

# **And I Half Turn to Go: Invocatio and Negation of the Public**

***Robin Bale***

M00336277

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Department of Visual Arts, Faculty of Arts and Creative Industries

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## Performances and Other Works 2010–16

(Works marked by an asterisk are included in the documentation. The disk number is stated. The work is also available for viewing on the following website:

[www.andihalfturntogo.blogspot.co.uk](http://www.andihalfturntogo.blogspot.co.uk)

2016 – Kkkaaa non-verbal vocal improvisation with digital enhancement, as part of Moving Performances, Faculty of Music, St Aldates, Oxford [\* Disk 2]

2015 – [Aqua Tophana](#) spoken word and musical performance at Chronic Illness of Mysterious Origin, Dungeons of Polymorphous Pan, London

2015 – [Schuld](#), five track EP of spoken word and experimental sound, self-released on own DISFIGMENT/BANKRUPSEA label (excerpts) [\* Audio Disk 2]

2015 – Ceiling Low, The Tide is Rising, improvised percussion and spoken word; at Invisible Noise Museum, the Pumphouse, Rotherhithe London

2015 – [Return to the Bike Cemetery](#), 10 minute experimental sound and spoken word podcast, broadcast on Critical Waves Radio program, Resonance fm [\* Audio Disk 2]

2015 – Root, verbal and instrumental improvisation at Middlesex University [\* Audio Disk 2]

2015 – Der Leierman, improvised spoken word, percussion and Kaoss Pad, Performance Space, Deptford London [\* Disk 2]

2015 – Apostrophe for a Citizen, spoken word and Kaoss Pad improvisation, Middlesex University [\* Disk 1]

2015 – Twat Graffiti, Vocal performance on the street at LADA Hackney Wick as part of the launch event for Performance Art Faction Box Set [\* Disk 3]

2014 – [Invocation](#), recorded sound piece, listening seminar at Goldsmith's College [\* Audio Disk 1]

2014 – Austerity, recording; online release

2014 – Contact Mic Dance, recording; online release [\* Audio Disk 1]

2014 – The Sphinx Song, recording; online release [\* Audio Disk 2]

2013 – Untitled, non-verbal vocal and instrumental performance, Performance Space London as part of ["Performance Exchange"](#) event

2013 – The Last Days of the Empire, improvised spoken word with percussion and digital effects; as part of Drone Planes Over Westfield event, London

2013 – St. James’ Infirmary, recording, online release

2013 – This Hurts Me More Than It Hurts You, spoken word and non-verbal vocalization at Anatum’s Abode, Limehouse London [\* Disk 3]

2013 – Of Course, We Write All the Time, non-verbal vocal and instrumental performance and text, Vibe Gallery London, as part of “Flows” event [\* Disk 2]

2013 – The Neighbour is an Other you can’t kill, performative lecture, part of “Powerplay” event, Arts Café, Toynbee Hall London

2013 – Ghosts and Weather, performative lecture and improvisation; Space Studios White Building, London

2012 – Chapter [“I Know Thee Not, Old Man”](#) in [“Critical Cities Volume 3”](#), Myrdle Court Press

2012 – We Owe the Future Nothing, derive performance, part of “Moving Forest Coda” event, Chelsea College of Art [\* Disk 3]

2012-2013 – Ghosts and Weather, residency project in dub aesthetics, Space studios London

2012 – [Invocation/Rehearsal for the Bike Cemetery](#) article, Journal of Media Practice

2012 – [Two live spoken word and music sets](#) Abject Bloc radio show resonance fm (excerpts) [\* Audio Disk 1]

2011 – [Rehearsal at Colonus](#), audiovisual performance, presented in Vilnius Lithuania, as part of TARP poetry festival [\* Disk 3]

2011 – Rehearsal at Colonus, improvised spoken word piece, in Malmberget Sweden

2011 – Cracks/Tracks improvised spoken word performance, Gallivare Sweden (excerpt) [\* Disk 1]

2011 – Rehearsal at the Bike Cemetery, performative lecture, part of Journeys Across Media conference, Reading University (excerpt) [\* Disk 1]

2011 – [The Rapture](#), fixed media sound and spoken word performance at Abject Bloc, Limehouse Town Hall (excerpt) [\* Audio Disk 2 ]

2011– I Can’t Be Near, lecture/ performance, at Fresh AiR Platform, Queen Mary University

2011– [The Dandyism of Contempt](#) spoken word/noise performance, Camden Unlimited

2010 – I Know Thee Not, Old Man, performative guided walk around the Designated Public Places (alcohol control areas) of south Hackney/Shoreditch; part of This Is Not a Gateway radical urbanists conference

2010 – [Football Hooligan](#) performance with Mark McGowan and Rex Nemo and the Psychik Self Defenders. London Anti-Design Festival

## DVD Contents

### Disc 1

*Apostrophe for a Citizen*  
*Cracks Tracks (excerpt)*  
*Comensationton bankrupsea*

### Disc 2

*Der Leierman*  
*Of course, we write all the time*  
*Kkkaa*

### Disc 3

*Rehearsal at Colonus*  
*This hurts me more than it hurts you*  
*Twat Graffiti*  
*We Owe the Future Nothing*

## Audio Work

### Audio Disc 1

- 1 *The Chariot (from Schuld, CD release)*
- 2 *Communities/Get Screwed (excerpts from the Abject Bloc radio show)*
- 3 *contact mic dance*
- 4 *In the Fifth Year Part 2 (from Schuld, CD release)*
- 5 *Invocation*

### Audio Disc 2

- 1 *Kicking at Pigeons (excerpt from The Rapture, performance: Limehouse Town Hall)*
- 2 *Return to the Bike Cemetery*
- 3 *Root*
- 4 *sphinx song*

## Abstract

This writing is the result of a practice-as-research project that I have undertaken as a poet, performance and sound artist. The works that I have produced dwell thematically and formally on themes of broken temporality, abject subjects, waste time and spaces, and are a response to the period coincident (London and the UK, 2010-2017) with this research. The writing is intended to create a context, or map, of where and when I made the performances and recordings, the pressures and atmospheres they responded to. During this time, broadly welfare-statist senses of “public” as polity, institutions and space have contorted under pressure from a rapacious neoliberalism and the rise of nativist and racist right-wing politics, exemplified by the 2016 referendum to leave the European Union. Both forces are hostile to the model of rights-bearing citizenship as the universality embodied in “stranger relationality”, which Michael Warner describes as a necessity for a sense of public (2002, p.7). This struggle feeds into debates concerning what both “public” and “citizen” mean as political concepts.

I use relational aesthetics as an example of a communitarian tendency that superficially might seem to be opposed to dominant political tendencies hostile to the idea of a universal public. In this, it follows both nativist and neoliberal tendencies; in its artistic strategies it also prioritises voluntaristic “engagement” over contemplation. In both these matters, it replicates certain neoliberal models of ideal subjecthood, in which rights are replaced by privileges. This is, for me, a parallel to the tension between the Romantic *lumpenprole* figure of “artist” and the valorised, entrepreneurial “creative worker”.

As a counterbalance, I look at a waste ground fly-tipping site in east London that I have called the Bike Cemetery. This place had at one time been occupied by an anonymous bricoleur who left an extraordinary mural comprising of collaged detritus and text on a wall supporting a motorway embankment. I take the rubbish strewn site, the mural and its creator as a constellation in themselves, a manifestation of stranger-relationality and the now abjected temporality of social democracy.

In keeping with my approach to my artistic work, I use Walter Benjamin’s concept of



allegory (Benjamin, 1998) as a tool for looking at the ways in which ideas can present through constellations of images and detritus, making the experience of hermeneutic labour almost haptic — a wandering across and through fragments. I use materials such as “scalies” (the figures that populate the architects’ renderings printed on the hoardings put up around the sites of speculative housing developments), UK public order legislation and the history of the temperance movement. Central to this mapping which attempts to delineate an emergent form of contemporary subjectivity, is an idea of “public”, in the dual and related sense of a political collectivity that can be addressed or appealed to and the political/social artefacts of public “space” and “services” in a welfare state. This response also necessitates, for a vocal and verbal artist such as myself, a consideration of the rhetorical structures at play: much that presents as in-vocation in political discourse, the “will of the People”, for example, is actually e-vocation — allegory to the invocation’s symbol, belonging to the temporality of waste (see Viney, 2016), ruptured or halted teleology (Agamben, 2009), the time of addiction, the time of performance.

I consider and have developed my work as an artist in relation to these questions: *Is a performer “being public”? Is the audience an instantiation of the public? Where are “we” and what are “we” when (in) public? How can a performance address the public-as-public, which is to say, as strangers; what rhetoric, what form of address can be used?*

*Can “public” be in-voked or e-voked by a performer? What part does my voice play as a vehicle of “in” or “e” vocation? What appropriate temporality can performance occupy or evoke at this time? How are tropes (turns, postures, images) of “national abjects” to be used without rendering them as decorative motifs for the creative class?*

## Introduction

This writing is the result of a practice-as-research project that I have undertaken as a poet, performance and sound artist. The performances and recordings that I have produced, which dwell thematically and formally on themes of broken temporality, abject subjects, waste time and spaces, are a response to the period coincident (London and the UK, 2010–2017) with this research. It is intended to create a context or map of where and when I made the art, and the pressures and atmospheres it responded to. I use Walter Benjamin's concept of allegory as a tool for looking at the ways in which ideas can present through patchwork: constellations of images and detritus as a mosaic and the hermeneutic labour of decoding as almost haptic. Following Benjamin's argument, I do not present "knowledge" as garnered through its transparent and perhaps ahistorical presentation, but through the action of piecing it together in time — pacing it out, weaving paths through and around it. This research was composed from fragments, still clearly visible, each one responding to a discrete institutional deadline. In this way, I believe the approach I have adopted is that which Benjamin called a "treatise" (1998, p.28)

As practice-based research (or practice-led research) it was driven by the modalities of my practice and the experience of my times. I trace a pattern on the floor — my movements crossing and re-crossing various fragments, half-completed projects and ruins of projects half-completed then left open to the vicissitudes of accident and history. This, like my performances, is an attempt to map out a space of "transfixed unrest" (Benjamin, Spencer and Harrington, 1985), the space in which I have been living and working along with all others living in this city and through these times.

Over this period, broadly welfare-statist senses of "public" as polity, institutions and space have contorted under pressure from a rapacious neoliberalism and the rise of nativist and racist right-wing politics. Both forces are hostile to the model of rights-bearing citizenship as the universality embodied in "stranger relationality" which Michael Warner describes as a necessity for a sense of public (2002, p.7). For myself, I feel the tension between a Romantic bohemian *lumpenprole* figure of "artist" that belongs to the liberal-democratic imaginary and the entrepreneurial worker of the so-called "creative classes" (Florida, 2002) which these changes

exacerbate.

Central to this mapping is an idea of “public”, in the dual and related sense of a political collectivity that can be addressed or appealed to and the political/social artefacts of public “space” and “services” in a welfare state, in which the spaces and services are discursively underwritten and legitimised by public as collectivity. This response also necessitates considering the rhetorical structures in play: much that presents as

in-vocation in political discourse, the “will of the People”, for example, is actually e-vocation — a “calling out”, as opposed to an illocutionary act of “calling on”. In Benjamin’s terms, this posits evocation as allegory to invocation’s symbol, therefore suited to this study as it belongs to the temporality of waste, ruptured or halted teleology, the time of addiction, the time of performance.

I have developed my work as an artist in relation to these questions: *Is a performer “being public”? Is the audience an instantiation of the public? Where are “we” and what are “we” when (in) public? How can a performance address the public-as-public, which is to say, as strangers; what rhetoric, what form of address can be used?*

*Can “public” be in-voked or e-voked by a performer? What part does my voice play as a vehicle of “in” or “e” vocation? What appropriate temporality can performance occupy or evoke at this time? How are tropes (turns, postures, images) of “national objects” to be used without rendering them as decorative motifs for the creative class?*

My own perspective on these matters is inevitably formed by the times I have lived in; I have, for most of my life, lived in a more-or-less functioning welfare state. It provided my education, provided me with subsistence through unemployment and disability benefits, kicked down my door on a few occasions and evicted me numerous times. It mended my teeth, tested my eyes, arrested me occasionally and nearly sent me to prison once. This is the nature of states, including more-or-less functioning welfare states. I have come to realise that in the face of an aggressive anti-statism (including within government) that operates in the name of “free

markets” and an illiberal statism that demands that borders are protected at all costs and those deemed undesirable are persecuted, the social democratic welfare state must be defended — not least because my own survival has always depended on it. The ambivalence I feel towards it is a functional part of the liberal democratic settlement, rather than a personal quirk. Part of that ambivalence is my identification with those of its wards or products that have been turned into weapons against it by much of the media and many politicians: those that Imogen Tyler calls the “national abjects” (2013, p.9). These are the usual figures of the tabloid and right-wing demonology, council tenants, the long-term unemployed, malingerers, travelers, single-parent mothers, asylum seekers, drug addicts, street drinkers, etc. — the so-called “underclass”, which I have known from my own experience. The argument, from the welfare state dismantlers, is that, like a feckless parent, the system has indulged these abjects, cosseted them with housing, healthcare etc., neglected (market) discipline and so has made them what they are. Further, that the state does this deliberately — to have a stable or growing constituency who can be relied upon to vote for further enlarging the state — the state itself is, by metonymic contagion, abject. I believe that there is something — inadvertently — correct in this charge, that the state’s purported “dependents” actually enjoy considerable sovereignty, a strange centrality to the state far more profound than that of the market. I argue that not only the public — as stranger relationality, as space and as institutions — is in danger from the present neoliberal ascendancy, but also the private, by which I do not mean property, but the specific bourgeois liberal modes of inwardness, of privacy, that have also been underwritten by the state.

If [...] neoliberal reason is evacuating these ideals and desires from actually existing liberal democracies, then from what platform would more ambitious democratic projects be launched? How would the desire for more or better democracy be kindled from the ash heap of its bourgeois form? Why would people want or seek democracy in the absence of even its vaporous liberal democratic instantiation? And what in de-democratised subjects and subjectivities would yearn for this political regime, a yearning that is neither primordial nor cultured by this historical condition (Brown, 2015), p.18).

Whilst I cannot pretend that the welfare state iteration of liberal social democracy

was anything close to a utopia, I agree with Wendy Brown's point that whatever kernels of actual (rather than formal) egalitarianism and liberation it contained are in danger of being irrevocably lost. Particular subjectivities are not natural phenomena; they are formed by the societies that they are part of. In contrast to my anarchist beliefs when younger, I now believe that we become subjects both through and against power (whatever the source or legitimation of that power is) and liberal democratic subjects are just as bound to (and against) it as those subjectivised by any other system.

The methodology I have deployed is something immanent in my own approach as an artist, which is, in turn, deeply marked by my condition as non-neurotypical. I am dyspraxic, which has had a profound effect upon my perceptions of space, time and the ways in which I inhabit and conceive of them. I have always been untimely, late, too slow; I have always been in the wrong place or placed wrongly in relation to other things in space. Neither time nor space have ever presented themselves to me as smooth continuums. Space has always been full of obstacles and traps, marked by radical discontinuity; time has consisted of an indeterminate present that keeps an inchoately threatening future in abeyance until, very suddenly, it no longer does. As a performance artist, I predominantly use improvisation as praxis, as a way of avoiding the difficulties I inevitably find in preparation. This has, though, made me acutely aware of the potential shame inherent in a performance that fails. I associate that shame in a failed staging with that which adheres to other forms of ostensibly "inadequate" subjection (becoming a subject), therefore to the aforementioned national objects.

Performers that are important to me in developing my work include Brian Catling (Fig.1), for his carnivalesque/mythological sense of menace (see Catling, 2005), which I try to evoke in performances such as *Twat Graffiti* (2015) [Disc 3], and his way of inhabiting all of a space, pressing uncomfortably close to the audience, which I adopted in *Root* (2015) [Audio Disk 2], a performance which I began by creeping up behind the seated audience, scratching at a drum behind their heads. Of the same generation as Catling, Alastair MacLennan is also important although the debt is not immediately apparent in my own performance work. What I have taken from him is the awareness of how performance can poetically respond to political and social

trauma in his immediate environment — for example, in *We Owe The Future Nothing* (2012) [Disk 3]. He started making performance in response to the long colonial and civil war in Northern Ireland and the affective climate of Belfast's streets in the 1970s, wearing a target on his walk to work at the art college (Fig.2) (NationalMuseumsNI, 2014). His estrangement in (and of the) public combined with physical grace in an apparently abjected subjectivity and his deadpan absurdism has resonated with me. The broader sense of the absurd in Bobby Baker's performance and video work interests me because of her sharp observations on gender and bourgeois domesticity and her use of awkward humour that veers strongly on the edge of pathos (Fig. 3). The well-defined performance persona that seems in part a form of self-parody invites a cosy complicity with the audience, which she then periodically undermines by flogging the joke beyond its demise or her thoughts taking on a more overtly dark hue, keeping things slightly uncomfortable and the target of the joke uncertain.

My music/sound influences include the part-improvised, jaggedly disjointed lyrics of the deceased frontman of The Fall, Mark E Smith. Though much of the music is purely functional, the perceptual leaps inherent in his diatribes evidence a distinct demotic modernist aesthetic of fragmentation. This cut-up quality is also evident in dub reggae, notably in the dub producer Adrian Sherwood's work with the avant-garde punk-funk outfit, The Pop Group, in the 1980s. Those recordings, with their abrupt incursions of apparently extraneous noise and the ambiguity of the spaces they made, seemed an appropriate analogue to the political anger and unease of the time. For a representative example, Mark Stewart's voice on the title track on *For How Much Longer Will We Tolerate Mass Murder?* The Pop Group (1980) seems to inhabit the aural space, rather than simply being placed in it, fading into the distance and then reappearing in disconcerting proximity to the listener, much like Brian Catling's performance persona. This spatial instability has strongly influenced my work, in *Invocation* (2014) [CD 1], for example, where my voice moves through the soundscape, rather than being placed in the centre foreground; this has the effect of fixing the stereo image by giving it a static focus.

Another abiding influence is 1980's UK anarcho punk scene in terms of performance, specifically by the bands Crass and Flux of Pink Indians in their move towards

deconstructing the form of the punk song. Both produced albums, *Yes Sir, I will* (1983) by Crass, *The Fucking Cunts are Treating Us Like Pricks* (1984) by Flux of Pink Indians, also their 7" single *Taking a Liberty* (1984), pushed the form closer to the *musique concrete* tape experiments of Pierre Schaeffer, or to dub deconstructions like those of Lee Scratch Perry or Adrian Sherwood. This was, at the time, a turn away from the codes of the subculture without "selling out". If anything, the formal change rendered the ostensible message more uncompromising as it no longer entailed playing crowd-pleasing songs for a self-selecting group of enthusiasts. I would argue that the gesture was, rather than being a retreat into a narrow aesthetic niche, an assertion of *publicness* of a particular kind. It was a form of public as negativity. Opposition was staged, not just to the particular hegemonic forces in UK society, but also (it seemed) toward their own audiences and themselves. That work cannot (perhaps despite itself) be reduced purely to politics, agit-prop or protest, but it presents a staging of the *political* in Carl Schmitt's sense of marking out a space based on the friend/enemy dichotomy (Schmitt, 2007), p.26). This was carried through into the recordings. The listener is positioned to either take up the lyric "you" being denounced as themselves and feeling attacked, or to side with the band. The songs often combined vocal and verbal registers: shouting, screaming, calmly discursive, for example Conflict *A Piss in the Ocean* (1986). The mix places different subject positions in a crowded and agonistic space, as if at a picket line or ill-tempered demonstration. A technique much used by Conflict was to edit the vocal so that the usual gaps where the singer would take a breath were excised. This gave the impression of a never-ending rant or scream, especially when each successive phrase was panned to the opposite speaker (Conflict, 1986). I have used digital effects live and on recordings to achieve similar atmosphere to this and to dub, for example, in *compensationton bankrupsea* (2011) [Disk 1], and the layered, looped chant that ends *Apostrophe for a Citizen* (2015) [DVD 1]. In terms of non-verbal vocalisation, the improviser and jazz musician Phil Minton's (2008) virtuoso vocalisations are also a point of reference, but perhaps the poet Bob Cobbing's experiments with non-verbal poetics and tape are the closest (Cobbing, 1983) to what I have aimed at, for instance, in *Kkkaa* (2016).

Over the past four years as I have added more conventionally song-like elements to my performance, I have developed an interest in the art-song tradition, specifically

Schubert's *lieder* and his settings of Wilhelm Müller's lyric poetry in the *Winterreise* song cycle (Schubert, 2004)<sup>1</sup>. This interested me as Schubert seemed, specifically in his explicit linkage of domestic-scaled piano music to starkly subjective Romantic lyric, to be marking out the territory of an appropriate subjectivity for the nascence of the modern bourgeois democratic state. Schubert was also one of the first properly independent entrepreneurial composers, according to Ian Bostridge, a celebrated singer of the *lieder*. This cements, for me, the connection between lyric poetry, bourgeois democratic subjectivity (valorisation of the private/personal), and the artist as cultural entrepreneur.

In keeping with my approach mirroring the subject (the allegorical), my form will reflect this. Emblematic interruptions will pepper the text, the content of which is derived from texts improvised in performance or written. These will be differentiated by using an image as background and the use of a demi-Gothic font.

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<sup>1</sup> see *Root*, 2015. Appendix 2 and CD 2; *Der Leierman*, 2015. CD 2.



**[Sound of traffic. Crack of beer can opening, hiss of escaping gas]**

**This - is for the good dead [sound of pouring beer on pavement]**

**Who tucked us in at night - closing the door, softly  
Who gaze, calmly, back at us from the family shrine  
Whose eyes are doubled in the faces of friends, lovers.  
The good dead - who love us,  
Because we're good.  
And we like to be good.**

**This - [sound of beer being poured on pavement]**

**Is for the bad dead - who we don't like to speak of  
Who implore us as we pass, whose voices -  
Are not quite voices,  
Whose language is not quite language - not quite -  
Who we've injured, or allowed to be injured  
Whose reproach is implacable - and infinite  
In their lost-ness to us.  
The bad dead; who we don't like to speak of.**

**And this [sound of beer poured on pavement]**

**Is for [shouts] Hermes!**

**Who stole the cattle of the sun,  
Who licks the crumbs from the sacrificial table  
-Who spits on honest labor  
Who casts his benediction on all who thief their language  
Stumbling on broken tongues  
Between the platform and the train  
Between here, and there  
Between the piss thin rain and the nagging wind  
Between the railings and the gutter.  
For Hermes! Bless us.**

**And this [sound of beer on pavement] is for us:**

**Who await the bailiffs at dawn  
Who work the treadmills of addiction  
Who are, forever, double hearted, double breasted,  
And voiced.  
Who live under assumed names - and  
The assumptions of name;  
Who fabricate our lives to officials -  
And cross our fingers when called to sign.  
Who never spoke a true word...  
For us, too.**

## Invocation – Prologue

This prologue is an opening, intended to function just as the invocation that I have often used to begin my performances<sup>2</sup> — a ritual form of words that will differentiate the time and space of the performance from that which surrounds them, through interruption. It is an attempt, in Louis Althusser’s useful formulation, to *interpellate* (1971, pp.127–186) audience, as audience, to constitute them as a particular kind of subject by hailing them in appropriate terms. Interpellation, as Althusser describes it, is an imaginary scene of subject-formation in which a policeman or other figure of authority calls out one’s name on the street. In that turning, in that response, one accepts the name and the authority of the namer to designate subjects. Arguably (it is a policeman, after all), one also accepts the guilt that thinkers such as Nietzsche (Nietzsche, 1989) and Judith Butler (Butler, 1995) consider to be essential to the formation of the subject. Following Butler, I see this subject forming as a “trope” literally a “figure of speech”. The audience are called upon to see themselves as “await[ing] the bailiffs at dawn/working the treadmills of addiction”; this is an attempt to place the work — the performance — and the audience it gathers around it, in a space of detritus that is in an arrested or disrupted history (see Viney, 2014). It is not so much to stop time or create a timeless interlude as it is to identify the event of the work and those present with those institutions, things and people that are being rendered obsolete by the current iteration of capital, which constitute much of this current writing.

This action is usually accompanied by spitting or pouring super-strong lager on the ground to mark out the space in which I will perform (Fig. 4, Fig. 26). I have come to think of this as a summoning of the audience and the (imaginary or otherwise) spirits surrounding them. The splashing beer also has the effect of keeping the audience at an arm’s length distance.

I used a contrasting form of interpellation in June 2016, the day of the UK’s EU referendum. It was an improvised adaptation of a recorded audio piece, *KKKaaa*<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The text is a transcription from the sound work *Invocation* (2014), available on Audio Disc 2 and online; the full transcription is included in Appendix 1.

<sup>3</sup> Available on Disc 2 and online.

(see Fig. 9), a non-verbal dub vocalisation created through deconstructing components of the accent of my hometown on the unglamorous western airport-and-prison fringe of London — my “mother tongue”<sup>4</sup>, as it were. I then reassembled it, emphasising what I saw as its most distinctive elements. I described these as “glottals like hawking up phlegm, or a kick in the balls; vowels like swinging on a rusty gate; consonants like ravens”. The name of the piece comes from the particular “a” sound that is croaking and bird-like, and which I grew up hearing, specifically in the word “cunt”, used as an expletive. In that dialect, it becomes lengthened into “caaaaunt”; hence *Kkkaaa*. On this particular day, I wanted to use “take back control” as a mantra, something to hang my performance on without intending anyone to understand what I was saying. Partly because of the disingenuous sentiment, no one can “get back” what they’d never had in the first place. The hard “t” in “take” comes from the tongue against teeth and almost creates the sensation of spitting. The equally hard “k” in that word and the next reminded me of retching perhaps. The “b” sound in back propels the consonant out with similar force to the “K”, but this work climaxes with the root of the tongue rising to the back of the palate, having allowed the lips and air to do most of the work at the beginning, a sort of giving out followed by an abrupt truncation. This is contrasted by the last word, where breath is pushed out from the “c”, arrested in mid-flow by the “t” against the roof of the mouth and pushed out with a flick of the tongue on the “l”. In my accent, however, this “l” is more expressed through a slackening and pushing out of the lips into an “oow” sound. But nevertheless, there is a satisfactory push-pull in the phrase. A niggardly voicing on the first two monosyllables contrasted with a comparative relaxation on the last word.

Voice places us; there is no more such a thing as The Voice as there is that other popular generalised (and capitalised) abstraction, The Body. It can only ever be a particular someone’s voice, emanating from a particular location in space, time and biography. In the UK, at least, accent also places the speaker in relation to a class as well as geography and history. Accent persists even when words are absent. It is one of the things that ties “voice” to our particular identities, however much the words

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<sup>4</sup> See Ong 2002 on the “mother tongue” and its relation to the international language of Latin from the medieval through the Renaissance periods.

that we enunciate through it might appeal to universal reason or fraternity.  
Consonants alone are enough to convey an accent.

Mladen Dolar, in *A Voice and Nothing More* (2006, p.106), describes the split in the subject that is necessary for a political order (or at least a *liberal* political order, understood as one that has as its basis a separation between public and private spheres) to stand. Recapitulating Giorgio Agamben's idea of the "state of exception" (1998, p.11) that area in which subjects are beyond the law whilst being included in it, Dolar suggests that voice is part of *zoe*, "bare life", that which all creatures have, whilst the word, or language, is a part of *bios*, the proper way of life, politics, *logos*, law. The citizen of the polis is thus split between a public language and a private voice. The politicised bands of the early 1980s maintained this split; arguably attempting to collapse the two would have led to a particular form of identity politics. This can be seen in Karl Schmitt's description of the sovereign's voice. For Schmitt, a legal theorist and jurist under the Nazi regime, the Fuhrer's words were law, without the need for codification in writing:

In the person of the Fuhrer, *zoe* and *bios* coincide. He represents the unity of *Volk* and its aspirations, its biopolitical ambition and endeavour [...]  
(Schmitt, 1935 in Dolar, 2006, p.116).

This coincidence of voice, speaker and words as self-present and equivalent is a shared feature of ethnic identities and nationalisms. The dialectic between voice and word, or between *zoe* (bare life) and *bios* (political life) (Ibid, p. 106) finds an end in the exemplary national subject, or for that matter, in the contemporary neoliberal subject. Because of this, I wished to literally make my voice spatially indeterminate. I wanted to make it multiply, shift position and pitch. I wished to separate it from my physical position, and also, from itself to avoid the sort of assumed wholeness that the campaigns to leave the EU had attributed to national subjects.

## Publics — Allegory — Melancholia — Torsion

Every feeling is bound to an *a priori* object, and the representation of this object is its phenomenology (Benjamin, 1993, p.139).

Performance creates the space of its happening. This space is untimely in the sense that performance contains and evokes a different time to that of the everyday (see Schechner, 1988, p.6). The stadium where the athlete competes and the places of other performances, whether in a gallery, theatre, music venue, or on the street, all have one thing in common: they are all what Peter Brook called an “empty space” (1968, p.1). This space is set aside from the everyday (Schechner, 1998, p.9). Whilst Brook refers to the whole space in which performer and audience are placed as empty as a necessary condition for performance to happen, I think that the space *between* performer and audience is the element productive of performance. Whether that space is purpose-built and set aside only for that, that “setting aside” still happens for as long as the performance has an audience, or, it could be argued, as long as the performer is conscious of themselves as “other”. The literal and metaphorical gap between the one who performs and those who watch them is what makes performance. It does not have to be made physical as a proscenium arch or stage with curtains in order fulfil its function. The observed action has, as it were, a set of quotation marks around it; there is a sense of “as if”. The space is created between someone doing something in front of (we say, “before us”, giving a sense of temporal primacy to the intention) others, who watch them doing it. Its “emptiness” is a function of that regard, of that focus, which sets the space aside (albeit temporarily, in some cases) from whatever other functions that it might fulfil. This space is not, first and foremost, architectural, or necessarily temporally located; firstly, it is a kind of social space, which Lefebvre has characterised as:

[...] not a thing among other things, nor a product among other products: rather, it subsumes things produced, and encompasses their interrelationships in their coexistence and simultaneity — their (relative) order and/or (relative) disorder. It is the outcome of a sequence and set of operations, and thus cannot be

reduced to the rank of a simple object. [...] Itself the outcome of past actions, social space is what permits fresh actions to occur, while suggesting others and prohibiting yet others (Lefebvre, 1991, p.73).

Whilst social space is produced, it also *produces*. The social space that is performance is produced by social agents and produces them in turn, as performer and audience. There are generally accepted rules; one or more person does something, and other people present, watch and listen.

I think that this tense structure could be better described in Walter Benjamin's terms, as a "monad", or "constellation". This is his term for a freezing of certain fragments (historical, spatial, cultural artefacts) into a pattern or mosaic in which the elements are not gathered together in a sublation<sup>5</sup>, but are held in tension with, and against, each other. An opposition is set up, a potentially agonic relation. This can be seen in courtrooms, at political rallies, in churches, public executions and monarchical state functions as well as very obviously in theatres and clubs. There are noticeable differences in these examples, but what they all share is a particular disposition of bodies in space that creates a clear division between protagonist (or victim) and audience.

A single subject is isolated — individuated, you might say — and set aside from a larger group and made subject to their scrutiny. In a sense, this is very similar to the process of subject formation that Judith Butler in *The Psychic Life of Power* (1997, p.2) refers to as "subjection", something that both makes a subject and "makes subject"<sup>6</sup>. A space is opened up in the subject — a gap of self-reflexivity, by virtue of which they can treat themselves as material. To develop a subjectivity that will be recognisable as such, the individual must repudiate their attachment to a (often parental) power that was anterior to them.

Stand-up comedy is an example that most clearly illustrates the agonic nature of this

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<sup>5</sup> The third term in the dialectic; after thesis and antithesis. Sublation gathers the terms together in itself, this gathering transcends their previous opposition.

<sup>6</sup> See also the "Trope/Torsion" section of this current work for a discussion of Butler's theory of subjection on p.4.

relation. The comedian is challenged to “make” the audience laugh; interruptions<sup>7</sup> and heckling from audience members is relatively common and the performer must come out on top in these exchanges<sup>8</sup>; what is at stake is the potential to be publicly shamed. People talk of “dying” onstage — having seen it happen, I would say that the term is not entirely hyperbolic; it is a form of social death, a catastrophic public loss of “face”. Cruelty, or the potential for it, is a necessary part of the entertainment. Comedy, in this context, is a fairly explicit power struggle between performer and audience. It mobilises the guest/host dynamic in a way that renders it fluid and constantly shifting. A variety act may thank the audience for having them, as one would to a host, or a comedian will fight the audience to become the host and receive the host’s due: they will laugh at her jokes. Performers talk of “losing the room”, as if it was part of ongoing hostilities — which in a sense it is. From sacrifice to the law court, via public executions and political speeches, the spatial relation (or the spatial gap) between performer and audience has existed as a physical archetype for political relations between the one and the many, between hospitality and hostility — a reified absence that has sometimes been presented as an obstacle to be overcome in the name of empowerment, or some kind of communitarian apotheosis.

The question which has been guiding me throughout this work has been “what is the relation between performer and audience”, and further, what is the relation between that audience and the idea of the public?” Obviously, this has necessitated trying to decide what I thought a “public” is and how it might be formed by utilising theories and histories of the public. As the idea of a public, a “general” public, public services, “public opinion” etc. are all thoroughly imbricated in the theory and pieties of liberal democracy, the current condition of UK democracy has demanded some consideration.

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<sup>7</sup> Whilst the challenge to the performer is to somehow “win” these exchanges, often by integrating them into the act, they — and the heckler — are not part of the act. The heckler is not usually challenging the comedian’s position in order to take their place.

<sup>8</sup> I once saw the usually quick-witted and extremely capable comedian, Simon Munnery, walk offstage in the middle of his act after failing to deal with a particularly obtuse heckler who would neither desist or engage with his ripostes. In the end, he invited her onto the stage and gave her the microphone in a gambit (to make her the explicit focus of the audience) that would likely have shamed someone more self-aware (and less drunk). Unfortunately for him, she accepted the offer and rambled repetitiously and incoherently, until Munnery walked off.

I am treating the category of audience as a subset of the public. In common with the public, the strange thing about an audience is that their being is an abstraction of a collective, a social imaginary, which means that it is not very easy to meet one<sup>9</sup>. This is clear if one imagines performing to a room full of people, half of whom leave over the course of the performance. One can say afterward that the audience got smaller, but not that it was only half an audience<sup>10</sup>. The category “audience” does not have a direct relationship with any one — or even half — of its members and can just as easily exist *as audience* with one set of people as with another.

Literary and queer theorist Michael Warner’s definition of the public “as a public of discourse” has been important to my thinking on this. Whilst Warner differentiates the idea of audience from the idea of a (or The) public, I think that the division is far more permeable than Warner allows, to the extent of not always really being there.

[...T]he public, as a people, is thought to include everyone within the field in question.[...] A public can also be a second thing: a concrete audience, a crowd witnessing itself in visible space, as with a theatrical public. Such a public also has a sense of totality, bounded by the event or by the shared physical space. A performer onstage knows where her public is, how big it is, where its boundaries are, and what the time of its common existence is (Warner, 2002, p. 65–6).

For example, the contemporary habit of recording performances, gigs and other such events on mobile phones to post them on social media indicates to me that audience self-perception extends beyond the walls of the venue and the timescale of a discrete event. I don’t think that this self-understanding is so much a new thing as the availability of the technology to make and circulate the recordings is. It also bears the question of whether there is ever an audience as a group of individuals who feel completely bound to that place and moment of performance.

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<sup>9</sup> This phantasmic being does not mean that either audiences or publics are ineffectual. They are powerful organising principles, in speech, art and politics. What it does mean is that there is a gap between the audience as an existing collection of individuals and the “audience”. There is no continuity between the two, but a chasm that must be leapt. I would describe this as *allegorical*.

<sup>10</sup> It could be said that the venue was “half-empty” by the end, but that is not the same thing.



What I mean to ask by that is whether the sense of “being there”, or “being part of”, is held by audience members (and performers) as an ideal that is often enough fallen short of in the face of distraction, or minds wandering elsewhere. For this reason, I maintain that an audience is also what Warner calls a public of discourse: “When an essay is read aloud as a lecture at a university, for example, the concrete audience of hearers understands itself as standing in for a more indefinite audience of readers” (2002, p.66). Despite this particular example, Warner makes it clear that he is not referring only to written texts. It might be that the punters holding out their smart phones to record what is happening are, in this gesture, figuring the ideal, attentive audience by proxy. The phones watch intently, catch any nuance, so their operators don’t have to.

Warner also introduces another extremely valuable concept in considering both liberal democratic states and the public, something which he calls “*stranger relationality*”: “A public might almost be said to be stranger-relationality in a pure form, because other ways of organising strangers — nations, races, guilds — have manifest positive content” (2002, p.75). And earlier: “Most of the people around us belong to our [modern] world not directly, as kin or comrades or in any other relation to which we could give a name, but as strangers” (2002, p.7).

Of this indefinite audience of others with whom we must identify or (I prefer the more suggestive phrase) *stand in* for, the most that we can accurately say about them is that they, like the larger public, are strangers. If I may take the liberty of suggesting another imaginary scenario: you hold a concert or exhibition which no one attends except your close family and friends. That is to say, no one attends whose relationship to you cannot be qualified in terms other than a “stranger”. If no strangers came to hear the concert or look at the exhibition, it would be only possible to say that it was *open to* the public (which is to say something about its mode of address), not that the public *attended*.

The tutelary presence of this work overall has been that of the German critic and

theorist, Walter Benjamin. I have used and adapted his concept of allegory<sup>11</sup> as a way of looking at the ways in which ideas can form images around which a public can be constructed, such as the billboards around new flats, the 2012 Olympics and UK Public Order legislation. What I consider to be important about an allegorical approach is that, in contrast to the related idea of the symbol (such as could be said to be operative in relational art and communitarian politics), the allegorical does not insist on a necessary, and so to speak, *organic and immediate* relation between image/idea and concrete manifestation. In fact, it operates on the assumption of a radical void between them. One of the important aspects of this void is that it is temporal; there is no chance of reclaiming past national or personal glories, things which the symbol is often associated with — the flag, for instance. The things — and people — of the world, like stage properties in the Baroque tragic dramas which Benjamin used to articulate his ideas on allegory, are reduced to signs referring to some other order — or, in the case of the Baroque, its absence. This absence, in our current situation, is often filled by the price mechanism, which like a symbol, is taken to have a necessary connection to the phenomena it attaches to.

It is important at this point to give some rough working definitions of allegory, before dealing with the aspects of Benjamin's interpretation of it that will be germane to this study. The etymology of the term gives us its root, via Latin and Old French, as the Greek *allēgoria*, a compound of *allos* "other" + *agoreuein* "speak openly, from *agora*, public place (Barnhart, 1988). That is, to *speak other*<sup>12</sup> with a hidden (or not directly apparent) meaning. One of the arguments I will develop in succeeding chapters is that the terms "public", "public space" and "allegory" are not unrelated, that there is an unspoken complicity between them. The two terms, symbol and allegory, have often been treated as interchangeable, but there are important distinctions to be made here. Benjamin quotes Goethe:

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<sup>11</sup> This is best known from his book *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (1998), but it was a lifelong concern for him. It also forms a structuring device in his considerations of Baudelaire, *Some Motifs in Baudelaire* (2013), in the fragments that form *Central Park* (1985), *The Arcades Project* (2002) and in his final work, *Theses on the Philosophy of History* (2013).

<sup>12</sup> I think that this element of openness, a public place, is important; also, that the term "public place" is not treated as self-evident. Allegory shows or shows itself off; it goes where it can be seen. What it does not do is explain itself exactly — the showing might be an index of what is not apparent.

There is a great difference between a poet's seeking the particular from the general and his seeing the general in the particular. The former gives rise to allegory, where the particular serves only as an instance or example of the general; the latter, however, is the true nature of poetry: the expression of the particular without any thought of, or reference to, the general. Whoever grasps the particular in all its vitality also grasps the general, without being aware of it, or only becoming aware of it at a late stage (Goethe, quoted in OTG, p. 161).

In his work on philosophical hermeneutics (*Truth and Method*), the philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer discusses the symbolic-allegorical dichotomy and the assumed relation of the symbol to experience:

A symbol is the coincidence of sensible appearance and suprasensible meaning, and this coincidence is, like the original significance of the Greek *symbolon* and its continuance in the terminology of various religious denominations not a subsequent co-ordination, as in the use of signs, but *the union of two things that belong to each other* [...] (Gadamer, 2004, p. 64, *my emphasis*).

This Greek *symbolon* was a piece of ceramic that was broken in two, the parts then given to separate individuals. When the broken parts were reunited along the fracture, it could operate as a kind of password, an identifying mark: [...] A symbol is something which has value not only because of its content, but because it can be "produced"— i.e., *because it is a document by means of which the members of a community recognize one another* [...] (Ibid, p. 63, *my emphasis*).

An example from 2015, which now looks prophetic of much to come, clearly illustrates this. It is the photograph tweeted by Labour MP Emily Thornberry whilst canvassing in Rochester during the 2014 by- election. The photograph depicted a terraced house with three St. George's cross flags hung from the windows and a white van parked in front. It was simply captioned "Image from #Rochester" (Fig. 7). After a surreal media outcry, which the art critic Jonathan Jones appositely described as being the first time a politician has destroyed their own career by tweeting "[...]an

offensively implicit photograph"<sup>13</sup>, she was sacked from her position in the Shadow Cabinet<sup>14</sup>. The following quote from Labour MP John Mann, approving the sacking of Thornberry, gives a good sense of what was felt to be at stake: "[...the tweeted image] insults people like me, it insults the people I know — my friends and family — Labour voters across the country because *white vans, England flags, they're Labour values* and actually pretty routine Labour values for most of us [...]" (Ibid, *my emphasis*).

How either a flag or a van of whatever colour could be said to be a political "value", in preference to something like an explicit commitment to equitable distribution of wealth and workers' ownership of the means of production, is a mystery that was not broached during this whole episode<sup>15</sup>. The picture along with Thornberry's intentions in posting it were interpreted by much of the press as being clear in its intent and referents, a view which was adopted as a weapon against Labour by UKIP and the Conservative party who were also contesting the by-election. David Cameron described the tweet as "completely appalling [...] sneering at people who work hard, are patriotic and love their country [...]". Not to be outdone, Nigel Farage, leader of UKIP said "The Labour Party hate the concept of Englishness [...]"<sup>16</sup>.

In my view this absurd episode illustrates the difference between the concept of

<sup>13</sup> Jones, J., November 21, 2014 - last update, "The Emily Thornberry Affair Proves It: US-Style Culture Wars Have Come To Britain" [Homepage of The Guardian], [Online]. Available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/nov/21/emily-thornberry-tweet-us-style-culture-wars-identity> [June 2, 2015]

<sup>14</sup> BBC News, November 21, 2014 - last update, "Labour's Emily Thornberry quits over 'snobby' tweet" - BBC News [Homepage of BBC news], [Online]. Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-30139832> [September 15, 2015]

<sup>15</sup> This rhetorical relationship, common enough in political discourse (and advertising) is a synecdoche, a means of representation as described by Kenneth Burke in his *Four Master Tropes* (1969):

The 'noblest synecdoche', the perfect paradigm or prototype for all lesser usages, is found in metaphysical doctrines proclaiming the identity of 'microcosm' and 'macrocosm.' In such doctrines, where the individual is treated as a replica of the universe, and vice versa, we have the ideal synecdoche, since microcosm is related to macrocosm as part to whole, and either the whole can represent the part or the part can represent the whole.[...] A similar synecdochic form is present in all theories of political representation, where some part of the social body (either traditionally established, or elected, or coming into authority by revolution) is held to be 'representative' of the society as a whole. The pattern is essential to Rousseau's theory of the *volonté générale*, for instance (Burke, 1969, p. 508).

Burke points out that this also holds true of artistic representation.

<sup>16</sup> BBC News, November 21, 2014 - last update, "Labour's Emily Thornberry quits over 'snobby' tweet" - BBC News [Homepage of BBC news], [Online]. Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-30139832> [September 15, 2015]. Obviously, what the hated "concept of Englishness" consists of is never specified.

symbol and that of allegory in some important ways. Thornberry was held to be guilty of *knowing what she meant*; that working from a position of generalised contempt or antipathy for the working class, she sought out those signifiers that, her critics asserted, best characterised it. Bringing these things together — the flags, the van — in one image was evidence of her ironic intent and the contempt that drove it, although it was a photograph of something that existed and not her own fabrication. She was held to be plainly engaging in “other-speech”. On the other hand, those like Mann would claim that those things were merely the unremarkable and routine particularities of working-class life. Thornberry was guilty of an allegorical slur, her image embodied a judgement that, because it was considered to operate from a universalising perspective, was inauthentic. The assumed irony in her inclusion of these figures was then held as evidence of her bad faith; she, the metropolitan visitor to middle England, had created her meanings from the top down.

Mann’s equation of working-class life with flags and vans is an assertion of their being symbolic; in Gadamer’s formulation, it is their *belonging to each other*. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, echoing Goethe, emphasised the symbols’ relationship to lived experience, characterised by its necessary partaking “[...] of the reality which it renders intelligible; and while it enunciates the whole, abides itself as a living part in that unity of which it is the representative [...]”(Coleridge, 1852; quoted in Tambling, 2010, p. 78).

Benjamin compares the allegorist with one of his other recurrent, emblematic figures, the collector. Whilst the collector attempts to achieve completion and arranges objects in temporal sequence and in relation to their affinities in an attempt to create, or recreate, a whole: [...] let him discover just a single piece missing, and everything he's collected remains a patchwork, which is what things are for allegory from the beginning<sup>17</sup>. I have adopted this “patchwork” as a structuring principle in accord with his method of the treatise (Benjamin, 1998, p. 28) — a dance that constantly approaches and moves away from its subject, tracing out a space and movement that articulates (that is, simultaneously joins *and* separates) the fragments that it

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<sup>17</sup> *Arcades Project*, Benjamin, 2002, p. H4a,1. All references to material found in the Convolutives of the *Arcades Project* will be cited in this way, according to the numerical designation that the editors gave them.

moves between.

I have used a quotation from Benjamin as an epigraph to this introduction and therefore to this work as a whole. It stands as mottos once did when placed on the lintel above a door. One enters the space through the frame of the description or admonition, under its seal. Beyond it is a patchwork of fragments. There are the contrastingly valorised “national” bodies of sleek Olympic athletes and the abjected bodies<sup>18</sup> of the long-term unemployed. There is the much-maligned form of public housing with the shiny (unaffordable) vistas in architects’ visualisations of the future city. There is the repetition-compulsion of addiction<sup>19</sup> that reaches into the past, set next to the sunny future-orientation of the relational citizen. And then, there is the place that I have named the Bike Cemetery, the centre of this patchwork that holds it together.

Benjamin’s work over his lifetime was in large part concerned with avoiding the supposed release of tension in the totalising solution of *aufheben*. His emphasis, in his theory and criticism, was on fragmentation and incompleteness. I would argue that relational aesthetics aims at sublation, the terms individual and collective are raised, gathered and cancelled, not in a notion of “public” so much as in one of “community”.

*Invocatio of the public:* The concept of evocation, in relation to the concept of the public referred to in my title, should be elucidated further. Is the public something that is amenable to, or in need of, evocation? The word is now used to describe a kind of poetic association often triggered in someone by a particular stimulus, but not always, an artwork. A poem or piece of music may evoke a particular place or emotion, for example. An event may evoke memories of something from the past. Smells and tastes are also powerfully evocative. A famous example is the smell and taste of Marcel Proust’s *madeleine* which led him on to thousands of pages of remembrance of his own experiences that he had previously believed to be irrevocably lost to him. In all these cases, the act or experience of evocation is to

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<sup>18</sup> See Tyler, *Revolting Bodies* (2013).

<sup>19</sup> As Mariana Valverde points out, the appearance of “addiction” as a recognisable condition has been coterminous with liberal democracy, and its discourse traces anxieties around the autonomy of the subject that liberal democracy is ostensibly founded upon. See Mariana Valverde *Diseases of the Will* (1998) and Helen Keane’s combatively titled, *What’s Wrong With Addiction?* (2002).

bring something otherwise absent into the present consciousness of those for whom it is evoked. It has connotations of a particularly personal and subjective experience. This can be a private memory or imaginary, or a particular place, or an affective state.

The etymology of the word shows that along with the Latin *vocare*, meaning “to call”, the *e* prefix is an adaptation of the more common *ex* — “out”, as in “ex-communicate” or “ex-pel”. Evocation is the “calling out” into visibility of something otherwise hidden or lost, inaccessible. Its historical roots tie it to the ancient magical ritual of *evocatio*<sup>20</sup>, which is far removed from any contemporary sense of personal remembrance or private epiphany. It belonged to the practice of war, as conducted by the Roman state. This was a process by which the gods of an enemy would be enticed or cajoled out of their shrines in the hostile city to take up new residence in Rome. Without the patronage of their resident god or gods, they would be unlikely to win in battle. The ancient historian Livy describes it happening circa 396 BCE, at the siege of the Etruscan city of Veii. Prior to the final assault, the general Marcus Furius Camillus entreated the goddess Juno publicly and out loud to abandon the city and return to Rome with the victorious army, where she was promised a new, magnificent shrine:

[...] Queen Juno, who now dwellest in Veii, I beseech, that thou wouldst follow us, after our victory, to the City which is ours and which will soon be thine, where a temple worthy of thy majesty will receive thee (Livy, Roberts, 1905, pp. 5:21).

It worked, and the city fell without the protection of the goddess. This process may have been aided by the tunnel the Romans had dug beneath its wall, but Livy at least was clear on the efficacy of the ritual. He describes the Veientes as unaware that “[...] some of the gods had already been invited to their share in the spoils, whilst others, called upon in prayer to leave their city, were looking to new abodes in

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<sup>20</sup> For an erudite discussion of this practice and of the “secret name” of Rome, concealed to protect the empire against hostile use of the same ritual, see: *Evocatio Numinum of Besieged Cities* (1868) by the pseudonymous “W”.

the temples of their foes [...]” (Ibid, p. 5:21). After the successful conclusion of the siege, there was a plenitude of massacre and plunder; one assumes that Juno was amongst the trophies paraded through the streets of Rome in the triumphal procession, to be deposited in her new temple built with the spoils. She was called out and away from an assumed periphery to the centre.

*Evocatio*, or as it is now, evocation, has theft or misappropriation as part of its history. It certainly has its roots in struggles over power. It can be seen in the medieval practice of “translation” of the relics of saints — stealing them from one state or city to take them to another, which acquired the blessings that their presence conferred, and not coincidentally, the money from eager pilgrims that they attracted. The modern period has not lost its desire to capture the numinous as a trophy, though it is not now housed within human remains. The Louvre, the Hermitage, the British Museum and many other art galleries of international repute, are stocked with the spoils of victory, carried back from outposts of empire, sieges and battlefields. Walter Benjamin used this image of the victor’s “triumphal procession” bearing the plunder of “cultural treasures” (1992, p. 256) to describe a particular version of history (and by extension, the idea of historical progress itself).

I would argue that the aura of the numinous that surrounded gods and goddesses, the relics of saints and more latterly works of art<sup>21</sup> that made them all targets for abduction or theft, has to some large extent come to surround the idea of the public. By that I mean the idea of the public as something different from an aggregate of individuals — an idea that is taken to legitimise the workings of democracy as it is supposedly on its behalf and through its mandate that governments operate. This aura possessed by artworks and ritual objects was described by Walter Benjamin as: “a unique phenomenon of a distance however close it may be” (2013, n.243). Elsewhere, he equated this spatial distance with a temporal remoteness that draws the beholder away in fruitless pursuit<sup>22</sup>. The idea of the public is surrounded by such a nimbus, infinitely distant and yet perpetually present as a horizon, for example, the second world war invoked as civic togetherness and self-sacrifice as a parallel to

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<sup>21</sup> See Walter Benjamin’s *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (2013) and Celeste Olalquiaga’s *The Artificial Kingdom: A Treasury of the Kitsch Experience* (1998) for more on the aura and the work of art.

<sup>22</sup> See Benjamin’s *Some Motifs in Baudelaire*.



leaving the EU.

The government and state machinery of liberal democracies, such as the UK, purportedly gain legitimacy from the *vox populi* (see Dolar, 2006) that is manifested through elections and constantly refreshed through ubiquitous public opinion polls that vindicate or decry particular policies or parties. However, this public, with its opinion, does not exist prior to or independently of these exercises that supposedly capture and present it. Democratic political discourse has always been a struggle over the nature of what constitutes the public good, but less obvious have been attempts to designate who, or what, that public is.

*E-voke, or in-voke?* It is useful to contrast this evocation with an apparently related term. *Invocation* and *evocation* both have the same component *vocare*, meaning to call. Voice is present in both, implying someone doing the calling, for, or in front of, others. Submerged in the word is the ghost of a physical situation in which speech happened. That is to say, the ghost of a social situation lingers in both. In his *Orality and Literacy* (2002), Walter J. Ong contends that the practice of writing — and even more so the printed word — profoundly affects our relationship to language, and therefore, the world and others in it. Ong plausibly claims that oral cultures, as opposed to what he calls “typographic and chirographic” (Ong, 2002, p. 33) cultures cannot perceive the word as anything other than sound, inseparable from both the voice that speaks them and the situation in which they are spoken. For the vast majority of human history, people have had no means of recording and replaying sound, so the hearing of words has meant, by necessity, being in close physical proximity to the speaker. Words are not divorced from the context of their speaking in oral cultures, in the way that they are for those with a long practice of reading. For us, reading (and writing), words have become “signs”; this has become possible through the visible marks we use to create them (Ibid, pp. 73–5). The letters stand in for a sound — the word — which, in its turn, is also a substitute for the thing that it denotes. I find Ong’s argument intriguing and persuasive. My own experience as someone with dyspraxia (which meant that I couldn’t read or write until I was nine) led me to think of words very differently than as being merely signs or labels, though I recognise that my experience is still vastly divergent from that of someone living in an oral-based culture. Where I disagree with Ong is that I believe that the original

speech situation remains as a deep stratum within language; even in a typographic culture, it has not been entirely eroded by internalisation of the technologies of writing and printing. These strata are available for use; they seem to constitute actual bodies, real entities that are invoked within them.

This speech situation can sometimes be re-presented in a reified form as a recouping of something lost to modernity, such as in the conventions of lyric poetry, which assumes a speaker directly communicating with a listener whilst eliding the mechanisms of publishing market and the printed page itself (see Warner 2002, pp. 79–82); or the current vogue for “intimate” performance art and theatre, which is predicated on a re-instatement of social intimacy that has purportedly been lost.

To *invoke* is to “call upon”. To *evoke* is to “call out” (of hiding, concealment). Invoking the power of God, a document or law, is to call upon something which is a continuous force that may be held in abeyance at that particular place and time until invoked. To evoke a place, time or emotion is to call something *out*. Whether out of hiding, or amnesia, or distance in time and space, the object of evocation is otherwise inaccessible. There is a disparity between the two in terms of power. Both the power of that which is called out or upon, and the power exercised by the one who does the calling. The continuous presence and potency of the law that can be evoked, for example, is a different matter to the tenuous stuff of memory. In both cases, the act requires mastery of a form. In the case of invocation, it is the form of words, such as that used by a police officer in arresting someone, or a priest performing a marriage ceremony.

Invocation implies an instantaneous effect from a force at hand. The judge sentences the accused, and from that moment they are consigned to the workings of the penal system. The priest declares the couple married, and they suddenly are. The availability of the power invoked is such that it is immediately there. Evocation implies distance or depth; the evoked comes from far away, from another city to Rome, from deep in a personal unconscious memory. As Walter Benjamin described it, the aura is the sense of distance.

Evoking “the public” is something no one can do with certitude or unquestionable

authority, but for it to work — be plausible — it must present itself as an *invocation*<sup>23</sup>, a process that requires both certitude and authority. The invocation of the public assumes that they are at hand, presently existing and available to be called upon. But as the etymology of allegory suggests, “speaking other” in public, to or as the public, is unavoidable; even more so when speaking *for* the public.

In the prologue to his forbiddingly dense book, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*<sup>24</sup> (1998). Benjamin implicitly defends the way that his text seems to circle its ostensible subject, not least with his 29-page methodological prologue, returning to it after forays into apparently other territories, such as melancholia and alchemy. Adopting the same approach on the treatise as a form, I will trace out what he described as a constellation. This is a series of fragments that are articulated — by which I mean both joined and held apart in tension — by a series of trajectories that repeatedly pass over the same ground, starting and ending at slightly different points. These take the form of dance steps that in their paths and pauses mark out the space of their presentation, this ground being a real site — a piece of waste ground that I call the Bike Cemetery — and the fragments of images and recent UK history which I associate with it. As Benjamin puts it, a treatise does not so much proffer a proof, or advance an argument, as mark out a territory. It establishes a field of enquiry, a topic. The Bike Cemetery is marked; a stranger came at some point long ago and left behind texts and collaged images on a wall. A constellation was formed from these texts and images: the rubbish that was dumped there, the sound of traffic from the nearby motorway and the absence and unknowability of the *bricoleur*.

In a work devoted to the critique of ideas of naïve self-presence and self-similarity, a unified structure would perhaps seem to be short-sighted at best, and at worst to invalidate its own thesis through its form. I have long had a fascination for pictorial emblem books from the sixteenth and seventeenth century, combinations of

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<sup>23</sup> A tiresome and disingenuous construction that has recently come back into vogue is “The People” (capitalised). The results of the recent election in America and the referendum in the UK were apparently unambiguous victories for “The People”.

<sup>24</sup> This book was itself written as Benjamin’s *Habilitation* dissertation, a necessary part of gaining a professorship in the German university system. He didn’t pass; in fact, his examiners at Frankfurt “advised him to withdraw it from consideration rather than face the ignominy of an official rejection” (Gilloch, 2002).

mysterious images (see Fig.6, Fig. 15) purportedly elucidated by text spiky with references to classical literature and the Bible<sup>25</sup>. They belong to the category of allegory<sup>26</sup>, and so require some hermeneutic labour to decode — if they can be decoded at all. Geoffrey Whitney, the author of a late sixteenth-century English emblem book *Whitney's Choice of Emblemes*, gives the etymology and meaning of the term emblem thus:

Which worde being [...] in Englishe as *To set in, or to put in*: properlie ment by suche figures, or workes as are wroughte in plate, or in stones in the pavementes, or on the waules, or suche like, for the adorning of the place: havinge some wittie devise expressed with cunning woorkemanship, somethinge obscure to be perceived at the first, whereby, when with further consideration it is understood, it maie the greater delighte the behoulder.  
(Whitney, 1586. Original emphasis and spelling.)

The word denotes something apparently heterogenous, both in facture and meaning to the setting, or ground, into which it is put.

Bainard Cowan, in a paper on Benjamin's use of allegory, described the characteristics of a treatise:

<sup>25</sup> John Manning, in *The Emblem* (2002) points out that at all times and places these books varied widely in format as relates to the quantity of text, whether verse or prose, whether a brief motto or caption was used and in fact whether an image was always necessarily present or not (Manning, 2002, pp. 18–21). The supposed originator of the genre, Andrea Alcatio, produced a manuscript of poems with no illustrations at all and no apparent desire for there to be any (Manning, 2002, p. 48). There was variety in terms of subject, as well. Emblems could be pagan or classical in their tendency, devotional, or erotic.

<sup>26</sup> As Manning points out, the emblem book is itself so various in form that there is no adequate definition to be founded on grounds their specific content so much as a particular hermeneutic attitude — that the world must be deciphered. Seventeenth-century poet Francis Quarles articulated what was a widespread view of the matter in a foreword to his *Quarles's Emblemes*:

Embleme is but a silent parable. [...] Before the knowledge of letters God was known by *Hieroglyphicks*: And indeed, what are the Heavens, the Earth, nay every Creature, but *Hieroglyphicks* and *Emblemes* of His Glory? (Quarles, 1658)

There is also, perhaps a sense that deciphering these hieroglyphics required a measure of contempt for the perceptible world. Quarles's Invocation at the beginning of the book exhorts his (and the reader's) soul to:

Cast off these dangling plummets, that so clog  
Thy laboring heart, which gropes in this dark fog  
Of dungeon-earth; let flesh and blood forbear  
To stop thy flight, till this base world appear  
A thin blew Landskip [...] (Quarles, 1658)

Through the means of the text and images to so transcend the world and flesh that it appears as itself an image.

Treatises are especially adapted to represent truth because they lack conclusiveness; they "treat of" a subject. Their method is not proof but representation. Method itself, within the form of the treatise, is not a privileged path to truth but something approaching a ritual form: it is "continually making new beginnings" in contemplating its object, thus resembling the multi-levelled method<sup>27</sup> of allegorical interpretation (Cowan, 1981).

The phrase "something approaching a ritual form" is both appropriate and resonant. It gestures to a sense that ritual is something that must be repeated, whether under pressure of individual, internal, compulsion or public ceremonial demands. It begins again in each iteration, whilst its form maintains the connection with previous iterations by which it must be recognised. In many senses it creates a link across time; this is especially clear in commemorative rituals such as Remembrance Sunday or the Thanksgiving meal in the United States. It also literally creates its own space; if there is not a space given in which it happens, such as a church for example. The movements and gestures of those officiating or participating demarcate the space of its happening, as in the old English tradition of "beating the bounds", or "Gang days", where a procession of parishioners led by their vicar visited in succession the boundary markers of the parish, reading prayers or preaching on the way. This regular return via circumnavigation investigates and establishes the boundaries of the *topos* (place); it demarcates; it is not coincidental, I believe, that we get the term "topic" — the subject, the bone of contention — from "place"<sup>28</sup>.

In describing why he has not succumbed to the impetus towards "system" in theoretical (he uses the related, but not identical, term "philosophical") writing, Benjamin uses a spatial simile, the manner in which a mosaic creates its image:

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<sup>27</sup> The "multiple levels" here referred to by Cowan in Benjamin's work are not as strictly formalised as those applied in the medieval Church for scriptural interpretation, which are enumerated by Angus Fletcher as 1: literal; the letter 2: allegory; *what you understand* 3: moral; *what you should do* 4: anagogy; *prophecy, eschatology*. Sometimes there were more, but this was the basic scheme (Fletcher 2006). Fletcher also points out that these can ultimately be reduced to two — 1: the literal (by no means straightforward itself); 2: every other level.

<sup>28</sup> In: R.K. BARNHART, ed, *Chambers Dictionary of Etymology*. London: Chambers, 1988.

Just as mosaics preserve their majesty despite their fragmentation into capricious particles, so philosophical contemplation is not lacking in momentum. Both are made up of the distinct and the disparate; and nothing could bear more powerful testimony to the transcendent force of the sacred image and the truth itself. The value of fragments of thought is all the greater the less direct their relationship to the underlying idea, and the brilliance of the representation depends as much on this value as the brilliance of the mosaic does on the quality of the glass paste (OGT, 1998, pp. 28–9).

Benjamin's insight points to something vital that is at play in the necessity for the reader to *articulate* the fragments: seeing them as totality whilst they are simultaneously held apart in tension, as with the experience of regarding a mosaic. That is, the necessity of this hermeneutic labour is important, as an integral part of the experience of "meaning". He uses a tellingly somatic (and performative) metaphor for this — "[...t]ruth, [is] *bodied forth in the dance* of represented ideas [...]" (Ibid, p. 29, *my emphasis*). In fact, he insists on reading and thought, not entirely figuratively, as embodied experience, that of moving away and returning (to the original object), of "pausing for breath" (Ibid, p. 28).

"Representation"<sup>29</sup>, in Benjamin's estimation, was the proper method for the philosophical treatise. That is, rather than presenting its subject in such a way that it can be grasped (in an important sense a-historically) as present in its completeness, the treatise form makes a series of approaches or feints towards it, coming constantly back to its subject before moving away again along another line of thought<sup>30</sup>. It interrupts itself, pauses, just as a dance might, and in this patterned movement creates varying figures.

Benjamin maintained that *the method itself* represented<sup>31</sup> "truth" (admittedly, a troublesome concept), in that truth cannot exist apart from its representation. It represents itself and cannot be contemplated (does not *present*) outside this

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<sup>29</sup> The German for this is *darstellung*, which can mean, variously, picture, account, portrayal and performance.

<sup>30</sup> Method is a digression. Representation as digression — such is the methodological nature of the treatise (OGT, p. 28).

<sup>31</sup> Or "bodies forth"; it *performs*.

representation. Benjamin defines truth as that which, unlike knowledge, cannot be accumulated or exchanged. Knowledge could be described as an array of empirical facts, a list of verifiable statements about a subject: “For knowledge, method is a way of acquiring its object — even by creating it in the consciousness; for truth it is self-representation, and is therefore immanent in it as form” (OGT, 1998, pp. 29-30).

This is intended as Truth<sup>32</sup> in the Platonist sense<sup>33</sup>. He states that: “[...]the object of knowledge is not identical with the truth [...]and this was...] one of the profoundest intentions of philosophy in its original form, the Platonic theory of ideas” (OGT, 30). The task of the philosopher, according to Benjamin, shared with the artist a commitment to representation (of the world of ideas) (Ibid, p. 32).

The idea (for example, an artistic genre such as *Trauerspiel* is an idea in this sense, as is the term *public*) is revealed as a configuration of fragments that are gathered together by concepts, “[...] ideas are not represented in themselves, but solely and exclusively in an arrangement of concrete elements in the concept: as the configuration of these elements” (Ibid, p.34). The concept acts as a halfway point between idea and the disparate “concrete elements” which it gathers up.

Here, we return to the image of the mosaic. This configuration is described as a “constellation”, as stars are arranged into the signs of the zodiac:

Ideas are to objects as constellations are to stars. This means, in the first place, that they are neither their concepts nor their laws (Ibid, p. 34).

There is no direct, causal relationship between the idea that is the constellation of

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<sup>32</sup> Although Benjamin does not capitalise the work, he does briefly discuss the practise of capitalising abstract nouns, which he claims was an innovation of German letters in the seventeenth century: [It is] the disjunctive, atomizing principle of the allegorical approach which is asserted here. [...] In its individual parts fragmented language has ceased merely to serve the process of communication, and as a new-born object acquires a dignity equal to that of gods, rivers, virtues and similar natural forms which fuse into the allegorical (OGT, p. 208).

Abstract entities were given the status of proper names, and to that extent, physical being. Truth is bodied forth in the arrangement of fragments.

<sup>33</sup> There is not the scope here for a digression into Platonism, suffice it to say that what Benjamin describes here as truth, or elsewhere “the idea”, is obviously not of the same order as a positivistic ranging of facts, nor is it what we might call a theory. I think that the images that Benjamin uses make it clear that truth is more of an embodied experience, like the pattern of a dance for the dancers.

Orion, for example, and the stars that make it up. The red supergiant star Betelgeuse that demarcates the position of Orion's shoulder is not changed in any way by its placement within the figure of a huntsman as opposed to, say, the fish-tailed goat of Capricorn.

The root of our word "topic", meaning subject or bone of contention, is the Greek *topos*; meaning "place". An agonic element still ghosts the word, such as is described by Walter J. Ong in *Orality and Literacy* (2002) as a characteristic element of oral cultures.

Writing fosters abstractions that disengage knowledge from the arena where human beings struggle with one another. It separates the knower from the known. By keeping knowledge embedded in the human lifeworld, orality situates knowledge within a context of struggle (Ong, 2002, p. 43).

The subject of discussion was, first of all, the place in which the discussion was to occur. Thereafter, it became merged with the subject itself. The discussion, the thing to be argued, contended, was also a place, a patch of ground to be contested<sup>34</sup> — a topic upon which at least one of the contenders would endeavour to *stand their ground*. Ong maintains that writing, or the interiorisation of writing into modes of thought, abstracts the contending parties from the somatic, from face-to-face confrontation, both on and for, physical, rather than abstract ground. I will trace and retrace my steps across the ground of the Bike Cemetery, which is the territory on which I have chosen to stand. I have stated that I think that Ong overstates the erasure of the original contextual elements within speech by writing and print. They remain within the words, the tropes they form (*trope*; meaning "to turn", something that only a body in space can do) as a residue of ancient rhetorical practice.

One could stage this *topos* thusly:

**And what does it mean to stand, just as I am figuratively standing before you now,**

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<sup>34</sup> Commonly used arguments in Roman rhetoric were *loci communes*, or "common-places". We still unflatteringly describe an argument or turn of phrase as "commonplace". See *Ibid*, pp. 107–8.



dear reader? Perhaps more than figuratively, our language, even in written form, contains strata comprising of an imaginary speech situation, an imaginary origin. Do I stand *before* you? Did I get here first, or did we arrive at the same time? The word for sign once referred to a banner, an emblematic image that soldiers followed (Ibid, pp. 73–4). Perhaps you have been here, waiting for me to arrive, which finally I did, at the right time; that is, the time that you turned this page or scrolled down the screen. Do we coincide? That is unlikely; I must *have* written for you to read, I may be somewhere else entirely by now. These are “my words”, presented under the seal of my name, but have I left them behind like discarded objects, or do I still speak in them? This implies that these letters hold my voice, or rather, that these letters evoke some internal voice of your own. My voice is gone from me the moment that I speak; it exhausts itself in its saying. My arrival is untimely, then, and yet I arrive on time, just as you read this. I speak, *now*, whilst you hear it from somewhere else, yet *before* you. This disjointed and untimely place<sup>35</sup> that I wish to tempt you away to is our present, between the heaps of dead commodities and the endless traffic, where someone has at some other time, left messages to no one.

There is a question I must explore, a thesis that I must justify. That is why we meet here. In writing “you”, as I have, I am obviously alluding to one of those strata belonging to a situation of face to face speech. As if you were here, as if I were. At the same time, “you” will understand that it is a generality. “We” work together on that assumption. As I stand here before you and these signs that I have placed here evoke your internal voice to speak my words, I am not addressing “you”. You may put down these pages or turn off the computer and leave it for someone else to continue reading. “You” will still be there to be addressed<sup>36</sup>, and I will continue to do so. We work together on that assumption. If “you” felt that I addressed myself to you in your particularity this would be an entirely different kind of text entirely. My stance would be quite different, my gestures more specific and less extravagant; we would be nearer, after all, and things would not need to be signalled so emphatically. Transforming things into signs is both what allegory does – its technique – and what it is about – its content (Cowan, 1981). The singular debasement of things through their signification, something characteristic of seventeenth-century allegory,

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<sup>35</sup> See: Agamben, *What is the Contemporary?* (2009).

<sup>36</sup> This point comes from Warner, 2002, p. 64.

**corresponds to the singular debasement of things through their price as commodities (Benjamin, 2002, p. 22).**

*Melancholia*: As Bainard Cowan puts it, for Benjamin, allegory

[...] is pre-eminently a kind of experience. A paraphrase of his exposition might begin by stating that allegory arises from an apprehension of the world as no longer permanent, as passing out of being: a sense of its transitoriness, an intimation of mortality [...] (Cowan, 1981).

It is a mode of expression that springs from crisis whilst also expressing the crisis that could reasonably be called "history". Fletcher describes the outcome of the process that entails first, recognition of the world as fragmented, and then a brooding attention directed upon the fragments: [...] allegory is a mix of making and reading<sup>37</sup> combined in one mode, its nature is to produce a ruminative self-reflexivity (Fletcher, 2006).

It might make sense to say that rather than specifically arising from a sense of crisis, allegorical consciousness becomes aware of itself *as such* at times of crisis. In other times, meaning might seem to be easily accessible; those meanings generated seem to fit the objects they are attached to easily, as if the join was invisible. The mode of interpretation, or rather the legitimating structure of ideas towards which it tends, changes: the "[...] system of interpretation keeps on changing its court of appeal, usually slowly, but at times fast" (Ibid). The crisis that gives rise to allegorical consciousness is, in itself, allegorical, concerning as it does the attribution of meaning through validating structures of power, whether conscious or not: "Allegory becomes appropriate where the question of how to read, *and the necessity of doing so, becomes prominent*" (Tambling, 2009, p.101, *my emphasis*).

Benjamin stresses the importance of melancholy to this consciousness that sees a radical rupture between world and the meanings conventionally ascribed to it. This chasm, whilst it has probably always existed, becomes urgently explicit at certain

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<sup>37</sup> "Reading" here should be understood in a sense that is applicable to all mediums and phenomena, not just texts.

times<sup>38</sup> of political upheaval and crisis. In the case of German Baroque *Trauerspiel*, he attributes their allegorical nature to the effects of the Protestant Reformation<sup>39</sup>. The influence of Lutheranism which had an “antinomic” relationship to the everyday world (Ibid, p.138), led to a melancholy in the playwrights of the mourning plays. The repudiation of the previously-held value of good works to individual salvation, which must now be achieved via personal faith alone, led to a situation where, according to Samuel Weber:

[...] human being and society [are placed] in a situation that is as intolerable as it is insoluble: it exalts the situation of the individual while subjecting that individual to an uncertain destiny, alone before God, unable to influence the future by action, dependent upon a faith whose status remains fundamentally opaque (2004).

The “works” denigrated included, of course, the rites of the Catholic Church which assisted towards salvation but also provided “[...] a guarantee of an orderly, transparent relationship of immanence to transcendence [...]” (Ibid), a link which mediated between the acts of an individual and their meaning. This meaning — existing in the hereafter — was assumed to be eternal and unchangeable, unlike secular meanings which were subject to history, change and decay. Left to their own devices, with no longer any direct connection between themselves (either individually or collectively) and the divine except the single, slender and mysterious thread of faith, the subject was trapped in a world fallen into fragments and arbitrary meanings. Rather than sharing some of the divine nature, at least in potential, the human was as much an animal doomed to decay and death as any other. Melancholy “[...]is the most genuinely creaturely of the contemplative impulses [...]” (OGT, 1995, p.146), trapped in a situation that is, in Weber’s phrase, “unworkable”, yet must nonetheless be worked.

Benjamin describes the melancholic loss of attachments to the everyday as something that leads the sufferer to see the usual accoutrements of active life —

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<sup>38</sup> OGT itself was written by Benjamin in the late 1920s, the period of hyper-inflation of the currency and attempted *putsches* by both fascist and communist groups against the Weimar government.

<sup>39</sup> Like the term “tragic” in present day usage — and with greater justification — the word *Trauerspiel* was applied in the seventeenth century to dramas and to historical events alike” (OGT, p. 63).

white vans or flags, for example — as becoming mysteriously emblematic in the Baroque period: “[...] the most simple object appears to be a symbol of some enigmatic wisdom because it lacks any natural, creative relationship to us [...]” (OGT, 1998, p.140); one is tempted to say almost like a stage property, or a commodity for that matter<sup>40</sup>.

I believe it is not going too far to assert that there is a contemporary parallel to the affective situation of (to use an anachronism) widespread depressive illness related to the Reformation emphasis on an ultimately unquantifiable and individualised personal faith as the sole means of salvation as Benjamin described it. This is an affective attitude that, borrowing a phrase from David Smail, Mark Fisher describes in an essay from 2014 as “magical voluntarism”<sup>41</sup>, a faith that is the inverted form and purported remedy for the depression that is becoming increasingly prevalent in the contemporary UK<sup>42</sup> and further afield. This is, it seems clear to me, the result of the current economic and social upheaval.

[...‘M]agical voluntarism’ — the belief that it is within every individual’s power to make themselves whatever they want to be — is the dominant ideology and unofficial religion of contemporary capitalist society, pushed by reality TV ‘experts’ and business gurus as much as by politicians. Magical voluntarism is both an effect and a cause of the currently historically low level of class consciousness. It is the flipside of depression — whose underlying conviction is that we are all uniquely responsible for our own misery and therefore deserve it (Fisher, 2014).

Fisher points out that the inculcation of this “magical voluntarism” is also the aim of numerous schemes, some run directly by the Department of Work and Pensions and others by out-sourced providers, aimed at unemployed and under-employed benefit claimants in the UK (see also Friedli, Stearn, 2015). These schemes are purportedly

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<sup>40</sup> See Tambling, 2009, pp. 103–4 for a brief discussion of Marx and allegory in the theory of alienation and the commodity.

<sup>41</sup> Fisher describes Smail as “[...] a therapist, but one who makes the question of power central to his practice [...]” (Fisher, 2014).

<sup>42</sup> According to the Chief Medical Officer of the UK’s Annual Report in 2014, the press release detailing which has the questionable title “Employment is Good for Mental Health”, “working days” lost to the economy (the default unit of measurement it seems, for so much and ever more) was up 24% since 2009 (Department of Health, 2014).

aimed at creating a state of “job readiness” in their recipients, described by Friedli and Stearne as “[...] a good but not particular attitude to work in the abstract and a capacity for adaptability that has no object” (Ibid). The foregoing description gives an idea of what is required from job-seekers; because the work being prepared for is abstract, the subject must be willing to submit to becoming infinitely adaptable (“adaptability that has *no object*”) in order to accommodate themselves to whatever the market may require, whenever it may require it and for however long.

“The aim is not a job, but the generic skill, attribute or disposition of employability” (Friedli, Stearn, 2015). A lack of work becomes treated as the result of a personal moral failing of the subject, something deficient in their make-up, rather than the result of the vagaries of late capitalism, thus neatly depoliticising the issue<sup>43</sup>. The jobless are lacking in those “[...] valued characteristics familiar from positive psychology, the wellbeing industry and public health — ‘confidence, optimism, self-efficacy, aspiration’ [...]” and will be taught to demonstrate them. The last quality in the list that Friedli and Stearn provide — “aspiration” is worth some examination. Like faith, it requires no visible outward signs but does impose a particular temporality.

David Cameron's stated wish (or aspiration) to build an "aspiration nation" can be placed on the same level as his predecessor Tony Blair's mission of securing "opportunity for all"<sup>44</sup>; both have the look of justification by faith. Aspiration and opportunity are not goods that can be distributed or re-distributed; they denote more a generalised ambition that people are provided with (or bullied into) what in themselves are generalised ambitions. Unleashing aspiration means very little more

<sup>43</sup> In a series of first-hand accounts from individuals dealing with the DWP's demands for particular affect and the use of the psy-disciplines to inculcate it, the following best encapsulates its full, sinister implications:

My ‘advisor’ said I needed to see a psychologist because I was tearful and anxious after having my JSA cut for 4 weeks despite having a young child to look after by myself. When I said I did not trust anyone who finds it acceptable to starve others as a punishment, he told me that I was paranoid and again, needed to see a psychologist. (Buckner, M. Quoted in Friedli, Stearn, 2015).

<sup>44</sup> From a speech in 2002 (Blair 2002) as a more or less random example; the phrase, or very near equivalents, was very popular with New Labour. In this context, an ambition to distribute “opportunity” is to be seen as a corrective to previous Labour policies which concentrated on “equality of outcome”. As Norman Fairclough pointed out in his study of New Labour language:

[T]he meaning of 'social justice' has also shifted through the omission of 'equality' in the sense of equality of outcomes (entailing redistribution of wealth), and its substitution by 'fairness' and 'inclusion' (Fairclough, 2002, p. 46).

than inculcating, not a particular moral orientation in itself, but a particular moral orientation to that orientation. In other words, Cameron's intent was to encourage people to aspire to aspiration. The constant mantra of "not yet", "wait", leads to an attenuation of the present that renders it merely an anteroom for a future state that is perpetually deferred. It is in no way surprising that debt becomes an instrument of aspiration, via mortgages, student loans<sup>45</sup>, etc.

This moral orientation (that aspiration is, in itself, good) has the virtue of being both free to the government and impossible to measure, except insofar as it can operate as a retroactive justification for stark inequalities of wealth or power. It is useful to be able to blame the condition of those who have little or nothing on their lack of aspiration. The sense of the allegorical should not seem alien or excessively archaic to us as inhabitants of the twenty-first century. In a 1939 discussion of the place of allegory in Baudelaire's lyric poetry, Benjamin described the dispensation that we continue to live under as the "debasement" of commodities (and life, more generally) under the price mechanism.

I chose this question about public and audience — or perhaps it found me — to help articulate my response to the body of artwork and theory that has been called the "relational turn"<sup>46</sup>; work that seems to valorise anything above the creation of a shared sense of conviviality between artist and audience. I disliked this work and the rhetoric around it before I could fully articulate why. Undoubtedly, the fact that my own performance work has relied on setting up a level of antagonism between myself and the audience was a large factor in this, but it was also a political disquiet. It seems to me that this emphasis on relationality only recognises one form of it — that of conviviality. That this relationality is supposed to stand for something larger than itself is clear not only from the claims that Bourriaud and others make for it, it is

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<sup>45</sup> If regarded from any other angle apart from an unspoken or perhaps unconscious conflation of debt and aspiration, Cameron's recent response to Jeremy Corbyn at Prime Minister's Questions on 20th January 2016 would be nonsensical. In response to a question from Corbyn about the abolition of maintenance grants for the poorest university students, thereby obliging them to take loans for that component, Cameron responded "We are *uncapping aspiration* [...]" (Watt, 2016).

<sup>46</sup> This turn was given a name and theorised by the curator Nicholas Bourriaud, in his book *Relational Aesthetics* (1998). There have been many critiques, the most astute, I think, being Clare Bishop's *Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics* (2004). Her more recent book, *Artificial Hells* (2013) has been less useful, though it contains some telling points aimed at art as a (cheaper) replacement for social work, as it seems to proceed from the premise that there can and should be a properly participatory communitarian art, just on different terms to what already exists.

also apparent in the smallness of the relations that are used to manifest those claims.

It further seems to me that this conforms with strains of communitarian<sup>47</sup> thought that exist currently in the discourse of both left and right in the UK and elsewhere. These often claim to be a solution to the alienating effects of either the welfare state or the depredations and destruction wreaked by untrammelled free markets. Sometimes they claim to be a solution to both. What these strains of thought do not recognise is the value of an *idea* of the public (as opposed to community) as an arena for conflicts over collective interests. This would also allow for conflict over what counts as a collective interest.

In relatively recent times in the UK, Margaret Thatcher notoriously pronounced that there is “[...] no such thing as society [...] There are individual *men and women, and there are families*”<sup>48</sup>. A Labour Home Secretary echoed the sentiment a decade or so later, although he (probably) thought that he was disagreeing: “[...T]here is no such ‘thing’ as society [...] because society is not a ‘thing’ external to our experiences and responsibilities. It is us, all of us” (Jack Straw, 1998, cited in: Rose, 2000).

Straw’s comments should be seen in the context of New Labour’s project of *responsibilisation*. This term is used by the urban geographer Mike Raco (2007) to denote governmental moves to counteract the perceived tendency of the welfare state to allow citizens to delegate responsibility for the consequences of their own actions to the state, which will, like an over-indulgent parent, insulate them from them<sup>49</sup>. More recently still, there has been the late and unlamented “Big Society” initiative of the Conservative/Lib-Dem coalition in 2010, which was to fill in the gaps swinging government cuts created in public services by tapping into an assumed

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<sup>47</sup> See: Driver, Martell, *New Labour’s Communitarianisms* (1997); also Rose, 2000. The idea seems to me to be currently used as a panacea for the ambiguities and potential for conflict inherent in the idea of “public”.

<sup>48</sup> That Thatcher is often selectively quoted, leaving out the later part of the statement, in which she says, “It’s our duty to look after ourselves *and then, also to look after our neighbour*” (my emphasis) is not the point here. I am not trying to put Thatcher on trial for valorising selfishness, I am interested in the fact that her (what you could call nominalist) position is shared by many who might believe that they are in absolute opposition to her ideas.

<sup>49</sup> The most notorious and arguably influential articulation of this idea on the Right came from Charles Murray and his concept of the “underclass” (see Murray, 1996).

reservoir of untapped voluntaristic fervour. David Cameron's once-favourite thinker, Philip Blond, a communitarian who was one of the inspirations for the Big Society, explicitly sets community against the welfare state:

The welfare state nationalised society because it replaced mutual communities with passive fragmented individuals whose most sustaining relationship was not with his or her neighbour or his or her community but with a distant and determining centre. Moreover, that state relationship was profoundly individuating — unilateral entitlement individuated and replaced bilateral relationship (Blond, 2009).

In this way, and without irony, in David Cameron's use of this critique, the citizen was supposedly "freed" of the shackles of the state by being forced to provide local public services for themselves. It seems to me that this version of society denigrates or dispenses with the Commons, in the sense of collectively owned resources which, whilst by no means perfect, the post-1945 settlement provided a sense of having *in common*. This latter is an assumption of shared desires or aspirations, in the way you might say to a new acquaintance "we have a lot in common" without meaning that you share a bank account, housing or healthcare provision with them. The "distant centre" that Blond denigrates allowed for conflict and a disparity of values and aspirations in the population insofar as resources were allocated on the basis of right, rather than as discretionary awards in return for good behaviour. Blond sets the rights-bearing citizen of the welfare state against the relational subject of community. It seems to me that this relational/communitarian turn in art and politics is an attempt to turn the stranger into someone with determinate content. The anonymous stranger who is the audience, or the rights-bearing citizen who is the public, is to be rendered both *responsible* and *knowable*.

This is made clear in the treatment of UK claimants of unemployment and sickness benefits. Over the past twenty-five years or so, the conditionality of benefits to the unemployed and sick has become increasingly stringent, as what was (and still is) a right of citizens to access a collectivised fund becomes dependent on demonstrating appropriate personal attitudes and behaviours. This places both large negative



restrictions and extraordinary positive duties on people who have not broken any law.

As Angus Fletcher points out in his essay *Allegory Without Ideas* (2006), the allegorical approach is very well suited to expression of notions both *of* and *about* power, in any given time: [...Allegory] permits the iconic rendering of power relations (Fletcher, 2006). This is because allegorical vision requires a sense of overlaid strata of signification — one may even call them hierarchies<sup>50</sup> — that are to be traversed by what he calls “daemonic”<sup>51</sup> entities, also ideas of secrecy, arcane meanings in observable phenomena that are hidden to all except initiates of action from a distance. The sense that a power is given legitimacy by its relation to some universal essence or idea tucked away in the realm of archetypes is obviously tempting to those that hold that power as, for example, justification for discretionary wars in the service of spreading freedom and democracy.

The so-called “War on Terror”<sup>52</sup> (now just closing its fourteenth year) has furnished numerous contemporary examples of this mode of vision, which in the guise of counter-terrorism has shaped and permeated domestic and international politics. The prosecution of a war against a particular technique (terror) which has conflated it with a particular idea (in this case, a particular interpretation of Islam) seems ideally suited to the projection of a ramifying structure of correspondences (the difficulty of pinning down how “radicalisation” is meant to happen, for one) and conspiracies (whether by those who attack “The West” or those who ostensibly defend it). These structures are traversed by those that can read below the surfaces of things, who are alert to hidden patterns and meanings, spies and conspirators<sup>53</sup>. The Platonic sense

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<sup>50</sup> For instance, in the four levels (or more) in the medieval technique of interpreting texts.

<sup>51</sup> “Daemons [...] share this major characteristic of allegorical agents, the fact that they compartmentalize function. If we were to meet an allegorical character in real life, we would say of him that he was obsessed with only one idea, or that he had an absolutely one-track mind, or that his life was patterned according to absolutely rigid habits from which he never allowed himself to vary. It would seem that he was driven by some hidden, private force[.]” Fletcher explores this idea in his seminal book *Allegory* (Fletcher, 2012) and also in his more recent paper, *Allegory Without Ideas*.

<sup>52</sup> Capitalisation, as before (see footnote 7). “Terror” becomes personified, in order to set “War” upon it. However, it has been remarkably difficult to decide who properly personifies “Terror”, and what to do about them.

<sup>53</sup> Benjamin claimed the political atmosphere of Paris was reflected in Baudelaire's allegorical project: Sudden sorties, secret-mongering, surprise decisions belong to the *raison d'etat* of the Second Empire and were characteristic of Napoleon III. They constitute the decisive *gestus* in Baudelaire's theoretical utterances (Benjamin, 1985).

of allegory that Fletcher describes as having been dominant would, for example, manifest Justice or Peace in a certain way; for example, the woman wearing a spiked crown on the top of the Old Bailey in London, who holds a pair of scales in one hand and a sword in the other, or the winged woman standing on top of a globe holding in one hand an olive crown for victory and a palm leaf for peace on the Spa Green war memorial in north London (Fig.8). Both examples are personifications of abstract ideals that exist in a perfect realm somewhere beyond time and space, where Justice and Peace are always contextless and unchanging. This profane, particularised, time-bound and wearing-out world was in a constant process of realising those ideals to a greater or lesser extent at any given moment, such as the figure on the Spa Green memorial reassuring us that the ending of World War 1 was a victory for peace (the resemblance to Nike, the ancient Greek figure of victory, is marked).

What Fletcher calls “Allegory Without Ideas” in his essay would relate power, rather than to a transcendent source — the Prince, God, Nation, the People — to something closer to what scholars following Michel Foucault would call “governmentality” (See Foucault, 1991), in which “things” are governed:

One governs things.[...] I do not think this is a matter of opposing things to men, but rather of showing that what government has to do with is not territory but rather a sort of complex composed of men and things. The things with which in this sense government is to be concerned are in fact men, but men in their relations, their links, their imbrication with those other things which are wealth, resources, means of subsistence, the, territory with its specific qualities, climate, irrigation, fertility, etc.; men in their relation to that other kind of things, customs, habits, Ways of acting and thinking etc. [...] (Foucault, 1991, p.93).

Governmentality is rule by a variety of tactics across a variety of scales, rather than law handed down from a centre. Foucault differentiates it from other models of rule which place the monarch in a transcendent position in relation to the ruled and the ends of government (brutally put, to stay in power) to be equally separate (Ibid, p.91). This is certainly not to say that powers will not rhetorically utilise one or other

of those hypostases when necessary, but that the actual practice of governing is closer to what Nikolas Rose describes as a series of “translations”:

In the dynamics of translation, alignments are forged between the objectives of authorities wishing to govern and the personal projects of those organizations, groups and individuals who are the subjects of government. It is through translation processes of various sorts that linkages are assembled between political agencies, public bodies, economic, legal, medical, social and technical authorities, and the aspirations, judgements and ambitions of formally autonomous entities, be these firms, factories, pressure groups, families or individuals (2004, p. 48).

### **Trope/Torsion**

One cannot counterpose subjectivity to power, because subjectification occurs in the element of power [...] (Ibid, pp. 54–5).

Cognitive structures are not forms of consciousness but dispositions of the body (Bourdieu, 1994).

We do not spontaneously appear as subjects at birth; as Judith Butler describes it, we are born into (both through and against) power. Our nativity is not an event gone through once and for all, but a constant *subjection* (in both the sense of becoming-subject and the sense of being-subject-to) as Butler calls it (1997, p.2) in *The Psychic Life of Power* (1997). She suggests that the process of subjection is, first of all, grounded in power. That is, the power that we begin our lives dependent upon, parental or otherwise, benign or otherwise, (hopefully) provides food, warmth, shelter and (perhaps) comfort. We are, in a very real sense, at its mercy and subordinate ourselves to it for survival. As part of the condition of becoming a subject, subordination implies being in a mandatory submission (Ibid, p.7).

The infant cannot discriminate. They form attachments to those who give food, comfort or warmth in order to survive. They cannot judge those to whom they are

A black and white photograph of a wall covered in graffiti and posters, with bare tree branches in the foreground. The graffiti includes the words 'CONVICTION ON', 'SEGMENT', and 'KRAUP'. There are also posters, one of which says 'TASTY' and another 'ELITI'. The scene is somewhat desolate and urban.

## A FIGURE OF SPEECH

**Imagine a contortionist, bent double...this is where we start. Their head stuck between their knees and their spine describing a taut, backward loop. Looking at them, the human pretzel, it's impossible not to imagine the fearful strain of the muscles and tendons that ordinarily hold the body upright to face the world - being bent - bending themselves - the wrong way, or the right way, but too far.**

**And you might think that it's not right - why should a human being do that to themselves? Head under their own buttocks or pressed into their own crotch. The first thought - speaking for myself, perhaps - is that I am witnessing some especially strenuous kind of autoerotic act. I repeat: this is where we - we *all* start.**

attached; in fact, Butler maintains that the subordination and dependence that gives rise to these attachments must be denied for the subject to form<sup>54</sup>. They must be repudiated if one is to “live one’s own life” as the cliché has it. Butler describes the

[...] adult sense of humiliation when confronted with the earliest objects of love—parents, guardians, siblings, and so on—the sense of belated indignation in which one claims, “I couldn’t possibly love such a person.” *The utterance concedes the possibility it denies, establishing the “I” as predicated upon that foreclosure* [...] (Butler, 1997, p. 8).

I therefore become a subject who “lives his own life” by repressing the dependence and the power that formed me and my ancient desire for it, without which (desire, dependence, repression) there would be no “I”. I “turn back on” (Ibid, p.4–5) myself, on the power and my desire for powerlessness. The subject is formed through this turning. The form this power takes is relentlessly marked by a figure of turning, a turning back upon oneself or even a turning *on* oneself (Butler, 1997, p. 3, *original emphasis*).

The power that Butler refers to here is the power of conscience<sup>55</sup>, the power that can

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<sup>54</sup> It is certainly clear that a state of “dependency” in individuals, whether on a drug or state benefits (though strangely not on employers or private landlords) is considered in contemporary political discourse an evil that is either a cause or result of inadequate subject formation. It goes without saying that the degree of vehemence with which the formative power is repudiated will alter at different times and places. Different forms of self-understanding (which is to say, self-formation) have operated under other instantiations of governmentality. Rose lists some:

[...M]embers of a flock to be led, as children to be coddled and educated, as a human resource to be exploited, as members of a population to be managed, as legal subjects with rights, as responsible citizens of an interdependent society, as autonomous individuals with our own illimitable aspirations, as value-driven members of a moral community [...] (Rose, 2004, p. 41)

The current form of liberalism in the UK seems to highly prioritise the autonomous, entrepreneurial self who actualises through making (market) choices.

<sup>55</sup> Butler cites Nietzsche’s *Genealogy of Morals* (Nietzsche, 1989) throughout this work. Especially important is his emphasis on conscience as

[...] the condition of the possibility of the subject, but the condition of the possibility of fiction, fabrication, and transfiguration. [...] Bad conscience fabricates the soul, that expanse of interior psychic space (Butler, 1997, p. 67).

In Nietzsche’s version of deep prehistory, the conscience is the fount of all subjectivity. It is the product of a violently coerced repression of natural, animal-like freedom that delighted in cruelty and inflicting pain. This delight in inflicting pain on others did not go away but simply, as conscience, became a delight in self torture (Nietzsche, 1989, pp. 84–8), almost as an artistic impulse to give form. Nietzsche emphasises the *creative* aspect of it. It is this self-forming torture in which we recoil from ourselves and are created by that recoil that Butler maintains comes into play when we repudiate our love of the power that formed us.

shame us. She asks: “if submission is a condition of subjection [...] What is the psychic form that power takes?” (Ibid, p. 2). Conscience, specifically bad conscience, is the mechanism that creates us through “[...] a psychic habit of self-beratement” (Ibid, p. 22). Self-reflexivity is the fruit of conscience’s rendering of the self as an object to be examined<sup>56</sup> and — certainly — tortured. Two related, but different emotions are instrumental here: guilt and shame. Guilt<sup>57</sup> arises from specific infractions of internal(ised) or external rules; shame concerns itself with the self as a whole; it is a relation to the whole self<sup>58</sup>; it does not require a specific infraction on which to operate. The foreclosure of desire is what the self is built on — “living one’s own life”.

Butler points out a logical difficulty with this: if bad conscience is the force that subjects us, and prior to this subjection there can be no “I” or “us”, who does the conscience that tortures into subjection belong to? She develops this difficulty into a figure, literally and in the sense of “figure of speech”.

[...W]e seek to account for how the subject comes to be. That this figure is itself a “turn” is, rhetorically, performatively spectacular; “turn” translates the Greek sense of “trope.” Thus the trope of the turn both indicates and exemplifies the tropological status of the gesture (Butler, 1997, p.4).

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<sup>56</sup> Foucault gives a compelling picture of the penitentiary as a machine for producing subjects of (and to) conscience through (coerced) self-examination in *Discipline and Punish*:

The legal punishment bears upon an act; the punitive technique on a life; it falls to this punitive technique, therefore, to reconstitute all the sordid detail of a life in the form of knowledge, to fill in the gaps of that knowledge and to act upon it by a practice of compulsion. It is a biographical knowledge and a technique for correcting individual lives. (Foucault, 1995, p. 252)

<sup>57</sup> Butler relies heavily on Nietzsche’s conception of guilt first as debt rather than conscious willed wrongdoing:

[...] the major moral concept *Schuld* [guilt] has its origin in the very material concept *Schulden* [debts][...].(Nietzsche, 1989, pp. 62–3)

He cites the practice of allowing a creditor to remove an equivalent part of a delinquent debtor’s body in lieu of payment, stressing that the payment is the pleasure to be had from causing suffering and also the extraordinary fact that such calculations of equivalence were considered possible (see also Butler, 2014).

<sup>58</sup> Sara Ahmed argues that emotions do not have specific referents, but their identification involves particular relations to the self. Whilst guilt identifies an action (or inaction) as “bad”:

In shame, more than my action is at stake: *the badness of an action* is transferred to me, such that I feel myself to be bad and to have been ‘found’ or ‘found out’ as bad by others. Shame in this way is bound up with self-recognition [,,,] (Ahmed, 2014).

One would not, ordinarily feel ashamed of just a part of oneself.

Trope, as figure of speech (we should perhaps take “*figure*” quite literally<sup>59</sup>) is also a form of “other speech”. In traditional rhetoric, trope denoted a turning away of the speech or language from its expected direction<sup>60</sup>. Sara Ahmed, too, characterises the action of shame as provoking a turning away and back to oneself, and also points out that this is literally what shamed subjects do with their bodies:

In shame, I feel myself to be bad, and hence to expel the badness, I have to expel myself from myself [...]. In shame, the subject’s movement back into itself is simultaneously a turning away from itself. In shame, the subject may have nowhere to turn (Ahmed, 2014, p.104)<sup>61</sup>

The website “etymologyonline” also lists a highly suggestive cognate for *trope* as the “[...] Sanskrit *trapate* 'is ashamed, confused,' properly 'turns away in shame' [...]" (Harper, 2016). In this context we are presently discussing it, the witness of the shame-provoked turn whose witnessing the shameful tries to evade is product of a particular relation to ourselves.

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<sup>59</sup> There is also a fascinating strand of work by literary scholars, based around the discursive structures of thought and production of the self. These mostly build upon Kenneth Burke’s enumeration of what he called four “master tropes” in rhetoric (Burke, 1969) that he thought all other tropes could be reduced to: metaphor, metonymy, synechdoche, irony. See *Tropic Constructions of the Self* (Leveille, 2010), for discussion of these in contemporary forms of subjection. For a provocative discussion of literary “troping” as defense mechanism against the death drive manifested in literal meaning, see Bloom, 1975, pp. 90–3.

<sup>60</sup> As figure, though, it can also denote adherence to precisely the expected course. Trope has also come to mean particular defining features of genre. In his introduction to *Tropics of Discourse* (1978) Hayden White gives this etymology:

It comes into modern Indo-European languages by way *oitropus*, which in Classical Latin meant “metaphor” or “figure of speech” and in Late Latin, especially as applied to music theory, “mood” or “measure.” All of these meanings, sedimented in the early English word *trope*, capture the force of the concept that modern English intends by the word *style* [...] (White, 1978, p. 2, original emphasis).

“Style”, to be recognisable as such, relies on iterability. Such also is the business of self-making.

<sup>61</sup> There are clear parallels in all this with Julia Kristeva’s theory of the abject as illustrated in her the anecdote of the milk cream:

Along with sight-clouding dizziness, *nausea* makes me balk at that milk cream, separates me from the mother and father who proffer it. ‘I’ want none of that element, sign of their desire; ‘I’ do not want to listen, ‘I’ do not assimilate it, ‘I’ expel it. But since the food is not an ‘other’ for ‘me,’ who am only in their desire, I expel myself, I spit myself out, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which ‘I’ claim to establish myself (Kristeva, 1982, p. 3, original emphasis).

However, I concur with Imogen Tyler’s estimate of Kristeva’s application of the concept: that whilst useful, she uses abjection in such a way that it becomes a kind of universal structure of subjection that effectively de-politicises the particular ways that *certain things and people* become abjected (and *others* simultaneously subjected) in particular ways at particular times (see Tyler, 2013, pp. 29–33).

Here, I would like to draw attention to the material that I have placed in appendix 1, a transcription of my performance *Apostrophe to a Citizen* (2015). In the notes to the transcript of this improvised performance, I noted that I did not look at my audience directly when formulating what next to say to them. This might be due to the pressure of their expectation, the fear of a pause turning into completely drying. It could also be related to an emotion that I believe is intimately connected to performance — *shame*, or the potential for it. The ashamed do not meet the eyes of those who witness (and thereby are instrumental in) their shame. [...] Shame is being exposed to someone in a situation where they have the potential to make one suffer deservedly. It requires the consciousness of wrong in the shamed<sup>62</sup>.

### Relational Aesthetics

Rendering responsible and knowable has been the hallmark of the attitude of relational art to its audience. The artist Carsten Höller was responsible for a supremely vacuous installation, *Test Site* (2006), at the Tate Modern in London — a set of helter-skelters extruded down from the upper floors into the cavernous Turbine Hall. The slides were open to the public to use, but if one didn't there wasn't much to see — just other people having a "slide experience". Mark Windsor, in a paper about *Test Site*, in which Nicolas Bourriaud<sup>63</sup> is predictably invoked, has this to say about

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<sup>62</sup> See Appendix 1 for the transcript of the performance. In shame, I see myself as an other. I become aware of the surface of my body, perhaps through blushing, as if I was outside looking at myself through the eyes of an *ideal* other (Ahmed, 2014, p. 106), one that comes from the recognition of, or love from another, or others.

Through love, *an ideal self is produced as a self that belongs to a community; the ideal is a proximate 'we'*. If we feel shame, we feel shame because we have failed to approximate 'an ideal' that has been given to us through the practices of love. What is exposed in shame is the failure of love, as a failure that in turn exposes or shows our love. (Ahmed, 2014, p. 106, *my emphasis*).

This is especially forceful in the context of an improvised performance, where those concrete others who are watching can have no clear idea of what I am going to do or say, and therefore no clear way of knowing *exactly* where, when, or how I may fail, though it might well be clear retrospectively. The other whose gaze I will not meet is gifted with the capacity *to see into me, at what I am thinking*.

This "proximate we" is shot through with ambivalence, as the product of love must be; as our early passionate attachment to power must be. As the psychoanalyst and writer Adam Phillips succinctly puts it: "If someone can satisfy us, they can frustrate us; and if someone can frustrate us we always believe they can satisfy us" (Phillips, 2015). I am not describing this mechanism in order to reduce the dynamics inherent in performance to the result quirks of personal psychology. The proximate "we" is collective, social, right from the start. The ambivalent business of attraction-repulsion between performer and audience is starkly manifested in stand-up comedy. The comedian Stewart Lee, in his *How I Escaped My Certain Fate* (2010), gives a very clear sense of this.

<sup>63</sup> Nicholas Bourriaud, curator and theorist. He coined the term "relational aesthetics", with his book *Relational Aesthetics* (1998). This had considerable influence for the succeeding ten years, and I



what using the slides does to the relationship between artwork and audience: "Experienced from within, the visitor is both the performer *and* the audience"<sup>64</sup>. The disorientation that comes from sliding down a spiralling tube is a powerful effect, no doubt, and also easier to achieve than something that might stimulate a critical assessment of the work or provide much-needed distance. It seemed to me that precisely this sense of being a performer in one's own drama, facilitated by the work, leads to a certain complicity with the account the work gives of itself. The users of the slide in this model are busy experiencing themselves having an experience, which leaves little space to stand outside it and assess *what sort* of experience is proffered. It is undoubtedly abrupt and intense enough to stand apart as an *event*, but beyond that, who knows.

Interactivity is offered in place of critical intelligence; the audience become part of the artwork. This is what Windsor and Bourriaud believe that an un-alienated artwork should offer, albeit in this case limited to the choice of submitting to gravity, or not. Windsor allows that though it is possible to appreciate the slides from the perspective of a non-participant, this maintains a subject-object division and therefore renders the observer "passive" (Ibid). In this scheme, to interact is held to be active; being active is valorised. Its obvious antonym is redolent of distance, perhaps, or contemplation. Contemplation, not being active, is assumed to be passive, and passive is bad. I would argue that citizens of societies dominated by transnational capitalism mediated through new technologies and instrumentalised in a sort of "*responsibilisation*"<sup>65</sup> imposed online, in work and as a strategy of self-monitoring within the welfare state, have far too much interaction, as opposed to too much opportunity to be passive.

The assumption of mere passivity in those who observe is a persistent idea. The most often avowed antecedent in modern times for this position is the Situationist International, and specifically, in Guy Debord's manifesto, *Society of the Spectacle*

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believe still does, though few people use that term anymore.

<sup>64</sup> Windsor, *Art of Interaction: A Theoretical Examination of Carsten Höller's Test Site* (2011).

<sup>65</sup> This term comes from the geographer Mike Raco (2007). I think that it encapsulates various contemporary currents, from public health to benefits and in work — performance review and purportedly more "horizontal" management structures. Subjects are to be made responsible for their health, their work or lack of it — even, as Raco suggests — the amount of crime in their neighbourhood.

(1967). Debord posited that late capitalism creates a society of simulacra or spectacle, and that subjects alienated from real relation, or experience of life and others, are rendered mere passive observers of the fractured dance of commodities and manufactured *erlebnis*. Whilst I have considerable sympathy with Debord's thesis, I find it hard to accept the suggestion that there is a possible unmediated or un-alienated mode of life. The positing of false consciousness to explain the lack of a revolution is a perennial position on the political left (although the concept is also sometimes employed on the right) and it does have superficial explanatory force. How else to explain that vast numbers of people in liberal democracies vote against what seem to be their best material interests? But I am uneasy attributing truth — or untruth, for that matter — to experience.

It could seem that relational art is the least “auratic” possible, to use Benjamin's term<sup>66</sup>. There is no apparent art object beyond the participants' experience and the aesthetic experience (such as it is) is almost indistinguishable from what we could call everyday life — talking, eating, standing around. The feature of the aura that Benjamin makes much of is its air of distance; relational artworks do not set much store in distance — one could call them over-friendly or banal. I would contend, however, that the aura does not vanish from these instances, but moves up a level, so to speak. It hovers like a nimbus over the event, evoking a lost, Edenic, scene of “community”, or “democracy”, a small fragment of which is recouped by the artwork. As Claire Bishop commented in her first critique of relational aesthetics:

[In Bourriaud's scheme...] all relations that permit “dialogue” are automatically assumed to be democratic and therefore good. But what does “democracy” really mean in this context? If relational art produces human relations, then the next logical question to ask is what types of relations are being produced, for whom, and why? (Bishop, 2004).

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<sup>66</sup> It is undeniable that Benjamin varied wildly in how he saw the aura — as something both human liberation and the artwork (Benjamin saw the two as related) could well do without in *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* and *The Author as Producer*, to a source of the “historical index” which could redeem past moments from ruling class domination in *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, to some mixed elements of collective memory and commodification in *Some Motifs in Baudelaire*. For myself, I believe that the aura can no more be dispensed with than nostalgia (a recurrent theme within modern culture) can be.

The placing of emphasis on the creation of social relations rather than objects, and the desire (which is nothing new, after all) to make artwork that cannot be absorbed into the circulation of commodities, is an attempt to recapture some idea of a “truer”, less mediated, experience.

The Romantic contrast between individual and society which informs artistic role-playing and its mercantile system, has become truly null and void. Only a “transversalist” conception of creative operations — lessening the figure of the author in favour of that of the artist-cum operator — may describe the “mutation” under way [...] (Bourriaud, 1998, p.93). This could be seen as an attack on a bourgeois form of privacy and private experience, as exemplified in the reified privacy of the lyric form or easel painting. It could be an attempt to meld life and art in an antithesis of gallery art, the hieratic aloofness of which stands as an analogue to its role in ornamenting the institution of private property. However, I think that it actually re-inscribes a form of privacy in what is public. It introduces a form of private sociality — a dinner party, say — as an image of the public, as its apotheosis. In its emphasis on conviviality — let alone the self-selecting nature of the participants, who are already gallery/exhibition visitors — I would argue that it excludes the stranger, not by erecting barriers to participation (although they are implicitly there), but by attempting to turn the stranger into something else: a familiar person.

Bourriaud’s “microtopias” do not live up to the name, at least in part because of their specificity, their located-ness. Utopia, as is often mentioned, literally means “no-place”. Relational works, in insisting on their ephemerality and spatial boundedness, are very specific places and times. The collapsing of a (or any) Utopian ideal into a specific temporal and spatial location denies exactly the universality that many Utopias are predicated on; unless, of course, that those present in the space and time of the work consider the model and their embodiment of it *to be* the universal. It belongs to those individuals who enjoy the atmosphere of conviviality at that time.

Whereas, according to Adorno, some (high) art might have contained the universal or the masses as a repressed content (such as in lyric poetry); relational works seem to promote themselves and the constituency they create as the mass, writ small (no doubt in sans serif without punctuation), with no surplus — an extension of the idea

that the gathering equals the work. It is a kind of literal mindedness that cannot conceive of the idea of the public (or society) as a thing separate (that is, as an idea or a demand) from those determinate individuals who happen to be there. It is a form of positivism that collapses society back into the individuals and groups who are present — or *representative*, just as the administrator at Berkeley (discussed in the previous chapter) designated the homeless in Peoples' Park as insufficiently representative to be public. It denies the social imaginary of the public as something open and estranged — an abstract universality, in other words — and replaces it with a determinate content.

This content is often described as “community”, which has become a defining trope in contemporary UK politics with its connotations of physical co-presence, personal familiarity, a specific and bounded spatial location. The “public”, in contrast, can be presented as too large and diffuse. The term is now often stretched in ways that cannot actually refer to co-presence or bounded space, although it relies on that connotation for its affective (and possibly moral) force: for example, the “business community” or the “Muslim community”.

In the UK, the New Labour Government's “Sustainable Communities” initiative<sup>67</sup> and the Liberal/Tory coalition's late and unlamented “Big Society”<sup>68</sup> initiative arguably share a political ideology, albeit not backed by equal levels of financial commitment. Both governments have expressed their intention of combating — through an emphasis on “community” — what they characterise as the anomie and social fragmentation that is created by the stranger orientation (in Michael Warner's phrase) of either the welfare state or globalised markets. In the contemporary political imaginary, communities seem to be pitched against the content-less nature — or universality — of the public, and the purportedly faceless profligacy of the public sector.<sup>69</sup> One could be charitable and say that these ideas were well-

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<sup>67</sup> Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, *Sustainable Communities: Building for the Future* 2003. See: Raco *Securing Sustainable Communities* 2007 for a critique.

<sup>68</sup> David Cameron, *Our Big Society Agenda*, 2010.

<sup>69</sup> For a description of the political right's critique of bureaucracy — supposedly one of the defining features of the public sector, with its “red tape” etc.— see David Graeber *The Utopia of Rules: On Technology, Stupidity, and the Secret Joys of Bureaucracy*, 2015. Graeber notes that in this critique, only the public sector has “bureaucrats”, whilst the private sector has “managers”, although increasingly their function is the same.

intentioned, at least by some. It was possibly an attempt to “empower” the individual with a sense of their own agency. However, in effect what it did (and does) is to remove any sense of breathing room for the individual (or any privacy) because *everything* — including the public sphere — is now part of the private individual. Private and public are now collapsed together in this scheme and it would be hard to say which it is more damaging to, an open public sphere (and a universal welfare state) or the privacy of the individual. This is obviously useful for a political project that wishes to create individuals who act as their own administrators within a society-as-market. It is a form of *responsibilisation*.

One could relate this to the term “relational citizenship”, coined by theorist Nikolas Rose, which was devised not with reference to Bourriaud’s artistic movement, but I think that it has applicability there in terms of what the version of sociality it valorises as its work. As summarised by Mike Raco in his discussion of New Labour’s Sustainable Communities, it describes the citizen and the community invoked by the term as

[...] politically, socially and economically active and self-reliant. They are ‘non-dependent’ on the state, and provide for themselves through private-sector (market) provision (Raco, 2007).

Differences between different groups are recognised and given certain rewards and penalties. [...] These differences are increasingly spatialised through divisive policy agendas which seek to control the presence and absence of particular types of citizens in particular places at particular times.

I would argue that whilst moving beyond conventions of display and contemplation that are historically formed by (and possibly, in their turn, informed) conceptions of liberalism<sup>70</sup> — a sense of privacy, private contemplation and all the links to private property and subjectivity that is a private property, the object with all its links to commodification etc. — the relational work, as an *experience*, manifests a kind of

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<sup>70</sup> Habermas describes the origins of the Public as lying in the sense of audience who use their judgement: In seventeenth-century France le public meant the lecteurs, spectateurs, and auditeurs as the addressees and consumers, and the critics of art and literature [...]” (Habermas, 1991, p. 31)

*neoliberalism.*

*The Bike Cemetery:* The work as a whole needed a centre; for this, I chose a site that I have called The Bike Cemetery, a piece of “waste ground” in Hackney Wick, east London. I first came upon it in 2002 when it was full of the cannibalised frames of bicycles that (I assume) were stolen nearby, and then stripped of any useful or saleable parts. It was also full of other rubbish. Some were in bin bags, but the ground was also thick with strange, disparate objects, pieces of clothing, deflated footballs, broken dolls and tools, beer cans, old magazines, plastic toys and thousands of dead batteries. All of these were trodden in, tangled in the roots and vegetation that had grown around them. Like the rest of the area at the time, it had been used for casual fly-tipping. I once found an entire street there blocked by 20 or 30 large sacks of lentils that had, for unknown reasons, been thrown from the back of a lorry. They stayed there for some weeks, getting rained on; eventually some of the lentils germinated, sending green sprouts through the brown paper sacks. Stolen cars were regularly driven there and torched. By some obscure law of physics, their blackened carcasses would attract other detritus. Old mattresses would be stuffed into the passenger compartments, pallets piled onto their roofs and brightly-coloured plastic bags of household rubbish stuffed anywhere they would go. In time — and nothing dumped there would be quickly cleared — these would develop into small Alps of obsolescence. Then the pyromaniacs would come, usually at night but once or twice in broad daylight — though no one ever saw them at their work — and the whole thing would have a second immolation. Empty warehouses were regularly used to host free parties and the streets would fill at strange hours with people enjoying (or not) the effects of whatever stimulants were on offer.

My own time, the time of this study, the fruits of which are presented here, has been deeply marked by a sense of a world “passing out of being”. The structures of the welfare state in the UK — within which I grew up (and the institutions of which I have been educated in), have been subjected to legislative attacks since the Thatcher government of 1979<sup>71</sup> — seem at the current time to be braced for the *coup de grâce*

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<sup>71</sup> I began my doctoral study in 2010, the year that the Conservative-LibDem governing coalition was formed in the UK. In 2015, a Conservative government was elected, albeit with a very small majority in the House of Commons. The work which they have undertaken, with apparent relish and dizzying

which will be delivered in the names of “flexibility”<sup>72</sup>, “consumer choice”<sup>73</sup>, “efficiency”, “competition” and “modernisation”<sup>74</sup>. This process is evident even in the physical environment. Many cities in the across the world and in the UK, including my own, London, are being rapidly re-shaped to service the demands of the international trade in residential property as speculative investment.

Obviously, the streets have always been, to some extent, canyons of condensed money, along with other things. Now exchange value is explicit (See Minton, 2009, pp. 41–58). Whilst Jeremy Tambling wrote, concerning allegory and the city, that the chaos of signs within the city render a single univocal meaning impossible to achieve (2009, p. 100) it has seemed that it, like so much else, is being re-made beneath the sign of commodity. This is evident not just with the accelerating proliferation of estate agents’ “for sale” or “to let” stuck outside. Blocks of private apartments clad with bright plastic and wood are replacing local authority housing, usually with retail

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speed, has been a combination of the sort characterised by Jamie Peck and Adam Tickell as “roll-back neoliberalism [...]preoccupied with the active *destruction* and *discreditation* of Keynesian-welfarist and social-collectivist institutions (broadly defined)[...]” with “roll-out [...]construction and consolidation of neoliberalized state forms, modes of governance, and regulatory relations” (Peck, Tickell, 2002). The previous New Labour governments of 1997–2010 were slower in their work and seemed, for the most part, to concentrate on the “roll-out” phase — perhaps from a collective belief (combined with a world-wide economic boom) that the achievements of the Thatcher years were irreversible.

<sup>72</sup> In a very prescient short essay from 1992, Gilles Deleuze sketches the defining differences between what he calls the “society of control” that he saw as superseding the older “societies of discipline” that Foucault described, with their localised and enclosed disciplinary sites such as school, prison, barracks, family home etc. “Enclosures are *molds*, distinct castings, but controls are a *modulation*, like a self-deforming cast that will continuously change from one moment to the other, or like a sieve whose mesh will transmute from point to point” (Deleuze, 1992). Control needs flexibility as a necessary condition, both for its governmental technologies and for those who are subjected (in both senses of the word) to and by them.

<sup>73</sup> In a telling passage in a book that discusses the changing nature of administration and ownership of the UKs cities, Anna Minton interviews an un-named manager of a town centre Business Improvement District (these districts are part of a process that is transferring control over urban spaces from elected local governments to business interests. who reshape and run things for their own gain). This manager is remarkably candid: “Bugger democracy. Customer focus is not democratic. [...] The citizen is a customer and the aim is to respond best to the needs of the customer. The second it becomes involved with politics, it becomes diluted down and the pure vision of the customer is lost” (Minton, 2009, pp. 55–6).

<sup>74</sup> I consider this last, “modernisation”, to be of great significance. The rhetorical imposition of a temporality that consigns particular ideologies or areas of social and political practice to the realm of the obsolescent is a necessary prior step to legislative and procedural change that renders that obsolescence actual and ostensibly necessary. New Labour lavishly used the term “modernisation”, along with “reform”; for example:

[...A]s Gordon Brown put it in his speech on the Government's spending review in July 1998, 'all new resources should be conditional on the implementation of essential reforms: money, but only in return for modernisation'. ('Modernisation' represents highly contentious changes such as welfare reform as if they were purely technical and value-free updates) (Fairclough, 2000, p. 39–40).

spaces on the ground floor. Owen Hatherley has pithily dubbed this style<sup>75</sup> “*Pseudomodernism*”, which is “[...] a modernism of concealment, a stylistic shell left after all the original social and moral ideas have been stripped out”<sup>76</sup>. These are interspersed with “iconic” buildings; that is, ones that function as their own trademark or logo<sup>77</sup>.

In keeping with this remaking of the pattern of ownership and use, the population are to be remade. As Nikolas Rose, following Michel Foucault, has pointed out

[...] there is no such thing as ‘the governed’, only multiple objectifications of those over whom government is to be exercised, and whose characteristics government must harness and instrumentalize (p.40).

As can be seen in public order legislation and the punitive actions of the Department of Work and Pensions towards the disabled and unemployed, in the growth of zero hours contracts and agency work, the subject form that is being constructed and instrumentalised is that of the autonomous utility-seeker that seeks markets through which to actualise themselves. The imposition of this neoliberal model has lent impetus to a new populist right that is ostensibly reacting to the economic terror, dislocation and precarity that it has inflicted on populations unable to adapt to its demands. They seek to root subject-hood in the supposedly stable soil of nation, ethnicity and (enormously disingenuously) class<sup>78</sup>.

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<sup>75</sup> It should be apparent that style, in architecture as in other things, is the constellation of fragments — capitals and columns, pediments, roof and window shape and proportion — that embody an idea, whether Classical, Baroque, Gothic, or Modern.

<sup>76</sup> The passage goes on to say what Hatherley (correctly) sees as having been excised: “But while the modernism of council estates, comprehensive schools, ‘plate glass universities’, co-operatives and libraries was driven to a large degree by socialist commitments and egalitarian politics, these entertainment centres, luxury flats, city academies and idea stores were driven by exclusivity, tourism and the politics of ‘aspiration’” (Hatherley, 2010)

<sup>77</sup> Leslie Sklair describes the function of the “iconic” building as a form of advertisement for transnational capitalism itself: “[...]the point of the images of iconic architecture is to persuade people to buy (both in the sense of consume and in the sense of give credence to) the buildings and spaces and lifestyles and, in some cases, the architects they represent.[...] Iconicity works and persists because the buildings in which it inheres are built by architects and teams of others to symbolize something (possibly several things) apart from the programme (functions) of the building itself” (Sklair, 2006). The architectural critic Owen Hatherley seems to be getting at the same thing, that icons “[...] appear to have been designed from the outside in, shapes and logos waiting around for appropriate functions to be conjured out of them” (Hatherley, 2010).

<sup>78</sup> It seems to me that the new right, or alt-right, version of class is stripped of any objective relationship to economic position and relation to the means of production. It is remade as a form of “cultural identity”; an irony that is apparently lost on members of the self-same constituency that rail





**IF YOU LIVED HERE, YOU'D BE HOME NOW (see Fig.5)**

**They are everywhere in the city, now. Carefully lit, styled, coiffured and laminated against the weather, dust and traffic haze. They gaze out on the street with the air of smug self-congratulation worn by people who arrived just in time to install themselves in the best seats, or present themselves as aloof, looking slightly askance, hermetically sealed in the display of their own immaculate aspiring.**

**Behind them, screened off by the few inches of plywood and styrene sheeting, from which the pressure of the futurity they embody projects them towards those who are condemned to the present, are the ruins; recently gutted dwellings, mounded rubble, earth movers and cranes.**

## The Public and the Negative

The public is a kind of social totality. Its most common sense is that of the people in general. It might be the people organized as the nation, the commonwealth, the city, the state, or some other community. It might be very general, as in Christendom or humanity. *But in each case, the public, as a people, is thought to include everyone within the field in question* (Warner, 2002, p. 65, *my emphasis*)

Michael Warner, in *Publics and Counterpublics* (2002), emphasises the generality of public discourse (that is, discourse that is meant to appeal to an audience of indeterminate strangers). He asserts that

[w]e've become capable of recognizing ourselves as strangers even when we know each other. Declaiming this essay to a group of intimates, I could still be heard as addressing a public (Ibid, p.74).

Whilst I think that this is a correct assessment of the situation, I don't feel that Warner goes far enough to investigate how this public manifests in those that are addressed. We are invited to recognise ourselves as strangers, certainly, but how far does this recognition go, and what does it mean? He rightly says that he could read his chapter out to his friends and through the rhetoric and register of it, they would receive it as an address to a public — this in despite of everyone present knowing one another. There is a current identification at work here: "we are, on this occasion, the public being addressed"; there is also a simultaneous *dis*, or *de*- identification: "of course, we, here, are not the public being addressed. *That* public is elsewhere, because that public, even if us, are strangers". There is a turning, a troping, both towards and away from identification. To turn in any direction, one must have a body; that is to say that one must be situated, particular and bounded. The movement is from a bounded particularity towards universality, and a recoil.

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the most loudly against "identity politics" when subaltern groups insist on their own rights being respected.

The reasons for this are several: first amongst them is the fact that it is a group of intimates being addressed, known both to each other and to the speaker. I do not believe that “public” as a category is reducible to a known quantity of identifiable subjects. I believe that the reduction of it to such a model, like that which is increasingly available via the aggregation of personal data on the internet, is dangerous to both privacy and to any sense of political equality. I think that the stranger-relation, or estrangement, protects both privacy and political equality. As Warner rightly says, a public is definable as being made up of strangers and our hypothetical group are not strangers. Another reason might be a sense that whilst that sort of thing appeals to the public, those in the room have the taste or critical facilities to see through it, or at any rate, to believe that they do. In this rather elitist posture, the public is definable through its uncritical acceptance of appeals to their love of the vulgar and trite. What this argues is that the public is definable by its lowest common denominator. Another is specificity; this is an extension of the “stranger-relationality” argument. The public is *no one in particular* because it is assumed to be everyone who qualifies as a “one”. Like an audience, individual members of the public can stop listening or be disqualified from membership in some way (we shall need to return to this matter) but the public will remain as the public. So, Warner’s group of friends can listen to his speech or essay read out to them and receive it as *if* they were the public, whilst simultaneously acknowledging that they are not. This will be because (in variable proportions) they know each other and the speaker, because they are less gullible and because they know themselves to be specific individuals. It is the first and last of these reasons that concern me here: the middle one, cynicism, can be seen as in part a reaction to them.

It is not in the least far-fetched to say that this simultaneous identification and dis-identification is shared by all who participate in publics. Participation in a universality (however bounded) does violence to one’s particularity. Equally, separating oneself from that universal — a necessary act if one is to *be* a self — is also violent. It is this violent wrenching from particular to universal and back and the performance of dis-identification that defines participation in the abstract universal<sup>79</sup>. The negation of the

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<sup>79</sup> See earlier section, *Trope/Torsion*, for a discussion of this modality in terms of Judith Butler’s theory of subjection as arising both through and against “power”.

whole that is required for individual being, *as being*, has a strong relationship to the structuring of a public. The public — general or otherwise — as the recipient, creation and object of public discourse, cannot have *me* as a part of it. This equally applies to any other determinate individual that is addressed. They cannot be addressed as themselves in their own particularity because that would be the register of privacy, as in a letter between friends. Individuals must, to some extent, see themselves as stand-ins or place holders for the public that exists elsewhere; over there, outside the room, so to speak. So, in order for a public to be public, it cannot include me, or you, for that matter, dear reader.

This is evident in the qualifying terms set before it — the "general" or "wider" publics. This generalising, this imaginary averaging-out of specifics leads to the discursive creation of a generic "average person" who can be presumed to be emblematic of the (wider or general) public. It is from here that the careful choosing of focus group participants or poll respondents, and the weighting of their opinions according to how far they are representative of a wider group, comes. Of course, as has often been said, it is impossible to meet an "average" person because the average is a statistical artefact, so this means of imagining the positive content of the public in the form of its exemplary member cannot give it a solid form. I would argue that the universally shared aspect inherent in the concept of publicness is negation. A public is constituted by the performed dis-identification from that group that is common to all its members.

The negativity through which the individual subtracts themselves from the category of public creates one of the defining features of that category: its "else-ness". The public is always "somewhere" else and "someone" else. This is not to say that there actually *is* any particular individual existing who is "really" part of the public, though the possibility has been a staple of both counter-cultural and reactionary rhetoric, for differing ends. Publics, in this sense, are the creation of both a mode of address and also by the acts of identification and dis-identification performed by those who are invited to see themselves as being addressed.

I would argue that the constant chain of deferral that places the content of the public as somewhere and someone else also makes publics into things that are evoked

rather than *invoked*. As was previously discussed, *invocatio* was the ritual by which the local gods of Ancient Rome's enemies were tempted to desert their temples and come to Rome with the conquering army. That which is invoked, say God, or a law, the power to marry or arrest, must be assumed to be continuously at hand, even if in abeyance locally, until called upon by a person who is suitably qualified. In the case of the public, this could, for example, be a newspaper columnist or a politician making a speech. Evocation, on the other hand, is a "calling out", rather than a "calling on". That which needs to be coaxed or charmed from concealment — whether hidden by time or distance — has a very different relation to the particular here and now than that which is available to be called upon in the way that electricity is, when one inserts a plug into a wall socket. That which is evocative comes and goes, just as a poor radio signal (in the pre-digital days) would fade in and out of presence into noise and vice versa. This, of course, does not preclude the rhetorical *invocation* of general, wider, other, forms of public, and its opinions or interest as if it had opinions, or interest as such, by those whose business it is to invoke.

Slavoj Žižek has discussed this negation as, in itself, a manifestation of the universal reason that forms the basic premise of the limited government espoused by liberal regimes (2008, p. 140–158). In a complex section, he follows the argument of Immanuel Kant's brief essay, *What Is Enlightenment?* (1784) in its inversion of the common sense definitions of public and private that renders what would usually be seen as the public role of subjects — priest, police — as being essentially private, because they partake in a particular determinate identity, and perform a particular defined duty<sup>80</sup>, from which they cannot demur. Žižek deals with this logic in the context of national and ethnic cultures and identities, the superlative contemporary examples of assumed parochialism<sup>81</sup>.

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<sup>80</sup> Interestingly, Kant describes the public use of reason in similar terms to Warner as something disseminated through the written word. He differentiates between a priest's congregation, which he describes as "however large it is, is never any more than a domestic gathering" and "the real public (i.e. the world at large)", which the priest can address "as a scholar [...] through his writings". The *real public* is mediated through print. The idea of the individual subtracted from their specific social determinations is easier to support when modelled on the anonymous populace of readers and writers who form the republic of letters.

<sup>81</sup> The widespread response to the protests and actions of the Black Lives Matter movement in the US and UK from conservative liberals ("liberal" in the UK and European sense) has been the retort "No. *All* lives matter". This attempted put-down is meant to demonstrate the assumed narrow sectional interests of the protesters, who cannot see beyond their ethnic identification. The fact that law

The basic opposition here is that between the collective and the individual: culture is by definition collective and particular, parochial, exclusive of other cultures, while-next paradox — it is the individual who is universal, the site of universality, insofar as she extricates herself from and elevates herself above her particular culture (2008, p.141).

According to Žižek, Kant argues that the private “is not one's individual as opposed to communal ties, but the very communal-institutional order of one's particular identification [...]” (Ibid, p. 143). In this sense, those who fastidiously subtract themselves from, say, a newspaper leader writer's appeal to “hard-working Britons” or the Leave campaign in the recent UK-EU referendum's appeal to “British values” and “British sovereignty” can reasonably see themselves as doing so in the name of universal European values, rights, tolerance, etc. or world citizenship. The subject of these universalities asserts themselves through these rights as an individual in opposition to the particularities of their specific lifeworld. At the same time, there cannot be any individual outside of some particularised lifeworld.

It is, as Žižek rightly points out, easy to point out that these universal rights are partial and predicated on a subject who is a default white, male property owner and they can be, and are, used to provide cover for wholesale exploitation and oppression; the patchy record and dubious motivations for the spate of “humanitarian interventions” by Western states in the Middle East are clear evidence of this. What is interesting here is that he suggests that the self-recognition of subjects as “contingent embodiments of abstract-universal notions” (Ibid, p. 149), such as being the possessor of an abstract capacity for labour as being functions of an abstract price mechanism, has been a necessary corollary to the development of the subject of universal rights. This description of the contemporary liberal self clearly parallels Benjamin's description of what he sees as the allegorical “debasement” of the commodity under the price mechanism<sup>82</sup>. The universality of transnational capitalism, argues Žižek, is genuinely *for itself* and not a pretext for particular interests, but

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enforcement and regimes of incarceration do not seem to see beyond it either is sidestepped, in the name of universality.

<sup>82</sup> The singular debasement of things through their signification, something characteristic of seventeenth-century allegory, *corresponds to the singular debasement of things through their price as commodities.*

“directly actual as universality, as the negative force of mediating and destroying all *particular content*” (2008, p. 156, *my emphasis*)<sup>83</sup>.

In the quote that I have placed at the head of this section, Michael Warner defines a public as a “kind of social totality”, possessing some form of unanimity, at least in terms of identifying themselves with the public in question.

In contrast to seeing individual subjects’ withdrawal from the assumed universality of the public as a retreat into a particular and private identity, Žižek posits this withdrawal as itself the “true universality”. This “I-am-not-that” is in fact not a rejection of the universality that the public might embody or represent, something which can be achieved with greater or lesser degrees of passion or distaste as a pragmatic action or radical gesture, but a manifestation of the actual universal that constitutes a public. The public is what exists, whilst no one feels that they actually belong to it. In fact, I will argue that this existence — as stranger relationality — is predicated on this not-personally-belonging. We do not choose not to be public, as if it were a thing with an independent existence from our choosing. It is in this very capacity to choose that the categories “private” and “public” are brought into being.

A striking performative negation of a proffered universality occurred in London on the occasion of ex-Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher’s (publicly funded and state, in all but name) funeral in 2013. About 300 protesters turned their backs on the coffin as it passed on a gun carriage along the procession route to St. Paul’s cathedral (see Fig. 10). This was intended as an explicit rejection of the construction of a public in mourning that the government and large swathes of the press had been promulgating. The organiser of this action stated that

[w]e will show the world that Britain is not all united in grief and that we are turning our backs on Thatcherism<sup>84</sup>.

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<sup>83</sup> The point being made here is clearly demonstrable in the effectively identikit style of architecture that has come to dominate new build housing and office developments in cities worldwide.

<sup>84</sup> Rebecca Lush [event organizer], from Facebook page for the protest, available at: [https://www.facebook.com/events/555029311185031/?active\\_tab=highlights](https://www.facebook.com/events/555029311185031/?active_tab=highlights) Updated: April 17, 2013; accessed: August 31, 2016.

The “turning our backs” line seems, on the face of it, to be jarringly literal-minded — almost juvenile. But the whole funeral, along with the media and parliamentary eulogies delivered in Thatcher’s honour, can be seen as an attempt to crystalise and anchor a sense of an integrated public and a shared reading of national and political history around this one particular body. Bodies are important, here. Claude Lefort has argued that the dissolution of the “corporeality of the social” (Lefort, 1986, p. 303) in universal suffrage is a hallmark of democracies. This corporeality was dissolved with the removal of monarchs who received their mandate from the divine and provided a model for the integrity and order of the social. They were literally a “head of state” whose body modelled and contained the rest of society. For Lefort, universal suffrage dissolved this body and its (hierarchical) order into a horizontal sequence of discrete numbers.

The danger of numbers is greater than the danger of an intervention by the masses on the political scene; the idea of number as such is opposed to the substance of society. Number breaks down unity, destroys identity (Ibid, p. 303).

Whilst the UK is a constitutional democracy rather than a republic, the monarchy has, for the main part, assiduously avoided any overt political position; aside from the obviously political position that holds that there *should be* a monarchy. The sacral body of the monarch, a vertical point that anchors the horizontal spread of history, society and institutions whilst linking the heavenly order to the earthly, is rather less emphasised as a trope in societies that pride themselves as democracies, whether monarchies or not. In fact, as Benedict Anderson pointed out, the nation form in some ways compensates for the loss of the divine dispensation that gave shape to the world, history, society and individuals’ place within it.

That is not to say, however, that such societies no longer have need to wrap some part of themselves in a sacral mantle in which to present themselves to themselves. In many cases, the nation form itself will take the place of the monarch and the divine order that they symbolised. Symbols such as flags or sites such as war memorials may be used; often the bodies of national heroes, such as Olympic athletes or reality TV stars, will take their place as the emblematic link between



individual, history and public.

Arguably, the decision to give Thatcher a funeral procession through central London, to mute the bells in Westminster, provide a gun salute at London Bridge, as well as a military escort in full regalia and ceremony at St. Paul's cathedral was an attempt to cement her significance in twentieth-century UK history. In so doing, it aimed to position her as a quasi-royal personage<sup>85</sup> (unusually for a Prime Minister's funeral, the queen herself attended), a national ancestor in her capacity as the founder of "Thatcherism" — the ideology that locally took her name. It was also transparently intended to legitimate the ideology and actions of the Tory-led coalition government of the time by tying it to this construction as essentially "British". This ideology, then, was to be equated with the nation through the figure of Thatcher; the parallels between the "ceremonial" Thatcher funeral and the state funeral of wartime Prime Minister Winston Churchill were not accidental. Churchill was granted a state funeral in recognition of his role leading the government during a world war, this war, and its associated clichés such as the "Blitz spirit" is often invoked as a foundational event for the modern UK, a parable of national sacrifice, courage and endurance, leading to the vanquishing of an undeniable evil. The comparisons were an invitation to see Thatcher's period in office in a similar light, as a period of struggle against morally bankrupt adversaries in order to found a new and better dispensation. This was not only due to the victory over Argentina in the relatively insignificant 1982 Falklands War, but also events like the 1984–85 strike by the National Union of Mineworkers, which arguably inaugurated several decades of decline in the power of organised labour<sup>86</sup>.

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<sup>85</sup> The columnist Peter Osborne made a perceptive point at the time in *The Daily Telegraph*: that the deliberate blurring of the categories of "state" and "ceremonial" funeral and the presence of the Queen undermined the separation between the "executive and ceremonial functions" in the British state. I do not believe that this undermining was a "mistake", but rather it was entirely deliberate. Available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/margaret-thatcher/9984619/Margaret-Thatcher-This-is-a-state-funeral-and-thats-a-mistake.html> Last updated: April 10, 2013; accessed: August 31, 2016.

<sup>86</sup> A typical example of this view would be from Prime Minister David Cameron's statement in front of Downing Street immediately after her death. Cameron states that Thatcher didn't "just lead our country; she *saved* our country" going on to say that she "took a country that was on its knees and made Britain stand tall again". He uses the word "battle" repeatedly, listing the purported enemies that she defeated (apparently single-handedly):

taking on the union barons, privatising industry [...] rescuing our economy, letting people buy their council homes, winning the Falklands war, strengthening our defences and helping to win the cold war.

The protesters' turn was, in the most literal sense possible, a trope. Apart from the physical turn away from the proffered version of national history and politics it proffered, it was also tropic in the rhetorical sense of a change in direction of thought or argument, wrought through a figure of speech. It could not have functioned as a performative act from a distance. Being physically present amongst the crowds was necessary to it. As Žižek has pointed out, the universal manifests in the negative through particular being — as particular as individuals in the crowd at a staged national event. The action presented a critical modulation of the British public as a body united in grief for the loss of a national saviour that the funeral attempted to stage. The back-turners turned the supposed unanimity of the event into a setting to stage *the political*, as opposed to politics; which is, in Carl Schmitt's definition, that which precedes politics and in fact makes any *particular* politics possible: the friend-enemy distinction (Schmitt, 2007, p.26). The demonstration asserted that a national public is not definable as a shared sentiment or content, but — insofar as it is democratic — as an agonistic space.

## ***The Bike Cemetery***

Fragments which seem inconsequential may be the most precious for the purpose of oblique representation (Gilloch, 2002, p.68).

### DISFIGMENT BANKRUPSEA<sup>87</sup>

It is a mere crumb of land less than a mile from the east London site of the 2012 Olympics, that arena of victorious national becoming. It is demarcated — you might say cut adrift — by a busy main road and a slip road and overpass for the M11. Even the most shameless speculative builder of starter homes, or entry-level buy-to-let flats would find it difficult to sell the kind of intimacy with the traffic that it has. It is a spindly coppice with ghosts of plastic bags rustling in its branches. As far as I know it lacks a name, so I have called it the Bike Cemetery because when I first came across it in 2001, it was full of the stripped carcasses of bicycles which I assumed were stolen somewhere nearby and cannibalised on the site.

I have described it as the sort of place you might find yourself at first light on a Monday morning in the thin drizzle, wondering how you got there and knowing that you were meant to be somewhere else — perhaps muttering “*not again*”. I have returned there on a number of occasions in the intervening years, though it might be true to say that a part of me has never left it. The space has occupied my imagination, becoming for me at various times an entrance to the underworld, the grove of the *Erinyes*<sup>88</sup>, the unacknowledged centre of the city or the *Omphalos* of the state. It has provided me with a *topic*. That is to say, it has given me a place to stand, or ground to defend — a virtual point from which (or perhaps *through* which) I have tried to survey the present time. The mosaic of the wall, its fragments of image and text spread out like pages of an emblem book (see Fig. 11) has cohered into a series of images.

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<sup>87</sup> Text on the wall of the Bike Cemetery.

<sup>88</sup> Both Bike Cemetery and the grove share a quality of not so much being untouched as untouchable. In Sophocles' play, the grove is forbidden to casual wanderers but it remains unclear as to whether this is for fear of polluting the place, or that their trespass should spread the pollution beyond its bounds. In the case of the Bike Cemetery, although I have visited many times of day and night and seen obvious traces of transient human presence, I have only on one occasion met, or even seen, other people there — two teenaged boys who said they were looking for a lost dog.

This sense of the untimely, the missed appointment, that I have said the site evokes is of some importance here. I would not say that it is simply my — perhaps illegitimately subjective — projection or a poetic flight of fancy. The nagging, but unspecific “not again” belongs, I assert, to that *erfahrung* of the festival days that Benjamin wrote of as “places of recollection”, holidays which are entered on the calendar as “blank spaces” (Benjamin, 2013, p. 184); times out of time. As such, this vague bad conscience (for want of a better phrase) of being in the wrong place at the wrong time is, itself, quite literally a sense out of time, or out of *this* time (the full ambiguity of the *this* I have just used should be noted, as should the great deal of work it does).

Where there is experience in the strict sense of the word, certain contents of the individual past combine with material of the collective past. The rituals with their ceremonies, their festivals [...] kept producing the amalgamation of these two elements of memory over and over again. They triggered recollection at certain times and remained handles of memory for a lifetime (Ibid, 2013, p.159).

I suggest that this is a very familiar feeling to many people. Every Christmas (the last remaining major public holiday in the UK), one cannot avoid thinking of previous Christmases, who they were spent with — family histories and historic rows. For a large part of the population it provides a still point of remembrance, to be relished or dreaded, or both.

The Bike Cemetery could be called a “blank space” on the map of the city<sup>89</sup>. Its intimate proximity to traffic has — so far — spared it the attentions of developers. It shares this quality of apparent blankness with all other pieces of what was called “waste ground” in my childhood. They were, and still are, an inevitable by-product of the fluctuations of industry and commerce, blank spaces left by failed factories, or situated in the interstices between parcels of land given over to newer enterprises. The term still has value, though perhaps “brownfield” is used more often now — a term used by planners and developers to differentiate it from “green” land

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<sup>89</sup> Also, as it is neither park or farmland, it has been spared the herbicides and pesticides that have decimated insect and animal species, no matter what other poisons have leached into it over years of industry in Hackney Wick.

(purportedly untouched) and designates it as already used, perhaps used up and likely contaminated by that use<sup>90</sup>. It is worth noting that whilst brownfield has an implication of future (the province of developers and planners) use in it, waste ground instead emphasises its present state as “waste”, the current persistence of its un-utility. This persistence is what William Viney called in his book, *Waste: A Philosophy of Things* (2014), the “tardy but unresolved, ‘already-and-not-yet’ of wastetime” (Viney, 2014, p. 11); already gone (from use) and yet persisting, waste performs a perpetual valediction on the threshold of non-existence, but never passes over it.

I choose to continue to use the term familiar from my childhood for what I consider to be its greater resonance so it is appropriate to unpack it somewhat. First, to consider the terms separately: “waste”, like rubbish, is an unwanted by-product of a process; it comes *afterwards* and represents that afterwards in the present. It is also a term that refuses to enumerate its content. It blankets what it indicates in summary dismissal. To stand accused of talking rubbish is to be told that there is no significance to your words; few inquire as to the specific constitution of a landfill — beyond its capacities as, for example, a methane extraction facility or recycling point. Rubbish remains itself insofar as it is not recycled, returned as useful material to the system that produced it as waste. As itself, rubbish has no issue, but remains stubbornly present nonetheless, so it is usually shovelled away to an unseen location. As a verb, waste demarcates the gratuitous, spendthrift act: wasting time, energy or money, to use the most common examples. It is also sometimes used as a colloquial euphemism for the act of killing in its literal sense. This works both ways — the null time of waiting for a train or bus is time that one “kills”. It denotes a profligate act which denies resources to more productive uses by consuming them. The connotations of the “ground” part of the conjunction are various; it is what we all have as our support, courtesy of gravity, and to speak of being or feeling “grounded” is to evoke an experience of being solid, rooted, not floating around, unmoored. Ground is a base where one starts from when metaphorically building thought or argument — as is

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<sup>90</sup> As contamination can necessitate the expense of cleaning the land up to make it fit for other purposes, “greenfield” sites for development have often been more sought after by developers; however, restrictions on building on green sites and inducements such as relaxation of local planning laws have made development on brownfield sites, especially in cities, more attractive to developers in the UK.

obviously necessary with a literal building — “from the ground up”. Ground is also an origin referring back to an assumed beginning.

This impression is in part due to its having been used as a casual dump. From when I first visited up until sometime in 2011, the ground was thickly sown with bin bags containing clothes and other objects (see Fig. 12) that I assumed were unsold and unwanted items from the very large unauthorised Sunday market that had sprung up on the site of an abandoned dog racing track to the east.

A burnt boot...crushed cans...ashes...bin bag, spilling its guts...burnt plastic...soles detached...from shoes...ashes...roof tiles...single rubber glove...over the mounded and overgrown rubble...sparks of new, blue off-licence bags leap out against the leaves...the green and the brown...and the traffic on the road beyond flickers between the trees<sup>91</sup>.

Waste can seem timeless, or, perhaps more accurately, untimely. As Giorgio Agamben writes in a very useful essay *What Is the Contemporary?* (2009) “Those who are truly contemporary, who truly belong to their time, are those who neither perfectly coincide with it nor adjust themselves to its demands. They are thus in this sense irrelevant [...]” (2009, p.40). Obviously, Agamben is here discussing human subjects, whilst the things of waste have no volition. What he means is that the intentions that subjects have, the schemes and plans — even the repetitive rituals of daily life — tie them to their times, that is, *their times*<sup>92</sup>, the times of their intentions, just as the driver of a car does not necessarily notice the margins of the road they drive upon. The road, too, is to most intents and purposes invisible unless there is a pothole. Intent carries subjects across the chasm of the present, their eyes firmly fixed on the horizons, near or far, of their ends. This tying together through time, of intent and consummation, is the valorised place of Nietzsche’s “animal with the right to make promises”<sup>93</sup>. However, we promising animals do not achieve this purely through individual will bolstered by self-inflicted cruelties as Nietzsche thought (Ibid) — we are accompanied by objects in our patterning and parcelling out of our times.

<sup>91</sup> From *Return to the Bike Cemetery* (2015). Audio Disk 2 and online.

<sup>92</sup> Agamben points out that the term *saeculum*, often used to mean “age” or “century” originally designated the span of an individual’s lifetime (Ibid, p.42).

<sup>93</sup> See book 2 of *Ecce Homo* (1989) for Nietzsche’s brilliant dissection of conscience.

The tube of toothpaste measures out a certain anticipated number of nights, a tank of petrol or pouch of tobacco contain a certain expected mileage or amount of days punctuated by cigarette breaks; a pair of shoes promises a certain amount of comfortable walking. As William Viney puts it in his book, *Waste: A Philosophy of Things* (2014), we live "codependent temporalities, neither entirely human nor non-human" (Viney, 2014, p. 184). If this is accepted as a reasonable assertion, then it is worth considering what the constant cycle of obsolescence in consumer goods does to our times.

Various times, abandoned or exhausted, are contained within the things of waste. Like tradition, they persist in dereliction, no matter how the apostles of "progress" (of the technological kind at least) trumpet that the world is beginning to march in unison towards a brightly liberal democratic future, synchronised by the drum beat of perpetual innovation in shiny machines.<sup>94</sup> Viney discusses the "matter out of place" approach (derived from Mary Douglas<sup>95</sup> — often applied to dirt or rubbish) and briefly dismisses it. To him, assigning matter to space as its proper domain, as Douglas does, ignores the element of time. He describes the ways in which objects structure our time through their usefulness in aiding the fulfilment of our intentions.

He calls the temporality contained in them "use time" (Viney, 2014, p.7), which we perceive in objects, and that when it expires with the utility it contains, consigns the object (for us) to a "was". Their trajectory through time (through *our* histories) has halted, *interrupted*. It is this "was" that lends allegory its charge, according to Benjamin. The gods and their attributes, the emblematic objects in their telling juxtapositions, have come too late; their contemporaneously speaking presence (as if there ever was such a thing) has been left back in the time of their use when they spoke to those who were complicit with them in that time. Their hollowed-out persistence, severed from the former life-world that they were part of, like stage properties, was what made them available to allegory.

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<sup>94</sup> For an analysis of techno-utopian ideas that reflexively link liberal democracy with consumer capitalism and the ways in which they have played out, see Evgeny Morozov *The Net Delusion: How Not to Liberate the World* (2011).

<sup>95</sup> Famously in *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (2002).

That which is touched by the allegorical intention is torn from the context of life's interconnections: it is simultaneously shattered and conserved. Allegory attaches itself to the rubble (*Trümmer*). It offers the image of transfixed unrest. (Benjamin, Spencer et. al., 1985)

It would certainly be true to say that dereliction and rubble, if left as such, are both "shattered", as remains of buildings and preserved as rubble, if a further use is not found for it (see Fig. 13, Fig. 14). It remains as the shell of the use value and time that it used to possess, like the dead batteries that the soil of the Bike Cemetery is thickly sown with — a properly profane *aufheben*.

[...W]hen newness became a fetish, history itself became a manifestation of the commodity form (Buck-Morss, 1991, p. 82).

The Bike Cemetery also attracted a writer and *bricoleur*. The wall of the overpass was liberally graffitied. The texts, constructed from single words or short phrases, heavy on repetition and play, were not the usual genres — not political slogans, football chants, sexual slander or biblical quotations. Neither were they the stylised tags of graffiti artists that mark territory or conduct rivalry with other writers or crews of writers. There were portmanteau words, a stuttering repetition of syllables and an obsessive chant repeatedly scrawled through the middle of the wall — “Wolf Vanish”. This compulsion to repeat evidenced in some of the inscriptions has been mirrored by my own periodic returns to the site<sup>96</sup>.

This was interspersed with collaged printed matter, predominantly magazine pages with images of animals, adverts and fashion photographs from the late 1980s and very early 1990s, Monopoly money and food packaging, and some porn, though not nearly as much as might be expected. Judging from the dates on the magazine pages, the work was done sometime around 1991. I believe the entire wall was the work of one person due to the handwriting of the graffiti, the thematic consistency, and the fact that the same paint was used to write and stick the images to the wall.

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<sup>96</sup> see *Apostrophe for a Citizen* on Disc 1 and appendix 3, *compensationton bankrupsea* on Disc 1 and *Return to the Bike Cemetery* on Audio Disc 2 for examples of my re-hearsing the texts from the wall.



I have often wondered about this person, who they were, and why they created the *bricolage* along the wall. To start with, I decided that their actual identity was unimportant because it was the work they had left that mattered. Later, I came around to the similar (though no means identical) viewpoint that it was *anonymity itself* that was important. The writer and site both became a clear manifestation of a stranger-relationality that I believe is a necessary condition for the liberal democratic state, as I have known it. For me, that is as important to the work as the site in which it was made and seen — I will not go so far as to say “where it was *displayed*”, because I can have no idea whether display was the motivation of its maker. I have no idea whether it was aimed at an audience or not; if it was, there is no way to tell who they were and what part in their economies of display it was meant to play.

In his book *Publics and Counterpublics*, Michael Warner points out that the contemporary world is unique in that “[...m]ost of the people around us belong to our world not directly, as kin or comrades or in any other relation to which we could give a name, but as strangers” (2002, p. 7). This is what he elsewhere refers to as “*stranger relationality*”<sup>97</sup>. This form of relationality is one of the defining features of modern liberal democratic societies. It is based upon a certain reserve, and an idea of the individual as an entity in possession of a private, closed individuality. The way that the phenomenon of is conceptualised traffic can demonstrate this.

The Bike Cemetery is islanded and penetrated by the noise of traffic; the roar and rumble there is unremitting. It almost seems to create an arena or bare stage in which the sound can clearly manifest. Omnipresent though it ordinarily is throughout the city, it is rarely consciously acknowledged. I am writing this now, a few miles away, in a room within a building that fronts onto a relatively well-traversed road. The council has installed speed bumps to calm what was a regular danger to the children attending the school along here, but should I choose to, I can still tell the time of day simply by listening to its rhythms, its slight variations in speed and larger variations of density — sirens during rush hour and weekend nights. It is unusual in the city,

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<sup>97</sup> “A public might almost be said to be *stranger-relationality* in a pure form, because other ways of organizing strangers — nations, religions, races, guilds — have manifest positive content” (Ibid, p. 75, *my emphasis*).

however, to be in what is woodland, threadbare though it is, filled with that roar<sup>98</sup>. The wall that supports the motorway slip road at its edge also provides a support for the inscriptions and imagery found there. Road and writing share the same physical foundation: the transit of the stranger.

What we call "traffic" is actually composed of particular individuals in their vehicles whose identity can be known only to the proper authorities, masked as they are by windscreens and a carapace of steel like rioters, looters, or riot police. Subsumed into the collective noun, traffic, these individuals and their cars nonetheless have, as individuals, no direct relationship to it. Any one of them can leave the stream of traffic and get out of their vehicle to stand at the kerb and watch the traffic pass, unchanged and unchanging, without them.

It is commonplace to excuse some lateness or non-arrival by saying that one was *caught in* traffic. Never that one was *part of* that traffic jam. This is, on the surface, simply the disavowal that both creates and responds to the problem that pursuit of individual utility leads to results incompatible with collective good, the so-called tragedy of the commons — those "externalities" that much classic economics ignores. If those in the traffic jam had travelled instead on public transport, thus reducing the volume of vehicles trying to use the roads, they would all get to their destinations faster, although no single individual would. We can say what this disavowal highlights is that "other people" are the problem, or that individualised solutions do not solve collective problems; in fact, they may make the problem harder to see as a collective one. But whilst this is true, that disavowal also demonstrates the clear — and I would say, *allegorical* — gap between "traffic" as abstract idea and the experience of any individual driver or passenger. *Traffic* has its own rules, its own destinations, or lack of them, as it clogs the roads and introduces a caesura, or hiccup, into the smooth teleology of the journey; in its roar and imposed stasis it represents another aspect of the waste time of modernity.

As Susan Buck-Morss puts it in *The Dialectics of Seeing* (1991), her companion and manual to Benjamin's unfinished *Arcades Project*, the coming of the railways in the

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<sup>98</sup> See Appendix 1, *Invocation*.

nineteenth century provided a new metaphor for history and progress:

Railroads were the referent, and progress the sign, as spatial movement became so wedded to the concept of historical movement that these could no longer be distinguished (Buck-Morss, 1991, p.91).

Now we have super-fast internet as the sign and panacea for fears of falling into obsolescence, whilst we also still have projects like the HS2 high-speed rail line which David Cameron promoted by happily combining the literal train with a metaphorical race; both are predicated on speed:

I think if we want to be in the front rank of countries, if we want to be a winner in what I call the global race, then we've got to have a really fast and efficient transport infrastructure<sup>99</sup>.

Cameron has never made clear what “winning” this “global race” would look like, only that in order to do so, the UK population needs to work harder and have the means to do it faster; but the teleological inclination is clear.

So how does the transit of the stranger manifest? In his essay, *On Some Motifs in Baudelaire*, Walter Benjamin observed that despite his being a resolutely modern and urban poet, the perpetual street crowd of unknown passers-by in Paris was not directly represented in Baudelaire's poems, “[...] but it is imprinted on his creativity as a hidden figure” (2013, p.165). In explaining this strange observation, he outlines a theory of modern experience and what he describes as its atrophy — the full and elaborate details of which, though both fascinating and provocative, are beyond the scope of this essay. For my purposes here, I concentrate on Benjamin's distinction between two different types of experience and their differing relations to temporality. One form is described as collective and continuous across time (*erfahrung*), whilst the other is individualised and episodic (*erlebnis*). There is no precise equivalent for these two terms in English, but David Ferris provides a very helpful analogy: “An appreciation of the distinction [between *erfahrung* and *erlebnis*] can be gained in English if experience (in the sense of what is handed on from one person to the next)

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<sup>99</sup> David Cameron, 2013, quoted in the Evening Standard.

is contrasted with experiences” (2008, p.111). I think that this works well — to say that someone has “experience” is to say something about knowledge and competencies developed over time, some form of wisdom that is more than the sum total of disparate “experiences”. The first sense, which should be identified with “experience” — *erfahrung* — is

[...] less the product of facts firmly anchored in memory than of a convergence in memory of accumulated and frequently unconscious data. (Benjamin, 2013, p.157)

It is a form that links individual and collective experience across time, but not in the sense of a conscious chronology; in an important sense, it could be said to be *opposed* to chronology understood as a linear sequence of events. Benjamin equates it with the blank spaces on the calendar that marked holidays, heterogenous elements caught, like fossils or flies in amber, in the orderly parade of numbered work days. It also exists in the form of stories and hand crafts (what were known under the medieval Guild system as “mysteries” handed down from master to apprentice); also “craft” as a metaphor for skills and knowings developed over long generations of practice. The frustrated desire for this might explain the recent preponderance of shops and products billed as “artisanal” — e.g. artisan coffee shops, artisan bakeries, micro-breweries — in gentrifying areas of London.

Benjamin gives the example of a newspaper as the epitome of modern experience. Prioritising the current and recent, it gives disjointed facts and figures; even its layout reinforces the presentation of each item as essentially discrete. It boils down to information given about “some various things that have (just) happened” (Ibid, pp.158–9); the purpose of which is to maintain an apparent separation between events described in the news items and the life of the reader, rendering their personal experience essentially inward and individualised.

The current vogue for online petitions “shared” across social media<sup>100</sup> in reaction to individual stories often demanding apologies from, or the sacking of, various public

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<sup>100</sup> See [www.change.org](http://www.change.org) for a sample. On May 19, 2016 the home page displays petitions to save the BBC’s recipe online archive from closure (187,035 supporters), to appoint Steve Lewis MBA — the “Peoples’ Taxman” — head of the board of HMRC (152,046 supporters), allowing couples of all orientations to enter Civil Partnerships (69,488 supporters).

figures attests to the effect and affect of contemporary news consumption. The frequently cited engine for this — the expression of personal (or *personalised*, complete with email address and a space to leave an optional comment) outrage — is a narcissistic form of identity politics. Whilst I do not subscribe to this view, I believe that this form places far too much emphasis on individual experiences (usually of prejudice and oppression) of subjects as a currency in debate. This can have the effect — and often does on the internet and social media — of reducing systematic inequality and exploitation to a discussion about experiences, including the policing of who has the right to speak of these things on the grounds of their experience. I think this can come dangerously close to not so much bringing of what was previously relegated to the private out into the public sphere — which is a necessary part of struggle for rights and recognition — as reconfiguring the public sphere as simply an extension of the private one.

This individualised and self-contained experience is what Benjamin calls *erlebnis*, literally meaning to “live through” or “be alive at the time of”. It has strong connotations of first-hand witnessing. It also, as Georg Gadamer pointed out, has a close relationship with the Romantic conception of the symbolic — a luminous self-contained moment charged with significance<sup>101</sup>. It was a term of some importance to later nineteenth-<sup>102</sup> and early twentieth-century philosophy<sup>103</sup> — and retains considerable cachet in the early twenty-first century<sup>104</sup> — as the production and marketing of “experiences” is believed by some to be the next logical step for consumer capitalism in the West<sup>105</sup> as the service economy becomes overcrowded and manufacturing is outsourced. Some of the apostles of this new economy

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<sup>101</sup> In contrast to the abstractness of understanding and the particularity of perception or representation, this concept implies a connection with totality, with infinity (Gadamer, 2004, p. 55). Also, see the previous chapter for a discussion of the symbol versus allegory.

<sup>102</sup> Gadamer states that the word *erlebnis* was a relatively late coinage in German, coming into wider usage around 1870, tellingly through its use in autobiographies and biographies where emphasis would be placed on experiences deemed formative for the subject’s later development (see Gadamer, 2004, p.53).

<sup>103</sup> Benjamin cites Wilhelm Dilthey, author of *Experience and Poetry* (1905) and also the father of archetypal analysis, Karl Jung.

<sup>104</sup> See Pine, G. (1998). The “Creative Class” booster Richard Florida also makes much of what he asserts as his affluent subjects’ strong preference for “experiences” over other goods:

On many fronts, the Creative Class lifestyle comes down to a passionate quest for experience. The ideal [...] is to “live the life” — a creative life packed full of intense, high-quality, multidimensional experiences (Florida, 2002, p.166).

<sup>105</sup> Universities, for example, now compete to offer the best “student experience”. The Times Higher Educational Supplement publishes a “Student Experience” league table.

describe it like this:

An experience occurs when a company intentionally uses services as the stage, and goods as props, to engage individual customers in a way that creates a memorable event. Commodities are fungible, goods tangible, services intangible, and experiences *memorable*. (Pine, Gilmore, 1998, original emphasis.)

The article quoted above reinforces the point in presenting a table setting out the specific qualities desired variously of commodities, raw materials, manufactured goods, services and experiences which places “personal” as a key attribute of experiences, just after “memorable”. Richard Florida, the promoter of the so-called “Creative Classes”, adds another attribute he claims as essential to his favoured demographic: that those experiences are “authentic” (2002, pp.187, 228–9). Authenticity plays an important part in contemporary life for many; it entails the application to experience of the category of truth. This is clearly a very difficult thing to pin down, and Florida, by his own admission, does not manage it very successfully.

Steven Poole, writing in the *London Review of Books* blog, describes the disgust felt by some urban coffee drinkers when it was discovered that a supposedly “independent” chain of coffee shops, Harris + Hoole, was in fact almost half owned by the supermarket chain Tesco, so not strictly independent at all. Poole quotes the outraged owner of a rival coffee shop who says Tesco’s bashfulness about their part ownership of the chain that they kept quiet is because “they know it doesn’t match with artisan values they are trying to make money out of”. This leads Poole to quite reasonably wonder if this rival business owner wasn’t also trying to make money out of these same values<sup>106</sup>. Celeste Olaquiaga, in her book *The Artificial Kingdom: a Treasury of Kitsch Experience*, describes the experience of authenticity thus:

A true fetish, authenticity stands for an era where the perception of things was more direct, mainly because it lacked both the complicating dimension of

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<sup>106</sup> Poole, *Get Your Authentic Hot Water Here* (2013). Available at: <http://www.lrb.co.uk/blog/2013/01/09/steven-poole/get-your-authentic-hot-water-here/comment-page-1/> Last updated: January 9, 2013; accessed May 22, 2016.

capital, [...] and the process of mechanical reproduction, in which the proliferation of copies unintentionally enhances the values of immediacy and originality (1998, p.16).

She goes on to make the important point that “authenticity”, rather than a timeless value of the object (“timelessness” presumed to inhere in pre-modern times) is an historical experience; it “takes place in the historical interaction between subject and experience” (Ibid, p. 17).

Interestingly, in relation to Baudelaire’s absent crowd, Richard Florida also extols what he calls “a good street scene” packed with “many ethnic groups”, “various ages, conditions and sizes” and lastly “many people of exotic appearance” (Florida, 2002, p.186). All of this is picturesque background that is consciously experienced, as grist to the creatives’ mill; Florida also recommends that it can be utilised as a unique selling point for the city or district that can display it. It is, in estate-agent speak, the valorisation of a mixture of the “trendy” and “edgy”<sup>107</sup> that is used to market areas to aspirational young owner-occupiers. For example, a recent development in east London has the following sentence in its promotional brochure:

Vibrantly raw and street-level cool, it's undeniably one of the most exciting places in London to call home<sup>108</sup>.

The developer, Telford Home’s appreciation of this vibrancy, rawness and coolness doesn’t seem to extend as far as allowing any of the local population to intrude into shot in the video produced to promote it, however. This will be further discussed later in this chapter.

This brings us back, albeit circuitously, to Benjamin and his discussion of the absence of the crowd in Baudelaire. The crowd is not explicitly evoked as a crowd,

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<sup>107</sup> This usually translates as “visible poverty nearby”. It is sometimes conjoined with “vibrant”, which means “high percentage of people of colour in the area”. People of colour can be either “vibrant” or “edgy”.

<sup>108</sup> Text taken from the brochure for the “Vibe Dalston” development from a section headed “Discover the Cool of the East”. The brochure is available at: <http://www.telfordhomes.london/microsites/vibe/brochure/index.html#p=1> Last update: 2013; accessed June 10, 2014.

or the experience of one in his poetry because it did not become part of the chronicle of his experience. It could not be summoned out of memory as part of the catalogue of daily events. This is because it did not consciously register; it slipped under Baudelaire's defences, so to speak. Benjamin suggests that there are two types of memory corresponding to the two forms of experience already outlined. Citing Freud, he suggests that individual consciousness preserves its own integrity, not by being open to external stimuli — he refers to these as “shocks” and emphasises that modern urban societies generate increasing amounts of them<sup>109</sup> — but by “parrying” them; deflecting their force into the conscious mind and memory. If not parried, they lodge in the unconscious.

The first type of memory, following Proust, he calls *memoire volontaire*; this is the ordinary act of remembering something, its vital characteristic is that “the information which it gives about the past retains no trace of it” (Benjamin, 2013, p.158); that is, the information is nothing more than information and contains nothing of the experience. This corresponds to *erlebnis* — experience as personal and discrete, aptly demonstrated by the example of reading the newspaper. The shock experience is parried, and the stimulus enters the chronicle within consciousness of “things that have happened”.

Benjamin draws a parallel between this and photography<sup>110</sup> — both the act of taking a photograph and that of looking at photographs — citing Proust’s comment that his voluntary recollections of Venice resembled nothing more than a set of photographs (Ibid, p.187). This makes me think more of holiday postcards than the “artistic”

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<sup>109</sup> This was by no means an unusual notion at the time. On the reactionary side, Max Nordau, the author of the extremely popular book, *Degeneration* (1892), attempts to explain and denigrate much of European high culture of his period on the grounds that it was a direct result of the individual pathologies of artists and writers. Amongst the various things that he assigned as enabling conditions for the spread of this “degeneracy” was the “fatigue” caused by rapid urbanisation and technological change in Europeans of the nineteenth century.

All its conditions of life have, in this period of time, experienced a revolution unexampled in the history of the world. Humanity can point to no century in which the inventions which penetrate so deeply, so tyrannically, into the life of every individual are crowded so thick as in ours. (Nordau, 1895, p.37)

<sup>110</sup> Benjamin enumerates a vocabulary of modern gestures that he claims started with the invention of the match, in which a quick gesture replaces a complicated process “[...] the countless movements of switching, inserting, pressing, and the like [...]” (Ibid, p.174). He describes the ease with which a photograph can be taken — simply a tiny gesture with the finger on the shutter button, fixing a moment as part of the archive — as being fundamentally related to the dominant place of *erlebnis* as an understanding of experience. This tendency towards economy of movement has by no means decelerated — how many more processes the even more cursory gesture of swiping and tapping the screen on a smart phone can set in motion?



variety of photograph that might be put on exhibition for its own sake; the postcard pretends to no status other than an index of the place by representing a distinctive (or as distinctive as can be managed) aspect of it, and the purchaser's presence there — "I was here and this is what I saw". The postcard is a souvenir; elsewhere, Benjamin argues that

The souvenir is the relic secularized. [...] The relic derives from the corpse, the souvenir from deceased experience (*Erfahrung*) which calls itself euphemistically "*Erlebnis*" (1985)<sup>111</sup>.

As in many other places, Benjamin implies a connection with ritual — this one relates the souvenir, via the relic (a skull, finger or bone fragment, allegedly once part of a saint) back to religious practice and by implication with the temporal-spatial practices of the pilgrimage. The saint's relic was believed to retain some trace of the numinous that they either embodied or were imbued with in life by a process of sacred contagion. Touching, or even just looking upon a fragment of them would cure sickness and save the souls of those who did so. As a commodified memory, the souvenir represents the shell of an experience that is taken for (or as) the thing itself.

[...] Only what has not been experienced explicitly and consciously, what has not happened to the subject as an experience, can become a component of the *memoire involontaire* (Benjamin, 2013, pp. 160–1).

The second form of memory is *memoire involontaire* — that which was contained in the Proustian *madeleine*. This is material which is not blocked by the conscious mind, or not sufficiently, and so does not become like the entries in the chronicle of memory which are available to be consciously retrieved at will but lacking in content the way that a photograph lacks it. This past does not belong strictly to individual experience in the sense that biographical memory does — accents and modes of speaking, frequently unconsciously employed, display some of the strata of this collective past.

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<sup>111</sup> From *Central Park* (Benjamin, 1985), a text that like *Some motifs in Baudelaire*, was originally intended to be part of Benjamin's unfinished book on Baudelaire.

It is *erfahrung*, the handed-down wisdom of the collective — that modern industrial society was rapidly eroding in the late 1930s, the decade in which Benjamin was describing this ongoing erosion in Baudelaire’s mid-nineteenth century. The process has not ceased since. Yet, if I can plausibly assert that it is still ongoing, then it has taken upwards of a century and a half and is still incomplete. What is this rapid and long-standing process, this perpetual churn that, for all its apparent rapidity, has not yet completed? One answer might be that it is the ceaseless production of novelty, whether in commodities or experiences, rapid obsolescence and the constant “[...] shock of the new, and its incessant repetition” (Buck-Morss, 1991, p.191).

Or perhaps, it might make as much sense to ask what it is that is perpetually vanishing, yet persists in that disappearance? (see Fig. 15)<sup>112</sup>. Although that question has the irritating triteness of a riddle, it can be reasonably answered as “this present moment”. Time weighs heavily on both production and consumption.

The opposition between clearly remembered facts and this unconscious convergence is of importance here. Benjamin’s argument, as it relates to what he describes in this essay and elsewhere<sup>113</sup> as “tradition”, is what properly constitutes experience. Put simply, tradition is the accumulated practice of generations, that which is sometimes called wisdom and is also passed down in the form of craft skills and stories. It is this which links the individual to the collective. Benjamin illustrated this point with a discussion of the effects of unskilled factory labour under the influence of Fordist industrial discipline. The worker needs to perform only one movement, which is repeated ad infinitum. There is no need for long experience or nuanced understanding of the work process. The effect of this denigration is even

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<sup>112</sup> Emblem of Kairos, or occasion. In the best tradition of the early modern emblematisers, I have chosen to accompany the image with a text for the same emblem from a different source that has a slightly different emphasis to the one that accompanies this particular engraving:

[...] Who are you? — I am the moment of seized opportunity that governs all. — Why do you stand on points? — I am always whirling about. — Why do you have winged sandals on your feet? — The fickle breeze bears me in all directions. — Tell us, what is the reason for the sharp razor in your right hand? — This sign indicates that I am keener than any cutting edge. — Why is there a lock of hair on your brow? — So that I may be seized as I run towards you. — But come, tell us now, why ever is the back of your head bald? — So that if any person once lets me depart on my winged feet, I may not thereafter be caught by having my hair seized. [...] I should warn all, it is an open portico that holds me.

Translation: Glasgow Emblem Project. Available at:

<http://www.emblems.arts.gla.ac.uk/alciato/emblem.php?id=FALc121> . Accessed: May 29, 2016.

<sup>113</sup> See also ‘The Storyteller’ in *Illuminations* (Benjamin 2013), the same volume as the Baudelaire essay.

clearer in our current age — that of the so-called “gig economy”, of casualisation and insecure temporary contracts forced upon workers in the name of flexibility. For the small number of workers who can develop the specialised forms of social and cultural capital required in certain narrow and oversubscribed sectors, this much touted “freedom” can work well<sup>114</sup>. For the vast numbers of semi- and unskilled workers thereby forced into precarity, it merely transfers what were previously the risks and responsibilities of the employer — tax, insurance, holiday and sick pay, etc. — onto the new-minted “freelancer”. For the majority under this system, there can be no “experience”, only a series of disjointed “experiences” corresponding to each separate contract or placement. As there are no fixed hours, there are no holidays (or time-and-a-half), either.

Continuing with the example he gives of the production line worker, the shocks are the repetitive choreography demanded by the machine, each iteration as near identical to the last as possible, but not developing from it.

Perhaps the special achievement of shock defence may be seen in its function of assigning to an incident a precise point in time in consciousness at the cost of the integrity of its contents. This would be a peak achievement of the intellect; it would turn the incident into a moment that has been lived (*Erlebnis*) (Benjamin, 2013, p.163).

[...T]he period in which publics have acquired the full significance of popular sovereignty and the bourgeois public sphere also happens, perhaps not by coincidence, to be the period in which the lyric — now understood as *timeless overheard self-communion* — displaces all other poetic genres [...] It is now thought of simply as poetry (Warner, 2002, p.82, *my emphasis*).

It is arguably a drastic misreading to treat the texts left on the wall as a form of lyric

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<sup>114</sup> This would be the “creative class” much lauded by Richard Florida in his book, *The Rise of the Creative Class: And How Its Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life* (2002). Though not its only advocate (there was an earlier UK pamphlet by Charles Leadbeater and Kate Oakley in 1999), Florida’s work has had a great deal of influence through this discourse on national and local government policy, allocation of resources and planning decisions in Europe and the US. Whilst the influence of these ideas and their public advocacy has rather diminished since the great crash of 2008, they are still clearly used — though less by government and more by corporate interests (specifically property developers).

poetry, but I confess that the habit of doing so is near insurmountable for myself and others as it is deeply ingrained in culture. Once it became clear to me that the wall was the work of one person, questions of what spurred them to make such a thing seemed to automatically arise. It is interesting to me that those questions would be qualitatively different if it appeared to be the work of more than one person. A dual production, for example, would tend to make me consider the work primarily as the result and expression of the dynamic between the producers. In short, the work would be the result of a set of social conflicts and compromises. This is also unavoidably the case with any work by a single individual and is actually part of the point I am making. The foregrounding of the interpersonal is, by extension, the foregrounding of the social in the work of production. The socially embedded nature of creation is something that the standard understanding of the lyric subject eschews, although it might be argued that the more the social is disavowed in the lyric voice, the more that it is present as an unspoken excess. My misreading of the BC texts as lyric has the justification of the misreading or misdirection that is an integral part of the lyric voice. My reading of them as inscriptions that mark out or claim a territory is part of the same wilful misreading. The lyric voice as we have come to understand it, is that of the individual subtracted from their particular context, including the context of speech (yet is built into our reception of the form that we still hear a "voice"). Their addressee is uncertain, but the success of the poet or poem relies on the reader feeling that they are being addressed in their bounded particularity by another. The fact that these texts are manifested scrawled across a wall — in the manner that taggers, councils and emperors mark out territory — seems to militate against a reading that emphasises the personal effusion. Adorno's comments concerning that which is repressed and yet inescapable in the lyric are interesting:

It is commonly said that a perfect lyric poem must possess totality or universality, must provide the whole within the bounds of the poem and the infinite within the poem's finitude. [...] In every lyric poem the historical relationship of the subject to objectivity, of the individual to society, must have found its precipitate in the medium of a subjective spirit thrown back upon itself. The less the work thematises the relationship of "I" and society, the more

spontaneously it crystallizes of its own accord in the poem, the more complete this process of precipitation will be (1991, p.42).

Like a conversation held next to a busy road, the words we speak, the way we speak them, is a result of the pressure of the collective that rush past. Using simpler, more easily decipherable words and raising our voices in order to be heard against the roar still expresses, whether we want it or not, the presence of the traffic. The very autonomous interiority that Adorno describes as being expressed in the lyric “thrown back on itself” is itself a product of that same society. It expresses that especially in its autonomy.

As Michael Warner and others point out, lyric short-circuits the trajectory of discourse through the public, emphasising "voice" (that is, the poet's own vocabulary, syntax, subject matter) as something individualised, a personal property that grows out of their experience (*erlebnis*). It is of course arguable, as Benjamin did in the case of Baudelaire, that the lyric form provides an ersatz version of *erfahrung*, what is properly speaking *erlebnis*. It should be noted that in this scheme, not only is experience a personal property, it is also *personal property*, a currency. Warner quotes John Stuart Mill in 1833 describing lyric, as “overheard”, in opposition to rhetoric which is consciously heard; he also describes it as “[...] feeling confessing itself to itself, in moments of solitude” (Warner, 2002, p.81). This was, of course, an echo of Wordsworth’s famous “[...] spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings recollected in tranquillity”<sup>115</sup>, but Mill focusses on the role of the reader who is to eavesdrop, whereas for Wordsworth they are nowhere to be found. Both, however, emphasise the solitude of the poet, their distance from the social. These descriptions or prescriptions might seem at first glance uncontroversial, but they are rather strange. Identifying a form with the (assumed) privacy of self-communion, that is written to be sold in shops, published on blogs, reviewed in newspapers and online, to (hopefully) be read by an audience of unknown others, is strange. The fantasy is a powerful one, however.

Rather than something produced by and vulnerable to history, the lyric speaker (or

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<sup>115</sup> Wordsworth (1798), quoted in Henrikson, *Poem as Song: The Role of the Lyric Audience* (2001).

singer) is ahistorical<sup>116</sup>, the result of perfected and self-contained moments that speaks directly to its readers across both time and space and so is the poem in which they manifest<sup>117</sup>. Thus also, by extension, is the individuality that produced it. The lyric voice can be seen as the avatar of a universalist version of private selfhood<sup>118</sup>, which is, not incidentally, as Michael Warner states in the quote opening this section, the legitimating figure of liberal democracy (when “The Family” is not invoked for this purpose). Especially under neoliberalising systems — whether its roll-back or roll-out forms — the provision of “choice” to individuals, figured as utility-maximising units (car drivers), is presented as the ultimate public good and the goal of good governance. The ostensible privacy (that is simultaneously displayed to the public) of the lyric voice, its distance from the social in its reflection upon its carefully curated personal experiences, is suggestive of the privacy of the bourgeois domestic interior.

The mutual reserve and indifference, and the intellectual conditions of life in large social units are never more sharply appreciated in their significance for the independence of the individual than in the dense crowds of the metropolis, *because the bodily closeness and lack of space make intellectual distance really perceivable for the first time* (Simmel, 2002, p.16, *my emphasis*).

I have imagined the Bike Cemetery’s *bricoleur* as standing before the wall, intent on their work. I cannot see their face. I have arrived after them, untimely. In this, I have associated them with the trope known as the *rückenfigur* — literally, “back-figure”; I use the German term as there is no suitably compact equivalent in English — who has populated much visual culture since the Romantic period, even down to

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<sup>116</sup> The title of this present work, *And I Half Turn To Go*, derives from a poem that displays an exemplary form of this: Christina Rossetti’s *Remember*, in which the speaker detaches herself from the present to foresee the world, and the addressee, without her.

<sup>117</sup> As Virginia Jackson puts it:

Whereas other poetic genres (epic, poems on affairs of state, georgic, pastoral, verse epistle, epitaph, elegy, satire) may remain embedded in specific historical occasions or narratives, and thus depend upon some description of those occasions and narratives for their interpretation [...], the poetry that comes to be understood as lyric after the eighteenth century is thought to require as its context only the occasion of its reading. (Jackson, 2005, p.7, *my emphasis*). See also Henrickson, 2001.

<sup>118</sup> I have utilised (and somewhat ironized) this notion in performance; see appendices 2 & 3.

blockbuster film posters<sup>119</sup> and individuals' private holiday snaps. The *rückenfigur* is always turned away from the viewer, very often apparently lost in contemplation of a sublime view before them. The most familiar example for me is Caspar David Friedrich's 1818 painting *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog*<sup>120</sup> (Fig. 16) which I have used on several occasions (see Fig. 17). It has been reproduced on the covers of numerous books<sup>121</sup> as a shorthand for various ideas loosely associated with Romanticism.

It depicts a figure stood on a rocky outcrop staring out into a deep valley filled with an expanse of fog which is pierced in the near middle ground by the tops of smaller crags, and in the far distance, by large mountains. He is evidently having *an experience* (of the *erlebnis* type). The turned back and proprietorial stance dominate the centre of the image. What is not clear — perhaps it could never be made clear — is whether there is an invitation for us, as viewers, to share vicariously in it. Is the figure a surrogate viewer into whose place the spectator can project themselves, or is our purpose to be witnesses of a closed circuit formed between the wanderer and what they look at? If they are looking, that is. We could be presented, as observers here, with an image of an ideal inwardness, but also an image of self-reflexivity, the turn that turns away at the same time as it presents — the torsion of the subjected self, watching their own subjection.

In *Root* (2015) (see Appendix 2), I described the encounter with the *rückenfigur* thusly:


And it was always anterior. You walk down the street and you see it ahead of you; you see its back receding round the corner. Along the crags, it got

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<sup>119</sup> See the piece by Ryan Britt on the science fiction and fantasy website tor.com. <http://www.tor.com/2013/01/07/the-19th-century-painting-that-most-blockbuster-movie-posters-are-based-on/> Accessed: 10 December, 2015.

<sup>120</sup> See also *Appendix 3*.

<sup>121</sup> The website goodreads.com lists 18 examples — which I suspect underestimates it — a caption perceptively describes its use as intending to “[...] signal [...] that the contents are a Deep exploration of some dead European or another”. They range from the relatively obvious — Thus Spake Zarathustra — and three different tomes simply entitled *Romanticism*; *to Jurisdiction and the Internet: Regulatory Competence Over Online Activity*, and suggestively, *White Identity: Racial Consciousness in the 21st Century*. [http://www.goodreads.com/list/show/76292.Wanderers\\_Above\\_the\\_Sea\\_of\\_Fog](http://www.goodreads.com/list/show/76292.Wanderers_Above_the_Sea_of_Fog)

A black and white photograph of a wall covered in graffiti and posters. The graffiti includes the words "CONVICTION ON ASSIGNMENT" and "WOLF". There are several posters, including one with the word "ELITE" and another with "BLANKET PAIRS". In the foreground, there is a large pile of trash, including a bicycle wheel and various pieces of debris. Bare tree branches are visible in the upper left and right corners.

**And there - at the edge of the city in the city where the city sputters out into sparks, flakes and ashes [staccato rattle and chimes]...Into industrial estates and landfills...Into hospitals and prisons...Where the streets unravel into nets to catch blown detritus and flightpaths. Outside the city, in the city, this is where we find our route...our root. [Rattle] And it was always anterior [chime, and delay on dais contact mic audible as a dull beat]. You walk down the street and you see it ahead of you; you see its back receding round the corner [chime]. Along the crags, it got there before you...at the vantage, its face occluded; just taking it all in. Pure anteriority - always ahead of you and always there when you've left [Chime, dais contact delay sound, drum being dropped].**



there before you...at the vantage, its face occluded; just taking it all in.  
Pure anteriority [...].

The figure is foundational, as the trope of an idealised subjectivity that has always already arrived. As I see them, the bricoleur of the Bike Cemetery in their untimely waste ground with their disjointed incantations on the wall, their turned back represents an opacity; of the stranger-citizen, protected by the anonymity of universal rights but also of some bourgeois privacy – the “creativity” one assumes of Florida’s “creative class” - from out of which poetry (or art) is produced.

## Scalies

Can't miss it mate — Just a step up the road, through the freshly privatised out-patients' clinic without walls, the result of a recent merger with the debtors' prison. Cemetery gates on the left, 24 hour offy on the right, and all the bright new, shining, glass, playschool clad, buy-to-let cash-farms, gleaming like an advert for the transparency and self-presence of the well-lived life. It's just there — yeah, next to those hoardings displaying gym-zombies with bodies like well sculpted CVs and posters exhorting responsible citizens to do something wild and life-affirming — go shopping — there's pictures of them gurning like giro day<sup>122</sup>.

The absent crowd that Baudelaire and other lyric poets could not process returns in the visualisations produced by architects' studios and design agencies of projected buildings. These are disseminated online in printed brochures and, most importantly, laminated onto the hoardings that surround the sites where those buildings are to appear (see Fig. 18, Fig. 5). The figures are pasted into the envisioned spaces of the development — small digitised groupings and individuals engaged in “typical” activities: strolling, cycling, shopping, sitting and reading a newspaper, tapping at a smart phone, or listening to a personal stereo. In the trade they are called, variously, “scalies”<sup>123</sup> (referring to their practical usefulness in giving an idea of the scale of the new structure), “people textures” and “populating images”<sup>124</sup> (see Fig. 19 for some scalies in their “raw” form). As the latter of the names suggests, their purpose is to give the impression (with some obvious poetic license) that the development and its users are already present. The future has already happened, as such it is “[...] *beyond critique; it's already part of our city*”<sup>125</sup> and should be embraced, or at worst, sullenly accepted as a fact of life that one can do nothing about. They represent a fantasy future public that these new buildings are to conjure into existence, perhaps by dint of their very newness. The term “regeneration” was often applied to this process. It is less current than it was, probably due to the state's abandonment of

<sup>122</sup> From *St. James' Infirmary*; appendix 5.

<sup>123</sup> Free samples are available from various companies online. I found immediateentourage.com had a good selection. <http://www.immediateentourage.com/category/free-cutout-photos/people/> Accessed: May 25, 2016.

<sup>124</sup> See Walker, Rob; *Go Figure* (2011).

<sup>125</sup> Geoff Manaugh of the speculative architecture blog BldgBlog, quoted in Walker (2011).

these kinds of projects under the Tories with the concomitant abandonment of the kind of social-mission rhetoric wafted around by New Labour<sup>126</sup>. But the Christian connotations of the word remain in the process that is visualised in these images; it denotes the escape from an unsaved life of subjection to sin and death and the beginning of a new life in God. For some Protestant sects, it comes with baptism and being “born again”; leaving the old behind and becoming a new person — precisely what seems to be depicted in these architect’s visualisations. It should be noted, however, that the placement on the hoardings does not advertise the sort of rupture with the old that a conversion (or re-conversion) experience might be predicated upon. The figures on the hoardings are there to reassure that nothing has changed and the gap — between present and future — was never there or has already been smoothed over.

The style of these buildings is invariably, in Owen Hatherley’s coinage, “pseudo modernist”, vaguely optimistic and futuristic, fetishising ostensible transparency with open plazas (patrolled by private security) and a lot of glass. These people on the hoardings do not appear to march, riot, or picket, or piss in doorways. They neither drink nor smoke and appear to have banished physical disability and obesity from amongst themselves.

Fig. 20 is a still image from a promotional “lifestyle” video for a development called “Vibe” in Dalston, east London. It depicts a young woman enjoying the shops and amenities of the area (including, strangely, a café in Paris — one assumes that the promo is not aimed at anyone too acquainted with local geography) shot in an arbitrary mix of colour and black and white with, for the main part, a very narrow focal depth. The version of the area that this video presents has recently caused a minor controversy on Twitter — although it was produced early last year — which was then picked up by the Evening Standard website<sup>127</sup>. It is justly accused of “whitewashing” Dalston, which it undoubtedly does, blatantly so. The Dalston that this young (white) model blithely skips around appears to be remarkably denuded of

<sup>126</sup> See Raco, Mike; *Securing Sustainable Communities* (2007).

<sup>127</sup> *Londoners criticise "whitewashed" vision of Dalston in "nauseating" property advert*. Available at: <http://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/londoners-hit-out-at-whitewashed-vision-of-dalston-in-nauseating-property-advert-a3202866.html>

Last updated: March 14, 2016; accessed: May 17, 2016

anyone with black or brown skin. It also seems to be an uncannily litter-free area that, in addition, lacks any inhabitants or passers-by who are older than their early '30s. It is undeniable that it takes an area that has remained in the face of rampant gentrification such as the “Vibe” development, notably ethnically and culturally diverse, and makes it look like a fantasy city dreamed of by a wealthy racist.

It does something else as well, however. The accusations of racism are well placed when levelled at the monochrome cast of the video, but the reason for the absence of black and Asian passers-by in the street and café scenes is because there aren't *any* passers-by at all. The city is deserted except for the protagonist and a few others. One can make some reasonable inferences as to the motivations behind the decision to denude the normally busy streets in the area of their population; tacit racism on the part of the film makers or those who commissioned the piece is one, antipathy to un-photogenic poor people is certainly another, in a film that is meant to be selling the place. But it is notable that not even other wealthy, white people accompany the protagonist in her wanderings. The narrowness of the focal depth means that the young woman, along with the other few subjects who appear in the video, such as the cyclist shown in Fig. 21, are isolated within a blur like a specimen under a glass dome. This is reminiscent of Benjamin's perceptive comments on Baudelaire's relationship to the city crowd and Adorno's discussion of the exclusion of the social in lyric poetry more generally. For Benjamin, the apparent absence of the city crowd in Baudelaire's poems meant that it was present as a “hidden figure” (Benjamin, 2013, p.165). For Adorno, the relationship of the individual to society appears most strongly as an unspoken sediment in proportion to how far it is apparently absent from the poetry (Adorno, 1991, p.42). Both maintained that the self-contained subjectivity “thrown back on itself” (ibid. p.42) bore the marks most strongly of the disavowed material support of that subjectivity. Like an ideal lyric poet, these characters in the video exist alone, sealed within their experiences (which are usually shopping) in a city where other occupants are absent or oddly out of focus, except for the hand that proffers the coffee cup or plate of food. The crowd do return in a sense; the comments left below the video express the commenters' views (see Fig. 22) on the version of the city — and its citizens — that it presents.

The public is a matter of representation — that is, of who is allowed as

representative, and therefore part of the public. In a discussion of the highly contentious 1989 “regeneration” of “People’s Park” — a park adjoining the University of California (which owned the land) in Berkeley that had historically been the site for festivals, riots, protests and provided a safe haven for encampments of homeless people — Don Mitchell quotes Milton Fujii, the University director of community affairs: “The park is underutilized. Only a small group of people use the park and *they are not representative of the community*” (Mitchell, 2003, p.122).

Leaving aside for a moment Fujii’s use of the word “community” which carries its own weighty baggage, it is interesting to dwell on the concept of “representative”. The homeless people that the UC Berkeley were intent on evicting were not part of the rather more well-heeled public that the park was meant to provide for because they weren’t representative of it — by having no homes or money, one assumes. There is an unspoken norm at work here which is frequently in play in political discussion and legislative action in the UK.

A rather sinister trend in legislation that was started by New Labour with the introduction of the notorious Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs)<sup>128</sup> has recently borne further fruit in the shape of the Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPOs)<sup>129</sup>, applicable in England and Wales. A government-produced factsheet explains them thus:

Public spaces protection orders are intended to deal with a particular nuisance or problem in a particular area that is detrimental to the local community’s quality of life, by imposing conditions on the use of that area which apply to everyone<sup>130</sup>.

It is worth stressing that the amorphous term “anti-social behaviour” covers a range

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<sup>128</sup> These were orders applied for by local councils and granted by civil courts against specific individuals. They were introduced by the New Labour government under provision in the *Crime and Disorder Act 1998*.

<sup>129</sup> Section 59, chapter 2 of *the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act* (HM Gov, 2014). Available at: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/12/part/4/chapter/2/crossheading/public-spaces-protection-orders>. Accessed May 22, 2016.

<sup>130</sup> *Fact sheet: Environmental anti-social behaviour* (Part 4) (HM Gov, 2014). Available at: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/251313/01\\_Factsheet\\_Environmental\\_ASB\\_-\\_updated\\_for\\_Lords.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/251313/01_Factsheet_Environmental_ASB_-_updated_for_Lords.pdf). Accessed: May 22, 2016

of behaviours that are not illegal in themselves. For example, several councils have prohibited young people gathering in groups of more than three. What this legislation does is introduce a form of summary justice for infractions — fixed notice payments (fines) that can be handed out, not just by police, but also by anyone that the council decides can do so — including private security guards. Not paying the fixed notice fine (the law allows for a special lower rate for prompt payment) will result in prosecution<sup>131</sup>. The fines are paid to the local authority responsible for the order. In the face of what was revealed about the workings of the US city of Ferguson in the aftermath of the rioting there in 2014, it might not seem too cynical to wonder about the possibility that these fines could eventually be used to fill the large gaps in local authority funding in the face of central government cuts. A report into policing in the city<sup>132</sup> after the events revealed that officers were urged to increase “productivity” (i.e. imposing fines predominantly on Ferguson’s black population for very minor infractions of byelaws, such as traffic offences and not cutting their lawn)<sup>133</sup>. A perceived subaltern population were used as a resource from which to extract revenue and this was achieved through effectively criminalising them.

An innovation introduced by the ASBO in the UK was that individuals were given the order by a civil court to desist from activities which were not in themselves criminal offences. However, breaking the terms of the ASBO by persisting in those behaviours led to criminal charges, not for the activities in themselves, but by breaching the (civil court) order. Unlike ASBOs, PSPOs are not applied to individuals but rather to particular geographic areas, and local authorities do not need to apply

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<sup>131</sup> Section 68(2), chapter 2 of the *Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act* (HM Gov, 2014). A fixed penalty notice is a notice offering the person to whom it is issued the opportunity of discharging any liability to conviction for the offence by payment of a fixed penalty to a local authority specified in the notice.

<sup>132</sup> Department of Justice, *Investigation of the Ferguson Police Department* (2015). Available at:

[https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/opa/press-releases/attachments/2015/03/04/ferguson\\_police\\_department\\_report.pdf](https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/opa/press-releases/attachments/2015/03/04/ferguson_police_department_report.pdf)

March 4, 2015; accessed May 21, 2016.

<sup>133</sup> The report notes that:

The February 2011 report to the City Council notes that the acting prosecutor — with the apparent approval of the Police Chief — “talked with police officers about ensuring all necessary summonses are written for each incident [...]”. The prosecutor noted that “[t]his is done to ensure that a proper resolution to all cases is being achieved and that the court is maintaining the correct volume for offenses occurring within the city”. Notably, the “correct volume” of law enforcement is uniformly presented in City documents as related to revenue generation, rather than in terms of what is necessary to promote public safety (Ibid, p.11).

to a court to impose one<sup>134</sup>. Geographer Bradley L. Garrett wrote in *The Guardian*<sup>135</sup> about one proposal for central Croydon that appeared to coincide — geographically and in its timing — with the development of a new shopping centre. The developers and council denied that this was a precursor for the passing over of Croydon town centre into private ownership; a representative of the developers claimed that both the new shopping centre and the PSPO were simply part of a scheme of “regeneration”. This incipient newness, both the quasi-public space of the Westfield-Hammerton development and the PSPO, under which signature<sup>136</sup> it would appear, would be dedicated to the protection and service of the Public.

The thing that I wish to stress here is that although the name “Public Space Protection Order” seems to border as much on meaningless tautology as its preceding incarnation — both being applied to places that are already ostensibly public — what is being “protected” or “designated” in the “Designated Public Place” is not the place; it is an idea of who the public *is*. These clean and happy individuals on the developer’s hoardings (See Fig. 5, Fig. 15) or in the Vibe advertisement, the future citizens invoked, are *representative* — if not of who is actually there, but who these spaces and amenities are intended *for*. This is a piece with the strain of neoliberal policy and thinking that is overtly hostile to the state as a guarantor of rights; marketised mechanisms (note that these are not the same as “markets” but are prized for also generating differentials in outcome) are considered a more objective and reliable means of sorting out who should be allowed to go where.

Richard Florida’s “creative classes” loom large here and have done so in many UK cities since the first New Labour government in 1997. I would argue, in fact, that the New Labour project was led by people who identified with (and as) the creative classes.

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<sup>134</sup> The Fact sheet *Environmental anti-social behaviour* (Part 4) (HM Gov, 2014) explains that whilst no court order is required before making an order, councils [...] must consult with the chief officer of police, the Police and Crime Commissioner and any representatives of the local community they consider appropriate thereby leaving any consultation or democratic accountability completely discretionary. This is further spelt out further on: This follows feedback in the consultation from local authorities that the current processes for consultation outlined in secondary legislation are costly and time-consuming.

<sup>135</sup> Garrett, B.L. (2015) *PSPOs: the new control orders threatening our public spaces*. Available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/cities/2015/sep/08/pspos-new-control-orders-public-spaces-asbos-freedoms>(Accessed: September 8, 2016).

<sup>136</sup> “Signature” in the sense of the trace of an authorising presence.

[...W]ith its dynamic arts vibe, fashion trend-setting and close proximity to The City [...] the area is increasingly attracting a rich mix of creatives, media executives, fashionistas, style leaders and young city professionals [...] <sup>137</sup>.

Florida's model treats the city crowds as a kind of set-dressing. Whilst he maintains that a "good street scene" will be ethnically diverse (he avoids mentioning class), they are not to impinge beyond that on the young creatives' hermetically sealed existences beyond, perhaps, providing "inspiration".

Another larger part of the background to the Bike Cemetery and its writer is the London 2012 Olympics, the main site of which was just down the road and is now known as Queen Elizabeth Park. If I have chosen to treat that site and its *bricoleur* as representative of something — some form of arrested temporality, subjectivity and citizenship elided or repressed within our current dispensation — then the athletic spectacles and the park and arena built for them represents what it is invoked in its place.

Both are spaces set aside, intentionally in one case, inadvertently in the other. The Bike Cemetery was the home of the untimely, a caesura in teleology in the form of the rubbish that was dumped there and the ephemera that made up the collage on the wall. In addition, it was surrounded by the disavowed presence of a collectivity manifested through diffuse and pervasive noise (traffic). The Olympics, in contrast, was promoted as the site of a national becoming, of an identification of the nation with specific bodies, and specific idealised models of progress. In a previous section, I briefly discussed the commonplace use of increasing speed as a metaphor for historical progress and the addition of the competitive element of the race; the Olympics provided that.

The London Legacy Development Corporation has overseen the repurposing of the buildings built for the games — the media centre now houses a branch of Loughborough University and the stadium has been leased to West Ham Football

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<sup>137</sup> The text is superimposed on a photograph of the city skyline combined with an architect's visualisation, giving the impression of having been taken from the balcony of one of the — at that time unbuilt — flats. Available at: <http://www.telfordhomes.london/microsites/vibe/brochure/index.html#p=1> Last update: 2013; accessed June 10, 2014.



Club (at remarkably preferential rates)<sup>138</sup>. This repurposing is, unsurprisingly, an enormous transfer of publicly-funded assets into private hands. Thomas Heatherwick, the designer of the Olympic cauldron that was lit at the opening ceremony, has won the tender to design the "Garden Bridge"<sup>139</sup> project — a vanity project providing yet more pseudo-public space<sup>140</sup> in central London. About the scheme, Heatherwick was recorded as saying in 2014 that "[i]t feels like we're trying to pull off a big crime"<sup>141</sup>; a sentiment that it is easy to see the logic in, but probably just meant that the designer felt the project was a brave, visionary gambit conducted in the face of hidebound bureaucracy, or something. This is commonplace in the "disruptive" world of late capital. The contract was awarded to him under circumstances<sup>142</sup> which make his comment seem prescient. Back at the Olympic 2012 site (now called Queen Elizabeth park), the self-consciously "iconic" twisted scarlet intestine/tower/folly of *ArcelorMittal Orbit*<sup>143</sup> by Anish Kapoor and Cecil

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<sup>138</sup> The taxpayer will foot most of the bill for the Olympic Stadium deal, paying for stadium costs down to goal posts and corner flags, at a price of £272 million — of which just £15 million will be paid by West Ham. Daily Telegraph: *West Ham's £12, 500 donations to the Conservative Party raises "serious questions" over "dubious stadium deal"*. Available at:

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/football/2016/05/27/west-hams-12500-donation-to-the-conservative-party-raises-seriou/>. Updated: May 27, 2016. Accessed: May 27, 2016. The Telegraph, predictably, emphasise the unfailingly splenetic opinion of the Tax Payers' Alliance. What they delicately skate over is the political relationship between the Conservative Party and West Ham FC Vice-Chair Karren Brady. She was appointed a Conservative life peer in 2014 as Baroness Brady of Knightsbridge. The stadium deal was negotiated by the London Legacy Development Corporation, chaired by Conservative ex-London Mayor, Boris Johnson.

<sup>139</sup> See: <https://www.gardenbridge.london/>. Updated: May 2016. Accessed: May 28, 2016

<sup>140</sup> Though receiving public funds of up to £60 million (£30 million from central government and £30 million from Transport for London) the bridge will be owned and administered by the Garden Bridge Trust and will only be open daily until midnight. Private security, called "Visitor Hosts", will monitor for crime and the perennial favourite "anti-social behaviour". This can include: sleeping, playing music, cycling or skateboarding.

<sup>141</sup> Quoted in: <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2014/jun/24/garden-bridge-london-thomas-heatherwick-joanna-lumley>. Updated: Accessed: May 27, 2016.

<sup>142</sup> The bridge and its designer were both championed by the actress Joanna Lumley, spokeswoman for the Garden Bridge Trust, who is also apparently a lifelong friend of the ex-mayor Boris Johnson. The design was decided through a competition, though there are strong indications that Heatherwick Studios, the eventual winner, were favoured from the start despite having little to no prior experience in building bridges. The person who made the decision, Richard de Cani of Transport for London, has since left TfL to work for Arup, the engineering firm tasked with building the bridge.

For a brief summary see: Moore, *Garden Bridge: a project promoted and sold with half-truths, deceptions and evasions*. Available at:

<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2016/feb/14/garden-bridge-half-truths-deceptions-evasions-thames-london-rowan-moore>. Updated: February 14, 2016.

Accessed: May 27, 2016.

<sup>143</sup> The *ArcelorMittal* part of the title was not used over the duration of the actual games due to the International Olympic Committee's draconian rules on un-approved trademarks and logos in the Olympic Park. It was added to the name — it is the sponsor's steel company — after the games had finished.

Balmond (predictably with help from Boris Johnson's contacts<sup>144</sup>) now has, in the inevitable phraseology, a "slide experience"<sup>145</sup> — a ticketed helter-skelter slide encircling it, by the artist Carsten Höller. The site is now to be a huge pleasure garden, owned and underwritten by international capital.

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<sup>144</sup> Boris Johnson got sponsorship from Lakshmi Mittal, the UK's richest man and the owner of the company that provided the steel (and part of the name). In a telling anecdote, Johnson described their meeting thus:

I happened to be in the cloakroom at the World Economic Forum in Davos, getting my coat and I bumped into Lakshmi Mittal. It was the first time in my life that I'd met him. I said hello and we had a very friendly conversation that lasted approximately 45 seconds. In that time, I explained the idea and he said: 'Great, I'll give you the steel'. [...] ArcelorMittal gave considerably more than the steel [...].

Interview available at: <http://corporate.arcelormittal.com/who-we-are/arcelormittal-orbit/perspectives/boris-johnson>. Accessed: May 27, 2016.

<sup>145</sup> This description is from the *Orbit* website. Available at: <http://arcelormittalorbit.com/whats-on/the-slide/> Accessed: May 26, 2016.

## The Athlete

The universal (albeit bounded) does make its way back, however, as the *Nation*. The Olympics promised an event that would provide an image of it in the valorised form of competitive sporting prowess as a set of trained bodies. These bodies are freighted with a variety of ideas about the nation, and even humanity itself, that their public<sup>146</sup> are encouraged to identify with. Whilst the neoliberal “relational turn” might ignore the existence of the public as an entity that can be separated from presence — that is, from the category of “everyone”<sup>147</sup> — there still exists a hunger to manifest society aesthetically as a body that can be seen and (theoretically) touched. Claude Lefort characterised democratic states as being “disincorporated”:

The *ancien regime* was made up of an infinite number of small bodies [...T]hese small bodies fitted together within a great imaginary body for which the body of the king provided the model and the guarantee of its integrity. The democratic revolution [...] burst out when the body of the king was destroyed, when the body politic was decapitated and when, at the same time, the corporeality of the social was dissolved. Then there occurred what I would call a "disincorporation" of individuals<sup>148</sup>.

Obviously, Lefort was referring to France as the UK has a constitutional monarch. However, the UK monarchy has not been entirely successful in providing a body for the social. The (surprising) outbreak of public mourning<sup>149</sup> on the death of Princess

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<sup>146</sup> In the case of an international franchise event like the Olympics, it is not the case of simply a presentation to those present in that particular space at that particular time, in Michael Warner’s definition (I have previously argued that audiences already include more members than that). It is an event intended to transcend the stadium and even, to some extent, nations themselves, in the identifications that it solicits from those who watch, listen to or read about it (or even those who don’t).

<sup>147</sup> “Everyone” is a group whose membership can be determined, even with some difficulty. Contrast this with “anyone”.

<sup>148</sup> Lefort, *Image of the Body and Totalitarianism* (1986, p.303).

<sup>149</sup> The intensity of this varied wildly from place to place and no doubt the tabloid narrative of a “nation in mourning” was part fabrication. But I can attest that, to my shock (and horror) it was very real in the town of Penzance in west Cornwall where I was living at the time. There were shrines in shopfronts along the high street and at my workplace — a public gallery — we were warned to strictly observe the one minute’s silence. This was not excessive caution, the people I talked to there were, it seemed to me, genuinely distraught. I also noticed that it became a focal point for long-standing local grudges. A member of the family who owned the local fish docks — and therefore the livelihood of local fishermen — were already deeply unpopular and had been for a long time, but several gallery volunteers and visitors told me that what was worst about them was that “they didn’t even mourn Diana”.

Diana in 1997 demonstrated that the Queen was widely considered too remote to represent “us” by not shedding a tear or expressing anything beyond very formal regret. That this is not a constitutional monarch’s job seemed to escape the tabloids. In the absence of a monarchy that is acceptable to fulfil this function, other surrogates are sought. In this, no less than in the communitarianism of relational art, the abstraction of the public is literalised into a determinate body, and just as in the “scalies” discussed in the previous chapter, this body also models acceptable modes of citizenship, or being public. As it does with the Romantic concept of *erlibnis*, the symbol reappears, an instantaneous melding of the transcendent and the discrete particularly when the winner ascends the podium.

No casting agent could have better chosen three people to represent modern Britain: a mixed-race heptathlete with a British mother and Jamaican father; a ginger-haired long jumper from Milton Keynes, and a Somalian refugee<sup>150</sup>.

In the case of the Olympic athlete, this body makes tangible within itself such (suitably capitalised) abstractions as the Nation, Health and Competition, and acts as a vehicle for them<sup>151</sup> through the mobilisation of the athlete’s will to win. The kind of gushing journalism that the UK successes in the games, and the perceived national success in hosting it inspired, are a clear indication of this<sup>152</sup>. The successes of the distance runner Mohammed “Mo” Farah (originally from Mogadishu) made him an

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<sup>150</sup> This quote is a fairly representative example of the sort of thing that commentators were publishing in the newspapers at the time. It comes from an editorial (unattributed) in the Evening Standard from 2012. Available at:

<http://www.standard.co.uk/comment/mo-farah-has-sent-a-message-of-hope-to-all-migrants-8009509.html>

Last updated: August 6, 2012; accessed: May 21, 2016.

<sup>151</sup> From the same Evening Standard editorial:

For as so often in the past, the skill and successes of sporting heroes symbolise something far more profound than just the longest jump or fastest run [...] Britain has discovered that far from being broken or bog-standard, the country remains world-class. Almost to our surprise, we have cause to feel good about ourselves and permission to feel patriotic.

One is led to wonder by this, what does a country that is not “world-class” look like? This usage is informed by the lens of international relations defined as competition, in sport and beyond.

<sup>152</sup> The following is from an unattributed leader column in the usually relatively sober New Statesman, lauding the game’s manifestation of a “new patriotism” that would be different from the old, chauvinist and imperialist variety:

But the Games have been much more than a distraction — they have created a sense of national unity and purpose and, at times, a kind of ecstatic sociality. [...] In an age when our lives have become so atomised, the yearning for the shared experience clearly runs deep.

Available at: <http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/politics/2012/08/leader-london-games-and-rise-new-patriotism>

Last updated: August 8, 2012; accessed: July 15, 2016.

emblem for the hoped for “integration” (a vague term, with slightly unsettling implications) of Somalis — and other immigrant groups — into UK society<sup>153</sup>. Photographs of Farah wrapped in the flag have been a notable staple of UK newspaper front pages (see Fig. 23).

An interesting sidelight is shone on the issue of perceived foreignness (foreign bodies, strangers), integration, will and foreign substances by the decision the UK Home Secretary (now Prime Minister) Theresa May made a year after the Olympics, which was to ban the mildly stimulant herb, *khat* (sometimes also spelled *qat*). May took this action against the advice of the government’s own Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD), who reported that a ban was not justified by detriment to health or wider social damage<sup>154</sup>. *Khat* is apparently popular amongst UK citizens of Somali, Ethiopian and Yemeni ancestry. A Guardian article published before the ban was announced contains the following quote from a campaigner and self-described “former addict”, Abukhar Awale:

For the Somali community, *qat* is the biggest barrier to our integration. It's segregating Somali youngsters from wider society. They are in the *marfashes* [social clubs for Somali men<sup>155</sup>, where *khat* is consumed]. They do not

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<sup>153</sup> For example, in a Daily Mail article from the time by Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, *Mo's joyful embrace of Britishness and why these Games mark a truly historic watershed* (2012), there is this:

But these two weeks have been a watershed of true significance. There has been a visceral reaction among black and Asian Britons to what we have seen. For some, it has been perhaps the first time they have really felt a part of this country. For others, the promise of tolerance and integration has come true.

Available at: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-2187469/Mo-Farahs-joyful-embrace-Britishness-Games-mark-truly-historic-watershed.html>

Updated: August 12, 2012; Visited: June 11, 2016.

<sup>154</sup> Travis, *Theresa May ignores experts and bans use of khat*; 2013. Available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2013/jul/03/theresa-may-bans-khat> Updated: July 3, 2013; accessed: June 11, 2016.

<sup>155</sup> Howard Swains, writing in *The Independent* in 2012 offers an interesting insight on the gender politics aspect of this dispute:

Typically, women and children settled in Britain before their husbands after leaving the East African refugee camps during the turmoil of the 1990s. Thus Somali women tend to be better integrated and can often be the principal source of income. An unemployed man's *khat* habit can be seen as an abandonment of familial responsibility and an inversion of societal norms.

Available at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/features/khat-fight-harmless-recreational-drug-or-a-recruitment-tool-for-terrorists-7893373.html>

Updated: June 29, 2012; accessed: June 12, 2016.

contribute, they don't speak English, they don't feel they are part of the society [...] <sup>156</sup>.

Awale says that whilst previously it was only consumed by the older generations within the Somali community — who presumably brought the habit with them to the UK — he was concerned that use was becoming more prevalent amongst younger people. There is a clear link being made here between the cultural practices of the “old country” and failure to “integrate” signified by a return to those practices figured in the trope (the physical posture) of the purported drug addict. This addict segregates themselves from wider UK society in the *marfash*, continually called back to another place and identity through their addiction. This is a part of the temporality of addiction, the persistent return to a substance and its associated behaviours <sup>157</sup>, an obstinate refusal to mobilise the will in order to “move on” with life.

It is worth noting that the ACMD did not mention any addictive properties of the drug. They also debunked purported links (thought to be the rationale behind the bans in force in the US and much of Europe) between the *khat* trade and the Somali Islamist terror group *Al-Shabaab* <sup>158</sup>. Awale has admitted his opportunism in exploiting the (unproven) link to further his cause, telling an interviewer in 2012,

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<sup>156</sup> Quoted in: Sample, *Khat ban divides opinion among UK's Somali community*; 2013. Available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2013/jul/03/khat-ban-uk-somali>  
Last updated: July 3, 2013; accessed: June 11, 2016.

<sup>157</sup> Recovering addicts are frequently urged to avoid friends and places connected to their addiction as it is believed that reviving old associations — social and spatial — will lead to relapse. Addiction is a compulsion of memory — or a fault in memory.

<sup>158</sup> Dr Axel Klein, writing in the left-ish blog Left Foot Forward, suggested that Awale's motivation in advocating and pursuing the ban was, in fact, to *increase* the influence of Islam in the UK Somali community. The *marfash* provide a space outside of the more controlled or “traditional” home or mosque for young men and provide a counterbalance to that control, Klein claims.

Mafrishes are public spaces, where discussion ranges widely and freely, as friends gather to relax and enjoy. At a time of rising hostility and nationalism making the assimilation for even second or third Generation British Somalis more difficult, such spaces come at a premium. In Somali neighbourhoods like Tower Hamlets of Lambeth these mafrishes were the strongest organised opposition to the grip held by Islamic organisations over the community.

Available at: <http://leftfootforward.org/2013/07/islamist-extremists-score-their-first-political-success-in-the-uk/>. Updated: July 3, 2013; accessed: June 11, 2016.

Awale also told the Mail on Sunday in 2013 that an allegedly radical Islamist preacher was attempting to recruit young men to *jihad* in a *marfash* in Woolwich, prior to the murder that same year of the young soldier Lee Rigby in the same area of London. The same article claims that one of the killers, Michael Adelbolajo, was a chewer of khat.

Available at: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2334499/Police-war-extremists-khat-houses-amid-fears-recruiting-grounds-Islamic-extremists.html>. Updated: June 1, 2013; accessed: June 13, 2016.

This is the tool for me, I will put this on the table and say, 'Now you must act'. And they will act. When this country hears terrorism, they will act<sup>159</sup>.

This is astute, and he was proven right. Terror is another contemporary anxiety frequently and deliberately linked to immigration in the face of the fact that most of those who have conducted attacks in the UK were born here; Islam-inspired terror is persistently treated as if it were an alien phenomenon, a strange visitor from other shores. The fact that one faction of Islamists in the areas of the Yemen that they are in control of have declared *khat* use to be contrary to *sharia* law has not given the UK government pause.

Muhamed Ibrahim, another anti-*khat* campaigner from the London Somali youth forum, explicitly linked chewing the herb to another form of supposedly malignant dependency — that of claiming benefits. He is quoted as saying he had seen young users' lives "wasted in the wilderness of benefit dependency"<sup>160</sup> as a result of using the drug (Quoted in Travis, 2013). *Khat* is not only posited as addictive, its use is causally associated with another pernicious form of dependency — the claiming of benefits. Dependency is something that clouds the lucid self-presence of the choosing subject and breaks the hermetic seal that protects that core from the contingency of need, thus undermining the legitimating function of choice. We shall return to this later.

The athletic body and the athletic nation state that is celebrated in the Olympics are both assumed to be self-identical and self-similar. That is, immune from outside incursion such as infiltration by "immigrant" drugs and terror groups. This can be seen in the furore that "doping" scandals cause. Steroids and other substances are regarded as bestowing unfair advantages on those that use them, in the same way that winning a hundred metre sprint by driving a car would be.

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<sup>159</sup> Interview with Howard Swains in The Independent. Available at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/features/khat-fight-harmless-recreational-drug-or-a-recruitment-tool-for-terrorists-7893373.html>. Updated: June 29, 2012; accessed: June 12, 2016.

<sup>160</sup> Another state supposedly characterised by passivity and the shirking of social responsibilities. It is also often described as marked by a similar kind of "stuck" temporality. In a society where work is assumed to be the ultimate social good and only legitimate route to self-realisation, the unfurling of the self along a trajectory incremental improvement, it is not surprising that unemployment would be regarded as a form of stasis.

A performance enhancing drug<sup>161</sup> is a prosthesis, something extra added to the body, a “foreign” substance that alienates it from its “true” being as manifested in that performance. There is necessarily an ambiguity in this formula; whilst “drugs” such as *khat* sap the will of their users, in sport the problem is seen as the possibility of sufficient enhancement such that the user can ignore pain and fatigue to secure victory. The presence of controlled substances in the athlete’s blood, whether or not they could be proved to have materially assisted, invalidates their performance which is no longer considered to be authentically theirs. That is, the performance is the result of the drug, and not the athlete’s own individualised striving. Jacques Derrida, in a published interview entitled *The Rhetoric of Drugs* (1995), describes this as one of the defining features of social disdain (and worse) towards drugs and their users:

[D]rugs, it is said, make one lose any sense of true reality. [...] We do not object to the drug user's pleasure per se, but to pleasure taken in an experience without truth. Pleasure and play (now still as with Plato) are not in themselves condemned *unless they are inauthentic and void of truth* (Derrida, 1995, pp. 235–6, *my emphasis*).

It is arguable that the arena of international competition that is the Olympic games also attempts to present an idealised and formalised version of the workings of capitalism. It manifests several of the key justifications of neoliberalism in dramatic form: meritocracy, and equality of opportunity, the idea that individuals freely compete on a “level playing field”<sup>162</sup> and succeed through a combination of will and talent. It attempts to present “the global race” beloved of David Cameron and others as a fair competition, whilst sidestepping larger questions about whether there *should* be a competition at all. Doping destroys the impression of fairness, in that particular individuals or countries are assigning to themselves an advantage which other participants can’t (or won’t) avail themselves of. That, however, does not in itself explain why the logical solution to this — that any and all drugs are permitted,

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<sup>161</sup> The term “drug” is not, in itself, neutral; doctors prescribe medicines, unauthorised individuals abuse drugs — even when the substance itself, pain killers, for example, is exactly the same in each case. See Keane, 2002.

<sup>162</sup> Stefan Collini’s (2010) tart observation on this metaphor is apposite here: Sports that are contested on a ‘playing field’, we might point out, are nearly always between two teams; indeed, the metaphor suggests something as old-fashioned as class conflict. More important, what happens on the playing field, however level, is heavily determined by things that happen off it. Recruitment, wealth, facilities, time, training — there’s almost no end to it.



thereby evening things out again — is not pursued. That it is not pursued tells us a great deal about the ideas at stake in this matter; as Derrida said, it is a question of truth, of *authenticity*. Not only must the competition be seen to be fair, it must also be seen to be authentic. Starting from a base of apparent formal equality of opportunity (to win) the unequal outcome (producing both winners and losers) of the competition must be seen to clearly be the result of qualities emanating directly from the competitors themselves<sup>163</sup>. As a morality tale where individual persistence, resilience, skill, effort and focus receive their just rewards, the awarding of victory to protagonists who achieved it through means apparently external to themselves would tend to invalidate the message. Sport is assumed to provide a model of “fair” competition with outcomes achieved through the merits (or otherwise) that are inherent in the competitors; a meritocracy, in other words.

The retrospective discovery of doping amongst a number of Russian athletes was described as not merely a scandal for the individuals involved, but also for Russia itself. The UK long-distance runner Jo Pavey speaks to this sense (whilst also articulating the most revealing cliché in sport and politics):

As a clean athlete you want to go out there and feel like you are competing on a level playing field and the thought that a nation itself would be systematically doping its athletes is absolutely shocking<sup>164</sup>.

A “clean athlete” is only themselves, just as dirt, or being “dirty”, would add a supplement of misplaced matter<sup>165</sup> to the essential core; there is nothing supposedly artificial added to what is given. When one considers that athletes are allowed

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<sup>163</sup> The place of competition in sport as an idealised analogue of competition in wider economic and social life is the subject of an illuminating discussion — to which I am much indebted — in sociologist Will Davie’s *The Limits of Neoliberalism* (2014). In it, he describes the fundamental anxiety concerning the bases of value which characterises neoliberal thought. In the place of subjective, evaluative moral and “ideological” modes of assessing social outcomes and formulating values, neoliberals prefer to prioritise the supposedly “objective” language of economics as being empirically verifiable. The language of sport, or sport as a metaphor, becomes pervasive in politics. The existence of “league tables” for schools and universities is one such example.

For more on neoliberalism’s hermeneutic anxiety, see also Mirowski, *Never Let a Serious Crisis Go to Waste: How Neoliberalism Survived the Financial Meltdown* (2013).

<sup>164</sup> Quoted in The Guardian, London Olympics were sabotaged by Russia’s doping, report says Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2015/nov/09/london-olympics-russia-doping-report> Updated: November 9, 2015; accessed: June 21, 2016.

<sup>165</sup> See Mary Douglas *Purity and Danger* (2002) for the idea of dirt as “matter out of place”.

specialised diets and such practices as training in high altitudes to achieve an advantage when competing at lower ones, there is obviously some reliance on categories of the “natural” and the distinctions made could scarcely be described as stable. The emphasis is on what is whole and given, as opposed to what is meant to supplement. The body with prosthesis is something that is constructed and composite; the drug experience is achieved by illegitimate means — something added — as opposed to a process of drawing out innate qualities. Drugs are a means of making, of shaping an experience as well as in part being their content. It is “cheating” in the widest possible sense because whilst it is arguably self-fashioning, it is a short-cut or counterfeit of the “true” process. In the case of a competition like the Olympics, it is no longer just the athlete who is tainted by the foreign substance, but the nation that they represent; in Pavey’s statement, Russia itself is, by implication, not “clean”.

The closed perfection of the Olympian body has neither surplus or lack; the writ of its focussed will runs all the way up to its borders. The parallels with the image of the nation state are obvious here. A recent example would be the successful campaign for the UK to leave the European Union in the recent referendum. This success seemed to me to be ascribable in large part to its clear appeal to fears of “foreignness” infiltrating the national body, as opposed to some notion of a cohesive and organic “sovereignty”. This manifested discursively in the constantly repeated slogan of “take back control” — both of borders (immigration) and of sovereignty (the supposedly large quantity of UK legislation that originated in Brussels). The question of whether “we” ever had the control (or ever would have, regardless of the result) or that we would be ostensibly “taking back” was not addressed. The full political impact of the fact that neither of these purported ills look likely to be addressed by leaving the EU is something which has yet to manifest.

## Addiction

And why are you so firmly, so triumphantly convinced that only the normal and the positive — in other words, only what is conducive to welfare — is for the advantage of man?... *Does not man, perhaps, love something besides well-being?* (Dostoyevsky, 2003, p. 261, *my emphasis*).

Temperate derives from the Latin *temperare*, itself deriving from *tempus*, meaning the proper time or season (Brown, 2005, p.137 n).

In an illuminating essay, *Epidemics of the Will* (1993), Eve Sedgwick discussed the strange dialectic between the concepts of will and attributions of addiction, which, she claims, had reached “epidemic” proportions in the 1990s. As the concept of addiction moved beyond its previous medical/psychiatric territory into commonplace speech, an ever-widening range of activities, substances and even affects, were drawn into its remit. In a society predicated on the ostensible freedom of the subject who manifests that freedom through the exercise of their sovereign function of choice, any implication that choice might be determined by external forces is deeply troubling.

[...A]ny substance, any behavior, even any affect may be pathologized as addictive. Addiction, under this definition, resides only in the *structure* of a will that is always somehow insufficiently free, a choice whose voluntariness is insufficiently pure (Sedgwick, 1993, p.132).

"Choice" is the legitimate path of self-forming, but only in the choices of the neoliberal subject who, by definition, will always choose more choices, thereby increasing the possibilities of self-fashioning. This is what addiction forecloses: it limits the choices of the self to that which will best feed her addiction, which is always figured as *something* (as the addictive substance has been in standard accounts) a foreign body introduced into herself. The self that is formed via addiction — and it most assuredly does form a self — is predicated on a lack, or refusal, of choice. The addiction, which is by definition a foreign body, must be fed before the native body's desires can be catered to.

In her history of alcoholism, *Diseases of the Will: Alcohol and the Dilemmas of Freedom* (1998) Mariana Valverde echoes Sedgwick in situating the construction of the problem of addiction, more latterly “dependency”, as a problem of the will. She points out that there has not been an orderly progression in the definition, diagnosis, legislation and treatment of alcoholism from the eighteenth century to the present that might be expected; for example, a progression from Foucaultian disciplinary methods (the clinic or sanatorium, for example) to forms of governmentality (such as self-help or talking therapies). Her history loops back on itself; it seems to have a compulsion to keep returning to the same point. It resembles the pattern of addictive behaviour: there is something that it cannot (generations of campaigners, legislators, psychologists, divines and medics) “get past”<sup>166</sup>. This place of repetition or the place that repetition *is*, is always the same: the knot formed by will and desire, freedom and compulsion. As Wendy Brown points out at the head of this section, temperance is about time, about the right time and a particular attitude towards time.

Valverde links this inextricable knot to a struggle of ideas concerning free will and determinism within both moral philosophy and Protestant theology. The determinism of Calvin confronted the believers in the freedom of souls to choose salvation (Valverde, 1993, p.2). The question was (and is) “how far are our actions determined by external factors; how free are we to choose?” The obvious corollary to which is “how *responsible* are we for our choices?” It might be noted that in a society that holds the idea of meritocracy as a shibboleth, the purview of these questions extends well beyond the realm of “deviant” choices. Both Warner and Valverde<sup>167</sup> draw attention to the fact that older conceptions of excessive indulgence viewed it as a choice made by the individual, or a bad habit which could be broken if desired. The original etymology of “addict” comes from a verb form (an act) derived from the Latin *addicere*, meaning to “deliver, yield, devote”<sup>168</sup>, which implies a voluntary surrender;

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<sup>166</sup> Valverde points out that “[...] the contemporary genre of addiction-recovery literature overlaps a great deal of abuse survivor literature [...]” (1993, p.16). There is a point or place of trauma that effectively cannot be left behind or integrated into a sequential (biographical) narrative, which recovery provides.

<sup>167</sup> See Warner, 2002, p.273; Valverde, 1998, pp.14-15. Both quote the same eighteenth-century divine (Johnathan Edwards) in support of this view.

<sup>168</sup> Chambers Dictionary of Etymology (1988). The derivation also reveals it as a speech act, *dicere* meaning “to say”. The voice is implicated here, as an index of the will; in this case the will to submission.

it only later became an involuntary state.

Addiction had been a legal term, describing the performative act of bondage, before it was metaphorized to describe a person's self-relation (Warner, 2002, p.272).

Valverde cites the extraordinary fact that, in the case of defining alcoholism, the *actual quantity* of alcohol the patient drinks is not an issue<sup>169</sup>. Definition and diagnosis revolve around the feelings of the subject towards their consumption; whether it has caused them social or marital problems, whether it causes them concern<sup>170</sup>. This medicalisation of indulgence was facilitated by a splitting of the subject's volition into will and desire. As described by Michael Warner, the early discourse of the temperance movement played a large part in formulating the category of addiction:

In temperance rhetoric, the concept [of addiction] loses the sense of an active self-abnegation on the part of the will. Desire and will became distinct [...] (2002, p.273).

Those who fall prey to addiction have an insufficiently strong will to overrule their compulsive desire or that desire takes the place rightfully occupied by will. As the example given by Valverde of the place of individual affect in diagnosis demonstrates, the true target for intervention is the subject's relation to their will — can they, or do they fear that they cannot *control themselves*? Insofar as the subject is identified as their will or their ability to exercise it to resist the demands and blandishments of desire, then the failure to resist is a significant falling short from full subjecthood.

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<sup>169</sup> Among the dozens of conflicting psychological, biological, spiritual, and common-sense definitions of alcoholism that I have collected over the past years, none made any reference to the amount of alcohol ingested (Valverde, 1998, p.28, *original emphasis*).

<sup>170</sup> Valverde observes that despite attempts to wrest diagnosis and treatment away from the realms of moral judgement and into empirical (medical) science, it has been impossible to find adequate diagnostic criteria that work in purely empirical terms. Personal affect (of the patient and clinician both) still find their way back in. Especially in the area of expressed concern about one's own drinking as a diagnostic tool.

The inclusion of emotional and ethical criteria has a peculiar effect: people who drink extremely heavily without ever trying to cut down will be less likely to be pathologised than those individuals who for one reason or another worry more about their drinking (Valverde, 1998, p.27).

In this way, the use of *khat* by men of Somali descent in the UK is figured as “addiction” and *therefore* as the barrier to becoming part of the wider society<sup>171</sup>. “Wider society”, the public in this scheme, is situated as composed of subjects who control their desire, who take part in a larger narrative of nationhood and normative political action. Demands of integration aimed at immigrant populations have often been couched in temporal as well as spatial terms, to be *here now*, rather than *there* in an assumed *then*. Telling people to “go *back* home” contains a temporal element. The desire that is *khat* can be characterised, in this scheme, as an inability (if addiction) to let go of the culture and rituals of the “old country”, and thus disqualification from partaking of the will that constantly unfurls itself out into the future, towards winning the “global race”<sup>172</sup>. Addiction is stasis, a constant circling of an abiding desire; recovery and temperance is the reassertion of narrative, teleology. It is an attitude towards *time*.

The nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Temperance movements<sup>173</sup> (more properly described as “prohibition” movements in their latter stages) in the UK and US sheds an interesting light on publics, politics and the construction of addiction as failed will. In the UK, Temperance was one of the first (and perhaps the longest lasting) mass social movements<sup>174</sup> in Western history. It came after (and shared personnel) with the campaigns against slavery, for the repeal of the Corn Laws and the democratic agitation of Chartism. For temperance campaigners who were increasingly drawn from the more prosperous parts of the working classes over the

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<sup>171</sup> This is the argument of UK Somali “ex-addict” and anti-*khat* activist Abukhar Awale, cited above.

<sup>172</sup> Doreen Massey discusses the tendency to treat all places as existing at various points along a unified trajectory of “development”. This enables countries and cultures to be treated as “backward”, or “developing” and reifies the idea of a single and inevitable historical teleology. It also means that the challenge, explicit or implicit, is defused from peoples who have an entirely different ambition for themselves and different ways of being. They are not simultaneous with “us”, they belong to the past (see Massey, 2005, p.71).

<sup>173</sup> Virginia Berridge, in her book *Demons: Our changing attitude to alcohol, tobacco, and drugs* (2013), quotes historian Brian Harrison:

The general impression conveyed is that by the 1860s there existed an influential and literate minority in the country of ‘opinion makers’, numbering well under 100,000 teetotallers. The efforts of this minority affected the personal habits of at least a million adult teetotallers, and probably influenced the conduct of many others who did not join tee- total organizations (Berridge, 2013, p.40).

<sup>174</sup> Michael Warner describes the scale of distribution for Temperance tracts in the US:

The American Temperance Society from its beginnings in 1826 drew on a tradition of tract-distributing reform groups, especially the American Tract Society, and pushed the publishing trade to an unprecedented outreach. Temperance tracts • five million copies by 1851 - dominated the American Tract Society's output (Warner, 2002, p.270).

course of the century, it was a method of demonstrating “respectability” (Berridge, 2013, p.37) and perhaps asserting a claim to equal valuation as subjects as that given to the upper bourgeoisie. Signing “The Pledge” was a performative act that dramatized the will of the signer, the free placing of themselves — or their desire — within strict bounds and in a voluntary association of similar others. Oddly enough, this sounds a lot like the original verb meaning of “addict” as noted above. This was ostensibly a demonstration of freedom, similar to that performed by Nietzsche’s “animal with the right to make promises”<sup>175</sup>, who promises because they can and because they choose to. A promise binds the promiser to a futurity, a teleological unfolding of action; this is contrasted with the stasis and circularity of addiction.

Possessing the will to govern oneself (one’s desire) conferred the ability to be free from the despotism of compulsive desire (drink being the emblematic example here). This self-mastery was also a demonstration of being a fit subject for liberal freedom, as dramatized with the pledge. Just as Temperance was one of the first consciously non-state movements, it was arguably an important factor in the formation of what we now call (or did call in the ‘90s) “civil society” or “the public sphere”. Over the course of the century, the movement also moved from individualised “moral suasion” (Berridge, 2013, p.45) — appeals to the better nature of drunks — to advocating legislative change from central government<sup>176</sup>.

Within the Liberal Party, the radical Liberal caucus organization, particularly strong in northern cities, saw local option and the local veto [on restricting licensees or outright local prohibition] as a way of asserting their overall demands for the mobilization of the will of the people ‘from below’. So the tactic of prohibition gained power through its association with these wider political objectives (Ibid).

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<sup>175</sup> Nietzsche, 1989, p.57. See also the first chapter of this work for a discussion of promising and shame in performance and the formation of subjectivity.

<sup>176</sup> Berridge describes how the tactics have changed over the course of the century:

From the 1870s onward, political tactics came to the fore and the movement aimed to infiltrate the Liberal Party as the likely vehicle of licensing reform. The aim was the so-called Permissive Bill, which would have allowed local preferences to decide what the drink situation should be in a particular neighbourhood. Voters would have to vote for or against the ‘local veto’ or local prohibition. The high point of this tactic was in the 1890s when the policy was central to the Liberals’ Newcastle political programme (Berridge 2013, p.38. See also pp. 44-8).

Eve Sedgwick, in her essay “Epidemics of the Will” (1993) draws attention to the construction of the addict who is figured as someone who has imbued a supplement be it substance *or activity* — with qualities that compensate for a corresponding lack in themselves. In contrast, the possessor of the “good will” sees themselves, their own bodies, like an un-doped athlete or the proper subject of a meritocracy, as already potentially containing whatever it is that needs bringing out (Sedgwick, 1993, p.132, *original emphasis*). This is assumed to be possible with sufficient aspiration, hard work and self-belief, and all the other nostrums of contemporary self-fashioning. She describes the explosion of “addiction attribution” that occurred in the latter part of the twentieth century as covering most activities and substances. As Valverde (quoted above) notes in relation to alcohol, the diagnostic emphasis is placed, not so much on substance in question as on the subject’s relation to it.

Under this view, which indeed is by now a staple of medicalized discourse both lay and clinical, not the dieter but the exerciser would be the person who embodied the exact opposite of addiction (Ibid, p.132).

The ultimate form that the exerciser can take would surely be the champion athlete. These are people who through the exercise of their will on their own substance have drawn from themselves qualities of strength, grace and endurance. With fine irony, Sedgwick points out the appearance of the “exercise addict” in the early ‘80s:

In the absence of any projective hypostatization of a ‘foreign’ substance, the object of addiction here seems to be the body itself. But more accurately the object of addiction is the display of those very qualities whose *lack* is supposed to define addiction as such: bodily autonomy; self-control; will power. The object of addiction has become precisely enjoyment of ‘the ability to choose freely, and freely to choose health’ (Ibid, p.132).

And, as Sedgwick goes on to point out, these are the antinomies of neoliberalism. The valorisation of the will leads to what could be described as an almost hysterical tendency to try to root out the “insufficiently free” choice, to pathologise the chooser. It is as if the autonomous utility-maximising unit of economic theory, who freely chooses the options that offer the best utility (the origin of such utility somehow



arising in their own, mysterious depths) might not exist, and the best way to hide this scandalous fact is to create it. So, working and shopping, the two founding activities of this consumer democracy, become minefields of potentially impure choices — as the apparent existence of "workaholics" and "shoppaholics" attests (Ibid, p.133). The will is "propagandised", in Sedgwick's terms; it is promoted, propagated, written as an historical imperative — as in Whig histories that tell us that a will for freedom has been the engine of development. But as it gets ever more pervasive, more vital to our understanding of what it means to be a subject, it withdraws; anxieties about its purity proliferate; it becomes discernible through its lack.

Earlier, I discussed Judith Butler's description of how we are subjected both through and against power, how in order to become subjects we must repudiate the dependency that first sustained us. I borrowed the image of a human figure in torsion from Butler's text — a human pretzel, perpetually turned against itself. This turn away from dependency is predicated on an exercise of will, of self-forming towards freedom from external authority. As the act of signing the pledge demonstrated in the nineteenth century, this movement towards independence is often framed as a simultaneous move towards appropriate or "deserving" citizenship. As Sedgwick persuasively argues, the proper will is a constantly receding goal and anxiety abounds as to whether subjects can be truly free. As the proliferation of addiction-attribution demonstrates, the stakes are by no means trivial; liberalism as a philosophy and political dispensation is predicated upon the freely choosing individual. Just as doping scandals in elite sports are assumed to have a corrosive effect on the authenticity of the competition and its result, a public that is feared to be in the grip of addiction is not a political entity to be trusted.

These abject figures are ideological conductors mobilized to do the dirty work of neoliberal governmentality. They are symbolic and material scapegoats, the mediating agencies through which the social decomposition effected by market deregulation and welfare retrenchment are legitimized (Tyler, 2013, p.9).

Dependency is the lurking menace behind the unfree will, the spiritual state of which the figure of the addict is the allegorical representation. To be a subject is to repudiate dependence; it is to be self-realising, self-forming. It is ultimately for this

reason that drug use is proscribed — to protect the addict from their own inadequate or absent will; drug treatment is to re-instantiate it. However, when we think of the *pharmakos*, we are also thinking of something that is also, potentially, a cure. It is telling how sick or unemployed recipients of state benefits are often labelled “dependent” (which obviously they are), but this dependency is purported to stem from their own moral failure, rather than systemic factors; this economic condition is often conflated with addiction in the more usual sense. It is also worth noting that the double form of the *pharmakon* appears here, too; that what the claimant is dependent on — money — is the same thing that work provides as a wage. It seems to be implied that money from an employer is healthy money, whilst that from the state is harmful. Of course, it can be argued that *all* money is state money.

As Fig. 24 shows, the figurehead and the symbolism of the state (of the whole) co-exist on either side of the coin. The stand-in for the sovereign subject (as a constitutional monarch) — Elizabeth II in this case — stands in relation to the crowned portcullis, the castle gate. Rather than utter complicity, the design of a coin suggests a tension between the two; perhaps an allusion to the doctrine of the King’s “two bodies”, mortal and immortal. However it is read, the coin (or note, of any denomination) is a state artefact in constant circulation.

As a representative example of the conflation of addiction and state benefits, in a 2011 article for *The Daily Telegraph*, Iain Duncan Smith (then Secretary of State for the Department of Work and Pensions) described the “causes of poverty” as

Welfare dependency, educational failure, addiction, debt, and family breakdown — these are the five pathways to poverty [...] <sup>177</sup>.

Two of his five “pathways” (note Smith describes them as *causes*, not *indicators* of poverty) fit into the model we are discussing. In the same article, he describes claimants as being “parked” on benefits, a telling metaphor that describes its subjects as if they were entirely lacking in agency, as merely inert objects to be

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<sup>177</sup> Available at:

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/8329315/Its-time-to-end-this-addiction-to-benefits.html>

Updated: February 16, 2011; accessed: August 30, 2013.

moved out of the way and left. In this scheme of things, claimants are the immobile victims of a welfare state that has supported them in this condition.

Negative discourse on benefits (or claimants) usually takes care to point out that the system of unemployment benefits was introduced with the best of intentions but has been abused. There is a clear parallel here between an analgesic that can be "used" and "useful" when prescribed by a doctor to treat the pain of an injury or disease, but which can also be "abused" when used un-prescribed, for pleasure. There is the ghost of *pharmakon*, too — the figure of the scapegoat who must be ejected from the city state in order to ensure its health.

The term "welfare", as used to denote state benefits, has an affective charge; this is entirely deliberate. It moves the object away from a discourse of rights and citizenship into the realms of discretionary charity. It shifts the subject who receives it into the space of guilty supplicant. Welfare has connotations of health or "well-being", but its recipient is not expected to feel anything of the sort; in fact, they are expected to demonstrate constantly that they do not desire or enjoy their condition. Displaying any sort of desire to retain that status, or signs of enjoyment of it will lead to withdrawal of benefits. Their existence can only be tolerable if they are seen to be not enjoying it. In fact, what they are condemned to *must not be life*, exactly. Benefits must not be a *"lifestyle choice"*.

In the same way as an athlete, monarch or dead politician can be seen as providing an allegorical form to the whole, the benefit claimant can also fulfil this function; although with vastly different connotations. The fantasised ideal unemployed, or disabled person, bears the stigmata of the state, of citizenship, more clearly than any other citizen. The state visibly supports them in a way that "hard-working tax-payers" are not. They have taken full advantage of the rights of citizenship. In the way that a drug can be a prosthesis in the case of doping athletes (an unfair advantage) or a supplement for some internal lack, the prosthesis of benefit claimants is not so much money, as *time*. They receive time (without working for it, because they do not work), but the time received is illegitimate because they supposedly can make nothing of or from it. They have spare time, but this time must be seen as empty; it is both poison

and cure — “leisure”, weekends and evenings for the workers<sup>178</sup>, the endless null time of the claimants.

The neoliberal formulation of the state and especially of specific legal arrangements and decisions as the precondition and ongoing condition of the market does not mean that the market is controlled by the state but precisely the opposite. The market is the organizing and regulative principle of the state and society [...] (Brown, 2005, p.41).

As Wendy Brown describes above, as markets are (re)defined as the sole means of self-realisation through selling one’s labour, the sole legitimate arbiters of value and distributors of wealth, the welfare state and its provisions are positioned as an obstacle to this dominance. The target for neoliberal critics of social provision is not claimants *as such*, but the mechanism that allows them to subsist — the state. The benefit claimant, abjected in the press, hounded by the Department of Work and Pensions, is a surrogate for a state that is presented as simultaneously being too indulgent, but also cynical in creating and supporting a class of clients, captive voters. These people need to be freed from their harmful dependency on benefits, state money and time, encouraged to embrace the limitless possibilities for autonomous expression and legitimate growth that markets offer.

[...] neoliberalism is grounded in the ‘free, possessive individual’, with the state cast as tyrannical and oppressive. The welfare state, in particular, is the arch enemy of freedom. The state must never govern society [...]. State-led ‘social engineering’ must never prevail over corporate and private interests (Hall, 2011).

On a visit to the House of Commons to see the Artangel commissioned piece, *The Ethics of Dust* (2016) by Jorge Otero-Pailos at Westminster Hall in the summer of 2016, I visited the souvenir shop there. I was amused by the multiplicity of things available with the same portcullis motif as on the penny piece, from tote bags and mouse mats to bottles of gin and Rioja. I purchased the bottle of beer, “Portucullis

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<sup>178</sup> Though due to the increasing prevalence of casualization, zero-hours contracts and generalised precarity, workers’ time is now for many, the time of anxiety, of waiting.

IPA" seen above (Fig. 25). I placed it in juxtaposition with another bottle, Strongbow, a popular cider. The latter has based its television advertising for some time on depictions of working class tradesmen (exclusively men) enjoying the product at the end of a day's work as a just reward for their labour. The advertisement I have used was for a new berry-flavoured line. The product was depicted on posters as being surrounded and partly obscured by a hallucinatory thicket studded with exaggerated thorns. The strapline exhorts the viewer in two words: "*Earn It*". The drink is presented, rather like sleeping beauty immured behind thorn walls, as an exemplary prize that can only be achieved through arduous trials.


Whilst obviously trying to insist on the rarity and preciousness of what is an overly sweet, widely available, carbonated alcoholic beverage, I believe it is doing something other than simply adding value. Whilst it might be an illustration of the kinds of more oblique approach to marketing that is becoming increasingly required by industry guidelines and clamoured for by an anti-alcohol/health lobby that would like to impose a form of iconoclasm, no actual people shall be seen to drink in advertisements; it can also be seen as a means of warding off association of intoxication with inauthenticity. It links consumption of the product — and perhaps getting drunk on it — with the idea of "earned" experience, earned time.

In contrast, the Portcullis IPA (and the other branded alcohol available in the gift shop) unashamedly links the insignia of Parliament with an addictive, intoxicating substance. The "brand" of Parliament, after all, needs no advertising. I use that term advisedly; luxury goods labels ("luxury" here denoting quality of materials and manufacture), for instance in fashion, have long understood that their logo generates value when placed on perfectly ordinary items — sunglasses or t-shirts, for example. The trademark which first acquired its meaning by its physical association with a particular quality of facture<sup>179</sup> takes on a meaning of its own, which can endow other objects with *mana* by contact. This is a process that could easily be categorised as a form of magical contagion; its workings are most clear in the coins that we carry around with us and exchange with each other. This image presents the dual face of

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<sup>179</sup> *Chambers Dictionary of Etymology* (1988) tells us that 'fetish' is most probably derived from the Portuguese *feitiço*, which is "an adjective with the meaning of made artfully, artificial, derived from Latin *facticius* made by art, artificial, from *facere* make". Chambers (1988). See Taussig (1992) on state fetishism, or the state as fetish (meaning "bad" making).

the *pharmakon*, the correct, refreshing after-work drink and the debilitating magic of state dependent alcohol. The temporality of the welfare state is that of the “addicted” claimant — a null time of stasis or intoxication, Viney’s “waste time”. This is something that it shares with the Bike Cemetery.



There's an empty space in the middle of the city, there's an empty space at the centre of the state...I have marked an empty space in beer and graveyard dirt here...

The example and the exception are related...the example and the exception bear some relation...*[shouting]* **the example and the**

**exception bear some relation...the**

**example and the exception bear**

**some relation.**

### Three Spaces

There are three empty spaces which I wish to draw attention to and attempt to superimpose, one upon the other. The quality of this emptiness should be considered. In all three cases, this emptiness fulfils the function of placeholder that enables something else to happen. The last is Claude Lefort's concept (See Lefort, 1988) of the space that occupies the place of sovereignty in liberal democracy. The first is the empty space of performance and it contains the others and so it was at the beginning of this writing.

*The Pomerium*<sup>180</sup> of the Bike Cemetery: The Bike Cemetery: it is not empty in any obvious sense. It is full of undergrowth, trees, dumped rubbish. In places, it is congested with brambles that clutch at the visitor and nettles that sting them. In a city that is understood and constructed as legible, however, where zones of commerce and leisure are clearly labelled and festooned with security cameras, there is an emptiness to it. It is an equivalent to Walter Benjamin's conception of holidays and festivals as "blank spaces" on the calendar, spots that have fallen out of the orderly progress of properly demarcated days and have therefore fallen out of time, becoming places for remembrance. The Bike Cemetery lacks a name beyond the one that I have given it and has no cameras or an explicit function in the economic circuits of the city. It is disconnected; beyond the thick undergrowth, there is no fence that would explicitly articulate its boundary with the surrounding area, nor a gate to mark the passage in or out. In the semiotic fullness of the city, with its street and shop signs (that which precedes and guides an army on the move) and ubiquitous advertising, the Bike Cemetery is a comparatively blank space. It is un-walled and yet secret, utterly open yet rarely visited (it is not a short cut to anywhere; I believe that it is where one inevitably ends up). It is arguably peripheral to the business of the city, having no official function.

But I would say that this lack of function, this unprivatised privacy, makes it central. It was there that a stranger came and left their mark<sup>181</sup>, the *nomos* being the law, the

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<sup>180</sup> This term refers to the ritually inscribed borders of the ancient city in Rome. This will be discussed further below.

<sup>181</sup> The etymology of "mark" comes from Old English *mearc*, a trace, boundary, sign or limit. See:



territory, or the order, but also the name<sup>182</sup>. In the same way that the sovereign in Karl Schmitt's description<sup>183</sup> (also used by Giorgio Agamben<sup>184</sup>) is simultaneously both inside and outside the law and this ambivalent position founds the law, or rather, the order which the law requires to function. This marking is both evidence of, and a structuring device for, another order.

I would argue that in distinction from the status of words being regarded as labels and thereby as separable from the thing that they attached to (which Walter Ong described as a feature of typographic cultures), the words of the Bike Cemetery writer are obviously more of the nature of inscriptions, or even concrete poetry. That is, in the first place, they are not separable from the physical context that they were placed in. Unlike an electronic file, a book or a clay tablet, they mark and are imbricated in a physical territory. Whether painted or engraved, they are placed on something relatively durable and immovable, such as stones, or buildings. They have a tendency towards the public, in the sense of being visible. Short of erasure, they cannot be concealed or closed and taken elsewhere as a book can be. It could be argued that they are the voice of the lawgiver, made solid<sup>185</sup>.

Boundary stones fulfil this function. The Roman emperor Claudius, in enlarging the city of Rome, set up stones around the new limits of the city, bearing his name and ancestry. Text and territory come into being simultaneously, the stones and the decree that they enacted (Fig. 27). But the texts referred backwards; for Claudius, as for many others, the text itself refers to antecedents<sup>186</sup>. This is both in the sense of

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Chambers, 1988. I would like to stress the senses of "sign" and "limit", as aspects of something temporally prior; some idea of origin.

<sup>182</sup> See Schmitt, 2003, pp.336–350.

<sup>183</sup> See Schmitt (1984). *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*.

<sup>184</sup> See Agamben (1998). *Homo Sacer*.

<sup>185</sup> A recent, and much derided, example of this, notable in that its failure to achieve the desired effect of both authority and permanence was to draw attention to its author's perceived ineffectuality and precarious hold on power — the so-called "Edstone". This was a two and a half metre tall limestone inscribed with a series of "pledges" signed by Ed Miliband, the leader of the Labour Party, during the 2015 UK election campaign. Miliband's prop, despite (or *because* of) how ill-fated it was, highlights the enduring power that the metaphor has.

<sup>186</sup> The stone illustrated says:

*Tiberius Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus, son of Drusus, Supreme Pontiff, vested with the Tribunician power for the ninth time, Consul for the fourth, Censor, Father of his Country, upon the enlargement of the territory of the Roman people increased and delimited the pomerium.*

lineage (“son of Drusus”) and in the use of the archaic term *pomerium*, which was a deliberate anachronism intended to link Claudius’ contemporary edict with an archaic ritual dating back to the founding of the city itself<sup>187</sup>.

This writing of the Bike Cemetery is in Derrida's famous term, a *pharmakon*. A drug, both poison and cure. It is a cure for bad memory or the absence of one who would have spoken in its place, but a poison for memory, a prosthetic supplement that will lead to dependence and the atrophy of its “proper” and “natural” function. It takes the place of the majesty of the sovereign word, spoken from the throne of the one who has *the right* to speak (to command, promise). Writing repeats without authority because it is divorced from presence, as Ong says — separated from the speech *event*. The Bike Cemetery writer is long gone, vanished to some unknown destination, but they left words behind them. I arrived at the space and it was already marked. Derrida was responding to Plato who provided the critique of writing from a position within a society of relatively few writers (and readers), where it was at least relatively plausible that if a writer was living, they could be met with and talked to in person. This is not the case now. The writer is a stranger, leaving their words behind them, but those words, when read, mark the margins of a space that divides private from public. The Bike Cemetery has this nature for me as it shares the fracture in space and time that performance creates. I have described it as a hole in the city, or an analogue to Walter Benjamin’s “days of remembrance” that are left as blank spaces on the calendar. It is exiled from apparent officially sanctioned use, which is a rare thing in contemporary London, and has been left as an open-ness to whichever stranger passes. It has a temporal disconnect from its status as a “waste” place, somewhere apparently lying fallow; unlike the imaginary associated with wilderness, it is not an a-historical “untouched” zone — that particular imaginary of the wilderness bears some comparison with so-called “urban frontiers” and their populations<sup>188</sup>. Waste grounds are places that have been marked by (usually industrial) history and then abandoned, for whatever reason. They are stasis points outside of narrative of nation, of biography, but not as wilderness is assumed to be,

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Translation by classicist Tyler Lansford, on his blog, Rome Inscribed. Available at: <http://romeinscribed.blogspot.co.uk/2014/01/claudian-boundary-stone.html> Updated: January 21, 2014; accessed: July 29, 2016.

<sup>187</sup> See MacRae, *Legible Religion*, 2016, pp. 108–9. MacRae asserts that the ancient authority for the ritual, and therefore the legitimacy of Claudius’ edict was a “convenient invention”.

<sup>188</sup> See Gray and Mooney (2011).

that which provides an external boundary to (Western) history, either at its beginning or end.

Labyrinth and *cippus*: the second of these spaces is Claude Lefort's concept of the empty space that is a central structural feature of liberal democracy. As Lefort argues, for democracy to function the place of sovereignty cannot be held by anyone in particular because it is supposed to be held by all<sup>189</sup> — that is, the *demos*, or “people”<sup>190</sup>.

Power was [once] embodied in the prince, and it therefore gave society a body. And because of this, a latent but effective knowledge of what *one* meant to the *other* existed throughout the social. This model reveals the revolutionary and unprecedented feature of democracy. The locus of power becomes *an empty place*. [...] it cannot be occupied — it is such that no individual and no group can be consubstantial with it — and it cannot be represented (Lefort, 1988, p.17).

Once the prince has been deposed or decapitated in the name of the rule of the *demos*, there is a void created at the centre of the *polis*. This void is the result of a fundamental paradox: if the people (voters) are sovereign, how can they be ruled? How can they be sovereign and subject simultaneously? The space is, therefore, left empty for the impossible ruler who is simultaneously sovereign and subject (Van Boxsel, 2004, p.124).

Lefort was obviously thinking of his own country, France, which is a republic. In the case of a constitutional monarchy such as the UK, the monarch ostensibly remains sovereign (and it is worth noting that the loyalty of the armed forces is legally owed to the Queen rather than parliament), but insofar as the UK is a democracy, cannot be said to “rule”. In rituals such as the opening of parliament, in which the Queen reads a speech outlining the prospective legislative program of “her” government and in the signing of bills in order to turn them into law, the performance of Royal assent is made as the placeholder for an ideal and abstract citizen — a *stranger* — whose approval must be sought for the actions of the government that they elected. As the

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<sup>189</sup> Quite who this “all” is, or how it is defined, is a somewhat more complicated matter.

<sup>190</sup> Again, who the “people” are is not a straightforward matter.

Dutch historian Matthijs Van Boxsel puts it in his *Encyclopaedia of Stupidity* (2004),

[t]he coronation of a monarch does not fill the vacuum of power. Anomalously, the monarch keeps free the space in which democracy can arise. Unlike the Jacobin, who occupies the centre of power by keeping it vacant, the monarch protects the empty space by occupying it (Ibid, p.133).

Van Boxsel likens this position to “King Log” in Aesop’s fable. This unsatisfactory king was given by Jove to a group of frogs who prayed for a ruler. Jove sent them a log, which the frogs felt was insufficiently active and king-like. On praying a second time for a real ruler, they were sent a stork, which ate them. This can variously be seen as a critique of authority, or of people’s desire for rulers and laws, or alternatively a cautionary tale about human hankering for something better than the status quo.

A real king, Louis XIV of France, included this fable in the emblematic labyrinth<sup>191</sup> he had built at Versailles between 1672 and 1677. It contained sculptural representations of many of Aesop’s fables in the form of fountains<sup>192</sup> (see Fig. 28). It is worth contemplating this space briefly. It was created for the purpose of wandering, perhaps getting lost, but also for the purposes of instructing those who wandered in it. It was built by an absolute monarch who spared no expense in its creation, as, in common with the rest of the palace and gardens of Versailles<sup>193</sup>, a demonstration of his power<sup>194</sup>. But as a space, it presents unusual features. As opposed to the boundary stones discussed earlier, the maze/labyrinth does not aim

<sup>191</sup> In a purist sense, it is not a labyrinth, but a maze. A labyrinth, properly speaking, has a single path through it (monocursal), whereas a maze can have multiple branching paths, dead ends, etc. (multicursal). The words were often used interchangeably in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, when there was a vogue amongst the powerful for building garden mazes/labyrinths, along with the suggestive term “wilderness”. See Matthews, 1922, p.131.

<sup>192</sup> Unfortunately, it cannot now be visited, as it was destroyed by the unfortunate Louis XVI in 1778, citing the cost of upkeep as a reason. I rely here on two contemporary guide books.

<sup>193</sup> Chandra Mukerji (2012) describes the function of the gardens and palace as whole as intended to cement Louis’ power over both nobles and church by presenting a centralised, absolutist France as being a direct descendent of and heir to Imperial Rome. The palace and surroundings were designed to combine classical allusion in the architecture and sculpture with “Roman” engineering prowess in the landscaping and mechanisms of the fountains.

<sup>194</sup> Mukerji also points out the pedagogical intent of the emblematic fountains and appended texts; it was intended to teach courtiers their place in Louis’ order, by analogy to the fables ranking of animals according to their “nature”: The labyrinth was constraining, teaching lessons in subordination to a higher power. But it was also entertaining because it turned powerlessness into pleasure.

to impose homogeneity on the area that it encloses.

On the contrary, it folds its space in on itself, eschewing the most direct path from one side to the other and forces the wanderer to navigate narrow pathways in which visibility of the way forward or back is strictly limited. In this way, it affords privacy, or secrecy<sup>195</sup>. It is an apparent contrast or opposition, to an imperial ambition that wants to extend straight roads from the centre out to the horizon, to unify space under a single name (that of the king, and his law); but these are twinned aspects of the same power. Whilst the roads, the clear lines of sight, the milestones (like boundary stones, also called *cippi*) and the legal code applied consistently across the territory express the rationality of power that makes things (population, territories, economies) visible and measurable, the maze expresses its converse: irrationality. In a maze, there is no near or far, no centre or margins. The space turns back upon itself, creating strange paradoxes of proximity and distance, equations of time and distance such as those that milestones and reliable roads make possible have no meaning. Wandering a maze is an embodied experience (as all experiences must be, but some in a far more marked way than others), of spatial disorientation, a game of deliberate confusion. Whilst it can create the experience of besiegers trying to break into a walled city<sup>196</sup>, or the detailed and painful progress of urban guerrilla warfare, it is also an experience of powerlessness; the wanderer gives themselves over to the twists and turns, the blind alleys. Louis placed emblematic instruction in the Versailles maze to inculcate in his courtiers a sense of their place in the wider scheme of things<sup>197</sup>.

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<sup>195</sup> In the early twentieth century, the idea that clandestine romantic meetings were intimately connected with the setting of the garden maze was strong enough for a writer to introduce the subject with it:

Many a tender intrigue has been woven around its dark yew alleys. Mr. Compton Mackenzie, for example, introduces it most effectively as a lovers' rendezvous in "The Passionate Elopement," and no doubt the readers of romantic literature will recall other instances of a like nature (Matthews, 1922, p.1).

The erotic connection speaks strongly to the idea of power as that which dazzles and disorients, where that disorientation is associated with both pleasure and fear.

<sup>196</sup> Matthews tells us that

A topiary work [...] 'The Siege of Troy,' was one of [King] William's pet horticultural adornments at Kensington Palace. It is said to have been a verdant representation of military defence works, cut yew and variegated holly being 'taught,' as Walpole says, 'to imitate the lines, angles, bastions, scarps and counter-scarps of regular fortifications.' (Matthews, 1922, p.130).

<sup>197</sup> These are strangely similar to milestones. Whilst milestones in a maze would have no conceivable function, from *where*, and by *what route*, could they measure the distance from anywhere? The Aesop

The maze was a pleasure garden with all the playful erotic stratagems of secrecy, intrigue, exploration and contrasts in revelation and concealment; but it was a threat, as well. The king can disorientate the subject's senses and cause them to lose their body, but also provide landmarks and advice, that if followed, would re-orientate to the correct *attitude* (a trope meaning direction, posture, inclination), bodily and intellectual. It is no surprise that the main entrance to the maze was flanked by sculptures of two allegorical figures: Eros and Aesop. This might seem to contrast with the boundary stone discussed earlier. One form, the maze or labyrinth, encloses and convolutes the space within its territory. The other, the boundary stone, marks out the margins of the territory, whilst the space contained is assumed to gain the homogeneity conferred by being inscribed under the presiding name, for instance the Emperor Claudius in the example cited above. The *cippus* gestured backwards to the ancestry of the emperor and, simultaneously, to the presumed archaic nature of the ritual as part of the founding of Rome. This originary power came from the centre, which is itself an origin. It is not enough for Claudius to sign "Claudius, Emperor" at the new limits of the city. Someone must always be standing behind him, and behind them, and so on in turn until one arrives back at a plough marking a single furrow, turning the previously unbroken ground over upon itself.

The most direct expression of this, one might even call it direct to the point of crass, is Brussels *Palais de Justice* (see Fig. 29). This is a vast structure, spread along a hillside that once hosted public executions, boasting over twenty large courtrooms and several hundred smaller offices, making one wonder what mid-to-late nineteenth-century crime wave necessitated this, although it might not have been domestic concerns that prompted this arguably hysterically compensatory edifice complex. The unconscious source of the guilty conscience that the building gestures toward placating might have been rooted in the Congo Free State of that time. It is, however, equally possible that the source of this over-compensation lay in the newness of the Belgian state and its accompanying lack of shared national myths that might provide an origin rooted in antiquity. The *Palais* hunches beneath a dome

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fountains do provide a form of orientation. The didactic intent of the fables was to indicate the proper hierarchy of the world, expressing it in the relations of species between one another. The maze thereby gave the visiting courtiers a sense of their relative position in relation to power, and the best way to comport themselves towards it; also, the behaviour that they had the right to expect from *their* inferiors.

— bigger than Rome’s St. Peter’s — the top of which is formed as a crown, combining law and monarchy in one material gesture. It also echoes the crowned globes and animals of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century emblem books; Aesop’s Crane King was a popular subject and was very often depicted as crowned. The novelist, W. G. Sebald has one of his characters, the mysterious wanderer Austerlitz, describe it fancifully thus in his eponymous novel:

[...T]his huge pile of over seven hundred thousand cubic meters contains corridors and stairways leading nowhere, and doorless rooms and halls where no one would ever set foot, empty spaces surrounded by walls and representing the innermost secret of all sanctioned authority (Sebald, 2011, p.39).

The unspoken irony is, of course, that Austerlitz claims to have been wandering in search of a “secret” basement where the Masonic rituals of power are conducted, whilst this quest takes place in an *actual* labyrinth built in plain view of an entire city, in which the law works in public.

Joseph Poelaert, the architect of the *Palais de Justice*, also designed the *Colonne du Congrès* (Column of Congress) in Brussels. This 47 metre-high monument was built in 1859 to celebrate the founding of Belgium as an independent state with a liberal constitution under a constitutional monarch. A sculpture of the monarch, Leopold I, stands at the top of it. It is a *cippus*, in two of the word’s other senses: column and (later) a gravestone. The column is inscribed with the names of the members of the Provisional Government and National Congress who framed the new state’s constitution after seceding from the United Netherlands in 1832. Perhaps out of a lack of confidence in the efficacy<sup>198</sup> of the names alone, and the addition of passages

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<sup>198</sup> That is, the efficacy to ground, or found, the state. Belgium has often been described as an “artificial” state, being created by treaty and consisting of three distinct language groups that are situated in separate geographical areas; the French speaking Walloon in the south, Dutch speaking Flemings in the north and a smaller group of German speakers in the east. This tendency to denigrate Belgium is especially marked on the anti-EU right, partly because the EU is headquartered in Brussels and partly because the supposed “artificiality” of the country is seen as a model for the federal Euro-state that is (or was) supposedly being planned there. Nigel Farage of UKIP articulated this view, as quoted by the BBC.

“The country was an artificial construction and we’re now at a point where the Flems and the Walloons are barely on speaking terms. Belgium is a prototype for the entire European Union.

from the constitution inscribed upon it, four female allegorical sculptures sit around the base, representing the four important liberal freedoms the constitution enshrined: Freedom of Education, Freedom of Religion, Freedom of the Press and Freedom of Association. After World War I, an Unknown Soldier was interred at the base. This act, which was also carried out in other countries after the war, is a rhetorical device aimed at creating a universal figure (or corpse) that stands in for the nation as a whole. Instead of a name, the Unknown Soldier is buried under the name of nation; in the case of this column, the corpse takes on nation and constitution as its epitaph. It creates a pairing between its anonymous grave (and presence of the corpse within it<sup>199</sup>) and the bronze sculpture of King Leopold I at the top of the column, named and represented as a singular figure, surveying his capital. This can, of course, be read as a diagram of hierarchy, requiring the sacrifice of innumerable unknowns to perpetuate the grandiose nomenclature of those at the top, but I think it also materialises the relationship between the many and the monarchical figurehead. Benedict Anderson, in his *Imagined Communities* (2006) argues that the figure of the Unknown Soldier is used by nations as one way of demonstrating a secular kind of immortality for the individual within the nation-state<sup>200</sup>. He suggests that the decline of religious certainty after the enlightenment created a vacuum in transcendent meaning (in life, in mortality) and that the idea of the nation, of nationalism, provided some sense of an afterlife.

In Boxsel's scheme, the constitutional monarch (as in Boxsel's own Holland and the UK) remains a log, stubbornly occupying the central place of power whilst refusing to use it. Van Boxsel perceptively argues that the hereditary principle is an extremely useful guarantor of the gap between the sovereign's role and their personal qualities,

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Belgium is going to split, it'll do it within the next few years... and when you criticise Belgium, you criticise the flawed European Union model, and that's why they're really upset with me". Available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/8538281.stm> Updated: February 26, 2010; accessed: August 3, 2016.

A right wing European blog, *Brussels Journal*, published a long article arguing the same point as Farage expressed more pithily, but with more care in trying to tease out the meanings of "artificial" in relation to nations and states. The Belgian politician Jules Destrée wrote, in a letter to King Albert I in 1912, "Sire, allow me to tell you the truth, the large and horrifying truth: *il n'y a pas de Belges*," ("There are no Belgians").

<sup>199</sup> That this one, along with other tombs of its type, might in fact be empty, does nothing to reduce its allegorical impact.

<sup>200</sup> [...]if one tries to imagine, say, a Tomb of the Unknown Marxist or a cenotaph for fallen Liberals. Is a sense of absurdity avoidable? The reason is that neither Marxism nor Liberalism is much concerned with death and Immortality. If the nationalist imagining is so concerned, this suggests a strong affinity with religious imaginings (Anderson, 2006, p.10).



in that it supplies a large degree of randomness into selection and no one can choose (or be chosen) for the job (Boxsel, 2004, p.137). If there was appointment based on merit and abilities, the role would no longer be a placeholder for the absent people because it would give evidence that the one who holds it needs to be *someone in particular* rather than *anyone* (who gets born to it)<sup>201</sup>. This is also the logic behind the figure of the Unknown Soldier mentioned above; no one knows the particular individual characteristics of the soldier in life, his heroism or otherwise. His qualification is simply that he was killed, just as, symmetrically, all the hereditary sovereign has to do is be born. That idea, I feel, is what is lost in democratic systems that replace hereditary sovereigns with an appointed or elected President, who takes a more ceremonial (one could reasonably say “magical”) role, as opposed to a more “political” Prime Minister. That president has to be someone who wants the job and is (at least theoretically) suited to it. They are, by definition, a known quantity. The current monarch of the UK has, on the whole, maintained a stolid silence on matters of state, confining herself to ceremonial and diplomatic duties. Her public lack of charisma and apparent political efficacy has maintained the institution of the monarchy, and arguably, the UK’s particular form of democracy.

It would seem anachronistic, to say the least, for a contemporary politician to speak of the legitimacy of a particular government as deriving from the monarchy. Instead, the current piety is that it stems from the infinitely elastic abstraction “the People” who have voted for it. This space is empty because if it has content, that content cannot be described or legislated. It exists as a space of privacy in the sense of not being accessible to scrutiny, in the same way as a locked room is private. At the same time, this space does not have walls and needs to be *seen* to be empty for democratic pieties to have purchase. King or Queen Log ensures this by being themselves, empty — a mere outline of a subject (a profile on a stamp or coin) that waves and smiles, gives assent. But what is the quality of this emptiness — is it a medium within which relations, of juxtaposition, simultaneity can form, or is it a given that is external to these relations? If we are to say as Lefort does, that this space

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<sup>201</sup> None of this is to say that there is any requirement for a sovereign to be possessed of vast quantities of land or treasure to fulfil their role. A decent council house tied to the job would be sufficient. Neither is it to say that random selection via the same sort of system used for jury duty would not also achieve the same results as the hereditary principle.

*must remain* empty in order to function<sup>202</sup>, is this emptiness a product of history, a particular outcome of it, or is it the ground of history, a sort of anterior *terra nullius*<sup>203</sup> upon which history gets written? If it is the space of sovereignty it can be held by none because sovereignty belongs to all who are subjects. As this sovereignty consists of a will that is undetermined<sup>204</sup>, then it must exist outside all other determinations, including that of history: in fact, outside of society itself. This places the centre of power in society outside society and history; it is not *caused*. In a liberal democracy such as the UK, the electorate exercises choice (though not collectively) of rulers, the legitimacy of this choice derives from its freedom; it is assumed to be arbitrary and undetermined. In other words, it must come from a mysterious zone of voluntarism that exists outside potential scrutiny or coercion. It is purported to be from this place, rather than a transcendent power channelled vertically downwards through a monarch. The contemporary notion of legitimacy (in experience as much as politics as the rise of lyric poetry demonstrates) derives from an “authentic” self-communing within individuals. This is why, as I showed previously, the figure of the addict has become a trope for an inauthentic because it is an insufficiently sovereign subjectivity.

But then, if it is a discernible space, where are its edges? In law, various spaces can be designated private: the (heterosexual) marital bedroom or heterosexual sex more generally, according to Lauren Berlant, is accorded legal status as a private zone where the state cannot interfere or legislate (1997, p.59). The European Convention on Human Rights grants citizens a (qualified) right to a “private *life*”<sup>205</sup>; in this case, an individual’s life itself is granted the status of privacy. The empty space that no one can occupy is mirrored and guaranteed by a privacy in which one, and only ever one, is accepted as sovereign in perpetuity — the space of a subject’s own body and

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<sup>202</sup> Here I think of the unspoken (and unspeakable) territorial struggles conducted over shared spaces in shared houses. These corners, hallways and half-landings can only remain “communal” insofar as no one uses them. A plant pot or pair of shoes, or a simple “tidying” or “organising” of these spaces by one of the tenants can spark a silent civil war.

<sup>203</sup> “Nobody’s land”: if, of course, there has ever been such a thing.

<sup>204</sup> See my discussion of Eve Sedgwick’s *Epidemics of the Will* elsewhere in this work.

<sup>205</sup> Interestingly, the ECHR differentiates between “family life” and “private life”, with some relationships falling under the protection of the right to “family life” and others being “private”. Same-sex relationships are treated as falling into the category of “private” whilst heterosexual ones are protected as “family life”. The reproduction of the social through child bearing and rearing (this law seems to assume that this is the sole preserve of heterosexual couples) occupies a different space: “family” as opposed to mere “sex”.

consciousness.

The space of exception, in Giorgio Agamben's formulation, given in *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (1998) provides an internalisation of that which is placed outside of the law (of exchange, of the usual case), by the suspension of the law. It is not that "the law will apply here, to this, but *not yet*". He writes:

*The rule applies to the exception in no longer applying, in withdrawing from it.*

The state of exception is thus not the chaos that precedes order but rather the situation that results from its suspension (Agamben, 1998, p.18, *original emphasis*).

The law cannot legislate without a general case — which is what "order" is — upon which law is founded. This order is also a spatial order-*ing*; the establishment of a territory which is empty, or rather, into which emptiness can be permitted without destabilising the whole.

As a waste ground, the Bike Cemetery exists outside circuits of commerce and authorised leisure. These are, however, not in total abeyance, but suspended, also through its function as an unofficial tip. Rubbish, as William Viney describes it, has an untimely presence — an "already and not yet". The bricoleur who left their mark on the wall in disjointed inscriptions and collaged imagery, is a part of this.

## The Neighbour

Michel Serres memorably described noise as a “third man” (1982, p. 67), an interruption or that which interrupts the scene of communion/communication. It is something, or someone, who is always at least potentially present as a disruptive force. This tends to place the interlocutors on the same side, united against this force in their quest for mutual understanding, as opposed to older ideas of dialectic that go back at least as far as Plato. If, in speaking, we are on the same side, then “meaning” as such is not immanent to and resulting from our exchange, our individual positions; it comes from outside it. We are trying to see, or hear past the noise of our individual vocabularies, modes of expression, accents, stutters, etc. to apprehend a meaning that is *a priori* shared; if is not “shared”, how could we recognise it as such?

[...] it is one and the same act to recognize an abstract being through the occurrences of its concrete, standardized form and to come to an agreement about this recognition. In other words [...] the attempt to eliminate noise, is at the same time the condition of the apprehension of the abstract form and the condition of the success of communication (Serres, 1982, p.68).

Serres' idea is that a successful dialogue or communication arises in the process of the parties involved eradicating as much as possible the incidental noise which would muddy the signal. This process of extracting signal from noise is what he would call agreement. He uses the example of abstract mathematical symbols which when drawn by hand on a blackboard, for example, can take all sorts of strange shapes through which one can see the figure intended. Douglas Kahn has very aptly described this noise as “[...] that constant grating sound generated by the movement between the abstract and empirical” (1999, p.33).

Steven Connor, in a lecture on noise:

Sound has always had associations with the sacred. Any sound that has been detached from its source, whether by concealment, technological mediation, or

by amplification, will carry a sense of unseen power, power that is the greater for being unseen.<sup>206</sup>

Nikkai, a brand of audiovisual cables, display the strapline “Pure Connectivity” on their packaging as if this was possible, or even desirable. It begs the question of what pure connectivity would sound like — it would sound like nothing, which is the point of the advertising; there would be friction-free exchange between particularities and universals. It would have the effect of immediate (and unmediated) presence/communion. To attempt communication at all, however, involves the recognition — the starting point is the recognition — that the sender and the receiver of the message are not the same. If they were, then communication would be redundant. A channel must be opened between them, and this channel must, as far as is possible, be kept free of noise.

The following is a description of a 2016 performance in which I along with several others was invited to perform and improvised “duet” with a very well-established performer. Neither party was to have any prior information on what the other would do. I was acutely aware of the power differential between us, as relatively unknown and un-named versus the well known name on the bill.

**A didn't want any of us to meet with them beforehand. This was made quite clear. We were to be strangers, to each other and to A, who was calling the shots, it was their reputation; their capital. I turned up early, to see what the set up was going to be. I asked if the lights could be adjusted and asked where A would be. They could adjust the lights the way I wanted, but they couldn't say where A would be at the time. I said that I'd like to come in from the back so no one would see me arrive, and they said that could be arranged. When the time came, very much later, we were taken into a side room to wait. There were five of us there, strangers. Mostly, they weren't very chatty; two were very concerned about getting their last train home and so we agreed they could go first. Those two were especially nervous, the first one said that this was not her thing at all; she'd volunteered to do something completely different, but they'd asked her to do this and she'd agreed. She rattled the papers she'd brought, and**

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<sup>206</sup> Steven Connor, from the Radio 4 broadcast, Noise (1997). Available at: <http://www.stevenconnor.com/noise/>. Updated: February 24, 1997; accessed: February 28, 2012.

scanned them repeatedly in preparation. The second one was fussing with her equipment and said she was unsure that she would know what to do when the time came. The third was quiet and seemed very young; he was polite. The fourth was the oldest of us and the only one who knew A at all; just as a passing acquaintance, he said. No, he didn't know why he'd been asked; he seemed slightly irritated by our questions. The first one was called out. We could hear what was going on from the side room. She was interrupted with strange noises as she tried to read out her prepared statement. We could hear laughter, then A, whose room it was, began interviewing her. We could hear A, putting the other off balance, allowing her to recover, then interrupting again, then laughter. 158 The second went with it. She went out playing a tune on her equipment. Then A, whose room it was, sang along; and after a while requested another tune, the second played it, as A, whose room it was, reminisced. The third, who was polite, did the same, but he sang, also. He sang questions about love to A, whose room it was. A sang back questions to him, about love. They sang a duet about love, on A's territory. The fourth had already left his equipment in A's room. He went through the door. I heard a piano play, on A's territory. A started to sing, the piano stopped. A talked, there was no reply, except some isolated chords. Then a different tune, which A started to sing to, again – until it stopped, abruptly. Then silence. I was the last. As arranged, I didn't go in through the door that the others had. I did not intend to step straight out onto A's floor. I left through the other door and entered their room through the back. I made no sound, at first. I stood behind the others who were sitting down in rows looking towards A, who was leaning, relaxed, against the wall at the far end, looking towards the door the others came through. After a moment, I started moving behind the back row of people, scratching the inside of my drum with a fingernail. It was not too loud, but was tense, abrasive. A moved forward slightly, not too far, I could see their stance become straighter, more tense. The lights had been set as I requested. They shone directly in A's direction. A squinted and shielded their eyes to see what was happening. I said nothing, but carried on, scratching the drum skin. I moved down the aisle, beating the drum sometimes, and scratching its skin, saying nothing. Halfway up the aisle towards A's zone, I took a pair of red plastic lips from my pocket and clenched them between my teeth, holding them over my own lips. They were a pound shop purchase, with a built-in whistle. I paused and blew through them. They 159 produced a wheezing glissando (Fig. 30). There was some laughter from those sitting.

**A responded by making a whooshing sound into the microphone. I allowed a silence to build, then took the plastic lips off and said “I'm trying to channel the spirit of my granddad. He was a right cunt.” There was some nervous laughter from those sitting...**

I was intending, in my response to the invitation to “duet” with the quite apparent host of the space, to play the part of awkward neighbor, rather than ingratiating guest. Neighbours are universally unavoidable. Unlike the guest, they have no need of hospitality; we cannot eject them if they speak out of turn or become tiresome. They do not have a visa that can be revoked. Equally, we do not have to laugh at their jokes or effusively appreciate their generosity to placate them. As anyone who lives in a flat will know, the neighbour is constantly present but usually unseen; the relationship is mostly auditory. We can hear their footsteps, smell their cooking, pass judgement on their taste in music or sex lives, know how often they use the toilet and when they go out to work. They will know just the same about us; their judgement cannot be appealed against any more than our own can and there is nothing that can be done about them. Unlike the other, whose position is always at a safe distance from which we can turn away from them — or invite them over — the neighbor is almost as close as our own skin.

The neighbour disturbs the self-similarity of the home, a place where supposedly no-one comes in and stays without our say so. The home is a private, discrete space, separated from the outside (the outside, as well as being weather, is also predominantly *other people*) by walls and doors with locks, the keys to which only known and named individuals have access. The key is a *tesserae hospitalis*, the token from the ancient world described by Georg Gadamer as a physical token that would be divided in half, each half carried by an individual to denote the claims of hospitality that existed between their families. Gadamer used this as an example of the strong connection between notions of the symbol and a sense of *simultaneous* presence (2004, p.63) of the “sensible and the nonsensible” (Ibid, p.64).

Obviously a symbol is something which has value not only because of its content, but because it can be “produced”—i.e., *because it is a document by means of which the members of a community recognize one another*; whether it

is a religious symbol or appears in a secular context—as a badge or a pass or a password [...] (Ibid, p.63, *my emphasis*).

The key is a manifestation of this same idea. It has jagged teeth that fit the tumblers of the lock in order to turn them, in the same way that the broken halves of the ceramic *tesserae* would, when presented, match each other. In both cases, the coming together of the parts — their being presented to one another — temporally and spatially, activates (or invokes) a power (to ask for hospitality, to unlock a door) that is otherwise latent<sup>207</sup>. A whole is created from heterogeneous parts; a key and a lock are separate components (each one theoretically belonging to only one other) until joined. Once this happens they form a single system, the purpose of which is to move a barrier or set it in place. This opening or closing controls the space and bestows power upon the one, or ones, who hold the key.

I have a key, and through this, I have a home. This is my piece of territory that I can — theoretically — control. The compromises of social life, of imposed hierarchies that exist outside, stop at these walls. Here is the space of my unhindered volition, just as my body is the house of my spirit, the seat of my will, in which I struggle against my appetites and desires, so in my house I must struggle against *noise*.

The private (from *privatus*, deprived) was originally conceived as the negation or privation of public value. It had no value in its own right. But in the modern period, this has changed, and privacy has taken on a distinctive value of its own, in several different registers: as freedom, individuality, inwardness, authenticity, and so on (Warner, 2002, p.28).

Whilst Warner emphasises the variety of registers and conceptual sedimentations left over the course of history in the pairing (not always strictly an opposition) of public/private, one of the oldest is that of a claim on territory. We still use private in that sense: private land, private space, private room or house.

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<sup>207</sup> Michael Warner points out that for medieval thought, the difference between “public” and “private” was “almost solely a spatial concept” defined by whether something was open or closed. See: Warner, 2002, p.26. Whilst the contemporary distinction is considerably more complex, it retains elements of this.

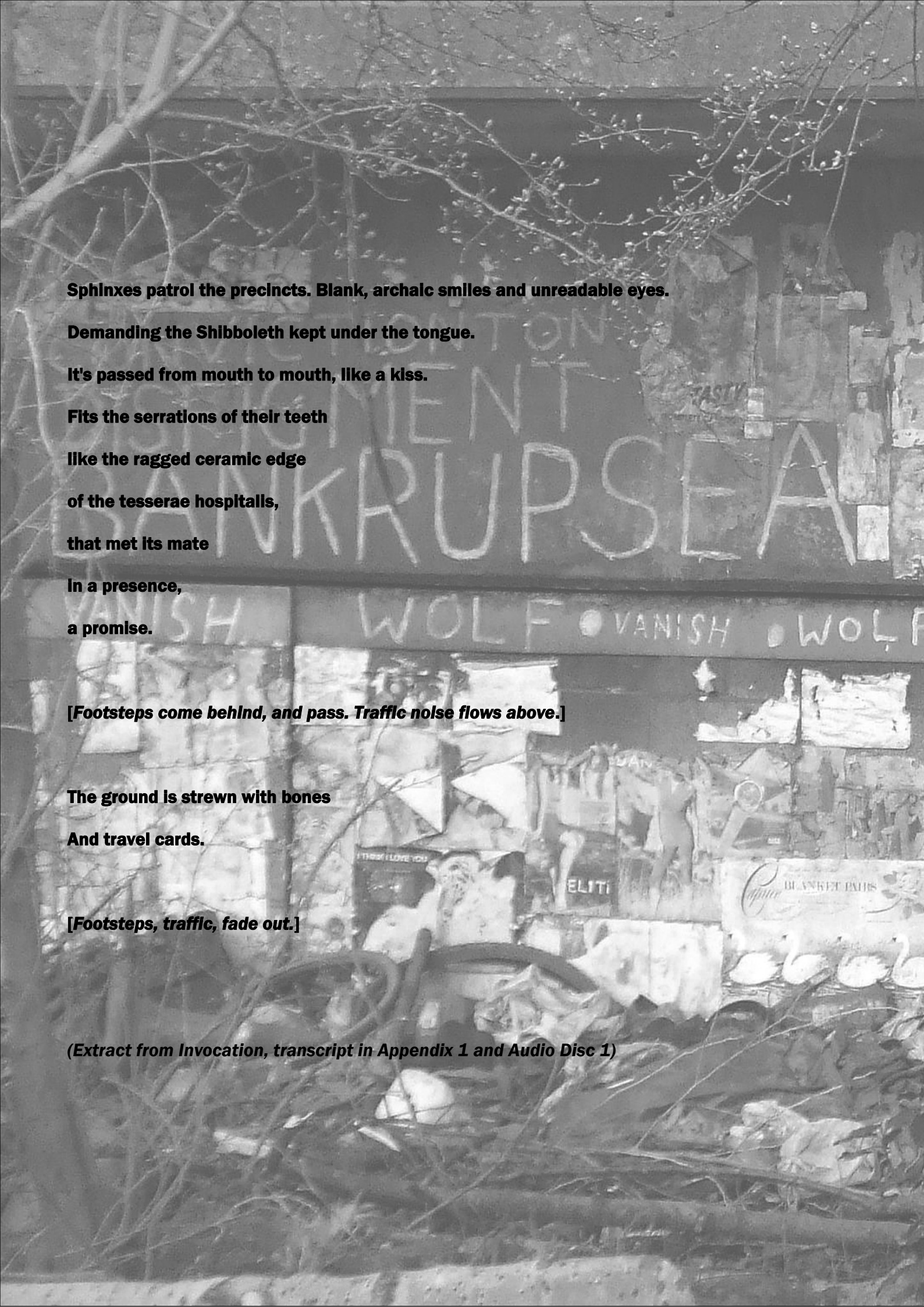


One of the traditional symbols of the papacy is the keys of the kingdom of Heaven, metaphorically given by Christ to St. Peter. Christ also takes the trouble to name Peter; the name, the foundation of a territory (the Church) and the keys are all placed together. This territory is enclosed, as territory must be, with a definable inside and out. Order must always be smaller than the matter it orders. In the scene that establishes the Church and its authority:

And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven (Matthew, 16: 18–19; King James version).

By this action, St. Peter becomes the first Pope and the holder of the keys to the territory; the Church became, as much as it was anything else, an empire when it became the Church of Rome. The keys that were presented in metaphor to Peter still appear on the arms of the Holy See and are associated with territory — supernatural as well as natural — and the ability to impose order within that territory. The key holder is given the power to allot, say, portions of land, or portions of salvation or damnation, to delegate power to others in his dominion.



**Sphinxes patrol the precincts. Blank, archaic smiles and unreadable eyes.**

**Demanding the Shibboleth kept under the tongue.**

**It's passed from mouth to mouth, like a kiss.**

**Fits the serrations of their teeth**

**like the ragged ceramic edge**

**of the tesserae hospitalls,**

**that met its mate**

**In a presence,**

**a promise.**

**[Footsteps come behind, and pass. Traffic noise flows above.]**

**The ground is strewn with bones**

**And travel cards.**

**[Footsteps, traffic, fade out.]**

**(Extract from *Invocation*, transcript in Appendix 1 and Audio Disc 1)**

## Lastly

In order to gather field recordings for a short podcast about the place, I went to the Bike Cemetery in the summer of 2015. I hadn't been back there for a year or so and each previous visit had revealed the effects of rain and wind on the inscriptions and collage that covered the wall. What had been preserved for many years unseen behind a screen of young trees had been left exposed by the highways department felling those trees when they grew tall enough to overhang the motorway slip road running across the top of the embankment that the wall held in place. The emblems were fading, the pasted elements decaying or falling off to join the rest of the detritus that not only lay on, but constituted a large part of, the ground beneath it. The previous year I had noticed that some local kids had found it and practiced a bit of inept spray can tagging on a small part of the wall. It was tentative and badly done, I noted that it had been abandoned after the first letter had been formed. Either the can had run out of paint or propellant or the tagger had decided that it wasn't worth the bother to tag a place where their peers weren't likely to see it; there is kudos in tagging somewhere inaccessible but public, visible. The Bike Cemetery is a hidden place, turned in upon itself.

On my 2015 visit, I was prepared to find further weather damage and perhaps some more disparate and inept tagging. I didn't expect nearly the entirety of the wall inscriptions and *bricolage* to be gone. I pushed through the usual undergrowth and followed a narrow path between brambles and nettles, reaching the small clearing in front of the wall, where I was confronted by the word "costume", painted very carefully and very large using a tasteful range of subdued greens in a curly cursive style script with a drop shadow (see Fig. 32). The calligrapher had stripped a great deal of the collaged material from the wall, presumably to give themselves a more even surface to work on. They had painted straight over the texts already there. Off slightly to the right, there was a small iteration of the word "Concrete" in another cursive style script with a drop shadow again (Fig. 33).

The care with which the work was done coupled with the meaninglessness of the words in context made me think of the sort of mood board that designers use when developing ideas for a client; sometimes these vapid but supposedly evocative

words find their way into the final product. Wall friezes with words like “fresh” or “stimulating” regularly find their way into coffee shops, for instance. I thought that perhaps the wall had been used for some aspiring young creative’s calligraphy practice, perhaps as a page or two in their portfolio. It reminded me most strongly of the hand-painted signage that has become popular in the cities of the UK for a particular kind of business, largely purveyors of the “artisanal” kind of food and drink. This has become something of a shorthand signifier for a place offering some description of an “authentic experience”. During the run up to the Olympics, as part of the generalised sanitisation of the Hackney Wick area, a design firm called the Bread Collective won a commission to design and paint what they called a “community mural” along White Post Lane, a street that was going to be one of the main approaches to the Olympic Park. It displayed

[...] words and phrases that pay homage to the area's industrial past. The typographic aesthetic also references traditional signage found on old factories, shops and canal boats<sup>208</sup>.

These were re-presentations of the names of various products once produced in the area. It also had short phrases, alluding to local landmarks or memories including “fridge mountain”; a small alp of obsolescent fridges that languished for some years in a yard next to the railway line. This remarkable landmark was cleared away near the beginning of the Olympic preparations. The factories that once had produced the products being memorialised had mostly closed in the late 1970s and the coming Olympics would lead to obliteration of the carapaces of the buildings. Combined with this would, of course, be a spike in rental values and the inevitable exodus from the area of those who could no longer afford it.

Much of this neatly matches Celeste Olalquiaga’s definition of kitsch that she explored in *The Artificial Kingdom: A Treasury of the Kitsch Experience* (1998) in experience that is unmediated by industrial capitalism. It is the fragmentation or

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<sup>208</sup> From documentation of this project by Bread Collective. Available at: <http://www.breadcollective.co.uk/work/#/the-walls-have-ears-olympic-site-murals-hackney-wick/>  
Last update: 2013; last accessed: September 27, 2016.

ruination of what Benjamin called “the aura”. The same impulse desires hand-painted calligraphy to commemorate industrial “heritage” (once the factories and those who worked in them are gone) and post-industrial landmarks. It is, as Olalquiaga says, marked by an indelible melancholy, a subliminal sense of being caught in a double-bind; it is the mechanism of industrial capital that enables the production of even the *ersatz* “artisanal”, just as much as the mass-produced. It is the class relations that are an integral part of that system that creates the appetite for it.

I inserted some still images of the Bread Collective’s mural project *The Walls Have Ears* (2012) into the video that documents my performance *Twat Graffiti* (2015)<sup>209</sup>(see Fig. 31). The performance took place very close to White Post Lane, which was the site for the Bread Collective work. It was this piece, and the effacing of the Bike Cemetery wall, that I was referring to as “twat graffiti”. The ethos behind *Costume* and *Concrete*, along with the work of the Bread Collective, belong in an entirely different category from teenagers’ tagging, or whatever the unknown *bricoleur* of the Bike Cemetery was doing. The supposed nostalgia that might be evoked by such painstaking handcraft is perhaps intended more as *invocation*, bearing in mind the distinctions between the two terms that I outlined earlier; invocation is a calling on of something that is available but locally or temporarily in abeyance<sup>210</sup>. The word “heritage”, just like the word “tradition”, plays on the idea of a continuity between then and now, just as invocation relies on the implicit sense of some shared language or identity between the one who invokes and that which is invoked; there is no gap between them. It is fairly common for new developments — most often but not exclusively those refurbishing old factories and warehouses as flats — to nod at “heritage” at least in the names that they give those places. A development on the site of the Haggerston Estate in Hackney has called itself “City Mills” after the industry that existed in the area in the nineteenth and earlier twentieth centuries, thereby eliding the social democratic post-war years when there was public housing there<sup>211</sup>.

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<sup>209</sup> See Disk 3 and online for documentation.

<sup>210</sup> It is interesting to consider where the “control” that the Leave EU campaign wanted to take “back” had been, or whether it is even possible to take something “back” that you never had in the first place. The implication is that a long-standing tradition will be re-instated.

<sup>211</sup> Tellingly, the brochure for City Mills describes the change that has occurred in the following terms:

I associate the Bike Cemetery writer (despite, or rather because, I have no idea of who they were) specifically with the post-war consensus as the archetype of the rights-bearing citizen, the one whose act of negation — their work — was facilitated by a state that maintained somewhat of a boundary between public and private. It did this in terms of spaces, certainly, in contrast to the pseudo-public privately owned “public realm” that too many streets and squares are becoming by stealth, but also in terms of boundaries within the subject; the separation of “citizen” and “subject” creates a necessary dyad for what we can broadly call liberalism. I have identified the space of the Bike Cemetery (its borders) with the neutral container of the citizenship offered by what was called the welfare state. It provided the space — the empty space — for the negative. I believe that like a Kantian solitary scholar, s/he performed a subtraction of themselves from whatever their context was, their specific historical and cultural determinations to partake in a universal negation.

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The old East End street markets have reinvented themselves and now offer artisan produce, original designer fashion and hand-crafted artefacts alongside the standard fruit and veg. Industry is reconfigured as heritage and “artisan produce” and “hand-crafted artefacts”.



## Conclusion – Reflections on Brexit

As I have been engaged in this study, public services and spaces are being run down and privatised, the public as a totality, bounded by particular identity, has become more dominant in UK and US politics and beyond. I nearly wrote that it has returned, because this is the autochthonic fantasy being purveyed; that some innate national being has been roused from somnolence after years of enervation and is alert for further “betrayal” from above or a contagion of estrangement from parts of society considered inherently estranging. An argument has been made for some time, from parts of the right, that mass immigration weakens the will of the “native” population to support the mechanisms of the welfare state (for a random example, see Goodhart, 2013). The state, like the fantasy of the nation, is assumed to have or need a determinate, symbolic, content that must be fiercely identified with, or not at all.

On 23 June 2016, the UK referendum on exiting the European Union returned a narrow margin (51.9% to 48.1%) in favour of leaving. Since then the negotiations have gone on inconclusively; at each stage the unpreparedness of the UK government, which chose (the referendum was not legally binding) to implement the result, has been exposed as woefully unprepared and incoherent in its intended outcomes. Despite the whole exercise — come to be known by the portmanteau “Brexit”, appearing ill-advised at the very best — it has not yet been abandoned as impossible or as impossibly damaging.

From my perspective, neither side in the referendum had anything politically compelling to offer: the “remain” side couched their appeal in the recognisably neoliberal/managerialist terms that have dominated political discourse in the UK since the 1990s. As such, it could not be other than an offer to maintain the status quo. Put bluntly, I could see nothing more appealing in the likes of Tony Blair or David Cameron’s vision of the polity and the public than in Boris Johnson’s or Nigel Farage’s on the other side. Those who led the leave campaigns presented it as a brave insurgency against “the establishment”. It looks more like the *denouement* of a power struggle between two factions of the financialised ruling class. However, as Dominic Cummings of the Vote Leave campaign admitted in a 2017 blog post, the



“trade babble” that some wanted the campaign to emphasise was not going to convince on its own:

Would we have won without immigration? No. Would we have won by spending our time talking about trade and the Single Market? No way [...]. (Cummings, 2017)

As Cummings acknowledges, the most emotive subject during the referendum campaign was the right of EU citizens to live and work wherever they chose within the union. This was deliberately conflated (by both the “leave” campaigns) with immigration from the rest of the world along with asylum seekers and refugees, although non-EU migration is a matter for individual states and the UK has international obligations towards refugees. It is for this reason that many have derided all those who voted ‘leave’ as racists or xenophobes. Whilst I don’t believe this can be true for all cases, the vote has been seized upon as expressing a fervent desire for the more ethnically homogeneous polity that is believed to have once existed — as a loud, gleeful riposte to the “cosmopolitan elite” and their sensibilities, just as the election of Donald Trump in the USA has been treated, not least by Trump himself. In fact, the campaign may well have been influenced, funded, if not driven (Cadwalladr, 2017) by parts of the American right. It is beyond the scope of this present work to cover the questionable nature of those funding and their ideological connections. It seems more probable to me that profits from picking the bones of a manufactured economic and social catastrophe (Klein, 2007) are likely a stronger motive for them than creating ethnic or “cultural” homogeneity.

Brexit is simply the latest manifestation of what I have been describing throughout this study: the replacement of an arguably liberal idea of being-in-public as space, crowd or institution predicated on the opacity of the stranger or citizen form in a dialectic relation with the privacy of the individual subject, by a differentially constructed set of degrees of access defined by individual particularities. In the case of Brexit, this essentially neoliberal formation is masked by, or allied with, a nativist communitarianism.

The public as polity is at best tenuously linked with any particular group or positive

content and so more logically “called out” by evocation than “called on” in an invocation. It has been retroactively called out by the result; the 17,410,742 people who voted to leave rhetorically identified with the country as a whole, constituting “the People” (see fig.34) whose monosyllabic “will” as expressed by that single vote must not be thwarted. Insofar as it was (or represented as) a singular “voice”, there was little coherent beyond a bare negation. Theresa May stumbled upon this reading of the result as pure performative with no tangible object *beyond its own saying* in her much-derided clarification (disguised as evasion) that “Brexit means Brexit”. The Peoples’ will is to now make the public sphere a reflection of the fantasies it has about itself. Arron Banks, co-founder of the Leave EU campaign told the *Guardian* not long after the referendum that

The remain campaign featured fact, fact, fact, fact, fact. It just doesn’t work. You have got to connect with people emotionally. [...] The first thing we did was poll everybody and we found that if immigration wasn’t the issue, the issue was schools or education, proxies for immigration (Booth, Travis and Gentleman, 2016).

One can add the NHS to the list of proxies — all standing in for fears of a public sphere being “swamped” by strangers. As a randomly chosen example of an incessantly repeated trope, in 2013 an audience member of *BBC Question Time* enjoyed a brief tabloid celebrity through her retort to “out-of-touch” panellist, the Classicist Mary Beard:

There are hardly any locals there any more [...]. You go down Boston high street and it’s just like you’re in a foreign country. It’s got to stop (Bull, 2013).

It was an archetypal face-off between a supposedly remote, liberal elite and the “real concerns” of the “ordinary public” who find their public space estranged by the mere presence of strangers.

An impromptu speech by Nigel Farage early in the morning of the day after the referendum when first reports came of a probable victory for leave echo this:

This [...] will be a victory for real people, a victory for ordinary people, a victory  
 This [...] will be a victory for real people, a victory for ordinary people, a victory  
 for decent people (Farage, 2016).

It was an unguarded remark, despite his carefully cultivated reputation as someone who will say the supposedly unsayable. It gives an insight into the sort of fantasies at play in the referendum. Reality — some form of epistemic density, perhaps — is achieved insofar as subjects align with the “ordinary”, the supposedly familiar-yet-unspoken substrate of the social. The role of the emblematic “real” in this has been assigned by many national haruspices to the “white working class”, a demographic supposedly hitherto ignored and despised. However, contrary to the frequent blithe assumptions about the identity of the 52% who voted to leave, overwhelmingly they were not people who lived in the North of the UK. Neither were they exclusively, or even mostly, working class (Dorling, 2016). They were predominantly white. The majority of BAME people were not in favour of Brexit, with the exception of UK citizens of Indian background (Begum, 2018), though the latter seem missing in the popular imaginary.

The favoured figures of the fantasy are “the left behind” which purport to designate those who have been condemned to the waste-time and stasis of obsolescence, additionally suffering from the loss of “the disappearance of a distinct working-class culture and the marginalization of their views in the public conversation” (Goodhart, 2016). It is not clear what this “distinct culture” entailed but considering those who have lost it are regularly described as “older white working class men with little education” (Goodhart, 2016), it might seem safe to say that part of it was a level of entitlement based purely on the status of “white” and “male”. Notably, the version of class being retailed is remarkably light in regards to any specific relationship to the means of production (which would include women and people of colour), preferring instead a definition relying on a vague idea of “culture”.

As Lauren Gail Berlant points out (Gail Berlant, 2005), political fantasies aren't powerless or a substitute for power, but a necessary part of any political thinking. In this case the fantasy was one of self-similarity, belonging. This appeal to the normative-mundane as an exemplification of clear-sightedness and practical virtues

is what Joe Kennedy, a literature scholar, calls “authentocracy”. Crucially, political and journalistic authentocrats are not usually speaking on their own account, but on behalf of a reified other. Kennedy defines authentocracy as [...] an economy of truth in which rightness is not immanent in a claim but is instead supported with reference to personal origins (2018; loc. 456).

Kennedy points out that this phantasmal “white working class” are very rarely, if ever, depicted in any of their actual located and variegated specificities. Rather, their role as those invoked — whose “legitimate concerns” should be listened to is — as Kennedy aptly puts it, allegorical (2018; loc. 1134). On one level, it is a strange spectacle for a purported national abject to become lauded as essential, but as previously noted, the exception from a given order can become an allegorical exemplar of it. The role assigned those “left behind”, “forgotten” or excluded by a cosmopolitan globalised capital (mediated and enabled by national governments) has switched from exception to exemplar, becoming Farage’s “real” — the People elevated as epitome of nation, models for the public and the validators of the state.

In my previous discussion about the Emily Thornberry “flag” tweet, I pointed out that symbolic readings provide the comfort that there is something tangibly *there* with which to underwrite fantasies of public self-similarity. In another anecdotal example: while speaking with someone who voted to leave, he reasoned that the EU is an “artificial construct” — a substitution of something overly rarefied, arid and etiolated for the (assumed) organic and living presence of the “real” (“ordinary”) nation state. For him the EU served as allegorical antithesis to the symbol.

The term “populism” has been attached to the anti-EU campaigns by both sides. Ernesto Laclau defines this as the development of apparently simplistic dichotomous positions within social space, articulated via rhetoric he describes as “metaphorical reaggregation” (2005; p.19) which establishes an equivalence between the grievances of different groups at one pole against an (assumed) oppressive force at the other:

the unification of a plurality of demands in an equivalential chain; the constitution of an internal frontier dividing society into two camps; the consolidation of the equivalential chain (Laclau, 2005, p.77).

This reaggregation operates through tropes: images, metaphors, phrases and bodily dispositions. Laclau calls these “empty signifiers” because their lack of particular content enables their function, which is to “give successive concrete contents a sense of temporal continuity” (2005, p.76). Even the speechwriters of the Tory Prime minister, Theresa May, were aware of this when they had her say “[T]he referendum was not just a vote to withdraw from the EU. It was about something broader – something that the European Union had come to represent” (May, 2016).

By Laclau’s definition, this falls a long way short of constructing “a popular identity which is something qualitatively more than the simple summation of the equivalential links” (2005, p.77). There is no suitably stable empty signifier around which to aggregate disparate grievances. Kennedy perhaps puts it most accurately when he describes authentocrats as being engaged in “not straightforward populism, but an [...] attempt to filigree its terms” (2018, loc. 649).

What has happened is that the irreconcilable differences between democratic and liberal strands of governmental rationality are exposed. Although often casually treated as virtual synonyms, the tension between them is, as Chantal Mouffe describes it, the foundational liberal democratic “paradox” (2000, pp. 2–5). The two strands are not independent of one another but locked into a productive dialectic. The current ascendancy of the idea that “democracy” was embodied forever in the result of a single plebiscite, rather than the plebiscite itself, is a step towards the emergence of a form of *illiberal* democracy, or what Wendy Brown has called in relation to Donald Trump’s appeal, “libertarian authoritarianism”, an apparent oxymoron which she sums up thusly:

Its sensibility is: ‘I can say anything, do anything, be anything I want, I can call for a certain restoration of my former entitlements (among whites), insist on my

libertarian rights and at the same time demand statist protection of my country, property, and racial and sexual entitlement' (Brown, 2018).

Theresa May carried this logic through with her “hostile environment” policies aimed at preventing undocumented migrants from accessing healthcare, working or renting accommodation. Predictably, this has ended up with UK citizens being deported, interned and refused medical treatment, housing and benefits.

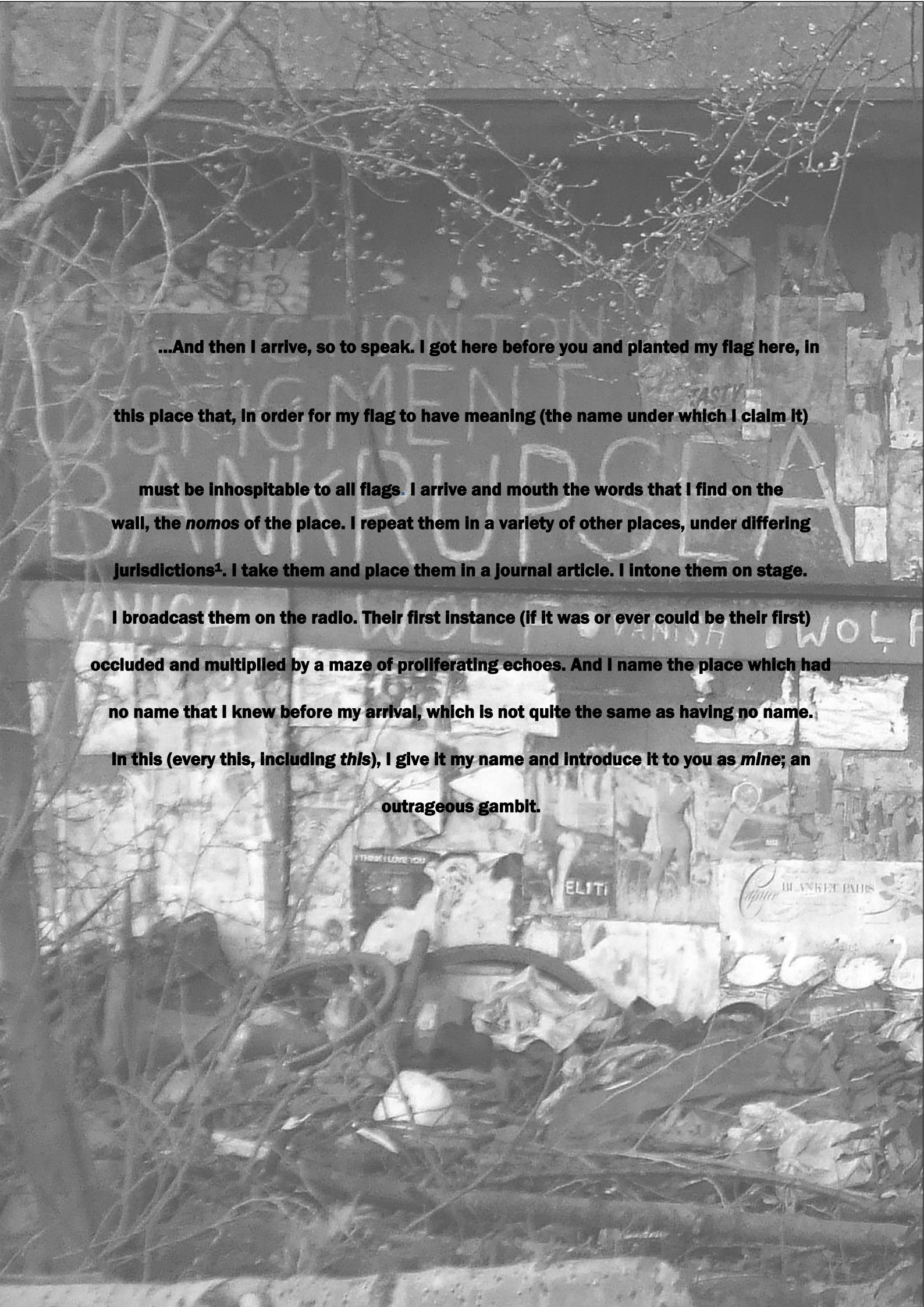
A population, or large part of it, who are caught in a moment that doesn't end, which their exhausted “practical sovereignty” cannot meet or navigate, are encouraged to identify with the neoliberal state and its “performance of imperial autonomy” (Berlant, 2005). This, I think, was the attempted hook in the “take back control” and “Leave” campaign slogan. The government was to performatively enact “control” as proxy. A fantasy of self-sufficient, buccaneering entrepreneurial spirit is resurrected and apparently expected to take the place of a “dependence” on the EU that is antithetical to the true interests of the nation. Presumably in the same way that removing benefits from unemployed and disabled claimants will help “free” them to independently navigate the market or starve.

In my own audiences, which consist predominantly of other artists and academics, Brexit seems universally greeted with horror. In more recent performances that are outside the time frame of this study, I have clearly articulated the Vote Leave slogan “take back control” to see the reaction from my audience. It has mostly provoked nervous laughter; it seems as if the audience is uncertain about whether I am sincere and where they stand in relation to it or me. This is always the point. The reaction is undoubtedly due in part to the fact that they are members of a class that identifies itself as trans-national in outlook. The proliferating examples of self-penned artist biographies on flyers and websites, describing themselves as “based in London and Berlin” or similar (whatever their practical accuracy), for example, attest to that. It seems inescapable that part of the reaction to Brexit is a reaction to *Brexiters* — an element of class-based antipathy, or rather an uncritical acceptance of the assumed class characteristics of the leave vote. It may be a reflexive identification with its presumed antithesis. Whilst The Art Market (writ large) and Big Museums (again) are imbricated with Richard Florida's ideas of a hyper-mobile “creative class” (Florida,

2002) most art made is distinctly local. However, as with the phantasmic Brexiter, that “local” is not easily situated or entirely coincident with itself.

Not a single family in Europe I don't know — By that I mean families like mine, who owe everything to the Declaration of the Rights of Man (Rimbaud, 2001), p.213).

In a future performance, in part a response to the lines quoted above from Arthur Rimbaud's coruscating prose poem “*Bad Blood*”, I shall be combining verbal provocation about “taking back control” with wearing a mural crown (see *Root* appendix 2) and a “ceremonial” blanket inscribed with slogans from the Bike Cemetery wall (fig.35). This is intended to allegorically combine the exemplary sovereignty of the (head of) state with the abjected subjectivity, space and time of the Bike Cemetery. In this way, I hope to present the paradoxical strands of (welfare statist) liberal democracy in confrontation with the supposed autonomy of the empty space of performance. Rimbaud's ambivalence in the poem towards both the bourgeois democratic society against which he lived and his role as artist within it and his tacit acknowledgment of their mutual complicity, appears apt to me. As Berlant remarked, [...t]here are no unmixed political feelings, there is no unambivalent potentiality for the social (Berlant, 2010); this seems accurate and more useful than ever in the current situation. At this dangerous time, avowed ambivalence might seem a luxury, but it is, in my opinion, more perilous to throw one's lot in with symbolic readings of commonality, even with one own self or one's times.



**...And then I arrive, so to speak. I got here before you and planted my flag here, in this place that, in order for my flag to have meaning (the name under which I claim it) must be inhospitable to all flags. I arrive and mouth the words that I find on the wall, the *nomos* of the place. I repeat them in a variety of other places, under differing jurisdictions<sup>1</sup>. I take them and place them in a journal article. I intone them on stage.**

**I broadcast them on the radio. Their first instance (if it was or ever could be their first) occluded and multiplied by a maze of proliferating echoes. And I name the place which had no name that I knew before my arrival, which is not quite the same as having no name. In this (every this, including *this*), I give it my name and introduce it to you as *mine*; an outrageous gambit.**



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Fig 2 Alastair MacLennan (1977) *Target*.



Fig 3 Baker, B. (2001) *Box Story*. [St Luke's Church, London. 26 June].



Fig 4 Performance still from *Cracks/Tracks* (2011), Robin Bale. Documentation: Nicola Woodham.



Fig 5 Hoarding Dalston Kingsland. Photograph: Robin Bale 2014.



Fig 6 Emblem XII from Quarle's Emblemes (1658).



Fig. 7. #Rochester, Emily Thornberry 2015.

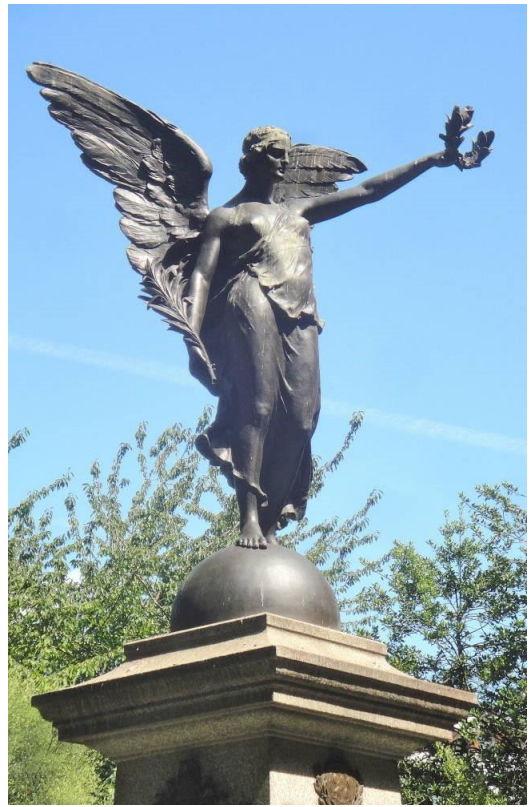


Fig. 8. *Finsbury War Memorial* (1921), Rudge, R. Photograph: Robert Freidus.



Fig. 9. *Kkkaaa*, 2016. Still from performance documentation.



Fig. 10. Turning backs on Thatcher funeral, 2013.



Fig. 11. The Bike Cemetery wall. Photo: Robin Bale 2013.



Fig. 12. Bike Cemetery, 2013.

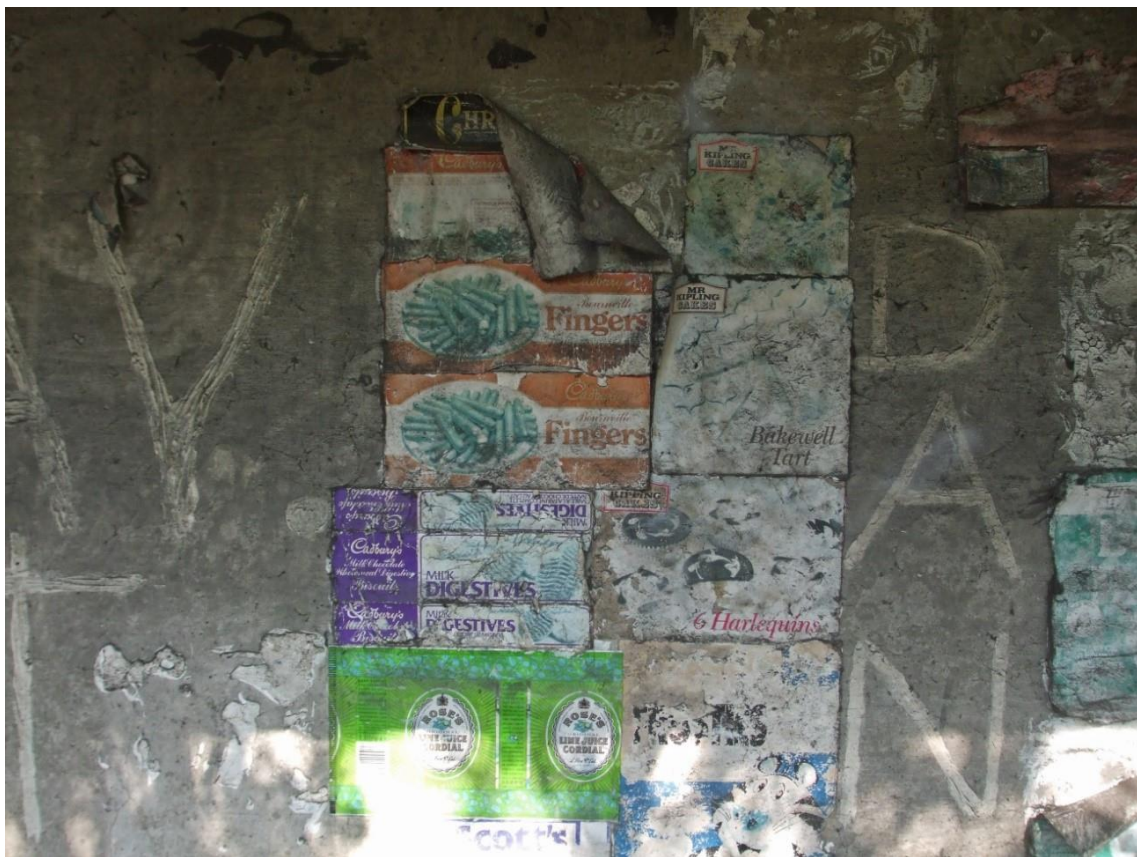


Fig. 13. Bike Cemetery wall (detail), 2010.





Fig. 14. Bike Cemetery wall (detail), 2010



Fig. 15. *Occasion*, George Withers, 1635.



Fig. 16. *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog*, Caspar David Friedrich, 1818.



Fig. 17. "He's stood here like that — walking stick, wasn't it?" Still from *Apostrophe to a Citizen* (2015) and Friedrich's *Wanderer*.



Fig. 18. Render with “scalies”, developer’s hoarding on Fonthill Road, London, 2016.



Fig. 19. “Entourage” people texture.



Fig. 20. Still from Vibe development promotional video. Telford Homes 2015.



Fig. 21. Still from Vibe development promotional video. Telford Homes 2015.

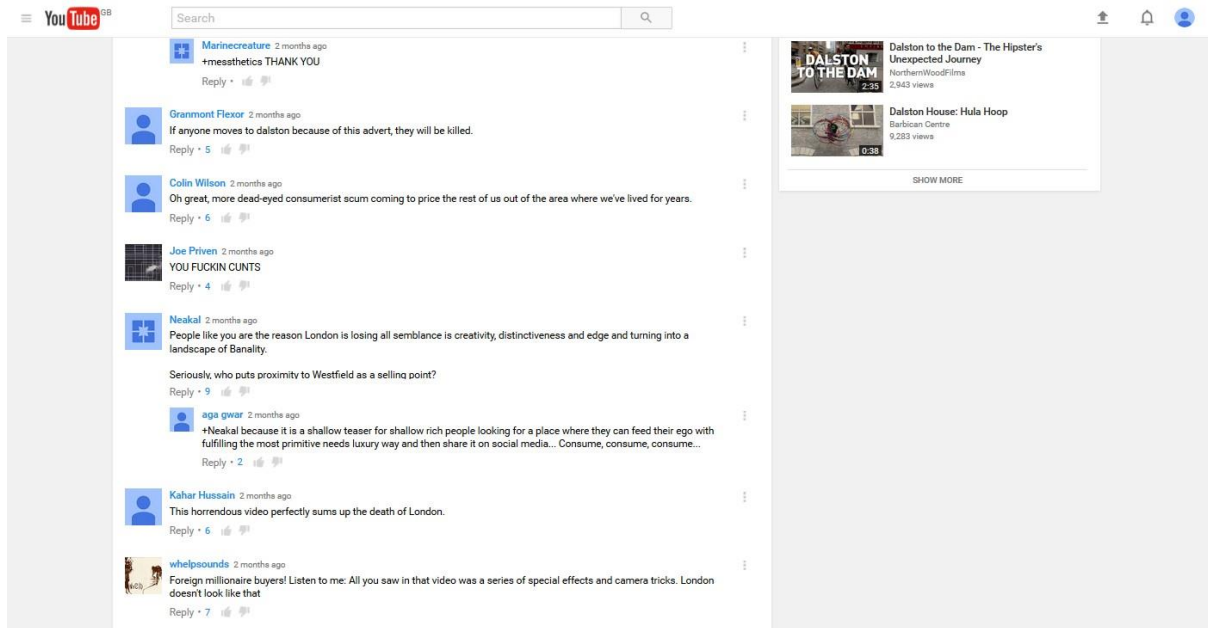


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Fig. 30. Still from *Duets With 5 Strangers* (2016).



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Fig. 32. *Costume* (2015), image from the Bike Cemetery. Photograph: Robin Bale



Fig. 33. *Concrete* (2015), image from the Bike Cemetery. Photograph: Robin Bale



Fig. 34. Covers of *The Sun*, *The Daily Express*, *Daily Mail* 2017-2018.



Fig. 35. Bale, R. (2018) *Bad Blood*. [Turf Gallery, Croydon, 11 January].

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## Appendix 1

### INVOCATION

Throat singing. Fades into traffic sound

[*Sound of traffic. Crack of beer can opening, hiss of escaping gas*] This — is for the good dead [*sound of pouring beer on pavement*] Who tucked us in at night — closing the door, softly

Who gaze, calmly, back at us from the family shrine Whose eyes are doubled in the faces of friends, lovers. The good dead — who love us,—

Because we're good. And we like to be good.

This — [*sound of beer being poured on pavement*] Is for the bad dead — who we don't like to speak of Who implore us as we pass, whose voices —

Are not quite voices,

Whose language is not quite language — not *quite* — Who we've injured, or allowed to be injured

Whose reproach is implacable — and infinite In their lost-ness to us.

The bad dead; who we don't like to speak of.

And this [*sound of beer poured on pavement*] Is for [*shouts*] Hermes!

Who stole the cattle of the sun,

Who licks the crumbs from the sacrificial table

Who spits on honest labor

Who casts his benediction on all who thief their language Stumbling on broken tongues

Between the platform and the train Between here, and there

Between the piss thin rain and the nagging wind Between the railings and the gutter.

For Hermes! Bless us.

And this [*sound of beer on pavement*] is for us: Who await the bailiffs at dawn

Who work the treadmills of addiction

Who are, forever, double hearted, double breathed, And voiced.

Who live under assumed names — and The assumptions of name;

Who fabricate our lives to officials —

And cross our fingers when called to sign. Who never spoke a true word.

For us, too.

*[Traffic fades into bass electric piano and phaser, drifts. Sound pans side to side Fades out. Drums start in the middle distance, and voices sound of tube train comes in closer by. Announcements, the train waits at the platform, then its doors close and it moves away down the tunnel. Drums continue, piano fades back in and then out again.]*

*[Strange, baby-like choking spirit voice appears, close by.]*

Ghost has it's ectoplasmic finger, pulpy and questing... up my arse. *[The baby is close by, but it is developing a nimbus of reverb]* Probing my guts, tuning in to the thrum of my blood —

*[atonal guitar approaches from behind]*

It's trying to trace the umbilical back. It wants to come home. *[Strangled baby voice softens slightly, comes slightly nearer]* The 'O' in "home",  
The same shape of pale lips curled round, sucking on emptiness, that's formed in "LOst" and "gOne". It mouths this silently, as if behind glass.

*[The strangled baby spirit voice moves off into a distant reverb, crosses behind and moves closer again, on the other side this time. Atonal guitar and bass still approach. Strangling spirit baby then circles like a released balloon]*

I have a city, somewhere beneath my solar plexus. A constant accretion. I am silting up with streets. Brimming with masonry, memory and alcohol.

*[Sighing, breathing voice appears, close.]*

The ghost finger elongates, feels overlaid edges; flicks through them, like an almanac...Or an A-Z.

They took a city and rebuilt it, exactly; down to every last ledge and cornice. And they called it "Heritage".



## Appendix 2

### Root

#### Performance. Middlesex University 2015

There is a spot, focussed on the back wall stage left. Centre stage, there is a stool on which there is a mural crown constructed from brown paper. The stool sits on a wooden dais, which has a contact mic attached to it that connects to the house PA, via a delay effect. On the way in, the audience pass me, standing in the corridor next to the door that they pass through to take their seats. I face the wall with my back to them. I have the rusted head of a pickaxe lying next to me on the floor, it is attached to my ankle by an umbilical of string.

*[I move in the space behind the audience and the chairs that they sit in. I strike my hand chimes against each other and the walls and furniture. I hit my drum with a beater, or scratch its skin with my fingernails. I rattle a caxaxa. I have the head of a pickaxe tied on a piece of string around my ankle. As I move, it drags after me, making a hollow sound on the wooden floor, it loudly taps and grinds if it gets caught on an obstacle. The audience are facing the stage area, so they cannot see me.]*

*[A verse of the vocal melody from Schubert's song Der Lieirmann, sung without words]*

Lalalalalala

La la la la la...

...At some point around 1798, an idealistic young man who somewhat resembled a worried sheep in appearance...enjoyed an epiphany *[chimes, rattle and drums, which carry on whilst I continue speaking. The pickaxe head can be heard dragging on the floor as I move around behind the audience]*...walking somewhere...in the north of Scotland, perhaps...A young woman reaping. A young woman, in a field reaping and singing. *[I start moving, the chimes sounding off each other and the pickaxe*

*dragging. I sing a verse of the vocal melody from Schubert's song Der Leirman, without words]...Lalalalalala la la la la la...*

The beauty of this moment [*drum*] was that supposedly he couldn't understand a word that she was saying [*drum*]. It may have been Gaelic she was singing in [*a beat on the drum*], or of course, he may have been lying. [*drum, and the chimes randomly tintinabulating*] but the reason why the song was so pure [*rapid scraping of pickaxe and drum*] was that it had no words...like the birds sing, like the birds at evening sing [*drum beats of decreasing tempo*]...this [*rattle*] outpouring [*chime, drum beat*]...of spontaneous emotion that he heard. [*scraping as I move again, behind the audience*] I've watched birds, in the yard of my building, singing...They actually sing to keep each other at bay. Our sheep-like gentleman, [*soft beats on drum*] being transported by some fantasised peasant epiphany, [*irregular drum beats*] may have been being sung away....[*loud drum beat*] sung away [*loud drum beat*]... The poor girl seeing some Englishman, resembling something like a worried sheep [*loud drum*]...fresh-ish, as it happens, from Paris; just missed the Terror...[*loud drum and scratching and scraping*] And she may have thought: "he's creeping me out, how can I get him to go away?"

[*Drum fill with scraping and random chimes*] He later described the experience as an encounter with a "Solitary Reaper"...She wasn't solitary — obviously. [*lighter strike on drum*] He was there. He abstracted himself out of the picture, and abstracted her voice into pure song; *sans* subjectivity. [*Scraping, drum flourishes and rattle*].

When the city was founded, and the monster was dead and the war was over — there's always a war, when the city is founded...Aeneas, bugging off from Troy as fast as he can; and then Carthage...Or the new city we find ourselves in...Post war...When the city was founded and the monster was dead [*scraping as I move, drum beats, chimes*]...an emblem was needed. [*Drum beats*] Of course, there can't be a beginning [*drum, scraping*]. Of course, there never was a beginning after the war [*drum*]. A beginning before the beginning [*chimes and rattle*].

You'll find them on city walls, coins...[*scraping from pickaxe as I walk along the aisle between the audiences' seats to the stage area*] The one figure set aside to protect

and embody the whole...*[flourish on the rattle]* The one figure crowned...in some place outside...time. There before the beginning was the beginning *[rattle]*...And they wear the walls on their head.

*[Rattle and chimes]* They go shopping. They sing, for the hell of it... *[kicking at the dais, which has a contact mic on it, rattle, chimes]* just for the hell of it.

*[Singing]*

Barefoot on the snowbank Swaying to and fro —  
And his little plate  
Has not a coin to show

And there — at the edge of the city in the city where the city sputters out into sparks, flakes and ashes *[staccato rattle and chimes]*...into industrial estates and landfills...into hospitals and prisons...Where the streets unravel into nets to catch blown detritus and flightpaths. Outside the city in the city this is where we find our route...our root. *[Rattle]* And it was always anterior *[chime, and delay on dais contact mic audible as a dull beat]*. You walk down the street and you see it ahead of you; you see its back receding round the corner *[chime]*. Along the crags, it got there before you...at the vantage, its face occluded; just taking it all in. Pure anteriority — always ahead of you and always there when you've left *[Chime, dais contact delay sound, drum being dropped]*.

When poetry finally becomes the whole of art — the spontaneous outflow of emotion...When poetry becomes the whole of art...when we are — overheard, as Mill *[J.S. Mill]* said, not heard...Who or what then wears the mural crown? Monarchs and cars...driving round...circles. *[Kicking the dais, rhythmic drum, chimes]*

*[Singing]*

Strange ancient — Shall I go...with you?  
To accompany my songs On your lyre, too?

***[Kicking the dais rhythmically, then dropping drum, chimes, rattle onto it, the sound of which is amplified].***

**He was always there before. His back — disappearing round the next corner...Taking it all in — his head obscuring the view... *[Scraping sound of pickaxe as I pick up the mural crown from the dais and walk over to the back wall, where, with my back to the audience, I hold the crown in such a way that it projects its shadow onto the wall. I stand there, still, for a moment]***

**Lights please.**

***[The lights are turned off]***

### Appendix 3

The following is a transcription of my improvised noise and spoken word performance *Apostrophe*<sup>212</sup> to a Citizen, which was presented in a black box theatre space at Middlesex University on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015.

The performance space — a black box theatre — is lit by a single, focussed spot on the stage. Within the area demarcated by the spot is a lectern supporting a Korg Kaoss Pad (hereafter referred to as KP), which is an effects processor and sampler. A microphone lies on the floor. A can of Carlsberg Special Brew<sup>213</sup> is placed at the edge of the spot.

At the beginning, I walk onto the stage, into the spot and pick up the microphone; standing with my back mostly to the audience I press buttons on the KP and make noises into the microphone. I am attempting to make a low frequency growl in the manner of Tuvan throat singing, which generates harmonics to the base (sung) tone by using the mouth, throat and sinuses as resonators. I sample this and put a resonant low pass filter on it, creating a cycling drone. When I have achieved this, manipulating settings with my left hand and holding the mic in my right, I take a few steps towards the curtain that marks the back of the stage area and stand for a moment facing it.

I look down at the floor as I turn and glance briefly up at the audience. I say

Here we are again then, eh?<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>212</sup> The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms describes apostrophe as:

A rhetorical figure in which the speaker addresses a dead or absent person, or an abstraction or inanimate object. In classical rhetoric, the term could also denote a speaker's turning to address a particular member or section of the audience. (Baldick, 2008, p.22).

My performance was intended as an apostrophe in both those senses. I believe that the idea of "citizen", as a content-free bearer of rights, has been consistently denigrated under neoliberalism in favour of a subject with determinate content, who accesses conditional privileges dependent on their demonstration of appropriate market behaviour.

<sup>213</sup> A super-strong lager (by UK standards), which enjoys the reputation of being popular with homeless alcoholics; this is not true (or no longer true), as it is considerably more expensive than other competing brands and also extra strong ciders. I have come to use it as a prop in part due to this association with what Imogen Tyler would call the "national abject" (Tyler 2013), those figures of semi-fantasy who play a part in shoring up, through their abjection, normative ideas of health, citizenship etc.

<sup>214</sup> This was the formulaic phrase with which the clown traditionally introduced the transformation scene in the Regency Harlequinade, forerunner of English pantomime. Joseph Grimaldi is credited



I walk forward, towards the audience and look up at them.

Michael Warner...said that at some point in the early nineteenth century...I'd be inclined to put it at the late eighteenth century, but there you go...The Lyric became the dominant mode of poetics. And then — by now — the Lyric becomes the entirety of poetry. That obviously excludes older genres — the epic, satire, Georgics, elegy...it excludes a lot.

The lyric is based on a productive misreading, let's say — a productive misreading that creates a sense of presence.

In a lyric, if I was to say "I", you'd think that means "you". And equally, if I was to say "you", you could easily place yourself in the position of "I".

I turn to the KP and adjust something on it, standing sideways on to the audience.

If you hear it now...if you listen...ssshhhhhh

I have sampled the "ssshhhhttt", I adjust the delay on it as it loops in accompaniment with the drone.

There are others in this room with us. There are others in this room with us. If you listen...ssshhhhhh

I reach out to the KP and sample this last "ssshhhhhh" in addition to the first. I allow it to loop a few times then turn it off, leaving only the drone.

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with its origination. See Banham, *The Cambridge Guide to Theatre* 1995, p. 454. The phrase is also used as a somewhat sinister refrain in Peter Ackroyd's novel, *Dan Leno and The Limehouse Golem* (1994).

There are others. The air is thick with them. When I say "you", which you do I mean? The you who sit out there invisible and mostly un-named — or the "you" that my voice actually passes through, that sits on the tip of my tongue that passes through my language. That is the Public<sup>215</sup>.

I swap the mic to my other hand and stand facing the audience, with my right hand on the KP and the mic in my left to manipulate a tape delay effect as I speak

Lyric...lyric became popular...

I turn off the delay.

As Michael Warner says, about the same time as the idea of the bourgeois public and of liberal democracy. Lyric — that transposition of my "I" directly to your "I"...whoever, and wherever you are...and that "you" directly transcribed to your "you"; without passing through

I swap the mic over

...that public. In fact, almost as an antidote to it. *Sssshhhhh...*

I turn sideways on again, this time with my left hand on the KP and the mic in my right, and turn on the delay again, with a loop of the last "*ssshhhhh*"

You can hear them...[whispering] *crowds of strangers...crowds of strangers...*[no longer whispering but *sotto voce*] the newspapers thick with them we read them through their eyes, the air is thick with them

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<sup>215</sup> Warner describes the specific type of public-ness that defines modern urban democracies as "stranger relationality". A public might almost be said to be stranger-relationality in a pure form, because other ways of organizing strangers — nations, religions, races, guilds — have manifest positive content". (Warner, 2002, p. 75, *my emphasis*). I would argue that this form of relationality is routinely disavowed.

I swap the mic and touch the KP with my left as I say

It's their bodies ...on the radio...as unknown bodies...[louder] **The basis of the public**

Here I turn slightly to turn off the delay and drone on the KP, look directly at audience.

**Is the stranger.** There is no public without the stranger.

I pause slightly after this last, turn towards the KP and place the microphone on top of it. I pick up the can of Special Brew and step outside of the circle made by the spot, so I am in shadow. I open the can, it is quite audible.

I then speak, without any amplification

And outside that space, where am i?

I step towards the circle with my left arm, holding the beer, extended into the light and leaving the rest of my body in shadow. I pour some of the beer on the floor. I walk around the edge of the circle and stop with my back to the audience at the nearest part to them and pour beer again. I then move around to the left-hand side and repeat the gesture and pour a line of beer whilst walking across the back of the circle where the curtains meet the floor. On reaching the edge of the light on the right-hand side, I drink a mouthful from the can and spit it into the circle. I take out an orange plastic bag that has been protruding from my pocket the whole time and retrace my steps in the opposite direction from the previous libation pouring, casting handfuls of earth ["graveyard dirt"] from the bag around the edges of the circle with my left hand as I do so. As I return to my starting point, I drop the bag on the floor within the circle and pick up the mic from the lectern with my left hand.

Outside...this small circle of light and name...at what point do we pass back through the public? At what point is it lost, and the lyric becomes dominant?

With my right hand I reach out to the KP and turn the drone back on. I then turn my back to the audience take a step back towards the curtain, swapping the microphone to my right hand and reaching out my left to the KP, though I think better of it and the gesture is not complete.

In the early nineteenth century, the *ruckenfigur* came down from his mountain — you probably know him, he's stood here like that — walking stick, wasn't it?

Still with my back turned I swap the mic to my left and hold out my right arm as if holding a cane in the manner of the figure in Friedrich's painting *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog*.

Admiring the vista. And rather than simply seeing him, or rather his or her back, vanishing up the next mountain pass or being swallowed into the mysteries of the forest, and being unable to catch up and see through those eyes that consumed the rocks and clouds... [unintelligible]...the sermons in babbling brooks, or whatever it happened to be. The *ruckenfigur* come down; attracted perhaps by the rustle of notes or the chime of coins<sup>216</sup> — but, having a refined sensibility, it would never be that simple [Benjamin on the flaneur "searching for a buyer"]. Perhaps just to look around. Or maybe to find a buyer.

I turn three quarters towards the KP and press a button with my right hand. "Maybe to find a buyer" repeats.

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<sup>216</sup> Here I equate the person of the *ruckenfigur* with the flaneur. "In the person of the flaneur, the intelligentsia becomes acquainted with the marketplace. It surrenders itself to the market, thinking merely to look around; but in fact it is already seeking a buyer". (Benjamin, 2002, p. 21, my emphasis.)

And now our calls for intimacy<sup>217</sup> [Delay:

*Andnowournowourcallsforallsfornowourcallsforintimacycallsforintimacy]*

I reach out my right hand, still facing the audience and reduce the intensity of the delay

are couched in the language of the lyric. The short circuit that loses the public of

*[inthelanguagethelanguageofthelangofthelyricofshortcircuitortcurcuitthatitlosethepubliclos*

**Ghosts, the public of strangers. We want intimacy as a...**

*Esthepublicofghoststheghoststhepublicghoststhepublicofstrangersofpublicofstrangerswewant*

**“I” is “you”.**

*strangersintimacyacyasalasalisyouisyou]*

I adjust the KP, then turn to the audience.

You were groomed by the welfare state

I turn back to the KP and adjust the reverb with my right hand By methadone clinics  
[cavernous reverb and delay]

I turn back and adjust the intensity of reverb with right hand.

And free dentistry. You were groomed by public service broadcasting... you  
were groomed by free milk...free glasses. You were groomed and corrupted by

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<sup>217</sup> “Intimacy” in performance has, in recent years, been touted as a panacea to the purported alienation (in a distinctly personalised sense, as opposed to the wider sense that might be evoked in Marxist critique) of contemporary society. I would maintain that the valorisation of this form of intimacy is a manifestation of the neoliberal drive to displace the concept of the citizen-stranger (and the concomitant sense of publicness) in favour of the known and knowable subject. It seems to me that the impetus towards intimacy, like the related vogue (now thankfully largely passed) for “relational” work inspired by Nicolas Bourriaud’s book (Bourriaud 1998), is the desire to replace the sense of public with private experience, along the lines described by Lauren Berlant as the “intimate public sphere”, which is: [...A] condition of social membership produced by personal acts and values, especially acts originating in or directed toward the family sphere. No longer valuing personhood as something directed toward public life, contemporary nationalist ideology recognizes a public good only in a particularly constricted nation of simultaneously lived private worlds. (Berlant, 1997, p.5).

trade union membership—when it meant something.

I turn back and adjust the KP with my right hand, I bring the reverb back in a milder form. Turn back to the audience.

That interiority, bracketed between the shoulders, like an ellipsis. Vanishing up the mountain passes and into the mystery of the forest...And one never used to see through your eyes.

I turn sideways on to the audience, extending my right arm to adjust the KP. As I do this, I whisper

*Wolf vanisssssssh...*

It loops

*Wolf vanissssh...Wolf vanissssh... Wolf vanissssh...Wolf vanissssh... Wolf vanissssh...Wolf vanissssh... Wolf vanissssh...Wolf vanissssh... Wolf vanissssh...Wolf vanissssh...*

**COM - PEN - SATion!**

I pick up the can of beer

*Wolf vanissssh...Wolf vanissssh... Wolf vanissssh...Wolf vanissssh... Wolf vanissssh...Wolf ATion...ATion...ATion...ATion...ATion*

**BANKRUPSY!**

*vanissssh...Wolf vanissssh... Wolf vanissssh...Wolf vanissssh... Wolf vanissssh...Wolf vanissssh ANKRUPSY!... ANKRUPSY!... ANKRUPSY!... ANKRUPSY!... ANKRUPSY! ATion...ATion...ATion...ATion...ATion... ATion...ATion...ATion...ATion...ATion*

**WOLF VANIssSH WOLF VANIssSH WOLF VANIssSH**

*vanissssh...Wolf vanissssh... Wolf vanissssh...Wolf vanissssh... Wolf vanissssh...Wolf vanisss*

**ANKRUPSY!... ANKRUPSY!... ANKRUPSY!... ANKRUPSY!... ANKRUPSY!**

*ATion...ATion...ATion...ATion...ATion... ATion...ATion...ATion...ATion...ATion*

**AL-SAY-TION-TON**

**SAY-TION-TON SAY-TION-TON SAY-TION-TON SAY-TION-**

*vanissssh...Wolf vanissssh... Wolf vanissssh...Wolf vanissssh... Wolf vanissssh...Wolf*

*vanisss ANKRUPSY!... ANKRUPSY!... ANKRUPSY!... ANKRUPSY!...*

**GRITANT. GRITANT. GRITANT. GRITANT.**

*Ssssh...ssssh...ssssh...ssssh...ssssh...ssssh...ssssh...ssssh...ssssh...ssssh...ssssh...sssh*

*NKRU NKRU NKRU NKRU NKRU NKRU NKRU NKRU NKRU NKRU NKRU NKRU NKRU NKRU*

**CHRISTMAS DAY. NIL COMBAT.**

**BAT BAT BAT BAT BAT BAT BAT BAT**

**GRITANT. GRITANT. GRITANT. GRITANT. GRITANT. GRITANT.**

*Ssssh...ssssh...ssssh...ssssh...ssssh...ssssh...ssssh...ssssh...ssssh...ssssh...ssssh...sssh*

**AL-SAY...AL-SAY...AL-SAY...AL-SAY...AL-SAY...AL-SAY...AL-SAY**

**LIGHTS!**

The lights go out, leaving the space in total darkness.

**WOLF! WOLF!WOLF! WOLF!WOLF!WOLF! W**

**GRITANT. GRITANT. GRITANT. GRITANT. GRITANT. GRITANT. GRITANT.**

**GRIT**

**Ssssh...Ssssh...Ssssh...Ssssh...Ssssh...Ssssh...Ssssh...Ssssh...Ssssh...**

**Ssssh...Ssssh...Sss**

***BANKRUPSY BANKRUPSY BANKRUPSY BANKRUPSY BANKRUPSY BANKRUPS***

**There's an empty space in the middle of the city, there's an empty space at the**



**WOLF! WOLF!WOLF! WOLF!WOLF!WOLF! W**

**GRITANT. GRITANT. GRITANT. GRITANT. GRITANT. GRITANT. GRITANT.**

**GRIT**

**Ssssh...Ssssh...Ssssh...Ssssh...Ssssh...Ssssh...Ssssh...Ssssh...Ssssh...Ssssh...Ssssh...Sss**

***BANKRUPSY BANKRUPSY BANKRUPSY BANKRUPSY BANKRUPSY BANKRUPS***

centre of the state. I have marked an empty space in beer and graveyard dirt

**WOLF! WOLF!WOLF! WOLF!WOLF!WOLF! W**

**GRiTANT. GRiTANT. GRiTANT. GRiTANT. GRiTANT. GRiTANT. GRiTANT.**

**GRiT**

**Ssssh...Ssssh...Ssssh...Ssssh...Ssssh...Ssssh...Ssssh...Ssssh...Ssssh... Ssssh...Ssssh...Sss**

***BANKRUPSY BANKRUPSY BANKRUPSY BANKRUPSY BANKRUPSY BANKRUPS***

here... The example and the exception are related...the example and the exception bear some relation...

**WOLF! WOLF!WOLF! WOLF!WOLF!WOLF! W**

**GRITANT. GRITANT. GRITANT. GRITANT. GRITANT. GRITANT. GRITANT.**

**GRIT**

**Ssssh...Ssssh...Ssssh...Ssssh...Ssssh...Ssssh...Ssssh...Ssssh...Ssssh... Ssssh...Ssssh...Sss**

***BANKRUPSY BANKRUPSY BANKRUPSY BANKRUPSY BANKRUPSY BANKRUPS***

**the example and the exception bear some relation...**

**the example and the exception bear some relation.**

**WOLF! WOLF!WOLF! WOLF!WOLF!WOLF! W**

**GRITANT. GRITANT. GRITANT. GRITANT. GRITANT. GRITANT. GRITANT.**

**GRIT**

**Ssssh...Ssssh...Ssssh...Ssssh...Ssssh...Ssssh...Ssssh...Ssssh...Ssssh... Ssssh...Ssssh...Sss**

**BANKRUPSY BANKRUPSY BANKRUPSY BANKRUPSY BANKRUPSY BANKRUPS**

*Remember me, when I am gone away, Gone far away, into that silent land  
When you can no more hold me by the hand Nor I half turn to go, yet turning  
stay...<sup>218</sup>*

**Gesture becomes posture.**

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<sup>218</sup> Remember, by Christina Rossetti; mis-remembered and mis-quoted.

## Appendix 4

I went down to St. James Infirmary  
 To see my baby there,  
 Laid out on a cold steel table,  
 So sweet, so cool, so fair.

Let her go, let her go, God bless her;  
 Wherever she may be  
 She may search the wide world over  
 And never find another sweet man like me

When I die  
 Just bury me.  
 Put your small change to cover my eyes-  
 To get me south of the river  
 And get some drinks in when I arrive.

Can't miss it, mate -Just a step up the road, through the freshly privatised out-patients' clinic without walls, the result of a recent merger with the debtors' prison. Cemetery gates on the left, 24 hour offy on the right, and all the bright new shining glass, playschool clad, buy to let cash-farms gleaming like an advert for the transparency and self-presence of the well-lived life. It's just there - yeah, next to those hoardings displaying gym-zombies with bodies like well sculpted CVs and posters exhorting responsible citizens to do something wild and life-affirming — go shopping — there's pictures of them gurning like giro day. It's a small door.

There's a buzzer...

...If they ask, say I sent you

Now that you've heard my story  
 My ashtray mouth and my piss stained shoes

**No one will ask you - just tell them anyway**  
**I've got the St. James Infirmary blues**