

Naked PUNCH



Credits:

Editors

Lorenzo Marsili
Qalandar Bux Memon
Jacopo Moroni

Associate Editors

Timothy Secret
Tully Rector

Assistant Editors

Luigi Galimberti Fausson
Nicolas Vieillescazes
Philip Ybring
Simon Webster

Art Curators

Sarah Adina
Rebecca Harris
Michela Pittaluga

Contributing Editors

Amelie Barras
John Bova
Kyoo Lee
Glyn Salton-Cox
Dylan Trigg

Consulting Editors

Simon Critchley
Hilary Lawson
Mark LeVine
Richard Shusterman
Micheal Taussig
Peter Weibel

Editorial Collaborators

Mark Charles
Artemy Kalinovsky
Simon McCarthy
Craig Reeves
Zian Sardar
Zoe Sutherland

Marketing & Sales

Claudine Vega

Art Direction & Design

Rasha Kahil
ayablue@hotmail.co.uk

Consultant

Ziba Norman

Patrons

Patrizia Bisi
Tristan Tzara

Advertisement

c.vega@nakedpunch.com

Contributions

contributions@nakedpunch.com

Enquiries

enquiries@nakedpunch.com

Published in association with the
Forum for European Philosophy.
www.philosophy-forum.org

✉ www.nakedpunch.com

NAKED PUNCH → ISSUE 06

ISSUE 06

→ CONTENTS ←

FRAGMENTS OF A PROLOGUE

- p.7..... Lorenzo Marsili → Grass Cracking the Pavement
p.9..... Qalandar Bux Memon → White Skin, White Mask
p.12 Jacopo Moroni → Framing a New View - A Dangerous Year
..... Yet To Be Lived

ESSAYS

- p.14..... Simon Critchley → Theatre is Narcissism - On Jean-Jacques
..... Rousseau's Narcisse

p.26..... Michael Epstein → Philosophical Awakening in Russia

p.122..... Michela Pittaluga → The Artist as Urban Historian: The Artistic
..... Evolution of Mimmo Rotella

DIALOGUES

- p.76..... Qalandar Memon and Jacopo Moroni in Conversation with TARIQ ALI
..... → 'Scoundrel times': Paris, Baghdad, Lahore...

p.98..... Vicky Steiri in Conversation with ROGER REDGATE → On Music,
..... Philosophy, and Creativity

p.106 John Bova in Conversation with BRUNO LATOUR → On Relativism,
..... Pragmatism, and Critical Theory

POETRY

p.48..... CONTEMPORARY ARABIC POETRY:

- | | |
|------------------------------------|------------------------|
| p.49...Fadhil Al-Azzawi | p.62...Adonis |
| p.51...Mahmoud Darwish | p.65...Kadhim Al-Hijaj |
| p.55...Abdulilah Shalhi | p.66...Iman Mersal |
| p.57...Abdel Kader El-Janabi | p.68...Saadi Youssef |
| p.59...Sargon Boulos | p.73...Ghassan Zaqtan |
| p.61...Khaled Mattawa | |



FEATURING ARTWORKS BY

- p.105..... Rasha Kahil
p.129 Mimmo Rotella
p.136 Noah David Smith
p.140..... Andrei Chehzin

FRAGMENTS OF A PROLOGUE

LORENZO MARSILI

Grass Cracking the Pavement



Naked Punch, before a mere product, a literary object, or a static commodity, is first and foremost an action and a stretching-towards. It is certainly a testimony to the culture of this age, but it describes and discloses the multiplicity of progressive voices transcending the role of mere recorder; Naked Punch openly addresses and brings to analysis the contemporary social and cultural sphere, it refuses to accept, it brings into doubt, it asks questions.

Just this characteristic of movement lends the publication its political dimension.

It is necessary not to stop. It so happens that a body left motionless, in static self-satisfaction, has the rather annoying tendency to rot. The germs of what we may unashamedly call evil, seem to be sleepless workers perpetually at play, waiting for others to fall asleep, rising high at the church bells of profit, setting to labour as treachery can be

perpetuated, betraying society and sublimating its role in one of personal imposition and red-handed material accumulation.

Questions. The Cartesian daemon taking on the mantle of the saviour. That holy "why?", that holy dissatisfaction and that most holy experience of insufficiency, that refusal to follow, that leaving of the queue, that departure, and that undertaking of a new route. Lu Xun; "it is walking men that forge the route".

For a question holds immense power; a question discloses error, makes error come-alive, creates the conditions for error, renders it visible, tangible, a question provokes bodily reaction, it stimulates awareness, increases the gaze, it situates person-hood, participates in the creation of the social multiplicity of conscious person-hoods, it moulds the skeleton of alert society, it challenges consensus and awakens

the consenter, it liberates vital forces subdued and restrained, it breaks deadly silence... its screams—the dawn, the wake, and the breeze.

Questions, like grass cracking the pavement. That vegetation within the city walls growing unplanned, those weeds dotting a brick wall, the climbing green engulfing an old house — a challenge to consented planning, the development of a force both external and in opposition to the established order, a living and vital energy that is in continuous expansion, a power that is not stuck, a force that is not a thing but a movement of growth, plastic and malleable, in self-doubt, in process of becoming, always to-be.

Grass cracking the pavement. That natural uncanny. Alien life, life outside of control, life that does not obey and surrender to dominion; and life that physically breaks and disrupts the familiar order, that technological and societal laying of the table; life, that, through the anarchic liberation of a patch of earth, raises problems.

The seed of dissent—grass cracking the pavement.

Fukuyama's claim to fame is the ridiculous contention that the end of history has finally been reached with developed Western liberal capitalism. There may nonetheless be a partial, albeit unintended, terrifying truth in this statement.

The West is morally stuck.

Political variation, belief in what went for the name of "progress", has in its fall from grace placated sentiments of reject, sentiments of not-being-enough, the will to shape and to transform — sentiments bringing in their wake a most fundamental perception of the wrong to be amended. The capacity to see wrong, the perception of the wrong forcing our bodies to stand up and walk, decisively, towards eternal Spanish windmills; but to have moved, to have caused a smile, to have assumed an armour because of that, that No followed by that energetic stance...

And who gains? For a pacified mass of entertained, falls at the first winter breeze like the dry leaves of an autumn tree...

QALANDAR BUX MEMON

White Skin, White Mask



Yes, yes the 'why's' but more so the 'how'. My friend, the why is apt to circle itself (that dog chasing its own tail), the figure of the 'why' is indeed Rodin's thinkers — poised in slumber. Praiseworthy but static. Aimé Césaire gives us another figure: "And more than anything, my body, as well as my soul, do not allow yourself to cross your arms like a sterile spectacle, for life is not a spectacle, for a sea of sorrows is not a stage, for a man who cries out is not a dancing bear..."

It is the 'why' that very soon craves an imaginary position outside of time, society, and into the decks of the library and those boorish questions — and only these questions — of TIME IN ARISTOTLE... - that why of disinterestedness.

The 'why' is the chief weapon of the child against the adult, it can undermine any given assumption, and for this we admire it. However, what does it build? The 'how' forces open another page. Turn your why — when you are ready — into a how and see:

Why should I live?

How should I live?

Assert.

=====

"To educate man to be actional, preserving in all his relations his respect for the basic values that constitute a human world is the prime task of him who having taken thought, prepares to act".

Frantz Fanon

On the third of January I visit an Antillean poet friend and we go to a pub in Edgware Road. Irish songs are sung and

rooted in this atmosphere of immigrants, he tells me of his recent visit to South Africa. He begins his story of one night beginning with the words, 'you think Apartheid is over?', let me tell:

we went, over the hills,
a big house, nothing much else around,
our flash-light landed on a guard,
he said, 'what are you doing here - you got no business here
you know what this place holds, they are 'whores',
interesting words but undeterred
we went in,
upon reaching the entrance, sizzling in a green gown,
a Garbo frame, she came, a real Madame,
"Gentlemen, how can I help you",
-'what are the rates, we inquired?'
-'500 for half hour',
-'where are the ladies'
-'this way please',
we followed - perturbed we asked,
and so are they 'all white'
she said, 'well, of course, no black girls here'.

A month previously, irritated and frail, with hung shoulders (true) I board a train. In front of me is a young black person - youthful, imperious and magnificently athletic - he gives no quarter or sign of deference and I utter under the slavish breath - 'Savage'.

Two weeks ago in reaction to the festive indulgence I venture for a jog, I don't go far before I hear a child's voice: "Paki".

What I am pointing to are instances that constitute the continued manifestation of Racial prejudice. It lies at the heart of our 'collective un/consciousness' and is continually being reinforced by academic practices (we are given Mill, Hegel, and the whole of the Eurocentric world view without so much as that warning as legislated by Wole Soyinka: 'WARNING! THIS WORK IS DANGEROUS FOR YOUR RACIAL SELF-ESTEEM), by shrivel but effective news coverage, by our gaze at the Other, in our words...in our poetry...in art.

Racist pruderies do not end with de-colonization and they don't just come from one-side. They form part of who I am. And be warned: They surface - the 'hidden' becomes 'actional'. They surfaced when a young Brazilian got off a London bus and calmly walked to get the tube - for this leisure he got 16 bullets. They surface when a dark skinned French person who rolls his "RRRs" goes for a job interview. They surface with similar wanton consequences when indiscriminating bombs are sent to 'shock and awe' or when peace-campaigners are kidnapped and be-headed.

And this is the danger, to be actional - to utter, to draw, to sing, to create - is at the same time to leave a mark, to change, to move - we possess, if only we would see it, irreducible agency. And who can be sure of one's song? 'Why' then risk action? But let us rather ask, 'how' then to be actional? Listen again to Fanon: "while 'preserving in all his (our) relations his (our) respect for the basic values that constitute a human world". The way is dangerous, true - and we must move carefully with ever an alert gaze, but it must be travelled.

'Was my freedom not given to me then in order to build the world of the you?

My final prayer:

O my body, make of me always a man who questions!

Frantz Fanon.

Qalandar Memon

London, January 2006

JACOPO MORONI

Framing a New View – A Dangerous Year Yet To Be Lived



Know everything, understand nothing. The danger, then, is to be subsumed by the sheer amount of information that on a daily basis 'describe' reality, doing so without a truly critical and informative stance, a faceless sequel of names, opinions and ideas barely scratching and denting the surface of the contemporary global order. There is something missing, something that escapes the simple methodology of how the piece of news itself is divulged to the general public. The contradiction, seemingly unsolvable, is that never before we could gain that much from the channels of information while, at the same time, it has never been so difficult to come to terms with and place into context the on-the-ground implications of the events – in short, how should one appreciate what has been acquired, how should one re-act?

In the enterprise of filling the gap between the elements of this contradiction, a useful exercise could be that of reconsidering the concept itself of 'news'. One, after all, could argue that it has altogether lost its *raison d'être* with the tabloids and 24-hour news channels - the ubiquity of its simulacrum denying by implication its real relevance. By contrast, by taking the simple dynamics of what occurs around us as a temporary surrogate concept, one could attempt to resolve this contradiction. In this context, history must be intended as a lived (as opposed to readable) discipline made of a continuous succession of historical burst – a jerky, often uncontrollable series of events that delineate and force upon each other societies, peoples and ideas, whereby the agents of historical action and the full social, political and cultural implications are never denied.

The creation of a new framework of analysis, of a New View that defines our sense of past, current and global affairs would take into account the importance of such 'raw' history. Deprived of the usual 'manufactured' pieces of news and hit by the full scale of a complex narrative, the task of the commentator or of the reader would be to highlight these implications and act as a consequence.

For the novelty of this approach is the rediscovery of hidden voices and unrefined connections that are rarely offered to the general public as 'news' and which by and large history as an institutionalized academic discipline often ignores by principle. Indeed, from this perspective, resolving the main contemporary contradiction in the realm of communication involves the realization that the raw history that is so often denied stems from a particular vantage point – that of dissent and opposition to the established order. In this context, the manifestations of dissent that act in opposition to current trends of neo-liberalism on a global scale represent an organic and contingent reality 'from below' that is for us to discover and which 'balances' the imperfect, a-historical

vision that defines the commentary on global affairs at the present moment of time. In this sense, what have we gained from the commentary of the French events of November 2005? Can the implications of these events – the perfect example of the jerky and unrefined bursts of raw historical power I referred to – be finally inscribed in an original narrative framework or rather will they have to be confined to the surface realm of the 'news', whereby they are detached from the social realities of France, Europe and the World? Can the tools of mass media report the irreducibility of an incredibly heterogeneous global underclass that stretches from the peripheries of London, Paris and Los Angeles to the bidonvilles of Rio de Janeiro and Calcutta and that finds, one would hope, its echoes reverberating in the political activism of millions of people in the over-developed world?

The year two-thousand-and-six is here to be lived dangerously. The dynamics of historical reality that will engulf us and the implications of historical agency are, in the end, for us to define. From below.

London, January 2006



ILLUSTRATIONS BY SARAH ADINA

SIMON CRITCHLEY

Theatre is Narcissism – On Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Narcisse*¹



I WANT TO try and answer the question 'Was bringt die Klassik auf die Bühne' by talking about a theatrical experience I had last year with an unapologetically contemporary staging of a classical play. From April 7-10, 2005, in the Theatre for the New City, in the East Village in Lower Manhattan, the newly-formed Eyeball Planet Company staged the American première of a little known play by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, called *Narcisse, ou l'amant de lui-même* (Narcissus, or the self-admirer). The production was directed by Anne Deneys-Tunney, Professor of French Literature at New York University and the idea for the production came about by chance during some conversations that Anne and I were having about our plans for a one-day symposium at the Maison Française of New York University to celebrate the 250th anniversary of Rousseau's *Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality Among Men*, the famous Second Discourse.

1. This is the text of a talk prepared as part of a series of events to mark the bicentenary of Schiller's death entitled *Spieltrieb. Was bringt die Klassik auf die Bühne?* (Playdrive. What Brings the Classics to the Stage?), held in Weimar in November 2005. It was originally published in German as 'Theater ist Narzissmus. Über Jean-Jacques Rousseaus Drama "Narziss"', *Theater der Zeit*, October 2005, Heft nr.10, pp.40-43.

What is the connection between narcissism and inequality? For Rousseau, the great sea change in the history of inequality is the institution of private property, where someone said "this is mine" and found people simple enough to believe him'. Yet, even prior to the establishment of private property,

when human beings first gathered together, socialized and looked at one another — Rousseau imagines this taking place around a tree in a purported state of nature, and the notion of the look, the narcissistic *regard*, is essential - there was engendered a desire for distinction, to be distinct and different from the others. It is with this desire for distinction that the healthy *amour de soi* or self-love that defines human beings in a natural state begins to be transformed into a narcissistic *amour propre* or pride. For Rousseau, the origin of narcissism consists in this desire for social distinction, from a sense of one's own importance. Thus, inequality and narcissism derive from the same source.

This is the kernel of the drama that is played out in *Narcisse*. I don't know how many people know of or have read Rousseau's plays, as they are fairly obscure. There are seven in all, in various stages of completion or incompleteness. *Narcisse* was the only play to be performed publicly. This was in 1752, where it lasted for just one performance by *Les comédiens du Roi* on December 18th. *Narcisse* found its way to the stage because of the considerable success of *Le devin du village*, Rousseau's pastoral opera, which was performed before the French King, Queen and court at Fontainebleau in October 1752. Louis XV was so impressed by *Le devin du village* that he requested to have an audience with Rousseau, but the latter was so neurotically plagued by a weak bladder that he was terrified that he would wet himself during the audience and therefore he declined, complaining of his '*infirmités*'.

Narcisse was described by Rousseau's sometime friend Grimm as '*une mauvaise comédie*', and although one might expect more loyalty from a friend, he is not incorrect in his judgement. The play is in the style of Marivaux, who read, commented and even made some changes to the text. Sadly, *Narcisse* is not of the quality of Marivaux, which is perhaps explained by the fact that Rousseau claimed

to have written the play when he was just 18 years old. Although this is not untrue, it is certainly not the whole truth, and it is clear that Rousseau periodically and significantly redrafted the play between his youth and the time of the only performance, when Rousseau was about 40 years old. Indeed, he admits this in his *Confessions*, writing that, '...when I stated in the preface to that play that I had written it at eighteen I lied to the extent of some years'. Nonetheless, it is probable that *Narcisse* was Rousseau's first extended piece of literary composition.

The action of *Narcisse* is very simple: it is about a man who falls in love with a painting of himself dressed as a woman. The drama begins with Narcisse's sister, Lucinda, devising a plan to trick the incurably vain protagonist, who is engaged to be married to Angelica². It is a test of his love, which backfires horribly as Narcisse falls completely in love with his own feminized portrait, his objectified self-image. There is much playful, if predictable, dramatic irony, where Narcisse sends off his man, Frontin, in search all over Paris for his new beloved, who is in fact himself.

2. In Rousseau's text, the male protagonist is called Valère, but for the New York production Anne decided to call him Narcisse, which is the name I will use in this presentation.

Lucinda: Frontin, where is your master?

Frontin: Gone in search of himself.

Lucinda: In search of himself?

Frontin: Ay, to be married to himself.

Eventually Narcisse realizes his mistake and the error of his ways, is scolded by his father, and decides to marry Angelica after all. There is also a second love story in *Narcisse*, which is curiously unresolved and unsatisfactorily presented in the play, between Lucinda and Leander, which is intended to mirror the main dramatic relationship. So, the play is a little lesson in the failings of narcissism that ends with the moral, 'when we truly love another, we cease to be fond of

ourselves'. As such, it is a derivative, slight and nicely inconsequential piece, just the sort of thing that Rousseau thought might gain him some sort of a literary reputation when he moved to Paris in 1742, in his thirtieth year.

However, matters become more complex and compelling when the play is linked to the long, important and fascinating Preface that Rousseau wrote to accompany its publication in 1752. In his *Confessions*, Rousseau declares that the Preface is 'one of my best pieces of writing'. The play thus gets situated in between the arguments of Rousseau's First and Second Discourses, in 1750 and 1755. Allow me to rehearse the philosophical arguments here by recounting a famous anecdote, that of Rousseau's moment of 'illumination'. In 1749, when Rousseau was thirty-seven years old, he went to see his friend and fellow Encyclopaedist Diderot, who at that time was imprisoned at Vincennes, outside Paris, for expressing opinions contrary to religion and the state. Short of money, Rousseau used to walk the 5 miles to the prison and to entertain himself on the journey he would read a journal or newspaper. On one occasion, he was reading *Mercure de France*, when he came across a subject proposed by the Academy of Dijon for an essay competition. The subject was: 'Has the progress in the arts and sciences done more to corrupt or to purify morals?' In a sudden flash, akin to the vision of Paul on the road to Damascus, Rousseau realised that progress in the arts and sciences had, in fact, corrupted morals. In a letter to Malesherbes from 1762, Rousseau writes of this experience, with a characteristic absence of emotional understatement,

If ever anything resembled a sudden inspiration, it is what that advertisement stimulated in me: all at once I felt my mind dazzled by a thousand lights, a crown of splendid ideas presented themselves to me with such force and in such confusion, that I was thrown into a state of indescribable bewilderment. I felt my head seized by a dizziness that resembled intoxication. A violent palpitation constricted me and

made my chest heave. Unable to breathe and walk at the same time, I sank down under one of the trees in the avenue and passed the next half hour in such agitation that when I got up I found that the front of my jacket was wet with tears, although I had no memory of shedding any. Ah, Monsieur, if ever I had been able to write down what I saw and felt as I sat under that tree, with what clarity would I have exposed the contradictions of our social system, with what force would I have demonstrated all the abuses of our institutions, with what simplicity would I have demonstrated that man is naturally good, and has only become bad because of those institutions.

The central belief of what we all too glibly call the Enlightenment that derives from Bacon and which is absolutely decisive for figures like Voltaire and Diderot is the belief in progress. That is to say, the development of science, technology, art and culture has led to the amelioration of humanity, or, in Kant's definition, Enlightenment is freedom from man's self-incurred tutelage. For Rousseau, on the contrary, rational and scientific progress is moral and political regress. Civilization is decline. The so-called progress in the arts and sciences has made humanity worse, less human, more depraved, selfish and greedy. What we see in Rousseau is an early version of 19th Century theories of history, in particular that of Marx and Engels in *The German Ideology* and the opening pages of *The Communist Manifesto*, where the seeming progress of humanity has led to progressive alienation from our true condition, what the young Marx called 'species-being'; or Nietzschean genealogy, where the history of morality is the crushing of the active forces of life-affirmation by the cringing *ressentiment* of Judeo-Christian morality. For Rousseau, human history, society and so-called civilization have all conspired to the degradation of the human condition: man was born free, but he is everywhere in chains.

However, if this is Rousseau's position, then isn't it utterly hypocritical of him to publish and indeed permit the performance of a play like *Narcisse*, not to mention his more or less successful experiments with opera, ballet, music and poetry? Betraying early signs of the paranoia that would painfully suffocate him in solitude in later life seeing spies at every turn, Rousseau spends much of the Preface responding polemically to this objection. Firstly, he rather implausibly claims that *Narcisse* is a work of youth and he has subsequently changed his mind. Secondly, and more compellingly, Rousseau argues that given that Parisian society is so utterly and irredeemably corrupt with regard to morals (les mœurs), it is better to divert them with such trifles as the theatre, as this might prevent them from engaging in more harmful, wicked activities like violence and warfare. Rousseau writes, with caustic irony,

My advice is therefore — and I have said this more than once — to leave alone and even to support the academies, the colleges, the universities, the libraries and the theatres, and all the other amusements which are capable of producing some diversion from the wickedness of men and which might prevent them from filling their idleness with more dangerous things. For in a country where there are no decent men and good morals, then it is better to live with mere rascals than violent ruffians.

From this perspective, the failure of *Narcisse* to extend beyond its opening performance offers Rousseau a rather perverse vindication of his views. He writes, with some delight,

My play had the fate that it merited and which I foresaw. But because of the tedium that I felt in watching it I left the performance much more content with myself than if it had been a success.

Thus, the manifest failure of *Narcisse* is transformed into success and its mediocre tediousness is an inverted triumph for Rousseau's assault on culture.

On this question of tedium, Anne decided to perform the play with the entirety of the Preface, read by Anne and myself in a mixture of French and English. It was set to music by Michael Schumacher in a very simple but powerful way and accompanied by some simple, slow movements from actors in the near-dark stage. I am delighted to report that the sheer length and enforced tedium of the performance of the Preface - it lasted for about 30 minutes - made many people in the audience very uncomfortable and many bottoms wriggled nervously in seats. Such is perhaps the Rousseauesque twist on the *Entfremdung* effect.

If we place *Narcisse* in the context of Rousseau's arguments in the Preface and Discourses, then the question of narcissism takes on a rather different, deeper aspect. If narcissism is the experiential effect of inequality - or rather its lived affect - then the very idea of theatre is thereby condemned. This becomes clear if *Narcisse* is linked to Rousseau's critique of theatre in the 1758 *Letter to D'Alembert on Theatre*, where he denounces the latter's proposal for a theatre in Geneva. Rousseau makes two main accusations against theatre. Firstly — and this is, to my mind, a pretty silly idea - theatre is morally and socially dangerous because it reverses the purportedly natural relation between the sexes, permitting women to take power over men through the play of theatrical representation. Theatre - and Rousseau is thinking of the playful comic ironies of Molière — reverses the hierarchy of the sexes and is essentially effeminizing. Seen in this light, the travesty of *Narcisse*, where the male protagonist falls in love with his own cross-dressed feminized image, enacts the entire sexual threat of theatre. Secondly, Rousseau's critique of theatre is a critique of representation. Here Rousseau

restates Plato's critique of the tragic poets in the *Republic* where theatre is excluded from the well-ordered *polis* because it is the *mimesis* or imitation of a mere appearance rather than an attention to the true form of things which should be the concern of the philosopher. The critique of theatre as feminization and representation runs together with his proposal to oppose theatre with civic spectacles, an idea that had a direct influence on Robespierre's *fêtes nationales civiques* in the years after the French Revolution. What is essential to such spectacles is that they are not representations but the presence to itself of the people coming together outdoors in daylight and not dallying in the darkness of the theatre, whose very architecture is reminiscent of Plato's cave. Rousseau writes,

Plant a stake crowned with flowers in the middle of a square, gather the people together there, and you will have a festival. Do better yet; let the spectators become an entertainment to themselves; make them actors themselves; do it so that each see and loves himself in the others so that all will be better united.

In the civic spectacle, the people do not passively regard a theatrical object of representation, but themselves become the self-present subject of their own drama, the actors of their own sovereignty. This idea obviously has enormous political significance and it is clear that behind the condemnation of theatre stands a radical critique of a decadent political system. The core of Rousseau's *The Social Contract* is a defense of the idea of popular sovereignty, namely that the only way of ensuring the legitimacy of society, and balancing the seemingly opposed claims of freedom and equality, is to root sovereignty in the will of the people, not in some external authority, such as a monarch or a hereditary aristocracy. The people should be the actors in the theatre of the state. If one bears this in mind, then the festival becomes the lived manifestation of popular sovereignty, of the people's individual and collective autonomy. The civic festival is the

acting out of the general will in pure presence without the mediation of representation. As such, Rousseau's idea of the civic festival perhaps corresponds to Schiller's conception of the aesthetic revolution that must accompany any political revolution, a vision which finds its most dramatic and aphoristic expression, as Jacques Rancière shows, in the sensual political organicism of the *Oldest System-Programme of German Idealism* and its call for a 'new mythology'. By contrast, the theatre is a veritable temple to Narcissus, a cavernous hall of mirrors that reflects nothing more than the desire for distinction and the hypocrisy of *amour propre*. The theatre is a place where actors are not subjects, but objectify themselves in their desire to see and be seen. Theatre is the very crucible of narcissism and inequality.



All of which means that the status of Rousseau's theatre is peculiar, perhaps without precedent, though with many subsequent imitators: *it is theatre against theatre; it is theatre against the very idea of theatricality*. What is theatre? It is narcissism. What is theatre for? It allows human beings to experience their cave-like captivity in the order of representation and objectification and to become alienated from their free subjectivity, both individual and communal. What, then, might be the purpose of Rousseau's theatre? It is nothing less than a means for diagnosing and criticizing the essential narcissism of Eighteenth Century life and subverting its social drama of inequality.

Theatre is narcissism. What's more, insofar as theatre does not arise *ex nihilo* from some societal vacuum, society is narcissism. Even worse, for

me at least, insofar as it feeds and feeds upon one's intellectual *amour propre*, philosophy is narcissism. Rousseau makes the case crystal clear in the 1752 Preface,

The taste for philosophy weakens all the bonds of benevolence and mutual regard that attach men to society. In fact, this is the greatest of the evils that philosophy engenders. The delights of study render any other attachment rather insipid. What's more, by dint of observing and reflecting on humanity, the philosopher learns to appreciate them according to their true value; and it is difficult to have affection for something that one despises. Soon, all the interest that so-called virtuous men share with their fellows is reunited in the person of the philosopher: his contempt for others is transformed into arrogance; his pride increases in direct proportion to his indifference for the rest of the universe. Words like family and country become for him completely meaningless; he is neither a parent, nor a citizen, nor a man, he is a philosopher.

To come back to the question of what brings classics to the stage, our conviction was that if narcissism, pride, and the desire for distinction were powerful features of life in the Eighteenth Century, then this is all the more true at the beginning of the terrified Twenty-First Century, in a world that has become a vast and spectacular hall of mirrors and where the only reality is that offered by Reality T.V. Unhindered by any egalitarian political vision, our great metropolitan cities have become cathedrals for the celebration of inequality. The polemical force of the New York production of *Narcisse* was, therefore, to undermine its audience, to use and abuse the techniques of theatrical representation in order to raise the issues of narcissism, inequality and theatre itself. Of course, this is a laughably naïve ambition which was doomed to fail. Nonetheless, naïveté is hugely important in my view and what brings classics to the stage has to be their enduring social truth, the fact that

these works make a claim on us, that they continue to speak to who and where we are and allow us to imagine how we might transform who and where we are.

The New York production was resolutely contemporary. It seems to me that the way in which we bring classics to the stage is by denying and dismantling their classicism and affirming their contemporaneity. Anne tried to achieve this effect in a number of ways. Through the use of Stephen Tunney's disjunctively accessible music, through Nikos Floros's outrageously elaborate costumes, but most of all through Anne's technique of what she calls 'automatic acting'. This is the idea that the actors should have absolutely no intentionality as they perform. They become like dolls, machines or dancing puppets trapped within a set of movements and routines. Anne tried to get the actors to learn a technique of dissociation, where their bodily movement was disconnected from their words, and where words and movement were pulling in opposite directions. As well as being comic, this dissociation produced the feeling of insincerity, which was essential to the theatrical effect Anne was trying to produce. What is essential is that this is a theatre in which no one *believes*, not the actors, not the audience, and not, of course, Rousseau himself. It is with this question of belief that I'd like to raise a final question: should we believe in theatre? Should we, really? And if so, how should we believe and what should we believe? You are sophisticated people and I will leave these questions for you to decide, but without some sort of response to these questions, we might begin to wonder what we are doing here playing in the dark.

MIKHAIL EPSTEIN (EMORY UNIVERSITY)

Philosophical Awakening in Russia



The more total society becomes, the greater the reification of the mind and the more paradoxical its effort to escape reification on its own.

Theodor Adorno. *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber, 34

THE LAST PERIOD of the Soviet ideocracy, approximately from the early 1970s through the late 1980s, can be characterized as a period of "philosophical awakening," to use the felicitous expression of the theologian Georgy Florovsky (1893 - 1979).

Such awakening is usually preceded by a more or less complicated historical fate, the abundant and long historical experience and ordeal, which now becomes the object of interpretation and discussion. Philosophical life begins as a new mode or a new stage of national existence... One can feel in the generation of that epoch some irresistible attraction to philosophy, a philosophical passion and thirst, a kind of magical gravitation toward philosophical themes and issues.

Florovsky refers here to the first "philosophical awakening" of Russia in the span of years from 1830s to 1840s: roughly, the generation of Chaadaev, early Westernizers and Slavophiles, such as Belinsky, Herzen, Bakunin, Khomiakov, the brothers Aksakov, and the brothers Kireevsky.

Russia's second philosophical awakening occurred in the first two decades of the 20th century, following in the wake of the unsuccessful revolution of 1905 and disenchantment of the most refined part of intelligentsia with the low intellectual level of populism, Marxism and other socialist theories. This intellectual renaissance is associated with the philosophical collection *Signposts* (1909) and the work of Merezhkovsky, Rozanov, Berdyaev, Bulgakov, Frank, Florensky, Shestov, and other outstanding representatives of the so-called Silver Age.

Finally, after the soporific years of Soviet materialist scholasticism, a third philosophical awakening occurred in the 1970s-80s. In this period, philosophical works were circulated in various forms of "samizdat" ("self-publishing"), "tamizdat" ("there-publishing," i.e., in the West) and "togdaizdat" ("then-publishing," i.e., in prerevolutionary Russia). Such works conveyed a mysterious charm that could not be explained in terms of "truth or falsity," "persuasiveness or dubiousness." The very touch of these books, by such authors as Berdyaev, Shestov, and Bakhtin, made one feel involved in the joy and mystery of self-reflective existence.

The new philosophical renaissance had its origins in the period from mid-1950s through the early 1960s, when Khrushchev's thaw evoked, for the most part unintentionally, new trends of thought implicitly independent of, or even opposed to official Marxism, or radically transforming it. From the late 1980s to the early 1990s these undercurrents rose to the surface and may be classified more or less objectively. Before we suggest such a classification, the reader should bear in mind that in Russia the term "philosophy" covers a broad range of social, religious, ethical, and literary thought and cannot be reduced to a narrow academic discipline. The greatest Russian thinkers of the 19th century, including Petr Chaadaev, Alexander Herzen, Mikhail Bakunin, Fyodor

Dostoevsky, Vladimir Soloviev, Konstantin Leontiev, Leo Tolstoi, and Nikolai Fedorov, were writers, journalists, critics, politicians, librarians, not university professors and academic scholars. This is also true of 20th-century philosophers. Since the term "philosophy" was reserved in the Soviet Union for orthodox Marxism-Leninism, many Russian thinkers came from and retreated into different fields of the humanities, such as literary studies, aesthetics, history, linguistics, ethnology, and psychology. As Gary Morson and Caryl Emerson remark in their study of Bakhtin's "prosaics," it often happens that, "in Russia, criticism and theory become the practice of philosophy by other means." This explains my preference for the broader term "philosophical thought," or even the transliteration, "filosofia," to designate the broad conceptual scope of this Russian intellectual practice, as distinct from the more specialized field of "academic" philosophy. "Filosofia," an outcome of the Russian spiritual tradition, encompasses various fields of the humanities and social theory insofar as they contribute to universal ideational systems and respond to the most general and "absolute" demands of the human mind and spirit.

Over the past forty years, several "filosofical" schools have emerged to challenge the ideocratic principles of Soviet Marxism which itself has undergone remarkable changes. Below, I will briefly outline seven principal trends of Russian thought of the 1950s-1980s.

MARXISM

One principal vector of its transformation in the post-war period was the infusion of nationalism into Marxism, undertaken first by Stalin in his work on linguistics, where the class categories of traditional Marxism were abolished in favor of a notion of national unity, as exemplified in the integrity of national language. This tendency resurfaced in the 1980s, with the increasing rapprochement of official Marxism

and grass-roots, nativist ideology, which later grew into a political alliance of communists and neo-fascists. Another revisionist tendency, toward the humanization of Marxism, emerged in the mid-1950s with the publication of Marx's early Philosophical-Economical Manuscripts, and found expression in the writings of Evald Ilyenkov, Genrikh Batishchev, and Yakov Mil'ner-Irinin. This tendency suffered a severe political blow with the 1968 failure to build "socialism with a human face" in Czechoslovakia, which revealed the incompatibility of humanism and Soviet Marxism.

Later, in the 1980s, three new approaches to Marxism emerge. The first is an attempt to revitalize and modify Marxism in the wake of the failure of the Soviet communist project. This version of post-communist Marxism, exemplified in the work of Sergei Platonov, proposes the purification of Marxism from its Leninist and especially Stalinist contaminations and the incorporation of new realities, such as the persistent success of market economics. The second approach argues that Leninism and Stalinism are consistent with the premises of Marxism, which must therefore be held responsible for all of communism's crimes against humanity. This version, developed in the writings of Alexander Yakovlev, the chief official ideologist of perestroika, involves the radical criticism of Marxism as a non-scientific and anti-humanist theory which, with its all-inclusive determinism, underestimates the sovereignty of consciousness, reducing personality to a function of social circumstances. The third approach, which can be called post-Marxist communism (as distinct from post-communist Marxism), glorifies the religious aspects of communism, which were abandoned by classical Marxism in favor of a quasi-scientific materialism. This position, articulated in the works of Sergei Kurginian and, to a lesser extent, Aleksandr Zinoviev, promotes a renewal of communism as a religious doctrine encompassing the deepest insights of many Eastern and

Western faiths and opposed to the soulless hedonism and consumerism of capitalist civilization. Thus Marxism is presented as the latest form of "humanist religion" that might save humanity from the pitfalls of bourgeois individualism through high spiritual ideals and collectivist aspirations.

NEO-RATIONALISM

A number of new methodological approaches starting from the late 1950s may be united under the title of neo-rationalism. Yuri Lotman (1922-1993), the founder of the Tartu school of Russian structuralism, undertook comprehensive research on what he calls the "semiosphere"--the universe of signs. He offers many penetrating methodological insights on the role of sign systems throughout history and culture. This project of rapprochement between the sciences and humanities was also developed in the Moscow school of structuralism (Vladimir Toporov, Vyacheslav Ivanov and others). Merab Mamardashvili (1930-90) and Alexander Piatigorsky (some of their works were written in collaboration) undertook a phenomenological analysis of consciousness, with a special interest in non-classical, post-rationalist and Oriental types of logic. The theory of systems and general methodology, as related to the philosophical problems of artificial intelligence and cybernetics, have been elaborated in the works of Georgy Shchedrovitsky, Vasily Nalimov, Yuly Shreider, and Georgy Mel'nikov. Neo-rationalism, and especially structuralism, achieved its greatest impact in the 1960s and 1970s when it boldly challenged the social mysticism of orthodox Soviet Marxism; but later, in the 1980s, the role of the primary philosophical alternative passed from structuralism to religious thought, which increasingly opposed itself to old-fashioned Marxist rationalism.

RELIGIOUS

Among the most influential intellectual trends in the 1970s -

1980s are varieties of religious thought, including orthodox Christianity as well as synthetic, occult, non-traditional teachings. Christian visions of history and contemporary society were powerfully expressed by such major writers as Boris Pasternak and Alexander Solzhenitsyn, who inspired many other thinkers. Father Aleksandr Men' (1935-1990) was by far the most influential Russian theologian and Orthodox spiritual leader of the 1970s-80s. In his seven-volume treatise, *In the Search of the Way, Truth, and Life*, as well as in his other books, he elaborates a philosophy of spiritual ascension that leads humanity from paganism to the Christian revelation of Godmanhood. A different, syncretic trend was expressed by Daniil Andreev (1906-1959) in his treatise *The Rose of the World* (1950-1958). Andreev develops an original "meta-historic" and "trans-physical" vision that attempts to absorb the religious wisdom of both West and East and to pave a way for a future "inter-religion" and harmonious world order based on a universal theocracy. Other influential trends in religious philosophy include "the philosophy of the common cause," originating in Nikolai Fedorov's ideas about the universal resurrection of the dead, physical immortality and the technological transformation of the cosmos. Nikolai Roerikh's version of Oriental mysticism and many other para-philosophical, Gnostic and occult teachings are also being intensely promoted and publicized by numerous intellectual groups. A younger generation of religious, mostly Orthodox thinkers is represented by Evgeny Barabanov, Tatiana Goricheva, Sergei Khoruzhii, and Vladislav Zelinsky.

PERSONALIST THOUGHT

Many thinkers and intellectual writers represent various trends of personalist philosophy whose supreme values are freedom and the individual. No comprehensive systematic treatises have been produced in this field, but there are numerous essays, articles and philosophical diaries by Mikhail Prishvin (1873-1954), Iakov Druskin (1902 - 1980), Lidiia Ginzburg (1902-90), Alexander Esenin-Vol'pin,

Grigory Pomerants, Boris Khazanov, Mikhailo Mikhailov, and Boris Paramonov. The formation and self-awareness of personality, in attitudes towards nature and society, love and death, and time and fate are the central motifs of personalist thought. This tradition of philosophical liberalism and pluralism has attracted influential supporters in the field of politics, such as academician Andrei Sakharov and historian Natan Eidel'man (1930-89), as well as outstanding proponents in poetry and fiction, including Joseph Brodsky (1940-1996) and Andrei Bitov, both of whom express personalist views in their essayistic writings and philosophical prose.

NATIONALIST

Nationalist ideology, which emerged in the early 1970s and escalated rapidly in post-communist Russia, has produced its own intellectual elite: writers, critics, historians, and scientists who attempt to create a philosophy of national spirit (which is routinely, though not necessarily, linked to rightist views). Its major intellectual predecessors include the Russian Slavophiles of the 19th century and the Eurasianists of the 1920s. Twentieth-century German and French sources, such as René Guénon (1886-1951), are also abundantly cited. The influential publicistic writings of Alexander Solzhenitsyn and the historio-ethnographic treatises of Lev Gumilev (1912-90) can be placed in this category insofar as they concern general philosophical issues, such as the relation between culture and nation, collective responsibility and guilt, biological energy and the moral patterns of ethnic groups. For example, Gumilev advances an original theory (which sometimes echoes Oswald Spengler's "morphology of culture") that explains the rise and decline of ethnic formations by biological rather than social factors, namely by disproportionate infusions of cosmic energies into the biological mass of humankind. Gumilev's key

concept is "drive," or "passionality," which accumulates in the "heroic personalities" of certain nations and epochs, accounting for their historical accomplishments. Even more extreme representatives of the same conservative nationalism are critic Vadim Kozhinov and mathematician Igor Shafarevich, who have developed a pessimistic view on Russian and Soviet history as permanently threatened and undermined from within by non-Russians, particularly Jews.

CULTUROLOGY

Another important trend of the 1970s-1980s is culturology, the philosophy of cultural dialogue and self-determination through "otherness." It received powerful impetus from Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975), who asserted in his later works that "a culture exists only on the border of other cultures." Another strong influence came from Aleksei Losev (1893-1988), who developed his philosophy of "dialectical idealism" and "absolute mythology" primarily on the material of classical antiquity (*History of Classical Aesthetics*, in 8 volumes, 1963-1988). Younger representatives of culturology include Vladimir Bibler who managed to create his own methodological school of "dialogical logic" in the history of sciences and humanities; and Sergei Averintsev, a brilliant scholar in the field of antiquity and Byzantine civilization who has elaborated the philosophical aspects of cultural heritage and innovation, giving special emphasis to the problems of symbol and the interaction between religious and secular types of culture.

POSTSTRUCTURALISM

The latest trend worthy of mention corresponds to the post-structuralist paradigm in the West. One of its most original versions may be identified as conceptualism. This name usually refers to a well-known movement in Russian arts and literature of the 1970s and 1980s, but it can also be aptly applied to a broad spectrum of critical and philosophical ideas that

complement and highlight this movement. Conceptualism assumes that certain conceptual schemes underlie the ideological construction of reality and determine its artificial, conventionalized character. Conceptual thinking is imbued with irony, parody, and a sense of relativity, since "truth" and "reality" are considered to be empty categories. The relationship between conceptualism and Marxism is somewhat reminiscent of the dispute between nominalists and realists in the epoch of the medieval scholastics: whereas Marxists assert the historical reality of such concepts as collectivism, equality, and freedom, conceptualists demonstrate that these notions are either contingent on mental structures or derived from linguistic structures. Every cultural form is conceived in terms of combinations of pre-established codes, such as Soviet ideological language or the code of the Russian psychological novel. The general approaches of conceptualism can be found in theoretical and artistic works by Andrei Siniavsky, Ilya Kabakov, Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid, and Boris Groys.

Another version of philosophical poststructuralism is presented by the Laboratory of Non-Classical Philosophy at the Institute of Philosophy in Moscow, in particular, by such authors as Valery Podoroga, Mikhail Ryklin, and Mikhail Yampolsky. They publish a philosophical collection *Ad Marginem* (books and an annual) which was methodologically inspired by contemporary French thinkers (Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari and others). Podoroga's works represent an original combination of phenomenological, hermeneutical and deconstructionist readings of German philosophers and Russian writers, with a special emphasis on the corporeal and spatial quality of texts as "landscapes."

Rarely in the history of thought has philosophy represented such a liberating force as it did in Russia from the 1960s through the 1980s. The Soviet State had generated a rigid system of "proven" ideas that aimed to perpetuate its mastery over the

individual mind. For this reason, philosophical thinking, which by its nature transcends the limits of the existing order and questions sanctioned practices, was under permanent suspicion as an anti-State activity: to philosophize was an act of self-liberation via an awareness of the relativity of the dominant ideological discourse. Philosophical ideas in the Soviet Union rarely matured into well-balanced, self-sufficient systems, because the State arrogated to itself the privilege of consummating and elaborating ideas in a systematic way. The fate of non-Marxist thinkers was to dissolve these ideocratic systems in a stream of critical, spontaneous thinking that attempted to go beyond all possible systems, in order to undermine rather than consolidate them. Since official philosophy functioned as a tool of power, it was the task and merit of non-official philosophy to advance anti-totalitarian modes of thinking, thus de-centralizing the structure of discourse and deconstructing any possible principle of systematization. Thought tried to free itself from ideocracy by putting down roots in authentic, concrete entities beyond ideology, such as faith in a living God, the existential uniqueness of personality, the organic soul of the nation, the empirical credibility of science, the symbolic meanings of culture, or, finally, by challenging the master-discourse of Soviet ideology through its parodic imitation and exaggeration. All of these trends in philosophy--neo-rationalist, religious, personalistic, national, culturological, post-structuralist--were initially and intentionally forms of intellectual self-liberation. The internal logic of development, however, has led some of these schools of thought, especially the philosophies of national spirit and religious syncretism, to renovated and "improved" projects of postcommunist ideocracy.

CONCEPTUALISM VS. METAPHYSICAL RADICALISM

I must reiterate that the Soviet system was not merely a political and legislative entity but was founded on a metaphysical, even eschatological, vision, officially called Marxism but stemming also from the prophetic philosophiz-

ing of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Hence the collapse of the Soviet regime left something more than just a need for governmental reform: it left a metaphysical vacuum, eager to be filled.

If the prevailing mood among intellectuals in the late Soviet period was to challenge and demystify ideocracy, then the collapse of that ideocracy generated numerous emulations and simulations among various intellectual groups, which attempted, at least in theory, to build a new ideocratic regime on a more firm, nationalistic, technological and/or religious foundation. Traditionally in Russia, political platforms have been constructed on a framework of the most general, "filosofical" ideas; in the early 1990s, competing metaphysical theories were rushing in to fill the demolished and excavated site with a foundation for a new political architecture. The death of one "big" totalitarianism gave birth to a number of smaller ones. Many politicians, of both leftist and rightist orientation, such as Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, Dmitrii Ragozin, and even the new communist leader Gennady Zyuganov more or less consistently wielded metaphysical ideas to justify their ambitions for intellectual leadership.

This overall tendency, characteristic of the Russian mentality in general but aggravated in the early 1990s by increasing political instability, can be called "metaphysical radicalism." Political radicalism flows from the very core of this type of metaphysics, which, following Marxist paradigm, does not limit itself to explaining the world but attempts to change it. At the same time, any politics with pretensions to radically transforming the world cannot limit itself to the social, economic, and legislative dimensions, but must entail metaphysical assumptions. Since Russia's historical dynamics are not evolutionary but disruptive and catastrophic, each break in political continuity necessitates renewed metaphysical speculation and indoctrination designed to justify the entirely new social order. It is the privilege of

metaphysics to address the world as a whole, as it is the objective of political radicalism to transform this whole completely. Thus metaphysical and political radicalism are mutually dependent, as the totalitarian experiments of the 20th century have shown: both communist and fascist radicalism advanced strong metaphysical claims and implications. Russian philosophy, which during the 1950s-80s had resisted the stranglehold of Soviet ideocracy, may now be preparing the foundation for a new type of ideocracy, potentially based on the ideas of Cosmism, universal theocracy, radical traditionalism or eschatological communism. The options are varied.

Another major strategy that shares the contemporary intellectual scene with metaphysical radicalism is conceptualism. Like its counterpart, it suggests a universal mode of speculation: a critical attitude towards traditional notions of reality and an ironic playfulness with regard to the sign systems of various ideologies that empties all metaphysical assumptions of their contents to reveal the bare skeleton of abstract discourse contingent on a system of arbitrary beliefs. Conceptualism exposes the "realistic fallacy" of "master discourses," and discloses the contingency of concepts. As Ilya Kabakov, the leading representative of Russian conceptualism in art and theory, puts it, "Precisely because of its self-referentiality and the lack of windows or a way out to something else, it [the concept] is like something that hangs in the air, a self-reliant thing, like a fantastic construction, connected to nothing, with its roots in nothing."

Initially, the name "conceptualism" was borrowed from the international aesthetic school founded in late 1960s by the American artist Joseph Kosuth. Conceptual art from the very beginning was connected with philosophy and even claimed to be more intrinsically philosophical than academic philosophy itself. Kosuth insists that, "The twentieth century brought in a time which could be called 'the end of philosophy and the beginning of art.' [...] Art is itself

philosophy made concrete."

Two lines of argument intersect in this statement. On the one hand, it implies that 20th century art is no longer limited to the creation of material forms but begins to question the very nature of art and to redefine it with each specific work. Art, therefore, becomes an articulation of ideas about art. "...'Conceptual Art' merely means a conceptual investigation of art." On the other hand, analytical philosophy, as Kosuth proposes, has reduced the task of philosophy to the analysis of its own language. Therefore, philosophy has lost its privileged "scientific" status and its claims to universal truth; in our "post-philosophical" age, its function passes to art, which creates new concepts, signs and languages without assuming their credibility. These two processes, the conceptualization of art and the aesthetization of philosophy, contribute to a mutual rapprochement and the redefinition of conceptual art as a concrete philosophy.

Another source of the term "conceptualism," less evident but perhaps more decisive for the fate of this movement in Russia, is the medieval philosophical school of the same name. Among the European scholastics of the 13th and 14th centuries, conceptualism functioned as a moderate version of nominalism, which asserted that all universals have their being not in reality itself but in the sphere of purely mental concepts. As such, this school was opposed to realism, which posited one continuum of physical and conceptual reality, insisting on the ontological being of such universals as love, soul, beauty, goodness and other general concepts. Strange as it may seem, an analogous confrontation of two intellectual trends occurred in the late Soviet period, with Marxism insisting on the historical reality of such general ideas as "class," "the people," "collectivism," "equality," "history," and "progress," while conceptualism argued for the purely nominative and mental basis of these

ideological constructions. Like its medieval counterpart, conceptualism attempts to expose the realist fallacy that attributes objective existence to general or abstract ideas. Whereas the Soviet system gave the status of historical reality to its own ideological pronouncements, conceptualism attempted to expose the contingent nature of these concepts by unmasking them as constructions proceeding from the human mind or generated by linguistic practices.

The origins of Russian conceptualist discourse can be traced to the works of the philosopher, writer, and literary critic Andrei Siniavsky, particularly to his treatise "On Socialist Realism" (1959). Instead of either praising socialist realism as the "truthful reflection of life" (in the words of official Soviet criticism) or condemning it as a "distortion of reality and poor propagandistic art" (in the words of dissident or liberal Western criticism), Siniavsky suggested the artistic utilization of the signs and images of socialist realism, while maintaining a playful distance from their ideological content.

Among leading representatives of Russian Conceptualism in the 1970s-1990s one could name, in addition to Andrei Siniavsky and Ilya Kabakov, artists and essayists Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid, poet and theorist Dmitry Prigov, and philosopher and art critic Boris Groys. Conceptualism may be viewed as a Russian version of postmodern and poststructuralist discursive strategy. In conceptualism, the idea is used in its aesthetic capacity. The field of philosophical reflection expands infinitely, subsuming all kinds of concrete objects and facts and treating them as mental constructions or general concepts, in such a way that these concepts claim their existential and material status and simultaneously expose the counterfeit behind these claims. Conceptualists view totalitarian thinking, with its claims of all-encompassing truthfulness, as a kind of madness: a network of internally connected though arbitrary propositions

presumed to coincide with external reality. In contrast to radical metaphysics "in the imperative mood," conceptualism could be called "metaphysics in the subjunctive mood," which also serves to distinguish it from pre-Kantian dogmatism, or "metaphysics in the indicative mood," with its claims of adequately describing reality as such. Kabakov argues that any object, however ordinary and trivial, can rightfully be placed in the center of a philosophical discourse, becoming its master concept, the universal "first principle."

In addition to demonstrating the contingency of metaphysical systems, Kabakov accomplishes two other closely related philosophical tasks. By contrasting the superficiality of the topic with the gravity of his chosen genre, Kabakov not only deconstructs the methodology of serious philosophy, but elevates the trivial to the status of a topic worthy of philosophical meditation. The same device that allows him to deconstruct traditional philosophy, also serves to construct a new range of philosophies that can assimilate the words and concepts of ordinary language in all its infinite richness. This pan-philosophical approach can also be applied to such concepts as "chair" or "table" or "wall," identifying them as potential universals that may provide a more vivid elucidation of the world than such traditional and almost empty concepts as Spirit or Life or Being. The proliferation of metaphysical systems within conceptualism is conceived as a way to overcome the metaphysical dimension of discourse, not by the means of serious analytical criticism (as in Wittgenstein or Derrida), but through the self-ironic, self-parodic construction of systems that deliberately disclose their own contingency.

Conceptualism, not unlike postmodernism on the whole, is sometimes criticized for its aesthetic snobbery and moral indifference (consider Solzhenitsyn's invectives against "spiritually impotent" postmodernism in the early 1990s). But Russian conceptualists, like their Western allies, emphasize the

moral implications of philosophical contingency, which undermines totalitarian and hegemonic discourse and promotes self-irony as a mode of epistemological humility. Russian culture proved to be fertile ground for the application of conceptualist theory, owing to the prevalence of ideological schemes and stereotypes throughout its history, especially during the Soviet period. In the West, the correlation between sign systems and observable reality has been persistently validated through scientific research and economic practice; while in Russia, reality itself has traditionally been constructed from ideological signs generated by ruling minds. For this reason, conceptualism may be viewed as the predominant Russian-Soviet mode of thinking.

The Russian version of conceptualism established a theoretical distance between itself and a great number of metaphysical schemes, including potentially totalitarian and hegemonic discourses that dominated late Soviet and early post-Soviet culture, namely: Marxist, nationalist, mystical-esoteric and other "grand" and "fundamental" discourses. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, as the official ideology lay in ruins, the critical sharpness and topicality of conceptualism diminished for a while, but conceptualists did not remain jobless for long: other ideologies (religious fundamentalism, national messianism, etc.) came to contend for the "yawning heights" of the State ideocracy, and their rhetoric escalated to such a degree of automatization and self-repetition that conceptualism could set about "working" with them.

If in the 1970s-1980s conceptualism was neatly opposed to more academic and serious types of humanistic discourses, such as neo-rationalist or culturological, the 1990s have witnessed a strong tendency for their consolidation. Just as Marxism, nationalism and religious fundamentalism have begun to gravitate toward a unified discursive strategy of metaphysical radicalism, so do structural-

ism, culturology and conceptualism, which were clearly divided in the 1970s-80s, tend to comprise a unity in opposition to metaphysical radicalism. This unity is based, first and foremost, on the poststructuralist notion of the cultural relativity and contingency of all discourses--the theoretical tenet that was not alien to structuralism and culturology but was most consistently and convincingly articulated in conceptualism.

Thus, in the mid-1990s, one can see a sharp polarization of radical and post-structuralist (or conceptualist, in the broadest sense) types of discourses with simultaneous neutralization of the internal ideological differences. One can compare the relationship between Russian conceptualists and metaphysical radicals with the division of "ironists" and "metaphysicians" among Western intellectuals, as described by Richard Rorty:

...The metaphysician is someone who takes the question 'what is the intrinsic nature of (e.g., justice, science, knowledge, Being, faith, morality, philosophy)?' at face value. He assumes that the presence of a term in his own final vocabulary ensures that it refers to something which has a real essence. [...] The ironist, by contrast, is a nominalist and a historicist. She thinks nothing has an intrinsic value, a real essence.

The position of ironists is summarized in this way: "never quite able to take themselves seriously because always aware that the terms in which they describe themselves are subject to change, always aware of the contingency and fragility of their final vocabularies, and thus of their selves." The ironists share the conceptualist position in relation to "eternal values," "self-evident truths," and "global imperatives" as advanced by metaphysical radicals.

However quickly useful, this parallel with Western intellectual

types needs certain corrections. Russian metaphysical radicals are not just "metaphysicians" in Rorty's sense, i.e. "realists" opposed to "ironists" as "nominalists." Metaphysical radicals not only believe in "real essences," they summon us to transform the world in accordance with their vision of these essences. As for conceptualists, they are not only "aware of the contingency and fragility of their final vocabularies, and thus of their selves"; they purposefully and sometimes aggressively eliminate and ridicule all existing vocabularies, directing their "redescriptions" against both "rightist" and "leftist" metanarratives whenever these lay claim to "intrinsic values."

This "extremity" on both sides, metaphysical radicalism and conceptualism, certainly deepens the split between these intellectual positions and diminishes the chances of their mediation and neutralization in the framework of a purely scientific or scholarly discourse. On the surface, metaphysical radicalism and conceptualism seem wholly incompatible, even antagonistic, since the former pushes the seriousness of metaphysics to the extreme of prophecy and propaganda, while the latter reduces it to an act of linguistic buffoonery. Indeed, metaphysical radicals have nothing but contempt for "futile" and "foolish" conceptualist games, whereas conceptualists pointedly ridicule "dangerous" pretensions of philosophically intoxicated radicals.

But, essentially, the current radicalization and conceptualization of metaphysical discourse may be regarded as two aspects of the same process. The more radical metaphysical assumptions become, the more they reveal their potentially conceptualist nature. It is not by chance that Russian conceptualism emerged as the ironic duplication of the totalitarian discourse of Soviet Marxism: as new, post-Marxist modes of radical discourse become politically influential, conceptualism easily assimilates them for its ironic repertoire of empty

cultural codes.

The conceptualist component in contemporary Russian thought cannot be reduced to a merely parodic gesture. The point is that radical discourse itself increasingly reveals internal conceptual qualities; the more an idea is pushed to extremes, the more it exposes its lack of referent and the pure schematism of its abstract speculation. For example, on the political scene, the Zhirinovsky phenomenon may be explained as an intersection of radical and conceptualist modes, making him the equivalent of a "postmodern Hitler." The title of Zhirinovsky's autobiography-manifesto, *The Last Rush to the South*, could easily have been taken from the oeuvre of Dmitry Prigov's conceptualist verses. The very idea of Russian soldiers washing their boots in the Indian Ocean presents a combination of political radicalism (the Russian Empire stretched to the continent's Southern margin) and the aesthetics of conceptualism (an idea that is ruthlessly consistent in logical or ideological terms demonstrates its ridiculous irrelevance and folly).

The regeneration of totalitarianism after the death of totalitarianism cannot but incorporate a conceptualist self-subversive mediation. That is why new radicalism, from the very start, is doomed to be conceptually loaded, though rarely to the point of self-realization, unlike conceptualism in a proper sense. Some subtle observers find even in Zhirinovsky's extremist escapades a kind of conscious buffoonery that plays with the signs of aggressiveness rather than actually pursues it. In most cases, however, radicalism acquires a conceptual dimension unintentionally, whereas conceptualism quite purposefully engages with radical discourse and demonstrates both luxury and poverty. Such a deliberate symbiosis of radicalism and conceptualism may outline the perspective for a new Russian metaphysics, which will give a postmodern dimension to a traditionally Russian holistic, potentially totalitarian, way of thinking. While Western postmodern discourse remains

predominantly critical and self-critical, as seen in the pervasive influence of deconstruction, Russian postmodern thought tends to emphasize its metaphysical disposition, finding the antidote to metaphysical indoctrination in its very excesses. Where Western thought prefers to mediate opposites and ground itself in "neutral," scientifically sound terms, Russian thought deliberately moves in the polar directions of excessive prophecy and relentless irony, pendulating between two opposites instead of attempting their rapprochement and stable synthesis.

One can imagine a kind of monolithic, though ambivalent, metaphysical discourse where the seam between radical and conceptualist ingredients becomes indistinguishable. The tendency for such symbiotic philosophizing is now evident both on the side of metaphysical radicalism, which cannot but locate itself in postmodern, post-totalitarian space, and conceptualism, which demonstrates an increasing proclivity for almost sincere, invariably grandiose and self-derisive, self-erasing metaphysical speculation.

Russian intellectual history is a history of thought that fights desperately to escape the prison of an ideocratic system. What makes Russian thought so unique is its internal tension, its struggle against itself, against its own ideational constructions and social extensions.

In the West, the field of philosophy is more or less clearly divided into ontology, the philosophy of being, and epistemology, the philosophy of knowledge. In Russia, such a division is perceived irrelevant since philosophy addresses a conception of being that is itself constructed by thinking. Beginning with Chaadaev, and the Westernizers and Slavophiles, Russian philosophy focused on the secondary reality, one created by ideas. One speculative capacity, "intelligentsia," opposed itself to

another speculative capacity, "ideocracy," -- but the former also created the latter. This self-contradictory movement of thought, shattering its own foundations, gives an unprecedented, sometimes "suicidal" quality to Russian philosophy. It may have been "derivative" and "secondary," but not so much in respect to Western thought, as in relation to properly Russian, utterly artificial, fabricated, and fantastic reality.

Till now, Russia never played an important role in world philosophy, but philosophy did play an enormous role in Russia, especially in the 20th century. Now that the system of ideocracy is not only theoretically deconstructed but, hopefully, historically transcended, one can envision the reversal of these tendencies. As philosophy will play a lesser role in a Russian society increasingly motivated by materialistic, economic goals, Russian philosophy, rethinking its unique experience of self-denial and self-liberation, will hopefully continue to assume a more prominent role on the international scene.

CE



BRINGING BACK SOME BRIGHTNESS
20 YEARS OF NEW WRITING SCOTLAND
Bringing Back Some Brightness is a celebration of 20 turbulent years of Scottish life and culture, from the 1980s to the post-Devolution 21st century. With works from Ron Butlin, Anne Donovan, Janice Galloway, A.L. Kennedy, Norman MacCaig, Edwin Morgan, Ian Rankin, Iain Crichton Smith, Irvine Welsh and many more, this anthology of short fiction and poetry is a striking snapshot of two decades of extraordinary creativity.

£6.95 200 pages
0 948877 60 X

ASLS, 9 University Gardens, Glasgow G12 8QH, UK
 tel: +44 (0)141 330 5309 www.asls.org.uk



CONTEMPORARY ARABIC POETRY

PRESENTED WITH THE SUPPORT OF
BANIPAL MAGAZINE.

SELECTED BY QALANDAR BUX MEMON



FADHIL AL-AZZAWI

فَضْلُ الْعَزَّائِي

Feast In Candlelight

Here is the twentieth century
In its long dim hall
With murderers and conjurors
Sitting at its table
In the flickering candlelight
Of their victory
Waiting for their meal.
They waiters come out
One by one
From their hidden corners
Balancing dishes of darkness
On their heads
To serve their guests

They will all drink from the same bottle
Watch the evening fall among the trees.
Parades of drunken soldiers
Wave their bloody flags
And march down the street.
Through the window
The moon will soon shine.

When they finish their feast
We will sit at that same table
And drink the same wine
Too.



Events

Something always happens:
A war can be declared suddenly
A baby born in a cave
A lonely heart broken.

Shall I forget all that?

Something always flows:
Water in a river
Wine in a tavern
Tears and blood too.

Can I stop all that?

Something we always miss:
A sentence we learned by heart
an umbrella forgotten in a bar
a woman with whom we fell
passionately in love.

Can I be happy about all of that?

And if nothing happens —
If I do not win a million pounds in the lottery
Or find a treasure in my garden
Or I do not take a trip to the moon,
For example,

Should I not be sad then because of that?

Translated by the author and Khaled Mattawa (check with Banipal).

Fadhil al-Azzawi → Was born in Kirkuk, Iraq, in 1940. He edited literary magazines and newspapers in Iraq and abroad and has been publishing his poetry since the 1960s. He has published ten volumes of poetry, eight novels, a collection of short stories, two works of criticism and numerous literary translations into Arabic from English and German. He has two collections in English translation by Khaled Mattawa, *In Every Well a Joseph is Weeping* (1997) and *Miracle Maker: Selected poems of Fadhil al-Azzawi*, BOA Editions 2003, www.boaeditions.org. He has lived in Germany since 1977, and travels widely performing and reading his poetry.

MAHMOUD DARWISH

محمود درويش

Without exile, who am I?

Stranger on the bank, like the river . . . tied up to your name by water. Nothing will bring me back from my free distance to my palm tree: not peace, nor war. Nothing will inscribe me in the Book of Testaments. Nothing, nothing glints off the shore of ebb and flow, between the Tigris and the Nile. Nothing gets me off the chariots of Pharaoh. Nothing carries me for a while, or makes me carry an idea: not promises, nor nostalgia. What am I to do, then? What am I to do without exile, without a long night staring at the water?

Tied up
to your name
by water . . .
Nothing takes me away from the butterfly of my dreams back into my present: not earth, nor fire. What am I to do, then, without the roses of Samarkand? What am I to do in a square that burnishes the chanter's with moon-shaped stones? Lighter we both have become, like our homes in the distant winds. We have both become friends with the clouds' strange creatures; outside the reach of the gravity of the Land of Identity. What are we to do, then . . . What



are we to do without exile, without a long night
staring at the water?

Tied up
to your name
by water . . .

Nothing's left of me except for you; nothing's left of you
except for me -- a stranger caressing his lover's thigh: O
my stranger! What are we to do with what's left for us
of the stillness, of the siesta that separates legend from legend?

Nothing will carry us: not the road, nor home.

Was this road the same from the start,
or did our dreams find a mare among the horses
of the Mongols on the hill, and trade us off?

And what are we to do, then?

What
are we to do
without
exile?

Translated by Anton Shammas from 'The Bed of the Stranger', Riad El-Rayyes Books, Beirut, 1999.

A cloud from Sodom

After your night, the last one
of winter, the seaside promenade
was empty of the night-watchman
there was no shadow to pursue
my steps, after your night had dried
in the sun of my song. Who will
tell me now: let go of yesteryears ago bday,
and dream freely in total abandon?
My freedom is near, it sits with me now.
It perches like a familiar cat

in my lap, and gazes up at me,
at all that you've left me from yesterday:
your lilac-coloured scarf, a video tape
about dancing with the wolves,
and a string of jasmines to lay
over the moss-covered heart...

What will my freedom do
after your night, the last one of winter?
'A cloud went from Sodom
to Babylon' a hundred years ago
but its poet, Paul Celan,
committed suicide today
in the Seine.

You will not take me
to the river again. No watchman
will ask me: and what's your name today?
We will not curse the war.
We will not curse the peace.
We will not climb the garden's fence
looking for the night
between two willows and two
windows, and you will not ask me:
when will peace open
our castle's gate for the doves?

After your night, the last one of winter,
soldiers pitched their camp
in a distant place, a white moon
settled on my balcony, and I
sat in silence with my freedom
staring at the night.
Who am I?
who am I after your night
the very last one of winter?

Translated by Sargon Boulus

Mahmoud Darwish → Was born in 1941 in al-Barweh, Palestine, and grew up under Israeli occupation. He published his first collection of poetry in 1960 and has since published another 20 also seven volumes of prose. His work is translated into 22 different languages. In 1981 he started the literary quarterly Al-Karmel, which he still edits, now in Ramallah. In 1995, the English edition of his book *Memory for Forgetfulness* (trans. Ibrahim Muhawi), was published. A new French anthology of his work *Poesie: La Terre nous est étroite* was published in March 2000, also two collection in English translation, *The Adam of two Edens*. In April 2002 he was awarded the Lannan Foundation Prize for Cultural Freedom.



ABDULILAH SHALHI

عَبْدُ اللَّهِ شَلْحِي

I detest nitwits who say it's not their century

I'm thirty and it's getting hard
to make it with 20-year-old chicks.
Well, always excepting the plain Janes
and those I treat myself to
for the price of a fix.

I don't have enough dough, right?
to make an impression on those
lofty souls with the skins of birds.
I'm brown, one metre seventy,
sometimes I'm taken for an Arab
on account of my complexion
in such cases the fall-out's considerable.
I like rap and techno
I've tried hard to like Ferrara
and Tarantino.
I take after this century's tail-end
and i'm seriously contemplating
a subscription to a porno mag.

I drink all the time
being hungover is no worse
than any study group.
When I'm makit it with a bigt of all right

i start writing good poetry
with fewer tears
fewer metaphors
less beauty
less poetry.

When the girls you fancy
are less and less accessible,
you have no other choice -
you have to write better. And better.

Translated from the French by James Kirkup

Abdulilah Salhi → Was born in 1968 in Beni Milala, Morocco. Since 1990 he has lived in Bordeaux and Paris. He established a literary magazine Israf, with Jalal Hakmaoui, and writes poetry in Arabic and French.

ABDEL KADER EL-JANABI

عَبْدُ الْقَادِرِ الْجَنَابِي

Hat-trick with rapid

For Salaj Faiq

Behind every scream of subtle alterations
Of a dark rain falling from the dreamer's eye socket
of words your mouth dropped on the bed's edge
of a tobacconist murdered by a cloud of smoke
of a reformer lulling a society to change
of someone moonstruck sucking the sun's black tit
of a lake forgotten in the dark mirror
of flames furled like carrots in water
of things passed off well
of a conventional revolt
of a horizon in an orgasmic fog
there exists a domestic animal which likes to have a haircut.

Translated by the author except 'Hat-trick with rapid' which was written directly into English.

Abdel Kader el-Janabi → Was born in Baghdad in 1940. He left Iraq in 1971, and settled in France after living for a while in London and Vienna. He has translated works of Miroslav Holub, Paul Celan, René Daumal, Joyce Mansour and Max Jacob into Arabic. His anthology, in French, of Arab poems, *le poème arabe moderne*, was published in 1999.



SARGON BOULUS

صَرَّغْنَ بُولُس

**Tea with Mouayed al-Rawi in a Turkish café
in Berlin after the Wall came down**

Our cigarette packs
close to hand (that secret fuel) . . .
The babble of immigrants
slapping dominoes on marbletops:
a noise familiar once,
 out of which
a word may flare up amid the smoke --
born there, refusing
to die here.
If we don't say it, who will?
And who are we
 if we don't?

Not about what came
to pass; how it came, and passed!
But about this spoon buried
in sugar, and this finjan.
Not that Wall whose remains
are sold as souvenirs
at check-point Charlie where
only yesterday
they exchanged spies
and traded secrets of the East

and West, but this
 wall painting facing us now,
 with a harem from the days
 of the Sublime Porte
 who recline dreamily
 in pleasure boats, on a river
 guzzled down, in one
 gulp, by history.

Let's say we have seen
 a lot of walls, how they rise
 and fall, how the dust
 particles dance under the hooves
 of the Mongol's horse,
 how "victory" laughs
 its idiot's laugh in the mirror
 of loss, before it breaks
 and its shards fill the world
 where we walk, and meet,
 every time.

Translated by the author.

Sargon Boulus → Was born in 1944 in Al-Habbaniya, Iraq, into an Assyrian family. He started publishing poetry in 1961, contributing to Shi'r, then working in Beirut on both Shi'r and later Mawaqif magazine. He has published five collections of poems; his latest 'If we were sleeping in Noah's Ark' was published in 1998.



KHALED MATTAWA

خالد متاوا

Ubbad

19⁶⁸ - Nasser - Sinai gone -
 & every tim I say
 Repentance
 enthusiasm enraptures
 floors & beams to creaking -
 sweat
 tears & soda (Soviet made)
 power on melancholy' grimly
 floors
 I'm tossed by the strong
 arms of fate - his liver -
 only he can feel the flame
 burn of flesh & I miss
 his black eyes & longing
 melts me away - Congas
 rondel a theft from

the honorable steadfast
 people of Cuba and Coungat -
 so the horn section maligns
 the green heart like mad
 potter hands thumbing
 smoke thick air - Did I say
 the songs are wilting in cotton fields -
 Suror on tenor sax pawning
 fellahin tunes & Taha
 Fluting the Pharoah's chant
 & every time I say repentance
 crowds howl - a song seeded
 years ago - an adobe hut
 in Minya & a swaddled baby
 cursing the almighty's good
 for noting name

Khaled Mattawa → Wwas born in Libya in 1964 and emigrated to the USA when he was 15. From 1998 he became the first Arab-American to win a Guggenheim poetry Fellowship. He has translated many Arab poets into English, has four published volumes of poems by Saadi Youssef, Fadhil al-Azzawi and Hatif al-Janabi, and co-edited *Post Gibran: Anthology of New Arab American Writing*. He has published many of his own poems and his translations in literary magazines, and has two collections of his own poems, *Ismailia Eclipse* (Sheep Meadow Press, 1995) and *Zodiac of Echoes* (usable Press, 2003). He teaches creative writing in the English department at the University of Michigan.

ADONIS

أدونيس

The Crow's Feather

1.

Stripped of seasons, buds, and fields,
 I leave so little to the sands,
 less to the wind
 and nothing to the day's hosanna
 but the blood of youth.
 IN tune with heaven,
 I hear the chiming of ascending wings
 and name the earth my prophet.

Stripped of seasons, buds and fields,
 I wake with springs of dust in my blood,
 and in my veins,
 such love, such yearning....

From the sea's floor
 my heart sets sail.
 My eyes remember oceans.

Here,
 banished here,
 my life is in my eyes,

and my eyes sustain me.
 I live my life out waiting
 for the ship of destiny
 to rise from its grave.

Is this a dream?
 Is there no voyage called return?

2.

Stricken by the cancer of silence,
 I scrawl my poems in the sand
 with a crow's feather.
 My eyes see nothing but lashes -
 no, no sea,
 no wisdom but the earth.

With springs of dust in my blood
 I sit all day in the cafe
 and wait for someone
 to remember me.

I want to pray on my knees
 to owls, with splintered wings,
 to embers,
 to the winds,
 to slaughterhouses and a thousand drunkards,
 to stars hidden at the sky's center,
 to death by pestilence.

I want to burn the incense
 of my days, my songs, my book,
 my ink and my inkwell.
 I want to pray
 to gods, that never heard of prayer.

Beirut is invisible.

Nothing blossoms on its mountains,
and nothing blooms on mine.
In the month of figs and apples,
locusts shall devour my fields.

Barren and alone in orchards,
in sun and after sun,
I walk Beirut and never see it.
I claim Beirut and cannot flee it.
As the day passes, I pass.,
but I am elsewhere.

3-

These days are mounds of skulls,
rubbish for mongrels.
Without a cross they welcome God
and chant the dead unblessed to burial.

Stricken by the cancer of silence,
I smoke all day in this cafe.
While sails of conquest
streak the sea,
I stamp my cigarettes to butts
and wait for someone
to remember me.

*Transpositions by Samuel Hazo.
From, 'The Blood of Adonis'.*

Adonis (Ali Ahmed Said) → Was born in 1930 in a Syrian village near Tartus on the Mediterranean shore. Adonis has written poetry, criticism, translations, and anthologies for fifty years. His poetry available in English translation includes, *The Blood of Adonis* (1971), *Pages of Day and Night* (1994) and *If Only the Sea Could Sleep* (2000). Notable critical studies by Adonis available in english include, *Introduction to Arab Poetics* (2003) and *Sufism and Surrealism* (2005).

KADHIM AL-HIJAJ

قَادِمُ الْحِجَاجِ

Postponement

We, the poor
postponed eating apples...
Till (paradise)!

Glories

Even amongst soldiers' bullets
There are some lucky ones,
Those which miss their targets
There are also some miserable ones,
Those which make for the glories of war !

Leaves of Forty

Days fall on age
O, Leaves of years
Once be courageous
And unite... against Autumn!

Troubling

How easy to throw a stone in the water
To deform the face of the moon!

Except That

The prettiest home on earth...
is an apple
Except that ...
The dweller is A worm!

Rejection

Reject!..
Even a chair can reject
A fat person from sitting on it , by
...breaking itself!

Translated by Kadhim Al-Ali & Adil Al-Thamiry (Barsa University - Department of Translation).

Kadhim Al-Hijaj → Wwas born in Basra in 1942, received his Ba from the College of Islamic Law – University of Baghdad in 1967. He has published four collections, most recently, *Unlike Things* (2005) and a book entitled *Women and Sex in Myths and Religions* (2002). He currently publishes the widely read and popular column "Spices" in Al-Akhbar Basri Weekly Newspaper.

IMAN MERSAL

إيمان مرسال

ECG

I should have become a doctor
 so that I could track the ECG
 with my own eyes,
 and confirm that the clot
 was a mere cloud
 that would break into normal tears
 when enough warmth is provided.
 But I am useful to no one,
 and my father who cannot sleep in his own bed
 sleeps deeply on a table
 in a wide hall.

Screams

Silent women
 fill the corridors leading to you.
 They are preparing for a ritual
 that will remove the rust
 piled on their throats
 and that can only test their range
 in collective screaming.

News of your death

I will receive your death
 as the last wrong you committed against me.
 I will not feel relief as you'd hoped.
 And I will firmly believe
 that you have denied me the opportunity
 to diagnose the tumors
 that lay dormant between us.
 In the morning
 I may be surprised by my puffed eyelids
 and that the stoop in my back

has gotten sharper.

Iman Mersal → Was born in Mansourah, Egypt, in 1966. She has published three collections of poetry.





SAADI YOUSSEF

سَعَادِي يُوسُف

America, America

God save America
My home sweet home!

The French general who raised his tricolour
Over Nagrat al-Salman where I was a prisoner thirty years ago . . .
in the middle of that U-turn
that split the back of the Iraqi army,
the general who loved St Emilion wines
called Nagrat al-Salman a fort . . .
Of the surface of the earth, generals know only two dimensions:
whatever rises is a fort
whatever spreads is a battlefield.
How ignorant the general was!
But Liberation was better versed in topography.
The Iraqi boy who conquered her front page
sat carbonised behind a steering wheel
on the Kuwait--Safwan highway
while television cameras
(the booty of the defeated and their identity)
were safe in the truck like a storefront
on rue Rivoli.
The neutron bomb is highly intelligent,
it distinguishes between
an ilî and an iIdentityî.

God save America
My home sweet home!

Blues

How long must I walk to Sacramento
How long will I walk to reach my home
How long will I walk to reach my girl
How long must I walk to Sacramento
For two days, no boat has sailed this stream
two days, two days, two days
Honey, how can I ride?
I know this stream
but, O but, O but, for two days
no boat has sailed this stream

La L La La L La
La L La La L La
A stranger gets scared
Don't fear dear horse
Don't fear the wolves of the wild
Don't fear for the land is my land
La L La La L La
La L La La L La
A stranger gets scared

God save America
My home sweet home!

I too love jeans and jazz and Treasure Island
and Long John Silver's parrot and the terraces of New Orleans
I love Mark Twain and the Mississippi steamboats and Abraham Lincoln's dogs
I love the fields of wheat and corn and the smell of Virginia tobacco.
But I am not American. Is that enough for the Phantom pilot to turn me
back to the Stone Age!
I need neither oil, nor America herself, neither the elephant nor the donkey.
Leave me, pilot, leave my house roofed with palm fronds and

God save America
My home sweet home!

We are not hostages, America
and your soldiers are not God's soldiers . . .
We are the poor ones, ours is the earth of the drowned gods
the gods of bulls
the gods of fires
the gods of sorrows that intertwine clay and blood in a song . . .
We are the poor, ours is the god of the poor
who emerges out of the farmers' ribs
hungry
and bright
and raises heads up high . . .
America, we are the dead
Let your soldiers come
Whoever kills a man, let him resurrect him
We are the drowned ones, dear lady

We are the drowned
Let the water come

Damascus, 20 August 1995

Translated by Khaled Mattawa

Saadi Youssef → Is one of the most important contemporary poets in the Arab world. He was born near Basra, Iraq, in 1934, and wrote poetry from the age of seventeen. He has published over thirty collections, plus a volume of short stories, two novels, several essays, and his collected works. Twice exiled from Iraq, he lived in many countries before settling in the UK. He has translated major international poets from English into Arabic, including Walt Whitman, C. P. Cavafy, Yannis Ritsos, Federico Garcia Lorca, Vasco Popa and Ungaretti, as well as novels by Ngugi wa Thiongo, Wole Soyinka, Nourridine Farah, George Orwell, David Malouf and V S Naipaul. His first major English collection *Without an Alphabet, Without a Face*, translated by Khaled Mattawa, Graywolf Press 2002 (www.graywolfpress.org) was awarded the 2003 PEN poetry in translation award.



GHASSAN ZAQTAN

غسان زقطان

Four sisters from Zakaria

Four sisters
climb the hill alone
in black clothes.
Four sisters sigh
facing the thicket.

Four sisters in the dark
read wet letters.
A train coming
from Artouf* passed
behind the picture.

A horse carrying
a girl from Zakaria*
neighs on the ridge
across the plain.

In the gorge
clouds slowly pass.

Four sisters
from Zakaria, alone
in black clothes
on the hill.

* Zakaria and Artouf are two Palestinian villages in the Khalil (Hebron) area whose occupants were forced to leave in 1948.

Translated by Sargon Boulus

Ghassan Zaqtan → Is a Palestinian poet, born in 1954 in Beit Jala, near Bethlehem. He lived in Amman from 1967 to 1979, and then went to Beirut. From 1982-86 he lived in Tunis, and now lives in Ramallah. He has published several collections of poetry, a novel and made two documentary films. He is editor-in-chief of Al-Shuara quarterly [The Poets] published by the House of Poetry, Ramallah.



ALL POEMS, EXCEPTING THOSE OF ADONIS AND KADHIM AL-HIJAJ, ARE REPUBLISHED HERE COURTESY BANIPAL MAGAZINE. WE WOULD LIKE TO THANK ALL THE POETS AND TRANSLATORS FOR THEIR WORK.



Rasha Kahil → **Sodeco**



Rasha Kahil → **Cardamom**



ILLUSTRATION BY EUNKYUNG KANG

QALANDAR MEMON AND JACOPO MORONI

IN CONVERSATION WITH

TARIQ ALI

‘Scoundrel times’:

Paris, Baghdad, Lahore...



Jacopo Moroni — Mr. Ali, we would like to begin by concentrating on the recent events in the French *banlieues*. First of all, it seems undeniable that the events are of fundamental importance for the future political and socio-cultural European landscape, forcing us to grasp for a theoretical understanding of the dynamics working on the multi-cultural ground of the European cities. By this I don’t mean to say that the riots had not been foreseen — Mike Davis recently suggested that urban centres are destined to become the battlegrounds of the future as neo-liberal economics and global conflict intensifies — but, rather, it is clear that only a few recognized that the revolts were by themselves a clearly defined political act by a subaltern class towards the mechanisms of the French republican state. Can you then tell us whether what you have seen can be considered as a foundation of a collective political, even revolutionary, project or rather an unarticulated apolitical gesture?

Tariq Ali — Well, I believe that the French events of 2005, which saw large numbers of young, dark-skinned French citizens coming out in revolt against the system, are extremely important. They are important for a number of reasons. I would not personally describe them as revolutionary because of the lack of ideology, even the sort of inchoate ideology that has anything to do with a process of social transformation. But I think they were in the great French tradition

of semi-insurrections and revolts against authority, which we have now seen continuously since the time of the French Revolution. From that point of view, I think that the first thing one has to say about the French events of 2005 is that *they were very French*. In this sense, all the talk about these young immigrants, this generation of children of immigrants born in France – they were the ones who did it, - is misleading as it deals with their failure to fully integrate in French society. This is true, *but I think that they are partially integrated in French society by the way they acted*. And that they understood what to do immediately as they targeted what French radicals had traditionally targeted in the past: property and not individuals. They burned the symbols of oppression - the schools, - and they burned cars, and the reason they burned the schools is that these were the institutions that gave them the false ideology that once they entered into society they would be treated as fully-fledged French men and women – and they were not. There was a great deal of hostility to a system that proclaims the equality of all but cannot fulfil it. And, secondly, burning cars of course is something that we remember well from 1968. Just think of the famous story of the great European Marxist leader Ernest Mandel, who watched his car burning on the barricades on the night of May the 10th and said, "*C'est beau. C'est la révolution*". (laughter)

So, the events are in the old tradition and I can say that to an extent they have retained the best features of the French tradition and have rejected some of the worst. What is deeply shocking to me, and I have to express this strongly, is the *total and complete failure of white France to carry out public acts of solidarity with these young people*. We know what is the French right and we observed Sarkozy pandering to Le Pen every single day. I speak of liberal France, 'human rights' France, the France of the far left, the gauchistes. There was not a single meeting at the *Mutualité*. Not a single demonstration. That I find frightening. It is an indication of how far France and the dominant culture has moved since the seventies of the last century. On this concern, I believe that the division

goes so deep that it is a division of colour. Some of the liberal newspapers underlined the importance of these events, there were some interesting pieces, but by and large white leftist France has remained isolated. This is even more so surprising as the events had nothing to do with religious rights, they were not demonstrating in favour of religion. It was instead a demonstration of anger against their condition that reminded me very much of that movie that came out several years ago, *La Haine*, in which the living conditions in these French *bidonvilles* is shown to be pretty terrific. And you can see that sometimes when you go to Paris. You do not see these youths in Paris - it is a very odd thing. When you go to Berlin you can see mixed crowds and in London you sense that very strongly. You can see these kids on the Metro but in Paris itself – no.

JM: I think that there are and there have been some points of conjunction in the past between white radical France and these disenfranchised youths, the recent no-vote in the referendum on the European Constitution being an example. Which is why the silence of the political left is hard to believe.

TA: Yes. I agree.

JM: And do you think that this failure points toward the need to create a political capacity that is extra-parliamentary, that articulates outside the domain of the state?

TA: Yes, but I think that the campaign against the European Constitution was a very different thing. This was a campaign that won because of the way the left organized it. The *Attac*¹ groups played a big part in this - they went into every village and city in France and organized seminars and public events to discuss the Constitution,

1. See the Declaration of the Administrative Council of Attac France – <http://www.france.attac.org/13963>

educating people to see how it was a neo-liberal Constitution. So, the model of the left campaign against the European Constitution was a very good model. Why don't they do that on this issue? Because they know that the French white public would not favour such an approach. But that is the big test for your politics - whether you can take up minority position and fight for it.

Qalandar Memon: In this regard I am reading Frantz Fanon at the present moment, concentrating on the colonial experience of the black man especially in his book *Black Skin, White Mask*. Are there continuities in the way Fanon described the experience of the immigrant and of the man of colour in the fifties in terms of alienation, and the present situation in France?

TA: Well, I think that what Fanon was describing was very much related to the colonial experience of Algeria and the way it extended to France itself. There was of course the famous demonstration of Algerians in France where the police was so brutal we still do not know the exact number of Algerians who were killed and thrown into the river Seine. A big difference is that in the fifties and sixties there was a whole tradition of Marxist intellectuals who protested against this. You had Jean-Paul Sartre writing the preface to the book by Henri Alleg on

2. Henry Alleg, "La Question", 1958.

torture². You had a whole network of intellectuals coming out against the Algerian War and playing a very heroic role in conditions in which the Algerians were a clear minority. The French defeat in Vietnam in 1954, where the French colonial Army was defeated at Dien Bien Phu by the Vietnamese Army, — the French could not believe it because they had been described General Vo Nguyen Giap in derogatory terms, — made them determined not to be defeated in Algeria. They could not suffer a double defeat — but they did.

And that is what gave birth to the present French right and conservative phenomenon that could never forgive De Gaulle for pulling out of Algeria.

So, the links between the contemporary traditional French far right and Algeria are evident. Their attitude to these young people of North African origin is to this day still marked by that experience.

QM: What do you think of the French government's response? Tactically, they have been re-enacting laws dating back to the Algerian crisis.

JM: Yes, that's right. Could you perhaps tell us why in your opinion this kind of legislation is inevitably part of the dynamics of empire and colonization and whether this is part of an ideology of security, very evident in Europe at the present moment, whose focus is on the need to restore order and to re-establish security primarily via police power and restrictive legislation? I can see this quite clearly in your most recent work, *Rough Music: Blair, Bombs, Baghdad, London, Terror*, where you concentrate on the curbing of civil liberties in present-day England after 7/7.

TA: What we are witnessing is a dual process. We are watching the rebirth of colonization and a colonial mentality of a new type represented by the 'human rights' brigades and their friends in *Le Monde* and *Libération*, of which the war in Iraq and the failure of the West to force Israel to retreat from its colonial positions are good examples. And tied to that is the process of neo-liberalism and the neo-liberal economy, which makes democracy itself into a very hollow shell. If you have a situation whereby centre-right and centre-left agree on virtually everything, then what is the function of democracy any longer? *The big project of centre-right and centre-left becomes on how to gain the consent of the ruled for what is being done to them, and so you see a process where democracy instead becomes what I like to describe as democratism.* The ideology of democracy, and democracy itself in any meaningful sense of the word, are now totally subordinated to econom-

ics. We then see a growing uniformity and conformism that begins to envelop the culture like a big blanket, and underneath this blanket many people resist.

But their resistance takes different forms. It can take the form of total alienation from the system. We see that in Britain where for the second consecutive election the majority of young people between the ages of eighteen and twenty-six did not bother to vote. It takes the form of being completely switched off to the cultural and political establishment. *This is something occurring globally in the western world because of what economics has done to the world of politics.* So you have far less dissent expressed in the press and in the media than you used to have thirty years ago. And I think that this is a result of a very conscious decision by those in charge - they do not really need democracy, after all. They needed it when the Communist world existed because it was essential to combat it ideologically, but now that the battle is over, why need it? Many American millionaires look at China, the most dynamic Capitalist economy in the world, and see that they do not bother with all this 'non-sense'. Privately they know that China has an advantage because it does not bother with Trade Union rights or anything like that. And, of course, Capitalism in the West flourished quite happily for three hundred years without any form of democracy. So, the notion, which is very strong in Western ideological constructs, that Capitalism, democracy and freedom go together is simply not true. It never was true. But it became accepted in the Communist epoch. Now that the epoch is gone, they do not need to push it anymore. We have to understand that what is going on means that the struggle for meaningful democracy and accountability will have to be taken up by the forces on the left. This is not something that the establishment is going to do.

JM: Since we are using this geographically broader framework of analysis, do you think that the struggles of these young Muslims in France can be seen as part of a larger struggle of Muslims across the world to integrate into a

globalized economic and social order from which they had previously been excluded for years, decades, and even centuries?

TA: I do not see it like that. I do not see the events of France having to do so much with religion. This is why I said that the French revolt was very French. What we see in Britain is slightly different. The acts of terror that occurred on 7/7 were the acts of kids who believed very strongly in their Muslim identity. They carried out these attacks not to defend religion but to attack the war in Iraq. That is now very clear. But even that was a political act. They were wrong, of course - it was an act of senseless carnage because it punished innocents most of whom were probably opposed to the war as the bulk of Britain is, - but that was their motivation. In failing to understand that motivation, doing so deliberately, the state is refusing to take its own responsibility. That's what I argue in *Rough Music* very strongly. It is not the case that you have a global rebellion on the same terms. Migrant populations, Muslim or non-Muslim, argue, fight and resist in different ways. Religion, in my opinion, is not the defining feature. The structure of the society in which they are placed nationally and globally — that is the defining feature.

JM: On this concern, it is interesting how recent scholarship³ places a lot of emphasis on how religion in North Africa and the Middle East has escaped the constraints of fundamentalism and can now be seen as a progressive form of social change. Do you then see, from the point of view of a secular critic, religion as an effective source of struggle from below against prohibitive conditions?

3. Mark LeVine, "Why They Don't Hate Us: Lifting the Veil on the Axys of Evil", 2005.

TA: No, I do not see that and I never have. I think that the new rise of religion that we have seen since the late nineties — I mean we saw it first in the

seventies with the clerical victory in Iran but a more global pattern emerged in the late nineties — is a pattern that does not simply affect the world of Islam. It affects India, where we have a big rise in Hindu politics. It affects the world of Christianity, where you see the influence of the Christian right at the heart of the Republican Party. You can see it in Britain, where in Tony Blair you have the most religious prime minister since Gladstone. And you see that in education - the woman who is the education secretary in Britain, Ruth Kelly, is a member of Opus Dei, the most reactionary catholic sect within the Catholic Church. So, you have this rise of religion globally, and what has brought it about, I think, is the absolute absence of any real material alternative to globalization. Because of the absence of a real material and social alternative to neo-liberal economics and Capitalism you see the revival of spiritualism, the revival of irrationality and the revival of religion. This affects many people in the world who do not like this structure in which the values of consumption are so dominant that everything is determined by money, in which the market dominates culture. They feel that they will move on to religion. What they do not know is that the market will also dominate religion. The way in which religion is being projected today, using all the modern advertising techniques of contemporary Capitalism, indicates that religion is not immune to the market although people imagine it is. This is something we have to be aware of. In my opinion, this will not be permanent. Whether it takes ten, twenty or thirty years it is a passing phase and people will get over it when they see that it does not deliver anything for them. It is another way of making politics but it is not a political form offering alternatives and this is the big problem with these Islamists, whether of the moderate or the extremist variety. They offer no real alternative to contemporary society. Of course in the Arab world it is the defeat of Arab nationalism that has helped the Islamists to dominate the field but even here there are divisions between Bin Laden supporters and the Muslim Brotherhood which is trying to become the Eastern equivalent of Western Christian democracy: conservative and reliable.

QM: Would you then argue that Western governments are 'using' certain moderate Islamic leaders for their own ideological purposes?

TA: Yes, they are. And that is the supreme irony. In the case of France they want the schools to train the Imams — and that's the French secular republic saying we should have a French state system of training Imams so that we can instrumentalise them! (*laughs*) It is totally bizarre. In this country, of course, there is a long history of this extending back to the sixties and seventies when you had especially the South-Asian migrant population quite heavily involved in trade unions, organizing strikes in which often they were not backed by the white officials in the unions and still they fought and fought, and the governments of the day deliberately encouraged the entry into the country of religious preachers so that they could build the places of worship and give them an alternative way. And now you pay the price for that. Also, in Britain, there is an old tradition of collaboration with a variety of moderates. And I always find it grotesque that whenever there is a new outrage, these moderates are paraded on television to show that the whole of Islam 'is not like that'. We know that already — the people who carried out the 7/7 attacks were a tiny minority.

The government is basically producing a stereotype of Islam by seeking the support of these people and then parading them on television. Because what do they say? They say that the Holy Koran does not acknowledge this. Now, the logic of that is that if the Holy Koran did permit these acts, it would be fine. And, of course, within the interpretation of the more extremist Islamic groups, you will find passages in the Holy Koran justifying just about everything, as you can do with almost any scripture. If you look at the Old Testament, it justifies rape, torture, killings and brutality. So this whole notion of sticking to a holy text is crazy in the twenty-first century. But that is what these moderate leaders say and that is what Tony Blair and George Bush mimic. It is crazy, even foolish and it is astonishing that

they do not understand that.

QM: I would like to talk about South-Asia and the recent earthquake in Pakistan. I have recently heard your speech at the London Review Bookshop⁴. You mentioned that you were there at the time and that you were appalled at the response of the Pakistani government. From the point of view of a campaigner for democratic government in Pakistan, as you have been for a long time, would you say that this would have happened if a democratically-elected government – the Pakistan Peoples Party or the Muslim League - had been in place at the time of the earthquake?

4. London presentation of "Rough Music: Blair, Bombs, Baghdad, London, Terror", London Review Bookshop, 09/11/05.

TA: No, I do not think that they would have acted differently. I did not even particularly attack this government although they could have done a lot more. But the point I made in Pakistan, in public and in the articles I wrote on the event was the following: that if you have a country that for the last fifty years has failed to build and provide a social infrastructure to defend and protect the lives of the ordinary working people, the poor, the peasants, the unemployed - if they had failed to do this during normal times, - then how would they be able to do it when there is a big crisis? The real problem that the country confronts is that they have not had any government – military or civilian – that has done very much for the lives of ordinary people, which has built a social safety net for them. They have not done it. And when the whole country was still traumatized by the earthquake, I argued that that was the moment to actually start building hospitals and schools all over the country for the poor. But it will not happen because the current global system of private capital does not encourage this. It does not want the state to take any initiative.

JM: So, in essence would you say that Pakistan at the present

moment could be seen as a microcosm or as an aberration of the contemporary dynamics of globalization?

TA: Well, it has become that although it has been like that for some time. This is a country that has always been ruled by an unfeeling elite, totally cocooned from the everyday needs of its people. They never cared and still do not care. But today when they do not care, they are joined by the rest of the world because of this global system of indifference. Although in the fifties and sixties the elite did not care, you could still look at India and look at Egypt, both of which had created their social safety net. Now, the social safety net is disappearing everywhere.

JM: And how can we characterize the inability of the United States to provide aid to the earthquake stricken area and what does that say about the state of the forces against United States influence in the region?

TA: Well, basically it was sort of telling seeing General Musharraf on television the day after the earthquake saying, 'we have no helicopters'. I mean, it was staggering as in neighbouring Afghanistan, one hour away from the earthquake zones, you had hundreds and hundreds of NATO helicopters. Now, why did they not make them immediately available? Because these helicopters are being used in a war. And quite clearly this war is more serious than it has been presented in the media. They carry out a series of missions everyday. This would have been a gesture of humanitarian aid and it was very revealing that they did not do it. After about ten days the Americans finally gave about fifty helicopters – not good enough. Help was needed urgently and many people probably died as a result of this. Interestingly enough the largest number of doctors came from Cuba. Over a thousand and half of them women, which was important in that world because peasant women will not

allow themselves to be seen by a male doctor. The Cubans set up three tented hospitals in the region and they had their own medicines. The poor had never been treated like this before but the Cubans could only do this because they have refused to join the neo-liberal world.

JM: A question about *Clash of Fundamentalisms*. The idea behind it, the construction of a framework where the fundamentalisms eo-liberal globalization and extremist Islamist activism set the dynamics of contemporary geopolitics, seems even more relevant at the present day. How has your analysis changed over the past few years with the events in Iraq and 7/7 and are you optimistic for the future?

TA: The central argument in my book was that what happened on 9/11 – and I explained the history leading to this – was a clash between a tiny group of religious fundamentalists and the world's largest empire. I argued that there is such a thing as *imperial fundamentalism* that defines all empires, past and present, something which is not specifically American. All empires believe that everything they do is in the interest of the people they are doing it to, although they might not realize it or they might have 'irresponsible' leaders who tell them the opposite. Further, I argued that this was an unbalanced clash – on the one side, you had a few thousand people belonging to Al Qaeda and, on the other, you had the imperial fundamentalism of the United States with the capacity of destroying the world ten times over. And that has somewhat been vindicated by what the United States has done in Iraq, by what it refuses to do in Pakistan and by the way it uses its military power to threaten any country it does not like. Am I pessimistic or am I optimistic? I am neither. I think that in these times one has to be hardheaded and realistic. Is there an alternative to the current global socio-economic system? *There is but it is in a very embryonic form*. I think that the attempts to create an alternative are

basically been hammered out in Latin America. That is the most advanced continent. The religious groups have no alternative in my opinion. If you look at the ideology behind some of these groups, what they talk about is a return to the Caliphate to the eight-century. They clearly have no idea what the real history of the Caliphate was, with murders and wars of succession going on endlessly. So it is foolish, it is a fantasyland. It was no golden age. The golden age of Islam was from the ninth to the twelfth century when you had a massive flourishing of dissent, debate, philosophical arguments and massive advances in mathematics and astronomy. Religious extremists argue that this is not really Islamic as the Holy Koran does not deal with that, which is a very narrow way of looking at one's culture. It is as if we tried to define Jewish culture solely through the Torah and ignoring Spinoza, for example. This would be crazy.

QM: You have written and discussed about that period in Islam – the ninth to the twelfth century during which you saw elements of an Islamic Enlightenment. Provocatively you titled a recent review, "Waiting for an Islamic Enlightenment"⁵. How long do you think we will be waiting for...?

5. See The Guardian webpage for this particular review - <http://books.guardian.co.uk/reviews/politicsphilosophyandsociety/0,6121,1597905,00.html>

TA: Well, I think that there were elements of an Islamic Enlightenment in that world. And the tragedy is that they were never fulfilled. But I think that this is not something that can be imposed from above – that has been tried and has failed. It has to be something that develops organically within these societies.

QM: Where in contemporary society do you see these elements of Islamic Enlightenment? Can we see any of its seeds in the intellectual class or in the educated elite in, for example, Pakistan or Britain?

TA: Well, no. I think that the big problem, in my opinion, is that this Enlightenment will only happen if it has a two-pronged strategy. One - a massive reform and the creation of new values of Enlightenment have to be coupled with opposition to the American empire. If you say to the people in the Muslim world that what we are trying to do over here is to create what is in the United States, that is not particularly enlightening. I mean — Starbucks, McDonalds and Hollywood do not add up to a new enlightenment. So, it has to be an original project and there are elements of this in what is going on in the culture and intellectual life in Iran, even under the Mullahs. If you look at the cinema that is being produced in Iran it is without doubt the most advanced cinema anywhere in the world and certainly in the Islamic world. And it is much more advanced than anything that is being produced in Western Europe and North America as well. The Iranian, Taiwanese and South Korean cinema — what is called the '*cinema of the margins*'. Well, they might be on the margins in a global sense but they are the vanguard in a cultural sense. The fact that the Iranian intelligentsia is producing this is an indication that it is a vibrant society underneath the surface. This is very exciting. We shall see, but I think that there will be surprises in store, which is why in The Guardian I criticized that book by Reza Aslan. Part of what I was saying earlier, there is this desperate desire to find religious moderates who say things that the West wants to hear.

QM: Right. Moving to culture and its role in the dynamics of resistance. You are a fiction writer. You have written six novels. How do they relate to your politics? Are they born out of it or have they an aesthetic criterion of their own?

JM: I recall that during your recent talk at the London Review Bookshop you made it clear that while you were writing *A Sultan in Palermo* you found it very difficult to detach yourself from the events going on at the same in Iraq.

TA: That is true. But it depends on each individual. *The act of writing, unfortunately, is not a collective act. It is a very individual act.* So whether you are writing history, non-fiction or fiction you are alone in your study. When I write non-fiction, I can afford to give a speech to six hundred people in the evening and go back home and carry on writing. When, on the other hand, I am writing fiction, at least in my case, I have to be totally alone, where I am not disturbed. But the fact that I am cut off physically does not mean I am cut off intellectually. I always have my mind to what is going on in the world while I am writing and this does affect my fiction. In this sense, Western culture celebrates the fiction of people like Ian McEwan who is for the war in Iraq and whose very bad novel, *Saturday*, got great reviews all over the British press. And this is because this novel essentially comes out of the dominant culture of the establishment. As far as there is opposition and dissidence in this world, all our writings reflect the very opposite. My fiction, I think, is very combative. I have two different projects. *The Fall of Communism Trilogy*, in which two novels have appeared, *Redemption* and *Fear of Mirrors*. And there is the *Islam Quintet*, in which four novels have appeared. And many people who have read these novels see them as something that challenges the dominant culture. And this trend, stronger in British culture than in the United States, of erecting a Chinese wall between culture and politics, is something I am opposed to. And it is interesting that at the same time critics were celebrating writers in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union who did the exact opposite. When Solzhenitsyn wrote *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* and *The First Circle*, these books were celebrated because he was challenging the dominant system. But if you did that here somehow it was considered not proper.

QM: In that respect, in *Clash of Fundamentalisms* you extensively use and quote poetry from Nizar Qabbani and Faiz Ahmed Faiz. Faiz was a founding member of the Progressive Writers Association. Having studied that period, I was

wondering...has that influenced your work and do you think that the artist must again reconstitute beauty and change aesthetic criteria to oppose contemporary models of imperial rule?

TA: Well...I do not know whether it has influenced my work but it has certainly influenced me as a person. When I was growing up in Lahore in the fifties, the Progressive Writers Association used to meet in our garage. So, these were people that came in our household all the times. Poets like Faiz Ahmed Faiz and many short-story writers and great literary critics like Sajjad Zaheer. These were very close friends of my parents. Part of my family life was totally dominated by bohemians, progressive writers and intellectuals. Clearly that had a very big impact on me and as a kid I was very attracted to it as it was much more interesting than the other part of our family life, which was more feudal in tone and it involved meeting people of the establishment — it was boring and dull.

QM: It was also very formalized, I suppose.

TA: Yes, that's right. Thus in much of my non-fiction — look at *Bush in Babylon* - you will find references to poetry and literature and short stories. And the reason is self-explanatory because poetry plays a very big part in the political life of a country like Pakistan and likewise in the Arab world, especially in periods of military dictatorship. So, it is something we cannot forget, and people in the West find this strange. But even here it has played a part in the sixties and seventies. You used to have big poetry sessions — Ginsberg in the United States played a very big part in the movement against the Vietnam War. Today, the New York poet Eliot Weinberger wrote that long essay in the London Review of Books, "What I Heard About Iraq"⁶, which is now being translated all over the world. So, there are elements of

6. See the London Review of Books website for a integral version of the essay - http://www.lrb.co.uk/v27/no3/wein01_.html

this building up over here but it is much stronger in our part of the world.

QM: Perhaps you could help me fill this gap in my knowledge...what happened to the Progressive Writers Association after Partition?

TA: Well, the Progressive Writers Association basically died after the government banned the Pakistani Communist Party in 1951 or 1952. Once the Communist Party was banned and many of its intellectuals arrested, with some going underground, the Association collapsed because it was impossible for them to keep going as many of them were members of the party. So they dispersed and now it is only a historical memory. Some of them are still around. Hamid Akhtar, the great figure in the movement still writes in the Pakistani press and is very highly respected. I met him in Pakistan lately as he had just done a full-page review of the Urdu edition of *Clash of Fundamentalisms*. (laughs)

QM: Your book *The Nehrus and the Gandhis* has been re-issued this year and I would like to ask you a question about this. The Communist Party in India did quite well in the last elections and is now in a coalition with the Congress Party. How do you see these dynamic working as India moves towards a neo-liberal economy?

TA: Well, this is a good question. I hope that the Communist Party in India will resist this dynamic. It is an open question whether they will or not. After all, many of the former Communists in Eastern Europe are today's Capitalists. The Iraqi Communist Part collaborates with the Unites States. So it is almost as if the Communist movement globally felt the need to attach itself to another great power after the collapse of the Soviet Union. That is the way they were trained and thus they attached themselves to the United States. The Indian Party has not done

that — they criticized the Iraq war and they resist what the Indian government is doing in caving in to American pressure on the issue of Iran and other questions. In this sense, they did not join the government. They stated that they would support the Congress Party in Parliament but they refused to form part in the government, which I think that, on balance, it was probably a sensible decision.

QM: And how do you see the evolution of the Congress Party from Nehru onwards?

TA: Well, you can say that the evolution of the Congress Party from Nehru to Manmohan Singh is not too different from the evolution of the Labour Party from Clement Attlee to Tony Blair. It is the same global change that affects all these parties. The Congress Party was essentially a Social Democratic Party. Nehru was very influenced by Stafford Cripps, Harold Laskey, Nye Bevan and by all the intellectuals of the left who were dominant in the Labour Party in the forties and fifties. He modelled the Congress Party somewhat on them and the policies were not that different either, except that Nehru refused to be part of the pro-United States bloc or the other one and went for neutralism, which the Labour Party here did not have the guts to do. So Nehru took social democracy further, in that sense. But what has happened to the Congress Party is what has happened to all these parties globally, all of which have essentially become carriers of the neo-liberal virus.

QM: You have mentioned Latin America as an alternative source of resistance. What is it that you see in Latin America as an alternative?

TA: Well, I think that the Bolivarian experiment in Venezuela is the most exciting development in world politics. The Bolivarian process shows that it is possible to resist neo-liberalism and the fact that Venezuela is the richest oil

producer in South America gives it the capacity to do so provided it has the government and the political leaders who want to go down that route. So, it is not just the oil that does it — *you have to have leaders of vision*. Hugo Chávez is one of these and he has constructed a movement of the poor in Venezuela. You have massive state expenditure on health, on education and land reform - *things that you were told were no longer possible*. He is showing that they are possible and so the process has been deepened. And because it has been done in a very open and democratic fashion he has been elected three or four times. And all the attempts by the United States to overthrow and to defeat him have failed. Every time they try, he becomes more popular and today Venezuela has become a model for many people in every other Latin American country who want to move in the same direction. With the victory of Evo Morales in the Bolivian elections last December there is a possibility of Bolivia actually becoming part of a Bolivarian federation. The aim of Chávez is to create a Bolivarian federation in Latin America that would better challenge the American empire.

QM: And as my final question I would like to concentrate on Iraq. What do you see as the future of Iraq under the present circumstances?

TA: Yeah. I think that the occupation of Iraq and the war imposed on Iraq by the West has created a situation whereby the country has been basically divided in three parts. The pro-Iranian factions are dominant in the south, at the moment. The resistance simply comes from middle-Iraq and the Kurds in the north have been collaborating quite happily with the United States for the last twelve years. My fear is that these divisions might be institutionalized if the occupation continues and that the Kurdish area will become a *de facto* Israeli-American Protectorate, while the Sunni badlands will carry on being centres of resistance and the south will be very much dominated by Iran. It is ironic. I think that, if

pushed, the United States might well decide to keep on backing the Kurdish areas and let Iran try to take the rest, but that, from the point of view of the United States, would be a total disaster. It would make the Iranian regime the strongest player in the country and if you were to have a joint-security pact between Iran and the bulk of Iraq and a joint-strategy on oil it would make them very strong, indeed. This is the outcome of what the United States has done – but it is not fixed as yet. If they were to withdraw their troops rapidly from the region it would be a defeat for them, so they will try to resist it. But if they were to do that, it is possible that there would be a big split within Shiite Iraq because I do not think that Muqtada al-Sadr will go with the Iranian factions as these are not popular, even within the Shiite population. But the very fact that we are forced to talk about Shiites, Sunnis and Kurds indicates that what has happened is the classic pattern of empires wherever they go – divide, divide, divide, divide...

JM: This leads to my final question, which is about the situation in Israel and Palestine, and in particular deals with strategies of cooperation, as opposed to division, between Israelis and Palestinians. I have recently seen Eran Torbiner's documentary *Matzpen*, a tribute to the great revolutionary, anti-war phenomena that inflamed Israel from 1962. In it you say that you are very much indebted to Moshe Machover and Aqiva Orr, two important figures in the movement, as they had clearly set out the Arab-Israeli situation as no one had done for you before. Now, as Israel has pulled out of Gaza after thirty-eight years of occupation, do you consider the model set out by *Matzpen* - revolutionary cooperation – to be still applicable?

TA: Well, I do not think that a revolutionary collaboration is possible because the revolutionary nuclei do not exist anymore. But now I am a firm believer in the single-state solution. I think that this is extremely important. In this

sense, the arguments expressed by Virginia Tilley in her very important book, *The One-State Solution: A Breakthrough for Peace in the Israeli-Palestinian Deadlock*, are unanswerable. I believe that the only decent future for Palestine is as Palestine-stroke-Israel, where you have a de-Zionized state and equal rights for all the population – Jews, Muslims, Christians. I believe in the need to break and cut loose from the Zionist monstrosity that is growing up over there. I think that this would be the only solution. It might not happen in my life-time but it will have to eventually. Probably, in the best of scenarios, by the end of the century we will have moved close to it. And the Palestinian Authority, which is totally dependent on the Israelis for its existence, should come out in public and say, 'we do not want this little *Bantustan* that you are giving us and we would rather be part of one large entity with the same rights as everyone else'. They should then dissolve the Palestinian Authority and argue that they are all part of Israel. And if Hamas militants were intelligent, they would do the same and that would completely throw the ball on the Zionist camp giving them responsibility for those areas.

JM: I have a sense that you suggest that there is little revolutionary hope at the present moment?

TA: Yes. But there is hope of moving forward again as we see in Latin America. This is a laboratory that should be carefully observed. Elsewhere, one has to be very hard-headed. I do not go in for Negri's pro-globalization nonsense, which leads him to support the European constitution. People like him have become part of the problem...



THANKS TO PROF. MARK LEVINE FOR USEFUL SUGGESTIONS IN THE COMPOSITION OF THE QUESTIONS



"RAVEL," ARTWORK BY SARAH ADINA

VICKY STEIRI IN CONVERSATION WITH
ROGER REDGATE
On Music, Philosophy, and Creativity



The following is a section of the interview with Roger Redgate, which took place on 29th of November 2005.

Vicky Steiri: Many titles of your works have to do with writing, like *Graffiti*, *Trace*, *Scribble*... an influence from Derrida? In which ways is writing important to your work?

Roger Redgate: Well, notation is the one way we have to communicate with the performer, unless you are working with improvisers, which I used to do a lot. If I am going to write a piece, I can either create a new notation and explain to the player how to do it, which isn't the way my brain works, or I have to use the conventional notational system, which is what I do, of course. This does present some problems. For one thing, there are received ideas of what notation means, about how you interpret it and about what is possible and what isn't possible, which creates an interesting kind of boundary or limit to what notation seems to be capable of for the performer. So, it is interesting to produce a conventionally notated score, give it to the performer and have him rather confused about how to play it. That's an area I am interested in exploring and it relates a lot to the things Derrida has to say about written notation. For one thing, there is the relation between what is going on in the mind and what ends up down on the page. How

much we write down is conditioned by its possibility in notation. If I sit down and write a piano piece, what I am going to do is that I am going to use some manuscript paper. That already starts to tell me what I can and can't do. It also relates very closely to the structure of the keyboard, because the keyboard is divided into semitones and the stave is divided into semitones. And then I have these little black globes that I put down, time signatures, etc. It's all already telling me what kind of music I can write, it's already providing a kind of contingent matter, if you want, that is external to me as a composer. Any ideas I have of music are very much influenced by what I can actually write down. So, that's why I am interested in notation.

VS: I think—correct me if I am wrong—that until 1994 the human voice was completely excluded from your work. Is there a reason for this? After that how did *Celan songs* come?

RR: I always think there is a problem in the relationship between text and music. First of all, I find it very difficult to find texts which can be set meaningfully, and secondly, I suppose I don't like vocal music very much (laughing). I was commissioned in 1990 to write a piece for fourteen amplified voices which was called *Vers-Glas*, but I didn't use the text, only the voices. So all that the singers do, is just to use phonetic symbols and means of articulating—like an instrument in a way. Then I was asked to write the *Celan Songs* and I spent a long time trying to find texts and, once again, the text I chose was by Paul Celan; he was a Jew and he survived the gas chambers by swapping queues with someone else. So, someone else got sent to the gas chambers and he went off. He knew what he was doing when he did it and he could never live with it. Anyone with any relevant experience to Auschwitz, inevitably has problems about the nature of what it is to express. Like the famous quote by Adorno, 'Is it possible to write poetry after Auschwitz?'. But Celan did. Eventually he killed himself in 1970, he threw himself

from the river Seine—he lived in Paris. He wrote in German, but he also wrote using words from other languages—he was multilingual—and he invented a lot of very beautiful words in his poetry. His poems are all very short. They do not seem to have the kind of narrative that a lot of poetry has. They are often quite bleak images to do with death and the kind of things that someone who has been to Auschwitz has been through. Once again, it is the same process¹; how do you express yourself. He had no means of expressing himself, so he wrote very small poems, he invented words, he invented syntax; some of the poems are utterly impossible to translate into English, because—as I said—he wrote in German and with German construction you can do all sorts of things that you cannot do with English. And then a few years ago, I wrote a small piece called *Mirlitonnnades*, which is text by S. Beckett again. There is a collection of about 25 of these little poems called *Mirlitonnnades*, which actually for Beckett are surprisingly explicit, but at the same time, they are about language, which is what I found interesting. And now I quite like writing for voice; I am intending to write two or three movements more to go with it.

1. In the previous question he had referred to S. Beckett and F. Bacon because they both share the same problems of artistic expression on the stage of 20th and 21st century.

VS: How do you find the music life in London as regards contemporary music today? Do you believe that there are more things to be done? Are you satisfied? Would you change something if you were in a position to do so?

RR: I think it's deeply problematic. We are reaching a crisis point in this country. First of all, the notion of what contemporary music is has changed radically over the years. When I was a student, or when I first came back to this country, contemporary music consisted of avant-garde music, Boulez, Stockhausen, Harrison Birtwistle... Now, it means a wide range of music, from world music to jazz, to popular music. For example, look at the prospectuses of concerts at -say- the

Barbican. If you are lucky, some major known composers like Xenakis, or someone, might get in there. But generally speaking, not. And, okay, you can say that that doesn't matter, but that attitude over the years spreads into the Arts Councils. So, if you want to get funding to put on some contemporary music, in the sense I mean it, it is virtually impossible. They'll fund it if it comes from ethnic minority groups in this country, or if it involves some kind of cross-over: for example if I decide to go and work with a rapper or a jazz musician. I spoke to the Arts Council recently myself, because I run this contemporary music group (for twenty years now), and I said, 'Look, I want some regular funding from the Arts Council'. They do these schemes and they give you regular fundings for three years, or something. And they said, 'What do you do?', so I told them what I do, and how long the ensemble existed and the musicians who are involved in it, and they said, 'You can forget it. There is no way you're going to get funding for something like that'!

VS: In a post-modern era where, as some people say, everything has been done, how do you see the future of composition?

RR: I don't think everything has been done, to be honest. We never know what is over the horizon in terms of the technology and who is going to come along with a completely new way of thinking. We've had composers like Xenakis, who suddenly came along with a completely new kind of music. Radelesku is another composer whose music has interested me, he himself makes it difficult to perform his music, but he has a very interesting and original approach. I think in the 20th century and now the 21st, we have become so obsessed with the idea of doing something new. No one of the contemporaries of Beethoven would have been obsessed with the idea of doing something new. Having an original voice maybe, but not necessarily doing something new. We will say, 'that's Mozart, that's Mendelssohn, that's Schubert, that's Schumann, that's Beethoven', we can recog-

nise that; even if they all work with tonality, there is something about their music which is uniquely their own. Dittersdorf for example, is far less interesting and you might listen to it and be not sure who it was or from which period it is from. When I teach composition, lots of my students tend to say, 'I am not interested in what composers before me have done, I want to do something new'. And then they bring something to me and I say, 'Yes, have you listened to Ligeti's second string quartet? He did something like this', or, 'Do you know the music of Helmut Lachenmann?' You cannot get away from it, you know; we have hundreds of years of musical history. There is a limit of what we can do with the notes and things we've got. I think the only way ahead is to develop your own language. That's where originality and new and interesting music comes from. And also I think that the only way you can do it, is to be absolutely steeped in what has gone on before. I think it's a big mistake for a composer not to be interested in what composers before him have done. And not just 20th century composers. As I said to you earlier, I listen to all kinds of music, because they are all very valuable to me as a composer.

VS: To what degree is an audience necessary to you?

RR: Well, it's essential, of course, because without an audience in a way there is not much point in doing what I do. It's one of these difficult questions which relates to why do you write music; do you do it for yourself, or do you do it for other people? I think it's a mixture of the two. I think I do it for myself because I am compelled to write music, I can not stop doing it. A few years ago when I found composing extremely difficult, I decided to stop. I thought, 'Why go through this? Why put myself through the depression and the struggle of writing music?' and I actually found out I couldn't stop thinking about it. I put my manuscript paper away, pretended I never wrote anything and just... (pause) then I found myself thinking about it. You hear all the people's music and the ideas of your own music

start flickering in your mind again, you just can't get away from it. There is a degree of fulfilling myself as an artist. But at the same time, obviously, I am interested in communicating with other people. I mean, it's what we were saying earlier, I wouldn't tell the people what to get out of it, but ...(pause) I don't make any compromises. I never think about whether people are going to like what I write. My music is controversial and many people don't like it, but I don't really care; it doesn't bother me at all. I would rather do what I do and have integrity about it, than compromise and think, 'Okay, I am going to write something which will a) make me a lot of money and b) make me famous', which probably I could do if I really wanted to... or write film music where I could make a lot of money. I couldn't live with myself, I couldn't get up every morning thinking that I was producing something for no reason. I like to think that with what I am doing, there's a reason I am doing it, I might not know what it is, but I know there's a reason I am doing it. And I know that it communicates with other people. It might be a minority, but it is there and I think there will be more people if our educational system, and the problems we were discussing earlier about people having access to the right kind of contemporary music rather than...you know, if you switch the radio on, what are you going to hear? We could go from one station to another and another and another and we know what we would hear over and over and over again. The chance of suddenly coming across Brian Ferneough's music at this time of day are absolutely zero (laughing). So the whole media institutions in that way are influencing so much what people listen to. It's the same with television, not just radio. And it doesn't just relate to contemporary classical music. There are lots of extremely interesting rock groups out there, who don't get on the radio because it's not the kind of thing radio stations would broadcast, because it would affect their audience figures. It all comes back to the same thing. People making money (laughing)...

BANIPAL

Magazine of Modern Arab Literature

In this issue
a focus on Arab women authors

Novels by
Hanan al-Shaykh,
Vénus Khoury-Ghata,
Samar Yazbek

Short stories by
Aroussia Naluti, Salwa al-Neimi,
Huzamah Habayeb, Haifa Bitar,
Jamila Omairah

Poems by
Joumana Haddad, Rachida Madani

Plus other authors, interviews and reviews

Banipal (ISSN: 1461-5363) is available on subscription, or per issue at the inclusive price of £7 (UK), £10/¥15 (Rest of Europe) and £12/\$20 (Rest of World) direct from subscribe@banipal.co.uk, online from www.inpressbooks.co.uk, or can be ordered from your local bookshop. Banipal is distributed to bookshops in the UK and rest of Europe by Central Books (www.centralbooks.com).

JOHN BOVA IN CONVERSATION WITH
BRUNO LATOUR
**On Relativism, Pragmatism,
and Critical Theory**



John Bova: You've written (in *Reassembling the Social*) that "sociology must become fully relativist". And it seems that your conception of relativism is intended to describe a phenomenon that is positive and productive, not epistemologically or ontologically negative. Could you expand on this sense of relativism that on the one hand is not negative, and on the other is so radical that you propose that only an explicit paradigm shift in the methodology of the human sciences will enable them to think "full" relativity?

Bruno Latour: "Relativism" is typically used as a term of abuse in the social sciences, as when it's pronounced by the former Cardinal Ratzinger...

JB: those remarks about the "dictatorship of relativism"?...

BL: Right. What relativism means for most people in the social sciences is the *absolutism of a point of view*, the right of everyone to impose his own point of view without having to *relate*. But this way that most people use the word "relativism" is exactly the opposite of what the word means! Deleuze defined my way of understanding the word "relativism" very well when he said that relativism is not *the relativity of truth* but *the truth of relation*. And that is how the term is used in the sciences. In science, *relativity* indicates the possibility of shifting points

of view, of going from one point of view to another, and establishing some sort of connectedness. So while people still use "relativity" as a term of abuse, there is no reason to be intimidated by idiots who use the term stupidly. It's the perfect term to indicate exactly what it means, and that's *establishing metrics, allowing shifts in points of view*. So the idea of relativism is not very contentious; it has simply become contentious because of this way that fundamentalists are using the term. But the opposite of *relativism* is just *absolutism*. Who wants to be absolutist?

JB: Let me ask you about the association you've just made between relativism and an ontology of relation. Many attempts to clarify the being of relation rely on tracing relations against some kind of background, measuring differences against some sort of self-identical framework or medium. Hegel perhaps thinks that we can avoid the postulation of such a background dialectically, but you don't agree?

BL: That's a strand of the meaning of relativism. Relativity theory is precisely based on the idea that you can *begin* to establish actual relations between frames of reference precisely when you *stop* asking for an absolutely determined fixed point of view. That's what relativity theory *is*. And this is solid ground! Already according to relativity theory there is a starting point when you stop asking for a background against which you can compare the frames of reference. There is no text clearer on that than Einstein's early texts on the principle of relativity. When you begin to have only *frames of reference*—as Deleuze would say, the *plane of immanence*—can you begin to trace the connections. Of course you need the *traces*, and the question of the traces is interesting. But for me controversy over relativism is a non-issue, really, because every instance of progress in science, morality, democracy, has amounted to an advance in understanding relativity. So when people say that this means that everyone will be able to have his own point

of view, they're thinking of an *absolutism of the point of view*, which is an entirely different matter and which is of no great interest.

JB: You're remarked more than once in print on the irony implicit in the pair of contrary objections that are frequently raised to the procedures of Science Studies. On one hand, people complain that it participates in technorational elitism; on the other hand, that it imports supposedly extraneous social/political considerations into science. These objections move in opposite directions, but are both ways of insisting on the *difference* between science and the political, and you say that they keep coming back no matter how thoroughly refuted. There's this feeling that science studies does justice neither to science nor to politics. I wonder whether one reason that people have trouble accepting your position, or any pragmatist theory of science, has to do with the sense that science's special relation to *mathematics* qualifies its status as another language-game? What is your view of mathematics? Is there a deep puzzle in our ability to use signs in this way that seems so heterogeneous with respect to our political uses? I take this way of putting the question—how is it possible that humans are able to speak both mathematically and politically *despite* the heterogeneity of their procedures—to be a Platonic one, therefore perhaps opposite in spirit to your and James' way of seeking a common ground in practices. But how do you get around the *apparent* difference? Is there a deep puzzle for you in the existence of mathematics, or do you regard the appearance of mystery as a mystification?

BL: There *is* a deep puzzle, but I have not worked on it myself, so I am relying on the secondary literature, which is not large. There are not many people working on mathematics in Science Studies, though we now have a large body of work on the experimental sciences and the problems with formalism there. There are perhaps six or seven books, and perhaps two dozen interesting articles,

not a massive library, and I have not worked on the problem. So for me, there is a puzzle, which is still largely untouched. There is a Platonism that is necessary for mathematics to work. It has to be respected, to be there in the work describing mathematics in a way that has not really been attempted, except by Whitehead, a mathematician himself, who in a way orders metaphysics around this respect for the quality of mathematics. But this [respect for working mathematical Platonism] is different from our critique of the modernists' dichotomy of Nature and Society as the two big assemblies in terms of which everything has to be divided, as if you were to take this table and say that everything on it has to be considered here or there, even though in reality everything is in the middle. But the fact that the critique of my branch of science studies alternates between those who say that we are old-fashioned realists because we believe in Platonism and realism and those who accuse us of politicizing science doesn't worry me much. I reply, "It's interesting that you believe that there are only these two ways of placing all the beings with whom we are sharing our lives, into the categories of Society or Nature, but that's not what I do."... I've stopped fighting that battle, and since I wrote *Politics of Nature*, I've stopped even mentioning it. This is a twentieth-century conflict. Now up to this point, the response that I've given is polemical or negative. We now abandon completely a view according to which Nature and Society are the two exclusive Assemblies. But then there are lots of interesting positive ontological questions attaching to the various hybrid procedures. And here mathematics will once again become extremely interesting... There are lots of intermediaries available. Alan Turing is such an intermediary, and I should like to approach this question as I did rereading Turing, who is supposed to be such a formalist, and instead shows an absolute proliferation of semiotic entities. And the same goes for politics. The politics in which we can discover a link to mathematics is not always politics in the traditional sense of Mr. Bush. When people think of politics, they



imagine dark forces and big guys and giant corporations. But when people say that there is no politics in mathematics, that's because they are looking for Mr. Bush, right? Though even in that sense you wouldn't have to search for too long to find Mr. Bush in pure mathematics, through the issue of contracts, as taken up in MacKenzie's book... And then if you begin to look for what happens to the little semiotic characters that *do* things in mathematics, the link is very close... So it's very hard on the surface. If you try to bring together a treatise on topology and the Acts of the Congress you will find them very far apart. But if you begin to look at a question like assembling, grouping, counting, the connection will be very close. I say that without having worked firsthand on mathematics, but looking at MacKenzie's book, for example, I think perhaps mathematics is not really the hard case after all. The connections are indirect and surprising, but this is not ultimately the hard case. But if you have in mind a bicameral picture to begin with, then looks impossible. You'll never chart a course between mathematics and the moral turpitude of Mr. DeLay. But there are many other things on earth between the Bush conception of politics and a purely formal conception of mathematics. So this is the way that I will answer, but again, I haven't looked into this myself. I'd like to, but I am too ignorant of mathematics and there are many other things to do.

JB: It's remarkable that starting, apparently, from the other extreme, from an explicitly ultra-Platonic axiom—that ontology is mathematics—Alain Badiou arrives nonetheless at a similar division of labor to that in your new bicameralism with its distinction between "taking into account" and "ordering".

BL: You'll have to explain that to me; I've never understood a word of Badiou, so you'll have to provide translation. I don't know how his writing is in English, but to me it has always been totally opaque.

JB: The link with Badiou would I think be in his ontological distinction between the situation, which resembles "ordering" in that it contains only those possibilities that have been pre-authorized to appear in accordance with some law or rule, and the deeper potentiality latent in the "state of the situation", which only appears in a supplementary event and therefore has to be "taken into account". I think that his conviction is that in Cantor's diagonal slash we find *mathematical* reasons for confidence that there are possibilities in excess of those pre-authorized at the level of metalanguage, or the law of the situation. Maybe the link would even be shared with Agamben, in that the impossibility of metalanguage leads in each case to renewed thought of *potentiality*. As I understand all three of these proposals, you're each interested in tracing what happens in language or representation once the assumption, operating at an everyday level, that metalanguage or a formalism is always or generally possible, is discarded so that frames become local. This seems to take the form of a division between the ordinary and the extraordinary, even if the latter is nothing but the ordinary seen without a frame. I'm suggesting that there's something expressed in your new bicameralism that is not only peculiar to science studies, but which organizes a lot of contemporary thought. But I'm probably overgeneralizing.

BL: I will not be able to comment in terms of Badiou; Badiou I could not make sense of. But Agamben seems to me to be on a very different wavelength. I don't think that Agamben shares my interest in science. So I will not have much to comment. For me the critique of metalanguage does not deprive us of anything; it is not disappointing. Rather, it was precisely metalanguage that was making relativism impossible. Being deprived of metalanguage is an *advantage*. It is then the connections in language, and not in metalanguage, which can become productive. Nothing is lost when you lose metalanguage, only a general impression, but nothing that makes a difference at the level of detail on the relativist plane of

immanence. But Badiou regards people interested in science as deniers of "nothingness" and he uses a very strong expression—I don't know how it translates, "bastards" perhaps—for such people. So I don't think there's much connection between this tradition and the pragmatist tradition. I'm the only French pragmatist, so it winds up that I have absolutely no contact with the French.

JB: I'd like to read a passage from your essay "Paris: Virtual City" and ask you to speak about it:

BL: Yes, I like "Paris," though the translation is not always reliable...

JB: *"What a strange feeling: if Paris is flat, then a huge reserve army is occupying all that unknown space that none of the networks considered in these pages cover. The surveillance and policing networks simply graze the bit of Paris that totally eludes them. Once again, an inversion of form and content occurs. The frame occupies only a tiny space. The context circulates in channels that are as invisible as the former tubes of the pneumatic dispatch system. The word 'power' changes meaning. It no longer denotes states of unquestionable things, but everything that crosses Paris in convoys of strong-rooms similar to those of security guards transporting money. There is indeed power; that is, force, virtualities, empowerment, a dispersed plasma just waiting to take shape. The term "Virtual Paris" doesn't refer to the downloading from the Web, complete disembodiment, ultimate modernization or final connection of hacker's dreams; on the contrary, it means a return to incarnation, to virtualities. Yes, power is invisible, but like the virtual, like the plasma, like the perpetual transformations of the Pont-Neuf."*
(Latour, "Paris: Invisible City")

BL: Did you type this, because you are not able to download it from the net?

JB: Yes I did.

BL: I regret this because now I want to download the text and it's silly that you have to type it. That's the problem with *Java*. Yes, so...

JB: You've drawn a fascinating implication in this text from the premise of the *flatness* of networks, which you mentioned earlier, to something follows from this premise, which is that we can assert that there is a reserve of power, a virtuality that necessarily lies off of any already-established grid or map. The reason is presumably that rather than describing the real network, such mappings are themselves to be understood as nodes in the network. For me this has been a helpful passage for thinking about the political implications of your ontology. Would you elaborate on the deduction of a (political) reserve of power from (ontological) flatness in this text? I don't know how willing you are to formalize the images of flatness or plasma, but it sounds as though the implication results from establishing horizontal relations between ideas that would traditionally be located on different vertical levels in a logical or descriptive hierarchy?

BL: I think you're right to pick out that passage, and I try, in *Reassembling the Social*, to bring this concept out systematically... The second part of the book is entirely about what it means to localize the global and you distribute the local. You reconnect, and then the next question is that what we mean by a framework changes. It's a completely relativistic point. The big pictures circulate inside the networks like ambulances in New York. They are not *occupying* the territory; they are *in* the territory.

JB: The "whole" is one of the parts?

BL: I didn't know when I was writing "Paris: Invisible", because I had not read Tarde at the time, but the point is made very nicely by Gabriel Tarde in that passage explaining that the big is always one tiny, amplified expression of the little, of the small¹. And again, we reiterated a lot of that in the catalogue for [the exhibit] "Making Things Public".

So all of that is preparatory for answering the question. The next question is: If all of these structural features are actually inside the networks and traveling through them, then *what is in-between?* This is what I call *plasma*... And I think that the word is not a bad one because of its etymology². And in "Paris" I call that same thing also a *reserve army*, so to speak, because nearly everything is in reserve [i.e., not calibrated or rendered *commensurable* by previously known social links³]. You can translate that idea in many ways. One is Wittgensteinian, which is that any course of action, in order to be completed, requires adaptation, creativity, something more than rule-following. Even to play chess you need to add something more. So where is this *more* coming from, if it is not coming from rules? If nothing in the structure of the setting is enough actually to fill in the account, where is the account *filled-in*, so to speak? You can make it as a Goffmanian interactionist point...

And of course, politically. You can find this in Foucault as well, because if you begin to relocalize the power-making mechanism, than what is *in-between* this mechanism has to be clarified. In my view this explains social movement. If you want more grandiose terms, you could use Whitehead's argument on "creativity". It explains

1. "The big (states, organizations, markets) is an amplification but also a *simplification* of the small. Only Tarde could reverse common sense that much in quietly stating that: 'So, too, there is generally more logic in a phrase than in a discourse, and more in a single discourse than in a succession or group of discourses; there is more in one special rite than in a whole religion, in one point of law than in a whole legal code, in one particular scientific theory than in the whole body of science; and there is more in a single piece of work executed by one workman than in the sun total of his performances.'" (Tarde, *Social Laws*, 76, in Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 243.)

2. The Greek *plasma*, or that which is *molded*, on one hand shares a side with the idea of a potentiality for form, but the kindred term *pelanos*, cognate with *plane* and *floor* is something *flat*. Thus in the etymology of plasma one sees the terms—flatness and potentiality—of the implication I asked Prof. Latour to connect. "Generals, editorialists, managers, observers, moralists often say that those sudden changes have a soft, impalpable liquid quality about them. That's exactly the etymology of plasma." (Latour *Reassembling the Social*, 245) For further elaboration on the logic of this point, and indeed for the logic and vocabulary of much of our discussion, see *ibid.*, 241-246. (J.B.)

3. See *Reassembling the Social* 243, 245.

why any course of action is not defined formally. So there are many ways of defining the idea, but basically it means that in order to achieve—I'll use an American metaphor—in order to *balance the accounts*, one must draw on something which is not itself formalized. It's a *very* simple point, a very simple point, but I think it has radical consequences in terms of the topology of the social; that's why I introduced it in "Paris". I like this point; I'm glad you point it out. It's also developed in *The Principle of Irreduction*, another work of mine Latour, B. (1988). *Irreductions part II of The Pasteurization of France*. Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press. In this book there is another passage concerned with getting the virtual out of its mislead-



ing association with the ideas of transparency, detachment, and so on. In that work, I describe extensively the spread of information technology around the country as the best way to *re-embody*, so to speak, because now we count in bauds and bytes, and the *materiality* of all of this connection—the virtual—is actually *greater* now than it was when we didn't have information technology. So, it's a flourish, a bit of a flourish, but at the very end of the work, I try to connect the two.

The politically minded don't always like this sort of argument. They want to say, "Yes, but there is a framework inside of which all of these networks are themselves placed," and they don't realize that when you say that, you actually immediately begin to *limit* the margins of maneuver. The plasma argument is in my view a great way of multiplying the margins of maneuver, because they are *everywhere*. So instead of having a world where there are very small margins of maneuver and the rest of the space is taken up by the frame, here the frame circulates inside very tiny networks and the rest is *terra incognita*! I think that's fair. I do this exercise with my students often—just to *describe* something in a very Jamesian way, even just that table there. When you do that you immediately see the plasma proliferating.

JB: In passages like the one we've been speaking about, and in your

remarks just now, you've celebrated, it seems, this reserve of potentiality (or virtuality) as *liberating*. You've celebrated the point at which one begins to be able to see the plasma, or the fact that the *terra incognita* is almost everywhere. But I wonder whether some people's resistance to this idea comes in part from the inevitability of experiencing this same indeterminacy also as a very great practical problem by people who are worried, perhaps ethically so, about providing some kind of minimal security for social networks. It seems like one response to what is unknown about a network—its edge, so to speak—growing not only with every nodal addition to it but also with every attempt to add it up in a framework would be an understandable experience of terror at a kind of absolute vulnerability. Isn't the plasma related to a self-undermining aspect to attempts at security, so that the unaccounted-for place where sociality can be *disrupted* is also, like the sense of possibility, "everywhere"?

BL: Is it not everywhere?

JB: But if we're establishing at the level of principle an infinite disruptability in ordinary people's lives, not only a positive sense of possibility, isn't there then a symbiosis between a growing awareness of this possibility and the kind of paranoid reaction to it that Agamben, for example, has described in terms of the "normalization of the state of emergency"? Don't these things go together? To the extent that we become more aware that the network is almost entirely *terra incognita*, isn't a predictable political response an increase in paranoia?

BL: A paranoid is a person whose paranoia will be increased by whatever you say. So whatever happens to the world, Agamben will wind up saying that Auschwitz is the model of modern civilization and there is nothing you can do about that, because Agamben is a paranoid in that sense. But I don't work along those lines at all. You have to understand that I am from a small country that is

completely stultified by Critical Theory, where everything is "impossible"—because of the State, but also because of social critique, and because of the *antimondialists*, the Far Left, the Trotskyites, the Liberals...The only thing that everyone in this country agrees upon is that nothing is possible—from the director of my school who has this great line, "My policy is to do nothing" all the way to the Trotskyites' "Everything is feasible"—except that the Trotskyites think that we need a revolution first! So I'm very interested in finding out how come this powerlessness, this disempowerment has become the main paradigm of the Left. How it is that the Left has associated a critical posture with disempowerment, which is quite extraordinary if you think of it. And the social theory they have is, of course, aporetic. "I can't do much, but this much I can do—to trace why is it so." A great American historian Bernard Yack has written a book which is called Yack, B. (1992). *The Longing for Total Revolution: Philosophic Sources of Social Discontent from Rousseau to Marx and Nietzsche*. Berkeley: University of California Press. *The Total Revolution* showing that you can trace from Rousseau to Nietzsche (and although he does not do it you could extend to Agamben and Negri *etc.*), a very long line of inheritance of this kind of argument; he tries to do a genealogy of this powerlessness—which, of course, robes itself in high moral language and which probably uses power in every line. It's a very perverse situation, and of course Agamben is one of the great perverts, in a very subtle way. He exemplifies what I call the subtly masochistic relation of the Left with powerlessness. So you could, of course, turn the argument into another paranoid argument, but for me, it is a very simple commonsensical argument. We *can*. We are able to do things. Except one of the conditions for doing things is that you can't believe Critical Theory—it will increase your powerlessness!

JB: But is it wrong to wonder about the darker side of networks, if you will—that in addition to the raw possibility, we experience networks in terms of an almost complete vulnerability? In the US, for example, people have a desire to

secure everything, and the only criticism you hear raised against this process is not that it's impossible in principle but just that everything isn't being secured quickly enough!

BL: I just saw at MOMA a magnificent exhibition called *Safe*. It was really marvelous—absolutely marvelous—about what could be called "paranoid design", a very interesting exhibition about all the lengths we go to in order to make people safe, in public and personally. It's a great exhibition; you should go to see it if you have time. But I'm not sure I understand the concern, because the relationship between network and plasma is just a background-foreground reversal. It doesn't describe what society is; it's a conceptual tool for inquiry, which is to say, "Okay, since the frame is inside the networks, now let's study how it circulates." And it circulates through techniques of representation which are traceable and which are completely fragile. There is nothing more fragile than the state, the providential state. There is nothing more fragile than the United States in the event of a hurricane. The surprise is just that the constant surprise at the fragility of things is always starting again, which is very odd because if you begin to relocalize the networks of a country, the fragility is built in. They are entirely fragile, and it's very difficult to make any network coordinate with any other one, as anyone who has directed an intelligence agency  knows, like in the very interesting report on the 9/11 intelligence mess-up. If you imagine a society behind all the networks then it comes as a continual surprise in a way, that no one should know what is happening. But no one knows. Politics is the blind leading the blind. Dewey understood that very well. The republic does not exist. It has to be made. It has to be created; it has no existence. But you also have the paranoid critique which reloads in transcendence this whole thing, makes the networks into a big plot. Which is why I like the notion of oligopticon in "Paris: Invisible City". The most you can get is an oligopticon. You can see a little bit.

There is no panopticon.

JB: So, in your view, this fragility is not necessarily something that grows with technological complexity?

BL: No, but it doesn't decrease either. It's just that the ambition increases. Technology does not make a big difference there; it just extends the plane. And the hype. And the disappointment. I've done a lot of work on technology myself, and it's always very interesting to see the constant hype and the constant disappointment and the constant repair. It's a property of technology—especially of intellectual technology—which is always coming back. The key thing about this plasma for me is more emancipatory, but I'm sure that it can be turned into another cause for gloom and paranoia on the part of the Left. They love to be paranoid; they love to be defeated. And I don't want to be defeated.

JB: Perhaps you could speak about the kinds of non-paranoiac participation that you see as making a difference, as deciding the status of the terra incognita in a hopeful or liberatory direction rather than as a structure of alienation. Elsewhere you've written of a goal and structure of action in terms of a sort of everyday participation, in these words: *"[I]n order to think, there's not only the critical mind. We can have a goal other than that of unveiling the real structures concealed by the common people's illusions. We can also spawn an abundance of mediators, drown the megalomaniacs and paranoiacs in a wave of little participants, add to the population of humans, those multitudes whose tireless labor, 'out of patience and rage', produces more beauty, truth, and justice than the cargo cult of those always dreaming of a transcendence finally rescuing us from our ordinary existence..."*

Is a confidence in this sort of participation the basis of your basically optimistic

experience of the plasma's exteriority to networks?

BL: I'm optimistic because I am from Beaune, in Burgundy! When you are born in Burgundy, you have an optimistic view of life, because it is a country of wine and good food. Whenever we had a war in the Middle Ages or the Renaissance, we would just open some wine casks for the people who were besieging us, and they got drunk and left quite happy! So I'm not a tragic figure. But the plasma argument has nothing to do with optimism. It has to do with a very classical view of liberty as capacity or empowerment. Whenever you want empowerment, the first thing you have to clear from your mind of the idea that you are powerless. Strangely enough, by a perverse argument which goes all the way back to Spinoza, and forward to Hardt & Negri (using Spinoza) and Bourdieu (using Spinoza) there is the idea that liberty consists in the recognition of necessity. There is a very funny argument here—that if you are aware of a necessity about which you can do nothing, then you will become liberated, like Spinoza's famous stone which goes up and believes it is free. I've always found that this argument, given a slight twist, immediately winds up making you even more powerless. It becomes an excuse. So I'm very interested in renewing arguments in which, according to a very old definition of politics, when you speak politically you should feel *enabled*. Whatever the truth, you feel that you *can*. And one of the ways of doing this is to use a social theory according to which you can make a difference. If you use a social theory according to which nothing makes a difference, then in the presentation of the social theory itself the possibility of a political way of speaking is wiped out. And I'm very sensitive to that because in Europe now, the powerlessness is everywhere, and especially in France as I said before, the whole critical discourse is about *indifference*. So that's why I'm perhaps oversensitive to arguments that increase powerlessness. And I'm very suspicious of this Spinozist argument about freedom—that freedom is the knowing of necessity. It doesn't seem to me right...





MICHELA PITTALUGA

The Artist as Urban Historian: The Artistic Evolution of Mimmo Rotella



In memory of Mimmo Rotella (7 October 1918 - 8 January 2006).

"TEARING UP POSTERS from the walls is the only compensation, the only means to protest against a society that has lost the joy of fabulous transformations..." It is in such a way that in 1958 Mimmo Rotella explains his philosophy of art. And, indeed, what Rotella wants to accomplish with his *decollages* is the creative re-appropriation of urban images such as the advertisement posters that, because of their redundancy, fail to make a lasting impression anymore. Pierre Restany, the theoretician of the *nouveau realisme*, defined him as a "discloser of the skin of the walls of our cities", whereby the walls are seen as an open book where one can 'read' the images of a continuously evolving history.

Mimmo Rotella was born in Catanzaro in 1918. He moved to Rome in 1945 and in 1953 he began to appropriate for himself fragments of posters attached to the walls in the area of Piazza del Popolo. He was to be the first artist to expose to the public a work of art defined as a *decollage* — "I had invented the *decollages* in Rome in 1953, but I only showed them to the public in February 1954". This statement becomes particularly relevant when Pierre Restany informs him that two Paris-based artists, Raymond Hains and Jacques Villeglé, were in the same period conducting a series of parallel figurative explorations. As it was possible to discern later on, it was from 1949 that the two Parisians had begun to create paint-

ings beginning from *affiches lacérées*. However, their first exhibition was to take place only in 1957, whereas Rotella first participates in the collective exhibition on the Tiber River organized in 1954 by Emilio Villa. But, as Restany himself stated, "the unawareness of each other was as complete on the one side as it was on the other".

Rotella's first step in his quest for the appropriation of urban nature was made in 1949 with the manifesto of *epistaltic* poetry. In these poems are to be found a series of elementary phonetic figures such as whistling, hissing, laughter and the calls of animals. Of particular interest to us are a number of points of the manifesto that clarify the connections between this early form of art and the *decollage*: "The inclusion, in the *epistaltic* compositions, of sound effects derived from the real corresponds to what *polimateric* art stands for in the field of sculpture and to what the collage stand for in the field of painting", and again, "the *epistaltic* language involves inventing all the words by detaching them from their utilitarian value in order to employ them as tracer rockets against the decrepit edifices of syntax and vocabulary".



→ Tyra

As it has been pointed out, Rotella begins to create the *decollages* in 1953, after a critical period that followed his return to Rome from Kansas City, where he had spent one year as an Artist in Residence at Kansas City University. In his words, "I was impressed by the walls covered by lacerated posters. I was absolutely fascinated as I then thought that painting as a form of art was over and that one needed to find something new, something alive and topical. In the evening I then began to

lacerate these posters, to tear them up from the walls and I brought them to my studio, putting them together or leaving them as they were, as I first saw them".

This is how *decollages* was born. Rotella's first pictures, which Restany defines as *double-decollages*, are obtained by a process of double laceration. First of all from the wall and then, once these fragments were attached on the canvas, from the canvas itself in order to obtain specific chromatic relations and certain effects of matter (for which Rotella would indiscriminately glue the front and back of the bill). In such a way, as argued by Tommaso Trini, we have a 'managed' *decollage* as it was for the 'managed' *readymades* by Duchamps. To begin with, then, there is little or no recognizability of the poster and the progressive disappearance of the picture as the support for painting increases in a context of sabotage against easel painting (See **La Crema**). But this affront to art could not be possibly accepted even in the Rome of the *Dolce Vita*, which could perhaps appreciate Alberto Burri's jute sacks because they were related to a very precise historical period, that of the *post-cubism* revisited and corrected by Kurt Schwitters, and also, for that matter, Rotella's *epistaltic* poems, but which could not understand this extreme appropriation of urban nature. And indeed it was to be in Paris, which Rotella visited frequently from the early sixties onwards, that he received the first very favourable opinions on his work¹.

1. P. Restany, *A Man of the Times: Mimmo Rotella the story of a perennial modernity*, in *Mimmo Rotella. Antologica 1949-2000*, Prato 2002 pag. 40

In 1958, Rotella makes the crucial encounter with Pierre Restany, who will update him on the artistic experiments of artists such as Yves Klein, Arman and Tinguely and the Parisian *affichistes* Raymond Hains, Villeglé and Dufrêne, who had just organized their first exhibition at the Colette Allendy art gallery – Restany would then invite Rotella to participate to the 'adventure' of *Nouveau Réalisme*.

The movement was officially created by Arman, Dufrêne, Hains, Raysse, Spoerri, Tinguely, Villeglé, Restany and Yves Klein in the latter's house on 27 October 1960. Later on, Rotella, Cesar (both of which were invited on the 27 October

but who were absent,) Niki de Saint-Phalle, Duchamps and Christo joined. And it's just 1960 that represents a turning point for the art of Rotella: "1960 was the year when I made the first *decollage* with the image" (See **La Doppia Vita Di Silvia**). This return to the image and the consequent abandonment of abstract decollage was not simply a result of the exterior influences deriving from the collaboration with the *Nouveau Réalisme* movement and the knowledge of the neo-dada and pop processes occurring at that time in New York. It was also the result of a new awareness of the *decollage* as being a literal representation of his iconography, a "on-the-road ready-made", and not anymore a simple product of the structural elements of the *affiches*. And in the Rome of that period, the urban iconography is mostly represented by the cinematographic poster, which Rotella employs in his most famous works, the *Cinecittà* series, presented to the public as early as 1962 in the J. Gallery in Paris (See **Gioventù**). Part of this series are Rotella's famous Marylins, which have become as important icons of urban culture as Warhol's ones. In this sense, it was not by chance that the Marylins of these two artists appeared next to the other in the "Halls of Mirrors" art exhibition at the MOCA in Los Angeles in 1996.

Already by 1965 Rotella, Otto Hanh and Alain Jacquet had began a new process of experimentation with photo-mechanic reproduction – what Rotella would later term Mec Art. With the following, Rotella explains the rationale of this new artistic production: "My new works have moved away from being *decollages* to become *reportages*, better explained as reproductions of the images on paper or canvas, in colour or black and white. I have inverted my old way of proceeding: I first tried to disintegrate, I now try to reintegrate this matter, this reality". At the same time, in the printer works he comes about the printing tests (over-exposed typographic prints with which the printer checks the quality and the colours of the images) – which he would later term *Artypos* (See **F.M. Segreta**) – with which he would bring the gesture of appropriation of the image to the extreme as he would employ an entirely mechanic technique without any touch-up (thereby differenti-

ating its work form the previous pop art of Rauschenberg and Warhol).

These sheets are initially glued on the canvas that is soon replaced by rigid supports made of plastic and without a frame. These plasticized Artypos can, according to Trini, be considered as a "modern mechanic tapestry born out of mass communication".

In this period marked by a strong interest for the processes of photo-mechanic reproduction, one can also point to Rotella's erotic drawings, on a small format, which are often based upon material printed in colour treated with a process of chemical frottage (See **Giochi Erotici**). In his book *Autorotella*, written in 1972, one can read: "Eroticism is very important for the life of a painter, to some extent as experience, to some as a, shall we say, progressive fact, as a lymph that nourishes the painter to continuously create erotic and non erotic works". But Rotella's "mental radar", as he defines his analytic instinct for the urban reality that encircles us, was always working. During the 1980s, two new techniques emerge: the *Blanks* and the *Overpaintings*.

With the *Blanks*, the artist explores the successive phases of the life of an advertisement poster up to its expiration (See **Green Blank**). It indeed seems that during his artistic evolution Rotella has personally reworked all the phases of the life of an advertisement poster, beginning from its typographic elaboration to its posting and up to the moment in which it is exposed and tore down (as suggested by Tonino Sicoli), and to its expiration and subsequent cover up by white or coloured posters before being definitively hidden by another poster. What is evident is this constant focus on the stratification of the image that underlines a continuously altering urban reality.

The *Overpainting* series can be similarly interpreted, whereby Rotella intervenes pictorially on the tore up posters in the same manner as the street artists of that period invaded the walls of the metropolis with images and signs (see **Flight**).

In the whole of his artistic production Rotella can be considered as a keen observer of the city, interested as he is by an art that documents urban reality, which is born out of an objective look and out of an intellectual appropriation of this reality. For this reason, Rotella has been looked at as an historian of the street and daily life and not by chance his works have been exposed at the "High and Low" exhibition held at the MOMA in New York in 1990 and at the "Face à l'Histoire" exhibition at the Centre Pompidou in Paris in 1996. Rotella is also represented at the "Italian Metamorphosis" exhibition held at the Guggenheim Museum in New York in 1994, in the "Les Années Pop" exhibition held again at the Centre Pompidou and in the "Platea dell'Umanità" exhibition at the Forty-ninth Venice Biennale, whereby Rotella participates "as a 'historical instructor', as a point of reference of the panoramic vision of the contemporary art" (Restany).

The words of Pierre Restany, a friend and critic of Rotella who has been a major figure of contemporary art in the context of the Nouveau Realisme movement and in Rotella's life, perfectly sum up the artistic experience of this great contemporary artist: "the planetary dimension of Rotella's works is the logic consequence of the total penetration of urban culture of his times. A urban culture that the gaze and the mental radar of the artist have followed in its progressive globalization. Mimmo Rotella was an *ante litteram* Nouveau Realiste in 1950s Rome, a pre-pop in 1960s Paris, a graffitist in Milan in the same years as Basquiat was one in New York. Today, Mimmo Rotella is the man of the moment: here is the story of a perennial modernity".

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Mimmo Rotella. *Antologica 1949-2000*, Prato 2002

T. Trini, *Rotella*, Milano 1974

L. Beatrice, *Dizionario Rotelliano*, in *Oggi come oggi! Mimmo Rotella*, Firenze 2001

T. Sicoli, *Un profeta della civiltà dei mixed media*, <http://www.abramo.it/service/arte/musei/rotella/rotellaweb/home.htm>

THANKS TO CARLO FRITTELLI FOR THE PERMISSION TO PUBLISH ALL THE IMAGES BY ROTELLA

IN THIS ISSUE. CENTRO D'ARTE SPAZIOTEMPO, FLORENCE.



→ **Sorprenante Marylin**, 2004, decollage



→ **Gioventu'**, 1962, decollage



→ **La Crema**, 1959, decollage



→ **F.M. Segreta**, 1970, artypo



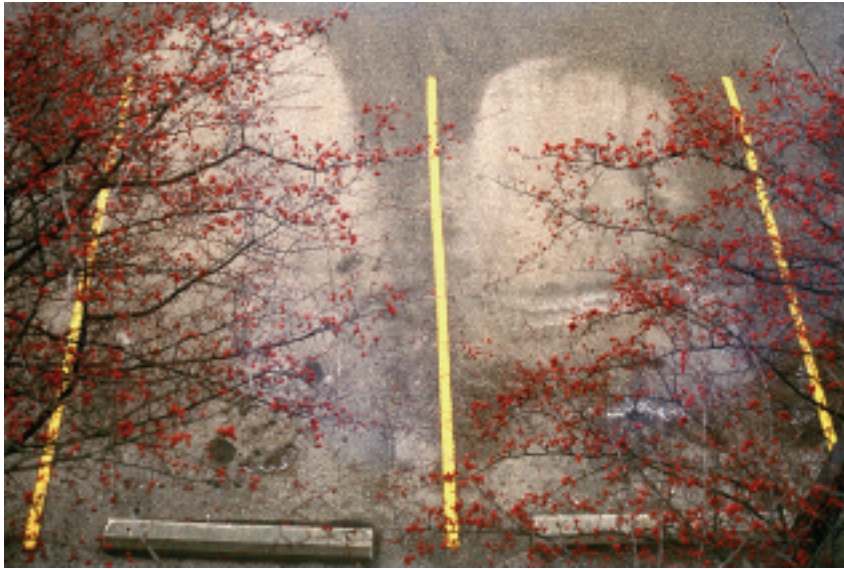
→ **Giochi Erotici**, 1974, frottage



→ **Flight**, 1989, overpainting



→ **Green Blank**, 1980, blank



→ **Parking Spaces**



→ **Space Lights**

Noah David Smith



Photographer and cinematographer Noah David Smith's images are in a state of perpetual ending or beginning, never simply happening. Noah places himself at an intimate distance to create open-ended narratives — putting the viewer on an emotional precipice, or perhaps at a fork in the road. Beauty obscures an often, overwhelming feeling of impending calamity or tragedy. Every subject and setting has a youthful quality of hesitant exploration —

parked cars are perfect in shape and color, but also act as aluminum Pandora's boxes. A young woman is suspended, quiet, and sitting on the edge, literally and figuratively. — Colby Bird

Noah received an MFA in Photography from the Rhode Island School of Design. He lives in New York City with his wife and son. More of Noah David Smith's images can be seen at www.noahdavidsmith.com (top image → **Night Work**)



→ RISD Store

↑
138

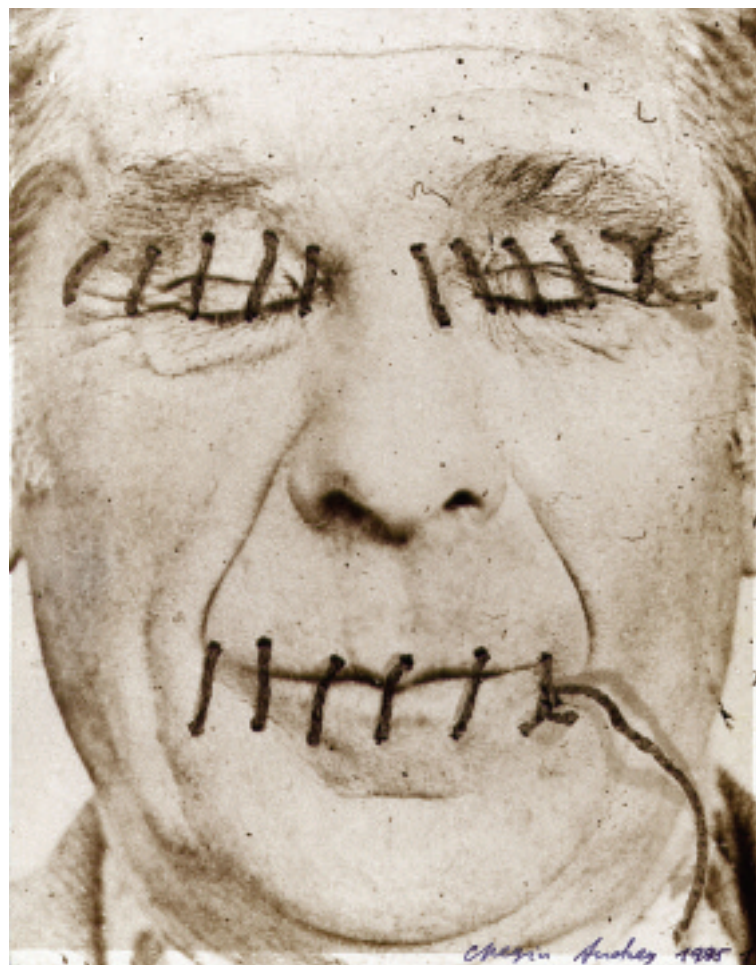


→ Apaprel Designer

↑
139

COVER ART

Andrei Chezhin



TO DATE, ANDREI Chezhin is an acclaimed master of contemporary Russian photography, a conceptual photographer distinguished by a pronounced and easily recognizable style. There are two

themes that thread their way throughout his works, that of man and his original uneven attitude towards himself and the world and that of the memory space in which strange metamorphoses and surrealistic shifts in time happen.

Chezhin works hard and with great ingenuity on old nameless prints, on excerpts from classical modernism, and he has wrought a paradoxical juxtaposition of naturally different time-and-space rhythms. As a rule, the artist prefers black-and-white photography, he exploits all the possibilities of the original print, which, in effect, is turned to a refined graphic plate. Having spent many long days in a regular portrait photographer's studio, Chezhin, of all people, came to realize the worth and significance of a simple, dispassionate studio photograph, and he elaborated upon this theme in a series of grotesque and absurd images devoted to the theme of Harms, The Harmsiade; he further developed it through the prism of "The Red Square" of Malevich. In another series, human faces are replaced with drawing-pins, frightening as they are by their uniformity, which, paradoxically, reminds one of the definition given by R. Bart, according to which a photograph is a wound, a cut.

The surrealistic rotation and dissolving of images in photographic cycles on the Petersburg theme is not only a peculiar view of the city subject to metamorphoses but also a delicate technique which uses double and repeated time-exposure, panoramic scanning,

bridging spots of fragments of various sizes: "A Herd of Horses", "The Nevsky Font". Each of his projects, novel and experimental, appeals to the main themes and subjects of the history of the 20th century and turns everything the artist makes into a huge palimpsest composed of oodles of visual associations. Chezhin travels through the space of Modern Art, he revives the lost visual meanings by way of introducing them into a new, topical context.

His works are cyclic – once he launches into a theme, he never drops it, but, on the contrary, he builds on it and creates a symphony of many movements, with an elaborated 'musical score' which is conceptually arranged. Such is his latest project devoted to childhood, which is a kind of brilliantly executed photographic excavation of the irremovable époque, it is the archeology of memory, which is perceived as both nostalgia and the breathing present.

Gleb Yershov Andrei Chezhin was born in Leningrad in 1960. He graduated from Leningrad Institute of Cinematographic Engineering in 1982. One of the founders of the PhotoImage Gallery (1995). Participant and initiator of the majority of exhibitions of photography in St Petersburg. Collections: The Russian State Museum, St Petersburg; the collection of the Free Culture Humanitarian Foundation, St Petersburg; the Museum of Photographic Collections, Moscow; The Navigator Foundation, Boston, U.S.A.; Columbus Museum of Art, Columbus, Ohio, U.S.A.; The Southeast Museum of Photography, Florida, U.S.A.; private collections Joshua P. Smith, Lucian Perkins, Ursula Herbrand, Paul Zimmer, Michael Peltzman and others.

COURTESY RUSSKIALBUM FOUNDATION
WWW.RUSSKIALBUM.RU



Notes On Contributors

→ **TARIQ ALI** is a novelist, a regular commentator in the British press, a historian and one of New Left Review's editors. His most influential publications include *Clash of Fundamentalisms* (Verso, 2003)

→ **SIMON CRITCHLEY** is Professor of Philosophy at the New School for Social Research, New York and at the University of Essex. His publications include *The Ethics of Deconstruction and Very Little...Almost Nothing*.

→ **MIKHAIL N. EPSTEIN** is Samuel Candler Dobbs Professor of Cultural Theory and Russian Literature at Emory University. His interests include contemporary philosophy and religion; new methods and interdisciplinary approaches in the humanities; semiotics; lexicology; ideological discourse; ideas and electronic media.

→ **BRUNO LATOUR** was trained first as a philosopher and then an anthropologist. Since 1982, he has been professor at the Centre de Sociologie de l'Innovation at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Mines in Paris and, for various periods, visiting professor at UCSD, at the London School of Economics and in the history of science department of Harvard University.

Together with Peter Weibel he has curated the exhibitions "Iconoclasm beyond the image wars in science, religion and art" and "Making Things Public: The atmospheres of democracy"

→ **MICHELA PITTALUGA** has received her degree in Conversation and History of Art at the University of Genoa, Italy. She is currently based in London where she plans to pursue further studies in the field of management of museums.

→ **ROGER REDGATE** is a composer and lecturer in Music Performance at Goldsmiths' College, University of London. He is conductor and artistic director of Ensemble Exposé with whom he performs regularly in European festivals and on BBC Radio 3. He has also worked in the fields of jazz, improvised music and performance art.