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## Faith and Fortune in the Post-Colonial Classroom

**Abstract** *The place of spirituality, religion, faith and cynicism in management education has received increasing attention in the past decade. From the point of view of teaching focused on critical engagement with practice, they are sometimes viewed as obstacles to practice. In this article we use resources from post-colonial thought and global critical race theory to suggest the opposite—that faith and cynicism can be understood as forms of critique issuing from the student perspective and that we might learn from these critiques as a way to reconfigure persistent dilemmas in the critique of the Enlightenment that trouble critical management approaches. We discuss a case study of the resistance to gigantic dam projects in India to illustrate both the possibilities of these critiques through what we call ‘faith’ and ‘fortune’, and the extent of the struggle that still remains to make such critiques effective. We then reconsider the dialectic of what Denise Ferreira da Silva calls ‘affectability and self-determination’ and the potential of liberation theology to offer a way to develop a ‘preferential option’ for the affectable subject. Drawing on the work of political philosopher and historian Jacques Rancière we conclude on a note of optimism about the creative subjectification of affectability. **Key Words:** critical race theory; critique; Enlightenment; pedagogy; postcolonial*

### Introduction

At a recent conference on empiricism at a college of the University of London, one of whose objectives was to explore the nature of the ‘evidence’ that is increasingly required of scholarly research as an input into policy, practice and curriculum development, one contributor questioned how social scientists could continue to teach ‘Muslim students’ (sic) through a curriculum based on science and history, when some such students found evidence of truth and objectivity instead in faith.<sup>1</sup> Management studies as a social science with its own contemporary concerns with

knowledge, evidence and practice might ask itself the same question, as much in the USA, Singapore, or Accra, as London or Cairo. The question also curiously unites both orthodox and heterodox scholars, specifically in their work as teachers. Faith and fortune in the classroom today challenge the scholar as teacher, but perhaps not in the way that the question might suggest: that is, not because faith or fortune undermine approaches to science or history based on reason and critique, but rather because they are implicitly critical of what we will here call here *the production of fate*.

In this article we explore a possible pedagogical strategy for what we will call the post-colonial classroom. We first question the juxtaposition of the rational social sciences and the irrational student; second, we question the assumption that the student responds to a rationally organized world irrationally; and third, we question the implication that the answer to this contradiction can be worked out outside of classroom engagement—even in articles such as this one. We then ask what strategic resources we might find in and through our students, and how available critiques of the Enlightenment (and indeed ‘enlightenment’), from the critique of capital, to the critique of the production of knowledge itself, to the critique of universality and the production of man, might allow us to confront at least some of the contemporary contradictions in which we are caught up.

### **Faith, Fortune and Fate**

By *faith* we mean religious faith, and by *fortune* we mean non-religious faith, such as an investment in luck or conspiracy theories—spiritual or non-spiritual attributions of causality and consequence.<sup>2</sup> By the production of *fate* we mean both the subjection of more and more of life to market logics, and also the way that science and history pursue these logics in a battle of rationality versus any sense of preordained fate. In other words, the present state of affairs is presented not as capricious or serendipitous, benign or corrupt but as a consequence of the working out of natural, rational principles. Any critique of the state of affairs must therefore always seem exceptional both to those market logics and to that rationality as well—as Margaret Thatcher was fond of arguing, ‘There *is* no alternative’. It is against the uncertainties and unpredictabilities of the market, and the sense in which rationality seems to feed this market, that ‘irrational’ faith and fortune are deployed in the classroom, and in the life of students. In effect, students may ironically be losing their faith in rationality. The failure of numerous rational and distinctly ‘modern’ projects, from the welfare state in the USA; to state socialism in China; to development programmes in Africa; to Enron and financial engineering; to the credit crunch and periodic crises of confidence in the financial markets, has only reinforced this defensive deployment of faith and fortune, the post-colonial classroom, a classroom built on the ruins of the Chinese walls battered down by globalization.

For more orthodox scholars who attempt to use ‘normal’ science, or indeed normative history, to account for human behaviour (including that human behaviour which does not conform to the precepts of rationality), the encounter with faith,

or other forms of apprehending the world, is a challenge to scholarship for which more of the same sort of science is the answer and research journals reflect this.<sup>3</sup> But the story in teaching is different. Here the scholar is in the position of asking the student to accept some form of 'science' as the best way to understand something that does not inhabit science. If the student does not accept science, and in some instances history, as the framework for knowledge, the teacher will find it difficult either to transfer the form of knowledge in which they are most proficient, or to set up debates about such knowledge (such as those popular set-pieces between critical realism and relativism typified by Fleetwood, 2005).

But the challenge appears no less formidable for heterodox scholars. Trained to critique the limits of the European Enlightenment, and to identify the productive and regulatory powers of science and history, these scholars certainly have much to point to in the contemporary world that opens up to this critique, from the 'rationalities' of war to the 'progress' of bio-prospecting. But in the classroom, the approach that begins with the tenets of the Enlightenment that underpin orthodox or mainstream approaches, and then makes a critique of the gap between the signifier and signified, rhetoric and reality, falters. Before teachers can share with students doubts about the just or appropriate application of science or history, or explore the way 'humanity' does not so much produce the Enlightenment as the Enlightenment produces 'humanity', such students would have to share such a discomfort. If on the other hand, some students possess a parallel certainty about the origins of the 'human', as strong as the most convinced humanist, the critique would seem to risk falling on deaf ears, or being misinterpreted. Perhaps a critique of science would suit someone with an alternative account. But the 'hermeneutics of suspicion' that critical pedagogy might offer such students would hardly seem comforting to these parallel certainties.

But although this question of how to teach based on the heritage of the Enlightenment may unite orthodox and heterodox scholars at the level of its initial contradiction, we would argue that scholars who *do* base their research and teaching on a critique of the Enlightenment are better placed to confront this contradiction than those who see it as an unfinished project, and are better able to try to work through its implications. This is so for three reasons that we shall elaborate in the next section. But first we should say that no doubt all good scholars, and teachers, are aware of the limits to and problems with constructions of science and history. Without rehearsing epistemological debates here, we mean to suggest a practical distinction in teaching between process and topic—does the teacher encourage an overall approach where every instance of science or account of history is subjected to questioning at the level of language and ideology, regardless of where it occurs within a programme? Or are such issues resolved only within the sanitizing cordon of a specific unit of address, such as a lecture on methods or ethics or even 'critical approaches'? If the latter is the case, critique inevitably courts marginalization, critical skills are less likely to be nurtured over time, and the critical position is one of risk and vulnerability, one far less robust and practically able to confront the contradictions at hand. So how do we proceed?

## Questioning Enlightenment

The first way that teachers who work from a critique of the Enlightenment might seek to address this contradiction is, as we promised, by returning to the premise of the question raised at the beginning of this article. Such a return to a founding premise is of course in keeping with a critique that must always turn on itself, as indeed we will need to acknowledge the continuing production of reason, and reasonableness, in our own argument. The querulous sociologist at the conference contrasted her position as someone interested in reason and its limits, with the ‘Muslim students’ who find answers in faith. But is this a sustainable characterization of social science and social inquiry? Is the history of their development one marked solely by reason, and the exploration of reason? Is it one where science and history are called upon as tools to open up society to reason? The answer must certainly be both yes and no. How many times have the social sciences been called upon in the name of reason, only to be used to mask prejudice, ideology, and interest? One recalls the notorious ‘science’ of the races in the 19th century, the birth of anthropology and sociology amid colonialism and fears of anarchism, Cold War political science, or the compromises made by area studies or experts of social policy on welfare, drugs, or crime. The list of superb studies of the *unreason* of the social sciences is long here, from political critiques such as Chomsky et al.’s (1998) *The Cold War and the University* to Cooke et al.’s (2006) ‘The Cold War and Management’, and such a list cautions us about taking up the side of ‘those who are not deceived’, to invoke Jacques Lacan. This is the first reason a critique of Enlightenment thinking is important, because it begins from the premise that we are *always already* caught in its logic, and subject to its problematic style of thinking.

This does not mean being inward-looking or self-defeating. There is a second way in which a hermeneutics of suspicion can confront this seeming contradiction in teaching today. Just as rationality itself is not as pervasive, or as rational, in the social sciences as (some versions of) these sciences would have us believe, neither is it as pervasive in the daily lives of our students as we might imagine. It is not so much that students reject the rational in favour of faith or fortune in their daily lives, as their daily lives fail to prove rational. From the fortune-telling of the financial markets; to the arbitrary power of managers and failing CEOs who get massive golden handshakes; to the persistence of racism, sexism, and homophobia in organizations and society; to the cynical accumulation and deployment of affect in consumption; to arbitrary state violence, the phenomenological universe of students (and not students alone) hardly conforms to the steady spread of science or the onward march of history—reality and fantasy rub shoulders on equal terms. Here is where the *first* critique of the Enlightenment becomes important. The critique of capital (largely emergent from Marx) saw the production of rationality and the production of fate as two sides of the same coin. For every step in pursuit of science or in the organization of history, a step in the development of capitalism meant submitting more and more of life, and the globe, to the fate of markets, wage-labour, and the drive for accumulation, introducing more and more for science and history to do. The submission of all life to fate, which Karl Polyani (2001) classically documented, is understood

today by critics of capitalism such as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri as the *real subsumption of life* under capitalism (Hardt and Negri, 2000, 2004). By this they mean that the forms themselves in which life reproduces itself are determined by the needs of markets in capital and labour (for instance, families, schools, even religion). This in turn means that these forms are abstracted as capitalist work in a moment of rationality in order to be inserted into direct production in the market (from fast food, to child care, to gyms, to for-profit universities, all contain forms of direct work once hidden beneath the male worker or in other instances the subsistence farmer).<sup>4</sup> This coming into history of the realm of social reproduction replaces the alleged natural and enchanted world of the home, the community, the child, with the roulette wheel of the market, a disenchantment that is at the same time re-enchanted in the charms of capitalist faith and fortune.

It seems hardly surprising then that faced with this atmosphere of fate, students should turn to faith, since in this reading rationality and history are not so much the answers to fate as the handmaidens. This first critique of the Enlightenment allows the teacher trained in this tradition to question today's post-ideological consensus about free markets as 'the one best way'. At the very least this is useful to understanding the phenomenological universe of the students in the classroom. As Georg Lukács (1972) put it

In every aspect of daily life in which the individual worker imagines himself to be the subject of his own life he finds this to be an illusion that is destroyed by the immediacy of his existence . . . He is therefore forced into becoming the object of the process by which he is turned into a commodity and reduced to a mere quantity.

Such an understanding of the implicit if not explicit predicament of the students could of course lead, as unfortunately it sometimes has in the tradition of this first critique of the Enlightenment, to a teaching strategy in which it is simply a matter of pulling the veil from the eyes of these students, of showing them that the markets in which they believe as business students are the source of the fate that buffets them in daily life.

But of course this strategy is in complete contradiction to the point of the critique, as it calls for more (better) science and more history without starting with the practical daily circumstances of the production and reception of this rationality. As Slavoj Žižek (2007) has reminded us, it is not so much that students *think* the commodity is magical. Almost any student who is confronted with the accusation that they are fetishizing a mobile phone or a pair of sneakers will admit that it is only an object and that there is something wrong with needing to obtain such objects to build a subjectivity. They are not in this sense unreflexive. The problem is the opposite. Although students can understand that such a fetish of the commodity is wrong, they cannot act on this understanding. They must act as if, in their daily lives, such commodities do have magical powers. This is why the 'false consciousness' approach to teaching, which in the end is only a version of positivism, is wide of the mark. It is also why one has to draw on other parts of this first critique of the Enlightenment, and yet newer critiques of the Enlightenment, to come up with a more satisfactory way of confronting the contradictions of the classroom.

One of the more important ways to avoid this false consciousness position, and with it the faith in a neutrality of science and history in the mind, a faith the critique of capital begins, after all, by attacking, is to be found again in Georg Lukács (1972). In Lukács we find the notion of the *standpoint*, a partial view of science and history that is nonetheless neither arbitrary nor stationary. For Lukács, although everyone might be subjected to this production of reason trying to keep pace with the production of fate, where one stands in relation to these processes can be crucial. In particular, if one is fully submitted to this fate, because for instance one must find a job in order not to starve, or one faces unpredictable violence in the home or from the police, then the answers of science and history will necessarily appear inadequate to the scale of the danger. Indeed pulled far enough into the world of fate, becoming as Jacques Rancière (2004) would say, *abject*, offers an entirely special standpoint. From here, a kind of *abolition* becomes necessary. Because what one is appears to be nothing but this fate, one must call for the abolition of fate, which is also the abolition of oneself. Needless to say this can take more than one form. But for Lukács the collectivity of this standpoint would lead to a class politics calling for the abolition of the class rather than any individual or set of individuals, ruling out for instance either suicide bombers or F-1 bombers, where no solidarity based on full submission to fate can be recognized from a class perspective. These more familiar contemporary forms of violence seek proof of their own place in a fateful world, not the end of their place through the end of this kind of fate. Like the great meditations on the abolition of slavery from Frederick Douglas to Angela Davis, the end in Lukács is not an annihilation of self or other, but an end to the annihilating present.

To begin then with a fractured world but one that cannot remain content with this partial view because, for some, moving to a total view is a matter of life and death, may seem a dramatic element to introduce into a business school class. Indeed it is precisely because business students find themselves wavering between fate on the one hand and science and history on the other, that faith rarely finds its action. In this regard the classroom is not so much confronted then with a contradiction, as it is a workshop for *the production of contradiction*. This is because the student comes to class, as Žižek suggests, knowing better, but ironically and wittingly joining with the teacher in reproducing this rationality in the teeth of fate. This would seem to indicate that the classroom is today not so much a place full of a faith that makes the scientists of man uncomfortable, as it is full of cynicism.<sup>5</sup> Yet this classroom, if we are to trace this line from Lukács to Davis, must also contain what Foucault called 'subjugated knowledges'. And these may be a source of strategy in the face of these contradictions.

To recap our argument then, the original question of the sociologist in the conference has now been deconstructed in three ways: we have questioned the juxtaposition of the rational social sciences to the irrational student, we have questioned the assumption that the student responds to a rationally organized world irrationally, and we have questioned the implicit suggestion that the answer to this contradiction is to be worked out by teachers at conferences, using yet more of their analytic skills. We now need to explore what strategic resources we might find in our students, and how the critiques of the Enlightenment we

have mentioned might allow us to confront the contradictions in which we are inevitably caught up.

## **Strategies for the Post-Colonial Classroom**

One way to do this would be to confront the cynicism of the moment together, teacher and students. If indeed despite their experience of capitalism as a fate beyond reason, students pay fees to learn the reason of management, accounting, and marketing, then it does suggest either that these students *want* to believe, despite the evidence to the contrary, in the rationality of their world, or that they feel forced to act as if they could master this ubiquitous fate. And perhaps these are not so different. It would be more comfortable if the commodity fetish were a seamless rather than a contradictory experience. Desire for the commodity becomes a desire to be commodified, as commodification of the self bestows an identity that grants a certain social leverage. Indeed, remaining without commodification can be problematic in terms of recognition—both in terms of how social systems identify and subjectify individuals and how social individuals might generate possibilities for resistance. Hence the continued success of the MBA. Pressing on this point, and trying really to believe with the students in the power of capitalism might be a way to pressure the contradiction between what capitalism promises to its rational children and what it can deliver. But that strategy has been explored elsewhere (Harney and Oswick, 2006).<sup>6</sup> Case and Selvester (2000) also record this false promise in an international management curriculum. Instead let us again take seriously the standpoint of students but this time not in the direction of their practice of self-commodification—their struggle to embody the rationality of capitalism and its promises—rather let us take seriously their practice of critique.

By practice of critique we mean that application of faith, or cynicism, or mysticism, or rebellion deployed against the production of fate, and often with the hollow practice of learning the rational techniques of management, marketing, and accounting. Rather than squeezing that practice to make it yield its contradictions, let us ask what this practice of critique might force open. What these different critiques in the face of the production of fate share is a sense that neither history nor science holds the answers, and even in some cases that they contribute to the proliferation of fate. In other words this critique charges them with being insufficient to the moment, if not complicit, and it seeks in their stead some larger, better, more durable way of coping with the production of fate. Let us call this, after Frederic Jameson, an impulse toward totality, a way of putting together a habitable understanding of what confronts them as students of business, and as subjects of capitalism. Jameson (1992) has suggested that the preference for conspiracy theories in both science fiction and in politics is a misplaced impulse toward totality, a sense among people that there must be other connections they cannot see that explain the world.

This sense that there must be other invisible or obscured connections comes from both a negative and positive set of experiences and practices, and thus takes into account the spectrum of critiques coming from students, from cynicism to



faith. On the one hand, to know that a pair of sneakers is just a pair of sneakers, but to continue to act otherwise, might imply that there is some element of compunction, just out of view, forcing this contrary behaviour. This produces the frequent and misplaced psychologization of the commodity fetish as motivated by some inner compunction working against our outer sense of self. On the other hand, the magic of socialized labour and the supernatural collective abilities wrought by capitalism, could suggest to students that behind these mundane practices of rationality are the hands of some otherworldly power. Accordingly, as Slavoj Žižek has remarked, capitalism is subjectively materialist, but objectively idealist—it engenders *belief*. Markets cannot operate without some form of belief—and the more deterritorialized they are, like financial markets, the more ideational, magical, or even theological they become.

But here we reach a problem—how can this strategy be kept from reducing itself to just a moral argument? How do we avoid responding to the objectively idealist quality of capital with another idealism—that of morality, or, as it is called in the practical world of business, ethics.<sup>7</sup> This might work for a portion of those students who seek totality in faith, but what of those who seek it in fortune, in cynicism, in mysticism, or in rebellions that need strategy? Even for students who posit faith as the totality that history and science cannot provide in the face of the production of fate, it is clear that this strategy has not reduced either their rough treatment at the hands of this fate, or their contradictory position as those who practise the rationalities of business without believing in them. This is not a problem for Jameson because his totality is immediately a materialist one. Indeed for him there is an admittedly unfashionable preference for the economic, though he does not mean this in what he would call the bourgeois sense that permits him to translate the implicit morality tales of conspiracy theories into the problematics of class struggle. He is able to do this because of an expansive sense of the cultural, subsumed as a form of life, within contemporary capitalism, suggesting therefore it is capital, not Jameson, urging the economic upon us.

But in our circumstances, if we want to encompass the range of the practices of critique among our students, we will need some help from what at first might seem like the wrong place to look. Because here we are going to take another post-colonial direction, through the ideas of Latin American, African, and Asian liberation theologians.

## Exploring Affectability

But first we must make a small detour through a brilliant new book by a Brazilian sociologist, Denise Ferreira da Silva, called *Toward a Global Idea of Race* (2007). In this monumental critique of western philosophy and social science, and its defective insistence on the self-determination of individual consciousness, and latterly, European individual consciousness, we have a way to take seriously the subjugated knowledges of faith and scepticism in our students. Exploring her argument helps us to see a long history of containment of which the management sciences are only the most recent instance. What da Silva is concerned with is what she calls *affectable* things, that is everything outside of consciousness that

seems to be influenced by other things, but especially by bodies and other beings. She traces a history of the development of western thought that diminishes affectability, and all people who can be said to be affectable. In this history of thought affectability stands in contrast to self-determination, and becomes vulnerable to rule and domination. Her arguments here are complex, but she tracks the way European thinkers first *produce* reason, and then *fear* it. They fear it will displace the individual mind as that which orders and explains the world. They fear, in other words, that self-determination will pass from them to it. What she does not explore is the phenomenology of this fear. The intellectual history she charts is also however the history of the rise of capitalism, and of the general intellectual equivalent Marx saw animating the commodity fetish. These Enlightenment thinkers both wanted this form of reason, against the past, and feared it, against the future. What they produce as a result is a kind of self-determination that is aggressive, even violent, in its identification of any body and any thing that seems vulnerable to the forces of external reason, any body that gives itself over to a kind of affective sociality. Of course the greatest external animator of the body, as Marx often rendered it, was to be capital, which would take possession of the worker. But of course, the Enlightenment tradition tended to look to emerging commerce, trade and money as progressive even as they feared its independent forces. Thus until Marx (and even he is not entirely free of it), it was, and would remain, other forms of possession, other forms of sociality, of collective affect that would form the enemy's list of the Enlightenment, a list populated with the bodies of women, queers, communists, and colonials, to name the most depressingly familiar.

Through what Denise Ferreira da Silva calls 'globality', in the hands of Enlightenment thinkers and their patrons and followers, this kind of vigilant self-determination comes to order all humans, using the tools of science and history, according to their degree of self-determination and resistance to affectability. Because this ordering is done in the name of a universal humanism (even after the death of the subject), each call to include more humans in the category of self-determination, only reinforces the insidious fact of the two categories again. These comments can only be a gloss on a rewarding work but it is enough to allow us to place against this deployment of history and science another project that seeks to reach universality through the bodies of others not against them.

To know that you are not self-determined because you are possessed by capitalism and its rationality is a strange thing. So often the commodity fetish to which we have already referred imagines the commodity as we have ourselves rendered it here, as a pair of sneakers, as a dance of sneakers that becomes the primary set of social relations in society. But the production of the human about which da Silva writes is not finally overtaken by history and science, that is to say affected by rationality unto the death of the subject, so much as it is subsumed by capital, affected by other commodified bodies. Yet life constantly escapes, as Foucault put it, and consequently this faith and cynicism comes out of something more material than either science or history. It comes out of (self) possession—and unsurprisingly we can then expect the intensity of critique to be generated by the intensity of possession, which would return us to race, among other dispossessions, and the abolition of the possessed and possessive self in favour of what Marx called the social individual.

Thus the most idealist moment in the practice of critique of these students, the moment of religion, or the resignation to fortune, contains within it a very materialist critique not of the failure of the rational, but of the failure of fate itself to achieve the very totality it threatens at the moment of possession. Fatality always overreaches itself. At this moment another affectability manages to escape, and this takes the form of a critique, a critique not of the contradiction between the production of fate and the rationality of management, or indeed European Enlightenment thought, but a grounded critique of fate itself as a totality. Something escapes, then, not from history or science and indeed much less through history or science, but by way of the body and of the bodies of others: which is to say by way of affect. This is a crucial passage precisely because it is the body that at least, at very least, capitalism can claim. In the moment when rationality *recognizes* the sneakers, the body still wears them and by wearing them is supposed to create the objectivity of capitalism that the mind would deny. But the flesh does not hold. This sensation of another affectability, of some other grip on the flesh, indicts fate as a false totality (and we might add history and science as false concretes in this universality). And in this way both faith and cynicism in the students counter-pose a more affected, a more material totality: one that reflects at another level of the impossibility of fully separating labour from labour-power in the body or in society.

This critique, based on faith or fortune in its positive form, in its strategic form, is what the liberation theologians call the *preferential option* for the poor. Such a strategy is often misunderstood as a kind of sectarianism in the realm of the spirit. Or else it is misunderstood as a spiritual cover for secular struggle. It is neither of these. It is an attempt to build a kingdom on earth based on the separation of this affectability, on the preference for this affectability, one might even say based on an exodus of that affectability against the mere possession of fate and the meagre affect faith and fortune identify. Now, for liberation theologians, clearly this affectability, to say nothing of this faith and fortune, are to be found among the poor, but this is not a simple sociological point. Their elaboration of both Jesus as ordinarily human and early Christian communities as communist can be read as an effort to imagine what this kind of affectability would look like (Ferm, 1986). This was an affectability that did not diagnose itself as in need of rationality, but in search of meekness, gentleness, humility, and some new kind of possession by others that sought not separation of labour from labour-power but new combinations of bodies in cooperation. Faith and fortune that led away from these concrete moments of another affectability, the faith and fortune of the land-owners for instance, both help to identify capitalist affect and its possession and dispossession of the poor and in the poor.<sup>8</sup> The preferential option for the poor in this sense is proper both to post-structuralism and the post-colonialism that is the context of that theory (Young, 2000). It puts history and science under erasure, until such time as something we might call the affectable human might be produced from this preference, and after which whatever such new projects might look like, they would not start from the individual self-determination that has chased the development of capitalism since Descartes (Federici, 2004).

## A Case in Point

One vehicle that can be used to highlight some of these issues is an exploration of the global water industry, with specific reference to the hydroelectric power industry, and with a useful initial focus on India. The Booker prize-winning novelist and political essayist, Arundhati Roy, has on the cover of her book *Power Politics* (Roy, 2001) a photograph of an Indian peasant woman demonstrating vividly *affectability*, as she stands in the middle of what appears to be a sea of fast running water up to her waist, a show of corporeal defiance against the flooding of her village by the damming of a river for another hydroelectric power scheme. We begin with the image without explanation and ask what the issues involved might be. The scene does not immediately present itself as a managerial one—it appears to be a natural disaster, in an arid area only infrequently accustomed to heavy rain, and one that motivates sympathy, with possible managerial consequences of rescue, reparation, resettlement, recovery and risk management. We ask what options the peasants might have for responding to these situations. Fate and faith typically begin to emerge in discussion.

We then introduce the text of an advertisement placed close to the International Departure gates in London's Heathrow Airport in July 2006 by the Chevron Corporation which read 'In the next 20 years the world will grow by nearly one and a half billion people. So how do we satisfy their appetite for energy?'<sup>9</sup>

The increase in population mentioned will of course come largely in the developing world, where poverty is still a major issue, and the issue of energy consumption is likely to be greatest in India and China, although this process is not the natural consequence of the raising of a standard of living across the board, as Roy's (1999, 2001, 2002, 2004a, 2004b) work illuminates dramatically. As she puts it, in India and the developing world more generally, while on the one hand there are groups who are benefiting from economic development, becoming wealthy in the process, other groups are being excluded as never before, forming a massive global underclass below the proletariat, who are unable even to sell their labour—Castells's fourth world, those migrant labourers, subsistence farmers, indigenous communities, and urban dwellers in the mega-slums thrown up by new enclosures—who are heading into the future on separate convoys. As Roy (2001: 3) expresses it 'The tiny convoy is on its way to a glittering destination somewhere near the top of their world. The other convoy just melts into the darkness and disappears'.

With this in mind, we present the students with some evidence of the most glaring disparities and contradictions (most of them acknowledged by global energy corporations) such as the situation that 6 percent of the world's population own 50 percent of its wealth—and they are all American. At the same time, 70 percent of the world's population are illiterate; 35 percent of the world's population have inadequate food supplies; and 35 percent of the world's population have problematic access to potable water. Our source is the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) but others could be used—figures would differ at the margins but would broadly concur. Our concern here is that the questions that need to be addressed are not framed by the 70 percent illiterates, nor the 35 percent struggling for a drink, but the extended networks of

the 6 percent. We invite students then to try to see the world and these problems from the perspective of the *affectables*—those dispossessed of self-determination.

At this point then, we can reconnect the Chevron question to our opening photograph, and reveal that the woman was in fact being flooded out of her home and livelihood—even a subsistence one—by what was and is part of an attempt to provide part of the answer to Chevron’s question. *The way the question is posed* is of course critical. For a capitalist corporation, a body of people is considered relevant, and thus emerges from abjection, in terms of its potential as a body of consumers. The first question—the one silenced by the Chevron dialogue—is how to make them consumers, how to get them to buy more Coca-Cola or use more energy. Roy in several well-referenced and highly readable political essays discusses the ways that US and other international corporations, with the support of their governments, set about convincing the Indian national and regional governments of the importance of increasing energy consumption and accordingly energy generating capacity, despite the massive inefficiencies and corruptions of the existing system that if remedied would have more than coped with any necessary expansion. The dynamics of these interactions extend politically from local village politicians to the White House; involve intricate financial arrangements that are specially created by governments and the World Bank for their benefit; may involve extremely one-sided contracts with crippling effects on the national debt of developing countries (Enron was disastrously engaged here); may involve controversial and questionable expert technical assessments often provided by supposedly independent experts whose independence is compromised; almost always displace thousands to hundreds of thousands of people living off the land (although not owning any of it—the *abject affectables*, of whom some 500,000 are estimated to have been displaced into nomadism) who receive no resettlement or compensation (even those who own the land may receive no compensation and resettlement is invariably inappropriate); may have disastrous anthropological and environmental consequences; and invariably benefit a limited group of corporate bodies whether as operators, constructors or investors. There are ample resources available through government, non-government and activist bodies both on and via the web, with substantial conventional bibliographic resources in books and journals also available to explore these issues and possible responses. What we are most interested in, of course, is the reconstruction of the questions from the point of view of the affected and dispossessed.

We begin the pursuit of the question in the context of India working outwards from Roy’s work both theoretically and empirically. While there are other ample examples available across the world, especially in Africa and South America, our own currently preferred avenues for further student exploration are the James Bay and Rupert River projects in Canada and the huge projects on the Yangtze, the Three Gorges project and the secretive Tiger Leaping Gorge Project in China.<sup>10</sup> There is scope for individual or group projects here, dissertations and even PhDs such is the range of material available, although obtaining primary empirical data becomes problematic. We want students to question the posing of questions, and think outside the Enlightenment-capitalist frame to which they have become accustomed, whilst reading this new perspective back into capitalism

on different grounds. Our view and experience is that once the problems are framed in identifiably human terms, students can bring an often considerable range of personal as well as intellectual resources to bear on the issues and can come to recognize how and where such questions as belief and faith arise in the conditions of possession that remain available to the dispossessed. To put it another way,

How are you going to persuade a Naga Sadhu—whose life mission has been to stand on one leg for twenty years or to tow a car with his penis—that he can't live without Coca-Cola? (Roy, 2004a: 17)

A Naga Sadhu is a warrior-ascetic of a Shivite sect that goes naked (*naga*). There are an estimated 5 million of them in India today. Their faith enables them to set improbable objectives and achieve them in the process of overcoming materiality and carnal desire, which is a form of *taking possession* that capitalism finds it impossible to incorporate. At the time of writing, there is no evidence that the sect has ever drunk Coca-Cola, but both the objectives mentioned by Roy have been achieved. The car-towing took place at the Maha Kumbh Mela in 2001 (an event that happens every 114 years) where the car was the District Commissioner's and the passengers were the DC, his wife and his children and there was considerable if surprising media coverage. The sect even has a web presence across several sites. But the confrontation between the Sadhu and the Coca-Cola Corporation is more than simply metaphorical. The Kumbh Melas are festivals that take place on rotating sites every three years, and draw millions of sadhus to bathe in sacred river waters. The waters of the rivers are not (in this case at least) being diverted to produce Coke.<sup>11</sup> But as Rampuri, an American who became a sadhu in the 1960s, has observed

the melas used to be sacred events but the last few have witnessed billboards for soft drinks and seen luxury tents erected for curious onlookers including newly affluent Indians.

'The perception of India has changed in the last few years—many Indians don't understand what's happened', Rampuri says. 'But they embrace Coke and Pepsi. The idiot box has replaced word of mouth. It's a pivotal moment. People have money now. It was never really needed before—a little income was enough. I see myself now as a witness to this.' (AFP, 2005)

The Sadhu may take emphatic possession of their symbolic world, and convert it into dramatic material demonstrations, but they depend on the charity of others to be able to live, to wander and be fed in return for stories, traditional medicine, yogic instruction and spiritual guidance. Whilst the Coca-Cola Corporation might not be able to sell them its commodity, it can commodify them, participate in turning their rituals into spectacle, and though not selling ringside seats, can use the spectacle as an advertising opportunity, a chance to sell refreshments and steal their magic. It repartitions the world around them, and though leaving their faith untouched, may ultimately squeeze out their possibility of existence.

On a more everyday note, Roy describes how the untouchable dispossessed peasantry, rendered abject and without identity or recognized existence in the

politics of power that authorized the dam development discussed earlier, became *organized* (e.g. through the Narmada Bachao Andolan, whose website documents the continuing daily struggle). Here the dispossessed demonstrated that they had remarkable intelligence, talent and skills that they were able to motivate in protesting the situation. The continuing story of the resistance, its successes and its repression, unfolds in the press and on the web and the story has no conclusion—the questions are live ones in India, Canada, China, South America and Africa in particular. But what it does demonstrate is what Rancière (2004, 2006) calls ‘subjectification’ in a move to emphasize the positive aspects of processes that when encountered in the work of Foucault are widely interpreted as constraining. For Rancière, subjectification can take place not only in being ‘written’ as a subject by rule, custom and law, but by asserting oneself creatively in the world and carving out new spaces for being, effectively writing subjectivity anew. For Rancière (2006), politics is inseparable from aesthetics, indeed it is an aesthetic activity, as it involves carving up the world in terms of sensibilities—the ‘partition of sensibility’—that tells us how and what we are able to feel and express. The abject of course, can only be affected, which is where Rancière supports da Silva, but can emerge from abjection by creative acts of *political aesthetics* that rewrite possibility by asserting new grounds of social possession of sensibility that may themselves realize the ‘preferential option’—which makes the photograph of the peasant woman wading in floodwater with which we began our discussion precisely such an act of political aesthetics.

## **Conclusion**

But where does all this leave us, and how far from the original question with which we began? If we sense that faith and fortune in the students are indeed forms of critique then as scholars and teachers our first obligation is of course to make room for this critique. We have tried to show in our example some materials that can call out that critique, and broaden students’ recognition of their own critical potential as they work through open questions. But if that critique is to come fully into focus, we also have to develop a *preferential* option. For liberation theologians, the task was to reclaim Christianity from its own transcendental moment, the moment that denies the meek the earth they are biblically supposed to inherit by denying them both their meekness and their earth and giving to them, in perfect harmony with the history of transcendental humanism, only the power of heaven. This is the task for us too. We can recognize the critique of capitalism contained in the Naga Sadhu’s practices, but despite its success as a form of possession we cannot demand of the affected that they continue to drag around a metaphorical weight attached to their genitals only to be alleviated in ultimate transcendence. Recognizing in students this critique based on faith and fortune can be a first step toward transcending this critique in favour of the critique of the Enlightenment. We need to build a base with them in the classroom that transforms our existing critiques until such time as we ourselves may inherit their affectability, a base that would strive for what we might call self-determination by affective possession.

## Notes

1. 'What Is the Empirical' Friday 8 June 2007, Goldsmiths College, University of London.
2. For a fuller discussion of the semantic and practical connections between 'chance', 'fortune' and 'fate' than we are able to give here see Thiry-Cherques (2005).
3. See for example Ferraro et al. (2005) whose critique of economic explanations of human behaviour calls for more, but better and different (i.e. psychological) empirical science.
4. The work on feminists in the movement out of which Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri write is crucial here, especially the collection by Mariarossa Della Costa and Selma James on the refusal of housework, and Leopaldina Fortunati (1995) on the hidden forms of capitalist value in the home, in love, and in prostitution.
5. Paolo Virno attributes this cynicism to a kind of breakdown of the general equivalent in capitalism which used, however harshly, to offer a form of measurement and comparison. This breakdown is caused by the difficulty of measuring what management sciences would call knowledge work or emotional labour. We prefer this materialist cynicism to a more moralistic one.
6. This is also a strategy that remains more explicitly within the tradition of the critique of the Enlightenment, and it is for this reason that it takes Gayatri Spivak and her notion of the abuse of the Enlightenment as its starting point. Spivak says that the first right is the right to refuse rights—a position that does not so much reject enlightenment values as reject their inadequacy.
7. There have been some good efforts to try to meet the objective idealism of capitalism with the objective idealism of ethics. Noteworthy is Rene ten Bos, Martin Parker, and Campbell Jones, (2005) *For Business Ethics*.
8. Here too we have another way to understand the concept of the base community, as the organization of this affectability, and why in some sense such bases are designed contrary to our notion of the base as a source of strength, power, stability. Base communities are often weak when understood in both capitalist, and it must be said Marxist, wars of manoeuvre. But their threat, and the threat of their affectability spreading, if we are to judge by the responses of the Church or the State, is not small. In this sense they have nothing in common with the concentrated firepower of an al-Qaeda cell or the Davidian compound, although something perhaps in common with Move. See Peter Hallward (2002) on the idea of the base in liberation theology for more.
9. The ad was one of a series of outdoor ads, the complete set of which can be seen at <http://www.willyoujoinus.com/advertising/outdoor/>. The 'willyoujoinus' site is an ostensible attempt by the Chevron corporation to involve consumers in forward looking energy debates.
10. Some useful sources would include Brown (2005); McCully (2001, 2003); Qing (1998); *Sydney Morning Herald* (2005); Bretton Woods Project (2005); World Commission on Dams (2000), and websites of campaigners and NGOs such as Narmada Bachao Andolan (see Friends of River Narmada, n.d.); Probe International (n.d.); and the International Rivers Network (1985–2008).
11. Coca-Cola has a history of diverting millions of litres of groundwater per day for use in its bottling plants, with the collusion of local officials as argued by Medha Patkar, leader of the National Alliance of People's Movement (NAPM), who says 'the Coke-Administration nexus . . . operates against the interest of people, polarizes money and power making the poor poorer and far more exploited'. The water table then sinks too low for handpumps to work and farmers must either invest in expensive deep-pumping equipment or give up their lands, perhaps to work in the bottling plant (Nath, 2003).



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