

# ephemera

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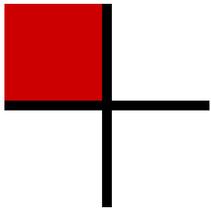
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## Writing in the Margins is Being Elsewhere. Always.\*

Martyna Sliwa, André Spicer and Peter Svensson

### Marginality and Popularity

In the editorial for the *ephemera* issue 7(2) Spoelstra, O'Shea and Kaulingfreks (2007) reflect upon *ephemera's* relation to the wider field of organization studies. Marginality is brought up as a main trademark of *ephemera*, in effect its core business. We would like to spend this editorial on following up on this theme. This is not only because marginality is a pertinent issue in need of further discussion. Which it is. It is also an attempt to use the editorial space as an arena for transparent dialogue between the members of the editorial collective of *ephemera*. For us, that is exactly what *ephemera* is or should be: an ongoing dialogue on organization (the original sub-title of the journal was *critical dialogues on organization*).

Let us take as our point of departure the very exit in Spoelstra, O'Shea and Kaulingfreks' reflection in 7(2):

Some challenges then – what can you do to sustain us at the margins? Not simply to affirm but to question, subvert, challenge and transgress the field. What can you do, as marginal, to oppose your own subjection by our academic field and contest the legitimacy of the centre that forecloses and totalises? (p. 285)

This question raises some interesting and crucial issues regarding what it *means* to work, to write and think, in and from the margins. What kind of writing existence is the marginal one?

A mundane form of marginal writing is that taking place when we read and make use of the margins of the book or article page as a space for our reflections, associations, thought, critique and comments. Jotting down uncensored pieces from the flow of consciousness in the margins of a text is a very physical manifestation of writing marginally. From outside the centre of the page the reader/marginal writer can respond

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\* Peter Svensson would like to thank Matilda Arvidsson for her thoughts and inspiration during conversations on marginal writing in the fall of 2007 in Lund, Malmö and Copenhagen.

to and comment on the text. Marginal writing then becomes a way of discussing *with* – not *within* – the centre text.

If we expand this mundane form of marginal writing to a reflection on marginality as an academic position, marginal writing is a way, perhaps *the* way, of discussing and engaging in a dialogue with the field of organization studies without actually becoming a received part of it, without writing within it. The dialogue thus takes place in-between positions. Arguably, the marginal is the ultimate position to assume in a dialogue. You cannot go any further than to the marginal without exiting the discussion at hand. Beyond the margins looms a different discussion.

As also acknowledged by Spoelstra, O'Shea and Kaulinfreks in their 7(2) editorial a marginal position, intended or realized, renders problematic popularity and impact. What is the relation between marginal writing and the width of its distribution? Arguably, marginality cannot enter the state of popularity without facing the risk of self-destruction. The marginal writer can never be a part of the field if by 'the field' we refer to the corpus of ranked journals with established editorial boards and high impact factors. Spoelstra, O'Shea and Kaulinfreks (2007: 282) pose a question pointing to the very heart of writing, i.e. whether "we have lost the plot?" Perhaps the answer to this question is nothing but a roaring, indeed a marginal, *No!* Perhaps this is the plot. The marginal position resides in its unwillingness – maybe even inability – to gain popularity as defined through established rankings of journals. Hence, *ephemera* is not marginal within the field of organization studies; it is (or can be) marginal just because it is *not* within the field of organization studies.

Is this to say that the marginal can never be popular? That a prevalent presence on Google Scholar would be an indication of a loss of marginality?

Perhaps so. Perhaps even yes. However, this is not necessarily a result of some immanent logic in the relation between the centre and the marginal, but rather as a consequence of an academia governed by market logic. Being mainstream or marginal/alternative becomes in this world little more than a matter of being in or out of demand on the market of texts and ideas. A core competence of a researcher, so we are told in PhD-programmes, conferences and by well meaning senior colleagues, is that of being receptive to fads and gaps in research. Pragmatism and opportunism are brought to the fore as vital tools in the survival kit of research careers. The market logic of academia is as clear as it is destructive for marginal writing: If you want to become a researcher, come inside and join us – in here, not out there. The invitation to the community of successful researchers is an explicit call for being in demand.

However, being in demand involves a risk of ending up in the broad mainstream, as accepted, received, established, legitimate, predictable, applauded. Popularity can be quite a pleasant state of being, however one that compellingly pulls us into the centre court of mainstream discourse.

Is unpopularity necessarily a sad state of existence? Maybe this is exactly what marginality is all about: to be unpopular, out of demand, the one without a date on the

school prom, the one standing in the corner of the conference drinks reception, the only one never receiving any awards. Maybe the marginal is the habitat of the few.

Whereas the centre can be expanded infinitely (in an entirely homogeneous system, the centre fills up all space), the marginal is always situated in-between the centre and the rest of discourse (that which is constructed as another discussion). Consequently, the margin tends to be a narrow position and does not handle overpopulation very well. A crowded margin can be the genesis of a new centre.

## Marginal Centres

What happens when the margin becomes crowded? When there are too many notes scribbled at the edge of the page; When there are too many people hanging around at the edge of the school disco, staring into their drinks; When being geeky becomes a piece of serious cultural capital? When the early hours are no longer the province of the lonely stroller; When the most deviant behaviours and styles become something which an accountant would declare themselves 'down with'; When it becomes acceptable for a twelve year old from a bourgeois family to wear a t-shirt declaring them to be a 'pimp', 'hustler', 'criminal', or 'dirty girl'? When business school professors get into psychoanalysis and masochism?

These situations may appear to be outlandish, but the marginal has become so central to many contemporary aspects of organizing. In their *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, Boltanski and Chiapello point out that calls for creativity, flexibility, empowerment and fluidity which were once apparently marginal have become the very stuff of the new economy. They note that new wave managers (in France at least) have sought to "stress the continuities between the commitments of their youth and the activities they pursued in their firm" (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005: 97). These corporate margin dwellers have sought to do this through emphasising a new set of values which act as a gateway to success in the new capitalism. These are:

Autonomy, spontaneity, rhizomorphic capacity, multitasking (in contrast to narrow specialization of the old division of labour), conviviality, openness to others and novelty, availability, creativity, visionary intuition, sensitivity to differences, listening to lived experience and receptiveness to a whole range of experiences, being attracted to informality and the search for interpersonal contacts. (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005: 97)

According to Boltanski and Chiapello, the margin has become the centre. The concerns of post-structuralism and the fascinations of cultural studies have fuelled the slang of corporate hipsters. Indeed in this issue of *ephemera*, Colin Cremin points out that it has become a virtual right of passage for any aspirant investment banker to propel themselves into the margin through a 'gap year' experience. This is a time where middle class youth engage in purposefully deviant activity like taking drugs, hanging out with 'ethnic peoples' and becoming ecologically aware and perhaps helping street kids somewhere in an un-named Latin American megalopolis.

So where are margin dwellers left when their uncomfortably cool place gets filled? What is to be done? There are a number of solutions on offer. One would be a kind of

neo-conservatism that attempts to reassert the importance of the centre, and strictly police the margins. This typically involves a return to the good old bread and butter rules. This is what René ten Bos calls the ‘new severity’ – a desire to do away with the corporate hi-jinks and obsession with creativity and wackiness in favour of a rule bound world. It is a desire for systematic and contractual punishment in place of the anything-goes fun-fare of contemporary capitalism. This is the kind of solution which contemporary champions of the return to bureaucracy flirt with.

A second solution would be a search for a radical change which would seek to make explode any dividing line between marginal and central. This appears to be the hope of what Nancy Fraser (1997) once called ‘deconstructive socialists’ – this is the attempt to interrupt boundaries and systems of classification which render some marginal and some central. It is to not only celebrate characters that cross these margins, but to actually begin to seek to erase these differences, or at the very least to radically question them. This seemed to be the strategy of many during the last ten years who have celebrated the potential of ambiguity, hybridity, and border crossings. In recent years, this kind of approach has found its embodiment in not just armchair deconstructionists but also those of a more practical bent such as the Zapatistas. In this issue you will find Khasnabish celebrating the shape-shifting and margin-crossing nature of Subcomandante Marcos.

A third approach might be taking seriously the formation of marginal centres. These are gathering places at the edge of activity, a place where marginality can be supported, sustained, and maybe not made so marginal. It is a place for clustering, places where we might sustain ourselves at the edges. This would involve looking at the gatherings which can and indeed do happen when more people come and go from the edges. This might form a pattern like the ‘foam’ that Peter Sloterdijk talks of in his final volume of the *Sphären Werke* (2004). If we are serious about maintaining these marginal centres, then we need to begin to ask ourselves how it is possible to sustain them, sustain each other. And indeed what spirit is needed? Is it just one of the lonely wanderer looking for an edgy experience, looking to be the man in black, looking for the bliss of emancipation from social norms, looking for autonomy from oppressive systems? Or could we imagine these marginal spirits being sustained by another dream, maybe groups being washed up at the margins together and sustaining themselves in certain atmospheres.

## Contributions to this Issue

In the first article of this issue, Alex Khasnabish discusses insurgent imagination as a way of articulating new forms of radical political actions and as a mode of engaging collectively in a hopeful creation of cultural and historical meaning. In this article, the impact of the Zapatista movement on the development of new insurgent imaginations amongst North American alter-globalization, anti-capitalist and social justice activists are explored. “To take social change projects seriously”, Khasnabish (this issue) argues, “we must also attend to this imaginative terrain and practice.”

In the next article, Colin Cremin offers a Žižek- and Lacan-informed reading of the phenomenon of the gap year. In the business and promotion of the gap year Cremin discerns a promise of a way out of the routinized everyday life and an entry into the *real* life, full of surprises and contingency. At the same time the gap year is constructed as a productive practice of self and career development where strengthened employability becomes a crucial selling proposition. As a promise of a safe escape from the routines of late-capitalism, the gap year is, Cremin suggests, an instance of the commodification of the contingent.

In his paper, René ten Bos engages with a new generation of management gurus. He points out that clown like calls for jocularly, fun and frivolity in the workplace have become increasingly passé. Instead, the management gurus call for a move back to the rule-book. This involves what ten Bos identifies as a kind of new corporate masochism – a desire to not just play by the rules but to be punished by them as well.

In the next paper, Christian Maravelias discusses the impact of the transformation from bureaucratic to post-bureaucratic principles of exercising power upon individuals' freedom at work. He argues that, rather than implicating an increase or decrease in individuals' freedom, this transformation results in a reconfiguration of its nature. Following his discussion, Maravelias warns that post-bureaucracy brings with itself the risk of "driving individuals into cynical and self-satisfied opportunism."

In her article, Prue Burns writes about Australian Generation X-ers. Deeply aware of the difficulties involved in speaking from the position of someone who belongs to a group which "simply do(es) not belong," Burns offers a personal, at times painful account of the cultural traits of her generation. In posing the question "So who are we?" Burns does not wish to provide a finite answer. Rather, her final words are words of inspiration and hope about who Australian Generation X-ers might become.

The Turbulence Collective has provided a brief note which reflects on the last year. For some it has been a year of triumphs, joy, love and pain. For them it has been a year when the alter-globalization movement has had to ask the question: "are we winning?" They invite the reader into a discussion of this and other pressing questions.

Bruno Latour's book *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-theory* is reviewed by Jeroen Veldman. The book is depicted as an introduction to ANT and as an argument for a wider understanding of 'the social' and 'agency', to wit, one that refrains from "the privileging of humans in the study of the social" (Veldman, this issue), and hence takes both human actors and non-human actors into account. Moreover, Latour advocates a research approach that takes seriously social life as it is played out in local and particular everyday situations.

Carl Cederström reviews Yannis Stavrakakis' book *The Lacanian Left: Psychoanalysis, Theory, Politics*. He praises Stavrakakis for the insights he offers into the differences between Žižek's and Laclau's respective theories, and for his overall comparative analysis of the four thinkers termed by Stavrakakis 'the Lacanian Left': Žižek, Laclau, Castoriadis and Badiou. Whilst not uncritical of the text, Cederström recommends it to

the readers as, arguably, “the most important resource for anyone interested in exploring Lacan empirically.”

Finally, Campbell Jones provides some reflections on one of the massive, most long awaited, yet most challenging intellectual events of recent years – the publication of the first complete English translation of Jacques Lacan’s *Écrits*. In the context of the recent outbreak of Lacanianism in organization studies, the good Doctor offers a wise prescription: *Read*.

## Exit/Entry

Let us exit this editorial and enter the 7.4-issue with one last question: Does the discussion in this editorial propose that being read and appreciated is a dangerous thing? Why should we publish if there is no single public? How do we write in foam?

The main thrust of the discussion is nothing more than a reflection on some of the tensions between writing from the margin of and writing within the field of organization studies. Applauds are seductive but potentially disarming. One mode of avoiding the gravity of mainstream, the exit from the margin, is to be in constant flux, to nurture a suspicious mind towards appreciation from the field, and to beware of broad agreement.

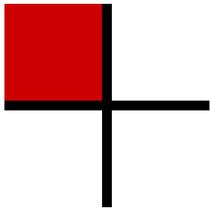
In that sense, the ephemeral aspirations of *ephemera*, “the celebration of the *ephemeral*, passing, transient, resistant to solidification, reification, massification” (Böhm, Jones and Land, 2001: 3) is intimately related to its ambition to operate from the margin(s) rather than from within the centre of the field of organization studies. Writing in the margins is being elsewhere. But is this desirable? Aren’t we here now? In this foam together? Maybe what we might hope for is a little stability; being able to touch, share words, and see each other for a few moments before the foam washes away and the world tears us apart again.

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## Insurgent Imaginations\*

Alex Khasnabish

### abstract

In the 1980s, ascendant neoconservative and neoliberal elites intoned ‘there is no alternative’ to global capitalism and its trappings of liberal democracy and in the decades since they have demonstrated their unrestrained desire to make reality match rhetoric. Today neoliberal capitalism dominates the global economic landscape even as its war machine strives for ‘full spectrum dominance’. The concrete realities of people’s lives around the world have been shaped by the brute materiality of these practices and processes but there is also another terrain that has become subject to colonization and enclosure: the imagination. Yet, as movements such as the Zapatistas have so powerfully reminded us, we never concede our capacity to dream, to envision other worlds, and to begin walking towards them. In this spirit, this article considers the intersection of Zapatismo, the insurgent imaginations of northern activists in the Americas, and radical political practice. By exploring this complex terrain, I intend to provide a glimpse of the powerful possibilities available to peoples’ movements that take up the challenge of reimagining the world even as they attempt to remake it.

In *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopias East and West* (2000), Susan Buck-Morss offers a provocation on the passing of modern utopias and the relationship between emerging collective political imaginaries and radical socio-political possibility:

From the Wall of China to the Berlin Wall, the political principle of geographical isolation belongs to an earlier human epoch. That the new era will be better is in no way guaranteed. It depends on the power structures in which people desire and dream, and on the cultural meanings they give to the changed situation. The end of the Cold War has done more than rearrange the old spatial cartographies of East and West and the old historico-temporal cartographies of advanced and

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\* This work is only a partial reflection of the dedicated and passionate work carried out by activists across Canada, the United States, and Mexico who so generously shared their time and insights with me. Politically and academically, I remain indebted to the inspirational struggle for an ‘other’ politics carried out by the Zapatistas in Chiapas, Mexico. I want to convey my deepest gratitude to my doctoral supervisor, Dr. Petra Rethmann, for all her feedback, support, and critical engagement over the years. I would also like to offer my sincere appreciation to the reviewers of this piece and to the editorial collective at ephemera whose constructive comments and encouragement were invaluable in the revision process. For their financial support of this research I also gratefully acknowledge Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the Institute on Globalization and the Human Condition, and the Faculty of Graduate Studies at McMaster University. As always, this work would not have been possible without the support, inspiration, and critical insights of my partner Candida Hadley. This piece is dedicated to our son, Indra, who reminds me every day that other worlds are not only possible, they are necessary.

backward. It has also given space for new imaginings to occupy and cultivate the semantic field leveled by the shattering of the Cold War discourse.

As long as the old structures of power remain intact, such imaginings will be dreamworlds, nothing more. They will be capable of producing phantasmagoric deceptions as well as critical illumination. But they are a cause for hope. Their democratic, political promise would appear to be greatest when they do not presume the collectivity that will receive them. Rather than shoring up existing group identities, they need to create new ones. (2000: 277-278)

Since the mid-1990s, no movement has better exemplified the spirit, possibility, and precariousness of the era Buck-Morss illuminates here than the Zapatistas of Chiapas, Mexico. On January 1, 1994, in the midst of neoliberal triumphalism in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union and with flagrant disregard for the grandiosely declared 'end of history,' the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), a guerrilla army composed primarily of indigenous Mayan peasants, rose up in the far southeastern Mexican state of Chiapas and declared '¡Ya basta! – Enough!' to the neoliberal reincarnation of the 500 year old trajectory of genocide, racism, colonialism, and imperialism. While the EZLN declared its intention to advance on Mexico City, overcome the federal army, depose the federal executive and allow for free and democratic elections (see Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, 2001a), the shape of the insurgency would ultimately bear little resemblance to this relatively straightforward revolutionary agenda. Furthermore, while Mexican civil society would indeed respond to the Zapatista uprising, this response would not take the form of the mass insurgency initially called for by the Zapatistas. Perhaps most surprisingly, the Zapatista rebellion would resonate far beyond the borders of Mexico, engaging in a complex and unanticipated transnational dialogue with a diversity of voices.

The resonance of Zapatismo, the political philosophy and practice of the Zapatista movement, amongst groups of North American political activists and the insurgent political imagination which has fuelled it are the phenomena upon which I focus here. Rather than focusing upon the concrete practices which have emerged out of the resonance of Zapatismo in the north, in this paper I examine the ways in which this resonance has provoked new imaginings of the political amongst a diversity of activists, a process which has in turn served to lay the groundwork for the articulation of new forms of radical political action. In employing the term 'resonance' I seek to describe an experience by which people are able not only to engage with political struggles which have emerged far from the contexts within which they live and work but, more significantly, through which they are able to find those struggles meaningful within their own spaces and places. In this sense, resonance refers neither to the act of 'projecting' a struggle nor to the act of 'receiving' it; rather, it is the non-linear process and experience of making new political connections and new political meanings out of an encounter with another. These encounters need not be physical, communications technologies such as DVDs, CDs, the Internet, and a variety of textual forms can, and often do, serve as the 'connective tissue' facilitating resonance. Yet resonance is neither random nor is it simply romantic, instead it testifies to the emergence of new understandings of political action, struggle, and possibility. Amongst the actors involved, it also speaks to a sense of sharing a terrain of struggle – however broadly defined – as well as the recognition of a common threat or subject against which to struggle.

As for the notion of insurgent political imaginations, I employ this term as a double reference: generally, to imagination as a fundamental dimension of radical political action; specifically, to the political projects that have emerged directly and indirectly due to the influence of Zapatismo's transnational resonance. As will become clear, these imaginations are 'insurgent' for four reasons: first, they orbit around a radical understanding of socio-political action as a project which must be directed from below rather than imposed from above; second, these imaginations embrace a notion of socio-political change as multi-layered and dynamic rather than being dominated by ideological dogmatism; third, these imaginations envision a political horizon of radical social, cultural, economic, and political transformation rather than piecemeal reform; fourth, these imaginations are not fully formed projects or political blueprints, they are provocations which offer glimpses of many possible futures that do not rely upon the logic of hegemony to inspire action. In this sense, they are what Utopian Marxist theorist Ernst Bloch (1986) called 'forward dreams,' unfolding visions of the future that are multiple and unclosed. Theoretically, this conceptualization of the political imagination shares an affinity with Susan Buck-Morss' use of the 'political imaginary'. Drawing from the work of Russian philosophers Valerii Podoroga and Elena Petrovskaja, Buck-Morss explains that rather than referring merely to "the logic of a discourse, or world view" the political imaginary is a "topographical concept... not a political *logic* but a political *landscape*, a concrete visual field in which political actors are positioned" (Buck-Morss, 2000: 11-12). Imagination seen in this way is the terrain of possibility. This understanding of the political imagination in its insurgent formations also evokes the ambivalent, plural, and diverse political imaginary of 'utopian spaces' rather than the totalizing, teleological, and forever deferring political imaginary of 'utopian worlds' engaged by Simon Tormey in his exploration of the social forum process (2005). It is precisely this unclosed terrain of possibility that so much contemporary political and social movement analysis misses due to a reliance on an overly structural and hydraulic framework. As Eric Selbin argues:

along with the material or structural conditions which commonly guide our investigations, it is imperative to recognize the role played by stories, narratives of popular resistance, rebellion and revolution which have animated and emboldened generations of revolutionaries across time and cultures. (Selbin, 2003: 84)

This imaginative terrain generated through the encounter between northern activists and Zapatismo is precisely what I explore here. This analysis draws upon a year of interviews, fieldwork, and targeted participant observation with alter-globalization, anti-capitalist, and social justice activists in Canada, the United States, and Mexico for whom Zapatismo had proven to be powerfully resonant.<sup>1</sup> In Canada and the United States, the resonance of Zapatismo has given rise not only to a diversity of organizations expressing direct solidarity with the Zapatistas but also to forms of

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1 From September 2003 to October 2004 I worked with activists in Canada, the United States, and Mexico who were engaged in political action they themselves identified as bearing the marks of Zapatismo's resonance. The organizations and groups represented by these activists include: Building Bridges, Global Exchange, the Mexico Solidarity Network, Food for Chiapas, Big Noise Tactical, the Chiapas Media Project, members from the organizing committee for the Third Intercontinental Encuentro for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism, Peoples' Global Action, the smartMeme Strategy and Training Project, and the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty.

political activism which overflow the bounds of solidarity and which have yielded new and unanticipated results. The existence of these collectives, organizations, and individuals can be read as signifying the material consequences of Zapatismo's transnational resonance but it is to the reflections of individual activists that I turn in this paper in order to explore the generative role played by Zapatismo in the emergence of new insurgent imaginations of political action and possibility.

## Radical Hope, Insurgent Imaginations

Invocations of 'hope' and 'imagination' are of course not the exclusive province of progressive or radical political movements. Indeed, 'hope' and 'imagination' are key terrains of commodification and colonization for neoliberal capitalism just as they are for a variety of reactionary and even fascist political projects. During our conversation in the winter of 2004, Patrick Reinsborough of the smartMeme Strategy and Training Project, a collective directed toward 'injecting new ideas into culture' and challenging the system at 'the point of assumption', spoke of his own evaluation of the significance of imagination and its relationship to the social in ways that connect to analyses of imagination as a constitutive force:

around much of the world and in many marginalized communities in the United States... coercion is maintained through physical brutality, whether it's the nightsticks of police or the brutality of the paycheck and the factory, but for many people in the United States the coercion that keeps them in line with the system is less about physical brutality and more of an ideological coercion, a mythological coercion. (interview, March 9, 2004)

The coercion exercised by corporate news and entertainment media, educational curricula increasingly tailored to meet the needs of capital, and the neoliberal dogma continually repeated by government and right wing, 'market-oriented' think tanks serves to produce 'control mythologies' which effectively constrain people's ability to even imagine how the world might look different (Reinsborough, 2004). Patrick's comment speaks powerfully to the notion that the imagination in a social context is not merely something to be 'mobilized' but rather is something that is always at work and which can function to inspire reactionary tendencies just as easily as democratic and liberatory ones. The challenge thus becomes finding ways of liberating imagination from the enclosures imposed upon it by neoliberal capitalism and by various political projects directed toward protecting existing structures of privilege and power.

Imagination as a powerful collective resource for the constitution of any social order is a theme that ran through my conversations with activists engaged in a wide variety of projects. Manuel Rozental, Colombian political exile, member of the Canada-Colombian Solidarity Campaign, and physician, reflected on this theme in our conversation during the winter of 2003. With respect to the importance of imagination in relation to political action and socio-political change, Manuel remarked:

I think that... it's the essential component [in the political], but what one understands by imagination is different and that's the key... see, we human beings are by nature, as strange as it may sound, creators of history, this is what we do different from a tree or a cow, we make history so... that transforms that into both a right and a responsibility, an obligation, we have to create

history. Now the sources, the inspiration for us to become involved in creating history and the expressions are all related to imagination, we have to imagine what history should be like, what our lives should be like, what everybody else's lives should be like and in fact the main thrust of communication between human beings... is precisely a shared imagination. So we're alive precisely for that, we're alive to develop an image of what life should be and then to name it collectively, to give it words, and to give it actions, and then that thing turns around in circles, the more we see the more we imagine, the more we imagine the more we act, the more we act the more we see again and imagine and act and the more we relate to each other through that and political passion is actually the outcome of the passion to achieve something from imagining and politics are actually the act of sharing imagination and without that what sense would there be? (interview, December 10, 2003)

Imagination as a creative, communicative, and foundational act is eloquently expressed in Manuel's comment. As Manuel asserts, imagination is not merely an individual act, it is a collective potential and expression and it is the tool by which human beings are able to engage their responsibilities as creators of cultural and historical meaning. Ultimately, it is the way in which as human beings we are able to envision and build possible futures.

Fiona Jeffries, cultural writer, academic, activist, and participant in the first Zapatista-convoked Intercontinental Encuentro for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism<sup>2</sup> in 1996 also spoke of the conflicted nature of imagination during our conversation in the winter of 2004 in Vancouver, British Columbia. Fiona explored the ambivalence of imagination in a context characterized by the voracious expansion of neoliberal capitalism:

Yes [imagination is] important... but... there's no... perfect articulation of a problem that's going to grab people's imagination and make people go with it 'cause... it's not just about imagination it's about... the circumstances of people's lives... I think that's one of the things that neoliberalism has done so successfully is... this serious frontal assault on the imagination, well I mean neoliberalism as... the outer limit of... commodity fetishism and citizenship through consumption... as an ethos... all your sense of imagination and self is externalized into this... act of drawing things around you... that make you a member, that include you... implicitly and explicitly... (interview, March 13, 2004).

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2 The Intercontinental Encuentros (Encounters) for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism emerged from the Zapatista movement's engagement with individuals and social movements around the world following the Zapatista uprising. More than 3000 grassroots activists from over 40 countries attended the first Encuentro held from July 27 to August 3, 1996 in Zapatista territory in Chiapas, Mexico to discuss the dynamics of and alternatives to neoliberal capitalist globalization (Kingsnorth, 2003; Neill, 2001; Notes From Nowhere, 2003). The most significant outcome of the first Encuentro, aside from bringing such a diversity of activists together, was the commitment on the part of the participants to create an intercontinental network of resistance and communication and to hold a second Encuentro a year later in Europe. One year later, the second Encuentro, organized by a variety of groups, was held in Spain. Drawing more than 3000 activists from 50 countries, the second Encuentro was directed toward building the networks of communication and resistance which emerged from the first Encuentro (Esteva, 2001; Flood, 2003). Two additional Encuentros have since been held in Zapatista territory in Chiapas, Mexico, one in December 2006/January 2007 and the other in July 2007. These Encuentros have been aimed at reinvigorating a global movement of resistance and alternative-building to neoliberal capitalism as well as reconnecting the Zapatista struggle with other movements around the world.

Thus imagination cannot be taken as an uncompromised force for progressive political change, particularly within a context shaped by the logics of neoliberal capitalism. As critical cultural theorist Henry Giroux forcefully argues, under conditions of suffering, inequality, and structural violence generated by neoliberalism, imagination can just as easily be put to work upon a political landscape of proto-fascism (Giroux, 2004). It is therefore not a matter of simply ‘liberating the imagination’ or creating spaces within which it is possible to ‘imagine alternatives’ precisely because of the fact that imagination in a social context is always at work, but it is at work according to specific socio-political conditions and dynamics. ‘Hope’ and ‘imagination’ are indeed terrains of power and possibility but they are by no means inherently liberatory and their content must be collectively articulated and defended if they are to provide more than a bulwark for the status quo. Indeed, unless it is grounded in the lived realities of people’s lives, imagination, even in its most radical formation, can constitute little more than a fantastic escape from the complexities and difficulties involved in organizing movements for radical change. Even more dangerously, an imagination divorced from lived contexts and living communities can become spectacular in nature, productive not of movement but of a culture of performance and spectatorship (see Routledge, 2005).

## **The Political Imagination of Zapatismo**

Before proceeding to my analysis of the insurgent imaginations provoked by Zapatismo’s resonance, a few words need to be said about Zapatismo itself and the concrete socio-historical context from which it has emerged. Indeed, in order to appreciate the significance of the resonance of Zapatismo’s insurgent imagination the politico-ethical practice of Zapatismo needs to be situated and understood. One of the very first indications that the Zapatista Army of National Liberation was something other than the familiar Maoist or Guevarist insurgent inhabiting so much of Latin American history was provided on January 1, 1994, the first day of the Zapatista uprising. In an impromptu interview following the EZLN’s liberation of San Cristóbal de las Casas, the old colonial capital of Chiapas, an insurgent calling himself Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos provided the following explanation for the uprising:

what was needed was for someone to give a lesson in dignity, and this fell to the most ancient inhabitants of this country that is now called Mexico, but when they were here it did not have a name, that name. It fell to the lowest citizens of this country to raise their heads, with dignity. And this should be a lesson for all. We cannot let ourselves be treated this way, and we have to try and construct a better world, a world truly for everyone, and not only a few, as the current regime does. This is what we want. We do not want to monopolize the vanguard or say that we are the light, the only alternative, or stingily claim the qualification of revolutionary for one or another current. We say, look at what happened. That is what we had to do.

We have dignity, patriotism and we are demonstrating it. You should do the same, within your ideology, within your means, within your beliefs, and make your human condition count. (Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos, 2002: 211-212)

While some commentators have claimed that the EZLN’s indigenous character and the rhetoric of dignity, radical democracy, and inclusivity were cynical political manoeuvres made by the Zapatista leadership to mobilize international support only

after the rebellion began (see Meyer, 2002; Oppenheimer, 2002), Marcos' invocation of these elements as well as his explicit renunciation of revolutionary vanguardism on the first day of the uprising point instead to the fundamental nature of these principles for the Zapatistas.

The Zapatista Army of National Liberation appeared publicly for the first time on January 1, 1994 when thousands of EZLN guerrillas seized several towns and hundreds of ranches in Chiapas. Later it would be known that in mid-1992, Zapatista communities had made the decision to go to war "to coincide with 500 years of resistance" (Harvey, 1998: 198). In 'The First Declaration of the Lacandón Jungle,' the Zapatista declaration of war which was publicly issued just prior to the interview with Subcomandante Marcos quoted from above, the General Command of the EZLN states that "we are a product of five hundred years of struggle," explicitly narrating a history of struggle not only of Indigenous peoples against Spanish invaders, but of the people of Mexico against invasion, dictatorship, poverty, and repression (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, 2001a: 13). While asserting their goal to advance on the Mexican capital and depose the federal executive in order to allow "the people liberated to elect, freely and democratically, their own administrative authorities," the Zapatistas also outline the central goals of their struggle, namely: "work, land, housing, food, health care, education, independence, freedom, democracy, justice, and peace" (*ibid.*: 14). These demands evoke not only the concrete concerns of peasants living in the far southeast of Mexico today, but also echo the demands of Mexican revolutionaries for almost three hundred years. Significantly absent from this list of goals are the seizure of the state apparatus, the claiming of ownership of radical struggle and its spoils by one particular group, and the invocation of a singular revolutionary telos. 'The First Declaration of the Lacandón Jungle' is, in this sense, an explicit reclamation of the Mexican Revolution and the Mexican nation from those who had usurped it and an invitation to a multitude of others to join in a struggle whose contours must be shaped collectively.

From the moment of its public emergence, the EZLN appeared at once familiar within the pantheon of revolutionary struggle in Latin America and radically different from it. An examination of the socio-historical roots of Zapatismo offers compelling insight into why. By calling themselves 'Zapatistas', the contemporary Zapatista movement is invoking the original Zapatista movement which took place during the Mexican Revolution from 1910-1917. Led by the agrarian revolutionary Emiliano Zapata, after whom both original and contemporary Zapatistas take their name, the Liberating Army of the South, an insurgent peasant army, would become one of the most significant fighting forces during the course of the Revolution. Under the banner of 'liberty, justice, and law,' Zapata and his insurgent forces fought for and, for a time, successfully defended radical land reform, community autonomy, and direct democratic practice in what was the most radical political manifestation of the Mexican Revolution. On April 10, 1919, Zapata was lured into an ambush by government forces and assassinated. To this day, his legacy remains that of an uncompromised revolutionary in Mexico and has been deployed by forces of the left and right in order to lay claim to this authentic revolutionary heritage. Indeed, by explicitly situating themselves in relation to this lineage, the contemporary Zapatistas are laying claim to a revolutionary heritage and legitimacy that continues to have profound resonance in Mexico.

Historical allusions aside, contemporary Zapatismo originated out of the encounter between indigenous communities in the Lacandón Jungle and highlands of Chiapas, Mexico and the urban and Marxist-inspired revolutionary cadres who arrived in Chiapas in the early 1980s to begin the work of organizing the peasantry for a revolution. By all accounts, this encounter resulted not in the ‘revolutionizing’ of the indigenous communities but rather in the ‘defeat’ of Marxist dogma at the hands of these indigenous realities, a defeat which actually allowed for the emergence of the Zapatista struggle itself. While Subcomandante Marcos, who would become the Zapatistas’ spokesperson and one of their chief military strategists, and other urban *guerrilleros* arrived not only with the ideological discourse of Marxism but with worldviews shaped by the legacy of the Enlightenment via rational and scientific thought, the indigenous communities whom they encountered grounded their existence upon very different understandings of the world.

As Neil Harvey describes, to the indigenous communities of Chiapas, the rugged mountainous terrain where Marcos and the other guerrillas first lived upon their arrival was not merely a location well-suited to concealing the nascent EZLN, more importantly it was “a respected and feared place of stories, myths, and ghosts” (1998: 165). Furthermore, Marcos and the other urban revolutionary cadres quickly began to realize that indigenous notions of time, history, and reality were fundamentally different from what they had been taught to believe (*ibid.*: 165). As Harvey explains, for these urban guerrillas, “[l]earning the indigenous languages and understanding their own interpretations of their history and culture led to an appreciation of the political importance of patience” (*ibid.*: 166). This lesson in patience would come to characterize Zapatismo’s political imagination for years to come and would provide a powerful model for those struggling in other contexts.

Learning from the indigenous communities and ultimately subordinating their own preconceptions to the realities they encountered in Chiapas had a profound effect not only upon the *mestizo* (mixed heritage) Zapatistas, it also proved vital to the formation of the EZLN itself. “Instead of arriving directly from the city or the university, the EZLN emerged out of la montaña, that magical world inhabited by the whole of Mayan history, by the spirits of ancestors, and by Zapata himself” (*ibid.*: 166). While Marcos had come to teach politics and history to the indigenous of Chiapas, he quickly discovered that this revolutionary pedagogy, steeped in its own epistemology and ontology, made no sense to the communities (*ibid.*: 166). The emergent politics of this encounter required a new language, one that was born of the Zapatistas’ critical reading of Mexican history and current economic and political context combined with the communities’ own histories of genocide, racism, suffering, and exclusion (*ibid.*: 166). This new political discourse would achieve its most powerful form once it was translated into the local Mayan languages (*ibid.*: 166). In the canyons and Lacandón Jungle of Chiapas, Chol, Tzeltal, Tzotzil, and Tojolabal Mayan migrants who had been forced to leave their original highland communities due to chronic land shortages and political cronyism, had become products and practitioners of a very different kind of politics than that which was practiced in highland communities based on ranks of honour and established channels of privilege and power (Womack, Jr., 1999: 18). Separated from the highland context, these migrants constituted new communities and developed systems of politics based on the communal assembly and consensus-based

decision making, thus, in this setting the community ruled their authorities and it was the communities who had decided to go to war (*ibid.*:19). This relationship exemplifies the key Zapatista democratic notion of ‘commanding obeying’ as all authority and legitimacy in this case resides in the community and in the assembly rather than military strongmen or political bosses. As Harvey notes, “the support base of the EZLN inverted the traditional leader-masses relationship and provided a distinctive model of popular and democratic organization” (1998: 166-167). This novel political discourse and practice would infiltrate the imaginations of activists around the world following the uprising in 1994, allowing the result of this convergence to resonate far beyond the borders of Chiapas.

Both nationally and transnationally, the making of meaning and connections are central aspects to appreciating the resonance of Zapatismo. While the original stated goal of the EZLN was to topple the government of Carlos Salinas, defeat the Mexican military, and establish the space necessary for people to restore democracy, liberty, and justice to their own lives, the seizure of state power or the imposition of a unitary vision was never part of the EZLN’s aspirations. As Xóchitl Leyva Solano argues, the “convergence of different political actors” which occurred across Mexico following the Zapatista uprising should not be seen as accidental “since the EZLN discourse had always emphasised the necessity of fomenting ties between the various popular struggles that had taken place in Mexico, in ‘isolated nuclei’, over the past five decades” (Leyva Solano, 1998: 48). In pressing for the opening of democratic spaces within which others could also engage in the pursuit of democracy and social justice in Mexico, the EZLN “established a cultural strategy that called into question the [ruling regime’s] hegemony by reinterpreting national symbols and discourses in favor of an alternative transformative project” (Gilbreth and Otero, 2001: 9). But it was also more than just a strategy of ‘reinterpretation’. Since 1994, the Zapatistas have sought to communicate new kinds of possibilities and experiences not in order to recapture a stolen tradition or history but to make room for a future that has not been foreclosed upon. In the words of Luis Hernández Navarro, “among the most important consequences of the Zapatista movement in our times is that it has stimulated dreams of social change, and resisted the idea that all emancipatory projects must be sacrificed to global integration” and it did so through “the symbolic force of the image of armed revolution that still holds sway for many parts of the population” and “the moral force that indigenous struggles have acquired;” furthermore, once “the cult of the rifles” had worn off what remained and what sustained the Zapatista resonance was the very fact that they continued to articulate and build a new political project (Hernández Navarro, 2002: 64-65). This approach to political struggle, profoundly informed by an engagement with Mexican revolutionary histories, has also served as a powerful base for the transnational resonance of Zapatismo.

## **The Fourth World War**

The Zapatistas have long asserted that the time and space within which we find ourselves now is that of ‘the Fourth World War.’ While the Third World War, otherwise known as the ‘Cold War,’ ended with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the ‘victory’

of neoliberal capitalism over state-sponsored socialism, the Fourth World War marks a time when global neoliberal capitalism has ushered in “a new framework of international relations in which the new struggle for... new markets and territories” has produced “a new world war,” a war against humanity (Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos, 2004a: 257). The socio-political challenge of our time thus becomes not one of capitalism versus communism but rather of a geopolitical system and its agents, armies, and weapons (military, socio-political, economic) versus the vast majority of humanity who not only continue to be marginalized and targeted by this system but who are actively seeking to build alternatives to it. As Marcos writes:

That is what this is all about. It is war. A war against humanity. The globalization of those who are above us is nothing more than a global machine that feeds on blood and defecates in dollars.

In the complex equation that turns death into money, there is a group of humans who command a very low price in the global slaughterhouse. We are the indigenous, the young, the women, the children, the elderly, the homosexuals, the migrants, all those who are different.

That is to say, the immense majority of humanity.

This is a world war of the powerful who want to turn the planet into a private club that reserves the right to refuse admission. The exclusive luxury zone where they meet is a microcosm of their project for the planet, a complex of hotels, restaurants, and recreation zones protected by armies and police forces.

All of us are given the option of being inside this zone, but only as servants. Or we can remain outside of the world, outside of life. But we have no reason to obey and accept this choice between living as servants or dying. We can build a new path, one where living means life with dignity and freedom. To build this alternative is possible and necessary. It is necessary because on it depends the future of humanity.

This future is up for grabs in every corner of each of the five continents. This alternative is possible because around the world people know that liberty is a word which is often used as an excuse for cynicism.

Brothers and sisters, there is dissent over the projects of globalization all over the world. Those above, who globalize conformism, cynicism, stupidity, war, destruction and death. And those below who globalize rebellion, hope, creativity, intelligence, imagination, life, memory, and the construction of a world that we can all fit in, a world with democracy, liberty and justice. (Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos, 2004b: 626-627)

This is not a struggle engaged in by a homogeneous group of people, it is not a struggle built according to strict principles or a revolutionary blueprint, it is rather a struggle that is being joined by people all over the world seeking to affirm their autonomy and interconnectedness, their will to live in a world capable of holding many worlds. Notoriously absent from the quote above and from other Zapatista efforts at constructing and communicating this new politics of radical possibility are the more familiar tropes of socialist imaginations such as the proletariat, the masses, the vanguard, the revolutionary state, and the progressive path from capitalism to socialism to communism. As John Holloway asserts with respect to radical social struggle today, “What is at issue is not who exercises power, but how to create a world based on the mutual recognition of human dignity, on the formation of social relations which are not power relations... This, then, is the revolutionary challenge at the beginning of the twenty-first century: to change the world without taking power. This is the challenge

that has been formulated most clearly by the Zapatista uprising in the south-east of Mexico” (Holloway, 2002: 17-20).

The notion of a systemic and inclusive analysis of the global terrain of struggle emerging at a moment seemingly defined by the defeat of the insurgent left and state-sponsored socialism is a vital element in appreciating the resonance of Zapatismo and its significance for insurgent imaginations elsewhere. Dave Bleakney, a member of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) and one of the North American activists involved in the formation of Zapatista-inspired transnational anti-capitalist network of coordination and communication known as Peoples’ Global Action (PGA), articulated this very sentiment to me when I asked him about his encounter with Zapatismo and the reasons he felt this movement mattered:

When I was... in... Prague for the IMF meeting in 2000 [some PGA comrades and I] were saying what a difference it had been, two years ago nobody was saying the word ‘capitalism’ and now you can open a newspaper and actually see the word and that that was a result of the mobilizations... the discourse had been shifted because when people come and say ‘what are you out here for?’ you wouldn’t just say ‘I’m out here to stop the building of big dams’ or ‘I’m out here to stop racism’, people were saying ‘the system is... corrupt, the system is... exploiting people and is destroying the environment and the system is jailing people’ so it became... not just one issue... and no matter what your issue was, whether it was a workers’ issue or an environmental issue you could bring it back to the system of profit called capitalism and really that period between ’98 and 2000 was when it shifted, particularly around ’99 and after Seattle... [The Zapatistas absolutely had a role in this]... the Zapatistas have helped us to question the nature of things, the norms that we’ve just come to accept without laying out some kind of dogma... I think in many ways the Zapatistas have put a mirror up to us... and whether that happened by accident or was clearly constructed the fact is the mirror is up and the questions are asked. (interview, March 25, 2004)

The notion of Zapatismo as a mirror is a highly evocative image. Rather than merely being another example of a distant and facile fascination with revolutionary struggle in the south, for many activists the Zapatistas actually provided not just a moment of inspiration but one of serious reflection as well. The deliberateness and seriousness of their approach to politics and struggle has unquestionably infiltrated the political discourses of the global justice/anti-capitalist movement and has inflected radical political struggle with a new kind of ethics that is explicitly “for humanity and against neoliberalism.”

Indeed, Peoples’ Global Action, the transnational network with which Dave has been involved, is a powerful example of the significance of the political resonance of Zapatismo. At the end of the first Intercontinental Encuentro for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism held in Chiapas in the summer of 1996, the General Command of the EZLN issued the ‘Second Declaration of La Realidad for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism’, calling for the creation of a “collective network of all our particular struggles and resistances, an intercontinental network of resistance against neoliberalism, an intercontinental network of resistance for humanity” (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, 2001b: 125). Specifying that this network would not be “an organizing structure,” that it would have “no central head or decision maker,” “no central command or hierarchies,” the EZLN called for the formation of a network that would provide channels of communication and support for the diverse struggles “for humanity and against neoliberalism” around the world (*ibid.*: 125). Peoples’ Global

Action would be the network emerging from this call with its ‘official’ birth occurring at a meeting in Geneva in February 1998 attended by 300 activists from 71 countries (Kingsnorth, 2003: 73). Since its birth PGA has been at the centre of many of the most impressive anti-capitalist actions including the protests that confronted the 3<sup>rd</sup> WTO Summit in Seattle in 1999 and has coordinated numerous Global Action Days, conferences, and political caravans.

In the quote above, Dave Bleakney deploys the metaphor of the mirror to evoke Zapatismo’s impact upon the radical imaginations of activists in the north but other activists saw Zapatismo’s resonance in other terms as well. Responding to my question about the significance and reception of Zapatismo by northern activists, Rick Rowley of the radical filmmaking collective Big Noise Tactical interpreted Zapatismo’s impact in terms of historical and imaginative rupture:

In terms of the continent... ‘93 was a several decade low point for movements in this hemisphere... the resistance movements in Latin America had been... successfully destroyed... NAFTA had just been signed... Mexico was already bought and sold basically when NAFTA was signed and the union movement in the States which had been limping along barely was smashed... there was a political horizon in which there was no hope and there were no actors who you could point to or... who would give you the least inkling of the possibility of movement, not in the universities, not in the countryside, not in the factories, not in the cities, nowhere, so... [when] the Zapatistas did emerge, [they] were a tear in the fabric of the present, they were a crack through which it was possible for people to... remember again histories of struggle that they’d been taught to forget or had been... worn away by the last couple of decades and to imagine possibilities of struggle and resistance and imagine different worlds that could be built in this world that they... had not been allowed to imagine... that was the main thing that Zapatismo gave us... it gave the lie... to NAFTA and the entire worldview it stood for, to the triumphalism of the Washington Consensus and... its model of corporate globalization. (interview, September 20, 2004)

In this poetic articulation of Zapatismo’s reception and immediate resonance, Rick points particularly toward the importance of Zapatismo as a “tear in the fabric of the present,” a crack through which it became possible for activists in the north to remember, reimagine, and reconnect with both histories and future possibilities of struggle which seemed to have all but disappeared. Tellingly, Big Noise Tactical, the radical filmmaking collective of which Rick is a part and which has produced such films as *Zapatista*, *This is What Democracy Looks Like*, and *The Fourth World War*, is itself a product of this rupture, emerging as a project out of the resonance of Zapatismo with some of its key activists. The centrality of the conceptual break which Zapatismo facilitated in the face of the ascendance of neoliberal capitalism is something which cannot be overstated and is reflected in the written histories of the contemporary global justice movement as well as in many of the reflections of the activists with whom I spoke.

## Speaking a New Language of Political Possibility

Beyond a sense of shared struggle, Zapatismo has resonated for political activists in Canada and the United States on the basis of an emergent transnational consciousness which has been shaped in part by the operation of neoliberal capitalism itself which has introduced forms of exploitation, insecurity, and violence previously largely unknown

in the north. At a moment when neoliberal capitalism had become intimately and explicitly concerned with exerting total control over the production of subjectivities and over the reproduction of life itself, the Zapatistas reclaimed the struggle for human dignity through their radical and innovative political project and were joined by people all over the world who rejected the same erasure of their agency and humanity as well. As Rick Rowley from Big Noise Tactical eloquently articulated with respect to the connections between Zapatismo's radical and inspiring political imagination and the emergent transnational fabric of struggle for humanity and against neoliberalism:

Zapatismo's not like an ideology that's easy... to lay out... it's not structured like that... it's more like a structure of myth and parables... but so much of it just so clearly articulated something that was in the water already just waiting to be spoken... in the same way that Seattle worked... we were all waiting... the entire world was waiting for so long for something like that to happen in America and when it did it instantly captured everyone's imagination because this is what we were waiting for... the movements were waiting for this to happen... at this difficult moment when... the old logic of movements... that was based on nationalism... both state nationalism and inside of that cultural nationalisms... had been... successfully defeated pretty much all over the place, certainly inside the [United] States it had been marginalized and effectively screwed over... this new model of organizing was something that we... had all been looking for... there's a bunch... of their central points that hit home for everyone... the first and most important one I think was the way they reimagined cross-border solidarity... especially First World-Third World solidarity... the way that forever movements in the north had organized their solidarity with the south around guilt and said that what connects you to people down there is the connection that exists between the oppressor and the oppressed... and that's it, and that created... really hierarchical structures of authority inside of organizations that did solidarity work in the States... that's something that the Zapatistas effectively made impossible... [when] the one person who... could out-trump anyone else's claim to authentic ownership of the struggle... says that, then it's something totally different... so it's because we were all waiting for them to say what they had to say and they were in many ways the only people who could say what they said and have it mean what it meant. (interview, September 20, 2004)

Rick identifies several important points relating to Zapatismo's transnationalized insurgent imagination. First, the resonance of Zapatismo beyond Mexico's borders needs to be understood as a phenomenon intimately related to the context within which it occurred. As Rick notes, Zapatismo resonated so strongly transnationally not only because of its own internal force but because it offered a vision of possibility and resistance people were waiting to hear, something that was already 'in the water' in the aftermath of the global ascendancy of neoliberal capitalism and the demise of its state-sponsored socialist rival in the form of the Soviet Union. The Zapatista rebellion and the insurgent imagination emerging from it can be understood in this sense as a bright spark lighting an already existing fuse of dissent, desire, and political possibility. Second, Zapatismo's transnationally resonant insurgent imagination proved so significant not only because it challenged the old logic of revolutionary movements but also because it provided a new vision and language of what political solidarity could mean across borders. Rather than conceiving of solidarity as a relationship between oppressor and oppressed or privileging a particular subordinate subject position as *the* authentically revolutionary one, Zapatismo instead opened a door onto a new landscape of political subjectivities, possibilities, and relationships capable of inviting people from diverse spaces and places to share in a common struggle "for humanity and against neoliberalism" and for the creation of a world made of many worlds.

Beyond the acknowledgement of Zapatismo as a foundational moment or point of reference within the emergent history of the global justice/anti-capitalist movement as it has been related in the literature coming out of the movement (see Callahan, 2004; Kingsnorth, 2003; Klein, 2002; Midnight Notes, 2001; Notes From Nowhere, 2003; Solnit, 2004), how have political activists living and working in the US and Canada positioned themselves in relation to the Zapatistas? Patrick Reinsborough, a grassroots activist and co-founder of the smartMeme Strategy and Training Project, described his own experience with Zapatismo to me in the following way:

The beauty and the wit and the strategy with which the Zapatistas... set the terms of their own conflict and intervened in something much deeper than... state power in Mexico, they intervened in a global system in a way that was creating new spaces and I think that certainly... much of my political work is... tiny ripple effects of some of the amazing leaps of work that the Zapatistas created, also... the power of poetry... just these incredibly powerful poetic critiques that were happening in a very systemic way that incorporates all the different pieces whether you're talking about an economic critique or a political critique or an ecological critique but also ground them in a commonsense emotional critique I think that's something that I've been very attracted to... in the struggle of the Zapatista movement and other similar resistance movements and trying to figure out... how can we help translate some of the experience... [of] the communities who are being massacred and bulldozed and the places that are being destroyed to feed the insatiable appetite of global consumer society, finding that connection, changing the feedback loop so that those messages, those new ideas are able to reach different parts of society particularly now in America when... a lot of that affluence [that has been perceived as being the reason that Americans haven't been involved in systemic movements] is actually increasingly becoming mythologized... people without health care, vanishing jobs, [an] increasing propaganda state using weapons of mass deception to convince Americans that they should have troops occupying the world... it seems like we're in... a real exciting time, a real crisis and breaking point in the story of global capitalism and that breaking point is really very articulately and effectively foreshadowed by the Zapatistas... in the face of what would seem like the most powerful destructive empire ever created, a global empire of corporate control... the Zapatistas were very effective in reminding us where our real power was, those are the ripple effects that are being felt around the world. (interview, March 9, 2004)

The intersection of imagination and lived reality is brought insightfully to the fore in Patrick's comment. As Patrick foregrounds so importantly here, the powerful poetic critiques articulated by the Zapatistas of issues ranging from neoliberal capitalism to racism to the ethical bankruptcy of conventional representative politics have served to provoke vigorous new insurgent imaginations of the possible amongst a diversity of others.

In addition to poetry, many activists with whom I worked also articulated the importance of the new language of struggle articulated by Zapatismo. Instead of a more traditional revolutionary language focusing upon relations of production, historical teleologies, or social evolutionary schema, Zapatismo has instead connected radical political action with the guiding socio-cultural stories of our time by challenging these hegemonic stories and inviting all of us to imagine new ones upon which to begin building new worlds. Jacquie Soohen, a key activist and filmmaker involved in Big Noise Tactical, articulated the significance of Zapatismo's new language of political possibility and the multiple new ways of speaking when she noted:

so much of the activism in the '70s and the '80s and this whole idea of solidarity activism was... if you just show the truth then that will... overcome something and... it's about speaking truth to power but... I think we're entering a whole different time and the Zapatistas made it clear too that

it wasn't just about this media blockade, it wasn't just about the information not getting out there, it was about this ideological encirclement and how do you break that, and so in the same way [our] films... are not about speaking truth to power in that way... especially *The Fourth World War*, it's about... creating myths... inside this movement and... connections... like a connection-making machine... between these different movements and also... speaking in a way that shows our humanity and the world that we want... and we start to create our own language in different ways and touch people in different ways as opposed to taking the language... of the powerful and using it to just show information because... if there's anything we've learned and we learn more everyday... it's not just... about the information, especially now, it's about... how it's interpreted and used and how people are made to feel connected or disconnected from it. (interview, September 20, 2004)

As Jacquie expresses here, one of the most compelling dimensions of Zapatismo is the way in which it has directly engaged issues of subjectivity, power, and meaning-making. This 'new language' of political struggle materializes the promise of Zapatismo's provocations surrounding issues of vanguardism, the state, privileged identities of struggle, and innovative and inspiring tactics for social change. Equally importantly, this new language has in turn provoked the emergence of other discourses of political struggle and possibility, new languages for new landscapes of socio-political alterity. Of course, this does not mean that the Zapatistas themselves have worked out ideal solutions to the many and varied challenges of radical socio-political change. What it does mean is that through the movement's internal and external struggles as well its attempts at communication within and outside the geographical, political, and cultural bounds of its own space, Zapatismo has participated in provoking questions not only about the goal of social change but of its very nature as well.

If the struggle for a new world is one to be engaged in by people engaged in diverse struggles in their particular worlds, in what way can Zapatismo function as an insurgent imagination capable of catalyzing interconnected resistance and alternative-building across time and space? The capacity of Zapatismo to catalyze such a project is partially illuminated by the ways in which the Zapatistas have situated themselves in relation to a multitude of other peoples in struggle. At the opening ceremonies of the First Intercontinental Encuentro for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism, held in Zapatista territory in rebellion in the summer of 1996 and drawing more than 3000 activists from around the world to consider the promise and possibility of shared struggle, the General Command of the EZLN explicitly articulated 'who we are' in the following way:

This is who we are.

The Zapatista National Liberation Army.  
The voice that arms itself to be heard.  
The face that hides itself to be seen.  
The name that hides itself to be named.  
The red star who calls out to humanity and the world  
to be heard, to be seen, to be named.  
The tomorrow to be harvested in the past.

Behind our black mask,  
Behind our armed voice,  
Behind our unnameable name,  
Behind us, who you see,  
Behind us, we are you.

Behind we are the same simple and ordinary men and women,  
who are repeated in all races,  
painted in all colors,  
speak in all languages,  
and live in all places.  
The same forgotten men and women.

The same excluded,  
The same untolerated,  
The same persecuted,  
We are you.

Behind us, you are us.  
Behind our masks is the face of all excluded women,  
Of all the forgotten indigenous,  
Of all the persecuted homosexuals,  
Of all the despised youth,  
Of all the beaten migrants,  
Of all those imprisoned for their words and thoughts,  
Of all the humiliated workers,  
Of all those dead from neglect,  
Of all the simple and ordinary men and women,  
Who don't count,  
Who aren't seen,  
Who are nameless,

Who have no tomorrow. (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, 2001c: 111-112)

The General Command's assertion of a shared identity with a multitude of diverse others is a powerful rhetorical move because even as it affirms a common struggle it does not erase or subsume difference. Combined with the evocative poetic power characteristic of this and many other Zapatista communiqués, Zapatismo's language and imagination of radical socio-political change represents a fundamental departure from the bureaucratic and homogenizing discourse of so many other revolutionary movements.

The radical diversity of subjectivities in struggle and the explicit recognition of the irreducible significance of a multitude of struggles has been a hallmark of the Zapatistas' approach to political analysis and solidarity from the outset of their movement. The flexibility and thoughtfulness constantly espoused by the Zapatistas with respect to their own struggle for radical socio-political change is something which has facilitated constructive dialogue with others engaged in similar efforts in their own spaces and places. The fundamentally unorthodox approach to radical socio-political change is woven through many Zapatista communiqués but the joy and possibility of this position is nowhere better expressed than in a communiqué issued by Subcomandante Marcos in 1994 in reply to an allegation made in the Mexican press that he was a homosexual:

Marcos is gay in San Francisco, a black person in South Africa, Asian in Europe, a Chicano in San Isidro, an anarchist in Spain, a Palestinian in Israel, an Indigenous person in the streets of San Cristóbal, a gang-member in Neza, a rocker on... campus, a Jew in Germany, an ombudsman in Department of Defense..., a feminist in a political party, a communist in the post-Cold War period, a prisoner in Cintalapa, a pacifist in Bosnia, a Mapuche in the Andes, a teacher in National Confederation of Educational..., an artist without a gallery or a portfolio, a housewife in any

neighborhood in any city in any part of Mexico on a Saturday night, a guerrilla in Mexico at the end of the twentieth century, a striker in the CTM, a sexist in the feminist movement, a woman alone in a Metro station at 10 p.m., a retired person standing around in the Zócalo, a campesino without land, an underground editor, an unemployed worker, a doctor with no office, a non-conformist student, a dissident against neoliberalism, a writer without books or readers, and a Zapatista in the Mexican Southeast. In other words, Marcos is a human being in this world. Marcos is every untolerated, oppressed, exploited minority that is resisting and saying, 'Enough!' He is every minority who is now beginning to speak and every majority that must shut up and listen. He is every untolerated group searching for a way to speak, their way to speak. Everything that makes power and the good consciences of those in power uncomfortable – this is Marcos. (Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos, 1994: np)

This well-known quote by Marcos is important for several reasons. Rather than fencing off and defending a strict political or identity boundary, in both these quotes Marcos asserts a vision of radical plurality and groundless solidarity that confounds typical attempts to delegitimize individuals and struggles based on their authenticity. Facing allegations of homosexuality, Marcos responds not by denying them and reaffirming his masculinity but by establishing his position as one among a multitude of oppressed identities in struggle. Dave Bleakney, CUPW and PGA activist, reflected upon the importance of this statement and the politics it signifies:

I think the Zapatistas open up a whole other area of relations around the importance of honesty, that you don't need to spin anything... it was mentioned a few years ago in Mexico... that Marcos was gay... well here in our culture we would try to do damage control... [we'd say something like] he's not gay but supports gays and all this stuff, whereas there [Marcos] said I'm gay, I'm black... completely turning around the discourse to say yeah I am, I'm all those things, I'm all the things you don't like and more. (interview, March 25, 2004)

As Dave notes, and as with the mock interrogation quote above, instead of defending his purity and orthodoxy, Marcos instead locates himself and the struggle of the Zapatistas as one among a tremendous diversity of others. The political landscape which emerges from this affirmation of radical solidarity is one in which there is no privileged subject position from which to struggle, no correct revolutionary line, no single path to effecting fundamental socio-political change. It is a vision of political struggle and possibility that has provided a strong basis for the transnational resonance of Zapatismo's insurgent imagination.

The explicit and fundamental recognition of the interconnectedness of people's struggles on a global scale as well as the diversity and irreducible significance of each of these struggles is a powerful element of Zapatismo's resonance. In many ways, what the Zapatista discourse of radical inclusivity and openness achieves is what Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe consider in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985) as the construction of 'the chains of equivalents' between struggles. Rather than privileging any particular subject position or site of struggle, the Zapatistas explicitly sought to redefine the terrain of political struggle by articulating a vision of struggle and socio-political change in which all people's struggles for 'democracy, liberty, and justice,' for humanity and against neoliberalism, become equally as important as any other. Fiona Jeffries, a scholar, activist, and writer and who had attended the First Intercontinental Encuentro for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism in Chiapas in 1996 reflected upon the inclusivity of Zapatismo and its implications for political action in the following way:

That quote, that amazing quote “Marcos is gay in San Francisco and a student without books and a Jew in Poland and a Palestinian in Israel”.... That was such a powerful, pluralistic call that was like everybody’s got something... there’s a very few people that are actually benefiting from this situation, we’re all being convinced that this is as much as we can expect to benefit and we shouldn’t ask for anything more, or we shouldn’t fight for anything more, we shouldn’t fight for freedom, that we should just exist ‘cause it could be a lot worse and so I thought that was amazing and I think... that is their strength, their historical subject... is... not in any singular being, their historical subject is people’s desire for freedom... and justice and dignity. (interview, March 13, 2004)

Fiona expresses one of the most powerful elements of Zapatismo’s resonance here by asserting that the Zapatistas’ ‘historical subject’ is not a particular identity or subject position but rather “people’s desire for freedom... and justice and dignity.” Within such a formulation it is possible for people participating in a multiplicity of struggles to see themselves as vital participants in a shared struggle without subordinating themselves to it. Such a capacity to articulate common terrains of struggle and to envision the possibility of movements that are unique and diverse just as they are interconnected and enmeshed in a shared fabric of struggle is most surely the product of insurgent imaginations at work.

## **Insurgent Imaginations and Political Awakenings**

The terrain that I have sought to explore here is one of imagination, but it is not one of an imaginative escape from reality. Instead, it is a terrain upon which it becomes possible to take up the challenges and promises of facing the often nightmarish realities of our present world order and confronting them with radical forward dreams of militant hope and possibility. While there can be a great deal to be learned from the study of organizing strategies and tactics in various locations as well as from paying close attention to the ways in which powerful socio-political struggles for radical change respond to and emerge out of the lived experience of those who constitute them, to take social change projects seriously we must also attend to this imaginative terrain and practice.

There is much more to be said about the significance of Zapatismo for new political imaginations both within and outside of Chiapas, Mexico. One aspect of this phenomenon that certainly demands attention and which I have only fleetingly engaged here is the question of the limits and dangers of powerful political imaginations. When and under what conditions do political imaginations become insurgent and productive of radical action and when do imaginations function as escapist or immobilizing? Even under conditions where insurgent political imaginations such as those provoked by Zapatismo emerge what is their limit given the fact that they remained confined to communities of resistance rather than achieving broad social resonance? Furthermore, is there a danger involved in radical political imaginations which in attempting to build non-hierarchical links amongst diverse struggles and to preserve specificity do so beneath political banners so broad and open they offer no serious, concrete basis for organized movement-building? These questions are beyond the scope of this piece but they loom large for any further consideration of the relationship between imagination as a political force and radical socio-political action. Here I have sought only to provide a

point of entry onto this rich and uncharted terrain and perhaps to provide a provocation urging its further exploration. Obviously, Zapatismo is only one entity inhabiting this terrain, others (including the resurgence of anarchism) also need to be engaged, but its significance for many contemporary radical challenges to the status quo around the world is profound and has often been treated far too instrumentally. To take seriously the promise and potential of these new collectivities in struggle it is essential to understand how the material and the imaginary are mutually constitutive of one another.

In the face of the failure of social democratic, Keynesian, and other technocratic approaches to ameliorating capitalism's worst consequences, the grotesque realities of 'revolutionary' socialist states such as the Soviet Union, and the arrogance of declarations of neoliberal capitalism and its trappings of liberal democracy as 'the end of history', insurgent imaginations such as those provoked by Zapatismo's transnational resonance offer visions of paths beyond these structural and ideological dead-ends. Rather than forwarding a ten point plan for revolutionary change for all peoples everywhere, the political imaginations inspired by Zapatismo that I have sought to partially trace here have instead offered radical, grassroots, hopeful, and open-ended visions of socio-political change. These imaginations are insurgent in relation to the hegemonic socio-political formations of both left and right that have held sway over the terrain of political possibility during the last century because they seek to unsettle the perception that these well-worn projects as the only viable ones. But these imaginations are also insurgent in the sense that they are provocations rather than blueprints, visions of possibility instead of revolutionary or reactionary science. The insurgent quality of these imaginations is central to their power and significance, particularly when they are juxtaposed to the poverty of mainstream political channels and discourse. Testing boundaries, moving over rough and less travelled terrain, always challenging singular claims to power, resisting established authorities and taken for granted truths – these are amongst the most important characteristics of insurgent imaginations. The insurgent political imaginations galvanized by Zapatismo's resonance that I have explored here embody four key qualities that offer hope for the realization of possible futures beyond the failures of familiar projects grounded in hegemony, the state, and a politics of power. The qualities making these political imaginations insurgent are woven through the reflections offered by my research partners just as they emerge from the discourse of Zapatismo itself, and they include: orbiting around a radical and grassroots understanding of socio-political action as a project necessarily directed from below rather than above; conceiving of socio-political change as multi-layered, contextual, and dynamic rather than beholden to ideological certainty; possessing a political horizon of radical social, political, economic, and cultural transformation rather than modest reform; and self-consciously celebrating their existence as provocations, not blueprints, offering glimpses of many possible futures rather than hegemonic monoliths.

Much more needs to be said about the powerful nexus of radical political possibility that is as much spectral as it is material, particularly in a world living through a waking nightmare of predatory accumulation, ecological crisis, and unending war. Neither the material nor the conceptual are privileged here, in fact, this dichotomy itself becomes nonsensical. Not only do insurgent imaginations draw from specific contexts and speak to the needs and demands of the people who inhabit them, they also serve to reshape how subjectivity itself is experienced within these spaces thus creating the opportunity

for new and previously unconsidered socio-political possibilities to emerge. In this spirit, and as a final provocation, I offer the reflections shared with me by Rick Rowley of Big Noise Tactical on the radical possibilities inhabiting the intersection of the spectral terrain of hope and imagination with the materiality of the everyday:

When you march... down a street and the police tell you to go home and you don't go, when fear breaks in that way and you refuse to... allow yourself to be controlled by authority like that then the world changes... I think it's hard to talk about it in terms of imagination because it's not limited to that... every police officer means something else to you, every street means something else... you've rewritten the meaning of the world you walk through and so if you have a network of these experiences that extends throughout every aspect of your life... that produces political subjectivities that are outside of the system... so that... bit by bit we retake our lifeworld... without imagining that there's some space outside of the system... we're not becoming hippies and going up in the mountains and saying 'oh we'll just grow our organic beans here... we can pretend like the rest of the world doesn't exist', that's not a revolutionary position to take either... that's making yourself irrelevant to the rest of the world, but... saying I can't disown this world, I was born into this language, this network, this system, and so... in a way that is... a battle of the imagination. (interview, September 20, 2004)

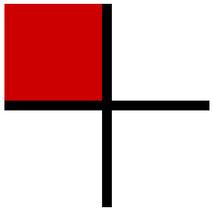
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## Living and Really Living: The Gap Year and the Commodification of the Contingent

Colin Cremin

### abstract

Gap years are associated with periods or breaks, usually in an unfamiliar location, between secondary and tertiary education or one job and another. Explanations for their popularity are found in promotional material on them. These describe the contrasts between the mundane life of subjects in familiar locations and/or situations and the adventure to be had in locations and/or situations seen as unfamiliar, even exotic. The gap year is a time of adventure as well as a means for improving career and educational prospects. In this regard, the ordinary life of paid employment merges into the exceptional life of the gap year. It is 'the time of your life', a period that from another perspective trains and vitalises the subject for the priorities of capital. It is this relationship between the ordinary life of home and the exceptional life of the gap year, or the priorities of capital and subjective desires as spatially and temporally configured, that this article addresses. By referring to promotional material from companies supporting gap years, the article examines the orientations and activities that complement career / lifestyle success. These are described, through a productive reading of Jacques Lacan's notion of 'enjoyment', as injunctions to be enterprising, to enjoy and to be ethical. The work of Slavoj Žižek helps situate the appeal of the gap year here and in terms of a desire to exceed the commodified limits of late-capitalism. With reference to the Lacanian concept of the Real, the event of the gap year, as a moment of excess or contingency, becomes the authentic referent or trauma for (re)imagining the subject for the labour market. Through the gap year example these points are distilled into a more general and essential argument about the relationship of the subject to free-market capitalism.

### Introduction: Commodifying the Gap

The gap year occupies an unusual place in the subject's biography as a period during which a break from formal employment or education is seen as having career and educational benefits. An institutionalised way of living life to the full, the gap year is a period of time – often in a distant location relative to lived experience – when we can fulfil our dreams, however structured, and sustain a relationship to the labour market back home. It is a 'professionalisation' of travel, as Kate Simpson (2005) puts it. It is an instrumentalisation of that most authentic of experiences, the world trip. Here we can formally acknowledge and positively embrace a relationship between travel and employment, to have fun, to be ethical and to advance our status in the struggle for inclusion as employable subjects. In this version of 'holidays in the sun' the experience adds value to the subject's personal profile and can be cashed in, in a manner of

speaking, for a job. In this way, the Gap Year is discursively constructed as productive and liberating:

A gap year is constructive time out – it can be anywhere, anytime, doing anything. You could be building a school in Chile, doing some work experience, basking on a beach in Fiji or simply working for a year to save enough money for university or a new house – or even taking time out to change your career. It is about living life to the full and realising that there is a world of opportunity out there just waiting to be explored. (<http://www.gapyear.com/firsttime/index.php?op=sm&mz=se&id=1760>)

By anticipating these benefits and structuring the trip accordingly, a gap need not signify a break with career trajectories. Here, ‘constructive time out’ and ‘basking on a beach’ are not a contradiction, they show, if anything, that the subject is able to balance their work/life commitments. After all, this is not a worker who will be seen to be too involved in pursuing career goals, to be “ingrown or narrowly focused” as Richard Sennett (2006: 171) puts it. Or, as highlighted in studies on customer services (cf. Fleming and Spicer, 2003: 167), this is not a worker who risks over-identification with routine labour and thus the possibility of (worker) burnout. Some autonomy from work enables us to sustain a productive relationship to the role. So by following the above advice the worker demonstrates their suitability to flexible labour regimes by performing the bureaucratic function and coming across as human too.

With these priorities in mind, the CV can help us to anticipate and frame activities for their post-gap year value or to insure against the risks of time out from formal education and employment. In this regard, a CV has a similar function to inoculations against rabies: to immunise or distance oneself from activities that are seen to have no direct or indirect value to employers. As gapwork.com advise, a gap year:

should be something that adds to your skills and experience, improving your skill set and making your CV more attractive to employers and admissions tutors. (<http://www.gapwork.com/gapsmart/before-you-go>)

UCAS, the university admissions body, endorse this point:

We at UCAS believe that by adding the experience of a planned year out to their qualifications students actively improve their chances of successfully completing a course. Quite simply experience complements education. Universities and colleges widely recognise the potential benefits of taking a year out which, when well-organised, extend into later life. (Anthony McClaran, Chief Executive UCAS, <http://www.yearoutgroup.org/>)

The gap year, then, enables the subject to improve their employment and educational prospects. It helps bolster the opportunities for those with access to the funds (or without commitments), whether acquired through parental support, paid employment or appeals to charity.

It is therefore a given that “[m]ost people need to work to save money before they go on a gap year. You can do this part-time while you are studying, or work for a few months in the UK before leaving” (<http://www.gapwork.com/finance>). Or, “If your family can help you out by lending or giving you money then this could go towards part of the cost” (*ibid.*).

Indications are that people want to take gap years. According to a YouGov poll of 2000 employees: “one in seven have already left the day job to go abroad, and more than 75% are thinking of doing the same” (<http://money.guardian.co.uk/print/0,3858,5179109-110400,00.html>). It is a growing business that improves employment relations: “[it] boosts staff morale and increases productivity. And it’s good for recruiting new people” (Human Resources manager at Yorkshire Water, *ibid.*). However, according to Gapyear.com ([www.gapyear.com](http://www.gapyear.com)), the average amount spent on a gap year is £3000, putting it beyond the means of many people. So, if gap years are beneficial to education and career advance – a point reinforced by the perceptions of recruiters – then it is precisely those in a position of privilege who will improve their competitive position in the job market. This point is not made by the not-for-profit Year Out Group, set up to “promote the concept and benefits of well-structured year out programmes” (<http://www.yearoutgroup.org>) but made up mostly of commercial businesses. They claim that gap year programmes:

are educational in a broad sense and include, for instance, cultural courses and exchanges, expeditions, volunteer work, structured work placements – though not ordinary paid employment, independent travel or au pair work. (<http://www.yearoutgroup.org/>)

The class dimension to gap years, then, should not be understated, nor the point that the appeal of such breaks is likely to extend beyond those who can afford to take them. Should we be in a position to take a gap year we might want to consider whether our particular trip delivers value for money. Will we have a good time and more importantly will that good time (not taking life *too* seriously) improve career prospects?

It [the gap year] can make a big statement about you as a person, both to academics and employers and you know how important that CV is going to be! If properly planned, a year out can say as much, if not more, about you as an individual, as any set of exam results ever can! (<http://www.yearoutgroup.org/students.htm>)

So WHAT you do in YOUR YEAR OUT is VITAL! (*ibid.* original emphasis)

There is a conflation of the person, as defined by their interests and activities, with the expectations of employers. The point made here is reproduced over and again in advice on how to increase competitive advantage for employment. So, in one respect we have the ‘time out’ from formal obligations, a liberation of sorts. Yet the ‘gap’ is defined and determined both for and against routine employment, a non-gap to accelerate or advance particular knowledge, skills and abilities through ‘hands-on’ experience. This is not a ‘holiday’: it is not an example of time-space compression (cf. Harvey, 1989) or a carnivalesque ‘break’ from servitude. Yet there are obvious parallels. For example, if we apply Urry’s (2002: 2-3) analysis of the tourist gaze here, then as with the holiday the gap year presupposes a relationship to ‘regulated and organised work’. There is an ‘anticipation of intense pleasures’. The trip is seen to be ‘out of the ordinary’. There is a collection of ‘signs’ constructing the ‘gaze’, such as, in the case of the gap year, images of the volunteer ‘helping out’ in ‘Africa’. There are also places that the gaze distinguishes from paid work, except in the gap year this relationship is somewhat blurred. Important omissions from this list, for an analysis of the gap year, are the instrumental gaze of career advantage or the ‘enterprising gaze’ (see Cremin, 2003); the ‘ethical gaze’ of the liberal activist (see Simpson, 2004; 2005); and the ‘contingent gaze’, in one sense a beyond what is seen (MacCannell in Urry, 2002: 145), or through

a more apposite conceptual reframing, the desire to exceed the commodity form through a traumatic encounter with the Real (discussed later). The contingent here is important because it expresses both a desire to exceed and a need to authenticate the Gap Year Experience as unique to the individual. So that one does not merely consume a standardised holiday, but encounters something akin to a life changing moment for orienting the subject to cope with lifelong vicissitudes.

Throughout this paper these arguments are developed with reference to material promoting gap years and conceptually framed through Slavoj Žižek's Lacanian-influenced critical theory. In doing this I hope to relate these theoretical points more substantively to the empirical instance of gap years and demonstrate the usefulness of Žižek's ideas when addressing issues of a sociological nature. I should like to emphasise that here my interest in the gap year is almost exclusively in terms of the broader implications of the argument, which is to say not the epiphenomena of 'gap years' as such.

The argument is organised to address configurations of enterprise, enjoyment (fun) and ethics, described here in relation to the Lacanian notion of the superego injunction *enjoy(!)*. Firstly, I unpack the concept of employability and its relation to enterprise through the gap year example. Next, employability is related to enjoyment. This includes an excursus on Lacan via Žižek in order to explain the theoretical framework of the overall thesis. Thirdly, I attempt a brief analysis of the significance of ethical acts to a normatively all-rounded character as functional to neoliberalism (understood as a combination of liberal individualism and laissez-faire economics, cf. Harvey, 2005). In concluding I elaborate on the *contingent* element that exemplifies and authenticates the Gap Year Experience and orients the subject to liberal capitalism.

## The Enterprising Injunction

A selling point of the gap year – or a point of reassurance – is that the employability of the subject is improved. The word 'employability' (see McQuaid and Lindsay, 2005) pertains, for the purpose here, to a reflexive ordering, accessing and marketing of all manner of disparate experiences, activities and identifications, or an ideological 'quilting point' to refer to Lacan (see Žižek, 1989: 87-8), for career advantage. Quoting from government sources, the 'not-for-profit' Year Out Group, underline the relationship between gap years and employability:

Young people who take a year out from their learning or employment can gain so much in terms of personal development and formulating their career choices. But they can benefit too from improved skills – in languages for example – which will make them more employable. And the experience of a year out can shape social values and a sense of community spirit. Ivan Lewis MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Skills and Vocational Education (quoted in <http://www.yearoutgroup.org>)

The idea of employability underlines New Labour thinking on social inclusion (cf. Levitas, 1998). It concerns 'assets', 'marketing and deployment skills', 'presentation' and 'the personal and labour market context' (Tamkin and Hillage, IES Report 361, 1999). It emphasises a supply-side logic (cf. Peck and Theodore, 2000) in which the

causes of and solutions to unemployment lie with the unemployed themselves and their (in)ability to flexibilise, motivate and price themselves into the market. Inclusion in this context is achieved by the efforts of individuals to adapt to a situation taken as given, rather than by addressing the conditions that engender un(der)employment and job insecurity. As such, the need to reflect on, adapt and market the self from the point of view of employers, shifts the relationship towards work from one in which the job is valued according to its immediate satisfactions (wage, well-being etc.), to how the particular role or activity improves future job prospects (cf. Baruch, 2001: 545). As Boltanski and Chiapello (2007) explain, this emphasis on individual 'activity', the idea that a person must never be seen to be without a project or to always be active, relates what the person does within and outside of paid employment.

The perception that in order to compete one has constantly to be involved in something helps to explain the emphasis on 'constructive time out'. By capturing the space of the gap year in the fold of the commodity, the person can avoid the problem that "a gap of any kind, for any purpose... is [seen by employers as being] unforgivable" (Ehrenreich, 2006: 169).

The gap is an enterprising one. The activity is related to the needs of capital. Enterprise refers both to an organizational form and "more generally... an image of a mode of activity to be encouraged in a multitude of arenas of life" (Rose, 1998: 154). In Foucauldian terms the enterprising discourse naturalises itself through the micro-effects of power so that it no longer appears as an object to be acquired but as a pre-discursive fact of life (cf. Burchell *et al.* 1991). Here power is reproduced through self-identifying 'subjectivities' rather than directly through relations of capitalist production (see Knights and Willmott, 1990). It is a point that is somewhat misleading. Following Žižek (cf. Butler *et al.* 2000: 203; also Böhm and De Cock, 2005: 284), the relationship of the subject to the mode of production, however discursively framed, remains the (disavowed) structuring principle. This can be explained in the example of subject disidentification with a particular role; for example, doing the thing while making ironic references to it, claiming that we do not really support the activity we are obliged to do. It is a false disidentification because we are still committing our labour power to the productive process, a situation, however it is viewed, we are obliged to maintain (see also Jaros, 2005: 17 on dilemmas in labour process theory). The point below, that year out group makes about future goals, is an oblique reference to the enduring primacy of capital in the considerations of gap year students:

merely clocking up the air miles or devising exotic ways of spending your own or your parents' hard earned cash, will do little to convince people of any sustained commitment to your all important FUTURE GOALS! ([www.yearoutgroup.com](http://www.yearoutgroup.com))

The subject may imagine that s/he is 'enterprising' independently of the pressures to secure paid employment. However, the choice to choose to partake in activities that employers regard as enterprising is one we are each obliged to make if we are to sustain employability in general terms. As such, enterprise is described here as an injunction that, in anticipation of the argument below on enjoyment, appears as a free choice made in the hope of fulfilling a particular desire (of the Other) or accounting for a lack or asymmetry between the subject and a world organised around the needs of capital.

Below are examples of people who have demonstrated enterprise either by raising money for a gap year or simply by using the time constructively ([http://www.gapyear.com/media/case\\_studies.html](http://www.gapyear.com/media/case_studies.html)):

John, at 18 (now 20), from Coventry, radio DJ: Took a gap year to find focus and further his media interests... Rated as hot property in Coventry he has won awards, met everyone from the Queen, Tony Blair and Hear Say! Now he has found his true career path he is postponing his university place.

Ben, at 18 (now 20), from London, entrepreneur: Featured on television, Ben made his mark in the dot com era and used his gap year to further his business ambitions. Having sold one of his websites to a competitor for a tidy sum Ben still has to his name a huge cyber community and one of the largest adult search engines on the net.

Georgina, at 18, (now 20), from Birmingham, Olympic Swimmer: Trained in her gap year and competed in the Sydney Olympics. Got to the semi finals, took British record.

Jackie at 16 (now 25), Solihull, abortive trip: After years of sexual abuse and expulsion from schools Jackie decided to run away. She stole money at a local charity event and headed off to France for her gap year. But she soon ran into trouble when she realised she'd lost her passport. So instead she took up casual work for unscrupulous firms in London.

Anna at 18 (now 20), at Oxford: Went to Ecuador to do conservation projects in the rainforest. Fundraised by writing an 'Interview Techniques' booklet which she sold to schools.

Stuart at 18 (now 19), from Derby – featured in our 'gapperslive': Assisted teaching deprived children in Brazil. Fundraising: Head shave, 'Day in drag', dad's skydive, held a college party, donations and also £50 from his MEP.

Sam, 30, Australian adventure – featured in our 'gapperslive' [career 'gapper']: Hitting 30 Sam decided to see the world. Her resolve to have fun and live her life overcame working in an office for a living.

The gap year of each individual represents an important stage in self-development. The experience is used as a springboard or opportunity to realise various ambitions and as reference point, even foundation, to future success. Part of the experience is the way the money is raised in the first place. After all, would the gap year have been less successful had Stuart, above, not had a 'Day in drag' and instead cadged the money off his parents? Or Ben, had he not 'made his mark' in the 'dot com era' but made no mark at all? Or Georgina, if instead of dedicating herself to swimming, she did so but ended up with neither a medal nor a job? Or would Anna's gap year experience have suffered if instead of doing 'conservation work' in a rainforest she chose instead to agitate for the violent overthrow of capitalism in London? What redeems these alternate realities is that each one can be marketed as enterprising, that Ben's 'adult sites' or Sam who had 'fun' instead of 'working in an office for a living' are marks of employability. The fictitious Jackie, above, is at odds in this list not because of her history and what subsequently has befallen her, rather it is because she has not 'bounced back', she has not turned her trauma into a marketable or commodified asset, it reminds us that for every winner there are countless losers.

Ideologically, the gap year endorses enterprise. It is an illustration of the opportunities available to those who are willing. The examples above are of people who are succeeding, sometimes in the face of adversity. And if they can do it then why can't

you? They have the right attitude. They overcame (self-imposed) limitations. So wouldn't we – you, me and everyone – be foolish, stubborn or lazy not to embrace the right spirit to achieve the same? Then what of Jackie? She is like the useless/repressed remainder, the impossible kernel or Real of the gap year (see section Discussion and Conclusion) that each of these other narrative fantasies disavows. No room for losers.

## The Injunction to Enjoy

The discourse of enterprise cannot entirely account for orientations of the subject to the gap year, employability or late-capitalism. It is not a totalising discourse, as Fournier and Grey (1999) unfairly claim du Gay (1996) argues (see Jones and Spicer, 2005). Rather, orientations to enterprise are supported in orientations to fun as a distinctive and compatible sphere of activity. The latter is an important aspect of the gap year in confirming the identity of the subject as human not wholly given over to business priorities, indeed distinctive (dis-identified) from an *enterprising* machine calibrated to maximise career and lifestyle opportunities. Year Out Group (<http://www.yearoutgroup.org/students.htm>) reminds us of this when they say that “you can still have a lot of FUN as well as a sense of ACHIEVEMENT” (original emphasis). Gap years are constructed as a disruption of routine but nonetheless productive to long-term career goals. Gaps throughout life become legitimate ways to be enterprising, to have fun or to enjoy in the Lacanian sense that one feels guilty for not making the right choice (see below):

Pre-university gaps, during and post-university gaps, career gaps (fastest growing gap year market), pre and post-baby gaps, ‘stag’ and ‘hen’ gaps, post-wedding gaps, pre-retirement gaps (second fastest growing market) – the list goes on. From the age of 18, people will now become ‘serial gappers’ as they head through each life stage, taking a ‘gap’ to prepare themselves for the transition ahead. The result will be a change in the mentality of society, away from the ‘live to work, work to live’ routine of a slow climb up a career ladder to a more exciting life path which simply involves doing what they enjoy in life and achieving that dream. Life is short. Why waste your time doing things you don't enjoy?! ([www.gapyear.com](http://www.gapyear.com))

There is no rub here, no ideological opposition. The person is simply doing what it is they want to do. Anything less is unacceptable. However, if a gap ‘year’ held up the prospect of a ‘life changing’ experience, by this token you can forget it. Gap years are designed, after all, to invigorate us for the challenges ahead: akin to lathering ourselves up in a power shower. It is a line that divides the before and after; a hibernation of sorts; an extreme makeover: work in progress. The before is the “live to work, work to live” (*ibid.*) routine, mundane conformity, bureaucratic oppression, a life dedicated to organizational priorities, plain living. The moment itself is doing what one enjoys in life and “achieving that dream” (*ibid.*). It is *really* living: it is fun, expressive, happy and spontaneous. It is the choice of reflexive agents making the most of their opportunities and having fun, so that once the chrysalis has ruptured the butterfly can leave its gap year cocoon and work for people friendly, interpersonal, flexible, team-based organizations. Therein, the fantasy that helps sustain the appeal of the gap year is that mundane life is a choice we make – the choice of losers, of single mothers, of the unemployed, of careerists – and that *real* life, as gap year, is for those with the attitude to live life to the full (independent of liberal-capitalist constraints). It is an attitude with

a price tag: those who are fortunate enough or indeed enterprising can buy into it, while the rest of us can dream.

Fantasy in Lacan, as Žižek explains, occupies an unusual position in that it can be defined neither as subjective nor objective, rather as ‘objectively subjective’ (see Žižek, 2004: 94 and 2006: 171). Fantasy pertains to the way we like to see the world – how the world objectively appears to us (an objective illusion) – even though it does not seem that way – how on an unconscious level the world really seems: for example, men describing their respect for women while unconsciously betraying misogynistic attitudes about the role of women in society. Through fantasy we account for gaps in the symbolic order – the rules of language and communication maintained through intersubjective agreement – or, put another way, the inscrutability of the Other’s desire.

This gap is the (empty) place that escapes symbolisation, the space that alienates the child from the (m)Other, the difference that the subject has to account for in order fully to orient itself in the world. With no other recourse, the child acquires the (m)Other’s tongue, the language to communicate a need for warmth, food, cleanliness and so on. The child comes to speak through the (m)Other, unconsciously to desire her desire by learning the symbolic codes that elicit specific responses from her (see Fink, 1997 for further elaboration). This gap or alienation is a creative space, the distance between the subject and Other overcome by orienting a need for total symmetry with the other by displacing it through a diversity of socially acceptable attachments. Put another way, the subject is an outcome of an unconscious desire to fill in for a lack in the Other, or what is unknowable about them to me (see, for example, Žižek, 1989: 124; 2006: 45). So what we desire in this sense is the desire of the Other (hence why the subject is decentred), with fantasy showing us *how* to desire by framing the unconscious desire to desire what the Other wants as our own desire (Žižek, 2004: 96). To give an example, we may enjoy a sporting activity, whistling in a certain way, strawberry cake, etc., but what remains inaccessible to us is why we desire it in the first place.

If we think of this lack, not in a specific literal Other – my pal, for example – but multiplied as the lack in everybody we encounter, it becomes clearer that what we seek to account for is a lack in the symbolic order as standing in for or coordinating this multitude of individual desires. A master signifier is thus made necessary as a way to relieve us of the burden of deciding what it is the Other wants. By acting *as if* there is an authority watching and judging us – a big Other – we in effect render that authority palpable as the ‘eyes’ of society (symbolic identification) (see Žižek, 1989: 105 and 1997: 153). To give an example, when gapwork.com ask us: “Are you learning to lead a team, or work as part of a team? Are you learning how to handle people from different cultures, or developing problem-solving skills?” (<http://www.gapwork.com/gapsmart/before-you-go>), are they not anticipating for us what the big Other wants? So that in this example symbolic closure is gained by actions that signify these qualities, that through a productive process of assimilation we can answer in the affirmative. In other words, we come to imagine or misrecognise ourselves in the mirror image or caricature of the teamworker, cultural ambassador, and problem solver (on imaginary identification see Žižek, 1989: 105).

This argument relates to the way the subject does the work of ideology by making up for gaps in the symbolic order, by seeking explanations for why the world is not harmonious. For example, blaming the Jew for the crisis in Weimar Germany, human greed/selfishness as the reason why society can never change, corruption in the third world as the reason for global inequalities. Žižek (2006: 304) makes the point that whatever the merits of such arguments, there is a need to posit something as a possible explanation for a fundamental antagonism or social alienation: we would have to invent the cause if it did not exist. Moreover, that in doing the work of ideology, in this way we derive a certain enjoyment or *jouissance*, described as an excessive fixation on recovering an impossible lost object, a traumatic X, a non-existent thing (Žižek, 1997: 95). “Jouissance is that which we can never reach, attain, *and* that which we can never get rid of” (Žižek, 2006: 15). This ‘object cause of desire’ is the (unconscious) enjoyment in taking back from the Master the pleasure he has stolen – for example, the pleasure in being singled out by the oppressive boss as a good worker – or the enjoyment-in-pain, the repetition of suffering as the block that is perceived by the (traumatised) subject (Žižek, 1997: 48) as preventing fulfilment of desire (the explanation for why things are a certain way, for example that Polish immigrants have deprived us of jobs). So when Lacan refers to the injunction *enjoy*, what is being referred to, as Žižek (2006: 188) argues, is a myth of absolute *jouissance*. This point is illustrated below.

In the past the repressive superego blocked ‘normal’ enjoyment (say of marital sex). Today the role of the superego has shifted. Now it commands us to *enjoy!* Examples abound in everyday life. We see explicit images of sexual acts on our cinema screens and the orgies that people like ourselves have; we learn about the dildo that works those fantastic orgasms. We see people around us, in leisure and entertainment complexes, on city streets – on holiday – indulging, having fun, and making the most of it: laughing, consuming, fucking. We hear of the great times people have on gap years, they *really* are living. We learn of high-flying entrepreneurs, social climbers: young professionals, career academics and property speculators. And what the superego (as externalised authority) asks in each of these examples is why *you* are not doing the same. Here the possibility of missing out by not taking an option that is available to us – the guilt that would obtain by not answering the Other’s desire – is resolved by making that choice: that is to step outside the ‘routine’, to let go by giving way to *jouissance*.

The obligation to enjoy displaces the spontaneous act of enjoyment or the ability simply to enjoy onto the Other. So when Žižek (1999) says that the appearance of choice becomes a trick the superego plays to compel us to do the right thing, the point is that the choice to choose has been blocked by the necessity to fulfil this obligation.

Or (we are obliged) to indulge in forced fun, a point Adorno (2001: 189) makes as regards to a reified “oasis of unmediated life within a completely mediated total system”. If we are not having fun we feel guilty. In this context, the point of psychoanalysis is to allow the person *not* to enjoy, to be relieved of the burden of the Other’s desire (see, for example, Žižek, 2006: 304).

## The Ethical Injunction

The ethical injunction or the obligation to be ethical is a screen that obscures and sustains the relationship of coloniser to colonised, privileged western subject to Oriental victim (see Said, 2003). It is a means for symbolic integration as an imaginary humanitarian subject. Here, an injunction to be ethical (see Žižek, 2006: 354 on Freud here) should be understood not as the ethical *act* as such (that is to fully assume one's responsibility in exceeding the coordinates of liberal-capitalism or to *negate* one's direct inclinations (cf. Žižek, 2006: 202) say towards enjoyment. Instead, it is an act for sustaining an ideological commitment to the notion that capitalism can address its own crises through interventions on behalf of its victims. In other words, the ethical injunction is a correlate of enterprise and enjoyment, exemplified in Third Way social policy, the role of the volunteer or charity worker, 'Red Nose day' – a configuration of enterprise, enjoyment and ethics – and companies that are 'investors in people'. Here we note the post-political horizons of liberal democracy in which the various struggles that take place – for recognition, human rights, tolerance and so on – leave untouched the essential class relation of society (see Žižek, 2006: 321 and in Butler *et al.* 2000: 326 for discussions on this).

The gap year stages a (spatial/temporal) disorientation that distinguishes between experiences available in each place and the subjectivities that each place makes possible. So it is *there* where I lived life to the full, could make that contribution to humanity and could work without ironic distance or disidentification. It is as if by relocating a job to an unfamiliar location, imagined as exotic, the relationship to the role changes. This is especially so if the job can be described as ethical. In the following example from a brochure from 'madventurer' (see [www.madventurer.com](http://www.madventurer.com)) we have a list of jobs that could be described as both ethical and mundane:

teach English on Mount Kilimanjaro, build an orphanage in Uganda... hang-out in the Bolivian jungle [presumably they could not think of anything worthwhile to do in the Bolivian jungle either]... weigh babies in Tanzania.

Or, from *The Guardian* newspaper (travel section, 25/06/05: 3), "help plant a forest in Bhutan."

According to Martin Thomson of *Timebank*:

Volunteering gives graduates the opportunity to take an active role in the charity. Graduates can have the opportunity to experience first hand management and see the strategic view of an organisation. A high-flyer couldn't get better work experience than taking on a role like that. (*The Guardian*, 17/02/01: r3)

In a survey printed in the same newspaper, 90% of the population agree that "a society with volunteers shows a caring society" (*ibid.*). As Simpson (2005: 465) argues, situations and spaces are created in which "the gap year volunteer will be needed and will be able to provide some external expert assistance... [on] placements as teachers, builders, medical workers, etc." Such identities and positions, she argues, are not always available to the person in their usual location. As Gapwork.com ([www.gapwork.com](http://www.gapwork.com)) explain, "if you aspire to be a nurse, doctor, lawyer, engineer or something specific, there will be particular gap year schemes run by different

companies that are relevant to your needs.” By transposing such a role to a ‘developing’ country there is an ethical payoff by association. This is especially so if there is an explicit reference to humanitarian concerns:

If it had not been a humanitarian mission, I don’t think my boss would have given it [the time off] (nine week volunteer for a Sri Lankan orphanage). (<http://money.guardian.co.uk/print/0,3858,5179109-110400,00.html>)

Assumptions about how other people live and what we can do to improve their lives underline this logic. This form of intervention sustains a tradition of cultural imperialism in which the (usually white) westernised subject mediates between different authentic, or quaint, cultural norms. This imagines the ‘Western’ subject as a multiculturalist. Žižek (2000: 216) is justified here when he describes multiculturalism as:

a disavowed, inverted, self-referential form of racism, a ‘racism with a distance’ – it ‘respects’ the Other’s identity, conceiving the Other as a self-enclosed ‘authentic’ community towards which the multiculturalist maintains a distance made possible by his / her privileged position. (Žižek, 2000: 216)

The fantasy that sustains this idea of an Otherness generates the rationale for intervention on their behalf. At the same time, our class relation, or the form of oppression each one of us has in common, is disavowed in a ‘cultural’ valorisation. For example, on the 2005 ‘Madventure’ brochure we have a picture of a white (gap year) student surrounded by black teenagers (black on black would render the gap year subject ‘invisible’). Or, from gap.org (<http://www.gap.org.uk/uyearout/uyearout.html>):

An extended period of time in a specific community will make you far more aware of the differences between cultures. You’ll learn why differences in religion, political system and outlook emerge and hopefully you’ll eventually be treated as an equal, rather than as a tourist.

Or you could read a book instead. But this is the real thing,

‘... I gained a great deal from living in another country, away from home for 6 months – it really made me appreciate everything a lot more. I’ve already been back to visit, just a year later!’ GAP Volunteer at Mother Theresa Orphanage in North India as part of a Duke of Edinburgh Gold Award. ([http://www.gap.org.uk/uwhere/asiapac\\_ind\\_vol07.html](http://www.gap.org.uk/uwhere/asiapac_ind_vol07.html))

What we find, then, is that the gap year signifies a time and space in which interventions and indulgencies are possible without disturbing the order back ‘home’ or the conditions that sustain the relationship of one (nation) state to another. The ideology here is that there is no ideology, what matters are the ways in which free-market capitalism is administered. The ethical act proper breaks with this order, it is an identification not with the victim-Other (acting on their behalf) but a solidarity in a *common* struggle. This occurs, as Žižek (2000: 220) explains, “when I discover that the deadlock which hampers me is also the deadlock which hampers the Other.” Alain Badiou (2002: 25) makes a similar point when he argues that:

The whole ethical predication based upon recognition of the other must be purely and simply abandoned. For the real question – and that is an extraordinarily difficult one – is much more that of recognising the Same.

However, the radical choice not to submit, to exceed the symbolic boundaries of the prevailing consensus, is the very choice around which the gap year is structured. It appeals to a desire to cut ourselves free, flirting with our powerlessness, imploring us to be other than who we are. It invites the subject to regard the location of the (victim) Other as a magical space in which alternative modernities are enacted and, for a time, can be indulged in.

Your 17 year-old daughter has let you know that instead of going to university next year, she'll be going alone to the forests of South America to 'find herself'. Your immediate reaction will probably be a mixture of horror, delight, admiration and panic. (Graham Jones, [www.ivillage.co.uk](http://www.ivillage.co.uk))

Of course, your 17 year old daughter will get over it, but as Madventurer tell us it will be "1 [sic] experience that will last you a lifetime". This, then, becomes an authentic reference point for (re)imagining the subject vis-à-vis the one back home. Thus a reward for enduring on the gap year physical discomforts, boredom, socio-cultural dislocation – the sweltering heat, the poverty, isolation and claustrophobia – and exploitative labour practices, is a re-imagining of the self in a way that is entirely consistent with business, the caring professions, NGOs and so on: to exemplify enterprise, fun (enjoyment) and ethics in a singular configuration. In other words, the confidence, empathy, social awareness, self-motivation, ability to work under pressure and the ability to communicate at ease can be attributed to that (distant) place, an (appropriated) authentic indivisible 'heart of darkness'. This confirms the subject as a fully adjusted human being. But the desire to fulfil such obligations is also conditioned by a desire to exceed them. This point can be examined with reference to the contingency the gap year anticipates.

## Discussion and Conclusion: Stuff Happens

Donald Rumsfeld used the phrase 'stuff happens' in an infamous response to the looting of Baghdad after the city's occupation by US troops. This phrase was repeated by commentators as an ironic reference to the looting of New Orleans in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Of course, the 'stuff' that did happen in both cities, the breakdown of law and order, the increasing desperation of the inhabitants, the looting, etc, were entirely predictable and indeed often predicted. The stuff that happens on a gap year, however predictable, is part of its attraction.

The popularity of the gap year would be inexplicable were it understood simply as a means for improving career prospects. Its appeal is not that it benefits us in career terms when there are various means to advance employability. Rather, gap years introduce a supplementary, non-instrumentalised, element as revealed in the way they are marketed. We learn that 'anything can happen' on a gap year, contingency as guarantor not that anything really will happen, but that what happens, however new or non-determined, is ideologically consistent. To give a rather clichéd, but pertinent, analogy, it is like the 'bungie jump', we are not really plummeting to our deaths but we can live out the sensation of a free-fall to oblivion. What the gap year signals is a desire to *really* live or to exceed the routine pressures of everyday life without having to assume the

consequences of realising that desire – perhaps by becoming ‘unemployable’ in the process of taking an adventure into the ‘unknown’. In other words, the various justifications for the gap year – dream fulfilment as simulacrum / cultural capital, acquisition of new skills / improvements in employability, helping others / charity – are productively contiguous to the desire to exceed the commodified limits of late-capitalism. The contingent moment, as the gap year promise, is what authenticates the experience as real or unique. It indulges the subject in the fantasy of a self-realisation that has already been anticipated as beneficial to employers. Thus the gap year is referred to here as an example of the commodification of the contingent.

Nevertheless, however much the words and images promoting a gap year construct ideas of what a life changing moment will be, the space for its occurrence is posited as empty. It is what exceeds the commodity relation and is accessible only to the subject, not reproducible. So what is being sold here is the experience as empty space or contingency, the Real as the shock of:

a contingent encounter which disrupts the automatic circulation of the symbolic mechanism; a grain of sand preventing its smooth functioning; a traumatic encounter which ruins the balance of the symbolic universe of the subject. (Žižek, 1989: 171)

As Žižek explains, this traumatic encounter, pure contingency, or irruption, as a definition of the Real apropos of Jacques-Alain Miller, can only be constructed as a point escaping symbolisation after the event. In other words, trauma is inscribed in language as ‘trauma’ only retroactively to the event itself, so that it is only ever the symbolisation or fantasy-effect of the event:

It is something that persists only as failed, missed, in a shadow, and dissolves itself as soon as we try to grasp it in its positive nature. (Žižek, 1989: 169)

Returning to the subject of the void, because the empty place is inaccessible to us (barred) we fill-in for this impossibility through (subjective) fantasy: i.e. the symbolic universe is only ever a partial representation structured around an impossible Real kernel. Consider the following quotation from the Year Out Group (<http://www.yearoutgroup.org/students.htm>) (original emphasis):

You can learn to live in a NEW ENVIRONMENT and DEAL WITH THE UNEXPECTED. You can demonstrate your sustained commitment and cannot fail to develop the PERSONAL SKILLS and EXPERIENCE which will stand you in good stead for many years to come.

Here the contingency of the gap year *experience* is highlighted in the phrase “deal with the unexpected”. By opening ourselves to the possibility that the unexpected will happen, which of course prepares us for the ‘surprise’ element, we toy with trauma as a character-building exercise as a way to improve ourselves for home, or the socio-symbolic order. If home is a world of simulacra then here the image dissolves, the thing really happens to us. With money, opportunity and desire we can physically remove ourselves to localities or engage in activities likely to produce such a contingent effect. This way we engineer authentic character-building moments, the real that complements images of environmental catastrophe, terrorist attack, and poverty – like vibrations in the Nintendo ‘Wii’ motion-sensitive device controlling videogame avatars. Here the challenge of the unexpected compensates for the competitive disadvantage of not

having had experiences of a character-building nature, perhaps the kind of experiences typically associated with working class lives, the traumas specifically that have an exchangeable value. This is not so much a display of trauma (see Skeggs, 2005: 971); it is more like a construction. Contingency is a selling point to entice subjects into taking that journey and marketing that moment thereafter:

Zoe, 18, from Leeds, eventful round-the-world trip she'll never forget! Travelling with family friend Kate, 18, Surrey. Earned money working for British Rail, temp jobs etc. Robbed of all her stuff, bitten by a shark. ([http://www.gapyear.com/media/case\\_studies.html](http://www.gapyear.com/media/case_studies.html))

By planning in advance what happens during a gap year and building into its framework the contingent as part of a character-building experience (added-value in exchange terms), the moment is decidable (configured to established knowledge). But it is decidable not in that I shall know that by swimming in these waters a shark will bite me, but that the shark bite is already included as one of all the possible moments that make up and exemplify a gap year experience (improve employability and provide the subjective 'moment'). Thus we plan for the form if not the content of the moment. This traumatic inflection is part of the adventure we buy into. Without this the gap year is ordinary life. With, the experience is recognisable as self-evidently atypical of everyday life and exemplary of the *really living* promise selling the idea. Thus contingency is a simulacrum of the event (see Badiou, 2005: 46).

The success of the gap year, it has been argued here, is partly attributable to a disavowed desire of the subject to exceed or rather break with the symbolic order and the unconscious acknowledgement (that the gap year represents) of the impossibility, as framed in post-political terms, in achieving this. However, it is the failure of the left to forge an adequate *politics* of the impossible – grounding a politics based on the universality of the proletariat as exception (disavowed structuring principle) – that necessitates individualised responses to alienation across different spheres of activity (gap years included). Energies are directed towards the reproduction of thoroughly commodified forms of *enterprise*, *enjoyment*, and *ethics*. These are attractive to the individual and sympathetic to prevailing imaginary and symbolic orders. Hence the gap that defines the fundamental alienation of the subject is turned into an object to promote the gap year and harness the disruptive potential of trauma as a point for re-imagining and re-invigorating the subject (through passionate identifications) for their ineluctable and insecure role as worker:

With careful planning and preparation... you should find yourself in the best position possible: on course for a life-changing experience, without the worry of quitting your job. (<http://money.guardian.co.uk/print/0,3858,5179109-110400,00.html>)

Or,

Paul Edwards, a 29-year-old City banker, convinced his employers to let him take a four-month career break with the promise that he would return afterwards. ([http://www.gapyear.com/media/case\\_studies.html](http://www.gapyear.com/media/case_studies.html))

The message here is simple, that a successful gap year returns us to the same. By appealing to a desire to exceed the material limits of everyday life we are invited on a hopeless quest to recover a *jouissance* by reproducing neoliberal versions of enterprise,

enjoyment and ethics as enhancements to employability and everyday life. These terms, as presented here, are described as having distinctive and relational characteristics that echo in the socio-symbolical ordering of late-capitalism. The gap year can be seen as an aid for social reproduction. However, whether contingency, in the final instance, is directed towards this, remains, of course, indeterminate.

The argument that is made here contrasts with Bauman's (in Hall and du Gay, 1998: 29) characterisation of the tourist who seeks experiences that can be "shaken off whenever they wish." The Gap Year Experience is a way to compensate for the fluidity of identity – 'a continuous present' – that Bauman (1995: 88) refers to, so that an ontological ground is (re)calibrated. Thus the individual is anchored to liberal capitalism – with its tendency to commodify heterogeneous sites of incommensurability (Jameson, 1984: 81) – through an orientation to a spatially alienated referent (the gap year) while, potentially, remaining tactical enough to make adjustments in respect of labour market insecurities (cf. Gabriel, 2003: 181).

In concluding it is apposite to refer to Žižek (2002: 88) when, in reference to suicide bombing, he asks:

What if we are 'really alive' only if we commit ourselves with an excessive intensity which puts us beyond 'mere life'? What if, when we focus on mere survival, even if it is qualified as 'having a good time', what we ultimately lose is life itself?

The excess that makes life worth living – the act – to take sides, is the thing that really happens, the *really* living is what the gap year would contain. Ideally, it does this by circling a desire to *really* live so that the subject is liberated from a decision that could potentially undermine future competitiveness.

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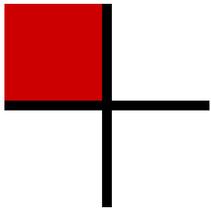
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## The New Severity: On Managerial Masochism

René ten Bos

### abstract

In the paper, it is maintained that both management and masochism are characterized by formal relationships, by a reliance on indisputable rules, and, finally, by a belief in the popular idea that soft can be hard and hard can be soft. To see whether this is more than just a superficial analogy some philosophical ideas about masochism are juxtaposed to populist understandings of management practices. More particularly, an analysis of masochism might shed some light on the work of management gurus from the past and is a severity which, in rather unexpected ways, opens up to certain humorous forms of resistance.

If you love me, be cruel to me. (Sacher-Masoch, 1999: 186)

“Soft can be hard.” This is a famous quote in management literature. Peters and Waterman (1982) used this formula a long time ago to argue for the importance of culture, customers, humanity, and other aspects they believe were oftentimes ignored in the world of business and management. Looking back at the success of *In Search of Management*, one of the authors commented that...

you could boil all of Search down to one idea: soft is hard. Up until then, everybody assumed that hard was hard. ‘Hard’ numbers told you everything that you needed to know about dealing with hard assets such as factories, machinery, and buildings. But Search said that everything soft is hard. People, customers, and relationships – they make up all of the real stuff that determines what really gets accomplished... (Peters, 2001: *unpaged*)

Here, I do not wish to enter into whether Peters and Waterman are right or not. I am rather interested in the formula itself. The analogy with the epigraph that I have chosen for this article intrigues me. The formula and the epigraph both seem to imply that nothing is what it seems: soft can be hard and love can be cruel. This suggests an analogy between certain convictions in management on the one hand and masochism on the other. Softness as such cannot be justified in organizational settings and can only become tolerable if it is somehow cloaked as hardness. In a masochistic relationship, love is only acceptable when it is disguised as cruelty. What to make of this analogy? Can organizational scholars learn from it? And, more importantly, is it more than just an analogy? It is not my intention here to suggest that managers are masochists or that masochists are managers, but I surely wish to maintain that there are important family

resemblances between masochists and managers. More specifically, what managers can learn from masochism (rather than sadism) is a certain form of humorous resistance towards the situation in which they find themselves. I will end by briefly discussing two continental managerial mistresses – Judith Mair and Corinne Maier – whose work has found an amazing appeal among (male and masochistic) managers.

## Masochism in Organizations

Let me start by stating that the conundrum about softness and hardness is by no means a coincidence. People in organizations indulge in oxymoronic language that is used, I suggest, to capture the paradoxical nature not only of organizations but also of the feelings that working for them might arouse. An autobiographical note might be in order here. Apart from being an academic, I also work for a company that sells, among other things, psychology-based training and education programs for public and private organizations. Most of the professionals working in the company have a psychological background. They more or less despise the world of big business and clearly think that the organization should be much more than a money-making machine. Yet, they are submerged in a world where capitalistic economics does play a major role. What can their mission be in a world like this? The answer to this question was formulated already early in the history of the company: the company's mission in the world is HEART/HARD. Even nowadays, when under economic pressures company policies have become harder rather than heartier, everybody still seems to be very happy with the mission statement. When soft can be hard, it becomes very important to believe that the reversal also holds: hard can be soft.

The insight that oxymoronic pairs such as idealism (heart) and cruelty (hard) should somehow be matched is not only characteristic of my own company. In fact, I think it is widespread in contemporary organizations. Take, for example, the popularity of such a concept as 'tough love'. In a piece about one remarkable business leader, a certain Sir John Sevens, I found the following quote somewhere on the internet:

But leaders also need to expose those who are not doing their job properly. 'It's tough love,' says Stevens. 'You must give praise where it's due but don't, for heaven's sake, give it where it's not due.'

The concept of 'tough love' is used elsewhere as part and parcel of a human resource strategy that is suitable for times of economic crisis. It is often argued that as soon as the bubble bursts, paternalism should be replaced by tough love as part of a new evolving workforce deal. It is not difficult to add many more examples that illustrate how people in organizations are trying to reconcile what is perhaps irreconcilable.

But is it irreconcilable? The epigraph – 'If you love me, be cruel to me' – stems from a novel by the Austrian professor of history Leopold von Sacher-Masoch (1835-1895) called *Venus in Furs* which was published first in 1870. One of the many things that you may get from reading this novel is that its heroes seem to resemble management leaders and gurus in at least one respect, to wit, their firm belief that there is a zone of

transition between hard and soft and soft and hard. I submit that it is only this belief that might ultimately allow one to reconcile both sides of the opposition.

When I suggest that there is perhaps a secret link between managers and masochists, I do not intend to imply that managers are suffering from a symptom that, for example, psychiatrists or psychoanalysts have referred to as ‘masochism’. The extensive literature in these disciplines usually describes masochism as a kind of (sexual) perversion that is premised on a wish to suffer pain, humiliation, and even torture. The words ‘masochism’ and its counterpart ‘sadism’ were coined by the 19<sup>th</sup> century psychiatrist Richard von Krafft-Ebing (1840-1902), a contemporary of Sacher-Masoch. Since then, these words seem to have a ‘natural’ place in psychopathological or psychiatric discourse (see, for some excellent discussions on this particular type of discourse: Weinberg and Kamel, 1983; Grossman, 1986). It is important, however, to note that both Sacher-Masoch and Marquis de Sade were figures of literature rather than of the medical sciences. This opens up the possibility of an understanding of these phenomena that evade overly clinical or pathological interpretations. Perhaps, we should even consider the possibility that masochism and sadism are not phenomena in the normal sense of the word, that is, they may not lend themselves to straightforwardly empirical or clinical observation.

Second, neither do I wish to imply that working in organizations necessarily involves masochism. Of course, there is a long history of pain, discipline, humiliation, repression, (malignant) narcissism and abuse of power which is well-known in the field of organizational theory. Organizational scholars have extensively reported on these phenomena (*e.g.* Jackall, 1988; Watson, 1994; Hearn, 1994; Gherardi, 1995; Fineman and Gabriel, 1996; Hearn and Parkin, 2001). Tony Watson (1994: 180) provides us with the interesting example of a manager who might be argued to refer to a variety of perversions in order to express his anger after having been repeatedly humiliated during meetings:

You saw me the other day leave that meeting in a hurry. Do you want to know why I left? If I had stayed I would have ruddy thumped that know-it-all bastard. Just you wait, though, when I get the chance I’ll really piss in his chips. I’m no delicate flower and I can shout my mouth off with the best of them at times. But I don’t think I could ever do that: sit there and talk to blokes who are flogging their guts out as if they were dozy school kids. You’ve got to respect people who are doing their best. He was just showing contempt for us and all we are doing. But he thinks he knows best. Just let him come near me and look down his nose at my operation. I’ll flatten the bastard.

Admittedly, this does not tell us really anything about someone’s predilections, but the language – thumping, shouting, pissing, flogging – has certainly a suggestive appeal. However, the observation that humiliation and contempt might be rampant in organizations and in the language spoken there should not lead us to jump to conclusions about the presence of a sadistic or masochistic routine. Most organizational scholars will probably assume that organization and perversity are not natural partners. For example, Hearn and Parkin (2001: 81) claim that

ordinary and extraordinary tactics perpetuating oppressions – bullying, isolation, exclusion, harassment, physical violence, emotional assault, demeaning actions, along with cultural ideological and symbolic violences – need to be named as violations.

In other words, they believe that pain and perversion are infringements upon organizational order. It is what should not be there in organizations. And if they occur in organizations, they are often understood as symptoms of an underlying illness (abusive power relations, gender trouble, ideological constraint, and so on).

What is then meant by my suggestion that management and masochism might share some assumptions, for instance, the idea that there are zones of indetermination between the soft and the hard and the hard and the soft? Well rather than treating masochism as symptomatic of a rather exceptional situation in which managers may find themselves, I wish to explore the idea that management and masochism do have a secret link. Their relationship involves more than just an analogy. At face value, this seems to be in accordance with at least some contributions to organizational theory. Gherardi (1995: 61), for example, has maintained that “various forms of sexuality, one of which is sadomasochism” find their structural basis in hierarchical dependencies. This implies that organizational structure does not cancel out pain and perversion but rather produces both as a normal rather than as a merely exceptional effect. But for all its normality, sadomasochism is still treated as a symptom of something that represents the dark side of organization.

Brewis and Linstead take a somewhat different view in that they insist on the paradoxical nature of sadomasochism for “... it seeks to disorganize, to transgress, to shatter, *but in a disciplined and regulated fashion*” (2000: 127; italics in original). In other words, S/M is a way of organizing, indeed, a “radically new way of organizing” that should arouse interest, if not enthusiasm, among organizational scholars (2000: 145). They emphasize the dialectical, contractual, ritual, and theatrical nature of S/M and also claim that the writings of De Sade and Sacher-Masoch have no direct bearing on contemporary sadomasochistic practices (2000: 140). They may be right in this, but the problem is that there are so many varieties of consensual sadomasochism that it is very difficult to see what it is that we, as organizational scholars, should be interested in or enthusiastic about.

## Deleuze on Masochism

In his exemplary study on masochism and sadism, Deleuze (1999) has argued that reading Sacher-Masoch and De Sade is crucial for our understanding of the phenomenon. More particularly, it is only the “*literary approach*” (1999: 14) that allows us to escape from the tendency to talk about pain and perversion in clinical terms. Deleuze makes a useful distinction between a *symptom* and a *syndrome*: whereas the symptom is a specific sign of an underlying illness, the syndrome can be described as “a meeting place or crossing-point of manifestations issuing from very different origins and arising within variable contexts” (ibid.). In Deleuze’s view, sadomasochism is a syndrome where two totally different phenomena, sadism and masochism, meet. The problem with some syndromes is that they all too easily allow for quick analogies between or common labels for fundamentally different disturbances. Deleuze is, as always, exceptionally clear:

Biology warns us against over-hasty acceptance of the existence of an uninterrupted evolutionary chain. The fact that two organs are *analogous* need not mean that there is an evolutionary link between them. We should avoid falling into 'evolutionism' by aligning in a single chain results which are approximately continuous but which imply irreducible and heterogeneous formations. An eye, for example, could be produced in several different ways, as the outcome of different sequences, the analogous product of completely different mechanisms. I suggest that this is also true of sadism and masochism and of the pleasure-pain complex as their allegedly common organ. The concurrence of sadism and masochism is fundamentally one of analogy only; their processes and their formations are entirely different; their common organ, their 'eye', squints and should therefore make us suspicious. (1999: 46; emphasis in original)

Analogies are not enough to suggest any commonality. This then opens up the question whether management and masochism are not more than two concepts that in spite of all their differences meet in a syndrome. Deleuze clearly shows how different sadism and masochism are, but the way he describes masochism is, I would argue, fascinating for management scholars. Central, says Deleuze, is the idea of the contract:

A contract is established between the hero and the woman, whereby at a precise point in time and for a determinate period she is given every right over him. (1999: 66)

Deleuze enters extensively in the gendered subtext of masochism. He argues, for example, that part of the contract consists in the woman's task to exorcise, within a narrowly defined timeframe and by repeated beatings and other acts of humiliation, the dangerous image of the father that is still visible in her victim. But in the present context, I will not enter into gender issues. Here, I am more interested in what Deleuze describes as the entirely formal relationship between two persons, something which he believes exceeds physicality and morality:

Fundamentally, masochism is neither material nor moral. (1999: 74)

Now, these are qualities – immaterial and amoral – that surely have been used, more than once, to describe managerial work. Managers, after all, do not work with their hands and are, if anything, in the business of formal thinking (planning, strategy, and so on). The manager should also be a morally neutral functionary: ideally, pain (negative feedback, bad news, layoffs, and so on) can only be inflicted if there is no intimate or personal relationship between the persons involved (duGay, 2000). Lust and pleasure are, of course, strictly forbidden when you are inflicting pain upon others. What also strikes me here is the idea that pain should always be limited to a precisely defined timeframe. In other words, pain is a project.

The contract within a masochistic relationship can differ according to what the involved parties wish. Deleuze provides some examples of different kinds of contracts. On the one extreme, we find explicit formulations as to the time limit, reciprocities of duties, or the preservation of certain inalienable rights; on the other extreme, we see more 'slavish' contracts that give more and more right to the master at the expense of the victim (who might very well lose the right to his name, his honor, his freedom, and so on). Generally, the partners in a masochistic relationship go through an entire series of increasingly extreme contracts, a process during which one party, paradoxically the initiator of the contract, loses more and more rights. But no matter how rights are being lost, the point of the contract is that it is always premised on the consent of both parties.

This is where sadism falls short. The libertines in the novel of Marquis de Sade are deeply hostile towards the very idea of the contract. They work rather by dint of institutionalization. It is thus important to make a distinction between ‘institution’ and ‘contract’. Deleuze claims that the juridical distinction between both is well-known:

the contract presupposes in principle the free consent of the contracting parties and determines between them a system of reciprocal rights and duties; it cannot affect a third party and is valid for a limited period. Institutions, by contrast, determine a long state of affairs which is both involuntary and inalienable; it establishes a power or an authority which takes effect against a third party. (1999: 77)

But there is an even more important distinction which involves the relationship between contract/institution on the one hand and the law on the other:

the contract actually generates the law, even if this law oversteps and contravenes the conditions which it made possible; the institution is of a very different order in that it tends to render laws unnecessary, to replace the system of rights and duties by a dynamic model of action authority and power. (ibid.)

Perhaps one might argue that in masochism and sadism, there are two entirely different forms of sovereignty or power involved. In masochism (and, I would suggest, in management), trust is conveyed to an ordering power relation (*potentia ordinata*) in which the oftentimes painful relationships between two persons are regulated and organized by a distinctively formal appeal to law, order, and regulation; in sadism, on the other hand, rules and regulations are replaced by an absolute power (*potentia absolute*) which uses grace, arbitrariness, and physicality in order to reign supreme over the victims who then have to endure that the law that would protect them is routinely suspended.

## Absolute Power and Ordering Power

The distinction between an ordering power and an absolute power is an old one and was used by scholastic philosophers to describe an ambivalence in the power of God. Philosophers like Thomas Aquinas wondered whether there could be any limitations to the omnipotence of God. Of course, God is free, but in His freedom He is limited to His essence which is then defined as goodness. His omnipotence is therefore restricted by His goodness: God cannot will evil and He creates because He is good (Gilson, 1956: 132-136). Already in the later middle ages, philosophers such as William of Ockham would resist what they saw as the moralization of God. We should not attribute anthropomorphic properties to God. Real omnipotence simply knows no limitation apart from self-contradiction or absurdity.

Although Deleuze discusses these problems extensively in his book on Spinoza (see: 1968), he does not refer to the distinction between the two divine powers in his study on masochism. Nonetheless, I suggest that it might be invoked to capture the two entirely different attitudes towards the law that the masochist and the sadist adopt. For the masochist, abiding by the law – that magnificently ordering power – is, in the end, the ultimate proof of love and morality. This results in one of masochism’s great paradoxes:

the urge to abide by contract and the law that is defined by it is premised on moral neutrality and repression of desire on behalf of the woman, but precisely this neutrality and repression of desire is what makes her so moral and so loving. This is, I suggest, one way to blur the distinction between hard and soft: acting formally becomes the pre-eminent token of love.

Deleuze points out that there is something profoundly tragic and humorous about the masochistic contract and the order it creates. What he means is quite simply this: in a masochistic relationship, a strictly formal application of the law shows the absurdity of the law – formality becomes love, cruelty becomes tenderness, and whipping does not prevent an erection but rather provokes it. The masochistic relationship lays open therefore the absurdity of the law. Analogously, any person's relationship with a good God might make him or her wonder why there is evil in a world that He has created. Here, however, we can see a difference between masochist and believer. Whereas the latter might be disturbed by the absurdity of a good and lawful God in an evil world, the former enjoys the absurdity that is the ultimate result of law abidance. It would indeed be a mistake to claim that the masochist loves pain and humiliation; it is rather that he loves the consequences of both, to wit, the demonstration's of the law's absurdity by meticulously applying it (1999: 88-89). It seems to me that this is not too far away from what managers know as 'working to rule' or from what they invariably describe as the idiocy of formal rules, protocols, performance audits and other bureaucratic measures that they themselves nevertheless help to perpetuate. It is sometimes hard to grasp why these people might still believe in these ordering endeavors.

The sadist libertine entirely disapproves of any contractual or law-like relationship. He argues that the law immobilizes actions by moralizing them and dreams of an institution – the libertine republic – which can function without frightened people constantly recurring to the law. Similarly, William of Ockham dreamed of a God beyond good and evil, that is, of a God without all kind of ordering and moral qualities. God cannot and should not be defined (see also: Deleuze, 1968: 47). The libertine echoes this understanding in that he dreams of a world "of free, anarchic action, in perpetual motion, in permanent revolution, in a constant state of immorality" (1999: 79). But here again, as in masochism, we find a strange reversal because De Sade delivers us a very moral argument for an immoral world:

I have infinitely less reason to fear my neighbor's passion than the law's injustice, for my neighbor's passions are contained by mine, whereas nothing stops or contains the injustices of the law. (quoted in: Deleuze, 1999: 86)

To explain this, Deleuze adds that tyrants are always operating by virtue of the law. De Sade sees this law as a mystification which is premised on "the infamous complicity of masters and slaves" (ibid.). The law should therefore, in ironical rather than humorous vein, be transcended so as to make permanent revolution possible.

At this point, it should be clear that from a juridical perspective masochism and sadism differ insofar as their respective attitudes towards the law (and what goes along with it, contract, abidance, morality, suppression, etc.) are concerned. The masochist knows perfectly well that a formal obedience to the law can result in a variety of ambivalent consequences whereas the sadist simply fears that such a formal obedience cannot result

in any ambivalence whatsoever and will in the end bring forth a frustrating immobilization and paralysis. The masochists argues that ordering power will sooner or later turn into ambivalence and absurdity; the sadist argues that ordering power will lead to tyranny and should therefore be replaced by a non-moralizing, property-less, and absolute power.

## Resisting the Power of the Law

This discussion about the distinction between sadist and masochist attitudes towards the law is preceded by one about Kant's conception of the law. The gist of this discussion is that, at least according to Deleuze (1999: 82), Kant developed an entirely new attitude with respect to the law as an ordering power. Before Kant, for example in Plato and Aristotle, the law was dependent on the good. Kant reverses this and argues not only that the good is dependent on the law but also that *The Law = The Good*. But a law that does not refer to something that transcends it, for example the good or the righteous, becomes itself "unknowable and elusive" (1999: 83). The law becomes a pure formal principle that operates "without making itself known" (ibid.). The effect of this formalization of the law is that a person can abide by it without ever having the feeling of doing something good or of being righteous. As Freud noted in *Civilization and its Discontents*, "the more virtuous a man, the more severe and distrustful" he will be with respect to his behavior.

Far from being an abstract philosophical discussion about morality and law, this seems to me a perfect way to describe the uneasiness that managers experience themselves with the law. Economists who argue that abidance by the law and to moral custom is enough to warrant responsible behavior in business (e.g. Friedman, 1970; see for discussion: Jones, Parker and ten Bos, 2005: 97-100) are generally scorned upon. The law, it is argued, is clearly not enough and as a consequence there is a lot of talk in the world of business about special forms of ethicality that transcend the dictates of the law. We may interpret the discourse on business ethics as a new way of providing a formalized law with a new kind of transcendence that goes under a variety of names: the good, the righteous, or the socially responsible. The result of the endless moralization of business and organization is, however, a nigh-too infinite increase of ordering measures. The more one tries to escape the stranglehold of ordering powers, the more one seems to be enmeshed by them. Business ethics deteriorates in an exercise to formulate and follow ethical codes and all reorganizations that should undo bureaucracy paradoxically result, as I suggested earlier, in more bureaucracy. The point of all these exercises seems to be that one tries to resist the law with more law, rules with more rules, and bureaucracy with more bureaucracy. But this is, of course, not resistance: it is compliance.

And it is laughable. People in organizations know only too well that the endless proliferation of rules, codes, and audits has nothing whatsoever to do with any understanding of the good or the righteous (see also: Power, 1997). What holds for the Kantian law, at least according to Deleuze, may very well hold for bureaucracy as such: it has boiled down to a pure formalism and lacks object, substance, and determination

(Deleuze, 1999: 83). No one knows anymore what these laws are and what they are good for. In other words, members of the organization are in fact left behind in the state of determinacy that is, for example, characteristic of the heroes in Kafka's novels. They abide by all the rules and laws but do not know whether they are still doing the good. Rule-following is demanded but nobody seems to get a feeling of being righteous about it. In fact, and here I find myself in agreement with the Freudian analysis, the more managers are abiding by the law, the more they feel guilty about it. Guilty and ridiculous.

Cynical self-mockery and humour are rampant in our organizations. This is well documented in literature (Jackall, 1988; Fineman and Gabriel, 1996), but an anecdote from my experience with managers from a Dutch banking company is telling enough. In this banking company, people became thoroughly cynical after years of reorganization. A couple of years ago, the board of directors offered employees a nice amount of money when they would choose to leave the firm. Management expected 3000 people (out of 16000) to accept the offer, but in fact almost 8000 people opted for what they understood was a most attractive escape clause. Why would they want to work for a company that could not longer offer them a solid future and that offered only work that was, according to many people, deadly boring? Somewhat later, management decided to go into battle against the widespread cynicism. After some deliberation, they decided to organize an event with the telling name *Make My Day*, the idea being to congregate in several hotels throughout the country. But they made a mistake: they organized the day that would make everybody's day during the weekend and also made everybody's participation obligatory. This lead, of course, to another upheaval of cynicism. As one anonymous member of the organization explained on the company's intranet: *Make My Day. Fuck Off: Kill My Weekend*. Rumor has it that management has lost their battle even before it got started.

## Mair, Maier, and Male Managerial Slaves

Irony and humour are two possible answers of people who are confronted with laws and rules that they do not recognize as helpful or as having any meaningful content. Irony is the sadist option: you transcend and subvert the law simply by arguing that there are more superior principles (nature, sovereign masters, absolute freedom, whatever... ) and that only anarchy is the perfect state of affairs. This is probably not an option most people in organizations would choose, even though gurus like Tom Peters (1988) have pleaded for something called liberation management or organizational anarchy.

Humour is the masochist option: by gladly submitting yourself to the laws and rules of the organization where you work, you show nothing less than humorous contempt for the world you find yourself in. Let me quote Deleuze one more time:

We all know ways by twisting laws by excess of zeal. By scrupulously applying the law we are able to demonstrate its absurdity and provoke the very disorder that it is intended to prevent or to conjure. (1999: 88)

Unlike the sadist who wants to ironically transcend the law just to enter into a somehow lawless universe, the masochist tries to reduce the law in a humorist vein to its ulterior consequences. The best thing you can do is to laugh about the rules that you meticulously abide by. I submit that this is what many managers do nowadays. No longer do they believe in emancipation, liberation, let alone in sadist transgressions. But they increasingly seem to adopt a certain masochistic feel for the absurdity in which they find themselves. Rules will sooner or later become the new hype. In the Anglophone world, bureaucratic behavior has been eloquently defended by duGay (2000), but this is a text that is probably only known within academic confines and it is therefore rather humourless. Outside the Anglophone world, however, there is a remarkable upsurge in masochistic fashion. And analogously to what is going on in the books by Sacher-Masoch it is women who seem to adopt the dominant role here.

In Germany, Judith Mair's book *Schluss mit Lustig* (Stop the Fun!), first published in 2002 and translated in many continental languages, became a bestseller. Mair, a marketing and advertisement consultant, wants us to believe that all the emphasis on soft and emotional qualities in contemporary business organizations (you may think here of emotional intelligence, friendship, emotion management, and so on) is, to say the least, somewhat unreal. She claims that business managers should recur to old rules because organizations need rules, that they should embrace toughness because people in organizations need guidance from leaders, and, finally, that they should simply abandon the assumption that business organizations can somehow become places where people can work on self-actualization. In a nice reversal of Peters and Waterman's injunction that soft is hard, Mair argues that hard is, in the end, softer than soft itself. In one of the many provocative passages of her book, the reader is assured that WORK = WORK and that we should not make more out of it. She urges to abandon all fantasies about team spirit, ethics, and fun. She is in favour of strict rules, not only in terms of work but also in terms of social contacts and even dress code. Her popularity among managers in Germany and Holland is staggering. In a well-known Dutch business paper called *Intermediair*, she was on the front cover: a solemn and grim gaze, stylish blonde hair and an impeccable blue T-shirt and a headline saying *The New Severity* ('De nieuwe strengheid'; see also: [www.womenontheweb.nl](http://www.womenontheweb.nl)). On photos, she never smiles but that seems only to contribute to her popularity. Many managers think that she perfectly shows the absurdity of efforts to make business organizations more ethical or more humanistic.

In France, Corinne Maier's book *Bonjour Paresse* (*Hello Laziness*), which appeared in 2004, became an instant bestseller. Once more, we have a book that purports to write in unequivocal terms about the realities in business organizations. Maier, a Lacanian psychoanalyst who has a part-time job in business life, is at pains to show the absurdities of business ideologies and claims, among many other things, that business organizations clearly do not exist to help you in your self-actualization. What organizations want are highly intelligent yet docile and uncritical people, that is to say, 'neo-slaves' who do their stupid work in the middle layers of the organizations. *Bonjour Paresse*, an obvious reference to Françoise Sagan's famous novel *Bonjour Tristesse* (*Hello Sadness*), can be read as a wake-up call for these neo-slaves who waste their lives by doing boring jobs and attending boring meetings. Maier urges these people to be as lazy as possible without appearing to be so. Her cynicism is fascinating. At the

end of her book, which is in fact a document that meticulously describes her own frustrations in a business organization and which, moreover, sold more than half a million copies, she formulates ten alternative commandments for the middle layer. The first two go like this:

Employees are the slaves of our time. You know or should know that business life is not the right place for self-development. You work for your salary at the end of the month and, as people often use to say, that's it... Don't try to change the system: resistance merely enforces it, to make it a topic for debate makes it stronger... the revolution was for rioters during the 1970s and you well know how they ended up (bosses). (Maier, 2004a: 118-119; my translation from the Dutch version)

Mair and Maier (what is in their names?) stress the importance of rule following and, like the masochist, they embrace the rather sobering absurdities that this might entail. But they do so, admittedly, in somewhat different ways. For Mair, rule-following is actually more humanistic than allegedly humanistic initiatives: she points out that in organizations that know empowerment, informal decision-making procedures, teamwork, and so on, work becomes intolerably strenuous and cannot be executed anymore between nine till five. This is why for her soft is harder than hard. The abidance by formal procedures 'in her office' should put an end to the absurdities of softness. For Maier, on the other hand, rule-following is in fact what will inevitably lay bare the absurdities of life within business organizations. Questioning the system is, in fact, what one should not do: the system erodes itself and its demise is therefore unquestionable.

The immense popularity of Mair and Maier among managers hints at a certain masochistic appeal. Both mistresses hit hard at the working slaves but these slaves recognize that hitting hard might be the only way to help them out of their predicament.

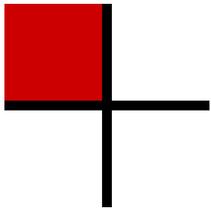
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## Freedom at Work in the Age of Post-bureaucratic Organization

Christian Maravelias

### abstract

A central issue in critical organization studies has been whether the transformation from bureaucratic to post-bureaucratic principles of exercising power increases or decreases individuals' freedom at work. This essay develops the argument that the transformation from bureaucratic to post-bureaucratic power implicates neither an increase nor a decrease of individuals' freedom, but a reconfiguration of the nature of individuals' freedom. By way of an analytical distinction between freedom as autonomy and freedom as potential it is argued that the two dominant views in critical organization studies are partly misplaced. The post-bureaucratic subject does not emerge as a 'slave' that is subtly forced to subordinate its very self to corporate values, as one strand of critical organization studies has it, nor as a 'silent rebel', that escapes totalitarian subordination through micro – routine – resistance and ironic distance, as the other strand has it, but as an 'opportunist', who, in the process of trying to seize on given opportunities, must fight against any form of subordination – even the subordination to his or her own self. Rather than totalitarianism, it is concluded that the risk of post-bureaucracy is its tendency to make freedom a privilege of those with potential, and of pushing others into vicious circles of opportunism.

### Introduction

For the majority of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the relation between individual freedom and efficient production was seen as problematic and loaded with conflict. Through struggles for higher wages, better working conditions, and shorter working hours, worker movements and trade unions sought to extend workers' freedom both inside and outside the factory walls. Employers, by contrast, saw workers' freedom as a significant cost and as a potential problem that needed to be restricted, controlled, or simply expelled from the workplace. And yet, over the past two decades individual freedom has seemingly become the underlying value principle of the ideologies of worker movements and managerial think tanks alike. It is regarded as no longer a problem to be controlled, but as a central economic resource – it is by constituting individuals as free men and women that corporations and economies prosper.

This glorification of freedom has been accompanied by a critique of bureaucratic principles of organizing work (Du Gay, 1994; 2000; Du Gay et al., 1996). Allegedly, bureaucracy is founded on a number of unfortunate divisions, which restrict individuals'

freedom. Divisions between professional and private behavior, economic and social concerns, rational and emotional motives, etc., at once split individuals morally in halves and push potentially valuable 'resources' such as individuals' social relations, desires and interests outside of work (Adler, 2001). However, in a number of critical organization studies of *post-bureaucratic*<sup>1</sup> organizations, individuals have emerged as free only superficially. In fact, these studies have pointed out that such organizations do not emancipate workers from oppression, but attempt to snare them in power relations even more efficiently than did the iron cage of bureaucracy (e.g. Barker, 1993; Casey, 1999; Kunda, 1992; Fleming and Spicer, 2004). Post-bureaucratic organizations seek to make commitment to and identification with work and the organization a norm that has to be respected by those who wish to keep their jobs. In this regard, post-bureaucratic organizations are seen to be geared towards a more encompassing form of subordination of its members. Some critical scholars have even 'accused' such organizations of settling for no less than the modulation and exploitation of the soul of the individual (Willmott, 1993).

In line with the critical studies referred to the general aim of this essay is to critically assess the nature of control and the status of the individual subject in post-bureaucratic organizations. However, in contrast to these studies, which analyze the transformation from bureaucratic to post-bureaucratic power in terms of how this transformation affects individuals' degrees of freedom, I analyze this transformation in terms of how it affects the nature of individuals' freedom. The essay develops the argument that the transformation from bureaucratic to post-bureaucratic organization should be seen neither as an increase nor as a decrease of individuals' freedom, but as a reconfiguration of the nature of individuals' freedom. More specifically, whereas bureaucratic organization configured 'freedom as autonomy', post-bureaucratic organization configures 'freedom as potential'. The essay suggests the ways in which these different notions of freedom imply different forms and idealizations of individual subjectivity. Whereas the former implies a stable and self-conscious subject, which achieves its freedom by setting a distinct course and maintaining a measure of distance between self and other, and between work and private life, the latter implies an unself-conscious and malleable subject, which achieves its freedom by blending into the environment and thereby managing to exploit fleeting opportunities.

By developing this argument I am not implying that critical organization studies are based on an undifferentiated and generally shared view of how post-bureaucratic power affects the freedom and subjectivity of individual members. With regards to this issue we may discern two groups within critical organization studies. One group envisions post-bureaucratic power as a subtly efficient way of subordinating the very self of the individual to corporate powers. Another sees post-bureaucratic power as less efficient, leaving individuals more discretion than suspected. Yet, even if these two groups differ

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1 The focus of the discussion that follows is on the types of workplaces often referred to as 'the culture managed service corporation', 'the network enterprise', 'the knowledge intensive firm', 'the customer centric firm', etc. For reasons which are elaborated further down in this essay I use the term post-bureaucracy as a summary for all these concepts and the type of workplaces they imply. Such post-bureaucratic organizations are not considered here as representative of the structure and functioning of work and organizations as a whole, but as a form of archetypes of the kinds of organizations in which new rules and principles of governing work are most apparent.

in their analysis and conclusions of the effectiveness of post-bureaucratic power, they tend to share the view of post-bureaucracy as harbouring the tendency to subtly colonize the self of employees, i.e. they see it as a trick or as a way of luring individuals into invisible but increasingly encompassing and coercive forms of domination. Such an analysis is based on an understanding of freedom as autonomy and of post-bureaucratic power as attempting – albeit more or less successfully – to regulate or perhaps even to nullify this autonomy. This essay argues that if we analyze post-bureaucratic power against the background of an understanding of freedom as potential we may instead see post-bureaucracy as a way of distributing opportunities to individuals based on judgments of their potential to seize on these opportunities. Hereby, however, we do not necessarily arrive at a more positive interpretation of the social effects of post-bureaucracy. The essay shows that by substituting autonomy with opportunity, freedom in, and in relation to, work is transformed from a right of all employees to a privilege of those with potential. Furthermore, it shows how such distribution of opportunities risks forcing individuals into vicious circles of ‘opportunisms’.

The essay is organized in four parts. I begin with some brief notes on my position of authority vis-à-vis the subjects discussed. I then develop the distinction between ‘freedom as autonomy’ and ‘freedom as potential’ and put it to use in relation to bureaucratic and post-bureaucratic modes of organizing work. The paper concludes with a brief discussion.

## **A Critical Essay**

The essay critically assesses academic discourses on bureaucratic and post-bureaucratic organization against the background of an analytical distinction between two forms of freedom. Given the lack of direct empirical observations I obviously cannot claim to have much to say about how and to what extent individuals actually experience themselves as free or not, both in and in relation to their work. A prisoner may experience him or herself as more or less free – e.g. spiritually and intellectually. Conversely a citizen of a democratic society with access to capital, knowledge, and other resources, may experience him or herself as helplessly trapped – e.g. by previous commitments and social relations. However, I do attempt to make claims about how the transformation from bureaucratic to post-bureaucratic organization affects the structural conditions of individuals’ freedom. By this I refer most generally to what is possible to think about contemporary forms of governance, and more specifically to the role of theory in contemporary managerial and organizational practice. That is, I generally assume that a certain kind of reasoning makes possible both the exercise of governance and the critique of that governance, not least by making governance and its critique understandable, potentially truthful and legitimate. More specifically, I assume that theories of governance, e.g. theories about post-bureaucratic organizations, play significant roles in forming our reasoning about proper forms of governance and in diagnosing the critical aspects of those forms of governance. Developing theories about organizations is, as I see it, not merely to take part in some neutral activity; it is to take part in political action. I affirm this stance: by suggesting some alternative ways of

thinking about post-bureaucratic organizations I hope to introduce some new options into our current political imagination.

What is the ethos of such an endeavour? Following Paul Veyne (1997: 231), I see the critical scholar as someone who, “facing each new present circumstance makes a diagnosis of the new danger.” By this I do not mean that critical scholarship should lead towards an anti-power or anti-management attitude; I mean that critical scholarship should attempt to evaluate the costs of present modes of thought, but also that it should point towards other possibilities of existence that these modes of thought may presently exclude, constrain, or condemn (Barratt, 2003). Hence, I would like to see this critical essay not only as an attempt to diagnose the status of the structural conditions of individuals’ freedom at work, but also as an attempt to provide analytical tools for political action in the field of organizations and organization studies.

## Freedom as Autonomy – Freedom as Potential

Through Descartes, Hegel, and Kant the European philosophical tradition has above all conceived *freedom as autonomy*; autonomy from external influences and constrictions and autonomy from passions and natural drives (Foucault, 1991; Liedman, 2004). One central premise of such freedom has been the individuals’ capacity to develop a profound self-understanding on the basis of which self-consciousness and reflection becomes possible. Only the pure and rational subject is free (in this sense of autonomous). That is, the subject that knows itself, and, on the basis of this knowledge, is able to give its own law to itself and remain unfamiliar with any form of abandonment to the world. Hence, self-consciousness functions here as a primary means for the subjects’ possibility of maintaining distance between the self and other, and more generally, between the self and the world. Obviously, such intellectual distance does not guarantee an individual’s practical autonomy. Yet, without control and understanding of the self, an individual has been seen to be unable to make choices that are unaffected by the negative influence of others.

Within this style of thought freedom is mainly discussed in ‘negative’ terms, i.e. as the absence of coercion and domination, and more generally, as the absence of power (Preston, 1987). This type of freedom, Nicolas Rose points out, has been discussed as “a condition in which the essential subjective will of an individual, a group or a people could express itself and was not silenced, subordinated or enslaved by an alien power” (Rose, 1999: 1). However, in defining freedom in negative terms, as the absence of power, an implicit relation is inescapably created to a power that, as it were, protects freedom from power. In this regard this notion of freedom as autonomy implies that the free individual is situated within a system of power, or that autonomy, as it were, is a zone within a system of power which protects it and surrounds it.<sup>2</sup>

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2 As shown by Foucault (1991), even in 19th century – ‘laissez faire’ – liberalism series of administrative and technical inventions were required to shape and protect the freedom of individuals – prisons, enforced medical interventions, compulsory education, moral policing, etc. It was, Foucault

Hence, according to this view an individual is free if he governs himself – i.e. maintains a relation with himself and a distance to the world – on the basis of self-knowledge, which, in order to develop and flourish, require safeguarding by authorities operating in the name of his freedom (Preston, 1987). That is, power functions at once as the antithesis of this idea of freedom and as one of its basic conditions.

Even if the conception of freedom as the necessity of being able to distance oneself from the world – and from oneself – continuous to dominate western thought, it does not exhaust the current meaning of the expression ‘being free’ (de Carolis, 1996; Preston, 1987). In everyday language being free tends to imply that one has at one’s disposal concrete possibilities, i.e. that one possesses power to initiate and complete certain actions (Liedman, 2004; de Carolis, 1996). Understood in this way, freedom is not based on the notion that the individual maintains an autonomous distance to his or her surroundings. On the contrary, it is based on that the individual maintains an intimate relation with the context of his or her actions. Someone who wishes to become member of a group cannot maintain a physical and psychological distance from other members, but must take active part in the groups’ practices. Similarly, a person who is confronted with transitory opportunities does not have the time to act on the basis of a reflective awareness of his or her own role and ideals. Acting freely in such situations is more a matter of making agile and instinctive choices on the basis of an unconstrained confidence in one’s capacities.

Hence, from this perspective a person is free if he or she is ready to exploit the innumerable chances offered by the world. Such an understanding of freedom, which I will refer to here as *freedom as potential*, implies that the subject becomes entangled with the environment and that such intimate interaction with the environment is celebrated – because without it, the potential of doing and accomplishing things does not exist (de Carolis, 1996). This idea of freedom is substantially different from the former one, especially in two regards. First, the lack of distance between self and others implies that individuals are not autonomous in the sense of the term developed above. To act freely implies action that is frictionless because it is seamlessly integrated with its social environment. That is, the freedom of an individual is not based on a self-conscious distance, but on the individuals’ willingness and ability to mould him or herself into social structures, even if it means rendering the self indistinct. The person who is free in this regard does not wish to stand at the side of the world, looking at it and analyzing it from a distance, but wishes to belong to it in a way that lets him or her move through it like a fish moves through water (de Carolis, 1996). Second, when the ability to seize on opportunities is accentuated before autonomy, power is no longer an antithesis to freedom but instead becomes an integral part of freedom. What is then emphasized is not that freedom means liberation from power, but that it requires power – power to act and to seize on opportunities. That is, if freedom as autonomy means freedom from power (which, however, is safeguarded by authoritative power), freedom as potential means freedom to seize on opportunities via distributed power.

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remarked (1991), the same political movement that in the 19th century celebrated liberty that built the prison.

The idea that freedom not only implies autonomy with regards to power, but is also related to potential and thereby to power, is in no way completely new. Already in the 1930<sup>th</sup> the American philosopher John Dewey (1935) argued that ‘freedom is power’ and that freedom from coercion was but a means to ‘real’ freedom; the power of accomplishing things. Similarly, in the early 1940<sup>th</sup> the German social-psychologist Erich Fromm (1969) famously explained how in modern societies individuals’ liberation from traditional authorities also leads to growing isolation, aloneness, and alienation. Liberation was but one – negative – aspect of freedom. The other aspect was ‘positive freedom’, i.e. growing individual strengths which helped individuals reach their full potential. Yet, Dewey’s and Fromm’s ‘positive’ notions of freedom were articulated in a society structured and dominated by powerful institutions such as the family, the school, and the factory, which together with the still relatively strong hold of tradition, at once constrained individuals’ actions and provided them with unambiguous identities and life courses – as workers, fathers, mothers, housewives, etc. (cf. Virno, 1996). Put differently, their notion of positive freedom was not articulated against the notion of freedom as autonomy, but as a complement to it. Fromm (1969: 270) writes:

We cannot afford to lose any of the fundamental achievements of modern democracy – either the fundamental one of representative government... nor can we compromise the newer democratic principle that no one shall be allowed to starve, that society is responsible for all its members... In spite of the fact that this measure of democracy has been realized – though far from completely – it is not enough. Progress for democracy lies in enhancing the actual freedom, initiative, and spontaneity of the individual, not only in certain private and spiritual matters, but above all in the activity fundamental to every man’s existence, his work.

Fromm as well as Dewey meant that the systems of power, which protected and circumscribed individuals’ autonomy, should not stop at that, but should in addition provide individuals with specific resources enabling them to act spontaneously on the basis of their desires. In its time this notion of freedom was interpreted by for instance Hayek (1986) as a demand for state controlled pursuits of reducing inequalities in income, education, health care, etc. In other words, it was interpreted as a demand for what later became known as welfare-state politics (Liedman, 2004).

In our age of post-welfare-state politics sociologist such as Rose (1999), Dean (1999), and Bauman (2004) and political thinkers such as Hardt and Negri (2000, 2004) argue that we have a good reason to suppose that the notion of freedom as potential will become more dominant, pushing the notion of freedom as autonomy to the margins of societal practices. Why? During the last 20 years we have witnessed how global flows of technologically mediated culture and financial capital have multiplied the number of job and life opportunities available to individuals. This multiplication of opportunities is closely related to how ‘advanced liberal’ political ideals and practices, which glorify self-governance and a distribution of choice via markets, have gained prominence over traditional welfare-state politics (Bauman, 2004; Dean, 1999; Miller and Rose, 1990, 1995; Rose, 1999). As argued by Rose (1999) freedom in the sense of autonomy implies a society structured and dominated by powerful and distinct institutions such as the family, the school, and the factory. During much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century individuals lived their lives in successions between such distinct institutional sites, which at once fettered them to specific roles and identities and provided them with autonomy – in the form of distance from the roles played at work, at school, in the family, etc. In contemporary

society, says Rose (1999), we are always in continuous training (we never leave school behind), we must always work on our employability (we are always potentially in between jobs), we are always still at work (even at home), and are never able to keep our private life outside work. This, he argues, is because contemporary institutions of work and education are not structured around a centralized but a dispersed principle of power and control. Power and responsibility are distributed in the form of opportunities which may or may not be realized depending on the individuals' practical powers and potential.

Hence, a common denominator of these financial, technological, and political transformations is that they create and distribute opportunities, that access to these opportunities is not evenly distributed, and can decreasingly be guaranteed (Castells, 2000; Hardt and Negri, 2004). University and college students may serve as an example. For a growing portion of the young populations of the western world it has become increasingly important to acquire bachelor and master degrees to be able to get jobs. At the same time such qualifications no longer function as guarantees for a limited ensemble of jobs, careers, and life courses, but as means of getting access to fleeting opportunities individuals would otherwise not have. Hence, access to increasing assembles of possibility demands more competence, wealth, preparation, social capital, and other particular qualities. In circumstances where the individual is surrounded by combinations of such possibilities, requirements, and insecurities, the pursuit of autonomy – in the sense of a self-consciously controlled distance to the world – not only seems inaccessible, it also risks becoming a conduit of marginalization. More pragmatic in such circumstances is to seek to develop one's powers to seize on opportunities by remaining attentive and open, constantly striving to connect, to learn, and to change.

Below we will see how these general societal transformations of the principles of exercising power and of distributing freedom and opportunities are relevantly captured by the transformation of the bureaucratic institution.

## **Freedom and Bureaucracy**

Before I begin discussing freedom in relation to bureaucracy, let me just make two brief remarks about the relevance of this discussion and about the way in which the notion of bureaucracy is defined and used. In contrast to mainstream management and organization theory where bureaucracy tends to be treated merely as a specific type of organization – where individual behaviour is governed by an encompassing and hierarchically structured system of rules and standardized procedures – I will treat bureaucracy in line with the Weberian tradition in sociology. Here bureaucracy emerges as “a major social innovation, essential to the expansion of industrial capitalism and the embeddedness of crucial social and economic goals or ideals such as progress, growth, meritocracy and egalitarianism.... bureaucracy coincides with the advent of modernity: it is part and parcel of it” (Kallinikos, 2004: 4). Hence, from this perspective an investigation of the relations between freedom, power and subjectivity in relation to bureaucracy is not just a way of developing an understanding of these relations in a

particular type of organization, but a way of developing a basic understanding of these relations in modern society at large. Furthermore, to the extent we can say that the bureaucratic principle of organization has changed or has been modulated into a post-bureaucratic principle of organization, investigating freedom, power, and subjectivity in relation to post-bureaucracy is a way of developing an understanding of changes in these relations in a post-modern (Bauman, 2004) or late-modern (Giddens, 1991) society.

To Weber (e.g. 1947: 1978) the defining characteristic and the social innovation implied by bureaucracy was the way in which it regulated the relationship between the individual and the organization. As pointed out by Kallinikos (2004), Weber's analysis shows that the distinguishing feature of bureaucracy was its disassociation of "organizational role-taking from social position and the experiential totality that is commonly associated with the personality or the particular mode of being of a person" (Kallinikos, 2004: 20). This means that a bureaucratic organization is not made up of concrete persons, but of systems of abstract work roles. Obviously individuals play these work roles. Yet, they are only partly included in the organization; those aspects of their personalities, social networks, and life worlds that fall outside the pre-established requirements of the work roles are kept outside work by the bureaucratic system of command. In this regard bureaucracy functions according to an *excluding* logic of organization and control; it demands and promotes some behaviours and excludes others. Below I will discuss what this basic principle means in terms of individual freedom in work and in relation to work.

With regards to the first aspect, freedom in work, let us first note that the fact that bureaucracy functions according to a principle of exclusion does not mean that it expels all forms of freedom from work. We may distinguish between two principal forms of autonomy in a bureaucratic setting. First, given that a bureaucratic system can never plan for and direct all the contingencies an individual faces in the job he or she performs, any type of work will imply at least some leeway. That is, the individual is expected to play his or her work role sensibly, with a sound professional judgment. In this regard the individual is more or less autonomous. An individual may also be autonomous in the sense that he or she gives orders that determine the behaviour of others. This form of autonomy is, however, not principally different from the first, because in a bureaucracy individuals who give orders are authorized to give orders, and more specifically, to give certain types of orders to certain types of people. Hence, in a bureaucracy an individual's autonomy is always relative to the heteronomy (i.e. the condition of being under the domination of an outside authority) that the individual faces (Weber, 1978).

Two points are important to make here. First, the heteronomy implied by the work roles individuals play not only restricts their autonomy, it in fact also creates their autonomy. It is through legislated duties that individuals are authorized to exercise autonomy. Individuals in bureaucratic organizations have rights – autonomy – which are relative to their assigned duties and obligations – heteronomy (Donzelot, 1991). Furthermore, the determination of individual work roles (heteronomy) implies that individuals are protected from prevailing external conditions. The individual does not have to take into account all the factors that may or may not be or become important to the organization

as a whole, only those which relate to his or her job (March and Simon, 1958). In this way the individual is enabled and given the right to distance him or herself from work, leave it behind for the benefit of private matters.<sup>3</sup>

We thereby arrive at the second aspect of freedom and bureaucracy: freedom in relation to work. Above we said that bureaucracy implies an excluding principle of organization. We now have to note that in terms of individual freedom this principle not only excludes aspects of individuals' lives from work, it also creates a private sphere of life outside work where, essentially, the bureaucratic powers of capitalist work organizations and state-controlled organizations cannot reach.<sup>4</sup> Bureaucracy means that work is sealed off from the rest of individuals' lives and conversely that the rest of individuals' lives is free from work.

The main point of this discussion of freedom and bureaucracy should be clear: in and in relation to bureaucratic organizations freedom takes the form of autonomy. Bureaucratic freedom is a circumscribed freedom – the autonomy of the work role and the autonomy of life outside work. It is a form of freedom that is relative to the bureaucratic system of command, which gives the individual the ability of maintaining a measure of distance vis-à-vis his or her work, vis-à-vis his or her role and professional identity, and vis-à-vis the representatives of power. It is, as we shall see below, in relation to these principles that post-bureaucracy differs most significantly from bureaucracy.

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3 According to Donzelot (1991) it was this double-edged relation between bureaucracy and individual freedom that explained the ambiguous attitude towards bureaucracy among 20th century worker movements (and the academic schools associated with them). Donzelot (1991) illustrates how the diffusion of bureaucratic principles in the early 20th century had severe effects on the balance of power and freedom in work. The 19th century industrial worker had been subject to the arbitrary power of bosses over the system's penalties and rewards. Yet, the worker had still been able to maintain a level of independence through capitalists' and state officials' dependence on his personal competence and craftsmanship. He had handled work according to the rhythm and principles that tradition and experience had taught him. In the early 20th century the introduction of encompassing bureaucratic administrative systems coupled with Tayloristic technological systems helped management radically reduce the craft element in work. According to the critics, this general reduction of professional autonomy was inhumane in the way it gradually turned workers into mere movements in the production process (e.g. Braverman, 1974; Burawoy, 1979; Edwards, 1979). However, says Donzelot, through bureaucratization workers achieve "rights which protect their conditions of work and reduce the arbitrary power of bosses in their employment of a deskilled workforce. It is as though the one change were the condition for the other, as though the gradual professional deskilling of the worker gave rise to his juridical requalification" (Donzelot, 1991: 254). Bureaucratization gave workers regulated rights while it created a deskilled workforce that could no longer lay claim to independence through mastery of a profession.

4 My point here is not that individuals, once they left the factory or office, would have been completely autonomous with regards to the powers of capitalists and the state. In an industrial capitalist society the social sphere outside work and production is largely based on consumption. Hence, once the worker or clerk leaves work he or she enters the consumption market, i.e. a sphere of life that is no way free from relations of power. In this respect, a more qualified view would be that individuals, once they left work, were autonomous with regards to the bureaucratic power, but significantly constrained by the restrictions of the consumption market. What this implies in terms of power and subjectivity falls outside the scope of this paper.

## **Freedom and Post-bureaucracy**

In this section I will attempt to assess how post-bureaucracy transforms the structure of freedom and power at work and how this transformation affects the individual subject. As a first step I develop a workable definition of how post-bureaucratic organizations differ from bureaucratic organizations. Above I defined bureaucracy by the way it lets work-roles, which are developed by an organizational hierarchy, mediate the relation between individuals and organizations. Richard Sennett (2003) indicates how post-bureaucratic organizations at once transform and extend this basic principle. Whereas bureaucracy used estimates of individuals' abilities of performing specific tasks as a yardstick for making employment and promotion decisions, post-bureaucracy uses estimates of potential abilities as its corresponding yardstick. In the world of work, Sennett argues, hierarchies of imposed roles based on technical skills are replaced by networks of self-created and self-governed roles where the person and his or her potential to adapt and evolve are as important as the technical skills he or she may possess.

Modern organizations judge the 'whole man', and especially what the whole man might become. In work as in education, the bald judgment 'You have little potential' is devastating in a way 'You have made a mistake' is not. (Sennett, 2003: 77)

What Sennett points out has been indicated by others (Casey, 1999; Garsten and Grey, 1997, 2001; Maravelias, 2001, 2003; Virno, 1996), namely that post-bureaucracy relies on a principle of organization which is inclusive rather than exclusive. As I have written elsewhere:

In contrast to bureaucracy that excludes those individual characteristics, which fall outside its instrumental schemes, post-bureaucracy, in its urge to harness aspects of the 'free spheres' of individuals' lives, does not obliterate these 'other' forces it faces, it opens itself to them and includes them in the networks of practice. (Maravelias, 2003: 562).

The question we need to answer here is what this inclusive principle of organization means in terms of individuals' freedom in and in relation to work.

## **Post-bureaucracy – A Critical Perspective**

To begin answering this question I will account for critical organization studies since it is the scholarly tradition which has dealt with it most extensively. With regards to the implications of post-bureaucratic power critical organization studies can roughly be divided in two groups (Knights and McCabe, 1998: 2000), although inevitably there are some overlaps. Despite post-bureaucratic organizations more democratic appearance, one group tends to see in post-bureaucracy reasons to return to Braverman's (1974) thesis that capitalist control of the labor process reduces the individual to a mere instrument with very little autonomy remaining (e.g. Willmott, 1993, 1994, 1995; Barker, 1993; Ogbor, 2001; Casey, 1999). Under the disguise of supposedly empowering and emancipating initiatives, such as corporate culture programs, teamwork, Total Quality Management, etc., management is seen to have shifted its traditional focus on controlling employees' behavior to a focus on controlling the selves

of employees (Casey, 1999; Delbridge, 1995; Sewell, 1998). More specifically, it is argued that management uses such programs and techniques to make commitment to and identification with work a norm that is enforced and controlled by workers themselves (Barker, 1993). In developing this argument this group tends to draw on Foucault's works on discipline, and especially his use of the 'Panopticon' as a metaphor for modern systems of control. Management is thus seen to be able to supersede panoptic – hierarchical – surveillance and replace it with post-bureaucratic control techniques such as peer- and self-control, which are seen to exercise an even more efficient form of surveillance. For in such circumstances control appears to be nowhere, when in actuality it is everywhere. This drives employees to consent "to be subject to a system of surveillance which they know will immediately identify their divergence from norms and automatically trigger sanction or approval" (Sewell and Wilkinson, 1992).

In sum, this analysis implies that post-bureaucratic organizations would seek to increase individuals' commitment and loyalty to their work – not by altering the relations of power in work, but by manipulating individuals' emotional relation to their work (Hughes, 2005). Furthermore, it implies that individuals would not be allowed, but in fact be required, to put their heart and soul into work (Fleming and Spicer, 2003). Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it implies that the distinction between the disciplinary sphere of work and the free sphere of life falls apart (Fleming and Spicer, 2004). Or more specifically, that the disciplinary sphere of work would risk taking over the entire life world of workers – the worker being left with no autonomy, any place becoming a place of work, any time a time for work, anyone a potential customer, partner or colleague. Together all these implications lead this group to view the post-bureaucratic regime as potentially totalitarian (Ogbor, 2001; Willmott, 1993). Rather than providing individuals with freedom it snares them in boundary-less responsibilities. Hence, we are led to believe that individuals in post-bureaucratic organizations confront a 'dictated autonomy'; an autonomy which is so wide that it is no longer defined by its opposite – the heteronomy that gives it its direction and limits – but is instead completely absorbed by it. It is a dictated autonomy in that it conceals its heteronymous determination. In such circumstances subordinates would need to anticipate the intentions of the persons in command and the only way of effectively doing so would be to internalize their values, norms, and intentions (cf. Friedman, 1977). This would in fact be the highest perfection of a bureaucratic system: a system of power which is completely internalized by its subordinates.

The other group emerges as an attempt to criticize and refine the first group's basic arguments (e.g. Knights and McCabe, 1998, 2000; Ogbonna and Wilkinson, 2003; Harris and Ogbonna, 1999, 2000; Bain and Taylor, 2000). Generally, it draws attention to how post-bureaucracy in fact leaves individuals with more space for autonomous movement than the first group claims it does. There are two strategies in this critique. One is to present empirical studies of call centers, banks, grocery retailing, IT-consultancy, etc., as evidence of how individuals find ways of escaping or avoiding managerial pursuits of colonizing their selves. Individuals ironically play along while secretly referring to managerial programs as 'corporate bullshit' (Kunda, 1992), or they routinely resist through ambiguous, half-hearted accommodations, gossip, withdrawal, etc. (Prasad and Prasad, 2000; Ogbonna and Wilkinsson, 2003). The other is to criticize

and further develop the first group's theoretical elaboration of the relations between power and subjectivity. A central element in this critique concerns the first group's alleged misinterpretation of Foucault's works (Knights and McCabe, 2000). It is pointed out that Foucault viewed subjectivity neither as an essence, which is impermeable to the influence of others, nor as a passive product of technologies of power, but as a process in which individuals are active participants in their own subordination to power. Such an understanding rules out the totalitarian interpretations of post-bureaucratic power. Because even though post-bureaucratic power implies a subtle and comprehensive confinement of individual subjectivity, this confinement is only effective if it maintains or even enhances subjects' freedom (Bain and Taylor, 2000; Knights and McCabe, 1998). From this perspective we cannot separate the processes in which individuals are regulated from those in which they are liberated; it is the regulation of individuals' behavior that opens spheres of autonomy and points of resistance; it is the fact that individuals are – to some extent – free that makes power what it is, a force that 'makes and breaks' freedom. Hence, the result of post-bureaucratic programs and techniques for regulating individuals' subjectivity can never be altogether predictable and effective; the result may be consent and compliance, but it may also be resistance (Knights and McCabe, 2000).

Over and above these differences both groups find a common denominator in the implicit assumption that post-bureaucratic power is geared towards the subjectivity or self of individuals and towards the pursuit of subordinating it to an integrated system of corporate values and norms. The main difference between the two groups is that the first at least implicitly treats post-bureaucratic power or control as effective, whereas the latter treats it as partly ineffective. The difference in effectiveness in turn relates to how the first views subjectivation as something that is done to individuals, who, as it were, passively succumb to it, whereas the latter views subjectivation as a process in which individuals actively use instruments of power to constitute themselves as particular subjects of this power.

## **Post-bureaucracy – an Alternative Interpretation**

It is thus via case studies and a careful reading of Foucault that the second group draws our attention to how post-bureaucratic power can be both regulating *and* liberating. It thereby provides critical organization studies with a more civilized and balanced view of post-bureaucracy, where the ambition of regulating the selves of its members is never altogether effective and predictable since it presupposes rather than diminishes individuals' free and active participation. This view of post-bureaucracy has considerable face validity. Yet, analytically it does not help us distinguish post-bureaucracy from bureaucracy, for, as I have tried to show above, a defining characteristic of bureaucratic power is precisely that it both regulates and liberates; it sets boundaries which at once restrict individuals and provide them with circumscribed spaces of autonomy and movement. Given the relative stability of institutional domains in modern society (cf. Jepperson and Meyer, 1991), it is of course reasonable to assume that real world organizations of the type we have come to refer to as post-bureaucratic would refine rather than completely do away with basic bureaucratic principles

(Kärreman and Alvesson, 2004). Even so, the fact that both groups within critical organization studies analyze post-bureaucratic power in terms of *regulation-autonomy*, i.e. in terms which define bureaucratic power, prevent them from distinguishing in which respects post-bureaucracy differs from the bureaucratic legacy.

My basic argument is that an analysis of post-bureaucratic power in terms of *potential-opportunity* enable us to see post-bureaucratic management principles not merely as more or less successful attempts at 'tightening the iron cage' (Barker, 1993) via subtle and encompassing command systems, but also as attempts to increase the pressures to perform by withdrawing the command system. As shown by Peters (1999), such principles lead individuals to work until they drop, apparently highly motivated and with full commitment precisely because no one forces them to do it. Hence, I argue that a defining characteristic of post-bureaucratic organization is that it does not situate individuals within more or less wide zones of determined autonomy, but instead seeks actively to make individuals independent of the command system, thus confronting them with the prevailing conditions external to the organization. Based on judgments of individuals' potential post-bureaucratic organizations provide them with opportunities and independence, but with no protection and no guarantees. In this regard they generalize the conditions distinguishing the top of a bureaucratic organization. Top management of large commercial companies is relatively independent of a bureaucratic command system. Top management jobs are full of potential and opportunities. However, the fact that top management's freedom to act is not restricted by a command system does not mean that it can do what it wishes, but simply that no one forces it to do more or less specific things. Top management is relatively free of heteronomy, but is thus also without protected and circumscribed zones of autonomy. Instead of having autonomy it is, as it were, exposed to the autonomy of the prevailing conditions surrounding it.

It is in this regard that post-bureaucracy transforms the bureaucratic structure of freedom and power. It places individuals in professional circumstances where autonomy has changed sides. If the autonomy of the employee of a bureaucracy gives him or her a limited ability of self-determination, the employee of a post-bureaucratic organization is determined by the autonomy of the prevailing conditions surrounding it. Hence, the post-bureaucratic employee is independent with regards to a command system, but dependent with regards to the autonomy of the conditions surrounding him or her.<sup>5</sup> It is also along these lines we should understand Sennett's (2003) argument that post-bureaucracy judges 'the whole man.' What Sennett makes clear is that post-bureaucracy does not only, or even primarily, take something away from its employees – their protected zones of autonomy – it also provides them with opportunity. That is, post-bureaucracy provides individuals with access to opportunities on the basis of judgments of their will and power to use their potential to transform their selves in ways that enable them to make productive use of these opportunities. Such principles of organization do not differentiate individuals in terms of what types and levels of autonomy they should be given and what regulated rights they have, but in terms of who

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5 This of course implies that the role of top management is also transformed; top management transforms itself from a commanding and punishing authority to an aspect of the prevailing situation faced by the employees who act as entrepreneurs within the company.

has and who does not have potential, and accordingly, who should and who should not be granted access to opportunity. What this implies is that freedom is transformed from a derivative of individual rights and regulated demands and duties, to a derivative of individuals' potential. Those who lack potential are not given opportunities, and even if they were, their lack of potential would make them unable to use them. In post-bureaucracy, *freedom thus becomes the mark of an elite and the privilege of those who already have it.*

Above I noted that, if we analyze post-bureaucracy against the background of a notion of freedom as autonomy, the post-bureaucratic worker emerges as either a 'slave' to a subtle totalitarian regime (Willmott, 1993), or as an unpredictable 'silent rebel' who develops spheres of free range within an all encompassing system of power (Kunda, 1992; Knights and McCabe, 1998). From such a perspective the individual's work-roles are destined to become so extensive that they more or less encompass their selves. From the perspective of freedom as potential a quite different image of the post-bureaucratic worker emerges. We are then enabled to see that the post-bureaucratic worker is not primarily subordinated to roles worked out by an authority; because post-bureaucracy does not first and foremost distribute role-related directives, but opportunities of working out temporary roles, which enable individuals to exploit the possibilities of the tasks or projects at hand. Rather than as a slave or a silent rebel the post-bureaucratic worker here emerges as an *opportunist* who must constantly fight against any form of subordination, even the subordination to his or her self (Sennett, 1998; Virno, 1996).

## **Post-bureaucracy and Opportunism**

But, more specifically, what do we mean by an opportunistic subjectivity and opportunism as a style of work/life? Above I suggested how freedom in the form of autonomy implies an idealization of a self-conscious subject who directs its actions towards principles of a greater scope and who affirms its autonomy from the ephemeral opportunities of the moment. Conversely, freedom in the form of potential implies an idealization of an unself-conscious subject who does not base its actions on a reflective consciousness of his or her own roles and ideals, but on a more or less spontaneous, confident, and unconstrained advancement in fields of opportunities and risks. The ambition of the opportunistic subject is not enlightenment or emancipation, i.e. an ambition of understanding better its self and the situations in which it takes part, but an ambition of instinctively moving in and through these settings with greater efficiency, comfort, and ease. Hence, the opportunistic subject is basically an uncritical subject. It does not attempt to change or criticize the situations in which it takes part. Rather, the opportunist stands out as a politically indifferent subject who seeks to adapt to the explicit and implicit rules of each situation without any genuine commitment and with an instinctive awareness of the situated, conventional, and possibly ephemeral nature of these rules. The opportunist makes sure to always keep at least one door open, ready to act on and adapt to new potentialities.

Based on this I would suggest that we can distinguish between two general directions of an opportunistic style of work/life. First, opportunism can be seen as behavior that is motivated by desire – desire for new experiences and challenges, desire to develop and

to prove ones potential, etc. From this perspective opportunists are those who are able to act in accordance with their inner drives. Second, opportunism can be seen as a reaction to insecurity and fear (Collinson, 2003). An opportunist is then a person who keeps open as many options as possible, turning to the one closest and swerving unpredictably from one to the other. From this perspective, opportunism emerges as the style of life of those with little security and protection. Those who know that they cannot let go of or sidestep their activities, not even for an instant, without the risk of losing the opportunities they presently have. Post-bureaucratic work is likely to be permeated by a precarious balance between these two figures of – positive and negative – opportunism. To the extent the balance of forces turns in the favour of the first, post-bureaucratic work would unfold in accordance with individuals' desires and talents.<sup>6</sup> Such forms of opportunism would then be more or less synonymous with Fromm's utopian vision of 'positive freedom' as consisting in "the spontaneous activity of the total, integrated personality" (1969: 268). The premise of such spontaneous activity would then be "the acceptance of the total personality and the elimination of the split between 'reason' and 'nature'; for only if man does not repress essential parts of his self, only if he has become transparent to himself, and only if the different spheres of life have reached a fundamental integration, is spontaneous activity possible" (Fromm, 1969: 257). It is, as Donzelot (1991) notes, as if management representatives and trade unionists alike have come to embrace this positive form of opportunism as an ideal and attempt to translate it into a model of management.

Whereas the individual's freedom hitherto basically meant the possibility of either accepting or refusing his assigned status, it is now seen as meaning the possibility of permanently redeploying one's capacities according to the satisfaction one obtains in one's work, one's greater or lesser involvement in it, and its capacity thoroughly to fulfil one's potentialities. (Donzelot, 1991: 252)

In general, however, such – positive – forms of opportunistic behavior rely on the assumption that individuals' desires are put to work without being stifled in the process. Individuals who lack motivation or who distrust their own potential of taking hold of the opportunities that present themselves, easily become victims of the will of others and of their own insecurity and desperation. That is, as soon as the individual loses initiative, post-bureaucratic work/life takes on a threatening rather than enabling character. Rather than desire it is then the precariousness and tension that comes from living with constant insecurity that turns the post-bureaucratic worker towards new opportunities: "Fears of particular dangers, if only virtual ones, haunt the workday like a mood that cannot be escaped" (Virno, 1996: 16). That the individual thus acts opportunistically in a desperate attempt to avoid threats and fear may become damaging to it, at least in the long run. This, however, does not necessarily mean that such forms of opportunistic behavior are damaging to the organization. Fear, writes Virno (1996: 16), "is transformed into an operational requirement, a special tool of the trade. Insecurity about one's place during periodic innovation, fear of losing recently gained privileges, and anxiety of being 'left behind', translate into flexibility, adaptability, and

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6 Such forms of work points in the direction of Marx' vision of work as action which is an end in itself. "The realm of freedom actually begins only where labor which is determined by necessity and mundane considerations ceases: thus in the very nature of things it lies beyond the sphere of actual material production.... Beyond it begins that development of human energy which is an end in itself, the true realm of freedom" (Marx, 2006/1894: 959).

a readiness to reconfigure oneself.” That such insecurity is not necessarily viewed as an unfortunate result of the functioning of post-bureaucratic organization is illustrated by the president of the Intel Corporation:

Fear of competition, fear of bankruptcy, fear of being wrong, and fear of losing can all be powerful motivators. How do we cultivate fear of losing in our employees? We can only do that if we feel it ourselves. (Grove, 1998: 6)

This form of opportunism thus compels the individual to take a reactionary stance in which it imitates power in order to take hold of the possibilities of his or her work and life. In post-bureaucratic work, says Virno (1996), employees have a tendency to adapt cynically to the contingencies of each situation, each new project, without any true conviction. Hence, opportunism incited and driven by fear emerges as the opposite of opportunism driven by desire; for it is here the lack of inner drives and ideals that defines the individual as an opportunist.

## **Conclusions**

In a seminal paper on liberal forms of government, Graham Burchell (1991) begins with the maxim that any particular form of governance implies a particular type of subject, which at once constitutes and is constituted by this system of governance. This paper has attempted to add to that maxim the argument that in modern societies, particular forms of governance and particular types of subjects are at once constitutive of and constituted by particular forms of freedom. The majority of the critical studies on post-bureaucratic organization focus on how the transformation from bureaucratic to post-bureaucratic principles of exercising power affects the individual subject at work. A crucial question in these studies has been whether post-bureaucracy emancipates individuals from restrictive bureaucratic power or if it in fact subordinates individuals to power even more effectively and totally than bureaucracy. The answer to this question has been that the focus of post-bureaucracy, despite appearances, is to limit rather than to extend individuals' freedom. Yet, these studies are conducted against the background of a notion of freedom as autonomy, and thus they do not fully acknowledge the extent to which post-bureaucracy implies not only a transformation of the principles of exercising power, but also a transformation the very notion of freedom itself.

This essay has suggested how bureaucracy was structured around a fundamental distinction between the space, time, and culture of work and that of life outside work, and how this not only made it a particular system for exercising power, but also a particular system for configuring freedom. Bureaucracy divided the lives of its members in two separate spheres: a productive professional sphere, where they were subordinated collectively to obligations, rights and interests governed by the organizational hierarchy, and an unproductive private sphere, where they could pursue 'their own' individual interests. Hence, the free, private sphere was as untouched and safeguarded from authoritative intervention as it was unorganized, unproductive, and impotent.

Critical organization studies have explored how post-bureaucracy transforms the bureaucratic principles of exercising power. Yet, they have not paid enough attention to how post-bureaucracy also transforms the bureaucratic principles of configuring

freedom. In this respect, critical organization studies provide us with a picture of post-bureaucracy which helps us see how contemporary work organizations continue, and in part extend, the bureaucratic legacy. However, critical organization studies do not help us see in which respects contemporary work organizations transcend the bureaucratic legacy. This essay has suggested that post-bureaucracy transforms individual freedom from unproductive autonomy to productive, self-organized opportunism. It is productive in that freedom becomes an essential part of post-bureaucratic work; post-bureaucracy does not keep the free choices of its members outside work, it promotes and presupposes an active and enterprising spirit. It is self-organized in that post-bureaucracy builds less on a distribution of directives and formal cooperation than on an organic and immediate cooperation amongst individuals. It is opportunistic, finally, in that post-bureaucracy distributes opportunity without guarantees to those who are perceived to have potential to develop themselves through work.

The image of the post-bureaucratic subject that thus emerges is one that departs from the image developed in most critical organization studies. For it is not a subject that is forced or lured to belong to any community or particular role, but a subject that 'belongs to' a continuous uprooting of the very possibility of any authentic tradition. It is a subject that exploits what Granovetter has termed "the strength of weak ties" (1973), a subject that has learned to live in what Castells has termed a

culture of the ephemeral, a culture of each strategic decision, a patchwork of experiences and interests, rather than a charter of rights and obligations. (Castells, 2000: 214)

For this subject freedom is literally a potential; it is never altogether realized and never experienced to the full; it is a practice of self-overcoming and a dream about becoming the 'superman' (Townley, 1999). As pointed out by Virno (1996), in these circumstances the crucial issue is no longer liberation, but how desire might evolve and be maintained when changing opportunities constantly risk driving individuals into cynical and self-satisfied opportunism.

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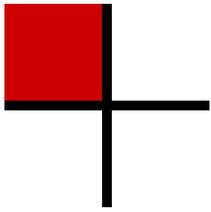
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## The Unknown Variable: Multiple Target Markets in One...

Prue Burns

Lower your expectations because it has been said that Generation Xers can't write, at least "not in a literary sense" (Dawson, 1997: 22, citing the views of the literary establishment). We are the missing link of literature, disdainful of form, feeling and sensibility.

When publishers Allen & Unwin went searching for the "voice of the young urban Australian" in the early 1990s what they found was 'grunge lit' (Dawson, 1997: 123). Reportage rather than fiction, it depicts a world of disaffection inhabited by characters with "low pay, low status and low future" (Brown, 2001: 125), drifting toward what appears to be self-annihilation. The writing itself is scrupulously detached and without illusion. It seems we quite like to shock the reader, but as to whether we move them or not, well, we pretend not to care.

These so-called non-literary tendencies have been viewed as a cultural trait, arising from the fact that Generation X is "the first generation for whom the book is not the primary source of cultural formation" (Dawson, 1997: 122). Born roughly between 1960 and 1975 (Rymarz, 2004; Dixon, 2004; Brabazon, 1998), we are the urban "children of the media revolution" (Brabazon, 1998: 11): cinema-going, comic-strip-reading, hyper self-aware devotees of pulp, which has the distinction of allowing us to "[indulge] in the playfulness of amorality" (Epstein, 1994, cited in Hopkins, 1995: 15) and try on different identities for size. We appropriate these identities as though they are fashion accessories, discarding one in favour of another, depending on the context and situation.

The only society we have known is market driven. Having grown up against a backdrop of economic rationalism and "in the shadow of a great demographic bulge, which foreshadows certain social problems" (Davis, 1997, cited in Brown, 2001: 126) the forces of the 'real world' are beyond our control, the patterns of our lives established by the market. Outvoted by the baby boomers, the state sets priorities divergent to all our leanings in life; we are valued by both the state and the market for our purchasing power alone. 'Economic participation' is the new sport (i.e. religion) of Australia and those of us without sufficient disposable income are expendable, losers relegated to the margins of society and accused of mental and physical sloth. Ours is a world ruled by

the marketing departments of corporations, crowded with images and slogans that infiltrate and bend the structure of our consciousness, threatening to transform us into “signs that consume” (Brown, 2001: 131).

With “impermanence and uncertainty” (Hopkins, 1995: 17) as the only constants in our lives and no reason to believe that this will ever change, our culture is surely the most high-context in the world today – we have raised situational behaviour to an art form. As Tarantino’s Pulp Fiction gangsters, Vincent Vega and Jules Winnfield, say, as they are about to embark on a series of hits, “let’s get into character” (cited in Brabazon, 1998: 17).

This lies at the heart of the culture of Generation X. It is the tacit creed by which we live. We have glutted ourselves in Mathews’ (2000) ‘cultural supermarket’ and are unpredictable not because we are ‘deeply individual’ (Way, 2000) and this makes it difficult for outsiders to get a fix on any group characteristics or cultural norms but because we are each multiple characters, fringe dwellers who prefer an in-between space where tedium and ordinariness are less likely to congregate, identity is unfixed and uncertainty prevails.

As possibly the first generation of Australians to reject national identity (Brown, 2001) and what Bouras calls “the pathology which calls itself nationalism” (2001: 18), we are now finding this in-between space challenging to preserve. Wedged between the boomers and Gen Y – who seem a curious mix of whimsy and ruthlessness, rather like a generation of child stars – most of us Gen Xers have now suffered the indignity of our being appropriated by the institutions, social structures and expectations that we once scornfully watched govern other people’s lives. We live in a climate that seems increasingly hospitable to Pauline Hanson’s extreme-right wing vision of One Nation<sup>1</sup> (who, by the way, has successfully reinvented herself on *Dancing with the Stars*), an idea that one suspects many more were taken with than cared to admit. Unable to see the world as a value-free playground and not quite sure that its heart isn’t dark and fathomless, our answer to date has been denial, a sort of self-imposed exile. Although it has been mooted that Gen Xers like to look real life right ‘in the eye’ (Brown, 2001: 125) and that this manifests itself in our unreserved, grungy tales, there is a faint but unmistakable thrum of anxiety that runs through our literature; the candidness seems counterfeit. We can deal with the ugliness of the world but not yet with the possibility of its meaninglessness. We are not ready for the ‘definitive awakening’, of which Camus writes, that occurs when the ‘stage sets collapse’ and the question ‘why?’ arises (1955: 11). Shunning this moment, or perhaps hopeful that it need not arrive at all, we look about us, finding ourselves in the depersonalised space of offices, shopping malls and supermarkets that could be anywhere. It is a stultifying, musty space where we feel

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1 Pauline Hanson, a Liberal Party candidate in the 1996 Australian Federal Election, co-founded the One Nation party in 1997. The One Nation party stood for ‘national unity’ in the face of what Hanson viewed as a division in the Australian community arising from discontent with ‘unfair’ policies that advantaged migrants and Indigenous Australians. At her now infamous maiden speech in the Australian Parliament she put forward the concern that Australia was being ‘swamped’ by Asians who did not ‘assimilate’ into Australian culture, with no apparent awareness of the moral and ethical issues associated with the earlier assimilationist policies of Australia enforced to assure the absorption of Indigenous Australians into White Australia.

that Rushdie's Alicja might be right: perhaps "these days, character isn't destiny anymore. Economics is destiny" (Rushdie, 1988: 432). Surrounded by the manifestations of a singular goal and trapped in spaces designed to pimp the market's wares, our compulsion to consume is literally unforgettable. The thriftiness of the market is unbeatable. It operates 24/7, ingenious at commanding space, creating new strata titles for bill boards, filling nooks and crannies with advertisements reminding us of what we are missing and presenting us with solutions to a discontent it successfully manufactured with last year's films and television shows. Even litter becomes a form of advertising, at once a sharp reminder of our bulimic condition and the ruination of the earth.

Utterly disenchanted with the refuse that surrounds us, we turn and find some truth in Deleuze's 'modern fact': "We [do not] believe in this world. We do not even believe in the events which happen to us, love, death, as if they only half concerned us. It is not we who make cinema; it is the world which looks to us like a bad film" (Deleuze, 1989, cited in Buchanan and Lambert, 2005: 4).

What we want are *real* Events. Something 'absolutely unpredictable' (Derrida, 2005: 21) and visited upon us with an impact that has zero finesse and shunts the framework we have been operating within so that the way we see and experience the world is radically altered so that something truly different might be glimpsed. We don't want stoppages about a ground "cross-hatched by psychic or real borderlines," we want 'open territories' (Conley, 2006: 95) that enable free movement, multiple connections and impossible, real-life plot twists – the more dislocating the better. It is a strange and beautiful space to occupy and takes quite some creativity to find, but we manage to get there, although sometimes with a little chemical assistance. When mum and dad invite their daughter over for dinner, they quite literally do not know who is going to turn up. And, often, neither does their daughter.

By day she manages staff older than herself and negotiates contracts worth hundreds of thousands of dollars in an office that looks like a set from *Gattaca*, all clean lines, plasma screens and white, white walls. Empty, in the half-light of night, "when the evening is spread out against the sky, like a patient etherized upon a table," it looks alien (Eliot, 1917, stanza 1, lines 2-3). A place where humanity has been expunged.

By night, she travels. Compressed into binary code she slips from state to state, place to place, evading the moral boundary riders with ease. The web is transgression made easy; the antithesis of our day time world where we flex and exercise our judgment – which, as Deleuze suggests, deeply implicates us in issues of justice – and where we support the high order, '*partition* of concepts', '*measuring* of subjects' and the hierarchization of these (Deleuze, 1994: 33). In our daytime world we partake of a system similar to that depicted by Derrida and which informed Butler's theory of performativity.<sup>2</sup> In that world, we "[attribute] a certain force to the law" and anticipate

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2 Butler's theory of performativity regarding gender essentially involves questioning the idea that gender (and identity, more broadly) comes from within, or is 'natural', pre-destined or inevitable but rather that gender (and identity) might be derived or manufactured from the sustained repetition of actions and ways of being that are regulated by and subject to the politics of society. Butler seeks to

“an authoritative disclosure of meaning” (Butler, 1999: 94) from a source that frames thought and being and ‘installs’ and legitimises that authority. In cyberspace, although there may be gateways and certain rules and norms, the levers of control are not yet held by a state to which one submits, nor by the hands of a puppeteer like that which Duena Alfonsa of McCarthy’s *All the pretty horses*, imagines to be pulling on “strings whose origins are endless” (1993: 231), check-mating her long past but not forgotten plays for freedom, enacting all manner of events. For Alfonsa, the question is “whether that shape we see in our lives was there from the beginning or whether these random events are only called a pattern after the fact” (McCarthy, 1993: 230). In cyberspace we feel we can forge our own patterns, and both abandon ourselves to the fates of unknown worlds and, strangely, choose if not control our journey. Authority is dispersed. It is not disgorged from a source that exercises the “authoritative power of naming” (Bhabha, 1987: 5). Decorous, subservient waiting – for enactments, answers and instructions, in places and in queues – is irrelevant. In cyberspace any identity is permissible and there are new and endless fields in which to play. It is a space teeming with possibility, capacious enough to entertain *anything*, and one in which we can forget that the world might be “so constructed that it [requires] our lives to unfold in this way and in no other” (May, 2005: 1).

## Resile from Finitude...

The issue of identity and difference is a consuming but undeclared preoccupation of Generation Xers. Hugh Mackay (2005) has euphemistically labeled us the ‘options generation’ whose approach to life is typified by a single question: “this is great, but what else is there?” This question can be used as a type of ethnographic fulcrum to subdivide Generation Xers into two groups that are fundamentally different. One group believes that “the only source of success and security in [their] lives is [themselves]” (Way, 2000: 18) and asks Mackay’s question quite literally, with the view to weighing up the pros and cons and making a pragmatic decision that is in their best interests (Anon, Australian Company Secretary, 2000; Bright, 2003). The other group is pragmatic about its very identity. It is also disconnected, ambivalent and collapsing under the realization that it lives in a dimension of banality, a world that proliferates sameness. This is the group that listens to the keening of The Dirty Three’s *Ocean Songs*, and, from across those oceans, to Yo La Tengo’s *And then nothing turned itself inside-out*. For this group, Mackay’s question, ‘what else is there?’ is rhetorical. In fact, it unwittingly encapsulates the essence of this sub-culture. We have satiated ourselves on the spoils of choice to the point where everything has become that other definition of ‘pulp’, a “soft, moist, slightly cohering mass” (Macquarie Dictionary, 1998). “What does ‘nothing’ look like when you turn it inside-out,” (Meyer, 2000) muses one music reviewer? Pretty empty...

Although I exhibit traits of both groups, on the whole I identify with the latter category. In terms of this paper, this is problematic. By definition our culture “[aims] to be

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challenge the notion that identity is stable and ‘given’, and expose the forces that shape and legitimise certain identities but exclude and alienate those that exude difference.

ambiguous and avoid definition” (Brabazon, 1998: 12) and likes to maintain an ‘ironic distance’ from stereotypes (Burton, 2000: 59). We are acutely conscious that everything in today’s technological world is readily superseded, including ourselves, and our survival technique is the creation of ‘disposable’ selves that are ‘loose, transitory’ and mutable (Hopkins, 1995: 15). To commit to paper and explore a single identity is anathema. For a start, searching for a sense of self is very, very uncool. Secondly, finding nothingness is terrifying. Better to mask it in cynicism. Better still to remain intangible. Given this context, this is a difficult paper to write. Writing in the third person is no problem since we are comfortable with actually *being* the third person; writing in the first person plural is a little more challenging, but at least we can take some sort of cover in the ‘we’. And writing in the first person singular? It’s akin to therapy – horrifying. Interestingly, Dawson observes that grunge lit, a product of our culture, “can only ever be a collection of first books” and is necessarily ‘confessional’ (Dawson, 1997: 121). It may be cathartic, but its permanence is also painful and marks the end of something.

## A Curious Diaspora

Although Generation X has its literary origins in North America (Jochim, 1997; Brabazon, 1998; Rymarz, 2004), the homeland of Generation X is virtual and accessed by a range of media. We are ‘media citizens’ (Brabazon, 1998: 13). Our homeland may not be physical, but it is a realm where “simulations are more real than reality” (Hicks, 1996: 75), “experience becomes fiction” and television is our ‘shared reality’ (Hopkins, 1995: 16). As a consequence, *all* members of our culture are diasporic. By its very nature, no one actually physically inhabits the homeland. This might seem a bold claim, given that ‘diaspora’ is a term usually reserved for national or ethnic identities displaced outside of a physical homeland, rather than generational or social identities, especially those with no fixed, cultural address. But there may be something to this: it is possible that this, in part, gives rise to the alienation and dispossession experienced by, and often written about, the Generation X culture.

For Anglo Australian Gen Xers, this sense of disconnection is acute. There is a disconnection from other generations, from society and its institutions, from meaning, and also from the land. The issue of land and belonging is particularly troubling for us. Alienation and exile form the central theme for much of Australian literature (Pons, 2001) which is perhaps not solely due to our country’s post-colonial condition. Brown (2001: 126) captures a similar feeling of disconnect when writing of Gen X New Zealanders, describing it as a sense of “living in Someone Else’s Country” but in her essay this dislocation seems to be attributable to a combination of factors, one of the most notable being the inexorable forces of the market and the changes it has effected in people’s everyday lives. Whilst this holds true for Australian Gen Xers, too, a multi-layered sense of trespass and repudiation has also entered into us that has moral, psychic and physical dimensions.

Ours is a country haunted by the spectre of genocide and shaped actively – strategically – by its ability to control its borders. As a penal colony its ‘national’ origins can be

found in these borders; its suitability for exile is the root of its genesis. It is difficult to identify or describe the impact of this, although Gunew explores the processes brought into play and their effect, an account rather disturbing because there is something in it that chimes true:

The boundaries of the penal colony had been internalized by its inhabitants to constitute procedures of normalization. On the other hand, the emigrants... had to be made aware that they were crossing boundaries and that, indeed, they would never stop crossing boundaries all their lives. By definition, to be a *new* Australian was to be a boundary crosser, a transgressor, in the eyes of those who like to think that they had already been t/here. (1990: 111)

Occurring at the median point where one of the definitional boundaries of the Gen-X cohort lies, it was as recently as 1967 that a referendum saw those recognised by law as Australians vote for Indigenous Australians to be recognised also as citizens of Australia, and not part of its flora and fauna. While in our lifetime we have been an active part of few changes of which we can be proud, the Mabo and Wik decisions of 1992 and 1996 which legally acknowledged Indigenous occupation are notable exceptions (although their potential remains unrealised) that changed the scope and tenor of historiographical debates (Veracini, 2003). We might say that our generation has grown up with an awareness of multiplicity, of other peoples and perspectives, and a deep suspicion of historicity and the Australian settler consciousness. Forays into the interior, the turning of land into pasture (and land holdings), tales of big, bold deeds carried out by big, bold men: the legend of the Australian settler unravels with very little pulling, spinning into different tales which seem at once both far removed and strangely extant.

‘Unfit’ though Australia may be “for (European) human beings” (Pons, 2001: 142), or perhaps precisely because of this, its landscape is nevertheless inextricably linked to our culture and makes Australian Gen Xers fundamentally different from our counterparts scattered in other parts of the world.

### **Adrift...**

Having travelled extensively in America and having lived in New York for two years – and having been confronted by the ‘other’ which Said once famously said both “consolidates our identity” and puts it at risk (cited in Ahluwalia, 1996: 4) – I find that there are some observable differences between American and Australian Generation Xers which may be due to geography and our ambivalent relationship to the land.

In America, urbanization feels absolute. Despite the fact that, like Australia, it is a relatively young country (‘young’ in the sense of ‘discovered’ by European explorers), it is a place in which everything feels compressed and intensified. Its vigour has produced a crowded history and a cleverness which has seen the natural almost completely subjugated by the synthetic or manmade. American Generation Xers live in uncompromisingly urban surrounds. Their cities are of a size that is incomprehensible. Their modern, manmade structures seem, paradoxically, like petrified, primordial matter. Perhaps this compounds the problem which, according to some theorists (Walsh

and Bahnisch, 1999), Generation Xers have in anchoring ourselves in the here and now and “locating ourselves historically” (Sarup, 1988, cited in Hopkins, 1995: 17). For all the advents of technology, signposts of the future and the ephemeral nature of films, television and advertising, American cities feel immutable, almost ancient, and certainly implacable to me. They are the perfect haunt for a culture that “feeds off itself” (Hopkins, 1995: 16).

In Australia, it is the boundless space which is incomprehensible and the land which is primordial. Most of us may live in cities but we are “surrounded by ocean and ambushed from behind by the desert – a war of mystery on two fronts” (Winton, 1993, cited in Taylor, 1996: 287). For non-Indigenous Australians the space of interior Australia is dizzying. We have nothing to help us decipher the landscape, no spiritual connection to make the land intelligible.

We simply do not belong. For the non-Indigenous, Australia is an uncongenial land. Our relationship with the land is epistemic and has been hollowed out over some 200 years by an accumulation of knowledge selected and shaped by a speculative disposition. We do not dream dreams like those spoken of by Pat Dodson (1999), of Lingiari’s grandfather, “walking carefully through the spinifex, his toes curling into the red soil, following the spoor of a wounded kangaroo,”<sup>3</sup> and neither can we understand them through text, for the lives of Indigenous Australians and their ancestors cannot be captured within the standards of written English. Clustered around the ‘civilized’ edges of Australia, where the institutions of the state reside among leafy parks and monuments, our dreams and remembrances of Australia are in many respects confined by ‘inherited barriers’ and the “striated spaces cross-hatched by psychic or real borderlines... that prevent the emergence of new ways of thinking” (Conley, cited in Buchanan and Parr, 2006: 95). Our ancestors’ dreams might consist of mustering cattle, tending the land, mending fences and dancing in the town hall, or of a network of footpaths, driveways, suburban plots with evenly spaced roses, and oceans netted so that we might swim safely. And if, as the Gen-X credo goes, “purchased experiences don’t count” (Coupland, 1991: 87), might not the same be said of those that have been borrowed, stolen, or otherwise acquired by generations of ‘settlers’ before us? This leaves us both literally and figuratively with the problem of reconciliation, which remains unresolved and is a constantly undermining presence, eating at our memories and our sense of self, leaving us rudderless.

The feeling of being cast away from place and time and yet subject to history’s domination of the future is beautifully captured by McCarthy in his Border Trilogy. Although set in a different time and country, the story of John Grady Cole in *All the Pretty Horses* is one of borders and transgression, an unruly land, a search for a life that does not exist and the inevitable reckoning that comes when one tries to defy the world that ‘lies waiting’ “between the wish and the thing” (1993: 238). Towards the end of the novel, after the reckoning, John Grady’s friend, Rawlins, sensing that his friend is still

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3 In 1966 Vincent Lingiari led the Wave Hill walk out, a strike by Indigenous stockmen who worked on one of the largest cattle stations in the Northern Territory of Australia, demanding conditions and pay equal to non-Indigenous workers. Wave Hill station was owned by Vestey’s, and English conglomerate that built an empire through the exploitation of its Indigenous workforce.

not at rest or peace asks him where he will go, where his country is, given that his homeland “aint [his] country.” “I dont know, [says] John Grady. I dont know where it is. I dont know what happens to country” (1993: 299). Notably, Rawlins does not answer. There is something enigmatic, obscure and deeply felt about John Grady’s response that accords the land a presence and power beyond our comprehension and acknowledges its true condition as unknowable. It also, though, hints that its fate is entwined with the peoples whose lives unfold and play out across its surface (but never at its core), locked in an unceasing tension. For John Grady, who is in many respects the transgressor of the novel, the imagined land proves to be illusory. This does indeed “[cure] him of his sentiments” (1993: 238) as Alfonsa predicts, however it does not embitter him.

We might take some comfort from this, and we might also learn from John Grady’s journey and coming of age. For Australia isn’t really our country, either, and neither can we live in cyberspace. However transient, visitant or even unwelcome this may make us feel, we can be deepened by our experience of things and this can bring its own kind of solace and growth, and a potentially subversive courage. There is a release to be found in the melancholia of alienation; the wariness with which outsiders have been regarded since time immemorial may well be justified. As both Bhabha and Butler suggest, liminal lives are unpredictable, non-conforming and potentially destabilizing. They are therefore threatening. More than a protest, they have the potential to radically and persistently interrupt the “illusion of ontological stability” (Salih, 2004: 11).

The fraught nature of our relationship with the land notwithstanding, the Australian coast, bush and desert are part of our subconscious and deeply symbolic (Jalland, 2001; Taylor, 1996). Most Australian Generation Xers have a direct connection to the coast, the bush or the ‘country’, meaning the arable land on the fringe of the bush. We were either born in coastal towns, the bush or the country, or have parents who were born in these places, and therefore relatives who still reside in non-urban Australia. The result is that urbanisation in Australia does not feel quite so bare-knuckled, individualistic and entrenched. Its cities feel less dominating, less insidious than American cities. Here there is the sense that people leave for the weekend, whereas in America urbanization and its concomitant brutality is inescapable, except perhaps through an endless succession of anesthetizing images and sound bites. This makes Australian Gen Xers fundamentally different to our American counterparts. In Australia the landscape is a “sign for the nation... and a repository of dreams and misapprehensions” (Radok, 1997: 14). Its peculiarities and dangers are world famous and recognisably ‘Australian’ (Hogben and Fung, 1997; Jalland, 2001; Taylor, 1996). “The importance of the personal journey in the landscape of Australia” was and is “a source of inspiration to Australian contemporary artists” (Bowers, 2004: 18). For many Generation Xers, our personal journeys of discovery have taken place, in part, in non-urban Australia. “Drenching light, heat in the nostrils,” (Krauth, 2004: 250) clay, sand and soil – things you can actually touch and smell – these are real, physical things that we have absorbed.

A journey that takes place in a wholly urban setting must surely be very different. Although Australian Generation Xers know all too well the “dead reaches of suburbia” (Greer, 2002, cited in Speed, 2004: 56), we do have some ‘referents’ and what Brabazon calls “anchors in the real” (1998: 11). Rather than Australia, it is in America

that Greer's dark vision has been realized: the boredom that terrifies all Generation Xers has "deepened into total inertia and deep silence" (cited in Speed, 2004: 56). It is a place where "absolutely nothing [happens] except behind the closed doors of teenagers' bedrooms, on the Net and on the phone" (Greer, 2002, cited in Speed, 2004: 56). The result is serious disconnection from society.

### **In It, But Not of It...**

Born with brown hair and see-through skin in a time and country where blue-eyes, tanned skin and blonde hair was recognised as the typical, physical features of an Aussie, I always felt vaguely on the fringe of things, a bit of an outsider. My interactions with the land were fugitive: ocean swims stolen in the early hours of morning or at dusk when the sun was low and the beaches empty; coloured, speckled eggs stolen at dawn from the nests of mallee birds. The land and coast is lovely, but it is also physically cruel to someone fair and small, determined not to wear ridiculous hats.

The sub-culture of my youth was burned in effigy by Lette and Carey in their 1979 novel *Puberty Blues*. The exploits of a group of young surfer chicks illustrated within the pages brought to the attention of parents a sub-culture which was nothing short of scandalous. The pre-requisite for the in-group in this culture (in addition to the blonde hair) was, to borrow a phrase from another Australian writer, long legs, "smooth and brown like a kid's back in summer" (Stow, 1965: 158).

If you didn't have these physical qualities, you didn't belong, and needless to say, the majority of young, adolescent girls aren't blessed with these attributes. This left a lot of us dwelling on the fringes of a culture already viewed by others as profoundly different to that of previous generations. What do the outsiders of an 'outsider culture' do? Enter stage left, the Generation X culture, a culture which celebrates anti-belonging and makes it acceptable to look for more desirable identities on the shelves of the "global cultural supermarket" (Mathews, 2000: 16). Mathews contends that the cultural supermarket is one of the 'shallowest' levels of culture, implying that it is not really a 'way of life' and is behaviour that can be controlled and changed. This brings us to the core of Generation Xers' identity. Whilst the browsing, sampling, consumer-oriented behaviour of Generation Xers may be likened to "the peasant who acquires a transistor radio and a taste for Coca-Cola" (Mathews, 2000: 16), the forces which shaped and continue to drive Generation X have their roots in a level of culture altogether deeper. The shaping of Generation Xers has taken place by stealth at a level 'beyond the self's control' and is an experience and 'way of life' that we are only just beginning to comprehend (Mathews, 2000: 15).

Mathews (2000: 15) is spot on, however, when he suggests that the freedom to choose aspects of one's identity is spurious: "Choice is not free, but it seems to be free."

Choice is the poisoned chalice of Generation X and comes at a cost. We seem to have dealt with change and an endless array of options with admirable sophistication but in fact it has left a damaging legacy. "Caught up in the processes of inventing a self" (Hopkins, 1995: 15) we have turned our backs on the darker side of our culture. For

those of us with ‘anchors’ or connections to the land and ocean, the folly of this can be examined through metaphor. Writing of the ocean in *Land’s End*, Winton recalls his father’s advice: “Never turn your back on the sea,” his father warns. “For every moment the sea is peace and relief, there is another when it shivers and stirs to become chaos. It’s just as ready to claim as it is to offer” (cited in Taylor, 1996: 288).

The ambiguous world of Generation X is rather like Winton’s ocean: a hedonist’s paradise but also treacherous, its shores proffering only “things torn free of their life or their place” (cited in Taylor, 1996: 288). For those of us ‘in it but not of it’ it also has an icy loneliness. In our efforts to avoid definition we have neither escaped stereotyping nor found what Matthews (2000: 16) calls a “sense of home [and] fixed belonging”. It is no accident that the alternative term for Generation X is the ‘Lost Generation’ (Rymarz, 2004).

This is a culture that has conspired to “disconnect us, one from another, from institutions, from ideas and from ideals” and has left many of us ‘precariously alone’ (Hickey and Fitzclarence, 1998: 9). As Eckersley (1997) shrewdly observed, sometimes this becomes untenable: “when Generation X loses it, they can lose it big” (cited in Burton, 2000: 55). But if we are disconnected and undecided, lost and dispossessed, we might also be better equipped than others to dwell in that in-between space, more receptive to ambiguity and open to (even part of) those who live at what Bhabha calls the nation’s ‘edge’ or ‘margin’, the ‘wandering peoples’ who “will not be contained within... the national culture... but are themselves the marks of a shifting boundary that alienates the frontiers of the modern nation” (1990: 315). We are knots of ambivalence and empathy, unstable and uncertain. We may not have the comfort of belonging, but neither do we experience discomfort when we encounter the Other, because we are other to ourselves.

*So who are we?* May it remain an unanswerable question, for in the instant we answer we are implicated in a performativity that effects our own finitude, transformed from something unaccountable and uncountable into grist to the state’s mill, no longer a vexatious puzzle, but quantifiable, reducible and susceptible to “the gathering of incriminatory statistics” (Bhabha, 1990: 291). If we look closely towards the end of Bhabha’s essay, *DissemiNation* (1990: 320), we find a call to action: “It is by living on the borderline of history and language, on the limits of race and gender, that we are in a position to translate the differences between them into a kind of solidarity.” For Gen Xers, having determinedly left the fold and all its conventions that we abhor but nevertheless dogged by the (rather conventional) need to belong, Bhabha gestures toward a beguiling space where we might find a sense of communion, a celebration of difference and an unceasingly transitional reality impossible to regulate. In this liminal space there is no transcendent ideology and the glittering array of peoples and possibilities seems nothing less than redemptive.

However, it will be tricky to uphold this multitudinousness and address injustice in our world of colonial governmentality if it is only when “the voices of dissent remain individual” that the “boundaries of national culture are open” (Bhabha, 1994: 94), especially when it seems only ‘collective dissension’ or unification achieves change.

The difference between John Grady's world and ours is that his is "redeemable in blood" (McCarthy, 1993: 5) whilst ours requires dexterity with sophisticated instruments designed to privilege certain views, and is under the control of those skilled at deploying Deleuze and Guattari's 'order-words' on behalf of the state. Our world is a place where people burrow down paths of specialisation that "[blunt] the power of the larger questions" (May, 2005: 3) and predestined public policy is invoked, emerging out of ancient philosophical foundations that spawned long ago the liberal theory that is now the grid for our thinking. The debates that take place here seem to be foregone conclusions; they are recitations shaped by the "constraints that haunt our language" (May, 2005: 11) and based on research that "introduces beforehand what it seeks to find" (Derrida, 1978; 2002: 193). In the main, they are also moderated by those hard men of Vestey's.

If we are to be inclusive of the excluded and enable absence to make its presence felt, we have to champion the creation of 'smooth spaces', confront the pitiless nature of Alfonsa's puppeteer, and be wide open to uncertainty. Then, one evening, standing in that strange half light of dusk after all the policy makers have gone home, we might feel some kind of instability enter into and occupy the space around us and begin to swarm. We might feel something permeate us, and though it might be foreign to us we will recognise it and know it to be sentience and that until now we have been complicit in our own zombification. We will be no more certain of anything than we were before but the thrum of anxiety and its accompanying white noise might abate, leaving us permanently altered. In this condition, the melancholia will stir and turn inside us and it will be the dreams of others that become lucid, and we will treat them with tenderness and gravity. Now that's an event worth waiting for.

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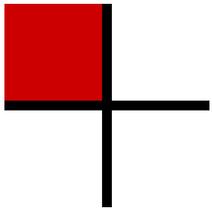
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## Move into the Light? Postscript to a turbulent 2007\*

Turbulence Collective

Recently, Alan Badiou, Etienne Balibar, Michael Hardt, Frederic Jameson, Antonio Negri and Slavoj Žižek (amongst other writers) have all published on the contemporary applicability of Lenin's political thought and philosophy. Yet none of these thinkers are associated with the 'dogmas' and 'vulgarity' of the classical Marxism that characterised the Second and Third Internationals. Contrary to Werner Bonefeld and Sergio Tischler's assessment that "Leninism has fallen on hard times,"<sup>1</sup> perhaps the Bolshevik leader is back in fashion. Is red the new black?

For many of these authors, the 'return' to Lenin is not particularly recent. What is new is the resonance it has found. One of the reasons for this might stem from a general recognition of the need – to paraphrase Mario Tronti – to do what Lenin did in England. That is, to strategically apply Marx's critique of political economy to a particular and material situation. Or, in George Caffentzis' words, to apply "Marxism to itself."<sup>2</sup> When Lenin asked himself the question, 'What is to be done?', the answer he came up with – the construction of a particular form of revolutionary organisation, the vanguard party – arose out of a close examination of the political and economic situation in Russia and the composition of its embryonic working class. It was these conditions that determined the form required to most effectively create rupture within capital's project. At our current historical conjuncture, where both neoliberalism and the movement(s) for alternative forms of globalisation find themselves in crisis, we need to return to this question. How can connections be made between the struggles of the vast multiplicity of productive singularities today? How can a single social actor be constituted out of these struggles, despite and beyond this heterogeneity? Is it even desirable to constitute

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\* Editors Note: This note was originally published at [www.turbulence.org.uk](http://www.turbulence.org.uk). The ephemera editorial collective have decided to re-print it here to encourage ongoing reflection about the current state of 'the movement'.

1 Bonefeld, W. and S. Tischler (2002) 'Introduction', in Bonefeld and Tischler (eds), *What is to be Done? Leninism, anti-Leninist Marxism and the question of revolution today*. Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate.

2 Caffentzis, G. (2002) 'Lenin on the Production of Revolutions', in Bonefeld and Tischler (eds), *What is to be Done? Leninism, anti-Leninist Marxism and the question of revolution today*. Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate.

a single social actor? Answers to these questions can only be found through an enquiry into the already existing social antagonisms and the extent to which they currently operate in common. This is what will necessarily be constituent of any new organisational forms. And the extent to which these forms are attuned to the global political and economic reality from which they seek to break will determine their potential.

Around six months before writing *What is to be Done?* Lenin began with a more modest question, *Where to Begin?* – published in 1901. Central amongst the proposals made in this text was the establishment of an ‘all-Russian’ newspaper. “A newspaper,” Lenin explained, “is not only a collective propagandist and a collective agitator, it is also a collective organizer.” He continued, “In this last respect it may be likened to the scaffolding round a building under construction, which marks the contours of the structure and facilitates communication between builders, enabling them to distribute the work and to view the common results achieved by their organized labour.”<sup>3</sup> Newspapers, magazines, and publishing projects, as well as conferences, gatherings, social forums and other events (can) continue to fulfil this function today. It is to this that the *Turbulence* project hopes to contribute.

Scaffolding, of course, makes no sense as an end in itself. It is an assemblage which needs to be bolted together carefully, with its form and pace of construction determined by the real productive process of building movements and struggles. On the one hand, if it starts to move too far or rapidly away from that whose construction it was designed to aid, it starts to become redundant. Yet on the other, a certain degree of distance can sometimes open up space for development or expansion in previously unforeseen directions. Because of course we don’t know what this construction will look like. We are neither architects nor bees.

The first appearance of the *Turbulence* project, was a 32-page newspaper containing 14 articles addressing the question, ‘What would it mean to win?’ This newspaper was distributed at the mobilisation against the 2007 G8 Summit in Heiligendamm, Germany, in June. The second was a workshop a few months later at the Camp for Climate Action, near Heathrow Airport in London. The third is the collectively written text, *Move into the Light? Postscript to a turbulent 2007*, reprinted below. Despite the different forms taken by each of these three interventions, their goal is the same: to open up a space for thinking through, debating and articulating the political, social, economic and cultural theories of our movements, as well as the networks of diverse practices and alternatives that surround them. The objective has been less to become another journal or newspaper offering a ‘snapshot of the movement’, and more to carve out a space in which we can carry out difficult debates and investigations into the political realities of our time. In doing this we hope to form one part of the scaffolding necessary for constructing organisational forms appropriate to today’s contemporary political and economic reality.

As such, we welcome comments and criticisms.

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3 Lenin, V.I. (1961) ‘Where to Begin?’, in *Lenin Collected Works*. Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House.

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It's night time and a man is crawling around on his hands and knees, looking for his car keys underneath a lamp post. A woman comes along and starts to help him. After they've been searching together for a while the woman asks the man: 'Are you sure this is where you dropped them?'

The man replies: 'No, I think I dropped them somewhere else.'

'Then why are we looking here?' she enquires.

'Because this is where the light is.'

At the beginning of 2007, the Turbulence collective commissioned 14 articles from around the global 'movement of movements', asking authors: 'What would it mean to win?' We edited their responses into a newspaper and printed 7,000 copies, most of which were distributed at the mobilisation against the G8 summit in Heiligendamm, Germany, in June. A few months later, we want to return to the question of winning.

As we resume our search it's no surprise that we keep coming across the problem of *visibility*. When we think about winning, our eyes are drawn to things that are highly visible or easy-to-measure, such as institutional or legislative change, the opening of a social centre or an increase in membership. That's where the light is. But we also need to assess victories in the less tangible though just as real realm of possibilities. Winning in this realm may involve increased potential, changes in perception or patterns of behaviour. Yet these seem to exist at the very edge of the luminous zone.

This problem leads into another: our experiences create their own luminosity and consequently their own areas of darkness. When we think about winning we are drawn to movements, people and events that are familiar to us; and we have expectations about how things should turn out if they are to constitute a victory.

So how can we overcome our night-blindness once we move beyond the familiar? In a sense this ability to look outside ourselves was key to Heiligendamm.

## Heiligendamm: A Different Repetition?

In many ways, this year's G8 summit on Germany's Baltic coast was much as we had expected it to be: a repetition of previous counter-summit mobilisations from at least Seattle onwards (Prague, Gothenburg, Genoa, Evian, Cancun, Gleneagles...). Each of these events saw a broad constellation of actors brought together in productive cooperation. Each opened up a space and set in motion processes of contamination (often behind people's backs) that were key to the politicisation of a generation of militants. On the one hand, people launched practical challenges to the legitimacy of global command (the rejection of dialogue, the blocking of roads into the summit); on the other, commonalities and mutations were produced, in the camps and convergence centres, during debates and actions.

However, previous summit mobilisations had already shown us the limits of such events. After Seattle, in 1999, it became clear that the affect produced in mass street actions would not translate automatically into everyday practices of transformation. Two years later Gothenburg and Genoa showed the price that would be paid by a movement for entering into a logic of near-symmetrical conflict (imprisonment, injuries and death). And Gleneagles 2005 showed the extent to which the desires of a movement could be captured and turned against itself, with 300,000 marching for the G8. So if many had already seen the limits of summit mobilisations, and Heiligendamm had always promised to be a repetition, surely the last thing it was going to be was *different*?

Sometimes, however, what appears like mere repetition is not really a repetition at all; at least not in the sense that it is simply the same thing taking place over and over again. So rather than return to a particular point in a cycle ('Bringing Seattle to Germany', for example), the point at Heiligendamm was to start anew with an unforeseeable process of becoming – one that would hopefully go beyond the achievements and limits of the past. Less a repetition that sought to mimic, more a new experiment in the production of politics; overcoming rather than reaffirming existing identities.

In the run-up to the summit, the groups involved in the organisation of the protest underwent something of a reconfiguration. They took some significant steps towards becoming a more genuine 'movement of movements'. A common 'choreography of resistance' was built and designed by a wide spectrum of groups – from the autonomous radical left through to people organising inter-confessional prayer sessions against poverty. While more radical elements attempted to set the terms of the coalition (a rejection of the G8's legitimacy alongside a toleration of diverse forms of action), there was a willingness to compromise and come to common agreements as to which forms of action were appropriate where and when. In this way Heiligendamm moved beyond the principle of 'diversity of tactics' that had become commonplace, and returned to the earlier process of cross-pollination. Instead of different political currents engaging in different forms of action – in a spirit of solidarity but without jeopardising their own identities – the work developed in Germany was in the direction of a 'becoming-other, together'. This meant collectively devising and carrying out forms of action new to all, actions and alliances that took people beyond their comfort zones towards the practical constitution of new commons, and therefore new common potentials.

## What's the Score?

While Heiligendamm wasn't a quantitative high-point in the history of the counter-globalisation movement (in terms of numbers, Genoa and Gleneagles were both around four times the size), in other respects it did seem that a new *qualitative* high was reached. It was a 'victory' because it was a reconstitutive moment, not least for the German left. But something was missing from this affect of victory: the sense of having *defeated* the other side. Sure, we scored some successes against the police and summit organisers with our mass blockades. But German chancellor Merkel won legitimacy by appearing to force 'the recalcitrant Americans' into an agreement on climate change. And the G8? It is celebrating the Heiligendamm summit as one of its most successful

ever. It managed to create the impression that the leaders of the world are tackling the 'global challenge' of climate change.

When the G8 first became the target of massive protests towards the end of the 1980s, it was relatively easy to point to the in-built illegitimacy of its activities. At the 1999 Cologne summit, when it clumsily responded to actions by social movements in the global South (and some Northern NGOs) by passing debt-relief programmes, hardly anyone took them seriously. But the G8 reinvented itself. It stopped being just a place for the major capitalist powers to hammer out differences and became a media-circus that presents itself as the only forum that can deal with global concerns. In other words, as the G8 came under attack, its very purpose became the re-legitimation of its global authority. And it learnt its lessons well. At Gleneagles, a big NGO operation sponsored by the UK government saw 300,000 people turn out, not to demonstrate against the G8, but to welcome and 'lobby' it in favour of debt relief and aid for Africa.

The initiative lost in Scotland – where the protests were hijacked by an efficient PR offensive – was successfully regained in Heiligendamm: the explicit goal of all major actions was the delegitimation of the G8. The problem however was that the G8 had once again moved on, now seeking to draw legitimacy by seeming to respond to widespread concern about climate change. And this is where we (got) lost. The actions carried out in Germany failed to convey a political challenge to the G8's re-legitimation on the issue of climate change, which had become a new key terrain of struggle.

How did this happen? One reason is that there isn't yet an overarching 'alternative' narrative to the newly greened global capitalist agenda: however bad their story may be, there is nothing else on offer. But the problem runs deeper than that. The G8's narrative on climate change solutions is a fiction, just as it was on making poverty history. But we can't counter this with a fiction of our own: at the moment we don't know how to 'solve' climate change. None of us can see far enough or clearly enough. All we can do is move from one puddle of light to another.

## **What's in a Limit? Capital, Crisis, and Climate Change**

It's no coincidence that talking about the G8 should lead directly to talking about climate change. For movements, it represents the possible emergence of a new focus, as shown by the buzz in public opinion and events such as this year's climate camp in the UK which, it seems, will be repeated in Germany, the US, Sweden and elsewhere in 2008. From the perspective of governance and capital, it is becoming a key element in the management of the global system, both at the level of decision-making and of political legitimation, not to mention new market niches. In the space between movements and governance, it exemplifies the ambiguity and complexity of the question of 'winning'. If the whole emphasis of environmental activism over the last few years has been on raising awareness about the threat of climate change, then 2007 must be seen as the year when 'we won'. The issue is now everywhere, and everyone, politicians and big companies included, talk about it.

Yet it is precisely this victory that could prove to be a defeat. Global concern about climate change must be given a new form if it is to actually affect the state of things (that is, radically reduce carbon dioxide emissions in a short time-frame). In part this means constructing a new story, one that can stop the issue being turned into a huge profit-making opportunity for capital. Without this, it's easy to see climate change being used to unleash a new regime of austerity on the governed, and to excuse measures like increased 'security' and border controls as geopolitical tensions rise. But if the fight is to be more than a public opinion dispute – one where we're always on the back foot – then it has to also take place at the level of production and social reproduction.

It's common to think of climate change as a technical-environmental problem that calls for a technical-environmental solution: the problem is too much carbon dioxide going into the atmosphere, so the solution is to reduce these emissions to 'acceptable' levels via technological innovation, government legislation and the public 'doing their bit'. The difficulty with this is twofold. First, almost everything we do is bound-up with fossil fuel use and the resulting CO<sub>2</sub> emissions: from travelling to work to phoning-in sick so we can watch DVDs. Second, the cuts required (some 60–90% before 2050) are so large they require sweeping changes, and cannot be solved simply by the world's environment ministries getting together.

An alternative way to understand climate change is in terms of metabolism. The Earth's metabolism, its ability to process carbon, runs at a slower speed than the metabolism of contemporary capitalism. The economy is on a collision course with the biosphere. Here we are talking about a limit to the expansion of capital and a possible crisis of accumulation.

For capital, limits are peculiar. Capital has an internal dynamic of expansion which must be satisfied, so limits must be ignored, subverted, side-stepped, or otherwise overcome. And the secret of capital's longevity lies precisely in its ability to use limits and the crises they engender as a launch-pad for a new round of accumulation and expansion. A good example of this dynamism is the emergence of the so-called Keynesian/Fordist phase of capitalism. The high levels of organisation of the industrial working class in the first half of the 20th century – not only the Russian Revolution but intense struggle worldwide – appeared as a limit to the expansion of capitalism, threatening not only to halt accumulation but to destroy the system once and for all. The welfare state was a direct result of these struggles, but it was also a way of neutralising this threat. And capital's greatest feat was to strike a productivity deal which actually transformed this limit into the engine of a new phase of capitalist growth.

What does an analysis of the generic response of capitalism to limit-crises tell us about likely responses to climate change? There's no doubt that climate change is a limit which presents as many opportunities as dangers to capital. Many are jumping at the chance to take this new limit, this potential crisis, and turn it into a new motor for accumulation. Look at the clamour for buying and selling rights to emit carbon: carbon credits, carbon offsets, Tradable Emissions Quotas, carbon futures. And then there's green consumerism: green cars, solar panels, green home make-overs. Could climate change inject new dynamism into the global economy? Are we looking at a new, 'green' phase of capitalism, where the atmosphere is opened up like cyberspace was in

the '90s? It's possible. And it's also obvious that it's unlikely to cut carbon emissions radically!

A capitalist solution will look, well, like capitalism. Just as the effects of climate change are uneven, having a far more devastating effect on the poor – look at the impact of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, or the east Asian tsunami on Aceh – so almost all the current crop of solutions will also work to reinforce existing hierarchies. Most 'green' taxes will increase the price of basic goods and services, limiting mobility and access to food and heating. Access to travel, food and comfort all tied in to possession of money? No news there, of course: just the rules of the game as we know it. Except now they will be justified on the grounds that they're necessary in order to save the planet. Expect 'green capitalism' to be a new regime of austerity and discipline, imposed on the poor more than on the rich in the name of the 'greater good'.

## The Eye of the Storm

But capitalism is neither all-conquering nor invincible. If climate change might open up a moment of crisis, it's worth trying to understand what its dynamics might be.

One key aspect is the variable of time, understood in two different ways. First, there is a problem of time lag. The outcomes of different decisions, in climate change terms, are felt decades later. Due to the thermal inertia of the climate system there is a huge temporal mismatch between cause and effect. This means that if the impacts of climate change become 'out of control', they may stay that way for several decades. Second, all the scientific evidence points to the urgency of the problem. If we are to avoid the 'tipping points' – points at which climate change becomes potentially irreversible and catastrophic for the majority of the Earth's population (the death of the Amazon rainforest being one example) – emissions have to be drastically reduced within the next decade.

There's a positive side to this sense of urgency. A lot of the 'awareness-raising' activism of the last ten years worked with no time variable whatsoever; it addressed 'the public', a general 'other' who needed to be 'informed' of what is going on. Because of that, there were no general deadlines, no overall calendar, no sense of escalation, no particular goals; when everything is always happening 'right now', there is no time as such. The urgency of climate change raises important questions which only exist because of the time variable; they are questions of strategy and tactics.

And here we return to the question of winning. For instance, some suggest that nothing this big can be done with such little time, and the best that can be done is start preparing now for the worst. We may as well extinguish the lights and blithely head off into the darkness. Others have said that the problem is so massive and so pressing that only a centralised body is capable of tackling it. Faced with the abyss of the unknown it's tempting to turn back to the comforting light of the state. But this harsh glare blinds as well as illuminates.

Take the example of air travel. The growth in aviation is clearly a massive environmental problem, so it's easy to get lured into supporting new taxes on flying, say, or even seeing people who fly as part of the problem. But focusing on this issue might make it harder to see some of the other dynamics at work. By restraining our autonomy or strengthening capitalist and state institutions, some climate change solutions may hinder other struggles and make it harder to tackle the larger causes of climate change. What is needed is a lens – an approach or ethic – that allows us to pose the question of how climate change politics can resonate with other struggles. Not because movements need an explicit, *conscious* connection in order to resonate with one another; they don't. But we do need to bring to light resonances and dissonances. Once we can see the paths, they're easier to follow.

While we have to be wary of being blinded by the glare of the state, we can't just close our eyes to it. So how can we relate to institutional forms? Perhaps recent events in Latin America can provide some clues.

## Changing the World by Taking Power?

The last few years have seen the rise and establishment of governments in different shades of red across Latin America. Chavez's Venezuela, Morales' Bolivia and Lula's Brazil have generated the most international discussion. But there's also Rafael Correa's Ecuador, Tabaré Vasquez in Uruguay, the return of Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua and, more contentiously, Michelle Bachelet in Chile and the Kirchners in Argentina. These national processes are not independent, but share two related themes: first, the neoliberal model has run out of steam in the region; and second, the movement of movements has managed to make its mark at an institutional level.

But what are we to make of this institutional success? Some people see these electoral victories as the only concrete result of those post-Seattle years. In this sense, 'winning' would also be the defeat of the 'movementism' of that period: confirmation that it is impossible to 'change the world without taking power'. By this logic, all that is left to do is to ensure that, once in power, the parties and groups that rode on that wave of resistance are able to produce change within institutional constraints. Further, these parties and groups that have ascended to power must also be forced where possible to transform institutions in ways that make them more permeable to this 'pressure from below'. It is taken for granted that such pressure can only fulfil its role if it is capable of being translated into institutional forms.

While we shouldn't underestimate the advances taking place across so much of Latin America, it's worth pausing to consider the implications of this view of social change.

First of all, it's important not to gloss over some important differences among these countries. It is only the case of Morales that directly corresponds to the picture of a growing wave of resistance leading to electoral victory. The history of Bolivia in the last ten years has been punctuated by moments of radicalisation that were always recuperated into the existing political system, only to be denied resolution again. As the episodes of resistance became more frequent and powerful, they forced the systemic

rearrangement that carried Morales' MAS (*Movimiento al Socialismo*) to power. In Brazil's case, a similar wave took place in the 1980s, and was beaten at the polls three times until Lula was elected. By then, the Workers' Party (PT) had become the translation into party politics of a movement on the wane (with the possible exception of the landless workers movement, the MST). In Venezuela, despite a diffuse anger at the impermeability of the institutions and at the policies implemented in the 1980s and '90s, there was no movement as such. Chavez has acted as a catalyst for an intensification of mobilisation and participation which is unheard of in Venezuelan history. It remains to be seen whether he was only the catalyst, or whether he has now become the pillar without which it could all come crumbling down.

More importantly, the idea that these electoral victories are the only practical result of the last decade is flawed on two related counts. First, it assumes that 'politics' only takes place in the institutional places where we normally look for it. This discounts a whole series of networks, infrastructures, knowledge, cultures and so on – a diffuse web of collective intelligence and memory that is always active in one way or another, always producing change, and crystallising as an antagonistic force at crucial points. The escalation of resistance in Bolivia before the MAS victory is a good example of this. What 'disappeared' after each flashpoint would 'return' bigger and stronger. And it could only do so because it had never gone away.

Second, it ignores that fact that movements, as long as they keep moving, have ways of effecting and producing change that do not need to pass through, or even be recognised by, institutional politics. They can do this by, to give a few examples, transforming public discourse, by making legislation unenforceable, or simply through their power of self-management and autonomous self-constitution.

## **What if There Were a New Cycle of Struggles and We Weren't Invited?**

This question of the power of movements brings us back to where we started. As the Turbulence newspaper explained, we had three main reasons to produce a publication for the G8 summit in Heiligendamm. The first, very pragmatic, was that it would be relatively easy to distribute to a wide readership. The second was that in our experience summit mobilisations are spaces where people are more open to other ideas.

The third includes a more complex wager. Since Seattle, summit mobilisations have been the most visible face of the movement of movements, the way its role as a global force is most explicitly manifested, and also the times when its strength and orientations can be gauged. But by the same token it's at summit mobilisations that all the movement's potential limitations have been most apparent.

On one level, the wager was what everybody asked themselves on the way to Heiligendamm: how socially relevant, big, transformative is this event really going to be? Will this be a last gasp, a new beginning, or neither? And, equally important, whatever it is, how will we recognise it?

But if we criticise those who only recognise change on the institutional level, are ‘movementists’ not similarly guilty of looking for answers in the usual places? Here we are again writing of summit protests and counter-summits. Perhaps the impasse of the last few years has arisen precisely because people have failed to see answers in the places they searched, and did not start looking elsewhere. However hazy our image in the mirror has always been, have we not become too enamoured of it to actually have a look around? What if there were a ‘new cycle of struggles’, and we were not invited?

Think about what happened in the French *banlieues* in autumn 2005 (and appears to be re-emerging as we write). Anyone on the ‘established’ left – parties, trade unions, ‘activists’; if you know who we are talking about, you belong in this category! – who claims that those who revolted are ‘with us’ in any strong sense would be guilty of appropriating someone else’s struggle by misrepresenting it. Sure, they fight against many things that we oppose. But let’s look at the established left’s reaction to them, along its three general lines. Either the *banlieues* are brought into a ready-made framework, and become the ‘proof’ of some ‘new stage of capitalism’. Or they signify the terror of a social dissolution that requires state intervention to redistribute wealth and access to opportunities in the long term (but possibly also to police them in the short term, so as to prevent civil war). Or they represent a romantic, abstract ‘other’ whose tough, uncompromising radicality – the poster image of revolution – is paid back with equally abstract solidarity.

If this is all ‘we’ – parties, unions, ‘movementists’ – have to offer, let’s recognise that we are part of the problem. Even the most ‘radical’ members of the established left could only interpret the *banlieues* as an eruption of pure negativity, a ‘force of nature’ rather than the work of real people. For the mainstream politician, it is the face of fear: we’re on the verge of civil war! For others, it’s in itself nothing, but as an unknown quantity it can fit anywhere in the theory: ‘See, it confirms our predictions!’ The latter simply eliminates the event; whatever else happened would mean just the same. The first two recognise an event, but see it as something so beyond any explanation that it can only be a harbinger of the end of the world (something to celebrate or lament, depending on your taste).

All three positions ignore the fact that, if the *banlieues* pose a problem, it is a problem made of flesh and bones. The *banlieues* reveal a gap in our knowledge: for as long as that gap is not filled by *banlieusards* – met on their terms, introduced by their own voices – ‘we’ feed into the game that excludes ‘them’. Worse, by posing as interpreters of those to whom we don’t speak, ‘we’ actively reproduce this game. And there is political currency to be gained, even for the most marginal leftwing groupuscules, by pretending to speak on behalf of those outside the gates. The real challenge, then, lies in effectively opening the gates to those outside. Or better, in tearing down the wall altogether. But this kind of coordination can only take place through actually working with actual people. There is little to be gained by flattering ourselves that abstract feelings of ‘solidarity’ matter in any real way.

Another example: for over a year now, different cities in Spain have seen a unique movement coalesce around people’s frustration with the impossibility of getting ‘dignified housing’ in the face of rampant property speculation. The movement began

when, at the height of the anti-CPE protests in France, an anonymous individual sent out an email calling for a day of protest for ‘dignified housing’. The email did the rounds, and on the arranged day hundreds of people – from cab drivers to hairdressers, as well as ‘activists’ – took to the streets. By the second self-convoked day of protests there were thousands involved. Since then a number of local assemblies have been created, many of which are still going.

The reactions of ‘activists’ to this housing struggle have been interesting. They ranged from confusion (‘How come there is a protest and I don’t know who called it?’), to a desire to fade into the background (‘In the assembly everyone is equal, people shouldn’t expect us to have anything special to say’), to a recognition of how their specific knowledges could be useful (‘Well, I organised a protest once, and I realise it works better if we do it like this...’). People with less of a history in politics, on the other hand, sometimes seemed to go in the opposite direction: famously, the Madrid assembly at one point discussed whether it should subscribe to a protest it had not called – ‘Now we’re the space in which the movement is organised, so we should be the only ones to decide these things’; ‘But didn’t this all begin with a spontaneous demonstration in the first place? Didn’t you attend that?’; ‘I did, but that was before there was the assembly!...’

All of this underlines the point that, no matter what meaning we give to the label ‘movement of movements’, it offers no guarantees. ‘Seattle’ or ‘Cancun’ or ‘Heiligendamm’ don’t mean ‘we’ are the be-all, end-all of social change. In fact, they don’t even mean ‘we’ exist. And to pretend we do, and that history is exclusively ours to make, can only make us blind to where we fit. (And if we fit somewhere, it means logically we are not the whole.)

## Move Into the Light?

This ‘thought travelogue’ that we have tried to establish – from Heiligendamm to Latin America, from the politics of climate change to the *banlieues*, to the movement of movements and back again – saw us start with a question and a few thousand papers to distribute, and come across a few themes and problems that just won’t go away.

We’ve started with the theme of visibility because it highlights the relation between movements and their dynamic of self-reproduction. It’s relatively easy to think of movements grappling with institutional politics, like the electoral experiments in Latin America, or the social forum process, or recent attempts to realign social centres across Europe. Depending on your perspective, these are examples of movements ‘selling out’ or ‘growing up’ or ‘being recuperated’. But all three positions make the mistake of seeing institutional forms as somehow *separate* from movements. Or put another way, all three see movements as discrete bodies, with an ‘inside’ and an ‘outside’, rather than as an endless moving of social relations.

As movements move, they constantly throw up new forms of organisation and practice which are constantly settling and consolidating. Of course this can be problematic: once established, identities and rituals can become huge obstacles to change. But this doesn’t

mean that movements die as soon as they begin to take root, or as soon as they move into the light of exposure. This process is also a way in which movements cast *their own light*. The ‘movement of movements’, for example, is an institutionalisation of a certain moment of struggles, with Seattle as one of its highlights. It has also helped to generate a whole series of other institutions, which have developed their own dynamics. Summit protests, for example, took place around the world, each building on the other with subtle and not-so-subtle modifications. As that cycle of protest seemed to wane, the social forum process took off, constructing a different kind of experiment. After the 2007 World Social Forum in Kenya, heavily sponsored and controlled by NGOs, many felt that this process itself had come to an end. But a few months later the US Social Forum showed that it’s possible to organise something that would not last just a few days but would produce effects in cross-pollinating and coordinating different struggles.

In fact the recent *encuentros* hosted by the Zapatistas brought this point home forcefully. They offered an encounter between, on the one hand, ‘movement’ visions of autonomy, horizontalism and non-hierarchical practice and, on the other, a real attempt to make these visions work on the ground – under threat of attack by paramilitaries and surrounded by hostile forces. Many ‘movementists’ got an insight into the functioning of the ‘Juntas of Good Governance’, a long-term experiment in self-government by the Zapatista autonomous municipalities. A startling aspect of this was the experience of being in a space where men with guns – the EZLN – are on your side. But if we’re serious about producing change in visible and tangible ways, how is that possible without creating institutions of one kind or another? How else are we *really* going to create other worlds?

But there’s a second theme of light and luminosity. When we asked the question ‘what would it mean to win?’, we were deliberately not asking for a ten-point programme. We didn’t want ‘illumination’. Instead we wanted to assert a politics that recognises that no one has the solution, that changing the world is, at least in part, a process of ‘shared investigation’, and that as a first step we can begin to ask the same questions. This is a world apart from the old-school politics of certainty, which is dominated by polemical confrontations, where differing political identities and approaches are pitted against each other, recreating identitarian or ideological niches.

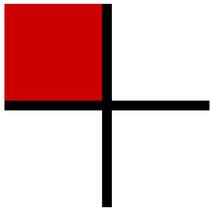
Of course the idea of total illumination is a fantasy. But it’s a very tempting delusion, one tied up with the myth of total knowledge. If you stare at the sun for long enough, an after-image will be etched into the back of your eyelids. After the G8 seized the issue of climate change, some concluded that we just need the right narrative, one that shows only we have ‘the answer’. Rather than adopt this approach, with all its overtones of dual power and counter-hegemony, it seems more productive to take another lesson from Heiligendamm. As people prepared to block the roads leading into the summit, a final piece of advice was circulated: ‘As you approach the police lines, don’t look at the cops – look at the gaps between them.’

Finally, there’s a third thread that ties together the idea of light and visibility. Throughout this text we’ve used the idea of ‘moving into the light’ in the sense of making yourself visible, ‘coming out’ and occupying space. Yet it has a different sense in so-called near-death experiences: you see a light, and a voice invites you to move

into the light. To a certain extent, change means dying. It means abandoning the comfort zone, giving up part of yourself, abandoning habits and certainties. And in a wider sense, movements need to flirt with their own death, with the possibility that they need to cease to be so that something else can be born. Dare we lay this wager? Dare we make this leap of faith? Dare we leap through those gaps, into the unknown, into the light?

**the authors**

Turbulence is a journal-cum-newspaper that we hope will become an ongoing space in which to think through, debate and articulate the political, social, economic and cultural theories of our movements, as well as the networks of diverse practices and alternatives that surround them. Turbulence Editorial Collective: David Harvie, Keir Milburn, Tazio Mueller, Rodrigo Nunes, Michal Osterweil, Kay Summer, Ben Trott, and David Watts. <http://www.turbulence.org.uk>  
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## Whose Passion?\*

Jeroen Veldman

**review of:**

Bruno Latour (2005) *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. (HB: pp. 320, £30.00, ISBN: 978-0-19-925604-4)

### Introduction

Actor-Network-Theory (ANT) has been around for quite a while now and has successfully created a field in which fascinating work has been produced. Despite its controversial nature, people like Wiebe Bijker, John Law, Annemarie Mol and many more within this field have shown the strength of ANT by creating very practical and insightful accounts of social practices, usually focusing on technological innovations and the ways those innovations become social in an entanglement of both human and non-human actors. A trio consisting of Michel Callon, John Law and Bruno Latour has produced and popularized a major part of the descriptions of ANT as well as developed its implications for social theory. Latour in particular abstracted the ANT critique of social studies from its roots in STS and (economic) interaction and developed it into a generalized idea of what a practical social science should look like. It fits that, after some excursions into democracy and green politics, Latour presents us with a book on the basics of ANT. The book is presented as a textbook on ANT, but the wider goal of the book is nothing less than to redefine the notion of the 'social' and to pit ANT polemically against the more traditional, deductive versions of doing social science.

The book is set up as a textbook in two parts plus an interlude. Part one aims to show what kind of general issues arise when ANT is deployed; part two talks about the reception of ANT in a wider context; and the interlude works as a synopsis of the book, in which Latour opposes a view of ANT as a simple method to confirm previously existing theories and positions of agents. Instead of taking both 'actors' and 'networks' literally, Latour wants to stay with the possibility of creating multiple types of

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\* The author would like to express his thanks to Maarten Onneweer, Armin Beverungen and Francois Bouchetoux.

connections. For Latour, the typical end-result of social studies today only serves to confirm what social scientists were looking for: the existence of 'the social'. This is the result of a debate between Tarde and Durkheim that was fought and won by Durkheim when sociology was conceived. To be schematic, Durkheim wanted a science of 'the social', and sought a deductive idea of what laws govern human behaviour, while Tarde championed a far more inductive way of approaching the field, which would mean staying at the micro-level while studying connections and postponing judgement. This allows the researcher to study more sorts of connections than just human interactions and thereby produces a different kind of 'social' than we use in sociology today. Favouring Tarde rather than Durkheim, Latour sets out to inductively explore how all sorts of connections are actually made. These connections involve the activity of various sorts of actors. These actors are not necessarily human, therefore connections can be found in 'assemblages' of human and non-human actors, which can then be traced in order to produce a 'sociology of associations'.

Latour's ANT is ideally a performative science of how assemblages come into being, of what different kinds of actors do. Rather than trying to find 'social forces' and thereby creating an incessant re-application and re-finding of what 'the social' theoretically already is, ANT is the study of interactions and the way in which networks form themselves by drawing in or mobilizing different sorts of actors in particular ways, and how that works to enable or disable the potential agency of those actors. The centre(s) of power and the actors able to speak for other actors from the position of an obligatory point of passage do not necessarily stay the same. The network in action creates its own dynamic, which means that actors change form, shape and position, and cannot rest assured of what or where they are to whom. Actors themselves can only be understood as being something in particular and having a particular kind of agency as a result of the network shape and history at a given time. This means that ANT posits that actors in an actor-network can be more and less than human beings alone.

## Method

The point of departure for Latour is threefold. First, in ANT research, non-humans have to be included as actors with an agency that is more open than traditional causality. By including non-human actors, Latour wants to move away from the privileging of humans in the study of the social. Therefore he starts by taking distance from what is considered routine. The 'black-boxing' of processes hides that possibilities for agency are framed by the inclusion of particular objects and technologies. In ANT-research, looking closely will expose how the possibilities for agency and the place in the network of agents are very much influenced by the inclusion of all kinds of non-human actants. These non-human actants do not just frame the possibilities for agency for human actors, they also attain a kind of agency for themselves.

The second point of departure is the expansion of the explanation of 'the social' to include such new actors and assemblages. Social forces are found in assemblages of concretely studied actants, not in anonymous social forces. It is the task of ANT to constantly re-study the assemblages that are formed, the constructions as they are made,

rather than to arrive at a fixed point where the creating forces can be made to disappear. To do ANT research, we have to stay with the local, with 'thick description', with the actors themselves: "when faced with an object, attend first to the associations out of which it's made and only later look at how it has renewed the repertoire of social ties" (p. 233). For this reason, there's a constant insistence on the study of action, of what becomes a social actant, rather than the revelation of grand power relations or social forces behind the activity. As Latour states: "there is only science of the particular" (p. 137).

This approach puts ANT in a position where any definition of groups can only be performative. It is important to listen to how actors engage with other agents to form a social world and have their own theories of action. The aim for the researcher is to follow the actors moving about in their worlds and to follow their self-defined actions and categories rather than have them speak into our preconceived categories. Agency can be studied through the surrounding controversies, what is being done and the figuration in its many guises. The proportion of actors that are allowed to speak for themselves and the amount of energy, movement and specificity captured are the benchmarks for a good ANT-account.

The third point of departure is the task of reassembling those findings with all the new forms of assemblies into some version of the social. According to Latour, what is gained by any explanation that starts by looking for social interactions is only an explanation of the mysterious force that is called 'the social': it creates a loop without adding knowledge. This kind of positivism is wrong because it hasn't done its job right. Durkheimian versions of social science have to reinforce their premature political conclusions endlessly by holding on to specific versions of 'the social', rather than going back to studying social interactions themselves. They have been acting too fast and without due process, trying to blur the distinction between multiplicity and unification too quickly. The reason for holding on to such a deductive approach in traditional sociology is political. It wants to form the social world at the same time as it is studying it: "The problem is that the social sciences have never dared to really be empirical because they believed that they simultaneously had to engage in the task of modernization" (p. 241). This is especially true for critical sociology: "the problem of critical sociology is that it can never fail to be right" (p. 249).

In Part Two, Latour addresses the wider background of his version of sociology. The social is put forward as a construction, a political representation and a reified substance all at the same time. Latour's main argument is that scale is not to be inserted by scientists, but should be the result of what actors do. We should stay open for a multiplicity that allows us to see our actors as actors, rather than placeholders, generic agents, nodes existing to uphold the structure of a pre-defined system that we are deductively proving or disproving to be true.

## Networks of Passion

Up until here, Latour's account of ANT is mainly an epistemological project involving a return to an inductive sort of science of the social. Latour's emphasis on inductive science works as a continuous effort to remind us of how to do proper research. However, the attack he simultaneously stages on interpretative sociology and phenomenology for placing emphasis on humans as the only beings that can exhibit intentional behaviour is not so promising. Latour attacks the prioritizing of the human(ist) intentional subject in interpretative sociology, because a focus on humans and intention will not automatically bring life, richness and 'humanity' to research. He argues that we should look closely at every kind of construction that inhabits our world(s). A 'lived world' is the world that we co-inhabit with the actants that we find in these constructions. 'Agency' and 'intentionality' cannot be limited to humans alone then. Non-human actors start to play a decisive role as well. For Latour, this means we move away from a metaphysics, an epistemology and a version of politics that takes only human actors into account.

This critique is understandable in so far as it is the prioritizing of one metaphysics, one privileged viewpoint. It works, as long as it is clear that he is talking only about epistemology. But Latour creates a mix of his performative approach towards research methodology and his aggregate ontological vision of what actors are. This pulls subjectivity into his network. For Latour "[s]ubjectivity is not a property of human souls but of the gathering itself – provided it lasts of course" (p. 218). In other words, subjectivity can be understood as a property of *any* particular gathering and can be applied to a world of quasi-objects with (emotional) attachments that can communicate. It is here that things start to slip in his argument.

Words like 'passion' and 'interests' become placeholders for different versions of subjectivity. Latour uses them in four ways: first, as motivation to open up epistemology to more actants and performative science in the epistemology of ANT; second, as interestedness of the researcher to study the why and how of the forming and moving around of assemblages to base a concrete political view; third, as a way of understanding the new constructions between objects and humans as new ways of subjectivity carried by the network; and fourth, by reinjecting this new actant-subjectivity into the research community (making researchers into actants, too). By using 'passions' on these four levels at once, Latour's idea of the subjectivity of actants in ANT keeps oscillating between humans as researchers, actant-networks, and the relation between researchers and actant-networks as the focal point. This means it becomes impossible to point to any actor which is acting in the research in a specific capacity.

The lack of distinguishing between these versions of subjectivity introduces a needlessly defensive stance towards phenomenological ideas of intentionality and agency. ANT constantly recalibrates the object of research between (a) the network under surveillance; (b) the specific subset (assemblage) that has a specific sort of agency and (c) the specific actants within that network it is focusing on. Latour has a tendency to treat the actants at level (c) as reified 'beings'. This makes it possible to stop the process and take interesting subsets and resulting actants 'out of the flow'. But

it also means we are then studying these actants as aggregate constituent components of a particular assemblage and as placeholders of the agency of the network as a whole at the same time. This is problematic because it uses two different kinds of system definitions with mutually exclusive forms of subjectivity.

In the first definition, Latour looks at the conglomerate, emergent agency of the network itself. In this version, it is not the actants, but rather the actants as nodes within the network that are under scrutiny. These actants function as nodes that are constituent for the kind of intentionality that the network as a whole exhibits. The conglomerate version of a network cannot allow for more than agency for the nodes that supports it. This agency emerges as a result of a specific network configuration that only indirectly bestows specific forms of agency to nodes and configurations of nodes within that network. Whether those nodes are human or non-human doesn't really matter, since they are only constitutive of the network and its agency. The fact that the nodes or configurations acquire their own agency does not mean that they will have that sort of agency by themselves outside of the network.

In the second definition, Latour uses the aggregate version of the network as a bottom-up construction of parts in which it is possible to make a cut at a specific point and find a level of aggregation that can support actants as actors-for-themselves. It is only when we transform actants from nodes or assemblages within the larger network into reified actants-for-themselves that passion shows itself. When actants are taken out of the network as actants in their own right, speaking and acting for themselves, these actants are reified enough to acquire intentionality. The actants then automatically attain a status on the same level as the network we were researching before and replace the network as the carrier of intentionality.

The difference between intentionality and agency for actants is a function of the specific cut we make. Not making this distinction explains why actants or assemblies created are no longer entities under research for Latour, but become the basis for a new sort of ethics and ontology and start to replace existing ideas of 'the human'. The subjectivity that was first emergent as a property of the network is functionally replaced by the subjectivity of the actant and this version of subjectivity is silently re-applied to the actants within the new, aggregate network. Understanding the passions and emotions of actants can then be done by looking at their new, reified configurations within the aggregate network. This new network is a function of the actant, and no longer the network we were researching originally.

Latour also uses 'passion' and the importance of the 'quality of gathering' and of 'attachment' as a standard for the epistemological worth of the research. The quality of the attachment between the researcher and the 'social puppet' researched means that "the strings of research can transport autonomy or enslavement" (p. 218). By making 'autonomy' or 'enslavement' of the actant a function of the actions of the researcher, the researcher is drawn into the network as a producer of qualitative sorts of relations. The subjectivity of the network now applies to the researchers and their communities as well. It seems that Latour wants his actants to escape from the carefully constructed focus on performative science to include the researchers and the research community.

The study of the characteristics of such new actor-network-researcher networks potentially leads to an infinite regress.

The question about actor-networks and the methodology of ANT, therefore, is: whose passions do we talk about at what specific moment?

## Discussion

At least now nobody can complain that the project of actor-network-theory has not been systematically presented. I have voluntarily made it such an easy target that is sharpshooter is not needed in order to hit it. (p. 262)

As stated, Latour has succeeded in providing a sharp and detailed account that makes both strengths and weaknesses of ANT visible. For that, he should be lauded, but it does not take away that some constructive criticism might be in place.

With regards to Latour's insistence on the epistemological strength of the programme, he would perhaps be better off to stay with the point that actants are actants that have to be composed within research. Actants have to be assembled from their own actions; they are not given, complete actors at the outset. The level of aggregation that we work with is usually supplied by the cut that is made at one specific moment in the system under observation. In other words, the calibration that we apply to our research and the point at which we zoom in is constitutive for the intentionality the node, actant or assemblage acquires in its new configuration as an actant-for-itself. Still, they are primarily objects within research and have to be seen as such, just like classical objects of research.

If actants are not natural carriers of passion, it seems that the network as such can only be understood as imbued with 'passion' and 'love' by humans researching that actor-network. It might then occur that Latour's 'conduits' are not what 'allows us' to become an individual and to gain some interiority. Rather, his 'conduits' are what makes this happen a bit more in a research methodology for actants within the research. Also, it's not the individual spirit, which would wither for an absence of love in research as Latour claims: it's the researched spirit at best. Lastly, rather than the abstract potentiality for actants to be actualized in the world at large, 'potentiality' could just mean an enlargement for the understanding of actants as more than just human actors and more room for those actants to speak and inhabit their particular world. In this way, ANT retains its value as a call to arms for an inductive approach to social science, but the critique on the primacy of intentionality in humans might be eased a bit.

Insistence on performative science, and harsh words towards the deductive approach, make Latour rightfully susceptible to the accusation of being anti-historical and anti-political. His approach does run the risk of de-historicizing, of losing track of structure and what has been learned before, which can result in forgetting of what has been learned before, and in a lack of feeling for obstructions. This shows itself when Latour explains how ANT is all about the opportunity that the research should have to fail. However much the moral superiority of that position is appreciated, the expectation of

endless resources, the willingness to include all types of actors, and the willingness to have a project fail is stretching the possibilities of modern academia. Going on stressing practicalities, it might be obvious that the book, as an introduction to ANT, would have been served with some more advice and the inclusion of at least some ANT-case studies to show what the strength of ANT is in practice.

There is a rather central problem with Latour's account of ANT, which is that it is a ship flying very many flags. If we accept Latour as its only spokesperson (he says it's a school of one), ANT is a current and a new stream of epistemological thinking, next to Science and Technology Studies. It is also an application or a methodology, which is not deconstructive or in opposition to existing thinking. Finally, it is a revision and a critique of ontological thinking in existing science by attempting to have different kinds of actants accepted as possible agents in social research.

This shows itself when Latour is looking for a new overarching position, a sociology that will answer to his dreams of unifying social science under the flag of performative research. In an answer to attacks on the anti-political nature of ANT-research, Latour posits that politics can only have meaning in a world where differences can be tracked and explored, not an ideology which sets out to find what it has already stated in advance. Latour thinks "critical proximity, not critical distance, is what we should aim for" (p. 253). The freshness of the results, rather than generalized position or cheap calls for social action, will guarantee ANT's ethical and political relevance. However, in the end "sociology, contrary to its sister anthropology, can never be content with a plurality of metaphysics; it also needs to tackle the ontological question of the unity of this common world" (p. 259).

ANT wants to produce some version of the social that is more than a plurality of metaphysical positions that are mutually exchangeable. As Latour says: "It is one thing to claim that social scientists produce written accounts...it's quite another to conclude from this trite that we can only write fiction stories" (p. 126). The insistent emphasis on practical research, combined with the implied imperative not to talk about the grand questions lying behind them, leaves only a limited set of people who can actually discuss the direction of this approach in terms of its tenets and the question of 'the unity of this common world'. His insistence to eliminate power from the research methodology doesn't save Latour from invoking power-relations to keep the ship of ANT sailing. The theoretical openness and focus on performativity of ANT becomes immanently political at this point. The book could be read as an ANT research in itself: who gets thrown out, who is in favour and how does Latour manage to make himself an Obligatory Point of Passage?

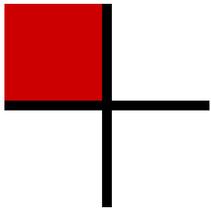
Latour seems to be on the edge of saying something against somebody else on every page of the book. There is a long list of theoretical accusations and counteraccusations in this book, which have one thing in common: they all do not discuss practical research examples, but concern themselves only with epistemology and ontology *in abstracto*. Some of the most common adversaries include natural scientists (misrepresenting ANT-sociologists as simple story-tellers), direct colleagues (STS is not radical enough and sociologists are too obsessed with 'the social' and unproven 'social forces') and Anglo-Saxon scientists generally (for using critiques from ANT in a far too simplistic and

binary way) (note 179, p. 126). Latour provides a strong central position for himself here by pointing out interesting authors and leaving out all others, relegating them to the wider field of STS. Since the book presents itself as an introduction, rather than a discussion of positions, the insistence that power should be avoided as an item of study in the way networks come into being becomes a bit stale here.

Having said that, what remains admirable about this book is the thrust for a methodology that allows for other sorts of actors and for real, inductive accounts of what different versions of reality could harbour. It conveys a feeling that what Latour really wants to do is a version of ethnography with the inclusion of non-human actors. His insistence on sociology being a matter of hard work, postponing judgement and staying close to the world of the actants are very commendable. In this respect, his return to Tarde and the inductive method are a relief, and do provide an interesting way to go forward with social science. Combined with the possibilities that ANT offers and the great work it has produced, this book serves as an excellent entry into the basic questions surrounding this passionate approach to social science.

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## The Lacanian Left Does Not Exist

Carl Cederström

**review of:**

Yannis Stavrakakis (2007) *The Lacanian Left: Psychoanalysis, Theory, Politics*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. (HB: pp. 328, £60.00, ISBN: 978 0 7486 1980 1)

Following the publication of the groundbreaking 1985 work by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, the last two decades have witnessed a surge of books dealing with the odd couple of Lacanian psychoanalysis and political theory. While *Hegemony* only made a few explicit references to Lacan, it has nevertheless been retroactively construed as *the* work that made possible a marriage between Lacan and political analysis.

The reason for this construal has a name: Slavoj Žižek. This Slovene philosopher, also known as the giant from Ljubljana, not only re-read *Hegemony* in his first book written in English, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, making the former perhaps more Lacanian than was intended, but was also the most industrious theorist among those who have tried to introduce psychoanalysis to political theory. Publishing books at an immense speed, Žižek has consistently poured his unique theoretical cocktail over the bald heads of boring and dull academics. He has, perhaps more convincingly than anyone else, shown how ideology operates not only at the level of meaning but also, and more forcefully, at that of enjoyment.

Starting out with an intense intellectual friendship, even publishing a book together (Butler, Laclau and Žižek, 2000), Žižek and Laclau have gradually parted. If before only an element of animosity smouldered, then now, after their heated debate in *Critical Inquiry*, following on from Laclau's latest book, *On Populist Reason*, it has become clear that the two are open enemies.

What did this debate generate, beyond a portrayal of their mutual dislike? If it gave a few indications of their different understandings of Lacan, for example as concerns the notion of the Real, and their opposing views of what class struggle may bring about, it did not say much about their own respective theoretical standpoints.

Fortunately, Yannis Stavrakakis, in his second sole-authored book (published 8 years after *Lacan and the Political*), helps us make sense of this divide. Having been the student of Laclau and having debated with Žižek on more than one occasion over the years, Stavrakakis is perfect for the job. He takes the reader on a journey that goes far beyond the conflict-ridden, theoretical minefield of the *Critical Inquiry* debate, showing in a straightforward and intelligible manner how Žižek's and Laclau's respective theories differ from one another.

But what is the paramount difference between the two? Stavrakakis' answer to this question is that while the former tends to exaggerate the importance of negativity while neglecting positivity, the latter does the opposite – overstressing positivity at the expense of negativity. The meanings of these two terms – negativity and positivity – require a few words of explanation.

The distinction between negativity and positivity, at least how it is articulated in Laclau's and Žižek's work, stems from two different interpretations of Lacan's notion of the Real. In the first interpretation, the Real is conceived as something impossible, as something which "resists symbolisation absolutely" (Lacan, 1991: 66). This version of the Real highlights the negative by arguing that in the construction of meaning and use of language there will always be a remainder that cannot be articulated or captured. The second interpretation of the Real, which is more present in Lacan's later teaching (from Seminar XI and onwards), concentrates more on the positive aspects of the Real, and closely links this notion to *jouissance* (the term that Lacan uses to designate an intense and paradoxical form of enjoyment).

Stavrakakis does excellent work teasing out these respective positions, clearly revealing how negativity has been a perpetual obsession for Laclau and how Žižek consistently romanticizes the positive dimension of the Real. Already in *Hegemony*, Laclau (and, of course, Mouffe) declared the impossibility of society, that 'society does not exist'. At the heart of this distressing announcement lay the theoretical argument that society is predicated on its own impossibility, that no political project or discourse, can hegemonize the whole field of discursivity, and that this impossibility is what drives hegemony forward.

As Stavrakakis points out, Laclau's negative ontology has persisted as a salient trait throughout his writing, explained most notably in relation to antagonism and dislocation. In this respect, Laclau has done a great deal to advance our understanding of *why* and *how* political projects always become articulated through the conditions of their own impossibility. He has continuously tried to theoretically persuade us that any political project – Nazism, Communism, the ecology movement, the feminist movement, or whatever movement there may be – gains its identity not in relation to its own positivity (that is, what it is on a descriptive level) but by virtue of its capacity to overdetermine the apparent identities of adjacent projects such that its core identity remains empty and impossible to pin down.

According to Stavrakakis, what Laclau has not achieved is to provide an account of why some ideological constructions, in spite of their inherent impossibility, remain relatively

stable over time. These concerns, which are closely tied to the notion of *jouissance*, have largely been passed over in silence.

In Stavrakakis' view, Žižek has explored this phenomenon much more convincingly. Having fore-grounded the affective and obscene dimensions of identification, he has shown how every ideological formation gains its force through a collective libidinal investment. But Stavrakakis argues that "Žižek's 'revolutionary' desire" (p. 110) has also led him, at least in his most passionate moments, to deny both lack and finitude. He has romanticized the image of the heroic figure, most notably the image of Antigone, and has thus overstressed "the unlimited (real) positivity of human action" (*ibid.*).

The most perilous effect of overstressing positivity – and, by extension, assuming the existence of pure desire – is that the symbolic conditioning of every act becomes obfuscated. In this light, and given the inevitable misfiring of every act, Stavrakakis suggests that the most radical endeavour one could pursue is to jettison the image of the hero.

The (lack of) balancing between theoretical positivity and negativity is central to the first part of *The Lacanian Left*. But not only Laclau and Žižek are nailed down along this axis. The two additional figures that Stavrakakis brings to this troop are Cornelius Castoriadis and Alain Badiou: the former being a passionate leftist with few good things to say about Lacan; the latter being a French, slightly militant, political theorist, whose appropriation of Lacan is often accused of being disingenuous. The inevitable question that follows from this is: *why* are these two figures labelled Lacanian Leftists? In a delicate manner, Stavrakakis *does* problematize his selection. He brings forth the fact that Castoriadis, at least in his later period, took "distance from Lacanian circles" (p. 37); and, at one point, Stavrakakis even goes as far as to say that "Castoriadis cannot belong to the Lacanian Left" (p. 17). As regards Badiou, Stavrakakis tones down his relevance by dedicating not a whole chapter (as is the case with the other three) but only a shorter "excursion" to him.

But the question persists, why take these two characters on board? Why not concentrate on Žižek and Laclau exclusively? The most plausible answer to this question is that to construct a new 'school' or paradigm, and to name it 'The Lacanian Left', one is compelled to come up with more than two representatives. Against this background it may be argued that the Lacanian Left is more a construction than a fair description of the academic landscape. It leads to the disheartening conclusion that the Lacanian Left does not exist, at least not yet. In fact, Žižek is the only member in the band of four that properly lives up to the name. Even in the case of Laclau it is ambiguous. His Lacanian position has constantly been negotiated and perhaps even forced upon him. And along with Žižek, who was an important influence in Laclau's earlier writing, Stavrakakis himself (often with the support of Jason Glynos) has played a crucial role in pushing Laclau closer to Lacan. If his influence was not obvious before, it becomes clear after reading this book.

Even though the Lacanian Left does not exist, Stavrakakis' attempt to invent it is laudable. He sketches the broad parameters of how a political (normative) strategy, informed by both negativity and positivity, can be successful in an era of post-

democratic consensus. He attempts throughout the book to push an anti-essentialist political programme forward that does not blind itself to the obscene and perverse sides of commitment.

The book is organized into two parts. The first part, which Stavrakakis tantalizingly calls ‘Dialectics of Disavowal’, thus making an oblique reference to the structure of perversion, offers a comprehensive and systematic outlook of the four theorists. The second part of the book, called ‘Analysis: Dialectics of Enjoyment’, starts with a convincing account of how Lacanian analysis transcends purely formal linguistic analysis and explores the opaque world of enjoyment. Following this chapter, Stavrakakis moves on to explore Lacan empirically. Here, three case studies are offered, including topics such as Nationalism, European Identity and Consumerism and Advertising.

Though the first part of the book presents a comparative analysis that has been eagerly awaited, it is the second part that should be of greatest interest for those who work (or will start to work) within the intersection of psychoanalysis and organization theory. This collection of essays is so dazzling and rich in its insights that, arguably, it will be the most important resource for anyone interested in exploring Lacan empirically. In short, Stavrakakis shows how to render a well-informed approach, crammed with complex theory, in the clearest of ways.

Yet, amidst these beautifully written essays something wearisome emerges. This uneasiness, which should be a staple concern to us all, emanates from how these texts may be picked up by communities occupied with questions of motivation. This field which often falls under the banner of management and organization hunts high and low for theories that could better assist them in their struggle to find even more insidious and effective forms of control. It may be paradoxical to say that Stavrakakis book, at least the latter part, is too comprehensible and too useful. But more than any Lacanian text published to date, *The Lacanian Left* can be used as a clear and solid template for crafting out alluring ideologies at the work-place.

In one of the essays, ‘European Identity Revisited’, we learn how Europe has failed to grip “‘the hearts’ and the ‘guts’ of the peoples of Europe” (p. 226). Stavrakakis argues that the limited appeal of the newly-constructed European identity is best explained by acknowledging a neglect of the affective dimension. In another essay, ‘Enjoying the Nation’, we encounter the same argument, albeit from a different angle. We get a detailed account of how nationalism is articulated in close relation to the obscene: from the construction of the obscene Other, always accused for having stolen our enjoyment, to the importance that we attribute to small, seemingly insignificant, aspects of national participation such as eating hot dogs and watching baseball. The lesson is the following: no enjoyment, no identification (that sticks).

Stavrakakis is well aware of this problem. At the end of “European Identity Revisited” he states:

Readers unfamiliar with types of argumentation such as psychoanalysis employs could easily be led to the conclusion that it naturally follows from this analysis that people should surrender to aggressivity and obscene enjoyment, that European studies should re-focus their research attention

on the shape of fruits and the castration fantasies of European peoples, and that Europe will only become really appealing as an object of identification if it starts a sexual – if not an S&M – revolution! (p. 225)

It goes without saying that no one would believe this to be Stavrakakis' claim. However, from the strength of the book follows a danger. I may exaggerate a little, but I shall not be too surprised if the Lacanian invasion of organization theory – when the lessons of Stavrakakis have finally been learnt – will result in the best-seller: *Know Your Employee's Perversities: New Recipes for Effective Human Resource Management*.

However, I'm not making the argument that because Lacanian theory is powerful in the wrong hands it should be treated with the same caution as radioactive waste – that is, to store it as far away as ever possible from man. On the contrary, my plea is to take these essays seriously, so seriously that they do not simply function as case studies, ready to be reproduced in an organizational setting. To take these essays seriously, though, requires a close reading of the first part, as well as the concluding chapter: 'Democracy in Post-Democratic Times'. It is only by virtue of juxtaposing these two parts of the book that a real commitment, which does not merely gloss over the ethical dimensions, can be made to Lacanian theory.

The question as to whether organizations can become ethical or not persists nevertheless. In Lacanian theory, Ethics is not conceived as "the right thing to do". Rather it is indicative of how symbolic structures can be dislocated from within, often through a radical act. The "political project" that emanates from Stavrakakis' book is not a recipe or ready-made template that could be applied to organizations. It is rather a systematic theoretical analysis that confers a particular meaning to the *political*. Far from simply equating the *political* with concrete struggles for and by power, Stavrakakis argues that the *political* is that which opens up new spaces, rendering established social norms contingent, such that new articulations can be made. Here organization theory has a great deal to learn. Though proponents of Social Corporate Responsibility (and those involved in other emerging projects questioning shady business practices) have put Ethics firmly on the agenda, they have nevertheless refrained from radically questioning the fantasmatically and symbolically constituted modalities in which their notion of Ethics is situated. Only recently has the question of Ethics, as a purely philosophical category, been introduced to organization theory (Jones, Parker, and ten Bos, 2005). And in the furthering of this burgeoning interest, Stavrakakis book, as well as other books dealing with Ethics and Lacan (e.g. Zupančič, 2000), will indeed become an invaluable resource.

It should be noted that this is not an introductory book to Lacanian theory (for such purposes it is better to read Stavrakakis, 1999; Fink, 1995; Evans, 1996). But this does not mean that one has to be an expert in Lacanian theory in order to appreciate and comprehend the book. Stavrakakis is almost unique in that he, perhaps more than any other Lacanian, always remains clear, structured and intelligible in his writing.

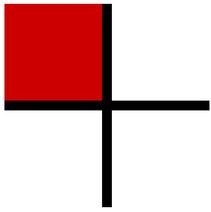
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## Read

Campbell Jones

**review of:**

Jacques Lacan (2006) *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. Bruce Fink in collaboration with Héloïse Fink and Russell Grigg. New York: W. W. Norton (HB: pp. 879, £30.00, ISBN: 978 0 393 06115 4; PB: pp. 896, £15.99, ISBN: 978 0 393 32925 4)

The year 1977 saw the publication in English of three translations from the French by Alan Sheridan Smith. The first was Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, published by the gargantuan publishing house Penguin. The second was Jacques Lacan's *Écrits: A Selection*, published by Tavistock Publications. The third was *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, the first of Lacan's famous seminars to appear in English translation, published by the renowned Hogarth Press in association with the Institute of Psychoanalysis. Three works of two French writers who at that time were already very well established in France – one translator. The itinerary of the reception of these three books could not have been more different. Given that our interest here is in theory and politics in organization, we might try to restrict ourselves to the consequences of the reception of these books for the study of organization.

Recall the situation in organization studies at that time. The *Academy of Management Review* was in its second year; Clegg and Dunkerley had just published *Critical Issues in Organizations*; and the consequences of Braverman's *Labor and Monopoly Capital* were still being calculated. We would have to wait another two years for Burrell and Morgan's *Sociological Paradigms and Organisational Analysis*. How might we gauge the distance represented by the 30 years that stand between 1977 and today? One possible framing comes from an important commentary published exactly half way between these dates. In 1992, Mike Reed wrote of the way that, between the late 1970s and the late 1980s, an "ever-widening range of theoretical perspectives were offered as alternatives to the unacceptable constrictions of orthodoxy and the potential palliatives for the conceptual profusion into which organization theory was being seduced" (Reed, 1992: 4). Commenting on these theoretical incursions into organization studies, he continues:

At one level, these developments seemed to signify the dissolution of organizational analysis as an identifiable field of study and body of knowledge. At another level, they seemed to open up attractive possibilities for research and explanation that forged connections between philosophical debate, theoretical developments and institutional change – connections that had either been ignored or inadequately treated in previous work. Organization theory seemed to have finally left its period of “intellectual innocence” far behind. (Reed, 1992: 4)

By the end of the 1980s and into the early 1990s, the cure for intellectual innocence was, for many, a turn to the works of Foucault. In critical circles, Foucault became one of the central reference points for a thinking of power, discourse, discipline, surveillance and subjectivity. This history is well known to readers of this journal, and the consequences of this turn to Foucault are still being felt today (Butler, 2006; Jones, 2002).

Why Foucault was given such pride of place in these developments is one of the recurring mysteries of that period, and one that cannot be resolved through recourse to either the structure of the field at that time or to the works of Foucault. Of course, Foucault was not the only French theorist who came to prominence at that time. Also apparently did Lyotard and perhaps even more so Derrida – or at least the name ‘Derrida’. The complexity of Lacan’s relations with these other French thinkers prevents any easy position regarding their mutual compatibility or incompatibility. But at the time in the 1980s and 1990s when Lacan swept the humanities, cultural studies and the fringes of the social sciences, he remained almost completely unknown in organization theory.

The 1977 edition of *Écrits: A Selection* contained translations of 9 of the 35 texts from the 1966 French edition of the *Écrits*. These include important texts such as ‘The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis’ and ‘The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious’ although central texts such as the ‘Seminar on “The Purloined Letter”’ and ‘Kant with Sade’ were omitted and appeared in various scattered locations. The selection of these essays was Lacan’s, and it certainly did create a shorter and more manageable volume than the rather grand 1966 volume, which appeared in two paperback tomes in French. This 1977 translation was then reprinted in 1982 by W. W. Norton, then again in 1990 by Routledge, who then reprinted this volume in 2001 as part of the ‘Routledge Classics’ series. For English readers this was, for many years, the only volume of Lacan’s writings that was known. Then, in 2002, Norton released a new edition of *Écrits: A Selection*, completely retranslated by Bruce Fink.

Fink, the author of *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance* (1995) and *A Clinical Introduction to Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (1997), has been prolific in recent years. Having translated Lacan’s *Seminar XX: Encore* (2000), the retranslation of *Écrits: A Selection* (2002) and written his *Lacan to the Letter: Reading Écrits Closely* (2004), he has now released a new translation of what is marketed as ‘The first complete edition in English’ of Lacan’s *Écrits*.

On the surface, this might appear as little more than a book for purists, something to be fondled and adored until the next new ‘little object’ comes along. But at the same time this publication promises something much more – at the extreme, the possibility of

something quite revolutionary in organization studies for the reception of Lacan and, by extension, French theory. This is particularly the case given that the first encounter with Lacan for many was Sheridan Smith's *Écrits: A Selection*, and for many that experience was of an obscure and impenetrable text, which might at least in part explain the lack of attention that Lacan has received to date in organization studies. As he was preparing the translation of the complete edition, Fink wrote: "I can only hope that readers will glean from my new translation of *Écrits: A Selection* (2002) and my translation of the complete *Écrits* (forthcoming) that his earlier translators may well have been more obscure and impenetrable than the man himself" (Fink, 2004: vii).

So this is not simply a new translation. In a way it is a completely new book. Insofar as this is Lacan's only collection of writings now available in English, this brings with it something of a new Lacan. It brings a clarity of prose that is almost totally missing in Sheridan Smith's rendering, and with this a set of insights into the play of language and a clear sense of the way that Lacan – whether he succeeded or not – certainly made a not insignificant effort to establish himself as a 'great writer'. But beyond preparing a completely new translation, Fink has been meticulous in supplying a completely new editorial apparatus. Throughout we find the page numbers of the French for ease of cross-reference, but perhaps most significantly this new edition includes an exhaustive set of 'Translator's Endnotes' which supply, without excessive intrusion or presumption, a set of clarifications regarding translations, implicit citations, cross-references and allusions. We have, then, a delightfully presented retranslation of the text with an incredibly helpful new editorial apparatus. One might think that this translation could solve the problems that previously interfered with the reading of Lacan and now bring him to the light of day. Don't.

There is at least one peculiar irony regarding this translation, and it is perhaps indicative of the cult that is still actively maintained around Lacan. This irony can perhaps be best understood in Lacanian terms, in a way that is analogous to the missing letter in Edgar Allan Poe's story that Lacan analyses in the 'Seminar on "The Purloined Letter"' and which is now reinstated as the first major essay in *Écrits*. The mystery is that Fink has here presented a truly magnificent translation of Lacan's book, in what is a seriously weighty tome. He has translated every word, with the exception of that thing that is perhaps most obvious, the thing that stares one in the face: the title!

One might rightly ask what would be lost in calling this new collection *Writings* by Jacques Lacan. This would have clearly distinguished the new translation from the earlier translation of *Écrits: A Selection*, and then would have also been a *complete* translation of this book. Why, given his great work, would Fink want to retain the French title, the title of a previous and, by his own hand, discredited edition of Lacan's writings?

Beyond the inexplicably untranslated title, we are also still faced with the fact of the text itself, and the fabulations that surround it. First, of course, Lacan's writing, what is known as his 'style'. This has been defended in a variety of ways, perhaps the most outlandish being that Lacan somehow produced a discourse of the unconscious, with the corollary being that the Master would therefore be unfaithful to the unconscious if he was to produce a coherent discourse. There is something more going on here in the

question of Lacan's style, which is at times brilliant but at times overcooked. More than once, I was tempted to concede to Derrida, who writes of Lacan: "I read this style, above all, as an art of evasion" (Derrida, 1981: 110). But this 'above all' perhaps misses something of the complications of the book, and the unevenness and differences between the essays that appear in this volume.

Shortly after the publication of the book, in a lecture given in Bordeaux on 20 April 1968, Lacan described his book as 'unreadable' and as "very thick, difficult to read and obscure" (2005: 80-81). But we should recall that, although students of management might think otherwise, the size of a book is a poor measure of quality, and to call a book 'unreadable' is in some circles a compliment. Indeed, in *Seminar XX* he offers unreadability as a compliment to Phillippe Sollers, and further remarks that "you are not obliged to understand my writings. If you don't understand them, so much the better – that will give you the opportunity to explain them" (Lacan, 2000: 34). In the same seminar Lacan (2000: 26) also famously described *Écrits* as a 'poubelliciation', a neologism that plays on the French *publication* (publication) and *poubelle* (rubbish bin). Perhaps this is another instance in which Lacan hits the SELF-DESTRUCT button, and joins the harshest critics of his style, and this is perhaps unfair, given that there are some beautifully crafted essays here, although it could perhaps be read as indicative of the great variations in style, exposition and the level of argumentation between the essays in this collection.

It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that the original French version of this book met such a mixed reaction. When the book was published, Lacan sent a signed copy of the book to Martin Heidegger. It would seem that Heidegger was not impressed, given that he wrote in a letter to Medard Boss: "You too have no doubt received Lacan's large tome. Personally, I haven't so far been able to get anything at all out of this obviously outlandish text." Heidegger wrote again a few months later: "It seems to me that the psychiatrist needs a psychiatrist" (Heidegger, in Roudinesco, 1997: 231).

This is, of course, a rather weak joke, and Žižek's remark that this is "the only joke – or, if not joke, then at least moment of irony – in Heidegger" (2006: 401) is inadvisable, to say the least. But Lacan was a controversial figure, and *Écrits* is a controversial book, a book that is at one and the same time rigorous, brilliant, insightful and outrageous, lazy and superficial. But for Lacan, psychoanalysis was something that should be controversial, and in Freud's time it was controversial and radical. Lacan bemoaned the fact that even by the 1930s psychoanalysis was something that "no longer involves a conversion that constitutes a break in one's intellectual development, a conversion that thus attests less to a carefully thought out choice of an avenue of research than to the outburst of secret affective strife" (2006: 58). We must not forget that for Lacan psychoanalysis was controversial, and part of his effort was to make it so again. This controversy continues today with the publication in 2006 of the *Black Book of Psychoanalysis* (Meyer, et al., 2005) and the responses coordinated by Elisabeth Roudinesco (2005) and Jacques-Alain Miller (2006).

Of course, if Lacan is a psychoanalyst, then we have here no ordinary psychoanalysis. The effort, as always, was to reinvent and to renew psychoanalysis, and that is the meaning of the proposed *return* to Freud. The reading of Freud that we have here is

then the radical Freud, the Freud of the Copernican revolution in thinking, the Freud of uncompromising speculation and the Freud of the cutting joke. It is Freud who is a reader of philosophy, Freud who is suspicious of Americanisation and Freud for whom the discovery of the unconscious involves a certain discovery from which it is impossible to return or to go back to the subject of the ego and its intentions. In this return to Freud Lacan introduces a lot into Freud that is perhaps not there, or that was underestimated by Freud. It is a reading of Freud in the light of early twentieth century European philosophy and in the light of linguistics, from Saussure and beyond.

This is a book that is literally brimming over with ideas, sometimes restricting itself to psychoanalytic practice but almost always expanding that well beyond its normal confines. Some of the ideas that we find here are incisive and some are drastically poorly formulated, and as a result the demand that faces any reader of the *Écrits* is to work critically against the seductions of style and profundity, and the seductions of both the figure and the person of Lacan, in order to *read* this book. Which means to struggle with it, to test it and contest it, to put it to use and at the same time to be aware of its limits.

To my mind it is a great shame that the current reception of Lacan's work is being so divided between those who seem willing to ignore or to dismiss as of little relevance the work of Lacan and psychoanalysis, and on the other hand a cadre of sycophantic ostensibly radical scholars who find in Lacan an unquestionable master thinker. For those who might become disciples of Lacan there is much to learn from, for example, Lacan's sharp remarks about 'disintellectualization' and the obedience of the 'Little Shoes' that we find in 'The Situation of Psychoanalysis and the Training of Psychoanalysts in 1956'. And those who would ignore Lacan or would keep blocking their ears while denouncing 'structuralism' or announcing that 'Desire is not Lack!' – they now not only can but *must* read Lacan, which means also some others.

We live in an age in which questions of language, meaning and interpretation are often pulverised beyond all recognition. In this sense *Écrits* is a very classical book, a book that, for the technocrats of 'communication', will indeed be unreadable. But it is perhaps only in the face of such a text that it is possible to give meaning to the word 'reading'. This is perhaps the condition of 'reason after Freud', as Lacan so forcefully puts his case in 'The Instance of the Letter'. The defile of the letter in the interests of meaning is presumption and arrogance. To interpret, to search for the meaning of the symptom, will not be easy nor satisfying, and those who want satisfaction should apply elsewhere.

This is, then, a challenging book, and perhaps most important for exactly the demand that it places on *reading*. For this reason, I will conclude here not simply with an invitation to read but with some indications as to how one might read such a book. Lacan put great emphasis on his teaching, and readers new to Lacan are almost certainly best advised to begin with the Seminars compiled by Jacques-Alain Miller, many of which are now in English translation. So if the large volume of *Écrits* is off-putting, these writings can be accompanied by a reading of the several volumes of his seminars which coincide with the *Écrits*. One should also be aware that *Écrits* contains only about half of Lacan's written output, the other half of which appears in *Autres écrits*

(2001) which is yet to appear in English. That volume contains most of the material written between 1967 and Lacan's death in 1981, and some other pieces, although some material has been held back and is now appearing in the 'Paradoxes de Lacan' series edited by Jacques-Alain Miller for Seuil.

But perhaps most importantly, the *Écrits* are, to my mind, best read in a group. Over the past year I have had the good fortune to meet with a committed group of scholars who have read aloud from the seminars and have met for full day meetings to discuss individual texts from the *Écrits*. This exercise was a lesson in the richness of Lacan's text, the use of techniques of prolepsis, anticipations, allusions, wordplay and, not the least, the jokes. But this is also crucial if one is to avoid the uncritical reception of Lacan's text. Many interested in radical theory and politics today come to Lacan through the detour of Žižek, and I have no absolute protest about this path. But the Lacan that we find in Žižek is a very particular one, and typically one that, to recall Heidegger's joke from earlier, has already been to the psychiatrist. But still needs to go back.

*Écrits* is a beautiful and a frustrating book. In many parts it is unreadable, overstated, repeats psychoanalytic prejudice or is based in unusual, unexplained or weak readings. But at the same time this is a crucially important text, and anyone who studies organization and has more than a passing interest in subjectivity and discourse must struggle with this book. Perhaps one way to put it would be to say that this is a great book, but it is not a good book. And as such it requires reading. Which, I can assure you, will cause you much pain. These are *Writings* that one must read. Which means to *Read*, in the strongest possible sense of that word.

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