

naked PUNCH

NAKED PUNCH → ISSUE II

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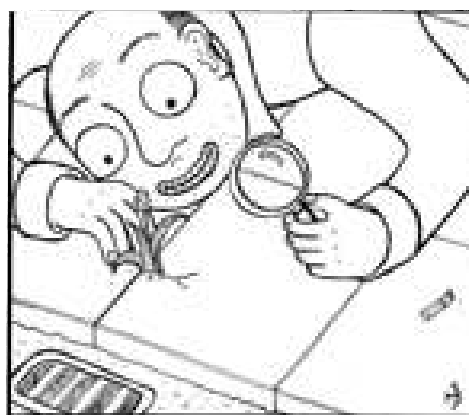
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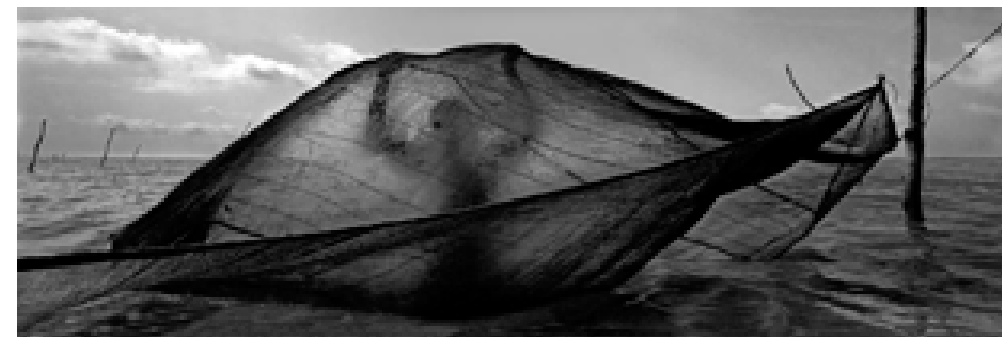
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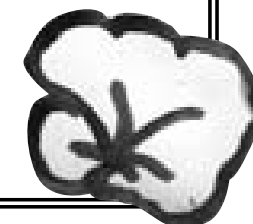
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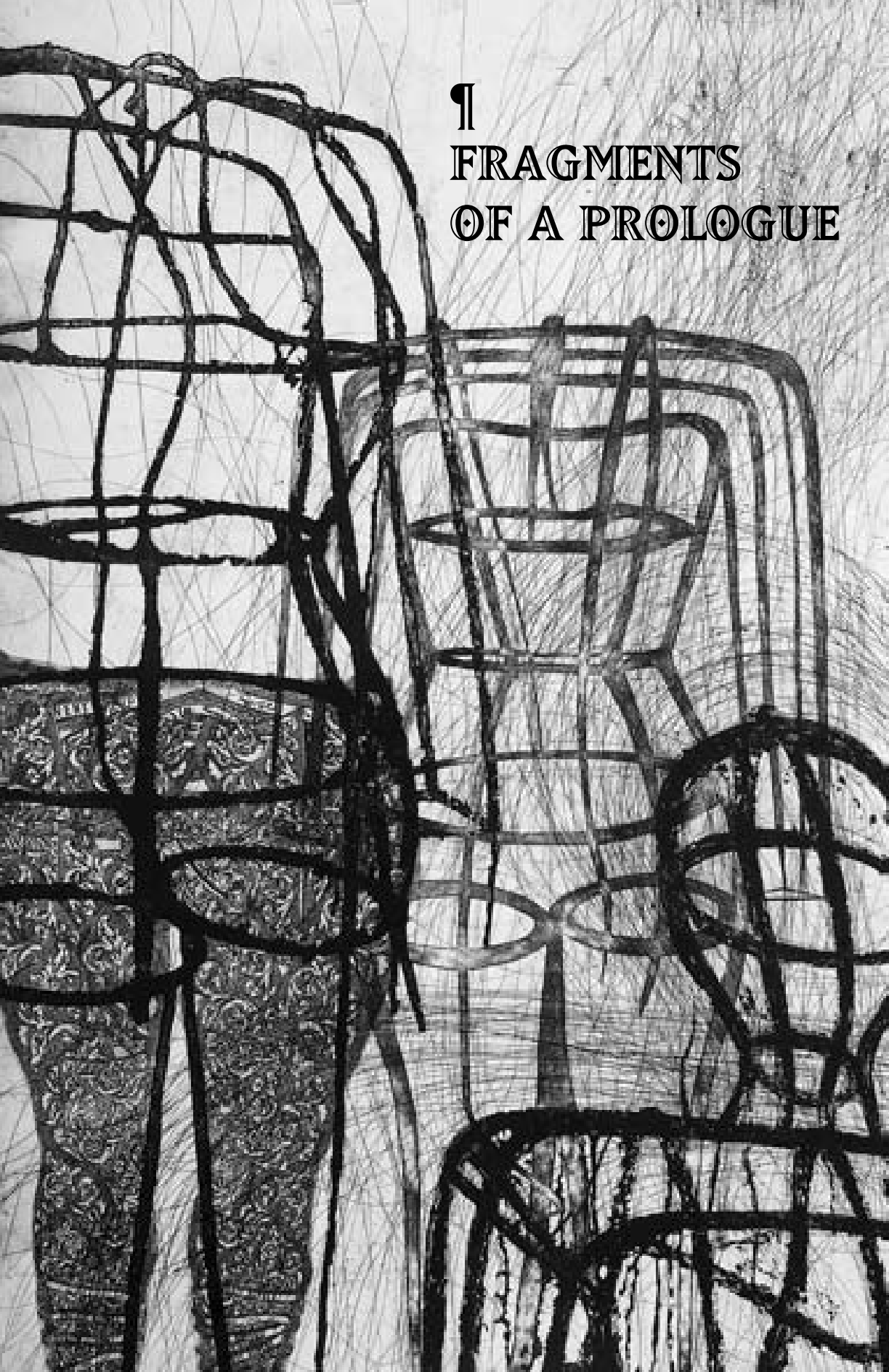
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I FRAGMENTS OF A PROLOGUE

NEO-HUMANITARIANISM AND RIGHTS TODAY:

*On human security and the ideological
destiny of Human Rights.*

By Oscar Guardiola

I. THE CONJUNCTURE: BEYOND MODERNIZATION AND GLOBALIZATION.

In most common understandings of the relation between development and modernity, the term 'modernization' is taken as entailing the unstoppable or necessary 'flattening of the world', that is to say, the emergence of a borderless world organized around economic competition, and trade as the premier principle of a new community, in which the labour force is fully dispossessed of the means of production and all commodities, including labour-power, exchanged freely at prices more or less equal to their production costs (Marx, Thomas Friedman, g-talk). At the geo-political level, this would translate into the power of some nations over other nations: "the cheap prices of its commodities are the heavy artillery with which [the bourgeoisie] batters down all Chinese walls" (Marx, *Manifesto*, quoted by

Arrighi, *Adam Smith in Beijing*, p. 77).

Confronted by this affirmation of the singular and unstoppable power of economic competition and trade, at least one question arises: if this is the case, if economic competition and trade is such a singular organizing principle, then what is the role of military might in the expansion of the West into the East (as in the case of the European Union and Eastern Europe, or the US-led coalition, East Asia and the Middle East) or the subjugation of the global South by the North?

A closely related but different thesis (defended by so-called 'Dependency Theory' in Latin America, and World-Systems history in America and Europe, both emerging out of a combined reading of Adam Smith, some but not most Marx, Schumpeter, Kenneth Pomeranz, R. Bing Wong, Harvey and others) approaches this question from the perspective that modernization and the globalization of capital

entail 'divergence' rather than 'convergence': the argument is that capitalist global expansion simultaneously generates development in core locations and underdevelopment everywhere else. The process rests on a series of metropolis-satellite relations through which the metropolis appropriates the economic surplus from its satellites for its own development, while the satellites remain underdeveloped for lack of access to their own surplus and as a consequence of the same polarization and exploitative contradictions which the metropolis introduces and maintains in the satellite's domestic structure (Gunder Frank, *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America*, pp. 9-5). This left-structuralist insight developed into the so-called 'Calvo Doctrine' and 'Drago Doctrine' in the International Law of the 1960's and 80's, and ultimately, into the proposal for a New International Economic Order.

The relevant points that we can obtain from this contrasting theses are the following:

(1) A Smithian distinction or divergence between the development of a market economy and a capitalist development proper (e.g. China and the West).

(2) That market-based growth is driven by productivity gains attending a widening and deepening division of labour limited only by the extent of the market; over time, however, the initial advantages of competition, raised incomes and effective demand, come up against the limits imposed on the extent of the market by the spatial scale and institutional setting of the process (the legal system, including international law). When these limits are reached, the process enters a high-level equilibrium trap (over-accumulation, rather than over-production). How do economies escape such a trap? The case-study used by Arrighi and others in order to answer this question is that of Brit-

ish-led industrialization in the XIXth century, in relation to the sharp decline of the East (from the Opium Wars to WW II). Part of the answer is what Schumpeter called 'creative destruction' (rather than, say, enhancing the degree of commercialisation). Creative destruction can be understood as a process of constant self-revolutionizing through technological innovation, including control over resource endowments and core-periphery relations (or 'coloniality of power', in the terminology used by Peruvian Dependency sociologist A. Quijano). Something like this might explain the divergence between China's market-based development without growth and Europe's properly capitalist development, in spite of China's better position in the early XVIIIth century. Some argue that the East underwent an 'industrious' rather than 'industrial revolution', a market-based development (which would have included learning the value of work, and developing a strong work and family-based ethics) with no inherent tendency to generate the capital- and energy-intensive developmental path opened up by Britain and carried to its ultimate fate by the US.

(3) Capital and energy intensive development, focused on exports, heightened consumption and the production of 'new' space-time (or 'creative destruction') has unintended consequences: it breaks up family-based ethics and strong attachments (the passage from 'tradition' to 'modern' society, in mainstream sociological theories); ultimately, it necessitates the radical and constant re-making of entire societies and populations. This process has been going on for quite a while, and as we know, produces 'surplus' populations, peoples that become a risk, or in more specific terms, a security risk both at the domestic and the international level. It is at this juncture that the notion of 'human security' emerges in parallel with the no-

tion of 'sustainable development', over and against the right to development associated with the principle of self-determination.

2. ON HUMAN SECURITY.

What is 'human security'? It is not merely a conception or a framework for international action. After Duffield (2007: 113 ff.) and others, who approach this phenomenon from a Foucauldian standpoint (Foucault, 2007), it could be said that 'human security' appears as an enlightened way of thinking that broadens security beyond states to include other threats to life, for example, poverty, environmental pollution, population displacement and infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDS. Importantly, it involves "a growing recognition of the role of people —of individuals and communities— in ensuring their own security" (CHS 2003: 5) (...) [and] evokes progressive values' (Duffield, 2007: 113).

Put simply, 'human security' is or aspires to be a master-signifier, that precisely because of its vagueness and lack of precision works as a technology of governance (or 'governmentality') within the external frontier zone. It works across boundaries, has the ability to simplify complex ideas, create alliances and tie independent administrative or 'petty sovereigns' (for instance NGO's) together. Rather than an empirical condition to be measured or compensated for, it is a mobilizing, integrating and colonizing concept (*the* colonizing concept of post-Cold War international governance, according to Duffield, 2007: 114). Rather than an analytical notion, it is a signifier of shared political and moral values, including Human Rights and the neo-humanism associated with the Geneva Conventions and the ICC. At least in this respect, Foucauldians like Duffield and Vivienne Jabri present 'human security' as the master-signifier that sutures the post-

Cold War project of global dominance which they and others (Hardt & Negri, 2000; Douzinas, 2007; Baudiou, 2005) identify in a variety of ways with 'empire'. Although I too approach this phenomenon from a perspective that is somewhat sympathetic to these accounts, let me argue that rather than presenting 'human security' as the discourse of hegemony, it would be better to think of it as the sign of dominance without hegemony, that is, as the master-signifier that never was.

Granted, as Duffield and others suggest, 'human security' emerges out of the amalgamation of people-centred or 'sustainable' development and 'self-reliance' as the feature of the entrepreneurial 'human' (in 'human' rights) thereby bridging the gap between self-management and risk-management while at the same time focusing its beam on internal war, social breakdown and the global circulation of 'risky' populations. However, the link between war (or more precisely 'militarism') and (global capitalist) development appears in these accounts, if it appears at all, merely as a reflection of the critical move from states to people (Duffield, 2007: 117) and a paradoxical gathering of 'globalizing' and 'containing' principles (Duffield, 2007: 119; also Douzinas's '10 Theses', 2008) made clearer in the so-called 'duty to protect' that reads 'unending war' as an attempt to render governable (in hegemonic terms) the ungovernable/underdeveloped global South.

This approach, for all its benefits, tends to obscure (a) the political nature of the 'ungovernable nature' of the global South, or to be more precise, the fact that the global South is in a state of rebellion. It does this by turning, perhaps unwillingly, the 'state of rebellion' into the terms of a 'state of exception'; and (b) the specific importance of militarism in (global capitalist) development, or to put it simply, the fact that one must redefine the pro-

ductive forces to include the production of protection (including innovation in protection and control over liquidity). Such a redefinition, following Tilly, Arrighi and others, would allow for a distinction between 'hegemonic empire' and 'domination without hegemony' in terms of the changing nature of the role of US/NATO as provider(s) of protection (from 'legitimate protector' into 'racketeer') and thus opened up to 'failure' and the dynamics of envy and mimesis that make up the political.

Recently, cultural critic Slavoj Žižek, himself placed in the 'hegemony' camp, has noticed how, at the ideological level, 'Hollywood' and westernised films mobilize a two-tiered structure of catastrophe and redemption that becomes concrete in terms of the centrality of 'family values': reaffirmation of paternal authority (also of the patriarchal classes) and reconciliation of the couple (as minimal unity of re-production). Žižek presents this as a description of the structure of ideology today. But what if these ideological formations were in fact a reaction to (a defense-formation against) the reality of the loss of 'family values' and 'paternal authority' that inevitably accompanies development along the capitalist path proper? Put otherwise, this would be to say that the West lives its loss of tradition, and comes to terms with it, to a certain extent, through a reactionary fantasy.

But also, if capital does go global and penetrates former 'traditional' societies, then, as the latter suffer the impact of modernization and the loss of strong attachments that accompanies it, a similar process would ensue: acting out and resistance through 'reactionary fantasies' (this time projected on to the screen of religion, for instance), or, more precisely, a politicised fantasy (that of revolutionary Islam, for instance) that some won't like very much. This would explain in a different way the destiny of the so-called 'Asian values' debates

concerning Human Rights in the 1980's (when the hybridisation of 'industrious revolution' and 'industrial revolution' was becoming more visible in the East), but also the turn-of-the-century outbursts of violence associated with the Middle East and Islam or Christianity, in Europe and Middle America.

Be that as it may, the question at this point is different: Why are these tensions 'projected', as a matter of course, not only or primarily onto the screen of cinema and religion, but rather, onto the screen of Human Rights, with the result that the more Human Rights becomes a global creed (Douzinas, 2000) the more it becomes embedded in ideology? Finally, if, as Costas Douzinas argues, Human Rights discourse and practice produces subjectivity, then is it not the case that HR produces subjects 'embedded in ideology'? Isn't this, precisely, what writers like Mark Duffield call the 'governmentalization of aid and humanitarian industry'?

3. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE NEW LANDSCAPE OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS.

The entry of sustainable development into the mainstream debate on international law, international relations, and human rights, reflected the new acceptance and respectability of the NGO movement at the donor court, as Duffield says. It also signalled that participative-community-self-reliance was formally adopted by multilateral aid organizations as the welfare policy of choice 'for the world's non-insured peoples' (Duffield, 2007: 67-8). At the international-legal level, the main evidence supporting this transformation comes from ILO support for a shift from 'industrialization' towards 'human capital', rural development, and the promotion of labour-intensive activities. In international development and human rights thinking, this

became evident as a turn against proposals for the transformation of the means of production (whether as opposition to technology, as in 'new age' or white conscience conservatism, or else, as opposition to the radical innovation of the framework of relations concerning the means of production, as in neo- and counter-revolutionary conservatism; the latter distinguishable from the former in that it does not shy from the radical use of technology and risk-intervention) and in favour of re-orienting aid towards securing the basic needs of populations, primarily in terms of policies seeking to maintain labour-intensive production (Pupavac, 2005, 171).

Importantly, the victory of sustainable development marked a victory for the counter-critique of nationalist modernization or 'Third Worldism' that had attended the process of decolonisation in the 1960's and 70's. As can be seen (1) ultimately, the result is deeply conservative, in spite, or perhaps because of the embrace of a liberal focus on basic needs —moves within the framework— rather than 'root causes' or structures —moves to transform the framework—, and (2) in this move, 'development' acquires the same two-tiered structure denounced by Žižek in the case of cinema: the threat of catastrophe that provides 'meaning' to the renewed focus on basic human needs and values (human rights, humanitarian, or 'family/national' values). The 'meaning' in question is this: just as in the Soviet films of the Stalinist period, here 'unity' (of family, nation, or civilization) is acquired through common identification with/through the figure of the exceptional decider/leader/paternal legislator. What distinguishes this form of societal unification (or totalization) from overtly totalitarian ones is the fact that the process of identification is mediated by the possibility (rather than the actuality) of catastrophe, that such a possibility remains always a possibility (and thus, the declaration of 'exceptionality'

embodied in the leader/decider can neither be falsified nor confirmed), and thereby becomes eternal or 'unending' (a bad infinity, in Hegelian terms). This provides the connection between neo-humanitarianism and the permanent state of exception (which is not an exception any more, *pace* Agamben), but also, importantly, with unending war.

The latter remains the only available remedy to the crisis of high-equilibrium that affects the West: a 'revolution in military affairs' which drives and is driven by a new phase of technological revolution, and the production of new space, either brutally (as in the failed Iraqi campaign) or softly (as in the 'unending' expansion of the UE into the East). In both cases, it becomes clear that the anxiety driving this more recent fusion between capitalism and militarism is to contain the 'threat from the East', mostly embodied in/by a resurgent China. Perhaps unsurprisingly, within such a constellation Human Rights become part and parcel of the arsenal available to be deployed by the West against the East. Also in terms of a mob unified against an alleged common enemy, as revealed by the recent outburst of protests following the Olympic torch on its way to China.

The renewed centrality of Human Rights is due to the (ideological) fact of the near-universal value given to such a discourse in today's popular culture. As usual, this near universality is mobilized by the popular media in the West in terms of 'our Human Rights' versus 'their lack thereof'. In this aspect at least, the debate lacks reflexivity. It is very fitting that the protagonist of such debates at the beginning of 2008 was none other than Hollywood director Steven Spielberg, who has made of the catastrophe/family redemptive narrative in film the ultimate and widely consumed form of neo-humanitarian ideology. ✱

WALKING WITH CRISTINA ON BURNT OAK HIGH STREET

By Qalandar Bux Memon

As you crossed the road, without looking,
the cars stopped. How could they not, as aspirations float and the wind too finds its path through trees,
and between bricks, it must move, must be allowed to move, apparitions which carry gaps of breath, that
space which contains you is sacred to them who appreciate their visions and hopes, for a step, a movement
of contained extension draws sublimity in hearts coarsened to reality. how could it not.

How could we not understand that in high streets also we must present, especially here, present and
please - recall that grandmother who upon understanding and seeing the greyness in my eyes displayed
her treasured grandson, so that I too may know that we are un-redemptionally connected, freely is given
and that we share, must share.

the drivers confessed more than love, they confessed to you, their eternal dream, my dream, our dream,
of living and breathing somehow freely without dimness of conformity or enslavement in gender and class
vocabularies...who better than you grocer understands beauty. You who with tomatoes and coriander
daily live know that 'character reveals beyond the will' - that it is not enough to judge by weight alone but
to smell, and taste, and sense also and even then we will not know - they understand that wind moving
through trees, altering, cleansing...doing more than can be understood, explained, contained...aimed for...
must also be allowed to cross roads...

Artwork by Akbar Ali

AMIRI BARAKA

Note From a Doomed Civilization

The Americans have broken all
Treaties, refused to be part of the
World Court
They are their own Carte Blanche
to massacre and destroy, Beyond
All judgment...
vampire face
insect eyes

Smirk
of the Blood Sucker
===

Inside Capital
Inside a White house

A conversation of murderers
Armed with
nervous breakdowns

the destruction
Of America
As Numbers

& America is here
The Bastard

Its own history perverted
un known

I

Nothing real
Except their
Appetites

RULERS
Of the
World

w/a God
who is filthy
with Dishonor
& white supremacy

A Heathen God
steal, kill
Eat

Dangerous Psychopaths

SOCIALLY OBSOLETE
PREDATORS

Want to RULE
THE WORLD

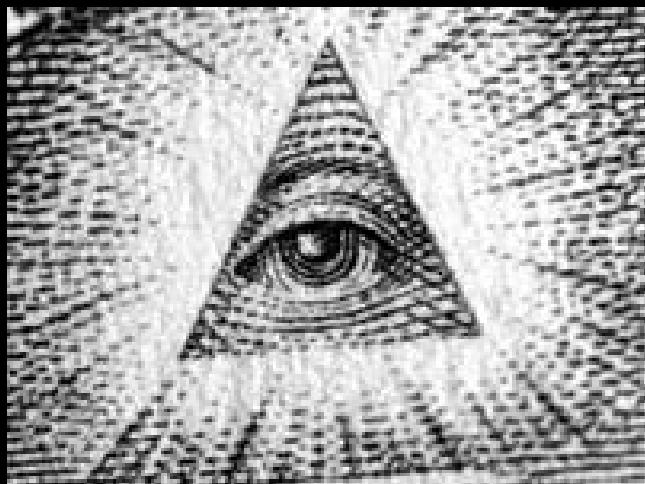
taught
By Money
& Hitler

Only Satan
Is more
Evil!

II

Glossary of Creatures From The Bush

Bush Breath (Ass Craft)
Bush Beast (Wolfowitz)
Bush Cannibal (Tom Ass)
Bush Dog (Ari Flesh eater)
Bush Eel (Pearle)
Bush Dope (Paige)
Bush Ghoul (Elder)
Bush Hog (Crouch)
Bush' it (The Colon)
Bush Kleagel (Cheney)
Bush Louse (Blair)
Bush Monkey (Armstrong)
Bush Nark (Mueller)
Bush Owl (Norm the Pod)
Bush Pig (Ridge)
Bush Quack (Saphire)
Bush Rat (Sharon)
Bush Snake (Lott)
Bush Crazyed (Rice)
Bush Ugly (Innis)
Bush Vermin (OReilly)
Bush Wack (Rums field)
Bush Osourus Z (Saud)
Bush Aids (Connerly)
Bush Crook (Jeb)
Bush Rubber (Fox)



part 2

EDITED BY AMIN THOMAS SAMMAN

DOSSIER

Global Economic Imaginaries

The Entrepreneur

DANIEL HJORTH & CHRIS STEYAERT

A creator who isn't grabbed around the throat by a set of impossibilities is no creator. A creator's someone who creates their own impossibilities, and thereby creates possibilities . . . without a set of impossibilities, you won't have the line of flight, the exit that is creation . . .
(Deleuze 1995, p. 133)

Ever since Adam Smith wrote *The Wealth of Nations* in 1766, the isolated individual has formed the basis for ideas of control. Whether it is the metaphor of an 'invisible hand' guiding the activity of agents — as in Smith and Machiavelli before him (*The Prince*, 1513), or systems of representation constituting forms of self-regulation — as in (neo-) Liberal thought, the connection between control and economy is striking. Michel Foucault has provided an impressive mapping of these relationships, and Albert O. Hirschman provides a fascinating history of how commerce was promoted as an activity that would channel 'industrious minds' away from misfit (Hirschman, 1977). These interconnections are of course central to modernity and industrial society. And yet Frederik W. Taylor — famous for creating the techniques of modern scientific management — does not even represent them at their peak. Since his days, we have seen the rise of increasingly sophisticated and subtle forms of control — most notably via Human Resource Management (HRM), which has created new technologies of performance-assessment and improvement, new methods of career planning and self-management, and new arenas for 'participation in the workplace'. Beyond Taylorism and HRM, one finds an even more impressive list of fads that aim at the same kind of control — from New Public Management and Business Process Re-Engineering to Lean Management. All these signal a tightening of management's grip on the employee. Indeed, management is today a dominant genre of self-performance. At the heart of this script is a discourse of *managerial entrepreneurship*, which has taken the traditional vision of the entrepreneur — that profit-oriented undertaker emblematic of capitalist society — and inscribed it into new areas of organisational life. We are falling increasingly under the spell of a very particular 'enterprise culture': every employee can now be said to be equipped with an entrepreneurial self and to be routinely called to act upon one-self and others in a specific, calculative and maximising way.

This inscription of managerial entrepreneurship into new areas of life indicates how the very idea of work-life has been transformed under late capitalism. But while its influence does appear hegemonic, it seems to us that post-industrial society actually provides a context in which the workings of entrepreneurship could emerge as a counter-controlling force. To be clear, we are not talking here about traditional entrepreneurship or its managerial form; we are proposing a counter-image which decouples capitalism and entrepreneurship, and which is capable of resisting the tendency to be co-opted by management and transformed into a novel form of control. More precisely, we seek to address the 'entrepreneurial' and to envision an *entrepreneurial entrepreneurship*. We acknowledge the many existing critiques of entrepreneurship in its managerial forms, but still feel the need to re-imagine the concept and its place in the social world. To us, entrepreneurship is a force that energises a very particular social creativity: that which connects people and resources in order to enhance or change the possibilities of living. Social creativity, especially of this organisation-creation kind, has become far more important for societal innovation. Organisations, companies and societies have, however, been largely shaped to fit managerial forms of organising. To the extent that (entrepreneurial) entrepreneurship is a force needed to allow innovation to blossom in contemporary organisations, it requires us to shift our collective focus from maximising or controlling the economy to multiplying the forces that take life beyond the limits of the present and change the possibilities of life-enhancement.

WELCOMING MOVEMENT

For too long, we have assumed that relations, practices and resources need to be controlled. The time has come to imagine how they can be pro-rolled. Here we play on the Latin for control (contra + rotulus, *against* what is rolling), and contrast it with the possible (pro + rotulus, *for* what is rolling). Against the normalised vision of 'the entrepreneur', we want to offer a new one: the entrepreneur as a *pro-rolling force*, one that simultaneously affects the economy from the inside and the outside. Camus' Sisyphus, whose philosophy of life is characterised by revolt and passion, seems to us a sibling of our pro-rolling entrepreneur. It was this type of revolted and passionate response to change that forced Schumpeter to grapple with the workings of innovation and invent the rich metaphor of 'creative destruction'. Although he clearly stated that this need not be associated with an individual,

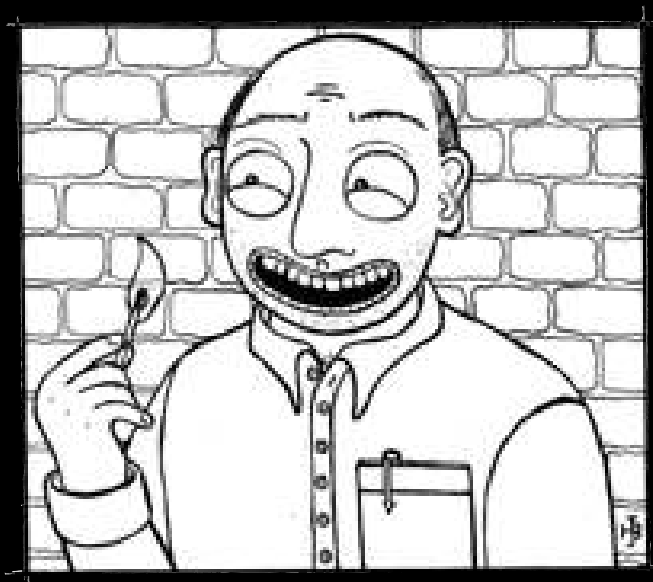


Illustrations by Hannah Battershell

dominant thinking at the time had to see a doer behind the deed: the figure of the entrepreneur came to represent entrepreneurship as a creative and destructive force. Even today, the tendency to think in terms of 'an entrepreneur' persists. To us, however, entrepreneurship seems best described as a power to be affected in order to affect, a passion that immediately presses the adequate affection into relations of people and ideas, so as to set-off action. It is a force which virtualises that which could become. In this way, entrepreneurial imagination sets in motion that which is about to achieve being. These virtualities crowd up as intense images of what-could-become and press themselves into the actual. We would like to suggest, therefore, that entrepreneurship of this sort was never central to industrial society in the way that management was: quite simply, it could not be tamed and turned into an idea of control as with managerial entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurial entrepreneurship, instead, describes a desire to become-other, and an art of organisation-creation that provides a passage for action and the emergence of new practices. It is a pro-rolling force.

This type of entrepreneurship is a distinctly important force in society. Firstly, it is primarily about creation rather than production and consumption. Secondly, it is a mode of action better characterised by *homo ludens* (playing human) than the self-interested *homo oeconomicus* (economic human). Thirdly, it is a relational force, operating in-between people rather than within them. And finally, it is a distant cousin to the entrepreneurship of economic science and management theory, affecting society beyond as well as within the context of business and start-ups. We will now explore the fabric of entrepreneurship by examining the multi-coloured threads out of which it can be woven anew. The figure of the entrepreneur will serve here as a conceptual persona – that is, a figure to help us re-think the concept of entrepreneurship. We are aware that term is a loaded one. Indeed, that is the point. What we are trying to do here is challenge the association between entrepreneurship and the logic of capitalism.

THE ENTREPRENEUR AS VIRTUALISER OF LIFE



The virtual forms the realm of potential; it is the pressing crowd of those preludes to the future, of *life-to-come*, which potentialises the *life-that-is*. Virtuality, therefore, is here meant to designate and indeed constitute the reality of ideas. Ideas are central to entrepreneurial life in the sense that they guide our interaction with images of 'what could become'. Imagination, in turn, is that form of thinking by which we can move through these potenti-

alities without reducing them to snapshots of 'future states'. Those creations where imagination has played a central role – creations such as literature, business start-ups, new social movements, art, and research – are primary virtualisers of life. Think of how George Orwell's *1984* has not only inspired imaginations of 'the future' but also shaped the future. Like every other novel, it plays with our vision of the possible and creates the freedom for alternative realities. Such virtualities move both thought and people, continuously creating tension between that which has already been actualised and that which requires creation in order to be actualised. Entrepreneurship – as the French suggests (*entre + prendre*) – operates in this in-between: it is the pyromaniac in a fire break, using fabulous stories as fuel for engaging people in their potential venture; it is the actualiser of the virtually real.

THE ENTREPRENEUR AS POTENTIALISER OF CONTEXTS

Entrepreneurship makes contexts into situations. It is an event-making force that summons the impulses and resources necessary to establish emergency or alarm in the social field of practices. Suddenly something not only *needs* to happen, but can also *take place*. The situation is that time when something is both about to happen and has just happened. It is the powering-up of groups, relations, projects, networks, people-in-relation and their capacity to act. This spills-over into actualisation: that is, it creates expressions of the virtually real through the contextual language of social practice. It is in this way that Dr. Martin Luther King's 'I have a Dream' speech can exceed the context of its utterance – that summer day on the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C. – and become a situation (or event) in which virtuality is made to operate generatively. The situation presses incipient imaginaries into a coiled-spring and then releases its grip, energising new movements. Moment and movement are in this sense intimately connected.

THE ENTREPRENEUR AS MULTIPLIER OF RELATIONS

When potentialising contexts, entrepreneurship operates iteratively. It is the AND, AND, AND...that synthesises and connects, that relates and makes possible. At the centre of this process is imagination, which creates potential by multiplying possibilities and making them resonate with each other. The character of Iago in Shakespeare's *Othello* gives a rather dark illustration of this 'multiplier of relations'. In plotting his master's downfall, Iago multiplies the images of Othello in circulation. This in turn increases the number of relationships that people have with him (Othello). Iago then uses these images to intensify the pressure on his desired outcome: the undoing of Othello. Iago can therefore be understood as having slowly and meticulously crafted a web of beliefs around a possible future. Such a plot rested on multiplying the images of peace needed for each party to be able to imagine their future after the signed treaty. But these images needed not only to be created; they also needed to be related to each other so that a resonance could achieve being and the potentiality of the signed treaty could press itself so forcefully upon the situation that 'not signing' became an impossibility. In much the same way, the entrepreneur can be seen as a multiplier of relations. The skill consists not only in creating an increase in desire (by relating existing desires to each other), but also in combining it with the introduction of an interest that directs and channels readi-

ness-to-act towards a specific goal or object. Entrepreneurship, therefore, always has an ethico-political dimension: every creation privileges some outcomes over others.

THE ENTREPRENEUR AS PASSAGE

Actualising the virtually real requires movement. The entrepreneur can therefore be seen as providing the passage or channel for incipencies to heat the ground under our feet (so that no one, in the end, can stand still). Every venture, be it of the business-kind or otherwise, provides such a passage for flows of energy, desire, and potentiality. *Médecins Sans Frontières* seem to us an emblematic example of the entrepreneur as passage because they are all about movement — both in literal terms, and in the sense of a collective organisation-creation that actualises the virtualities of medicine (and those practicing it). But in all its forms, entrepreneurship provides the shortest route between idea and action. This is evidenced in those instances where socially situated knowledge and understanding outstrips its official counterparts. For example, sociologists Charles Perrow and Mauro Guillen have documented how the faster and more effective response to the emergence of the AIDS crisis in 1980s New York came not from the policy and research communities, but instead, from those people who were hit hardest by the crisis: prostitutes, drug-users, homosexuals and large groups of African-Americans (Perrow and Guillen, 1990). All kinds of new organisations were started, from political pressure groups to self-help groups, and through these, people began to connect themselves and create networks of support and movements of resistance. For example, the *AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power* (ACT UP) began life at an evening lecture held by Larry Kramer at the Lesbian and Gay Community Services Centre and went on to become a very influential movement, guiding the response to the crisis by creating a new understanding of the problem. They fought against the stereotypes and clichés that underpinned the passive policy stance and re-framed their own image, emphasising the values of being human and related, healthy and solid-air. In many ways then, entrepreneurship can be accurately defined as that social creativity which creates 'organisation': it interconnects people and resources in different ways and styles, and makes an organisation of what was before only energies and potential resources. Sometimes this relies on a 'vision' or story that organises images for people, but it can equally be a 'network' that relates and synthesises, that constructs an entrance or exit, that allows a movement or flow. This idea of entrepreneurship could not be further from that which was being popularised during the 1980s. Reagan and Thatcher glorified the individual, chose the traditional entrepreneur as its prototypical figure and — in Thatcher's case — even denied the existence of society (let alone social creativity).

THE ENTREPRENEUR AS PYROMANIAC

As we have emphasised, creating new movements and organisations involves a certain 'powering-up' of people and relations. This is reliant on stories and visions resonating with people's yearning for action. The entrepreneur is an ultimate connector in this sense, merging desires and increasing people's productive capacity in the process. Insofar as this ignites people's desire-to-act, the entrepreneur can be seen as the pyromaniac who uses others as fodder for the fire. But as we well know, fires can destroy

as well as energise. We encounter numerous examples of this in the daily newspapers, where the business and political pages are rarely free from scandal. In these cases, the energy and passion of desire is not balanced by an interest that directs and steers. Ultimately, desire desires its own furthering. It is the role of the entrepreneur to provide the passage that is needed for desire to 'get to work'. When, against the backdrop of the newly erected wall between East and West Germany, John F. Kennedy made the declaration 'Ich bin ein Berliner', he forged a passage from outside to inside and provided a route for the energy of hope. In much the same way, the entrepreneur builds bridges only after he has already crossed them: the entrepreneur is a figure that senses the beauty and risk of the open sea and opts to be thrown into the deep water rather than stay on the shore. This deep-sea diving, just as playing with fire, shows how manically (and maniacally) the entrepreneur is consumed by curiosity and the search for a new direction. There is, however, always the possibility that this passion and obsession will fire back with an equal intensity. Long ago, Goethe brought this very point to us in his interpretation of the legend of Faust when he wrote: "In the beginning was meaning/In the beginning was power/In the beginning was action". New ideas and actions are connected with power, which makes invention politically unpredictable and ethically ambivalent. Faust, therefore, like every inventor, is to be both worshipped and feared. This is also the risk of entrepreneurship: that in its attempt to create, it might destroy.

THE ENTREPRENEUR AS TACTICIAN AND POACHER

Michel de Certeau — the French Jesuit, theologian, historian and philosopher — is famous for making a distinction between *strategies* and *tactics*. He saw dominant rationality as an example of the former: that is, as a strategy that appropriates a place for itself and, in turn, delineates inside from outside. We find this tendency in all politics of organising resources, in all history writing and, indeed, in all monological cultures. Against this tendency, de Certeau imagined poachers operating on these boundaries, employing various tactics to undermine the strategically dominant by using it against itself. It was the cracks and fissures, the spaces of fungal growth, the marginal places where creativity of the unofficial sort could proliferate, that interested him. He sought to 'unsilence' the various histories of everyday creativity, and to investigate the space between



official discourses and what people make of them in the context of their practice. We believe that this politics of cultural plurality has much in common with entrepreneurship, properly conceived. After all, to us, the word itself precisely describes the art of finding the entre-, the in-between, or the interstitial, and making things grow in that space. In a world dictated by the official discourses of the economical or managerial nomenclature, entrepreneurship should be conceived as a lingua of the street; a sudden slang that with unprecedented precision captures the energy of the day; a minor language that can break open the dominant language from within. The importance of thinking entrepreneurship in this way only becomes clear when we realise how entrepreneurship has been turned into such a dominant strategy, powerful ideology and language of the majority. Whether it is the city or the university, health care and education or art and development aid, it is the entrepreneur that is called upon to deliver the solutions. The red carpet is laid-out, the grand-doors of policymaking swing open, and the well dressed ladies and gentlemen of the creative classes gather to solve the problems of society over wine and canapés. In such a scenario, entrepreneurship has been robbed of its democratic potential and turned into an elitist idea.

TOWARDS AN ENTREPRENEURIAL MOVEMENT: FROM HEFFALUMP TO HARLEQUIN

While we have spent little time clarifying the need to strip the entrepreneur of its business attire, we hope the various ideas which have here been connected and interwoven enable us to re-dress the figure in the costume of a Harlequin; a schizophrenic mélange of colours and textures. This should make clear that we are not in favour of a romantic return to the entrepreneur as an individualised hero or self-made man (which inevitably makes a solo-player of everyone). The entrepreneurship we have championed is actually a collective and relational force that subverts characterisations of the entrepreneur. We need therefore to abandon the hunt for the Heffalump and resist the temptation to turn entrepreneurship into a grand policy programme. Instead, the entrepreneur should be treated as what Deleuze and Guattari have called a 'conceptual persona' — that is, a figure that presupposes the creation of a concept and thus helps us to think and multiply the concept of entrepreneurship (which we have characterised as that social creativity which alters lives and societies). The Harlequin can contain and indeed exceed all the meanings, forms and practices of entrepreneurship that we have presented here: virtualiser, potentialiser, multiplier, passage, pyromaniac, tactician and poacher. Ultimately, entrepreneurship of this kind forms the carnival that is economy. It is therefore itself a force capable of destabilising established economic ideas and practices. By re-imagining the concept of the entrepreneur, we have tried to emphasise its truly political potential: rather than being simply about finding new ways of pursuing the same goals — as many on the Left contend, entrepreneurship can and should be linked to the processes of collective imagination that transform economic, social and political systems. Furthermore, it can and should be about change that is both life-enhancing and participative. If we reclaim entrepreneurship in this way, then it will be us — as a heterogeneous collective of infamous men and women, waiting to become — that fabulate the social world as we engage with the singularities of the times and spaces in which we live. ✱

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The Offshore Economy

RONEN PALAN

When the Bank of International Settlement of Basle (BIS) decided to include offshore financial centres in its international financial statistics in 1982, it discovered an oddity: approximately half of all international lending is conducted through the minute and exotic jurisdictions known as tax havens. The BIS decided to look more closely into the matter, only to reach a similar conclusion. Soon after, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) released a report suggesting that tax havens receive approximately 30% of all inward foreign direct investment (FDI). Today, the figures are no less startling. In 2004, the island of Bermuda alone was the recipient of more U.S. FDI than China; meanwhile, the nations investing most in China are not the 'usual suspects' but neighbouring Hong Kong and the British Virgin Islands in the Caribbean. The Cayman Islands – with a population of only 51,000 – have emerged as the fourth or fifth largest financial centre in the world, and the small Channel Islands of Jersey and Guernsey are not far beyond, ranked 11th and 14th respectively. What is going on?

For a long time, the implicit answer was that not much was going on; there was very little discussion of tax havens. Yes, the statistics are startling. The reality, however, is that the net capital that stays in these countries is minimal. It is just that bankers, lawyers and accounting firms prefer to register ownership in these jurisdictions, which in turn are able to charge a small fee for their trouble. At best, they serve as lubricants in the world economy, facilitating capital mobility and helping indigenous developing-country businesses to avoid harassment by corrupt officials at home – as the British Virgin Islands do in the case of China.

But as scholars have paid greater attention to tax havens, this conventional view has come under strain. To begin with, it is not little money but a lot of money that flows through tax havens. In law, a distinction is drawn between tax evasion – which is a criminal offence in most countries, and tax avoidance – which is the perfectly legal re-arrangement of one's tax affairs so as to minimise taxation. In reality, the distinction between the two is rather blurry, and most tax avoidance schemes involve an element of tax evasion. Indeed, this is why secrecy is such a desirable commodity in the world of offshore.

No one knows the exact amount of tax avoided and evaded worldwide. Estimates of the direct impact of tax havens on revenues vary. An increasingly popular measure used by Inland Revenues around the world is called the 'tax gap'. This refers to the gap between estimated tax revenues and actual tax receipts. It is believed that a considerable portion of the gap is due to various avoidance techniques. Unfortunately, not many Revenues reveal estimates of their tax gaps. Richard Murphy, a tax analyst, recently conducted an analysis of UK business taxation and came to the conclusion that annual avoidance in the UK stands at about £25 billion. To this he adds the revenue's own estimates of £25 billion of direct tax evasion, and about £32 billion of indirect tax evasion (such as VAT), to reach the conclusion of a gross annual avoidance of about £80 billion – 16.3% of tax receipts or 6% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Not all but a good portion of such evasion is conducted through tax havens. The figure for the U.S. is US\$ 350bn or 16% of federal revenue and 2% of GDP. These are very rough estimates, but they nonetheless suggest a substantial role for tax havens. Against the backdrop of other studies that suggest that business receives subsidies in advanced industrial countries to the tune of 3% to 4% of their GDP, the degree of transfer from the taxpayers to the shareholders becomes clear. Indeed, tax havens seem a likely factor in the otherwise mysterious and apparently unstoppable growth of the gap between rich and poor.

We should not, however, be too fixated on 'hard' numbers. The true impact of tax havens on taxation may be more indirect and unquantifiable, as growing number of countries have responded to rise of tax havens by lowering their nominal and real rates of corporate taxation as well as marginal high-rate taxation, further skewing the distributional functions of the state. And taxation is itself only a starting point. On closer examination, we begin to recognise that the impact of tax havens may be structural, embedded in the very practices and structures of contemporary global economy. Hence, widespread concerns about money laundering and criminality – however important they may be – may also be somewhat misguided. The very image of the world economy we carry in our head must be amended in light of the phenomenal rise of the offshore economy.

WHAT IS OFFSHORE?

Conjuring images of pristine sandy beaches adorned by palm trees, tax havens have caught the popular imagination. Yet few have a clear idea what they are. Tax experts are quick to point out that your average accountant knows ways of using the laws of every single country in the world to avoid paying some taxes. Hence, they argue that there is no clear and unambiguous definition of a tax haven. Add to this that many have been rather innovative in moving into new sectors – serving as 'offshore financial centres', 'gaming centres' and 'e-commerce centres' – and their true status becomes even more ambiguous. The result is that every list counts a different number of tax havens. Most end up with a figure of about 70 or so worldwide.

I believe that the term 'offshore' refers to a distinct and definable phenomenon that has arisen out of what I describe as the *bifurcation of sovereignty*. For a variety of reasons, certain states have been in the habit of dividing their sovereign territories into two separate realms: the 'on-shore' – in which they fully apply their taxes and regulations; and the 'offshore' – in which they either reduce or eliminate these altogether.

There are basically two models of sovereign bifurcation. The first one is the familiar *duty-free zone* model. The duty-free zone, as we all know and enjoy, is the area we enter into when we cross passport control in the airport. Retail outlets in this space are normally not subject to VAT, local taxation or import and excise tax. We descend joyfully on the duty-free shops in order to buy alcohol, tobacco, perfumes, electronics, and clothing items at purportedly lower prices. The duty-free zone is, of course, not a separate zone outside the territorial boundary of a country, but a legal enclave where states decide not to fully apply taxation.

But why do governments choose to revoke some of their regulation and taxation? The rationale is fairly straightforward. In principle, governments maintain heavy taxation on spirit and tobacco to ensure the health and safety of their population by discouraging them from indulging in these pursuits. But once people leave the country, governments seem somehow less concerned about the health of their population — let alone the health of all those foreigners who are returning to their countries. Considering that people are likely to indulge themselves in similar ways elsewhere and that the tax system will no longer be able to prevent them from doing so, they might as well spend some of their money here to help 'our' merchants.

The same principle applies to other type of enclaves such as 'export processing zones', which are duty-free writ-large. These are large territorial zones — normally located near airports or ports — where foreign companies are invited to process and assemble goods for re-export. In return, governments remove certain taxes, labour and environmental regulations, and so on. The idea is to entice foreign capital that would otherwise be elsewhere. There are at least 900 such zones in the world by now, employing millions of people.

Tax havens operate on the same principle, only with an added twist. They are 'zonal' in the sense that they create special provisions for non-residents. Foreign companies or banks, for example, can set up offshore companies, subsidiaries or trusts and are normally exempt from the majority (if not all) of local taxation and regulation. By doing so, tax havens entice foreign businesses to run their financial activities such as savings, borrowing, insurance, and hedging in these low-cost jurisdictions. But this is not all. Tax havens have come up with an even cannier plan; let's call this the 'brown-bagging' principle. To draw on the duty-free zones analogy, there are problems with logistics: how many bottles or cigarette boxes can one physically carry over borders? How many of these bottles could pass customs on arrival? Well, how about if our duty-free shops were prepared to transfer the finest whisky into, say, Coca-Cola bottles, and pack them into ordinary brown bags? Surely we could then fool custom-officers and bring many more of these coveted items across the border. This is exactly what many tax havens are doing. Not only have they reduced taxation and regulation for foreign businesses, but they have removed all forms of capital controls and enacted special provisions, bank secrecy laws and other secrecy provisions so that the identity of an account holder, company director or trust owner cannot be revealed even to the tax haven government — let alone to that of their country of origin. The 2 million or so International Business Corporations, trusts and other type of companies located in tax havens are masquerading under fancy names and brass plates, and can rarely be traced to their country of origins. A classic illustration is the 1934 amendment to Swiss banking law, which prohibited banks from revealing any information about accounts they hold...to

the Swiss government! As a result of this legislation, the Swiss government cannot cooperate with foreign governments on tax and evasion issues. Any foreigner lucky enough to have an account in Switzerland has the equivalent of a very tight brown bag.

Tax havens have also been innovative in developing these kinds of techniques. Liechtenstein, for example, created the famous Anstalt in 1926. These are trusts that pretend to be companies but can be a company of one person. This allows individuals to act as if they are businesses and demand all sorts of depreciation allowances and the like from their governments. Others have created the 'international business company', which can be bought 'off the shelf' and owned through bearer shares, which makes it difficult to tell who the real owner of the company is. Is it a scam? Not so according to the International Monetary Fund. It is a legitimate and respectable technique for establishing a flourishing international financial centre.

The other technique of establishing offshore is even more ingenious; let us call it the *ocean model*. Again, the idea is very simple. Sovereign states can claim sovereignty only over their own territories (coastal areas included). As a result, a considerable portion of the earth is under the sovereignty of no one state, but mankind as a whole. This is the legal status of the oceans in the international law, as well as that of outer space and Antarctica. In the 1960s, commercial radio stations like Radio Caroline took advantage of these rules by setting themselves up on floating barges just outside the sovereign boundaries of states and began to broadcast commercial radio without any state restrictions. Literally, they were 'offshore' radio stations.

In 1957, the British government accepted the same principle in its dealing with a certain type of wholesale financial transaction, later to form what is now known as the Eurodollar market. Why the bank of England has created such facility is a complex story which I cannot go into here; why the bank, as well as the City, does not tell us about it is another complicated story which I cannot go into here. The upshot, however, was that the Bank of England treated certain transactions that took place in London by British banks — as long as they were conducted in a foreign currency and between two non-residents — as if they didn't take place in London. But because they did, no other authority was able to regulate these transactions. Such financial transitions were therefore 'deemed' to take place in some 'virtual' space, common to all mankind, but not under the sovereignty of any one state in particular. As a result, the inter-bank financial markets — yes, the ones that have dried up recently due to the credit crunch — inhabit an odd legal space emulating the status of the oceans in the law of the sea: they are an unregulated, or offshore market.

Not surprisingly, London proved a magnet for foreign banks and other financial institutions — especially American banks keen to escape New Deal regulations that were set-up in the wake of the 1929 stock-market crash. They literally poured into London, to be followed by German, Japanese and other banks, and transformed London into the largest financial centre in the world. But London was not alone; other members of the British Empire also enjoyed the new provision. Bermuda, Hong Kong, the Caymans and the Channel Islands all developed their own Eurodollar markets. It is estimated that today, over 80% of all international financial activities take place through these unregulated markets.

Over time, these two models — the *duty-free zone* and the *ocean model* — combined to create a series of unregulated and lightly taxed legal spaces. Unsurprisingly, these proved extremely popular and began to integrate into a veritable offshore economy.

OFFSHORE AND DEMOCRACY

A number of cash-strapped countries began to campaign against tax evasion and avoidance, arguing that it needed to be stemmed in order to prevent a 'race to the bottom' and/or fiscal meltdown. These countries, led by Germany and France, were behind an important report compiled by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) entitled *Harmful tax competition: An Emerging Global Issue* (1998). The report launched a campaign against tax havens that has been gathering pace ever since. Most interesting, however, was the response of the U.S. government. Initially, the Clinton administration was in favour of the report. But as the Bush administration came to power, the U.S. has changed its views and has come to reject the very concept of 'harmful tax competition'. The U.S. administration advanced an interesting argument, which goes roughly as follows: just as competition in the market encourages innovation and the optimal delivery of goods and services, so too does competition between tax-regimes improve the efficacy of tax policy. Sovereign states have the right, of course, to develop their tax-regime as they wish. But a competitively international environment is likely to punish those governments that are opting for 'bad' policies (including those that are taxing their population too little as well as too much). Tax competition between countries should therefore be encouraged because it is likely to deliver 'optimal' legislation. The U.S. maintained that the OECD campaign was interfering with the natural working of the market and potentially creating market distortions, and that it therefore had to be abandoned.

On the surface, this is not an unreasonable proposition. But the idea has profound implications, which go to very heart of contemporary debates on governance and democracy. By adopting this view, the Bush administration was in effect arguing that important decisions about taxation must be sanctioned not only by governments, whether they are elected democratically or not, but also by another constituency — 'the market'. The U.S. government was not arguing against the right of states to decide on their own internal affairs, but suggesting that this right should be mediated the 'rights' of the market. In their enthusiasm for the market as a mechanism of resource allocation, the U.S. government's policies amounted to an important revision of the principle of sovereignty and sovereign equality. This was, at heart, an anti-democratic argument and policy stance, for it suggested that the market should sanction the will of the democratic state and not the other way around.

Under the guise of an intellectual debate, therefore, the Bush administration was not only arguing that markets were superior mechanisms of resource allocation; it was also proposing a radical change to the structure of international governance. It was not simply a case of a power shift from states to markets, as many seem to believe; it was a conscious political decision to strengthen the power of the markets vis-à-vis the state.

THE COMMERCIALISATION OF SOVEREIGNTY

The true significance of the offshore world must be seen in this context. These relatively unregulated and untaxed bifurcated sovereign spaces serve to structure a political arena that privileges mobile capital vis-à-vis territorial states. Superficially, it may appear that globalisation — an abstract concept that obviously lacks agency — has somehow contributed to a shift of power from states to markets. The paradoxical reality, however, is that the opportunistic use of the principles of sovereignty for pecuniary purposes — which is at the heart of offshore — has produced conditions that are strengthening mobile capital vis-à-vis the state.

These changes, in turn, have introduced subtle modifications to the nature of sovereignty itself, as the sovereign rights of nations are becoming a marketable product and a coveted commercial asset in and of themselves. Since the French Revolution, sovereignty has been understood as an expression of the people's right to self-determination. It is considered a juridical and political concept; an expression of the ultimate will of the nation. Meanwhile, classical economists such as Adam Smith and David Ricardo developed theories of national economic growth. At the centre of these was the theory of 'comparative advantage', which recommended that each nation pursue its economic wellbeing not by harming its neighbours, as the mercantilists proposed, but by trading with other nations. They demonstrated that international trade is likely to encourage an international division-of-labour as every nation develops those industries and sectors in which they have a comparative advantage. The combined effect would be a net increase in global productivity, which is a 'win-win' situation. With the rise of Japan and the East Asian 'tigers' — countries that did not possess any apparent comparative advantage — economists began to talk instead of 'competitive advantage': the idea that comparative advantage can be manufactured by states through the provision of good governance, infrastructural support, investment in education, political stability, a moderate tax system and, more controversially, targeted industrial policy. Ever since, states have been encouraged to use their sovereign prerogative to develop their competitive advantage.

Tax havens are taking things in an unexpected direction by showing that sovereignty itself can be used as a commercial asset. Not only are they enacting laws specifically aimed at attracting foreign capital — which is what states have done for a long time now; they are also, because of their puny size, working around the fact that they are unable to attract real business into their territories. Their enactment of liberal incorporation laws, which, when combined with low or zero taxation, allow companies to establish virtual subsidiaries which pay little or no tax and are effectively unregulated. In return, tax havens charge small license fees for the service. Many also insist that these companies hire 'dummy' local directors, thereby boosting the income of the local economy. But what exactly are companies who set up subsidiaries in tax havens paying for? They receive little or no support from these states, and many of them run their businesses elsewhere. Well, they are paying for a right of abode. In this way, tax havens have learned to commercialise their sovereignty. For some, the ability to write law serves as their principle source of income.

CONCLUSION

At one level, the offshore economy is a bizarre outgrowth of the interplay between the principles of sovereignty and market capitalism. At a deeper level, however, something else is going on. Markets and sovereignty are often thought of as separate spheres: one belongs to economics, the other to politics. Yet tax havens – with a helping hand from lawyers, accountants and bankers – have managed to tie the two spheres together. The result, it would seem, is the emergence of a unique and unregulated spatiality at the heart of the world economy. The paradoxical reality, however, is that this unregulated space is both enabled and constrained by the principle of sovereignty. It is asymmetrical space, biased towards mobile capital, which works for those who can take advantage of it and against those who cannot. On the one hand, those who feel the deleterious impact of offshore – that is, the majority of the world population – have no vote in the small, exotic and superficially marginal states in which it happens; on the other, those who are able to take advantage of it do so with great impunity and even think of it as their natural birthright. This offshore world is a glaring loophole. It is a structural bias that is difficult to oppose because it is sheltered by the 'sacred' principle of sovereign rights. ✱

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Feature on
Syrian Literature

Listening To Grasshoppers: Genocide, Denial and Celebration

By ARUNDIATI ROY

A lecture in Istanbul on January 18, 2008, to commemorate the first anniversary of the assassination of Hrant Dink, Editor of the Turkish-Armenian paper, Agos.

I never met Hrant Dink. From what I know of him, of what he wrote, what he said and did, how he lived his life, I know that had I been here in Istanbul a year ago I would have been among the 100,000 people who walked with his coffin in dead silence through the wintry streets of this city, with banners reading "We are all Armenians", "We are all Hrant Dink." Perhaps I'd have carried the one that read, "One and a half million plus one."

I wonder what thoughts would have gone through my head as I walked beside his coffin. Perhaps I would have heard the voice of Araxie Barsamian, mother of my friend David Barsamian, telling the story of what happened to her and her family. She was 10 years old in 1915. She remembered the swarms of grasshoppers that arrived in her village, Dubne, north of the historic city Dikranagert, now called Diyarbakir. The village elders were alarmed, she said, because they knew in their bones that the grasshoppers were a bad omen. They were right; the end came in a few months, when the wheat in the fields was ready for harvesting.

"When we left my family was 25 in the family", Araxie Barsamian says, "They took all the men folks. They asked my father, "where is your ammunition?" He says, "I sold it". So they says, "Go get it". So he went to the Kurd town to get it, they beat him and took all his clothes. When he came back there — this my mother tells me story — when he came back there, naked body, he went in the jail, they cut his arms...so he die in jail.

And they took all the mens in the field, they tied their hands, and they shooted, killed every one of them".

Araxie and the other women in her family were deported. Araxie was the lone survivor.

This is, of course, a single testimony that comes from a history that is denied by the Turkish Government, and many Turks as well.

I do not wish to play the global intellectual, to lecture, or to fill the silence in a country that surrounds

the memory (or the forgetting) of the events that took place in Anatolia 1915. That is what Hrant Dink tried to do, and paid for with his life.

The day I arrived in Istanbul, I walked the streets for many hours, and as I looked around, envying the people of Istanbul their beautiful, mysterious, thrilling city, a friend pointed out to me young boys in white caps who seemed to have suddenly appeared like a rash in the city. He explained that they were expressing their solidarity with the child-assassin who was wearing a white cap when he killed Hrant.

The battle with the cap-wearers of Istanbul, of Turkey, is not my battle, but Turkey's. I have my own battles to fight against other kinds of cap-wearers and torchbearers in my country. In a way, the battles are not all that different. There *is* one crucial difference though. While in Turkey there is silence, in India there's celebration, and I really don't know which is worse.

There was genocide against the Muslim community of Gujarat in 2002. I use the word 'genocide' advisedly, and in keeping with its definition contained in Article 2 of the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. The genocide in Gujarat began as collective punishment for an unsolved crime — the death of 53 Hindu pilgrims in the burning of a railway coach. In a carefully planned orgy of supposed retaliation, 2,000 Muslims were slaughtered in broad daylight by squads of armed killers, organised by fascist militias, and backed by the Gujarat government and the administration of the day. Muslim women were gang-raped and burned alive. Muslim shops, Muslim businesses and Muslim shrines and mosques were systematically destroyed. 150,000 people were driven from their homes.

Even today, many of the victims live in ghettos — some built on garbage heaps — with no water supply, no drainage, no streetlights, no healthcare. They live as second-class citizens, boycotted socially and economically. Meanwhile, the killers, police as well as civilian, have been embraced, rewarded, promoted. This state of affairs is now considered 'normal'. To seal this 'normality', in 2004 both Ratan Tata and Mukesh Ambani, India's leading industrialists, publicly pronounced Gujarat a dream destination for finance capital.

The initial outcry in the national press has settled down. In Gujarat the genocide has been brazenly celebrated as the epitome of Gujarati pride, Hindu-ness, even Indian-ness. This poisonous brew has been used to win two consecutive state elections, with campaigns that have cleverly used the language and apparatus of modernity and democracy. The helmsman, Narendra Modi, has become a folk hero, called in by the BJP to campaign on its behalf in other Indian states.

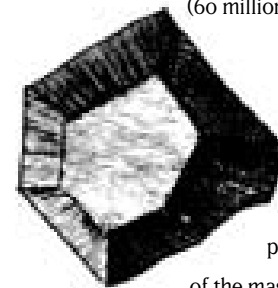
As genocides go, the Gujarat genocide cannot compare with those in the Congo, Rwanda and Bosnia, where the numbers of dead run into the millions, nor is it by any means the first that has occurred in India. (In 1984, for instance, 3,000 Sikhs were massacred on the streets of Delhi with similar impunity, by killers overseen by the Congress Party.) But the Gujarat genocide is part of a larger, more elaborate and systematic vision. It tells us that the wheat is ripening and the grasshoppers have landed in mainland India.

It's an old human habit, genocide. It has played a sterling part in the march of civilisation. Amongst the earliest recorded genocides is the destruction of Carthage at the end of the Third Punic War in 149 BC, though the word itself was coined by Raphael Lemkin only in 1943, and adopted by the United Nations in 1948, after the Nazi Holocaust. Article 2 of the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of

Genocide defines it thus:

"Any of the following Acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: killing members of the group; causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life, calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or part; imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; [or] forcibly transferring children of the group to another group".

Since this definition leaves out the persecution of political dissidents, real or imagined, it does not include some of the greatest mass murders in history. Personally, I think the definition given by Frank Chalk and Kurt Jonassohn, authors of *The History and Sociology of Genocide* is more apt. Genocide, they say, "*is a form of one-sided mass killing in which a state or other authority intends to destroy a group, as that group and membership in it are defined by the perpetrator*". Defined like this, genocide includes, for example, the monumental crimes committed by Suharto in Indonesia (1 million) Pol Pot in Cambodia (1.5 million), Stalin in the Soviet Union (60 million), and Mao in China (70 million).



All things considered, the word *extermination*, with its crude evocation of pests and vermin, of infestations, is perhaps the more honest, more apposite word. When a set of perpetrators faces its victims, in order to go about its business of wanton killing, it must first sever any human connection with it. It must see its victims as sub-human, as parasites whose eradication would be a service to society. Here for example, is an account of the massacre of Pequot Indians by English Puritans led by John Mason in Connecticut in 1636:

Those that escaped the fire were slain with the sword; some hewed to peeces, others runne throw with their rapiers, so they were quickly dispatchte, and very few escaped. It was conceived they thus destroyed about 400 at this time. It was a fearful sight to see them thus frying in the fyre, and the streams of blood quenching the same, and horrible was the stincke and sente thereof, but the victory seemed a sweete sacrifice...

And here, approximately four centuries later, is Babu Bajrangi, one of the major lynchpins of the Gujarat genocide, recorded on camera in the sting operation mounted by Tehelka a few months ago:

We didn't spare a single Muslim shop, we set everything on fire...hacked, burned set on fire...we believe in setting them on fire because these bastards don't want to be cremated, they're afraid of it...I have just one last wish...let me be sentenced to death...I don't care if I'm hanged...just give me two days before my hanging and I will go and have a field day in Juhapura where seven or eight lakhs of these people stay...I will finish them off...let a few more of them die...at least 25,000 to 50,000 should die.

I hardly need to say that Babu Bajrangi had the blessings of Narendra Modi, the protection of the police, and the love of his people. He continues to work and prosper as a free man in Gujarat. The one crime he cannot be accused of is Genocide Denial.

Genocide Denial is a radical variation on the theme of the old, frankly racist, bloodthirsty triumphalism. It probably evolved as an answer to the somewhat patchy, dual morality that arose in the nineteenth century, when Europe was developing limited but new forms of democracy and citizens' rights at home while simultaneously exterminating people by the millions in her colonies. Suddenly countries and governments began to deny or attempt to hide the genocides they had committed. "Denial is saying, in effect that the murderers didn't

murder," says Professor Robert Jay Lifton, author of *Hiroshima and America: Fifty Years of Denial*. "The victims weren't killed. The direct consequence of denial is that it invites future genocide."

And when genocide politics meets the Free Market, official recognition—or denial—of holocausts and genocides is a multi-national business enterprise. It rarely has anything to do with historical fact or forensic evidence. Morality certainly does not enter the picture. It is an aggressive process of high-end bargaining that belongs more to the World Trade Organization than to the United Nations. The currency is geo-politics, the fluctuating market for natural resources, that curious thing called futures trading and plain old economic and military might.

In other words, genocides are often denied for the same set of reasons for which genocides are prosecuted. Economic determinism marinated in racial/ethnic/religious/national discrimination. Crudely, the lowering or raising of the price of a barrel of oil (or a ton of uranium), permission granted for a military base, or the opening up of a country's economy could be the decisive factor when governments adjudicate on whether a genocide did or did not occur. Or indeed whether genocide will or will not occur. And if it does, whether it will or will not be reported; and if it is, what slant that reportage will take. For example, the death of two million in the Congo goes virtually unreported. Why? And was the death of a million Iraqis under the sanctions regime, prior to the US invasion, *genocide* (which is what Denis Halliday, the UN Humanitarian Co-ordinator for Iraq, called it) or was it '*worth it*', as Madeleine Albright, the US ambassador to the UN, claimed? It depends on who makes the rules. Bill Clinton? Or an Iraqi mother who has lost her child?

Since the United States is the richest and most powerful country in the world, it has assumed the privilege of being the World's Number One Genocide Denier. It continues to celebrate Columbus Day, the day Christopher Columbus arrived in the Americas, which marks the beginning of a Holocaust that wiped out millions of native Indians, about 90 per cent of the original population. (Lord Amherst, the man whose idea it was to distribute blankets infected with smallpox virus to Indians, has a university town in Massachusetts, and a prestigious liberal arts college named after him).

In America's second Holocaust, almost 30 million Africans were kidnapped and sold into slavery. Well near half of them died during transportation. But in 2002, the U.S. delegation could still walk out of the World Conference Against Racism in Durban, refusing to acknowledge that slavery and the slave trade were crimes. Slavery, they insisted, was *legal* at the time. The U.S. has also refused to accept that the bombing of Tokyo, Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Dresden and Hamburg — which killed hundreds of thousands of civilians — were crimes, let alone acts of genocide. (The argument here is that the government didn't *intend* to kill civilians. This was the first stage in the development of the concept, "collateral damage".) Since the end of World War II, the U.S. government has intervened overtly, militarily, more than 400 times in 100 countries, and covertly more than

6,000 times. This includes its invasion of Vietnam and the extermination — with excellent intentions of course — of 3 million Vietnamese, approximately 10 per cent of its population.

None of these have been acknowledged as war crimes or genocidal acts. "The question is," says Robert MacNamara — whose career graph took him from the bombing of Tokyo in 1945 (100,000 dead overnight) to being the architect of the Vietnam War, to

president of the World Bank — now sitting in his comfortable chair in his comfortable home in his comfortable country, "The question is, how much evil do you have to do in order to do good?"

Could there be a more perfect illustration of Robert Jay Lifton's point that the denial of genocide invites more genocide?

And what when the victims become perpetrators, as they did in the Congo and in Rwanda? What remains to be said about Israel, created out of the debris of one of the cruelest genocides in human history? What of its actions in the Occupied Territories? Its burgeoning settlements, its colonisation of water, its new 'Security Wall' that separates Palestinian people from their farms, from their work, from their relatives, from their children's schools, from hospitals and health care? It is genocide in a fishbowl, genocide in slow motion — meant especially to illustrate that section of Article 2 of the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, which says that genocide is any act that is designed to "*deliberately inflict on the group conditions of life, calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or part*".

Most of the genocidal killing from the fifteenth century onwards has been an integral part of Europe's search for what the Germans famously called *lebensraum*, living space. *Lebensraum* was a word coined by the German geographer and zoologist Freidrich Ratzel to describe what he thought of as dominant human species' natural impulse to expand its territory in its search for not just space, but sustenance. This impulse to expansion would naturally be at the cost of a less dominant species, a weaker species that Nazi ideologues believed should give way, or be made to give way, to the stronger one.

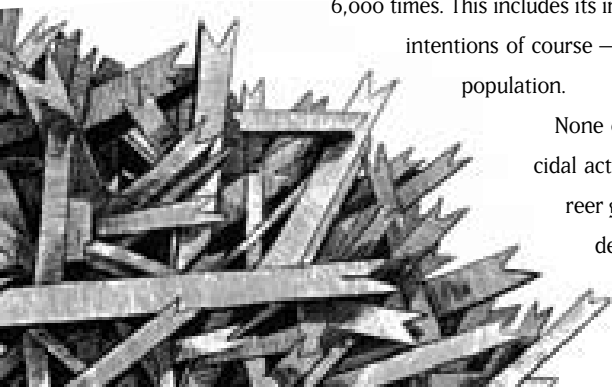
The Jews of Eastern Europe and western Russia stood in the way of Hitler's colonial ambitions. Therefore, like the native people of Africa and America and Asia, they had to be enslaved or liquidated. The Nazis' racist de-humanization of Jews cannot be dismissed as a paroxysm of insane evil; once again, it is a product of the familiar mix. Economic determinism well-marinated in age-old racism, very much in keeping with European tradition of the time.

'Union' (racial/ethnic/religious/national) and 'Progress' (economic determinism) have long been the twin co-ordinates of genocide.

Armed with this reading of history, is it reasonable to worry about whether a country that is poised on the threshold of "progress" is also poised on the threshold of genocide? Could the India being celebrated all over the world as a miracle of progress and democracy possibly be poised on the verge of committing genocide? The mere suggestion might sound outlandish and, at this point in time, the use of the word genocide surely unwarranted. However, if we look to the future, and if the Tsars of Development believe in their own publicity, if they believe that There Is No Alternative to their chosen model for Progress, then they will inevitably have to kill, and kill in large numbers, in order to get their way.

In bits and pieces, as the news trickles in, it seems clear that the killing and the dying has already begun.

It was in 1989, soon after the collapse of the Soviet Union, that the government of India turned in its



membership of the Non-Aligned Movement and signed up for membership of the Completely Aligned, often referring to itself as the 'natural ally' of Israel and the United States. (They have at least one thing in common: all three are engaged in overt, neo-colonial military occupations. India in Kashmir, Israel in Palestine, the U.S. in Iraq.)

Almost like clockwork, the two major national political parties, the BJP and the Congress, embarked on a joint program to advance India's version of Union and Progress, the modern day euphemisms being Nationalism and Development. Every now and then, particularly during elections, they stage some noisy familial squabbles, but have managed to gather into their fold even grumbling relatives, like the Communist Party of India (Marxist).

The Union project offers Hindu Nationalism (which seeks to unite the Hindu vote, vital you will admit, for a great democracy like India). The Progress project aims at a 10 per cent annual growth rate. Both these projects are encrypted with genocidal potential.

The Union project has been largely entrusted to the RSS, the ideological heart, the holding company of the BJP and its militias, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the Bajrang Dal. The RSS was founded in 1925. By the 1930s, its founder, Dr Hedgewar, a fan of Benito Mussolini, had begun to model it overtly along the lines of Italian fascism. Hitler too was, and is, an inspirational figure. Here are some excerpts from the RSS bible, *We or Our Nationhood Defined*, by M.S. Golwalker, who succeeded Dr Hedgewar as head of the RSS in 1940:

Ever since that evil day, when Moslems first landed in Hindustan, right up to the present moment, the Hindu Nation has been gallantly fighting on to take on these despoilers. The Race Spirit has been awakening. Then:

In Hindustan, land of the Hindus, lives and should live the Hindu Nation...

All others are traitors and enemies to the National Cause, or, to take a charitable view, idiots...

The foreign races in Hindustan... may stay in the country, wholly subordinated to the Hindu Nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment — not even citizen's rights.

And again:

To keep up the purity of its race and culture, Germany shocked the world by her purging the country of the Semitic races — the Jews. Race pride at its highest has been manifested here... a good lesson for us in Hindustan to learn and profit by.

(How *do* you combat this kind of organised hatred? Certainly not with goofy preaching of secular love.)

By the year 2000, the RSS had more than 45,000 shakhas and an army of 7 million swayamsevakas preaching its doctrine across India. They include India's former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the former Home Minister and current leader of the opposition L.K. Advani, and, of course, the three time Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi. It also includes senior people in the media, the police, the army, the intelligence agencies, judiciary and the administrative services who are informal devotees of Hindutva — the RSS ideology. These people, unlike politicians who come and go, are permanent members of government machinery.

But the RSS's real power lies in the decades of hard work it has put in to create a network of organisations

at every level of society, something that no other organisation can claim.

The BJP is its political front. It has a trade union wing (Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh), women's wing (Rashtriya Sevika Samiti), student wing (Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad) and economic wing (Swadeshi Jagran Manch).

Its front organisation Vidya Bharati is the largest educational organisation in the non-governmental sector. It has 13,000 educational institutes, including the Saraswati Vidya Mandir schools with 70,000 teachers and over 1.7 million students. It has organisations working with tribals (Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram), literature (Akhil Bharatiya Sahitya Parishad), intellectuals (Pragya Bharati, Deendayal Research Institute), historians (Bharatiya Itihaas Sankalan Yojanatalaya), language (Sanskrit Bharti), slum dwellers (Seva Bharati, Hindu Seva Prathishtan), health (Swami Vivekanand Medical Mission, National Medicos Organization), leprosy patients (Bharatiya Kushta Nivarak Sangh), co-operatives (Sahkar Bharati), publication of newspapers and other propaganda material (Bharat Prakashan, Suruchi Prakashan, Lokhit Prakashan, Gyanganga Prakashan, Archana Prakashan, Bharatiya Vichar Sadhana, Sadhana Pustak and Akashvani Sadhana), caste integration (Samajik Samrasta Manch), religion and proselytisation (Vivekananda Kendra, Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Hindu Jagran Manch, Bajrang Dal). The list goes on...

On June 11 1989, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi gave the RSS a gift. He was obliging enough to open the locks of the disputed Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, which the RSS claimed was the birthplace of Lord Ram. At the National Executive of the BJP, the party passed a resolution to demolish the mosque and build a temple in Ayodhya. "I'm sure the resolution will translate into votes", said L.K. Advani. In 1990, he crisscrossed the country on his Rath Yatra, his Chariot of Fire, demanding the demolition of the Babri Masjid, leaving riots and bloodshed in his wake. In 1991, the party won 120 seats in Parliament. (It had won two in 1984). The hysteria orchestrated by Advani peaked in 1992, when the mosque was brought down by a marauding mob. By 1998, the BJP was in power at the centre. Its first act in office was to conduct a series of nuclear tests. Across the country, fascists and corporates, princes and paupers, celebrated India's Hindu Bomb. Hindutva had transcended petty party politics.

In 2002, Narendra Modi's government planned and executed the Gujarat genocide. In the elections that took place a few months afterward, he returned to power with an overwhelming majority. He ensured complete impunity (immunity?) for those who had participated in the killings. In the rare case where there has been a conviction, it was of the lowly foot soldier, and not of the masterminds who stand in the dock.

Impunity is an essential pre-requisite for genocidal killing. India has a great tradition of granting impunity to mass killers. I could fill volumes with the details.

In a democracy, for impunity after genocide, you have to "apply through proper channel". Procedure is everything. In the case of several massacres, the lawyers that the Gujarat government appointed as public prosecutors had actually already appeared on 'behalf' of the accused. Several of them belonged to the RSS or the VHP and were openly hostile to those they were supposedly representing. Survivor witnesses found that, when they went to file reports, the police would record their statements inaccurately, or refuse to record the names of the perpetrators. In several cases, when survivors had seen members of their families being killed (and burned alive so their bodies could not be found) the police would refuse to register cases of murder.

Ehsan Jaffri, the Congress politician and poet who made the mistake of campaigning against Modi in the Rajkot elections, was publicly butchered, by a mob led by a fellow Congressman. In the words of a man who took part in the savagery: "Five people held him, then someone struck him with a sword... chopped off his hand, then his legs... then everything else... after cutting him to pieces, they put him on the wood they'd piled and set him on fire. Burned him alive".

The Ahmedabad Commissioner of Police, P.C. Pandey, was kind enough to visit the neighbourhood while the mob lynched Jaffri, murdered 70 people, and gang-raped 12 women before burning them alive. After Modi was re-elected, Pandey was promoted, and made Gujarat's Director General of Police. The entire killing apparatus remains in place.

The Supreme Court in Delhi made a few threatening noises, but eventually put the matter into cold storage. The Congress and the Communist parties made a great deal of noise, but did nothing.

In the Tehelka sting operation, exception of Babu Bajrangi, killer had been planned and executed, police officers had been person- was new, but there they were, the admitting to, but boasting about, tion to the sting was not outrage, but that the exposé would help Modi win outlandishly, that he had engineered won on the ticket of Union *and* Progress. broadcast recently on prime time, with the after killer recounted how the genocide how Modi and senior politicians and ally involved. None of this information butchers, on the news networks, not just their crimes. The overwhelming public reac- suspicion about its timing. Most people believed the elections again. Some even believed, quite the sting. He did win the elections. And this time, he A committee all unto himself. At BJP rallies, thousands of adoring supporters now wear plastic Modi masks, chanting slogans of death. The fascist democrat has physi- cally mutated into a million little fascists. These are the joys of democracy. Who in Nazi Germany would have dared don a Hitler mask?

Preparations to re-create the 'Gujarat blue-print' are currently in different stages in the BJP-ruled states of Orissa, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Karnataka.

To commit genocide, says Peter Balkian, a scholar of the Armenian genocide, you have to marginalise a sub group for a long time. This criterion has been well met in India. The Muslims of India have been systemati- cally marginalised and have now joined the adivasis and dalits, who have not just been marginalised, but *de-humanised* by caste Hindu society and its scriptures, for years, for centuries. (There was a time when they were de-humanised in order to be put to work doing things that caste Hindus would not do. Now, with technology, even that labour is becoming redundant.) The RSS also pits Dalits against Muslims and Adivasis against Dalits as part of its larger project.

While the 'people' were engaged with the Union project and its doctrine of hatred, India's Progress project was proceeding apace. The new regime of privatisation and liberalisation resulted in the sale of the country's natural resources and public infrastructure to private corporations. It has created an unimaginably wealthy upper class and growing middle classes who have naturally become militant evangelists for the new dispensation.

The Progress project has its own tradition of impunity and subterfuge, no less horrific than the elaborate machinery of the Union project. At the heart of it lies the most powerful institution in India, the Supreme Court, which is rapidly becoming a pillar of Corporate Power, issuing order after order allowing for the building of dams, the interlinking of rivers, indiscriminate mining, the destruction of forests and water systems. All of this could be described as ecocide – a prelude perhaps to genocide. And to criticise the court is a criminal offense, punishable by imprisonment.

Ironically, the era of the free market has led to the most successful secessionist struggle ever waged in India – the secession of the middle and upper classes to a country of their own, somewhere up in the strato- sphere where they merge with the rest of the world's elite. This Kingdom in the Sky is a complete universe unto itself, hermetically sealed from the rest of India. It has its own newspapers, films, television programmes, morality plays, transport systems, malls and intellectuals. And in case you are beginning to think its all joy-joy, it must be said that it also has its own tragedies, its own environmental issues (parking problems, urban air pollution), its own class struggles. An organisation called Youth for Equality, for example, has taken up the is- sue of Reservations, because it feels upper castes are discriminated against by India's pulverized lower castes. The Kingdom has its own People's Movements and candlelight vigils (e.g. Justice for Jessica, the model who was shot in a bar) and even its own People's Car (the Wagon for the Volks, recently launched by the Tata Group). It has its own dreams, manifested in TV advertisements in which Indian CEOs (smeared with Fair & Lovely Face Cream, Men's) buy over international corporations, including an imaginary East India Company. They are ushered to their plush new offices by fawning white women (who look as though they're longing to be laid, the final prize of conquest) and applauding white men, ready to make way for the new kings. Meanwhile the crowd in the stadium roars to its feet (with credit cards in its pockets) chanting 'India! India!'

But there is a problem, and the problem is *Lebensraum*. A Kingdom needs its *Lebensraum*. Where will the Kingdom in the Sky find *Lebensraum*? The Sky Citizens look towards the Old Nation. They see Adivasis sitting on the bauxite mountains of Orissa, on the iron ore in Jharkhand and Chattisgarh. They see the people of Nan- digram (Muslims, Dalits) sitting on prime land, which really ought to be a chemical hub. They see thousands of acres of farm land, and think, these really ought to be Special Economic Zones for our industries; they see the rich fields of Singur and know this really ought to be a car factory for the People's Car. They think: That's *our* bauxite, *our* iron ore, *our* uranium. What are these people doing on *our* land? What's *our* water doing in their rivers? What's *our* timber doing in their trees?

If you look at a map of India's forests, its mineral wealth and the homelands of the Adivasi people, you'll see that they're stacked up over each other. So in reality, those who we call poor are the truly wealthy. But when the Sky Citizens cast their eyes over the land, they see superfluous people sitting on precious resources. The Nazis had a phrase for them – *überzahligen essern*, superfluous eaters.

The struggle for *Lebensraum*, Friedrich Ratzel said after closely observing the struggle between Native Indians and their European colonisers in North America, is an annihilating struggle. Annihilation doesn't nec- essarily mean the physical extermination of people – by bludgeoning, beating, burning, bayoneting, gassing, bombing or shooting them. (Except sometimes. Particularly when they try to put up a fight. Because then they become Terrorists.) Historically, the most efficient form of genocide has been to displace people from their

homes, herd them together and block their access to food and water. Under these conditions, they die without obvious violence and often in far greater numbers. "The Nazis gave the Jews a star on their coats and crowded them into "reserves", Sven Lindqvist writes, "just as the Indians, the Hereros, the Bushmen, the Amandabele, and all the other children of the stars had been crowded together. They died on their own when food supply to the reserves was cut off."

The historian Mike Davis notes that between 12 and 29 million people starved to death in India in the great famine between 1876 and 1892, while Britain continued to export food and raw material from India. In a democracy, as Amartya Sen says, we are unlikely to have Famine. So in place of China's Great Famine, we have India's Great Malnutrition. (India hosts 57 million—more than a third—of the world's undernourished children.)

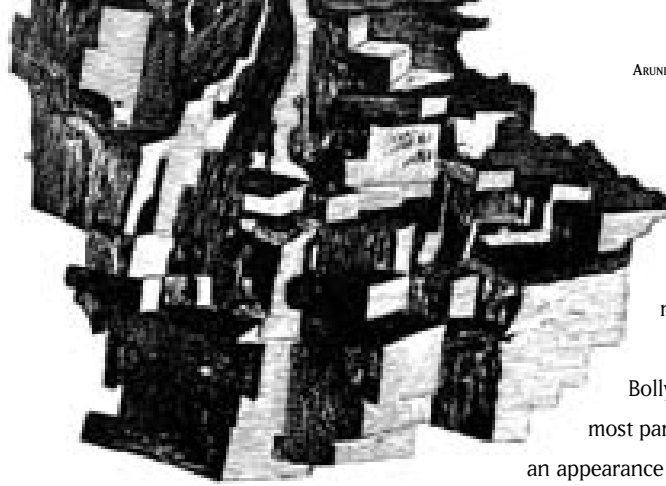
With the possible exception of China, India has the largest population of internally displaced people in the world; dams alone have displaced more than 30 million people. The displacement is being enforced with court decrees or at gunpoint by policemen, by government controlled militias or corporate thugs. (In Nandigram, even the CPI (M) had its own armed militia.) The displaced are being herded into tenements, camps and resettlement colonies where, cut off from a means of earning a living, they spiral into poverty.

In the state of Chhattisgarh, being targeted by corporates for its wealth of iron ore, there's a different technique. In the name of fighting Maoist rebels, hundreds of villages have been forcibly evacuated and almost 40,000 people moved into police camps. The government is arming some of them, and has created Salwa Judum, a 'people's militia'. While the poorest fight the poorest in conditions that approach civil war, the Tata and Essar groups have been quietly negotiating for the rights to mine iron ore in Chhattisgarh. Can we establish a connection? We wouldn't dream of it, even though the Salwa Judum was announced a day after the Memorandum of Understanding between the Tata Group and the government was signed.

It's not surprising that very little of this account of events makes it into the version of the New India currently on the market. That's because what is on sale is another form of denial — the creation of what Robert Jay Lifton calls a "counterfeit universe". In this universe systemic horrors are converted into temporary lapses attributable to flawed individuals, and a more 'balanced' happier world is presented in place of the real one. The balance is spurious: often 'Union' and 'Progress' are set off against each other, a liberal-secular critique of the 'Union' project being used to legitimise the depredations of the 'Progress' project. Those at the top of the food chain, those who have no reason to want to alter the status quo, are most likely to be the manufacturers of the "counterfeit universe". Their job is to patrol the border, diffuse rage, de-legitimise anger, and negotiate a cease-fire.

Consider the response of Shahrukh Khan to a question about Narendra Modi. "I don't know him personally...I have no opinion...", he says, "personally they have never been unkind to me". Ramachandra Guha, liberal historian and founding member of the New India Foundation, a corporate funded trust, advises us in his book—as well as in a series of highly publicised interviews—that the Gujarat government is not really fascist, and the genocide was just an aberration that has corrected itself post elections (!)

Editors and commentators in the 'secular' national press, now over their outrage at the Gujarat genocide, assess Modi's administrative skills, with which they are nearly uniformly impressed. The editor of the



Hindustan Times said, "Modi may be a mass murderer, but he's our mass murderer", going on to air his dilemmas about how to deal with a mass murderer who is also a "good" chief minister.

In this 'counterfeit' version of India, in the realm of culture, in the new Bollywood cinema, in the boom in Indo-Anglian literature, the poor, for the most part, are simply absent. They have been erased in advance. (They only put in an appearance as the smiling beneficiaries of Micro-credit Loans, Development Schemes and charity meted out by NGOs.)

One evening last summer, I watched Amitabh Bachhan (famous Bollywood filmstar) on TV, appearing in a commercial for the *Times of India's* "India Poised" campaign. The TV anchor introducing the campaign said it was meant to inspire people to leave behind the "Constraining ghosts of the past". To choose optimism over pessimism.

"There are two Indias in this country", Amitabh Bachhan said in his famous baritone.

One India is straining at the leash, eager to spring forth and live up to all the adjectives that the world has been recently showering upon us. The Other India *is* the leash.

One India says "Give me a chance and I'll prove myself".

The Other India says "Prove yourself first, and maybe then, you'll have a chance".

One India lives in the optimism of our hearts; the Other India lurks in the scepticism of our minds.

One India wants, the Other India hopes... One India leads, the Other India follows.

These conversions are on the rise.

With each passing day, more and more people from the Other India, are coming over to this side...

And quietly, while the world is not looking, a pulsating, dynamic, new India is emerging.

And finally:

Now in our 60th year as a free nation, the ride has brought us to the edge of time's great precipice...

And one India, a tiny little voice in the back of the head is looking down at the ravine and hesitating. The other India is looking up at the sky and saying it's time to fly.

Here is the counterfeit universe laid bare. It tells us that the rich don't have a choice (There Is No Alternative) but the poor do. They can choose to become rich. If they don't, it's because they are choosing pessimism over optimism, hesitation over confidence, want over hope. In other words, they're *choosing* to be poor. It's their fault. They are weak. (And we know what the seekers of *lebensraum* think of the weak.) They are the 'Constraining Ghost of the Past'. They are already ghosts.

"Within an ongoing counterfeit universe", Robert Jay Lifton says, "genocide becomes easy, almost natural".

The poor, the so called poor, have only one choice: to resist or to succumb. Bachhan is right: they *are* crossing over, quietly, while the world's not looking. Not to where he thinks, but across another ravine, to an-

other side. The side of armed struggle. From there they look back at the Tsars of Development and mimic their regretful slogan: "There Is No Alternative".

They have watched the great Gandhian people's movements being reduced and humiliated, floundering in the quagmire of court cases, hunger strikes and counter hunger-strikes. Perhaps these many million Constraining Ghosts of the Past wonder what advice Gandhi would have given the Indians of the Americas, the slaves of Africa, the Tasmanians, the Herero, the Hottentots, the Armenians, the Jews of Germany, the Muslims of Gujarat? Perhaps they wonder how they can go on hunger strike when they're already starving. How they can boycott foreign goods when they have no money to buy any goods. How they can refuse to pay taxes when they have no earnings.

People who have taken to arms have done it with full knowledge of what the consequences of that decision will be. They have done so knowing that they are on their own. They know that the new laws of the land criminalise the poor and conflate resistance with terrorism. They know that appeals to conscience, liberal morality and sympathetic press coverage will not help them now. They know no international marches, no globalised dissent, no famous writers will be around when the bullets fly.

Hundreds of thousands have broken faith with the institutions of India's democracy. Large swathes of the country have fallen out of the government's control. (At last count it was supposed to be 25 per cent). The battle stinks of death, it's by no means pretty. How can it be when the helmsman of the army of Constraining Ghosts is the ghost of Chairman Mao himself? (The ray of hope is that many of the foot soldiers don't know who he is. Or what he did. More Genocide Denial? Maybe). Are they Idealists fighting for a Better World? Well... anything is better than annihilation.

The prime minister has declared that the Maoist resistance is the "Single largest Internal Security threat". There have even been appeals to call out the army. The media is agog with breathless condemnation.

Here's a typical newspaper report. Nothing out of the ordinary. *Stamp out the Naxals*, it is called.

This government is at last showing some sense in tackling Naxalism. Less than a month ago Prime Minister Manmohan Singh asked state governments to "choke" Naxal infrastructure and "cripple" their activities through a dedicated force to eliminate the "virus". It signalled a realization that Naxalism must be through enforcement of law, rather than wasteful expense on development".

"Choke". "Cripple". "Virus". "Infested". "Eliminate". "Stamp Out".

Yes. The idea of extermination is in the air. And people believe that faced with extermination they have the right to fight back. By any means necessary.

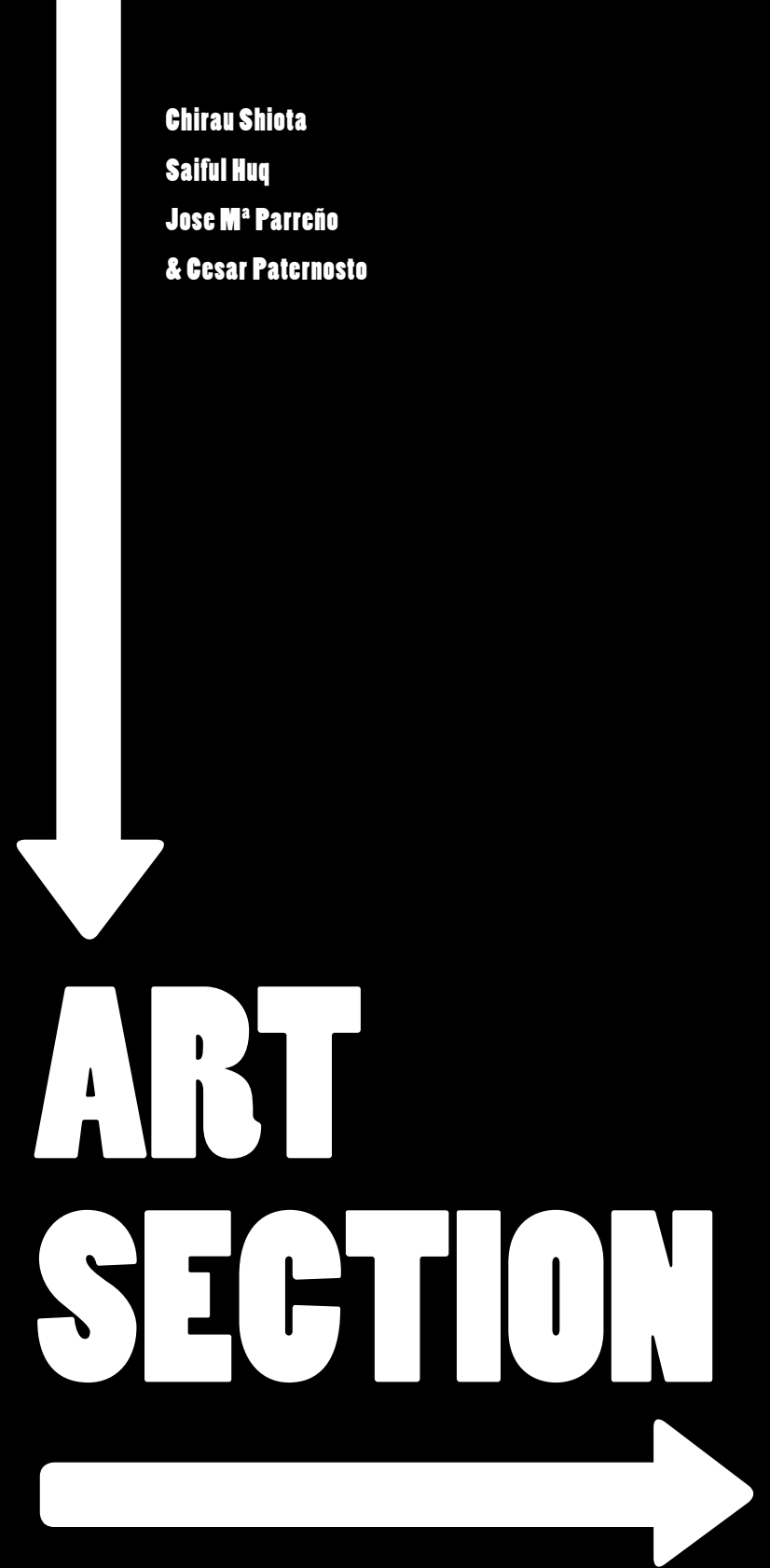
Perhaps they've been listening to the grasshoppers. ✱

Chirau Shiota

Saiful Huq

Jose M^a Parreño

& Cesar Paternosto



ART SECTION

Featured artist:

Juliana Cerqueira Leite interviews CHIHARU SHIOTA

塩田千春さんとのインタビュー

聞き手：グローバルの美術の世界では、国際アートフェアや国際美術貿易が倍増しましたが、それによって、アートを通して地域（ローカル）の課題を表現するといったような、地域性が失われたように感じになりますか。そして、アーティストの生きている場所の現実とアートの世界を分離してしまったように思われますか。

塩田さん：私もそうですが、多くのアーティストは地理的な位置や国籍から独立した個人的なアートを創造しています。ですので、私のアートはグローバル化にあまり影響されていないと思います。個人の感情は普遍的ですから。

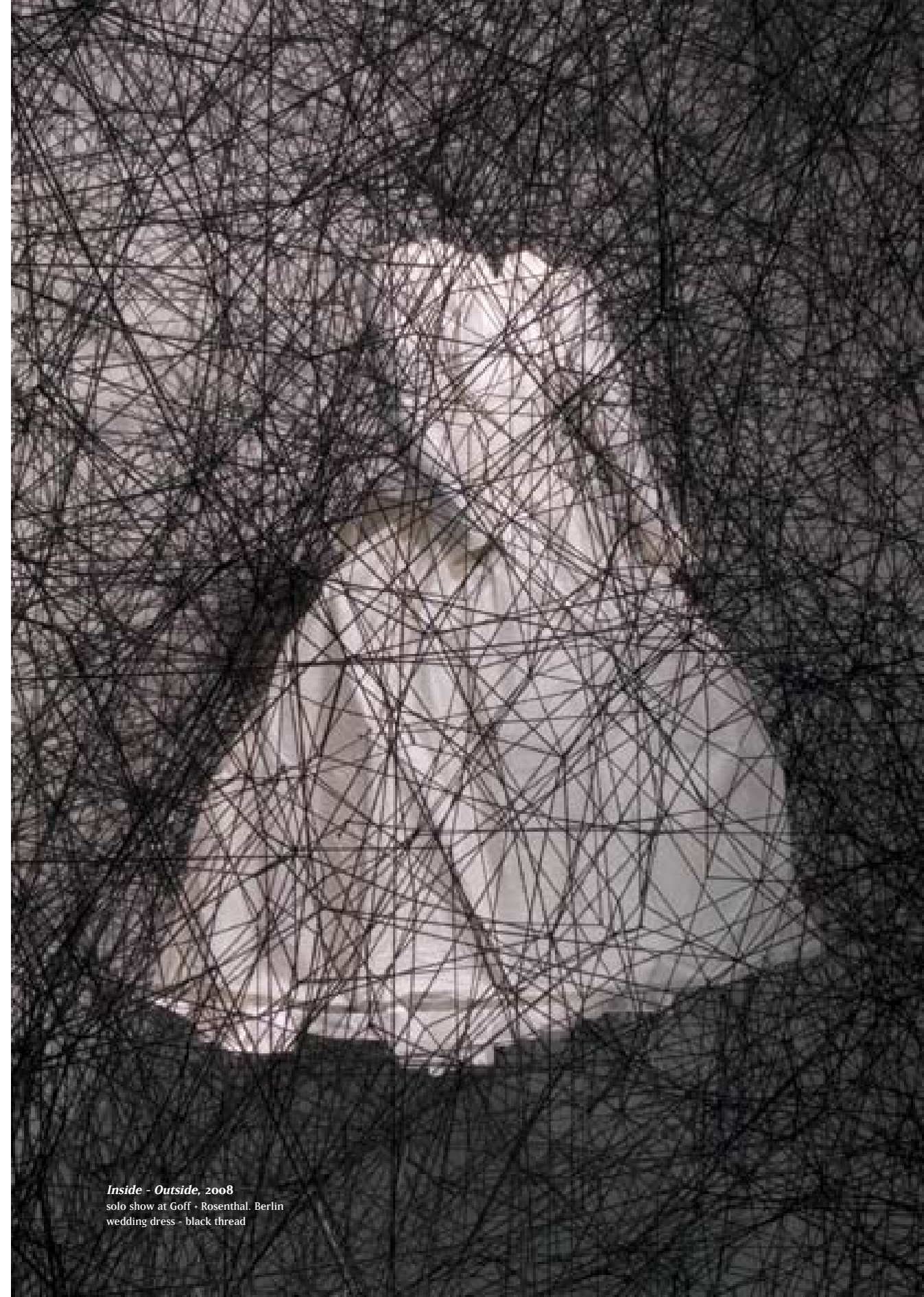
聞き手：益々国際化する芸術教育のおかげで、芸術作品を見ても、そのアーティストがどこ出身かを見分けることは困難になってきています。それでも、異国のものに触れたいという願望はまだあるわけです。Doris Salcedo（ドリス・サルチェド）はアーティストとして、自分の属している所から追い出されること、アウトサイダーになることの重要性を語っています。塩田さんの初期の作品や、ベルリンへの転居にこのような要素がどのようにかかわっていると思われますか。

Juliana Cerqueira Leite: A global art world has come into being with the multiplication of international art fairs and trade. Do you feel this has occurred at the cost of addressing regional issues through art and that it creates a separation of the art world from the immediate reality of an artist's location?

Chiharu Shiota: Many artists, like myself, are creating very personal art independently from their location or nationality. So globalisation doesn't really affect my art work since personal emotions are universal.

JCL: The increasingly international nature of art education is creating a situation where artist are no longer easily defined in their practice by where they are from, yet the desire for the foreign still remains. Doris Salcedo speaks of the importance of being displaced as an artist, of being the outsider, how do you feel these factors have played out in the early development of your work and your relocation to Berlin?

CS: I don't feel like an outsider in Berlin. I have been living here for over 12 years, partly also in



Inside - Outside, 2008
solo show at Goff - Rosenthal, Berlin
wedding dress - black thread

Hamburg, my husband is Korean living in Berlin for 28 years, our daughter is German with a Japanese and German passport, so we have 3 different countries in one family. But these different nationalities and me being a Japanese in Berlin have no impact on my artwork since it is universal.

JCL: Some of your pieces are also performances and cross beautifully from installation to set. You studied under Marina Abramovic and Rebecca Horn, both artists that make use of sculpture and installation in a performative way. How do you feel their influence has informed how you articulate and handle space?

CS: Marina Abramovic brought us students to France for a fasting experience lasting for one week. After this fasting my perception of space changed which was very important for my later work.

JCL: How did the fasting change your perception of space?

CS: Rebecca Horn mainly taught us in a very detailed way about forms and materials. But above that, both women are very strong women and artist, and society in Japan is still dominated by man, so I also learned a lot through them emancipation wise.

JCL: Installation and performance art can engage the viewer in more physically direct ways than other mediums. The way in which they are presented is key in determining this interaction for example being accompanied by explanatory text, or encouraging the viewer to touch the work. How do you plan for the viewer in your work and who would your ideal public be?

塩田さん：私はベルリンでアウトサイダーのように感じていません。ここに来て12年になります。ハンブルグにも少しおりましたが。夫はもうベルリンに28年いる韓国人です。私どもの娘は、ドイツと日本のパスポートを持ったドイツ人です。ですので、一つの家族の中に3つの異なった国が共存しているわけです。しかし、このような異なった国籍や私がベルリンに住む日本人だということは、私の作品に何の影響もありません。作品は普遍なものですから。

聞き手：塩田さんの作品のいくつかは、パフォーマンスですね。インスタレーションからセットにととても美しく交錯している。塩田さんはMarina Abramovic（マリナ・アブラモヴィク）とRebecca Horn（レベッカ・ホーン）について勉強されましたが、お二人とも彫刻とインスタレーションを演劇のように活用されるアーティストですね。このお二人の先生からの学びが、塩田さんの空間の表現や活用の仕方にどのように影響していると感じておられますか。

塩田さん：マリナ・アブラモヴィクは、私たち学生を一週間の断食体験にフランスに連れていきました。この断食経験のあと、空間への私の見方が変わりました。それは、私のその後の創作活動にとっても重要なものでした。

聞き手：断食がどのように空間の見方を変えたのですか。

塩田さん：レベッカ・ホーンは、おもに形と材料についてとてもきめこまやかに教えてくれました。しかし、何よりもこの二人の女性は強い女性であり芸術家で、日本はまだ男性上位の国なので、私は、女性解放の面でも彼女たちから学ぶところは多かったのです。

聞き手：インスタレーションやパフォーマンスのアートは、他の媒介よりも、見る人をより物理的に直接に関与させることができますね。どのように作品が展示

されているかが、その相互作用の決め手となるわけですが、たとえば、説明するテキストがついているとか、鑑賞者が作品に触れるよう勤めるとか。塩田さんの作品の中では、鑑賞者の位置づけをどのように企画されますか。そしてどんな人たちが理想的な鑑賞者なのでしょうか。

塩田さん：私のインスタレーションもパフォーマンスもとても親密なものなので、見る人たちは、よく彼らと私の間の隔たりのようなものに直面しているように、感じるようです。

聞き手：ご自分をその作品の中に置かれるのは、見る人の体験を深めるためですか。

塩田さん：私のインスタレーションの多くのコンセプトには、見る人の側からの相互作用や物理的な経験を意図するものは、含まれていません。その例外は、「DNAからの対話」と題したインスタレーションです。そこでは、地元の人々に使い古した靴を寄付してもらって、それに関する思い出を書いてもらいました。

聞き手：日本の文化では記憶や過去を異なった観点から扱いますね。たとえば、神道では、先祖への畏敬の念やまた特定の神聖な場所では亡くなった人々の存在を感じ、敬うといったことです。村岡三郎は、第二次大戦の記憶や、自分の仕事での目に見えない力の存在を語っています。塩田さんの場合も過去と接するご自分の姿勢が日本でのご体験によって形成されたのでしょうか。

塩田さん：私の祖母は小さな村の出身でして、その身ながらも焼かずにそのままお棺に納められ、お墓に埋められました。私が子供の時、よくお墓の草抜きをさせられましたが、祖母の霊が草の中にあるように感じたので、気持ち悪かったのを覚えています。9歳の時でした。それが死との初めての出会いでした。

CS: Since my installations as well as my performances are very intimate the audience often has the feeling of facing some kind of separation between them and me.

JCL: When you put yourself in your work is it to enhance the experience of the viewer?

CS: And the concept of most of my installations doesn't include the intention for interaction or physical experience on the side of the viewer. The only exception is my installation "Dialogue from DNA" where I asked local people to donate used pair of shoes and to write down the memory they connect to them.

JCL: Japanese culture has a different relationship to memory and the past. I'm specifically referring here to the Shinto reverence for ancestors and the presence of those from the past in certain sacred places. Saburo Muraoka expressed memories of World War II and invisible energies in his practice. Do you feel your relationship to the past is defined by your experiences in Japan and in what way?

CS: My grandmother came from a small village and was buried in a coffin without being burnt. When I was a child I sometimes was asked to weed the graveyard. I felt very uncomfortable doing it because I thought the spirit of my grandmother was in the weeds. At that time I was about 9 and had then my first encounter with death.

JCL: Fire plays an important role in your work. It is also an element associated to loss and an eraser of the past. Could you discuss fire as a creative and destructive force in relation to 'In Silence'?

CS: Fire isn't for me an eraser of the past. When

I burn the piano it is broke but it also reveals its inner core and thus its personality. The piano loses its function, but it doesn't lose its beauty and becomes even stronger.

JCL: Your work represents subjects from the psyche in a very physical and organic way. It is often contextualized through parallels with Eva Hesse, Louise Bourgeois, Ana Mendieta, Mona Hatoum and others. Do you believe women artists are somehow more strongly connected to expressing memory, physicality and loss through artwork?

CS: I think women artists are more often relating to the body, nature and the connection to the universe. I'm not sure of this can be stated concerning memory and loss.

JCL: The gradations from opacity to translucency in your installations create feelings of expansion. While the string can be read as protecting, like a spider's threads protect an egg by wrapping and shading its view, yet it also appears to be threatening. Is the space defined by the installations a positive force or does it need to be controlled?

CS: I would say it rather needs to be controlled as I sometimes become overwhelmed by the emotions.

JCL: There is a connection between the visual elements present in your work and those that compose the vocabulary of Horror. Motifs such as old and broken objects, wedding dresses and the use of the corner are all psychologically charged. Does the language of Horror have a direct influence on your aesthetic decisions?

CS: I don't relate old and broken objects with

聞き手：塩田さんの作品では、火が重要な役割りを果たしていますね。火は喪失と関係ある要素で、また、過去を消すものでもあります。作品「In Silence」（沈黙の中）での、生みの力でもあり、破壊の力でもある火についてお話下さいますか。

塩田さん：私にとっては、火は過去を消すものではありません。ピアノを焼く時、ピアノは壊れてしましますが、その芯はむき出しにされます。すなわちそのパーソナリティですね。ピアノはその機能は失いますが、その美しさは失わず、より強いものになります。

聞き手：塩田さんの作品は、非常に物的、有機的に、深層心理からの登場人物（題目）を表現しておられます。その作品では、よく、Eva Hesse, Louise Bourgeois, Ana Mendieta, Mona Hatoum などとの並列比較を通して位置づけられています。芸術作品を通して、記憶、物性、喪失などを表現するのは、女性のアーティストのほうが、その傾向が強いというご意見でしょうか。

塩田さん：女性のアーティストの方が、体、自然、宇宙との関わりをもつように思います。でも、記憶や喪失に関しては、どうだかわかりません。

聞き手：塩田さんのインストレーションでの不透明から透明への目盛が、拡大化のフィーリングを生み出しています。蜘蛛の糸が、卵を見えなくなる程ぐるぐる巻いて、その卵を守るように、糸は保護するものと読めると同時に、脅かすものにも見えます。インストレーションによって形作られた空間はポジティブなパワーなのでしょうか、それともコントロールされる必要があるのでしょうか。

塩田さん：私が思うのには、コントロールされる必要があります。というのも、私は、感情に時々圧倒されてしまうからです。

聞き手：塩田さんの作品に存在する視的要素と、ホラ

ー（恐怖）の語彙を作り上げるものとの間に接点がありますね。古くて壊れた物品、ウエディングドレス、コーナーの使い方などすべて、心理的に強烈なものがあります。塩田さんの美的選択にホラーの言語は直接影響していますか。

塩田さん：私は、古くて壊れた物を恐怖感で見ません。これらの対象物を、そのストーリーを語る道具として、扱います。恐怖を引き出す源としてではなく。

聞き手：最近のインタビューで、夢のことを話しておられましたね。そこで、道学者のChuan Tzuの話について述べておられるようでした。その逸話とは、Chuan Tzu が蝶々になった夢を見た時、目が覚めたとき、彼は、自分が、人間であったことを夢みた蝶々なのか、蝶々であることを夢めた人間なのかわからなくなったという話です。自分が誰かというアイデンティティは自分の今までの歴史と記憶に関連していますが、その歴史というのも、いつも解釈次第で変わりますし、記憶も変化します。心理学や神経心理学の発達には、私たちのもつ普通の自己という概念に疑問を投げています。このような文脈の中で、塩田さんは記憶と歴史がどうなっていくと感じられますか。

塩田さん：私は、記憶も歴史も時には疑問を投げかけられる必要があると思います。

だから私は芸術作品を創造するのです。私もはっきりわからないし、時には、不安や恐怖でいっぱいです。✳

horror. I rather treat these objects as literary tools telling their story, not as a source for horror.

JCL: In a recent interview you discussed dreaming, and seemed to refer to an account of Taoist philosopher Chuan Tzu. The story goes that Chuang Tzu dreamt of being a butterfly. Upon awaking he could not tell whether he was a butterfly dreaming that it was a man or a man who had awoken from dreaming that he was a butterfly. The sense of identity is connected to one's history and memories yet one's history is always open to interpretation and memories change. Developments in psychology and neuropsychology have put into question our notions of a continuous self. What do you feel becomes of memory and history in this context?

CS: I think memory and history have to be questioned sometimes.

This is the reason why I make art. I'm uncertain and sometimes full of fear. ✳

Translated by Mariko Foulk



In Silence, 2008
CentrePasquArt
Biel Bienne, Switzerland



Bathroom, 1999
performance, studio, Berlin
video still

Image: Sunhi Mang © VG Bild - Kunst

Erinnerung der Haut - Memory of Skin, 2001
Yokohama Triennale, Yokohama, Japan



Image: Emi Suzuki © VG Bild - Kunst



CONVERSATION: Jose M^a Parreño & Cesar Paternosto

JMP. The tribal arts of Africa have had a well known impact on the early avant-garde. Has Pre-Columbian art had an equivalent influence? If so, who are the artists or the movements that reflect this influence?

CP. As we all know Picasso virtually singlehandedly canonised the tribal arts of Africa, and though he had a marked insensibility towards Pre-Columbian art, his gaze on non-European arts forever blazed the trail for those kinds of cross-fertilisations. Later on, the Surrealists leaned towards the arts of Oceania, as well as to the North West Coast Indian art of North America; the Mexican muralists adopted Mayan and Aztec iconography as a doctrinaire principle within the social orientation of their art; and under the influence of Siqueiros, Pollock also appropriated, in his early work, the totemic forms of the indigenous arts of North America. Klee, Torres-García, Albers, Gottlieb and Barnett Newman, on the other hand, found stimulus in the more abstract forms generated in the textile grid and its reflection on ceramic designs, as much as in the architectural works of America's ancient civilisations. I featured this trend in a show I curated in 2001 for the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels, *Abstraction: The Amerindian Paradigm*. However, due to a complex of historical and cultural reasons that even today is not properly appreciated by the artists working in the Americas, the reception of these ancient cultures implies, in the last analyses, a crucial step towards establishing those traditions as the cultural heritage of *all* peoples of the Americas, as was proposed by Torres-García and Barnett Newman. I firmly believe this is true. Yet, there still persists in this field a sorry confusion between ethnicity and culture. And in this sense, it is the artists who, by intersecting with Pre-Hispanic cultures, demonstrate that these are not the exclusive property of modern nationalisms as it is habitually suggested in reference to Mexico and Peru, a suggestion, however, that verges on dangerous racial or ethnic prejudices.

At any rate, what is paramount here is that the geometric design in a textile or of a ceramic vase becomes for the artist a learning experience, a "lesson in abstraction" so to speak, which, reverberating with the ancient symbolism embraced by the social group, in the receiving process bestows a generic sense of cultural validity to a modern abstraction practiced in the Americas.

JMP. Leaving aside the formal differences, what are the conceptual discrepancies between modern

geometric abstraction and the 'geometric' arts of the Amerindian cultures?

CP. The often rigorous geometric vocabulary of forms we find in the Amerindian arts emerged within the textile orthogonal matrix which, as a principle, the weaver would accept without trying to force the technique in order to reproduce naturalist pictorial models, as was the case with the Coptic tapestry and the Unicorn tapestry. From there, those geometric forms were passed on to ceramic or mural painting. But the primordial trait of this art was its integration into social life. The weavings had a purpose, they were meant to be worn: they were clothing. In this sense, textile construction, as much as its colour and form configurations, proclaimed the regional or ethnic origin of the wearer. Furthermore, in societies that lacked writing, and with a degree of visual saturation infinitely smaller than ours, it is possible to infer the enormous *intensity* that this heraldry had. In other words, we already have here a basic signifying system.

In a more specific sense, we have the *t'oqapu*, a family of geometric designs found in textiles as well as painted on ceremonial vases—the *kero*. These designs not only had an enviable sense of colour and geometric configuration—that could be the source of inspiration for many artists today—but also have been deemed to be logographic signs, just as the Chinese calligraphic ideograms. We could synthesise, then, that Amerindian (textile) geometric art could be "worn on", thus acquiring an organic sense that could also be, as suggested before, a sort of writing. All in all, in the Amerindian tradition textiles had a polysemic significance that encompassed a symbolic role not only in matrimonial or funerary rites, but also in political and diplomatic solemnities. In summary, these geometric forms contained from their conception an unmistakable aesthetic sense that was inextricable from the social or ritual functions of this geometric symbolism.

This is what demarcates the fundamental difference between Amerindian art and modern geometric abstraction; to begin with, this is just a chapter in modern western art and, as such, it is a limited phenomenon within modernity, only a fragmentary experience within our total social experience. To an overwhelming degree, we experience art in its own context, the museum or the gallery, and, as Gombrich said, with a special mental attitude.

By resorting to a repertoire of geometric forms, the modern artists aimed to radically accentuate the autonomy of art, breaking away from the *ontological* dependence that it had with the natural model. It was the creation of a self-referential aesthetic object (painting, sculpture) that establishes a co-reality. (Here I am quoting Max Bense, a German philosopher mostly ignored today, who was very influential in the Buenos Aires intellectual milieu of the fifties, my formative years). Now that I've said all this, I foresee a lot of qualifications or exceptions because, for one, I personally reject the contemplation of geometric abstraction as a merely aesthetic phenomenon: there has to be more than mere enjoyment. I think that, as it intersects with *other* cultural horizons, it has to pose questions, stimulating knowledge.

JMP. On the other hand, could you pinpoint the differences between the various tendencies of contemporary geometric art?

CP. For me, the most significant difference lies with a geometric abstraction that tries to recover the spiritual with which it was infused by its founders, Malevich, Mondrian, Kandinsky and Kupka, as compared with the trend inaugurated by the second generation, personified mainly by Vantongerloo and Max Bill. I see in the former, and this is crucial to understand the emergence of a geometric abstract art, what I call the *irruption of the other*, that is to say, an intersection with various non-European cultural strains that was propitiated, in the first

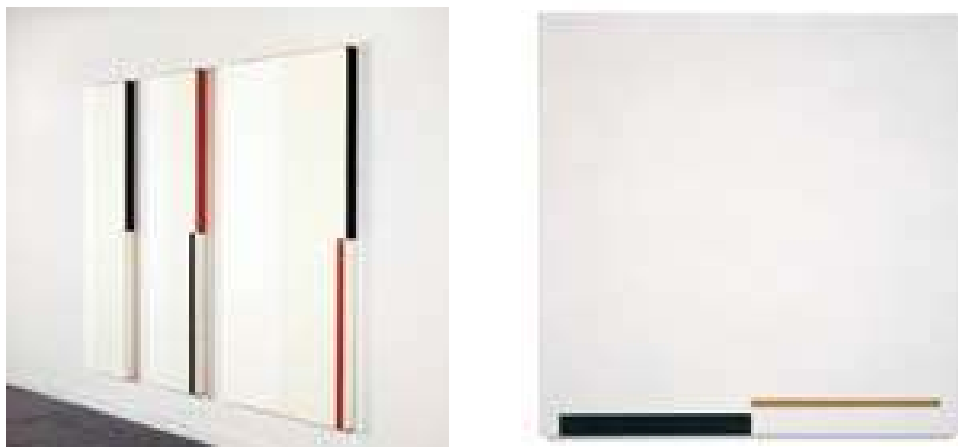


place, by Picasso's encounter with African tribal sculpture. And then, towards the mid-teens and the twenties, when the artists mentioned above broke away from the millennial representative tradition there existed among them various connexions with the occult, more specifically with theosophy, a transcendentalism that syncretises neoplatonic and hermetic tradition with Buddhist and Tantric notions of the metaphysical symbolism of geometric forms. Furthermore, Kandinsky approached Zen Buddhism, and Kupka was himself a medium. Whether we like it or not, these doctrines, so alien to the positivism or rationalism that infused the ideology of progress prevailing in the early 20th century, provided definite conceptual support for that momentous rupture. The neoplatonic school had suggested that "God geometrises". Therefore, the adoption of a repertoire of geometric forms seemed to be responding to Kandinsky's angst: "What would replace the missing object?"

Yet, later on, Vantongerloo and Max Bill, as they started working with the mathematical postulates suggested by the plastic geometric solutions, introduced a rationalist ingredient, a "scientific" bias, which ended up "Westernising" geometric abstraction. This variant, due mostly to Max Bill's theorising, came to be known as "concrete art", a designation that Arp had used some time earlier. In fact, it was to throw a persistent and heavy veil over those undesirable earlier connections. Something similar occurred in Russia when the Constructivist sculptors—the heirs of Tatlin's extrapolations from Picasso's cubist reliefs—intending to incorporate themselves into the industrial process, called themselves "Productivists". Because they were driven by a doctrinarian materialism, they attempted to eradicate the spiritual qualities that emanated from painting, especially Malevich's Suprematism. To summarise, all of them were crushed by another art, if that is what we can call the Socialist Realism espoused by the sinister figure of Stalin.

The modern pictography proposed by Torres-García, in which the grid is populated by symbols—again, not devoid of metaphysical resonances—evinces many of the postmodern eclectic mannerisms and, in this sense, he is in league with Klee. However, for the canonical history of geometric abstraction, dominated today by the Anglo-Saxon discourse, Torres-García remains, at best, an unclassifiable character. This is not the case in Spain or Latin America, where his modernist stature is unassailable. In fact, his presence in South America—in his native Uruguay—since the mid thirties, was to be a catalyst for the emergence of the Rio de la Plata avant-garde, which enacted notable qualitative leaps within geometric abstraction. I am thinking of the painting with structured frame or cut out frame initiated and theorised by the Uruguayan Rhod Rothfuss—and which anticipated the New York *shaped canvases* of the sixties—or in the neon tube sculptures by the Argentine Gyula Kosice that also anticipated the later use of that medium by Fontana, or Bruce Nauman. The sizable group of artists who started working towards the mid-forties, when Europe was devastated by war, were at that time the genuine embodiment of the avant-garde of geometric abstraction and Constructivism, even though today they are not more than a blip on the screen of the hegemonic art history.

I find intriguing that in the far away South American capitals of Buenos Aires and Montevideo, which already displayed an European influenced cosmopolitanism, the geometric abstractionist movement appeared to symmetrically repeat the creative explosion of the Russian avant-garde, which had occurred at the periphery



of Europe at the outset of the First World War, and in a cultural environment heavily conditioned by Francophile Tsarist Russia. There is another parallelism: in Russia the avant-garde precedes and coincides with the revolution. In Buenos Aires, the abstract movement emerges as workers were marching in support of then colonel Perón, the polemical figure who was to dominate the Argentine political scene until his death, three decades later. I just point out the intriguing coincidence of the traumatic social and political circumstances—there were obvious differences between the ideology and social and economic realities of revolutionary Russia and Argentina in the mid-20th century, but that discussion is out of place here.

I could not sum up in a few words the American artistic phenomenon of the second half of the 20th century because we are now, more than ever, immersed in the wake of the transformations that US artists inflicted on the European modern tradition. It suffices to say that geometric abstraction, unlike the utterly persistent deri-

vations from the Duchampian or Dadaist gestures, never became entirely dominant. Still, it is important to recall some of the leading lights of abstraction in the US. In the early sixties, as they evolved towards highly minimal art objects, Donald Judd and Frank Stella fiercely rejected all connections with the European geometric abstraction that they saw as a "relational" art. Ellsworth Kelly, who took his first steps as an abstractionist in Paris in the fifties—and who even showed together with one of the artists from the Rio de la Plata avant-garde, Arden Quin—ended up closely affiliated with Matisse's hedonistic use of colour (emulated in his figurative drawings), rather than with the conceptual rigours of the European tradition. And then, the variants auspiced by the Kantian formalism of Greenberg's discourse exhausted rather quickly its own superficiality. The authentic heirs of Mondrian's Neoplasticism, Burgoyne Diller, Ilya Bolotovsky and Fritz Glarner, are practically unknown outside the US.

"Against the philistine division of art into form and content it is necessary to insist on their unity [...]"
 "What appears in artworks and is neither to be separated from their appearance nor to be held simply identical with it—the nonfactual in their facticity—is their spirit. It makes artworks, things among things, something other than a thing!..."
 Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theo*

JMP. "What is decoration is not art" declare our cultural conventions. At what point of our cultural evolution did that happen? Because Riegl saw in the contouring line of the figure the origin of ornament autonomy...



CP. Towards the end of the 19th century Riegl wrote on the origins of ornament and saw that art was inextricably linked to nature; therefore, he considered sculpture as the most apt medium to represent the natural model in actual depth. When the artist approaches the plane, he/she has to invent the silhouette, the contour line. In this sense, the description that Riegl makes of the "geometric style" type of ornament, where the autonomy of the line generates forms that already have nothing to do with nature (triangles, diamonds, curves, zigzags), he seemed to be characterising a geometric abstraction *avant la lettre*. This is one of my arguments to expose the erroneous dominant art historical theory that sees an 'ornament' in what was *the central art* in cultures alien to the modern European tradition. What is confusing here is that those so called ornaments appear in "artifacts" ascribed to a ritual or ceremonial use, or simply to daily use, because in those cultures the category of "fine art object" (the *beaux arts*) had not developed. A category that, as we know, is an exclusively Western conception

embodied in the canonical media of painting and sculpture.

When? Well, quite gradually, starting after the Renaissance, and consolidating towards the 17th century. In my view, it was the conception of the easel painting—given that sculpture is a medium common to other cultures— that typified the concept of *art* as we have it today (and wrote it with capital 'A'). Thus, all visual configurations that did not appear in a painting or an anthropomorphic sculpture became "decoration": weavings, ceramics, furniture, etc. Yet, we have to bear in mind, time and again, that those hierarchical dichotomies, art/crafts or art/decoration, made no sense beyond the Occident.

JMP. Could we say that the archaic "geometric decorations" originated or had a base in nature? Are they a simplification of the visible or is its origin quite different? In the case of your own work, what kind of relationship, if any, has it with nature?

CP. Although I couldn't ascertain this categorically, I believe that the archaic pictographies, where schematic renditions of natural forms connive with geometric designs, would indicate that there was a relationship with nature. In general, I think that in every culture there exists some sort of *symbolic decisions*, so to speak, which we cannot easily rationalise. It is possible to infer, for instance, that the geometric meander may represent the curves of a river which is central to the life of the social group; or that the diamonds generated by weaving are alluding to the skin of the serpent, a mythic animal in many cultures; or that the spirals appearing in rock art refer to the gyrations of the nocturnal sky, etc. It is evident that the symbolic geometric design is distancing itself from the natural phenomenon. Paraphrasing Merleau-Ponty, I would say that geometric forms, like writing, do not resemble the things they name.

In reference to my work, at the beginning I didn't want anything to do with nature. But I think that the latter started smuggling itself in when I adopted earth pigments, whose immemorial use in archaic cultures was tightly linked to the natural world.

JMP. From your point of view, what is the anthropological origin of art? Is it a transpersonal symbolic need? Or is it the individuation of objects or individuals?

CP. The transpersonal symbolic need is, in my view, at the very origin of art itself. The individuation of objects or individuals comes much later.

JMP. Your early paintings using geometric forms were done prior to your later intellectual research into the world of archaic forms. To what extent has your early art led to the discoveries that the ensuing research would confirm? Is artistic creation an epistemological tool?

CP. I am convinced that art is a means of knowledge, although it operates unlike science or philosophy. Intuition is basically its cognitive tool. When, at the end of the seventies, I encountered in Peru the sculptural works of the Inca epoch — decidedly non-figurative — I intuited, thanks to my lifelong perception as an abstractionist, an "artistic will" (Riegl's *kunstwollen*), that is to say, a symbolic utterance of that culture which had escaped the scholars and anthropologists, whose capability for art reading doesn't go, it needs to be said, beyond recognisable natural forms. Let's say it in another way: After a lifelong commitment to abstraction, I discovered in the Inca sculptures a commitment that led to the experience of the abstract, something I never lost: I am referring to the conviction that the abstract, geometric forms that I was working with "spoke" to me, without words, and that I was able to

make them say things that I could not express verbally. I intuited that something similar was happening in that ancient American culture. And I ended up theorising, rather boldly I must say, over the existence of a visual-tactile semiotics that substituted for alphabetic writing, integrated by the textile designs I mentioned before, the (starkly geometric) *t'oqapu*, the knots of the *qipu* (the knotted strings whose viability as a semantic system has recently started to be emphasised), and its morphological analogue: the protuberances—some sort of "stone knots"—that the Inca builders left in key sites on the walls of the structures as "announcements" of their significance.

JMP. Now, conversely, what has been the influence of your research on your creative work?

CP. My "discovery" of the Inca sculptural works and my subsequent immersion in the studies of Pre-Columbian art opened my perception towards the symbolic sense of colour as well as the geometric forms in non-Western art. It was nothing less than a re-education of the modern artist I was at the time. And that led me, going back to what I said before, to the distinct awareness that abstraction could become a *cognitive model*.

JMP. Your view of geometric art seems to sum up all the characteristics of a critique that we could call "Postmodern": it originates in the art medium rather than in theory, it breaks the boundaries of the established art categories, it goes beyond the eurocentric canon... There is also implicit a multicultural view, the vindication of an art not separated from real life, and also the vindication of feminine work. To what extent do you believe we are at a turning point in modern culture?

CP. Yes, I think that, in effect, we are before a turning point in modern culture. It is undeniable. Yet I find the term "turning point" far more acceptable than speaking of "Postmodernism". Albrecht Wellmer, an author less well known than the figures popularised by the media as emblematic of the postmodern discourse, says, quite perceptively in my view, that if postmodernism is "not a mere theoretical vogue", it has the unclear sense of an ending and a transition. "But an end to what? And a transition to what?" In my opinion, however, we are indeed before a fashion, and a rather *passé* one I'd say, which was astutely presented to us by the perpetual French culture industry. And this is said by someone who grew up in the Francophile intellectual ambiance of the Argentina of my youth, but who with time learned to "deconstruct"—a method so dear to recent theorising—that is, weeding the good from the "pseudo" philosophising concocted in Paris. I think that at this point of modernity — for I believe that modernism is still alive — some aspects are emphasised that were already in a germinal state in the modernism now presumed dead. For example: in that first intersection with the arts of tribal Africa there was the seed of the multicultural penchant voiced today. Didn't the anti-art fury of the Dadaists have at its core an acerbic confrontation with Reason, that later the Surrealists so exacerbated by delving in the subconscious? I am reminded also of the ferocious social critiques by Grosz and Heartfield. In other words, I think that modernism already advanced the possibility of intellectual and moral self-criticism that we observe at this turning point and which, in my view, points the way to a "second modernity": a radicalisation of itself rather than its burial.

Furthermore, I cannot help but see the reception of "Postmodernism" in the art world as a superstructural phenomenon of the neo-liberal "market economy" of the eighties ... Hey! it used to be just "capitalism"! ... the economies that were stoked and fueled by the neocon Reagan-Thatcher axis which has largely shaped, much to our chagrin, the world we still live in. At that time the verbal fog of the *philosophes* began mumbling about the "death of utopias, the passing of the hard narratives", proclaiming the *pensiero devole* instead. In

any event, the sorry consequence in the fields of art and architecture was an art market inflated by the sudden fortunes of stock market raiders and other speculators. Money that went on to support unashamedly reactionary products: megalomaniacal, bombastic neo-expressionist paintings, plagued by "quotations"; equally unscrupulous "appropriationism" in painting or photography or plain narrative pictures that were echoed by an equally regressive architecture set out on the sterile resurrection of past styles.

Now, in considering the vindication of traditional female tasks, we are certainly going well beyond the eurocentric canon. For, if we accept that the textile by definition a woman's art is the archaic genesis of geometric abstraction, then the theoretical clichés of the North American feminist critique should be duly revised: obfuscated by the Abstract Expressionist discourse, they saw abstraction as a *machista* art. I am afraid it is just the opposite: it was feminine.

JMP. On account that your works employ a marked sense of visual rhythms, of intervals, what kind of relationship do they keep with music? On the other hand, do you believe that kind of rhythmic relationship between music and the geometries could have existed in ancient civilisations?

CP. Yes, whether consciously or not, I always intended in my abstract works a parallel with music, mainly with the atonal or twelve tone music—the pregnant silences in Anton Webern's music are something I never forgot. Already the intervals of my blank frontal planes imposed a real ambulatory time in order to search for the pictorial notations that did not appear from the conventional standpoint. Thus, more recently, and even working on the frontal plane, I have had in mind the modern musical notations, or scores, that only seem to mark accentuations, rhythms or silences.

On the other hand, it is not easy to ascertain that relationship insofar as the archaic geometric arts. Yet, given that there was no separation of the arts, as we have in our culture, we cannot rule it out. On the contrary, the shaman's chant, for instance, cannot be separated from the marks that he/she makes on the recipient's body or in the dust.

JMP. A famous book by Robert Rosenblum established a relationship between the art of certain Abstract Expressionist painters with the tradition of Northern Romanticism and inevitably linked it to the sublime. Does geometric abstraction keep a similar relationship?

CP. I have not read Rosenblum, but I heard about it. Yet I do remember that in 1948 Barnett Newman already attempted to bring forth, based on Burke, the concept of the sublime. He wrote an essay, *The Sublime is Now*, and he intended to embody it with the then exasperating reductivism of his painting: barely a vertical line cleaving rectangular planes of even colour, which he curiously denied as geometric abstraction. However, I believe that even though he wasn't clear then, with that painting Newman led the way to recover the symbolic sense of so-called "geometric decorations".

JMP. We could say that what led you to utilise the side-edges of the painting was the search for a new pictorial space, as well as stressing the object-hood of painting or, equally, an emptying up of the centre for the benefit of the margins. Some critics see, too, an enunciation of the sacred, for a space for meditation was being created. What do you think about this?

CP. I have to admit that when I faced the emptying up of the painting's frontal surface—which was, and I'll say it without false modesty, an unprecedented step in the modern pictorial tradition—I was consciously responding to the pressures inhabiting New York's art world of the late sixties: "Carry the medium to the last consequences" was virtually a mandate. And, if on the one hand, my gesture was influenced by the fierce reductivism of minimalist works, it was, too, a fervent reaffirmation of painting, an art that the Minimalist sculptors considered anything but inert. I'd be lying if I said that at that moment I was trying to infuse a sacred resonance to my painting. Years later, however, I became aware of it; and in one occasion this feeling seemed to receive reconfirmation from outside the art world. It happened when I watched Eliot Weinberger interview the American poet Gary Schneider, an avowed convert to Zen Buddhism. At some point he confessed that once, at an exhibition, he suddenly found himself staring intensely at the blank wall between the pictures...

JMP. Contemporary art seems to be reintroducing a sacred resonance to many aspects of life and reality which, since the Enlightenment, had been relentlessly secularised. Does art have the power to connect humans with the sacred? Is it a duty?

CP. I believe that if we pretended to forget the sacred dimension that art has had since the dawn of humanity we would be left without that experience that today the West calls *art*. In light of the Amerindian art paradigm, I attempted to stress the work of artists in which the ancient connection with the sacred already reverberates, to a greater or lesser extent, precisely because these artists were open to this experience. There are other figures, like Ad Reinhardt or Agnes Martin—whose work I deeply admire—in which that connection resonates, I'd say even in spite of themselves. On the other hand, I must confess that I find it extremely difficult to find a sense of that reverberation in most recent art. Having lived in the hotbed of New York, I find far too evident that art has become, to an overwhelming degree, the anxious means to grab an instant 15 minutes of celebrity.

JMP. To what extent do you feel you are the heir of the art of Max Bill, of Torres-García, of the Madi, or of the Pre-Columbian cultures?

CP. Max Bill's art and discourse had a dominant presence in my formative years in Argentina (the late fifties). However, as the years went by, I realised that there had been a triad of modellic figures, Mondrian, Torres-García and Barnett Newman, whose work had been most influential on my evolution. Although not necessarily in that order, and at different times in my evolution, I have found in their oeuvre the conceptual support, the example to follow, or *¿why not? ¿the challenge to go beyond?* vainly, needless to say. As a matter of fact, after my encounter with the arts of ancient America, I found conceptual sustenance in Torres-García's discourse as much as in Newman's.

JMP. Torres-García attempted to re-establish the union between nature and geometry: he assimilated Mondrian's neo-plastic grid and took it to the symbolic field. What is your position in this regard?

CP. I'd like to see the grid, that is, the immemorial textile grid, as well as the modern one, as the *zero degree of abstraction*. That is to say, to become aware anew of its signifying possibilities, something that the visual noise of today's art and society have been obscuring. ✱

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BOYAR CHAR

Photography by Saiful Huq





→ "I listen to you"



→ A woman wades where her children used to play

Life Along the Coastline

Their homes are not far from the sea. Their homes are not far from the mighty rivers. And they have lost their homes many times. With climate change they change their lives. Sporadic cyclone, flood, river and soil-erosion change the environment constantly. The people migrate from one island to another and from one part of the island to the other end. In Boyar Char you people who have changed their homes fifteen times. Some cannot recall the location of their first home.

It's a story of migration, of losing homes and trying to survive.

Along the coastline of Bangladesh you meet these people - the strong people - who have fought against nature and an uncaring elite. They stood against the wind, water and the broken soil. They will whisper in your ear- "we will survive."

The Photographs were part of an exhibition Partnership in Practice. The work was supported Bangladesh Water Development Board and Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands

All images © Saiful Huq Omi / Counter Foto / Polaris



→ A young woman photographed with pictures of her gods



→ Shurodrho Ray, age 104





→ Taslim age 13, taking a bath in the hot sun



→ Karim, a fisherman who has neither boat nor land



→ A day laborer



→ Fishing in the river Meghna



Nicolas Vieillescazes IN CONVERSATION WITH Jacques Rancière

Translation by Anna Preger

--> ART AND POLITICS

N.V.: Your thought mainly revolves around mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, around a great divide defining positions and shares, determining who may and who may not take part in an activity (primarily, in political practice), and which you term, in recent works, "the distribution of the sensory" (*le partage du sensible*), thus bringing to light the aesthetic origin of politics. But you also have this second, more historical proposition that the "aesthetic regime of art" which appeared towards the end of the 18th century is inextricably linked to the birth of modern politics, in which the novel figures of the people and the proletariat emerged as political actors.

i) Could you explicate this historical link between politics and aesthetics, and the manner in which it is articulated with your more general (if not more fundamental?) thesis of a distribution of the sensory?

J.R.: The birth of aesthetics as a regime of identification of art signifies the overthrow of a set of hierarchies that determined the status of artistic practices and the very nature of their sensory perception: a hierarchy of the arts and genres determined by the lowliness or nobility of their subjects, that is, ultimately by the rank held by the characters and activities they represented; the subordination of works and practices to social destinations defined within an hierarchically structured world; the definition of taste as a form of sensibility that was the preserve of an elite; the definition of the very practice of art according to the scheme of an active form commanding passive matter. Aesthetics represents the destruction of this edifice: all subjects begin to share an equal status thanks to the reinstatement of genre painting versus historical painting; the production of works without destination comes with the development of museums; the revocation of the form/matter model and Kant's definition of universality without a concept of aesthetic

judgement. It is this sea change that is taken into account when Schiller translates in political terms Kant's "free play" of the faculties. Aesthetics emerges as the theory of an experience of sensory neutralization, of a concrete experience of the oppositions that structured the hierarchical world-view. This is why, for Schiller and the Romantics after him, it was possible to contrast a revolution in the very forms of sensory life with the revolutionary overthrow of the forms of government. But, alongside the great programmes of aesthetic revolution, a far more diffuse process occurs by which workers, ordinarily destined for a life of "passive" production or reproduction, internalize aesthetic attitudes, ways of disassociating their gaze from the labour performed by their arms or their language from the language forms of their social milieu. Workers' emancipation came about through these processes of break which are not counter-cultural phenomena but ways of neutralizing the distinctions and hierarchies in which a condition was associated with a way of being, of feeling and of speaking.

2) More generally, how are the discourses of history and philosophy connected in your work? For on the one hand your thesis of a distribution of the sensory appears to be a trans-historical philosophical statement; on the other, after a properly historical study centred on the critique of discourses of mastery, your work seems to have gradually reverted back to philosophy, which seems to me to characterize the general evolution of French thought over the last twenty or thirty years.

J.R.: There is no opposition between a trans-historical orientation and an historical critique. Philosophy, as I practise it, is not a science of the Eternal. It deals with the singular knots that bring into being this or that configuration of experience: art, politics, social life, philosophy itself. I embarked on a study of workers' archival resources because I wanted to escape the dogmatic categories for thinking history, the workers' movement, class struggle, etc. I set these against the uniqueness of the workers' emancipation by mobilizing the resources of the historian, the philosopher and the writer, that is to say by blurring the boundaries that are meant to separate not only disciplines, but also the theoretical and the empirical, the scientific and the poetic. When working on Plato's texts on the division of labour, Aristotle's texts on the unique sensibility of the political animal or Hannah Arendt's work on "political life", I did so by constantly translating these propositions into the terms of the distribution of the sensory that I analyzed in its most concrete form through the workers' archives: I approached Plato's work on the artisan's "absence of time" via a carpenter's texts, and the difference between Aristotle's human speech and animal voice through 19th century strikers' manifestoes. It is not a case of a return from history to philosophy but rather a constant use of one form of discourse and knowledge so as to challenge another. The historical helps to deconstruct philosophical truisms, but, moreover, philosophical categories help to identify what is widely at stake in what historians always present as realities and mentalities that cannot be dissociated from their context. I wished in this way to allow for a thinking capacity that resists confinement within disciplinary boundaries that function as taboos. To go from the historical mode to the philosophical mode and vice-versa means that thought is one and that everyone thinks.

3) How does a distribution of the sensory come about? And how do new "regimes" emerge? Your notion of the sensory indeed appears to function in a similar manner to Foucault's concept of "savoir" (knowledge), and, like him, you seem to carefully keep your distance with the historical causality model, rather positioning yourself at the level of the eruption of events, in order to define combinations and configurations.

J.R.: Regimes are not separated from one another by thunderclaps or by a clash of cymbals. A regime is not a radical historical irruption that would annul another regime. The birth of "literature" as a new historical regime of art took place without a single manifesto, without an institution of new rules. And it took place by reinventing a tradition: the Romantics reinvented the Greek tragedy, against its Classical domestication. They set out to mobilize Rabelais, Cervantes and Shakespeare against the norms of the poetic arts and the distinction of genres. Art critics mobilize the Venetian colour, the Dutch *chiaroscuro* or the village scenes of Flanders against norms of the Beautiful inherited from Raphael's drawing technique and Poussin's composition. They create a vision of the painting as gesture of the artist and the metamorphosis of matter, thus an "abstract" vision that precedes by a long stretch abstract painting proper. There is thus a mutation in the regime of perception that lends a non-figurative visibility to figurative paintings. A regime is thus an articulation of materials, forms of perception and categories of interpretation that are not contemporaneous. This articulation never defines a necessary structure. There are possibilities that define new emergences, but there is no limit that would render impossible certain forms of art. And art forms themselves are very often a mixture of several logics. This is what I have attended to with regards to film: it was considered, by the authors of 1910s-1920s manifestoes, as the art of light and movement that would cast into oblivion the old narrative art of stories and characters. Yet film did no less than reinstate the art of stories and characters precisely at the point when literature was discarding it. And it settled in the position of a mixed art in which the logic of history and that of the visible ceaselessly intertwine, unite or separate themselves from one another.

4) Which conditions determine the political or artistic status of an object, an interaction or a situation? Because, as you have argued, the presence of power does not necessarily entail that of politics, and the presence of painting, poetry, etc., does not always entail that of art, are art and politics not characterized by rarity then, and does your thought not articulate within a framework similar to that of Alain Badiou's philosophy? Do you think that 'eventuality' is the necessary precondition of art or politics? This would have two consequences: the first would be a form of idealism, with the reintroduction of an abstract Idea functioning as the norm of an activity; the second, contiguous to the first, would be the reintroduction of the question of the legitimacy of the judge, of the one who is qualified to determine the true nature of things, and who distinguishes himself, by this, from the layman, or even the *profanum vulgus*: who can decide the political or artistic character of an object?

J.R.: Your question presupposes a thesis that is not mine. When I say that there is no art in general, it is not because I make art subordinate to some kind of volcanic eventuality. It is a fact that art as a concept for a specific sphere of practices and experiences only emerges in Europe at the end of the 18th century. It is also a fact that it emerges as an undifferentiated concept, free from the forms of normativity that used to define the arts, genres, etc. Art becomes a specific reality when the objective criteria defining the inclusion of a given practice within a defined art form, or enabling the assessment of the quality of works pertaining to this art form, disappear. The consequence is not the establishment of a body of almighty judges. The consequence, rather, is that, as Mallarmé upheld, the works must "prove themselves", that is to say they must propose singular formulas of this power that is henceforth unbound by norms. Further, this results in a multiplication of formulas, a multiplication of exchanges between art and its other. Criticism itself then becomes a sort of supplementary art more than an instance of normative judgement.

The same goes for politics. Because politics is not identified through power, because there is nothing that is political in itself, a multiplicity of inventions emerge, which are so many ways of challenging the limits within which politics was more or less confined and confiscated. To define things that are properly political, distinguishing them for example from that which is social, is the point of view I refer to as "*police*." Yet political action starts when this distribution is called into question, when collectives use this or that "social" issue to define a capacity for thinking and acting that pertains to all. With art and with politics, inventions and subjectifications constantly reconfigure the landscape of what is political and what is artistic.

5) If art is necessarily political, then how do we distinguish "engaged art" from other art forms? What can "engaged art" stand for?

J.R.: I did not say that art is necessarily political but that politics is inherent in the forms themselves, for example the museum, the book or the theatre. Then, there are the myriad inventions that reconfigure, directly or indirectly, the landscape of the visible, from those that purport to transform the furnishings of individual and collective life, according to the *Arts and Crafts* or *Bauhaus* models, or to convert the theatre stage into a site of collective action, in the fashion of Meyerhold or Artaud, right up to all those that rework the images through which a community recognizes itself and its world. These inventions define politics of art that remain the same whatever the artist's effective engagements may be: collage has served specifically targeted political denunciations as well as anarchic forms of destruction of an entire cultural universe or disenchanted affirmations of the equivalence of all things. The great political art forms of the 1920s-30s, like Brecht's epic theatre, constantly play with this plurality of politics contained within one formula. This is because the concept of engagement does not in itself define an art form. It defines the artist's will to place their work in the service of a particular cause. This is precisely what presupposes a split between the two domains, a necessity to de-neutralize art by making it articulate messages about the social world, or to withdraw it from its exclusive sphere by turning it into a direct instrument of intervention, from *agit-prop* to contemporary forms of intervention in deprived neighbourhoods or to the participation of artists as such in the big alter-globalization demonstrations. Historically, the tension was

resolved through the ambiguity of critical art; by producing a sensory strangeness, this art form was meant to prompt the spectator to seek the reason for this strangeness amongst the contradictions of the social world, and to become mobilized for action through this realization. The deduction was gratuitous, but the system functioned as long as the forms of contestation of the dominant order and the alternatives for the future were strong enough to anticipate its effect. When this is no longer the case, the system is emptied of substance and artists are drawn instead towards direct political activism.

--> HISTORY

6) In *Film Fables* you propose a conception of history as co-presence, as the potentiality of associating any sign with any other. This, you advance, is what has characterized history since its emergence two centuries ago. However, is yours not a postmodern conception of history, a vision of history as random collage, a spatialized vision that marks a break with the modern relation to history as a temporal blend of identity and difference, with history, to use Malraux's expression, as constant "metamorphosis" of beings, things, and civilizations, as the perpetual movement between death and rebirth in other forms and other configurations?

J.R.: The idea of history as a co-presence is in no way a postmodern invention. If it can be apprehended in this manner, it is due to a very simplistic understanding that binds "modernity" to the dominance of the "grand narrative". We conceive of "coexistence" then in terms of a plurality of dispersed and autonomous small narratives. But this is not at all what coexistence means and for over two centuries the concept of coexistence has been enmeshed with that of a movement of history towards the fulfilment of a promise. Since the end of the 18th century, the promotion of history as coexistence has been linked to the "aesthetic" revocation of the old opposition between action and life. "History" was the preserve of those who performed great deeds. The rest of humanity was meant to devote itself to life, that is, to routine and reproduction. Conversely, the modern conception of history takes into account lifeworlds in which the grand and the modest, amazing feats, works of art and forms of everyday life are perceived as the manifestations of the same process, of the same way of living. This egalitarian vision was the basis for the formation of conceptions of history as a movement towards the fulfilment of a promise of emancipation. The dominant form of the history of mentalities is a "cultural" repercussion of ideas of historical emancipation. But these ideas are themselves grounded in this "cultural" revolution that turned the production of necessary goods, works of art and brilliant thoughts and feats into the various facets of the same general process.

7) I would describe your approach to history as postmodern, also because the world itself seems to get sucked into the substance of the image, transformed into a surface of signs, and because the referent – what is outside the sign and which guarantees its existence

— is, as it were, lost. For if the modern moment is characterized by the emergence of the sign (as sign), this sign nevertheless had a referent as its structural opposite: thus, in the artistic domain, art could oppose reality — as an autonomous artistic utopia — or on the contrary it could act upon it — in so-called "engaged art" — the two forms being just two sides of the same coin. But today, particularly after the critiques of meaning as a dual entity, is the sign not on the contrary characterized by its univocal, omnipotent quality, and by the loss of this structural opposite, the referent, reality or world?

J.R.: Here two problems must be distinguished: firstly, there is history in the sense of narrative, fable, arrangement, and secondly there is history as a form of collective life. Let us start with the first sense: I have distinguished two major types of narrative: the representative narrative as an arrangement of actions, whose model is the Aristotelian fable, and the "aesthetic" narrative which is a process whereby signs are presented and deciphered. This has nothing to do with postmodernism or with the self-sufficiency of signs. On the contrary, this narrative mode has been closely linked to literary realism. It is the latter that challenged the old opposition between the dramatic logic of chains of actions and the insignificance of everyday life. When everyday life became a subject of art, this also signified a change in the regime of speech. The latter ceased to be the expression of a purposeful will. It became the manifestation of a meaning proper to life. With Balzac, for example, walls, clothing, objects start to speak. The aesthetic narrative opposed the significance of things themselves to the old rhetorical model of speech that is subordinate to the will of a speaker. Social science, critical theory and modern art forms were all strengthened by this expansion in the realm of signification that repudiated a separation between the materiality of things and the immateriality of signs. But what also needs to be acknowledged is that history as a form of collective life is indeed a matter of signs without a referent. No one has ever encountered the thing that would be the referent of the word history. History is a particular way of arranging events and meanings. Several arrangements can be put under this term: the history of great examples in the manner of Plutarch, the history-as-coexistence model of the moderns, a history directed towards a purpose, etc. Conversely, we can also conceive of forms of collective life without recourse to this referent. Similarly, the "people" of politics does not exist as a solid entity. It is a supplementary entity with respect to the counting (*le compte*) of the population and its parties. In any case, this supplementarity is what distinguishes a political people from other forms of gathering. Arrangements of signs are not opposed to reality, they are opposed to other arrangements of signs that construct different "realities". This does not strip anything of its material solidity, rather, it shifts the frameworks within which these solid things are for us organized into worlds.

--> CINEMA

8) In *Aesthetics and Politics* you posit that the political dimension of art resides in its capacity to produce "dissensus", the disruption of the established distribution of the sen-

sory, and the reshaping of a common (*le commun*). To what extent does film, as a mass medium and a privileged mode of collective perception ("*simultane Kollektivrezeption*", to use Benjamin's expression), play a special part in the reshaping of the common?

J.R.: It seems to me that there are two ideas that should not be conflated: that of popular art, that is, art that directs itself to all, and that of collective art that institutes a community. Film having emerged as a mass form of popular entertainment, it was therefore tempting, in the 1920s, to see it as a modern equivalent of Greek drama or the medieval cathedral. Film did not in fact have this role and the retrospective idea of its complicity with the great Fascist spectacle that we find in Godard's *Histoires du cinéma* is as abusive as are the dreams of a great collective ceremony that we find with writers such as Elie Faure in the 1930s. Film spectators remained individuals, they identified far less collectively than did their theatre-going peers. And film was primarily the vehicle not of mass emotions but rather of a mode of appropriation of new styles of individual life, or new forms of sensitivity to the poetry of the everyday. If film had a subversive role, it is due more to the fact that it extended the field of the Beautiful, blurred the boundaries between popular and high art, and created aesthetic passions and forms of evaluation that were not controlled by the dominant cultural authorities.

9) On reading *Film Fables* one feels that you are influenced not only by films but also by the culture of the directors and critics of the New Wave (Murnau, Eisenstein, Ray). Could you tell us more about the influence of the New Wave on your cinematographic work?

J.R.: The "New Wave" is not, in fact, a school that would have revolutionized the aesthetics of film. It is, rather, a particular historical configuration characterized by the affirmation of a new taste. The figures of the New Wave were influential as critics before becoming influential as directors. They proclaimed the passing of a certain aesthetic of a "*cinéma de qualité*". On the one hand they legitimized, against the latter, genres that were considered to be minor (the western, the thriller, the musical) or directors who were seen as failures or as mere Hollywood entertainers (Hawks, Walsh, Hitchcock, Minnelli, Cukor, amongst others). On the other hand they established a great tradition, an historical legacy to film from Murnau or Dreyer to Rossellini. The young New Wave directors challenged legitimate cinematographic art with the culture of the Cinémathèque, somewhat similarly to the manner in which the Impressionists challenged the academic lessons of their professors with the lessons on painting drawn from Rubens or Velasquez. But they did not produce a new doctrine of cinematographic art, and they never sought to institute a consistency between a passion for Rossellini and a passion for Minnelli. And, as directors, they produced very different works; Godard was the only one amongst them to really illustrate a certain tradition of the avant-garde, breaking with the traditional logic of plots, characters, situations and expressions. Thus, I would say that what marked an era and what counts for me is this widespread revolution in taste, this challenge to hierarchies, thus, what we could call the disorder of the New Wave, more than a fixed theory or usage of film. This disorder was important moreover because it coincided with other sea changes of the 1960s: Structuralism, the Marxist revival, anti-imperialist struggles and youth movements.

10) Finally, the films you cite and analyse are now elements of high or legitimate culture – unlike blockbusters or “lighter” or more “mainstream” films. To return to the cinematographic context and the question of legitimacy, do you regard the distinction between high and popular art as important, and what do you think about the attempts, essentially American (found, for example, in Noel Carroll and in Richard Shusterman’s work), to reinstate cultural forms which “serious” philosophers and critics hold in contempt?

J.R.: Anthony Mann’s films have only very recently become part of high culture – albeit not in the United States, where I recall having greatly surprised a Film Studies professor by citing an *auteur* he had never heard of and, after consulting an encyclopaedia, the professor remained no less perplexed vis-à-vis my interest in him. A great many films that are now part of high culture were for a long time “mainstream” films that were rejected by *cinéphile* culture. But *cinéphilie* itself was just a phase in a much longer history of the blurring of the boundaries between “mainstream” and legitimate film. The aesthetes of the 1910s celebrated serials and derided “art films” staging actors of the Comédie Française and reconstitutions of historical

1. An affectionate nickname for the Charlie Chaplin character in the French context (Translator’s note).

scenes. The major reference for those who wished to make film a legitimate art in the 1910s-20s, was *Charlot*¹ (at this point, people only considered *Charlot* the character, and not Chaplin the actor). It must also be added that this enthusiasm

for a certain kind of “popular” film was itself inscribed within an aesthetic trend that had been seeking, for a long time already, a renewal of inspiration drawn from the “minor arts”: circus, pantomime (Malarmé) or fairground shows (Meyerhold). Even “serious” philosophers adhered to this tradition. “The animal-madman-clown constellation”, claims Adorno, “is one of the foundations of art”. There is nothing to reinstate. What is called for, rather, is that we track the ways in which supposed opposites interpenetrate with one another. ✱

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Dossier: POETIC AND ARTISTIC ONTOLOGY

part 1

SURFACIALITY

Some Poems by Fernando Pessoa
and a Brief Sketch of a Poetic Ontology

SIMON CRITCHLEY

*'In "poetical" ("dichtenden") discourse, the communication of the existential possibilities of one's state-of-mind can become an aim in itself, and this amounts to a disclosing of existence'. Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, p.162*

Unbelievably, the word 'pessoa' means 'person' in Portuguese; and the original meaning of person, of course, is a mask or actor, as in the notion of *dramatis personae*. Those familiar with Fernando Pessoa's work will know that he wrote using a series of invented personae or 'heteronyms' that were not pseudonyms, but fictional voices complete with distinct biographies and dramatically different literary styles. He used at least 20 heteronyms, although we do not know for sure the exact number. After Pessoa's death in 1935, 27,500 fragments of writing were found in chests in his workroom in Lisbon, in much confusion and containing a profusion of fictional, aesthetic, philosophical, political, sociological and autobiographical writings, in addition to a large quantity of verse. As only 5,000, or less than a fifth, of these manuscripts have been published, there may well be some surprises in store in for? the future.

Pessoa's maxim is '*Sêr plural como o universo!*', 'Be plural as the universe!', (*Alguma Prosa*, p.41) and his work is a galaxy, a vast and decentred plurality of stars. In my view, what is important to grasp with the idea of heteronymic authorship is that this galaxy does not orbit around one creative God-like authorial sun, but is a vast, shifting and interconnected energy field with numerous and conflicting centres that form into distinct personages. As Bernardo Soares, whom Pessoa refers to as a 'semi-heteronym', writes in *The Book of Disquiet*, 'This book is the autobiography of a man who never existed'. What exists is a multitude irreducible to the authority of any imperial authorship.

I would like to examine a few poems by Pessoa, or rather by the heteronym Alberto Caeiro, who is always referred to as 'the master'. Caeiro was born in 1889, one year after Pessoa, and died of tuberculosis in 1915, although – somewhat mysteriously – the master heteronym continued to write poems posthumously through the person of Pessoa until 1930. Pessoa himself died in 1935 and may still be – who knows? –producing poems, perhaps through the person of someone reading this paper. Caeiro was recognised as

the master by two of Pessoa's other major poetic heteronyms, Alvaro de Campos, the sexually ambiguous Whitmanesque 'sensationalist' who smoked opium, drank absinthe and studied naval engineering in Glasgow; and Ricardo Reis, the Horatian classicist and monarchist sympathiser who fled to Brazil after the abdication of the last king of Portugal in 1910. In an extreme literary conceit, Caeiro was also recognised as the master poet by Pessoa himself, the orthonym as it were. What is perhaps most extraordinary about the galaxy of heteronyms is the intertextual communication, admiration and criticism that circles amongst the various personae, with Caeiro writing prefaces to the verse of Campos and Reis, Campos writing a memoir of Caeiro that is delightfully critical of Pessoa, Pessoa writing the preface to the 'Factless Autobiography' of Soares, and on, and on, and on... The shape of the galaxy keeps subtly shifting.

I would like to begin with Poem XXXIX by Caeiro,

O mistério das cousas, onde está ele?

Onde está ele que não aparece

Pelo menos a mostrar-nos que é mistério?

Que sabe o rio disso e que sabe a árvore?

E eu, que não sou mais do que eles, que sei disso?

Sempre que olho para as cousas e penso no que os homens pensam delas,

Rio como um regato que soa fresco numa pedra.

Porque o único sentido oculto das cousas

É elas não terem sentido oculto nenhum,

É mais estranho do que todas as estranhezas

E do que os sonhos de todos os filósofos,

Que as cousas sejam realmente o que parecem ser

E não haja nada que compreender.

Sim, eis o que os meus sentidos aprenderem sozinhos: -

As cousas não têm significação: têm existência.

As cousas são o unico sentido oculto das cousas.

The mystery of things — where is it?

Where is it, since it does not appear,

At least to show us that it's a mystery?

What does the river know about this and what does the tree know?

And I, who am no more than they, what do I know about this?

Whenever I look at things and think about what people think of them,

I laugh like a brook that sounds freshly against a rock.

For the only hidden meaning of things



Is that they have no hidden meaning at all.
 It is stranger than all estrangements,
 Than the dreams of all poets
 And the thoughts of all philosophers,
 That things are really what they seem to be
 And there's nothing to understand.

Yes, this is what my senses learned on their own:
 Things have no meaning; they have existence.
 Things are the only hidden meaning of things.

The poem sets out to undermine the idea of the mystery of things. For Caeiro, the mystery of things is that there is no mystery. Things are exactly as they seem to be and they have no hidden meaning. The hidden meaning is that things have no hidden meaning, where 'hidden' translates '*oculto*', a word that we will come back to. With regard to things, there is nothing to understand, for we understand them already. We understand them as they are and no more, but also no less. Caeiro insists -- and this is the most compelling thought in the poem -- that there is something stranger than all the dreams of poets and thoughts of philosophers: that things are really what they seem to be and there's nothing to understand. That is, we understand things already, always already as Heidegger might add, and the purpose of the poem is to point this out. This means that poetry, as nothing more but nothing less than the enactment of the poem itself, is the pointing out of that which we understand already, but have forgotten or passed over. That is, the poem gives us reminders, it functions as what I like to call 'everyday anamnesis', the recollection that brings us back to the fact that things are what they really seem to be. Such a notion of anamnesis does not, as it might do on a certain caricatural metaphysical reading of Plato, invoke the existence of some world behind the scenes, some invisible and hidden meaning that supports visible and manifest meaningfulness. On the contrary, as Caeiro insists, 'Things have no meaning', '*As cousas não têm significação*', in the sense of a hidden signification. What we can say of them, what the poet says of them, is that they exist, or better, that they *have* existence, *têm existência*. Things merely are; or better, they are in and through their mere existence in the world. This is what Campos calls his M(this isn't capitalized elsewhere- I think it should be lower case?) aster's 'direct concept of things' ('*ao conceito direto das coisas*', p.247)

This line of meditation is continued in a second poem,

*O que nós vemos das cousas são as cousas.
 Por que veríamos nós uma cousa se houvesse outra?
 Por que é que ver e ouvir seria iludirmo-nos
 Se ver e ouvir são ver e ouvir?*

*O essencial é saber ver,
 Saber ver sem estar a pensar,*

*Saber ver quando se vê,
 E nem pensar quando se vê
 Nem ver quando se pensa.*

*Mas isso (tristes de nós que trazemos a alma vestida!),
 Isso exige um estudo profundo,
 Uma aprendizagem de desaprender
 E uma seqüestração na liberdade daquele convento
 De que os poetas dizem que as estrelas são as freiras eternas
 E as flores as penitentes convictas de um só dia,
 Mas onde a final as estelas não são senão estrelas
 Nem as flores senão flores,
 Sendo por isso que lhes chamamos estrelas e flores*

What we see of things are the things.
 Why would we see one thing when another is there?
 Why would seeing and hearing be to delude ourselves
 When seeing and hearing are seeing and hearing?

The essential is knowing to see,
 To know seeing without thinking,
 To know seeing when seeing
 And not think when seeing

Nor see when thinking.

But this (sad are we who bring the soul clothed!) –

This requires deep study,

An apprenticeship in unlearning,

And a withdrawal into the freedom of that convent

Of which the poets say the stars are the eternal nuns

And the flowers the devout penitents of a single day,

But where after all the stars are but stars

And the flowers are just flowers,

Which is why we call them stars and flowers.

Although I am not at all sure about the image of the convent and the stars as eternal nuns (although Pessoa was first educated in a convent in Durban, South Africa), let's look more closely. We begin where we left off in the first poem, with the poet reminding us that what we see of things are things. Nothing more and nothing less. Just that. Such is Caeiro's, or Pessoa's, 'sensationism', which has a family resemblance to Ezra Pound's imagism and which is wonderfully and succinctly expressed by Pessoa in a letter to an English editor, (colon here?)

Art, fully defined, is the harmonic expression of our consciousness of sensations, that is to say, our sensations must be so expressed that they create an object which will be a sensation to others. Art is not, as Bacon said, 'man added to nature'; it is sensation multiplied by consciousness — multiplied, be it well noted.

Keeping those words in mind, particularly the idea of the multiplication of sensation through the activity of the mind, the argument of the poem is deceptively simple, but its consequence is vast. It is the disappearance of the philosophical problem of skepticism concerning the external world or other minds. Caeiro asks: why would we delude ourselves into thinking that another thing is in front of us rather than the thing that we see? Surely, seeing and hearing are seeing and hearing and that's that. If they weren't, then they wouldn't be seeing and hearing. But in the second stanza Caeiro makes a distinction between seeing and thinking. We become deluded, and the consequences of this will begin to become clear in the third poem, when we think instead of seeing and fail to see when thinking. That is, when seeing becomes thinking, then the possibility of skepticism announces itself and we bewitch ourselves with pointless ratiocination of various sorts: if the stick looks bent when I stick it in the pond, then how can I be sure of the evidence of my senses? Or, how can I be sure whether the people to whom I am speaking are really people like me and not automata or aliens from another planet who have snatched some local bodies? The problem, in Caeiro's words, the problem that gives rise to the so-called problem of skepticism, is that we have a clothed soul, *a alma vestida*, or what Richard Zenith translates as a 'dressed-up heart', and this is something *triste*, something sad. We translate the line, with deliberate awkwardness, as 'sad are we who bring the soul clothed'. Therefore, we need to undress that soul, unclothe that heart, in order to see things as things and not think about things. As Caeiro puts it with disarming directness elsewhere, 'I don't have philosophy: I have senses' (*'Eu não tenho filosofia: tenho sentido'*, 207)

Yet, unclothing one's soul is not so simple. Caeiro insists that it requires *um estudo profundo*, a deep study; it requires, in Richard Zenith's pleasing oxymoron, 'lessons in unlearning'. Yet, the phrase is stronger and more tautological in the original, *uma aprendizagem de desaprender*, an apprenticeship in 'disapprenticeship', in unlearning or forgetting. This is where we withdraw or become sequestered (*seqüestração*) in the freedom of that convent where the stars are nuns and the flowers are devout penitents.

When we have undergone this disapprenticeship, these lessons in unlearning, then finally we will be able to see that flowers are just flowers and stars are just stars, which is why we call them flowers and stars. What we unlearn when we learn to undress our soul is the realisation that things exist, or have existence, and that we see them before we think them. The 'scandal of philosophy', as Kant might say, is that we bewitch ourselves with thinking rather than seeing, and delude ourselves that such is both the properly philosophical attitude and the true comportment towards things. The scandal is philosophy itself, if by that word we denote the activity of thinking and the cultivation of the theoretical attitude towards things. As Caeiro puts it in the first of his *Poemas Inconjuntos*,

Não basta abrir a janela

Para ver os campos e o rio.

Não é bastante não ser cego

Para ver as árvores e as flores.

É preciso também não ter filosofia nenhuma.

Com filosofia não há árvores: há idéias apenas.

Há só cada um de nós, como uma cave.

Há só uma janela fechada, e todo o mundo lá fora;

E um sonho do que se poderia ver se a janela se abrisse,

Que nunca é o que se vê quando se abre a janela.

It is not enough to open the windows

To see the fields and the river.

It is not enough not to be blind

To see the trees and the flowers.

It is also necessary not to have any philosophy.

With philosophy there are no trees: there are only ideas.

There is only each of us, like a cave.

There is only one closed window and everybody is outside;

And a dream of what could have been if the window opened,

Which is never what is seen when the window is opened.

Philosophy is life in the cave with the dream of an open window, it is the monadic life of ideas cut off from sensuous contact with things. If we want to learn to see, then we have to unlearn philosophy. Poetry, we might conclude, is anti-philosophy. However, that conclusion is far too quick, for if we go back to the poem we can see that the similitude between stars and nuns and flowers and penitents is something that the poets say, *os poetas dizem*. Learning to see and not think also requires that we unlearn the lessons of the poets, those mystical poets who believe that stones have souls and rivers feel ecstasy in the moonlight. I will turn to this line of thought in a third poem, but this brings out an important strand in Caeiro's verse. He declares, 'I'm not even a poet: I see' (*'Eu nem sequer sou poeta: vejo'*, And in a fictional conversation between Caeiro and Campos, the latter reports of the former that what is important is not poetry, but see-

ing, '*Nem é poesia: é ver*'. (p.248) Elsewhere, Caeiro talks of the *prose* of his verse, 'As for me, I write the prose of my verses/And I get happy' ('*Por mim, escrevo a prosa dos meus versos/E fico contente*', XXVIII). If Caeiro is opposed to philosophy's theoreticism, then he is equally opposed to poetry's mysticism. He writes,

*Os poetas místicos são filósofos doentes,
E os filósofos são homens doidos.*

The mystical poets are sick philosophers,
And the philosophers are madmen. (XXVIII)

Permit me a brief anecdote: on the first occasion that I spoke publicly about Pessoa, the distinguished literary critic Marjorie Perloff was in the audience. Afterwards, we talked at length and she told me that her problem with Pessoa, at least with the Caeiro heteronym, was that she didn't think the work was *poetical* enough. In a way that she didn't intend, I think, she is right. Caeiro is against poetry's obfuscations and mystifications of our relation to things and perhaps that relation is best caught in the stark and disarmingly straightforward prose line of his verse. Perhaps Caeiro's poetry is an anti-poetry, or what I have called in relation to the very late lyrics of Wallace Stevens, a poetry of the antipodes of poetry.

The final poem by Caeiro that I would like to examine was written 'posthumously' in 1919, four years after his 'death'. The theme of the poem is the critique of mysticism and it pushes the line of thought that



we have seen in the first two poems in a slightly more radical direction.

*Tu, místico, vês uma significação em todas as cousas.
Para ti tudo tem um sentido velado.
Há uma coisa oculta em cada coisa que vês.
O que vês, vê-lo sempre para veres outra coisa.*

*Para mim, graças a ter olhos só par aver,
Eu vejo ausência de significação em todas as cousas;
Vejo-o e amo-me, porque ser uma coisa é não significar nada.
Ser uma coisa é não ser susceptível de interpretação.*

You, mystic, see a meaning in all things.
For you everything has a veiled sense.
There is something hidden in each thing you see.
What you see you always see to see something else.

For me, by grace of having eyes only for seeing,
I see an absence of meaning in all things;
I see this and I love myself, since to be a thing is to mean nothing.
To be a thing is not to be susceptible to interpretation.

The poem is addressed in the second person singular to the mystic, '*Tu, místico*', where the comma breaks up the rhythm of the line for added emphasis. The mystic is the person, often the figure of the poet in Caeiro, who sees a meaning in all things and for whom all things have a veiled sense, *um sentido velado*. Elsewhere, Caeiro writes,

*Li hoje quasi duas páginas
Do livro dum poeta místico
E ri como quem tem chorado muito.*

Today I read almost two pages
Of a book by a mystical poet
And laughed like someone who has been crying a lot. (XXVIII)

For the mystic, the mere existence of things is only a path that points beyond them to their hidden or occult meaning; once again, the word Caeiro uses is *oculta*. The mystic – or indeed any person whose religion involves a commitment to invisible realities -- has an intuition of a reality behind appearances, an intellectual intuition whose keys, clues or symbols are written into appearances. The world becomes

the visible symbol of the invisible truth of the divinity, whether this entails a belief in nature as the visible book written by the invisible hand of God or whatever, as for example in what is laughably called 'intelligent design' at the present time. (I would just delete this...) Mysticism can be defined here as the belief in a power of metaphysical intuition, or an intuition of a hidden meaning or a world behind the scenes. The mystic 'sees' or 'thinks he sees' the hidden meaning of reality behind the disorderly meaninglessness of appearances, which is a deceptive trait common to gurus, sophists and some poets, from antiquity to contemporary new ageism. For Caeiro, on the contrary, all we see is an absence of meaning, *ausência de significação*, of meaning absenting itself in perception, 'to be a thing is to mean nothing./To be a thing is not to be susceptible to interpretation', *'ser uma coisa é não significar nada./Ser uma coisa é não ser susceptível de interpretação'*.

Yet, how are we to understand the meaning of this statement? Are things meaningless? What is the meaning of this declaration of meaninglessness and this denial of interpretation? Well, it is said (perhaps 'uttered,' 'spoken' or something else better here...get's confused otherwise with 'it is said that', as in, 'common understanding has it...' because of the aside) -- and here is the essential paradox of Caeiro's poetry, which encloses the meta-paradox that his words were not written by him but by the *peessoa* of another -- in an act of meaningful interpretation. The poem is the formal, wrought and beautifully articulated meaning of meaninglessness. To see an absence of meaning in all things means, I think, seeing things without imagining some sort of hidden or occult meaning behind the scenes or interpreting the visible world by referring it to some invisible domain. The point for Caeiro and for us is learning to see things without thinking, to see that things are, that they exist as such and they have been disclosed. We do not see in order to see something else, something occult; rather we see in order to see precisely what stands before us. In the words of the first poem, there is nothing to understand because we understand things already. To think is not to understand, and to understand is not to think,

*Creio no mundo como num malmaquer,
Porque o vejo. Mas não penso nele
Porque pensar é não compreender...*

I believe in the world as in a daisy,
Because I see it. But I do not think about it
Because to think is not to understand...

Of course, one might say that Caeiro is simply replacing one kind of mysticism with another: that is, rejecting an other-worldly mysticism of the transcendent beyond with the here-and-now mysticism of immanent perceptual presence. To which Caeiro might respond, 'that's fine' (*está bem*); his would be a mysticism of the body, of the bodily presence of things to the senses. The contrast is between what we might call a mysticism of gnosis that claims to see beyond appearances to their invisible source of meaning and an agnostic mysticism that is essentially thoughtless. Caeiro does not claim to *know* anything about nature; he simply sings what he sees,

Se quiserem que eu tenha um misticismo, está bem, tenho-o.
Sou místico, mas só com o corpo.
A minha alma é simples e não pensa.

O meu misticismo é não querer saber.
É viver e não pensar nisso.

Não sei o que é a Natureza: canto-a.
Vivo no cimo dum outeiro
Numa casa caiada e sozinha,
E essa é a minha definição.

If you'd like me to have a mysticism, that's fine, I have it.
I'm a mystic, but only with the body.
My soul is simple and doesn't think.

My mysticism is not wanting to know.
It is to live and not to think about this.

I don't know what nature is: I sing it.
I live in the top of a small hill
In a whitewashed and solitary house,
And this is my definition. (XXX)

For Caeiro, we need an apprenticeship in unlearning in order to learn to see and not to think. We need to learn to see appearances and nothing more, and to see those appearances not as the appearances of some deeper but veiled reality, but as *real* appearances. Of course, it is often hugely difficult to even see those appearances, as our vision becomes obscured by habit, by what Pascal called the machine. Such machinic habit is what Caeiro calls the 'sickness of the eyes' that happens when we think and do not see, '*Pensar é estar doente dos olhos*'. (II 207) In our sickness, we pass over what is most *obvious*, most familiar and closest to us, namely the phenomenon of the world, the fact that things simply are, in their plain, palpable and everyday presence. What Caeiro counsels is that we give up both the skeptical and mystical impulses that are distrustful of the world of appearances. If we follow the path of Caeiro's disapprenticeship, then what we might learn to cultivate is the art of appearances, the prose of things that surround us, those things that escape our attention because of their sheer obviousness, because they are under our noses. Everyday anamnesis returns us to the recalcitrant and enigmatic surfaces of things. To avoid the skeptical and mystical impulses means -- and this is important -- resisting two temptations, the philosophical and the poetic. Both are forms of sickness that lead us away from the difficulty of the obvious.

Campos reports that he was away in England when Caeiro died, while Reis was in Brazil. Pessoa himself was present, but -- Campos adds, deliciously -- it is as if he wasn't (*'mas é como se não estivesse'*, p.249). Campos once asked Caeiro, 'Are you happy with yourself?', to which he replied, 'No, I am happy'.

*

For reasons that I hope soon become clear, at this point I would like to sidestep into Heidegger and connect what we have learnt from Caeiro's writing with some passages from *Sein und Zeit*, particularly Heidegger's remarks on understanding, interpretation and meaning. Hopefully, the light cast here will reflect both ways: onto both Caeiro's and Heidegger's words. As readers of *Sein und Zeit* will know, there is precious little discussion of the ostensive subject matter of the book -- the meaning of being -- and Heidegger keeps nudging it into the future until it falls over the edge of the published tome. Heidegger focuses rather on trying to define the meaning of the being of that being for whom being is an issue, namely the human being or *Dasein*. Yet, about five chapters into the First Division of the book, Heidegger momentarily pulls back and expands the focus of his concern. He writes,

If we are inquiring about the meaning of being, our investigation does not then become a "deep" one (*tiefsinnig*), nor does it puzzle out what stands behind being. It asks about being insofar as being enters into the intelligibility of *Dasein*. The meaning of being can never be contrasted with entities, or with being as the 'ground' (*Grund*) which gives entities support; for a 'ground' becomes accessible only as meaning, even if it is itself the abyss of meaninglessness (*Abgrund der Sinnlosigkeit*). (SuZ 152)

That is, meaning is not deep. It is not a question looking beyond what appears for some hidden meaning which structures appearance. Inquiry into the meaning of being is not deep either. It just sounds deep. It sounds like we are after a ground, something determinate but hidden, something behind the scenes that pulls the strings of the world's stage. This is what we might call a metaphysical misconstrual of both the meaning of meaning and the possible meaning of the meaning of being. The problem with being-talk is that it sounds as if being has some fantastic agency of its own, or that it is 'miraculously transcendent' as Glaucon ironically replies to Socrates as he is about to introduce the three similes for the relation of the soul to the Good at the enigmatic centre of the *Republic*. One can easily entertain the mistaken idea that being is the puppet master pulling the strings behind the scenes, doing amazing things like shaping human action in the world and producing various historical epochs. This is an error. Worse still, it succumbs to the sort of obscurantist temptation that continually seduces readings and readers of Heidegger. Too many readers of Heidegger see being as some kind of rabbit in a hat. There is no rabbit. The point is to learn to see the hat without wanting the rabbit.

Heidegger only asks (*can* only ask) about the meaning of being insofar as being enters into the intelligibility of *Dasein*. The latter is characterised from the first pages of *Sein und Zeit* by its possession of understanding of being (*Seinsverständnis*), although this is admittedly vague and average. So, meaning can only mean insofar as there is *Dasein*. That is, meaning is *Dasein*-dependent, or as Heidegger puts it,

'Meaning is an existential of *Dasein*, not a property attaching to entities, lying "behind" them, or floating somewhere as an "intermediate domain"'. (SuZ 151) As Heidegger says, meaning is the 'upon which' '*das Woraufhin*' in terms of which something becomes intelligible *as* something. But this 'upon which' is nothing other than *Dasein* itself insofar as *Dasein* lays itself out (*sich auslegt*) as that being that understands meaningfulness.

Of course, this is the meaning of interpretation or *Auslegung* in Heidegger, where interpretation is understood as the laying out (*auslegen*) of the understanding, or the act by which understanding becomes aware of itself. In interpretation, Heidegger writes in one of his characteristic tautologies, '...understanding appropriates understandingly that which is understood by it (*...eignet sich das Verstehen sein Verstandenes verstehend zu*). In interpretation, understanding does not become something different. It becomes itself.' (SuZ, 148) Of course, this is to say that the act of interpretation is retro-active, it is the retroactivity or reactivation of a prior understanding. Here we enter what Heidegger sees as the hermeneutic circle. Interpretation already understands, and what interpretation lays out is already understood and must have been already so understood. Heidegger suggests that interpretation differs from what we might call 'normal' scientific proof, or the logic of discovery, where it is illegitimate to presuppose what we must provide grounds for.. With everyday human life in the world, or what we may call social being, it is precisely the other way around, and we have to presuppose that which we provide grounds for, namely understanding. We are always stuck in a circle; we can hope only to enter it in the right way and not try to get out. As may already have become clear, in my view poetry also moves within the hermeneutic circle. The poet issues reminders for what we already know and interprets what we already understand but have not made explicit. Poetry takes things as they are and as they are understood by us, but in a way that we have occluded through force of habit, a contempt born of familiarity, or Caeiro's 'sickness of the eyes'. As Caeiro says, 'To think is not to understand'. Poetry returns us to our familiarity with things through the de-familiarisation of poetic saying. What the poet discovers is what we knew already, but had covered up: the world in its plain simplicity and palpable presence. Thus, we reach lucidity. But this lucidity is not a propositional explicitness, it is not the cognitive awareness that 'water is everywhere and at all times two parts hydrogen to one part oxygen', or that 'Benjamin Franklin was the inventor of the lightning rod'. It is rather a lucidity at the level of feeling that the poetic word articulates without making cognitively explicit, as when Pessoa writes in a text on sensationism, 'Lucidity should only reach the threshold of the soul. In the very antechambers of feeling it is forbidden to be explicit'. Poetry produces felt variations in the appearances of things that return us to the understanding of things that we endlessly pass over in our desire for knowledge.

Now, Heidegger's inquiry into the human being is phenomenological, it is concerned with trying to elicit *Dasein*'s being-in-the-world phenomenologically. Crucially, this is also not a deep inquiry. Heidegger defines the Greek words '*phainomenon*' as 'that which shows itself,' and '*logos*' as 'that which lets see'. Therefore, phenomenology is that which lets us see what shows itself -- a tautology, as Heidegger was perfectly aware. Phenomenology also moves within the hermeneutic circle and this is not a matter of occult,

hidden or deep meanings, it is a question of surfaces. The phenomena, as those surfaces that show themselves, have to be brought to appearance through the activity of *logos*, or what Heidegger calls discourse, talk or *Rede*, which is perhaps the most important and elusive concept in *Sein und Zeit*. It is discourse that lets us see what shows itself; it is the activity of talking that reactivates our prior and *a priori* understanding of things.

Yet, if I say that phenomenology is not deep inquiry, that does not then mean that it is superficial. Phenomenology is the refusal of metaphysical or mystical depth and the cultivation of surfaces. It is a matter of opening one's eyes and seeing the palpably obvious fact of the world that faces one and that one faces. Human life in the world is two surfaces that touch and resonate each with the other. Phenomenology gives lessons in unlearning that allow us to relearn how to see the world. Now, in my fancy at least, I want to imagine poetry as phenomenology, as an art of surfaces or the cultivation of what we might call *surficiality*. The problem is that these surfaces only show themselves with great difficulty, they are enigmatic surfaces that come to appearance through the felt variations that flow from the poet's words. I think this is what Heidegger has in mind in the sentence from *Sein und Zeit* that I chose as my epigraph. Poetry, in the broad sense of *Dichtung* or creation is the disclosure of existence, the difficult bringing to appearance of the fact that things exist. By listening to the poet's words, we are drawn outside and beyond ourselves to a condition of being there with things where they do not stand over and(?) against us as objects, but where we stand with those things in an experience of what I like to call, with a nod to Rilke, *openedness*, a being open to things, an interpretation which is always already an understanding (hence the past tense) in the *surficial* space of disclosure. If this sounds a little mystical, then I'd like to say with Caeiro, '*está bem, tenho-o*'. If there is a mystery to things, it is not at all other-worldly, or some mysticism of the hidden. On the contrary, the mystery of things is utterly of this world and the labour of the poet consists in the difficult elaboration of the space of existence, the openedness within which we stand. ✱

This paper is dedicated and deeply indebted to Thamy Pogrebinski.

The poems by Caeiro that I cite are co-translated with Thamy Pogrebinski. They are indebted to the versions published by Richard Zenith in Fernando Pessoa & Co. *Selected Poems* (Grove Press, New York, 1998), although I have striven for much greater literality than Zenith. For the original text, see Fernando Pessoa, *Obra Poética* (Editora Nova Aguilar, Rio de Janeiro, Third Edition, 1969).

Poems are referred to by the numbers given in the *Obra Poética*.

The Poetic Strategy

HILARY LAWSON

Is poetry capable of approaching a truth which lies beyond the grasp of literal meaning? In the face of the perceived failure of the literal to describe the nature of the world, philosophers, from Heidegger to Rorty, have been tempted by poetry as a possible alternative strategy. What however is the poetic strategy capable of delivering? If poetry avoids saying something in particular how is it capable of saying anything at all? Using TS Eliot's Quartets as a focus I will explore the potential and the limits of such a strategy and outline some consequences for our understanding of language and the world.

Describing the world is a strangely perplexing process. It feels as if it should be effortless, but the more closely we seek to say how things are, the more we uncover our failure to do so. It is an outcome that philosophy both uncovers and relies upon for its continued existence. No doubt it is for this reason that poetry and philosophy, so seemingly distinct in their approach to the world, find themselves deeply entwined.

Now there are, of course, those who suppose that the task of describing the world is in some way solvable, who think we can access, in Richard Rorty's phrase, 'the really real'. It is a view adopted by many scientists and widely held in our culture, and embedded in the notion of progress and the increasing knowledge of humankind. In the philosophical world it is characterised as realism. Realist philosophers, and those who endorse the project to correctly describe an independent reality, have tended to regard poetry as a romantic flourish, a flowery plaything, while the true work of language takes place in the realm of the literal. Poetry may express emotion or create a mood, the emotion may be powerful and deep, but it has no place in our understanding of the world and is secondary and dependent on agreed and fixed meanings that we use in our factual descriptions.

In contrast, in an article published just a few months ago, within six months of his death, Rorty proposed that poetry was the source of the imagination, and without imagination, he argued, there would be



no new words, and without new words, no reasoning, no intellectual or moral progress.^a Poetry is the fire of life. By giving poetry a central rather than secondary place, Rorty placed himself in a line of, what I shall call, 'non-realist' philosophers that includes Nietzsche, Heidegger, Wittgenstein and Derrida, and who between them have perhaps been the primary philosophical figures of non-analytic philosophy. Non-realism is not about the assertion of a different set of existent things separate from the material which is prior or more real. Instead it is a challenge to the possibility of saying how things are, a challenge to our ability to speak of the really real. Unlike the anti-realist, the non-realist denies the very possibility of an ontology.

Each of these non-realist philosophers provided their own particular challenge to realism, and each grappled with the puzzle of how to respond to the perceived failure of the realist project. In each case they were led to place poetry or a poetic stance at the centre of the philosophical endeavour. They did so not in some romantic desire to escape the literal but in response to what they saw as the failure of the literal to deliver philosophic truths about the nature of the world. The attachment to poetry, as a metaphorical use of language, is not an outcome of a wooliness of thinking, or a lack of rigour, as critics have sometimes argued, but is the consequence of a determined and unflinching thinking through of the realist project and a recognition of its impossibility.

I do not intend here to rehearse the arguments against realism other than to note that realism cannot get off the ground without a theory about the means by which language describes or is hooked onto the world, and Hilary Putnam, the renowned American analytic philosopher, has described this project to identify the relationship between language and world as being 'in tatters'. Furthermore, at the outset of the analytic school of thought, Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* concluded that an account of the relationship between language and the world is not possible because the account would have to stand outside of language itself. Non-realists maintain that in the 90 years since that conclusion, no viable realist response has been forthcoming.

While the challenge to realism is substantial, the alternative is far from evident. It is perhaps the difficulty of the non-realist 'position' — if for the moment one can call it such — that has enabled realists to pursue the metaphysical project, to say how things ultimately are, against the odds. For realists, however difficult it is to form a viable realist theory -- and all admit its complexity -- the alternative is notably less appealing; for non-realism is seemingly at once embedded in a mire. If it is not possible to say how the world really is, if it is not possible to connect language to the world, how is the non-realist to find a means to express any view at all? There are times when Nietzsche, Heidegger, Wittgenstein and Derrida appear to be making claims about the nature of the world and of the human condition, but on reflection they cannot hold to any of these claims for, were they to do so, they would seemingly be retaining an implicit realism. The denial of our capacity to describe the really real would appear also to involve the denial of that denial itself. Such is the non-realist predicament.

It is for this reason that the non-realist is led towards poetry. If we are not capable of describing

the world, such a claim cannot be made literally without it being at once self-denying. For, if the statement 'we are not capable of describing the world' is itself taken as a description of the world — which at first sight it appears to be — it is not possible to provide the statement with meaning since it denies itself. More broadly, a non-realist account requires a means by which expression and meaning is made possible without it being at the same time a commitment to asserting a given state of affairs. If realists require an account of how language is hooked onto the world, non-realists require an account of how we can have meaning and can intervene successfully without access to the really real. Non-realist philosophers would certainly appear to be trying to say how things are in some sense even if they cannot do so directly, even if they choose to describe this saying as playing in the language game, or exploring our vocabulary, or unravelling the tradition from within. And it is here that a poetic stance seemingly allows the non-realist philosopher a space from which to be able to speak and a means of talking that does not involve a commitment to the real. Hence Wittgenstein's remark: 'I think I summed up my attitude to philosophy when I said: 'Philosophy ought really to be written only as *poetic composition*'.^b Or Heidegger's: 'Poetically, man dwells on this earth.'^c

It is the late Wittgenstein and late Heidegger who find in the poetic strategy a response to the implicit realism of their early works. It is in his later work that Rorty advocates the poeticisation of culture, and at the end of his life, after he is diagnosed with cancer, that Rorty comments: 'I now wish that I had spent somewhat more of my life with verse'.^d (Perhaps the desire of young men to build edifices of thought is tempered by age, and failure.) T.S. Eliot, however, came to the same conclusion, and for similar reasons, at the outset of his career. He came from Harvard to study at Oxford in 1914, not as poet but as a budding philosopher. Two years later, while still in England, he submitted a dissertation, on 'Knowledge and Experience in the philosophy of FH Bradley', to Harvard as part of his doctorate. It was not published until 1964, less than a year before his death and is remarkable for the way in which it prefigures relativist and poststructural standpoints elaborated by non-realist philosophers many years later.

In his conclusion Eliot adopts the perspectival stance typical of non-realism when he writes:

"We are certain of everything — relatively, and of nothing — positively".^e

And goes on to argue, in terms that could almost have been written by Derrida a half century later:

"Any assertion about the world, or any ultimate statement about any object in the world, will inevitably be an interpretation. It is a valuation and an assignment of meaning. The things of which we are collectively certain, we may say our common formulae, are certainly not true. What makes a real world is difference of opinion."^f

Eliot takes up a radical non-realist stance providing a critique not of material reality but the very possibility of things:

'The fact that we can only think in terms of things does not compel us to the conclusion that reality consists of things. We have found from the first that the thing is thoroughly relative, that it exists only in a context of experience, of experience with which it is continuous.'^g

These are remarkable conclusions, written two years before Wittgenstein wrote the *Tractatus*, 10 years before Heidegger's *Being and Time*, 50 years before Derrida coined the term deconstruction and introduced the notion of 'différance', and demonstrate the sophistication and originality of Eliot's philosophical thinking (as Childs, Shusterman and Michaels have catalogued in some detail). Just as similar conclusions led Wittgenstein to abandon the attempt to make general philosophical claims about the world, so we can conclude Eliot was led as a young man to abandon philosophy in favour of poetry. Not as an abandonment of the rational but as its extension.

I Non-realism may lead to poetry but what is poetry capable of delivering? Amongst non-realist philosophers the strongest claims are made by Heidegger who sees poetry as the means to approach an understanding not available to us from the literal. For Heidegger, the poet is engaged in the attempt to name that which is holy. Poetry allows us insight into the essence of Being.

'... poetry is the inaugural naming of being and of the essence of all things...' ^h

T.S. Eliot can be seen to adopt his own version of this strong thesis, expressed in the context of the Absolute rather than Being. Eliot does not claim that poetry can arrive at the Absolute any more than Heidegger supposes that poetry can reach Being, but in both cases poetry provides a means to approach an underlying truth — even if that truth is itself ineffable.

Others have explicitly challenged this view, seeing the claim that poetry can provide insight into the essence of being as a residual hankering after the metaphysical. Rorty, for example, in explaining his attachment to poetry says: 'This is not because I fear having missed out on truths that are incapable of statement in prose. There are no such truths; there is nothing about death that Swinburne and Landor knew but Epicurus and Heidegger failed to grasp. Rather, it is because I would have lived more fully if I had been able to rattle off more old chestnuts — just as I would have if I had made more close friends. Cultures with richer vocabularies are more fully human — farther removed from the beasts — than those with poorer ones'.ⁱ

All of the non-realists can be seen, however, to hold the weaker thesis that language is poetic in character. Rorty is perhaps the most explicit, arguing for the poeticisation of culture, by which he does not mean that we should all become poets but rather that we should identify the poetic element inherent in our descriptions of the world and in our culture generally. For Rorty, the scientist, the historian and the novelist all use language poetically. They do so through the invention of new words and new vocabularies to say new things. For Wittgenstein and Derrida, the poetic character of language is expressed as an ambiguity of meaning, or an inability to provide decidable meaning; for Heidegger and Nietzsche, it is shown in their poetic disposition.

There is a fundamental difficulty however with both the strong and weak theses. As Rorty identified, the strong thesis, that poetry might be a key to a deeper truth, appears at once to hark back to the literal, to the desire for a metaphysical reality. The weak thesis is perhaps less evidently but nevertheless equally challenged. For how are we to understand this poetic stance? We cannot take it to be a claim about the nature of language, a literal description of a true state of affairs, namely that language is poetic in character. As if we have in this understanding a quick glimpse into the really real. As if we have caught site of the true nature of language and, implicitly, what it is to be human. But if the poetic stance is not asserting something about the nature of language, in what does it consist? Where is Rorty's theory of meaning that enables him to give us an account of how we are to understand his claims that are not claims, his descriptions of our circumstances which are not such descriptions, and which provides us with an explanation of the means by which language as poetry is able to generate specific meaning?

As I understand it, Rorty's reply is that we find ourselves at a particular juncture, with a particular vocabulary and its set of literal metaphors, and as such we do not need an explanation to understand what he is saying. Such a reply, however, seems to me to have already provided the explanation, has already given us our metaphysics, with which we can interpret Rorty's perspective. As with those he describes as being engaged in ironist theory, Rorty wishes to provide us with a perspective which denies the possibility of authority. Recognising the reflexive problems of such a proposal, his solution is to opt out of the literal in favour of the poetic. The problem with such an approach is that if such a solution was a solution, it is not clear how he could not tell us about it.

A similar critique can be made of the later Wittgenstein and Derrida. What is unique about Eliot is that unlike his fellow non-realists, Eliot abandons philosophy early in his career – one must suppose for these very reasons – and devotes his life to poetry and criticism. In doing so Eliot prefigures Wittgenstein's notion of language as use and Rorty's pragmatism but in contrast with them the impossibility of objective truth is precisely what drives Eliot to a pursuit of a paradoxical Absolute. Eliot's references to the Absolute are of course in the context of FH Bradley's Hegelian notions of the Absolute but his arguments are strangely contemporary:

'.... 'objective' truth is a relative truth: all that we care about is how it works; it makes no difference whether a thing really is green or blue, so long as everyone behaves toward it on the belief that it is green and blue. ...

And this emphasis upon practice – upon the relativity and the instrumentality of knowledge – is what impels us toward the Absolute.¹

'And furthermore no judgment is true until you understand it; and you never wholly understand it; because 'understanding' experience means merely knowing how to use it; so that what we actually know of a judgment is not its truth but its utility (and truth never is utility). That at which we aim is the real as such; and the real as such is not an object.'^k

Eliot does not therefore give up the attempt to say how things are, even though he is convinced of

the impossibility of being able to do so. In this respect, he has more in common with Heidegger than with Wittgenstein, Rorty or Derrida. Those who argue for the end of metaphysics may be tempted to dismiss this approach as a task worthy of Don Quixote. Eliot's defence must be that metaphysics are unavoidable, that Wittgensteinian silence, Derridian unravelling and deconstruction and Rortyesque poeticisation cannot eradicate a residual 'position' while still retaining content. The denial of metaphysics is itself metaphysical. And it is for this reason that we have to continue to pursue the real even though we know – and I use the word with caution – that the real is not achievable.

III

Of the non-realists, Eliot is in many respects the most radical. The question to consider is to what extent Eliot is successful with his radical poetic strategy. In response to this question, I'm going to focus on The Four Quartets as Eliot's most evident attempt to approach philosophical truths, albeit that they are at once not truths.

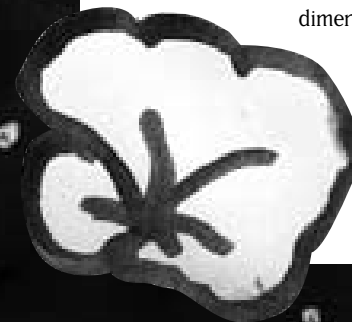
In these poems I will argue that Eliot succeeds to a remarkable degree in approaching something that we might be tempted to call an underlying truth. He does not of course do so by stating a position, but allows the text to propose an insight only to undermine its own pretensions and thereby leave us with a notion that we have passed close by to somewhere that cannot be named. In this manoeuvring there are certainly echoes of the later Heidegger but with a greater sense of illusion and of unstated strangeness.

In the short space available I can only provide a limited indication of this success. Of course I also risk appearing to say straightforwardly what Eliot is so careful to avoid saying directly, or at all. My description should be taken therefore not as a description but as a temporary way of holding the Quartets which may help to explain my judgment as to their success.

One of the central themes in the Four Quartets is the nature of time. Eliot offers us a number of alternative stories about time each with their own linked set of metaphors. There is time as the momentary present: the shaft of sunlight in which we spend our lives. There is time as passage: the river we flow along. And time as the sea, time as it stretches before and after the moment of the present, out to the edges of the beginning and the end. I want to suggest that we approach these perspectives on time as precise descriptions of our experience and of reality rather than supposing them to be a poetic flourish. We find ourselves in the moment of the present, a present from which we cannot escape, a present which provides everything that there is.

Yet we are also in the ocean of time, part, we might say in the context of the Einsteinian story, of four dimensional space time. Our lives, our civilisation, an inconsequential eddy in the vastness of this ocean. And between these two static poles there is time as movement, as coming and going, as becoming and passing away.

Each of these perspectives on time are attempts to describe how it is to be alive. Yet time is all of these seemingly incompatible things. And where Eliot's



poetic and philosophic brilliance comes to the fore is his ability to both describe with fine precision each of these perspectives, but at the same time illustrate the inherent strangeness and paradox of each description so that we cannot be content with having understood but have instead a sense of having passed close by to a truth which if examined closely would be seen to be illusory.

Take for example one of these perspectives in a little more detail. Time as the momentary present. This is the moment of subjectivity, the moment of experience. It is the moment we can always point to as 'now'. It is a strange place this momentary present despite the fact that we spend our time there. For here we are now. In this now together. There is nothing else at this moment for us than the now. Memories can be part of this present but they do not give us access to the past and are instead hazy versions of a previous present held in the now. The past a memory, the future an imaginary space, we have only the present. Yet this present that is at once all that we have, is also somehow wafer thin, almost without substance.

Eliot describes this present in his famous phrase 'the still point of the turning world'.¹ Still, because in the momentary present there is no movement. Movement only happens between moments of the present. The world outside of the present turns, but the moment is still. If there was movement within the momentary present it would have duration and could be subdivided into shorter instants. It was this paradox that Zeno relied upon to argue against instants and in favour of the One. It is a paradox that many believe we have now excised with Cantor's notion of infinity but in doing so we replace the paradox of the present with the paradox embedded in the notion of infinity itself. Within the phrase, 'the still point of the turning world', Eliot has already incorporated an essential strangeness, an ineffability to a description of the now. The description contains its contradiction. The present is still yet the world, of which it is part, turns. Yet despite, or perhaps even because of, the contradiction we have sense of understanding what Eliot is seeking to say.

Eliot goes on to describe this present as 'Neither flesh nor fleshless; Neither from nor towards'. It is the same strategy of internal contradiction, but this is not empty poetic rhetoric. The present is not flesh in the sense that it is not of the physical. The wafer thin present of experience has no corporeality. It is not of the body. Pure subjectivity is somehow ethereal. And yet, it is not empty, it is not fleshless. It has content and distinguishes itself as being itself. Nor is there a sense of direction in the present. In the moment of the present there is no sense of being caused by the past, it is just itself. Nor does it cause any subsequent present. We are simply here, now, in the moment. A strangeness that Hume so extensively grappled with. So Eliot's description of the present: 'Neither flesh, nor fleshless; Neither from nor towards', is a precise and accurate description, but is expressed in a contradictory manner. Here Eliot offers us what we might imagine is a glimpse of the Absolute, of how things really are, and he tries to get as close as possible, to be as precise as possible, but at the same time to express this precision in a way which undermines the notion that the Absolute has been described, for the description is at once something that cannot be fully held because it does not allow for a resting point.

Now you might wish to argue that Eliot is here relying on different meanings of the word 'flesh', and

that the seeming contradiction is in fact a poetic creation. Instead we can see Eliot using these words to highlight the limitation of all description. There is no literal meaning accessible for Eliot just as there is no literal meaning for Derrida. Meaning is undecidable and we operate in the play of language. Eliot seeks to draw our attention to the limitation of our vocabulary by highlighting its contradiction and thereby the strangeness of our predicament. In offering us a precise description and at the same time undermining this description in each phrase, and as a whole, Eliot gives us a sense of having glimpsed the Absolute and at the same time demonstrates that such a glimpse is illusory. In this play the reader has the impression of having caught sight of something about the nature of the world and our place in it. Not because of the accuracy of the description, or because of the deliberate undermining of that description, but in the search after accuracy and its failure.

In subsequent phrases Eliot reasserts this account of the present, repeating its paradox in new forms:

'.... At the still point, there the dance is,
But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity,
Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from nor towards,
Neither ascent nor decline.'

And then Eliot reminds us that this strange ineffable present, this stuff of paradox, is all that we have even though it is at the same time no thing.

' . Except for the point, the still point,
There would be no dance, and there is only the dance.'

One way of understanding Eliot's underlying strategy is a means to avoid the text becoming static. He describes precisely but in such a manner that the description cannot be held. Contradiction is only one of his tools to achieve this outcome. More broadly his text is a moving raft of metaphor that evades all capture. We can see the example of the momentary present repeated throughout the Quartets, both in specific phrases and sentences that offer and undermine themselves in the one gesture, and as a whole, in the way that the poems develop and refer back to previous metaphors only to use them in a new context and thereby deepen the previous offering and undermine that offering.

As a philosopher Eliot argued:

'The Absolute, we find, does not fall within any of the classes of objects: it is neither real nor unreal nor imaginary.'²

As a poet he abandons this attempt to philosophically describe our circumstances and instead avoids offering any description which can be held as such. Eliot describes this process himself in a later Quartet:

'So here I am, in the middle way, having had twenty years —
Twenty years largely wasted, the years of l'entre deux guerres —
Trying to learn to use words, and every attempt
Is a wholly new start, and a different kind of failure

Because one has only learnt to get the better of words.
For the thing one no longer has to say, or the way in which
One is no longer disposed to say it."ⁿ

Again it will be apparent that this is no mere rhetorical poetic remark but a precise description of Eliot's predicament. And it is, of course, at once the non-realist predicament. Here is a sentiment that could, for example, equally apply to Derrida's canon, and to which Derrida himself would surely approve. If meaning is undecidable it cannot be expressed as such. Derrida offers us a variety of terms to explicate our circumstances: deconstruction, absence, *différance*, trace, each adopted and abandoned in turn. His continual reinvention of his own vocabulary is one of the means he has used to seek to overcome the self-referential aporia engendered by non-realism. Eliot sums up this predicament with poetic brevity: 'one has only learnt to get the better of words for the thing one no longer has to say'. A description which at once applies to itself, thereby providing insight and undermining that insight in the same gesture. It is in this movement of an approach to a truth and the abandonment of that truth that we have a sense of falling and being close to something deeper.

IV The literal and the poetic appear distinct. The literal is precise, defined, capable of confirmation or refutation. The poetic is metaphorical, elusive and cannot be corrected. The one offers a description of the world which might be thought to be true or false, the other does not invite such judgment. The poetic strategy appears as an abandonment of the literal, an abandonment of the attempt to describe the world. It is an abandonment that leads Wittgenstein to silence on matters metaphysical.

The literal however has always already failed. It is at once poetic. While the poetic requires the literal. Literal prose and poetic expression are not two opposites but two ends of a spectrum. If we seek to be literal and therefore precise and exact in our descriptions we uncover our inability to do so. If we seek to be purely poetic we find ourselves dependent on the descriptive and mundane.

Now in my own way I have struggled with the non-realist predicament, and my last book, 'Closure', tried to rework the problems of non-realism in the context of the vocabulary of openness and closure. This vocabulary, it seems to me, may be helpful in casting light on the relationship between the literal and the poetic.

In the vocabulary of openness and closure, we close the openness that is the world. Through the process of closure we create sameness out of difference, and in doing so realise the differentiation, the identities, the things, that enable us to intervene in the world, to achieve and do things, in short to survive. But these closures do not enable us to intervene in the world by being, or describing, openness. Closure is not a categorisation or patterning of openness, instead each closure is a way of holding the world that realises new material and

new texture. We can, for example, hold our current perceptual visual field in many potential ways, themselves containing countless further potential identities; but none of these are, or approach, openness. Any more than when we hold the stars as constellations, the constellations are a description of what is ultimately there — as if Orion or the Plough are somehow out there in the universe. And in the same way, our everyday world of people, houses and cars, tables and chairs, are closures that hold the openness of the world in a certain way rather than being descriptions of how things are.

In this context, the pursuit of the literal is the pursuit of a final or complete closure, the pursuit of a description that will not require any further revision, while the poetic is the pursuit of openness and the evasion of closure. In neither case can they be successful. When examined, the closure offered by the literal will be flawed. The scientific enterprise must in this sense have no end, for it will always require further closures to counter the failures of the current ones. And in some sense it never comes any closer to openness, for the gap is always almost everything. While the poetic cannot evade closure while still having content. The ultimate poetic gesture would be silence — a philosophical strategy adopted not only by Wittgenstein but by many religious individuals — but then silence is not a poem.

Perhaps this is what Eliot meant when he writes in *Burnt Norton*:

'Words move, music moves
Only in time; but that which is only living
Can only die. Words, after speech, reach
Into the silence.'^o

In his philosophical writing Eliot explicitly identifies our inability to say how things are, our inability to capture openness with our closures.

'We all recognise the world as the same 'that'; it is when we attempt to describe it that our worlds fall apart, for as we have seen, the same 'that' can only persist through a limited range of whatness. But just as we all admit the world to be the same world, though we cannot specify in precisely what respects, for there are no precise respects, so we feel that there are truths valid for this world, though we do not know what these truths are ... The true critic is a scrupulous avoider of formulae; he refrains from statements which pretend to be literally true; he finds fact nowhere and approximation always.'^p

Eliot's pursuit of poetry can be seen as the pursuit of openness not through closure but through the evasion of closure. A total evasion of closure would be silence so instead Eliot offers us insights only to undermine them. We find ourselves on the cusp of openness and closure and Eliot in his poetry both reflects and explores that cusp.

Eliot does not describe openness but reaches out towards its character by constructing a text that does not allow us to hold any particular closure, allowing the text to remain open with seemingly precise descriptions, at least in so far as it is open. A similar experience can be achieved by being silent, and without thought, and allowing the world to wash over oneself. Most easily approached when we are alone and in circumstances

where differentiation of our experience is not required or even easily achieved — facing out to sea, or under a night sky. At such points we have a sense of the wonder at the strangeness of being alive and at the same time a sense of having understood how things are, but it is an understanding without content, a closure that is at once open.

As a philosopher, Eliot tried to describe this cusp of openness and closure saying:

'Every experience is a paradox in that it means to be absolute, and yet is relative; in that it somehow always goes beyond itself and yet never escapes itself.' ⁹

As a non-realist poet Eliot instead offers a description of this circumstance but one that is not intended to be held and which defies attempts to do so.

Each is perhaps a mirror image of the other. Both seek to describe the cusp of openness and closure: one from a perspective of the literal and the pursuit of closure; the other from a perspective of the poetic and the pursuit of openness.

VThe notion of understanding and knowledge is so close to us, so embedded in two millennia of western culture, that we have forgotten how strange the idea is. Our language, our stories about the world, our closures and in particular our linguistic closures, help us intervene in the world, help us achieve our aims and purposes. They are not thereby a description of the world, nor is their usefulness and success, if we wish to call it that, dependent on their being true in a realist sense. We usually assume that our closures accurately depict the world but so long as they are effective we do not insist that the closures are complete, are capable of exhausting the openness of the world even if we have a specific and precise task. An engineer building a bridge will require the closures used to be effective, and will assume that they are an accurate depiction of the world. The engineer will be meticulous in identifying any weaknesses in the closures used to describe the project that might undermine its success, but the engineer is not concerned to complete closure, to define for example what the bridge really is, or the nature of force. The only concern is that the calculations and description of the project enable effective intervention. Limitations in the closures employed are to be ignored — unless they threaten the project. The aim is not to know the world but to intervene effectively.

In contrast, when we look for understanding we seek a final and complete closure. To look for understanding is to look for an endpoint, a place from which no further discussion, no further exploration, needs to take place. It is a safe haven, a place where we can rest knowing that there are no further surprises, that there is nothing we have overlooked. No such safe haven is, however, possible and in this sense understanding must elude us. At the moment when we think we have understood how things are, we have failed to do so; our understanding is in the context of closure and offers a discrete set of identities, while the world is not a thing or set of things, but is open.

In so far as philosophy attempts to help us intervene successfully it can operate within the literal and identify effective closures and thereby refine its theories. In this respect it operates as a metascience. In so far as philosophy seeks to describe how things ultimately are, to provide an understanding of the world and our place in it, the literal is inadequate and revision and refinement of its literal theories will only make more apparent its failure. For the pursuit of closure serves merely to bring to the fore the residual gap between openness and closure, which on examination turns out to be not less than everything. (Could it be that this is the core of the dispute between so called analytic philosophy — which wants to make progress in our dealings with the world and function as a metascience, and continental philosophy, which seeks an understanding of what it is to be human? The first set of questions can be addressed with theory while the latter is not reducible to the literal).

This is not however an all or nothing choice. Nor could it be given we find ourselves on the cusp of openness and closure, given that the literal is poetic and the poetic literal. We choose where to place the balance. Philosophy is surely concerned with understanding and starts out as an attempt to say how things ultimately are, to describe, as Rorty would have it, the really real, even if it ends up uncovering the impossibility of this attempt. It can also be an attempt to provide a workable theory of our circumstances that might help us operate in the world. While poetry may be appropriate to the metaphysical goal of understanding, it is not going to offer a workable theory to help us intervene in the world.

Perhaps the quality of good philosophy is that it presents a workable theory but at the same time presses on the theory sufficiently for its failures to become apparent and to accept and adopt those failures as an essential element of understanding and thereby come closer to saying how things are. I think a good case could be made that Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Rorty and Derrida are all examples. And in this light I am beginning to wonder whether my own attempts to rework the tradition in the framework of openness and closure at times made it look as if the theory was more watertight than it might have been. I ended 'Closure' with the sentence: This book, this epilogue, this sentence, are attempts to offer (just such) a temporary form of abode — a means of holding the world that has the appearance of holding fast that which cannot be held at all.' It is a sentiment that could perhaps have been more apparent in the remainder of the seemingly literal text. But then with my scientist hat I wanted a workable theory and I was excited by the potential it seemed to offer.)

The presentation of a workable theory, if presented as such, has its value. The closer the theory appears to be a consistent account of the whole the more likely is the enterprise to fail. For, as the philosopher closes the system the enterprise fails. Non-realist philosophers are usually sufficiently swift-footed to have spotted this danger and to have drawn attention to the limitation of the theory. There is the further risk however that by identifying the constraint, the philosopher imagines the opening has been left. In my own case I proposed that the closure of the theory was itself held open because closure contains openness. The neatness of this formulation is perhaps its weakness. It is not good enough to speak about openness. The text itself must remain open, must itself avoid seeming to offer too tightly refined a closure which has the illusion of having captured an understanding of how things are. For in that moment any such understanding has been lost.

In so far as philosophers seek understanding, seek a means of catching sight of where we ultimately are, Eliot's version of the poetic strategy looks compelling. Perhaps in this sense all philosophical insight into the nature of the world is necessarily poetic. Perhaps the metaphysical task of philosophy is to write the insights of poetry as prose. In so far as they are insights, and in so far as they can be written. Yet in the moment of having caught sight of where we stand we have lost our way. As we circle the space that would be the truth we falter in the moment of our arrival.

Let me leave Eliot with the last word. For somehow he seems always to have been there before and to such greater effect.

'And what there is to conquer
By strength and submission, has already been discovered
Once or twice, or several times, by men whom one cannot hope
To emulate — but there is no competition —
There is only the fight to recover what has been lost
And found and lost again and again: and now, under conditions
That seem unpropitious.'* ✱

ENDNOTES

- a- Richard Rorty, 'The Fire of Life' in the review 'Poetry', Nov 2007
- b- Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, ed. G. H. Von Wright (in collaboration with Heikki Nyman), trans. Peter Winch, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1980, p.24e
- c- Martin Heidegger, *Existence and Being*, Vision Press 1949 'Holderlin and the essence of poetry', p.312
- d- Richard Rorty, 'The Fire of Life' in the review 'Poetry', Nov 2007
- e- TS Eliot, *Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of FH Bradley*, Columbia University Press, 1989, p.157
- f- Ibid, p.165
- g- Ibid
- h- Martin Heidegger, *Existence and Being*, Vision Press, 1949, 'Holderlin and the essence of poetry', p. 307
- i- Richard Rorty, 'The Fire of Life' in the review 'Poetry', Nov 2007
- j- TS Eliot, *Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of FH Bradley*, Columbia University Press, 1989, p.168
- k- Ibid, p.167
- l- TS Eliot, The Four Quartets, Burnt Norton II, In 16
- m- TS Eliot, *Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of FH Bradley*, Columbia University Press, 1989, p.168
- n- TS Eliot, The Four Quartets, East Coker V, In 1
- o- TS Eliot, The Four Quartets, Burnt Norton V, In 1
- p- TS Eliot, *Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of FH Bradley*, Columbia University Press, 1989, p.163
- q- Ibid, p.166
- r- TS Eliot, The Four Quartets, East Coker V, In 11

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POETRY SECTION

break (balance)

SUHEIR HAMMAD

everything is

looking for balance
in my body

this the thing

everything
once broke open deluge original
ark naked fallen stars

ana beside river myself
humble prayers broke
pity please don't become me

way poet starts poem
in full moon
in box empty
waving for a call
a soweto sunset

space habibi in head wa heart
not math space in daily

at dawn reach for ra wa kiss sky

my homegirl's morning counting gaza bodies
she will tell you the dead do not kiss
wa curly hair needs tending

no remainder melting dice craps all gamble tipping
point internal compass wa complicit wa content wa violent

way poem ends poem



Photographs by Francesco Cincotta

break (for love)

heavy breathing drum machines

west banked sisters hold each curly heads ducked ducked loose
bullets tight soldiers loz eyed oranges in blood explosion of hair

the weary shoulder sacred
the pulsing wrist sacred
the clasped hand temple
the smoking chest temple
sister holy fly sister holy

terra material prima wa ana lapis azure flame wa scarlet star ana mud wa huddled into
shelters wa centers off balance bastana vision wa epiphany

zooted wa cased
air yo dynamic
w'ana mashi layale
drum skin stretched far

ya rayah when my sapphire dusted dream static supreme

dream
crash bombs everyone around me
dream
sash green gold coins surround me
dream
flash dear god flood within me

tremor moon seas moan treble please sing trouble keys

break (through)

red wa black feathered ears girdle wasted girl
explosive abdomen damaged holy gram

malcolm midnight baldwin dawn unseasoned weather
homegirls nesting opening blossom chest bear to love despite all

what you got
to kill in order
to leave home
bridges over
head ankles aflame

what you got to kill in order to live

sometimes i leave my body wa i
leave my country wa my religion
sometimes leaving is my religion

pray with me habibi
wa over wa within



break (clear)

(here) when he says he's not the one believe
him
is the poem act like you now

isis was remembering herself
all that travel all that ache (here)

i confuse spirit wa flesh
especially in dark
seen
what had happened was nation wa hon-
or wa religion wa language
all that shaped me was illusion formless

post surgery stretch isis stitching wa
searching for her body

(jerusalem)

habibi smokes cigayer in his grave await-
ing resurrection

(baghdad)

if thieves see your beauty they will loot
some think they liberators wa some sav-
iors
wa ooohh girl a few will even love you

long the way

(new jerusalem)

break (clean)

dawn sky midnight long past lightening dusk rose horizon

sunrise zam zam coffee suzan w'ana healing swell then bruise then hard-
en cuts heal like hearts please god this hurt do not calcify endurance half
faith

heal clean

al waha ahead snake hearts in purse anti-venom
wa own heart in fist against breaking

radio reports growing exodus west bank life no future
how many times can you refugee

wonder land alice coltrane organ raga brooklyn babka home boy

break meta morpheus
break don't lead ending
break new dream

w'allah even in war women cry over hearts broken
wa even in privilege women want
wa injury dynamic
wa each hurt sings own song

god bless the non-violent
ooooh god bless them

break (maktoub)

moon
 same in ramallah wa new orleans wa jerusalem wa johannesburg wa beirut
 same moon

body responds lunarly
 a pulling
 in time a tearing
 out time a warda blooming

ana garden

ana love destroyed cities wa broken fathers distant lovers silent brothers
 same moon

water
 paper wa books wa laws wa swears wa i promises wa resolutions wa history
 vulnerable to flood
 water same moon

ana ocean

nar
 bellies wa tires wa homes wa jails wa shoes wa bridges wa desks wa wara
 flammable
 nar wa water wa moon same

ana phoenix

the order is dis
 then that
 luna tidal ever shifting ana changing gaza worrying ya allah lissa bas only proof
 destined to change
 same moon
 go through changes
 same moon

break (vitalogy)

all matter related
 we connected

ana on corners
 holy grams
 ana incarcerated light

gaze me

ana gaza
 you can't see me

ana blood wa memory

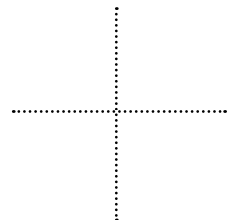
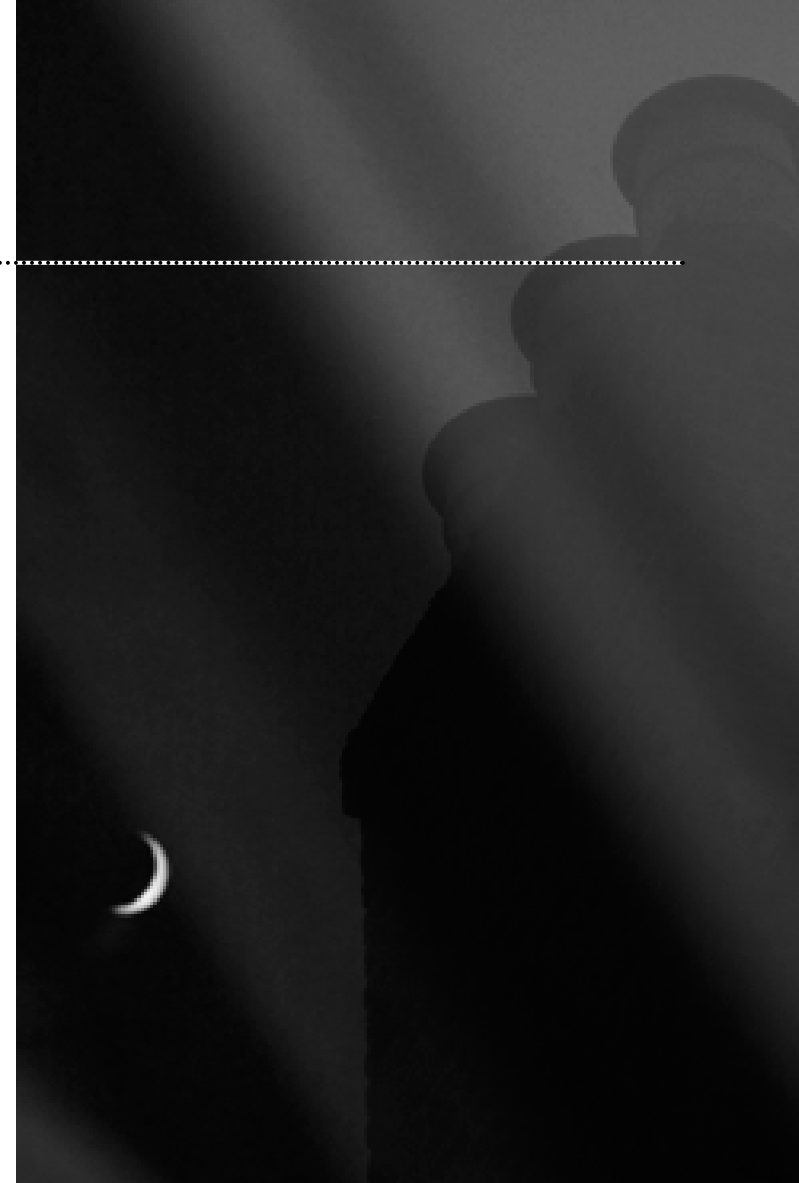
it was all a dream
 lion kissing me

ana harb
 ana heart
 ana har

ana wa ana

we related
 woven
 ultimate design
 physical dream

please excuse my state of disappearance
 been renovating structure
 innovating space
 hype earrings on



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