



O cursèd spite

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Welcome to the second issue of *ephemera*. We must admit that there is already something that feels a bit tired, a bit old about this issue. Its not quite the shiny new thing that it was last time – our first, virgin issue. And we’re late too. This issue should have been online on the first of May, not just because of the global significance of that day in terms of protest, resistance and revolutionary activity, but because that was *the* deadline. But we’ve broken rank. We weren’t quite organized enough. So we’re late, and we’re not that new anymore. Sorry.

In this issue we have tried to work with, and around, the twin themes of newness and resistance. And you will have noticed that there is something new, or simply odd (just plain stupid?) with how this/we present(s) itself/ourselves. But in playing with form, we do want to indicate something substantive. We want to pose some serious questions here about newness. We are not simply asking ‘What’s new?’, with the resonant shades of mindless greetings - “welcome to new *ephemera*, whassup?”. Rather, we want to resist newness a little and the far too easy,

I don’t think that there is any such absolutely novel and unified thing as *the* postmodern condition. It’s another version of that historical amnesia characteristic of American culture – the tyranny of the New. (Stuart Hall, ‘On Articulation’)

In the first paper in this issue Rolland Munro identifies the ways in which, by focusing on meaning many writers, both modern and postmodern, have ‘disposed’ of material objects such as the body. His paper operates in an unusual fashion, enacting as much as it explains itself. Indeed, it enacts a certain sense of misplaced time, being published here for the first time almost a decade after it was written. In his postscript to the paper, Munro explains the oddities and quirks of the paper, refusing to dispose of these ‘peculiarities’. Instead he lets it stand as is, hoping that the paper will make more sense now than it could then, in light of the developments in debates over (post)modernity, which are now far from new.

Following Munro’s questioning of certain all-too-presumptuous positions on the modern, John Armitage casts suspicion on the newness of the postmodern. He suggests a conception of *hypermodernization*, which involves an acceleration and amplification of the revolutionising tendencies of modernization. This process of hypermodernization is, therefore,

over-zealous embrace of the new which is so dominant today.

Newness is, presumably, something about change, about transformation, and about difference, but these themes seem to be far from new. Indeed, they are central to the *doxa* of neo-liberalism (which, it is now clear, is far from new), and even seems to be markers of our era. Isn't there a paradox at work in this idea of 'novelty-without-change'? There is both an emphasis on 'the new', as evinced by the hyper-, post-, and neo- (*etc.*), as well as the recognition that this 'new' is probably just more of the same-old. *Hypermodern*: the same as the modern only more so, faster, more efficient and bigger. So what of difference and monstrosity? Can we only imagine organised futures as an extension of the present? In what way might we be able to really think novelty – a transformation that is more than an extension of the present?

It seems clear that the new doesn't come 'out of the blue', so to speak. It is the result of forces acting upon a resistant present (and other oppositional forces). Our friend the manager bemoans the workforce's luddism, and its refusal to change with the times. A focus on resistance allows us to think about how change occurs; how novelty is produced. If the future is to be anything but a simplistic extension of the present, the present needs to be challenged, disoriented and knocked off course: in a word *perturbed*. To create, the artist works

Constant revolutionising of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relations with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned. (Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*)

The future can only be anticipated in the form of an absolute danger. It is that which breaks absolutely with constituted normality and can only be proclaimed, *presented*, as a sort of monstrosity. (Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*)

both continuous and discontinuous with modernization: rupturing the dynamics of modernity and inducing a qualitative change through quantitative intensification. Armitage analyses this hyper-modernization, through a series of project(ile)s – hypercapitalism, globalitarianism and militarization – that 'project' the present into the future, thereby accelerating 'change' and ensuring that nothing radically new or truly monstrous can ever happen. In the third paper, Iain Munro takes up that 'postmodern' technology *par excellence* – informa-

tion. Examining the emergence of the information society, he traces continuities from Joseph Goebbels to the Brave New World of Internet surveillance, whilst simultaneously recognising this very continuity constitutes a revolution – one that is being intensified by contemporary management fashions like Knowledge Management, viral marketing and mobile telephony. Rejecting the utopianism of a widely promoted informational democracy, Iain Munro considers the effects of information and communication technology on processes of subject formation and examines the ways in which informed identities are generating an 'interactive docility'. The result of this docility is to stifle and destroy creativity and novelty, producing more of the same, producing identi(cali)ty.

All of these papers share a questioning of the new and a debunking of narratives of progress, even (and especially) where that progress comes in

with, and often against, resistant matter – a material with its own forces of expression. Creation happens somewhere in-between these forces, at the points of their intersection. In this sense the future is by definition a contested terrain. But it is never a simple contest where one side of a dualism can win out. Its becoming is always monstrous and heterogeneous and potentially dangerous (for some at least).

But perhaps we have all had enough of change. Perhaps we are sick of the unceasing search for new novelty, struck down with a serious case of retro futuristic chronosemiitis. Perhaps we are bored with novelty and want to resist it. Following Benjamin, perhaps this boredom can manifest itself in (at least) two ways. On the one hand as the production of new (ephemeral) commodities to glut the market and accelerate consumption: ‘novel’ productions of the same old consumption. Or on the other hand by letting boredom manifest itself as an affirmative, critical flux: a boredom that cannot be assuaged and bought off with a shiny wrapper, low-fat dressing or two-for-the-price-of-one special effects/offer. A boredom with boredom – the remorse of the sugar junky coming down from yet another donut high and refusing the diet coke, antacid pill and exercise regime.

But what hope for a ‘critical boredom’? Or are we simply accelerating acceleration by dreaming of a *new* resistance? Are we prematurely heralding the death knell of the ‘old’

In cloning – this collective fantasy of a return to a non-individuated existence and a destiny of undifferentiated life, this temptation to return to an indifferent immortality – we see the very form of a repentance of the living toward the unliving. This repentance arises from the depths of a past time; we pine for a state that is long gone but that will be possible again by virtue of our technologies, becoming eventually an object of our fascination, our nostalgia, and our desire. This may well be the story of a deliberate project to put an end to the genetic game of difference, to stop the divagations of the living. Aren’t we actually sick of sex, of difference, of emancipation, of culture?

(Jean Baudrillard, *The Vital Illusion*)

Habit is the ballast that chains the dog to his vomit.
(Samuel Beckett, *Proust*)

the form of new grand theory (such as the postmodern’ rejection of ‘progress’...). In this sense, each of these papers enacts a resistance. They call for hesitation, a break, a rupture, an escape. This is more than the conservative resistance of slowing down or ‘back to basics’. If the archetypal metaphor of progress is the train, a conservative resistance at best acts as a brake, slowing progress so we can check on the rails ahead. Conservative resistance can only ever be *reactive*. What Munro, Armitage and Munro offer us are *active* resistances. And at times, they quite literally go ‘off the rails’.

If progress and novelty are questioned and resisted in our first three papers, resistance itself takes centre stage in this issue’s Note From the Field. In a kind of literary montage inspired by Walter Benjamin, Böhm reports on the anti-capitalist activities taking place this May Day by juxtaposing journalistic reportage with emails and itineraries of activists involved with the protests, and theoretical reflections on the contemporary political scene. Refusing to provide any authoritative commentary, this method aims to let the conjunctions of these discourses generate ‘new’ insights, trying to avoid imposing any particular reading.

The two reviews in this issue are perhaps more conventional (i.e. not so new) in their reading strategies but in their own ways they continue the themes of

resistance, a kind of ideological euthanasia? (“It was the kindest thing we could do really - he had a terminal case of Marxism you know...”) Or perhaps the ‘new resistances’ *do* constitute something new, and perhaps something that is worthy of the name ‘resistance’.

(But didn’t optimism go out when the last light-bulb of the enlightenment blew?)

We have been told often enough that we would be best off thinking of resistance in forms other than opposition to a singular dominating force. This is the message of so many efforts to rethink resistance (anew?), principally those following Deleuze and taken up so effectively by Foucault.

Resistances, then, which are not singular or simply oppositional (which would be to presuppose a power which is pre-formed and molar), but multiple and creative. In this sense, resistance doesn’t come ‘after’ an already powerful force, but is instrumental in the proliferation of openings, of movement, transformation, difference. The new?

Is this the power of the new anti-capitalist movements – a multiplicity without centre, but united in opposition?

Or will these new resistances allow that which is opposed to rally its own forces and unite them in yet more oppressive practices, carried out in the name of ‘democracy’? A ‘new’ democracy...(Fade out accompanied by ‘The March of Progress’...)

newness and resistance. In the first review Oliver Speck engages with two recent books on Deleuze, one of the ‘hip and the new’ amongst recent theorists. And we must admit some sympathy with this work. Indeed, we were recently accused of being ‘Deleuzian’ (*too* Deleuzian’ actually), which we might be able to take as a compliment or an insult, if only we knew what this meant. (And when Foucault suggested that there might be a ‘Deleuzian century’, wasn’t he talking about the one just passed? – damn, too late again!).

In Peter Fleming’s review of Ackroyd and Thompson’s *Organizational Misbehaviour*, questions of resistance return to centre stage. This book refocuses on the question of workers’ strategies of resistance in the workplace. Accusing ‘the Foucauldians’ of failing to account for resistance at work,

Ackroyd and Thompson suggest that this neglect has led to an impoverished account of organizational reality. Here we concur in both directions. We share an excitement in this upsurge of interest in workplace resistance, but equally share Fleming’s concerns about Ackroyd and

Thompson’s accounts of power and resistance and all too easy rejection of Foucault. At the risk of

being vanguardist, it is quite possible that these *new* forms of resistance might only be thought through with the benefit of *new* theory...(Fade out accompanied by ‘The March of Progress’...)

Here, I think, we are touching on one of the forms – perhaps we should call them habits – one of the most harmful habits in contemporary thought, in modern thought even; at any rate in post-Hegelian thought: the analysis of the present as being precisely, in history, a present of rupture, or of high point, or of completion or of a returning dawn, etc. The solemnity with which everyone who engages in philosophical discourse reflects on his own time strikes me as a flaw. I can say so all the more firmly since it is something I have done myself...

(Michel Foucault, ‘Critical Theory/Intellectual History’)

Time is out of joint. O cursèd spite,
That ever I was born to set it right!
(William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*)

discussion

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