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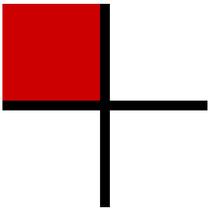
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Throwing shoes...

Nick Butler, Chris Land and Martyna Śliwa



Ben-Haviv After Sankofa (2009)

Revolution is not revolt. What carried the [French] Resistance for four years was revolt, which is to say the entire stubborn refusal, practically blind at first, of an order that wanted to make men kneel. Revolt is at first a matter of the heart. But there comes a time when it passes into the mind, where feeling becomes idea, and spontaneous outbursts end up in concerted action. That is the moment of revolution. (Camus, cited in Todd, 1997: 197)

What is the structure of the social? If we accept organismic metaphors, the social is analogous to the body, usually the human body. In managerial writings this might give us heads (managers, leaders and CEOs), hands (workers/employees/sub-contractors), and hearts (...insert your preferred academic apologist here...). In officially state-sanctioned readings of structural Marxism, we could find a similar coding of the ideological superstructure in the head, the relations of production in the arrangement of the organs and limbs, and the forces of production in the feet (motive power) and in the hands (the most basic and flexible of all the tools). But even here we should recognise that the head as superstructure is not truly a head but a *face*, that is, human social and cultural reproduction that has become inhuman:

The inhuman in human beings: that is what the face is from the start. It is by nature a close-up, with its inanimate white surfaces, its shining black holes, its emptiness and boredom. Bunker face. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986: 171)

As an image of power and naked ideology, the bunker face seems resonant. The blank expression and vacuous eyes of a Premier, perhaps, mouthing platitudes to the Iraqis

about democracy literally from a bunker deep within occupied territories. This is the hollow-dogma of democracy in a mass mediated global circuit of primitive accumulation, where the appropriation of fossil fuels and the mobilization of ideological apparatuses run hand in hand (cf. Retort, 2005).

Just as the face is a deterritorialized head, so the feet and the hands deterritorialize into cyborganic admixtures: couplings of hand/tool and foot/ shoe. Of these, the foot/shoe is the most basic foundation, the ground upon which the rest of the socialbody rests. By standing on two feet, the hands are freed to become tool making and using appendages, and the mouth is thereby freed from carrying to bear words instead. In structural terms, the foot/shoe functions as base to the face's superstructure.

But when a shoe is thrown at the face of power, a double inversion comes into play. On the one hand, the base rises up to strike directly at the superstructure and to challenge materially the basis of its legitimacy. On the other hand, the most basic sign of development and civilization – the shoe – is removed from the bare foot. As well as turning the foot's prosthesis into a projectile weapon, this move symbolically reaffirms the body *against* a becoming-face or a becoming-technology. This moment of unshod insubordination asserts a basic, naked, human dignity in the face of dehumanization.



Image © Lisa Temple-Cox

These themes of insubordination and rehumanization, structure and ideology, run through the various contributions to this issue of *ephemera*. In his review of Göran Therborn's book *From Marxism to Post-Marxism?*, David Harvie shows that Therborn's history of Marxism focuses almost exclusively on state socialism and on institutionally established and legitimated academic discourses on Marxism. Little or no space is given to 'struggle from below': to the insurrectionary revolts and rebellions that brought the Soviet tanks into Hungary to suppress the workers' uprising; to the bodies mobilised against power in the

new social movements of the '60s and '70s; to the even newer social movements protesting against globalization, the WTO, IMF, G8 and World Bank; to the grass-roots movements in Latin America that occupied factories in Argentina, rendered Chiapas

ungovernable, and brought Chavez and Morales to power on the back of popular revolt. In each case, it is the grounded uprising from below – from the feet and from the grass – that produces change and movement, even in the elevated spheres of ideology and theory. Without these material practices, without these movements of bodies, both individual/human and collective/social, Post-Marxist theory would not, could not, be what it is today. In a sense, then, Harvie is alerting us to the real base upon which shifting intellectual histories are grounded and need to be articulated.

These themes of insubordination and rage are most clearly presented in Memos' article 'Dignified rage, insubordination and militant optimism'. Here, Memos recounts the Greek uprising of December 2008 in terms that recall Camus' observation that revolt precedes revolution, and therefore any 'serious' political change; that it issues from the feet and the legs; that revolt rises from a position of genuflection to take a stand, literally, against power. It is only subsequently that this refusal migrates up the body, to the mind, where it takes the form of political strategy and theory, and can truly become revolution. In Memos' analysis, the Greek uprising was properly a revolt, an insurrection that refused both strategic thought and faciality. In its condemnation of the riots, Memos tells us, the Greek Communist party counter-posed the rage and indignation of those who rose up, to the 'mature', 'calm' thought of a 'real' uprising, with its 'demands and goals [and] political purpose.' Within the grid of intelligibility shared by both the right-wing government and the Communist Party in Greece, the revolt of masked youths, immigrants, workers and 'ordinary people' was incomprehensible. Those involved in the riots had no place in the conception of politics held by those in either the ruling parties or the opposition parties. Their organizational logic came from outside the orthodox political rationality, and their voice – a cry of rage – was heard as an incoherent cacophony rather than as a valid form of 'political' expression. Not only could the rioters not be heard, they could not even be seen. Their actions were characterised as the 'blind violence of the hooded people': those who reject faciality and thus cannot be recognised. And yet, as Memos reminds us, it is precisely because of this invisibility in the face of power, which sees nothing but a faceless mass, that so many involved in uprisings cover their face so that they *can* be seen, or at least can no longer be ignored.

As Jacques Rancière suggests, it is this demand for participation from outside the dominant grids of perception and intelligibility, from outside the normal roles and parts allocated by established political process, that characterises the political moment and significance of democracy:

As we know, democracy is a term invented by its opponents, by all those who were 'qualified' to govern because of seniority, birth, wealth, virtue and knowledge. Using it as a term of derision, they articulated an unprecedented reversal of the order of things: the 'power of the *demos*' means that those who rule are those who have no specificity in common, apart from their having no qualification for governing. Before being the name of a community, *demos* is the name of a part of the community: namely, the poor. The 'poor,' however, does not designate an economically disadvantaged part of the population; it simply designates the category of people who do not count, those who have no qualifications to part-take in *arche* [rule], no qualification for being taken into account. (Rancière, 2001: 6, italics added)

With the example of the Greek uprising, then, we see the demands of a poor who are not, or not only, poor in terms that can be remedied by distributive justice, but who are

poor in terms of participative justice. Their struggle is thus more than a struggle against power, against capital and the state, but also a struggle for democracy and dignity.

These lines of political struggle, violent revolt, and ideology again intersect in Uli Edel's film *The Baader-Meinhof Complex*, reviewed here by Raphael Schlembach. In his review, Schlembach highlights the ways in which Edel's film downplays the political nature of the Red Army Factions' (RAF) armed insurrection. Instead, the film focuses on the psychological maladaptation of its members, who are said to have had personal rather than political reasons for their revolt (in much the same way as the Communist Party explained the Greek riots in terms of the immaturity of its young participants rather than as a politically meaningful expression of their rage). Schlembach is careful, however, not simply to revel in an uncritical celebration of violence and armed insurrection. In the second part of his review, he describes how the RAF's unreflexive anti-imperialist stance, and their celebration of action over critique, gradually drew the group into nationalism and anti-Semitism. Whilst Edel's film reinscribes 'politics' within a well established grid of familial relations and personal psychology, the reality of armed insurrection brings out the fascism of the face. The effect of the RAF's descent into anti-semitism, reproducing imperialist and fascist political formulations, suggests something of the difficulties encountered when challenging State power on its home terrain of violence and militarization. This form of opposition, it would appear, does nothing to unsettle an underlying grid of intelligibility and create spaces for new political subjectivities to experiment and become. Instead it reinforces old antagonisms and subject positions, struggling over who will dominate, rather than articulating a genuinely radical demand for participation. For Rancière (2004) this is true politics, the articulation of a demand that recomposes the plane of the political, effecting 'a redistribution of the sensible' that changes whose voices can be heard and what can be seen.

In her review of Boucher's *The Charmed Circle of Ideology*, Anna Woźniak addresses Boucher's claim that postmarxism, particularly Žižek's version, reduces 'politics and economics to ideological struggle'. For Woźniak, and for Boucher, what is at stake here is a concept of the 'real' – the base, ground, or feet – upon which solid political and economic analysis and action can stand firm and secure. Boucher's challenge to postmarxism is that its emphasis on ideology leads us inexorably towards a position of 'irrationality and relativism' that precludes any serious political engagement. With Woźniak, and perhaps also Memos and Schlembach, we should pause with caution at this attribution of irrationality, since this is itself an ideological product: the result of a specific logic of ideas that serves to demarcate 'rational political discourse' from the seemingly incoherent babble of the *demos*. Žižek's concern with 'how we are to reinvent the political space in today's conditions of globalization' thus reflects Rancière's conception of democratic politics as a demand for a place, for participation in a political space that would necessarily be reconfigured by this admission.

The tension between Boucher and Žižek is one of realism versus relativism, a debate that Garance Maréchal, in her article 'Flat-pack philosophy' turns to in the more narrowly circumscribed field of 'organization studies'. Although she questions the lines along which the debate between realism and relativism have been drawn, and prefers the concept of 'dialogue' to the more aggressive 'debate', Maréchal is particularly

concerned with the ways in which theorists have sought to defend 'realism' through a 'death and furniture' style of argumentation. Here we are thrown back upon shoes and the ground they conventionally tread. When Boswell famously asked Samuel Johnson his opinion of Bishop Berkeley's idealism, the man of letters reputedly kicked a stone, proclaiming 'I refute him thus'. It is a defence that Maréchal refers to as the furniture argument, as when philosophers bang on tables (as if by so doing they could leave the sphere of discourse and bring bodies in contact with a brute, dumb and undeniable reality). Maréchal points to the paradox that such encounters with reality are themselves rhetorical devices, as the persistence of the story of Johnson's foot-stone encounter bears witness.

But what seems to be most pressingly at stake in Maréchal's discussion is the death argument and the suggestion that the denial of a basic reality leaves little purchase upon it for politics and for ethics. According to Maréchal, the realists claim that a refusal to separate epistemology and ontology, and to give some ground for the 'reality' of the latter, leaves no space on which to understand the limits and extent of human agency. It ushers in a kind of ethical relativism on the basis of which political and moral action is impossible. And yet, if we return to the idea of the foot and the stone, we find again and again the shoe at the heart of political action. In the eco-activist classic *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, Edward Abbey has the most educated of his protagonists repeatedly deploy the refrain of 'I refute it thus' when engaged in activities from kicking over ant-hills to sabotaging bulldozers and blowing up dams (Abbey, 1985; Jones, 2006). And, lest we forget, the very term sabotage derives from the *sabot* – the clog – that was supposedly used to smash early industrial machinery. The irrefutable refutation of the kick and the clog – the throwing of a shoe – is already politically, ethically, organizationally and technologically situated. Far from the basic ground of a universal, common-sense reality that cannot be denied, the shoe/stone is a political and discursive weapon precisely because it can resist the common-sense, ideological systems of the face and demand the impossible.

As the slogans on the streets of Paris in May 1968 had it, 'sous la pave, la plage' – beneath the cobble-stones, the beach – an invitation on the one hand to dig up the cobbles and throw them at the police, and on the other to use them to build the Hacienda, a utopian counter-reality or collective fantasy that would enable serious political and moral action by imagining a world that is radically different. The throwing of a shoe or stone thus has a double function. It refuses and resists, demanding a halt to technological 'progress' or an end to occupation. But it also has a positive moment in which it signifies a reassertion of the thrower's humanity and demands, or simply takes, a part in democratic determination. In this sense, the throwing of a shoe is a demand for participative justice. It is both a refusal to stand quietly in line and to take one's allotted place in the social division of labour, and an assertion of the right to be counted amongst the *demos*, the people, and to have a voice – to part-take – in the political process.

In another contribution to this issue, Peter Sloterdijk picks up this issue of building and architecture to ask about the desires that inspire the building of monuments and dwellings. In one sense, his concern is with the desire to erect structures that shape and constrain, but also enable and facilitate, forms of organization and behaviour. In another

sense, perhaps, he is responding to the building project of reconstruction that is the other side of the destruction and demolition that results from the thrown clog, shoe or stone – the time of counter-reality or fantasy when stones are no longer kicked or thrown but picked up and reorganized to create something new.

For Sloterdijk, however, the ground upon which building takes place is essential: It is the savannah. In the forests, living as tree-apes, proto-humans did not need shoes or stone houses. It is only once the ape drifts out onto the open plains of the savannah, and starts walking upright, that the foot is flattened and deterritorialized from its early climbing function to be reterritorialized as a distinctive ‘foot’. Likewise, the hands are deterritorialized from their locomotive function and freed up to enter into new assemblages with, eventually, shoe-making instruments, but first with stones and flint tools. Upright on the savannah, it is not only the hands and feet that are de- and reterritorialized in this way; the entire perceptual apparatus is transformed as it adapts to new vistas and distances. As Sloterdijk puts it, once it becomes able to see the approach of a predator or other dangers from far away, the savannah-ape is introduced simultaneously to boredom. Removed from the constant vigilance of the jungle, and overwhelmed by boredom and joblessness, the savannah-ape sets its hands and tools to work and *builds*.

What is built out there on the savannah? In short, ‘boredom containers’. The primary function of architecture, Sloterdijk tells us, is to contain boredom. So the savannah-ape builds in order to fend off boredom and joblessness, and slowly but surely the open savannah is reduced to a closed monastic cell. Isolated within four walls, and trapped within the strict hierarchy of the Church, the process of destruction and new building must start again. Since, as Pascal has it, ‘no-one is able to stay quietly in his own room’, their inhabitants will inevitably begin to dismantle the monastic cells as they reach out for a democratic form of participation that is not premised upon a preordained compartmentalization and social isolation. Cut off from each other, and condemned to stare only at the imponderable face of God, the Brothers slowly remove their clogs...

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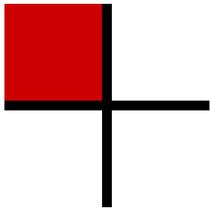
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'Flat-pack' philosophy:¹ relativism, realism and the persistence of rhetoric in organization studies*

Garance Maréchal

abstract

In this paper I explore several ways in which critical realist and relativist arguments and ontological claims have been presented in recent debates, with especial reference to organization studies. The purpose of this exploration is to consider whether discussions have, or could have, moved away from reductive bottom-line arguments in the ways sometimes suggested by commentators, both theoretically and rhetorically. I argue that despite claims to the contrary, elements identified in earlier relativist critiques of some forms of realist argumentation still persist, although relativists themselves are not immune to criticism. Neither Critical Realism nor its adapted forms of (lower case) critical realism (such as those applied in organization studies) escape the trap of bottom-line rhetoric, despite their claims of offering a sophisticated stratified ontology that departs from empiricist views of science. They only succeed in moving the bottom line forward from a flattened world of ready-made pieces of furniture to flat-pack structures-to-be-actualized. Moreover, despite changes in the content of their arguments, the rhetoric of critical realists reveals the continuance of underlying strategies of power based on commitments to theology rather than ontology. Part of the problem, I conclude, is a consequence of constructing these textual exchanges as 'debates' in the first place.

Introduction

Realism/relativism is not a debate hanging in the air; it is made into one. (Potter, 1998: 42)

Relativism in the social sciences has experienced a range of critiques that sometimes identify relativist practice with its radical and abstract extreme, using this as a rationale for its dismissal. Realism too has complained that its more naive exponents are no longer typical of the range of its current complex understandings. As a landmark and dramatic intervention into this stand-off, Edwards et al. (1995: 26) produced an argument that has achieved the status of a minor classic in the philosophy of the social sciences: a discussion of the 'Death and Furniture' argumentational style. In their paper

¹ With acknowledgement to The Buzzcocks' 1996 album *Flat-Pack Philosophy* (Cooking Vinyl).

* I would like to thank Andrew Sayer and Stephen Linstead for their valuable comments on earlier drafts of this paper. I would also like to thank three anonymous reviewers for their constructively critical suggestions.

'Death and Furniture', Edwards et al. (1995) attempt to show that the rhetorical practice of realist critiques of relativism typically deploys what are intended to be two irrefutable proofs of ontological realism. The concrete 'facts' of the existence of 'death' (as a universal condition that all humans must face) and 'furniture' (such as tables – representing a physical object world) are established by realists as two common and unavoidable objections to ontological relativism. Both are regarded as inalienably universal and external to human experience, and provide a 'bottom-line' beyond which argument is deemed to cease. Edwards et al. set out to expose the poverty of such 'bottom-line' arguments. Some recent critical realist writings have felt it necessary to claim that they have moved on from and are not reproducing such arguments, distancing themselves from earlier naive positions (Fleetwood, 2005: 219; Mutch, 2005). In this paper I critically explore some of Edwards et al.'s arguments about realist rhetorics, and some critical realist responses, questioning whether, even in more recent debates, both realists and relativists continue to reproduce their own bottom lines in less obvious guises.

In the first section, I summarise what Edwards et al. term 'Death and Furniture' ontological arguments against relativism and outline their response. In the second section, I turn to consider Bhaskar's more sophisticated transcendental realist arguments and highlight some of the logical contradictions and conceptual problems pertaining to his justifications of critical realist ontology. This is discussed in the context of the overarching naturalist scientific programme defended by critical realists. While my subsequent argument scrutinizes realism and its contradictions from a relativist perspective, it also includes a reflexively critical evaluation of the limitations of relativist standpoints in section three. I then further consider the rhetoric and politics of specific critiques of relativism, including the reductionist strategies that they adopt and the political and 'theological' content of their claims. In the fourth section, I consider more recent arguments by critical realists in the field of organization studies (Fleetwood, 2005; Mutch, 2005; Reed, 2005a, 2005b) and responses to them. I also examine whether these do, as they claim, offer a more sophisticated account than 'Death and Furniture' bottom-line arguments, or whether beneath a polished rhetorical surface the politics and theology remain the same. I conclude by suggesting that, despite obvious developments to incorporate social constructionist insights, the bottom line has shifted rather than disappeared. At best, the 'furniture' of the metaphor, rather than being just natural evidence of objectivity, is recognised as having constructed elements that nevertheless operate objectively. The 'furniture' now has the 'flat-pack' quality of a ready-made but customizable reality while death arguments have merely been prolonged.

'Undermining' relativism: Death and furniture arguments

Philosophy... has long recognized the pro-relativist implications of the fact that empirical observations themselves cannot conclusively establish a theoretical interpretation, and thus cannot in and of themselves account for the acceptance or truth of a knowledge claim. (Knorr-Cetina, 1982: 133)

'Death and Furniture' arguments have been explored recurrently in the history of the philosophy of the social sciences and, for ontological realists, these arguments are deployed to represent the absolute 'end of rhetoric'. Indeed:

'Furniture' and 'rocks' type arguments [in which solid things on which we sit, upon which we might bang our hands, or against which we might stumble are deployed metaphorically and sometimes literally] invoke 'the objective world as given, as distinct from processes of representation; [and] as directly apprehended, independent of any particular description'. (Edwards et al., 1995: 26)

As Edwards et al. observe, the solidity and the 'out-there-ness' of objects like furniture and rocks make it hard for relativists to deny or deconstruct them, or even to argue that their 'reality' is a strict social construction.

The use of 'furniture' arguments tries to establish relativist responses to what appears to be obvious as complicated, over-elaborate, unnecessarily ambiguous and even duplicitous – 'pedantic and unreasonable deconstructive nit-picking' (Edward et. al. 1995: 29). Realist 'death' arguments deploy the inescapable fact of human death and the reality of global and historical horrors (such as genocide and the Holocaust) to indicate that there are universal aspects to existence beyond the relative that have absolute moral sticking points. Edwards et al. (1995: 33) specifically identify two forms of 'death' arguments: *ontological* and *siren*. Ontological versions stress that the reality of 'death, misery, tragedy, disaster... [is] undeniable, except by a scoundrel or a fool' (ibid.). Alternatively, the siren version of the argument is aimed to act as a warning against dangerous and unintended consequences of relativism ('relativism actually *produces* death and misery'), invoking obvious politico-moral realities that relativists should not undermine without being thought of as morally perverse (ibid.). The overall intention of a 'death' argument is to discredit any relativist position towards a series of presented 'inescapable realities', often by appeal to the undesirable consequences of that stance (ibid.). For such realists, only realist thought, and the acknowledgment of ontological realism, can recognise incipient horror and prevent its proliferation.

Edwards et al. undermine the 'death and furniture' line of argument in two ways. First, they identify what they call the 'realist dilemma', namely, how ontological realism cannot escape the paradox that, in spite of its protestations to the contrary, it undercuts itself and the assumed obviousness of the reality that sustains it the moment that it needs to justify itself by representation. Realism therefore denies what they regard as its own rhetorical devices, political objectives and quasi-theological commitments. Indeed, Edwards et al. demonstrate persuasively how reality-based 'furniture' arguments are themselves rhetorical devices. Even the simple act of banging a fist on a table in demonstration of a point in one's argument, the common illustration used to indicate the undeniable materiality of the object world, is based on a double metonymy that involves allowing *one* part of *one* table to stand for the universality of all tables, and the narrow waveband of our human perception of 'solidity' for all states of 'table' matter. Consequently, they argue, most realist claims may at best be those of an experiential realism whilst the specificity of human experience is paradoxically denied (cf. Campbell, 1985). The 'reality' of different categories of rocks and stones that exist independently of human practices and categorizations (Edwards et al., 1995: 30), and function as emblems of natural reality, also relies upon a centring of human experience.

Nevertheless, how the independent status of rocks and their categorization are relative to human actions, immediate intentions and broader purposes (such as those of the geologist, construction engineer, climber, stumbler, catapult manufacturer) are unfortunately glossed over. What remains, they continue, is a situation where intentional states *precede* the real status of rocks, and self-consciousness and memory are accepted as reliable bases on which 'to report events' such that reality is assured (*ibid*). Commonsense definitions of reality have here colonized apparently analytical thinking.

The second way that Edwards et al. undermine death and furniture argumentation is by pointing out that ironically, in order to make Death arguments work, realists take an ethical position and superimpose it on their ontology, i.e. they know 'the Good, the Bad and the Ugly' and naturalize it. Here ontology is not merged with ethics; ethics is masked as ontology. But as Smith (1988: 54; in Edwards et al., 1995: 33) points out, misery, tragedy, atrocity and disaster exist in a world that is still predominantly realist in orientation. This suggests that both realist science and realist common-sense assumptions are more prevalent and influential over contemporary tragedies than are relativist orientations and appear to offer no incontrovertible defence against such tragedies.

Edwards et al. target their arguments at 'bottom-line' realism. It could be claimed that they in fact only refer to one kind of realism in their critique (naïve or empirical realism) but they do not consider death and furniture objections to be the sole province of such extreme positions. Indeed, they argue that resonant bottom-line arguments can be found in the work of 'those sophisticated realists or moderate relativists for whom there has to be a bottom line, beyond which they refuse to go ...' (Edwards et al., 1995: 26). Critical Realism anticipated such critiques and does not claim such extreme naïve realist positions. Critical Realism supports (and 'aims to re-establish') a realist view of being (ontology) whilst at the same time accepting and accounting for the relativism and subjectivity of knowledge and scientific activity (Bhaskar, 1975). Indeed, Critical Realists, with their differentiated and stratified conceptualization of reality (which includes three domains: the empirical, the actual and the real), seem to offer a more subtle version of ontological realism than empirical realism.

In what follows we will see that neither Critical Realism nor its adapted forms of (lower case) critical realism – such as those applied in organization studies – escape this trap in spite of their claims to offer a differentiated conception of reality stratified into empirical, actual and real levels, departing from empiricist views of science.

Displacing the bottom-line: Bhaskar's transcendental rhetoric

For critical realists, the real encompasses an independently existing world of intransitive structures and generative mechanisms that are causally active and give rise to, but are being manifested or not into, *actual* patterns of events that occur independently from the

social mechanisms of perception of the *empirical*² (Bhaskar, 1975). Critical realism subsequently moves the 'bottom line' of realist ontological arguments from observable and atomistic events ('the ultimate objects of knowledge' in 'superficial' ontological formulations inherited from Hume) to underlying causal 'structures and mechanisms that generate phenomena', considering the latter as the primary ontological entities or 'intransitive objects' (Archer et al., 1998: 19). Contrasting with idealist or relativist positions, critical realism clearly differentiates between ontological (intransitive) and epistemological domains but acknowledges that scientific observations and knowledge are historically and socially situated ('produced in the social activity of science') as well as mediated by 'transitive objects', understood as 'the artificial objects fashioned into items of knowledge by the science of the day' (Archer et al., 1998: 16-19; Shoter, 1992). Critical realism also aims to offer an alternative formulation of causal explanation based on the discovery of actual mechanisms and structures ('causal laws'), which is distinguished from the empiricist production of regularities and patterns thanks to the empirical observation of constant conjunctions of events.

In this section, I reconsider Bhaskar's transcendental self-justification of critical realist ontology and demonstrate the tautological rhetoric that contributes to its certainty and indubitability. Bhaskar's (1975) Critical Realism is formulated as an answer to some of the weaknesses of existing philosophical positions, including relativism (as a form of idealism). However, Bhaskar's transcendental argument itself cannot depart fully from the idealism that it criticizes, in spite of its reclothing of Kant's formulation, which we will discuss below.³ Bhaskar's justification of ontological realism is performed using a transcendental argument extending the model of Kant's transcendental deduction of objective categories of thought (Callinicos and Bhaskar, 2003; Viskovatoff, 2002). He transposes Kant's transcendental argumentation from the possibility of sense experience to the possibility of science (Viskovatoff, 2002), summarized as follows:

What kind of transcendental arguments can be produced... to demonstrate the intransitivity and structured character of the objects of scientific knowledge? The intelligibility of [experience in science, which depends on experimental activity as well as sense-perception] presupposes... the intransitivity and structured character of the objects of scientific knowledge, at least so far as these are causal laws. And this presupposes in turn the possibility of a non-human world... and in particular of a non-empirical world. (Archer et al., 1998: 23-26)

Bhaskar's transcendental argument concludes by asserting 'the necessary condition of the existence of a natural and independent real' through developing a retroductive (or abductive) process of argumentation which starts from certain widely accepted premises

2 As Bhaskar (1975: 46-47) states it: 'There is a distinction between the *real* structures and mechanisms of the world and the *actual* patterns of events that they generate. (...) The world consists of mechanisms not events. Such mechanisms combine to generate the flux of phenomena that constitute the actual states and happenings of the world. They may be said to be real, though it is rarely that they actually manifest and rarer still that they are empirically identified by men. They are the intransitive objects of scientific theory'. Bhaskar also distinguishes between necessary and accidental patterns or sequences of events, with the former corresponding to 'a real connection actually manifest in the sequence of events that occur' (ibid.).

3 It is ironic to note as an aside that, at the time of his foundational Critical Realist writings in the mid-1970s, Roy Bhaskar was a member of the Department of Philosophy at the University of Edinburgh with an office located in the 'David Hume Tower'.

about the intelligibility of scientific activity (Parsons, 1999: 152). The transcendental character of this assumption has been challenged, however, with Bhaskar's logical demonstration being deemed questionable (Bhaskar and Callinicos, 2003; Mingers, 2006). Unlike Bhaskar, Kant is able to regard his transcendental deduction of common human categories of thought as unquestionable and showing apodeictic certainty because 'he starts with something indubitable: with the kind of sense experience that every human being has' (Bhaskar and Callinicos, 2003: 92). As Callinicos further notes:

It's the indubitability of the starting point that transfers certainty, from the premises to the conclusion. But if we look at Roy's version of the argument in *A Realist Theory of Science*, we don't start from anything indubitable. (Bhaskar and Callinicos, 2003: 93)

First, then, it has been argued that Bhaskar's 'de-individualized' and 'de-idealized' version of Kant's transcendental argument is problematic as a basis for Bhaskar's ontological claims, as his formulation robs Kant's argument of its 'apodeictic' certainty (Viskovatoff, 2002: 700). Moreover, the question of the existence of science and the question of the existence of thought are two very different questions, but Bhaskar (1975) treats them as the same, with 'human activity' and 'cognitive activity' being used ambiguously (Viskovatoff, 2002: 700). Callinicos also notes how 'science is not a universal feature of human existence [but] a highly culturally and historically specific set of practices' and how Bhaskar (1975) offers a persuasive interpretation of what is 'central to scientific practice'. But this is only an interpretation: a 'contestable, conjectural account of what scientific activity involves' (Bhaskar and Callinicos, 2003: 93) based on claims that are 'fallible and corrigible' (Viskovatoff, 2002: 700). This makes Bhaskar's argument vulnerable by his own criteria. Second, the persuasiveness of Bhaskar's argument is partly based on its rhetoric: the premises of the argument are assumed to be fairly secure, therefore the use of abduction as a form of argument is considered to be reliable and its conclusions are treated as valid (*ibid.*). But, as noted by Mingers (2006: 26), Bhaskar's logical demonstration of the veracity of his transcendental argument for 'an independent, stratified ontological' domain is also questionable as he reverses the form of the traditional syllogism, going 'from the agreed occurrence of some phenomena [or activities] backward to an inference about what, therefore, the world must necessarily be like', rather than from (theoretical) inference to (actual) occurrence.

Bhaskar (1975: 36), however, manages to make his transcendental argument a convincing and attractive justification for the ontological possibility of science by pulling a magical rabbit out of his philosopher's hat. This is by invoking the epistemic fallacy: 'the [erroneous] view that statements about being can be reduced to or analyzed in terms of statements about knowledge'. Bhaskar's transcendental argument is made into an ontological (foundational) claim instead of a knowledge claim under the cover of this epistemic fallacy, as follows.

Critical realism establishes causality as a necessary and not a contingent feature of human agency. It is accepted as a constitutive principle of the existence of an independent and external world and a justification of the possibility and intelligibility of science. But in taking this position Bhaskar merely transforms Kant's earlier 'regulative' (and therefore not 'properly transcendental') argument relating to the 'ideal of an ordered nature' into a constitutive or transcendental one in order to interpret

contingency as natural necessity (Viskovatoff, 2002; Parsons, 1999). Kant's regulative argument runs as follows: 'in studying nature, one must proceed as if nature is ordered ... [otherwise] the project of science would not make sense' (Viskovatoff, 2002: 701). The assumption of a natural order as a probability is merely regulative, however; it is a practical stratagem applied to regulate scientific activity, and its truth cannot be established with certainty. Viskovatoff (2002: 702) notes that Bhaskar is 'aware of Kant's idea of regulative principles, but is dismissive of it', apparently believing that he offers more than a mere regulative principle. He is only able to do so, however, by conflating reasons and causes and by setting aside the uncomfortable fact that the truth of the premises he makes to justify the possibility of science cannot be established with certainty, using the epistemic fallacy as cover. Bhaskar's argument is in effect:

if we knew that my ontology was really true, then we would understand how our experiments are possible, but that we don't really know, since to worry about this would be to commit the epistemic fallacy. (Viskovatoff, 2002: 702)

It is worth noting here that Bhaskar frames his justification of his transcendental form of argumentation in terms of 'immanent critique', or critique that emerges from inquiry. This, however, appears to be a way of sidestepping the circularity of its logic without appearing tautological. Bhaskar displaces the logical closure of his system of thought by injecting the idea of change and history as a dialectic to open it up, saying 'we have a certain phenomenon or a position which someone is holding, let's see what must be the case for that phenomenon or position to be possible' (Bhaskar and Callinicos, 2003: 97).

To summarise, then, Bhaskar's (1975) stratified ontological formulation displaces the 'bottom line' from the empirical (as in experiential realism) to the actual or real (via generating causal mechanisms). His structured and differentiated view of the real, he claims, enables him to conceptualize change and contrasts with 'flat, undifferentiated and unchanging' views of the world as conveyed by empiricists and idealists (Bhaskar and Callinicos, 2003: 97). Critical realism, however, only succeeds in moving the bottom-line from a flattened world of ready-made pieces of furniture to flat-pack structures-to-be-actualized. Flat-pack ontology invites capable human agents to discover 'the potentials and possibilities of the powers of structured entities' by dialectically creating a multi-dimensional reality from transient instructions (Morgan, 2003: 578). Unfortunately, Bhaskar's deterministic system only partially allows human freedom and makes limited room for change under constraints. The transcendental self-justification of Bhaskar's ontology, which assumes the existence of causality as a natural necessity, is ironically a leap of faith that undermines his own project of solving the problem of induction in scientific inquiry (Viskovatoff, 2002). Even if ontological commitments are considered inescapable by critical realists, the assumption that this necessitates 'a separate philosophically constituted and validating domain of ontology' is problematic for some (Bhaskar and Callinicos, 2003: 109; Kivinen and Piironen, 2006: 304-308). This again suggests that the leap of faith is a little too far:

Whenever we speak something about the world, whenever we have a set of beliefs, embodied in that speech or those beliefs are presuppositions about the nature of the world. So it was obvious to me that the world is in some way stratified – it is structured and differentiated – and it is changing. (Bhaskar, in: Bhaskar and Callinicos, 2003: 98)

The leap is necessary, however, because Bhaskar's (1978) Critical Realism is also part of a wider scientific project of developing a critical and non-reductionist naturalism in the social sciences. Whilst accepting that the process is affected by the performative and historically-situated character of social structures and objects, the critical naturalist project aims to provide a social scientific theory with a relational conceptualization of society as a 'complex and causally efficacious whole' and a truth-seeking mode of explanation that makes the latent and generative structures of the social world visible, through abstraction being continuously transformed in practice (Bhaskar, 1978: 24; Sayer, 1981). In the process, he produces a reformulation of the Death Argument (siren version) in claiming that the distinction between ontology and epistemology is necessary for political and moral reasons. Bhaskar also offers another moral reformulation of the death argument when he claims that only critical realism is able to offer an appropriate conceptualization of agency which can 'properly grasp the nature of human freedom as emancipation from real and scientifically knowable specific constraints' rather than poetic or other kinds of descriptions of an 'already determined world' (Shotter, 1992: 160). But as Shotter (1992: 163) subsequently notes, Bhaskar's 'scientific' method for discovering the true using 'philosophical discourse and argumentation' severely limits the range of possible approaches to intelligibility in its making (hence the creative production of new interpretations and meanings) by systematically evaluating theories, models, claims, arguments and positions (what critical realists call 'transitive objects') along reductive criteria like truth and falsity, correctness and error. Again, such an evaluative form of argumentation enables critical realists to level difference, diversity and plurality in terms of oppositions and rivalries and to frame them into competitive claims for access to the (ultimate) truth. Differences in perspective are transformed into positions that are then rendered into politically opposed rivalries to be resolved through debate. Hierarchies are also encouraged and elaborated with some theories being thought of as being more powerful or satisfactory e.g. offering better explanations of social phenomena than others.

Critical realist reactions to relativist evasions

In the case of *A Realist Theory of Science*, [I] start from two premises: experimental activity and applied activity. Why? It's not that no one can dispute them, it's because these are premises which infused [most] philosophical thought [and that it] did not dispute (or even sometimes theorize). In fact, there's nothing you can take for granted in philosophy except your opponents' premises. (Bhaskar and Callinicos, 2003: 97)

To return to Edwards et al. (1995), although they may see some vindication of their position in the foregoing critique of Bhaskar and other critical realists, and although they themselves develop their views persuasively, they nevertheless remain vulnerable to criticism (see McLennan, 2001; Parker, 1999 and O'Neill, 1995). In particular, their explicit neglect of ontology in their arguments; their privileging of language as almost the only considered form of representation; and their concentration on 'bottom-line' reductionism are regrettable, as not all reductionisms take this form as Critical Realists argue. Edwards et al. frame their arguments as epistemological rather than ontological. In this they largely follow Gergen's (1994: 8) line of ontological neutrality towards the world 'out there', which seeks neither to deny nor affirm the nature of external 'reality'. They focus on the problem of meaning rather than the problem of existence, and in

some senses could be seen as reinforcing the divide between ontology and epistemology that critical realists emphasise. In the process, they neglect alternative approaches to ontology, such as what Bergson calls his 'partial realism', the rhizomatic materialism of Deleuze (which De Landa insists is realism), the pragmatism of Dewey, and the process philosophy of Whitehead. What these diverse writers would deliver of relevance to pro-relativist argumentation is an emphasis on the problematic processes by which reality as flux is engaged and shaped, the significance of the body's immersion in those processes, and the importance of non-linguistic evocational forms amongst those processes alongside language. Similarly, recent social constructionist writers who centre linguistic processes or 'conversational realities' within their work have also begun to place renewed emphasis on the role of the body in knowing and the need for a critical appreciation of modes of representation, expression, relation and apprehension outside language in reality construction (Shotter 1993a, 1993b; 2005).

Furthermore, the arguments of Edwards et al. on representation heavily favour language rules and language-mediated representation. Postmodern thought is sometimes caricatured by critical realists as being solely about language as discursive form, with a literal view of the meaning of 'text' (although recent developments in critical discourse analysis have sought to redress this). Yet whilst the world as we know it might be within language, is language only the verbal/textual form that we commonly refer to as 'language'? Derrida argued that language itself is comprised of organising practices such as ordering, sequencing, marginalizing, bracketing, prioritizing and erasing/correcting. As such it constitutes ways of 'writing' the world, or of bringing it into relation, but this does not necessarily entail inscription in words – other forms of representation are equally relevant, and their practices are equally worthy of close scrutiny (see Cooper, 2006; Shotter, 2005). Edwards et al. unfortunately miss an opportunity to dispel this myth.

One of the aims of the 'Death and Furniture' article's argumentation was to 'explicitly repudiate' the mistaken realist view of relativism as 'anything goes' – itself a variant of realism (Potter et al., 1999: 81) – and defend it against accusations of 'moral dissolution' (Edwards et al., 1995: 39). As Potter et al. (1999: 81) reiterate, relativists can possibly make assumptions and judgments about the world, but 'they also hold these assumptions to be permanently open to examination and critique'. Relativists also challenge 'fact/values' polarities, treating facts as inseparable from judgments (*ibid.*). But contemporary or subsequent intellectual exchanges illustrate that Critical Realists and critical realists alike are still deaf to such attempts (see e.g. O'Neill, 1995; Parker, 1999; Bhaskar and Callinicos, 2003).

In death and furniture arguments, it is precisely what they take to be the opponents' premises that critical realists find so infuriating, leaving them often 'bewildered if not outraged' (Willmot, 2005: 761). In his response to 'Death and Furniture', O'Neill (1995: 102) described and defended table-banging as a 'sign of hopelessness and exasperation' by realists when faced with the absence of serious consideration by relativists of any utterance, rather than it being a bottom-line argument. We could, however, by the same token note the frustration of relativists with the obsession of realists with framing, indeed imprisoning all dialogue within the 'ritual of Theory-Criticism-and-Debate' that infuses Bhaskar's Critical Realist and most derivative

critical realist writing (Shotter and Lannamann, 2002). As Rorty counters, this 'appears as the end-product of an original wish to substitute confrontation for conversation as the determinant of our belief' (Rorty 1980: 163, emphasis added). Potter's (1998) documentation of his attempt as an author to resist the ordering imposed by realist forms of argumentation, in presenting a fragmented and situated collection of realized thoughts, ironically incorporates his editor Ian Parker's own resistance to the project of his chapter by re-presenting their email correspondence as the conclusion to the paper. Although despite his robust resistance, Parker as editor obviously gave way, Potter's strategy proves both amusing and edifying, mirroring back O'Neill's (1995: 102) critical accusation levelled against Edwards et al.: 'This is a strategy of power, quite literally'.

Familiar critiques and caricatures of relativism continue to re-emerge in the rhetorics of realists of diverse loyalties (Bhaskar, 1975; Bhaskar and Callinicos, 2003; Hibberd, 2001). Long-standing realist critiques include the following:

1. *Relativism denies ontology*. Bang! Bang! Realists are now exasperated (O'Neill, 1995) and they despair of debate in the face of imagined relativist claims: 'What possible point could there be in my carrying on a dialogue with something that doesn't exist? Of course the moral here is that ontology is absolutely unavoidable' (Bhaskar, in Bhaskar and Callinicos, 2003: 98). Or they find pretexts not to take relativist claims seriously until relativists accede to 'their demand that some utterances be taken seriously' – which the realists won't accept that they do (O'Neill, 1995).
2. *Relativism is conflated with post-structuralism (and vice-versa)*. Relativism is accused of reducing all assertions and truth-claims to matters of language and rhetoric. O'Neill (1995: 101-102) exemplifies such simplistic reductions of post-structuralism's critique of representation: 'if a claim is made, put quotation marks around it and discuss it as a piece of language. Don't take the sentence seriously as an assertion. This I take is the central move in recent relativism... The distinction between fiction, jokes and assertive utterances about the world then falls'. Relativism reconstructed in this way does not see anything beyond text and is only concerned with irony, creating 'performative contradictions: it is a performative contradiction to assert that you are not making an assertion' (O'Neill, 1995: 101-102; O'Neill, 1998). But conversations are not about logic, and language can be used tentatively rather than assertively – which is precisely to raise reflexive awareness of the consequences of such discursive performativity and particularly performative foreclosure – whilst nevertheless communicating meaningfully.
3. *Relativists oppose realism to relativism*. Such an opposition is a mistake (O'Neill, 1995; Hibberd, 2001). But as illustrated in O'Neill (1995: 102), critical realists construct argumentation in terms of assertion and counter-assertion, and argument becomes defined as debate rather than as conversation. In Parker (1999), for example, relativism is abusively described as a 'full scale perspective', a 'position, equal and opposite to critical realism' instead of a 'more or less extensively theorized questioning – analysis, problematizing,

critique – of the key elements of traditional objectivist thought and its attendant axiological machinery' (Potter et al., 1999: 81, quoting Smith, 1988). McLennan (2001) temporizes such polarized distinctions, calling for a more nuanced discussion of differences between perspectives. But, together with O'Neill (1995), he reinforces an integrationist discourse of immanent convergence. Relativism is not so much a perspective as a process of working on perspectives. If the binary opposition were true, it would negate the equation of relativism with post-structuralism, an approach that in Derrida in particular seeks to deconstruct such polarized thinking and its implicit power relations. So do Potter et al. (1999), who also reject the realist construction of relativism in terms of polarities. Relativism is neither more nor less moral or political than critical realism (O'Neill, 1995; Bhaskar and Callinicos, 2003), but is rather more aware of the perils of claiming the moral high ground of representation and speaking for the Other. Critical realism, unfortunately, cannot usurp the privilege of speaking for the 'tortured, oppressed and murdered' as emphasized by Potter et al. (1999).

In summary, then, Edwards et al. make a telling critique of realism through their identification of 'death' and 'furniture' arguments. Nevertheless, their own form of relativist argumentation is not without its flaws, in common with other forms of relativism as I have noted. The question that now needs to be addressed is whether these flaws enable critical realism, widely recognised within organization studies to be the most articulate form of realism, to have a cohesive response to this attack.

Shadow boxing? 'Stripping down' critical realist ontology in organization studies

I hope that the reasonably sophisticated ontology developed here can prevent accusations that critical realists invoke 'Death and Furniture' type arguments ... and /or are prone to table thumping while claiming 'you're not telling me that's a social construction'... (Fleetwood, 2005: 219)

The worst and most obvious excesses of 'Death or Furniture' argumentation, as we have seen, are eschewed by more sophisticated critical realist writers such as Fleetwood (2005). Nevertheless, we might still question whether such arguments continue to appear by stealth in an unacknowledged way in critical realist writings. We should also ask whether changes in the argumentational rhetoric of critical realism brought about accompanying changes in what Edwards et al. argued were its politics and 'theology'.

Unfortunately, examination of two important critical realist statements in the field of organization studies, Fleetwood (2005) and Reed (2005a), along with a critique (Contu and Willmott 2005), and a response to the critique, Reed (2005b), suggests that 'Death and Furniture' argumentation is still present, and its politics and theology remain intact. To begin with, ontological and siren versions of the 'death' argument are still employed, typically using two different nominal strategies. The first move involves a nominal strategy of identifying events and situations as having unequivocal moral significance, regardless of their complexity. The Holocaust is such an event, treated as having obvious significance – one does not need to discuss it – as it represents an evil that so obviously must be avoided. The key threat here is the relativist condition of not

being able to see the event for what it so obviously is, and therefore to be unable to avoid or correct it. In Fleetwood's (2005) ontological version of the death argument, the ultimate horror presented by 'death' in the extreme versions of this type of argumentation is attenuated into its intellectual equivalents: being mistaken (p. 205), stupid or nonsensical (p. 211) – all presented as profound scholarly abominations for critical realists. Similar labelling strategies may appear in other guises in critical realist accounts, and can be found in both Fleetwood and Reed's work. Among these is the pejorative device of naming those who make relativist arguments as 'postmodernists' or 'poststructuralists' – those who cannot or will not acknowledge the obvious (a repackaging of the siren version of the death argument). Fleetwood selectively quotes a series of often complex quotations from a somewhat heterogeneous group that he chooses to label 'postmodernists' and leaves the quotes to speak for themselves, with only a brief general comment. A similar strategy is used by Fleetwood where comments from one of those previously and perhaps curiously labelled postmodernists (Karl Weick, for instance!) are dismissed 'rather than dissect[ing] these statements to show what is wrong with them' (p. 209). Reed (2005b) gives an eloquent siren version of the death argument after Contu and Willmott (2005: 1646) take him to task for relying heavily on 'traditional' approaches that cannot therefore be considered 'new and innovative' – his initial claim for the contribution of critical realism (in Reed, 2005a). This resonates with what Edwards et al. identify as the 'realist dilemma': in needing to deploy arguments for realism as well as negatively characterising oppositional positions, critical realists cannot avoid the need to 'represent' that which is supposed to be self-evident. O'Neill (1995) argues that it is not a genuine dilemma as realist thought is not inevitably 'trapped' in language but constitutes a mode of engagement with the world outside language. This, however, seems to be more of a denial of the problem than a refutation of it.

Reed's (2005b) defensive, if combative, response culminates in an *ad hominem* that accuses Contu and Willmott (2005) of being closet postmodernists after he took their point as a negative accusation of traditionalism and lack of vision, rather than an ironic observation. Reed's (2005b) negative nominal strategy does not make any further attempt to make this labelling relevant to his argument, with the implication that we all know what the terrible consequences of being postmodernist are. Next stop: chaos and disaster – again, a weak variety of the siren version of the death argument!

The second move reverses the first nominal strategy by naming the good things that are abandoned or neglected by relativism. *Ontology* is the good here, because flawed ontologies provide flawed foundations for everything else we do in the world. Epistemology, despite the inevitable epistemological features of their constructions of ontology, is typically regarded as nugatory. Epistemologists are at best mistaken and at worst misleading, another weak example of the siren version of the death argument (Fleetwood, 2005: 206). Only critical realist philosophy is used as a source by Fleetwood and Reed, and those who reject it are treated the same summary way as those who neglect it. Ironically Fleetwood and Reed actually don't appear very interested in philosophy per se at all – they only ever cite Bhaskar and the adapters of his work, Lawson and Archer, and often their 'translations' of this work into organization studies are either not very accurate, as Contu and Willmott (2005) point out, or fail to constitute the creative move forward that Mutch (2005) attributes to critical realism. Almost no-

one else appears to get any substantial treatment. Their critique of 'postmodernists' is entirely based on secondary sources, citing them outside their textual as well as their social and historical context. Fleetwood, particularly, does not even bother to interpret or explore how the statements he cites might have come to be possible or regarded as meaningful by their authors themselves except in a throwaway metaphorical argument (several times he gives the excuse of not having space or time to do more). So death arguments – albeit heavily mediated, still pervade critical realist contributions in organization studies.

To continue, 'furniture' arguments, where the object world speaks for itself and refuses constructivist attempts to render it malleable, are not immediately obvious. But consider the emphatically put idea in Fleetwood (2005: 205) especially that *one can know simply*, what is an *error* or *mistake*. The impact of this intervention in scholarly argument is the verbal equivalent of banging one's fist on the table. *You or they are wrong!! It's obvious!!* One can almost feel the shockwaves. Fleetwood (2005: 217) himself also asserts that his critique of postmodernism (conflated with relativism as we have seen) is 'hard-hitting', evoking the noise of the impact as he slams the metaphorical table. Reed (2005b), despite his attempt to be a deft counter-puncher, has little by way of a response to Contu and Willmott's (2005: 1648) question as to how critical realists can be so sure that the world conforms to their version of it other than bluster. Ontological ambiguity is condemned out of hand, but what if it is a reflection of the way the world is rather than of analytic inadequacy? After all, any physicist would be familiar with the (quantum) insight that light can be seen to behave both as a particle and a wave. For some critical realists, at some point, and after some accommodation of social construction, reality just is. If we want to look for a concept that performs an equivalent function to tables or rocks for critical realists, we have the *entity* (Fleetwood, 2005: 199). An entity can be real without being empirically observable or material, its reality stemming from its causal efficacy or actuality (*ibid.*). The 'flat-pack' components of reality can thus become *ideally*, *materially* and/or *socially* real once animated by causal powers, depending on whether and how they are conceptually, materially and/or socially mediated. Transient, emergent and performative mechanisms shape, reveal and animate fundamental entities and structures-in-waiting. But unfortunately, the ontological status of entities relies upon a limited incorporation of relationality, constrained by causal mechanisms, procedures and laws.

The common discursive forms of realist argumentation display a persistent stubbornness. As Edwards et al. (1995: 35) observe, the typical realist dispute follows the form: 'I'm right and you are wrong'. 'No, I'm right and you are wrong'. 'No, no, I'm right and you are wrong'. Here for illustration we can compare Fleetwood's discussion of Du Gay's work on p. 215, and his earlier critical realist rejection of Du Gay's position on p. 206. Whilst there is not room to reproduce this discussion here, the similarity in the approach is unsurprising, although the terminology used is more on the dialectical lines: 'You do'. 'I *don't*'. Yes, you do'. 'No, I *don't*'.

Rhetoric is replete in critical realist organization theory. Reed (2005a: 1636) uses critical realism (i.e. the more explicitly philosophical work of Bhaskar, Lawson and Archer) to symbolise what he characterises as a bold new direction in thinking, which only serves to mask an underlying and somewhat nostalgic return to the concerns of

“classical” historical and sociological studies of management and organization’. In pointing out that critical realists in organization studies often diverge from Critical Realist statements in social philosophy,⁴ Contu and Willmott (2005: 1659) suggest that Reed is ‘invoking it to anoint and regenerate classical analysis as a model for the contemporary study of organizations’. In fact, the realism of Fleetwood and Reed turns out to be not as critical as they avow, which may explain why they don’t appear to be terribly interested in philosophy more broadly. There are also strong rhetorics of collectivity – ‘critical realists think, say or do [the following things] etc’, with widespread use of the character ‘we’ (see Edwards et al., 1995: 29). Ironically, in spite of a shared condemnation of identity and subjectivity turns in recent work influenced by poststructuralism, these three critical realist papers seem themselves to be obsessed with identity – the establishment of their own.⁵

Edwards et al. also note that an underlying concern with politics typically surfaces textually in the form of an argument we want to win. Fleetwood (2005) is pugnacious and indeed masculine in his vocabulary, self-satisfiedly describing himself as ‘stringent’ and ‘hard-hitting’. Reed claims to be valiantly contesting a dominant approach although Contu and Willmott (2005) demonstrate (empirically, with some relish of the irony) that the approach Reed targets was and is far from dominant.⁶ Furthermore, Reed (2005a) asserts that, contesting this assumed dominance, a realist ‘turn’ has now been achieved. Contu and Willmott (2005) demonstrate that not only has such a counter-turn not materialized, but that the claims for distinctiveness of such a turn are questionable: it might, if achieved, constitute little more than a retrogression to earlier, somewhat tired, ideas. Both Fleetwood (2005) and Reed (2005a, 2005b) liberally use phallic imagery: they repeatedly characterize their own position as strong and powerful, and Fleetwood even claims it is impregnable to counter arguments (Fleetwood, 2005: 214). These papers are political statements, establishing the ‘identity’ of critical realism for the purposes of changing the balance of power in organization studies, and indeed returning it to the golden age of British industrial sociology when Labour Process Theory was in its pomp.

Finally Edwards et al. insist that critical realism constitutes a belief system or a theology. The giveaway here is that ontology, rather than being regarded as simply given or prior, is termed a ‘commitment’ (Mutch et al., 2006: 612). Realist ontology, and indeed realist science, then, is a belief system, and the arguments in the papers introduce us to its rituals, its prophets, and even its human sacrifices. And like a religion, it is holistic without being complete – if you adopt its ‘prism’ (or pentacle perhaps) you will be saved from the evils of epistemology and ambiguity and you will epiphantly ‘see the world more clearly’ (Fleetwood, 2005: 197). Of course, such a theology insitutionalizes aporia and its reflexivity, if there is any, is always limited by

4 This would be acknowledged by critical realists, many of whom who don’t follow Bhaskar’s intellectual trajectory and are more influenced by the recent theoretical and empirical work of Margaret Archer.

5 I am of course aware that even a paper such as this one constitutes some form of intervention in identity politics, however innocuous, and Edwards et al themselves acknowledge this as an inalienable part of their own position. But the rhetorical emphasis, style and claims are striking.

6 And outside the UK, such an argument could barely be launched, let alone sustained.

the failure to acknowledge that its own carving up of the world is itself a language, and constitutes an epistemology. So despite Fleetwood's claims that his sophisticated ontology should not be vulnerable to accusations of death and furniture arguments, we detect hubris. The ontology is actually limited; insofar as it is based on Bhaskar's transcendental argument, it is contentious; much of it is rhetorical; its aims are political and theological; and the paper accordingly does not constitute sophisticated ontology but sophisticated 'death and furniture': 'flat-pack' philosophy. The solid reality that the furniture metaphor represents in earlier bottom line argumentation is no longer so simplistically represented. But even though a critical realist version of the real recognizes conceptual mediation and social construction, its assumption of entities, structures and mechanisms is still part of a solid bottom-line rhetorical justification strategy – a flat-pack artefactuality to be actualized. The more politics and theology are present in these discussions, the more agonistic the dialogue becomes, with debate being constructed as something to be won, and arguments as something to be settled (Linstead, 2003).

Looking for ground:⁷ Final reflections on the debates

In an age in which recognition and understanding of difference has come centre-stage, the study of relations between differents has correspondingly become more pressing. (Gabriel and Willman, 2005: 425)

My final comment will be about the 'nature' of the 'bottom line' and of forms of argumentation. For realists, the bottom line is the line between interpretation and that which resists interpretation – its meaning is regarded as uncontestable and the means of the construction of that meaning remain unexamined. For relativists, what is beyond the line of interpretation is mysterious, rather than to be understood through a reduction of its dimensionality. So where realism takes a positive approach to the bottom line, relativists embrace negativity and ontical (not ontological) ambiguity – not a taken-for-granted approach to the real but an openness to possibility. Critical realist flat-pack-structures-to-be actualized only partially allow limited possibilities for human action and change. Some relativists, as Edwards et al. note, do themselves embrace a bottom line and their arguments with realists consist of debating where the line should be drawn. However, as Contu and Willmott (2005) hint but don't fully discuss, the argument ought to be about how what lies beyond any such line should be approached, between common-sense positivity and impressionable negativity.

Following from Gabriel and Willman (2005), it could be argued that contemporary developments in the social sciences have rendered projects that seek to integrate different perspectives nostalgic, if not obsolete. Critical realism, from Bhaskar onwards, is explicitly committed to the integration of the social sciences into a naturalistic project (Bhaskar, 1978; Mutch et al., 2006). This entails a preference for a language of convergence that is seen to be insufficiently cultivated in relativist approaches. Fleetwood (2005: 3), for example, deplors the ontological ambiguity, i.e. lack of

7 With acknowledgement to Wyckham Porteous's 1995 album *Looking for Ground* (Bohemia Beat Records).

clarity, imprecision, conceptual slippage and confusion vis-à-vis matters ontological—that relativism introduces to debates. But as Gabriel and Willman (2005: 3) reiterate, boundaries and differences are increasingly seen 'not as fixed entities, but as provisional, loose, contexted, challenged, reinforced or blurred'. Critical realists, however, are uncomfortable with such fragmentation and fluidity, and seek ways to solidify boundaries and aggregate differences into larger units of meaning that can be more easily manipulated analytically. Furthermore, realism in general tends to pursue a majoritarian or imperialist strategy that seeks either to dismiss different approaches or incorporate them within its perspective. Even where realist perspectives allow themselves to be modified by the encounter, relativist approaches are rendered as minor voices within it. This is one by-product of approaching differences as invitations to debate. As Linstead (2003) reminds us, one of the origins of the term 'debate' is the medieval French *debâttre*, meaning 'to beat down'. Debates are unavoidably power struggles, to be settled by one party asserting a dominant position over the other. 'Moving forward' entails the supposedly defeated party accepting this situation. This requires some establishment of shared criteria by which both are comfortable to be judged, a common bottom-line. In the absence of this, skirmishes continue with the possibility of both sides considering themselves triumphant in their own terms.

Dialogue offers a different possibility of communication across boundaries, a recognition of the provisional nature of bottom lines, unencumbered by a unificatory mission. It opens up the potential of criteria to be immanent and mutable, and the productivity of dissensus. It requires, for its continuing success, a sense of openness against closure, and a reflexive awareness of the potential of rhetorical strategies and devices to reassert the agonistics of older argumentation. Whilst there is no doubt that discussions between critical realism and relativism in organization studies have become more nuanced in recent years, I have argued in this paper that the underlying rhetorics may nevertheless allow earlier positions to persist. To the extent that this remains unaddressed or unacknowledged, future dialogue is likely to be frustrated.

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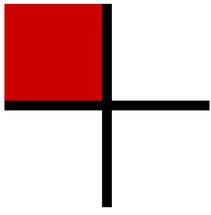
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Dignified rage, insubordination and militant optimism

Christos Memos

abstract

This paper seeks to shed light on the Greek uprising of December 2008 by providing an analysis of the events and their significance. It suggests that the Greek revolt was an explosion of anger, sensitivity and indignation: an expression of dignified rage. The insurgents stood on the side of human dignity and insubordination. The paper argues that one of the most considerable successes of the uprising was the active solidarity between the participants and the development of a community of struggle against capital and its state. The Greek insurrection also challenged traditional notions of organisation and defended the unity between the forms of organisation and their content. The paper goes on to argue that the Greek revolt was also significant in terms of understanding movements for social emancipation and readdressing issues of the state, political parties and revolutionary violence. It concludes by suggesting that the insurrection was a 'fire-alarm' for the political and social elites all over the world, and that its effects could be contagious. Yet the hope that it will spread cannot blossom without our everyday radical struggle for social emancipation.

Introduction

Due to Anglo-American intervention, the Greek liberation from Nazi occupation did not entail a period of peace, social stability and economic development. Unlike other European countries, for Greece the end of the Second World War constituted a new period of crises, conflicts, and the first phase of the events which led up to the outbreak of the Greek civil war (1946-1949). Churchill's policy, in combination with the provocations of the Greek right-wing establishment, led to the armed conflict of December 1944, the so-called 'Dekembriana' ('the December events'). On December 3 1944, the Greek Police opened fire on a mass demonstration organized by the leftist movement, killing more than 28 people and injuring 148. The leftist fighters attacked police stations to get small arms and ammunition. Over a month's fighting was set off between the forces of the Greek Communist resistance fighters and the forces of the Greek Government and the British Army. The Greek leftist movement was defeated militarily and, on February 12 1945, a peace agreement ('Varkiza Peace Agreement') was signed between the Greek right-wing government and the 'National Liberation Front/National People's Liberation Army' (EAM/ELAS). The 'Varkiza Agreement' led to the disarmament of the leftist fighters and signalled a period of uncontrolled violence and atrocities against the civilian population and the Greek leftist movement.

64 years later, graffiti on the buildings of Athens read: 'Varkiza Agreement is dead. We are at war again'. Athens – a city of a country which is a member of the European Union – again looked like a 'war zone', according to the mainstream media. On December 6 2008, a policeman shot and killed 15-year-old Alexis Grigoropoulos in cold blood. After the killing of the boy, spontaneous protests began in Athens and within days the insurrection had spread all over the country. The social explosion was a dialectical coincidence of the multilateral crisis of neo-liberalism, the struggle against capital and its state, and the young people's identification with the murdered boy. The Greek unrest brought to the fore the complete failure of neo-liberalism and its severe crisis. The implementation of neo-liberal policies after the demise of the Soviet-type societies resulted in social dislocation and the destruction of social relations. It caused a political, social, moral and cultural degeneration which is without precedent in modern Greek history. The neo-liberal crisis, however, has been caused by the social and political struggles developed over the last 20 years. It is the outcome of a growing opposition and refusal of those who live from the sale of their labour-power to submit passively to the neo-liberal misery and injustice. The struggles against neo-liberal globalization, the emergence of the anti-war movement, the militant mobilizations of workers and farmers, the anti-racist campaigns and solidarity with immigrants, the everyday visible and invisible struggles to develop alternative social relations, to create autonomous spaces or reclaim public spaces, the occupation of state buildings, the student movement and resistance against the privatization of universities and the insurrection in Greek prisons, all of which preceded the December revolt, played an important role in this disintegration of political and economic neo-liberalism. All these movements of struggle and resistance not only undermined the power of capital but also broadened the radical political experience and formed militant political capital which was transmitted to the new generation. As Walter Benjamin (2003a: 390) would say, there was an activist and radical past tradition, which carried with it 'a secret index' and led up to the social explosion.

In a parallel way, the Greek revolt disclosed the fragility of the neo-liberal norms as a means of social cohesion and integration. The young people identified themselves with the young murdered boy and not with the dominant neo-liberal order, and a 'hidden world of insubordination' (Holloway, 2005: 157) arose. They reached 'the zero point' of rage, anger and resentment and this 'zero point' at last became 'the dialectical point of change' (Bloch, 1995: 1358). A confluence of interwoven and interdependent reasons took the form of rejection and confrontation with the established order which caused Alexis Grigoropoulos's death. It was a rejection that was expressed both as 'process of thought as well as of action' (Marcuse, 1978: 446). And the action of the young people of Greece was prompt, explosive and subversive. This paper reflects on the Greek unrest and argues that the Greek unrest was a carnival of the oppressed, a struggle against capital and its state, a struggle for humanity and dignity. It concludes that this struggle contains seeds of the 'new', promotes the project of social autonomy, and allows us to have a militant optimism.

Revolt is the festival of the oppressed

Fear the Wrath of the dead. (Elytis, 1974:42)

The ‘interpretation’ of the Greek youth uprising should not constitute an effort to deal with it as an ‘*object* of social scientific inquiry’. To think of the Greek insurgents as an *object*, as something apart from us, would mean ‘doing violence’ to them, ‘refusing to listen to them’. The Greek young people are not a ‘they’ but a ‘we’ (Holloway, 2002b: 156). It is the revolt of our conscience and sensitivity, our struggle for humanity and dignity. It is our great effort to ‘learn what we already know’, to ‘become what we already are’, to escape our conformism, subordination and compromise by ‘thrusting them into our dreams’ through practice, through revolutionary *praxis* (Vaneigem, 1983: 7). Until the uprising of December, it appeared from the media and the established order that the vast majority of us, the world of the oppressed, had ‘reconciled itself to bitterness’ (Elytis, 1997: 15), to misery, to the loss of its humanity. Given this, not surprisingly capital considers and treats us as commodities, as things, as rootless and baseless ‘quantities’.

In reality, capital draws upon our activity and creativity and at the same time attempts to dehumanize, to reify us. But, ‘reification...can never be wholly realized’ (Castoriadis, 2005: 16). This incomplete reification and the fact that the people in capitalism have been alienated go hand in hand with their struggle against this reification, against their reduction into objects. This imperfect reification constitutes the driving force and at the same time indicates the fragility, the vulnerability and the ultimate contradiction of capitalism. This struggle in and against reification is the decisive characteristic of capitalist society and not the action of economic laws which could lead capitalism to an unavoidable collapse.¹ For capital, we are fragmented, alone, miserable and unchanged. We are conceived as objects, we are a ‘nothing’. Yet, unfortunately for it, ‘a nothing we were, are, shall remain, flowering’ (Celan, 1980a: 142-3).² A nothing which is flowering: perhaps in Celan’s verse we can find the most pertinent description of our struggle against fetishistic ‘thing-ification’. And this ‘blooming’ appears in full in the revolutionary moments, the moments of uprising and revolt which are ‘carnivals in which the individual life celebrates its unification with a regenerated society’ (Vaneigem, 1983: 82). Capital believes that it can control and calculate everything. But it cannot calculate and destroy unpredictable passion, rage and anger. Man is Man because he/she is unpredictable. As Heraclitus put it, ‘one would never discover the limits of soul, should one traverse every road — so deep a measure does it possess’ (Heraclitus, 1987: 33).

After Alexis Grigoropoulos was shot dead by a special guard on Saturday December 6th, spontaneous protests began in Athens and later on the same night in Thessalonica and in

1 On this issue, see the brilliant analyses made by John Holloway (1997: 146-9; 2002d: 27-40; 2002a; 2005: 43-105).

2 ‘Ein Nichts
waren wir, sind wir, werden
wir bleiben, blühend’
Celan P. (1980a: 142-3).

many other big cities. On Monday December 8th, in an outpouring of rage, thousands of high school and university students marched spontaneously and the insurrection took on nationwide dimensions. Thousands of young people, many of them hooded or masked, joined the marches and became involved in a 'battle' with the police. They carried metal bars, stones, petrol bombs, and Molotov cocktails. Protesters confronted the police violently and police cars were overturned and damaged. They attacked police stations all over the country throwing stones, eggs, paint bombs, bottle of waters, fruits, coins, and in some cases they attacked police with flares and Molotov cocktails. Over the following two weeks, young people set up burning barricades across downtown streets and hundreds of banks, shops, big stores and government buildings were attacked, smashed, looted and burned down. Protesters mostly targeted symbols of capitalism, burnt vehicles and smashed windows of luxury hotels and shops, and occupied town halls and ministries. Approximately 600 high schools and over 150 university faculties were also occupied and open, public and popular assemblies were held by the insurgents. Radical actions were carried out in theatres during performances, the studios of state television and even at the Acropolis of Athens. The Greek unrest was distinctive in terms of its mass character, radicalism, explosiveness and rapid spread across the country. Protests and demonstrations, occupations and clashes with the police took place all over the country, even in the more remote and politically conservative areas. It was an indication that 'revolt is inherent in our existence in an oppressive society' (Holloway, 2002c: 199).

The spread and radicalism of the uprising took the right-wing government by surprise. Both government and parliamentary parties — with the exception of the 'Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA)', which took a sympathetic attitude towards the unrest, albeit acting within the framework of state institutions and with certain tendencies within the coalition being hostile towards the uprising — began to panic as the unrest escaped their control. On the other hand, and despite their sectarianism and fragmentation, anarchists, anti-authoritarians, libertarian communists and autonomists joined the revolt and wholeheartedly supported it. As for the extra-parliamentary and anti-capitalist political groups, some of them were sympathetic towards the unrest and members of their rank and file tried to play an active role within the insurrection. Other minor Leninist, Trotskyist and orthodox Marxist groups, however, adopted an ambivalent and contradictory attitude towards the Greek revolt. They were greatly surprised by the dynamism and radicalism of the insurgents. Their major objections had to do with the violent radicalism and spontaneity of the revolt and its apparent lack of political demands. For this reason, while thousands of young people were building barricades against the police and were fighting against capital and the state, these minor leftist groups attempted to give the unrest an 'explicitly political tone' by making a number of 'concrete proposals', such as calling for the resignation of the government and the disarmament of the police.

Yet the most hostile and conservative attitude towards the uprising was taken by the Greek Communist Party (KKE). A mere shadow of its former militant self, it could be labeled as Communist or Marxist only very loosely. As Marx (1991a: 113) put it, 'in historical struggles one must... distinguish the language and the imaginary aspirations of parties from their real organism and their real interests, their conception of themselves from their reality'. In practice, the Greek Communist Party has been

reduced to a Stalinist-Leninist Party, a completely reactionary and repressive organization. In its political program, not only does it defend the Stalinist period but also considers the abandonment of the Stalinist model as the fundamental reason for the collapse of the Soviet Union. On a theoretical level, the Greek Communist Party has recently completed the publication of Stalin's *Collected Works*, while significant texts by Marx are lacking or have been published by other political currents and publishers. There is also a notable absence of publications of other important Marxist writers such as Lukács, Luxembourg, Korsch and Gramsci. In view of this, unsurprisingly, the Greek Stalinists not only supported the Greek right-wing government with their policy, but they stated through their general secretary, Al Pappariga, that 'the molotov cocktails (fire-bombs) and looting of the hooded individuals' are 'linked with the state secret services and centers abroad' and it is a conspiracy of foreign agents acting as provocateurs to undermine the Greek labour movement.³ According to the leader of the Greek Stalinists, 'what some parties call a "popular uprising" is the ridiculing and vulgarisation of popular uprisings. A real uprising will have as its starting point the workers, wage-earners and youth. Not even one window will be smashed. It will have demands and goals, it will have a political purpose, it will not merely be indignation.'⁴ She went on to say that a genuine popular uprising does not want to destroy capitalist banks, machines and enterprises but to transform them into popular property. Stalinists attacked the 'blind violence of the hooded persons' and argued that the 'the core of the so-called "anti-power" forces' aims to 'defame the organised struggle and movement and appear as a painless substitute for class struggle'. Finally, Greek Stalinists argued that they struggle 'without a mask' and came to conclude that 'we know very well that many of these youths will come to be mature and think calmly'.⁵

The stance taken by the Greek Stalinists is indicative of the tragic outcome of vulgar 'Marxism' and epitomizes the role that orthodox Marxism has played in the history of the labour and radical movement as an enemy of critical thought and revolutionary practice: 'Masked and hooded individuals linked with the state secret services and centers abroad'; 'in a real uprising...not even one window will be smashed'; and most importantly, we have 'to be mature and think calmly'. Not surprisingly, conservative newspapers wrote that, if the right-wing government proved to be unable to quell social disorder, then the Greek Communist Party had to be called on to impose some order on the chaos of the whole country.⁶ Meanwhile, the Greek government was thinking of

3 Interview with KKE leader Pappariga, <http://www.ana-mpa.gr/anaweb/user/showplain?maindoc=7126121&maindocimg=7124323&service=102>.

4 See her speech issued in Rizospastis, the Party's newspaper, on 23/12/2008 <http://www1.rizospastis.gr/page.do?publDate=23/12/2008&id=10466&pageNo=6&direction=1>.

5 'Speech of the General Secretary of KKE, comrade Al Pappariga, delivered at the big rally organised by KKE in Athens on 8th December, after the murder of Alexandros Grigoropoulos by the police', Available at <http://inter.kke.gr/News/2008news/speech-aleka>.

6 For example, on December 10th 2009, the newspaper *Αδέσμευτος Τύπος* had its front page covered by the photograph of the General Secretary of KKE, Al Pappariga, and her statements according to which the harsh hooded young people act on the commands of Greek or foreign para-state centres. In the same vein, the newspaper *Αυριανή* on December 15th praised the Greek Communist Party as it was the only organized political force which had the nerve to publicly denounce the hooded and came into conflict with these provocateurs, who aimed at the destabilization of the country. Taking a step further, the same newspaper on its front page on December 19th wrote that if the government

declaring ‘a state of emergency’ while the police brutality against the insurgents took on unprecedented dimensions. More than 270 people were arrested and the last prisoner was released at the end of August 2009. At least 70 immigrants who were arrested during the uprising got 18 months imprisonment and are being deported, while in the city of Larissa 19 people, among them students aged between 14 and 16 years old, are being prosecuted under anti-terrorist law.⁷ On Monday 22nd December, Konstantina Kouneva, immigrant and trade unionist, the secretary of the Greek Trade Union of Cleaners and Housekeepers, was attacked with sulphuric acid because of her unionist action and was hospitalized in a critical condition, continuing to fight for her life. Assassinations, brutal state violence, state terrorism, prosecutions, imprisonments and deportations: ‘the tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the “state of emergency” in which we live is not the exception but the rule’ (Benjamin, 2003a: 392).

And the thousands of hooded and masked individuals who joined the uprising en masse? Who were they? Where did they come from? Where did they go after the insurrection? Orthodox Marxists spend much of their time in an attempt to define the revolutionary subject of the forthcoming revolution and they are unable and unwilling to understand that the revolutionary subject is formed through a continuous struggle against capital and its state, and that ‘the social composition of this subject will depend on those who stand on the side of human emancipation’ (Bonefeld, 2004). The revolutionary subject, the ‘material reality of anti-power’ (Holloway, 2005: 155) was ‘there’, in the Greek revolt, was present in the battles against capital and the capitalist state. The arrests made by the police showed that the people who ‘were not mature and did not think calmly’ during the insurrection were ‘ordinary people, that is to say, rebels’ (Holloway, 2005: 158): working men and women, unemployed people, migrants, high school and university students, football fans and Romanies. We were those who are ‘invisible’ to the world of capital, those whose struggle ‘is the struggle of those without face’, those who ‘cover our face so that we can be seen’. As Zapatistas put it, ‘behind the balaclava are the we that are you’.⁸ We are the ‘stifled’, ‘silent volcano’, the ‘hidden world of insubordination’ (Holloway, 2005: 156, 157) who are both subordinate to capital and insubordinate against it, who reinforce capitalism and negate it. As one of the slogans of the insurgents put it, ‘We are here’, our sensitivity is here, our dignity is still alive and we know that we must scream, we must resist and refuse in order to affirm our humanity. And it is this ‘substratum of resistance that exists in any oppressive society’, this ‘substratum of negativity which, though generally invisible, can flare up in moments of acute social tension. This substratum of negativity is the stuff that social volcanoes are made of. This layer of inarticulate non-subordination, without face, without voice, so often despised by the “Left” is the materiality of anti-power, the basis of hope’ (Holloway, 2005: 159-60).

Throughout the Greek uprising, the violence perpetrated by the capitalist state against those who resist and negate capital was extreme and brutal to an unprecedented extent. Not accidentally, one of the most popular graffiti and chants during the protests was

and police are incompetent, then the Greek Communist Party has to restore order and guard democracy.

7 See newspaper *Ελευθεροτυπία*, 29/01/2009.

8 Quoted in John Holloway (2002b: 160).

‘cops, pigs, murderers’. As Marx vividly put it, ‘the civilization and justice of bourgeois order comes out in its lurid light whenever the slaves and drudges of that order rise against their masters. Then this civilization and justice stand forth as undisguised savagery and lawless revenge’ (Marx, 1991b: 288). Against the capitalist violence of suppression, the insurgents had no respect for the bourgeois law or property, but for what is right. They did not serve the capitalist state, but they serve humanity with their conscience.⁹ And as Thoreau argued, ‘action from principle, the perception and the performance of right, changes things and relations; it is essentially revolutionary’ (Thoreau, 1960: 242). Capital exercises violence on every aspect of this society; it is responsible for the deaths of thousands of people on a global scale and at the same time, as Marx would say, ‘is convulsed by horror at the desecration of bricks and mortar!’ (Marx, 1991b: 289) ‘Administrative violence’ (Benjamin, 2003b: 252), that is to say, the bourgeoisie’s violence of suppression, ‘is bloody power over mere life for its own life’; on the other hand, the violence of the protesters was ‘pure power over all life for the sake of the living’ (Benjamin, 2003b: 250).

Towards a real state of emergency: being immature and thinking insubordinately

The analysis of the Greek youth revolt made by the bourgeoisie, media and political parties in terms of its meaning and importance constitutes an effort to rewrite its history, to falsify its struggle and to distort the meaning of events. They attempt to present the uprising as an isolated and unpleasant incident, as a temporary episode. Thus they intentionally refuse to accept that the Greek revolt belongs to the revolutionary tradition of the oppressed and it is part of this ‘discontinuous series of rare moments in which the chain of domination has been broken’ (Löwy, 2005: 106). They do not want to see that it continues a great Greek revolutionary tradition which started at the beginning of the last century, passing through the heroic Greek Resistance (1941-44), the Greek Civil War (1946-49), the youth and student movement during the 1960s, the uprising against the military dictatorship (1973), and is still kept alive. The Greek revolt was not spontaneous since ‘no historical action is “spontaneous” in the sense of arising in a vacuum, of being totally unrelated to its conditions, its environment, its past’ (Castoriadis, 1993: 257). At the same time, the Greek revolt was spontaneous in the sense that, as radical historical action, it was ‘creation — and this means emergence of that which is not already contained in its “causes”, “conditions,”...which is not repetition, neither *stricto sensu* nor in the sense of a “variant” of the already given, but position of new forms and figures and of new meanings— that is, *self-institution*’ (Castoriadis, 1993: 257). By extension and paraphrasing Marx, one would say that the greatest significance of the Greek revolt was its own existence.¹⁰ The insurgents need now to be aware of what they have already done, to become conscious of the achievements of their uprising which are their own work.¹¹

9 On the difference between ‘law’ and ‘right’, see Henry David Thoreau (1960: 236, 237).

10 Marx wrote of the Commune that ‘the great social measure of the Commune was its own working existence’. (Marx, 1991b: 280).

11 See a similar point on May ’68 in France in René Viénet, (1992:100).

In this respect, one of the most considerable successes of the unrest was the active solidarity among high school and university students, migrants, professionals and workers. As a result, the participants went through a remarkable process of resocialization, anti-sectarianism and openness. When all these different social groups demonstrated together on the streets of Athens and assembled to make collective decisions, the most important outcome of their struggles is what Holloway describes as ‘the development of a community of struggle, a collective doing characterised by its opposition to capitalist forms of social relations’ and these moments of struggle organized through events are ‘flashes against fetishism, festivals of the non-subordinate, carnivals of the oppressed’ (Holloway, 2005: 208, 215). At these moments against fetishism, people struggle to overcome their fragmentation, to defeat their perverted social relations and to find ways of self-determination. With their initiatives, radical actions and autonomous activity the insurgents broke the monotonous continuity of their everyday life, the endless reiteration of the same and unchanged situations and connected themselves with the demands and objectives of the past struggles of the oppressed and exploited.

This process of re-socialization and openness was particularly evident in the critical and active solidarity developed between Marxists and anarchists during the social unrest. Hitherto, the polemic between the two currents has become synonymous with ideological monolithism, intolerance, and exclusiveness. Having lost a large part of their radical or revolutionary character, both sides are imbued with sectarianism, overemphasizing their ‘unbridgeable differences’. Most of the time they seek their points of reference and their ‘reasons for being’ not in what they have in common but in what distinguishes and differentiates them. The uprising showed that the prevailing way of perceiving this conflict should not be accepted unthinkingly and from mere habit. The hostility between Marxism and anarchism should not be interpreted as natural, immutable, and eternal. Through their participation in the uprising, both rank and file Marxists and anarchists marked out an area of discussion, united action, tolerance, critical solidarity, and even synthesis between the two opposing currents. And they both did this without necessarily always aware of it. This solidarity between Marxists and Anarchists and the development of a community of struggle was also clearly and decisively expressed through common actions to support, defend and release the 270 people who were arrested during the revolt. The last example of solidarity and collective action between Marxists and anarchists was the common struggle aimed at securing the release of the last prisoner of December’s revolt, Thodoris Iliopoulos, who was on hunger strike for 48 days until the end of August 2009. Both Marxists and anarchists organized solidarity campaigns, such as protests or concerts, and contributed in a determined way to his release.

The social unrest also posed the question regarding the forms of organization in an emancipatory movement and the means-end relationship. Indeed, another moment of struggle against fetishism, fragmentation and sectarianism was the formation of ‘*open popular assemblies*’ during the revolt. It is true that in many cases these assemblies were not large-scale and remained marginal. In some of them, the situation was chaotic and debates were confused, protracted and redundant. Orthodox Marxists, Marxist-Leninists, Trotskyists and radical leftists who participated in them repeatedly expressed their views on the need for a revolutionary party as an organized vanguard of the

working class. Or they questioned the political orientation of the uprising and the non-participation (according to them) of the working class. On most occasions, the defect of these Orthodox Marxists and Leftist individuals and groups who participated in them was, as René Viénet (1992: 105) would say, 'to draw their proud experience from past working-class defeats, and never from the new conditions and new style of the struggle which they ignored on principle. They repeated their usual *ideology* in the same boring tone that they had used during one or two decades of inactivity. They seemed to perceive nothing new... They had seen it all before'. On the other hand, many anarchist and anti-authoritarian individuals and groups remained hostage to their fragmentation and sectarianism. In many cases, they fetishized violence and promoted life-style anarchism. However, both Marxists and anarchists with their participation in open assemblies unconsciously criticized and rejected in practice the traditional organizational forms that usually characterize the radical movement.

Open assemblies were formed in almost every city and covered the whole country. The emergence of the organizational form of the assembly, which was hardly part of the militant tradition in Greece, entails a radical break with the Leninist tradition of the revolutionary party. It is a considerable contribution to our struggle for finding the appropriate means towards the goal of social emancipation. Assemblies were not hierarchical but based on direct democracy, giving everyone the opportunity to participate and discuss issues. There were neither leaders nor 'revolutionary professionals'. Thousands of young people joined and promoted vigorous debate. The existence, role and function of these assemblies not only defended the unity between the forms of organization and the content of social emancipation, but they also called for a critical reflection upon the means-end relationship. Undoubtedly, there is still a long way to go in this process of reconsidering the means-end relationship. The assemblies need to be expanded and adopted by other concrete collectivities. Most importantly, we still need to learn how to listen, how to talk and how to tolerate, think and reflect upon different views. Yet, despite the fact that the question of organization is not a simple one, open popular assemblies are one step towards a form of self-organizing movement that does not separate the end from the means, with the aim of moving from revolt to revolution.

New ways of organizing also impacted on the way the youths organized their marches and radical actions. The role of the internet in the interlinking of previously unrelated groups was immense and allowed the activists to self-organize in a very short period of time. The extensive use of the internet as the platform for what Harry Cleaver termed 'contro-informazione (counter-information)', for information that 'is opposed to the official reports of governments and commercial mass media' (Cleaver, 1998: 84), is a lesson that activists have learnt through their involvement in previous mobilizations, notably the struggles against neo-liberal globalization. The existing activist websites and blogs, along with mobile phones and cyber-environments such as Facebook, became the media through which the young people organized themselves. The Facebook group 'Alexandros Grigoropoulos', to take an example, was formed the day after he was killed and attracted thousands of members (over 130,000 by February 15th 2009). These means permitted the activists to self-organize in non-hierarchical networks and, together with open assemblies, a lesson was given to both Marxists and anarchists about how the negation of capital and the state has to be organized. The use of

electronic forms of organizations, however, did not replace physical actions and direct connection as most groups and individuals met in assemblies and occupied buildings, streets and squares.

On the street, the Greek youth opposed any political superstition and fetishism of the state and its role. Contrary to the orthodox Marxist critiques of the uprising, the anti-state practices of the movement were a useful reminder that, before developing his critique on political economy in *Capital*, Marx first did away with the foundations of the 'political superstition' and the 'fetishist' faith in the State. For Marx, the critique of the State precedes both logically and chronologically the critique of political economy. Greek orthodox Marxists tend to neglect or simply ignore Marx's anti-statist and libertarian aspects. As Maximilien Rubel wrote, in Marx's writings 'the critic of politics comes prior to the critic of political economy... In his theory, the negation of the state is prior to the negation of capital, anarchism prior to communism'.¹² In this sense, the Greek uprising and its anti-state tendencies forces anti-capitalists, radical leftists, Marxists and anarchists to reflect anew on the problem of state and extra-institutional opposition. For Marxists, the question concerns the reconsideration of the principle which argues that social emancipation can be achieved through the state and its institutions. The insurgents through their practical and autonomous activity, embodied in radical actions and new organizational forms, reaffirmed the need to struggle against capital outside of state institutions. On the other hand, the revolt brought to the fore the inadequate and dogmatic perception about the state espoused by anarchists. It showed how problematic the anarchist perception and confrontation with the state is, given the fact that it is seen by anarchists as a 'thing' and not as a historically specific form that expresses concrete social relations. For them, most of the time the state takes tangible forms and is personified in the face of policemen, police cars and police stations which should be attacked and smashed from outside by means of violence.

Likewise, the events of December made it obvious that the insurgents rejected and transcended hierarchical and repressive organizations such as political parties and trade unions. The uprising proved in practice, once again, that 'the very expression "revolutionary party" is a contradiction in terms' (Pannekoek, 1936). Lukács' words could very eloquently express both the views held and the role played by Greek Stalinists and orthodox Marxist groups throughout the revolt: 'To a vulgar Marxist, the foundations of bourgeois society are so unshakeable that, even when they are most visibly shaking, he only hopes and prays for a return to "normality", sees its crises as temporary episodes, and regards a struggle even at such times as an irrational and irresponsible rebellion against the ever-invincible capitalist system. To him, the fighters on the barricades are madmen' (Lukács, 1970: 11). These thousands of 'madmen', 'immature', 'irrational' and 'irresponsible' young people who fought on the barricades had become conscious that the 'Left', in all its parliamentary and extra-parliamentary versions, 'tolerate[s] spontaneity only as the result of [its] own power' (Horkheimer, 1978: 98), with the purpose of institutionalizing it or reaping electoral gains.

Amid the insurrection, orthodox Marxists and Leftist parties remained both in theory and practice hostage to their Leninist, Maoist or Trotskyist perception of the world and

12 Quoted in Kevin Anderson (1997: 162).

understanding of anti-capitalist struggle. Incapable of interpreting the world of revolt, they appeared to be completely incompetent at dealing with the practical questions of the revolt and comprehending social human practice. Having been deeply immersed in their orthodox presuppositions and certainties, vulgar Marxists attempted to incorporate any social radicalism into their preconceived conceptions of class struggle and revolution. For this reason, young people are becoming increasingly aware of the fact that capital and the capitalist state have to fear the opposing left parties 'only as competitors' who 'would only replace the existing rulers' (Horkheimer, 1978: 103). The insurgents, working men and women, students and unemployed, 'have learned that they have nothing to expect from those who called them out from time to time, only to send them home again, but more of the same — even after a victory' (Horkheimer, 1978: 104). They are coming more and more to the point of understanding that the organization of their lives and struggles must be their own work and realizing that they have nothing to expect from all those Leftist politicians, bureaucrats and 'revolutionary professionals' who have become 'voyeurs of the working class, spectators of their own shelved potential' (Vaneigem, 1983: 215).

In contradistinction to 'mature' Leftist 'voyeurs' of the Greek revolt, the insurgents confirmed that 'clearly the weapon of criticism cannot replace the criticism of weapons' (Marx, 1992: 251). They re-affirmed what we already knew from the tradition of the oppressed and their heroic struggles, namely, that 'without the criticism of arms, the arms of criticism are but weapons of suicide' (Vaneigem, 1983: 214). The issue of revolutionary violence was located at the epicenter of the debates as it had widely become clear that 'preaching nonviolence on principle reproduces the existing institutionalized violence' (Marcuse, 1967). It challenged the orthodox Marxist and Leftist positions, which support the need to march peacefully through state institutions in order to bring about a radical social change. It also drew a sharp line with the fetishisation of violence from the side of anarchists. But the issue of the revolutionary violence was not the only one that came up during the revolt. One of its most considerable achievements was the vast movement of politicization and re-politicization that occurred and spread throughout large parts of Greek society. The unrest shifted the everyday agenda by provoking theoretical and political discussions, and recalled debates, concepts and 'words being crippled together'¹³ (Celan, 1980b: 150-1) with us: rebellion, solidarity, collectivity, comradeship, self-organization, councilist organization, dignity, insubordination, class struggle and revolution. The uprising 'interrupted the course of the world' (Benjamin, 2006: 145), it broke up the repetitious cycles of everyday life and practice, it ruptured the 'time of the state form', and it produced 'its own temporality', which is the time of dignity and insubordination (Tischler, 2005: 231). The Greek social unrest built up a social and historical

13 Ihr meine mit mir ver-
Krüppelnden Worte, ihr
Meine geraden
[You my words being crippled
together with me, you
my hale ones]
(Celan, 1980b: 150-1).

experience, which was based on the self-mobilization and self-activity of the people negating the established institutions of the neo-liberal society and breaking with the idea of professionalized politics. It also defended the 'unity of reason and conscience', and this unity contributed – albeit temporarily – to a destruction of capitalist mystifications and to a better 'understanding of the meanings of things, of man, and of reality' (Kosík, 1995b: 14, 15). It was an attempt to regain and bring the 'essential' back into our lives against the efforts made by capital to impose upon us 'the unessential and the accumulation of the unimportant' (Kosík, 1995a: 49).

What is distinctive about the Greek uprising, however, is the 'violence of the negative' (Viénet, 1992: 71), the power of rage, the power of refusal, of negative thinking and practice. The Greek civil unrest did not seek to improve the existing societal conditions by the seizure of political power. It did not have any reformist demands; it did not fight for better salaries or for improving the existing political system; it did not operate constructively; it did not contain itself within the limits of the capitalist system. But then, where was the positive? The positive is found in its negation of capital and the state, the negation of the commodity system and its political power. The Greek uprising was ignited by the explosive power of 'destructive critique' (Agnoli, 2003: 25-33), and the motto 'doubt everything' was omnipresent within the insurrection. The insurgents doubted the existing 'system of order' and demanded its destruction. They negated the established state of affairs, and therefore their negation was determinate. They fought against the imposition of neo-liberal values and their false morality. Their negation was a positive and destructive act, and 'a determinate negation is ultimately a political negation' (Marcuse, 1978: 449). Their critique operated outside the rules, norms and limitations of liberal parliamentary democracy in its attack on the capitalist status quo and all its structures of inequality, subordination and power. They acted extra-institutionally and without participating in state politics but within society. This is why the Greek revolt cannot be integrated within the system. The insurgents were neither defeated nor reconciled. The capitalist order now has great difficulties in understanding what happened, to comprehend the social explosion. Capital has got into a state of panic and fear: Radical social change has again been posed as a question. Happy New Fear!

The spectre of the Greek uprising is haunting capital and the political establishments of liberal countries all over the world and, in particular, the EU member states. Since the beginning of the insurrection, concerns and fears about the spread of the unrest have been intense among the economic and political elites. Anti-government street clashes have already occurred in Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania and Bulgaria. The French government expressed fears about the unrest extending into France. Nicolas Sarkozy, The French President, cancelled his planned educational reform because he was worried that the 'Greek syndrome' could spread across Europe. The social unrest in Guadalupe was reminiscent of the Greek revolt and confirmed the French establishment's worst fears. However, their fears are our hopes.

Until now, the political and economic elites seem unable to comprehend the changing world, to fully grasp the 'fire alarm' sent to them by the Greek uprising. By focusing on the existing and growing economic crisis, they appear not to perceive the multidimensional character of neo-liberal disintegration. They want to attribute social explosions or the current economic crisis to distorted applications of neo-liberal

policies. But neo-liberal economic policies, even when properly implemented, always result in the working classes living in a state of permanent crisis, poverty, insecurity, wretchedness and oppression. Global capital and its political representatives appear not to understand the depth and systemic character of the crisis and the end of the neo-liberal social and economic model. They do not want to see the outcomes of their policies, that is to say, the accumulation of oppression, rage, anger, misery and despair among the working classes. They refuse to notice the millions of silent volcanoes or to think about the massive spread of social, moral, and mental degradation or the mental diseases their policies have caused.

From a radical perspective, one could say that this is good news. When the rulers and the exploiters cannot comprehend the world and the exploited and the oppressed have started to disidentify themselves with the ruling ideas or when they start to realize the magnitude of the neo-liberal deception, then revolutionary situations could arise. The 'Greek syndrome' could spread across all of Europe, in Africa, in China, and in India. This is why right- and left-wing professional politicians try to pass over in silence what happened in Greece. They make an effort to defame the Greek insurrection, to conceal its radical character and to repress its significance. However, the most honorable recognition for the Greek revolt came from the Zapatistas through the words of Subcomandante Marcos: 'Comrade woman, comrade man. Revolted Greece. We, the smallest ones, from this side of world, salute you. Accept our respect and our admiration for what you think and do. From far away, we learn from you. We thank you.'¹⁴ But the respect and the admiration is deep and mutual! We all learnt from the Zapatistas' uprising. They opened the way and their revolt comes from the future and not from the 'left melancholy' that marked the close of the last century.

Revolts are contagious. Or better, they could be contagious. However, there is no certainty, no naïve optimism (Bloch, 1996: 16; Bonefeld, 2004). It depends on our struggles all over the world, whether or not the Greek revolt will be catching. It will depend on our social fights and our radical activity, our ability to produce a 'real state of emergency', to respond to the crisis of capital with a 'revolution from below' and not to allow a self-transformation of capital through a 'revolution from above'. The hope does not lie in Obama but in the radicalism of the Greek revolt. In this respect, the Greek unrest allows us to have a 'militant optimism' (Bloch, 1995: 1372). Yet this hope is not a certainty. In the words of Ernst Bloch, 'if it could not be disappointed, it would not be hope. That is part of it... Hope is critical and can be disappointed. However, hope still nails a flag on the mast, even in decline, in that the decline is not accepted, even when this decline is still strong' (Bloch, 1996: 16-17). The parents of the murdered boy, Alexis Grigoropoulos, engraved on their son's tombstone lines from *Hamlet*: 'Had I but time...oh I could tell you...I am dead, thou livest; report me and my cause aright to the unsatisfied'. For all those innocent young 'princes' who die murdered by capital and its

14 Subcomandante Marcos [EZLN], MENSAJE a Grecia rebelde: Compañera, compañero. Grecia rebelde. Nosotros, los mas pequeños, de esta rincon del mundo, te saludamos. Recibe nuestro respecto y nuestra admiración por lo que piensas y haces. Desde lejos aprendemos de ti. Gracias. *Subcomandante Marcos 1er FESTIVAL MUNDIAL DE LA DIGNA RABIA. Mexico, Diciembre 2008.*

state in battles which are not even given, murdered with their faces marked with weakness and woe,¹⁵ the Greek revolt nails a flag on the mast.

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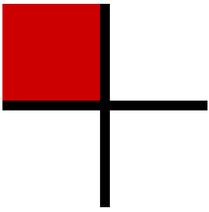
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15 The expression is taken from William Blake's poem 'London' from *Songs of Experience*.

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Some notes on the ‘Baader-Meinhof Complex’*

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abstract

This film review essay offers some reflections on the contemporary receptions of left-wing armed struggle politics as represented in the film *Baader Meinhof Complex*, directed by Uli Edel and based on a book by Stefan Aust. It argues for a political understanding of the actions of the RAF or similar ‘terrorist’ cells. From such a perspective, the anti-imperialist ideology of armed struggles can be subjected to criticism.

If we were to name a trigger event that radicalised the 1968 movement in West Germany, it would be the tumultuous scenes of 2 June 1967, near the Deutsche Oper in West Berlin. The SDS (Socialist German Student Union) had mobilised for protests against an official visit by the Shah of Iran to the city. Hundreds turned out to demonstrate against repression and dictatorship in Iran, some trying to disrupt the Shah’s visit to the opera with paint and flower bombs. They were met with pro-Iranian demonstrators, flown and bussed in by the Shah’s secret services. While Berlin’s opera performed Mozart’s magic flute, outside the pro-Shah activists turned on the student protesters. The Uli Edel film *Baader-Meinhof Complex* depicts this scene in a highly dramatised and almost theatrical way. Young Iranian men in suits suddenly turn their placards into weapons and begin attacking the German students. The police forces, drawn in to protect the Shah, stand by and watch. Eventually, they intervene – not to separate the two groups but to assist in the brutal beating of the pro-democracy protesters. The film scene stands out as an attempt to explain the political anger and frustration that must have been the background to the formation of armed struggle guerrilla groups in West Germany. Groups like the Red Army Faction (RAF) could only make sense in a context where police brutality was the accepted response to young people’s political concerns. Unfortunately, this is one of only few scenes in which the *Baader-Meinhof Complex* tackles the issue of the conditions that gave rise to a popular anti-imperialist movement, complete with its violent and armed underground groups. All too often, the film remains stuck on questions of method (armed struggle) rather than political motivation (anti-imperialism).

* This essay is a much revised and expanded version of an earlier film review published in *Shift Magazine* n.6, see www.shiftmag.co.uk.

The police action to clear the area of anti-Shah protesters escalated later on that day in 1967. The pacifist student Benno Ohnesorg was shot dead by policeman Karl-Heinz Kurras. In the aftermath, Kurras was charged twice with manslaughter, but was acquitted both times. Thousands of students held anti-repression demonstrations, memorial events and conferences to come to terms with and learn the lessons from Ohnesorg's death. The '2 June' date here became the common reference of identification. It is no surprise that 4 years later, by which time the militant extra-parliamentary opposition in West Germany had dramatically increased, a left-wing urban guerrilla group would adopt the name 'Movement 2 June'. The Baader-Meinhof Complex tells the story of militant left-wing politics in West Germany from 2 June 1967 to the 'German Autumn' in 1977, focusing on the RAF group around Andreas Baader and Ulrike Meinhof. Initially, a politicised generation of students protests and demonstrates against the failed denazification of West Germany, against their parents' authoritarianism, and against what they perceive as the new face of fascism: US imperialism. Less than a year after the killing of Benno Ohnesorg, a right-wing fanatic nearly kills popular student leader Rudi Dutschke. Those who would later found the RAF, the Movement 2 June or similar armed struggle groups begin to contemplate more militant tactics. In many ways here, the ten year time span of the Baader-Meinhof Complex is overly ambitious. At once action movie, personal drama and political documentary, it races through an eventful decade and is forced to neglect nuances and details – at times to such an extent that the political context and motivations behind the RAF's militancy cannot be understood. Indeed, it may well be that we still do not know enough to grasp fully the reasons behind the decisions to take up arms. Only recently, newly accessible documents revealed that the policeman Kurras, who shot Benno Ohnesorg, was in fact a spy working for the German Democratic Republic. In the light of the significance of 2 June 1967, the revelation could have given a very different twist to the Baader-Meinhof story.

Terror and politics

The 'real' story of the RAF and its motivations, it seems, is still being contested. On the day of the German cinema premiere of the Baader-Meinhof Complex, a group of left-wing Autonome threw rocks and paint-filled bottles at the house of journalist and author Stefan Aust and started a fire at the front door. Aust's popular book on the history of the RAF, also called the Baader-Meinhof Complex, had provided the background study to the film. Aust, too, was a close collaborator to Bernd Eichinger's script and Uli Edel's direction. The trio hail their work as a historical intervention into the contemporary debates on terrorism. Stefan Aust is one of the most successful German journalists. Last year, he retired from his position as editor-in-chief of the major politics magazine *Der Spiegel*. He has led, in the past decades, the academic, journalistic and cinematographic vision of the Red Army Faction – as author, in a number of TV productions and as *Spiegel* editor. His journalistic career, however, began in the same intellectual milieu as Ulrike Meinhof's. In the 1960s, they both worked for the radical left-wing magazine *Konkret*, whose founder and editor was Meinhof's husband Klaus Rainer Röhl. From then onwards, Meinhof's and Aust's paths could not have taken more different turns. Meinhof went on to join the RAF, leaving behind her personal and journalistic life. Convicted for an arson attack on a Springer Press building and on trial for murder, she

was found dead in her prison cell in 1976 (the official cause of death is suicide, though this is contested by many). In contrast, Stefan Aust – after Meinhof had gone underground abandoning her children – freed her twin daughters from an RAF hideout in Sicily to return them to their father. From his villa in Hamburg's noble district of Blankenese, he still maintains his passionate interest in recent German history. Now, the film version of his book was to be another great achievement – possibly the culmination of his journalistic career. It is obvious that the paint and fire attack on his house was also directed against this career that Aust has made from his knowledge of the RAF. In a letter claiming responsibility for the action, an anonymous group justifies it as an act against the 'continuation of the distortions and lies' of Stefan Aust (anonymous 2008, my translation).

The story of the RAF is not yet history. The anonymous attackers still seem to have a stake in its representation. They denounce the list of former RAF allies, student militants of 1968 and former members of guerrilla groups ('notorious liars') who have helped Aust in his historical project. Some of those collaborations, of which the Baader-Meinhof Complex is the final product, 'have led to new investigations and blackmail attempts by the public prosecution service against comrades who were once part of the RAF' (ibid.). The group continues to write about Aust: 'He denounces armed, militant resistance against imperialism and state terrorism as insane. This accusation, that one has to be crazy to take up arms, is the recurrent theme in Stefan Aust's work' (ibid.). One does certainly get a sense in the Baader-Meinhof Complex that there is little attempt to understand the political, rather than personal, motivations behind anti-imperialist armed struggle in Germany. There are some reflections on the use of violence and strategy for revolutionary change, partly through the films use of Meinhof's writings. However, wider ideological issues are neglected. More than that, the extreme violence portrayed in the film is explained as pathology – not based on ideological thinking but on the psychological inability of some individuals to adequately respond to the upheavals of the time. While the book's and film's title refers to the name given to internal dossiers of government and police authorities investigating the RAF group, the term 'complex' could also be understood as a reference to the anti-political direction that the film takes. A psychological complex refers to unconscious mental factors that determine ideas and actions. The militant and armed struggles of the 1970s – of the RAF and the Movement 2 June for example – sometimes come across as the result of a psychological complex of a young, naïve, but frustrated element of the hippie generation. As such we might want to understand the militant reaction of contemporary RAF sympathisers to the film's release. It is a response to the perception that the Baader-Meinhof Complex condemns armed struggle tactics in the past and present through de-politicisation.

Take the depiction of Ulrike Meinhof. With her articles in the magazine *Konkret* she captured the zeitgeist of a whole generation of students and leftists through a series of political tracts and arguments. In the film she at best provides the 'theoretical' voice-over for Andreas Baader's adventurist and macho escapades. Already Meinhof's first – and, in the view of Aust and Eichinger, fatal – decision to leave behind the bourgeois idyll of nude beaches and garden parties for the revolutionary milieu is not one she only takes out of political conviction: foremost, she is driven away by her cheating husband. The fact that her divorce from Klaus Rainer Röhl, her husband and *Konkret* editor, was

also a political break is omitted. In 1969, Meinhof ended her work for her husband's journal 'because it is becoming an instrument of the counter-revolution' (Meinhof 1969). But in the guerrilla movement, her credentials as a radical journalist do her little favour. She is repeatedly challenged by über-activist Gudrun Ensslin for her intellectualism. For the film makers, the Baader-Meinhof group still had to abandon its political and theoretical baggage before it could begin its campaign of terror. At worst Meinhof's appearance strikes the viewer as naïve, timid and intimidated by the 'deeds-not-words' actionism of the Baader clique. Her decision to join the gang into illegality is shown as impulsive, rather than as the result of the ideological escalation of her own beliefs. Even when she leaves behind her children, against all her previous principles, it is other members of the group that speak for her and make the decision on her behalf. It is here that the film's ideological condemnation is most striking, though again the argument is made on the basis of emotion not politics. It is Meinhof's emotional state that has been altered to such an extent that she is no longer guided by the love for her children. She abandons them not out of political conviction of the primacy of her underground existence, but out of feeble subservience to the 'madness' of the armed struggle. Meinhof's suicide in prison is finally no longer a protest against the prison complex and the conditions of her imprisonment. In the end it comes across as no more than apologetic self-justice or as the only possible frustrated attempt to leave the RAF and its violent campaign.

In stark contrast to Meinhof is the character of Andreas Baader. Baader's first appearance is with a bottle of beer in his hand, making petrol bombs with the other, and telling his friends that they should burn down a department store. Macho, womaniser, drinker – Baader comes across more like a Wild West villain than as the political leader of a revolutionary group. With his liking for fast cars, drugs and guns, he is action hero – not terrorist, bandit – not revolutionary. Armed struggle was certainly a major tenet for the RAF, with the Heckler & Koch machine gun as its logo. But Baader's continuous racist and misogynist outbursts reinforce the image that he is in it for the thrill, not political change. The juxtaposition of the two protagonists also entails a class condemnation. Confronted with the proletarian Baader, Meinhof is challenged in her politically principled and rational attitude.

However not Meinhof, but a third key character plays the role of the measured and rational antagonist to the raging Baader. Bruno Ganz, who previously played the figure of Adolf Hitler in Eichinger's *Downfall*, is persuasive in his role of Horst Herold, the president of West Germany's national police force (BKA) and the RAF's enemy number one. Only that Herold, who in the 1970s vowed 'we'll get them all', is portrayed more as an understanding and intelligent chief-of-police who sees the root of the problem not in terrorism, but in the 'objective' wars and social conditions that have radicalised a generation. What is needed according to the film character is not a police operation but political change. It is here that the film comes closest to engaging politically with the left-wing terror campaign, and to treating said violence as embedded in its social context. With Herold, however, the Baader-Meinhof Complex situates this insight at the heart of the bourgeois state (Herold even dishes out soup as he makes his remarks). Meanwhile the real Herold was ousted from his job in 1981. His controversial methods of treating as suspect everyone with radical left-wing views had led to accusations of a police and surveillance state. There is certainly an attempt by the film-

makers to portray the fear-mongering dragnet controls, though this remains unconvincing. It is after all much easier to visualise the terror of an armed robbery or the attack on family homes, than the creation of a climate of fear through systematic state and police repression of political opponents.

Anti-imperialism

While the defenders of the RAF's methods and politics see the Baader-Meinhof Complex as Stefan Aust's final betrayal of the movement, the group's ideological motivations have also been subjected to critical scrutiny. Not so much by Edel and Eichinger – they only make occasional allusions to this – but there have been strong reactions to some of the elements of the RAF's anti-imperialism in the German Left. The uncritical collaboration with Palestinian nationalist groups (in the film, the differences are based on lifestyle, not politics), the activist-elitism that removed it from working class organisation, the deeds-not-words ideology that put it at odds with more reflected revolutionary agitators – what would it mean to depict, critically, the ideological background that underlay much student rebelliousness and armed struggle tactics? The film makes some vague attempts though they could easily be overlooked.

For example, the roots of the RAF's anti-imperialism are portrayed vividly in an early scene when Gudrun Ensslin storms out of her conservative-religious home dominated by her priest-father. The first step towards rebellion against the state is rebellion against one's parents, it seems. Next, Rudi Dutschke and his student audience at the Berlin Vietnam congress, consumed by a quasi-religious revolutionary fever, react to the only pro-war protester with passionate chants of 'Ho- Ho- Ho-Chi-Minh'. Ensslin adds a few derogatory comments about consumerism in America. It certainly was the Vietnam War and American military and cultural imperialism that guided many into action. The continuous point of reference, however, remained the Nazi past of the previous generation. A fascinating commentary is made in an early scene. The apparently significant, almost apocalyptic camera shot stands out, and yet goes almost unnoticed. In front of the flames of a burning Springer Press building (the symbol of mass media collusion with war and capital) stands the lonesome figure of a bare-chested hippie. Directed at the night sky, he repeatedly shouts his 'political' message: 'Dresden! Hiroshima! Vietnaaam!'. All three refer to large-scale bombing campaigns by US American forces against their enemies. Lumped together and taken out of their contexts, however, their political meaning is either equated, or forgotten altogether. While 'Vietnam' was the disastrous US war that mobilised the RAF's generation, 'Hiroshima (and Nagasaki)' were nuclear attacks on the Empire of Japan towards the end of World War II. Millions died in the Vietnam war and hundreds of thousands as a result of the nuclear bombing. The air raids on the East German city of Dresden, on the other hand, were much smaller in scale and were carried out by British and American air forces in February 1945 as part of the allied war against Hitler's Third Reich. Is the irrational scream of the hippie to the backdrop of burning newspapers a depiction of the 'madness' that would engulf the armed struggle?

To appreciate the significance of the Dresden analogy, it is necessary to understand it with a view to the re-formulation of German nationalism. It would be false to see the

Dresden bombings from a humanitarian perspective alone; its meaning has become deeply politicised. Most dramatically, the comparison of the bombings of Dresden and Hiroshima is a central demand of neo-Nazis today, who refer to the allied air raids as a 'bombing holocaust', thereby also equating it with the Nazi Holocaust against Europe's Jews. Here the number of deaths in the air raids becomes a contested figure. The exact number of casualties is unknown, though historical and officially documented estimates range from 18,000 to 35,000. Neo-Nazi publications, on the other hand, put the number much higher, sometimes at up to 350,000. The destruction of most of the city alongside the high number of casualties is considered proof of the fact that the Germans were victims too. The city itself became occupied by the Red Army on 8 May 1945, the day of the Nazi capitulation. For the Nazis, Dresden had central military and strategic significance. Already in 1944, the allies flew their first air raids on the area, but the Dresden air raids refer to the large-scale bombing of the city from 13-15 February 1945. The raids were not the heaviest during the Second World War. Cities like Hamburg and Köln suffered from much larger and longer air attacks. However, more than any others, the Dresden raids provoked condemnation of the Royal Air Force's practice of bombing vast urban areas irrespective of civilian casualties. The higher numbers of deaths in the bombings were initially made up by Nazi strategists themselves and taken up by some international media, which could explain why the figures persist until today. Also, a number of revisionist and far right historians continue to insist that the Nazi figures were correct. Amongst them is convicted Holocaust denier David Irving, who with his 1963 book *The Destruction of Dresden* also influenced Ulrike Meinhof. Already in 1965, Meinhof reiterated Irving's message that Dresden had turned the anti-Hitler war into fascistic barbarism (Meinhof 1965).

The film scene of the Springer Press protest is an indication of the political turn that would come for some of the Baader-Meinhof group. Most striking of course is the direction taken by Horst Mahler, prominent lawyer and RAF founding-member, who in the Baader-Meinhof Complex organised the group's trip to the Jordanian training camp and appears complete with Castro-style cap. He is the one who finds Baader, Meinhof and Ensslin in Italy and convinces them to return to Germany to form an urban guerrilla group. Mahler spent 10 years in prison for his role in Andreas Baader's prison escape and the group's subsequent series of bank robberies. Behind bars, and after his release, Mahler made his slow but complete conversion to neo-Nazism. Still using anti-imperialist rhetoric, he began describing Germany as an 'occupied territory', which was in dire need to liberate its 'true' national identity. Later, he became a member of Germany's far right party, the NPD, successfully defending it in lawsuits brought by the German government, which was attempting to ban the organisation. Mahler has been back in court and prison several times since, for Holocaust denial and showing the Hitler salute, providing him with a welcome platform for anti-Semitic and xenophobic remarks. Mahler is still a self-professed anti-imperialist and claims that he never gave up on the principles of the 1968 generation. The concepts that, for him, enabled him to bridge the gap from left to right are US imperialism and Zionism. Of the former, Mahler says: 'The enemy is the same. The means to fight it have changed' (Mahler 2007, my translation). The transition from anti-Zionism to anti-Semitism was not that easy. There had been no conscious anti-Jewish sentiments in the RAF politics: 'We felt guilty towards the Jews and were embarrassed when we were in the Palestinian camp of the

Fedayeen, the Fedayeen came with their pictures of Hitler and said: Good man. This was difficult for us' (ibid.).

The student generation of 1968 was outraged by the institutional continuation of Nazism in the Federal Republic – many who had held Nazi positions were not dismissed or punished. But they offered only a limited critique of authoritarian fascism and militarism – epitomised in their parents' generation, the Springer Press, and in the United States' war in Vietnam – despite the warnings from such intellectual figureheads as Adorno and Habermas. On the one hand Adorno disliked the at times anti-theoretical actionism of the student movement (Adorno 1978). In his view, the paradigm of the unity of theory and practice more often than not had as an outcome the opposition to critical thought in favour of pseudo-activism. On the other hand, the actionist, anti-imperialist mindset allowed some to slip into nationalistic and anti-Semitic tones.

The films reluctance to look more explicitly at that side of the RAF's politics is also picked up on by Hans Kundnani in the review for Prospect magazine. Kundnani spots Abu Hassan, the leader of the early Arab terrorist group Black September, appearing in the film as the commandant of the Palestinian training camp in Jordan. Black September was later responsible for the killing of 11 Israeli athletes and a police man at the Munich Olympic Games in 1972 and the hijacking of a Lufthansa plane. They demanded the release of Andreas Baader and Ulrike Meinhof alongside 230 Palestinian prisoners. Kundnani (2008) writes:

What the movie omits, however, is the bizarre communiqué Meinhof – the designated 'voice' of the RAF – wrote from jail celebrating the killing of the Israeli athletes as a model for the West German left. Meinhof's weird logic illustrates the arc of anti-Semitism on the German New Left that began well before the RAF, with the bombing of a Jewish Community Centre in West Berlin on November 9th 1969, the anniversary of *Kristallnacht*. This left-wing anti-Semitism culminated in the Entebbe hijacking in 1976, in which two German members of the Revolutionary Cells – another terrorist group to emerge out of the West German student movement – and two members of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine hijacked an Air France jet, flew it to Entebbe and separated the Jewish passengers and the non-Jewish passengers before Israeli commandos stormed the aircraft. And all of this from a student movement that began as a rebellion against the 'Auschwitz generation'.

Kundnani is right to highlight the importance of anti-Zionist ideology that became part of German anti-imperialism at least after the 1967 Six Day War between Israel and Egypt, Jordan and Syria, at the end of which Israel had gained control of Gaza and the West Bank. Also Ulrike Meinhof's editorials in *Konkret* were characteristically pro-Israel before 1967 and anti-Israel thereafter. However, the RAF's anti-imperialism was not necessarily anti-Jewish. The conversion of former RAF members and sympathisers (Mahler was not the only one) from anti-imperialist Leftists to anti-imperialist neo-Nazis can only be understood with reference to the radicalised branch of anti-Zionism and anti-Americanism that the RAF had adopted.

While one might be hard-pressed to spot a critique of left-wing anti-Semitism in the Baader-Meinhof Complex, the film's treatment of RAF-style anti-imperialism is nonetheless not sympathetic. Until now, the story of RAF terrorism was also the story of political policing, illegal surveillance and state cover-ups, which could open up some uncomfortable questions. Documents that could give an indication whether Baader's

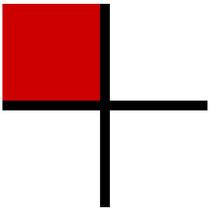
and Ensslin's deaths were suicide or murder are still withheld from public view. The Baader-Meinhof Complex turns these questions into non-topics: the RAF; they were slightly mad, slightly cool – but the ideological conversion from lefty students to armed struggle organisation remains an enigma.

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Inspiration

Peter Sloterdijk

transcribed and edited by Luc Peters

abstract

This is a transcription of a lecture given by the German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk on Tuesday 31st May 2005, between 13.30 and 16.00, at the Jan van Eyck Academy, Maastricht, The Netherlands. The transcription is made from a private CD recording. Throughout, Sloterdijk partly worked from notes but mostly improvised. This, added to the fact that the lecture was given in English, or, as Sloterdijk stated, *bad English*, gives a certain flavour to the work undertaken here. The transcription starts with a quotation from Sloterdijk himself. Sloterdijk's thoughts on boredom and its containment bring us towards a consideration of architecture and the ways in which we act in and around buildings. It is therefore relevant not only to students of architecture, but also for students of organisation.

Introduction

The only promising way in philosophy is to engage in a constellation of art, writing, and philosophy. That form is not exhausted yet.

Sometimes in your life the rules of politeness and your personal inclinations converge. This is such a moment and both sides motivate me to say to you that I'm very grateful for your invitation and that I'm happy to have the opportunity to share a couple of reflections on the essence of architecture and inspiration with you this afternoon. I'm particularly grateful for the organiser's decision to have this meeting in English. This helps me as an author to overcome the linguistic narcissism in which I'm caught all my lifetime and it helps me to understand that the times of good German are gone and that the times of bad English have come. As far as bad English is concerned I can promise you a convincing exercise.

The subject matter of this discourse seems to be inspiration but I'm convinced you're not interested in inspiration at all. I think you want to know what makes people build buildings. What makes you, what drives you on your way to this somehow perverted desire to erect constructions that humankind has designed as architecture, monuments of architecture. And my personal approach to this theme will be a meditation on the relationship between building and time. This will be reflections on architecture in an almost Heideggerian mode.

In order to familiarise you with the basic concept of my approach I think it is useful to refer to a famous saying of the seventeenth century French philosopher Pascal, Blaise Pascal, who is well known for his lamento in his *Pensees*, the collection of ideas, when he said: ‘All the misery of mankind comes from the fact that no-one is able to stay quietly in his own room’. I would like to draw the architectural consequences of this lamento and I would like to demonstrate the implications of this sentence.

I think that what we hear in Pascal’s saying is a projection of what I would like to call a monastic anthropology, and this is important for architects, because the monasteries were the places in European history where, later-on, the so-called individualistic person has been bred. Monasteries are breeders of individuals. And when Pascal carried on his complaint about the incapacity of the human being to stay alone, quietly, silently in a room, he evidently refers to the basic situation of the monastery; because here, for the first time in the history of mankind, a concept of building has been conceived in which a person and a room are brought together in such a way so that the individual becomes, as it were, the kernel of the cell in which he is located. The human being is, as it were, the *Zellkern*¹ of a room especially designed to contain people who learn the support of divine boredom, which is the very centre of monastic existence.

The monk or the religious person in general, male or female, is always a human being that has engaged his or her life in the adventure of allowing God to bore you, because he cuts all his or her natural engagements. This is the deeper meaning of this vow of obedience, that is the basic vow of religious existence. Obedience means you drop your own will and you allow your superiors and finally you allow your God to order your life. From that moment on, you have the opportunity to discover that divine orders are extremely vague and that you are absolutely incapable of catching a clear message from beyond. This means that you have to withdraw into this monkish cell and push the beyond to reveal itself. Obviously it never does and Pascal discovers this profound relationship between the unsupportable existence in a monkish cell: one individual, one room, no message. The consequence is that out of this impossible and insupportable holy boredom, which is the essence of monastic life, arises the drive to rush out. Restlessness, which is the key-concept of modern existentialism, is a discovery of this monastic, or pseudo-monastic, meditation that Pascal has carried out in his *Pensees*.

By the way, I would like to mention the fact that the biological term of the cell is an architectural metaphor that the biologists of the seventeenth century borrowed from the architecture of the monasteries. It was a British physicist, Richard Brooke, who put a piece of cork under his microscope and discovered a strange order, a line of small *carrees*,² or rectangles and hexagons. This gave him the idea to liken what he saw in a cell to the orders of the cells in a monastery. This shows that the biologists are deeply indebted towards designs of architecture.

Now Pascal’s lamento is reflected in what is probably the most important diagnosis of the existence of modern man in modern times that you can find: the lectures given by the German philosopher Martin Heidegger during the winter semester of 1929/30 in

¹ Nucleus: LP.

² Squares: LP.

Freiburg: *Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik (Basic Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Loneliness, Finitude)*. In this lecture Heidegger develops, for the first time in the history of thinking, the idea that the continuity of history for us has definitively broken. We no longer can afford the illusion of living in the history of mankind. We are the first generation, according to him, that has to realise that history is over and that everything we do is just designed in order to hide a deep feeling of boredom. That is the bottom of our existence. Heidegger's diagnosis is directly oriented to the environment of post-war Germany; but indirectly, it also concerns the totality of the modern way of life.

According to his diagnosis, the human beings of our time are basically bored. And to be bored means that if you look into yourself, what you find is the profound absence of a driving conviction. You find all kinds of interests, games, inclinations, but no convictions. So it's a ruthless, ongoing game of convictionless inclinations. One day you desire this, the other day you desire something else. The absence of convictions means that you have no real job. This deep joblessness is the very essence of the term *existence*. If you hear the word existence, without thinking immediately of joblessness, something is missing. That something, by the way, is what Jean Paul Sartre perfectly understood when he, in his famous saying, explained that for human beings, existence comes before essence. This is just another and more scholastic way of saying that human beings are basically jobless and, according to me, what modernity is all about is the discovery of joblessness, the re-discovery of joblessness, because joblessness will be re-discovered at the very moment when the modern conditions of life are able to reconnect with the original conditions in which homo-sapiens arose during this very long period that we today call the paleolithical stage of evolution. Between the primates or the big apes and homosapiens there is a long transition period in which, as it were, a jobless ape came down from the trees and started this amazing exodus, from the woods to the savannah.

I'm not quite sure if the term savannah is also used in English but I think it can be understood. In German it's *die Savanne*. Die Savanne is our home. Our ancestors are savannah-apes, who sometimes still dream to be tree-apes. Sometimes they dream even to be water-apes, waterside-apes to be more precise. And these savannah-apes are true ancestors because for them existence, in the literal meaning of the term, began by the simple fact that in the savannah you're living in an open space with a very faraway horizon, which gives you a very wide range of security, because all kinds of aggressors usually are visible very long in advance. Human intelligence is shaped in the savannah because usually nothing happens. That's why human intelligence has a profound inclination to fall back into the attitude of, what is this wonderful term we have been talking about? '*Doezelen*'.³ This is one of the three Dutch words that I have learned recently when I prepared for this conference. *Doezelen* is the basic attitude of human intelligence in the savannah when the alarm-bell of the lion-alarm, the leopard-alarm, has not been given.

So our next relatives in the savannah are the lions, or the kind of animal that has virtually no natural enemies. And the life pattern of lions in the savannah is quite [similar] to those of original androids and homonide forms of life. They hang around for

³ Dozing or drowsing: LP.

22 hours a day, moving as little as possible, and are convinced that *doezelen* is just the right way to be in the world, except for the relatively rare moment when a sexual-alarm, a hunger-alarm, or a stranger-alarm is given. Something similar happens to the human beings in the savannah, who become the interpreters of their own basic boredom. This is the original situation of the human race and this is the original way to interpret the difference between stress and alarm. The stress pattern shapes the moments when human beings are totally awake and the let-go pattern lead us towards this situation of divine laziness, which can be so easily brought back again, which comes back on the surface also in modern humans. You just have to allow them to make an experiment about savannah-conditions, what we call 'holidays' usually. But in anthropological terms, 'holidays' is just another word for the generalisation of savannah experience with descendants of savannah-apes. You should not be surprised that all these patterns can easily be brought back.

I hope you feel we are approaching the problem, because before this background it becomes obvious that architecture is all about the interpretation of the forms of life of an animal, for which existence is profoundly defined by the boredom experience. But architecture is not just about interpreting boredom. It is a very well-defined task to create containers of boredom. It is contained boredom. It is not just vague, it is contained boredom. A good building is always a good boredom-container. That's one of the reasons why, if you don't tell people this in the very beginning, you have to say it in the first or second seminar at the latest, because otherwise the students will feel that you're hiding something. You avoid telling them the truth because architecture is about containing boredom and bored people. A bad building is just misplaced boredom. In order to understand what architects do, you have to go back into this original situation of the savannah and ask yourself: how did human beings manage their existence in times when architecture was not yet there?

There has to be a kind of proto-architecture out of which architecture can arise, because human beings are always condemned to shape their spaces. Space shaping is, as it were, co-existent or co-extensive with human existence, and to exist is the position of a human being that is standing out somewhere in the savannah, within an open, wide, very wide, horizon. So they're always in a huge circle. This huge circle is so wide that you lose yourself inside the circle if you cannot draw a narrower circle inside this wide circle. This small circle is what gives life to original invisible architecture. This is the fireplace of the primitive horde. You know that the history of the human race is accompanied from its very beginning by the fact that the art of making fire is already there. The oldest traces of human existence, again this strange term, are places or shelters that were found in the African prairies, that let us draw the conclusion that some pieces of stone were collected in order to support big leaves that were used as a kind of wind-shelter in order to protect the fireplace.

So the invention of the wall, the principle of the wall, has an intimate relationship to the phenomenon that the fireplace itself can be or should be protected. And with the discovery of the principle of the wall, you discover the possibility to change the side of the wall and through this discovery of changing sides, in front of the wall or behind the wall, the invention of the door is also close at hand. It will take hundreds of thousands of years before this concept is materialised into wooden walls or walls of stone. But the

principle of the wall is already there, and the principle of the door is conceived relatively early. As soon as the wall is there, the question of the other side can be asked. And when it can be asked it can be answered. The answer to the question of the other side is just this: walking through the door.

By the way, all of us still have this horizon habit in our brain. Our brain has an innate concept of a stable horizon. All of you have had this strange experience, this famous train station experiment that our life provides us with almost daily. You're sitting in your compartment in the train station and suddenly you have the feeling that your train is set in motion, you look outside the window and you're still on the right side, and suddenly you see that it is not you but the train on the other track that has departed. What happened? Your brain provides you automatically with the information that you move, because the horizon cannot move. As soon as you see that the other train is leaving your brain is obliged to convert this information into the opposite information: you move, and the horizon is still stable, because a moving horizon: this is a horror, this is the vertigo, and in order to stabilise you're being there, in a given world: a horizon is never allowed to move.

This is, by the way, all the romanticism of modernity to invite us into a world where the horizon itself is moving, which means you have to reprogram your mind, your brain, and reprogramming a brain for a world with moving horizons is an almost impossible task. Next time you're sitting in the train station and you start moving, think about what you heard today. You will discover, even if you know it, the information will be exactly the same, because it is an innate pattern. You cannot do anything about it, because it is a human right, the big ape right, human rights and big ape rights coincide at a certain point, to live in a world where horizons do not move. This has to be known if you want to trace back the history of architecture into the primordial conditions of existence of human beings in the savannah.

Then humans developed the upright position. A gesture we call standing was designed and our body was designed for this upright position. But something which is even more important, especially for architects: in this time, also, the art of sitting arrived. There is a certain anthropological idealism to put the stress only on the ability of human beings to adopt this upright position. But if you ever have been in contact with people still living in savannah-like landscapes, you will be surprised how elegantly and effortlessly they sit. If you're perverted by 20 years at least of sitting training, you have lost the natural grace of sitting on the floor and the position of sitting on the floor in an elegant, effortless way is one of the first abilities that the pre-humans have developed.

Sitting on a chair in real boredom, adopted boredom, this is a real plague that came up with the development of higher culture, especially with the development of education, because education is linked to the invention of chairs and bringing people into a position that is neither authentic sitting, nor convincing standing. It is something in the middle and it is still a certain lack of proof that the sitting position is really compatible with intelligent functions of the brain. Sitting is very relaxing, it releases lots of brain energy, and standing is a position where decision-making is indicated. So much for savannah-architecture.

You all know that approximately 7,000 or 8,000 years ago, maybe a little bit more here and there, the conditions of life of the human race changed dramatically with the rise of agriculture. Here, for the first time, architecture intervenes in positive forms, because here for the first time we have architectural forms beyond the caked [mud] huts. We have for the first time real houses. But what is a house? A house, according to our former definition, must be a place to contain boredom. But this time it is a totally different boredom. It is the boredom of the peasant. It is a boredom of those who cannot do anything but wait for the ripening of the plants outside the house. Original houses are waiting rooms, nothing else. They're just waiting rooms where people who have the agrarian capacity of supporting boredom lived all around in order to reproduce the sacrament of the peasant, peasantry life, which means the day when the crops are harvested. They wait one year in order to live and relive this moment. Being in the world as a peasant means to wait for this moment, for this harvesting. This is the centre of time, and the farmers' house is not only a waiting room, it is also a kind of clock that tells you once in a year when the crop is ready to be reaped.

At the same time, when the farmers' houses are built, a new type of house arrives that brings something into the world which still disturbs our existence. That is the house that is used for stocking goods. With the eruption of the stock, the whole drama of history is released, because the stock means that emancipation of our time-horizon becomes possible. For the first time there are things in the world that you have not to wait for. They're disposable, they're already there. Disposable, superfluous, usable, and this is a kind of race towards power. From the stock, there leads a way to the construction of temples, of cathedrals, castles, and fortresses, because a temple, a castle, a cathedral, a fortress needs a stock as alimentionation.

With this, a new type of boredom arises as well. Maybe you remember the famous descriptions delivered by Herodotus on the summer residence of the great king of Persia, Ekbatana. This seven-fold castle was the place where the monarch lived or was surrounded by seven walls, each of which was severely defended by military fortresses and frightening doors and kings who served as servants and guards at the entrances. Every ring had a different colour and in the middle, invisible, immobile, was sitting the king, deeply bored, receiving messages from all over his empire. Always immobile and for the first time giving birth to this gesture that leads to telecommunications, because his spoken word was written down on tablets that were carried by his soldiers all over the empire.

This is the model of all telecommunication systems up until our own day. The Persian king, immobile in the centre, sending out his soldiers that on the way back brought all the information on events in the empire. Again this is the castle as a boredom-container of a very special kind, because in order to become a king or a governor, you have to train your capacity for boredom in a very special way. High-cultural-boredom is nothing that you can compare with savannah-boredom. It has to be established and cultivated in a very special way and for this capacity to support boredom under high-cultural conditions, our ancestors have developed a very special concept. It is a concept that helped people in metaphysical times to develop the ability to suffer boredom with nothing else [but] wisdom. Wisdom is the virtue of the man and the woman who have been trained in this very special kind of suffering, living in boredom-containers,

farmhouses, or castles in which certain types of eventless life are contained. This is the reason why people in metaphysical epochs are trained to develop the ambition to imitate the organisms that are the best designed for suffering boredom: the plant.

The idea of existence, the existential of humankind in metaphysical times, is the *imitatio plantae*. As long as you take the plant as your model, you develop this cardinal virtue of the metaphysical existence, which is patience. Have you ever seen an impatient plant? Becoming plants is a great program of existence in metaphysical times. That's the reason why architects in these times always are, as it were, gardeners. They construct artificial gardens in which artificial plants, human beings, can be kept. That's the context in which the deepest word of modern poetry, as you find it in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, has to be understood: *ripeness is all*. But ripeness means that you develop not only all the virtues of a real plant. You are ready to await the moment when someone comes to harvest you. This is the way a plants reflects on mortality. That is the reason why, in European history, death has always been represented, or very often represented, as a harvester. This strange instrument that you don't see anymore today, the scythe. There is a voice that is always coming down from heaven to the earth, inaudible, but that can be deciphered nevertheless by every intelligent human being: plants of all countries unite! This is the big harvest of the end. God will organise sooner or later a general harvester where all these useless and lunatic plants, who take themselves for something other than plants, will be gathered and separated. Good plants, bad plants.

The last chapter of this evolution. Modern times. Of course, the conditions of possibility of constructions dramatically change at the moment when the technical age begins, when the urban age begins. When people unlearn the art of being well-disciplined plants, because the capitalist society no longer wants plants, it wants animals. In anthropological terms, capitalism is all about the program of the *bestialisation* of human beings. When metaphysics, the high-times of religious hermeneutics, was obliged to transform the human soul into a kind of high plant, capitalism and consumerism are condemned to turn human beings into animals, because the purpose of our existence is to become very performant metabolic machines. The deep vocation of human beings in modern times is to become a metabolism-maximizer. If you're looking for an alternative term for human being, try this one: a metabolism-maximiser. Here we have the full program of modern existentialism and here we come back to that deep and frightening diagnosis that Martin Heidegger has formulated in the early thirties of the twentieth century, because the modern man and modern woman are exactly those human beings who have entirely unlearned the art of boredom. This is the deep meaning of the loss of metaphysical orientation.

Also, Catholicism was nothing but a great school of divine boredom and cathedrals were the places where the highest motivation that human existence can provide is linked to the feeling of the sublime eventless-ness. You enter into this room and immediately feel something breathtaking, literally. Useless to breathe in such a place. When nothing happens, breath is just superfluous. Breath is no longer needed. But from the eighteenth century on, the rural forms of existence disappear. Today only two or three percent of the modern population still live within agriculture and bi-agriculture, everyone else has found one way or another towards urban forms of life. The art of building becomes

necessarily the art of building for people without convictions, people who now have an unlimited demand for entertainment.

That's what Heidegger's diagnosis on modern times was all about. He was not only speaking of boredom, his analyses of boredom carried out from October 29th until December 29th is a huge philosophical event: the deepest phenomenology of boredom that's ever been pronounced. He begins with the phenomenology of entertainment. We are all splendidly entertained. But returning from entertainment for him becomes the new form of fulfilling the Augustinian motto 'go back into thyself', it is in the inner man that truth lives. This was the great motto that Augustine had launched at the beginning of the Christian age, and Heidegger repeats this movement by proposing an analysis of entertainment, returning from entertainment into ourselves.

What do you find if you come back from entertainment? You find the total lack of convictions. You find that nothing in the world is strong enough to hold you, to orient you, to direct you, to exercise any kind of authority. You can chase one form of entertainment by another form of entertainment. That once was the case with a famous colleague of mine of the twentieth century – Max Scheler – who was also a very gifted person, a contemporary of Heidegger, who has learned a lot from him, but he was a living document, a living proof, to the fact, for the truth of Heidegger's interpretation. This is because he changed his religious belief just like other people change their wives or their clothes or something else. He became a Catholic, a Pantheist, a Buddhist. He became everything you can become, because in this big conviction-park, this big religious bazaar, which is the modern world, so-called ultimate orientations can be exchanged more or less easily. That's exactly what the biography of Max Scheler seemed to prove.

So Heidegger knew exactly what he was talking about. If you go back from entertainment into the inner-most core of your existence, you find that there is nothing that holds you. There is no ultimate conviction and that time gets long, that's what the German word '*Langweile*' means, the exact translation of '*Langeweile*'. Boredom now has to be replaced by the German word '*Langeweile*', because the word '*Langeweile*' is in itself a philosophical concept. It shows that if you have nothing to do, this situation of deep joblessness is given, then the time that is a kind of inner-pool in your existence gets loose, and this loosened tension of time makes you feel extremely bored. When the string of time is pulled, you feel engaged and you have the feeling that your life is meaningful, oriented to what Musil calls 'the utopia of motivated life', seems to be realised. But Heidegger made his experiment with the contrary, the string of time is loosened, nothing pulls. There is only one form of evidence that meaning is missing: all attractors are too weak to catch you, your life just becomes a meaningless drift.

And here you have what modern architecture is all about: producing containers for these kinds of people. And if I would ask you to name two or three outstanding features of modern architecture, I hope you would give me two answers. In my eyes the two major features of modern architecture, the real innovations are, *on the one hand*, the apartment as a container of the single individual living alone, the individual who is driven by the idea to manage his own completeness. The apartment-dweller is an individual who tries to marry himself or herself and to form the perfect couple with himself or herself. This

is apartment-existentialism. I think that among the achievements of modern architecture, architecture of the twentieth century, the apartment is certainly one of the most characteristic patterns. I call these kind of buildings: isolators, or even better, taking up a formula created by the Californian couple of architects Morphosis, 'connected isolations'. I do not know any better formulation for the existential situation of modern human beings, because in order to be human in a modern way, you have to be sufficiently isolated. In order to retain the important features of being human you have to be connected. Connected isolation is just what modern existence is all about. *On the other hand*, you find the collectors, architectural structures designed in order to collect massive numbers of human beings.

And here I would like to draw your attention to the fact that, among the forms of architecture of European antiquity, only one big form did not return until the twentieth century. In the fifteenth century, you see the return of the villa, the Greek temple, the small amphitheatres in universities. Virtually everything antiquity had built came back. One architectural structure is waiting, waiting, waiting, waiting, and it comes precisely at the beginning of the twentieth century. You know what I'm talking about: this is the stadium. One of the most perfect forms that the history of architecture ever has produced. It has definitive form, it cannot be improved. The only thing that modernity has added is the Romanization of the Greek form. That means the real stadium was a U-form, [it] had an open side for religious purposes that I cannot explain here. And the Romanization of the stadium means that the arena-principle copes with the stadium-principle. And in our days when we are talking about a stadium, we always mean the arena, because the arena is closed. The arena is the temple of fatalism.

This is the true religion of late-antiquity and it is also the true religion of modern times and postmodern times. Fatalism is a cult of success. The cult of success means you arrange games that allow the Gods to show who they prefer and you allow the Gods to make the only difference that makes a difference, between winners and losers. In order to make this visible, you need an arena called a stadium and you bring 10,000, 100,000, deeply bored people into the arena and transform them into observers of this difference, of this distinction-drama that shows the only difference that really makes sense for all those who are caught within this cult of fatalism, decisive fatality. Winners on the one side, losers on the other side.

Now you see what I mean when I'm saying that the deep purpose of modern culture is to transform human beings into consuming animals, animals that like to be entertained. Entertainment is the most successful form of containing boredom. The biggest boredom-container that we know so far is that huge construction that I had the pleasure to describe in my last book: *Im Weltinnenraum des Kapitals* [*The Interior World of the Capital*], where I deliver a re-description of modern Western society in terms of the metaphor of the Crystal Palace. I refer to this famous construction by the British garden architect John Paxton, who erected the Crystal Palace in 1851, on the occasion of the first World Exhibition in London. And what I'm saying is just that this Crystal Palace has been widened and generalised to such an extent that our lives in our days are all contained in this ultimate container of boredom.

The great performance of modern architecture and modern culture as a whole is that we have elaborated this perfect equation between boredom and entertainment, so that this art of containing jobless humans is really pushed to a very high peak. This means, by the way, that also politics long ago have already become a part of this arena-game. The Dutch people will have a very nice opportunity to play the game next. Within the big container the difference between yes and no is no longer so important, because it is not just yes and no, or not coextensive with inside and outside. This is a serious distinction. Yes and no is a play-distinction and for the sake of the play, the no is much more interesting. That is, by the way, exactly what Baudrillard recently explained, to an astonished French audience, and they followed the advice of the first complete game-philosopher who has abolished every serious meaning out of his discourse and gave very wise advice to his fellow country-men, just the advice that can be given to people without conviction, to vote no, just for the fun of it.⁴

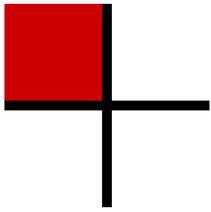
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⁴ A reference to the Dutch European Constitution referendum of 2005: LP.



From here to there... to where?

David Harvie

review of:

Therborn, G. (2008) *From Marxism to Post-Marxism?* London and New York: Verso (HB: pp. 194 + xi, £14.99, ISBN: 978-184467 188 5).

According to the author's introduction, *From Marxism to Post-Marxism?* is intended as a 'traveller's notebook, unpretentious notes jotted down after a long, arduous journey through the climbs, passes, descents and dead ends of twentieth- and early twenty-first-century Marxism' (p. x). Taking this as my cue, I shall jot down my own 'unpretentious notes' about *From Marxism to Post-Marxism?*

The book comprises three chapters. Each chapter is actually written as a paper and each of these has already been published: two in *New Left Review* and the other as a contribution to *The Blackwell Companion to Social Theory*, edited by Bryan S. Turner.

Göran Therborn has two aims in *From Marxism to Post-Marxism?* First, 'to situate the left-wing political practice and thought of the early twenty-first century in the terrain of the previous century' and, second, 'to provide a systematic panorama of left-wing thought in the North at the beginning of the new century, to compare it with the Marxism of the preceding era' (p. x). Although Therborn asserts that the fate of Marxism is to be decided in the South, he goes on to admit that 'a systematic overview of contemporary Southern radical thought [is] beyond [his] linguistic competence as well as [his] time constraints' (p. xi). This admission unwittingly diminishes the potential usefulness of Therborn's book for reflecting on the future of Marxism.

The first chapter, 'Into the Twenty-first Century: The New Parameters of Global Politics', seeks 'to map the social space of Left-Right politics, from the 1960s to the first decade of the twenty-first century'. Therborn's intention in this chapter is 'to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the forces of Left and Right, in a broad, non-partisan sense – both during the recent past, which still bears forcefully of the present, and within emerging currents' (p. 1-2).

Here the author introduces a two-dimensional schema for understanding global 'political space', with irreverence–deference along one dimension and collectivism–individualism along the other. But this heuristic device is barely

developed or employed, and its various tensions are unexplored. For example, Therborn states that '[t]he classical Left was driven by the 'irreverent collectivism' of the socialist working-class and anti-imperialist movements, while other contemporary radical currents – for women's rights or human rights, for instance – have a more individualist character' (p. 4-5). On the one hand, this formulation seems to ignore the importance of the anarchist, anarcho-syndicalist, and libertarian to the 'classical' workers' movement. On the other, it neglects those activists and scholars – for example, Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James and the Midnight Notes Collective – who have insisted that women's rights and 'human rights' issues such as capital punishment are, in fact, class issues.

The discussion in this chapter is oriented to the state, to institutional politics, to constituted power. The Left is mostly identified with Communist, Socialist, Social Democratic, and Workers' parties, whether in government or opposition. By and large, extra-parliamentary groupings and movements are ignored. There is no mention, let alone discussion, of *operaismo* and *autonomia* in Italy, of Solidarity in the UK, of the myriad groups active in the US in the 1960s and '70s: the Black Power movement, the Johnson-Forest Tendency and its studies of worker self-organisation, Students for a Democratic Society. The influential French group *Socialisme ou Barbarie* is mentioned only in passing and for the sole reason that Jean-François Lyotard left it. In fact, the author seems to regard these movements and struggles as *outside* the Left, for at one point he alludes to 'the failure of the Left to cope with the distributive conflicts that broke out during the economic crises of the seventies and eighties' (p. 23). (I would instead understand the various participants of these social struggles as *part of* the Left, albeit a divided Left in which Left parties and trade unions often did their utmost to undermine and even criminalise non-institutional movements.)

In a brief excursion to Latin America, Venezuela is reduced to Hugo Chavez (no mention of the 'struggle from below'), Bolivia is Evo Morales, Nicaragua the Sandinistas. Onward to Africa, where the Communist Party of South Africa and Samir Amin in Dakar are noted. In South Asia the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and 'Indian academia' get the nod. And so on. The only 'civil society' formations Therborn refers to are the World Social Forum and ATTAC. But since these are both linked with the Brazilian Workers' Party (the PT), the CPI(M) and various French Trotskyists – to the extent that many autonomist and anti-state types have refused or ceased to be involved – I am not sure they really count.

The subject of the second chapter is 'Twentieth-Century Marxism and the Dialectics of Modernity'. Therborn opens this chapter/paper by claiming that 'Marxism, as a social-historical phenomenon, has been Her Modern Majesty's Loyal Opposition to modernity – always critical of and fighting against her predominant regimes, but never questioning the legitimate majesty of modernity and, when needed, explicitly defending it' (p. 66). This is an intriguing idea, and probably quite an apt characterisation, but it is not really explored in the chapter. One could, for example, mention that towards the end of his life, as he studied the struggles in the Russian *mir*, Marx gave up his silly 'idiocy of rural life' perspective of *The Communist Manifesto* and instead came to believe that it might be possible for communism to emerge out of pre-capitalist societies. One could also mention the many struggles against Communist Party sponsored or supported

‘development’ over the course of the twentieth century. One could even mention that there is currently, in the Andean parts of Latin America, a debate on modern vis-à-vis (or versus) indigenous variants of Marxism. Such discussions, however, are conspicuously absent from Therborn’s analysis.

Instead, over the course of 45 pages, Therborn provides brief synopses of the thought of a series of more-or-less modern Marxists: Engels, Bebel, Bauer, Lenin, Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse, Lynd, C. Wright Mills, Habermas, and so on. Most thinkers are allotted just a paragraph or two, but there are longer sections on the critical theory of the Frankfurt school and ‘Western Marxism’. Therborn identifies those texts he considers most important and notes the founding of European and North American journals such as *Past and Present*, *New Left Review*, and *Monthly Review*.

What’s lacking here is any sense of excitement, intellectual or otherwise. Nor is there a great deal of historical context. Take as just one example the British Marxist historians, E.P. Thompson, Christopher Hill, and Eric Hobsbawm, whom Therborn names. Reading *The Making of the English Working Class* or *The World Turned Upside Down*, say, brought me out in goose pimples, and this is decades after they were first published. Imagine the effect in the 1960s and ’70s, when ‘history-from-below’ was an entirely novel approach. Accounts of people making their own history (though not in circumstances of their own choosing)? This really was revolutionary stuff! (And of course, Hill’s book even inspired Leon Rosselson to write a song of the same name, about the Digger commune on St. George’s Hill, later made popular by Billy Bragg.) But the revolutions weren’t only intellectual. Therborn notes that the Historians’ Group of the Communist Party – of which Thompson, Hill, et al. were core members – broke up in 1956. Of course it did: this was the year Soviet tanks rolled into Hungary in order to put down a workers’ rebellion. The Hungarian uprising was a key event of the post-war period, which sparked intense debate across the Left. It turned Communist parties upside down, with thousands – including Thompson and Hill – tearing up their Party cards. Indeed, it was against Communist orthodoxy – the invasion of Hungary in particular, the suppression of debate and dissent in general – that Thompson and fellow CP dissident John Saville founded the journal the *New Reasoner*, which merged with *Universities and Left Review* to become *New Left Review* in 1960. Therborn does not once mention the Hungarian uprising.

The third and final chapter is entitled ‘After Dialectics: Radical Social Theory in the North at the Dawn of the Twenty-first Century’. Here Therborn begins by recounting the worldwide demise of Communist and Left political parties over the period of the past three or four decades and the related onslaught of neoliberalism. He then suggests that ‘the history of Marxism may best be seen as a triangulation’. Its three poles are (i) a ‘social science, in the broad Germanic sense of *Wissenschaft*, focused on the operation of capitalism and, more generally, on the historical developments determined ‘in the last instance’ by the dynamics of the forces and relations of production’; (ii) a ‘philosophy of contradictions or dialectics’; and (iii) a ‘mode of politics of a socialist, working-class kind, providing a compass and a road-map to the revolutionary overthrow of the existing order. The politics was the overdetermining apex of the triangle, making the ‘ism’ a social current, not just an intellectual lineage’ (pp. 116-117). But, this ‘Marxist triangle of social science, politics and philosophy has been broken – in all likelihood,

irremediably' (p. 119). Again, I find the possibly irremediably broken 'triangle' hypothesis intriguing, but it is not really developed. What is more developed, however, is a *two*-dimensional 'heuristic searching device' to help find 'current left-theoretico-political positions', which Therborn introduces later in the chapter. This has socialism—capitalism along one axis and Marxism—non-Marxist Left thought along the other.

In some ways, both the 'triangle' and the two-dimensional heuristic remind me of Harry Cleaver's (2000) schematic 'approaches to reading Marx' in *Reading Capital Politically*, in which he distinguishes and discusses 'political economy' readings, 'philosophical' readings, and 'political readings'. Cleaver's account of the development of Marxism over the course of the twentieth-century until the late 1970s (when his book was first published) attempts to demonstrate both how Marxist thinkers responded to the real struggles and changes in capitalism *and* how such thinkers sought to shape such struggles. In contrast, Therborn's history tends to be exclusively intellectual. Thus, in his account, Marxism must respond to the challenges of postmodernism or poststructuralism, such as the work of Frederick Jameson or Jacques Derrida. Absent are the myriad struggles of the 1960s and '70s, as diverse groups – women, students, blacks, queers, etc. – sought to escape invisibility and/or stultifying and universalising identities and roles.

The Left's 'resilience' is also argued almost exclusively through reference to intellectual currents, journals, and books. Therborn provides exuberant praise for *New Left Review* ('the generally recognized flagship of left-wing social thought', '[b]rilliance and radicalism have been the *NLR* criteria for publication, never orthodoxy of any kind') and its 'guiding spirit' Perry Anderson ('not only a major Marxist historical scholar but also a master of intellectual critique'). He also notes with approval the German publications *Das Argument*, *Prokla*, and *Sozialismus*, as well as other Anglophone journals such as *Capital and Class*, *Socialist Register*, *Rethinking Marxism*, *Historical Materialism*, *Monthly Review*, and *Science and Society* (p. 172-74). Little or no reference is made to the wave of struggles that have engulfed the planet over the past 15 years or so, which have arguably contributed to capitalism's present crisis – see Midnight Notes Collective and Friends (2009).

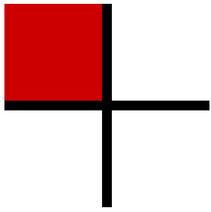
As a final comment, it seems worth mentioning that *New Left Review* and its publishing arm Verso are significantly overrepresented in *From Marxism to Post-Marxism? A* quick count of references in the footnotes reveals that, of the 230-odd books and articles cited, 60 – more than one-quarter – were published either by Verso (or its precursor New Left Books) or by *NLR*. When the 50 or so foreign-language texts are excluded that proportion rises to one-third. Make of that what you will.

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The charmed circle... set straight

Anna Woźniak

review of:

Boucher, G. (2008) *The Charmed Circle of Ideology*. Melbourne: re.press. (HB: pp. 194 + xi, £14.99, ISBN: 978-184467 188 5).

Geoff Boucher, in his book *The Charmed Circle of Ideology*, plunges into a project of critical mapping of 'postmarxism defined by the political strategy of radical democracy' (p. 3). He brings together works of Laclau and Mouffe, Butler and Žižek and approaches them as one distinct political tendency. He seeks to demonstrate that theory of class politics can be developed without recourse to 'postmarxism's tendency to reduce politics and economics to ideological struggle' (p. 16). In other words Boucher tries to demonstrate that there is space for social and political reality which escapes the influences of ideological mechanisms. In what follows, I will focus on Boucher's criticism of Slavoj Žižek's premises which most clearly demonstrates Boucher's assumptions which undermine the logic of the argument he puts forward in the book. I suggest that Boucher does not succeed in establishing an adequate conceptual engagement with Žižek's ideas already at the level of his position of enunciation, prior to the presentation of his argument.

In spite of the fact that Boucher makes a number of interesting comments in relation to Žižek's line of thought, I will not attempt to engage in discussion of their soundness and that is for two reasons. Firstly, Žižek himself responds to Boucher's allegations on the pages of *Teolos* (Žižek, 2004). Although Žižek's reply addresses Boucher's article published in 2004 in the same issue of *Telos* (Boucher, 2004), it is entirely valid in relation to the premises introduced in *The Charmed Circle of Ideology* (published in 2008). Boucher has not changed the line of his attack and admits that: 'I have not altered my position because ... Žižek does not appear to me to have a reply' (p. 165). Meanwhile, Žižek makes very clear where Boucher's argument goes astray: he makes a number of factual inaccuracies in rendering Žižek's position; he does not seem to grasp Žižek's elucidations of the idea of the 'death drive'; he constructs false oppositions underpinning Žižek's framework (e.g. the Real as an 'inherent transgression' of the Symbolic versus the symbolic field supported by an obscene enjoyment, Žižek's oscillation between 'ethical Marxist' and 'materialist Pauline'). It is very clear to any reader of Boucher's book who is acquainted with Žižek's work that Boucher confounds a whole series of key distinction in Žižek's work.

Secondly, an enlightening effect of reading Boucher's book, together with his and Žižek's earlier publications, comes from grasping what is in this debate more than the debate itself. It reveals the more general character of the foundations on which many 'critical scholars', in wide sense of the term, construct their arguments without appreciating the complexity of the thinking of the writer with whom they engage. It is the case of Boucher's project which he describes as aiming at 'theoretically disentangling the many strands of [Žižek's] thinking' (p. 235). It is this aspect of reconstructing a multidimensional, circular framework into one-dimensional one which turns Boucher's project into a mere supplement of Žižek's thinking rather than its critique.

Boucher admits that he does not investigate Žižek's contributions to film theory and psychoanalysis (p. 3) suggesting it is his intentional choice, made independently of his main intellectual venture. However, if looked at closer, this is not a random choice but, rather, a necessary exclusion which makes the construction of the linear and straightforward interpretation of Žižek's concepts possible at all. This repression (which also excludes the whole Kierkegaardian side of Žižek) is the condition which makes Boucher's critical mapping of 'Žižek's postmarxism' feasible. It is his lack of concern with a broader sense of Žižek's theories which renders possible an impossible mission of determining the 'unity-in-diversity' (p. 4) in the work of Laclau and Mouffe, Butler and Žižek in spite of their insistence on their distinctiveness which even Boucher recognizes in the concluding part of the book (p. 234).

Boucher discusses extensively Žižek's idea of historicism and simultaneously excludes Žižek's distinction between historicism and historicity. It is an exclusion which again makes the construction of Boucher argument possible. Žižek argues that historicity depicts a condition of a person caught in the flow of historical 'becoming' and its 'openness' where the historical sense is provided by the gaze of those stigmatized by the actual distress (Žižek, 2001). On the contrary, historicism captures a mindset concerned with and privileging the retrospective view of history as some 'eternal necessity'. The latter is the gaze represented by Boucher. He declares that he is 'interested in the moment of emergence of postmarxism: broadly speaking, from *Hegemony of Socialist Strategy* (1985) through to the joint declaration of tendency in *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality* (2000)' (p. 15). Retrospective reconstruction of 'the moment of emergence of postmarxism' (p. 15) in the period between these two publications is a gesture by means of which Boucher creates a link in a chain of historical necessity, taking an outsider's perspective and reconstructing the history of intellectual struggles and tensions as a neat linear process rather than as an evidence of its impossibility.

It becomes then clear that there is an additional dimension to the 'exclusions' which Boucher argues to be deliberate and intended for logical reasons. In fact they carry a number of strategic consequences in relation to the validity and effectiveness of Boucher's criticism. As a result of this repression of the repressed, he frequently falls into acting-outs which take form of his charging Žižek with unjustified statements and 'vulgar' judgments (expressed in statements which desperately seek to fix Žižek's political stance: 'Instead of a radical politics for the twenty-first century, I suggest, Žižek's metaphysical radicalism risks descent into irrationality and relativism' (p. 218);

Žižek's 'position, as archaic as it is irrational, cannot possibly found a radical politics for the twenty-first century. To the contrary: it has strong neo-conservative affinities' (p. 221). Meanwhile, in line with the logic of psychoanalysis, the accusations against the other (i.e. Žižek) are in fact accusations against one's own (i.e. Boucher's) soul. Boucher himself reproaches Žižek for using 'psychoanalytic "invectives"' (p. 226) such as 'hysteric' and 'pervert' in relation to some thinkers. The paradox of this situation rests on the fact that in Žižek's framework these 'invectives' are systematically elaborated concepts, in which case they lose their 'vulgar quality'.

By falling into the crude critical remarks in regard to Žižek's philosophy and by trying to locate him on the politico-theoretical map, Boucher returns Žižek's lack which is unavoidable consequence of a phenomenon which Žižek, drawing on Lacan, describes as identification *qua* symbolic opposition. Boucher closes an intellectual field which Žižek strives and continuous to open. As a result, Boucher does not expand Žižek's argument but, paradoxically, repeats and reinforces it.

For example, Boucher brings to attention Hegel's distinction between the *absolute negativity* ('Natural negation of consciousness ... which remains without the required significance of recognition' (p. 186)) and *radical negativity* (negation 'of self-consciousness, which generates a continuous movement of transcendence in quest of self-reflexivity through mutual recognition' (p. 186)), accusing Žižek of engaging in the former. This creates an economy well described by Žižek where an enunciator (Boucher in this case) by means of the enunciated content transmits a statement determined at the level of his position of enunciation. Boucher, by way of the implicit force of his speech, personifies what, at the level of locution, is the object of his denunciation – 'Žižek's absolute negativity'.

Radically negative engagement with Žižek's project requires considering details of Žižek's manner of extending the political project with psychoanalysis and investigations of culture. These extensions trigger understanding only when Žižek's line of thought is treated as an entity, rather than as a set of separated arguments which can be arranged and made sense of in a linear way. True, Žižek falls into inconsistencies many of which, however, he remains aware. On various occasions Žižek underlines the tension of being involved simultaneously in philosophical and in political projects, reflections which remain outside of Boucher's analysis.

He points out that Žižek 'claims the real question is 'how are we to reinvent the political space in today's conditions of globalization?' I suggest that Žižek has no real answer – hence the rhetorical question' (reference omitted, p. 227). Boucher is right Žižek is probably the last to throw himself into a project aiming at finding 'the real answers'. On few occasions of his public speeches, he admits, that his philosophical project consists of searching for the 'real questions' (or unmasking the unreal ones) rather than providing 'real answers'.

Boucher's critique contributes to a 'negativity' which by its disruptive power generates positive effect of an identity of a writer critical towards Žižek's arguments – a libidinally attractive position in an intersubjective intellectual network. However, an enlightening critique of Žižek would consider the reasons for his recurring failures to

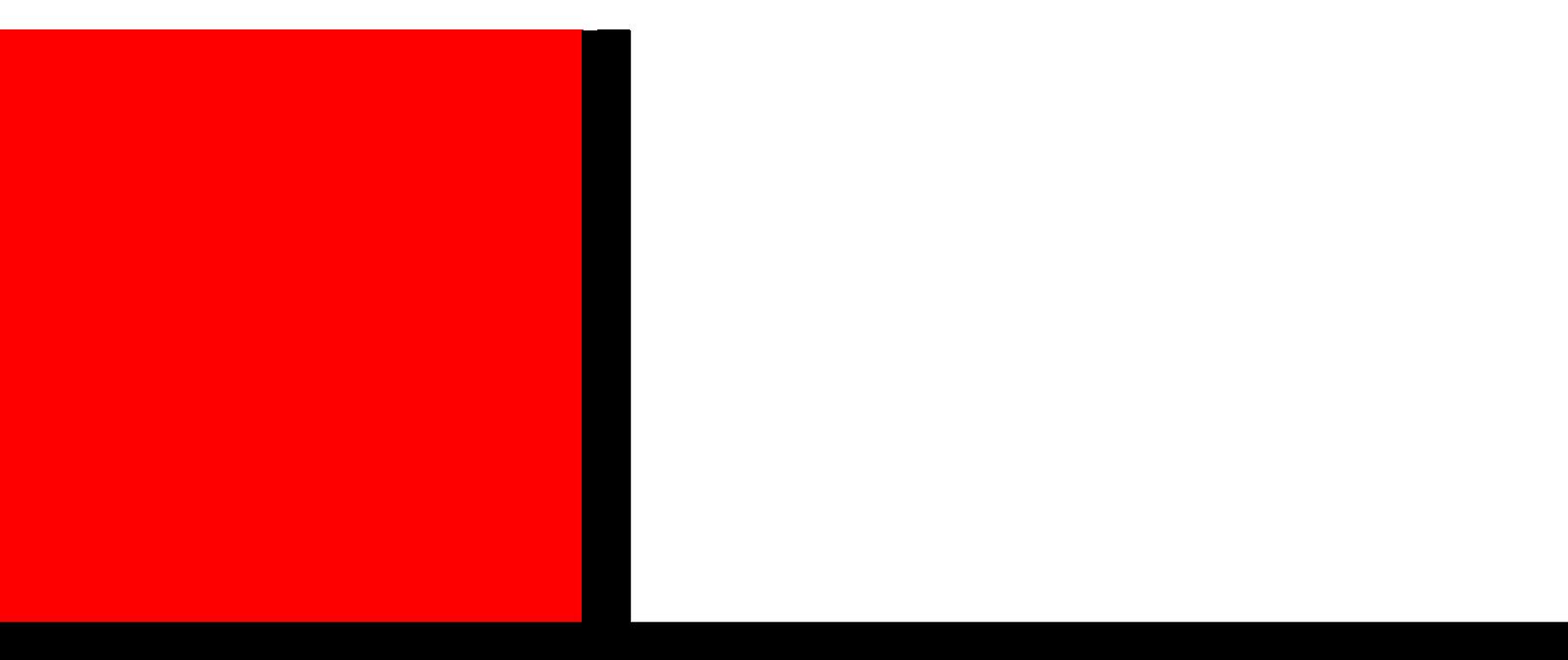
marry the philosophical and the political. It would also account for the condition of today's intellectual world which contributes to Žižek's increasing popularity. It would attempt to unravel the present situation of the social theory and theorists which renders Žižek's style, with all its inconsistencies, vulgar jokes and vivid illustrations, attractive to thinkers in spite of the fact that they disagree with him radically, to thinkers like Geoff Boucher himself.

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