

Theorising Futurities

Edited by

Alexa Athelstan & Rosemary Deller

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Editorial: Theorising Futurities

Alexa Athelstan and Rosemary Deller

'Theorising Futurities', the July 2012 edition of the Graduate Journal of Social Science, is inspired by the degree to which concerns regarding 'the future' have gained a pressing importance. This has been accompanied by the concurrent presence of both a language and material conditions of 'crisis.' Frequently, one finds that talk of crisis and 'the future' appears intrinsically coupled; to speak of a 'broken' present seems to encourage one to extrapolate from the situation of today to consider the terms of the impending future. Of course, it could be argued that the 'crisis' and 'loss' found in the discursive landscape of the social sciences are nothing new. They are visible in Jean-François Lyotard's (1984) influential argument that we are living amidst the loss of grand religious and ideological narratives with the advent of post-modernism (a claim cogently discussed in the paper of Anneke Sools and Jan Hein Mooren), in the nineties debates surrounding an apparent 'crisis' of masculinity (see Robinson 2000; Morgan 2006), in growing fears surrounding climate change, and in Wendy Brown's (1999) exploration of 'left melancholy' within left-wing movements

that are increasingly marginalised by the rise of neo-liberalism. Yet, despite these pre-existing sites of perceived instability and loss, 'crisis' and social change seem to have gained palpable meaning following the global financial crisis of 2008 that has continued to dominate discourse across Europe (and beyond) from the level of the everyday to national and international policy and governance.

As well as intruding upon multiple layers of contemporary social life, the landscape of 'crisis' has also become particularly implicated in discussions surrounding recent changes to the University as an institution (see Calhoun 2006). While many of the structural changes to the University find their roots in the rise of neo-liberalism in the eighties, the economic recession and austerity measures recently imposed by many European governments have been accompanied by – and have arguably even legitimised – extensive budget cuts, the growing intrusion of government into academic research and funding as well as the increased precariousness of academic labour. Indeed, the implications of this changing climate are so great that Paul Mason (2012), in

a Guardian article published earlier this month, saw fit to describe the 'typical' student of today as a 'graduate without a future.' While this phrase was used by Mason during a lecture at Birmingham University, it nonetheless speaks to the rising number of unemployed graduates across Europe and beyond.

However, as a number of papers included in this edition highlight, the precarious status of graduates is not only something that lies in the future of students after they finish university. It has also entered the academy as an economic reality for many graduate students and their academic colleagues. This transformation of the University consequently threatens to further entrench class hierarchies within the academy by greatly increasing the financial burdens placed upon those entering academia, whilst concurrently affecting the research and working conditions of many currently situated in the social sciences and other related fields. Such a discussion draws upon a dialogue that has woven a course through recent editions of the GJSS under the editorship of Gwendolyn Beetham and Melissa Fernández Arrigiotía in 'Interdisciplinarity and the New University' (Vol. 8, Issue 1) and by special editors Alexa Athelstan, Cassandra McLuckie, Liz Mills, Angelica Pesarini and Mercedes Pöll in 'Thriving on the Edge of Cuts' (Vol. 8, Issue 2). The implications of such changes to the conditions of academic

labour were also brought powerfully into the spotlight by Linda Lund Pedersen and Barbara Samaluk (2012) in the previous edition 'Critical Whiteness Studies Methodologies' (Vol. 9, Issue 1). Responding to Lund Pedersen and Samaluk's timely provocation to direct attention to the unpaid labour increasingly normalised within the academy, one of the aims of this edition has been to continue this dialogue. This has been enabled by the reflections of **Gwendolyn Beetham and Melissa Fernández Arrigiotía** in their essay '**Precarity and Privilege: A Response to Linda Lund Pedersen and Barbara Samaluk**' and **Jenny Thatcher** in her position paper '**PhDs of the UK Unite! Your Future Depends On It**'. Writing in reaction to Lund Pedersen and Samaluk, Beetham and Fernández Arrigiotía draw attention to the activities of those seeking to challenge the institutionalised silences around unpaid academic work. Highlighting similar issues, Thatcher's article particularly discusses the formation of the Postgraduate Worker's Association (PGWA) across a number of British universities as an emergent site of student activism and protest against the growing exploitation of labour within the academy. **Sam de Boise's** article '**The Coming Crisis? Some Questions for the Future of Empirical Sociology in the UK**' offers additional insight into the manner in which these changes – in particular the growing emphasis

upon 'impact' as a crucial criterion for research excellence – are also affecting the status, study and methodologies of empirical sociology in the UK, giving a valuable concrete example of the kind of disciplinary transformations that are being engendered by recent changes to University structures.

Mason's article seems to confirm that a whole swath of young graduates are part of a generation being written off as just another additional cost of the continued recession. Nonetheless, this edition is wary of positing the experience of a particular environment, institution or social group as having a singular, universal or prioritised relation to the future that can be generalised to apply or stand in for all segments of society at once. In other words, as self-reflexive academics, we need to be aware of how such experiences fit into a broader social context. Mason (2012) himself provides some evidence of this when he suggests that 'the graduate without a future is a human expression of an economic problem: the west's model is broken', thus putting forward a very specific experience of impending 'crisis' as paradigmatic of a broader systemic collapse. Yet, the suggestion that the graduate forms the 'human expression' of the recession not only risks obscuring the privileges that can be found in academia. As Beetham and Fernández Arrigiotía highlight, it may also elide the complex ways in which precariousness

can be compounded by intersecting collisions of racial, classed and gendered positionings and histories. We consequently need to interrogate any self-evident or totalising narratives of 'crisis' to ask instead how futures – rendered necessarily multiple – are represented, debated and played out across the contemporary social world.

Certainly then, this edition asks how social scientists theorise futurities in times of social change and how these dynamics affect our epistemological and methodological approaches. However, **Yvette Taylor's** article '**Future Subjects? Education, Activism and Parental Practices**' suggests that the very ability to discuss 'the future' and participate in narratives of future being, becoming and belonging (however thwarted they may currently seem) are themselves bound up in intensely real nexuses of power and privilege. Turning her critical lens on the University itself and the position of the mobile academic, Taylor draws attention to the intricate class hierarchies that must be unpacked in order to uncover the pressing economic and material conditions which cut subjects off from access to the future as a site of meaning. **Gerald Koessl's** article '**Precariousness and Futurity: The Example of Subcontracted Cleaning Workers in the Banking and Finance Industry in London**' provides such an exploration by analysing interviews with cleaning staff in the

City of London and Canary Wharf, whose precarious working conditions and low wages make it difficult to plan for the future. **Thomas Allen's** discussion of Margaret Archer in dialogue with Lars Von Trier's (2011) film *Melancholia* in his paper **Melancholia and the Radical Particular: Against Archer's Realism** offers an imaginative collision of philosophical critique, filmic analysis and discussion of the experience of 'crisis' for a range of 'real-world' subjects. Allen parallels Von Trier's apocalyptic narrative with the way in which relations of alienated capital heavily impact – if not outright tear asunder – many people's ability to find meaning in a conceivable future. These authors thus draw attention to narratives that operate along exclusionary grounds whereby the future is always-already curtailed for subjects marginalised along intersecting lines of class and ethnicity. These discussions are furthermore complemented by **Christian Rojas Gaspar's** review of Jerry Hollingworth's (2008) **Children of the Sun: An Ethnographic Study of Latin America**. Rojas Gaspar's exploration of Hollingworth's study of street children in Mexico and Peru may well provide another concrete site through which to consider such temporal exclusions. This prompts us to consequently suggest that networks infused with power, privilege and precariousness need to be examined in order to understand how notions of 'the future' and ac-

companying discourses of 'crisis' are available to some subjects at the expense of others.

While dialogue surrounding 'crisis' often positions it as something inherently to be avoided, solved or 'made better' through future action, this edition also seeks to break open debates about the kind of futures that are seen to be productive and, indeed, the very notion that it is only 'productive' futures that we must strive for. The so-called 'anti-social turn' found in the work of a number of contemporary queer theorists (see Edelman 2004; Halberstam 2005) has, for instance, involved explicit explorations of 'failure.' Arguing that queer subjects are always-already seen as having 'failed' according to dominant heteronormative narratives, Sara Ahmed's (2010) recent work **The Promise of Happiness**, reviewed here by **Julia Downes**, examines what it means to 'fail' to be happy or pursue happiness according to heteronormative paradigms. Furthermore, Judith (Jack) Halberstam's (2011) **The Queer Art of Failure**, reviewed by **Marianna Szczygielska**, uses an imaginative bricolage of cultural texts that fail to pursue (re)productive pathways integral to the functioning of Western capitalist structures. While not explicitly drawing upon this work, Allen's contribution to this edition shares Halberstam's attentiveness to the link between capitalism and futurities by suggesting that a relation of 'negativity' towards the fu-

ture may be essential for subjects in order to emancipate themselves from the alienation of wage labour found under contemporary Western capitalism. The works of Ahmed and Halberstam, taken alongside Allen's article, prompt one to ask: must one always strive to produce 'positive' or 'progressive' futures in the social sciences? Moreover, if a 'positive' relation to the future is seen as interwoven with the tenets of neo-liberalism and its accumulative reproductive drives, what can come out of a social science driven by 'negativity'? As evidence of the highly dialogic nature of this edition, the work of Taylor and **Yi Xing Hwa** seeks to temper the idea that the divisive and alienating nature of capitalism necessarily demands a turn towards absolute negativity. While she discusses the influence of theorists such as Lee Edelman (2004) and Halberstam in her essay **Holding on to a Lifeline: Desiring Queer Futurities in Jeanette Winterson's *The Stone Gods***, Hwa remains focused on queer futurities as enabling orientations that can open up new horizons of desire, possibility and community. Taylor moreover suggests that the privileged mechanism of choice involved in 'opting out' of certain futures can contrast deeply with those already positioned as outside of the system and thus peripheral to these discourses of 'the future.' The papers brought together in this edition thus offer varied investments and traversals

of these 'positive' and 'negative' futures.

While this edition certainly places emphasis upon 'the future' as the site of inquiry, many of the authors featured invite us to consider how the future functions as one temporal trajectory among others, necessarily in dialogue with both the present and the past. This need to carefully interrogate the narratives that one tells about the past in order to engender a particular conceptualisation of the future is found in Clare Hemmings (2011) book **Why Stories Matter**, reviewed by **Allison Kinsey Robb**, which focuses particularly on the way in which the history of feminist theory has been framed by feminist scholars. **Caitlin Boland's** and **Tracey Walker's** articles also suggest that the process of thinking through futurities is not merely rooted in extrapolations from the present in a forward-flung line of motion; rather, they look at the ways in which our histories – more precisely, the telling of these histories – can be instrumental in how we position and make sense of the present and the future. Bringing Hannah Arendt and Jacques Derrida into dialogue in her article **'(De/con)structing Political Narratives: Hannah Arendt and Jacques Derrida on crafting a positive politics'**, Caitlin Boland suggests that meaning is actively constructed, rather than inherently and passively present, in the stories we tell. This indicates that we must acknowledge respon-

sibility when choosing the narratives that we wish to propel us into various futures. Tracey Walker's article **'The Future of Slavery: From Cultural Trauma to Ethical Remembrance'** shares Boland's investment in the role of literature, yet her discussion of the legacy of slavery in contemporary Britain highlights the need to become more critical of the attachments we make to certain narratives concerning this history. Walker argues that we need to move beyond a paradigm of trauma and its related trappings towards an ethical remembrance of slavery grounded in alternative narratives and practices: vital in a society that still seeks to clothe the most painful legacies of the imperialist past in silence. In addition, **Anneke Sools'** and **Jan Hein Mooren's** article **'Towards Narrative Futuring in Psychology: Becoming Resilient by Imagining the Future'** discusses a narrative psychology project currently being undertaken in the life-story lab at the University of Twente, the Netherlands, which invites participants to write letters as a means of cultivating 'resilience' to crisis and social change. These essays consequently share a focus on narratives and stories as an illuminating and vital means of considering the available framings of the future.

Inspired, then, by the feeling of an overriding 'crisis' and the accompanying drama of social change, this edition seeks to place this seemingly palpable 'broken' reality under

the spotlight in order to unpack the assumptions that lie behind this interwoven discourse of crisis and futurity. Admittedly, such discussions include their omissions, gaps and silences. This edition, for instance, does not feature articles that relate to the ecological 'crisis' and environmental considerations of the future that form a particularly pressing parallel to many of the issues explored in this edition (see Ackerman 2009; Donovan and Hudson 2011). Other such omissions may also be noticed by our readers. Yet, if the current landscape of crisis seems to impact upon our relation to our histories, our research, to society and to each other, we hope this edition shall prompt us to ask how we can look at and examine this elusive, but nonetheless intensely present question of 'the future' in order to fundamentally reshape these very relations.

To conclude, we would furthermore like to invite readers to continue dialogues surrounding questions of precariousness in academia and beyond. If you would like to contribute a short essay or position paper, please contact the editors at editors@gjss.org.

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Precarity and Privilege: A Response to Linda Lund Pedersen and Barbara Samaluk

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As former editors of the Graduate Journal of Social Science, we were asked by the current editors of the journal to formulate a brief response to the precursor to Volume 9, Issue 1 – the special issue on Critical Whiteness. The piece, titled ‘Precarious workers that made this special issue possible’, was a reflection by the special editors, Linda Lund Pedersen and Barbara Samaluk (2012), on the ‘wage theft’ (in this case, of an estimated £24,000) that makes journals like this one possible.

It is true, as Pedersen and Samaluk (2012) assert, that academia thrives on the unpaid labour of its inhabitants – especially in this era of austerity. As our issue on the ‘crisis’ in higher education (see Vol 8, Issue 1) makes clear, however, this is not a new phenomenon, nor is it UK-specific. The lives of academics are made precarious not only because of the decades-old tradition of unpaid work, but also for the more recent trends through which the institutions of academia are being eroded: for example, by a reliance on graduate teachers or adjuncts¹, while long-term or tenured positions become a thing of the past. This is

taking place as part of a political system that has been decreasing public funds directed at Higher Education institutions and, particularly, social science programmes. But it is also a result of those same institutions which, in their efforts to secure the ever-decreasing pot of allocated funds, have been all too complacent with these shifts and, in many cases, supportive of acts that silence or repress opposition to them.

These factors are themselves embedded within a more ‘toxic’² environment that is devaluing education as a tool for critical thought and inquiry while favouring a more profit-oriented and ‘impact’-driven model of knowledge creation. This has translated, for instance, into departmental scrambles for REF³-rateable employees (that have been writing journal articles for free in efforts to gain those points) at the expense of others who have spent a greater amount of their time on teaching commitments, now seen as secondary in the race to the top. In this equation, open access journals like the GJSS and the work that goes into them inhabit a kind of existential paradox: they are losing their value

in a mainstream academic 'market-place' that favours Thompson Reuter's citation 'Impact Factors' (IF) while gaining greater currency in the lives of those concerned with openly challenging those very frameworks. Metrics like IF's and REF act as structuring devices through which the neoliberal market logic of 'quantified control' and competition successfully penetrate everyday intellectual cultures. Their numerical imperative is multidimensional, trickling down most perniciously into individual academics' lives through what some have aptly described as an 'affective somatic crisis' (Burrows 2011; Gill 2011): when our feelings about our own (and others') sense of worth and intellectual value become inextricably linked to the abstract performance levels implied by these measurements.

Recently, one of the author's friends, who is currently finishing her PhD and thus 'on the market', was asked why she thought that many of our contemporaries (and elders) worked such long hours, for little (or no) money, and at the risk of burn-out. She responded: 'Because we love our jobs, and actually, to have a [full-time lectureship or] tenured position is a really good gig. We are so lucky to be doing what we're doing that perhaps we almost feel guilty, and so we have to work extra hard to make up for it; or at least make it sound like we do.' Having been the editors of the GJSS for over two years – during

a period when we both were also working part-time and finishing our PhDs – we know the pressures of over-working; the late nights, the pressure to produce, the feeling that you're never really 'off the clock'. But we also know the joys of the profession – the writing, the conversations with interesting people, the ability to do something that you truly love. And we also know that we all learn how to negotiate these different sides: learn to say 'no' to that additional book review; learn to say 'yes' to a real weekend, an eight (okay, maybe ten) hour work day. The sad part about the brilliance of full-time permanent academic positions is that they are now few and far between: the market is saturated, and the neoliberal logic that overruns university culture shows little sign of abating. As a result, for every person that is able to secure a job that allows her to do what she loves, there are several who continue to struggle with precarious positions. For every PhD student who is able to complete her studies, several drop out of the PhD due to lack of funding, lack of institutional support, and/or other setbacks.

The fact that a significant portion of academic work is traditionally unpaid – in the form of peer reviewing, attending lectures, and, yes, sometimes even the editing of journals – does not make it right. In fact, what we suggest is that this tradition is being silently transformed or transferred into new forms of exploita-

tion, masked as necessary towards the ever-increasing measurements of success. We do find it interesting, however, that there has been a lack of dialogue about the privilege that one has to be in academia in the first place. Though Pedersen and Samaluk refer to their 'migrant' nature, as academics, we are privileged migrants in a way that many of those in precarious work situations can never be, not least because our academic status gives us the legal right to be, work and travel in particular countries. In places like the UK, past and present histories of classed, gendered and raced exclusion further delineate the form these privileges take. Recognising this privilege, however, should not come at the expense of acknowledging the situated, relational and compounded nature of precarity. One example (among many) is the additional structural burden of being women.⁴ In London alone, according to some recent figures published by the Fawcett Society: women experience a pay gap of almost 23%, child care costs are higher than the national average and single mothers can expect to lose 8.5% of their net annual income by 2015 (<http://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/index.asp?PageID=1273>). These logically suggest that being a female academic, especially as a mother, will have additional consequences to the ones already stated.

We heed the special editors' call to make unpaid labour and pre-

carious work visible throughout the academy, including all kinds of event organization, reviewing, proposal writing, etc. and would further suggest that special attention be paid to the scandalous and unexplored profits being made by large publishing houses and companies that are reaping economic benefits from the unquestioned normality of 'journal writing for free' alongside 'journal reading for a fee'. Within the field of mathematics, a campaign and boycott called 'The Cost of Knowledge' (<http://thecostofknowledge.com/index.php>) concerning said practices of research journal publishers has recently emerged and is gaining force.⁵ Their boycott strategically targets mega-publisher Elsevier to condemn 'everything that is wrong with the current system of commercial publication'. Other inspiring groups include the Precarious Workers Brigade in the UK, who within the field of culture and education are campaigning for equal pay, free education, democratic institutions and the commons (<http://precariousworkersbrigade.tumblr.com/>); the Adjunct Project in the US, an accessible database resource that promotes transparency in Higher Education practices and exposes institutions not faring well in terms of their educational, labour or human rights practices (<http://www.adjunct-project.com/>); and the Federacion de Jovenes Investigadores/Precarios in Spain who have spent more than a decade seeking to eliminate

the exploitative conditions (and 'working' scholarship schemes) under which young researchers must operate (<http://precarios.org/>). These mobilisations, both old and new, are creating growing and productive alliances to not only criticize but also suggest alternatives for non-precarious futures.

Endnotes

¹ An adjunct position refers to the casualised labour force in academia. In the U.S., these are often the remit of PhD students but also of insecure short-term contracts that require holding multiple jobs in order to earn a living wage. This stark picture is made staggeringly evident in the following statistic: 70% of faculty positions in the U.S. are non-tenured (Patton 2012). In the UK, the equivalent (time-restricted and insecure) position is that of an Associate Lecturer or part-time teacher.

² We borrowed this word from a roundtable hosted by the University of Leeds called 'Academia as a 'Toxic' and 'Careless' Culture: Academic Labour, Subjectivity, and the Body' that discussed the 'embodied and affective experience of academic labour at a time of intense (re) configurations of academic cultures and working practices' (See: <http://www.gender-studies.leeds.ac.uk/about/events/genderact.php>)

³ The Research Excellence Framework (REF) is the new system (following the Research Assessment Exercise- RAE) that will be assessing the 'quality' of research of HE Institutions in the UK in 2014 based on 'outcomes' submitted by each institution and their individu-

al departments. The results- and the methodologies used to get them- will determine the governmental allocation of research funding for each university and are the subject of intense debate and criticisms.

⁴ For a visualised perspective of the world-wide labour gender divide, see 'We Work Hard for No Money: Who does the most unpaid work around the world?' (<http://www.creditsesame.com/blog/unpaid-work-world-05312011/>)

⁵ For more information, see the Guardian Article: 'Academic Publishing Doesn't Add Up' (Naughton 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/2012/apr/22/academic-publishing-monopoly-challenged?fb=optOut>) and The Scientist's 'Academic Publishing is Broken' (Taylor 2012, <http://the-scientist.com/2012/03/19/opinion-academic-publishing-is-broken/>).

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PhDs of the UK, Unite! Your Futures Depend on It

Jenny Thatcher

This paper addresses the increasing casualisation of academic labour in higher education and its implications for PhD students in the UK. It will contextualise a recent campaign resulting in the formation of The Postgraduate Workers Association established by a group of PhD students in an attempt to build a collective resistance to the growing exploitation of postgraduate students that teach in UK universities. It is also concerned about the way the competitive marketisation of higher education benefits some institutions and disciplines, particularly at the expense of the ex-polytechnics and the social sciences and humanities. As the future of some universities will be left in jeopardy, the future of social science may depend on its willingness to adapt to the new economic climate and help those most affected by inequalities of the market to develop a more reflexive mode of relating to the social world. Lastly, it questions what consequences the increasing exploitation of PhD student teachers might have on social class hierarchies in academia.

Key Words: Higher Education, Casualisation, Labour Exploitation, Precarity, Doctoral Students' Campaign

Introduction

Participation in higher education in the UK has expanded significantly in recent years. Figures for 2010 reveal that higher education participation rates experienced an all time high of 45 percent in UK universities with 2.49 million students studying in higher education (Universities UK 2011). When higher education began its rapid participation increase in the early 1960s, only one in twenty people went to university (Coughlan 2010). The expansion of higher education in the UK has undergone two rapid waves, the first one in the 1960s and the second one

in the early 1990s. The first expansion coincided with the coming of age of the post-war baby-boomers and the publication of the Robbins Report of 1963 which argued that higher education should not be supply constrained. The early 1990s witnessed a substantial expansion which overlapped the ending of the binary divide between polytechnics and universities and the changing nature of the employment structure which was demanding more highly educated workers (Mayhew et al 2007). The last ten years have seen an even greater expansion with student numbers at UK higher

education institutions increasing by 28 percent for the period between 2000/01 to 2009/10 (Universities UK 2011).

This unsurprisingly has resulted in an increasing number of people undertaking full-time doctoral studies. Today's PhD students are undertaking their education in one of the worst economic crises since The Great Depression. But what does that mean for postgraduate students and universities? Postgraduate students are now being faced with growing pressure to engage in additional low-paid and sometimes unpaid teaching and marking work to enhance their CVs for future employment prospects. Dissatisfied with the acceptability of this practice, a group of PhD students across different universities have joined forces to start a campaign which collectively resists the exploitation of postgraduate students' academic labour and have recently formed The Postgraduate Workers Association (PGWA). It is still in its early days but its aims are simple – to work with University College Union (UCU) and National Union of Students (NUS) in order to ensure fair conditions for research students employed by UK universities. The PGWA believe that students who work in higher education are professionals like any other, deserving of the respect, pay and conditions which should also be afforded to their non-student colleagues. As such postgraduate students are not free or cheap la-

bour to be exploited, or to be used to undercut established academic colleagues' pay and conditions. The PGWA plans to fight for postgraduate student workers in the higher education sector to be given the same entitlements as other workers in universities including: comprehensive written contracts, fair pay for every hour worked, holiday and sick pay, trade union representation, equal, free access to the resources they need to perform their job and no threats, or implicit threats, of academic repercussions for matters of employment and so on.

PGWA also believes that research students, as early career researchers, are entitled to adequate and fair access to paid teaching opportunities to develop this aspect of their academic skills. Recruitment practices must be fair, transparent and open. Of course, this is an important point because our brief research in the issue has shown that when some students feel they cannot get paid teaching work, they have taken up unpaid positions for the work experience. The growing struggles that PhD and early career researchers endure comes at a time of increasing marketisation of higher education, escalating commodification of university products and the looming fear of privatisation of the 'public' university. Therefore, perhaps PhD students should be doing all they can to promote themselves in the job market – including taking unpaid teaching work? Or does this

simply become another strategy that contributes to the maintenance and reproduction of social inequalities and elitist social class domination in higher education?

Marketisation of Higher Education

Since the 1980s, higher education has moved away from a social democratic policy-making model and towards a public sector management and quasi-market model of education. The current neo-liberal free market economics of the British education system should be located in this wider context of extensive social and economic restructuring of policy which has been experienced throughout the world (Ball 2003 and Pierson 1998). From the 1970s Britain underwent a restructuring of social forces which saw amongst other things an ideological shift from Keynesianism to neo-liberalism. This not only resulted in a restructuring of the education system but also the occupational sector. The Western world experienced a downgrading and global outsourcing of manufacturing and a move towards the 'knowledge economy' in which its economy became more reliant on knowledge-based industries such as education, training and research. Such a shift in the world of work has also resulted in the increased participation of women workers in the labour market and the growth of part-time, insecure employment, particularly in the teaching and caring professions (Giddens 2001).

The quasi-market creates a system in which patients, parents, passengers and so on, become consumers of a product while the producers are forced to compete with each other (Maclure 1998). The increasing individualisation and the regime of choice in education produce a number of anxieties particularly with regards to middle class social reproduction. It also intensifies the relationship between the structure of the education system and the structure of class reproduction, as middle class reproduction is no longer assured unless accompanied by careful planning and consideration (Ball 2006)

This neo-liberal free market educational system and the extensive social and economic restructuring that has taken place as a consequence of the forces of modern globalisation and international competitiveness have created new markets that require new consumerist relationships. Subjected to market competition, universities are managed like businesses with the increasing commodification of university practices and products. This is so the student can ensure that standards are set, measurable, and comparable when deciding where to maximise their investment in their education, be that in the national or international market (Smyth and Shacklock 2004). As the production of knowledge becomes commodified, this requires a convention to measure the quality of that product. In the UK,

the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) was introduced in 1986 under the Conservative government to act as an evaluative system to assess, amongst other things, research productivity (Tomlinson 2005). Each department within a university gets a quality score. It is these measures of 'excellence' that can help attract students, as well as much needed private research funding.

Universities themselves need to be located within the structural relations of power as they position their own institution within the education market and against other universities, in which they are becoming increasingly pitted against each other in their fight for survival (Naidoo 2004). This situation becomes all the more complex in the British context, as the binary system was abolished in 1992 and polytechnics were granted university status and independence identical to older universities. However, status and funding differences remain due to historic context (Robbins 2006). Will it be the elite universities that survive at the expense of the old polytechnics? Only time will tell. However, with a three-year university course costing up to £27,000 in tuition fees alone from September 2012, early signs do not bode well for post 1992-universities. The projected figures show that many of them will experience a decrease of more than ten percent in undergraduate student numbers this coming academic year of 2012-2013 (Vasagar 2012).

The commercialisation of knowledge also leads to struggles between disciplines as well as internal battles; between different schools, different departments, the academics themselves, and so on and so forth (Burawoy 2011).

Students are embedded in complex decision-making settings when choosing not only which university to attend, but what to study. Universities are subject to national and international ranking systems connected to the idea of excellence. One of the most well known ranking systems is the Times Higher Education Supplement (THES). Students and parents are increasingly using this system for comparing and ranking their choice of university in order to ensure that they get the 'best value' for their money. But the decisions become more complicated as within each university different schools and departments are given separate marks of 'excellence' (Burawoy 2011a). The education market and the individualist mode of social reproduction require that students plan and reflect upon their strategies for advantages in the education system. As Stephen J. Ball (2006) states: 'In the education market you can never know enough but often know too much' (Ball 2006, 266). Such perceived 'risk' of making the 'right' decision is likely to widen divisions and hierarchies in higher education. Students are worried by the prospect of indebtedness and want to ensure that the

degree they obtain is valued by prospective employers. Demand theory suggests that when prices rise, the consumer's tastes and choices alter in accordance (Leslie and Brinkman 1987). Figures from the Universities and Colleges Admission Service (UCAS) reveal that not only has there been an overall decrease in applications to study at university, but a variation in choice of discipline as well. Humanities and social sciences are the worst affected, whilst Medicine experiences a relatively small decline in applications (Vasagar 2012). So how are universities going to deal with the issue? Universities will search for more strategies to replace public funding cuts as well as save money. Michael Burawoy (2011b) suggests that universities might do this in three ways. The first involves universities collaborating with the private sector, the second is raising tuition fees and the third strategy is increasing the use of casualised staff.

In a time of economic recession and budget cuts, the social sciences in 'lower' ranking universities tend to be increasingly disadvantaged as they are often less likely to find large corporate donors to sponsor their research on the same scale as the medical sciences or engineering. Furthermore, many higher-ranking universities' social science departments have guarded against public funding cuts by having ESRC studentship funding and status available by becoming Doctoral Training

Centres. The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) has only granted 21 Doctoral Training Centres (DTCs) (involving 45 institutions) in the UK to the universities which they see as being able to deliver the highest quality training provision. The majority of those recognised as DTCs are Russell Group universities (Holmwood 2011). Significantly, no ex-polytechnics were granted DTC status. DTC status will help universities to attract the 'best' students and the ones most likely to be awarded funding as well as drawing in top academics looking to supervise high achieving PhD students and thereby increasing the output of high ranking research for the universities, while maintaining the university's position in the hierarchy of institutions.

The second above-mentioned strategy of raising tuition fees was introduced by New Labour, which argued the need for an overhaul of the funding basis of higher education. It introduced tuition fees in the wake of the Dearing Report of 1997, abolished remaining maintenance grants and expanded the income contingent loan scheme. It also brought us the Higher Education Act of 2004, concerned with the implications of mass higher education and of the role of higher education in the global economy, as New Labour famously stated that it wanted to increase the proportion of students going into higher education by fifty percent (Tomlinson

2005). Furthermore, the Browne Review in 2010 concluded that the cap on student fees should be lifted, that students should pay the main proportion of the actual cost of a degree and it should be the universities themselves who decide what to charge (Vasagar and Shepherd 2010).

Casualisation of Academic Labour

The third above-mentioned strategy is already in full swing. The higher education sector is increasingly reliant upon casual staff, as fiscally constrained universities look for the most efficient and cost-effective way to run. A report by University and College Union (UCU) estimated that there was a record-number of 77,000 hourly paid teachers in higher education in the UK for the period 2009-10. Universities are dealing with cuts of up to forty per cent in their teaching budgets with humanities and social science worst affected (Vasagar 2010). Thus, the salary gaps between and within the universities widen, the working conditions decrease, feelings of insecurity increase and academic labour seems to be more open to exploitation than ever before.

Of course, the increasing trend towards the casualisation of labour has been happening for some time in all sectors of industry, not just in higher education. Early in 2012,

Britain was gripped by a backlash to the controversial ‘workfare’ experience scheme, a ‘voluntary’ programme in which unemployed young people would do unpaid work in some low-skilled service sector job while still receiving their job-seeker allowance (Topping 2012). Then there is the growing use of unpaid internships by employers, in which young interns circulate on a conveyor belt simply replacing each other and endlessly looking for the one placement that will lead to that paid job. Is it really surprising that universities have jumped on this bandwagon? Just as ‘workfare’ was met with a hostile response from the public, postgraduate students and early career researchers are also going on the counterattack over the escalating abuse of their academic labour.

One such response has been the establishment of a campaign by a group of PhD students –one that I am myself involved in – uniting across different universities in an attempt to build a collective resistance to the economic exploitation of postgraduate students who work as lecturers. After our first conference held in May in London, we democratically elected to form The Postgraduate Workers Association (PGWA). Our aims and goals have been outlined above. But one of the most important things we want to do is help organise ourselves as postgraduate students into a mass, democratic movement that fights

this exploitation working with organisations, including UCU and other trade unions, NUS and student unions. We also want to assist localised movements across UK universities and help them in their own institution as each case might have unique differences. As such we are calling for reports from across the country about experiences of organising postgraduates that teach at different universities.

When we question the future of social science, perhaps we might want to think about how sociological knowledge is increasingly beginning to be appropriated for a variety of campaigns in retaliation to the current climate of austerity? This is also being reflected in the anger that people feel because of the challenging situations they find themselves in – from the wave of larger-scale occupation movements to sit-ins or, for example, a small scale campaign to save the local library. What emerges with this opposition is the interaction between the commentators of the brutality of the market and the communities which feel its impact. Burawoy (2005a) argues that post-war sociology operated in a period of state protectionism from the market and that social science was concerned with issues emerging with the welfare state. However, we are now living in an era of ‘third wave’ marketisation and the state no longer offers the security it once did. Therefore, sociology must recognise this and engage in the politi-

cal sphere by supporting people to develop a reflexive and theoretical mode of relating to their world. This is what Burawoy (2005a) refers to as public sociology.

What about the future of sociology? Might it actually be to defend civil society against neo-liberal political rationality that attempts to individualise responsibility for the problems created by global economic forces? After all, sociology from its very beginning embodied a radical reorganisation of social relations. Maybe a more engaged social science is not really as new as we might think? The philosophers of the Enlightenment chanted a revolutionary rhetoric of a new class struggle against the ideology of the divine right and natural god-given order of social relations (Hobsbawm 1975). C. Wright Mills was one of the original campaigners of public sociology viewing professional sociology as ‘meaningless abstracted empiricism’ (Burawoy 2005b, 33). Alvin W. Gouldner (1970) argued that it is not just knowledge and technical skills that sociologists require; they also need ‘courage to compromise their careers on behalf of an idea’ (Gouldner 1970, 504). The fact that sociology challenges the existing framework and is accused of being too radical is not necessarily a problem, and in truth many would argue it is not radical enough. Sociology originally began to help spread the ideas of self determination and change the world, now often it is

used to conserve the very thing it sought to change (Burawoy 2005b). As Gouldner suggests, vulgar careerism is wide spread amongst the sociological profession and institutions. According to Gouldner (1970) sociology needs to be more reflexive and this reflexivity requires a radical character. Sociology has become too detached from the larger society – the object of its study. Universities, themselves once a place of intellectual freedom, are now part of the welfare state and as Gouldner (1970) puts it ‘sociology has become dangerously dependent upon the very world it has pledged to study objectively’ (Gouldner 1970, 512). To be a radical sociologist is not just to be critical, it involves a total praxis. Reflexive sociology is a work ethic that requires sociologists not to betray themselves in order to fit ‘neatly into the standardised requirements of his professional role’ (Gouldner 1970, 505).

So how might sociology be instrumental in defending civil society? First of all, it needs to acknowledge that public sociology cannot exist in isolation from other forms of sociology, outlined by Burawoy (2004) as ‘the Division of Sociological Labor’ consisting of four types of sociology: professional, policy, critical and public. Secondly, social scientists must become reflexive in what they do. They should investigate the causes and consequences of whichever issue they are dealing with and recognise that their interest in a better so-

ciety reaches beyond the university. Public sociology needs to connect with the people whose interests are best served by its knowledge (Burawoy 2005a).

However, this is more easily said than done given the commodification and privatisation of academic knowledge in the university. So perhaps it might be best to start with the actual university itself. Take for example our campaign and The Postgraduate Workers Association. I suppose like many campaigners I was somewhat affected by the issue personally. I was also the PhD representative for my school and was concerned about the financial difficulties PhD students encountered when trying to support themselves through their studies, as well as what resources a university offers for the career development of those students. Recent figures from the Higher Education Statistics Agency show that 32,735 students were doing an arts and humanities doctorate in the UK in 2011 (Tobin 2011). An estimated three out of ten full-time PhD students will not complete their doctorate within seven years and only one in three part-time PhD students will be likely to submit a thesis within six years (MacLeod 2005). Undoubtedly, the ‘right-wing’ press associates such statistics to the ‘declining’ standards of PhD students and holds the university responsible for not admitting the ‘right’ kind of student, accusing the university of seeing international students as

'cash cows' (see Paton 2008).

Nonetheless, universities need to recognise the value and expertise of casual teaching staff, including PhD students and the contribution they make to teaching. In the United States, universities are reliant on low-paid PhD researchers, postdocs and casual staff, often known as the 'ugly underworld of academia'. It was once expected that a PhD student would tolerate such conditions as a form of delayed gratification, as they would gain a good academic job later on. However, the struggles that early career researchers¹ are increasingly finding themselves in suggest an even more extended deferral of job satisfaction. Indeed, this might be reflected in the rise of PhD teachers' unions throughout the USA, which includes private universities. Yet, many of the elite institutions have been harder to infiltrate as many faculties argue that PhD students who teach are simply apprentices and should not have the same entitlements as workers (The Economist 2010).

There is also a broader concern about how the increased use of casualised lecturers may interact with the institutional responsibilities for the quality of the learning experience for the student. Commonly casualised staff do not have the same facilities as full time lecturing staff, including the use of office space making it difficult to arrange student contact hours. The issue seems even more central with stu-

dents paying higher tuition fees, which is likely to make them more consumer-orientated in their university and course choice, as well as more demanding about the quality of the teaching that they receive. Recently Liam Burns, President of the National Union of Students, stated that the standard of teaching seminars delivered by postgraduate students needs to be improved because of higher tuition fees (Boffey 2012). PhD students working as teachers face similar concerns, aware of the increased expectations that undergraduates will bring with them and the intensified scrutiny they are likely to be under because of the increased fees. Another issue is that many universities will offer some type of teacher training, but will not pay for the PhD students to gain a formal teaching qualification. Undergraduate students are often observant in the conditions and treatment of PhD students who teach. This has left PhD students feeling vulnerable. However, the university could address this by regarding PhD student teachers and casual staff as valuable members of the teaching team by not treating them as free or cheap labour to be exploited, or to be used to undercut their colleagues' pay and conditions, by also offering them the same pay and conditions as other established full time professionals.

A recent graduate teaching assistant (GTA) pay survey carried out by the British Postgraduate Philosophy

Association at 28 different university philosophy departments across the UK and Ireland revealed one of the biggest problems was being paid for the actual hours GTAs taught. Many GTAs were paid for the hours they taught and received no additional pay for preparation or marking and no additional holiday pay. Once their hourly wage was divided between the actual hours worked it turned out that many were working below the UK minimum wage of £7.20 per hour. At one particular university that remains unnamed in the survey, it was exposed that the average GTA received in real terms for the hours they worked just £4.79 per hour (Rowland 2012). Our own PGWA brief research² revealed that often PhD students³ are asked to teach on modules in which they are currently doing empirical research and have a large knowledge base on the subject. Postgraduates who work as teachers usually bring a large amount of energy and passion into their job as they are not weighed down with the more bureaucratic matters of the job that more established staff members have to deal with.

Paid teaching experience is a valuable source of income for PhD students, as well as being helpful in future employment. But if this is badly paid or not paid at all, why are PhD students doing it? Of course, this has just been answered: experience. Teaching experience is being sold as a major addition to PhD

students' CVs for future employment prospects. Many universities encourage PhD students to take on teaching work – so much so that some universities have started to 'outsource' their PhD student teachers. Nearby colleges and other universities often look for additional teaching staff from each other. In some situations, PhD students travel far distances often incurring expensive travel costs just to gain the experience. Then, at many universities bursary and scholarship students are expected to teach or work in some capacity for their faculty on an unpaid or reduced amount. This particularly affects international students who might receive a bursary to cover only the cost of their fees. They are then tied into a contractual agreement with the university in which they undertake this exploitative labour, reducing the time they might otherwise have had to earn money in other types of employment to support themselves financially.

Please do not misunderstand; PhD students often want to teach, and some universities have said because of the funding cuts and decreased enrolments there will be no teaching work available to PhD students from September 2012. Many universities have come up with several solutions to the issue. Some universities are assigning teaching work as 'part of the course' even to the point of getting students enrolled in a postgraduate certificate in education (PGCE)

to teach undergraduates for free as part of their placements. Other universities are cutting wages for PhD students and increasing their work load. At one institution, PhD students claim to be fighting a pay cut of over fifty percent by their own calculation. And, of course, some universities are simply increasing the class sizes and workloads for full-time established lecturers and not making teaching work available for PhD students. So what of the PhD students who feel that teaching experience is essential as part of their career development? Well, they can gain experience by teaching for free to enhance their CVs and it seems that some overstretched lecturers are only too keen to oblige. Indeed, some PhD students were not happy about a campaign that they saw as dictating what others can do and what they believe to be denying other students the opportunity to gain teaching experience on an unpaid basis.

However, every action has a consequence and no more so than in higher education, which acts as a powerful means for the reproduction and maintenance of social inequalities. By those PhD students who can afford to work for free doing so, they are consciously or unconsciously supporting a strategy of reproduction. Pierre Bourdieu and Luc Boltanski (1978) argued that when there was a change in the structure of the education system, the strategies of reproduction by the dominant

classes also altered so as to protect their positions in the class hierarchy. The restructuring of the economic field creates a change in the mode of appropriation of social and cultural capital, in which the dominant classes maximise the education system as an instrument of reproduction. According to the Higher Education Statistics Agency, there has been a 23 percent increase in people undertaking arts and humanities doctorates in the UK in the last ten years (Tobin 2011). Educational qualifications have become an essential requisition of economic and cultural capital in today's society, therefore increasing the number of people gaining qualifications to succeed in the labour market. As such, those in dominant positions in the class structure search for new strategies to counteract those from other social groups orienting themselves towards the same goals (Bourdieu and Boltanski 1978, 218).

PhD students working for free simply allows the most financially able people to take up these unpaid job 'opportunities'. This not only affects the livelihood and chances of completion for other struggling PhD students, but also helps to guarantee occupational success in the future through social networks and enhanced CVs, masking the social class inequalities that operate in the world of academia. What is more, PhD students should also consider the consequences that working for free will have on those members of

teaching staff that are essentially being undercut. Several academics have contacted the campaign to say that many of them are working on short-term contracts from one semester to the next, and in some cases have been doing so for as long as eight years even though this is illegal. They are increasingly finding it hard to find paid teaching work because universities are using PhD students on an unpaid basis. Although some academic staff might be tempted to use PhD students willing to work for free to relieve their increasing work load, the staff might in the process be opening up the lecturing profession to exploitation by university management. The Postgraduate Workers Association stands in solidarity with, not against, our colleagues and fellow students and we aim to unite with academic staff to form a democratic movement that fights to advance our interests cutting across all societal divides of social class, gender and ethnicity, using every appropriate method, including industrial action, protest, non-violent direct action, and institutional negotiation and lobbying. PGWA supports fair pay, pensions and conditions for all workers. We oppose fees and the marketisation and privatisation of education. We support action taken to advance these principles, in this country and abroad. PGWA is planning on collaborating with UCU anti-casualisation committee to help raise awareness of the job insecurity, worsening

employment conditions, the lack of occupational sick pay and the insufficient, or sometimes lack of office space that fixed-term and hourly paid staff are fighting just as post-graduate students are (PGWA 2012).

Conclusion

In the current economic climate, the fiscally constrained university is under increased pressure to make cuts and save money. However, this started because of the neo-liberal processes and market competition that universities have found themselves in since the 1980s. Such ruthless market competition might have severe effects on the future of some universities, notably, the ex-polytechnics as students' educational consumer choices intensify. Universities strive for more imaginative ways to make cutbacks – including the increased use of casualised and unpaid PhD student teaching staff – and academic labour seems to be more exploited than ever before. So should PhD students be doing all they can to enhance their CVs for future employment opportunities? It seems that PhD students might be mistaken in thinking that what is essentially exploitative labour will lead to a well-paid secure job once they have completed their studies, as they might just find themselves competing against other PhD students teaching for free! It appears that the purpose of social science also needs to alter in rela-

tion to the current context it finds itself in. This may well be to support those whose interests are best served by its knowledge.

The Postgraduate Workers Association is currently looking for people who want to get involved in this campaign either at a local university level or a national level assisting with the main organising duties. If you are interested in the campaign or the associated issue please contact us at postgraduate.worker@gmail.com. We are especially interested in hearing people's experiences and how they might be organising to resist this type of exploitation at their own university and are currently putting out a call for people to write pieces about this for our blog: <http://postgraduateworker.wordpress.com/>. You can find us on Facebook at: <http://www.facebook.com/#!/PGWorkers>. We are also planning a national conference in the autumn of 2012 to help raise awareness of the issue of postgraduate worker's exploitation and our campaign and will be having a Postgraduate block at the NUS national demonstration this autumn.

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Endnotes

¹ The issue of the casualisation of Higher Education and early career researchers is currently being researched by Dr Kirsten Forkert (University of East Anglia) with Dr Bridget Conor (Kings College London) but is not available for reference at the time of writing this.

² The research we undertook was of very small scale and basically involved putting out a call for experiences to postgraduate students who contacted us (as well as academics) with their stories. Therefore, the research has very little generalizability and validity. However, as the PGWA, one of the things we want to do is get the NUS and UCU to carry out more systemic research on the issue.

³ PhD students were encouraged to contact the campaign and share their experiences in order to get a better idea of the practices PhD students were experiencing. All participants were assured that their identity and their university's identity would be kept anonymous.

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The Coming Crisis? Some Questions for the Future of Empirical Sociology in the UK

Sam de Boise

Working in commercial research, it was interesting to note that many researchers had little grounding in academic social research methods or social theory. Organizations dealing with research often took for granted that to get at 'the truth' involved either simply 'talking to people' and looking at an aggregation of opinions, or carrying out a mix of 'pre' and 'post' (usually online) surveys and 'ad-hoc' pieces which privilege Likert scales as the primary tool of 'measurement'.

As Mike Savage and Roger Burrows (2007) note, such industries have challenged the public legitimacy of empirical sociological inquiry. Such a challenge arguably hinges on political rhetoric around demonstrable 'impact' and 'maximising efficiency'. However a lack of attention to research design poses significant problems for the authority that these industries lay claim to. Noting sociology's ethical value and personal experience of commercial, 'client led' research, this paper seeks to outline a case for the continued importance of rigorous, ethical social research in contemporary society and against narrow conceptions of impact.

Keywords: Impact, Ethical research, 'Coming Crisis', Mixed methods, Empirical Sociology.

Introduction

The current drive toward measurement and 'impact assessment' (IA) seems increasingly concerned with 'instrumental' research, based on commercial sector models. Because much sociological research is simply not reducible to quantifiable metrics of impact and causality, a move toward measuring 'impact' seeks to marginalise the discipline's ethical value and the quality of research, as well as fur-

ther damaging perceptions of sociology as 'useless'. Moves toward aping commercial sector research places more emphasis on speed and efficiency at the expense of considering how research comes to be used. This article outlines some key issues for consideration in securing a future of empirical sociology in the UK.

This article makes the case that there are three general trends which have led to the public devaluation of

sociological research. Firstly, sociology's relationship to institutional politics, which stands at odds with discursive emphasis on 'individuality' and New Labour's rhetoric around 'policy based evidence'. Secondly, it explains how methodological questions and challenges within the discipline, related to epistemological shifts, have led to a so-called 'crisis' (Savage and Burrows 2007). Thirdly, it points to the challenge from the private sector dependent on ideas around demonstrable 'impact'.

Zygmunt Bauman's (2000b) critique is then applied to illustrate the dangers of reducing empirical sociological research to what Michael Burawoy (2005) refers to as 'policy sociology', before detailing some practical, methodological considerations. These include increased use of online research and a broader engagement with 'mixed methods', as well as fundamental ethical questions around the uses of research. The contribution that sociological research still has to make cannot be made reducible simply to pre-specified 'outcomes' and this piece aims to demonstrate how client-led initiatives may undermine the initial spirit of the 'sociological imagination' (Wright Mills 1959).

The Political Problem of Sociology

In the midst of last year's unrest in London, Boris Johnson tellingly declared that "it is time that people who are engaged in looting and violence stopped hearing economic

and social justification for what happened" (Independent.co.uk 2011); these justifications (rather than explanations) give people excuses for bad behaviour. His accusation focused on the fact that sociologists were publicly explaining the violence with reference to the material and social inequalities engendered by a neoliberal system of governance. As Burawoy (2005, 6) has argued, sociology as a discipline is perceived to have moved 'to the left' and Johnson's comments seem to support this perception; sociology is dangerous for individuals because it provides an excuse for, if not an impetus toward, accepting that social location shapes behaviour.

This is sociology's fundamental insight, that it is the societies in which we live which give rise to belief in the importance and illusion of individualism as the perception of unrestrained thought and action independent of others (Wright Mills 1959; Elias 1991; 1994) The idea of being an individual is seemingly undone by social influence, because it suggests that we alone are not responsible for our circumstances. As C. Wright Mills (1959) succinctly notes in his division of 'issues and problems':

When in a city of 100,000, only one man [sic] is unemployed, that is his personal trouble...but when in a nation of 50 million employees, 15 million men are unemployed, that is an issue and we may not hope to find its solution

within the range of opportunities of one individual (Wright Mills 1959, 9).

Contemporary neoliberal rhetoric advocates precisely the opposite; the paramount importance of taking 'individual responsibility', tying 'freedom' to the perpetual 'freedoms' of market choice (Bauman 2000a; Harvey 2005; Davis 2008a; Bauman 2011).

Sociology, therefore, represents a particularly difficult case for contemporary politicians. On the one hand, it assumes a historically privileged authority to speak about societies (whom politicians allegedly serve) and on the other, it is frequently critical of the impact that governments have on those societies. It is unsurprising then that politicians are increasingly attempting to define the agenda of what academic sociologists should be studying; evident last year in the allocation of sizeable chunks of Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) funding into investigating the 'Big Society' (Boffey 2011). This disregard for the 'Haldane principle'¹, which in this country has never been truly autonomous from interest-led funding (Shore 2010, 22), indicates empirical sociology's common use as a footnote in a media appearance, political spin or commons debate; to back up what politicians wanted to say, rather than to question the assumptions behind what they are saying.

Political mobilisation against the 'sociological imagination' certainly intensified during the Thatcher years in the UK, manifest in concerted attempts to undermine the public role of the social sciences. For example the Social Science Research Council, initially established in 1965 to provide government support for a semi-autonomous social sciences (Bulmer, Coates and Dominian 2007, 91), was threatened with closure (Cornish and Clarke 1987, 191). It was eventually kept open but funding subsidies were severely cut and its namesake changed to the Economic and Social Science Research Council (ESRC) in 1982. No doubt Thatcher's public denunciation of society as fictional² also did the discipline a good deal of harm and whilst she subsequently argued that the abridged version of her full quote 'there is no such thing as society' was a deliberate distortion of her intentions (Thatcher 1993, 626), as Gerald R. Steele (2009) notes, this was something sociologists were all too happy to perpetuate. He has a point; a lazy demonization of Thatcher on the grounds of one 'out of context' sound-bite is not nearly enough.

Not that contempt for sociology is necessarily the preserve of Conservative or the current Coalition government (who also slashed ESRC funding by just under thirty percent last year). Despite common perceptions, sociology is not de facto 'left wing' (Holmwood 2007,

53) any more than it is completely ignored by policy makers, as the legacy of Parsonian functionalism in the U.S. attests (Bauman 2000b). Whilst Anthony Giddens' sociologically grounded, 'Third Way'³ (see Giddens 2000) famously provided the rationale for New Labour's populist shift from 'left to centre left right' (McRobbie 2000), sociological work is increasingly considered of use only if it spells out, in direct 'actionable' terms, exactly what government policy should do.

To this end, as Katherine Smith (2011) notes, David Blunkett's particular disdain for sociological research led him to ask:

Can the social science community help to improve government or is it destined to be largely irrelevant to the real debates that affect people's life chances? [...] often in practice we have felt frustrated by a tendency for research either to address issues other than those directly relevant to the political and policy debate or, in a seemingly perverse way, to set out to collect evidence that will prove a policy wrong rather than genuinely seeking to evaluate or interpret its impact (Blunkett 2000).

New Labour's particular problem with sociology hinged on the rhetoric of 'policy-based evidence'. As Alan Finlayson remarks, according to 'Third Way theory', 'policy is legitimated not by ethical principles, but the truth of certain social facts'

(Finlayson 1999, 271); sociological research however is not often amenable to easy, direct, policy implications (Bulmer, Coates and Dominian 2007; Monaghan 2008a; 2008b) or providing 'facts'. Therefore sociological research came to be challenged not only on the grounds that it was antagonistic toward governmental policy, but also difficult to implement.

Conversely, policy-based-evidence meant that it was too easy to construct a bricolage of multiple pieces of 'evidence' (Dwyer and Ellison 2009; Monaghan 2011), which may be mutually incompatible in many ways, to push a singular policy. Refraining from a fuller discussion around the problems of loaded terms such as objective 'social' or 'natural' scientific research (Papineau 1979; Fay 1984; Harding 1986; Longino 1987; Kemp and Holmwood 2003; Tebes 2005), it should be noted that the cautionary conclusions of empirical sociology are often deliberate attempts to stress the impossibility of providing singular, definitive 'answers'. Societies as dynamic processes are infinitely more complex than 'cause and effect' models that underwrite the assumptions of the 'natural' sciences (Holmwood 2001). Thus empirical sociology often requires appropriately complex interpretations.

As a concept, the 'Third Way' was adopted, not because it was particularly radical, but because it reflected a particular ideological stance which

mirrored that of New Labour's leaders (themselves a by-product of discourses which emphasised the free market and the abject failure of Keynesianism), whilst appearing to transgress old class divisions. It heralded the death of both left and right yet what this kind of rhetoric actually did was to further entrench inequalities in both material and cultural terms (Harvey 2005), operating itself as an ideological driving force; what others have termed 'post-political' (Žižek 2000; 2005).

The Problem with Sociological Objectivity

The knowledge generated through sociological research also occupies a liminal space between 'proper science' and 'arty subjects'. Crucially, an ideological separation of art and science as polar opposites (Adorno and Horkheimer 1997 [1947], 18), rests on the perception of the extent to which the type of knowledge generated may be seen as 'objective'. 'Objective' knowledge, supposedly achieved through 'rational', detached experimentation, often carries greater political freight over 'subjective' types of knowledge, achieved through individual involvement, feelings, thoughts and interpretation. As Victor J. Seidler (1994, 24) notes, the devaluation of 'subjective' knowledge, rests on a particularly gendered conception of knowledge as distorted through embodied experience (see also Bartky 1990; Shildrick 1997).

Sociology's Comptean legacy of 'social physics', and later development through Durkheimian positivism (Durkheim 1970 [1897]) have often coloured attempts to make it more like the 'natural' sciences (Fay and Moon 1977). Such appeals are made on the grounds that in remaining 'objective', sociological research becomes 'more valid' and therefore 'more legitimate'. What is important to note here is that sociology is often perceived as subjective interpretation, precisely because it is a discipline where the researcher or student is inseparable from the 'object' of study; it is a discipline *sui generis* (Kilminster 1998).

With this in mind, much of sociology's political devaluation can also be explained by shifts in methodological epistemologies. This partially explains a decentring of sociological authority as the discipline has moved toward more 'post-structuralist' methods of 'subjective interpretation'. What the 'phenomenological turn' (Husserl 1967) highlighted was that what constitutes 'A' singular population can and should be contested. As Clark E. Moustakas (1994) notes, "Husserl's phenomenology...emphasises subjectivity and discovery of the essences of experience...Husserl's approach is called 'phenomenology' because it utilises only the data available to the consciousness – the appearance of objects" (Moustakas 1994, 45, original italics).

It depends then on how the per-

ception is shaped by social experience; if sociological research reveals truths, whose truths are they? How do respondents understand questions compared to those who write them? What are the ethical implications of speaking for people that researchers have never spoken to? Such questions facilitated broader methodological shifts, leading to greater use of qualitative methodologies and recognising the position of the researcher in social research. However the popular equation of interpretivist methods of knowing, which often explicitly involve direct, 'unobjective' discussion with those engaged in society, with subjective and therefore 'partial' truths, has rendered sociology, in popular and political consciousness at least, less comparable to the 'natural sciences' and therefore less valid.

The impact of feminist critiques of positivism (see Oakley 1981a;1981b; Longino 1987; Bartky 1990; Harding 1996; Oakley 1998) has also shaped sociological empiricism. The influence of feminist theories and methodologies exposed both the claims to universality that sociology had made (universal assumptions didn't speak for women) and also built on criticisms that 'objective' accounts of experience were themselves shaped by 'malestream' agendas (Hearn 2004, 49). In light of this, sociologists have themselves been keen to caveat the partiality of claims that can be derived from 'populations', thus steer-

ing clear of accusations of class, age and gender bias and ethno- and hetero-centricity. This is, again, a particular problem for policy makers who demand easy, direct solutions to seemingly universal problems.

At both national and supranational levels, the problems of making claims to 'full' representation have therefore been exposed as more and more difficult, thus narrowing the focus of some sociological projects for justifiably pragmatic reasons. Alongside this, recognising the researcher's own biases and incorporating reflexivity into the process of enquiry (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) refutes any claim to scientific 'objectivity'. Empirical sociological research then is a double bind; it cannot be removed from its object of enquiry but conversely, if it gets too close then it loses claims to providing evidence and representation rather than opinion. However sociological researchers cannot speak for interstices of every single variable in complex societies nor can sociological enquiry, in good conscience, make generalised claims without reflecting on the limitations of its scope.

The Coming Crisis to Empirical Sociology

There is a common public perception then that if data generated by qualitative methodologies are less 'scientifically objective' they are therefore less valid. This perhaps strengthens the case for develop-

ing quantitative methodologies in the social sciences in order to provide a more rigorous comprehensive analysis of multiple, complex trends where some qualitative research designs are lacking (see Onwuegbuzie and Leech 2005; Onwuegbuzie and Leech 2007). However there are particular problems surrounding quantitative research which have also led to the erosion of sociological authority. On this point, as Savage and Burrows (2007) note:

The sample survey, it is claimed, and so we tell our students, allows us to generalize and predict through revealing enduring regularities by the use of inferential statistics...[however] one difficulty is that in an intensely researched environment, response rates have been steadily falling, and it is proving more difficult to obtain response rates of 80 per cent or more, which were once thought normal. People no longer treat it as an honour to be asked their opinion, but instead see it as a nuisance, or even an intrusion (Savage and Burrows 2007, 889).

Key to the positivist method, commonly linked to Emile Durkheim's positivist sensibilities in *Suicide* (1970 [1897]), was access to large numbers of those who represent 'a population'. The equation of 'large robust datasets' with statistically sound 'scientific', and thus 'better' conclusions, or what Stephen

Gorard calls the 'numbers are fab' villain (Gorard 2004, 7), still has discursively popular undertones, both within and outside sociology. This is a hangover no doubt of positivism as the Enlightenment method of generation of 'facts', par excellence (Adorno and Horkheimer 1997 [1947]).

In addition to steadily falling survey completion rates amongst populations (Cook, Heath and Thompson 2000, 823), the internet now theoretically provides the ability for anyone to conduct 'social research' regardless of the assumptions that social research courses have taught us to be aware of. The growth in survey sites and free survey software enables greater ease of data collection, potentially democratising the types of knowledge production that sociology itself has invested in. This carries a potential cost however because as Couper (2005) argues, 'the internet gives the lone researcher the power to survey large numbers of potential respondents cheaply and quickly. However, in doing so, the profession may be losing control over the quality of the work being done' (Couper 2005, 494).

Savage and Burrows (2007) also point out that the unequivocal access to transactional data, which the internet affords large companies who 'routinely collect' this information (Amazon, eBay, iTunes to name a few), presents empirical sociology with a problem; can sociologists make claims to specialist knowl-

edge, when non-academic entities actually have greater access to 'accurate' data on demographic profiles, spending habits, tastes and behaviour? With regards to inductive method (see Blaikie 2010, 84), companies such as Amazon, eBay, Facebook and Twitter are far more able to identify underlying trends (and develop successful marketing strategies from these trends) than academic surveys, in order to infer not just what people are buying, but why they are buying in certain ways. These companies are able to demonstrate direct singular outcomes by multiple demographic factors.

This is Weber's critical distinction of sociology's core aims. Typically, the main limitation of most forms of quantitative research has arguably been its stress on the 'what' (erklären) over the 'why' (verstehen). Using sophisticated data mining techniques in order to map trends and target advertising, companies like Facebook almost fully collapse a fiercely retained, yet occasionally arbitrary (Howe 1988; Blaikie 2010) distinction, between the 'qualitative' and the 'quantitative'. In many ways Facebook's almost unparalleled access to personal information makes it a much more effective tool for understanding the attitudes and motivations of different groups than many national and transnational surveys. Given that status updates are commonly taken as indicative of 'authentic' or 'honest' attitudes, an aggregation of Facebook 'rants'

represent a considerable threat to carefully constructed sociological surveys designed to elicit precisely these types of response.

Of course what constitutes an 'authentic' or 'honest' thought firstly requires greater interrogation of the researcher's philosophical dispositions (Mason 1996). That companies such as Facebook cannot set directly the terms of research, and have limited application when it comes to exploring anything beyond purchasing habits, still guarantees a special place for the 'sociological imagination' – especially with regards to critical, social research. Nevertheless, what Savage and Burrows demonstrate is that perception around the usefulness of empirical sociology has shifted significantly. The staples of positivist method especially have been largely rejected by sociology and colonised by commercial research.

Impact and Accountability

The 'coming crisis' to 'academic' sociology rests on perceptions of, and political rhetoric around sociology's 'use value'. Increasingly, government funded research with the intention of feeding directly into public policy has been put out to tender to private research agencies and university departments as if they are the same, whilst simultaneously politicians stress the 'accountability' of universities for the type of research they conduct (Willettts 2011). As outlined above, looking to commercial

organisations as well as universities may be justified by the notion that increasingly sophisticated techniques of sociological analysis are not the preserve of sociology departments. The question then is to whom sociological research is made accountable.

The cornerstone of what is labelled academic 'accountability' is the idea of measuring 'impact', encouraging a visible quantification of costs over benefits. Integral to this in universities is the now outmoded Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) and the incoming Research Excellence Framework (REF) which as Taylor (2008, 336) notes, 'marks the push towards 100 per cent metrics-driven evaluation of research for science-based subjects and part-metrics, part 'light-touch' peer review for the social sciences and humanities'. Journals now come with an 'impact factor' rating on which to measure 'good' and 'bad' publications and the assumption is that the 'best' journals have the highest impact and receive more submissions so that academics may improve their 'REFability'. This is entrenched within a neoliberal framework of market creation and ideologically legitimated by appeals to 'driving-up' research standards (Gillespe, Pusey, Russell and Sealey-Huggins 2011).

The ESRC have developed a deliberately broad definition of what constitutes research 'with impact' in order to allocate funding to universi-

ties. In essence this equates to what types of research are considered worthy of funding and which are not, on the ostensible premise that social research should be beneficial to certain aspects of society. Of particular concern for a sociological audience however is who 'worthwhile' research appears to be beneficial for:

A key aspect of this definition of research impact is that impact must be demonstrable. It is not enough just to focus on activities and outputs that promote research impact, such as staging a conference or publishing a report. You must be able to provide evidence of research impact, for example, that it has been taken up and used by policy makers, and practitioners, has led to improvements in services or business... you can't have impact without excellence (ESRC 2012).

There is however a troubling conflation of the ESRC's conception of 'use value' with economic or instrumental outcomes, indicating that the value of social research should be conceived of only in terms of how it helps policy makers or profiteering. This raises three key concerns with regard to empirical sociology. First, that the outcomes can be specified in advance so as to be measured; this is problematic because it fails to consider the ethical impact of research in the long term. Secondly, cost and time constraints feed into

bad research design, actually damaging the quality of the research being conducted. Thirdly, and perhaps more troublingly, the idea that impact can be measured rests on the classic ‘test’ and ‘control’ model of metric ‘measurement’, discounted by sociologists but so frequently used in testing the ‘impact’ of advertising campaigns, which denies the subjectivity of ‘objective’ research and attempts to ‘predict’ if not control populations (Bauman 1994; Bauman 2000b).

Questions of Ethics

What are noticeably absent from the ESRC’s conception of impact as ‘research which is used by policy makers, and practitioners [or] has led to improvements in services or business’, are fundamental philosophical and sociological questions of ethics; particularly whom the social research taken up by policy makers or businesses benefits. Whilst the ESRC recognises that ‘determining the impact of social science research is not a straightforward task’ (ESRC 2012), there is a significant danger that measuring impact becomes a euphemism for ‘value for money’, reduced to a simplistic cost-benefit equation. This may either favour those approaches which can quantify observations (i.e. quantitative approaches) or those which provide economic benefit. Again, a justifiable concern around impact is how and who empirical sociology will be accountable to and impacts

on. Popular opinion would undoubtedly be the imaginary figure of the (singular) ‘tax payer’, yet the most vocal tax payers seldom reflect the interests of a diverse society.

Private research agencies may be interested in doing government work for ‘philanthropic’ or ethical reasons, but their *raison d’être* is hardly the pursuit of genuine understanding of social phenomena. ‘Costing’ projects, (uncoincidentally much like current academic workload models), involve breaking every aspect of a project into quantifiable ‘chunks’; essentially reducing projects to equations of cost vs. quality. Secondly, in order to secure future investment from government bodies, and therefore profit, agencies need to produce results which are going to be favourable to those allocating the funding. Providing an insightful piece of research which goes against the funders is unlikely to make for a good working relationship. Local governments must certainly also know, even without research, that in economically deprived areas, people are likely to say that they want more police, or more investment. What they really want are sound bites to show this.

In breaking research down in such a way so as to maximise the efficiency of costs, to deliver an ‘end product’, to make research accountable to the funding body, the longer term impact of this kind of research on communities, people or populations is ignored. This is another

of the key side effects in reducing 'impact' to quantifiable metric assessments (De Angelis and Harvie 2009) as if they are merely objective reflections of quality. As Bauman (2000b) highlights, 'the humanities may (conceivably) rise to a scientific status in a world in which their speaking/interpreting human subjects descend (or are pushed down) to the status of speechless objects; in a world remade after the likeness of concentration camps' (Bauman 2000b, 74). A narrowly instrumental, empirical sociology modelled on commercial, private sector research, like a positivist objective sociology, is precariously balanced to do more harm than good, as it acts in the interests of those who define the limits of the research, rather than those who the research is actually supposed to benefit.

This is exactly what Burawoy warned of in his 2004 address. From a position in the American academy, he was well placed to document the withering of ethical questions when sociology departments formed economic alliances with private sector institutions or, I would suggest, tried to ape their mechanisms. Empirical sociology should be wary of what he calls 'policy sociology' or 'sociology in the service of a goal defined by a client' (Burawoy 2005, 9). As he goes on to argue, 'if market research had dominated the funding of policy sociology, as [C. Wright] Mills feared it would, then we could all be held to ransom' (Burawoy 2005, 17). The

contention here is that empirical sociology is being held to ransom. Not only by the direct funding of projects by multinationals or conglomerates, but also by the dictates of neoliberalism; rationalised efficiency, competition, instrumental value, speed, the commodification of thought through 'knowledge economics' (Harvie 2006; De Angelis and Harvie 2009) and the 'increased marketability of scientific knowledge with concomitant commercial investment in its production' (Holmwood 2007, 48).

A notion of ethical, empirical, sociology should also not be confused with the idea of formalised ethics committees as being the sole determinant of sociological research's ethical validity. In fact, as Martyn Hammersley (2009) argues, such ethics committees may actually work against sociology's ethical contributions. Empirical sociology cannot be subject to rigid quantifiable metrics of impacts and outcomes or ethical approval forms which standardise means / ends approaches (any more than it already has historically), because attempts to calculate and order social life, which 'orthodox' sociology presumed (Bauman 1994; Bauman 2000b), dehumanises the object of sociological enquiry, rendering the purposes of sociology redundant at best and sinister at worst.

Bad Research Design

The staple of projects in private sector media research, where I

worked, usually included ascertaining how many people recognised an advert on TV before and after an ad campaign and whether this meant (often on a five point Likert scale) that they were more or less willing or likely to buy a product; thus demonstrating impact. Average turnaround time for a project was about two months, including analysis. Generally the sex and age of the product's 'target market', or the potential to buy or watch something, were ascertained and then data were generated in line essentially with what would give clients a positive outcome.

Advertising departments for example wanted to see that advertising on a particular medium 'worked', or have quotes to back up that their advertising was going to work. Many of the decisions had already been made by the time research was conducted, so there was very little to gain by subsequently critiquing those decisions. Research often involved quota sampling (for problems associated with quota sampling see Gorard 2004, 72-73) and online surveys were the primary method of data collection here because they were cheap and quick. There was huge emphasis on getting the 'best CPI' (cost per interview), though depending on the use of the research, sample sizes varied considerably.

'Accountability' and 'impact' also place undue stress on the design process. Let me provide a few brief examples of how this may happen, in

the same agency in which I worked. The company was asked to conduct research on the effectiveness of a campaign which aimed at trying to reduce binge drinking behaviour amongst young people, funded jointly by a central government body and a public service broadcaster. Adverts were run on a TV show, popular amongst 16-24 year olds, in tandem with storylines on the same show, highlighting the dangers of binge drinking. There were also anti-binge storylines in an online series consisting of ten minute episodes, in an effort to 'de-glamorise' binge drinking. Conducting an online survey with regular viewers and non-regular viewers, before, during and after the storylines and online episodes were aired, behaviour related to binge drinking was found to have gone up at odd intervals. This was especially amongst those who were regular viewers of the show and had seen the online episodes.

There were four plausible explanations. Firstly, those regular viewers were more likely to be engaged in binge drinking than non-regular viewers. This didn't explain overall binge drinking going up amongst both groups. Secondly, that the anti-binge drinking storylines actually glamorised binge drinking (definitely possible). Thirdly, that the respondents at one of the stages had completely different attitudes to drinking, despite being from similar backgrounds (again, fully plausible). Fourthly, in order to price the work

'competitively', preparation time had been cut and other potential influences on 'binge drinking' had not been isolated. The 'post' stage of research took place after 16-24 year olds were likely to have completed GCSEs, AS Levels, A-Levels and University exams and thus were more likely to be drinking heavily during those periods. Luckily quantitative data is often amenable to selective distortion in order to 'paint a positive picture'.

This was not necessarily due to a series of bad individual decisions, but the demands placed on 'time' and 'value for money' leading to some major oversights on both the part of the client and research agency. The questions in the survey were also mainly derived from personal experiences of binge drinking amongst agency colleagues and the client's own ideas (both parties' average ages were often far greater than 24). In addition, virtually no consideration was given as to the explanations as to why young people seem to drink more in the first place. This was treated as common sense.

Similarly, on commission from regional Primary Care Trusts (PCTs), the agency looked at the causes of male obesity in the North of England. The interviews conducted with respondents had a narrow focus on individual circumstance rather than socio-economic or cultural factors, which would have taken much longer to investigate. Research design

generally assumed a linear causal link between what people said as indicative of their 'honest' opinions, marketing and behaviour change; precisely the same simplistic assumptions that have shifted sociological research away from instrumental behaviourism. Presenting interviewees with a series of posters designed to shock and produce instant change, failed to accurately determine why certain areas have higher levels of alcohol consumption contributing to obesity in the first instance. In addition, sending someone weighing ten and a half stone to interview people about which advertisements would make them lose the equivalent of their entire body mass, was on at least one occasion, met with an unsurprising 'I'm not being funny mate, but you just wouldn't understand'.

This will more often than not be the case in private, market-oriented, outcome driven research. Where there is a lack of autonomy, with the focus on consistent turnover of projects and profits, questioning the quality, scope and use of the research will always be secondary. This is the irrationality of the conveyor belt approach to empirical enquiry and an increasingly narrow, instrumental, empirical sociology, which attempts to ape commercial sector models. This is the main concern in the reduction of relatively autonomous, governmental funding for the social sciences, greater emphasis on impact and measure-

ment (the rhetoric of accountability), and advocating ‘partnerships’ between private enterprise and universities. Good empirical sociological research asks not only about the wider social context in which behaviours are formulated, but broader ethical questions about how the research will be used and what difference empirical research will make to discursive shifts in understanding. Such questions are lacking in private research precisely because they put up barriers to outcome led research; barriers that are time consuming and costly, but mostly unproductive to consider.

Some Suggestions for Sociological Empiricism

It is necessary to make value judgments about good and bad pieces of social research, by understanding the conditions in which that research is formulated. Social research conducted by either universities or private sector agencies is self-defeating on its own terms if it simply provides the aggregation of opinions designed to tell a (singular) ‘story’. In this case ‘researchers’ become merely narrators (not to be confused with the serious endeavours of interpretivism).

What the opening up of universities to market-oriented logic has the potential to further entrench is the same conveyor belt approach to empirical sociology as that of the private sector; staple methods for predetermined situations and repeti-

tious ‘insights’ that lead to observing symptoms rather than understanding their origination. Unreflexive and unquestioning use of the staples of empirical sociology, surveys, questionnaires and interviews for example, which fail to engage with the broader issues of phenomenology, positivism, experience, ‘truth’ and researcher ‘position’, are not the practical application of academic theory but a different endeavour entirely.

This is not to say that empirical sociology should be directed to crudely behaviourist and instrumental policy ends, nor that individual sociologists necessarily should be considered as solely dictating the terms of their research from their ‘ivory towers’ (as is a popular narrative). What sociology as a discipline develops is awareness that sociological research is not undertaken because of the acts of ‘unique’ individual thinkers (Bayatrizi 2009). There is no option to conduct research in an individualist, ethical vacuum because the agenda has already been shaped by the methodological, ideological or institutional boundaries.

As Ben Watson (2011) in a characteristic polemic against ‘pop sociology’, states; ‘designed to inform government and commercial bodies, empirical sociology must perforce concentrate on ‘business as usual’, rather than on the capitalist society that produced them. The normative, quantifying approach

inevitably promotes reaction, since it is concerned with what is, not what might be' (Watson 2011, 108). Given that quantitative empirical sociology tends toward retroactive categorisation, how far can it describe and critique social process when, at the moment of analysis, its object of study (trends, tastes, behaviours) may have already eluded it, rendering its critique regressive?

Whilst this is a deliberately caricatured reading of sociology by Watson, it raises key issues which question the relativist nature of sociology as just a collection of opinions. Even in abstraction, quantitative data can help to lay bare the material effects of social processes, leading to critique and feeding back in to empirical research, though not to the point of ever closing that critique down. The relationship between 'critique' and 'evidence' need not necessarily be a linear or even cyclical one. Instead it must be more discursive in form; less easily ordered and less constrained by the dictates of instrumental economics.

Empirical sociology cannot be separated from a theoretical grounding. Yet sociology cannot start from a rejection of empiricism either. By constantly challenging our own assumptions as sociologists about the ways in which society works, reflexively questioning our position at every stage (Bourdieu 1989; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992), through theory and experience, sociology can foster rather than close down dia-

logue. As Rogers Brubaker (1993) notes, social theory is itself a form of constantly 'becoming' which shapes our expectations as sociologists. Therefore we must be conscious of the ways in which identification with the discipline informs how we approach research and come to imagine what our research will yield. As with practical critiques of positivism, the generation of universal claims about society made solely from the point of theory is in danger of doing precisely what Bauman rightly fears about empiricism; the reduction of humans to objects.

Perhaps unpopularly, it should also be suggested that the future of empirical sociological research must engage more with, but not adopt wholesale, some of the methods of commercial research. There is a great deal of potential for refining some of the cruder research methods employed by private sector organisations, not to mention the co-creation of research by democratic means. Whilst there are still major considerations with using online methods (see Weible and Wallace 1998; Cook, Heath and Thompson 2000; Crawford, Couper and Lamais 2001; Vehovar, Manfreda and Batagelj 2001; Kwak and Radler 2002; Shih and Fan 2008), of which coverage is still one of the most pressing issues (Couper 2000, 467), new techniques of conducting quantitative or qualitative research can be a practical means of generating data particularly on sensitive,

personal and hard to discuss topics (Duffy, Smith, Terhanian and Bremer 2005; DiNitto, Busch-Armendariz, Bender, Woo et al. 2008).

Similarly the rejection of some methods or approaches outright because they don't necessarily fit with an epistemological tradition, is problematic (Howe 1988; Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004, 15). Beginning from the premise that different methodologies are only useful for distinct and separate reasons, the exploratory nature of social research becomes limited. To see only respondents' interpretations as important diminishes the researcher's ability to locate these interpretations in a wider, relational context. Clearly regularities in behaviour based on similar social location still exist, despite the mutability of language. On the other hand, to assume knowledge a priori of the respondents' interpretations, therefore conducting a standardised set of quantitative interviews on the assumption that questions will be understood in exactly the same way, reduces the researcher's ability to understand subjectivities.

Private agencies do not necessarily have the same moral or philosophical impasses restricting the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods, and whilst failing to interrogate such assumptions is clearly a problem, this is not something restricted to commercial research. Engaging with quantitative methods does not necessarily mean

subscribing to an objective positivism and qualitative methods do not necessarily undermine the ability to generalise or capture the experience of a wide range of different people. To deny knowledge of anything outside of the researcher's individual experience is to commit to an 'extreme Protagorean relativism' (Winch 1964, 308), which renders empirical sociology comparable to the neoliberal frameworks which have undermined sociology's ethical contributions.

Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1989; 1991) concept of 'intersectionality' made the 'situatedness of all forms of knowledge' clear (Haraway 1988; Davis 2008b). This is a significantly important concept for sociological empiricism, as it makes demands for a more ethical conception of equality, through the recognition of difference. However, just as the universal 'truths' provided by positivism erased certain groups' experiences, thus marginalising them, increasingly microcosmic approaches to sociological method have conversely led to increasingly parochial research projects. In this respect, all approaches to social research are equally valid, regardless of their quality. As already argued above, this should not be considered the case.

Whilst the problems of 'meaning imposition' (Pawson 1989) exist more tangibly in quantitative research strategies, as Anthony Onwuegbuzie and Nancy L. Leech

(2005) note:

[I]nterpretivists also are not safe from criticism. In particular, their claim that multiple, contradictory, but valid accounts of the same phenomenon always exist is extremely misleading, inasmuch as it leads many qualitative researchers to adopt an 'anything goes' relativist attitude, thereby not paying due attention to providing an adequate rationale for interpretations of their data (Onwuegbuzie and Leech 2005, 378).

The tendency toward arbitrary sample selection is as equally at fault in qualitative empirical accounts as in quantitative generalisations. The idea that quantitative strategies fail to be of use if they include subjective interpretation of the question is as naive as thinking that interviews necessarily counteract the problem of 'imposing meaning'. Seeking to reduce foisting the researcher's own assumptions on respondents (through the inclusion of lengthy open ended responses, whereby respondents can write if they do not understand what is expected of them), can be a practical use of carefully designed online survey; in other words 'the conduct of the fully objective and value free research is a myth, even though the regulatory ideal of objectivity can be a useful one' (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004, 15-16 my emphasis).

Mixed methods research emerged as a distinct paradigm in re-

sponse to bipartisan conflicts, within the social sciences, over methodologies (Collins, Onwuegbuzie and Jiao 2007; Tashakkori and Creswell 2007; Teddlie and Tashakkori 2009). Whilst 'mixed methods', and more frequently 'triangulation', become terms thrown into research proposals or methodology chapters without sufficient consideration, mixed methods research combines both philosophical (Tashakkori and Teddlie 1998; Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004; Johnson, Onwuegbuzie and Turner 2007) and pragmatic elements (Onwuegbuzie and Leech 2005; Creswell and Plano Clark 2007) of empirical research in its own right.

There is no firm consensus as to what form a mixed methods design must take, however it is generally agreed that it involves adopting a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches (Collins, Onwuegbuzie and Jiao 2007, 267), as opposed to the combining of one or more qualitative or quantitative methods (for example including face-to-face life histories, structured interviews and online surveys).

John W. Creswell and Vicki L. Plano Clark (2007) advocate that '[B]y mixing the datasets, the researcher provides a better understanding than if either dataset has been used alone' (Creswell and Clark 2007, 7). They go on to note however that 'it is not simply enough to collect and analyze quantitative and qualitative data; they need to

be 'mixed' in some way so that together they form a more complete picture of the problem than they do when standing alone' (Creswell and Clark 2007, 7). This raises both the question of what mixed methods research can add (thus what the purpose is of employing both methods over using one) and also how to integrate different forms of data.

Both questions are inevitably dependent on the methodological and epistemological persuasions of the researcher. If the data generated are seen as antagonistic rather than complementary, then both questions are difficult to answer. What a mixed methods strategy offers is the elucidation of key trends, framed in terms of respondents' interpretations, whilst offering a much broader picture of differences and similarities in attitudes between demographic groups. Individual respondents' motivations, attitudes and feelings can therefore be explained in their own terms, whilst linking this to both individual responses, specifically in relation to the open ended questions, and the broader trends evident in the various demographic categories to which they identified.

Summary

The future of empirical sociological research is not just about better, 'more innovative' methods, more time spent on thinking about how to phrase questions or how to ensure outcomes. It is about a contribution to ongoing dialogue or again, as

Bauman (2000b) puts it '...the kind of enlightenment which sociology is capable of delivering is directed to such freely choosing individuals; sociology is a service to a democratic society insofar as it enhances and reinforces that freedom of choice, re-opens rather than closes the work of signification' (Bauman 2000b, 79-80). The kind of means/ends instrumental approach that commercially sponsored sociological and commercial research adopts attempts to close down this debate, by providing facile explanation. Empirical sociological research needs to retain the idea of not attempting to provide a definitive answer, but better understanding of the ways in which different ideas are constructed.

What is clear is that empirical sociology needs to develop autonomy from the dictates of commercial interests and 'laissez faire' knowledge economics. Whilst the new privatised university system in Britain aims to further engender 'accountability' as a rhetorical device, especially with regards to the allocation of research funding, it should be noted that very few sociologists reject the idea of accountability to the 'object' of their enquiry. This 'object' should be toward people and societies however, with a view to expanding the opportunities and possibilities of the disenfranchised groups; not to increasing control of marginalised populations. This was the ordering potential of moral statistics (Bauman 1994; Bayatrizi 2009)

and orthodox sociology (Bauman 2000b), geared precariously toward social engineering.

Governments cannot and should not put funding for social research out to competitive tender. There is no absolutist way of knowing how empirical research will be used or received; thus, directing it to an instrumentally singular 'end', as is the fear with the new 'impact assessment' criteria, will inevitably be a futile, costly and dangerous exercise. This is the broader ethical challenge that empirical sociology needs to address which should be placed over and beyond the dictates of impact, outcome, or more troublingly, profit.

At the heart of this system is a shift in accountability from 'publics' to 'funders', contributing directly to the perception that if it doesn't feed directly into social policy, individual earning potential or economic interest, then empirical sociological research is useless. It is far more useless however, to feed directly into a policy where the parameters have already been pre-determined. The coming crisis to empirical sociology consists not just in a case of companies having access to more data than academies, but also in resisting the temptation to engage with the kind of instrumentality that undermines the point of sociological research and reduces it to a mouth-piece for commercially selective interests.

Research geared toward 'client satisfaction' often produces ill-

thought out designs. This should not be the aim of academic, empirical sociology; to bolster the reputation, or the profiteering potential of the university. Aside from undermining the ethical commitment to which empirical sociology should be directed, a focus on conveyor belt approaches to research grants undermines the quality of the work done. On a practical level, empirical sociology must seek to reengage with the methods, but not the ethos of, some aspects of commercial sector research. The bipartisan conflicts which emerged as a reaction to positivism are justified, yet a continuing conflation of method with epistemology has the potential to reproduce some of the worst aspects of these conveyor belt approaches. On the other hand, as Savage and Burrows (2007) note, it is not enough to simply reject research done by commercial sector enterprises on the basis of greater expertise within universities. What empirical sociology has to offer should extend far beyond 'better' methods; it should look to fundamentally question the uses of research and the value of any empirical work directed toward instrumental ends.

Endnotes

¹ This was established as a result of the 'Haldane report', published in 1918, which advocated that 'decisions about what to spend research funds on should be made by researchers rather than politicians' (see <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/>

cmselect/cmdius/168/16807.htm)

² 'There is no such thing as society. There is living tapestry of men and women and people and the beauty of that tapestry and the quality of our lives will depend upon how much each of us is prepared to take responsibility for ourselves and each of us prepared to turn round and help by our own efforts those who are unfortunate' (Thatcher 1993, 626).

³ This essentially purports to be a non-ideological economic and moral position reflecting a 'middle ground' between Keynesian capitalism and communitarian socialism and, between cultural segregation and cultural homogeneity.

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Future Subjects? Education, Activism and Parental Practices

Yvette Taylor

This paper considers the 'coming forward' of certain classed subjects through the fields of education, parenting and activism. Questions of the future pose who, where and when questions: who is 'stuck' in the past, who is capacitated as taking 'us' forward, and what embodied, spatial and material collisions occur in these renderings of past-present-future? I locate feminist questions in educational trajectories, parental practices and forms of activism, and highlight the implicatedness of past and present in 'travelling' beyond research trajectories. As some are recognized as activating their own (and their families') futures, others are condemned as failing, irresponsible and out-of-place. This is a distinctly classed process, witnessed in educational journeys and the parental - even activist - claims enacted therein. In these encounters, class 'sticks' as waste and as wrong, as a past residue attached to those behind the times and without worthy futures.

Keywords: Class, Education, Gender, Parenting, Futures, Activism

Introduction: Class as a future subject?

This paper considers the 'coming forward'¹ of certain classed subjects through the fields of education, parenting and activism. In these locations, some subjects are praised as future orientated while others are condemned as stuck in the past, redundant and wasteful. Processes of mobilization and capitalization, often esteemed as success, care and mobility, are located alongside sticky issues of failure, waste and immobility. I argue that only certain subjects can make legitimate claims on the future - as educated, knowing and

responsible citizens and parents (or 'parenting citizens'). Even when these claims are rendered precarious they are, in the case of non-normative ('queer') lesbian and gay parents, still recuperated and accumulative, buffering middle-class children as future citizens (Ahmed 2002; Skeggs 2004; Parker 2010). Gender inequalities also impact on these claims with many feminist researchers speaking to the gendering of social futures, as women are welcomed and celebrated as now-included in the worlds of work and education, becoming unstuck from family cares and all-consum-

ing parental practices (Adkins 2002; McRobbie 2009; Taylor 2012a). The interconnected spheres of family, education and employment are located as sites of change, offering new, capacitated and equalized futures, to be activated by achieving subjects. Women in particular are called upon to be present, to be new future subjects standing-in as visible signs of gender equity (McRobbie 2009). At the same time, many have queried this celebrated post-gender arrival, given that inequalities are re-configured rather than erased within the still profoundly gendered sites of family, education, and employment (Armstrong 2010; Evans 2010). As some women are recognized as activating their own (and their families') futures, others are condemned as failing, irresponsible and out-of-place (Parker 2010). This is a distinctly classed process, witnessed in educational journeys and the parental - even activist - claims enacted therein. In these encounters, class 'sticks' as waste and as wrong, as a past residue attached to those behind the times and without worthy futures (Allen and Taylor 2011).

To argue that this is so, is not to efface the inevitably intersectional collisions of, for example, class, gender and race, which re-emerge in struggles over futures, and the right and entitlement to be present and legitimate within key sites of parenting and education (Caballero 2007; Gillies 2007; Reynolds 2010, 2012; Taylor 2009). Empirically, I

have always hoped to be attentive and resistant to class, in mapping my own sense of place in and outside of academia and in keeping class present on academic agendas, as I see it misplaced and absent (particularly in sexualities research, see Taylor 2011c for an overview). Attention is increasingly given to identities as fluid, flexible, multifaceted and de-territorialised, rather than located in distinct, solid markers of a person's position (fixed employment positions, stable regional identities). Such 'fluidities' often centre those entitled and mobile in relation to geographical residence and lifestyle variety, anticipating how, who and where to be, as a future orientation and self-becoming (Addison 2012). Notions of choice and change also shape research preferences where new sociological methods are proposed to focus '... upon movement, mobility and contingent ordering, rather than upon a stasis, structure and social order' (Urry 2000, 18 in Adkins 2002, 4). Such a call variously recognises the ways that class, gender, race and nationhood are redone anew and often aims to take account of social paradoxes and contradictions (Tolia-Kelly 2010). Despite this, less is said of the retention of identities and enduring inequalities as class in particular is dismissed as a relic of the past, even as it re-emerges in fields of 'future-making': it is remade in the construction and claiming of familial identities, located here

in the spheres of education, activism and parental practices (Taylor 2009; Browne 2011; Dixon 2011). These are sites of enduring feminist concerns - they are also sites of belonging and welfare where 'future citizens' (and 'parenting citizens') are made, mobilized and excluded.

Pressing classed intersections reside in, and are reproduced through, new-old labours, research projects, and academic productions. Where others have pointed to the 'stickiness' of race (Ahmed 2002; Toilia-Kelly 2010) as a blockage and a stopping or curtailing, of futures, I point to class and sexuality as also bound up in 'sticking', 'blocking' and facilitating futures. The stories that I tell are themselves 'sticky'; they are re-told by me through my particular empirical and theoretical stances (class and sexual positions are also 'stuck' to me as biographical realities and points of dis-identification²) and they collide as intersectional, slippery and lived concerns rather than as points which can be neatly added to constitute *the* future subject. Many have argued for a more intersectional framing of class, with Linda McDowell (2008) claiming that any re-focus on class must not marginalize gender, or sexuality; it must not make claims to a simple return-to-class as abandonment of intersectionality and other lines of difference (see Binnie 2011; Taylor 2012a). In empirically and theoretically turning to classed lives - including my own - I both take seriously

the necessity of 'intersectionality' while refusing a reduction of class analysis, and classed lives, as never enough (Taylor et al. 2010). As I will hope to make clear, middle-class lives, futures and even 'failures' are worthy of comment, rather than being left simply unstated, obvious or celebrated: many have pointed to the worth of interrogating normative identities and positioning (such as whiteness, able-bodiedness, heterosexuality) and I hope to join this conversation on a level which is empirically plausible and which questions class and sexuality in framing futures.

Questions of the future pose who, where and when questions: who is 'stuck' in the past, who is capacitated as taking 'us' forward, and what embodied, spatial and material collisions occur in these rendering of past-present-future? In times of global economic, environmental and social crisis, I seek to highlight whose paths get marked as urgent, and which routes get facilitated and endorsed. Here, I dwell on these questions in relation to intersecting UK and US research projects and travels, which have all been variously concerned with matters of social inequality and justice; of bringing forward attention to enduring inequalities and their new-old shape. In 2010, I was granted a Fulbright Distinguished Scholars Award held at Rutgers University in the US, which enabled a temporary exit from the changing UK landscape of high-

er education at a time of mass public outrage about increased tuition fees and devastating welfare reforms (Taylor 2010). In 2012 I spent time at the University of California, Berkeley as a visiting professor and, again, colleagues congratulated me on my protected status as someone able to enjoy time away from UK higher education³ (productive academic labour did not seem to carry despite the rhetoric of 'internationalisation', 'diverse' academic routes and a more 'global university' economy). Many warned of empty, depleted returns and shifting balances between research-teaching in an all change 'no future' moment. Being geographically near and far away in inhabiting UK and US academia, and being aware of, for example, the different meanings and experiences of class and sexuality, leaves me wondering about what is held between educational journeys and distances. These are questions that I map on to my own (non)academic trajectories just as they are mapped onto interviewees' accounts and experiences. In writing, and researching, I am aware that I may well be producing only myself as a global moving academic subject (Skeggs 2002; Taylor 2012). Yet these projects have all variously 'failed' too, in that they don't by and through themselves create *the future feminist* subject⁴, capacitating only my own professional mobility (Taylor 2012). The question of broader social futures both 'theirs' and 'mine' is

one I hope to hold close as an urgent measure of feminist engagement and practice across time and place. This calls for a different attentiveness to claims made for and by 'future subjects', rather than wholly rejecting or discarding these complicated intersections.

As I locate feminist concerns and interventions in educational trajectories, parental practices and forms of activism, I highlight the implicatedness of past and present in travelling beyond research trajectories. I urge attentiveness to enduring disparities rather than ending with personal, or even politicized 'failure' as a transgressive non-normative 'art' (Taylor et al. 2010; Taylor 2011c; Halberstam 2012). Judith Halberstam (2012) points to the queer art of failure, as a stepping out of the expectations and binds of femininity, family and even feminism - as it is located onto perhaps surprising (if non-academic is indeed a surprise) celebrity icons (such as Lady Gaga). This holds an appeal, a loud, proud coming-forward of youthful, playful femininity, removed from the everyday of education and employment, into the realm of subversion and performativity. Despite the appeal, not everyone gets to re-brand their 'failures' as successes; some of these act not as performative openings, but as sticking points, where the wrong type of femininity, family, feminism and 'failure' is read as fact (Gillies 2006; Taylor 2012a). Awareness of the classing of such

futures or failures sits uneasily with Lee Edelman's (2004) notion of queer politics as one which explicitly rejects reproductive futurism - any queer concerns over education and family are not really queerly political, simply parental and parochial. His call to 'fuck the child' while dramatic and dystopian, sidelines the ways that some classed bodies/citizens/families/futures are already 'lost' and dis-invested in; some bodies simply do not get imagined as having a presence or a future (Taylor, 2011a). As such it is important to ask who has the discursive and material power to construct and enact Edelman's call for a certain queer politics and non-responsiveness to 'future subjects'. When the UK Prime Minister David Cameron is arguably 'fucking' over a whole generation of children, can Edelman's call really be understood as transgressive?

Academics have brought critical perspectives to bear on the complex educational, familial and employment causes and consequences of the 2011 summer's UK riots, as questions of what the future holds for 'today's youth' are dramatically highlighted. These interventions have unsettled the easy answers offered by some politicians, media outlets and the police. And they unsettle again notions of performativity, failure and a 'fucking' of the future which is already denied to some, with waste, loss and failure stuck to specific bodies ('youth')

and locations (Black and Minority Ethnic and working-class neighbourhoods). Important questions have been raised about the relationship between 'rioting' and the increasingly hostile conditions of neoliberalism and Coalition policies, including; growing unemployment, rising tuition fees, the withdrawal of the Educational Maintenance Allowance, cuts to Sure Start and an overhaul of welfare provision (Allen and Taylor 2012). There are distances and cross-overs between UK and US provision in changing climates. With my health insurance certificate tucked safely away every time I enter the US, along with other visa documents, approvals and invites, I am conscious of the borders we re-create around belonging and entitlement at local as well as (inter) national levels. Futures are created and extended across local, regional, national and international spaces, affectively and materially. Facts and figures could undoubtedly be pored over here, including respective spending on healthcare in different countries. The human cost in lives and deaths produces much more intimate and urgent concerns and negate a romanticized appeal to 'fail' and step out the system (Taylor 2012b).

Pragmatic reorientations to future subjects and attentiveness to the emplacement of subjects in and through the university (see Back 2007), could begin to remedy the classed binary between future po-

tential and wasteful subjects (Evans 2010; Parker 2010). Understandings of whose future, where and when may be pragmatically and practically orientated to the inequalities which exist in the present, with the hope of working towards different, plural, inclusive futures (rather than failing-failed futures as normatively lamented or non-normatively celebrated). What this reorientation means in the research context is subject to challenge where income and impact are increased measures of a successful viable even enterprising future, involving individual accumulation via CV additions ('income', 'impact') (Back 2007; Taylor and Addison 2011). As the editors point out, changing social and educational dynamics shape upon research and the 'future subjects' that are constituted therein; we fail them in giving up on other possible futures negotiated and engaged in by researcher-researched-research.

Educational Futures: Theirs and Mine

If we strive for positive futures in and through academia, what does this now look like in a changing educational landscape? How do we negotiate the spatial and temporal collisions of impact agendas and a hierarchy of universities as future-orientated regenerators, bringing forward capacitated citizens? The entrepreneurial university – and indeed the 'entrepreneurial' funded researcher – has been tasked with

making an impact in responsabilising citizens to come forward and make a difference as part of a 'Big Society' (as conveyed in shifting funding priorities). The discourse of the entrepreneur has directly influenced the role of universities in, among other things, developing more intense collaborations with industry and increased involvement in regional economic development. Within this model, enterprise and entrepreneur are striking concepts that have become synonymous with the colonisation of academia by the market (Allen et al. 2012). What and who are our future subjects (future students) and how can different pasts-presences be mapped onto this? There are several points on the map, rather than a start and finishing line. So I first turn to the University as one of my present, pressing locations. The promise of entering and achieving in Higher Education is at once seductive (CVs produced, academic stars circulated internationally) and disturbing, felt and encountered across the university environment, via administrative, teaching and research concerns. These points of arriving, departing and travelling through institutional space intersect with occupying academia in particular recessionary times where the future of education is in threat.

As a visiting scholar at US 'premier public university', the University of California, Berkeley⁵ (2012), I see commonalities in the 'happy, diverse student' urgently en-

gaged in disseminating value and distinction as cure for future educational and economic crises - their place is best, their choice correct. At Berkeley, even the 'old' history of activism, radicalism and institutional dis-engagement is re-invoked and made safe, or somewhat safer, in the name of variety, where everyone is present, and even the (activist) past is recast with future value. The 'first', 'best' and 'biggest' would be words likely to be found elsewhere - as on my guided campus tour - and one can wonder about the room for improvement, gaps, and 'failure' in these well-defined university maps.

Cynical sentiment was nonetheless displaced by the undergraduate Biology student leading a tour around Berkeley campus on a sunny March morning; she lead us on a hour and a half walking trip, complete with historical facts, key statistics and noteworthy venues on and off campus. She was adding to her CV, her future employability, just trying to get by and facing life-long future debts (Taylor 2008; Evans 2010). She excelled as a university representative and her enthusiasm earned her resounding applause as she related her weekly timetable, extra-curricular activities, and exam success. As Evans (2012) highlights, educational entrances require these ready, activated subject positions, with UK University Central Admissions System stating the application is '... your opportunity to

tell universities and colleges about your suitability for the course(s) that you hope to study. You need to demonstrate your enthusiasm and commitment, and above all, ensure that you stand out from the crowd' (UCAS 2011, in Evans 2012).

In being duly impressed by this student standing-out-from-the-crowd, I was joined by other potential outstanding students who were informed about the 25% admissions success rate. Eager parents were keen to find out what their child should put in her or his personal statement - how to make the special child become part of the special institution, to secure that special future. While choice of activities, eateries and societies was described, I wondered how this process of alignment already demarcates a 'good fit' for future students, institutional stories, and societal success (Taylor 2010).

The sun was shining and it was hard not to 'just believe' as one banner, quoting words from a current smiling student urged us to do. Our guide was believable, committed, determined. And isn't that just what we would want from good students? On a sunny day, with an unobstructed view of the Golden Gate Bridge (this line of sight is university owned and protected), this all seemed perfectly plausible. But the tour also hinted at presences and absences beyond these lines of sight. We tried to find the university mascot, a

Golden Bear, on the first university building (1873). I put my glasses on for the task, confident that I could master it and also achieve. The bear, so the story goes, is a guardian, a mother bear who is watching over her cubs. Many parents smiled and the journey from home to university was made safe and familial. The emergency poles, promising a 1.5 minute response time from on-campus police, if the button is pushed, also reassured of a 24/7 presence. Campus is made safe, students are located, and futures are confirmed as familiar/familial.

(Future) students are ever-more implicated in the marketing of their universities, often awkwardly displayed in costly ways (Taylor and Scurry 2011). Students appear in prospectuses and even on welcoming banners, where their eager presence and happy faces stand for institutional happiness, diversity and success (Ahmed 2009; Addison 2012). Their presence often represents a resilient endurance, where the successful face of the university shines on, despite the devastation of Higher Education. The personal and professional collide here, where standing for the university can also mean standing for and supporting your own value, now made public for a personal return ('employability', 'International' diversity and career mobility). In the UK context, students are warned that NSS scores attach to themselves, marking current status and future

employability: 'complete the survey, if you don't, you lose too'. In a time of cut-backs, there is a heightened urgency to market your university – and yourself – via institutional reputations/credentials, to ensure that the map of campus, even if cut-back and under-funded, is still resilient and responsive.

As with many UK campuses, a park-feel is maintained at Berkeley and I strolled over Strawberry Lake via a wooden bridge. Echoing many University Open Days, eager parents pushed to the front and asked their questions - this time about trees, wildlife and plants. Protection and security is naturalised, even as the construction of this pervades the architecture and ecology of campus, also present in evoking scenic sounds, taste and smells (Australian Eucalyptus trees, International House café). These scenes shifted as an all-in-pink team ran past declaring their search for a 'Berkeley personality'; we were told of opportunities to join the cheerleading squad (and even imagine ourselves as having a 'Berkeley Personality'). This kind of future may well be enticing...

But just as you reach for that university personality, as I reached for the university door, we were told that all outside door handles had been removed after student protestors chained themselves to such handles not that long ago. The student of today has, perhaps, no choice but to align; to be un-obstructive to these

directing pathways as 'good guides'. My Berkeley guide did all this with good humour, intelligence and pride. She told the story of Athena, Goddess of Wisdom, who, sitting above the arched entrance bestows knowledge on those entering the library. Because Athena is greedy, as well as knowledgeable, she takes this away as students make their exit. Universities have this knowing, yet greedy, potential, and the strategies to resist this - in times of abiding doors (without handles) - are vital. Suspicious students, we are told, choose a different exit. But what would it mean for universities to choose another entrance? To be responsive to those not included on campus and not identified as future subjects/workers/citizens and not capacitated as 'coming forward'?

But even a supposed responsiveness to those off campus can be re-worked to close down possibilities and futures; to highlight an inevitable failure rather than a more equalized plural future. 'A Smug Education' (Delbanco 2012) responded to previous US Republican Presidential Candidate, Rick Santorum's attack on American colleges as 'indoctrination mills', which we are advised not to enter. In his call, Barack Obama was named as a 'snob' for urging Americans to go to college, with universities cleverly placed as unknowing, out-of-touch and pretentious, while 'reality' and hard work are situated elsewhere. In these colliding claims, it is vital that the hard work

of students and staff is foregrounded on and off campus, where broader conceptualizations of learning may also exceed the numerical count of entrance and (employment) exits, only conferred in following specific, and often expensive, university routes and certain futures. These dis-junctures in and around university settings (mis)place young people as future citizens, subjects and workers, posing the question of who can inherit the future.

Inheriting the Future: 'I've Got You'

Despite differences in welfare regimes, educational provisioning and the private financing of post-compulsory education, debates in both the UK and US frequently position the middle-class white child as the new potential victim of a 'lottery' system which robs them of their inherent right to elite educational access. The grief – and joy – in failed/fostered futures re-appears regularly in US and UK press. *Time* magazine's front page recently declared 'The Truth About Tiger Moms'⁶ attaching future economic competitiveness between the USA and China onto children's achievements, as accumulated and transmitted through families (and specifically via mothers' gendered labour). This news feature produced much commentary on practices of good parenting as bringing forward future citizens – yet this hope/practice for the future is not to be transmitted

to all. Witness the criminalisation of Tanya McDowell, a homeless mother charged with the crime of sending her son to a better school by lying about her address in the context of locational and classed stratifications around educational provision, as reported in the *New York Times* (Applebome 2010).

Somewhat differently, *Lesbian and Gay Parenting: Securing Social and Educational Capital* (2009) explores changing welfare regimes and recognitions in the UK context. Jeffrey Weeks (2007) explores the 'coming forward' of certain subjects in moments of sexual citizenship, and sums this up as a linear success across time and place, a 'winning of worlds' in which LGBT citizens are now capacitated and filled with life (as parents, citizens, recognized subjects) as opposed to death (as criminals, deviants, sick-subjects). The increasing existence of rights gained and demanded by LGBT activists/scholars (manifest around e.g. Civil Partnership Acts, Equalities Legislation), often intersects parental claims, hopes and 'failures'. To some extent these new rights represent a success and a securing of (feminist) futures in so far as claims can be made on the State and new existences can be secured and materialized; further, individual and family futures are also protected and legitimised in these socio-cultural transformations. But even seemingly subversive 'winning' practices project specific futures aligned to –

rather than challenging of – societal and educational inequalities.

In the broader project, I argue that middle-class parental practices seek to bring forth a future capacitated citizen, as a measure of queer parents' *sameness to* and *even success against* their heterosexual counterparts: (re)producing a certain future involves a turn from social difference, disgust and abjection to one of sameness, inclusion and a desirable diversity (Taylor 2011a, b). Within this process of resourcing the good, succeeding child, others are positioned as failing, excessive and culpable. This has an embodied and spatial dimension where (social, parental) 'disgust' is re-located onto working-class bodies and practices. The shaping of children's bodies/spaces as a (middle-class) caring act involves 'choice', 'balance' and 'discernment' as indicators of diversity/difference, and as claims upon a new improved version of good parenting. By positioning working-class families as failing children, the implication is that they are also failing to bring forth a certain future, capacitated citizen; working-class families' choices and realities remain fixed through notions of risk and blame. While queer parents were once positioned rather homogeneously as gambling with social futures, this judgment now firmly attaches itself to working-class parents and re-embeds current injustices.

To turn to some empirical examples from queer 'parent citizens',

many middle-class interviewees celebrated their children's entrance to 'very graded' 'top schools', in the 'top 5%' in the UK'. Awareness of different gradations of successful and failing schools, gauged through published league tables, often generated a fear around political changes and disruption, leading 'good judgements' to be troubled. Middle-class respondents spoke of feeling nervous of changes in schools' admissions policies, which would make children's education somewhat of a 'lottery'. Jess speaks of doing her homework and selecting a better school outside of her immediate catchment area, capitalising on family connections:

It's really important that they get a good education and it has affected the choice of schools – they go to one just outside of the catchment area. We researched the local schools, their dad's a teacher and so we made him do his homework and read the Ofsted reports, which then enabled us to pick a school with good results and a nice feel. It's a state school but we've been selective.
(Jess, 43, middle-class)

These respondents, however, did not face the penalty of homeless mother Tanya McDowell, criminalized for her 'poor parenting' despite her attempted strategies at exactly this kind of maneuvering. Others, predominantly working-class respondents, in my study were more

uncertain in exercising a selective discernment, speaking instead of their children 'just being happy', where they could be provided for, socially as well as educationally. The value in proximity was gauged through access to friends, where their kids could enjoy the company of others living locally. Mostly working-class parents spoke of local schools as the 'obvious' or only 'straightforward' choice: '...I didn't think about it really. I'm not sort of a great pick and chooser' (Katerina, 52, working-class). Here, the local was 'good enough' for parents and children, while middle-class parents spoke of the local as sufficient when it was also a 'good school' – entry was not automatic but was instead sited as suitable only when it worked educationally.

Queer theorists, such as Edelman (2004), reject claims around reproductive futurism, which can be at least partly located in overlapping in parental and educational sites. Yet, this transgressive 'opting out' does not resonate with efforts made in 'getting-by' by those lost in the accumulative logics of bringing forward certain classed futures. It is not that working-class parents are 'stuck' in place but rather they are unlikely to be recognised in research, social policies, media and popular representations, which foregrounds agentic capacities, mobility and 'good parenting', or in research which poses dystopian/transgressive rejection. How then to locate

these futures and failures and to recuperate value amidst distinction and discrediting?

Edelman (2004) provides a critique of the state of play within queer theory and queer lives, where queer politics is dependent upon the rejection of reproductive futurism: 'queerness names the side of those not 'fighting for the children,' the side outside the consensus by which all politics confirms the absolute value of reproductive futurism' (2004,3, italics in original). Read in the context of a politics that centers on same-sex marriage, parenting and reproductive rights, Edelman's call to 'fuck the child' represents a rejection of reproductive futures and parental 'credentials', citizenship and claims-making. Indeed, Edelman argues that the queer subject is defined by all that is negative and non-productive. Rather than responding with calls for equality and recognition, Edelman urges queers to embrace negativity and non-futurity. For Edelman, standing outside reproductive futurism entails standing outside of futurism itself: 'Fuck the social order and the Child in whose name we're collectively terrorized; fuck Annie; fuck the waif from Les Mis; fuck the poor, innocent kid on the Net; fuck Laws both with capital Is and with small; fuck the whole network of symbolic relations and the future that serves as its prop' (Edelman 2004, 29). This call sidelines the ways that some classed bodies/citizens/fami-

lies/futures are already lost within these logics. In everyday practices of queer parenting, classed realities shatter and complexify measures of homo-hetero-normativity, where the 'coming forward' for some (via e.g. Civil Partnership recognition) erases the immediacy of fundamental classed presences, inequalities and endurances (Taylor 2011b).

The fantasy of the 'good parent' and the 'good child' who can be resourced and propelled into the future is a profoundly classed and (hetero-homo) normative discourse and practice which re-circulates in current times. In relation to LGBT parental sites and struggles, as with educational sites and struggles more generally, it can be asked: whose movements or 'coming forward' into citizenship take 'us' somewhere? When children act as condensed signifiers of the future of 'the family' and, by extension, the nation, it is important to trouble the linear narrative of futurity and coming forward which capacitates some (middle-class) subjects as capable, rendering others as culpable. But it is also important to carve out a claim for – rather than rejection of – plural futures, where these can be re-orientated as pragmatic, practical and as also existing in the everyday 'here and now' (Gillies 2006; Armstrong 2010).

Consider this other 'queer' everyday example: the playful video 'I've got you' by Black, female, gay US rapper, Mélange Lavonne (2008),

which represents some of the issues of raising children in LGBT households. The images and accompanying song depict the normal activities of childhood and parenting and we witness the not so unusual footage of children in play parks, held lovingly, if notably, between two (prepared) queer mums:

You weren't even here yet and I'm preparing myself,
I'm trying to give you the best, like love and help

So I'm doing everything I can even though they keep telling me Raising kids needs a woman and man.

But I met your other mama, that's the love of my life,

I got down on one knee and made her my wife

And we both wanted kids so we made it a plan.

I gave up the two seater and bought me a van.

(Lavonne 2008)

The song describes anticipated discrimination, to be dealt with and buffered by preparedness (such as education, which sets a 'good foundation'), maturity and financial investment. While an 'ordinariness' is undermined *and* mobilised throughout, responding to anticipated negative responses constructed through sexual, class and racial inequalities, there is a tension in voicing defences and 'attacks' without re-invoking normative notions of what – or who – constitutes good or bad parents:

I used to spend money now all I do is invest.

So you can go to college and be as great as you can

And accomplish all your dreams as a young woman or man.

But until then help you get an awesome education,

And make sure you're the proper age when you start dating.

(Lavonne 2008)

Sentiments of bringing forth a proper future at the right time are heard in the call for some parents to rethink their parenting skills, placed in the context of crime, drug taking and parental disinterest, summarised in the defiant declaration that 'I'm not saying I might be a better parent than you, what I'm saying is that I am a better parent than you' (Lavonne 2008). Such claims, even if subversively and defiantly made, deploy and re-inscribe distinctions of value, worth and respectability.

Education fuels parental anxieties and 'winning' victories, echoed in Lavonne's rap as well as in empirical accounts of lesbian and gay parents in the UK. Such sentiments are re-articulated over lives - and deaths - of queer youth. 'Queer suicides', including the suicide of Rutgers student Tyler Clementi in September 2010, fuel complex educational-parental-activist responses (apparent and felt as I visited Rutgers University in 2010-11, see Taylor 2011a). Following the death

of Clementi, the 'It Gets Better' Campaign started by openly gay columnist Dan Savage was posted on Youtube; it now has its own website and book with global hopes of preventing queer suicides and sustaining the future of LGBT communities (see <http://www.itgetsbetter.org/>). The campaign's sentiments of protection, danger, mobility, orientate and guide us to certain futures, away from harm.

On the website there is an opening pledge: 'THE PLEDGE: Everyone deserves to be respected for who they are. I pledge to spread this message to my friends, family and neighbors. I'll speak up against hate and intolerance whenever I see it, at school and at work. I'll provide hope for lesbian, gay, bi, trans and other bullied teens by letting them know that 'It Gets Better''. Youtube clips have been archived on this site (given the enormity of responses) providing an insight for queer youth into what the future might hold for them: 'Many LGBT youth can't picture what their lives might be like as openly gay adult ... So let's show them what our lives are like, let's show them what the future may hold in store for them' (<http://www.itgetsbetter.org/>). Celebrities and ordinary 'survivors' are invited to talk about troubled childhoods and developed, successful adulthoods as indicating full recovery, where bullies by contrast are positioned as 'losers', 'weak', 'less worthy' and 'inferior'. The youth of tomorrow are imbued

with a regenerative futurity, a multi-cultural diverse inclusivity, but this is denied to those 'already lost' to public concern and our communities – as homophobic others who should be expelled from institutions and nations⁷, removed as 'backward' and 'out of place'. Many clips from queer people dissent from the happy message of upward mobility and movement to a queer city: some don't 'get out' to be out; some don't get to 'grasp the future' via educational and geographical travels (Taylor 2007). And others too, it seems, function as the depository for the lack of tolerance, affluence and becoming. While homophobia could be located *within* university environments, 'being educated' is described as the solution to discrimination, positioning white middle-classes as rightful inheritors of futures, as liberal correctives against racialised working-class hatred (Puar 2007; Haritaworn 2010). We are asked to lament the deaths of some – those young people who could have 'been something' – while others are already excluded from this future.

Future Subjects, To Be Continued...

Children act as signifiers of the future of family and as future citizens, responsibly inserted into the spaces of education by knowing parents carving out accumulative claims on the future (as 'parenting citizens'). In empirically attending to these claims and practices it is im-

portant to trouble the linear narrative of futurity and coming forward which capacitates some (middle-class) subjects as capable, rendering others as culpable. Articulations of present inequalities and resolved futures (as expressed in *The World We've Won*, Weeks 2007) need to go beyond the map of legislative and educational rights and entitlements pursued by the good campaigner/ parent/child in celebrating our moves forward, our diverse potentialities and even in claiming our injuries and failures (e.g. 'queer suicides') as a claim and a capital.

In a time of increasing social recognition via equality legislation which carves out certain futures, it is important the current injustices are centered rather than passed over as a straight-forward linear movement of 'coming forward' (Weeks 2007; McRobbie 2009). Queer theories generally associated with the work of Leo Bersani (2009), Edelman (2004), and Halberstam (2012) provocatively assert that queer subjects should embrace non-productivity, resisting narratives of futurity explicitly bound in capitalist accumulation. But in empirically disengaging classed lives from the web of intersecting inequalities constructing (non)productive lives this queer rejection of the non-normative sidelines the practical and pragmatic classed (im)possibilities and present material injustices.

It is important to carve out a claim for – rather than rejection of – plu-

ral futures, where these can also be re-orientated as pragmatic, practical and as also 'getting-by' in the everyday 'here and now', rather than as accumulative and re-productive of (homo)normative middle-class futures (Gillies 2006; Armstrong 2010). Not everyone can flexibly cast themselves through trajectories of future potential, but a dystopian side-step away from *negotiated* futures ignores intersecting dimensions of agency and constraint. I have made a case for the importance of class within the attention to 'future subjects' as part of a continued rather than ended conversation, about which futures are celebrated and which are marginalized. The risk in leaving privileged lives unproblematised is that these are understood as fitting, standard and chosen; as the trajectories of agentic and capable future-orientated subjects now able to take full advantage of 'parenting citizenship' while being injured by others' lack, failure and culpability. Moments of pragmatism and 'getting by' are lost again and mis-placed by a queer pessimism or failure. There are research efforts and orientations compelled in inhabiting university settings - as my thoughts on inhabiting US-UK campuses across time hoped to illustrate. These professional-personal-political trajectories are recast in researcher-researched-research relations and occupations as feminist researchers necessarily make future claims. Present-future re-ori-

entations towards higher education, as 'engagement' and 'impact' bound to monetary evidencing and material measuring, rework future subjects (see Taylor and Addison 2011). The good researcher has a 'five year plan' and knows her 'five key words' (Taylor, 2009): sometimes these subjects stick and sometimes they travel. But the effort seems to be in *trying again* for the sake of bringing forth plural inclusive futures.

Endnotes

¹ Angela McRobbie (2009) argues that the 'movement of women' substitutes the 'women's movement' based on a 'coming forward' in the realms of education and the workplace, where women are placed – and self-place – as 'efficient assemblages for productivity'; their achievements can be measured, their work/life balance assessed and rated, ever-monitored on intimate scales, where, with appearance and self-presentation, this work to reinforce what are (hetero)normative and class specific constructs of successful femininity (Skeggs 1997). Unsurprisingly, there are various (im)mobilities re-constituted in such 'movements', where a 'coming forward' reproduces and rests upon a supposed 'backwardness' and 'failure', attached to specifically classed women. The centering of the mobile 'global girl' as a subject with educational and employment capacity, occurs at the expense of impoverished people somehow elsewhere: '[T]he attribution of both freedom and success to young women ... take different forms across the boundaries of class, ethnicity and sexuality, producing a range of entan-

gements of racialised and classified configurations of youthful femininity. So emphatic and so frequently repeated in this celebratory discourse that it comes to function as a key mechanism of social transformation. From being assumed to be headed towards marriage, motherhood and limited economic participation, the girl is now endowed with economic capacity' (McRobbie 2009, 58).

² As Skeggs (1997, 2004) highlights, only certain people's stories are considered worthy of telling, posing problems for feminist inspired calls of 'putting one's self' into the research process: 'By telling a story about myself, I redefine myself as a subject with a specific history and seek to persuade others of the importance of that history' (Felski 2000 in Halberstam 2005: 126).

³ In May 2010 a new UK coalition government, comprising of the Conservative and the Liberal Democrat parties, was formed. Prior to the election, these two parties had espoused considerably different views on the future of HE funding in the UK. The leader of the Liberal Democrats, Nick Clegg, had pledged that his would work to abolish the tuition fee system. In December 2010, both the House of Commons and House of Lords voted to implement an amended version of one of the recommendations made by Lord Browne (2010) in his report on the future of HE funding, which recommended the removal of the cap to tuition fees, alongside an amended student loan system, supposedly ensuring that 'No one has to pay back the loan unless they are earning above £21,000 per year. Payments are linked to income' (Browne 2010: 37). The coalition

government voted to raise the basic threshold for fees to £6,000 per annum with a cap at £9,000 to be implemented from the academic year 2012–2013.

⁴ This raises questions of what kind of futures we might hope for and instigate. Current desires and discontents can be situated alongside debates on ‘future feminist subjects’ as emerging from somewhere, as involving a history of activism, debate and academic labour. While we mustn’t forget about where ‘we’ve’ come from, as we seek expansion of who the ‘we’ is in these shifting debates across time and place, care has to be taken to avoid rehearsal of past scholarship as a debt to pay, a truth to convey or a burden to shake off in moving to ‘new’ terrain. Several feminist authors have challenged the linearity of feminist stories of ‘now’ and ‘then’ - including Lisa Adkins and, more recently, Clare Hemmings (2011), problematising how the ‘loss’ of feminism as failure is attached to a younger generation, as incapable of heeding wise words and repeating history-as-future.

⁵ At Berkeley, approximately 64% of undergraduates receive some form of financial aid: in 2008-09, 37% of all Berkeley undergrads were eligible for Pell Grants (family incomes generally less than \$45,000 a year). Berkeley educates more economically disadvantaged students than all of the Ivy League universities combined. Some 5,700 undergraduates received a total of \$33 million in scholarships, many of them privately funded. In 2009, Berkeley received \$649.46 million in research funding. The positioning of this contrasts somewhat drastically from my current home institution, London South

Bank University, which despite its long-standing commitment to widening participation, ‘added’ value and employability cannot claim a ‘premier’ status, where ‘post-1992’ attaches negatively as a gross ‘catch-all’ by which the ‘engaged institution’ can never come forward, the ‘1992’ indicating a stick rather than a substance (Taylor and Allen 2011).

⁶ See Time Magazine, 31 January 2011 (<http://www.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,20110131,00.html>).vii Vice-President Joe Biden reassures that ‘There’s not a single thing about you that’s not normal, good or decent’, urging us to contribute and make ‘us’ feel better about ‘our country’. Even US President Barack Obama has added his own tale of survival and overcoming of hardships to the voices which echo ‘It Gets Better’ as an incentive for young queer youth to hold on, keep going and never kill themselves.

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Precariousness and Futurity: The Example of Subcontracted Cleaning Workers in the Banking and Finance Industry in London

Gerald Koessl

By adopting a temporal perspective this article examines the relation between people's conditions of work and their possibilities of being agents of their future working lives. This is done in the empirical setting of subcontracted cleaning firms servicing the banking and finance industry in the two main financial districts of London – the City of London and Canary Wharf. An analysis of eighteen in-depth interviews with cleaning workers and two trade union organisers reveals the divisions and processes of polarisation within organisations along core and periphery positions, resulting from the fact that cleaning workers are not employed in-house but by subcontracted cleaning firms. The precarious conditions of work induced by the periphery position from their 'real employers', that is, the banks, undermine cleaning workers' possibilities to individually confront their future. Poverty wages - in many cases still being paid - in combination with the absence of appropriate social protection (e.g. sick pay or pension schemes) force many of the workers to 'stabilise the present' whilst future plans remain out of individual reach. However, in recent years, many of the workers have joined trade unions, aiming to collectively improve their future working lives.

Keywords: Precariousness, Future, Subcontracting, Cleaning industry, Trade Unions

Introduction

This article examines the temporal dimension of precariousness of subcontracted cleaning workers in the banking and finance industry in London. Specifically, by adopting a temporal perspective I will investigate how precariousness can be understood vis-à-vis the ways in which these workers relate to their present and future working lives. Whilst the public perception of banking and finance may be of people

in suits, modern high-rise architecture and luxury, I will turn attention to a less glamorous side; that is, to a workforce that is easily forgotten and overlooked in this industry. This workforce comprises service-sector workers who allow everyday business to take place and includes cleaners, security staff and caterers. Typically, these services are not provided in-house but are contracted-out to specialist firms.

More specifically, this article con-

concentrates on subcontracted cleaning in two main financial districts of London - the City of London and Canary Wharf. The City of London, sometimes referred to as the Square Mile, is located in Central London. Canary Wharf, which is situated within an area of the former docklands of London, is the second major financial centre in London after the City. While the City of London has been the historical centre for business and finance, Canary Wharf was built in the 1980s as an extension of the City, during a time when financial services were expanding rapidly and port-related industries were in decline.

My analysis in this article is based on eighteen interviews conducted between October 2009 and March 2010 with cleaning workers of varying age groups who service the banking industry, and on two interviews with trade union organisers. The contact with the cleaners was established by attending events for the campaign 'Justice for Cleaners', which demands better conditions of work and payment for the workers, as well as by going to monthly meetings of the cleaning workers branch committee of the union Unite. These meetings were well suited for interviews with organisers and representatives of the union about their activities and challenges of organising labour under conditions of subcontracting, the financial crisis and the increasing importance of migrants in London's workforces. While the

interviews with trade union organisers were undertaken at the Unite office in Holborn, the majority of the interviews with cleaning workers took place in their homes. It is of significance that all of the workers interviewed were not born in the UK and have histories of migration, which will be addressed as well in this article. However, the main focus will be on how 'subcontracting as a new employment paradigm' (Wills 2009a) shapes the temporalities and in particular the future perspectives of cleaning workers in the contracted-out cleaning sector in the banking and finance industry in London.

These interviews also revealed the importance of trade unions for the way in which cleaners imagine their futures. As such this chapter will examine the role of unions in shaping the temporal structures of the working lives of this group of workers. Before analysing the empirical data, I will briefly discuss the context of this research, namely the changing structure of London's economy and the growing inequalities and processes of polarisation in London's service sector, and specifically the situation in the banking and finance industry, which has become dependent on subcontracted cleaning workers in recent decades. More specifically, I will first discuss how subcontracting as a business practice has become a new employment paradigm in the low-paid service sector of the banking and

finance industry in London and how this subcontracted cleaning industry mainly employs migrant workers, which has created a new migrant division of labour. Thereafter this paper will argue that the changing of contractors often results in a deterioration of conditions of work and frequently leads to workers needing to do more work in the same amount of time. In this context I will also discuss how changing contractors mitigate against upward mobility or incremental wages within the cleaning industry. The third section will then show that the precarious nature of employment relationships in the cleaning industry requires workers to 'stabilise the present', often by doing two or three jobs, without being able to plan or confront the future individually. The last sections will go on by illustrating the importance of trade unions for the futures of cleaners and it will provide evidence for the challenges of organised labour in the context of subcontracting.

The rise of London as a centre for banking and finance and new migrant divisions of labour

The growing importance of subcontracting in London's banking and finance industry is the result of a number of economic and political changes that occurred over recent decades. Until the mid 1960s a considerable amount of London's economy was still based on light manufacturing¹ (Hamnett 2003,

31). However, since the mid 1960s, both manufacturing and London's port witnessed a gradual downturn (Hamnett 2003, 14), which had far-reaching effects on London's labour market. While employment in manufacturing and port-related industries declined over the last decades, there has been a considerable growth of the service sector, in particular the banking, finance, insurance and business services (Hamnett 2003, Massey 2007). These transformations, however, were not a straightforward result of economic and technological changes, but were also induced politically by the Conservative government in the UK under Thatcher (Helleiner 1994, Toulouse 1992, Tallon 2010). The establishment of London as a centre for banking and finance has thus been enabled by neoliberal policies that deregulated financial services (Buck et al. 2002, Butler and Hamnett 2009, Massey 2007, Toulouse 1992), which in turn 'strengthened its role as one of the major control centres for the global economic and financial system' (Hamnett 2003: 4).

The role of London as a 'global city' (Sassen 2001) or 'world city' (Friedmann and Wolff 1982, Massey 2007), was paralleled by new inequalities that reflected the changing corporate structures in the service sector economy. The growth of well-paid employment in finance, banking, insurance and business services has been accompanied

by a rising demand for 'work on the periphery', that is, for workers ensuring the cleanliness and security of the respective workplaces. New economic and social divisions within the service sector have become particularly evident in London's banking and finance industry, which employs two very different types of workforces. By drawing on her empirical research on contract cleaners in London (Wills 2008), Jane Wills illustrates these two types of workforces:

The stark divides between rich and poor are nowhere more evident than at Canary Wharf and in the City of London. The well-heeled army of analysts, brokers, dealers and traders do their business in the gleaming tower blocks and offices alongside a supporting cast of low-paid caterers, cleaners and security staff (Wills 2008, 305).

Similarly, Saskia Sassen argues that 'the rapid growth of the financial industry and of highly specialised services generates not only high level technical and administrative jobs but also low wage unskilled jobs' (Sassen 1996, 583). In the case of London's banking and finance industry, these low-paid jobs are mainly filled by migrants (see also Pai 2004). Wills et al. (2010) indeed argue that a 'new migrant division of labour' has been put in place over recent decades:

London now depends on an army

of foreign-born workers to clean its offices, care for its sick, make beds, and serve at its restaurants and bars. (...) in relation to its global-city status, London has become almost wholly reliant on foreign-born workers to do the city's 'bottom-end' jobs (Wills et al. 2010, 1).

As Wills (2008) points out, this migrant division of labour is particularly true for London's two financial districts, that is, the City and Canary Wharf, where a large proportion of cleaning workers come from countries that were once under British colonial rule, such as Nigeria or Ghana (see also Wills et al. 2010, 61). As noted earlier, these cleaning workers are typically employed by subcontracted specialist cleaning firms. Subcontracting has been identified as a major factor in determining the rhythms and pace of work as well as in shaping the ways in which workers relate to their future working lives. Furthermore, subcontracting plays a vital role in the formation of new divisions of labour and in the development of new inequalities, which is why I will now turn attention to analysing the specific case of subcontracted cleaning workers in the banking and finance industry in London.

Subcontracting as a new employment paradigm – the case of cleaning workers in the banking industry in the City of London and Canary Wharf

There have been many attempts to describe division and polarisation processes within organisations. While some authors speak of the division of workforces into a core and periphery (Atkinson 1984, Harvey 1989, Pellow and Park 2002, Virtanen et al. 2003), others suggest the notion of a dual labour market, which is divided into a primary and secondary market (Barron and Norris 1976, Gordon 1972, Piore 1971, Doehringer and Piore 1971). Whatever model one chooses, it is apparent that cleaning workers in the banking industry of London can be located in the periphery or the secondary market. This was evidenced by the fact that all of the people interviewed working as cleaners for the banking sector were employed by specialist cleaning firms that are contracted to perform the cleaning of bank buildings for an agreed period of time. Subcontracting as a business practice has become more widespread over the last decades, mainly as a result of measures to cut down costs of services that are not directly related to the core-activities of a company (cf. Rees and Fielder 1992). Cleaning contracts in the banking industry are usually negotiated only for a few years and are hence re-tendered on a regular basis with newly agreed terms

and conditions. Robert MacKenzie places subcontracting in a broader context by arguing that:

[t]he deregulation of employment has been a key feature of the 1990s. There have been considerable reforms visited upon traditional systems of employment over this period. The hierarchical-bureaucratic employment structures represented in the traditional internal labour market have been undermined. This has been paralleled by a revival of interest in the contract as the favoured mechanism for the organisation of economic activity. (...) A key feature of this restructuring of employment has been the use of subcontracting (MacKenzie 2000, 707-708).

The use of subcontracting exposes cleaning companies to fierce competition and systematic short-termism, which has fundamental impacts on the terms and conditions of workers. Drawing on their recent research on subcontracted labour in the UK, Wills et al. (2010) note how subcontracting has served as a tool for privatising services in councils, hospitals, schools and universities and how in conditions of subcontracting:

[r]egular re-tendering and intense competition between contractors meant that wages, conditions and staffing were kept at minimal levels, and managers no longer had the burden of responsibility for

employing their staff. New workers could be taken on without the troublesome costs of annual increments, sick pay or overtime rates (Wills et al. 2010, 3).

The economic and social transformations that enabled the introduction of subcontracting must be put into the context of the rise of neo-liberalism, which gained ground in the UK from the 1980s onwards (King and Wood 1999, Prasad 2006). Neo-liberal agendas introduced subcontracting in the public as well as private sector in order to reduce cost at any price, without considering the effects on people's conditions of work. As a result of 'neoliberal policy agendas' that 'allowed greater market penetration in sectors like cleaning' (Wills 2008, 310), the competition among cleaning contractors has intensified. A competitive climate in which contractors are trying to beat each other's offers has triggered a downward spiral not only as regards prices at which they offer their services but also as regards the resulting conditions of work for the cleaners, who have no real influence over the bidding and contracting process. For organisations such as banks, subcontracted cleaning provides a cheap and easily available labour force as they [the banks, A/N] neither have to pay incremental wages nor offer fringe benefits such as sick pay or pension schemes. The absence of these benefits, as my

empirical data suggests, has fundamental impacts on the temporalities of working lives of cleaners and is a major reason for their precarious situation. Precarisation due to subcontracting is particularly prevalent in low-paid industries, such as cleaning, catering or security services. The incomes of workers in these industries are in many cases only slightly above the legally required national minimum wage (NMW), which is currently set at £6.08² per hour. The widespread use of subcontracting in contemporary economies makes Wills go so far to say that while 'the paradigmatic form of employment during the middle years of the twentieth century was the factory (...) subcontracted capitalism is becoming paradigmatic today' (Wills 2009a, 442).

Despite legal regulations such as the Transfer of Undertakings Protection of Employment Regulations³ of 2006 (TUPE), which does not allow new contractors to employ its staff at conditions and terms that are worse than the previous contractor offered, the majority of the interviewees in fact reported a deterioration of their working conditions after a new contractor had taken over. Nonetheless, my analysis of the interviews suggests that there is not a straightforward relation between subcontracting and the effects on people's conditions of work. The people interviewed stated a number of ways in which the contracting-culture impacted on

their working lives. Apart from those who mention that they were being dismissed during the course of a change of contractors, one of the most immediate forms of change that many cleaners experienced was an increase of workloads and hence an intensification of time. An intensification of time means that the actual amount of time per task is reduced and time hence intensified, as Efia's case illustrates:

There are also less people now... I don't know why they don't put anybody there. After somebody left some time ago the manager didn't replace her which means that there is more to do now. So you do the job of the other people but you don't get paid for the additional work. This happened recently, maybe over the last two years. So two or three years ago I had twenty something colleagues and now I have fifteen, so maybe we are five or six persons less who actually do the same amount of work (Efia, female cleaner, five years' service for Lancaster at Merrill Lynch).

These findings add weight to Gareth Rees and Sarah Fielder's empirical study (1992) of subcontracted cleaning workers in the 1980s, in which they provide evidence for processes of time intensification in the cleaning industry. Processes of intensification, as Rees and Fielder go on to say, mainly result from the labour-intensive character of clean-

ing work, where increases in productivity⁴ were only attainable by 'getting fewer workers do the same amount of work' (Rees and Fielder 1992, 356). The authors also state that efforts to raise productivity and cut costs were accompanied by 'a general deterioration of working conditions' (Rees and Fielder 1992, 356). Similarly, Jean-Yves Boulin (2001) argues that over the last decades, due to just-in-time production and a demand-oriented economy, working time has increasingly become intensified and densified, as individuals need to complete more work in the same or less amount of time. For the interviewed cleaners, time intensification increased the pressure on each individual worker and easily escaped the legal regulations of the TUPE law, as there are no clear standards as to what amount of work can or should be done within a certain time-period. In particular, in a current climate dominated by uncertainties about the future, workers accept these changes easier than would be the case in another industry or job where people have stronger collective representation and hence stronger bargaining power over their conditions.

In addition to this effect, subcontracting keeps cleaners at arms length from their 'real employers' and therefore makes them more vulnerable in regard to redundancy, as many of the interviewees stated. Uncertainty for the future intensified during the period of the financial

crisis in 2008 and 2009, the effects of which were indirectly felt in the cleaning industry. As many of the banks were laying-off people, banks searched for smaller premises or reduced their office space considerably. As a result, cleaning companies lost their contracts or required fewer workers. The fact that most of the interviewees experienced some form of change to their working lives as a direct result of subcontracting has made them realise the link between subcontracting as a business practice and their own precarious situation. Ajagbe, a male cleaning worker for six years at Johnson Control and Mitie in the Goldman Sachs building in Canary Wharf explained that 'when you come to the cleaning companies... like we are working for Goldman... our job is not safe because we are contracted'. Indeed, my analysis evidenced a strong link between the (business) practice of subcontracting and the extent to which workers are able to be agents of their future working lives, that is, between precarious conditions of work and the way in which individuals relate to their future. This point will be addressed in more detail in the following sections of this article.

Precarious (working) lives: Stabilising the present and losing the future

In this section I suggest that the precarious situation of the majority of the cleaners forces them to sta-

bilise their present situation, without being able to individually engage with their future working lives. This temporal dimension of precariousness⁵, in particular in terms of futurity, has already been noted by several authors (Kraemer 2009, Dörre, Lessenich and Rosa 2009, Tsianos and Papadopoulos 2006, Fantone 2007). The interviews revealed that most of the cleaners are required to have two and sometimes even three jobs in order to earn enough to make a living. Many of the interviewees were still working on an hourly income that only marginally exceeded the current minimum wage of £6.08. However, despite this fact there is an increasing amount of cleaning sites, where cleaners, together with the support of trade unions, have negotiated with cleaning contractors and 'real employers' (i.e. the banks) to pay the London Living Wage, which is currently set at £8.30 for London (£7.20 outside London). The importance of the London Living Wage, as a social and economic minimum standard, became particularly evident in cases where people needed to do two full-time jobs. The interview with Madu illustrates the daily rhythms and time pressures of doing so:

I was working eight hours at Compass, I started at six am in the morning, I finished at half two, then I would go home, I would sleep, I wake up at around eight, have my shower and go back to

Lancaster, both of them are in Canary Wharf. At Lancaster I work from nine pm and I finish at six am and from there I go to my money job, eight hours, you understand? (...) So I was working in the day with Compass and I was working in the night with Lancaster, you understand, sixteen hours. (Madu, male cleaner, three years' service for Lancaster at Nomura Bank and two years' service for Compass, a catering company as a porter).

In some instances people mentioned that they were taking on a second job in order to secure their futures by saving while in other cases interviewees stated that a second job helped them to provide for their family members, either in the UK or in their countries of origin. Morowa put it as follows:

You can only save some money if you have two jobs. The money from one job is maybe just enough to live, but you can't save for the future, or often people have relatives in their home countries who they want to support; you can only do that with a second job (Morowa, female cleaner, four years' service for OTS at JPMorgan).

Morowa's account shows that the ways people engage with their working lives is often only to stabilise the present. The desire to manage and save money for the future or to maintain family members or

relatives abroad forces some to work excessive hours that would far exceed the legal regulations if they were employed by a single organisation. Because of these excessive hours of work and the time-constraints faced by some of the workers, the location of the workplace and the time they need to get there is vital. This geography of time is particularly true for London, where living and transportation costs are high and workers usually have to commute considerable distances and spend a lot of time only to get to work in the City of London or in Canary Wharf, places they could never afford to live.

Moreover, many cleaners in the banking industry are doing night-shifts. By doing an additional job during the day, they only get a few hours of sleep per night, which in the long run poses a serious health hazard. Ebo, who is doing two cleaning jobs, one from ten pm to six am in the City and another one in west London from seven am to nine or ten am, spoke about the reasons for doing more than one job as well as the effects of doing night work on his health:

Working in the night affects your health because in the day you cannot sleep very well, as you can in the night... and that's more or less a health hazard. By the time I get home, it should be around eleven. (...) with the high cost of living in the city you can't depend on only one job. This is why people have

up to three jobs. Without that you can't survive (Ebo, male cleaner, five years' service for Johnson Control and Mitie at Goldman Sachs).

The previous two interview extracts demonstrate the tensions between financial constraints that required people to take on more than one job and the desire to gain control over their future. These desires, however, were often contrasted by the extreme time pressures and health risks involved in doing excessive working hours in two or even three different jobs.

Another reason that makes the work of the cleaners particularly precarious is the contractual nature of their employment relationship, which in many cases does not offer entitlements such as sick pay, a pension scheme and in some instances only a reduced number of days of paid holidays. The absence of these entitlements had fundamental effects on the conditions of work and life of the cleaners. Morowa explains what it meant for her to work without being entitled to sick pay:

We don't get sick pay. So that's why a lot of the workers who are sick go to work, because they cannot afford to stay at home. Sometimes you feel so sick, but you have to go to work. When you stay in the house for two, three days, your money is gone... you don't have enough money. And you need the money to pay your

rent and everything (Morowa, female cleaner, four years' service for OTS at JPMorgan).

Morowa as well as numerous other interviewees gave similar accounts stating that with their current income they could not meet the expense even for staying at home for a few days. Nonetheless, there were also interviewees who mentioned that they did get a certain amount of days of sick pay per year, although at a lower level of pay than the actual income would be.

The precarious condition of the cleaning workers is aggravated even more by the fact that subcontracted cleaning companies rarely offer pension schemes to their workers. Hence, subcontracting does not only result in low wages as the interviews evidenced, but also in very limited social protection individuals get via their employment. Abena, for instance, described her situation at work after a new contractor had taken over in the following manner:

Well, since we work with Lancaster there is no job security... they just want to make money and they just work like that, we don't have any security like that when you are old they would pay you a pension, nothing like that (Abena, female cleaner, eight years' service for Lancaster and Eurest at Royal Bank of Scotland).

Although some of the workers would be entitled to receive a pub-

lic pension if they paid contributions for a long enough period of time, these pensions would hardly suffice. For this reason, many of the cleaners I spoke with had already ideas of what they would like to do after they retire from their (cleaning) job. Keeping in mind that all of the workers that were interviewed had personal histories of migration and were not born in the UK, some said that they would like to return to their countries of origin after they retire. This was mainly the case with cleaners who had close relatives in their home countries. Other workers spoke about the desire to open their own business or shop after their retirement, as Ajagbe for instance stated:

So after you are sixty, you have to plan for your coming years. If you reach the age of sixty, nobody knows... but you have to plan. If you are old you can't afford to look after yourself. So if you can get a job... If I can look for a job with a little bit of money, I can sell my own product that would be very good. So I would like to have my own shop (Ajagbe, male cleaner, six years' service for Johnson Control and Mitie at Goldman Sachs).

The plan to open one's own shop or business was closely related to the desire to either 'be one's own boss' or to 'do one's own thing', as some of the workers noted, which contrasted many of the cleaners'

daily experiences at work. Mira, a female cleaner with two years' service for Lancaster at Tower 42, put it the following way: 'I can't go on like that, I have to move forward. That's why I decided to do my own thing, my own dance company'. In this statement, Mira expresses not only the desire to 'do her own thing' but also that 'she wants to move forward', which is not easily possible in the cleaning industry. However, the plan to open one's own shop or business was strongly affected by the precarious retirement perspectives that many of the cleaners are expected to face in the future. Put differently, as a result of their low incomes, most of the cleaners said that they were not able to make proper provisions for their pensions and were therefore forced to continue work or open their own business that allows them to earn some additional income when they are retired in the future.

The (im-)possibilities of individual change?

The relationship of precariousness to certain understandings of the future was also evident when interviewees spoke about their desire to either change job or to do some additional education in order to qualify for other jobs. In many cases, individuals were financially not able to take the necessary time off they would need to do some additional education or to search for another job. These economic constraints made it hard for cleaners to

individually change their future. The following excerpt from Adeola's interview underscores this situation:

You know in the case of a cleaner's job... you just want to stay because you want to earn money, you don't want to lose any money. If you find something better from there you can leave, but people cannot afford to leave and wait to find something else without working (Adeola, female cleaner, eight years' service for Johnson Control and Mitie at Goldmann Sachs).

In cases where change was possible, decisions were not taken individually but were weighed against other financial and familial obligations such as children or relatives living abroad. In the interviews this was the case when cleaners aimed to do some further education or upgrade their previous education to UK standards, as Madu's interview illustrates: 'There were so many things for me to do back home... because of that I could not go back to school. So I decided to continue working' (Madu, Lancaster at Nomura). The only way people imagined a more individually determined working life lay beyond a distant point in the future with less commitments, as an interview extract with Kodwo underlines:

I don't have a specific plan... I don't have any choice now because when my children grow up to the point that they can sort themselves out... it's different.

But as I also said I'm going back home by next month and I'm going to figure out some things there and that will tell me what my plans will do to me... to my future life. So I can start to think of myself when I am more independent, when I can afford it (Kodwo, male cleaner, six years' service for ISS at Morgan Stanley).

Previous excerpts from interviews demonstrate that cleaners time their working lives and in particular changes to their work in accordance with the financial necessities and commitments they have, mainly towards members of their family. An individually determined working life is projected into the future and seen as something that is only possible once 'one is able to afford it', as Kodwo put it. However, familial relations as well as personal networks and in many instances also ethnic support networks were also reported to be important resources, in particular for finding employment or affordable accommodation in London. The majority of the interviewees noted that they had found their job as cleaning worker with the help of a friend or relative, who introduced them to their current workplace. Although these personal networks provide important systems of support for cleaning workers, they rarely help in terms of offering better future perspectives or opening up possibilities for progression. This is so mainly because the people

who support each other usually do not have access to other sectors of employment. Hence, despite these support networks many cleaners find themselves in a precarious situation with little possibilities for individually engaging with their future working lives.

This precarious situation is exacerbated even more by the absence of incremental wages or possibilities for progression within organisations. Andy, who works with OCS at Lloyds in the City of London, described the impossibility of moving forward in the cleaning industry as follows:

Cleaning is not a job I would strongly recommend for you because you don't get promotion from it. As a cleaner you will be cleaning for all of your life, because they transfer managers from there to there and even for the position as a supervisor, you don't hear. You just see that they brought in and introduce you a new supervisor or a manager. Those few who are there, no matter how many years you have been there, there is no opportunity there. They don't say 'Let's train this man, let's see what he can do', except if you know someone who can influence and help you. If you don't, it's difficult (Andy, male cleaner, more than twenty years' service for OCS and Maclellan at Lloyds).

As previous interview excerpts

indicate, the temporal structures of cleaners' working lives and the way in which they relate to the future can thus be characterised by notions of precariousness and the structural impossibility to individually influence the future of one's own working life. In contrast to commonly held views about individuals being active agents of their working lives, such understandings of (individualised) agency are unfeasible in the context of my analysis of subcontracted cleaning workers, where the (im-)possibilities of individual change were mainly shaped by external factors that were beyond individual control. While the precarious condition of many cleaning workers does not allow for a more individual engagement with their future working lives, it has prompted new ways of confronting the future in a collective way. The following sections draw on interview data in order to demonstrate that trade unions are one of the major resources and forms of socialisation that enable cleaners to imagine a future which they are able to influence and shape.

Collective futures: trade unions and the representational gap

The impossibility of changing their working lives or improving their situation in the future has raised the awareness among cleaners that change and an improvement of their condition is only possible at the collective level. For this reason many of the cleaners have joined a trade

union over the last years. In the following excerpt, Kodwo explains how the union provides a resource for imagining a better future:

If you are a union member you are one. When you got a problem, I got a problem and when I get a problem you also get a problem. So we team up all the time and fight for our right and hope we can change our future to the better. Before the union, we couldn't do much as individuals, alone you don't have the power to change anything but as a union you do (Kodwo, male cleaner, six years' service for ISS at Morgan Stanley).

Trade unions have become increasingly important for cleaning workers because 'in a subcontracted economy, many workers have no industrial relations contact with their "real" employer' and thus 'the workers themselves have no channel through which to bargain over [these] terms' (Wills et al. 2010, 180) and conditions of work. By 'real employer', Wills et al. mean the companies who have subcontracted some of their services, which in the context of this research are banks or financial institutions. The cleaning workers' engagement in the union and the struggle for improvements to their conditions further illustrated that a 'good' workplace does not only concern the levels of pay and social security but encompasses a wide range of aspects including re-

spect and feelings of being valued, as Eze elaborated:

The union has given us some kind of strength. So, if you are organized on the site, you have some kind of confidence, that the managers will not treat you too bad. As far as you are bullied... you know your rights better than before. Also the way they talked to us was... they talked to us as if we are nobody, they didn't show any respect (Eze, male cleaner, two years' service for ISS at Citigroup).

The dilemma with subcontracted work is that a mere pressure on the contractors to 'improve [the] pay and conditions of work (...) would probably price their [the cleaners', A/N] immediate employer out of the market' (Wills et al. 2010, 180). Therefore, workers have started to organise themselves with the help of the trade union in order to increase pressure on the 'real employers', that is, on banks and financial institutions. In 2005, the cleaning workers, together with the union, launched a campaign for a London Living Wage (Wills 2009b). A London Living Wage as Alberto, a union organiser, put it 'means a salary that the workers can live with in London, because London is one of the most expensive places around the world'. The Living Wage Campaign, which was originally launched by London Citizens, the biggest community alliance in Britain, is set every year

by the Greater London Authority. Although the London Living Wage is not legally binding but rather addresses employers on a social and ethical basis, the campaign has managed to introduce the Living Wage into a considerable number of workplaces, including subcontracted cleaning companies in the banking industry. The London Living Wage has been of particular importance in the context of subcontracted work, as Wills et al. illustrate:

The idea of a Living Wage campaign was developed to overcome [the] ‘representational gap’ between subcontracted workers and their ‘real’ employers by linking subcontracted workers with a broad alliance of community organisations (Wills et al. 2010, 180).

Trade unions and collective imaginations of the future

Apart from the attempts to increase the levels of pay and create a work environment where workers are respected and appreciated, the workers also demand benefits such as sick pay, pension schemes and a higher degree of job security. Ebo, who works as a cleaner at Johnson Control in the City is also very active in the union and in organising people to improve the situation of cleaning workers. He explained how the collective ambition of the union has helped to a certain degree to improve the conditions at the site

where he works:

If you are sick you have to go to work because you cannot afford to stay at home. But since the union is in, the situation is better because they introduced sick pay of ten days a year. So if you are sick for ten days, you will be paid. But after the ten days, if you are still sick you will not be paid. But we achieved this only because of the activities of the union. That’s something the union fought for. Although it’s still not yet fair it’s better than we didn’t have at all. We hope that in the future the number of days will go up. The other thing is that we are not offered any kind of pension scheme, not at all. This is another goal for the future that we are going to fight for. It’s not for now, but in the future we will tackle this issue (Ebo, male cleaner, five years’ service for Johnson Control and Mitie at Goldman Sachs).

Ebo’s experience of improvement through the union, which is shared by the majority of the other cleaners, shows that positive change is mainly a result of collective effort and hardly possible at all individually. His account also outlines the importance of non-monetary entitlements such as pensions or sick pay, entitlements that amongst regularly employed workers are an implicit part of their employment contracts and do not have to be demanded explicitly. The erosion of regular em-

ployment contracts and the rise of contracts that offer social security only at a marginal level, facilitated by practices such as subcontracting, have thus fundamentally contributed to present-day precariousness in the workplace and have undermined individuals' agency in terms of shaping their personal future working lives.

This relation between precariousness and the inability to engage with one's future has also been noted by Wills et al's (2010) empirical research on migrant workers in London. The authors discuss how the structural positions of migrant workers in low-paid jobs are related to possibilities of individual future planning. Their findings reveal that:

although migrants have considerable agency to respond to the challenges facing them, such efforts are constantly undermined by poverty, poor working conditions, state policy, and community exclusions that frustrate their ability to develop longer-term or more 'strategic' goals. Indeed, although migrants' lives may include very careful planning and budgeting, these are often aimed only at coping with the immediate exigencies of their day-to-day lives (Wills et al. 2010, 126).

This argument about the ways in which migrant workers are unable to relate to their future is supported by the findings reported in this paper, where I demonstrated how the

precarious nature of cleaning urges workers to stabilise the present, a stabilisation which brackets engagement with their future working lives.

The high number of migrant workers among cleaners has also challenged trade unions as institutions that have been traditionally involved in disputes over (white) working class issues. In fact, the relation between trade unions and migrant workers has not been and is still not always as smooth as these previous statements may indicate. In fact, in the decades of post-war immigration to Britain, trade unions were often opposed to immigration as they tried to restrict the labour supply (Wrench and Virdee 1995) and were thus reluctant to represent migrant workers. Until the 1980s, which 'saw the integration of black voices⁶ and anti-racist practice into the political mainstream' (Wills et al. 2010: 167), many migrant workers faced racism even from the side of trade unions. As Wills et al. (2010) go on to say, 'it was only during the 1980s, and following efforts at black self-organisation within the unions, that these new members were really accepted' (2010: 167, see also Wrench and Virdee 1995). Despite the ongoing difficulties many migrant workers are facing in terms of being adequately represented by trade unions, the majority of the interviewees in my sample were very positive about their experiences with the union and felt that this was

the only way to improve the future conditions of their working lives.

Subcontracting as a challenge to organised labour

Apart from the changing role of unions as regards the representation of an increasing number of migrant workers, one of the biggest challenges for unions that are dealing with low-paid service sector work is the mounting prevalence of subcontracting. The unions often have to negotiate with both the cleaning companies as well as the 'real employer', which in the case of this research is the bank. Alberto, an organiser at Unite, explains the situation as follows:

We work with both, the cleaning companies and the banks. Usually we have meetings with the cleaning companies to establish the London Living Wage. And also if necessary we speak with the clients, the banks. In some places, like when we went to a demonstration against one of the banks, after speaking with the cleaning companies we went directly to the bank and we explained them that we will continue embarrassing them if they don't sort this out (Alberto, Unite Organiser).

Alberto's statement shows that damage to their public reputation poses serious problems to banks and hence is a main target in the union's fight for better pay and conditions of work. It also makes clear

that in the subcontracted economy it is important to address both the so-called 'real employer' as well as the contractor. Over the past years and decades, trade unions have experienced the challenges of organising people in the subcontracted economy, which, according to Unite organiser Nick, has become 'much, much more prevalent since Thatcher, so since the mid 80s'. Nick emphasised the importance of getting in contact with the 'real employers':

...because cleaning companies such ISS, OCS, etc. will always say: well, it's not our problem; we are only paying what we can with the contract. So the way we go is trying to embarrass the banks, which is the main weapon we have. And the media, of course, play a very important role in that (Nick, Unite Organiser).

The excerpts from Alberto's and Nick's interviews demonstrate not only the role that trade unions have in terms of offering individuals the possibility of being agents of change but they also give account of the changing nature of the unions themselves. Changes to business practices such as subcontracting as well as an increasingly diverse workforce have challenged the work of the unions and have shown that union organisers need to respond to these changes. This is particularly true for a global city like London, where there is a concentration of service sector industries such as

banking, finance and insurance, and with them the number of sub-contracted workers servicing these industries. In these subcontracted industries, labour turnover is high and they employ many migrant workers, who often find themselves in situations that do not allow them or make them hesitant to get organised in trade unions. As several of the interviewees mentioned, this is often due to people's uncertain immigration status and the fear of losing one's job when joining the union or when speaking out on their conditions of work. These factors pose a serious challenge to organised labour in the context of subcontracted economies with large numbers of migrant workers.

My analysis of interview data further revealed that apart from the support that unions offer, it is political and legal regulations⁷ that give a certain degree of job security to cleaners, in particular the previously mentioned TUPE Regulation, which applies when new contractors are coming in and take over from previous ones. The time periods for which cleaning contractors stay at a bank are often only for a few years and many of the interviewees therefore reported a change of contractor during their working lives as cleaners. The fact that cleaning workers are not included in negotiations and hence have no influence over the terms and conditions of new contracts makes national legal regulations particularly important for them.

Peter, who was working with the contractor OCS for six years, is now working with a new contractor in the same site. The reason why he could keep his job was mainly due to the TUPE regulation, as he explains:

So I continued with GSF because OCS lost the contract. They lost the contract last year in October. So this company took over and I continued there. That's because of the TUPE; it gives you the security that you can stay (Peter, male cleaner, four years' service for GSF at State Street).

However, as noted earlier, despite the TUPE regulation, there were also cases in which a change of contractor resulted in either people losing their jobs or having to face a considerable deterioration of their conditions of work.

Conclusion

The data analysed in this article suggests that 'work on the periphery' in the banking and finance industry in London creates precarious conditions of work and life and furthers existing divisions and inequalities within this industry. These divisions reflect the widening gap in incomes and social protection in the service sector economy more generally, which has increasingly become dominated by subcontracting and precarious forms of work with little future perspectives. This article further showed that in the case of

the banking industry these divisions are divisions of ethnicity as well as core and periphery (subcontracted) positions in organisations and have fundamental impacts on individual life chances and future perspectives. Subcontracting has contributed to a situation where people working in bottom-end jobs and thus at arms-length from their 'real employers' often only earn poverty incomes with little or no social and legal protection. In terms of futurity, these precarious conditions of work engender a lack of choice as the development of an individually determined working life is hard to achieve and change in the future often only possible on a collective level. These divisions along core and periphery positions are particularly striking in an industry where profit margins have been growing enormously over recent decades and where a bonus culture has been established that created vastly diverging pay ratios between executives or traders and those working on the periphery. These divisions provide additional evidence for ongoing polarisation processes within the service-economy where low-level jobs are increasingly outsourced or subcontracted and as a result of that do no longer offer possibilities for progression or incremental wages within an organisation.

Finally, a number of important limitations need to be considered. One important limitation is that due to the relatively small sample size

questions of class, gender or age could not be explored in more detail. However, from the eighteen conducted interviews no identifiable pattern emerged across different age groups that would indicate variations as regards the questions being asked in this paper. Questions of social class were even more difficult to address as a number of those interviewed did not want to speak about some aspects of their past lives, which was mainly due to people's difficult histories of migration or the fact that they had to leave their home countries for political reasons. The research undertaken rather indicated that a more important factor in shaping individuals' futurities was related to factors such as the degree to which past educational degrees were acknowledged, whether the respective person had to support other members of family or relatives, either abroad or in the UK, and how well support networks were suited to offer access to employment opportunities or affordable housing in London.

Considering the limitations mentioned in the previous section, further work needs to be done to examine in more detail gender and class related issues as well as the influence of age in terms of people's possibilities to determine the course of their working lives. This is particularly true for a growing and increasingly diverse migrant population in London, which is usually hardest hit by organisational downscaling,

subcontracting and by changes to the legal framework of employment. Future research may also help to establish in further detail the ‘geographies of time’, that is, the tensions arising from the fact that cleaning workers, alongside other low paid workers, are working in one of the most expensive areas of London whilst being increasingly forced to move further away from central areas of London due to rising housing costs and processes of gentrification. This may result in a situation where the majority of those who service, clean and maintain the working of the banking and finance industry have to commute considerable distances and thus spend a lot of time and money in order to get to work, which would further already existing precariousness and socio-economic inequalities.

(N.B. The names of the interviewees in this paper have been changed in order to guarantee confidentiality.)

Endnotes

¹ In 1961 London had 1.45 million manufacturing jobs (32.4 per cent of the total) in electrical engineering, food, drink and tobacco, chemicals, instrument engineering, paper and printing, furniture making, clothing and footwear. By 1981 it had fallen by just over fifty per cent to 681,000 (nineteen per cent of the total); (Hamnett 2003, 31).

² [http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/employment/Employees/TheNationalMini-](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/employment/Employees/TheNationalMinimumWage/DG_10027201)

[mumWage/DG_10027201](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/employment/Employees/TheNationalMinimumWage/DG_10027201) (accessed February 14, 2012).

³ The Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations (TUPE) protects employees’ terms and conditions of employment when a business is transferred from one owner to another. Employees of the previous owner when the business changes hands automatically become employees of the new employer on the same terms and conditions. It is as if their employment contracts had originally been made with the new employer. Their continuity of service and any other rights are all preserved. Both old and new employers are required to inform and consult employees affected directly or indirectly by the transfer (www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=1655, accessed February 12, 2012).

⁴ In economics productivity is usually measured in terms of the ratio between input and output.

⁵ See for example Franco Berardi’s definition of precarity: ‘Precarious is a person who is able to know nothing about one’s own future and therefore is hung by the present’ (Berardi 2009, 148, see also Berardi 2005).

⁶ The interviews showed that for those who do not have English as their first language and who have language problems, the union has an important ‘voice function’ in articulating their complaints and thus maintaining their sense of autonomy. The union ‘can speak for them’, as a female cleaner put it in an interview.

⁷ For a discussion on policy responses to precarious work from the EU see Di-

among Ashiagbor (2006).

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Melancholia and the Radical Particular: Against Archer's Realism

Thomas Allen

*The successful refutation of post-modern conceptions of subjectivity does not automatically give one the right to posit an acting subject. What is missing in any such positing is a value-judgement. How much is such a subjectivity worth? Why is such an attempt even being made? This paper argues that it is precisely these questions which go unasked in Margaret Archer's work, and as such her human being is hollow. This is not because it is purely linguistic, but because if conditions of generalised exchange are taken as a normative ground for subjectivity then it can only exist as a bourgeois capitalist. To posit agency within these boundaries is to affirm them. To gain a different view of subjectivity one must forego the liberal need to rescue the 'soul' of the human and investigate the subject in its unfreedom and in its non-actuality. This position is, paradoxically, one which remains far more true to the idea of meaningful subjectivity than one which believes that the wrong life may be lived rightly. This paper begins by manifesting a contradiction in Archer's work and goes on to read her development of human agency through the work of Georg Lukács and Theodor W. Adorno. Following this I read Lars Von Trier's (2011) film *Melancholia* through Sigmund Freud and Adorno and claim that in times of crisis a negative conception of subjectivity may allow for an experience of emancipation precisely due to the tangential relation between the subject and the social world. I conclude with a brief consideration of the ontology of capitalist crisis and maintain that a melancholic and essentially negative structure is essential for understanding agency as it exists outside of demarcated social roles.*

Key words: Margaret Archer, Adorno, Von Trier, Futurity, Melancholia, Negativity

PART I

'They speak and hear,
and are cast into the deep.'
Dante, *The Inferno*.

Contradiction

Margaret Archer is a realist social theorist dedicated to reinvigorating a working conception of human agen-

cy in the face of post-modernism and other trends that she claims seek to impoverish the concept of the human in favour of a view of subjectivity that is entirely socialised and a human being that is merely a gift of society. This project takes place over the course of several books including *Realist Social Theory: The Morphogenetic Approach* (1995),

Culture and Agency: The Place of Culture in Social Theory (1996) and *Being Human: The Problem of Agency* (2000). The first part of this paper will focus primarily on the latter of these works, as well as Archer's more recent text *Making Our Way Through the World: Human Reflexivity and Social Mobility* (2007).

I mean to argue that there is an inherent contradiction in Archer's work because, while she successfully argues that a human subject must exist, she does not provide an adequate criticism of the objective circumstances in which that subject moves. This results in her overestimating the potential for subjective autonomy. To see this contradiction one need only consider the closing passages of *Making Our Way Through the World*. Here Archer describes a personal experience of a recent holiday she spent in the company of family and relative strangers in a Swiss Châteaux. The youngest of these individuals are described as 'opting out' of a system of corporate interest and free-competition:

These young professionals were rejecting the organisational contexts in which they were occupationally expected to exercise their skills and were crafting small, new outlets for themselves in the social order....We seemed to be celebrating not only the New Year, but also the freedom to pursue one's where one would - following the situational logic of opportunity in order to give priority to

what one cares about most (Archer 2007, 325).

This notion of opting out is contentious, and it displays a prejudice in Archer's thinking that can be illustrated with a brief consideration of a more recent event. In the UK last year, in the early hours of the morning of 19th October 2011, around eighty-three families were made homeless in the violent eviction of Dale Farm, a long standing Traveller site in Essex, southern England. Reports of police beatings and the use of tasers were common. Spokesmen for the residents at the site explained their refusal to leave before the eviction with the simple statement that they had nowhere else to go. ¹ At that point, and in countless others, it became clear that involvement in the social world is not something which one may opt in or out of. Or rather, to 'opt out' one must already be in some degree 'opting in.' As Theodor W. Adorno writes, 'The form of the total system [society] requires everyone to respect the law of exchange unless he wants to be destroyed and regardless of whether profit is his motive or not' (Adorno 1970, 147). I maintain, along with Mattias Benzar (2011), that many of the problems that pre-occupied Adorno in sociology have yet to be solved, or rather, are insoluble. As such, I believe his work to be of the highest importance when considering any social theory, especially one that claims to deal with an authentic subjectivity.

The affirmation of subjective freedom in Archer's model sits comfortably alongside objective entrapment. The question then presents itself as to how does a theory attempting to describe agency complement exactly a situation of unfreedom? I attempt to answer this by first of all sketching the development of selfhood and agency as it appears in *Being – Human*, and counterposing it to Adorno's conception of reified subjectivity. I mean to argue that if subjectivity is affirmed positively within the social world then it is a subjectivity that must be reified, and as such, the affirmation of a positive futurity is deeply conservative. After this I will present a reading of the structure of melancholia as presented in Lars Von Trier's 2011 film of the same name and attempt to point towards a notion of subjective singularity that emerges precisely from a radical incommensurability with the temporality of the status-quo.

Archer's Subject

As I stated above, my interest is not in whether Archer successfully counters the arguments of post-modern thinkers and manages to give the self a necessary constitution, but how and why such a subjectivity complements objective conditions of unfreedom. As such, I will not consider at length the first sections of *Being Human* that are dedicated to a refutation of Michel Foucault, Richard Rorty and Jacques Derrida; rather, I will begin

at the end. Archer's human being is defined by its positive relation to the future and its integration into a social totality. This positive futurity is maintained via the existence of subjective concerns and commitments that each individual seeks to actualise within their own life-world (Archer 2007, 97). Such a standpoint can be easily questioned. To begin with one may consider the following passage from Adorno's 'Minima Moralia':

A mankind which no longer knows want may begin to have an inkling of the delusory, futile nature of all arrangements hitherto made in order to escape want, which used wealth to reproduce want on a large scale...Being nothing else, without any further definition and fulfilment, might take the place of process, act, satisfaction....(Adorno 2005, 157).

If this passage were making a positive claim about the future of subjectivity then it would be open to the criticism of gross utopianism. However, it is essentially negative in nature. What it succeeds in doing is connecting a positive relation to the future, a relation of 'process, act, satisfaction,' within the context of historically specific relations of production and prevailing conditions of want amongst the human population. Neither of these things are essential components of human social life, although they are historically prevalent.

One may consider Adorno's state-

ment that 'there is nothing under the sun, which in being mediated... through the human intelligence... and thinking, is not socially mediated (Adorno 2002, 15-16; Adorno in: Benzar. 2011, 47). One sees a presupposed ontological ground imprinted upon any social theory. Indeed, it is the task of a sociological interpretation to allow the sedimented history in social phenomenon to come to light (Adorno 2002, 145). This is not to return to an argument of socialisation but, rather, it is to say that no theory escapes its own historical context. It is with regard to the existence of this imprint that I will consider the formation of Archer's subject.

In *Being Human* subjectivity is developed through a series of stages which culminate in the social 'actor' who is possessed of both a 'social' and a 'personal' identity. The latter comes about through a series of reflections known as 'internal conversations' by which a subject considers their previous experience in terms of their future plans and attempts to live their life accordingly. This reflection revolves around a collection of concerns which are described as 'emotional states...not commodities which can be costed...' (Archer 2000, 63). As we read in *Making Our Way Through the World:*

The goal of defining and ordering our concerns, through what is effectively a life-long internal conversation, is to arrive at a satisfying and sustainable *modus vi-*

vendi. Through *prioritisation* conducted by inner dialogue...The subject constitutes her identity as the being-with this constellation of concerns (Archer 2007, 97).

These 'concerns' emerge through a subject's interaction with three stratified layers of the real: the natural, the practical and the social. It is the ability to reflect on them in each of these arenas that guarantees some kind of autonomy for the subject.

The natural order is the primary stage of self-development. Here Archer makes use of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's conception of an 'embodied practice,' a conception of the subject as necessarily orientated and corporeal. As an infant a subject forms relations with her immanent exterior surroundings and repeated interactions with them lead to the emergence of the self as a 'relational property, whose realisation comes about through the necessary relations between embodied practice and the non-discursive environment' (Archer 2000, 123). This environment remains non-discursive because the relation to it is conducted on the level of sensual immediacy, not through the 'disembodied Cartesian cogito' (Archer 2000, 128). At this point the subject experiences her 'inherent attunement to things which is the nature of our being-in-the-world' (Archer 2000, 132). This attunement would be impossible without a minimal sense of memory.

The 'self' is precisely this repository. As such, Archer's self emerges 'monologically' as a pure individual in its surroundings. It is important to note that it has been rightly suggested that this attitude over-individualises the self to the extent that the input of carers and minimal linguistic influence is ignored. This is not to suggest a re-socialisation of the self, but rather to suggest that Archer maintains a bias towards absolute individuality when one is not necessary for her argument (Luckett 2008, 303).

Once the practical order has been entered then a sense of personal identity begins to be formed, and the 'internal conversation' comes into play. This, Archer maintains, is present in every normally functioning human being and represents the major PEP (Personal Emergent Property) that contributes to the irreducible nature of the human being. The conversation initially functions by mediating emotional commentary on the subject's relations with the practical order of reality. Archer insists that emotions are primarily to be seen as 'anthropocentric commentaries on the situations in which we find ourselves...' (Archer 2000, 207). As such the internal conversation explains the continuation or cessation of action according to the pleasure or lack of it that is expected to be received from different activities. For example, people decide to pursue or not pursue sports based on their aptitude for or enjoyment of them,

and musicians dedicate themselves from an early age to many hours of practice because they experience the activity as fulfilling, or expect that it will yield such fulfilment in the future. Personal identity forms itself around what activities are decided to be the most profitable for a subject, and through this process the practical order provides the ultimate ontological ground for the formation of social identity (Archer 2000, 213).

This dialogue is described as a 'dialectic between our human concerns and our emotional commentaries on them' (Archer 2000, 231). It is maintained that the potential for agency emerges through the fact that, in appropriating the world we have 'taken responsibility for these concerns, and have made them our own' (Archer 2000, 173). At this stage, it is clear that social integration is crucial to agency. Just as in John Elster's 'Adaptive Preference Formation', a theory which Archer derides (Archer 2000, 63), the normative ground for a healthy subjectivity is its ability to adapt to the current social world.² I would argue that the existence of this normative ground is already an affirmation of that status-quo's rationality.

Once a personal identity has been adequately formed, one begins to become aware of one's own social objectivity, and to be represented as an agent, or rather as one of a group of agents who share a similar stock in cultural (and, presumably, real) capital. Agents may manifest their

singularity as an 'actor' by taking on a pre-existing social role. Archer is insistent that there is no contradiction involved in this process. Rather, each actor, typified by some kind of involvement in wage-labour, whilst not free to choose their role, is free to 'activate or personify it in a particularistic way' (Archer 2000, 284). Archer insists that through the use of reflexivity the actor is able to secure a human status rather than a merely objective one (Archer 2000, 288). The adult internal conversation grows as social roles are occupied. It is through juggling these social roles with personal ones that human agency again comes to the fore. The subject is effectively split between social roles and concerns which are animated by a personal identity (Archer 2000, 293).

Archer's argument for the positive relation between personal and social identity relies on the conception that roles may be performed, as it were, in an unscripted way, that, although occupying a certain role means being restricted, the subjects are their own 'script writers' as 'even the smallest print which spells out formal obligations cannot tell us how to greet our partners, breakfast the children, let the dog out or acknowledge God' (Archer 2000, 303). As a result changes in roles and in societies' normative ground may occur through 'a continuous stream of unscripted performances, which also over time can cumulatively alter role expectations (Archer 2000,

296). The human agent is ultimately neither the gift of, nor the king, of society but is involved in a continuous morphogenetic relationship with it which changes both the normative structure and the subjects defined by it.

Archer's Conservatism

Archer acknowledges that her work is largely commensurable with phenomenology (Archer 2000, 127). She maintains that this is because both schools of thought give primacy to action in the practical field. However, they are also commensurable on another point; a pre-occupation with the irreducible freedom of the human being. Archer effectively adopts Jean Paul Sartre's dictum that 'freedom...is the being of man' (Sartre 2003, 441). However much this may be true, the descriptions of freedom that Archer uses all manifest themselves within the normatively sanctioned realm and are minuscule in their reality such as taking the dog for a walk, giving children breakfast etc. One may argue that the prisoner in solitary confinement maintains a similar degree of freedom because they are free to walk around their cell as and when they choose. I would argue that one may say the same thing of Archer's conception of freedom as Adorno says of existentialism; that it is, to some extent, 'allergic to objectivity' (Adorno 2000, 50). The logic of 'no matter how small the small-print' (see above) is a logic whereby the

tighter objective circumstances become, the more a subject manifests its freedom.

The subjective ground of freedom exists at the expense of a critique of a subject's objective conditions and, ultimately, acts as an apologist for them. This is apparent in the conception that the internal conversation is a universal linguistic experience. No consideration is given to the fact that individuals may have different linguistic abilities based on background and cultural capital. Pierre Bourdieu's conception of the habitus, for example, describes a situation in which 'schemes of perception, appreciation and action enable them [social subjects] to perform acts of practical knowledge, based on the identification of and recognition of conditional, conventional stimuli to which they are predisposed to react' (Bourdieu 2000, 138). Thembi Kate Lockett maintains that the dialectical relation between thought and language is underestimated in Archer's work: 'The more abstract one's thoughts are, the more they depend on access to repertoire of discourses which enables higher order thinking' (Lockett 2008, 139).

There is in Archer's thinking something deeply conservative which points towards the thought that, regardless of a person's upbringing, all they have to do is to go out in the world and prioritise their concerns appropriately, and they may exist as a fulfilled agent. This

is present again in the conception of 'taking responsibility' for social concerns and models. As Judith Butler (1990) observed, on the back of Franz Kafka, conceptions of subjective autonomy are primarily useful in a courtroom situation (Butler 1990, 157) and I would argue that a prejudice towards legalistic schemas of freedom of choice heavily influences Archer's model of subjective growth. One does not necessarily choose to take responsibility for the social world; rather one may equally well be forced to do so in order to survive. Money is required in order to live and getting a job is generally required to get money, and this comes with a series of normatively sanctioned social responsibilities. The primary movement, however, could just as equally be seen as one of forced adaptation rather than a voluntary assumption of responsibility. The citizens of a particular state do not choose to be born under its laws, although they are assumed to be responsible for not breaking them.

This point can be elaborated if one considers the term 'reification.' Literally meaning to make a thing of something, it enters the lexicon of critical theory via Georg Lukács's (1975) *History and Class Consciousness*, and draws on the a specific section in *Capital* Vol.1 in which Marx remarks that it is a peculiar characteristic of commodity production and exchange that relations between men take on the character-

istic of relationships between things (Marx 1990, 164). Key to this idea is the conception of abstract labour. Stemming from the same chapter of Marx, this refers to the process through which the individual labour time that goes into making a commodity, be it an item of clothing or a pot of stew, is necessary homogenised into an abstracted form of value which then allows for the exchange of otherwise incommensurable items. The object produced emerges as both a use-value and an exchange-value, a dual structure of materiality and abstraction. Lukács writes that 'this fragmentation of the object of production necessarily necessitates the fragmentation of the subject...Neither objectively, nor in his relation to his work does man appear as the authentic master of this process. He finds it already pre-existing and self-sufficient....and he has to conform to its laws whether he likes it or not' (Lukács 1975, 91). The subject that emerges from this process encounters a situation in which 'the relations between man that lie hidden in the immediate commodity relations...have faded to the point where they can be neither recognised nor perceived' (Lukács 1975: 93).

For Adorno, the entire social world itself exists as a reified set of relations between individuals, one predicated entirely on the existence of exchange relations and commensurability. Adorno defines a reified consciousness as that be-

ing which has effectively 'adapted itself to objects' (Adorno 2005, 193). I would argue that Archer's subject represents almost a case in point of subjective reification. The language of accumulation and exchange permeate her work. To quote another passage regarding the formation of social identity: 'What new employees have to do is to evaluate the up-side against the down-side and come with a *positive balance* if they are going to find a cause to invest something of themselves in that role' (Archer 2000, 191. my emphasis). This is the reasoning of finance capital, not the language of an emancipated human subject. The abstraction between personal and social identity mimics almost exactly the abstraction between the individual person and their socially abstracted labour. According to Archer the further one goes in terms of subjective reification, in terms of an internalised division of labour amongst one's concerns, the closer one comes towards singularity. The successful subject is 'everyone who has managed to achieve both personal and social identity' (Archer 2000, 296) This is not to say that Archer's theory is not an accurate description of current human behaviour, but that it mistakes historical contingency for a transcendental human nature.

Rather than attempting to ground the subject in the social, Adorno remarks, quite simply, that the objective nature of society only becomes

present when it ‘hurts’ (Adorno 2002, 36). The normative ground of social integration must be shifted on to the individual suffering for this to come clear. Benzar notes that ‘to job seekers who must do what they do not want to do, the coercion to adapt to the almighty exchange principle and to *sell* themselves is immediately evident’ (Benzar 2011, 59). This thought cannot be integrated into a system of positive futurity, in which an individual subject locates itself comfortably within the social, because it locates the two at a point where they are radically incommensurable. One could argue that if Archer’s subject feels no pain, does not understand the nauseating experience of selling themselves in order to gain work, it is because they have successfully adapted themselves to a reified objectivity. For Adorno, this road ends in Auschwitz in which ‘even in his formal freedom the individual is as fungible and replaceable as he will be under the liquidator’s boots’ (Adorno 2000, 362). It is this dialectic between fungibility and ‘formal freedom’ which characterises many people’s experience of the social world. To affirm freedom within it is to fail to see that this autonomy can only exist along lines which do not belong to the subject and which can always be denied to it.

Finally, on a macro level, I would argue that Archer’s work forms a parallel with what Walter Benjamin identifies as a narrativising tendency

within discourse orientated towards ideas of progress. In Benjamin’s ‘Thesis on the Philosophy of History’ one reads of the necessity for a ‘messianic *cessation* of happening’ (Benjamin 2007, 263, my emphasis) within the continuum of historical progress; a continuum that necessarily passes over the individual suffering of those who ‘lie prostrate’ before it (Benjamin 2007, 256). The idea of a normatively sanctioned subject moving towards the future manifests this same characteristic on an individual level. Those singular moments of suffering which society passes over in a violent silence are re-appropriated into that subject’s narrative as necessary preconditions of the attainment of a precarious social identity. In this way they are retrospectively justified according to the same logic which inflicts them. I would argue that the wound in both the subject and the social which occurs when the individual stands against their systems of mutual appropriation must be kept open.

Archer’s work demonstrates that positing a positive subjective agency within the currently existing social world must end with the objective reification of that subject. This is simply because in order to survive one must engage in some form of continued process of exchange. Such a conclusion demands a re-focusing on the ontological constitution of the subject as it exists in its unfreedom. Archer states that

a primary sense of self-hood is a condition of possibility for 'experience.' Likewise, she insists, via the quotation of Piaget's work on child development, that it is only through an awareness of the permanence of the object that the self can be founded (Archer 2000, 147). This bears a striking resemblance to the following passage from Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*:

'The original and necessary consciousness of oneself is at the same time a consciousness of the original and necessary synthesis of all appearances in accordance with concepts...for the mind could not possibly think of the identity of itself in the manifold of its representations...if it did not have before its eyes the identity of its action which submits all synthesis of apprehension (which is empirical) to a transcendental unity (Kant 1999, 231-232).

The subject predicates itself upon the objectivity of its surroundings, upon the schema of cause and effect that it sees within the world, and the ability to infer permanent existence upon a series of temporal encounters with the 'same' object. This maintains itself throughout the subject's life time, as a necessary pre-condition of 'making our way through the world.' However, what follows from the Kantian thought is that object is itself mediated already through the subject in order to achieve its objective sta-

tus. Categories of understanding serve to reflect back to the subject only what it is capable of knowing about the object in the first place. What appears to be natural is already domesticated by the subject into its own perceptual schema. For Adorno this represents a mimesis of the capitalist exchange:

This tautology [between subject and object] is nothing other than the expression of captivity: as knowing subjects we are never able to get outside of ourselves... The world in which we are captive is in fact a self-made world: it is the world of exchange, of commodities, the world of reified human relations that confront us, presenting us with a façade of objectivity...a second nature' (Adorno 2001, 137).

It is through this dialectic of domination, subsumption and abstraction that the world is experienced as reified.

On this model, there is no escaping the positive unfreedom of the subject by further enmeshing it in the social. Rather, Adorno inherits from Hegel the conception of the inherent negativity of the subject. One reads in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* that 'the genuinely *positive* exposition of the beginning is...also, conversely a *negative* attitude towards it' (Hegel 1977, 13) Active thought anchors itself via the negation of what is. Within the original Hegelian dialectic this movement of negation

resolves itself into a positive resolution and the structure of determinate negation is ultimately the restoration of the positive. However, to maintain the conception of positive negation is to maintain the possibility of a reconciliation between subject and object; a reconciliation impossible in the world of the reified social. Rather, the fidelity to be maintained is to the inherently negative act. As we read in *Negative Dialectics*: 'The seriousness of unswerving negation lies in its refusal to lend itself to sanctioning things as they are. To negate a negation does not bring about its reversal; rather it proves that the negative was not negative enough' (Adorno 2000, 159-160). The original negative action is that which maintains the space for the new by existing against time, against the narrative appropriation of the positive future.

In the following section I will attempt to ground a negative conception of time and subjectivity within the experience of melancholy; a state of being-in-the-world which a focus on positive futures necessarily renders pathological. By reading Von Trier (2011) through Freud and Adorno, I will aim to show how subject – object relations can be unsettled in the event of objective crisis, and how this provides a negative framework for conceiving of action in the world and comportment towards objects, and, by extension, subjects, which is not modelled around the principal of equivalency and exchange. I will

begin by considering the melancholic subject's relation to time.

PART II

'For only what does not fit into this world is true.'

Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*

Melancholia and the Social

Melancholia is inherently anachronistic. By this I mean that, in its most literal sense, it is a condition which acts against time. Freud describes the condition in relation to mourning, a process that involves a similar removal from world affairs, but is not treated as pathological because 'we rely on it being overcome within a period of time' (Freud 2005, 202). The latter occurs due to the identifiable loss of a loved object. In melancholy, however, the lost object cannot be replaced and as such is internalised into the unconscious resulting in a paradoxically narcissistic incessant series of self-abasements (Freud 2005). Julia Kristeva discusses the effect succinctly: 'It is impossible to change partners or plans, for the object that has caused me pain is not only hated but also loved and thus identified with me' (Kristeva 2000, 47). In essence, the impossibility of replacing the lost object makes it impossible for a person to 'get on with their life' because their very personhood is predicated on loss.

This status becomes more complicated as Freud later concludes that the normally functioning ego

is founded on the loss of a beloved object, and on the acceptance of a socially sanctioned number of replacements. David L. Eng (2000) has suggested that the melancholic structure of subjectivity becomes a manifestation of the inability for public language to address unsanctioned objects, allowing clinical depression to take an overtly 'political' meaning (Eng 2000, 8). In this sense it becomes an index for that which must be passed over in silence within the social world. As Butler (1997) writes, 'the character of the ego appears to be the sedimentation of objects loved and lost, the archaeological remainder...of unresolved grief' (Butler 1997, 133). These griefs themselves catalogue heteronormative prohibitions and gender demarcations. It is this powerfully anachronistic relation to the status-quo that connects Adorno's negativity with the melancholic structure of subjects. It is also at this point that Archer stands most obviously opposed to this conception of subjectivity. The narrative assumption of 'social roles' necessarily pushes the subject into demarcations which cannot allow for the restoration of the lost object. The world actively promises fulfilment and works at the same time to deny it.

If one continues the discourse of second-nature and reification then what are missing from the social world are not only specific objects of desire, but equally a meaningful objectivity as such. This double

bind manifests itself in Adorno's statement that 'thought awaits to be wakened one day by the memory of what has been missed, and to be transformed into teaching' (Adorno 2000, 81). This restoration would provide the ultimate justification for social philosophy. Its mission is 'to show objects in their truly alienated, deformed state 'as they would appear in the messianic light' (Adorno 2000, 247). The presentation of the messianic here is negative. It is through the light of the a-historical objective, that objectivity that cannot be conceived within the world of the falsely objective, that aspects of the social world can be shown in their true state. Such discourse relies on the view point of the melancholic; the one who refuses to maintain themselves within a progressive narrative. It is therefore through the action of negation and loss, those essential constituents of the subject, that the potential for a redeemed relation between subject and object indexes itself.

It is within this ontological nexus of false and unrealised objectivity that I will consider Lars Von Trier's film *Melancholia*. Released in the autumn of 2011, by the Danish studio Zentropa, a company started and part-owned by Von Trier, it is the Danish director's most recent work. I will argue that the structure of melancholy appears here as having two faculties. The first of these is its anachronistic nature, the second is an emphasis on particularity and

a potential for an experience of an object which is paradoxically negative. Kristeva writes that the artistic drive avoids succumbing to melancholy by investing a subject's drives into individual objects; by 'sexualizing words, colours and sounds' (Kristeva 2000, 60). This may appear impotent whilst the world functions normally around the subject, however I will argue that this structure, as it appears in *Von Trier*, contains a reflection of a relationship to objectivity not based around utility and exchange.

This emerges if one considers the opening sequence of the film in which, against the musical backdrop of Wagner's prelude to 'Tristan und Isolde,' one sees a series of brilliantly composed high resolution, slow moving photographs, in which objects and people exist radiant in their particularity. These images include a bride attempting to walk away from roots in which she is entangled, a horse falling in slow motion against a sky spotted with stars and three figures; two women, whom we later find out to be the film's central characters, and a child, standing in a perfect composition against the back drop of a large country home. Intercut between these is the image of Earth being destroyed in a collision with another, much larger, and clearly dead, planet. What I would note about these images is that they appear to be aesthetic before they are narrative. They appear as metaphor not documentary. One may be

tempted to see them as examples of the aestheticising power of the melancholic consciousness, as discussed above. However, I would argue that equally what are presented are particulars as particulars. They are not entirely removed from a universal, such a thing would be impossible to comprehend, however they are not *subsumed* by the subject. They exist outside of an exchange relation. It is at this point that the negative and the anachronistic aspects of melancholia already converge. It is the dialectic between them, and its relation to the social world which I will argue manifests an ontological ground for a negative subjectivity.

Once the opening sequence is finished the viewer witnesses the bride, Justine, played by Kirsten Dunst, delayed on the way to her wedding reception as the limousine in which she is travelling with her new husband fails to negotiate a tight bend in a country road. Eventually the couple arrive two

hours late, and are greeted by the frustrated figures of Clare, Justine's older sister, played by Charlotte Gainsbourg and her husband, played by Kiefer Sutherland. Justine increases this frustration by immediately going to say 'hello' to her favourite horse in the family stables. As the scene progresses from this point it becomes clear that her sense of time is not commensurable with the world in which she finds herself. The wedding is running ac-

ording to a strict timetable, one that, as Claire's husband remarks, was drawn up by 'the most expensive wedding planner on the planet.' In contradiction with this attempt to manage her subjectivity, Justine frequently drops out of the appropriate forms of behaviour. The Archerean social roles present themselves for her to play. She is a new bride, she is a woman and is clearly from a privileged background. As such, her agential status seemingly equips her with everything necessary to become a successful actor. What is missing is a reified relation to the future; a desire to realise her own concerns as they placed before through a temporally bound series of commitments.

The assumption of such roles appears to her as an essentially de-meaning and boring act. Options available are meaningless. Upon her arrival at the reception, she is asked to guess how many beans are in a jar and upon receiving a congratulatory speech from her employer, during which she is promoted, is given the task to come up with a tag-line for a new advertising image. Both these tasks she fails to achieve, eventually telling her boss that she despises him and having sex with the young man who has been plucked from obscurity to encourage her to come up with the slogan. Throughout this sequence, the constitution of social identity is shown to be an inherently violent act. Not only does Justine fail to

achieve her combination of the personal and the social identities that would enable her to function as an active human, but she induces in those around her the feeling that this very relation as it exists in themselves may be something inessential. Characters, with the exception of her father, react with increasing desperation and frustration towards her behaviour. Her husband leaves, presumably for good, and Claire tells her how some times she hates more than she can say. This is not the reaction of a benevolent social world nurturing personal identity; rather it manifests the inherent violence of subjective constitution. This is not to suggest that Justine manages to sublimate gender in any meaningful way, however her negative relation to it, along with the economic structures in which she finds herself placed, allows disjunction between these structures and a subjective freedom to come to light.

Melancholia and the Negative

If the first half of Von Trier's film deals with the false objectivity of the world of second nature, then the second introduces objectivity of a new and absolute kind. The tautological domination of the object by the subject, the second nature of subjective existence, is obliterated by an object unable to be domesticated within the subjective framework. The half, entitled 'Claire', starts an indeterminate amount of time after the wedding. The opening

scenes deal with the title character's efforts to cope with the, now literally, debilitating depression of her sister. Several scenes depict her attempting to help Justine with small tasks, such as getting into a bath and eating supper. The latter remains incapable of doing these things, screaming as she is walked to the bath tub and saying that food tastes 'like ashes.' At other times she is seen as marvelling over specific flowers in the garden, and at the flight of a bird passing above her. When this happens, Claire looks on, seemingly happy but unable to participate.

In the previous section, I mentioned that Archer's subjective ontology is explicitly Kantian, in that she predicates the subject's knowledge of itself on the knowledge of its objective surroundings. This results in the subjective alienation experienced as 'second nature', an inability to know oneself and a persistent sense of entrapment. If the discourse of melancholia allows one to notice the particular of individual suffering that is missed in the social universal, it also contains intimations of a state in which neither the object or the subject are committed to their mutual bind. This is something that may approach subjective freedom: 'A freedom to step outside of the object, a freedom which the identity claim cuts short' (Adorno 2000, 313). The identity claim, the fastening of an object to its concept by a subject that in turn is fastened to the object, is something that reaches to the

core of positive subjectivity.

From the images that open the film there is consistent emphasis on an ability to experience passively within Justine's character, to achieve something approaching a relationship to an object which does not amount to subsumption. In *Structure, Agency and the Internal Conversation*, Archer makes reference to what she describes as the possibility of a 'fracturing' within a subject's internal conversation which would result in an inability to prioritise one's concerns and move through the world accordingly (Archer 2003, 298). Needless to say, this is judged as an incomplete subjectivity. However, what Von Trier (2011) emphasises is that it is precisely this inability to function according to the standard normative ground that maintains itself against that ground's failure in moments of objective crisis.

This ontology takes centre stage as it emerges that a planet named Melancholia has been 'hiding' behind the sun and is approaching Earth. Claire begins to worry that it will collide with them and her husband assures her that it will not. From this point, the planet represents precisely the social world's inability to appropriate an absolute object. Indeed, I would argue that this failed domestication is present from the opening shots of the film. Von Trier's affinity and familiarity with the work of Nietzsche has been noted (Bainbridge 2008). This rela-

tion between object and metaphor is a pre-occupation in both their work. As one reads in the small essay 'On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense':

Every concept originates through our equating what is unequal.... What then is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonyms and anthropomorphisms: in short, a sum of human relations which have been enhanced, transposed and embellished...truths are illusions...*metaphors* which are worn out and without sensuous power' (Nietzsche 1994, 47, my emphasis).

The construction of discourse, of objectivity itself, predicates itself on making the visceral familiar via the use of metaphor and translation, in which objects are literally transplanted into different areas of discourse. As the film progresses, this appropriation is made explicit in its failure. The opening shots, originally taken as metaphor, become increasingly prophetic as this failure becomes more and more evident. In the most moving example Claire's husband presents her with a device made by their son. It consists of a stick of wood with an adjustable ring of metal that can be held up to the planet and adjusted according to its size. The holder then waits for five minutes and places it over the planet again to see whether or not it is approaching or receding away. Ultimately, all that can be known

about this object is its relative size.

Merleau-Ponty (2005) writes that 'sense experience is that vital communication with the world which makes it present as a familiar setting of *our* life. It is to it that the perceived object and the perceiving subject owe their thickness' (Merleau-Ponty 2005, 61, my emphasis). What emerges in *Melancholia* is a process by which an object appears that cannot provide a foundational point for a life-world precisely because it is too much of an object. As such it causes terror amongst those whose subjectivity is contained within a schema of a positive futurity.

Justine's relation to the planet is strikingly different to her sister's. Two scenes serve to illustrate this. The first takes place at night. Justine goes walking in the grounds of the house, and Claire follows her clandestinely. *Melancholia* is shining brightly in the sky and after a few minutes the latter stumbles across Justine who is lying naked on a river bank staring back up at the planet and bathing in its white light. The position here is clearly voyeuristic. What is witnessed is a mode of comportment towards an object which manifests itself as a paradoxical stepping outside of the remit of subjective objectification. Such a position is only possible via the fractured subjectivity of the melancholic and from a subjective perspective that is outside of social time. It is from this position that the apocalyptic object appears as both

redemptive and destructive; as the messianic perspective from which the false is shown in its falseness.

The second scene occurs close to the end of film when it is now irrefutable that the Earth will soon be destroyed. Claire finds her husband dead in the stables, and tells Justine that she wants to re-enact a familiar ritual and to sit out on the terrace drinking wine with her sister and her young son. According to all of the requirements of rational behaviour, this plan is a good one. Claire has the means and the money at her disposal to actualise her plan, and the act exists within a social role that she is comfortable in playing. After a few moments of strained silence Justine tells her sister that this is one of the most stupid ideas that she has ever heard and proceeds to walk out into the grounds of the house where she meets her nephew and tells him that they will make a magic cave to escape the apocalypse. What is revealed in the convergence of the objective lack of a future with the attempt to maintain a degree of behaviour within the social world is that those normative behaviours are themselves guaranteed by a false objectivity.

The film ends with a negative image of redemption as the planet impacts and the three characters are sitting in a makeshift house formed from dead branches. History ends with an event which is precisely a-historical and the object that is never appropriated into schema of the fu-

ture converges with the consciousness unable to participate in it. The societal roles, the sedimentations of social history are obliterated along with the very subjectivities that they render necessary. For Justine, the melancholic always outside of time, the last moment is immortal. The social world that throughout has been predicated on a violent appropriation of subjectivity and time dies because the lost object that founds the ego in its melancholy state returns in all of its objectivity. Justine's relation represents a model for a comportment outside of exchange, a relation that can only exist as essentially negative.

Conclusion: Crisis

As the preceding discussion has investigated, the condition of melancholia acts against time in two ways. It refuses the necessary incorporation of the subject into the schema of the world's temporality, and it focuses on the particularity inherent in that world's crass universals. In both of these ways it is experienced as a deviation from the normal mode of existence. It represents a prolonged existential crisis, the process which, for early phenomenology, reveals the 'world as world' (Heidegger. 1978, 139). It is the visceral experience of being out of joint with one's surroundings, an interruption in the Kantian self-narrative.

The experience of financial crisis can be described in a similar way. It is the point at which discourses of

progress and inevitable subjective actualisation fall away. To view this position as ontologically secondary to the normal flow of life in the social world, is to appropriate the crisis into a discourse of the future in which the basic ontological ground of pre-crisis states will inevitably re-emerge. One could argue that the apperception of capital mimics that of its subjects. Every drive towards economic growth necessitates the enforcing, and tightening, of acceptable social roles and the subjects / objects which occupy them. The conception of a 'constellation of concerns' is rendered meaningless in the face of social objectivity attempting to recover from such a crisis. The situation which led to one elderly man shooting himself outside of the Greek parliament is a fitting example of what remains of subjective freedom when objective circumstances allow no avenue for its realisation.³

It is situations like this when one realises the essentially conservative nature of a focus on positive subjectivity. This is a focus that must take the currently existing world of social relations as its normative ground. As such, throughout her work Archer refers to the 'epistemic fallacy' as the mistaken belief that the world is how we imagine it, and not as it is in reality (Archer 2003, 207). However, whilst the world in which the naïve person moves may be opposed to their own conceptions of it, this does mean that it is, in itself,

something right and true. One who affirms the idea of wishful thinking serves only to justify the punishment of those mad enough to believe that the world could be different, and to sympathise with those who benefit from such punishment. It is no coincidence that Don Quixote receives his most sadistic humiliation at the hands of the nobility.

Benjamin once described the state as possessing a 'monopoly on violence' (Benjamin 2004, 239). A direct consequence of this is an equal monopoly on time. This monopoly is two-fold and involves both demarcating the social roles available and the subjective conditions of those who occupy them, and in dictating the narratives with which any crisis within those roles is explained. Actions orientated towards economic recovery focus themselves equally on fixing the ontological gap experienced in times of financial crisis and on re-establishing a universal narrative between both subjects and objects; a narrative that does not belong to either of them. In the UK one saw this process working explicitly in the discursive domestication of the London Riots of 2011. The reaction of the media and political mainstream served to either condemn what took place or to provide a liberal framework of justification for the actions.⁴ Actions which interrupt the expected temporality of capital accumulation must be re-appropriated into its structure, both through a narrative and a legal pro-

cess of punishment based on the grounds of individual responsibility. However, before any retroactive justification takes place, I would argue that acts that necessitate this reaction are essentially melancholic in nature. They represent a negation of the expected behaviour of actors who occupy a minimal social role, not by a slow burning change in a society's normative ground, but by a violent rupture in its time-frame. It is at these historical moments that the appropriative elements of the state come into full view.

It is also at these moments when the potential for something new emerges. In early March 2012 Cambridge University invited ex-head of the IMF, Dominique Strauss Kahn, to speak at their student union on the subject of economic recovery. Outside approximately two hundred protestors gathered demonstrating against the speaker's on-going involvement in allegations of sexual assault. As the evening proceeded, women began to come forward from the crowd and share stories of surviving rape. Individuals emerged from the crowd, told their stories and returned to tears of solidarity from complete strangers. One independent blogger described the atmosphere as such: 'We sustain one another, we create a vocabulary for our experiences, a discourse where we get to tell our own stories, and no one else can tell us what they mean.'⁵ These experiences exist outside of the time of

narrative appropriation; they maintain a melancholic negation and singularity achieved through, as much as is possible, the refusal of the social world's sedimented discourses. It is this phenomenon of stepping outside, via the paradoxical act of negation, of prevailing time frames that presents an intimation of something approaching the ground for a positive subject. To affirm this positivity outside of these demarcations is to affirm the conditions that make such a stepping outside necessary.

A piece from the string of university occupations in California declared itself to be a 'Communique from an Absent Future' (After the Fall 2009). This is wrong. The future is not absent, but it is estranged. This is not a time stream from which anyone may 'opt out,' precisely because it exists tangentially to the subject. But it is one that one may act against. In the words of another recent publication:

A revolutionary time form, a time away from time as we know it, cannot be understood in anything other than negative terms...It is not exhaustion and industry, but neither is it free time and leisure in the current ways in which those are understood...Time must be interrupted by us. Not Eden, not Heaven. NOW' (Escalate, 63).

Time, as a reified quantity, cannot be taken as a defining aspect of a meaningful autonomy because it is a time that can always be cut short; a freedom in chains. Rather,

the subject, if it is to mean anything at all, must stick fast to its own potential for negativity. At a time when statements regarding the universal reification of life impress one with their empirical verifiability rather than their rhetoric, such an aggressive fidelity could hardly be more vital.

Endnotes

¹ See Alexandra Topping (2011). <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2011/oct/19/dale-farm- eviction-police-taser>.

² See John Elster (1985) *Sour Grapes: Studies in the Subversion of Rationality*.

³ See Helena Smith (2012). <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/apr/04/greek-man-shoots-himself-debts>.

⁴ For an example of an article which manages to do both, see Mary Riddell (2011). <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/law-and-order/8630533/Riots-the-underclass-lashes-out.html>.

⁵ See Elly (2012). <http://www.gender-agenda.org.uk/discuss/931/breaking-silence-breaching-the-peace/>.

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Holding on to a Lifeline: Desiring Queer Futurities in Jeanette Winterson's *The Stone Gods*

Hwa Yi Xing

*This paper seeks to address the question: How do we 'arrive' at queer(er) futures? To begin with, queer rethinkings of futurity need to make a radical break from logics that find their basis in heteronormativity and reproductive futurity. Sara Ahmed's concept of orientations provides a framework within which we might move beyond nostalgic narratives and the reiteration of these normative logics. Developing orientations that are critically queer (enough) will enable one to choose lines of disorientation, to remember differently, and to integrate the past and future differently in relation to the present. I also look at José Esteban Muñoz's suggestion that we put queer 'on the horizon', viewing it as potentiality for a different world. Further, I regard the element of community as an essential element in one's queer knowledge production, as 'queer' cannot exist in isolation. How to shape our bodies, lives, and worlds differently, and develop queer potentialities that might eventually materialize? In Jeanette Winterson's novel *The Stone Gods*, I examine how her characters are orientated, and how they reorientate themselves when obstacles throw them off course. What do they do with these queer moments? Do they invest in them, or do those moments just slip away, unnoticed?*

Key words: Orientations, Queer Potentiality, Queer Futurity, Utopia, Nostalgia

In my assessment, one of the central issues at stake in this project is how to reconcile historicity, and therefore agency, with the (unconscious) desire for change. The most difficult task is how to put the will to change together with the desire for the new that implies the construction of new desiring subjects.

This difficulty is due to the fact that inner, psychic or unconscious structures are very hard to change by sheer volition.

Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects* (Braidotti 1994, 38)

Introduction

My paper seeks to address this question: How do we 'arrive'

at queer(er) futures? I take the term 'arrival' from Sara Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology*, in which she argues that arrivals are not by chance; rather, there is work that comes before an arrival (Ahmed 2006, 16–17). This work, I argue, concerns narratives; it is about the stories people tell about themselves and others, and about that which surrounds them. This work also concerns the retelling of stories. In Jeanette Winterson's writings, she regularly insists that stories are to be told again. Can we change their

endings? My analysis here which engages Winterson's novel *The Stone Gods* is part of a larger project that explores the ideas of 'home' and queer belonging. Due to the limitations of this paper, I primarily discuss the first part of the novel, although I do incorporate textual analysis from other parts when necessary.

I will begin with a brief introduction to the novel, before moving on to discuss some of the key theoretical concepts and positionings that I will use in this paper. Secondly, I will define my use of 'queer', which follows Judith Halberstam's work, and approach the logics of reproductive time (Halberstam 2005, 4) and reproductive futurism (Edelman 2004, 2), which are key points of departure for my understanding of queer futurity. Third, I will link José Esteban Muñoz's work on queer and utopia with Ahmed's work on orientations, in order to provide the final framework within which I approach *The Stone Gods* and its characters. Utilizing this theoretical framework, I will examine how Winterson's characters are orientated, and how they manage to reorientate themselves when obstacles throw them off course. What do they do with these queer moments? Do they, can they, invest in them? Or do those moments just slip away, unnoticed?

In dealing with Winterson's work, the themes of love and belonging (among others) have been returned to time and again. Alan Sinfield re-

fers to recurring patterns such as these as 'faultline stories'; they are the 'narratives which we revisit compulsively (in literary writing and many other forms)' (Sinfield 2004, 6). In our visiting and revisiting of faultlines, Sinfield suggests that we either then stick to 'old shapes', and end up telling known stories, or we manage to break into 'new shapes' (Sinfield 2004, 6). Winterson herself insists on telling the story again, on new beginnings, on different endings (Winterson 2000, 243). *The Stone Gods*, however, is a story of a repeating world. Do Winterson's characters manage to change shape, to tell us something new in this narrative? Further, apart from this text, how do we visualise queer futurities when nostalgic narratives of 'home' abound?

The novel is written in four parts. In this repeating world, humans seem to make the same mistakes again and again, collectively sealing the fate of their doomed planet(s). Still Winterson insists that stories can be 'written again', and that human beings have the potential to change the outcome in a quantum world where things are 'neither random nor determined' (Winterson 2007, 181, 203). Part One, Planet Blue, begins on the planet Orbus. The narrator, Billie Crusoe, lives in one of the cities of the Central Power, a corporate, capitalist democracy more technologically advanced than the other two governmental systems that inhabit the planet. Orbus is dy-

ing, and the humans' only hope is to relocate to the new planet that they have found. Billie, through a turn of events, ends up leaving her farm-home on Orbus to join the exploratory trip to Planet Blue - during which she and the Robo *sapiens* Spike become lovers. Billie/Billy and Spike/Spickers appear in several different incarnations throughout the novel, and in Part Two, which takes place on Easter Island in the 1770s, they are both gendered male. In Part Three and Part Four, Billie is living in a near-future, post World War 3 scenario.

In my arguments I endeavour, as far as possible, not to set up a 'queer'/'straight' dichotomy, but to use 'queer' together with Ahmed's concepts of 'lines' and 'orientations' in a way that bypasses patterns of binary thinking. For this purpose I find it useful to focus the discussion on the concept of 'orientation' instead of 'subjectivity'. I have decided against using the term 'subjectivity' because it is too totalizing - 'queer subjectivity', for example, implies that one is either a queer subject or is not, that a line can be easily drawn somewhere between 'straight' and 'queer'. I would like to suggest that the terms 'orientations' and 'lines' as employed by Ahmed in *Queer Phenomenology* (Ahmed 2006) are located in the dynamic semantic field of a verb, and as such are potentially less essentialising than a noun which is drawn in relation to the concerns of subjectivity. In this

way 'orientation' leaves more room for ruptures, change, and imagination, in that it allows for multiple lines and trajectories in several directions at a time - some of which may be 'queerer' or 'straighter' than others. For the same reason - i.e. to avoid any essentialised constructions of 'queerness' - I use terms like 'queerer' and queer (enough) in this paper. My view is that any given behaviour, orientation, or element of being can only be termed 'queer' in relation to its given context. Hence, when I say 'queerer', or 'queer (enough)' I mean that something is relatively 'queer' in relation to something that might be more 'normative' in that given context. At the same time, I don't view 'queer elements' or orientations as occurring on a straight line; rather, there may be a range or field of 'queer things' and there is no absolute 'queer value' that can be attached to any of them.

Rosi Braidotti and Donna Haraway both argue that one needs to be situated/located enough in order to say/produce anything of general value (Braidotti 1994, 36; Haraway 1991, 196). Haraway argues that 'the only way to find a larger vision is to be somewhere in particular' (Haraway 1991, 196). One does not pursue situated knowledges for their 'own sake', rather, the point is that these types of knowledge unexpectedly produce different connections and openings, perhaps those that would have been impossible to find otherwise (Haraway 1991). Situatedness

promises a certain form of orientation. But what of disorientation, and a lack of situatedness? While Winterson's Billie is in some ways orientated 'queerly', at many other points we get the feeling that she is overly disoriented/lost. While being disoriented or 'lost' (as I will argue later) might be a prerequisite to understanding and becoming 'queer', remaining lost is not a very productive option. Billie more often than not comes across as 'just lost.' As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has demonstrated, it is all too easy to fall into the trap of producing solely paranoid or reactionary forms of knowledge (Kosofsky Sedgwick 2003, 123-124). I argue that this is the only form of knowledge that Billie is able to produce while being 'lost', and it is only when she manages to orientate later in relation to 'something else' that she is able to produce different forms of knowledge. In addition to a relative situatedness, I regard the element of community as an essential element to one's queer production - production of orientations, positionalities, knowledges, etc. Ahmed argues that 'queer' is not something that exists in any one body, but that it is 'dependent on the mutuality of support' (Ahmed 2006, 170). Challenging 'straight' time and space requires a combination of both individual and collective action.

'There are two questions,' Winterson's Billie says, 'where have you come from, and where are you going?' (Winterson 2007, 204). My

work here tries to explore how we might more effectively deal with the 'where have you come from', in a way that then better addresses the question 'where are you going?' Ahmed's concept of orientations provides a framework within which we might move beyond nostalgic narratives and the reiteration of normative logics. Developing orientations that are critically queer (enough) will enable one to choose lines of disorientation, to remember differently, and to integrate the past and future differently in relation to the present (Muñoz 2009, 27). I also look at Muñoz's suggestion that we put queer 'on the horizon', viewing it as a potentiality for a different world (Muñoz 2009, 25). The development of queer-er orientations - doing the work of walking paths less-trodden and imagining alternative futurities - is crucial. How to shape our bodies, lives, and worlds differently, and develop queer potentialities that might eventually materialize?

Queer, Futurity, and Nostalgia

How do queer-er refigurations of the future begin? Where do they come from? To start with, queer rethinkings of futurity need to be radically different in at least these two ways: first, they need to move away from logics of reproductive time, reproductive futurism, and the nuclear family, in order to move in the direction of imagining models of queer kinship. By extension, secondly, they need to reject

assimilationist LGBT politics, called out by Duggan as 'the new homonormativity' - a politics, she argues, that simply serves to reinscribe the very same heteronormative structures and institutions just mentioned, instead of questioning them (Duggan 2004, 50). The rejection of these originary, normative, and limiting logics serves as the underlying structure of my argument and analysis.

Judith Halberstam, in *In A Queer Time and Place*, has defined 'queer' to mean 'nonnormative logics and organizations of community, sexual identity, embodiment, and activity in space and time' (Halberstam 2005, 6). Halberstam also importantly emphasizes queer subcultural activity and cultural production, which play a large part in the production of these nonnormative logics. My use of 'reproductive time' above refers to the temporal logic described by Halberstam as the 'middle-class logic of reproductive temporality' which 'sustains conventional forms of association, belonging, and identification' (Halberstam 2005, 4). It is a logic that privileges longevity, a logic that privileges the cycle of birth, marriage, reproduction and death (Halberstam 2005, 2, 4).

By comparison, 'reproductive futurism' is a term used by Lee Edelman in *No Future*, where he describes how the figure of the Child structures and determines the framework within which all political discourse necessarily takes place

(Edelman 2004, 2). Speaking from the political context of the United States, Edelman argues that the Child is identified with 'the future of the social order' - the Child is the 'Imaginary fullness' that wants for nothing, it is the 'innocence' that is 'constantly under siege' (Edelman 2004, 21, 25). Further, he argues that reproductive futurism, which fetishizes the figure of the Child, assigns any force or element that threatens to rupture this social order as 'queer'. Queerness, then, represents a structural position; it is 'the force that shatters the fantasy of Imaginary unity' (Edelman 2004, 22). Within the Central Power of *Orbus*, the Resistance is one element that represents this queer force; it is an anti-government political movement that Billie has cooperated with in the past (Winterson 2007, 59). Edelman goes on to critique the 'future itself as fantasy', and seems to understand futurism as always inscribed in an impossible 'Imaginary past', linked to the construction of a future 'Imaginary wholeness' (Edelman 2004, 28, 10). In the novel this structure is made visible through this fact: 'the official line' is that 'there is no Resistance to the Central Power' (Winterson 2007, 26). The Central Power's insistence on this is necessary to maintain a present and future imaginary wholeness. While I agree with Edelman in his critique of reproductive futurism, I take a different stand on how futurism may be conceived of, a depar-

ture from his insistence that 'the future stop here' (Edelman 2004, 31).

In my view, queer futurities need to *do* things, inform our lives in new ways, and desire different objects and relations. The challenge is: how to create new logics to structure these futures, without repeating known ones that lead us again into unproductive, nostalgic narratives? Edelman's understanding of futurism, in fact, ties up with how I understand and use the term 'nostalgia'. Dictionary definitions of nostalgia tend to describe a longing for places and times of the 'past'. But the question that needs to be asked is: what kind of 'past' does nostalgia actually create? Svetlana Boym points out that nostalgia is in effect, not just about the past, but that it is a reconstruction of the past tied to present needs which can have a 'direct impact on realities of the future' (Boym 2001, xvi). She adds an important element by defining nostalgia as 'a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed' (Boym 2001, xviii). There is no straightforward way to remember the past; one reconstructs the same 'slice' of the past in different ways at different times, and as Boym points out, because of different present needs.

The logics of futurity that Edelman and Boym describe are further visible in the discourse surrounding Planet Blue. Planet Blue is repeatedly portrayed in idyllic terms; it is 'pristine' with 'abundant natural resources', it

is a '*polar-swirled, white-whirled, diamond blue*' world (Winterson 2007, 32, 30). The new planet is an image from the past, said to resemble Orbus sixty-five million years before (Winterson 2007, 30). The protagonist Billie is critical, however, of these representations, saying 'We just stay in line and get there some day. Yeah, we'll get there some day, blue planet, silver stars' (Winterson 2007, 13). In my opinion, nostalgia is risky when it 'remembers' in a way that too easily erases cracks and fissures - in this manner creating a longing for an overly idealized time and/or place. This version of nostalgia involves forgetting memories that cause cognitive dissonance while carrying forward the ones that uphold an unquestioned satisfaction with the past. It can limit rather than expand, if it rejects any excess that does not agree with its story or logic, and rejects alternative logics that may provide different narratives. Paradoxically, while Billie is critical of certain nostalgic narratives that are produced by the Central Power, she invests in her own nostalgic narratives, tied to her particular vision and knowledge of the past. For example, she uses a notebook and pencil, instead of a SpeechPad, in a world where 'nobody reads and writes any more' (Winterson 2007, 8).

For the purposes of this paper, I view nostalgia as a specific form of 'remembering', a remembering that often projects an ideologically re-

constructed form of the past into the present and future. It might be argued that insofar as nostalgia contains the force of longing/desire, it has the potential to be a somewhat productive force. Nostalgic narratives, then, are not necessarily 'unproductive', but insofar as they construct an idealized time and place, and reiterate the originary and normative logics that my argument endeavours to depart from, I do use 'nostalgia' in a somewhat negative sense. In this vein, I do agree with Edelman's argument that queerness has the ability to dismantle the logics on which these sorts of (what I term) 'nostalgic narratives' - futures that have already been foreclosed by reproductive time and futurism - are built (Edelman 2004, 24, 25).

Muñoz's queer problematization of time and space in *Cruising Utopia* is strongly influenced by the ideas of Ernst Bloch. He understands Bloch in *The Principle of Hope* to be critiquing 'straight time', which Muñoz goes on to define as that which 'tells us that there is no future but the here and now of our everyday life' (Muñoz 2009, 22). Muñoz is also very critical of reproductive time and capitalist logics; he comments that the only type of 'futurity' that is promised is that of the 'reproductive majoritarian heterosexuality, the spectacle of the state refurbishing its ranks through overt and subsidized acts of reproduction' (Muñoz 2009, 22). His criticism of this sort of reproductive futurity agrees with

some of Lee Edelman's work,¹ but Muñoz then goes on to position himself very differently by linking 'queer' to 'utopia'. He refigures 'queer' in essence to mean something that hasn't yet arrived, suggesting that this way of thinking queer enables 'greater conceptual and theoretical leverage' (Muñoz 2009, 22). For Muñoz, queer is a utopian impulse that can often be seen in everyday moments, in 'utopian bonds, affiliations, designs, and gestures' (Muñoz 2009, 22). He argues that:

Queerness is utopian, and there is something queer about the utopian (...). Indeed, to live inside straight time and ask for, desire, and imagine another time and place is to represent and perform a desire that is both utopian and queer (Muñoz 2009, 26).

Muñoz posits the utopian impulse as excess, as the 'extra to the everyday transaction of heteronormative capitalism' (Muñoz 2009, 22). This 'extra' might be thought of as that which is articulated outside of normative structures, logics, or representations. The 'extra', in fact, is crucial; it provides potential points of departure from these normative imperatives, and a starting point then from which alternative representations and lives that reject logics of the 'majoritarian public sphere' (Muñoz 2009, 56) might be created.

Queerness for Muñoz is ultimately about an insistence on potentiality - 'a certain mode of nonbeing that is

eminent, a thing that is present but not actually existing in the present tense' (Muñoz 2009, 1, 9). To this end, queerness needs to be seen 'as horizon', perceived as 'a modality of ecstatic time' that interrupts straight time's linear progression, encouraging 'a greater openness to the world' (Muñoz 2009, 25, 32). He argues that it is the possibility of and desire for a different world, and a complex relation to the present, which informs and drives 'queer' (Muñoz 2009, 1, 27).

To Arrive Somewhere Else

I turn to Ahmed's work on orientations now; first, to provide a way of understanding how the 'majoritarian' and 'normative' social structures that Halberstam and Muñoz speak of function, and second, towards ways of developing less conventional, queer-er orientations. Ahmed explores how bodies gain orientation by the ways in which they occupy time and space (Ahmed 2006, 5). Inhabitation is a key point of her discussion, as being orientated, she argues, is really about how intimate bodies are able to be with the spaces that they inhabit, and how well they are able to extend into any given space (Ahmed 2006, 8). It is a certain 'familiarity' with the world that allows one to be orientated, but also, importantly, to 'feel at home' (Ahmed 2006, 7).

Ahmed argues that orientations shape the way in which we inhabit space, but importantly, also shape

how 'we apprehend this world of shared inhabitation, as well as 'who' or 'what' we direct our energy and attention towards' (Ahmed 2006, 3). One's orientation determines 'who' and 'what' is within reach, and in turn 'who' or 'what' is then close enough to have an effect on oneself - in a way that might then alter one's (future) orientation (Ahmed 2006, 7-8). Our orientations form and inform our worlds, directing what we see and do not see, or what we turn toward and turn away from. She suggests that a queer phenomenology might begin 'by redirecting our attention toward different objects, those that are 'less proximate' or even those that deviate or are deviant' (Ahmed 2006, 3).

Ahmed also points out that the ability to be orientated, first and foremost, depends upon taking certain perspectives and 'points of view as given' (Ahmed 2006, 14). These 'givens', which tend to disappear from sight and be forgotten, become the basis for the construction of collective (and individual) direction. If not for that which is given/unquestioned/forgotten, upholding any particular orientation is impossible. If every orientation requires that some things be taken as given, this suggests that one should pay closest attention to the different 'givens' of various ways to be orientated. Billie doesn't 'remember', for instance, the downsides to aging 'naturally' - a viewpoint which is revealed in her startling encoun-

ter with an old woman. For political reasons, Billie had (illegally) chosen not to be genetically 'fixed' - in this way running the risk of aging 'naturally'. But when she encounters the first aged person she has ever seen, she is not able to look at her. The old woman tells her point-blank: 'I am what you will become.' Billie describes her as looking like 'a thing with skin like a lizard's, like a stand-up handbag (...) Her arm was bones and stretched flesh - brown, thin skin pulled over bluish, visible tendons. I looked away' (Winterson 2007, 37-38).

At the same time, Ahmed argues that one's orientation, along with one's (past) choices determine the future choices that become available (Ahmed 2006, 14-15). Because moving in certain directions inevitably excludes certain options for us:

The lines that allow us to find our way, those that are 'in front' of us, also make certain things, and not others, available. When we follow specific lines, some things become reachable and others remain or even become out of reach. Such exclusions - the constitution of a field of unreachable objects - are the indirect consequences of following lines that are before us: we do not have to consciously exclude those things that are not 'on line'. The direction we take excludes things for us, before we even get there (Ahmed 2006, 14-15).

Ahmed then goes on to discuss how spaces are orientated, and in

this way how they become more conducive to some bodies than others. The orientation of space, for Ahmed, is always a reciprocal/two-way mutual constitution; bodies 'are shaped by their dwellings and take shape by dwelling' (Ahmed 2006, 9). Bodies also 'direct' spaces through their inhabitation of them, and 'acquire direction' through this inhabitation (Ahmed 2006, 9, 12). For example, think of the many objects and spaces in this world that are designed for right-handed people. All the right-handed people in the world - who, needless to be said, form the majority - have 'directed' these spaces and objects in this way. We can speak, Ahmed says, of 'collective direction', for example the ways in which nations or other 'imagined communities' (Anderson 2006, 6-7) move in a certain direction, or face the same way:

Becoming a member of such a community, then, might also mean following this direction, which could be described as the political requirement that we turn some ways and not others. We follow the line that is followed by others: the repetition of the act of following makes the line disappear from view as the point from which 'we' emerge (Ahmed 2006, 15).

Speaking of communities and collective direction also implies that there are certain directions and lines that are followed more than others. In effect, being orientated

entails being 'in line':

The lines we follow might also function as forms of 'alignment,' or as ways of being in line with others. We might say that we are orientated when we are in line. We are 'in line' when we face the direction that is already faced by others. Being 'in line' allows bodies to extend into spaces that, as it were, have already taken their shape (Ahmed 2006, 14–15).

The experience of dis-orientation then, is the experience of being 'out of line'. When the body does not line up with the direction of the space that it is in, or when the body does not line up sufficiently well with other bodies, it is then that the body experiences disorientation (I will discuss this point further in a moment).

Recall the contingency inherent in the way that spaces and bodies shape, and take shape, through inhabitation. Ahmed references Butler's discussion on performativity in order to elaborate on the relationship between how lines emerge, and how they are followed. She says that when we talk of the 'path well trodden', for example, the paradox is that lines are both 'created by being followed and are followed by being created' (Ahmed 2006, 16). It is only through following and treading, through a repetition of lines, that the lines themselves are reproduced. She argues that the lines that produce 'collective direction' depend on the 'repetition of norms and conven-

tions, of routes and paths taken, but they are also created as an effect of this repetition' (Ahmed 2006, 16).

This leads us into an important point of Ahmed's, which is crucial for my argument: to term lines 'performative' means that we make a way and direction only 'as an effect of work, which is often hidden from view' (Ahmed 2006, 16). Arriving at a certain place involves the previous work of following particular directions and lines; arrivals do not happen 'by magic' (Ahmed 2006, 16). To 'arrive' at alternative futures, then, we need to do work in the present that entails the work of following non-normative lines - of shaping our bodies such that different potentialities are created. To arrive differently first entails imagining differently, imagining different arrivals. With queer on the horizon, we can then engage in a "doing" that is a becoming' (Muñoz 2009, 26).

Intentionally Queer, 'Lost' Investments

Although my discussion is largely concerned here with how to move in the direction of orientating more 'queerly' in order to create different potentialities, Ahmed reminds us that the question is not so much what constitutes a 'queer orientation'. It would be naïve to suppose that there is one 'queer line' that we could follow (Ahmed 2006, 171, 179). The more crucial question, she argues, is 'asking what our orientation toward queer moments of devi-

ation should be' (Ahmed 2006, 179). We might think of 'queer moments' as the 'extra', the 'utopian impulse', moments of disorientation, 'the point at which things fleet' (Ahmed 2006, 172). 'Queer', then, might open up from those points, from those moments that are inhabited, invested in, instead of being allowed to 'slip away' (Ahmed 2006, 172, 179). Queer-er orientations, ones that allow these queer moments to open up new directions and possibilities, will result in the following and creation of different lines, paths less well-trodden. This in turn will create potentialities, make available new objects and lines that might previously have been excluded or out of reach (of course, it is also possible that certain 'queer lines' might become relatively well-trodden, to the extent that the line in question might become less 'queer' - perhaps as it becomes more normatively compelling in its directionality, and harder to deviate from.)

In line with the discussion thus far, it seems to be the case that the work of sustaining relatively queer orientations requires a degree of intentionality and critical awareness. This work involves an awareness of what it means to be 'in line' and 'out of line' - which basically is an awareness of the normative logics that tend to dictate 'activity in space and time' (Halberstam 2005, 6). The intentionally queer body is more aware of how bodies get directed (Ahmed 2006, 15); necessary if one

is to create and forge alternative directions that break with dominant logics/narratives/lines. Bodies that invest in queer-er ways of being oriented in the world, that make a point of 'not following', are in effect investing in different potentialities *by accepting* the experience of 'disorientation' or 'lostness' (Ahmed 2006, 177–179). Muñoz in fact argues that queerness involves 'the intention to be lost'; Queerness is illegible to the logic of heteronormativity, the logic of straight time and space (Muñoz 2009, 73):

To accept loss is to accept the way in which one's queerness will always render one lost to a world of heterosexual imperatives, codes, and laws. To accept loss is to accept queerness - or more accurately, to accept the loss of heteronormativity, authorization, and entitlement. To be lost is not to hide in a closet or to perform a simple (ontological) disappearing act; it is to veer away from heterosexuality's path (Muñoz 2009, 73).

Committing to a 'queer politics', Ahmed argues, is committing to a certain way of inhabitation, a certain way of being (dis)orientated in the world - even if one cannot afford 'a life of deviation' (Ahmed 2006, 176–177). Disorientation comes about as an effect of 'doing' and living queer politics (Ahmed 2006, 177).

While accepting lostness/disorientation in relation to the space of

heteronormativity is crucial toward being able to invest more queerly, queerness cannot exist as 'just lost'. It is necessary for queer lives to orientate in relation to something (else) - not just in opposition or reaction to heteronormative logics - and to be situated or located enough such that one might produce knowledge that is of relative value (Haraway 1991, 196). I believe that Muñoz's view of queer as horizon, in combination here with Ahmed's work on orientation, point us in the direction of being able to conceive of what this 'something else' might be, as their ideas, even as they begin with a move away from heteronormative imperatives, open up multiple potentialities and the possibility of multiple ways/lines/trajectories to explore and move into. Ahmed's work also, importantly, reminds us that there is work that must be done, in order to be able to imagine and orientate ourselves differently.

In addition to keeping in mind the 'something else' that queer orientations might relate to, I strongly agree with Ahmed's argument that in order for 'queer' to be productive, it needs to exist in community. She argues that 'queer' depends on mutual support; it is not a phenomenon that resides 'in a body' (Ahmed 2006, 170).

When we tread on paths that are less trodden, which we are not sure are paths at all (is it a path, or is the grass just a little bent?), *we might need even more support.* (...) In refocusing our attention on prox-

imity, on arms that are crossed with other arms, we are reminded of how queer engenders moments of contact; how we come into contact with other bodies to support the action of following paths that have not been cleared (Ahmed 2006, 170).

In my analysis of the novel below, I argue how Billie's lack of community and support is a major element that halts her movement toward being more productively 'queer'. It does not do to walk a path alone, what's more an overtly nostalgic one. For queer potentiality to materialize, to re-imagine, to be creative in its representations, we need to build community networks that will sufficiently situate us, that will provide support and inspiration in the continual work of facing different directions, walking different lines, and imagining different futures.

Refusing the Imprint

In the earlier sections of Part One, Billie demonstrates an overtly nostalgic disposition, one that is enmeshed largely in paranoid and reactionary forms of knowledge. She yearns for a time long gone, for a time when people still lived on real farms, read books, and wrote with pens and pencils (Winterson 2007, 8, 11). In the following sections I will look at how some of the ways in which she is orientated might still be termed somewhat 'queer'. She demonstrates some queer potentiality, which does actually result in her life moving in a completely un-

expected direction. However, her somewhat queer orientation, though it has direct impact on her life, does not appear to have much of a wider impact - it does not produce any 'queer knowledge' that is of more general value. I argue that this failure to more effectively realize her queer potentiality is due to her isolation and lack of community. It is only at certain points in the latter half of Part One, when Billie/y manages to orientate herself in closer relation to at least one other figure (the lover) that she is able to begin to produce different forms of knowledge.

I argue that that Billie's life and body on Orbus are organized according to some 'non-normative logics'. She very much rejects the 'majoritarian public sphere' of the Central Power (Muñoz 2009, 56), and frequently experiences moments of disorientation within it. Billie is overtly critical of the system, and voices disagreement with many of its given, unquestioned logics, while the characters Pink McMurphy and Manfred often serve as the voices of the more 'normative' Central Power citizens. Take, for example, the following exchange between Manfred and Billie (in which he is telling her that she either leaves Orbus or gets arrested):

'I believe in the system. You don't.'

'No, I don't. It's repressive, corrosive, and anti-democratic.'

'Then you'll be very happy on

Planet Blue. There is no system.'
(Winterson 2007, 45)

In another instance, while engaged in a discussion of the bombing of MORE-*Futures* - the branch of MORE that enabled and introduced the practice of genetic fixing - Billie tries to draw attention to the fact that their 'democracy' is largely owned by the MORE corporation. Pink, in response, simply says, 'Can't see why you want to blow a place up for making a woman look good on a date' (Winterson 2007, 59). This particular quote from Pink also demonstrates her unquestioning acceptance of genetic science's progress - specifically of the process known as 'Fixing'. 'Science can't fix everything, though,' Billie points out (Winterson 2007, 9). No women Fix older than thirty, but men on the other hand are sometimes confident enough to Fix late-forties, Manfred being one example. In other words, 'women feel they have to look youthful, men less so, and the lifestyle programmes are full of the appeal of the older man' (Winterson 2007, 9). People no longer celebrate birthdays, instead they throw G parties that celebrate the date that they get fixed genetically (Winterson 2007, 15).

Billie, however, looks to the past and questions how 'normal' the practice of fixing is, arguing that it makes people 'fucked up and miserable.' Pink's replies by saying, 'It is normal...What was so normal about

getting old?' (Winterson 2007, 58). Her response, though at first glance a 'normative' one that is unquestioning of the current system, in actuality manages to also question what was 'normal' even 'back then' - something which Billie actually fails to do. Nevertheless, Billie questions a dominant logic of the Central Power in her present time, and in relation to this logic, Billie is a non-normative body within the system. She has illegally chosen to not be Fixed, and has had her data-chip reprocessed to hide this fact (Winterson 2007, 44). Billie's choice necessarily re-routes her life in a way that rejects the dominant temporal life narrative of the Central Power's society.

In another exchange with Manfred, where he blames the Caliphate and the Pact² for 'destabilizing the planet', Billie argues an alternative interpretation of the 'facts', reminding Manfred of the part that the Central Power had to play in global warming and the like. 'We made ourselves rich polluting the rest of the world, and now the rest of the world is polluting us' (Winterson 2007, 31). Overall, Billie's orientation - unconventional by the Central Power's standards - demonstrates a relatively critical perspective. Although she often falls into the trap of nostalgia, of romanticizing a past that she does not really know, she still manages to highlight different interpretations of the past and present.

This relatively queer potential,

however, stands in contrast to the other ways in which she is orientated in a particularly nostalgic and solitary manner. Billie seems to lead a fairly isolated life - her home is a farm, the last remaining one of its kind, a space that she inhabits with her dog. The only hint that we are given of any sort of 'community' that Billie is/was involved in, is her involvement with the Resistance - the group that she assisted in the bombing of MORE-Futures (Winterson 2007, 59). Billie's present orientation on Orbus, in which she seems to invest primarily in her farm-home-space while rejecting many elements of 'normal' life in the Central Power, demonstrates a problematic sort of isolation and lack of reflexivity. She exists in a sort of vacuum, resisting the imperative that Spike, the Robo *sapiens*, puts forth: 'The universe is an imprint. You are part of the imprint - it imprints you, you imprint it. You cannot separate yourself from the imprint, and you can never forget it. It isn't a 'something', it is you' (Winterson 2007, 87).

By comparison, the character Pink McMurphy is worth paying attention to. As an inhabitant of the Central Power who is quite 'normatively' orientated, she deals very well when confronted later with the crisis situation on Planet Blue. Billie thinks to herself, 'Who could have said that Pink would cope and Billie would not?' (Winterson 2007, 79). This example suggests that Pink had sufficient resources behind her to cope

when 'knocked off course' (Ahmed 2006, 19), more than queerly-oriented-but-isolated Billie. 'We'll make it,' Pink says confidently, even finding time to speculate about the possibility of an 'arctic romance' with Handsome (Winterson 2007, 79). Pink's use of 'we', and hint toward romance, demonstrates that it is her investment in community, mutual support, and interaction, which allows her to hope. This gathering of resources allows her to continue moving forward (into the unknown, the path not-yet trodden) despite the difficult circumstances.

While Billie's isolation here is problematic, the progression of the narrative illustrates how the following of certain lines still opens up different potentialities. If we think about Ahmed's points regarding the directionalities of bodies and spaces, and the way in which they are mutually constitutive, it is possible to view Billie's choices as having directed her body in a certain way. Her refusal to be completely 'imprinted' by the Central Power's norms and directionalities - through her resistance of genetic fixing, and investment in the inhabitation of a nostalgic-nonnormative space - has a direct impact on the lines and objects that become available and within her reach.

Holding on to a Lifeline

Ahmed's discussion of lifelines is conducive to a brief analysis of an example from *The Stone Gods*, one

that reveals how one's orientation and past lines can limit, or potentially open up, the choices that are actually available to oneself. Ahmed argues how some bodies can be pressured to reproduce certain kinds of lifelines that follow narratives of familial inheritance and reproduction. She then goes on to say:

How ironic that 'a lifeline' can also be an expression for something that saves us. A lifeline thrown to us is what gives us the capacity to get out of an impossible world or an unlivable life (...) And yet, we don't know what happens when we reach such a line and let ourselves live by holding on. If we are pulled out, we don't know where the force of the pull might take us. We don't know what it means to follow the gift of the unexpected line that gives us a chance for a new direction and even a chance to live again (Ahmed 2006, 17-18).

Ahmed also speaks of lifelines as becoming possible through 'accidental or chance encounters' that happen, that might 'redirect us and open up new worlds' (Ahmed 2006, 19). When one is 'knocked off course', what happens next depends on oneself, on the resources that we have available to draw upon (Ahmed 2006, 19).

The second half of Part One takes place in outer space, and then on Planet Blue. Billie, whose relatively queer orientation has resulted

in her stepping out of line within the Central Power's system, is faced with the choice of being arrested and losing her farm, or being sent to Planet Blue and losing her farm anyway. Billie chooses to go. The chance to go to Planet Blue was a lifeline for Billie, one that she chose to hold on to. While her chosen lines thus far had been limiting in some ways and perhaps questionable in the (lack of) directionality of her motivations, they still brought her to this point where a specific lifeline opened up. At one point, after leaving Orbus, Billie says, 'One word, and a million million worlds close. One word, and for a while there's a planet in front of me, and I can live there' (Winterson 2007, 69).

Compare, for example, how Winterson's different individuals approach such chance encounters. Billie, as we have seen, grabs on to the lifeline and lets new possibilities open up. Manfred however, responds very differently when presented with a different sort of crisis. Orbus is dying, and factually speaking, the humans' only chance is to relocate to Planet Blue, quickly. Spike points out that human beings will have to 'make the best of [their] mistakes' on Orbus, and 'begin again...differently' (Winterson 2007, 32). Starting anew on Planet Blue is the human race's 'second chance', a lifeline. Manfred, however, says:

We need infrastructure, buildings, services. If I'm going to live on a different planet I want to do it properly.

I want shops and hospitals. I'm not a pioneer. I like city life, like everyone likes city life. The Central Power believes that the biggest obstacle to migration will be setting up the infrastructure in time. We can't go back to the Bog Ages (Winterson 2007, 32).

Lifelines can only save us if we choose to grab a hold of them and let ourselves be led into the unknown. Manfred seems unable to (theoretically) grab a hold of this lifeline that is Planet Blue. We could argue that his more normatively orientated body is really unable to do so—the choices that he has made thus far do not allow him to say 'yes' to this, to step into the unknown. This line, this possibility, is 'out of reach' for Manfred. He made 'investments' and shaped his body in such a way that this option - 'going back to the Bog Ages' - is a non-option, is simply impossible for him (Ahmed 2006, 17–19). Billie's queerly orientated body, on the other hand, and her previous investments, put her in a position where the lifeline was within reach.

Set Adrift

Overall, lostness/disorientation is a significant theme in the novel. In this excerpt below we get a sense of Billie's disorientation:

Strange to dream in the right shape and build in the wrong shape, but maybe that is what we do every day, never believing that a dream could tell the truth.

Sometimes, at the moment of waking, I get a sense for a second that I have found a way forward. Then I stand up, losing all direction, relying on someone else's instruments to tell me where I am. If I could make a compass out of a dream. If I could trust my own night-sight... (Winterson 2007, 62)

Her thoughts suggest that she does not have sufficient resources 'behind' her, to support the path forward. It is arguable that this is due to her relative isolation and lack of community. While it might be worth noting that at this point in the narrative Billie is actually in the process of re-orienting herself somewhat differently in relation to Spike, I would argue that this bit of narration is a reflection of Billie's general orientation in Part One. Billie's inability here to believe enough, to trust her own vision(s), points again to that which is missing—she is a loner who has not gathered sufficient resources around her to support, or to ascertain the validity of her dreams. Despite her ability to hold onto the lifeline which takes her in a new direction - which was a result of her relatively queer orientation - the lack of community support and interaction meant that Billie's potentiality never managed to move beyond a non-normative, nostalgic disposition. She was never really able to imagine anything beyond her nostalgic home-space on Orbus. In her relative isolation, she was unable to

imagine a more productive queer futurity.

We see this lostness/disorientation surfacing again in Part Two where Billy says, 'Here I am, little Billy, and nothing round me but the sea.' Billy of Part Two is a crew member of Captain Cook's voyage to Easter Island in the 1770s. When he gets stranded on the island, he attempts to drown himself, only to be rescued by the character named 'Spickers'. Billy, like Billie of Part One, demonstrates the ability to hold on to the lifeline that is held out to him. He comes to accept the situation, and again, like Billie, he reorients in relation to the figure of the lover, who in this case is Spickers. The key point in Billie and Billy's stories is that they both manage to reorientate themselves in relation to 'something else' when faced with a difficult choice. In a queer moment where the 'extra' presented itself as an option, they reached out for it, and moved forward in a new direction, at the same time producing new knowledge and perspectives - rather than letting themselves be held back. In both cases too, the key perspective/viewpoint that changed was the way in which they thought of home and belonging. Their reorientations happened in relation to the (new) figure of the lover. If Billie (Part One) had managed to orientate herself earlier on in relation to a community (and not just toward a single person/*Robo sapiens*), perhaps she would have been able to

realize her queer potentiality more productively on Orbus.

Perhaps Billie's lostness/disorientation is most extreme in Part Three and Part Four. In these two sections of the novel, the character is primarily orientated by a single, profound, experience of loss:

The line that is the first line of this story – *I was born*. The line that had nothing to read between it – being only one, one only, my lifeline (Winterson 2007, 120).

The 'lifeline' that Billie speaks of here carries an entirely different meaning from 'lifeline' as the term from Ahmed. Here, rather than opening up a new direction, this line seems to be the one and only thing that Billie holds on to. Given up for adoption by her mother after a month, Billie spends her whole life unable to 'break the shape' of this loss (Winterson 2007, 127). Throughout Part Three, Billie demonstrates her inability to let go of her attachment to her lost mother - whom she places in a completely idealized, imagined narrative. She is never able to do something different with the queer moment of loss; instead it paralyzes her, binding her to an "echo" of a life:

You never stop looking. That's what I found, though it took me years to know that's what I've been doing. The person whose body I was, whose body was me, vanished after twenty-eight days. I live in an echo of another life (Winterson

2007, 124).

In Part Four Billie is presented with at least one opportunity to 'break the shape', to reach out to touch and orientate herself differently. She doesn't, however, manage to change direction:

He looked at me. I nearly touched him. There are so many things that we nearly do and they don't matter at all, and then there are the things that we nearly do that would change everything.

He looked at me. He turned to clear the plates (Winterson 2007, 167).

Ultimately, in the novel, the only points where Billie/y manages to 'arrive' differently, to create new forms of knowledge, is when s/he manages to detach from what has been lost, and walk a different path that opened up in a queer moment. The figure of the lover, in both Part One and Part Two, provides a new beginning, a new way to orientate. In Part Three and Part Four, however, when Billie is unable to detach from the loss of her mother, when her only orientation draws a line from the past to explain her present, she remains bound to a singular narrative of origins that renders her unable to invest in any 'queer moment'.

Throughout the novel, Billie shows minimal attachment to forms of community, if any, and is only ever shown to be orientated strongly in relation to one other person (plus

her dog, in Part One). The novel, in my reading, actually ‘regresses’, as Billie of Part Three and Part Four is orientated in an overtly nostalgic way - this orientation does not really develop or change, and the ending of the novel in fact reiterates some conservative logics that my argument insists against. However, we do see some potential in secondary character representations like Pink McMurphy, who showed how an investment in community enabled her to persist along a difficult path. Part Four of the novel also actually introduces some of the queer potentiality and orientations found in the space called ‘Wreck City’—the alternative communities found there include a few ‘dinosaur-friendly lesbian vegans’ and six nuns (Winterson 2007, 174–175). These subcultural communities, in contrast to Winterson’s main character, seem to have rather successfully invested in various different forms of belonging, and in queer spaces and temporalities.

Conclusion: Remembering That Which Fleets

In this paper I have argued that developing queer-er ways to be orientated is essential towards producing queer potentiality, which leads to the ability to realize alternative ‘arrivals’. Further, community is a necessary element in one’s ‘queer production’; without sufficient support, it might be difficult if not impossible to realize the potentiality that might be present. Being orientated in a

‘queer’ way also entails maintaining a critical perspective on the past, remembering that which takes place before in order for something to ‘arrive’, and interrogating structures that tend to dictate that which is remembered and forgotten (Ahmed 2006, 37–42). Developing queer-er orientations that are sustained in community is a way to break with (1) normative logics that find their basis in heteronormativity, reproduction and the nuclear family, and (2) with solely paranoid/reactionary forms of knowledge (Sedgwick 2003, 123–124). Putting queer on the horizon provides us too with another way of thinking about a complex past-present-future relation; further, the imagining and desiring of a different future helps us orient in new ways towards queer moments or utopian impulses in the present.

We might orientate towards the desire, in fact, for something different. Elspeth Probyn argues that it is desire that moves bodies, that propels them into ‘forms of living with ourselves and with others’ (Probyn 1996, 23). Desire, in fact, is where we ‘start from and what we go with’ (Probyn 1996, 62); it is a point from which we might also begin again. Desiring a different future pulls the utopian into the present, directs us towards new paths that might lead to new forms of becoming and belonging. It is the desire for something else, that which is not on our current path, that renders us more likely, and more able, to choose different

ones. Probyn too, reminds us that bodies need to 'engage with others'; this is the only way that queer, and queer forms of desire, become relevant and productive (Probyn 1996, 49).

Winterson, throughout *The Stone Gods*, constructs human beings as agents with free will. Spike tells us that free will is the human capacity to 'affect the outcome' in a quantum universe where things are 'neither random nor determined' (Winterson 2007, 181). It is a universe of potentialities, and 'true stories,' Winterson tells us, 'are the ones that lie open at the border, allowing a crossing, a further frontier' (Winterson 2007, 87, 181). To get to the point where the border lies open, however, to the point where one is able to reach certain potentialities and choose to make them reality - one first has to choose lines that lead to that border, to that space of possibility. A critical awareness, an intentional disorientation, and intentional queer orientations are needed in order to realize alternative lifelines, alternative stories of space and time, different ways of being in the world, and different ways to orient oneself. The refusal to be mass-collectively-orientated keeps different objects and options within reach, and ensures that the point of how bodies get directed and pressured into certain lines more than others remains in sight (Ahmed 2006, 17).

Ahmed argues that 'queer' does not reside in any individual body

(Ahmed 2006, 170). Similarly, 'queer' collectives do not and should not reside in isolation from heteronormative worlds. Complete coherence and agreement is not the goal of collectivity; Haraway reminds us that 'the joining of partial views and halting voices into a collective subject position', and working within our 'limits and contradictions' can promise a relative situatedness - and 'views from somewhere' (Haraway 1991, 196). Our 'somewheres' should arise out of positions and orientations that are engaged and accountable (Haraway 1991, 196).

What, ultimately, should be the goal of thinking and rethinking queer futurities? What do we want to create? Ahmed argues that permanence is not the goal, and instead points us in the direction of ephemerality:

It is given that the straight world is already in place and that queer moments, where things come out of line, are fleeting. Our response need not be to search for permanence, as Berlant and Warner show us in their work, but to listen to the sounds of 'the what' that fleets (Ahmed 2006, 106).

While the work of orientating differently toward the utopian impulse might be aimed at producing queer spatialities and temporalities that stick around for a tad longer, perhaps we should always remember to pay attention to that which 'fleets' - and to remain criti-

cally aware of the 'givens' in our own orientations. In this way we might collectively cultivate queerer pasts, presents, and futures - and also move in the direction of imagining new models of queer belonging.

Endnotes

¹ See Muñoz's consideration of Edelman's work on page 22, and his relationality/anti-relationality discussion on pages 10-12 (Muñoz 2009, 22, 10-12)

² The Caliphate and the Pact are the 'other' two governmental systems that share Orbus; they are also referred to as 'the Believers' and 'the Collective' (Winterson 2007, 7). I read these names as thinly-veiled references to Islam and most likely, Communism. Winterson's division of this world into these three political systems seems to be a sort of projection of our current situation into the future, and in this way is an extremely simplified and problematic point in itself. However I regret not being able to discuss this further as this point lies beyond the scope of my paper.

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The Future of Slavery: From Cultural Trauma to Ethical Remembrance

Tracey Walker

This paper focuses on the current and ongoing engagement with slavery as a space for traumatic remembrance and explores how one's sense of self and identity might be transformed by applying ethics to the remembrance of slavery. I reject the ideas central to trauma theory purported by Cathy Caruth (1991) that considers cultural trauma to be rooted in the tragic episode itself, arguing that it is driven by the strategic, practical and political interests of both nationalist discourses and the Black diaspora. By engaging with new thinking in cultural trauma proposed by Jeffrey C. Alexander (2004), I maintain that trauma is evoked through the effects of stories, narratives and images which are adopted and accepted as our history and attempt to look past the constructed slavery narratives premised on death and victimhood to reveal subjectivities that expose tropes of renewal, creative energy and agency. I further criticise trauma theory's denial of unconscious fantasies and psychopolitical forces behind the representation of traumatic memories and consider the importance of applying psychosocial thinking to the impact of this cultural atrocity on a post-slavery generation. The paper attempts to fashion an ethical mode of remembrance by engaging with postcolonial thinkers such as Franz Fanon, Paul Gilroy, Saidiya Hartman and Toni Morrison and includes literary pieces by Caryl Phillips, Octavia Butler and William Blake. In addition, Judith Butler's (2005) theory of 'opacity' is used to reveal the fragmented nature of slavery and slave subjectivity. Overall, I argue that applying ethical thinking to the memory of slavery is of critical importance not only for the creation of black subjectivity and political lives, but also for the future of multicultural relations in the UK.

Keywords: Memory, Slavery, Cultural Trauma, Psychopolitical, Ethical Remembrance.

'They will remember that we were sold but they won't remember that we were strong. They will remember that we were bought, but not that we were strong.'

William Prescott, former slave in the United States, 1937¹

Introduction

As an event, institution and phenomena, the trans-Atlantic slave trade was arguably one of the most

astonishing atrocities to have existed in human history. The rationale for this paper is based on my concern with the lack of contemporary black British voices with regards to the topic of slavery as well as the ongoing pathologisation of its memory in the postcolonial present. With the 200th anniversary of the abolition of slavery having been commemo-

rated in England recently, it seems a good time to think again about black British subjects and their relationship to slavery such that our experience is included alongside the monopoly of American slavery studies that already exists within the academy (Wood 2003).

By engaging with cultural critic Arlene Kiezer's (2004) assertion that 'representing the broadest range of black subject positions under slavery enables the representation of a myriad of black subjectivities of the present and the future' (Kiezer 2004, 16), I argue that modern representations of slavery in the public domain have a tendency to focus on the sentimentally constructed slave, reifying factors such as passivity, death, victimhood and the pathology of plantation life. However, there seems to be less focus on the stories of slaves who demonstrated agency, personhood and above all, a critical consciousness. The paper is concerned with the polarisation of slavery's memory as a one dimensional story of terror and explores the significance of ethical remembrance as a means through which to locate narratives that move beyond terror and pathology. This practice asks that we seek a new language to narrate cultural histories premised not only on trauma but also creation, renewal and mutual recognition.

In order to expose the mediating forces and political regimes inherent in the representation of slavery's

memory I explore new perspectives in cultural trauma focusing specifically on the work of theorists Jeffrey C. Alexander (2004) who reject the common sense ideas central to trauma theory as purported by Cathy Caruth (1991) and Shosana Feldman & Dori Laub (1992). I argue that trauma theory's emphasis on the 'event' as the trauma inducing stimulus is reductive when we consider the unique circumstances of raced subjects and the role of symbolic fantasies and psychopolitical forces in the practice of remembrance. In an attempt to create alternative strategies for remembrance based on ethics, I demonstrate how Judith Butler's (2005) theory of 'opacity', which proposes a way of 'seeing differently' to release the subject from a tyranny of fantasies and projections, can offer something new to the way in which we engage with the remembrance of slavery. In addition, I explore slavery's position within the context of the wider world and other cultural atrocities and consider the importance of recognising 'another-side' to the 'white perpetrator' of slavery's memory; aspects not usually discussed in traditional studies of the slave experience.

Taking a multidisciplinary approach, my exploration of slavery and ethics is conceived through the ideas of postcolonial theorists, writers and novelists such as Franz Fanon, Paul Gilroy, Saidiya Hartman and Toni Morrison and employs literary pieces by Caryl Phillips, Octavia

Butler and William Blake. Situated with the works of Dominick LaCapra, Paul Ricoeur and other theorists concerned with history and ethics and its role in contemporary lives, this paper aims to make an original contribution to the current debates in slavery studies and considers its application a pedagogic resource for future generations.

A Tale of Terror

It is a commonly held belief that trans-Atlantic slavery is an experience that belongs to the past. Certainly, contemporary global and local lives seem to be preoccupied with their own new revolutions, injustices and fresh acts of barbarism. Moreover, black British subjects, born and raised in the modern Western world to immigrant Caribbean parents, already occupy a diasporic location that is twice removed from their ancestral home of Africa, perhaps making the experience of migration more powerful and relevant than the memory of slavery in contemporary black British lives (Gilroy 1993a).

Such a notion of the past repeating itself has preoccupied postcolonial thinkers and theorists, all of whom are interested in slavery's legacy in the modern world as well as its impact on black British cultural lives. These theorists argue that the experience of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, where millions of Africans were, in Althusserian terms, 'interpellated' through the

force of Western hegemonic ideologies and discourse into racially bounded, non-human subjects, not only continues to shape the socio-political ideology of Britain today (Gilroy 1993a), but also has a profound effect on the becoming of black subjectivities (hooks 2003). The legacy of slavery continues to haunt public memory in contemporary black society through recollections that are 'memories' passed on through generations and retained across various representations and specific discourses (Eyerman 2004). This 'familial discourse' forms the root of collective identity amongst black people (Eyerman 2004, 108) and culminates in a "shared racial memory" across black diasporic communities (Gilroy 2000, 263).

Although popular and nationalist discourses in Britain tend to position slavery as an event from the past and unconnected to modernity (Gilroy 1993b), its memory is nonetheless a central, albeit silent feature in the lives of black British individuals. This perhaps uncommon idea has been fully embraced by historian Sidney Mintz (1974), who describes the embedded nature of cultural memory as forever sutured onto its host:

we might be struck by the breath and depth of the embedding of the slavery institution in the social fabric not of one but of many different new world societies – an embedding so intimate and persistent that the aftermaths of slav-

ery still endure in the social forms and perceptions of new world peoples (Mintz 1974, 62).

The legacy of slavery therefore is always-already residually active in the present such that it is cyclically 'lived and living' (Eyerman 2004, 108), despite the 'historical amnesia' of its memory in Britain (Hall 1997, 173).

If the historical consciousness of the Black diaspora is, as argued by French postcolonial theorist Edoard Glissant (1996), 'the product of shock, contradiction, painful negation and explosive forces' (Glissant 1996: 62), then contemporary black individuals are automatically implicated in and are carriers of a violent cultural memory embodying the psychic 'afterlife' of slavery (Hartman 2008, 6). In addition, they are deemed to be collectively haunted by the shame, domination and abuse inflicted on their ancestors by European perpetrators (hooks 2003), which means that its memory has been framed within a narrative of cultural trauma. In its simplest form, this trauma pertains to the symptoms and traumatic effects experienced by a group who have been subjected to a rapid and massive social change due to a sudden and unexpected episode (Alexander 2004). As a result, in the modern Western world black people who have no direct experience of the event of slavery are nonetheless implicated in a common fate

which insidiously haunts the collective (Eyerman 2004).

The concept of trauma itself originates from Freud's (2003) work in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, where he demonstrates that the patient's inner conflict, motivated by a traumatic event, would become an outer reality through the 'acting out' of internal dramas (Freud 2003). Contemporary thinking about trauma has been rooted in the work of scholar Caruth (1991), heralded as having produced some of the most pioneering work on trauma to date. Along with fellow trauma theorists Feldman and Laub (1992), Caruth's trauma theory has been used to explain the traumatising effects of the Holocaust on post-survivors and delineate a unifying theory of post-atrocity generations as they experience trauma's effects from the past:

In its most general definition, trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena (Caruth 1991, 181)

The hallucinations and delayed effects that are the symptoms of living in the aftermath of slavery's legacy have been explored by theorists bell hooks (2003) and Joy Degruy Leary (2005), who consider the traumatic effects of slavery to be at the heart of pathological and de-

structive behaviours amongst contemporary blacks living in the New World. In her book *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome*, Leary asserts that the trauma of forced domination and systematic torture suffered by the slaves has caused future generations to suffer from traumatic stresses such as low self esteem, anger, and aggression. This form of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, linked directly to the horrors of slavery, is also affiliated with distorted notions of masculinity, fatherhood and underachievement (Leary 2005). Similarly, In *Rock My Soul: Black People and Self-esteem*, hooks (2003) maintains that slavery's legacy has created an 'internalisation of shame' for black women which impacts on feelings about hair texture, skin colour and body shape (hooks 2003: 37). These examples are what sociologist Piotr Sztompka (2000) identifies as the side-effects of a massive social change which might produce 'dislocations in the routine, accustomed ways of acting or thinking [and] change the life-world of the people in often dramatic ways' (Sztompka 2000, 456). He argues further that this type of trauma is also the 'most threatening' as it takes its hold upon each generation:

like all cultural phenomena it has the strongest inertia; it persists and lingers considerably longer than other kinds of trauma, sometimes over several generations, preserved in collective memory or hibernating in collective sub-

consciousness (Sztompka 2000, 458).

With such a powerful force at play within the collective cultural psyche, there are huge efforts to facilitate 'recovery' from the traumatic loss of history and identity. In trauma theory, the recovery from such a traumatic loss is worked around the idea that this unconscious memory must be revisited in order for the event to be assimilated, understood and accepted (Caruth 1991). Therefore, the postmodern trend is towards subjective narratives premised on redemption and return and hidden histories which include the recovery of slave narratives, oral histories, documents, images, poems and rebel slave accounts. Narratives are the important substance of remembrance and it is through this medium that the 'education of memory' finds its voice and where some form of healing is able to begin (Ricoeur 1999, 8).

However, my concern here is that the canon of redemptive novels unearthed as part of an ethical postcolonial project to represent a traumatic past has produced 'fragmented accounts' which offer an 'intensity' of experience yet little insight into the depth of the human condition (Parker 1997, 169). For example, slavery historian Marcus Wood (2003) explains how aesthetic trauma influenced the most popular and widely disseminated representations of slavery during the 18th

century within which stereotypes such as the mulatto mistress, the rape victim, the runaway and the idle slave were constructed (Wood 2003). In addition, American abolitionist literature at this time was particularly interested in the pathology of plantation life, while British slave literature tended to focus on the terrible conditions of the middle passage in an attempt to appeal to an emphatic public and secure political support against the evils of the slave trade (Wood 2003). Using poems, stories, pictures and other representations, the horror of the slaves' condition was depicted through a series of polarised categories such as passivity, victimhood, shame, abuse and pathology. Similarly, autobiographical slave narratives have dominated our contemporary understanding and memories of what life was like for a slave and despite the fact that some of the most popular and widely disseminated slavery texts contain recurrent themes of whippings, lynchings, mutilation and death alongside the highly charged emotional responses of shame and anger, this action of 'witness' to the testimonies of slavery claims to facilitate acknowledgement, recovery and self-transformation (Feldman and Laub 1992).

These scenes of slavery, which are often all too horrific to digest, produce a series of tyrannical memories that govern its narrative as a dominant discourse and crystallise potent emotions into essentialist ac-

counts. Moreover, these fragmented stories leave no room for other subject positions or alternative slave subjectivities to emerge (Kieser 2004). Given that a heavy dose of Manichaeism and polarised subject positioning exists in the representation of slavery, Trinidadian theorist and poet Derek Walcott (2006) warns that history in this context 'petrifies into myth' and results in a 'literature without morality' (Walcott 2006, 371):

In the new world servitude to the muse of history has produced a literature of recrimination and despair, a literature of revenge written by the descendents of slaves or a literature of remorse written by descendents of masters. Because this literature serves historical truth it yellows into polemic or pathos (Walcott 2006, 371).

With its memory dominated by a grand narrative of 'pathos', is it surprising that slavery is considered somewhat of a taboo subject which remains an uncomfortable tale for both blacks and whites living in Britain today? (Gilroy 1993b; Woods 2010). Moreover, should it shock us that it is only as recently as 2008 that slavery history lessons were made compulsory in British schools?² Fanon made quite clear his feelings about slavery in his remark, 'slavery? It was no longer even mentioned, that unpleasant memory...I forgot it all' (Fanon 1967, 115) and certainly, for Hartman (2008)

the terror of slavery often meant that 'remembering warred with the will to forget' (Hartman 2008, 16). According to Friedrich Nietzsche, this trope of 'active forgetting' forms an integral part of remembrance by creating a 'clean slate' from which to transform and diminish feelings of anger and revenge (Nietzsche in: Galloway 2006). Yet, something is very wrong if post-slavery generations actively choose to blindly disassociate from slavery due to the very unpleasantness of its memory, especially if we pay heed to Paul Gilroy's (2012) warning that 'So much of the crises in contemporary multiculturalism depends...on the ability to look at the past and to be comfortable with that past' (Gilroy 2012). What is acutely evident here is that the memory of slavery communicates its force as a trauma and pathology inducing site and it is in this way that its legacy seems to have 'swung decidedly toward despair' (Brown 2009, 123⁵). My concern therefore is that if slavery is doomed to such a polarised interpretation across national discourses and representations, what then is at stake for contemporary black political lives if our history and collective identity is rooted in the horrors and traumas of the past? In other words, must we continue to be 'united in terror?' (Hall 1997)

Whose Trauma is it Anyway?

New ideas about cultural trauma pioneered by theorists Alexander

et al (2004) have allowed us to ask questions as to why the memory of slavery is represented as a one dimensional, pathological experience. That slavery was traumatic is understood and I do not wish here to dilute the memory and importance of the trauma experienced by the millions of Africans who lived and died throughout the time of slavery. However, in their book *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* the authors argue that trauma is in fact a socially constructed phenomenon, not 'naturally existing', but altogether created, mediated and historically produced (Alexander et al 2004, 2). This line of thinking runs counter to the common sense ideas of trauma theory which posits the 'event' and the remembrance of the event as the authentic trauma inducing stimulus.

Alexander et al (2004) explains that fundamentally, events do not create cultural trauma. Dominant narratives of slavery are not produced by the collective group but by social agents or 'carrier groups' who maintain their own political and personal interests (Alexander et al 2004). We have already seen how slavery's memory can be disseminated through a narrative of terror and pathology to garner both psychological and political support, yet it is also filtered through bodies such as the mass media, entertainment, religious groups and state institutions who all have their own personal interests with regard to the

way in which slavery is represented (Alexander et al 2004). These are the agents of the 'trauma process' that create the channels through which trauma is injected into the collective cultural psyche and who decide what to include in slavery's memory (Alexander et al, 2004). My concern is what happens when one's cultural memory is colonised in this way? And how do these narratives affect our relationship with the past, present and future? In her paper *Collective Remembering and the Importance of Forgetting*, Anne Galloway (2006) warns of the danger inherent in having others control the way we remember since 'without being able to decide what we can remember and forget we are effectively left without hope of becoming different people or creating different worlds' (Galloway 2006, 1).

Trauma theory's focus on the event becomes even more problematic when we consider that there is a distinction to be made between the 'event' of slavery and the 'legacy of slavery' as an ongoing process that has transmuted into a living social condition. The reality is that in spite of slavery having been abolished over 150 years ago, many of its ideologies still remain within institutions and practices throughout the diaspora (Mama 1995). For example, attitudes and beliefs about race, inferiority and superiority are arguably as embedded today as they were during the time of slavery given the plethora of studies revealing

the unequal status of black people in housing, employment and education (Gilroy 1993a) and the disproportionate number of black men in UK prisons and mental institutions (Fernando 2002). Theorist Hartman (2002) argues that these uneasy feelings associated with feeling excluded from society are usually our first trigger to remembrance:

if slavery persists as an issue in political life...it is not because it is an antiquarian obsession of bygone days or the burden of a too-long memory but because black lives are still imperilled and devalued by a racial calculus and a political arithmetic that were entrenched centuries ago (Hartman 2002, 6)

Her analysis alludes to the force of racism that is 'clearly entangled with an older racial discourse' (Gilroy 1993b, 7), as well as regimes and forms of 'social death' in the present. Thus, even if one seeks to disassociate entirely from their slave past, the anxieties bound up with belonging, exclusion and feeling like an outsider are nonetheless at the heart of slavery and are characteristic tropes of New World diasporic identities (Hartman 2002). However, popular accounts of trauma do not consider the emerging field of the psychopolitical that enables us to consider the mechanisms of racism and the raced subject's relationship with the Eurocentric fantasies of the social symbolic - a Lacanian

idea that describes the symbolic forces which interrupt the individual's sense of self identity by working its ideologies and fantasies into the psyche³.

Algerian psychiatrist Fanon (1967) was one of the first to explore psychological trauma and the black man's relationship with the 'gaze' of the symbolic. In *Black Skin White Masks*, Fanon introduces us to the power of Eurocentric fantasies of superiority embedded within a still ongoing colonial system, through which he says, 'I discovered my Blackness, my ethnic characteristics; and I was battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency fetishism, racial defects, slave ships...' (Fanon 1967, 112). Fanon demonstrates that colonial fantasies create symbolic links between the slaves of the past and the excluded 'minorities' in the new world who live antagonistically in relation to the social symbolic. Thus, for Fanon it is the ongoing 'colonial situation' and the white man's fantasy of superiority that is the root cause of the black man's cultural trauma. Clearly, due to the ongoing traumatic effects of racism, domination and exclusion, there are no 'flashbacks' of the atrocity, from which trauma theory's post-survivor holocaust generation are said to suffer, since, there is simply 'no time to make it unconscious' owing to the 'racial drama' (or trauma) being 'played out in the open' (Fanon 1967, 150). It is therefore not the

event of slavery, but the strength in which its effects linger residually into the present that renders its memory traumatic (Eyerman 2004).

We find therefore that it is the strain of modern racism in contemporary lives that colours much of what we choose to focus on and how we choose to feel when approaching remembrance of slavery (Hartman 2002). We might for example, feel empathy towards the slaves and anger at the white slave masters, but in an act of double vision motivated by fantasy, we inadvertently activate the trauma of our own lives:

We imaginatively witness the crimes of the past and cry for those victimized—the enslaved, the ravaged, and the slaughtered. And the oblitative assimilation of empathy enables us to cry for ourselves, too. As we remember those ancestors ...we can't but think of our own dishonored and devalued lives and the unrealized aspirations and the broken promises of abolition...The intransigence of our seemingly eternal second-class status propels us to make....unshakable explanatory narratives, and sites of injury (Hartman 2002, 767).

Remembrance in this context serves as an outlet for feelings of revenge and victimization and therefore creates a 'masochistic attachment' to slave victims of abuse (Hartman 2002, 8). British Arts and

Heritage Consultant, Baroness Lola Young (2007) also claims that focusing on victimhood might 'masquerade as a source of comfort' through which to deviate from our own contemporary circumstances as the modern victims of racism. This act of voyeurism and over-identification with the slaves is the 'darker side' of empathy and has little to do with honouring their memory.⁴ Instead, our own desires and fears linked to racism take centre stage.

Similarly, over-identification with the illusion of white superiority also acts as a mediating force in slavery's memory; a trope which theorists argue continues to permeate the remembrance of slavery in the UK today (Young 2007, Woods 2010). This abolitionist's narrative, recognised as a celebration of white triumph and superiority is what Gilroy (2005) describes as a type of 'post-colonial melancholia' - an aftermath of empire which has caused the west to hang on fiercely to stories of their own triumph while excluding others. It is this pathologic force which ruminates insidiously underneath the abolitionist narrative, where heroes are white and deemed to be acting autonomously while black protagonists are ignored and their agency disavowed. This systemic violence⁵, woven deep within the fabric of the social symbolic injects its trauma inducing fantasies into the memory of slavery through highly seductive and polarised stories. Ricoeur (1999) describes this exercise as

'abuses of ritualised commemoration' and therefore, 'an opportunity for the abuse of memory' (Ricoeur 1999, 9).

By taking into account the unique experience of post-slavery black communities and the way in which slavery's memory impacts on history, subjectivity and the psyche, what becomes apparent is that there is a need to 'decolonise trauma' seeing as its strong link to Holocaust Studies has meant the exclusion of other groups whose spatial, temporal and symbolic relationship to atrocities of the past exist outside of the current model (Rothberg 2008). In the case of post slavery individuals, the psychopolitical framework of racism and the symbolic fantasies of white superiority are already designed as a system of knowledges through which all narratives pertaining to the black self and the Other are filtered. The central argument therefore contends that contemporary ideas around cultural trauma and memory should not focus solely on celebrating memory as contestatory or subversive of established grand narratives, but must also be concerned with deconstructing the 'regimes' of memories and the frameworks within which they are positioned (Radstone 2005).

Black theorists and writers who engage with the creation of new sites within which to communicate with slavery warn that its memory is 'in more danger now than 30 years ago' (Morrison in: Gilroy 1993, 178)

and in need of an emancipatory vision that is not solely premised on recovery and mourning (Hartman 2002). Gilroy (1993b) argues that slavery should be seen from the slaves' point of view and suggests a certain ethics by advocating the importance of recognising that slaves had a conscience. Perhaps most interesting is Toni Morrison's proposal that we must 're-inhabit' the slaves in order to make ethical rather than traumatic connections with ancestors (Morrison in: Gilroy 1993). In light of this vantage point, the central question that this paper asks is can we move towards ethical remembrance of slavery and remember this event in a way that is non-pathological, productive and useful for contemporary lives?

Slaves, Strangers and Aliens

Attempting to apply ethics to the memory of slavery means that we must re-consider what we think we already know about slavery. Ideas concerning the interplay of ethics, history and memory have been well debated across the academy by historians such as Hayden White, Dominick LaCapra, and Nancy. F. Partner⁶ who have argued against simple notions of historical accounts underpinned by ideological interests, advocating instead ways in which to use the past as an on-going dialogue for the future generations (LaCapra 1985). This deconstruction of history based on ethics lends itself well to new think-

ing in the fields of relational psychoanalysis and feminist theory where the questions, 'who are you?' and 'can I know you without my own projections and fantasies getting in the way?' are foundational themes (Benjamin 1998; Pedwell 2002; Butler 2005). Moving towards ethical remembrance of slavery within this paradigm is to be acutely aware that one can not really know what slavery was like for the slaves, instead, we must become mindful of our 'invariable and partial blindness' about ourselves and others and exercise 'a certain patience with others that would suspend the demand that they be self same at every moment' (Butler 2005, 42). When we position the slaves solely within a framework of suffering and victimhood we ask that they are the same person in every scene of slavery. An ethical mode of remembrance however, is rooted in acknowledging the ambiguity of slave subjectivity and strives to connect with the 'stranger' or 'alien' Other (Benjamin 1998).

In her post-Hegelian analysis, Butler also reminds us that Others are not transparent, but display an 'opacity' which indicates that we can not know all aspects of ourselves or the Other since there are always shadows and spaces which we are unable to penetrate (Butler 2005). This willingness to 'experience the very limits of knowing' means that we refrain from condemning the slaves to a singular and vertical subjectivity based on responses to

terror and instead excavate for the 'pre-history' or an alternative slave consciousness. This ethical exercise allows a post-historical slave to emerge into the future, one who displays multiple selves and subject positions that 'interrupts the story' of the memory we have taken so far as fact (Butler 2005, 78). When cultural memory is linked to identity in this way it reinforces the 'use-value' of memory and creates a space where remembrance can become psychologically and politically resourceful in the future (Kansteiner 2002, 184). In this ethical turn, the memory of slavery exists as a 'living intellectual resource' revealing that modernity does not involve an 'absolute break with the past' but is merely disillusioned by its own rigid concept of temporality (Gilroy 1993b, 39).

Octavia Butler's (2004) neo-slave narrative⁷ *Kindred* for example, uses the concept of time travel to allude to the slippery nature of memory and its deep connection to contemporary life. The protagonist of the novel is Dana, a modern African American woman who inexplicably travels back and forth through time and is able to relive the past as a slave. In one scene, her arm is cut off in her slave life and she returns to the present with her arm still severed. Butler claims that this might be a metaphor for our 'disfigured heritage' or the fact that 'slavery didn't leave people quite whole' (Butler in: Crossley, 276). Given that Dana must save her white ancestor

in order to be born in the future, her account also opens up a new type of dialogue with the past that enables us to witness the opacity of our links to the slave masters.

Instead of entertaining the polarized subject positions and vertical narratives that dominate the memory of slavery, ethical remembrance recoils from the desire to legitimate one's own projections and releases memory from its epistemological prison:

By not pursuing satisfaction and letting the question remain open even enduring, we let the other live since life must be understood as precisely that which exceeds any account we must try to give it. If letting the other live is part of any ethical definition of recognition then this version of recognition will be based less on knowledge than on an apprehension of epistemic limits (Butler 2005, 43).

Suspending our own sense of 'what it is to be a slave' means there is 'vision rather than voyeurism' (Williams in Doss 2010, 276) which enables us to welcome subjectivities 'beyond recognition' (Oliver 2001, 85). Doing the ethical work means making honest connections with these alien Others and requires that we excavate otherwise unknown aspects of slave consciousness in order to expand subject positions which are currently limited by a tragic language.

Are We Dead Yet?

To argue that there is more to the popular conception of slaves as victims who experienced social death within the abusive regime of transatlantic slavery is not to say that these subjectivities did not exist. When considering the institution of slavery we can quite confidently rely on the assumption that it did indeed destroy the self-hood and the lives of millions of Africans. Scholar Vincent Brown (2009) however, has criticised Orlando Patterson's (1982) seminal book *Slavery and Social Death* for positioning the slave as a subject without agency and maintains that those who managed to dislocate from the nightmare of plantation life 'were not in fact the living dead', but 'the mothers of gasping new societies' (Brown 2009, 1241).

The Jamaican Maroons were one such disparate group of Africans who managed to band together and flee the Jamaican plantations in order to create a new mode of living under their own rule. These 'run-aways' were in fact 'ferocious fighters and master strategists', building towns and military bases which enabled them to fight and successfully win the war against the British army after 200 years of battle (Gotlieb 2000, 16). In addition, the story of the Windward Jamaican Maroons disrupts the phallogocentrism inherent within the story of the slave 'hero' by the very revelation that their leader, 'Queen Nanny' was a woman (Gotlieb 2000). As a lead-

er, she was often ignored by early white historians who dismissed her as an 'old hagg' or 'obeah' woman (possessor of evil magic powers) (Gotlieb 2000, xvi). Yet, despite these negative descriptors, Nanny presents an interesting image of an African woman in the time of slavery who cultivated an exceptional army and used psychological as well as military force against the English despite not owning sophisticated weapons (Gotlieb 2000). As an oral tale, her story speaks to post-slavery generations through its representation of a figure whose gender defying acts challenged the patriarchal fantasies of the Eurocentric imaginary and as such 'the study of her experiences might change the lives of people living under paternalistic, racist, classist and gender based oppression' (Gotlieb 2000, 84).

The label of 'social death' is rejected here on the grounds that it is a narrative which is positioned from the vantage point of a European hegemonic ideology. Against the social symbolic and its gaze, black slaves were indeed regarded as non-humans since their lives were stunted, diminished and deemed less valuable in comparison to the Europeans. However, Fanon's (1967) assertion that 'not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man' (Fanon 1967, 110) helps us to understand that this classification can only have meaning relative to the symbolic which represents the alive-

ness of whiteness against the backdrop of the dead black slave (Dyer 1997). Butler (2005) makes it clear that the 'death' one suffers relative to the social symbolic is imbued with the fantasy that having constructed the Other and interpellated her into 'life', one now holds the sovereignty of determining the subject's right to live or die:

this death, if it is a death, is only the death of a certain kind of subject, one that was never possible to begin with, the death of the fantasy of impossible mastery, and so a loss of what one never had, in other words it is a necessary grief (Butler 2005, 65).

The point to make here is that although the concept of social death has proved useful for theorists to describe the metaphysical experience of those who live antagonistically in relation to the social symbolic, it is nevertheless a colonial narrative within which the slaves are confined to a one dimensional story of terror. In keeping with Gilroy's (1993b) argument that the memory of slavery must be constructed from the slaves' point of view, we might instead concentrate, not on the way in which the slaves are figured within the European social imaginary, but on how they negotiated their own ideas about self and identity. We might therefore find some value in studying a group like the Maroons who not only managed to create an autonomous world outside of the

hegemonic discourse which negated them, but also, due to their unique circumstances, were forced to create new modes of communication which would include a myriad of African cultures, languages and creeds (Gottlieb 2000). This creative and resistive energy of slave subjectivity not only disrupts the colonial paradigm of socially dead slaves, but also implies the ethical tropes of creation, renewal and mutual recognition.

In contrast, the passive slave proved to feature heavily in the 2007 bicentenary commemorations causing journalist Toyin Agbetu to interrupt the official speeches and exclaim that it had turned into a discourse of freedom engineered mostly by whites with stories of black agency excluded⁸. Young's argument that 'one of the damaging side effects of the focus on white people's role in abolition is that Africans are represented as being passive in the face of oppression', appears to echo the behaviour in the UK today given that a recent research poll reveals that the black vote turnout is significantly lower than for the white majority electorate and that forty percent of second generation 'immigrants' believe that voting 'doesn't matter'.⁹ Yet, Gilroy (1993a) argues that this political passivity may not simply be a self fulfilling prophecy, but might allude to the 'lived contradiction' of being black and English which affects one's confidence about whether opinions will be validated in

a society that, at its core, still holds on to the fantasy of European superiority (Gilroy 1993a). Without considering the slaves' capacity for survival and their fundamental role in overthrowing the European regime of slavery, we limit the use-value of the memory and risk becoming overly attached to singular slave subjectivities seeped in death and passivity. The Maroons story however, enables slave consciousness to rise above the mire of slavery's abject victims and establishes an ethical relation with our ancestors who lived and survived in the time of slavery.

Mirror memory

Having applied modes of ethical thinking to the memory of slavery by unearthing the hidden regimes inherent in its remembrance and in turn using these insights as a counter-narrative in debates within the field of trauma theory, we move towards reflection on how to place slavery's memory within the context of the wider world and other cultural atrocities. This step is important as it illuminates the relational theory that we are constituted through others and therefore suggests that the memory of slavery is itself a product of 'Other' protagonists. Young (2007) argues that this ethical move would be of value to black people since they might find that they are not 'wholly determined by a history of enslavement' (Young 2007).

To undertake the ethical mission

of global relation through remembrance, French postcolonial theorists have drawn upon their experiences of Caribbean Creole cultures which are hybridised nations consisting of a myriad of racial mixes. Given that the concept of hybridity (a practice that allows for the giving and receiving of different cultural forms amongst diverse groups)¹⁰ leads to collective relation, it is a useful metaphor and interpretive tool for understanding the dynamic of 'entering into relation with the world' (Glissant 1996). In this context, the concept of hybridity is used to describe a global framework where one is able to conceive of 'a global imagination' across heterogeneous groups and nations (Glissant 1996). This ethical turn towards global remembrance encourages the pedagogical ideal that there are moral lessons to be gained from what we might call the *mirroring of memories*. This practice attempts to locate the commonalities within each trauma narrative and succeeds in mirroring the Other's pain to establish some form of global healing and acknowledgement (Smelser 2004).

Yet, the challenge remains as to whether a move towards global historical consciousness is a concept that has arisen prematurely considering that local communities are still unable to settle their differences and accept different forms of cultural expression.¹¹ In his book *The Black Atlantic*, Gilroy (1993b) has already explored the possibility of blacks

and Jews finding a common voice, yet he severely overestimates the capacity for the global holding of the dynamic space of fetishized wounds, distorted fantasies and fictional truths that are all linked to traumatic memories across cultures. Certainly in the UK, any attempt for blacks and whites to remember slavery together is already tempered by deep racial divisions within society and with cultural memories heavily invested with the tropes of community, unity and belonging, a global historical consciousness, as advocated by Edouard Glissant (1996) runs the risk of atrocities collapsing into each other and disarticulating them from space, time and context. It also remains to be seen whether such groups are ready to give up the only space where they might feel free to reflect on self, identity, culture and history without judgement from Others.

For Walcott (2006), the tendency to establish a rigid classification of what constitutes as trauma and for whom, proves redundant when one considers, 'who in the new world doesn't have a horror of the past, whether his ancestor was torturer or victim? Who in the depth of conscience is not silently screaming for pardon or for revenge?' (Walcott 2006, 371). Walcott implies that all humanity is in some way traumatised by their own social or political circumstances and that the spirit of remembering together could be better located in modern global is-

ues such as exploitation, racism and abuse of human rights. In an ethical turn, we might consider instead the plight of the eleven thousand Sudanese men and women who have been abducted to work as slaves for Arab militiamen. Francis Bok (2003) is one survivor of this contemporary regime who details being captured and living for ten years as a slave in his book, *Escape from Slavery*.

Glissant's proposal for the creation of memorial centers in every nation, dedicated to the memory of slavery seems rather ambitious when we consider that slavery's memory is not static and bound, but a multi-layered, unfixed entity and highly contingent upon the narratives through which it comes to life. Consequently, Sztompka (2000) maintains that 'traumatizing events may be qualitatively quite opposite for various groups: destructive and disruptive for some, beneficial and welcomed for some, ignored and neutral for others' (Sztompka 2000, 459). We find his argument clearly demonstrated in Hartman's (2008) account of her visit to the slaveholding castles where she encounters Ghanaians who were confused as to why 'something that happened so long ago could hurt us', choosing instead to remember slavery as a time of opportunity rather than a tale of woe and suffering (Hartman 2008, 75):

In Ghana slavery wasn't a rallying cry against the crimes of the

west or the evils of white men; to the contrary, it shattered any illusions of humanity of sentiment in the black world and exposed the fragility and precariousness of the grand collective 'we' that had yet to be actualised (Hartman 2008, 75).

Quite simply, 'there is no common idea of slavery' and therefore no diasporic unity that can be claimed through its remembrance (Hartman 2008, 73). The problem with establishing new voices outside of the hegemonic narrative of slavery is closely linked to what Gilroy (1993b) calls the 'Americocentricity' of black political lives which is an invented framework driven by the political interests of the Diaspora through which the memory of slavery is disseminated and filtered. We can argue therefore that choices about what we remember, how we remember and for whom are controlled by a regime which establishes its own 'metaphysical notions of what it means to be black' (Gilroy 1993b). The hegemonic discourse of an Americanized version of the memory of slavery therefore presents another a set of knowledges at work which serve to colonise the spaces through which other representations, images, articulations and narratives of slavery can emerge. Trauma theory fails to acknowledge the heterogeneity of cultural groups and therefore limits the expression of alternative voices and discourses of slavery's memory

(Radstone 2007).

Glissant's (1996) hope that one day all atrocities will be integrated into the global psyche is flawed if he rushes towards the ideal of mutual understanding without considering in what form, within which narratives and according to whose story these memories are to be interpreted. Despite its limitations, Glissant's vision of relationality, which is rooted in respect for the Other and one's continuing ambiguity, is central to the practice of ethical remembrance, yet if the mission to encourage global remembrance of all atrocities serves as his utopian ideal for the future, exploring the possibility of blacks and whites in Britain remembering slavery together might be a more practical place to start (see also McCusker 2009).

White Trauma

Gilroy (1993a) has argued extensively that blacks and whites have always been in a symbiotic relation with one another despite the racial fractures embedded within modern society. Many theorists and writers such as Toni Morrison, Caryl Phillips and Fred D'Aguiar have also alluded to the importance of integrating whites into the memory of slavery beyond the dichotomy of master and slave so as to disrupt the traditional narrative of 'good vs. evil' and create the possibility for a new encounter with the 'perpetrator'. In *The Pagan Coast* for example, Phillips explores the torment of a

slave master who displays ambivalent feelings towards the slave trade and wishes to 'divest himself of the burden...of being a slave owner', developing like his father before him an 'aversion to the system which has allowed his fortunes to multiply' (Phillips in: Low 1998, 133). In this case, the inescapable thrust of capitalism appears as the insidious evil which distorts the white psyche, a trope often missed in popular slavery texts.

Nevertheless, the difficulty of imagining another side to the white perpetrator of slavery should not be underestimated since for black people living in its aftermath, the haunting of anger and bitter emotions towards cruel white masters can not be given up easily, nor can the unconscious distortions and fantasies towards those masters be wiped out overnight. Butler (2005) however, warns of the ethical violence inherent in denying the Other to become part of one's own consciousness and states:

If we forget that we are related to those whom we condemn, even those we must condemn, then we lose the chance to be ethically educated or 'addressed' by a consideration of who they are and what their personhood says about the range of human possibility that exists, even to prepare ourselves for or against such possibilities (Butler 2005, 45).

Butler's thesis helps us to under-

stand that denying the importance of the perpetrator in slavery's memory only serves to reify its role of terror and forecloses the possibility of discovering new subjectivities and counter-narratives of the white experience. The basic argument here is that slavery is about the white experience too, however, in popular representations of slavery the emphasis tends to fall on the traumatic life of the black slave while the white master remains as a ghostly figure embodying the darker side of humanity. Might it be possible to gain a more ethical means of relating to the white mistresses and masters who lived in the time of slavery if they were also allowed the space to exhibit their own opacity?

In the poem *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, poet William Blake (2008), himself deeply opposed to slavery and committed to its abolition, exposes the psychic state of Bromion, a white slaveholder, who rapes Oothoon, a white woman. Rather than concentrate on the powerless black female slave, Blake's narrative points to the deep seated patriarchal fantasies at the heart of slavery. For Bromion, Oothoon is like a country to be conquered, such that he proceeds to 'rent her with his thunders' and claims her as if property, declaring that 'the soft American planes are mine and mine thy north and south' (Blake 2008, 46). The tropes of power and domination, conquest and owning people as property, which are at the heart

of a colonialist mindset, are found to be underpinned by a patriarchal ideology. Thus, by inverting the popular discourse, Blake demonstrates that there is more to the story of slavery such as questions about class, the treatment of white women and white male 'rage', which are often overshadowed by the penetration of racial politics.

Morrison elaborates further to argue that white people, who found themselves having to assume the role of the master in the time of slavery, were also victims of a perverse ideology:

Slavery broke the world in half, it broke it in everyway. It broke Europe. It made them into something else, it made them slave masters, it made them crazy. You can't do that for hundreds of years and it not take a toll. They had to demonize not just the slaves but themselves. (Morrison in: Gilroy 1993, 178)

To talk of the legacy of slavery is also to talk of 'white trauma' and to realise that they too were traumatised by an event that they have 'trapped emotionally' such that its memory becomes a 'secret that no one can discuss' (Leary in Talvai 2002). To remember ethically then means to 'make trauma strange' and acknowledge that everyone implicated in slavery was traumatised and constrained by the ideologies of the enlightenment, capitalism and the European thirst for adventure

and domination.

Despite the possible benefits that may be accrued by reconnecting with the perpetrator in slavery's memory, for Fanon (1967), this utopian ideal of mutual recognition is believed to be foreclosed by the white Other who he argues denies any link with the black man and his extreme 'otherness'. This of course presents major obstacles to the idea of creating a third space for mutual recognition. In some support of this view, Rosi Braidotti adds that European identity must wake up from its 'lily-white...purity' and 'universalistic fantasy' and commit itself to the postcolonial turn that seeks to 'expose whiteness as a political issue' (Braidotti, 19).¹² Ethical remembrance desires that we liberate our historical consciousness by 'remembering oneself-as-another' (Kearney 2003, 27) and from this deeply ethical position we are able to 'release the historical past into a different, freer, future' (Kearney 2003, 27). Perhaps this ethical move towards exposing the ambiguity and opacity of the white experience during slavery marks the embryonic stages of lifting its silence and establishing its memory as a foundational and highly relevant part of British history.

* * *

Having interrogated the scene of slavery by applying ethical thinking, the main conclusion to arise is that memory can indeed be moulded,

manipulated and controlled to engineer feelings of trauma, vengeance, shame and ambivalence and as such, there is no memory of slavery that has not been mediated. Setting out to understand whether the black experience can be communicated through a narrative other than terror, employing ethics and the concept of opacity has allowed us to contemplate how we might move away from an event based history to one which provides lessons and examples for contemporary lives. By practising ethical remembrance of slavery we are able to arrive at useful resources, guides and tools to influence the creation of subjectivity which helps to lead us out of a traumatic past offering new routes to the future (Ricoeur 1999).

The goal is not to obliterate the narrative of terror and trauma in slavery's memory since it is a testament to the injustices and cruelty that the slaves endured. Rather, we seek to simply break its hold and contribute to the ethical mission that allows for the creation of other spaces, channels and routes of remembrance to emerge that reflect the precarity of black identities across the diaspora and their relationships to slavery. What becomes apparent is that doing the ethical work is not easy; instead it requires an enormous commitment to the challenges present in the process of undoing the self and the Other. Yet, we must do the ethical work to ensure that the master narrative of terror and pathology

does not dominate the memory of slavery or the black experience in general. Theorising the future of slavery is a vital practice as it allows us think about other modes of recovery which can help to eradicate the cycle of trauma from spiralling onward across successive generations. Given that 'trauma is created in our present and reinvented for the future' (Waugh 2006, 506), we have a moral duty to be continually critical of slavery's popular representations in the public domain and to scrutinize who or what is controlling its story. One day we will become ancestors for future generations and we therefore have an ethical responsibility to create multiple narratives of slavery that can also be positioned within the context of agency, life and new visions of self.

Endnotes

¹See <http://www.twmuseums.org.uk/slavery/online-exhibition/we-were-strong/>

² See Andrea Lipsett (2008). <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2008/aug/26/slavery.schools>

³ For an interesting analysis of how the social symbolic influences subjectivity see Jacques Lacan. 1977. 'The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience' in Jacques Lacan. *Ecrits: A Selection*: 1-6.

⁴ This notion of a 'darker side' to empathy is inspired by the work of Susannah Radstone (2007) who states that 'criti-

cal 'empathy' is not without its darker aspects' (Radstone 2007, 23). For additional reflections on critical empathy, see also Gwendolyn's interview with Carolyn Pedwell (2012) (<http://feministing.com/2012/05/22/the-academic-feminist-goes-global-a-conversation-with-carolyn-pedwell/>).

⁵ For Slavoj Žižek (2005), when we look to the political landscape we find that 'there is a hidden violence, a political violence that is unlike the subjective violence we are familiar with' (Žižek 2005). He argues that aggression and violence are found in the underbelly of the social, it is a political organism that breathes life into its subjects and therefore is itself the cause of the subjective violence that is visible. See Slavoj Žižek. 2005. *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*.

⁶ See *Metahistory* by Hayden White (1975), *History and Criticism* by Dominic LaCapra (1987) and 'Historicity in an age of Reality-Fictions' by Nancy F Partner (1995).

⁷ In an attempt to establish new ways in which to remember slavery, neo-slave narratives use the imagination to fashion an alternative slavery text by reconstructing past realities through re-visioning and imagination.

⁸ See David Smith (2007) <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2007/mar/27/race.world1>.

⁹ See Roger Mortimore and Kully Kaur-Ballagan (2005) <http://www.ipsos-mori.com/Assets/Docs/ArchivePublications/ethnic-minority-voters-and-non-voters.pdf>

¹⁰ See Homi Bhabha (1994) *The Location of Culture*.

¹¹ For a recent example, see Matthew Taylor (2012) <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/mar/09/far-right-hardcore-armed-conflict>.

¹² See Rosi Braidotti 'The Return of the Master Narratives.' <http://www.e-quality.nl/assets/e-quality/publicaties/2003/e-quality.final.rosi%20braidotti.pdf>.

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(De/con)structing Political Narratives: Hannah Arendt and Jacques Derrida on Crafting a Positive Politics

Caitlin Boland

*In 1961 the notorious organizer and facilitator of Nazi death camps, Adolf Eichmann, was tried in Jerusalem for war crimes and crimes against humanity perpetrated during the Second World War. He was found guilty after weeks of often gruesome testimony and in 1962 he was hanged. Hannah Arendt—a Jew who had escaped the Holocaust by fleeing to America—attended his trial. Although the detail and accuracy of her reporting on the trial was widely applauded, the analysis she included throughout her book *Eichmann in Jerusalem* outraged many who previously had praised her. That Eichmann organized the day-to-day logistics of the Holocaust Arendt never disputed. That he was responsible for the Holocaust or that his death was somehow retributively just she found not only implausible but counterproductive. Arendt forced her readers to think: are legal and illegal the same as right and wrong? Should they be the same? Can we make them the same? In this article I weave Arendt's questions and answers about law and politics in with those of Jacques Derrida—a thinker who also cared a great deal about political meaning and responsibility. Derrida's theory of deconstruction revealed political meaning in stories and poetry, in songs and speeches, in language itself. Taking an interdisciplinary approach I argue that together, Arendt and Derrida shed new light on the significance of political narratives, the importance of remembrance—linguistic, historical, political—and the tragic yet hopeful nature of responsibility.*

Keywords: Narrativity, Deconstruction, Plurality, Responsibility, Positive Politics

'...yes I said yes I will Yes.'
~closing line of James Joyce's *Ulysses*

Introduction

Embracing the affirmation and the

hope in the word 'yes,' and maintaining the backward glance of 'said,' the forward-looking, promise-making of 'will,' and the present urgency of 'Yes,' I seek a revitalization

of a positive conception of politics. Positive politics, as opposed to negative politics, sees in plurality community, not relativism; sees in judgment thought, not power; and sees in responsibility hope, not blame. And revitalization is key: re (again), vita (life), -ization (noun formed from a verb, suffix for the condition, act, or process (Warriner 1982, 25)). Just as a verb may generate a noun, action generates responsibility. Thus with a rebirth (*re-conception*) of a positive politics comes a re-affirmation of political responsibility. In this article, I will initiate a dialog between Hannah Arendt and Jacques Derrida that will begin such a revitalization of politics. Essential to a positive politics, though, are what Derrida called 'specters'—the unpredictable, the irreversible, the incomprehensible, the impossible, the undecidable, the unforgivable, the dead.

Arendt and Derrida generated a wealth of critical literature in the fields of political theory, philosophy, comparative literature, epistemology, metaphysics, intellectual history, and international relations. This article primarily focuses on Arendt's narrative method and Derrida's deconstruction, although I will touch upon many other concepts found in their work. Arendt was one of the first political theorists to use stories as a means of understanding events; a methodology now termed 'the narrative approach.' Though she rarely spoke of her methodol-

ogy, Arendt's use of narratives was an attempt to gain understanding from experience. Since humans never have lost the capacity for storytelling, Arendt's approach becomes especially useful when all other categories of understanding—objectivity, positivist social science, rational explanations, cause and effect discourse, etc.—have failed. Paying equal attention to stories, but with a finer attention to detail, Derrida articulated a process of deconstruction that allows a reader to discover internal contradictions, conflicts, and complexities in words and language which undermine the stability of a text. Derrida intended to illuminate the internal contradictions within words and texts—within language itself—but his goal was loftier than the demonstration of absurdity. Derrida placed the burden of decision-making and responsibility on the shoulders of political actors by denying them recourse to linguistic ambiguity. If political texts contain irreconcilable internal complexities and contradictions, then political actors, for the sake of practical existence in our world, must decide which meanings to favor. And of course, they must also bear the responsibility for their decision. Together, Arendt and Derrida shed new light on the significance of political narratives, the importance of remembrance—linguistic, historical, political—and the tragic yet hopeful nature of responsibility.

The theoretical and interpretive

approaches I will take in this article are interrelated. I will use the theories of narrativity and deconstruction and the interpretive methods of dialog and interdisciplinarity to investigate Arendt, Derrida, and their contributions to political theory. I chose a dialogical interpretive approach in order to generate new understandings of narrativity and deconstruction that are much harder to see when each approach is considered alone. Finally, when putting two theoretical methods in dialog with each other, unsurprisingly, interdisciplinarity results. Establishing an interdisciplinary interpretive approach allows me to escape the confines of what predominantly is considered 'political' in order to show the ways in which language, literature, and history are political.

This line of investigation may have several important implications for the politics of futurity. First, it advocates a shift away from quantitative, theoretically uncritical approaches to political problem solving. Second, it highlights the necessity of interdisciplinary study to political thinking, especially the inclusion of history and literature. Third, this paper emphasizes the often overlooked role of language and narrative in preservation and disremembering, production and destruction, inclusion and exclusion. And fourth, it uses binaries, dualities, multiplicities, heterogeneities, paradoxes, and pluralities to grow our understanding of political meaning and responsibility.

Arendt's narrativity

Arendt loved to attribute the following quote to Isak Dinesen and she cited it often: 'All sorrows can be borne if you put them into a story or tell a story about them' (Arendt 1998, 175). Although she never described her methodology in a single word, Arendt's use of stories in political theory came to be known as 'narrativity' or 'the narrative approach.' In her own words, 'whenever an event occurs that is great enough to illuminate its own past, history comes into being. Only then does the chaotic maze of past happenings emerge as a story which can be told, because it has a beginning and an end' (Arendt 1954, 319). Listening to, telling, and retelling these stories formed the basis of Arendt's approach to politics.

Simply put, Arendt's narrative approach seeks understanding through experience. In *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1969), Arendt began her inquiry wondering, 'how is this possible?' and 'how do we move on?' rather than 'what caused or what explains totalitarianism?' The Third Reich gave birth to the political concept of totalitarianism—before then it was an impossibility. Arendt recognized this, and spent the majority of her book trying to understand totalitarianism and learn from it. But, as she described it in her essay 'Understanding & Politics' (1954), 'understanding, as distinguished from having correct information and scientific knowledge, is

a complicated process which never produces unequivocal results. It is an unending activity by which, in constant change and variation, we come to terms with and reconcile ourselves to reality, that is, try to be at home in the world' (Arendt 1954, 307-8). Arendt found that by increasing the number of stories to which she exposed herself—by listening to and telling stories of Nazis, Holocaust survivors, soldiers, diplomats, pacifists—she deepened her understanding of the event under consideration.

The example that best illustrates her narrative approach—the short work, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (2006)—also generated the greatest controversy. Arendt attended Adolf Eichmann's 1961 trial in Jerusalem and her 'report on the *bannality of evil*,' shocked many of her fellow Jews. In addition to faulting many Jewish authorities for collaborating with the Nazis—she argued they had the choice of nonparticipation, even if outright resistance was impossible—Arendt chastised the prosecution for their handling of the trial. The parade of witnesses who came to testify about their experiences in concentration camps offended Arendt not because she objected to the Jewish survivors having a chance to tell their stories but because only certain Jews were allowed to testify. 'In this respect,' she wrote, 'perhaps even more significantly than in others, the deliberate attempt at the trial to tell only the

Jewish side of the story distorted the truth, even the Jewish truth' (Arendt 2006, 12). Arendt's controversial but incisive point—that victims cannot tell the whole story on their own—reinforces her call for plurality and understanding. As she kept reminding her readers, this was no ordinary trial, and conventional wisdom and standard procedure no longer sufficed.¹ In a more sympathetic passage about the prosecution, she commented that they faced an unprecedented dilemma in prosecuting Eichmann because they '[were] unable to understand a mass murderer who had never killed' (Arendt 2006, 215). Eichmann's role in the Holocaust presented an enormous challenge to international law, to psychological understanding, and to moral judgment, not because he was the first to commit or even condone genocide but because the totalitarian system shattered 'our categories of thought and standards of judgment' (Arendt 1954, 318). How does one try a man for murder who has never killed? How does one legitimately punish a man who obediently followed the laws of his country? How does one classify as evil a man who radiates mediocrity? These questions cannot be answered until one has an understanding of totalitarianism, an understanding gained by the pursuit of as many perspectives as possible. Then and only then can we begin to judge those involved.

To engage in politics is to experi-

ence, to *think*, to understand, and to judge. What disgusted Arendt most about Eichmann was his inability to do any of these. 'The longer one listened to him,' she observed, 'the more obvious it became that his inability to speak was closely connected with an inability to think, namely, to think from the standpoint of somebody else' (Arendt 2006, 12). Telling his story allowed Arendt to understand him and to hold him responsible.

Derrida's deconstruction

Deconstruction, like narrativity, begins with the assumption of plurality, multiplicity, and otherness. Derrida showed first with literature and then with metaphysical, philosophical, and political texts that whether it is in the form of a novel, an essay, or a declaration of independence, language never can be reduced to a singular, original, and 'true' meaning. Words on a page do not refer to (signify) a form or logos (truth) that is prior to the text; searching for what is prior to the text (context) originally led Derrida to the process (happening) of deconstruction. Precisely because Derrida calls into question the idea of a single, prior, and absolute meaning of a word, providing a definition of 'deconstruction' is both impossible and counterproductive (Derrida 1985, 4). Like all other words though, 'deconstruction' has contextual substitutes: dismantling, desedimentation, destabilization, undecidability. Deconstruction may

not be definable, but as a 'happening,' it is understandable.

Derrida, like Arendt, consistently reminds his readers that, 'in language there are only differences' (Derrida 1968, 10-11). Words only convey meaning to readers or listeners because they are distinct, they differ from other words. For example, when a reader encounters the word 'rational,' he or she only knows its meaning (significance) because of the non-presence of 'irrational,' which is presently absent but always already there. To represent this absence of presence in a text and to remind the reader of the differences that were being assumed, Derrida often would use strikethroughs, writing the word 'rational' as '(ir)rational.' This unrestrained, even playful, way of using language infuriated(s) many scholars. Critics—including many analytic philosophers, John Searle², for example—accuse him of contributing nothing but absurdity, of demonstrating endless difference, of making light of moral, political, and ethical problems by playing with language. But Derrida's insistence on linguistic plurality had wide-ranging implications. '[Deconstruction],' he argued, 'is not opposed to ethics and politics, but is their condition: on the one hand, it is the condition of history, of process, strategy, delay, postponement, mediation, and, on the other hand, because there is an absolute difference or an irreducible heterogeneity, there is the urge

to act and respond immediately and to face political and ethical responsibilities' (Derrida 1999, 77). This urge to act is the political side of deconstruction.

The key to understanding the political implications of deconstruction is the subtle distinction between undecidability and indeterminacy. Derrida's critics accuse him of the latter, claiming that he promotes relativity of meaning and thereby destroys the possibility of decision-making. 'But undecidability is not indeterminacy,' he responds, 'undecidability is the competition between two determined possibilities or options, two determined duties. There is no indeterminacy at all' (Derrida 1999, 79). In other words, not knowing the right answer is a necessary condition of decision-making. 'Far from opposing undecidability to decision,' he continues, 'I would argue that there would be no decision, in the strong sense of the word, in ethics, in politics, no decision, and thus no responsibility, without the experience of some undecidability' (Derrida 1999, 66).

Double gestures pervade Derrida's work—'respect and disrespect, fidelity and violation, preservation and emancipation, description and transformation,' absence and presence, undecidability and decision, playfulness and deadly seriousness (Royle 2003, 32). Perhaps it is difficult to see how someone who refused to be bound by methodology, who chose multiple words to

mean the same thing, who combined multiple meanings into a single word, who emphasized the absence of presence as much as presence, who insisted on the importance of undecidability, can be credited with forcing responsibility. But more powerfully than an ethicist with moral guidelines, a politician with a bureaucratic program, or an international relations scholar with a predictive or prescriptive theory, Derrida shows us that decisions are both impossible and imperative. While acknowledging the undecidability facing our political leaders, we still must hold them responsible for the decisions they make. Words are not signifiers of truth and politics is not programmed decision-making—undecidability and deconstruction shine a critical light on those decision-makers who otherwise would hide behind linguistic, moral, and political ambiguities.

There is nothing outside the text'

'There is nothing outside the text,' Derrida famously commented (Derrida 1988, 136):

'The phrase which for some has been a sort of slogan, in general so badly understood, of deconstruction...means nothing else: there is nothing outside context. In this form, which says exactly the same thing, the formula would doubtless have been less shocking. I am not certain that it would have provided more to think about,' (Derrida 1988, 136).

Making 'text' and 'context' synonymous was Derrida's way of demonstrating that texts are more than words on a page—they are carriers of meaning, producers of history, promise makers, liars, tricksters, specters. 'There is nothing outside the text' means one need not look elsewhere for answers, that deconstruction is ever-present and ever-occurring. Arendt's phrase for a very similar process was 'pearl diving.' Although the Arendtian understanding of 'pearl diving' is more of an action than the doer-less happening of deconstruction, both terms signify a process of generating (that is, of gathering or uncovering) meaning in texts.

Pearl diving

In her introduction to Walter Benjamin's *Illuminations* (1968), Arendt quoted the following passage from Act I Scene 2 of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*:

Full fathom five thy father lies,
Of his bones are coral made,
Those are pearls that were his eyes
Nothing of him that doth fade
But doth suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange
(Benjamin 1968, 38).

She adopted the image of the pearl, of something that once was alive but now waits to be raised, examined, and cherished, as a metaphor for her approach to political theory. The way she described Benjamin's work—his ability to think poetically—also aptly characterizes

her own thinking:

Like a pearl diver who descends to the bottom of the sea, not to excavate the bottom and bring it to light but to pry loose the rich and the strange [...] What guides this thinking is the conviction that although the living is subject to the ruin of time, the process of decay is at the same time a process of crystallization, that in the depth of the sea, into which sinks and is dissolved what once was alive, some things 'suffer a sea-change' and survive in new crystallized forms and shapes that remain immune to the elements [...] (Benjamin 1968, 50-1).

The idea that history is more a record of pearl diving than of 'true' chronological events has a Foucauldian and even a Nietzschean ring to it.³ Although her attention to meaning stood opposed to much of Nietzsche's nihilism and her insistence on plurality contradicted his theory of the *Übermensch*⁴ (see Arendt 1998, 190), Arendt most certainly would have agreed with his oft-cited dictum that 'there are no facts.' One of the aphorisms in his book, *The Will to Power* (1968), hints at this process of pearl diving: 'Interpretation,' the introduction of meaning—not 'explanation' (in most cases a new interpretation over an old interpretation that has become incomprehensible, that is now itself only a sign). There are no facts, everything is in flux, incomprehensible, elusive;

what is relatively most enduring is—our opinions’ (Nietzsche 1968, 327). Arendt understood history in precisely this way—as a process of interpretation, not explanation. History only comes about when a diver explores the depths, raises certain pearls, and leaves others behind.

Arendt’s propensity for pearl diving, for selecting and examining pieces of history, for favoring certain stories over others, for discussing limited aspects of political culture, for engaging parts of texts but almost never the whole, became the central concern of many of her critics. In an article about Arendt’s controversial approach to history, Judith Shklar made the observation that Arendt’s method was more than a personal preference, that it carried important political ramifications:

[Arendt] became convinced that the notion of history as an inevitable process contributed materially to the mentality of totalitarian leaders...It is therefore hardly astonishing that she resorted to so different a way of considering the past. It is selective, dwelling only on those moments that have a constructive present bearing, and it emphasizes the avoidable in contrast to the inevitable (Shklar 1977, 87).

Her goal, it seems, was to tell the tragic stories of history as if they might have been otherwise and to ask us to think about our futures in non-inevitable terms.

This narrative approach to history and politics, an approach designed both to inform and to instruct, is controversial among political theorists because Arendt refused to feign neutrality.⁵ Her readers always knew her views on any given subject. As Lisa Disch insightfully remarks in her article on Arendt’s methodology, ‘storytelling signals [Arendt’s] resistance against the dictate that the political thinker must withdraw to a vantage point beyond the social world in order to understand its relations of power and adjudicate its conflicts of interest’ (Disch 1993, 668). Arendt was not interested in ‘objectivity’ as it typically is understood. In fact, she sought a redefinition of the concept altogether. In reply to colleagues who accused her of sentimentality, moralizing, and failing to be objective, Arendt argued that her narrative approach to history was truer to the nature of events and thus, in a sense, more ‘objective’ than traditional political theory. ‘In this sense,’ she writes, ‘I think that a description of the [concentration] camps as hell on earth is more ‘objective,’ that is, more adequate to their essence than statements of a purely sociological or psychological nature.’ And she went further, claiming that, ‘to describe the concentration camps *sine ira* is not to be ‘objective,’ but to condone them’ (Arendt 1953, 79). Arendt’s redefinition of objectivity resembles her emphasis on understanding over explanation, on interpretation

over the gathering of ‘facts.’ Her failure to be ‘objective’ in the usual sense of the word is the true power of the narrative approach.

In a 2006 article in *Atlantic Monthly*, E. L. Doctorow surveyed various pieces of Western literature—Homer’s *Iliad*, Melville’s *Moby Dick*, Shakespeare’s *Richard III*, and Tolstoy’s *War and Peace*, among others—with an eye to the question in his subtitle: ‘Who would give up the *Iliad* for the ‘real’ historical record?’. The section on *War and Peace* illustrates the fiction of history, the truth of fiction, and the political dimension of narrativity. After summarizing Tolstoy’s physical description of Napoleon, Doctorow notes that:

The issue here is not the accuracy of Tolstoy’s description—it seems not that far off from nonfictive accounts—but its selectivity: other things that could be said of the man are not said. We are meant to understand the incongruity of a warring emperor in the body of a fat little Frenchman. Tolstoy’s Napoleon could be a powdered boulevardier putting a pinch of snuff up his nose—and that is the point. The consequences of such a disparity of form and content can be counted in dead soldiers strewn across the European continent (Doctorow 2006, 88-9).

Doctorow’s point about Tolstoy’s treatment of Napoleon applies equally well to Arendt’s treatment of the many historical people and

events that interested her. In order to understand Eichmann’s role in the Final Solution, Arendt concentrated on his mediocrity and his obedience instead of on his moral depravity and political power (see Arendt 2006). In her section on Dinesen in *Men in Dark Times* (1968), Arendt praised the wisdom of Dinesen’s storytelling instead of the accuracy of her reporting on a story that happened to be true (see Arendt 1968, 95-109). Even in her criticisms of Karl Marx, Arendt focused more on the problems with his storytelling and his interpretations of history than on the ‘fact’ that his utopic vision did not turn out as planned (see Arendt 1998, 159-165). The current that runs through all of her work, whether she is writing about history, politics, or literature, is the desire to capture and record stories that give meaning, to polish and preserve these pearls.

The force of fiction

The manner in which Derrida approached the problem of objectivity bears a striking resemblance to Arendt’s approach: both discussed objectivity in a larger section on Benjamin and both used the example of the Holocaust to illustrate the dangers in the perceived neutrality of objectivity. In his lecture *Force of Law: The ‘Mystical Foundations of Authority’* (1989), Derrida deconstructs the idea of legal authority, highlighting the paradox that enforceability requires force. ‘How

are we to distinguish,' he asks, 'between the force of law of a legitimate power and the supposedly originary violence that must have established this authority and that could not itself have been authorized by any anterior legitimacy, so that, in this initial moment, it is neither legal nor illegal—or, others would quickly say, neither just or unjust?' (Derrida 1989, 6). Such seemingly simple questions rock the foundation of Western legal authority. Derrida continues his line of questioning and eventually demonstrates that law is not justice, that law is deconstructable but justice is not, that deconstruction is justice. By disassociating justice and law Derrida challenged legal authority and by demonstrating that deconstruction is ever-occurring, he shattered the guise of objectivity.

In praising novelists over historians, E. L. Doctorow commented that, 'to be conclusively objective is to have no cultural identity, to exist in such existential solitude as to have, in fact, no place in the world' (Doctorow 2006, 92). Arendt clearly agreed with this statement, but as far as Derrida was concerned, she did not take her critique of objectivity far enough. In her report on Eichmann's trial, Arendt sought to understand the accused in the context of Nazi law and political culture. But Derrida saw a danger in Arendt's approach, the danger that limiting the context in which Eichmann can be judged and attempting to be 'objective' in one's assessment of his ac-

tions leads to a sense of normalcy. '[O]ne cannot think the uniqueness of an event like the final solution, as extreme point of mythic and representational violence, within its own system,' Derrida argued. 'One must try to think beginning with its other, that is to say, starting from what it tried to exclude and to destroy, to exterminate radically, from that which haunted it at once from without and within (Derrida 1989, 59-60).'

The mythological scale of the violence of the Holocaust and the attempt to exterminate the 'other'—this attack on plurality also deeply offended Arendt—generated in Derrida a desire to demonstrate that law is not and cannot be conflated with justice. Deconstructing law and objectivity allowed Derrida to challenge the sense of normalcy that inevitably arises when such crimes are tried in the usual manner:

[Nazi Germany] kept the archive of its destruction [...] with a terrifying legal, bureaucratic, statist objectivity and paradoxically produced a system in which its logic, the logic of objectivity made possible the invalidation and therefore the effacement of testimony and responsibilities, the neutralization of the singularity of the final solution...even 'normalize[d]' it as an act of war (Derrida 1989, 60).

Thus, the best weapon against the normalization of such violence is not law, but literature.⁶

Barbara Leckie explores Der-

rida's use of literature as a method of legal critique in her extraordinary article, 'The Force of Law and Literature' (1995). Literature, as Derrida understands it, 'carries a 'revealing power' with respect to language; it shares certain similarities with the law, 'but at a certain point it can also exceed them, interrogate them, 'fictionalize' them" (Leckie 1995, 118). Literature's ability to 'fictionalize' the law, to deconstruct it, to challenge its authority and objectivity, leads to a blurring of the disciplinary lines and a reemphasis on the narrativity of politics. 'Not only does literature simultaneously depend on and interrogate laws,' Leckie writes:

...but the law—the continual subject of narratives—can only be understood as self-contradictory, lacking in pure essence, and structurally related to what Derrida terms *différance* or, in its metaphysical sense, 'literature'. The disciplinary integrity of both law and literature, then, are both thoroughly 'contaminated' at the outset (Leckie 1995, 116).

Derrida insisted on the 'contamination' of disciplines in order to legitimate literature as a method of legal critique. In this way, literature transcends history, politics, and law, because literature acknowledges its own fictive qualities and it can reveal the fictive qualities of those disciplines that cling so futilely to the guise of objectivity.

In one of the most insightful com-

ments in his article on the history of fiction, E. L. Doctorow asserted that, 'the novelist hopes to lie his way to a greater truth than is possible with factual reportage' (Doctorow 2006, 92). Although reading Derrida's *Force of Law* (1989) highlights some potential problems with Arendt's reporting of the Eichmann trial, her narrative style, her free use of 'nonobjective' commentary, and most importantly, her rendering of an alternative, fictitious verdict reinforces Derrida's challenge to legal authority. After two hundred and seventy-seven pages of 'factual' reporting on Eichmann's trial, Arendt concluded the epilogue with the verdict she wished the court would have handed down:

Just as you supported and carried out a policy of not wanting to share the earth with the Jewish people and the people of a number of other nations—as though you and your superiors had any right to determine who should and should not inhabit the world—we find that no one, that is, no member of the human race, can be expected to want to share the earth with you. This is the reason, and the only reason, you must hang (Arendt 2006, 279).

This alternative verdict—whether one agrees with Arendt or not—undermines the legitimacy of the actual verdict by revealing its inadequacies. Eichmann was condemned to death on shaky legal precedent and

in a country with no real authority to try him, yet his execution was hailed by many as a triumph of international law. Arendt touched upon the 'true' reason for our abhorrence of Eichmann's actions in her fictitious verdict, and through Derrida we can acknowledge her verdict as a valid legal critique.

What's in a name?

Returning to the metaphor of the pearl diver, Arendt once commented that, 'there is no more effective way to break the spell of tradition than to cut out the 'rich and strange,' coral and pearls, from what had been handed down in one solid piece' (Benjamin 1968, 40). Cutting out the 'rich and strange' is what Arendt and Derrida sought to do, each in their own way. But in addition to the construction and destruction of political narratives, Arendt and Derrida jointly passed to posterity an understanding of the role of language in preservation and disremembering. One of the most disturbing elements of the Holocaust, for Derrida, was the systematic destruction of names. '[W]hat the [Nazis] tried to exterminate,' he writes, 'was not only human lives by the millions, natural lives, but also a demand for justice; and also names: and first of all the possibility of giving, inscribing, calling and recalling the name' (Derrida 1989, 60).

Destroying the record of their victims' names—what Arendt referred to as negating their humanity (see

Disch 1993, 673)—was the Nazis' attempt to force disremembering. Examples of such negation and willful forgetting abound. In Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* (1862), Jean Valjean is referred to as prisoner number 24601 so that even he loses the sense of his own worth. Looming over Arlington Cemetery in Washington, D.C. is the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, famous because his identity is unknown, because he will not be forced to join his comrades buried under row after row of white crosses until a name can be etched on his tombstone. The folly in Romeo's plan to marry Juliet without his family's consent consists precisely in their failure to understand the implications of Juliet's question, 'what's in a name?' (*Romeo & Juliet*, Act II Scene 2). Memory is in a name. History is in a name. Politics is in a name. Together Arendt and Derrida taught us where to begin our search for political meaning: in language, in stories, in names.

To think is to judge: tracing political responsibility

Over the centuries, the search for meaning has consumed many influential thinkers and generated a multitude of schools of thought. From various forms of religion and spirituality, to hedonism, existentialism, and nihilism, 'meaning' has maintained its central place in Western thought, even in the works of those who deny its existence or importance. Eschewing both singu-

lar and eternal meaning, Arendt and Derrida found a way to speak about meaning without advocating one. For Arendt, finding meaning was not a quest for an unchanging truth but rather the pursuit of understanding and acceptance. Similarly, Derrida believed that the exposure of infinite meanings was a necessary precondition for decision-making and responsibility. Although faulting the Jewish leadership for their role in the Holocaust seems incredibly insensitive and deconstructing the Western canon may appear to discredit it, both endeavors require a good deal more thought than political correctness otherwise would demand. In the preface to *The Human Condition*, Arendt articulated her most fundamental motive for conducting political theory the way she did: 'What I propose, therefore, is very simple: it is nothing more than to think what we are doing' (Arendt 1998, 5). Although they offended many along the way, Arendt and Derrida certainly made us think what we are doing. Thinking, as they understood it, leads to judgment, and responsibility must follow.

The politics of plurality

Plurality, 'acting and speaking together,' is the very condition of politics. But for Arendt, plurality signifies more than the existence of a multitude of people. Plurality is an active force. It requires accepting that we do not inhabit the earth alone, committing to thinking from another's

perspective, and combating the fear of the other. A careful analysis of Arendt's writings on plurality reveals this three-step process toward the generation of meaning and the assumption of political responsibility.

First, Arendt insists that productive and memorable public actions begin with an acknowledgment that 'not one man, but men, inhabit the earth' (Arendt 1998, 234). In a thinly veiled attack on the Nietzschean *Übermensch*, Arendt argues that:

The popular belief in a 'strong man' who, isolated against others, owes his strength to his being alone is either sheer superstition, based on the delusion that we can 'make' something in the realm of human affairs...or it is conscious despair of all action, political and non-political, coupled with the utopian hope that it may be possible to treat men as one treats other 'material' (Arendt 1998, 188).

A man may fabricate something—a chair, a sword, a novel—in isolation, but he never can act in isolation. The existence of other people—the initial and superficial definition of plurality—is what allows for speech and action, and thus for politics, and thus for meaning and remembrance.

The second step toward the generation of meaning and responsibility in Arendt's political thought is the ability to think from another's perspective. In one of the most un-

forgiving passages in all her works, Arendt describes what she considers Eichmann's ultimate failing: 'bragging is a common vice,' she wrote, 'and a more specific, and also more decisive, flaw in Eichmann's character was his almost total inability ever to look at anything from the other fellow's point of view' (Arendt 2006, 47-8). The concluding sentence of her report on Eichmann's trial garnered instant fame because it ran counter to the most common assumptions about evil. The lesson Eichmann taught her as he was led to the gallows was 'the lesson of the fearsome, word-and-thought-defying banality of evil' (Arendt 2006, 252). Eichmann's greatest sin, according to Arendt, was the sin of refusing to think.⁷ Over a decade after the publication of *Eichmann in Jerusalem* in 1963, the association between evil actions and thoughtlessness still fascinated her. Recalling Eichmann's demeanor, she noted that, 'the deeds were monstrous, but the doer...was quite ordinary, commonplace, and neither demonic nor monstrous...[his] only notable characteristic...was not stupidity but *thoughtlessness*' (Arendt 1978, 4). This observation led to her investigation of how we think and ultimately to the series of lectures she gave entitled *The Life of the Mind* (1978). In the introduction to the published version, she told her readers that the impetus for this project was the question: 'Could the activity of thinking as such, the habit of examining

whatever happens to come to pass or to attract attention, regardless of results and specific content, could this activity be among the conditions that make men abstain from evil-doing or even actually 'condition' them against it?' (Arendt 1978, 5). Her resounding conclusion was, 'yes.' The ability and the commitment to think for one's self—which also encompasses a commitment to think from someone else's perspective—precludes the performance of evil actions. A self-reflective person has no one to blame but him or herself; thought is the crucial ingredient in responsibility.

The third and final obligation of plurality is not to fear the 'other' but to seek enrichment in multiple perspectives. With this understanding of plurality comes meaning, for 'the inexhaustible richness of human discourse is infinitely more significant and meaningful than any One Truth could ever be' (Topf 1978, 363). But this obligation does not require magnanimity or empathy so much as an acceptance of reality. As Arendt noted, 'the language of the Romans, perhaps the most political people we have known, used the words 'to live' and 'to be among men' (*inter homines esse*) or 'to die' and 'to cease to be among men' (*inter homines esse desinere*) as synonyms' (Arendt 1998, 8). The 'other' need not be the enemy; his or her existence is a necessary condition for the generation of meaning. This insistence on the multiplicity of

meaning is also where the thought of Arendt and of Derrida most closely overlap.

In a recent article in the *German Law Journal*, Elisabeth Weber makes a brief but compelling argument that, 'deconstruction is justice since it calls for an untiring, in principle infinite, because never 'finished,' analysis of the philosophical heritage and its juridicopolitical systems, an analysis that is inseparable from an equally infinite responsibility' (Weber 2005, 184). She shows that the dominant power—as Derrida defined it, 'the one that manages to impose and, thus, to legitimate, indeed to legalize (for it is always a question of law) on a national or world stage, the terminology and thus the interpretation that best suits it in a given situation' (Weber 2005, 183)—is always in danger of being challenged by deconstruction, a position she holds in direct contradiction to many of Derrida's critics who see deconstruction as nothing more than 'an aestheticizing apolitical and ahistorical exercise' (Weber 2005, 179). For example: the dominant international powers, the United States of America and its Western European allies, have employed the term 'war on terror' to characterize their military actions in the Middle East. These military actions are a war in the sense that they are organized, state-sponsored acts of violence, but since the United States Congress has refused to declare war—and besides, how does one

declare war against a noun?—these acts of violence are allowed to occur relatively unregulated by the 'rules of war.' Torture can be used as long as the victims of torture are labeled 'enemy combatants' and not 'prisoners of war.' In fact, torture is not torture anymore—it is 'enhanced interrogation.' Attacks on civilians can be forgiven as accidents instead of prosecuted as war crimes. And most importantly, by fighting a concept and not a people or a nation, the West can continue to view itself as unequivocally 'right' and virtuous. The phrase 'war on terror' is both descriptive and deceptive; it serves to justify the dominant powers but it is also haunted by those it seeks to silence. Only by understanding the plurality of meanings and intentions embedded within this phrase can we begin to assign responsibility to our political leaders. The slogan used by Big Brother in George Orwell's dystopic novel *1984* (1949) summarizes the power of 'doublespeak' best of all: 'War is peace. Freedom is slavery. Ignorance is strength.' In Orwell's novel, the government understood the power of language and sought to change reality through language—but phrases like 'war on terror' demonstrate that his story, in many ways, is true. Deconstruction is justice because it uses the plurality of language not to distort reality, but to reveal it.

The hope of responsibility

As the previous section outlined, plurality, in the sense in which Arendt and Derrida spoke of it, is a necessary condition of responsibility. To understand why this allows for a positive conception of politics, though, one must understand that Arendt and Derrida raised the threshold for what counts as 'responsibility.' They did not mean to equate blame or guilt or even causation with responsibility. Responsibility—in typical Derridian fashion—is a double gesture of acceptance and refusal, of action and abstention, of promising and forgiving, of remembering and forgetting, of seeking others' perspectives and relying on one's own judgment. Responsibility is understanding the past and thinking and judging in the present, with hope for the future.

Derrida's disassociation of law and justice resulted in a challenge to legal authority and an accompanying increase in political responsibility. By undermining the 'justness' of law, Derrida denied politicians recourse to the law when trying to determine a just course of action. That something is legal or illegal says nothing about whether it is right or wrong: Each case is other, each decision is different and requires an absolutely unique interpretation, which no existing, coded rule can or ought to guarantee absolutely. At least, if the rule guarantees it in no uncertain terms, so that the

judge is a calculating machine, which happens, and we will not say that he is just, free, and responsible (Derrida 1989, 23).

The strongest indication of Arendt's agreement with Derrida's assessment of justice and responsibility is her report on Adolf Eichmann. The fact that Eichmann was convicted, tried, found guilty, and hanged for his role in the Final Solution did not, in Arendt's eyes, prove his responsibility. By her description, Eichmann was a man 'who never made a decision on his own, who was extremely careful always to be 'covered' by orders, who... did not even like to volunteer suggestions and always required 'directives'" (Arendt 2006, 94). He was not a monster, but a clown, not evil, but thoughtless (Arendt 2006, 54). If this pathetic character can be held responsible for the Holocaust, if his death is somehow retributively just, then we as a society mean very little by the words 'responsibility' and 'justice.' Certainly Derrida and Arendt demanded more.

A haunting sense of tragedy inevitably accompanies any discussion of justice and responsibility, for these concepts take on their true significance in dark times. Arendt spoke of the tragic heroes of Greek lore, the quest for immortality that plagues mortal beings, and the preventability of so many human atrocities. 'She elevated politics and political action to the level of epic and

tragedy,' noted Sheldon Wolin, 'not in order to exonerate actors from their misdeeds or to glorify a particular nation, but to impose a demand upon those who presumed to decide great public matters and upon those who presumed to theorize about political actors and actions' (Wolin 1977, 91). Much is at stake in discussions of the political and only a grave and seemingly tragic tone would suffice. But the tone of Arendt's writing stood in sharp contrast to the hope she held for natality, change, and action. A religious metaphor is not inappropriate here: she sought remembrance and reconciliation in the hope of a brighter future.⁸ By seeking out the excluded, the disregarded, the forgotten, the disremembered, the erased, the dead, Arendt adds to the number of stories, experiences, and perspectives that can be considered in future political debates. And in so doing she forces decision-makers either to silence her as well or to think. Thinking necessitates judgment, and she based her assessment of the quality of political judgments on the politician's ability to think from another's perspective. In a paradox that Arendt understood no less than Derrida, hope for the future only arises from an understanding of the tragedy of the past, and responsibility is only possible because humans have an ever-present capacity for failure.

In contrast to Arendt, the hopefulness in Derrida's work lies not in the

paradox of tragedy but in seemingly paralyzing indecision, although the unpredictability of action which forms a central part of Arendt's work makes its appearance in Derrida's as well. Political actors are faced with impossible decisions every day, impossible because their outcomes are unknown and unknowable. The greatest threat Derrida sensed in modern politics was the drive for singularity and simplicity. Rules, plans, programs, bureaucracies, operate on the assumption of decidability: if x happens, we will respond with y. 'The privilege granted to unity, to totality, to organic ensembles, to community as a homogenized whole—this is a danger for responsibility, for decision, for ethics, for politics,' Derrida explained in an interview (Derrida 1997, 13). True decision making depends on the uncertainty of the outcome.

In addition to their similar discussions of language, narrativity, and plurality, Arendt and Derrida share two more fundamental similarities: both convey an urgent mandate to *think* and both are fundamentally hopeful because of their willingness to embrace that which is so often considered frightening in politics, the 'other.' In an example that brings to mind Arendt's discussion about her methodology of 'pearl diving' as an attempt to avoid totalitarian thinking, Derrida spoke of plurality within contemporary debates over the politics of identity:

We often insist nowadays on cul-

tural identity—for instance, national identity, linguistic identity, and so on. Sometimes the struggles under the banner of cultural identity, national identity, linguistic identity, are noble fights. But at the same time the people who fight for their identity must pay attention to the fact that identity is not the self-identity of a thing, this glass for instance, this microphone, but implies a difference within identity. [...] Once you take into account this inner and other difference, then you pay attention to the other and you understand that fighting for your own identity is not exclusive of another identity, is open to another identity. And this prevents totalitarianism, nationalism, egocentrism, and so on (Derrida 1997, 13-4).

In other words, plurality is inherent in any cultural identity. Against the singularity so often imposed by power, narrativity gathers this pluralism and deconstruction exposes it. Arendt's approach can be summarized as remembrance and reconciliation, Derrida's as deconstruction and decision, but both rely on the plurality of experience, the multiplicity of meaning, the urgency of thinking, the necessity of judging, and the hopefulness of responsibility.

A story is only the beginning

In this article I set out to explore what a joint reading of Arendt's

narrative approach to political theory and Derrida's articulation of deconstruction could tell us about the importance of political narratives. In support of my conclusions, the United States Congress has been debating various ways to cope with the crushing weight of America's debt. Among the possible solutions are tax increases. But the narrative about the American middle-class is so powerful and so pervasive that even the most progressive Senators have agreed to a discourse about taxes that assigns those households making up to \$250,000 a year the label 'middle-class,' which exempts them from tax increases. And this at a time when the average annual income in America has declined to just over \$40,000 (Social Security Online 2010). Cloaked in the rhetoric of the working middle-class, the lightly-taxed high-wage earners in America have succeeded (with ample help from Congress) in steering the debate toward which social programs should be cut in order to reign in the deficit. The longer some politicians further the narrative about middle-class millionaires, and the longer their opponents accept these terms of debate without questioning the narrative and linguistic framework, the more powerful this narrative (and its beneficiaries) becomes. But the debate about the American tax code is only one example of many found on the nightly news. Clever phrases like 'the war on terror,' 'pro-life,' 'The Freedom to Farm Act,' and

'the Death Tax' all give witness to the sophisticated way in which governments and politicians have used language to frame debates and alter (that is, create a new) reality. But luckily for those who oppose political 'double-speak,' in these debates, one can fight fire with fire. One of the most potent antidotes to political power is a people's innate ability to tell a story.

Today, Tolstoy is remembered as one of the greatest supporters of the Russian peasants. Charles Dickens has been honored with a similar position in support of the working poor in Victorian England, as has Virginia Woolf of pre-suffrage women, Hugo of revolutionaries in nineteenth-century France and Foucault of revolutionaries in twentieth-century France. It is no accident that writers, novelists, thinkers, storytellers, theorists of language and history, outlive most contemporary politicians in the cultural memory of successive generations. We remember these great men and women in part because their stories took on lives of their own. As Arendt said, 'even though stories are the inevitable results of action, it is not the actor but the storyteller who perceives and 'makes' the story' (Arendt 1998, 192). Therein lies the true potential of the political theory of Arendt and Derrida: their stories have outlived them and they have left us with the theoretical tools to craft a positive politics.

Arendt sought understanding from experience, reconciliation from remembrance, and hope from tragedy. Her work on plurality serves as a beautiful reminder that we do not inhabit the earth alone—the 'other' is necessary not only for politics but for meaning and even for reality. 'Only the experience of sharing a common human world with others who look at it from different perspectives can enable us to see reality in the round and to develop a shared common sense,' she wrote, 'Without it, we are each driven back on our own subjective experience, in which only our feelings, wants, and desires have reality' (Arendt, 1998, xvii). Her narrative approach was one of the first political theories to see in stories the true seed of resistance and change. But those who would use Arendt's theories to legitimate nontraditional forms of politics must also accept her demanding call for inclusion, understanding, and responsibility. Irish ballads may be used to fight British dominance, but they may not be used to exclude Protestants or gypsies from participation in Irish society. Stories of the Holocaust may be told by survivors to their children in order to preserve the memories and begin reconciliation, but they may not be told to exonerate the Jewish people from violence done toward the Palestinians. Arendt's narrative approach at once widens the field of traditional political theory and raises the standard for political participation and

responsibility.

Coupled with the more playful but equally serious Derrida, Arendt's work takes on an urgency and a hopefulness that are necessary if a positive revitalization of politics is to be effected. No text was sacred for Derrida - that is, no text was beyond his critical analysis and the ever-de-stabilizing effect of deconstruction. The Declaration of Independence, the Laws of Plato, and the Hebrew Bible were as likely to be the focus of his radical approach as the in-themselves-radical works of Heidegger, Kafka, or Joyce. Whether he was writing about literature, philosophy, or international relations, Derrida's recurring emphasis on linguistic plurality and undecidability *made* his subjects political. That words differ from themselves; that the intention of the author matters less than the contextual interpretation, that the outcome of a decision cannot be known beforehand in order for a decision to take place - all these conditions add to a sense of urgency about political decisions and demand responsibility for those decisions. Deconstruction is justice because justice cannot be deconstructed - it is the only thing immune to the destabilization of language. It is the only standard by which we may judge right and wrong; it is the foundation of ethics, politics, and morality. But in a sense, deconstruction assumes the fundamental premise of a Western tradition that it simultaneously deconstructs:

the assumption found in most religions that man is not omniscient or omnipotent. We do not and cannot know what will come, we are subject to the threefold frustration of action, we must exist in a world inhabited by others, but still we must act. Together Arendt and Derrida help to dispel the fear of the other, the fear of decision, and the fear of action while demanding thought, plurality, and responsibility.

Reading Joyce's *Ulysses* (2007) first awakened in Derrida his fascination with the playfulness and the endless possibilities of language. In many ways, Joyce was the literary frontrunner of deconstruction and he faced as much outrage over his alleged irreverence as Derrida did. Joyce rewrote the standard Catholic sign of the cross, 'In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.' to read: 'In the name of the former and of the latter and of their holocaust. Allmen' (Joyce 2007, 419). Sacrilegious perhaps, but the beauty in Joyce's rendition is its prayer to and for humanity. We remember the past, we hope for the future, and we presently call on all men. Embedded within Arendt's narrative approach and Derrida's deconstruction is a similar call. In a time when politics so often is characterized by wealth, power, war, fear, and division, Arendt and Derrida are hopeful without being naïve. They demand action as well as responsibility. They revitalize a sense of community that rightfully

belongs in the heart of politics. And they say both to those who have and to that which has been lost, forgotten, or silenced, 'yes I said yes I will Yes' (Joyce 2007, 806).

Endnotes

¹ Adolf Eichmann was a high-ranking member of the Nazi party in Germany during the Second World War. He was tasked with running the day-to-day operations of the Holocaust – literally making sure the trains ran on time. After the fall of the Third Reich, Eichmann escaped to Argentina where he eluded the famed Nazi-hunters until his capture by Israeli intelligence agents in 1960. He was taken to Jerusalem and tried and convicted for war crimes and crimes against humanity. In 1962 he was hanged. His case presented unique difficulties for the prosecution because although he organized the Nazi death camps, Eichmann never personally killed anyone. He also carefully followed German law at the time, so prosecutors could not charge him with breaking any laws. Additionally, there were many who questioned Israel's authority to try a German citizen. See *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (2006) for Arendt's discussions of the problems and complexities of this trial.

²John Searle wrote a series of pieces in *The New York Review of Books* criticizing Derrida and deconstruction for, among other things, 'the low level of philosophical argumentation, the deliberate obscurantism of the prose, the wildly exaggerated claims, and the constant striving to give the appearance of profundity by making claims that seem paradoxical, but under analysis often

turn out to be silly or trivial' (Searle 1982). He also opined that, 'Authors who are concerned with discovering the truth are concerned with evidence and reasons, with consistency and inconsistency, with logical consequences, explanatory adequacy, verification and testability. But all of this is part of the apparatus of the very "logo-centrism" that deconstruction seeks to undermine' (Searle 1982).

³ Michel Foucault, heavily influenced by the work of Friedrich Nietzsche, problematized the Western approach to history. Instead of recounting past events with an air of inevitability, Foucault preferred what he termed the 'genealogical approach.' He would take a historical happening, like the rise of the Western penal system, and trace its origins in the social and political thought of the society out of which such an institution arose. His goal was to demonstrate that many of the developments we understand to be rational, inevitable and progressive are, in fact, none of these. His approach to historiography is similar to Arendt's in that they both seek to dispel the notion that a single, chronological, and comprehensive history exists or can be created.

⁴ Nietzsche introduced his idea of the 'Übermensch,' often translated into English as the 'Superman,' in his book *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (1883-5). Although the Übermensch was in many ways the embodiment of Nietzschean nihilism and the personification of Nietzsche's belief that man could be the creator of his own meaning and his own morality (replacing the need for a God), the idea often is used to describe an idealized individualist—someone who

depends solely on himself for success and happiness. Arendt's explanation of human speech, human action, and the importance of plurality stands in sharp contrast to the idea that a man can do or make anything of lasting value on his own.

⁵ Unlike so many social scientists, Arendt did not believe that in order to analyze and pass judgment upon political happenings, one somehow must be above the political fray. She thought that traditional social scientific virtues like neutrality, objectivity, and data-driven factuality were not only impossible to achieve but dangerous to pursue. In fact, the only people who can pretend to be distant, neutral, and objective are those who fundamentally are unaffected by the political questions at stake. Arendt believed that although her political philosophy was informed by her experiences as a woman, as a refugee, as a Jew, etc., the richness of perspective that each of those lenses provides is much more valuable than the ramblings of someone who claims to have no ties, no biases, and no defining experiences.

⁶ I have focused on the political power of literature in this article for two reasons. First, literature does what social science cannot: it allows for multiple, equally valid meanings. Second, literature, unlike art or music or other forms of expression, is a means of communicating through words and language. The fact that politics and literature both rely on the medium of language to convey meaning enables literature to be used to critique the political on its own terms. Simple anecdotal evidence reveals the power of literature to work against the

normalisation of violence: federal law in America makes lynching African Americans illegal but Harper Lee's portrayal of Atticus Finch and Tom Robinson in *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) makes the reader feel deeply why it is wrong.

^{vii} Arendt believed Eichmann's thoughtlessness to be his greatest sin because, under a totalitarian regime, his thoughts were the only element in his life that could have been free. Although his actions were monstrous, Arendt does not fault him for them primarily. Even Nazi Germany could not monitor or control a man's private thoughts. By refusing to think for himself, Eichmann placed his moral agency in the hands of Nazi Germany.

⁸ I believe the distinction between a utopic vision of politics and a positive or optimistic view of politics is crucial. The former has come to represent an idealized, perfected, almost Heaven-like community of peace and happiness. Arendt certainly had hope for the future of human communities, but her entire political theory was based on an understanding and an acceptance of human plurality. As long as humans experience the world differently, have different aspirations, and pursue different goals, discord is inevitable. Arendt would not have trivialized the enormity of the political problems we face by suggesting that perfection is attainable. But that concession did not dampen her hope that a better future is possible.

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Towards Narrative Futuring in Psychology: Becoming Resilient by Imagining the Future

Anneke Sools & Jan Hein Mooren

In this article we develop a narrative psychological approach to futuring (imagining the future). We explore how this approach addresses the question of how people can become resilient in order to anticipate (social) crisis and change. Firstly, we bring to the fore how futuring takes shape in psychological theories. We argue that the linear-causal temporal perspective underlying the classical theories developed by Alfred Adler and Albert Bandura is insufficient to deal with the increasing speed and complexity of social change. The more complex temporal approaches of Frederick Towne Melges and Thomas Lombardo seem better suited for the purpose at hand. Secondly, we complement our search for a psychological theory of futuring by exploring the role a narrative approach can play in understanding and enhancing resilience. We illustrate the potential of a narrative approach to futuring with an example of on-going research into the relationship between narrative futuring and well-being at the life-story lab at Twente University, the Netherlands. We conclude with a reflection on methodological and epistemological issues of the proposed narrative psychological approach.

Keywords: Narrative psychology, future imagination, resilience, non-linear time, letters

Introduction

In this article, we develop a narrative psychological approach to futuring (imagining the future) to address the question of how people can become resilient in order to anticipate (social) crisis and change. While crisis and change are arguably characteristic for the 'condition humaine', specific to our contemporary era is a crisis as a result of serious challenges facing humanity on an ecological, economic, cultural, social and political level. As

psychologists we are interested in the complex interplay between the macro-processes (for instance globalization), the meso-processes (organization-level, local government), and micro-processes at the individual level (social relations, daily interactions). Societies and international relations seem to change at an ever-increasing speed, dragging along in this turmoil individuals who have to face increasing complexity in their daily lives while they also might face a loss of adequate frames of

meaning and practical guidelines. Postmodern philosophers such as Jean-François Lyotard (1979) refer to this last development as the 'loss of Grand Récits.' Lyotard used this expression to indicate the inadequacy of all-encompassing religious beliefs, as well as ideologies like the belief in the Enlightenment, socialism, etcetera. Ernst T. Bohlmeijer (2007) describes the psychological consequences of living in a post-modern time as a two-edged sword, e.g. increased freedom to shape our identities, and at the same time increased pressure to deal with life on our own.

One of the most distinctive characteristics of our current social crisis is perhaps the speed with which our world changes. Future consciousness psychologist Thomas Lombardo¹ presents a dramatic outlook where 'humanity is in a battle over the future. Our minds are in a battle over what to believe and what to do' (Lombardo 2006, 37). Perhaps more than his description of specific crises (such as an impending ecological disaster, a global economic crisis, and the so-called postmodern crisis in which the promise of progression of modernity is questioned), his temporal approach of crisis is particularly worth mentioning. Lombardo holds that 'time is compressing – more and more is happening in a day – in a week - in a year. One could say that the future is coming at us more rapidly than ever before – the flow

of the river of time is speeding up' (Lombardo 2006, 36).

It has been argued that our world is not only speeding up, but becoming larger and consequently more complex too, thanks to technological advancements, modern communication devices, and worldwide economic, political and social connections. Stewart for instance, an evolutionary thinker, argues that mankind moved from adapting to local and immediate concerns (the here and now) to adapting to changes in an expanding space-time frame (Stewart in: Lombardo 2006, 30). This enlargement of space for meaning and action is considered an effect of globalization. Globalization might be a very abstract notion, but its influence is felt through varying real local effects (e.g. Kennedy 2010; Eriksen 2007; Savage et al. 2005). In describing globalization as a process, anthropologists Tine Davids and Francien Th. M. Van Driel (2005) do not refer to unification processes such as the global interconnectedness of economic and ecological systems, but emphasise local differences in how everyday lives are shaped by global processes. Particularly interesting from a psychological perspective is their description of how men and women in local settings act under the influence of global processes. This is not an easy accomplishment considering that the authors characterize globalization metaphorically as an 'ever-changing landscape of

on-going flows and moving structures, shifting borders and different perspectives' (Davids and Van Driel 2005).

From a psychological perspective, we consider resilience as one important way of negotiating social change. The concept of resilience was developed in response to deficiency models in health care and health promotion (Bohlmeijer 2012; Westerhof & Bohlmeijer 2011; Westerhof and Keyes, 2008; Sools 2010). Resilience encompasses not only the ability to 'bounce back' from adverse experiences, but also the ability to navigate to resources that enhance well-being (Liebenberg and Ungar 2009; Ungar and Lerner 2008).

Resilience has largely been studied in relation to times of personal transition. However, it can also be a useful concept to study the way people at an individual level deal with collective transitions brought about by globalization processes, cultural changes and technical revolutions (like the introduction of the home-computer). Then resilience is not merely an inherent individual trait, but rather emerges in dynamic interaction with the environment (Tusaie & Dyer 2004; Jacelon 1997; Olsson et al 2003). Moreover, there might be differences in the extent to which people need, want and can be resilient.

These differences might depend on individual variation as well as structural inequalities between peo-

ple regarding the extent to which they are or feel vulnerable - in the sense of being exposed to the precariousness of life (Butler 2004). These differences could be due to subjective (experiential) varieties or to objective (due to socioeconomic) circumstances. The experience of loss of the Grand Récits, as well as the extent to which people are capable of imagining the future, further impinges on the capacity and need for resilience. We assume that these three dimensions (differences in precariousness, in loss of stories to make sense of their lives, and in imaginative capacity) interact with each other, but not necessarily in a predictive, stable way. In this article, we bring these dimensions together by combining insights from psychological temporal theories on futuring with narrative psychological theories. Narrative psychology takes storytelling as root metaphor for human thought and action (Sarbin 1986). We consequently explore narrative futuring, e.g. imagining the future through storytelling, in terms of its capacity to address the question of becoming resilient to anticipate crisis and change.

To more concretely explore the question of what a narrative psychological approach has to offer when addressing the question of becoming resilient to an uncertain, complex, dynamic future, we take as an example on-going research at the life-story lab. This lab was founded at Twente University in January 2012

by psychologists Ernst Bohlmeijer, Gerben Westerhof and Anneke Sools. The life-story lab is the Dutch expert centre in the area of narrative psychology and mental health promotion. The lab engages in a critical project to counterbalance current complaint and deficiency-oriented approaches in mental health care with an approach focused on resilience and well-being. Whereas the first approach tends to rely on standardized procedures, the second approach is aimed at reinstating a person-oriented approach with eye for difference (see www.utwente.nl/lifestorylab). At the lab we do fundamental and applied research, using mixed-methods derived from both approaches, to study the relationship between stories (storytelling and writing) and well-being. One of the studies in the lab, the letters from the future project, serves as an example in this article. We consider these letters prospective reflective tools, and study if and how they can be used to promote health and resilience.

Becoming more resilient in anticipating the complexity, the speed and the dynamics characteristic of social crisis and change processes such as globalization, implies paying attention to the future. The future, however, is not an explicit part of the concept of resilience. To understand how futuring might play a role in building up resilience in anticipating crisis and change, we turn first to some psychological theories

in which the future is explicitly addressed, without suggesting completeness. In the second part of the article, we explore the possible role of the narrative approach in understanding and enhancing resilience. We illustrate the potential of the narrative approach to futuring with an example of the letters from the future project at the life-story lab. Finally, we conclude with a reflection on methodological and epistemological issues of the proposed narrative psychological approach.

Theories of futuring in psychology

In this section, we first describe linear temporal theories on futuring in psychology, and then more complex theories of futuring. We conclude this brief literature review by exploring how futuring can play a role in enhancing resilience.

Linear future time

Futuring (imagining the future) is a capacity that defines who we are as human beings. It forms an important part of psychological functioning. Although he himself did not formulate a theory about the future, Abraham Maslow (1968) certainly had a point when he remarked that 'no theory of psychology will ever be complete which does not centrally incorporate the concept that man has his future within him, dynamically active at this present moment' (Maslow 1968, 15). Indeed, a host

of psychological phenomena presupposes the continuation of existence in time yet to come. Concepts like psychological development and education, for instance, are empty notions without the prospect of time ahead of us, as is the case with related concepts such as identity and self-actualization. Erik Erikson's concept of identity, defined as the subjective experience of sameness and continuity over the life-span presupposes future time (Erikson 1968). The same applies to self-actualization, defined as the process of developing one's abilities, in order to realize one's potential, one's not yet actualized capabilities (Maslow 1968, 191 ff). Emotions like hope, anxiety, despair, or desire and emotion-related states like expectation, boredom, stress or nostalgia only make sense in the context of time moving on. In cognitive psychology the study of choosing, planning, forethought, goal-directed behaviour and self-regulation, as well as control-theories would not exist when no future was implied. Without too much exaggeration, one could say that the future is always and everywhere.

It should be mentioned, however, that more often than not the temporal dimension of these phenomena, especially concerning the future, is neglected or not made explicit. As an example we can refer to theories of the will. The will, considered one of the basic functions of the psyche (like thinking, feeling, etcetera), can

be described as the conscious wish for something to obtain or to do, in combination with the determination to act according to this wish. What we want, then, always lies before us, even when our longing is coloured by nostalgic overtones. Nevertheless the future does not come into the picture in, for instance, Roberto Assagioli's (1974) research into the act of will. Philosophical issues of debate are whether the will exists (as Assagioli forcefully states; see Assagioli 1974, 7) and what is its nature. A central question here is to what extent we are capable of consciously determining our actions in order to shape our own future. Also the subject of extensive debate is the connection between the will and the concept of man as a rational being, capable – if strong enough – to wilfully create his future.

However few, in some psychological theories futuring is part of the concepts and the future explicitly has its place. One of the early personality theorists who gave the future its due is Alfred Adler (1947), the founder of Individual Psychology. 'Individual' is used here to express the fact that the human being is indivisible as well as unique' (Ellenberger 1970). Adler states as one of the axioms of his system of thought (inspired by his experience as an internist with 'organ inferiority' and compensatory processes) that psychic life is future-directed and teleological: it is striving toward a goal ('Zielstrebigkeit im Seelenleben';

Adler 1947, 13). He made this premise one of the cornerstones of his approach, and tied this to a second fundamental premise. From the philosopher Hans Vaihinger he borrowed the concept of 'fiction' as well as his contention that fictions have important psychological, scientific and cultural functions. Vaihinger (1924/1968) stated that 'without the imaginary factor neither science nor life in its highest form are possible' (Vaihinger 1924/1968, 44).

Adler's 'goal', then, is fictional in nature, and human behaviour is to a large extent determined by striving for this goal. It is formed to a large extent during early childhood (in the first five years), partly as the outcome of the interaction between feelings of inferiority and a striving to superiority. This results in an unconscious fictitious norm or ideal, going by the name of 'Leitlinie', which has to be actualized. 'Leitlinie' is a complicated concept. It is often translated in English as 'lifestyle'. This generic concept should not be confused with the sociological concept of lifestyle that designates a specific (middle-class) way of living. Lifestyle, in its original sense of the word, reasonably captures what Adler had in mind, although something is lost as well in this translation. 'Leitlinie' also means guideline and line of action, while at the same time it has motivational power. According to Adler, present behaviour is determined by an unconscious goal, an image of the fu-

ture that is partly formed in the past. What drives us is not only what lies behind us (as in psychoanalysis) but in what is ahead of us. This is why Adler's theory is characterized as 'fictional finalism' (Hall and Lindzey 1970, 121). Circumstances and adversity may result in the individual diverging from their 'Leitlinie', forcing them to seek compensations for the activities intended to give them the illusion of power. To the extent that these compensations are culturally acceptable and that the 'Zielstrebigkeit' (goal-directedness) is not too obsessive in nature, the individual is, according to Adler, a healthy person. Overcompensation, in which the compensatory activities dominate the function of the organism at the expense of other functions, in the end leads to psychic problems and pathology (Adler 1947, ff). In Adlerian theory, every human being is considered to be motivated by its Leitlinie, but there are culturally shaped differences in the space for individuals to follow or diverge from their Leitlinie.

Forethought, a concept developed by Albert Bandura (1986, 19 ff), one of the main advocates of the social cognitive approach, is another example of explicit theorizing about the future in psychology. For Bandura forethought is not a magic capacity to foretell the future, but 'the capacity to extrapolate future consequences from known facts' (Bandura 1986, 136). Social cognitive theory explains human function-

ing not in terms of inner forces (as does psychoanalysis) or controlled by external stimuli (as does behaviourism). Instead, Bandura sees behaviour, cognitive factors and environmental events operating as interacting determinants of each other ('triadic reciprocity'). The concept of triadic reciprocity describes the interaction between individual and environment in a more complex way than Adler's (1947) largely intrapsychic theory. It is unclear, however, how Bandura's theory addresses a rapidly changing social environment. Do the same regularities apply, that govern healthy psychological functioning in dealing with a relatively stable and simple social environment, when 'the known facts' are dismantled?

To explore this question in more detail we focus on one of the cognitive abilities central to Bandura's theory: forethought capability. It is Bandura's contention that the future acquires causal efficacy by being represented cognitively in the present (Bandura 1986, 19). Forethought then, consists of the capacity to regulate one's actions on the basis of predictors of response consequences (Bandura 1986, 205). This is possible because cues acquire predictive value through close observation of outcomes of one's actions. In a rapidly changing and complex social environment, it is precisely this predictive value that becomes problematic. The causal linkage between cues in the present and

future events, always a precarious linkage, of course, becomes less taken-for-granted when variety in life cycles increases. In addition, it is much more difficult to cognitively represent a future which is increasingly uncertain, complex, and dynamic. Moreover, the emphasis on control over one's future (proven to be an important cognitive ability for enhancing psychological well-being), is challenged when the horizon of what we desire expands and yet what we can control is diffused by the multiple possible life paths, and by interfering cultural and social processes. Finally, the conscious goal setting presupposed in Bandura's concept of forethought is insufficient in light of recent neuropsychological evidence that our conscious mind is poorly equipped to deal with complex processes. Unconscious processes play a much larger role in processing complex information (Donald 2001, 20; Dijksterhuis 2008), than social cognitive psychology takes into account.² So, interestingly, in this respect Adler's unconscious Leitlinie might be closer to current neuropsychological findings than social cognitive theory.

The above differences in theorizing futuring in terms of an unconscious Leitlinie or of conscious goal setting represent different images of the human being (conscious versus unconscious agent). Both theories concur, however, in the value they place on control. The social cognitive theories are exemplary of the

value placed on predictability and reliability in mainstream experimental psychology. Adler's theory risks a form of social control, by placing value on adaptation to cultural norms. How much room is there for people who do not abide to predictable or culturally accepted behaviour, perhaps because they face structural barriers when trying to realize their goals or *Leitlinie*? In addition, both theories concur in their reproduction of linear-causal thinking dominant in our Western society, which seems to us insufficient to deal with rapidly changing and complex social processes. Moreover, this view does not leave much room for creative future imagination in the sense that new perspectives are developed from multiple, uncertain, unknown or unknowable facts, which cannot (and need not) be inferred causally from either a *Leitlinie* or the present.

Complex future time

Frederick Towne Melges' temporal view on psychopathology allows for a more complex, non-linear way of theorizing the future, and for the inclusion of creative imagination. Psychiatrist Melges conceptualizes futuring as a way of generating future possibilities through 'the process of visualizing future images' (Melges 1982, 38). He complicates a linear progressive time perspective by making a distinction between objective and subjective time.³ Objective time refers to clock-time, which represents a linear-causal

time perspective. Subjective time or sense of time refers to how people experience time. Sense of time has three components: duration (long or short future time perspective) and rate (fast or slow pace); succession (different sequences of events unfolding); and temporal orientation (retrospective, prospective, or oriented at the present). These three components of subjective time play a role in developing an individualized kind of 'personal inner future' (e.g. how each person is experiencing his unique future).

Melges (1982) relates this personal inner future to psychiatric conditions: psychosis is characterized by temporal disintegration (incoherent sense of inner personal future, the past, present and future are mixed up); depression by spirals of hopelessness (the future is blocked and looks empty and meaningless); neurosis by dread of the future (ambivalent and foreboding sense of inner personal future) (Melges 1982). More specifically, Melges describes how the development of a sense of inner personal future is mediated by emotions. For instance, unpleasant emotions accompany a sense of time in which the future time perspective is foreshortened (e.g. anxiety accompanies the dread of a pending bad future). Pleasant emotions accompany slower time sense, in which a longer, open, and unrestricted time perspective is experienced. During pleasant states there is little need to accomplish

a goal within a short time span. From the progressive perspectives of Lombardo (2006) and Erikson (1968) it is argued that the capacity to hold a longer time perspective, including concern for later generations, is a complex developmental task that comes to the fore later on in the adult life-span and later on in the evolution of humanity.

Melges' (1982) concept of futuring, influenced by cybernetics, allows for a creative, open way of imagining the future through anticipation. According to Melges, futuring 'involves expectation, anticipation, and imagination, and specifically refers to the visualization of future images' (Melges 1982). While forethought implies linear thought in which current and past events result in one outcome, visualization is a form of thinking, in which parallel future images, and thus a variety of future possibilities, are simultaneously produced. This complex cognitive process involves both a more conservative (expectation) and a creative (imagination) process. Anticipation is 'the process of preparing to respond to a future event in advance of its occurrence' (Melges 1982, 20), while expectation visualises future possibilities based on extrapolation from past events. Where expectation of what we know results in reproducing our past, anticipation opens up to possibly new and unexpected events. Therefore anticipation is a less deterministic form of futuring,

in which new behaviour, feelings, and thoughts can emerge. Melges developed his temporal perspective with the treatment and prevention of mental illness in mind. However, his ideas could potentially be translated to our question regarding the enhancement of well-being and resilience (both of which are concepts referring to more than the absence of illness) via futuring.

Futuring and resilience

Lombardo (2006) notes that there are individual differences in the extent that people can anticipate multiple, possible futures. There are individual and structural differences in the capacity to envision the future. However, it is also a capacity that can be developed. Our imaginative capability is strengthened by using it, not unlike exercising our muscles. We expand our mind by enriching it with new possibilities. Training imaginative capacity could serve many purposes that bear relevance to resilience. For instance, increased capacity to seeing possibilities and thinking them out facilitates open-mindedness and makes us mentally flexible (Lombardo 2006). Mental flexibility is considered one of the main criteria for psychological well-being (Bohlmeijer 2012; Hermans & Hermans-Janssen 1995). Lombardo connects the capacity to imagine the future with a supposed need for certainty. It follows then, that the higher the need for certainty, the higher the need and/or relevance

for imagining the future. This would entail becoming more resourceful in times of crisis and change as a form of resilience. An important question for psychologists then, is if and how people with different personal, social, and cultural resources, can become more skilled at futuring as one way of developing resilience in the face of uncertainty.

Enhancing the anticipatory capacity, and future consciousness in general, might be even more important among people with a low sense of certainty. However, the risk of this line of reasoning is a separation (and consequent stigmatizing) between those who feel certain or have certainty in life (and are therefore more inclined to develop anticipatory skills) and those who feel uncertain. A related risk is blaming people for lacking courage to face uncertainty, without acknowledging existing inequalities in how uncertainty is distributed across the population. However, a low sense of certainty does not necessarily go hand in hand with low objective exposure to the vulnerabilities of life as the result, for instance of socio-economic inequality, job-related health problems, living in a situation of war or being a member of vulnerable groups (such as elderly, migrants, ill people). That being vulnerable is not the same as being a victim is an important notion in a resilience approach.

Post-traumatic growth theories, developed by such researchers as

Aaron Antonovsky (1987), can illustrate our point. Antonovsky investigated why some people after traumatic experiences (of, for instance, holocaust survivors) did not develop post-traumatic stress disorder and sometimes even functioned better than before the trauma experience. To explain this finding, he developed a salutogenic approach (searching for the origins of health) as a complement to dominant pathogenic approaches (focused on the origins of illness). His conclusion was that people differ in what he called the 'sense of coherence' (SOC), which he defined as 'a global orientation that expresses the extent to which one has a pervasive, enduring though dynamic feeling of confidence that:

- a) stimuli deriving from one's internal and external environments in the course of living are structured, predictable, and explicable;
- b) resources are available to one to meet the demands posed by these stimuli and;
- c) these demands are challenges, worthy of investment and engagement' (Antonovsky, 1987, 19).

There is ample evidence that a high SOC-score is related to better health (Bengel, Strittmatter and Willmann 1999; Eriksson and Lindström 2006), and that high SOC scores are found among groups with and without traumatic experiences. One might expect that people with a high SOC-score are better at shap-

ing their futures than people with a low score. In addition, it could be argued that the resilience to deal with uncertainty might actually be greater among those exposed to the vulnerability of life, because one has learned that a sense of uncertainty does not necessarily entail a loss of a sense of coherence.

Greater exposure to the vulnerability of life could also result in greater recognition of vulnerability in others. This recognition forms the heart of Butler's (2004) ethical and political project that she embarked upon after 9/11 to formulate an alternative for an antagonistic perception of difference in which others are perceived as threats. She does not propose to refrain from political action to diminish structural inequalities, but focuses instead on recognition of our inevitable vulnerability as human beings. Butler's proposal involves rethinking the meaning of strength and precariousness and, more importantly, rethinking the subject as relational. Butler makes clear that she does not argue against the importance of developing autonomy, but this striving should be complemented with a recognition that we are first of all relational beings who share vulnerability to the precariousness of life. Her arguments resonate well with our position that it is important to acknowledge that the concept of resilience should include a self-transcending dimension in order not to envision the development of resilience of one person at the

expense of others. Becoming resilient through futuring thus not only accommodates goals and values such as becoming an autonomous being, but also values that concern the other and the world as well (cf the concept of generativity; Erikson 1950).

Our proposal could easily be mistaken for further contributing to a moral discourse on individual responsibility (Lupton 1995), even of a responsibility of individuals beyond their own lives. However, to acknowledge the fact that my future is connected to the future of other people could perhaps, rather than being a burden, be a realisation of our relational being (Gergen 2009). Instead of encouraging people to take the whole world on their shoulders, we propose a more creative (possibly inspiring and fun) route of using narrative futuring as an individual and collective instrument for reflection. This can be done, for instance, in group sessions by using imagination in a process of producing shared future narratives about environmental, political or social issues and about collective strategies to realize the desired outcomes (Mooren 2011). Personal and group prospective reflection can also be achieved via writing letters from the future. This latter type of prospective reflection serves as an example case in the next paragraph to illustrate the relevance of a narrative approach to futuring.

A narrative approach to futuring in psychology

The development of a narrative approach in psychology started in the 1980s. Narrative psychology takes storytelling as root metaphor for human thought and action (Sarbin 1986), for identity construction (Polkinghorne 1988), and for giving meaning to life (Bruner 1990). Storytelling provides a powerful way of constructing identity in the face of social crisis and change because of its capacity to create coherence and meaning (Polkinghorne 1988; Bohlmeijer 2007). Time plays an important role in narrative psychology, although the future is seldom explicitly theorized (Sools 2012; Squire 2012). Paul Ricoeur (1984) for instance, who had a huge influence on narrative psychology, hardly mentions the future in his seminal work on *Time and Narrative*, and when he does, it is predominantly in linear terms. Due to the 'linear character of the speech chain ... it follows that retrospection and anticipation are subjected to the same conditions of temporal linearity' (Ricoeur 1984, 75). The future comes to the fore in Ricoeur's reference to the conditional tense⁴ in narrative, which is used to signal anticipated information. In this view, the future remains a relatively empty notion, because anticipated information 'only means that the information is given prematurely in relation to the moment of its realization' (Ricoeur 1984, 74).

Mark Freeman (1993), a student

of Ricoeur, wrote intricately on temporal orientation and narrative. He sheds light on how we rewrite our past from the present, and focuses mainly on retrospective processes of identity construction (Freeman 1993; 2009). The few times when he does refer to the future, it is either in the negative sense of 'narrative foreclosure', indicating the end of story (Freeman, 2000; 2011), or as an empty space that yet has to acquire meaning when it becomes present. 'So it is that we must often await the future in order to discern more fully the meaning and significance of what has gone on in the past' (Freeman 2009, 24). As opposed to the full meaning and significance that only the past and present can acquire, the future appears in bits and pieces, in the form of hints of what might happen. The emphasis on retrospection and memory in Freeman's work seems to arise from his diagnosis of our contemporary era, in which our image of the future is no longer stable and enduring. Freeman describes 'the situation in which we find ourselves' as 'living in waiting, in anticipation, not quite knowing what is going on now, much less what the future will bring, and relying on hindsight, again and again, to discern what meaning there may be' (Freeman 2009, 90). He seems uneasy with a present that is an 'open, indeterminate space, largely devoid of meaning' (Freeman 2009). Freeman sees the route out of narrative foreclosure not

so much in projecting ourselves into the future, but in gaining self-knowledge by telling autobiographical stories. His psychoanalytical affinity here seems to play a role in his contention that only through hindsight can we come to understand that 'the present differs from the past and that it will not be repeated in the future' (Freeman 2009, 31).

A more positive engagement with the future comes to the fore in the concept of narrative imagination. This 'fundamentally inventive capacity' (Randall & McKim 2004) links 'the way we imagine our lives' to 'the way we are going to go on living our lives.' It is 'the genre through which events become experiences' (Hillman 1975, 146 in: Randall and McKim 2004). According to Martha Nussbaum, narrative imagination (defined as 'the ability to be an intelligent reader of another person's story'), enhances the ability 'to empathize with others and to put oneself in another's place' (Nussbaum 1997, 11). The multiple perspectives readers engage with when reading literature increase empathy. William L. Randall and A. Elizabeth McKim (2004) translate this literary competence to narrative competence in everyday life, and propose its relevance for developing practical wisdom. Because narrative imagination is par excellence the narrative mode that deals creatively with an open, uncertain future, developing this capacity arguably facilitates becoming resilient in a way that fits coping with

an uncertain, complex, dynamic future. To explore this assumption we now take as an example on-going research at the life-story lab at Twente University.

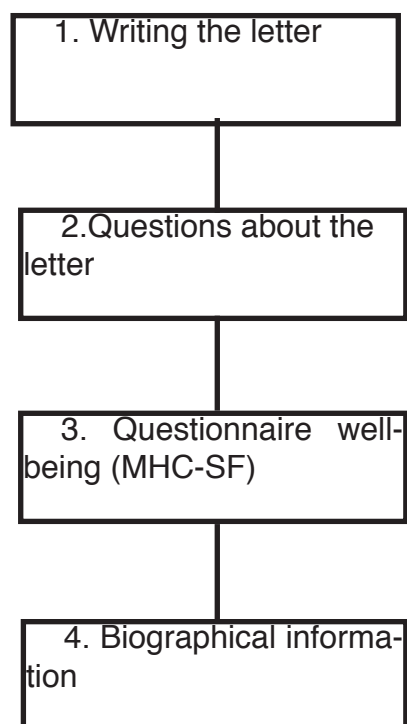
Letters from the future

In December 2011 the 'Letters from the Future Project' started at the life-story lab. The goal of the study was to gain insight into the function of one particular narrative medium - a letter from the future - by studying the relationship between the content, the structure, form and audience of these letters with psychological well-being. In contrast to life story interviews (usually hours-long oral texts) letters are short, written texts. Because life story interviews are the main data collection and intervention method in narrative psychology, written letters provide an interesting new medium for research. The letter exercise is an adaptation from an exercise used in storytelling groups in mental health promotion settings in the Netherlands (Bohlmeijer 2007). However, currently there are no empirical studies into if and how such letters function to promote well-being.

A practical advantage of using letters rather than interviews is that collecting letters online is much less time-consuming than interviews. However, sufficient narrative competence of participants is required. They have to be willing and able to read, write, and use a computer. In

the recruitment process and in the instructions we emphasise that no special writing skills are necessary and that all letters are welcome. Nevertheless, we anticipated a literacy bias in our sample. However, there is also evidence in favour of using online tools. An advantage of online self-help programmes for instance is that these programmes are available to anyone with access to the internet, which facilitates easy access from home. Not only spatially but also temporally the threshold to participate is lowered, because participants can choose a time that fits their daily routines. Moreover, physical presence is no longer necessary, and the internet provides a high degree of anonymity that is positively evaluated (Gerhards et al. 2011). Our actual sample of over 600 letters, collected between December 2011 and May 2012, consists of a diverse group of participants: there are both men and women, from lower and higher educational backgrounds and socioeconomic status, from different age groups, and at least two nationalities (the first phase consists of Dutch and German⁵ participants, and the second phase which started in May 2012 targets an international participant group, starting with one of the North African “Arab Spring” countries, see www.utwente.nl/lifestorylab).

Figure 1. Research Design letters from the future project



In the project we invite participants to donate letters from the future online at the website of the life-story lab. They follow a four step procedure (see figure 1). Firstly, they are asked to vividly imagine a particular situation at a particular moment in the future, in which something positive has been realised. By asking for particulars, we aim to invoke what Tom Wengraf (2001) calls ‘particular incident narratives’. Participants are invited to write a letter to someone in the present from their experience of this particular, positively

evaluated situation. Secondly, some open questions follow regarding the experience of writing the letter, the motivation for writing and so on. Thirdly, participants are asked to fill out the Mental Health Continuum Short Form (MHC-SF), a questionnaire measuring psychological, emotional, and social dimensions of positive mental health (Lamers et al. 2011). Finally, they provide biographical information regarding their gender, age, socio-economic background and so on. At the end participants are asked for their informed consent to use their letter for research purposes. The additional questions (step 2 t/m 4) are optional as is the option to share their letters by publishing them online (about one third of the participants agree to share their letters online).

The resulting letters show great variety in terms of content (personal and societal themes, different domains of life, more or less fictional), structure (for instance regressive, progressive, and stable plots), form (formal and informal, length, tone, more or less literary), genre (for instance letter, life-review, tutorial, utopia, testament), audience (directed at the present self or others), and temporal orientation (for instance long and short horizon, proportion of retrospective, prospective and present-oriented sentences).

Example 1. Ironic expression of personal achievement in the near future

2011, reading behind the computer in my office at the university.

Honorabel Me

Hey Me, cool that I bump into you, the fact is that I want to tell you than I am really proud of us. The way you nowadays respond to your duties, assignments and other responsibilities, not postponing them any longer, gives me an intense feeling of love for you, and thus for myself. I still remember well how difficult this was ten years ago. You were very talented in avoiding your responsibilities. That came in handy for momentary pleasures, but if you had persisted in it, it would have been a disaster for your long term happiness.

So, cool that you became how I wanted to be, we fixed that nicely.

Greetings (I don't give you a smacker, no idea how one takes it nowadays, but in 2011 it is still a bit weird to kiss oneself)

You, byyyy .

Example 2. Utopian manifest of the distant future

A life in and with nature, the year 5000

Dear me of times gone by

[...] The by mankind chosen lifestyle was self-destructive in nature. When this started to dawn on man, it already was too late: the earth became uninhabitable. Only some people survived. Those who did, came together to start a new life. They let nature have her way and soon extensive woods emerged, rich with food and animals, and clear waters and clean air. Nowadays man and Nature are one. We only eat the old animals. And what we find in the woods and in the vegetable gardens. We life together. What is mine, also belongs to my neighbour; when my neighbour helps me out, I return the gesture. Everything is ours, but at the same time we don't have personal

belongings; stealing therefore, is impossible [...]. When I want to shine, it is not to outshine others, but to gain respect and it is to be able to better help myself and others. We take care of each other and live as one great family. We believe that when it is the right moment and we make an effort to come to know each other we can befriend everyone. We accept and respect everyone and try to be as little judgmental as is possible.

So, let life find its own way, and in the end everything will be all right.

These data provide rich material to study how narrative futuring works. At this point, we would like to share some preliminary findings, to outline the possible relevance of a narrative approach to futuring.

Firstly, the narrative instrument we used, e.g. letters from the future, seems to invite implicit, unconscious goal setting, in addition to the more explicit goal setting in most psychological research on this process (see, for instance, Emmons 1999). The distinction between conscious and unconscious goal-setting thus seems to get blurred. Even when writers at first consciously define which goals they strive for, and then write their letters, some report that unexpected goals emerge. In other words, their own writing surprises them, which is an indication that they engage in a truly creative process. Writing thus can be considered a generative and unpredictable process.

Secondly, the goals and values appearing in the letters acquire meaning in a specific and highly per-

sonalised context, in which different values are brought into relation with each other. This characteristic of the letters becomes more pronounced the more the letters are written in the narrative mode rather than in the paradigmatic mode (Bruner 1986). The letters can accordingly be situated on a continuum from more to less narrative (e.g. in highly narrative letters values are narrated more vividly, concretely and therefore closer to lived experience, whereas letters in the paradigmatic mode typically present values as general, abstract categories). Thirdly, a functional analysis of the letters shows that they fulfil a myriad of roles, for instance emotional (e.g. to motivate, grieve, process); social (e.g. promise, share, express pride, communicate); educational (e.g. give and receive advice); behavioural (e.g. to encourage action, guide choices); spiritual-existential (to establish a value orientation, belief and hope, to prophesise); autobiographical (to look back on one's imagined life, to remember and project desired and valued life-trajectories).

Finally, the letters can be categorised according to their stance towards the future: 1) control, involving planned goal-directed behaviour, 2) openness, involving an open, welcoming and accepting attitude in anticipation of an unknown future, 3) understanding, involving a hermeneutical enterprise of making sense of what is to come, and 4) intrinsic, concerned with future imagi-

nation for its own sake rather than to achieve some alternate goal. These last two orientations extend the control- and prediction oriented way of theorizing the future in theories of Adler and Bandura, and the more open, creative future time in the theories of Lombardo and Melges. Taken together, these four orientations and the myriad functions can each be considered a way of anticipating crisis and change.

As these functions indicate, the letters, as a specific form of narrative futuring can be perceived as 'treasury...into which we can enter' (Bruner 1990, 54). Stories 'can be tried on for psychological size, accepted if they fit, rejected if they pinch identity or compete with established commitments' (Bruner 1990, 54). Thus, they provide a way to creatively and concretely explore the consequences of future possibilities, and gain a lived understanding of which values we hold dear. An advantage of this process of narrative imagination is that it potentially counters the ethical repercussions mentioned in the introduction to this article: imposing values; fostering relativity; and reinforcing a one-sided moral obligation. It also provides a way to evaluate the multiple and alternative possibilities that arise in the course of futuring. Which future is desirable, and which one is of more value than another, instead of being an abstract question, becomes a very real and practical one in the letters.

The outcome of the prospective reflection facilitated by the letter is a personalized value-orientation. As such it is a projection into the future, but it is an act of imagination which matters for the here and now. As the overview of possible functions indicates, it is a powerful means to organize current identity, thought, and action, and foster prospective consciousness. The psychological function of imagining the future, then, is not so much about prediction. It allows us to make informed choices in the here and now, which might guide us towards a better future (Glen 2009), but, more importantly, imagining the future seems to have an all-over organising and motivating effect. As the content of the letters shows, the image of this better future could entail a nearby future for an individual person as well as a more distant future involving concerns beyond personal interests. Which one of these images corresponds to high levels of well-being, is part of our on-going analysis. It is important to acknowledge though, that our search for ways of enhancing resilience is not restricted to the immediate effects on personal well-being, but also on long-term, more sustainable effects on collective well-being.

The brief overview of possible functions outlined here is a first step to empirically study if, how, under what circumstances, for whom and for what purposes narrative futuring works. The diversity of the sample

will additionally be used to gain insight in patterns of sameness and difference in narrative futuring along intersecting axes of identity.

Conclusions and discussion

In this article, we developed a narrative-psychological approach to futuring in order to address our question on becoming resilient in the face of crisis and change. We discussed the consequences of experiencing crisis and change on the individual level in terms of vulnerability to the precariousness of life. As the sense of vulnerability increases, the need for certainty might increase as well. We hypothesised that the higher the need for certainty, the higher the need and/or relevance for imagining the future. This would entail becoming more resourceful in times of crisis and change as a form of resilience. Narrative imagination could provide a powerful way of becoming resilient in this sense. Preliminary results from our letters from the future project indicate that there are a myriad of functions and stances toward the future involved in narrative futuring. The multitude of functions and stances - which all on a more general level perform the function of guiding current thought and action - open up a broad spectrum of resilience processes. Because there are differences in the extent to which people need or want certainty, and to the extent to which they have the capacity for narrative futuring, an important question for future em-

pirical research is if and how people with different personal, social, and cultural resources can become more skilled at narrative futuring as one way of developing resilience in the face of uncertainty.

When engaging in this project of studying empirically how to enhance narrative futuring, some critical remarks are needed. Not all people might want or need to increase their capacity to imagine the future. For some enhancing an already prominent skill might result in escapism. For others their imaginative capacity might be very well developed, but be insufficient or even frustrating in the face of structural barriers and inequalities. Moreover, enhancing narrative futuring runs the risk of reinforcing discourses in which being happy becomes a moral obligation (Ahmed 2010), and in which people are blamed for their illness (Lupton 1995; Sontag 1979). These and other possible negative effects provide arguments to be critical of the universalising tendency of especially the early psychological theories on futuring. The goal then should be to provide situated knowledge of when and how futuring takes place, and when and how it can be a way of enhancing resilience. Questions to explore are, for instance, when narrative futuring takes place spontaneously in the course of everyday life, who engages in this process, and how? The overview of possible functions of narrative futuring we described provides further direction

to study which type of function matters and, importantly, also when and for whom enhancing narrative futuring is not desirable or possible.

Our research into letters from the future thus provides a way to systematically address the question of how narrative futuring works and the work it does. The turn to a narrative approach in psychology, and an inclusion of different stances towards the future, affects the dynamics of the methodological and epistemological approach in psychology. First, a mixture of qualitative and quantitative methods is necessary to capture both an idiosyncratic understanding, and nomothetic explanation of narrative futuring. This implies that our methodologies should not only be mixed-method, but also interdisciplinary or even transdisciplinary, involving both hermeneutical and socio-scientific methodological repertoire. To increase the chances of success of this ambitious project, we follow the dreams of two leading narrative psychologists, Jerome S. Bruner and Donald Polkinghorne. We infer from Bruner's (1986, 1990) plea that psychologists and our colleagues in the humanities need to learn to productively communicate and cooperate with each other. We understand Polkinghorne's (1988) contribution as a wish to establish a fruitful cooperation between clinical psychologists (who have a lot of experience with forms of narrative futuring in actual practice) and academic psychologists who study how

narrative futuring works.

Second, we might have to acknowledge what it means for our methodologies when we move from prediction and control of the future as central focus in psychological research, to a perspective in which we recognize that choices in the here-and-now change the future unfolding. This perspective implies that patterns are not wholly predetermined from past to present to future, but that they can change. It also implies that asking people to imagine the future in a research setting already is an intervention that changes current and future affairs. The role of the researcher thus has to be taken into account. More specifically, this requires openness within psychology towards a revision of the still dominant idea of the neutral observing researcher. A critical attitude towards developing narrative futuring is also important; to make sure that stimulating narrative futuring does not become another control mechanism. Understanding the future runs the risk of doing just that, instead of allowing the gift of the future to unfold (Squire 2012).

Finally, if our search for proper psychological theorizing about the future has taught us one thing, it is the pervasive emphasis on retrospective temporal orientation in psychology. The emphasis on looking back, as well as the predominance of linear thinking in mainstream psychological theory, could be an indication of the value placed on predict-

ability and reliability in psychology. However, we encountered at least partly the same focus on linearity, and on retrospective temporal orientation in narrative psychological theory. Perhaps the difficulty to distance ourselves from linear temporal thinking is due to the pervasiveness of clock time in our Western society. Even the study of narrative imagination, which in principle involves both memory and looking forward, concerns more often imagining the past than the future. Whatever its causes, at this point, we tentatively conclude that, both theoretically and empirically, the future seems underdeveloped in (narrative) psychology.

Endnotes

¹ Lombardo is one of the main representatives of future consciousness studies, an interdisciplinary field that developed from the 1970s onwards.

² Theories about psychological control, conceptualized as 'the ability to cause or influence intended outcomes by differential responding and results in a sense of effectiveness desired by the individual person' (Rodin 1986, 141), share his emphasis on prediction and consciously influencing future outcomes.

³ In addition, Melges (1982) challenges linear-causal conceptions and experiences, by referring to cultural varieties in time experience

and conceptions of time. He notes the possibility of a cyclical ordering of time, and timelessness that can be found in some cultural contexts, in dreams, and in for instance Jung's notion of synchronicity. How these different time conceptions and experiences relate to psychological well-being is a research question that Melges left unanswered, perhaps due to his early death.

⁴ The conditional sense is a grammatical construction in the English language. A conditional sentence shows that an action is reliant on something else (there's a condition). There are three types of conditionals: it's going to happen - it's only going to happen if something else happens - it's never going to happen (source <http://www.learnenglish.de/grammar/conditionaltext.htm>)

⁵ Respondents were partly recruited among students (and their friends and family) from University of Twente, partly among other populations. Because of its geographical situation near Germany, the University hosts a considerable amount of German students. This accounts for the letters in German that we received.

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Clare Hemmings. 2011. *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory*. Durham and London: Duke University Press. 288 pp. Paperback. ISBN: 9780822349167

In *Why Stories Matter* (2011) Clare Hemmings follows several feminist journals (e.g. *Signs*, *Feminist Theory*, *Feminist Review*) arguing that over the past couple of decades themes of progress, loss, and return have come to dominate Western feminist theory. This has demanded not only a rethinking of Western feminist theory, but also the ways in which histories are constructed. As Hemmings suggests, ‘feminist theorists need to pay attention to the amenability of our own stories, narrative constructs, and grammatical forms to discursive uses of gender and feminism we might otherwise wish to disentangle ourselves from if history is not simply to repeat itself’ (2). In this spirit, Hemmings’ interest lies not in what she prescribes as a “corrective” story telling or bringing forth that which has been left out of the Western feminist archive, but rather a questioning of the very politics and rea-

soning that ‘sustain one version of history as more true than another, despite the fact that we know that history is more complicated than the stories we tell about it’ (15-16).

Why Stories Matter offers a well-structured analysis and convincing critique of reoccurring Western feminist narratives of progress, loss, and return. To illustrate her points, Hemmings uses back-to-back citations from various journal issues, at times using as many as three or four quotations in a row, to expose repeated patterns in Western feminist thought across a multitude of disciplines. Rather than citing the authors of the articles Hemmings instead cites the journal and year of its publication. This nontraditional technique proves effective as it demonstrates the power of institutional production and the appropriation of individualized positions. Hemmings stresses that in ‘citing journal place and time rather

than author, I have situated these narratives not only as shared by a group of individuals, but also as institutionally resonant...my point is that our reading and writing of Western feminist stories locates us institutionally rather than only in relation to individual others' (134). Hemmings' citation tactics alone uncover a troubling framework in Western feminist writing securely positioned in repetitious narration rendering itself stagnant, commonplace and in desperate need of interruption.

The first half of Hemmings' book addresses narratives of progress, loss, and return dedicating a chapter to each of these themes. The Progress narrative, as Hemmings explains, is most commonly portrayed as a positive account marking success and accomplishment. This, she argues, is typically relayed in a chronological order that brings the audience from a Western feminist past (typically the 1970s) to a complex feminist present, one that credits the shifts in Western feminist thought as opening a new space for contemplation. Hemmings suggests this technique distances itself from earlier readings incorporating words such as 'patriarchy', 'woman', 'female subordination', and instead focuses on power relations such as gender, race and ethnicity, sexuality, and class. The story of progress, according to Hemmings, is marked by a redemptive underpinning in so much as it uses a corrective structure to make it a story of transfor-

mation, strategically outlined to deconstruct, move beyond, and move forward (35). In Hemmings' introduction she discusses her reasoning for not wanting to 'point out the errors...and suggest other pasts' (12) primarily because in telling the past, one is prompted by the position they wish to occupy in the present. However, should presenting the past through a position held in the present be examined as negative? In presenting 'other' histories, must we assume that there were 'errors' in the previously told stories of the past? Could it be that in revisiting histories, rereading them, and providing examples of other histories that were perhaps overshadowed by more dominant narratives, we can address the many layers of feminist history and expose the dangers of the teleological narratives/histories that concern Hemmings?

Hemmings' next chapter, 'Loss', works in conjunction with her previous chapter on progress. Both are noted as being the most common stories depicted, as they are mutually dependent on each other - recovering lost histories yields progress. However, loss is not merely about the recovery of other stories, it is also a critique of the progressive narrative; here post-structuralism is held responsible for the de-politicization of feminist commitments. In this story, 'feminist academics and a new generation of women have both inherited and contributed to this loss, particularly through their

lack of interest in recent feminist history and an acceptance of political individualism' (4). In this section, Hemmings does not shy away from voicing her own opinions and concerns on feminism in the academic arena and the isolation of its generational lineage. She concludes, '[s]ubjects of progress and loss narratives insist on their absolute separation from one another, missing the ways in which they utilize and instantiate a common historiography, missing the ways in which that historiography grounds post-, quasi-, or antifeminist claims as well' (83).

Hemming's final chapter, 'Return', acts as a joining of the two narratives. The return narrative is one which aims to remedy both stories of progress and loss through a current position held in the present. '[R]eturn narratives can thus affirm a common present by affirming a shared past' even if the previous narratives were secured and marked through difference (98).

The last half of Hemmings' *Why Stories Matter* focuses on practices of citation as a potential approach to telling common feminist stories differently. Hemmings exercises her concept of re-citation by offering a re-reading of Monique Wittig via Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*. Hemmings' ability to re-cite Butler through Wittig offers an alternative position (not marked in 'Foucauldian' references) and makes available a rich lesbian feminist history of materialist sexual politics.

Hemmings' demonstration of re-citation results in not only opening up other histories, but also recognizes the importance of reflective thinking as an exercise to help one extract from it alternative modes and methods of institutional and political engagement in the present. Confronting recent attempts to reread the subject of Western feminist thought through modes of empathy and agency, Hemmings, in her final chapter 'Affective Subjects', argues that empathy often 'manages' rather than 'transforms' the subject/object relation. Hemmings goes on to explain empathy as 'always marked by that which cannot be empathized with and draws that limit as a self-evident boundary for what (and who) can be included in feminism itself' (197). Taking cues from Gayatri Spivak and Julia Kristeva, Hemmings discusses shock and horror as providing possible ruptures in Western feminist narratives of progress, loss, and return. However, through the analysis of several case studies, Hemmings finds that in confronting horror it reciprocally produces a limit to the subject/object relation. Hemmings resolves that horror casts out the abject and, as a result, reconfigures 'feminist subjectivity as coherent' and 'mark[s] others as fully readable within its singular temporality' (223). Therefore Hemmings returns to recitation as a practice refusing to resolve the limitations noted in her previous critiques. Hemmings concludes, 'judgements that are based

in the protection of a singular vision of a Western feminist past, present, and future are bound to reproduce rather than challenge' the amenabilities of feminist storytelling (226). It is in this spirit that Hemmings' *Why Stories Matter* requests a move towards new subversive and unpredictable narratives, which can be made evident if we simply wish for history not to repeat itself.

Clare Hemming's *Why Stories Matter* delivers a valuable perspective on how historical feminist writing is received and functions today. For anyone interested in feminist theory, historiography, and the writing of feminism into history, this book should be compulsory reading.

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Sara Ahmed. 2010. *The Promise of Happiness*. Durham and London: Duke University Press. 328 pp. Paperback.

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I was holding on to a love I knew so long
I thought it must be keeping me afloat
Only when I was down,
Only when I was drowning.
Did I finally feel the hands on my throat
(The Thermals 'I Let it Go' 2009)

Ahmed's book directs us to recognise the role of affect in the discipline of our personal, political and social orders. Irreverent to the self-help market, *The Promise of Happiness*, along with (guilty) pleasures of academic-activist-popular books (e.g. Halberstam 2011; Easton & Hardy 2009; Behrendt & Ruotola-Behrendt 2005), zines, superfox treatise, unrelenting support and mix-cds from friends, has provided me with a rich resource to help reconfigure a life turned upside down, and engage an ocean of bad feeling, failure and unhappiness. The speech act Ahmed starts from – "I just want you to be happy" - has of course been uttered by my parents in a limited acknowledgement of my same-sex partner.

Blame has been placed on my feminist and queer orientations in my role as a killjoy bent on spoiling the happiness of the family dinner table. Ahmed even touches on the hopeless attempts that my ex-girlfriend and I engaged in to make each other (and convince others that we were) 'happy' to the detriment of my mental health and inevitable exhausting and painful breakup. Ahmed's main argument that the promise of happiness (including its objects, rituals and trajectory) is located in the production of privilege (in marriage, family, monogamy, employment, money, heterosexuality, gender norms and citizenship) resonates very well with the everyday life of this undone queer feminist subject.

This book carves out a home within feminist cultural studies of emotion and affect that push forward an engagement with bad feelings (Nguyen 2010), failure (Halberstam 2011), shame (Munt 2007),

and violence (Cvetkovich 2003). Ahmed turns the situation around to understand the promise of happiness as a process of concealment that hides inequalities and justifies the oppression of 'others' under the rubric of the 'good life'. In this argument happiness plays a neo-liberal trick, placing responsibility on the individual to achieve authentic happiness and obscures diverse ways of being. In short; queers, feminists and migrants all threaten to expose the unhappiness of the scripts and duties of happiness and can only be seen as the cause of bad feeling. Feminists cause sexism. Migrants need to get over racism. Homophobia no longer exists. Nobody wants to break the illusion of happiness and those who refuse to play along and dare to make alternative lives in queer, feminist and migrant life worlds are stigmatised as unhappy, negative and difficult 'affect aliens' (Ahmed 2010, 158). Nonetheless it is through engagement with negative affect experienced by bodies that refuse to be placed in the social order that Ahmed argues we can explore the "feelings of structure" [...] how structures get under our skin' (Ahmed 2010, 216). In this sense it is those that have been 'undone by suffering' that Ahmed views as potential 'agents of ethical transformation' (Ahmed 2010, 216). Unhappiness is not something that should be simply overcome or eradicated but should signal the limits of the promise of happiness and motivate

'affect aliens' to create life worlds around a different set of wants and needs.

Ahmed constructs her cultural critique from readings of popular literature and film including *Mrs Dalloway*, *The Well of Loneliness*, *Rubyfruit Jungle*, *Bend it Like Beckham* and *Children of Men*. Her ideas constitute a theoretical framework for an empirical study into the everyday life worlds of queers, feminists and migrants. However an empirical investigation of how culture and affect are used to resist structures and create different ways of being and grassroots life worlds is not realised in Ahmed's book. Grassroots music-making is not included in Ahmed's archives despite its use by marginal groups in the creation of resistant life worlds (e.g. Smith 1997). Nonetheless Sara Ahmed makes crucial theoretical contributions towards an understanding of the tensions in UK contemporary queer feminist life and activism. Contemporary commentators have identified the 'resurgence' of feminism, the goal to 'normalise' feminism and a 'new generation' of feminist activists (e.g. MacKay 2011). These are important interventions in a field that has previously focused on the political apathy of young women. However, what is often missing from these accounts is an admission that the doing of feminism can be difficult and challenging. What happens when the feminist collective or women-only space fails to be a positive ex-

perience? What are the options for those who do not fit in?

In 1972 Jo Freeman critiqued the white middle-class heterosexual feminine values of feminist groups. This breakdown of feminist organisations across lines of race, class, sexuality, ability and gender is well documented. Ahmed's assertion that 'feminist consciousness can thus be thought of as consciousness of the violence and power that are concealed under the languages of civility and love, rather than simply consciousness of gender as a site of restriction of possibility' (Ahmed 2010, 86) is well placed to interrogate the affective bonds and spaces in feminism and other progressive social movements. For instance, in riot grrrl, moments of 'girl love' also reveal failures, 'affect aliens' and bad feelings. Mimi Thi Nguyen's work in this area identifies how queers of colour are constructed as problematic interruptions to a linear historical narrative of feminism (Nguyen 2010). This links to Ahmed's concept of the 'melancholic migrant' (Ahmed 2010, 121) who will not let go of racist suffering and pressure felt by queers of colour and refuse to take part in a fantasy of forgetting racism or comply with a 'happiness duty'. Likewise LGBT social movements have also invoked positive affect as an important counterpoint to shame, guilt and silence suffered as an effect of the violence of straight happiness. Ahmed astutely identifies how rights and recognition for

same-sex relationships act as gifts from straight society that obscure queer labour, struggle and diverse life worlds generated by queer activism. In this sense Ahmed warns against being a 'happy queer' to instead be 'happily queer' (Ahmed 2010, 117): happy to be the cause of unhappiness and discomfort, push the straight lines of happiness scripts, be defiant, irreverent and make trouble. As activists and academics of social movements and social theory I agree with Ahmed that we need to engage with what hurts, what causes us pain, what we have learned to tread quietly around for the sake of maintaining a happy united front. We need to be ready to investigate how happiness makes some personhoods more valuable than others and be prepared to make trouble and disrupt the lines drawn around our biographies, cultures and lives.

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**Judith Jack Halberstam. 2011. *The Queer Art of Failure*. Durham and London: Duke University Press. 224 pp. Paperback.
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Why would anyone devote their time to a project on failure? Judith Halberstam has willfully taken the risk of not being taken seriously. Her new book is dedicated to ‘all of history’s losers’ – it brushes the dust from the forgotten archives of those who seemingly do not write history. Yet the aim of this truly inspiring and thought-provoking publication is not to rescue any alternative visions or forms of knowledge from the bottomless pit of oblivion. *The Queer Art of Failure* celebrates forgetfulness, spectacular failure and outlawed absurdity. In this sense it is rather an anti-archive manifesto that looks for a political alternative in ‘low theory’ and what she calls ‘silly archives’ (Halberstam 2011, 19). In a witty style, Halberstam dismantles the overwhelming logic of success that is inevitably linked to the capitalist mode of production and heteronormative hegemony. Instead of guiding this journey with a pantheon

of dead white philosophers, she provocatively quotes SpongeBob SquarePants and The Sex Pistols. From the animated revolt of cartoon characters, through stupid comedies for adolescent males and Valerie Solanas’ anti-male manifesto, to Yoko Ono and queer artists who strive to capture unbecoming, *The Queer Art of Failure* strikes with anti-heroines and anti-heroes making a detour from the conventional, academic, proper mode of writing theory. Halberstam avoids fetishizing or glorifying the queer rebellion, resistance and counterhegemony. Although some of the chapters of the book were available before in other edited volumes such as *Queering the Non/human* (Giffney and Hird 2008) or in articles (Halberstam 2008), the framework of failure as a new iteration of the anti-social turn in queer theory proposed by Halberstam forms a very coherent and powerful structure. In each chapter

she boldly outlines queer theory's relation towards cultural phenomena that can be easily dismissed as unacademic, childish, insignificant or even as racist and homophobic (e.g. the movie *Dude, Where's my Car?*)

In a neoliberal system that rests upon the idea that every individual is an architect of his or her own fortune, behind every winner, there is a crowd of losers. From the introduction onwards Halberstam argues that it is exactly this pressure to be successful along with the desire to be taken seriously that makes people stay on well-trodden paths, instead of exploring unknown territories of alternative knowledges and queer strategies of unknowing. She even writes that 'failing is something queers do and have always done exceptionally well' (Halberstam 2011, 3). This statement raises some questions: Why would queers serve as scapegoats? Can somebody excel at failing and should we then treat it as a form of success? For Sara Ahmed, to queer something is to disturb the order of things (Ahmed 2006, 161). According to Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner the 'queer world is a space of entrances, exits, unsystematized lines of acquaintance, projecting horizons, typifying examples, alternate routes, blockages, incommensurate geographies' (Berlant and Warner 2005, 198). In this sense failure and the disturbance of heteronormative teleologies are always inscribed in

queerness. In *The Queer Art of Failure* Halberstam goes even further and questions the normativity of the humanness for the purpose of arguing for failure as a truly queer way of life.

The first chapter introduces a lively menagerie of both animated and blood-and-flesh species that in Halberstam's analysis gracefully transcend the hetero-familial schemes of reproductive and productive imperatives. With creatures like a Hegelian possum from the animated movie *Over the Hedge*, 'feminist' chickens from *Chicken Run* and 'gay' penguins from the New York Zoo, Halberstam vividly and convincingly shows that larger-than-human worlds are not only a valuable source of critiques of capitalism, of the heteronormative order and of kinship structures, but that they also offer alternative scenarios of an anarcho-queer revolt. It might seem counterintuitive or even dangerous to engage in an argument that links animals and queerness. Greta Gaard in her article 'Toward a Queer Ecofeminism' warns that 'queers are feminized, animalized, eroticized, and naturalized in a culture that devalues women, animals, and sexuality' (Gaard 1997, 119). However, Halberstam explores this connection amidst its negative connotations in order to un-think modernist rigid taxidermic taxonomies and to re-think queer embodiment and social relations. Drawing on the work of Donna Haraway she

invests in monstrous cyborg unities, and in this way manages to add 'queer' to the Marxist dictionary (Haraway 1996). In the children's animation *Chicken Run* Halberstam traces Gramscian structures of counterhegemony and Hardt's and Negri's praise of collectivity and technologically enhanced multitude (Hardt and Negri 2005). Paradoxically the rebellious feminist potential of this animation has already been acknowledged and taken very seriously by the Iranian political regime – the documentary *Traces of Zionism in World Cinema* from 2008 focuses on *Chicken Run* as a western tool for smuggling revolutionary propaganda (IRINN TV). Indeed, Halberstam would probably agree that what she calls the 'Pixarvolt' genre in kids films is a highly political enterprise, which by privileging collective cooperation over selfish individualism, diverse communities over untrammelled consumption and social bonding over family kinships, poses a threat to both authoritarian and neoliberal political regimes. Her analysis makes important connections between the elements of the animation/animality/animism triad. This allows us to imagine what transcending borders between the human and the nonhuman, reality and imagination, life and non-life, objects and subjects, might look like.

In the second chapter Halberstam continues to build the framework of failure as a way of life. This time she turns to stupidity and

forgetfulness as queer strategies that help to reveal false narratives of heteronormative continuity and succession. By using the counter-example of loopy idiocy in *Dude, Where's My Car?* Halberstam paints a startlingly accurate analysis of the messy relationships between amnesia, stupidity, masculinity, whiteness and temporality. Later she points out that stupidity and forgetfulness are deeply gendered ways of knowing. While 'Dudes' exemplifies male stupidity, an amnesiac fish named Dory from *Finding Nemo* represents a female model of queer time, knowledge, kinship and cooperation.

In chapter three Halberstam eloquently challenges queer theory's rejection of the child figure, criticized as the embodiment of 'reproductive futurism' (Edelman 2004), by recognizing childhood and childishness as queer experiences. Leaving the Darwinian motto of winners aside, she focuses on the 'not close enough' losers of the Olympics photographed by Tracy Moffat, the punk junkies from *Trainspotting*, George Brassai's social outcasts in 1930s Paris, and a butch lesbian from *The L Word*. The failure of this last character, according to Halberstam, legitimizes the fabulous lesbian figure of this popular TV series that successfully attracts a heteronormative gaze. She writes: '[d]yke anger, anticolonial despair, racial rage, counterhegemonic violence, punk pugilism—these are the bleak and angry territories of the antisocial

turn; these are the jagged zones within which not only self-shattering (the opposite of narcissism in a way) but other-shattering occurs' (Halberstam 2011, 110). Later in chapter four she proposes that radical passivity and masochism can form strategies for envisioning difference in lesbian femininity. Refashioning victimhood that is beloved by liberal feminism (which is still invested in generational logic of passing down knowledge), Halberstam stands for 'shadow feminisms' that through apparent passivity and negation resist the unchoosable choices posed by the capitalist imperative of striving for happy endings (Halberstam 2011, 4).

In arguing for what she calls 'pirate cultures' Halberstam acknowledges that pirates can actually be bloodthirsty bandits (Halberstam 2011, 18). It becomes clear in chapter five where by uncovering dark histories of the Nazi past she explores the troubling relationship between homosexuality and fascism. This part of queer history is unwanted and unwelcome by the 'pink triangle activism', because it does not neatly fit into the narratives of the persecution of gay people under the Nazi regime. For Halberstam it's a pretext to raise questions about the erotics of history and ethics of complicity. In the last chapter she comes back to the animated worlds of posthuman creatures that often (but not always) offer a promise of 'antihumanist, antinormative,

multigendered, and full of wild forms of sociality' (Halberstam 2011, 181) other-worldly becomings.

I think that *The Queer Art of Failure* is an immensely valuable resource not only for those new to queer theory, but also for students and scholars who are more invested in the field. I was pleased to discover that Halberstam has managed to create an alternative queer archive that is composed of artists, outcasts, cartoon characters, and punks. However, her insightful critique of the gay male archive (preferred by queer theorists like Edelman and Bersani) as being completely western- and male-centric, although present in her previous article (Halberstam 2008, 152), was unfortunately not included in this book. Nevertheless, *The Queer Art of Failure* is a path-breaking radical project which, thanks to the engaging and lucid writing style, is an accessible read. Halberstam has chosen a truly queer approach that does not follow a straight path; it takes unexpected detours, but at the same time does not shy away from troublesome and complicated memories of queer pasts and doesn't try to please readers with a big bang fairy-tale moral in the end. Instead we are left with a deeply political, anti-capitalist, fleshy project that posits queerness within the framework of the wacky, hopelessly absurd art of failing spectacularly.

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Jerry Hollingsworth. 2008. *Children of the Sun: An Ethnographic Study of the Street Children of Latin America*. New Castle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. 136 pp. Paperback.

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In *Children of the Sun*, Jerry Hollingsworth, Professor of Sociology at McMurry University, takes the reader inside the subculture of 'street children' in Cuernavaca, Mexico and Lima, Peru. Street children are children up to the age of eighteen, who are forced to live and work on the streets as a result of poverty, migration or familial conflict. They are burdened with a myriad of issues. Many lack access to formal education and adequate healthcare, face discrimination, and show a propensity towards drug use and victimisation. They are also excluded from what conventional society has defined as childhood (10). Hollingsworth's goal is to give an in-depth account of street children's lived experiences, and analyse their individual characteristics and day-to-day behaviours through a lens of subculture, pseudo-adulthood, and the importance of play.

Children of the Sun is a two-part book. Part one is titled 'The Children

of Mexico' and part two is titled 'The Children of Peru.' Each part begins by providing the historical, political, and economic background of each country. This background information provides the reader with an understanding of the structural factors, such as social stratification, unemployment and political corruption that according to Hollingsworth, contribute to the presence of street children on Mexican and Peruvian streets.

Hollingsworth uses the term 'street children' to refer to children in three different situations. Market children labour on the street in order to supplement their families' income and attend school sporadically. They comprise the majority of the street children population. Homeless Street children live on the streets full time and in most cases, have lost contact with their families after running away or being abandoned (11). Hollingsworth introduces a third category, street family children.

Like homeless street children, street family children live on the street full time, but do so with their families, and are mainly the children of indigenous migrants (11).

Chapters two (Mexico) and ten (Peru) expand on the field methods employed. Hollingsworth relies on ethnography in order to explore the subculture of street children. Hollingsworth undertakes two forms of ethnographic observation, participant and non-participant observation, as well as one-on-one interviews with the street children. Non-participant observation is undertaken in the case of Mexico. In contrast, Hollingsworth assumes the role of a volunteer with a non-governmental organisation for the first part of the fieldwork in Peru, to report on children who live in extreme poverty. He then returns to the role of an observer, for his analysis of market, family, and homeless street children.

Chapters three, four and five relay Hollingsworth's narratives and observations of Mexico's market, family, and homeless street children respectively. Hollingsworth presents the children's stories in the form of case studies; the case studies include four market children, four homeless street children, and three street families. Following each case, Hollingsworth's assessment consists of two things: (1) the importance of play in the children's lives, and (2) the pseudo-adulthood traits that the children exhibit, through the way they cope with street life in their

everyday routines. These chapters shed light on the unique characteristics of each group of street children. Hollingsworth observes that market children are able to form connections with adults and other children for protection and business. On the other hand, Hollingsworth finds that street family children are too young to experience the street on their own, so they beg for their survival under their mother's watch. Hollingsworth argues that there is possibly a stratification system between market and street family children, since street families are often indigenous migrants. Based on the colour of their skin and their appearance, they are looked down upon by the market children. Consequently they are unable to take advantage of the same economic opportunities (45). Finally, Hollingsworth notes that homeless street children live without any supervision but form connections with other children in similar situations for protection and camaraderie. Out of the three categories, Hollingsworth finds that homeless street children are more likely to engage in delinquency for their survival.

In chapter six, Hollingsworth explores two behaviours that are most common to homeless street children: the use of inhalants, and sexual promiscuity. Having attended a "huffing party," Hollingsworth identifies paint thinner and glue as the drugs of choice for homeless street children, due to their low cost and the lack of regulations associated

with their use. Hollingsworth finds that homeless street children rely on inhalants as a mechanism to cope with feelings of sadness, loneliness, and hunger (57). Hollingsworth further notes that during “huffing parties,” homeless street children practise unprotected sex with each other. Sometimes this happens willingly, and other times through force or coercion. Hollingsworth labels this a ‘social event’ that combines inhalant use and promiscuity, making homeless street children more vulnerable to sexually transmitted diseases (58-59) and heightens their chances of sexual victimisation by other street children and adults.

In chapter seven, Hollingsworth briefly acknowledges the role of non-governmental organisations, which for years has been to provide street children with education, legal assistance, and rehabilitation, in an effort to draw them away from street life. Hollingsworth further addresses the failed attempts of the Mexican government to deal with street children, which have led to controversy over corruption and human rights violations. In Chapter eight Hollingsworth outlines some of the strategies that market and street family children employ in order to sell their products or beg for money. Hollingsworth characterizes market children as ‘clingy’, due to the persistence and drive they demonstrate in order to sell their products to people passing by. On the other hand, Hollingsworth notes that street family

children follow people around with their hand extended, without saying anything, simply looking to make eye contact. Eye contact, according to Hollingsworth, is meant to cause pity in those passing by, which may lead them to give money to the children.

In Chapters eleven, twelve and thirteen, Hollingsworth turns to the children of Lima, Peru, but unlike the Mexican analysis, his assessment of Peru takes a different focus. In chapters eleven and twelve, Hollingsworth’s analysis is about children who live in extreme poverty in two different shanty-towns of Lima. Hollingsworth notes that the four children in this analysis have experienced sporadic episodes of street life, as they were members of rural migrant families before settling in the shanty-towns. Hollingsworth’s analysis of Peru is similar to his analysis of Mexico, focusing on the children’s instances of play, pseudo-adulthood traits, and delinquent behaviours. In Chapter thirteen, Hollingsworth returns to the original analysis of market, family and homeless street children in Cusco, Peru. This analysis is short as Hollingsworth only presents the analysis of one market child, one homeless street child, and one street family. Hollingsworth’s conclusions are similar to the Mexican cases, but one difference emerges with respect to the market children of Peru. According to Hollingsworth, Peruvian market children speak English in order to communicate

with foreigners and better market their products to tourists. In Chapter fourteen, Hollingsworth provides a historical description of 'basuco', a plant used by Peruvians working in the fields, which has similar effects to the inhalants used by homeless street children in Mexico. According to Hollingsworth, Peruvian homeless street children use basuco for similar reasons, and in a similar context as the homeless street children of Mexico. Basuco helps the street children cope with their current situation, suppress hunger and loneliness, and is often used during sexual activity with other street children or with adults.

Jerry Hollingsworth's *Children of the Sun* is a well written and thought provoking account, as it takes the reader inside a subculture that has become part of the daily landscape of Latin American streets. As qualitative research endeavours to do, Hollingsworth gives a 'voice to the voiceless.' *Children of the Sun* can be used as a 'jumping off' point for researchers interested in street populations and ethnographic methods. Furthermore, it is written in an accessible way to be understood by a non-academic audience. Books that are geared towards general and academic audiences are rare.

Children of the Sun, however, is not without a few shortcomings. In only 136 pages, Hollingsworth analyses the subculture of street children in two different countries, and contrasts them with each other. The

book could have been longer and provided more in-depth information about the street children with direct quotes from their narratives. Furthermore, from a methodological standpoint, Hollingsworth would have benefited from a sample drawn from different areas of Mexico, like he did in Peru, since the street children of one area are different from those from another area. Finally, this book brings back an age-old debate between 'spoiling the field' and 'fair compensation' when paying respondents. This occurs when Hollingsworth obtains participation from the mothers of street family children 'by paying one to 50 pesos at the time' (42).

With *Children of the Sun*, Jerry Hollingsworth makes a contribution to the literature on street children. Through Hollingsworth's analysis, it becomes evident that market children have the opportunity to develop networks, skills, and habits that may help them come off the streets. On the other hand, homeless and street family children are far more vulnerable. Finally, as long as structural poverty continues in Latin America, lack of education and children relying on the streets for their survival will continue to be a common sight. This perhaps suggests where research and reforms are needed. *Children of the Sun* belongs on the desks of researchers and in university classrooms; it should be read by anyone interested in the results of structural inequality.