



## Throwing shoes...

Nick Butler, Chris Land and Martyna Śliwa



Ben-Haviv After Sankhy (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...

#### references

- Abbey, E. (1985) *The Monkey Wrench Gang*. Salt Lake City: Dream Garden Press.  
Deleuze, G. and F. Guattari (1986) *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. London: The Athlone Press.  
Jones, S. (2006) *Against Technology: From the Luddites to Neo-Luddism*. London: Routledge.  
Rancière, J. (2004) *The Politics of Aesthetics*. London: Continuum.  
Rancière, J. (2001) ‘Ten theses on politics’, *Theory and Event*, 5(3).  
Retort (2005) *Afflicted Powers: Capital and Spectacle in a New Age of War*. London: Verso.  
Todd, O. (1997) *Albert Camus: A Life*. New York: Carroll and Graf.

#### the editors

Nick Butler is a member of the editorial collective of *ephemera*.  
E-mail: [nick.butler@st-andrews.ac.uk](mailto:nick.butler@st-andrews.ac.uk)

Chris Land is a member of the editorial collective of *ephemera*.  
E-mail: [cland@essex.ac.uk](mailto:cland@essex.ac.uk)

Martyna Śliwa is a member of the editorial collective of *ephemera*.  
E-mail: [Martyna.sliwa@ncl.ac.uk](mailto:Martyna.sliwa@ncl.ac.uk)