. Political and economic forces undermine liberating hopes which have been placed in technology. Google, post sell off, is more atuned to maintenance of foreign markets and a new mass consumership rather than the political rights of global citizens. The *realpolitik* of government interference and corporate financial imperatives have combined, as they do in the meat world, to strip the Internet of its frontier-trouncing capacities.

In addition, the Internet, in the guise of Web 2.0 applications, is a new battleground in the intellectual copyright war. The dotcom crash of Web 1.0 chastened the venture capitalists and a halcyon era of inflated hyper-investment in speculative virtual enterprises ended.

However, recent acquisitions mark a renewed interest in cyber entrepreneurialism. News Corporation’s buy-up of the loss-making MySpace for \$580million may seem financially wanton. But the surge of conglomerates onto the Net, in whatever form, is testament to its capacity to deliver advertising revenues now in decline in newspapers and television and on the increase in cyberspace. Sites with vast audiences are proffered vast sums in acknowledgement of their realisable commercial potential. Both the social networking site Del.icio.us and the community photo-sharing site Flickr were bought by Yahoo; the latter sale causing considerable consternation amongst its 1.2 million members. Yahoo had previously sought to claim intellectual rights over the contents of a previous site it bought up, although in the case of Flickr they provided reassurances that this would not happen again. However, the danger is that big business simply appropriates the community kudos invoked by Creative Commons licences, which in its increasing use now has wider cultural resonance. Subcultures are regularly consumed by corporations to bolster goods’ sellability.

Herein lies an essential tension and contradiction of Net entrepreneurial development. In its libertarian and altruistic character, the FLOSS world of code producers provides the Web with its intellectual copyright-usurping products, yet capitulation to the market is the course taken by those exploiting these non-corporate software forms. Members of community sites are left adrift in a corporate sea they specifically chose to avoid when first joining these sites.

Flickr’s submission of photographs operates under Creative Commons licences, which is a form of ‘copyleft’ whereby text and imagery can be reused, but only if it’s not for profit and the author is credited. If money is made, fees can be arranged. These licensing forms have enabled “mashups” – hybrid cultural forms constructed by taking data from one site and adding it to data on another.¹⁸ The BBC have provided Feed Factory and Backstage.bbc.co.uk to enable mashups, claiming it’s done as part of their public-service profile. Suspicions are raised, however, when other BBC initiatives are blatantly for financial gain, such as their on-demand programme download service. Why does the BBC support mashups, when it appears that forays into new media are generally part of agendas with long-term financial goals in mind?

One hypothesis requires first of all examining big business behaviour in this arena. There is no business model logic as yet for mashups, but corporate enterprise is lowering its resistance to what traditionally would have been copyright

infringement cases. Rather than sue (as witnessed in cases of illegal downloading of music files) film studios, for example, are now in discussion either with mashup creators (any publicity is still publicity), or with peer-to-peer application providers.¹⁹ Big business rationale could be two-fold. Firstly, if money is to be made from sites containing data provided for free, investment in terms of waiving copyright fees is repaid in future advertising revenues, or subscription/download charges. Secondly, as FLOSS technologies overtake corporations in terms of innovation, the ‘can’t beat them, join them’ strategy is deployed in an attempt to head off piracy culture. However, if these technological innovations are now being bought up and/or embraced by the conglomerates, what are the implications for the egalitarian principles of techno-libertarianism as well as public space?

Communications media has always profited from what John Thompson refers to in *The Media and Modernity* (1995) as the ‘symbolic valorisation’ of media text. But mashups and peer-to-peer technologies are innovations outwitting existing modes of data creation and dissemination, thereby signifying another notch on the nerd’s bedpost as he usurps standard regulation/copyright/publishing practice of traditional media. In the fusion of the postmodern world of bricolage and cyber information fetishisation, the symbolic valorisation of text can be recycled to squeeze further marketability from it. Data operates as a signifier: what is signified is economic viability and what is connoted in the creation of new ‘signs’ is the mythology of ‘democratic freedom’. Or, for the more radical ‘communist’ elements of FLOSS deploying filesharing, the myth is the end of capitalism. Reordering data becomes an endless process of fishing through the deconstructed ether of hypertext, fetishistically privileging cybered form over political content. But information text is neither knowledge nor ‘freedom’. Often, the only liberty being sought is untrammelled access to new markets. Information fiddling replaces politics and democratic endeavours in place of meaningful communication or participation.

So, this cat-and-mouse game may not be as radical or anti-corporate as envisaged. And in the event of even public organisations such as the BBC providing data for these new cultural forms, how is any public media space to be maintained if it is continually absorbed into other media forms which could be put to commercial use? The battle to maintain non-corporate and egalitarian space in the virtual world is undermined as the public spaces created and maintained in this arena become corporatised in the buy ups and sell offs. Rheingold’s fear that the big boys will belligerently invade the space is misplaced: instead it’s being voluntarily handed over to them – by the techno-communitarians. Access to digitised spaces requires either investment in technology hardware or access to distribution platforms. As consumers, these artefacts and services are to be paid for. Public space is ever diminished in the conflation of freedom of access and choice in the market with political equality. And radicalised elements may be burying their head in the sand in an opt-out culture which does not tackle the real problems of diminishing public service media. Remaining marginalised will mitigate against the political leverage hoped for by Rheingold. The victim is a pluralist public space free from corporate influence.

The notionality and idealism surrounding the Web/Internet and democracy may be attributable to the American political culture FLOSS communities hail from. Cass Sunstein in *republic.com* (2000) examines the role of the Internet in a US republican system of representative democracy. There is an emphasis on free expression as a pivotal aspect of democratic functioning. Whilst Sunstein is thorough in

politically constructing the Internet as a site for democratic process, the techno-enthusiasts may equate the unfettered registering of free expression in cyberspace as a sufficient criterion to claim democratic credibility. And the free expression is not only registered in contraposition to the influence of the corporation, but also to government: the techno-communitarian ethos is strongly anti-regulation. Cyberspace activist, John Perry Barlow of the Electric Frontier Foundation, in his piece “A Declaration of Independence of Cyberspace”, requested that “Governments of the Industrial World, I ask you to leave us alone.” As Sunstein points out, regulation established the Internet in the form of government action and subsidy at its inception. The fetishisation of free expression, in whatever form, whilst divorced from complex democratic processes may be attributable to the US Constitution’s First Amendment. The right to free speech is undoubtedly a tenet of a democratic society, but it is not assured without the facilitation of regulated frameworks. As John Street reminds us: It makes little sense to talk of ‘free speech’ without reference to the methods by which (mass) communication occurs. This ability to speak freely depends on access to the main means of communication, and this is not a necessary or natural state of affairs. It has to be organized or created.

And Sunstein reminds us that free speech is not an absolute in terms of beneficence: making available on websites lists of doctors who have carried out abortions is a call for criminality, not public good.

Reconfiguring the Public Service Ethos for Digital Media

The above outlines how the apolitical concept of the Internet engenders a culture which may be neglectful of its place in public space whilst claiming to uphold that public space from corporate and state infringement. However, beyond the democratic shortcomings of corporate machinations and techno-communitarian solipsism, the politics of citizenship are further challenged, not by laissez-faire libertarianism, but by the media landscape shifting toward “narrowcasting” – as opposed to broadcasting – and also by “cyberbalkanisation”. This is the tendency of some users to visit only those websites that confirm and pander to already-held prejudices, or move to ever more extreme positions once a group sharing one’s opinions is identified.

Digitisation, convergence, and the customisation of media pose significant challenges in maintaining functioning public spheres. Habermas’s conceptualisation of 17th Century bourgeois mercantile culture as an idealised ambit of political communication²⁰ has its shortcomings, but it functions to differentiate this sphere from public space which is not necessarily about opinion forming. The public sphere model dovetails with Graham Murdock’s model of cultural citizenship²¹, comprised of information and cultural rights. Information rights are the provision of a full range of information on government and corporate issues impacting on people’s lives and the “broadest array of arguments and conceptual frames”, to enable the interpretation of this information. This provides a framework for the forming of knowledge. Cultural rights embody having one’s “experiences, beliefs and aspirations represented in the major fora of public culture.” Clearly, the Internet is potentially able to fulfil these requirements, being both a provider of information and a forum for expression and debate. Yet impediments exist to ensuring its place in a public sphere.

In the mass mediated culture of broadcasting, a plurality of recipients determined the audience.

In a narrowcast culture, the fragmenting audiences and markets of a multi-channelled, digitised landscape cannot assure hybrid audiences of differing opinion and proclivities. As radio and television converge on the Internet, narrowcasting exponentially establishes a mode of reception which challenges the rights to the plethora of information and arguments required for opinion forming. Multichannelism and its genre-limited content pander to the myth of choice but that there are fewer genres and therefore less choice in the audience-grab of ratings-assured programming is a fact that is ignored in the freedom-of-choice rhetoric.

The second shortcoming in this neo-liberal invasion of communicative space is a withdrawal from the normative criteria of public service broadcasting. In a discursive shift to consumership, only tokenistic nods to social responsibility, accountability and diversity are apparent. This occurs in an attempt to bridge the contradiction that is political regulation requiring public service programming and simultaneous political harassment demanding justification for the licence fee. The BBC, while having been assured licence-fee funding until 2016, is now morphing less discreetly into an international media player. Lacking unqualified political support since the Peacock report in 1986, the BBC has hedged its bets. Its trajectory in the direction of commercialisation is justified as a means of returning money made “back to licence fee payers to invest in programmes.”²² Deregulation since the Government White Paper of 1988 has proceeded apace. Globalisation of media operations, as the background against which all interests must operate and compete, underpins government deregulation and commercial rationales.

As television prepares for Internet convergence, the diminution of public service content meets the culture of choice of multichannelism. What are the ramifications for the polity of a public sphere? In an ambit in which different arguments are brought to bear, and through debate opinion is formed, can plurality be sustained if an audience is no longer subject to (albeit paternalistic) scheduling but free to choose in niche channels? If documentaries, current affairs and also socially reflective drama are overlooked in the indulged preference for sport, music, or lifestyle programming, what scope remains for Murdock’s requirements for cultural citizenship? In an atmosphere of deregulation, the risk is a media landscape doomed to entertainment and leisure fulfilment, with spectacularised news coverage as the only recourse to current affairs.²³

The distributive capacity of the Internet is being utilised to meet these concerns. In the US, where the retreat from public service television runs at pace, vociferous legal lobbying is deployed to forestall any attempt at even the meagrest public service provision. Corporate media lawyers invoke infringement of the First Amendment – free speech signifying unregulated commercial operation – to ward off governmental regulation being imposed on commercial imperatives.²⁴ In the US and UK websites are being established that reclaim a public mediated space in the face of corporate hegemony and government deregulation. Democracy TV is an example of this²⁵. It is a free, open-source platform based in Massachusetts which gives space to video and film covering social and political issues. In the UK, the Broadcasting Trust has a website²⁶ with 25 hours of archive material from community and grassroots films. The hopes for democratic participation are met as access and distribution limits are overcome. But does this establish Internet programmes as inherent facets of a public sphere? Are the hopes of techno-libertarians finally realised?

As techno-communitarianism is testament

to, the Internet is a medium conducive to communing with the like-minded. However, is the role of the Internet in a public sphere of debate and opinion-forming foreclosed in the nature of Net engagement? In a replay of computer communities’ “narcissism of similarity” – identified by Stephen Doheny-Farina in *The Wired Neighbourhood* (1996) – websites are visited which relate to personal interests and/or reflect already-held opinions and beliefs. The capacity of the Internet for mass customisation of information reduces the likelihood of serendipitously encountering new voices and opinions, reducing its deliberative capacity. This certainly puts paid to Sunstein’s view that “unplanned, unanticipated encounters are central to democracy itself.”

Sunstein also fears that not only will democracy itself suffer, but there is a tendency toward cyberbalkanisation. He offers several solutions to the potential for cyberbalkanisation on the Net, all involving degrees of regulation. One proposal requires providing hyperlinks to sites with differing opinions, although he prefers this to be done via voluntary self-regulation using co-operative agreements rather than government imposition. Andrew Shapiro, on the other hand, in *The Control Revolution* (1998), advocates government funding of a Public.Net site dedicated to dissemination of differing points of view. For such a site to have a visible public profile, he proposes an icon on the computer serving as both an advertisement and a gateway. Thirdly, paralleling the arbitrary nuggets of information encountered in physical public spaces, Noah D. Zatz²⁷ suggests cyberspace ‘sidewalks’ – an automatic, and interruptive, connection to alternative-view sites. All these initiatives are attempts to configure the Internet as a forum for opinion forming by providing structures enabling its place in a cyber public sphere, where different arguments and beliefs are aired and which provides the opportunity for opinion forming, not just opinion expression.

Regulatory suggestions such as those posited by Sunstein may be countered on several fronts, even by those sharing these concerns. Any attempts at regulation in the name of public service could precipitate a wholesale regulation. The plethora and plurality of opinion and information presently available online could be undermined. In China, a licence is required for Internet access. Could attempts in liberal democracies to ensure “balanced” views, or regulate access, risk unleashing increasing editorial imposition? The danger is ideological gerrymandering if not quite the blatant censorship of Chinese expression and a reassertion of, what is arguably, the present situation in broadcasting regulation.

The dissolving of geographical boundaries in cyberspace is reflected in globalisation’s arguable dissolving of nation state boundaries. However, the nation state can swiftly reassert its geographical sovereignty if threatened in virtual space. The Chinese government’s interventions too clearly illustrate that free expression and liberty are dependent on more than technology. These tensions are a harbinger of the potentially illiberal nature of cyber meddling. Regulation – even in the name of balance – can be a Pandora’s Box.

Conclusion

Claims for a global utopia afforded by the Internet seem spurious in the face of the economic and structural realities facing the developing world²⁸. However, the presence of domestic computers and burgeoning Internet access precipitated by broadband in western consumer societies is reaching a critical mass. As a tool in negotiating mediated space, it is no longer the domain of its early proponents who were principally white, English-speaking,

middle class males. Iris Marion Young advocates conceptualising the public sphere as both singular and containing “subaltern counter publics”. These are the groups often deploying the Net as an organising tool. In the wake of globalisation John Keane in ‘Structural transformations of the public sphere’ (1995), further distinguishes public spheres operating at micro, meso and macro levels. The thousands of disputants at localised level embody the micro public sphere, whilst the nation-state and supra-national agencies – such as the EU – are respectively reflected in the meso and macro public spheres.

The Internet’s capacity to compress space and time and connect people across global geographical divides attests to its role in providing a forum for negotiating the meso and macro public spheres – albeit in a qualified form, unless every member of the globe is Internet linked. Whilst much of Internet culture – including its egalitarian principles – is rooted in its US origin, the concerns of the radical elements of techno-enthusiasts are pan-national in a globalised arena of capital accumulation and conglomerate manoeuvring. The Internet is presently prey to the consuming energies of big business²⁹. So provision must be made to maintain its ability to function as a public space and a public sphere. If regulation incites fears of hierarchies and power structures that are reconfigured for virtuality then a debate is required in the name of public good that tackles maintenance. Many benevolent operators determining the pace of Internet change work to a model of social entrepreneurship. But this is the desultory face of individualism left to save the Net from ‘the doing evil’ problems of corporate capitalism. The Internet requires forms of public service action, as well as free software/open source initiatives and deployment, to ensure its democratising potential. Presently this is negotiated in the shadow of the fickle interface between national government and the globalised market. Any technology is bedded in social and political cultures, and is a product of those cultures: meanings and applications are contingent. Unfortunately, libertarianism will not protect the democratic application of the Net from voracious market forces. Indeed, it is in danger of paving the way ideologically for total commercial appropriation of the Net. The idealising rhetoric, in which many evangelising Web groups couch their philosophy, may in fact rob a new technology of its place in the polity.

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With thanks to Peter McCluskey and Nic Wistreich.

Notes

1 ‘The virtual community: finding connection in a computerised world’, (1994), Secker and Warburg.
2 See www.gnu.org/philosophy/shouldbefree.html for Stallman’s position on the ideological differences between free and open source software. www.opensource.org/ for the Open Source Initiative’s site.
3 This is an oft-cited quote from Richard Stallman, the Free Software Foundation founder. Software may be free, as in gratis, but this is not a prerequisite of the term.
4 See *Mute – Underneath the Knowledge Commons*, (2005), Vol 2 #1 www.metamute.org
5 See *Mute* (ibid) for interviews with groups using FLOSS for file-sharing or supporting independent video-makers.
6 Kevin Robins critiques Rheingold as a techno communitarian who is conservative and nostalgic invoking a restoration of a ‘lost’ community. In evading issues of politics and power, Rheingold is proffering ‘not an alternative society, but an alternative to society’. See *Into the Image: Culture and Politics in the Field of Vision*, (1996), Routledge.
7 See Charles Arthur’s article ‘Dreams of faster TV streams meet nightmares of reality’ in *The Guardian*, 2 February, (2006). This article outlines the bandwidth and software problems presently experienced. However,

there are already initiatives by media companies to make programmes specifically for the Internet. A pilot project has already been run by BBC 2.
8 See ‘The revelation of unguessed worlds’, (1996) (no reference).
9 People’s Video Theatre, ‘Proposal for Video Theatre’, *Radical Software*, Issue Two, (1972). For more dystopian technological determinism dealing with television, see Kalle Lasn’s *Culture Jam* (1999), Quill/HarperCollins.
10 The Web is a collection of pages in HTML, although other languages also exist for Web content. The Internet is a network of computers enabling the dissemination of Web content.
11 John Street in ‘Remote control? Politics, technology and “electronic democracy”’, *European Journal of Communication*, (1997), Vol. 12
12 David Held in *Models of Democracy*, (1996), Polity, outlines the histories and aspirations of various democracy models. John Street, (ibid), examines the argument that plebiscite vote-registering, an example of ‘direct democracy’ – which the Internet could be deployed for – is simply an individualistic ‘registering of preferences’. Issues of the public good risk being circumvented without a representative system.
13 Ibid.
14 See Julia Finch’s article ‘HMV boss is first victim as Internet price war batters the high street’ in *The Guardian*, 6 January, (2006).
15 www.wired.com/wired/archive/12.10/tail.html Chris Anderson outlines the ‘long tail’ phenomenon.
16 Google ‘O’Reilly-What is Web 2.0’, for an article giving a technical break down of Web 2.0 applications.
17 See ‘How the web will link us all’ 29 December, (2005).
18 Jack Schofield’s article ‘In the mix’, *The Guardian*, 2 February, (2006) covers mashup culture and how those creating successful forms are headhunted by firms such as Yahoo.
19 Bernhard Warner’s article in *The Guardian*, ‘File sharing? It’s great business’, (9 March, 2006) examines corporate embracing of previously illegal file sharing tactics.
20 See *Masses Classes and the Public Sphere*, (2000), Verso, edited by Mike Hill and Walter Montag, a collection of essays examining the place of capitalism in the public sphere and the omission of women, the proletariat and minority groups from this conceptualisation.
21 See ‘Corporate dynamics and broadcasting futures’, (1994), in *Controlling Broadcasting: Access and Policy and Practice in North America and Europe*, Manchester University Press.
22 David Moody, head of strategy and a board member of BBC Worldwide, quoted in ‘The BBC wants to make money from the web’, by Jane Martinson in *The Guardian*, 29 March, (2006).
23 In ‘Bad News from Israel’, (2004), Pluto Press, Greg Philo and Mike Berry highlight a culture in which editorial agendas are driven by decisions for dramatic visuals to retain audience numbers. In ‘Making television news in the satellite age’ (1997), *Live, Direct and Biased? Making Television in the Satellite Age*, Arnold, Brent MacGregor examines how technology has determined the ‘live’ and ‘latest news’ formats, both of which can dilute values of understanding and accuracy.
24 See Cass Sunstein in ‘republic .com’
25 See www.getdemocracy.com
26 See www.showcase.commedia.org.uk
27 This article ‘Sidewalks in cyberspace: making space for public forums in an electronic environment’ (1998), from Vol. 12 of the *Harvard Journal of Law and Technology*, is available on-line at http://jolt.law.harvard.edu/articles/pdf/12HarvJLTech149.pdf
28 See ‘FLOSS redux: notes on African software politics’ Mute, (ibid) by Soenke Zehle, which identifies the uneven adoption of IT development in Africa, and the particular problems of corporate infiltration of IT provision which can shift wealth from local software industries.
29 See Nic Wistreich’s article ‘The march for neutrality continues’ at www.netribution.net detailing Internet Service Providers’ moves to establish different speeds of Web information loading which will be paid for.

Showing Rage and Resistance: Bristle: Political Street Expressions in Bristol and the South West

Jamie Dockery

Bristle *bris'l v.i.* – to show rage or resistance.

Alas, Tony Blair's recent announcement that he was to clamp down on those assaulting our sensibilities in the towns and cities across the UK did not signal a new era of respect for public spaces and an end to corporate hectoring.

As Blair leads his crusade to reclaim the streets from "neds" and "chavs", activists in Bristol are engaged in a battle to rescue the streets from a much more dangerous enemy, big business and their corporate mouthpieces in the advertising industries. *Bristle*, the radical Bristol autonomous collective, and arts magazine, has produced a photo compilation showcasing political street images and actions produced in the city since 1999. Unsurprisingly from the town that gave rise to Banksy, stencils feature prominently, but they do not dominate the selection.

Reflecting the political activism demonstrated in various forms the book is packed full of images, some more obviously "artistic", others clever and many both daring and amusing. In contrast with Banksy's most recent coffee table tome, 'Wall and Piece', *Bristle* is a mere A6 size but packs in almost 500 colour photos into a pocket edition. Covering stencils, graffiti, billboard actions, subverts, "hangings", murals and street art, the work is a catalogue of actions carried out over the period.

"We don't want to live life as one long commercial break. Instead we choose to break the commercials", says one participant summarising the mood.



If some of the images are obscure or have a too local appeal, the biggest strength of the book is in the "how to do" features. Penned by the artists themselves, there are tips on dismantling billboards, subvertising, and stencilling. Some articles have been gleaned from the pages of *Bristle* magazine and may be familiar to those in the South West, but the book packs a lot of interesting material, both visual and written, into a powerful small package.

It is also worth noting that all this is happening in the city which prides itself on the Bristol Graffiti Partnership; an arrangement between the city fathers and Bristol's Art Colleges whereby, among other things, any student convicted of graffiti "crime" will be expelled from their studies.

Attractively designed and having a useful location directory for all the works, at £6 the book is a snip and an asset to anyone involved in this criminalised sort of stuff. As an alternative guide to Bristol it would be an essential companion to any visit to the city. While the small format is handy for slipping into your pocket, there is a disadvantage in that some of the photos are hard to decipher and, after all, some slogans are supposed to be intelligible. If it is also the case that some of the works are actually not great, the *Bristle* collective are to be thanked for producing the book and recording the pieces for posterity and, more importantly, for inspiration. The book bears the legend "Volume 1". We look forward to Volume 2 but a bit of selectivity may not be bad thing. Recommended.

Available for £6 (inc post) from 14 Robertson Road, Easton, Bristol BS5 6JY or online from www.fugazi.net/dswat/catalog/product_info.php?products_id=922

www.bristle.org.uk

www.bristol-city.gov.uk



www.variant.org.uk