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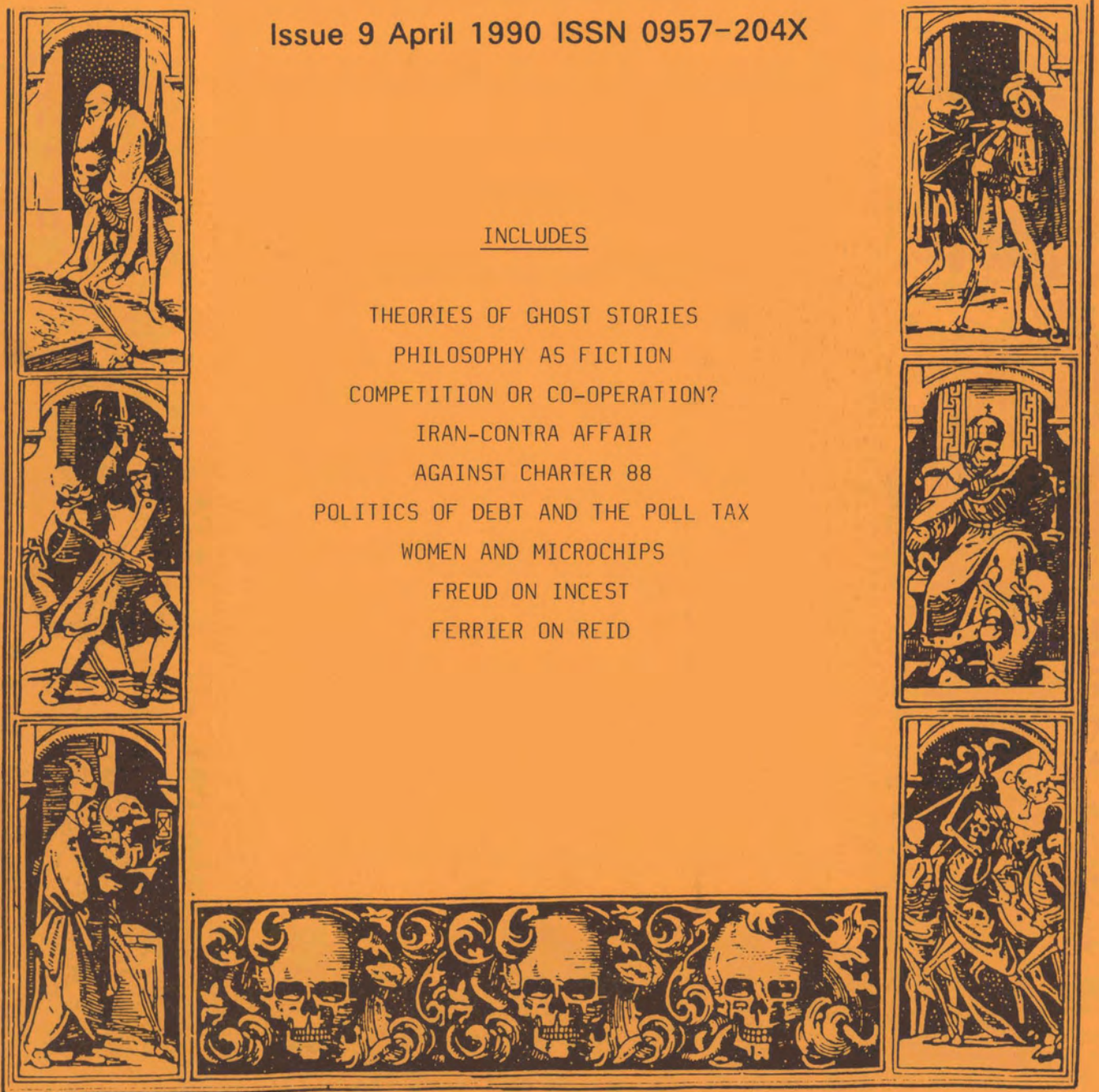
Common Sense



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Common Sense

No. 9: April 1990

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An Outbreak of Democracy?

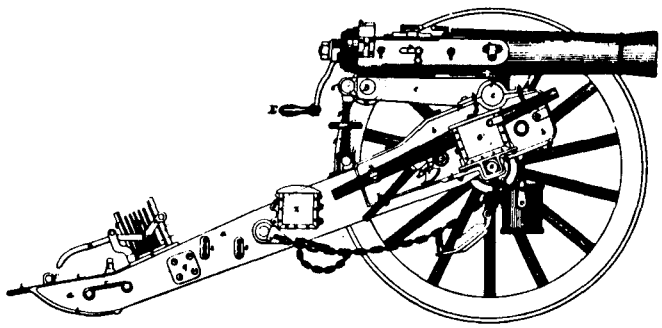
Since *Common Sense 8* was produced, the world has turned into a different place. Oppressive regimes are tumbling even as we write and democracy is breaking out all over the place. In Eastern Europe, Marxism has been voted out of existence; in South Africa, apartheid is being dismantled; in Nicaragua, voters have elected a president who represents a coalition of political opinion; and The Soviet Union is disintegrating into its constituent regions. And in other places too, previously oppressed peoples are now able to exercise their inalienable right to choose how they are to be ruled.

Or at least, so it would appear. The rapid movement of world history has become something of a media event and is presented as a victory for bourgeois opinion. Revolutions are turned into election campaigns: the complex histories of country after country are rendered as glib stories about doom defeat and depression while individuals break free and the market economy extends its infinite opportunities to more than ever before. There is no longer reason to fear any enemy and we can all sleep more easily in our beds. Our collective guilt has been assuaged and we are free to move within a world community of consumers.

Readers of *Common Sense* will not need to be told that such appearance is a bleak attempt to conceal a more credible reality. The world is perhaps moving through particularly turbulent times, and political opportunities are undoubtedly available to people long denied any channels of expression. But history is not yet complete and there is no necessary outcome of such changes. History is open and only history will tell what is going on.

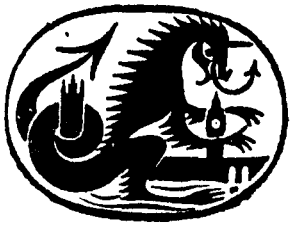
In the meantime, we still live in a country where bosses are screwing the life from workers, where the State attempts to identify and control its population with absurd legislation, where our national culture and heritage is commodified as a tourist attraction, where our ancient schools and universtities are preparing a few young people for careers in business and the rest for a dismal life of poverty, where the teevee screens churn out banal images and empty rhetoric which masquerade as an accurate picture of the world, where value is judged by price tags, and where political power is provided by careful choice of parents.

We at *Common Sense* will continue in spite of the outbreak of democracy. We will carry on offering these pages to those with something different to contribute. We do not offer any political programme and we do not believe that we will change the world. But we feel that by making available this public space, we can bring together struggles against oppression in all its forms, give people the means to make common sense of their experience, and offer hope that the world can be changed. For if anything is behind the changes that the world has experienced over the last few months, it is the common sense of the people rather than the "rational" arguments of democrats. The collective strength of people living, reading, laughing, thinking, working, writing, organising, crying, dancing, arguing, loving, and just being together is greater than any power that might arise from marking a piece of paper with a cross and dropping it into a metal box.



M. R. James

Two Short Discussions of Ghost Stories



M R James (1862–1936) was arguably the best ever writer of ghost stories in the English language. Unlike most practitioners of his art, he offered comment upon it. Here, we reproduce his two central statements (so far as we know out of print): the first comes from V H Collins (ed.) Ghosts and Marvels (1924), the second from The Bookman (December 1929). The informality of these statements is disarming: James always saw ghostly presence as an anarchic force breaking into ordered lives such as his own. For more details see Michael Cox M R James: An Informal Portrait (OUP 1986) especially chapter 12, and reviews of James in Edinburgh Review 78–79.

At the outset of this preface I must make it quite clear that the choice of the stories which it introduces is not mine. I am glad that it is not, for I have been saved much trouble, and I am also free to comment (if I desire it) adversely on anything that does not please me. But the stage of comment has not yet been reached; general remarks are expected first, and these are to me an obstacle not lightly got over.

Often have I been asked to formulate my views about ghost stories and tales of the marvellous, the mysterious, the supernatural. Never have I been able to find out whether I had any views that could be formulated. The truth is, I suspect, that the *genre* is too small and special to bear the imposition of far-reaching principles. Widen the question, and ask what governs the construction of short stories in general, and a great deal might be said, and has been said. There are, of course, instances of whole novels in which the supernatural governs the plot; but among them are few successes. The ghost story is, at its best, only a particular sort of short story, and is subject to the same broad rules as the whole mass of them. Those rules, I imagine, no writer ever consciously follows. In fact, it is absurd to talk of them as rules; they are qualities which have been observed to accompany success.

Some such qualities I have noted, and while I cannot undertake to write about broad principles, something more concrete is capable of being recorded. Well, then: two ingredients most valuable in the concocting of a ghost story are, to me, the atmosphere and the nicely managed crescendo. I assume, of course, that the writer will have got his central idea before he undertakes the story at all. Let us, then, be introduced to the actors in a placid way; let us see them going about their ordinary business, undisturbed by forebodings, pleased with their surroundings; and into this calm environment let the ominous thing put out its head, unobtrusively at first, and then more insistently, until it holds the stage. It is not amiss sometimes to leave a loophole for a natural explanation; but, I would say, let the loophole be so narrow as not to be quite practicable. Then, for the setting. The detective story cannot be too much up-to-date: the motor, the telephone, the aeroplane, the newest slang, are all in place there. For the ghost story a slight haze of distance is desirable. 'Thirty years ago,' 'Not long before the war,' are very proper openings. If a really remote date be chosen, there is more than one way of bringing the reader in contact with it. The finding of documents about it can be made plausible; or you may begin with your apparition and go back over the years to tell the cause of it; or (as in 'Schalken the Painter') you may set the scene directly in the desired epoch, which I think is hardest to do with success. On the whole (though not a few instances might be quoted against me) I think that a setting so modern that

the ordinary reader can judge of its naturalness for himself is preferable to anything antique. For some degree of actuality is the charm of the best ghost stories ; not a very insistent actuality, but one strong enough to allow the reader to identify himself with the patient; while it is almost inevitable that the reader of an antique story should fall into the position of the mere spectator.

These are personal impressions. Many other views are current, and have been justified in practice. This collection shows how various are the methods which have made their appeal to the public, for there is none of these tales that has not had its vogue. A few pedantic comments upon some of them may be allowed. The dates, which, in particular, look pedantic, are really not without their use and meaning.

Defoe's 'Mrs. Veal' (1706), we are told by Sir Walter Scott, was a successful device for selling off an edition of *Drelincourt on Death* which threatened to be a drug in the market. There is no question but that Defoe was perfectly capable of writing such a narrative as this without anything to base it on. But in this case doubts have been expressed, not of the truth but of the untruth of this particular tale, and, though I cannot point to any investigation of it, I remember that Mr. Andrew Lang refers to 'Mrs. Veal' as being no imposture, but an attempt to record an occurrence believed to be real. Whether imagined or reported, it is an admirable piece of narrative.

'Wandering Willie's Tale' (1824), that acknowledged masterpiece, has its roots, as may have been suspected by many readers, in old folk-lore. Scottish parallels I cannot cite, but a Danish one is to be found in the story of Claus the coachman of Fru Ingeborg Skeel of Voergaard.

'Fru Ingeborg was Skeel's widow, and of Skeel it is told that some years before his death he got by wrongful means some fields from the village of Agersted. They are still called Agersted fields, and still belong to Voergaard. Now Skeel had been hard enough on the peasants, but his widow was far worse. One day she was driving to church—it was the anniversary of her husband's death—and she said to the coachman "I wish to know how it is with my husband that's gone." The coachman—Claus was his name, and he was a free-spoken man—made answer; "Well, my lady, it's not so easy to find out, but I'm sure he's not suffering from cold." She was very angry, and threatened the man that unless by the third Sunday from then he brought her news from her husband of how he fared, he should lose his life.

'Claus knew she was a woman of her word, and first went to ask advice of a priest who was said to be as learned as any bishop, but he could only tell him that he had a brother, a priest in Norway, that knew more than he ; Claus had best go to him. He did so, and this priest, after some thought, said : "Well, I can bring about a meeting between you, but it will be a risky thing for you if you are afraid of him : you will have to give the message yourself." It was settled that at night they should go out into a great wood and call up the lord. When they got there the priest set to work to read—till the hair stood upright on Claus's head. In a little time they heard a terrible noise, and a fiery red carriage with horses that threw out sparks of fire all about them came driving through the wood, and pulled up beside them. Claus recognized his master. "Who is it would speak with me ? " roared he from the carriage. Claus took off his hat and said, "My lady's regards to my lord, and she would know how he has fared since he died." "Tell her," said the lord, "that I am in hell, and there's a chair in making for her. It's finished, all but one leg, and when that is done, she will be fetched, unless she gives back Agersted. And to prove that you have talked with me, I give you this ring of my betrothal, which you may give her."

'The coachman held out his hat, and into it there fell a ring : but the carriage and horses had vanished. On the third Sunday Claus took his stand outside the church when Lady Ingeborg came driving up. When she saw him she asked at once what message he had brought, and Claus told her what he had seen and heard, and gave her the ring, which she recognized.

'"Good," said she, "you have saved your life, and I shall join my husband when I am dead—that will no doubt be so—but I will never give up Agersted."'

In other versions the land is given back, and somewhere among E. T. Kristensen's multitudinous collections there is, I am confident, a version in which a receipt for rent actually plays a part.

Three stories, 'Ligeia,' 'The Werewolf,' 'Schalken the Painter,' all date from 1838–9. The first represents the dream-like, rhapsodic, quasi-allegorical *genre*. The editor of Poe's tales in 'Everyman's Library' calls it 'so moulded and perfect, that it offers no crevice for the critical knife,' and doubtless it would be possible to collect other equally enthusiastic descriptions. Evidently in many people's judgements it ranks as a classic. 'The Werewolf' is undeniably old-fashioned ('Prepare therefore to listen to a strange story') and, as undeniably, well told. But 'Schalken' conforms more strictly to my own ideals. It is indeed one of the best of Le Fanu's good things. We have (if I may be bibliographical for a moment) two texts of Schalken. The one given here is the original, which appeared in the *Dublin University Magazine* in 1839, as one of the 'Purcell Papers,' and was reprinted in 1883 under that title. The other appeared in a rare anonymous volume issued at Dublin in 1851, and called *Ghost Stories and Tales of Mystery*. Here each story in the book is headed by a motto—felicitously chosen—from the Bible. That of 'Schalken' is from Job. 'For he is not a man as I am, that we should come together ; neither is there any that might lay his hand upon us both. Let him, therefore, take his rod away from me, and let not his fear terrify me.'

The story then begins, 'There exists at this moment in perfect preservation a remarkable work of Schalken,' and the little dialogue between Father Purcell and Captain Vandael is all transferred to the third person ; the whole preamble is shortened, and there are many variants throughout the text, which ends with the words—'Rose

Velderkaust, whose mysterious fate must always remain matter of speculation,'—the second, and rather unnecessary, description of the picture being omitted. Where, by the way, is that picture? That it was a real one is fairly plain, but I have never seen it, and know no print of it. Most likely Le Fanu saw it in a private house. If so, there is every probability that it has not survived the more generous outbursts of the friends of freedom.

The two stories by Bulwer Lytton and George Eliot both date from 1859. The first is deservedly famous. Does it owe some of its details to the 'veridical' history of the haunted mill at Willington, inhabited by the Proctor family?[1] I have thought so. Of this story also there are two forms, in the later of which the encounter with the Comte-de-St.-Germain-Cagliostro gentleman does not appear. In parenthesis, I wonder whether many readers share my annoyance at the old trick of writing 'Mr. J— of G— street.'

Probably it will be agreed that 'The Open Door' (1885) is the most *beautiful* story in the volume. I class it with the equally beautiful book *A Beleaguered City*, and put these two very much in the forefront of Mrs. Oliphant's excursions into the other world. In this case again I have wondered whether a very old story did not furnish the *motif* of this. I mean the history of Mr. Ruddle of Launceston. He tells it himself as a veritable experience he went through in the year 1665. Here, too, there was a young boy who was troubled by the appearance of the ghost of a woman, whom he knew to have been dead about eight years, which met him in a field every day on his way to school. The story is interestingly told: I do not know if it has ever been critically treated. The only text I can now lay hands on is in *News from the Invisible World*, by T. Charley. Mr. Ruddle keeps counsel as to what the ghost (whom he eventually interviewed and exorcized) said to him: the end was that 'it quietly vanished, and neither doth appear since, or ever will more, to any man's disturbance.'

So many of the best stories of this class are variants on old themes—indeed, so inevitable is it that they should be based to a greater or less extent on tradition, that I count it no depreciation of an author to show that some old tale may have been at the back of his mind when he was devising his new one.

But I do not think that 'The Monkey's Paw' (1902), nor any other of Mr Jacobs's supernatural stories, can thus be provided with an ancestry. They seem absolutely original. They are always terrible, and they are wonderful examples of the art, which I commended at the outset, of leaving a loophole for a rationalistic explanation, which is, after all, not quite practicable. You are sure that the ghost did intervene, but sometimes you will find it quite difficult to put your finger on the moment when it did so.

On the other stories of this collection, all of which I hope may be enjoyed, I have little to offer in the way of comment. Mr. Wells's 'Crystal Egg' (1900) is a delightful instance of his unequalled power of pressing natural science into the service of fiction. Mr. Blackwood seems to have laid the scene of 'Ancient Sorceries' (1908) at Laon—though, happily, the cathedral there is not a ruin. Mere commendation of such stories as 'The Body-Snatcher' (1884) and 'The Moon Slave' (1901) is alike impertinent and useless.

I hope it will be generally allowed that this is indeed a representative collection of the ghost stories of two hundred years. Of course every reader of it who is at all versed in this branch of literature will have his own addition or substitution to suggest—just as I have myself. But I am prepared to say that on one ground or another every one of the stories has a claim to its place here.

Let me end a desultory preface with the passage which justifies all ghost stories, and puts them in their proper place:

Hermione. Pray you, sit by us
And tell's a tale.
Mamilius. Merry or sad shall't be?
Her. As merry as you will.
Mam. A sad tale's best for winter; I have one
Of sprites and goblins.
Her. Let's have that, good sir.
Come on, sit down: come on, and do your best
To fright me with your sprites; you're powerful at it.
Mam. There was a man—
Her. Nay, come, sit down; then on.
Mam. —Dwelt by a churchyard: I will tell it softly;
Yond crickets shall not hear it.
Her. Come on, then,
And give't me in mine ear.

M. R. JAMES.

[1] See Mrs. Crowe's *Night Side of Nature*, and Stead's *Real Ghost Stories*.

SOME REMARKS ON GHOST STORIES.

By Dr. Montague R. James.

VERY nearly all the ghost stories of old times claim to be true narratives of remarkable occurrences. At the outset I must make it clear that with these—be they ancient, mediæval or post-mediæval—I have nothing to do, any more than I have with those chronicled in our own days. I am concerned with a branch of fiction; not a large branch, if you look at the rest of the tree, but one which has been astonishingly fertile in the last thirty years. The avowedly fictitious ghost story is my subject, and that being understood I can proceed.

In the year 1854 George Borrow narrated to an audience of Welshmen, "in the tavern of Gutter Vawr, in the county of Glamorgan," what he asserted to be "decidedly the best ghost story in the world." You may read this story either in English, in Knapp's notes to "Wild Wales," or in Spanish, in a recent edition with excellent pictures ("Las Aventuras de Pánfilo"). The source is Lope de Vega's "El Peregrino en su patria," published in 1604. You will find it a remarkably interesting specimen of a tale of terror written in Shakespeare's lifetime, but I shall be surprised if you agree with Borrow's estimate of it. It is nothing but an account of a series of nightmares experienced by a wanderer who lodges for a night in a "hospital," which had been deserted because of hauntings. The ghosts come in crowds and play tricks with the victim's bed. They quarrel over cards, they squirt water at the man, they throw torches about the room. Finally they steal his clothes and disappear; but next morning the clothes are where he put them when he went to bed. In fact they are rather goblins than ghosts.

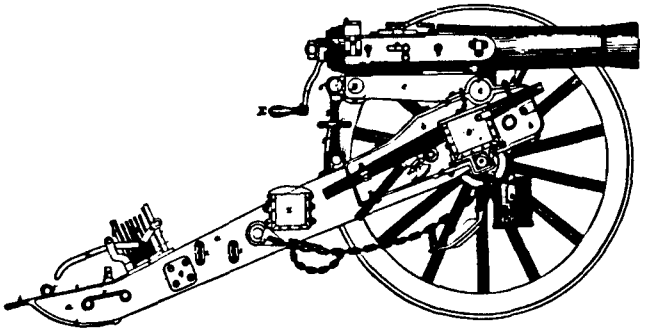
Still, here you have a story written with the sole object of inspiring a pleasing terror in the reader; and as I think, that is the true aim of the ghost story.

As far as I know, nearly two hundred years pass before you find the literary ghost story attempted again. Ghosts of course figure on the stage, but we must leave them out of consideration. Ghosts are the subject of quasi-scientific research in this country at the hands of Glanville, Beaumont and others; but these collectors are out to prove theories of the future life and the spiritual world. Improving treatises, with illustrative instances, are written on the Continent, as by Lavater. All these, if they do afford what our ancestors called amusement (Dr. Johnson decreed that "Coriolanus" was "amusing"), do so by a side-wind. "The Castle of Otranto" is perhaps the progenitor of the ghost story as a literary genre, and I fear that it is merely amusing in the modern sense. Then we come to Mrs. Radcliffe, whose ghosts are far better of their kind, but with exasperating timidity are all explained away; and to Monk Lewis, who in the book which gives him his nickname is odious and horrible without being impressive. But Monk Lewis was responsible for better things than he could produce himself. It was under his auspices that Scott's verse first saw the light: among the "Tales of Terror and Wonder" are not only some of his translations, but "Glenfinlas" and the "Eve of St. John," which must always rank as fine ghost stories. The form into which he cast them was that of the ballads which he loved and collected, and we must not forget that the ballad is in the direct line of ancestry of the ghost story. Think of "Clerk Saunders," "Young Benjie," the "Wife of Usher's Well." I am tempted to enlarge on the "Tales of Terror," for the most part supremely absurd, where Lewis holds the pen, and jigs along with such stanzas as:

"All present then uttered a terrified shout;
All turned with disgust from the scene.
The worms they crept in, and the worms they crept out,
And sported his eyes and his temples about,
While the spectre addressed Imogene."

But proportion must be observed.

If I were writing generally of horrific books which include supernatural appearances, I should be obliged to include Maturin's "Melmoth," and doubtless imitations of it which I know nothing of. But "Melmoth" is a long—a cruelly long—book, and we must keep our eye on the short prose ghost story in the first place. If Scott is not the creator of this, it is to him that we owe two classical specimens—"Wandering Willie's Tale" and the "Tapestried Chamber." The former we know is an episode in a novel; anyone who searches the novels of succeeding years will certainly find (as we, alas, find in "Pickwick" and "Nicholas Nickleby"!) stories of this type foisted in; and possibly some of them may be good enough to deserve reprinting. But the real happy hunting ground, the proper habitat of our game is the magazine, the annual, the periodical publication destined to amuse the family circle. They came up thick and fast, the magazines, in the thirties and forties, and many died young. I do not, having myself sampled the task, envy the devoted one who sets out to examine the files, but it is not rash to



promise him a measure of success. He will find ghost stories; but of what sort? Charles Dickens will tell us. In a paper from *Household Words*, which will be found among "Christmas Stories" under the name of "A Christmas Tree" (I reckon it among the best of Dickens's occasional writings), that great man takes occasion to run through the plots of the typical ghost stories of his time. As he remarks, they are "reducible to a very few general types and classes; for ghosts have little originality, and 'walk' in a beaten track." He gives us at some length the experience of the nobleman and the ghost of the beautiful young housekeeper who drowned herself in the park two hundred years before; and, more cursorily, the indelible bloodstain, the door that will not shut, the clock that strikes thirteen, the phantom coach, the compact to appear after death, the girl who meets her double, the cousin who is seen at the moment of his death far away in India, the maiden lady who "really did see the Orphan Boy." With such things as these we are still familiar. But we have rather forgotten—and I for my part have seldom met—those with which he ends his survey: "Legion is the name of the German castles where we sit up alone to meet the spectre—where we are shown into a room made comparatively cheerful for our reception" (more detail, excellent of its kind, follows), "and where, about the small hours of the night, we come into the knowledge of divers supernatural mysteries. Legion is the name of the haunted German students, in whose society we draw yet nearer to the fire, while the schoolboy in the corner opens his eyes wide and round, and flies off the footstool he has chosen for his seat, when the door accidentally blows open."

As I have said, this German stratum of ghost stories is one of which I know little; but I am confident that the searcher of magazines will penetrate to it. Examples of the other types will accrue, especially when he reaches the era of Christmas Numbers, inaugurated by Dickens himself. His Christmas *Numbers* are not to be confused with his Christmas *Books*, though the latter led on to the former. Ghosts are not absent from these, but I do not call the "Christmas Carol" a ghost story proper; while I do assign that name to the stories of the Signalman and the Juryman (in "Mugby Junction" and "Dr. Marigold").

These were written in 1865 and 1866, and nobody can deny that they conform to the modern idea of the ghost story. The setting and the personages are those of the writer's own day; they have nothing antique about them. Now this mode is not absolutely essential to success, but it is characteristic of the majority of successful stories: the belted knight who meets the spectre in the vaulted chamber and has to say "By my halidom," or words to that effect, has little actuality about him. Anything, we feel, might have happened in the fifteenth century. No; the seer of ghosts must talk something like me, and be dressed, if not in my fashion, yet not too much like a man in a pageant, if he is to enlist my sympathy. Wardour Street has no business here.

If Dickens's ghost stories are good and of the right complexion, they are not the best that were written in his day. The palm must I think be assigned to J. S. Le Fanu, whose stories of "The Watcher" (or "The Familiar"), "Justice Harbottle," "Carmilla," are unsurpassed, while "Schalken the Painter," "Squire Toby's Will," the haunted house in "The House by the Churchyard," "Dickon the Devil," "Madam Crowl's Ghost," run them very close. Is it the blend of French and Irish in Le Fanu's descent and surroundings that gives him the knack of infusing ominousness into his atmosphere? He is anyhow an artist in words; who else could have hit on the epithets in this sentence: "The aerial image of the old house for a moment stood before her, with its peculiar malign, sacred and skulking aspect." Other famous stories of Le Fanu there are which are not quite ghost stories—"Green Tea" and "The Room in the Dragon Volant"; and yet another, "The Haunted Baronet," not famous, not even known but to a few, contains some admirable touches, but somehow lacks proportion. Upon mature consideration, I do not think that there are better ghost stories anywhere than the best of Le Fanu's; and among these I should give the first place to "The Familiar" (*alias* "The Watcher").

Other famous novelists of those days tried their hand—Bulwer Lytton for one. Nobody is permitted to write about ghost stories without mentioning "The Haunters and the Haunted." To my mind it is spoilt by the conclusion; the Cagliostro element (forgive an inaccuracy) is alien. It comes in with far better effect (though in a burlesque guise) in Thackeray's one attempt in this direction—"The Notch in the Axe," in the "Roundabout Papers." This to be sure begins by being a skit partly on Dumas, partly on Lytton; but as Thackeray warmed to his work he got interested in the story and, as he says, was quite sorry to part with Pinto in the end. We have to reckon too with Wilkie Collins. "The Haunted Hotel," a short novel, is by no means ineffective; grisly enough, almost, for the modern American taste.

Rhoda Broughton, Mrs. Riddell, Mrs. Henry Wood, Mrs. Oliphant—all these have some sufficiently absorbing

stories to their credit. I own to reading not infrequently "Featherston's Story" in the fifth series of "Johnny Ludlow," to delighting in its domestic flavour and finding its ghost very convincing. ("Johnny Ludlow," some young persons may not know, is by Mrs. Henry Wood.) The religious ghost story, as it may be called, was never done better than by Mrs. Oliphant in "The Open Door" and "A Beleaguered City"; though there is a competitor, and a strong one, in Le Fanu's "Mysterious Lodger."

Here I am conscious of a gap; my readers will have been conscious of many previous gaps. My memory does in fact slip on from Mrs. Oliphant to Marion Crawford and his horrid story of "The Upper Berth," which (with the "Screaming Skull" some distance behind) is the best in his collection of "Uncanny Tales," and stands high among ghost stories in general.

That was I believe written in the late eighties. In the early nineties comes the deluge, the deluge of the illustrated monthly magazines, and it is no longer possible to keep pace with the output either of single stories or of volumes of collected ones. Never was the flow more copious than it is to-day, and it is only by chance that one comes across any given example. So nothing beyond scattering and general remarks can be offered. Some whole novels there have been which depend for all or part of their interest on ghostly matter. There is "Dracula," which suffers by excess. (I fancy, by the way, that it must be based on a story in the fourth volume of Chambers's *Repository*, issued in the fifties.) There is "Alice-for-Short," in which I never cease to admire the skill with which the ghost is woven into the web of the tale. But that is a very rare feat.

Among the collections of short stories, E. F. Benson's three volumes rank high, though to my mind he sins occasionally by stepping over the line of legitimate horridness. He is however blameless in this aspect as compared with some Americans, who compile volumes called "Not At Night" and the like. These are merely nauseating, and it is very easy to be nauseating. I, *moi qui vous parle*, could undertake to make a reader physically sick, if I chose to think and write in terms of the Grand Guignol. The authors of the stories I have in mind tread, as they believe, in the steps of Edgar Allan Poe and Ambrose Bierce (himself sometimes unpardonable), but they do not possess the force of either.

Reticence may be an elderly doctrine to preach, yet from the artistic point of view I am sure it is a sound one. Reticence conduces to effect, blatancy ruins it, and there is much blatancy in a lot of recent stories. They drag in sex too, which is a fatal mistake; sex is tiresome enough in the novels; in a ghost story, or as the backbone of a ghost story, I have no patience with it.

At the same time don't let us be mild and drab. Malevolence and terror, the glare of evil faces, "the stony grin of unearthly malice," pursuing forms in darkness, and "long-drawn, distant screams," are all in place, and so is a modicum of blood, shed with deliberation and carefully husbanded; the weltering and wallowing that I too often encounter merely recall the methods of M. G. Lewis.

Clearly it is out of the question for me to begin upon a series of "short notices" of recent collections; but an illustrative instance or two will be to the point. A. M. Burrage, in "Some Ghost Stories," keeps on the right side of the line, and if about half of his ghosts are amiable, the rest have their terrors, and no mean ones. H. R. Wakefield, in "They Return at Evening" (a good title) gives us a mixed bag, from which I should remove one or two that leave a nasty taste. Among the residue are some admirable pieces, very inventive. Going back a few years I light on Mrs.

Everett's "The Death Mask," of a rather quieter tone on the whole, but with some excellently conceived stories. Hugh Benson's "Light Invisible" and "Mirror of Shalott" are too ecclesiastical. K. and Hesketh Prichard's "Flaxman Low" is most ingenious and successful, but rather over-technically "occult." It seems impertinent to apply the same criticism to Algernon Blackwood, but "John Silence" is surely open to it. Mr. Eliot O'Donnell's multitudinous volumes I do not know whether to class as narratives of fact or exercises in fiction. I hope they may be of the latter sort, for life in a world managed by his gods and infested by his demons seems a risky business.

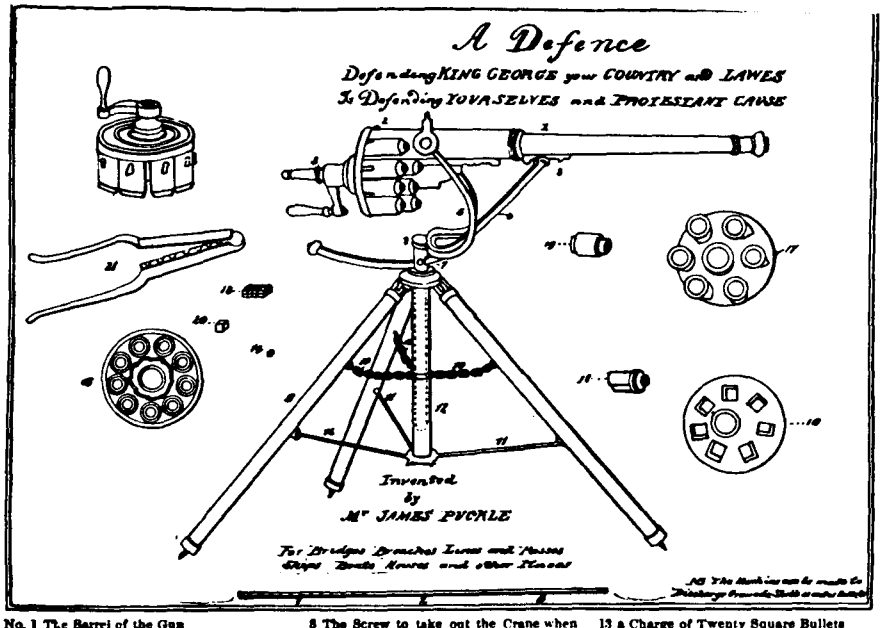
So I might go on through a long list of authors; but the remarks one can make in an article of this compass can hardly be illuminating. The reading of many ghost stories has shown me that the greatest successes have been scored by the authors who can make us envisage a definite time and place, and give us plenty of clear-cut and matter-of-fact detail, but who, when the climax is reached, allow us to be just a little in the dark as to the working of their machinery. We do not want to see the bones of their theory about the supernatural.

All this while I have confined myself almost entirely to the English ghost story. The fact is that either there are not many good stories by foreign writers, or (more probably) my ignorance has veiled them from me. But I should feel myself ungrateful if I did not pay a tribute to the supernatural tales of Erckmann-Chatrian. The blend of French with German in them, comparable to the French-Irish blend in Le Fanu, has produced some quite first-class romance of this kind. Among longer stories, "La Maison Forestière" (and, if you will, "Hugues le Loup"); among shorter ones "Le Blanc et le Noir," "Le Rêve du Cousin Elof" and "L'Œil Invisible" have for years delighted and alarmed me. It is high time that they were made more accessible than they are.

There need not be any peroration to a series of rather disjointed reflections. I will only ask the reader to believe that, though I have not hitherto mentioned it, I have read "The Turn of the Screw."

"The moment he was through the hole in the roof, all the winds of heaven seemed to lay hold of him."

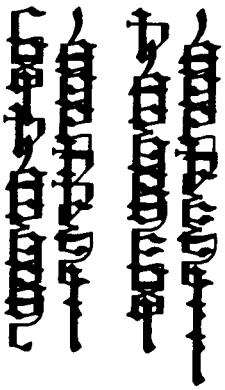
One of the drawings by Arthur Hughes, illustrating "At the Back of the North Wind," by George MacDonald (Blackie).



No. 1 The Barrel of the Gun
2 The Sett of Chambers Charg'd put on ready for Firing
3 The Screw upon which every Sett of Chambers play off and on
4 a Sett of Chambers ready charged to be Slip'd on when the first Sett are pull'd off to be recharg'd
5 The Crane to rise fall and Turn the Gun round
6 The Curb to Level and fix the Guns
7 The Screw to rise and fall it
8 The Screw to take out the Crane when the Gun with the Trepeid is to be folded up
9 The Trepied whereon it plays
10 The Chain to prevent the Trepieds extending too far out
11 The hooks to fix the Trepied and Unhook when the same is folded up in order to be carried with the Gun upon a Man's Shoulder
12 The Tube wherein the Pivot of the Crane turns
13 a Charge of Twenty Square Bullets
14 a single Bullet
15 The front of the Chambers of a Gun for a Boat
16 The plate of the Chambers of the Gun for a Ship shooting Square Bullets against Turks
17 For Round Bullets against Christians
18 a Single Square Chamber
19 a Single round Chamber
20 a single Bullet for a Boat
21 The Mould for Casting Single Bullets

Philosophy as Fiction

Martin McAvoy



...'what can be thought must certainly be a fiction.'
Nietzsche[1]

Divergences, incompatibilities, irreconciliables are everywhere.
De Selby[2]

'I have forgotten my umbrella.'
Nietzsche[3]

Water is rarely absent from any wholly satisfactory situation.
De Selby[4]

I am looking at the fictional elements of philosophy, looking with an eye for fiction in the narrow sense of 'falsehood' and another open to the wider sense of 'the story-telling activity'. Try not to cross the eyes or focus on false stories just yet. Any apparent squint can be corrected by covering one and exercising a little circumspection with the other, by imagining, initially, this diagrammatic conception: two sets of objects or spheres of activity, philosophy (ϕ) and fiction (ψ), converge and coalesce; their intersection ($\phi \cap \psi$), seen as hatching, grows from spindle to spheroid to interfuse the former two into a virtual one ($\phi \simeq \psi$). Have we three sets now, or two, or one? Considering the objects involved, recoil and repulsion might be the more likely outcome, even the build-up of a buffer zone.

See the dark saying that hangs above us like a storm-cloud - such a violent compression, a syzygy of elements (Phi. as Fi.) charged with friction and threatening to sunder. The respective factions are ready to throw down their forks of protest, to burst and disembogue in copious sheets of water-holding arguments or mere eyewash, so to speak. Such an atmosphere is hardly conducive to rapprochment, even if the storm is only simile and the cloud a cloud of words about to be dispelled. Let's shift the scene away from the tropic condensation of a cloud-burst and into the inside of a temporary elliptical contraction - to a rolled umbrella (/parasol, i.e., an en-tout-cas)[5] of a phrase about to be unfurled and expanded upon like so:

'Fiction' is the rolled cover, the true-but-false hood and cover story; is all you can see at present, furled and crushed against the hidden structural apparatus of ribs and stretchers, stick and handle, the essential philosophical framework, itself severely attenuated. The open umbrella is the kind of protection that language can provide against the reign of Being, that bombardment of the senses by light and watery darkness; selecting and combining from the plethora of meanings supplied by intuition and imagination, and so from language too; so it is both hood and no hood, being also part of the weather. It is essential too, no accessory, despite its covering as it uncovers, just like a metaphor. Time now to unlock the catch and push the runner out to clear some space for understanding the elements of that first optical allusion.

Philosophy as 'falsehood' is a topic too huge for here and one I'm quite unqualified to unfasten but would refer anyone to Johann Jakob Brucker's five-volume History of Philosophy[8], 'a history of the human intellect' and 'the index of its errors', or Hegel's Phenomenology where 'Absolute Knowledge is simply Spirit's survey and inner remembering of the whole series of its former errors'[9]. Philosophers can scarcely forego questions of truth and falsity, but many would agree that there are many kinds or senses of truth. I ask them now to focus for a

moment on the kinds of truths (and falsity) that stories might tell, and consider the possibility of looking at philosophy as a 'story-telling activity' without detracting from its status as the love of truth; at least we can admit this love is usually expressed in language. It is becoming more generally appreciated that language is more than mere semaphore, that we cannot absolutely separate an argument from its linguistic form or divest it completely of rhetorical contours, for all arguments seek to persuade. As one recent writer remarks,rem acu tetigisti,

> 'Recognition of the embroilment of dialectic in rhetoric does suggest that close attention to the linguistic properties of philosophical writing of the sort traditionally associated with literary criticism may be relevant to its assessment as philosophy.'[10]

It is not simply a matter of distinguishing logic from rhetoric, or argument from imagination (in examples, for example); we need to see the levels of interpenetration and conjoint working as well. Philosophy aspires to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth (with or without the help of God), but it tells nothing if it tells no stories, and the 'truest' story must create a stage and set the scene, must select, put some facts forward and thus push some facts back, if purely for the sake of coherence and intelligibility. We can't say everything we know at once, but make do with running out (discoursing) our facts as words in consequential sequence, i.e., we narrate. Arguments are another kind of narrative, like cases for the defence, something fashioned (fictio), something made (factum). The argument here has the following pattern:

* There is a space where the two activities of philosophy and fiction meet and overlap; there are several points where they actually connect, and this is because they share a common use of language and a common ground of meaning at these points and elsewhere. This is admittedly an area of great generality but one I will attempt to describe using the heuristic device of an umbrella metaphor. When open, the umbrella illustrates the axes of language (see below); when closed or curtailed it serves as an instrument of sombre pointing. Of course metaphors, like models and analogies, are not literal truths but necessarily unlike what they refer to at some point, perhaps the most important point of difference. I can't , for example, hang the crossed axes of language in the hall. But why should I wish to; it would only destroy the metaphor, whose purpose is to open up another avenue of meaning,provide an aid to understanding. Clearly 'it is not to be pressed'[11]beyond use about to be established. A purely literal language is literally a dead letter, pure pointing or pointing out.

This 'umbrella' pivots on a central ferrule-spike, viz., that conjunctive 'as' in the title, to be loosely construed (in the modish misappliance of a buzz-phrase) as:

a) Aristotle's adverbial 'hei': in the capacity of, in the role of, considered as, as far as, in so far as; rendered traditionally as 'qua', thus suggesting
b) Beckett's adjectival 'quaquaquaqua': the divine attribute 'quaquaversal', i.e., dipping, turning outward in all directions and pointing towards the everywhichway and disordered duckquacks of Lucky's[6] extorted monologue; and so
c) to z)... any significant interpretation of the ellipsis in the catch-all slogan 'x as y' sufficient to cover 'chalk as cheese' etc., e.g. as being/not being partly/wholly, as if, as (like) having the appearance of,etc.,etc...

Before getting too extended I should say the original intention was to make the 'as' an (a) while being aware of (b) as a recurring threat. The difficulty in restricting 'as' to (a) is that the 'qua' expression, at least for Aristotle, points out a difference or differences within a formal unity, within, e.g., the same person who, like a Pooh Bah, bears different capacities and titles and performs different roles and functions, perhaps simultaneously.[7] 'As' looks like 'is'. So it makes sense to say that Iris Murdoch qua philosopher and Iris Murdoch qua fiction-writer are both references to the same person; or, to put it more sharply,

we can say she is a philosopher even when writing fiction, and she is a fiction-writer even when teaching or writing philosophy, for she is both. Of course the verb 'to be' has many senses but all of them spell trouble here for philosophy if we can sensibly claim that it is in some capacity or role a kind of fiction. If 'qua' refers us to a property or attribute of what it qualifies, 'fiction' turns out to be a very predatory predicate, for it swallows its subject. Opening fire on my headline with Nietzsche's deadly maxim reduces us to the last word in hackneyed apophthegms.

This word 'fiction' has itself become 'a kind of umbrella,[12] sheltering many different kinds of mental activity and cultural institution', even, according to the latest fashion, all kinds of mental activity, understood along the lines of 'imaginative creation'. Fictions are all the shapes and interpretations we impose on reality to make sense of it. This new model emerges as a useless article which quite fails to cover anything in particular or protect us from any supposed 'formless flux existing outside our minds'; in its own terms, another fiction for the flux, yet another imposed shape. In effect this is a massive soaring gamp, a purely fictional umbrella; in fact, as the Sages point out, it is more like 'the banner of a naive and reactionary fundamentalism, which measures the validity of all ideas by a single standard of truth (Pure Contingency or Chaos).' A metaphorical umbrella should at least resemble a real one and function like one, not some flattening tarpaulin. By plaiting philosophy and fiction togetherinto one image I am signifying that these two activities and their artifacts share a common use of language and cover a common ground of meaning. To say this, I think, is to run counter to the spirit of Quine's remark that 'there are no meanings, nor likenesses, nor distinctions of meaning, beyond what are implicit in people's dispositions to overt behaviour.'[13] We might ask what is the meaning of this last phrase 'beyond...' and its elements. No doubt we are to discover these by following the current procedures of science, but on what ground do we accept these as the only meanings allowed or that there are? Is there not a case for saying that intuition and imagination discover or create meaning (and non-meaning) and these dispositions are prior to, because meaning is prior as the antecedent condition of, questions of truth and falsity that science seeks to settle?[14] This would explain why our interest in stories, true or false, is rarely an interest in literal truth, and why we can look for meaning in manifest fictions.

For example, consider this brute fact: On Saturdays in Sauchiehall Street you can see someone performing the part of an animated automaton, solus, silent, but strutting to muzak; moreover this machine makes money.[15] It is not a wholly convincing performance yet fascinating and sinister: a staccato of rapid jerks, it is a parody of us, the rapidly passing consumers, now brought to a stop for a moment. It, I say, because dressed in white techno-boiler suit and cap and black-and-white epicene mask it remains of indeterminate sex, yet something in its arched back and arch manner suggests a small man become designer-robot, a tout for the 21st century. The possibility we are lead to entertain while standing there is that this being before us is actually a machine (or even an alien) only pretending to be human though presumably the reverse is true. This being, however we look at it, is actively engaged in creating a fiction, a modern urban mime with basic story line and contracted, almost collapsed narrative structure, yet a story being told, a narrative none the less. We could start with the minimal definition of narrative provided by one scholar:'a perceived sequence of non-randomly connected events.'[16] If we stand and watch we see a tableau start to move. Coiled wires attached to a uniform and a piped music tape supply motivation and significance. The shuddering consequential action provides a galvanic animation resembling the flickering evanescence of early silent film. The continuity of movement seems inexorable, unless broken by some human reaction, usually from the audience. The clockwork soldier turns

to shake hands with a bemused child, proferring an electric glove or the grip of a restrained vice; or turns to wave or mock, to photograph the witnesses. Nothing breaks the artifice, for should the motion stop and momentarily betray a human trait this can always be presented as a more sophisticated mechanical response. Should he/she/it remain a tableau the fiction is less convincing but nevertheless apparent, being aware as we are that every picture (and word, I want to say) tells a story. But how can it, and why?

'The simple relation of successive facts,'says Tzvetan Todorov,'does not constitute a narrative: these facts must be organized, which is to say that ultimately they must have elements in common.'[16] The common element here is the actor, the locus of the sustained role throughout its various contortions. However, as Todorov observes, 'if all the elements are in common, there is no longer a narrative, for there is no longer anything to recount.' If nothing happens then there is no story to tell. He is looking for the element of 'transformation', 'a synthesis of differences and resemblance, it links two facts without their being able to be identified'. In my example the synthesis is of the human and mechanical (whichever came first) and this provides the necessary transformation, though this might seem too contracted (almost static) a sequence of events to constitute consideration as a story. When we stress connections, as I am here, we are bound to contract the dividing spaces, as with the image of a rolled umbrella, the opening of which applies the countervailing stress on differences, differences of something, something connected. The activity of feigning as fiction is emphasized by this example. The actual object or work of fiction crystallizes in the record of a verbal report.

Frank Kermode gives a'very simple example' of this kind of fiction: tick-tock.[17] 'Tick is a humble genesis, tock a feeble apocalypse,' he says, admitting that tick-tock isn't much of a plot. Nevertheless it satisfies the minimal definition of narrative and could satisfy, like my example, a more comprehensive one. Toolan offers the following five typical characteristics of narrative:[18]

1) a degree of artificial fabrication or constructedness.
2) a degree of prefabrication, with bits seen or heard before.
3) trajectory, the sense that it is going somewhere.
4) a teller and someone told, speaker and addressee.
5) is richly exploitative of displacement (the ability to refer to things or events removed in space or time.

We might call 'tick-tock' a nursery story, a child's answer to the question 'what does the clock say?', when 'seven o'clock' or 'time for bed' might be the adult alternatives; all three are humanizing fictions, unless it be a speaking clock. We make the clock talk our language, tick the initial complication (the opening of an Aristotelean drama)[19], the interval the peripetian turning-point, tock the final denouement with resolved wider vowel. This is to stretch (or compress) these terms way beyond their usual range of application, but it allows us to discern parallels, even with these two highly restricted examples. What is perhaps more disturbing for the philosopher is how equally the definitions of narrative describe essential characteristics of scholarly articles and treatises.

And this is the nub of the issue at the heart of my approach. It's a trivial truth but largely ignored: despite ostensibly disparate goals the productions of philosophy and fiction depend upon a narrative structure,i.e., they are both story-telling activities,are both bound by the constraints of language, which is not to say they are identical activities (far from it, as I will attempt to demonstrate)or implythat they are bound in the same way. The story that philosophy has to tell may not, to the litterateur, constitute a story at all in any usual sense. Yet consider another very simple example, the abstract proposition A=B. Is this not ' exploitative of displacement' in extremis? Certainly we perceive a sequence of non-randomly connected events now when we speak it or write it down. Propositions 'are said to occupy no space, reflect no light, have no be-

ginning or end'[20], because they are 'so-called abstract entities'. Yet the writer, Benson Mates, admits that 'each proposition is regarded as having a structure, upon which its logical properties essentially depend.' Can we not infer from this that even the most abstract proposition has a grammatical structure or syntax, and it is this syntax which allows different sentences with different word-orders to have the same meaning. Certainly to mention or to use a proposition is to occupy time and 'mental' space, and actual space when we write it down. In effect I am denying that there can be a rigid distinction between the formal and material mode of speech as long as they both are modes of speech, i.e., use words, grammar, syntax, etc.. Whether we are talking about concepts or objects or events, a discursive account is one which possesses a discursively analysable structure or 'orderly spread' (αναλυσις, struo στορνυμι)[21] which, no matter how rudimental, we can perceive as a sequence of non-random connections whose nodes we can interpret as real or imagined events, receptions of entities into our experience by announcement.

To resort to graphics again, my 'umbrella' is the umbrella of language, which functions on at least two apparent axes:[22] i) the syntagmatic ('horizontal') axis of combination where the ordered arrangement of the elements of speech are spread out in terms of the linear distribution of syntagms, fusions of two or more linguistic signs or elements in a word phrase or idiom; ii) the paradigmatic ('vertical') axis of selection which cuts across the chain of speech or writing to pick out the linguistic paradigms, i.e., the sets or classes of words or other elements that provide possible alternatives at each point. So, for example, 'I have forgotten my umbrella' includes at least two syntagms, 'I have forgotten' and 'my umbrella', and an infinite number of paradigms, starting with the smaller paradigms of subject pronoun, verb, possessive adjective and object noun, to the larger ones of all the noun phrases that would fit the subject slot, and so on. But this is like giving a story outline where all the events and charcters are presented synoptically, and so with the minimum attention to the syntagmatic dimension of complexities of sequence; we end up with the paradigmatic raw materials or ingredients, but the linear distribution of the unfolded story (the syntagmatic) is severely foreshortened.

This distinction cannot be always rigid, for both dimensions are concerned with alternatives, alternative combinatory possibilities and syntactic options of weaving words and phrases together, and alternative selections from sets of words or elements that can replace each other; so, in a sense, it folds up along this latter line. It expresses the structuralist principle that ideas are largely defined by contrast with other items and their ability to combine to form more complex items at a higher level. Fiction can be crudely represented as running along the syntagmatic plane, concerned with the play of alternative combinations, while philosophy goes up and down in the paradigmatic dimension, concerned with those relations of opposition and distinction between elements which can replace one another; that is of course when compared to fiction, which of the two lines drawn is perhaps the most flexible. So we end up with something like an arc on a stick, something like an umbrella, whose stretched open cover is held rigid by philosophy, but this framework cannot itself spread out (analyse, unloose) without the supporting cover. This is to present too rigid a separation, but now I am concerned with differences - the open umbrella has been pressed and stretched, the spaces between the struts have pushed to their farthest extent. Recall how Wittgenstein distinguished himself from Hegel:[23]

> 'He felt he would not get far with Hegel because he seemed 'to be always wanting to say that things which look different are really the same.' He

> placed himself at the opposite pole. 'My interest is in showing that things which look the same are really different.' He was thinking, as a motto for his book,of the phrase 'I'll teach you differences.''

Interestingly he chose a phrase from fiction, from King Lear, the disguised Earl of Kent's violent teaching of manners and rank by force to Goneril's ill-mannered steward. The Fool, in contrast, teaches 'thee a speech.'[24] But this is to touch on deep issues perhaps half-buried in psychology. Similarly Nietzsche places himself (above,in his opening 'salvo') 'at the other extreme' from Parmenides for whom only 'what is' could be thought. It is worth acknowledging that there can be very different approaches to philosophy, perhaps ones deliberately diametrical, just as there are with fiction.

Another approach to the question raised here of philosophy's relationship to fiction is by way of the ancients. Derivations cannot be decisive for establishing word-meanings but they do provide essential clues to the history of our notions. The story of the Greek word for 'story' is interesting;[25] it seems to open with a two-way switch (μυθος mythos/λογος logos) and end with that duplex construction, though the meanings have changed or developed. Originally perhaps there was only a very little difference between the two terms. In Homer 'mythos' refers to anything delivered by word of mouth, word, speech, and 'logos' to a word or words (logoi) themselves, language, talk; both are contrasted to εργον ergon, action,deed. A tale, story or narrative is a mythos , but also is a resolve, purpose, design, or plan, depending, as with all Greek, upon the context; in the plural , mythoi, it can be, like logoi , talk or conversation. With Herodotus and Thucydides a clearer distinction emerges between a tale or saying or story (logos) and 'mere' fable (mythos) on the one hand, and regular history (istoria) on the other; but fictitious stories or fables like those of Aesop could be referred to as logoi , as could histories, narratives, even the historical tales of Herodotus and later the myths of Plato. However with Plato a more profound distinction appears that may until then have been latent but uncodified.

' Logos',also perhaps because of Heraclitus' unusual stress upon the term, is used more to emphasize the inward thought expressed and serves to signify a true, analytical account, though still it can encompass applications such as Herodotus' tales and the dialogues of Plato, now distinguished from legends, myths and the fables (mythoi) of Aesop and Plato. Aeschylus and Sophocles developed the use of 'logos' as reason , ground,account or consideration in their plays. Plato is out to establish it as the ruling faculty that can give the rational, true account. Nevertheless his dialogues are filled with myths that play a central part in the development of the arguments; this suggests that there are some circumstances in which mythoi can be considered reasonable or supportive of reason, and that 'logos' means something more than logic, something more like ratio or due proportion in speech, something that includes 'mythos', those various ways that we try to give general pictures or 'likely stories' through symbols and images. Aristotle, who gave up the dialogue form, seems to advocate replacing myths with rational accounts, yet he was aware how in the early cosmogonies mythos and logos overlapped, if in a childlike form (Meta. 1000a) without regard to comprehension. He retains 'mythos' as a technical term in his Poetics, referring to a dramatic plot with its several elements. Here we touch the modern distinction between a rational, true, discursive account and an account or story that need be none of those, between philosophy and fiction, both with a common root in language and talk. Aristotle's high praise of drama and the importance of metaphor (Poet.1459a within a rational logos could be balanced by Plato's portrait of a truth free from all artistry set within his philosophical fictions. Neither can completely dispense with either mythos or logos, but both must put a space between them, a space where both kinds of account can function.

This leads to one final reformulation of the issue. In her article 'Fictions of the Soul', Martha Nussbaum draws the following conclusion:

> 'The old quarrel between philosophy and literature is, as Plato clearly saw, not just a quarrel about ornamentation, but a quarrel about who we are and what we aspire to become. Each view can appropriately claim that the other styles lie about the person and misrepresent him; each can claim that its own mode of conversation is the truthful type. To see that there is a genuine opposition here, not only of conceptions but in fact also of styles, is the first step towards serious work on these questions, so long obscured by an assumption that there is a neutral contentless way of conversing.' [26]

I would also disown any 'neutral contentless way of conversing', but would press it further and put forward the view that there is no mode of conversation that is purely of the truthful type, because, as she adds, 'to choose a style is to tell a story about the soul'; and to tell a story is, via the process of foregrounding and backgrounding built into narrative, inevitably to distort. The hope is, of course, that it will enlarge and not diminish our perceptions, but for that and all this we need access to originals and intellectual intuition; only that can save this view from the same self-destructive fate of Nietzsche's 'fiction' or a version of the liar paradox. We can see this and yet know of no way to express it discursively without contradiction, for there is always the possibility that the inevitable distortion in any remark is the crucial one in question, no matter how much we might try to pre-empt such a possibility by the deliberate distortion of a metaphor. In this sense Socrates' profession of ignorance hangs over philosophy and fiction alike. Plato left no explicit instructions on how to tell the sensible from the fantastic, except to develop tact and a sense of the fitting or appropriate (Statesman 284e). Is it not appropriate to ask, what is the nature of philosophical rhetoric, where does it begin and could it end?

Philosophy stripped of all its fictional elements of narrative structure and rhetorical device would cease to be philosophy of the kind expressible in language. To say this, however, is in no way to equate'philosophical stories' with intentionally fictional stories, but instead to find a common point of interpretable leverage for distinguishing them. Put side by side it is easier to compare and contrast and give each its due. It may seem too Hegelian an approach to a follower of Wittgenstein, but I believe it is neither and does less violence to both. Nietzsche is dead, but we can still read his thoughts. De Selby was never alive or dead, except in two books of Flann O'Brien, but in the first he is dead and the second alive. A real person and a fictional character can both acquire a posthumous existence and enter into factitous dialogue for the sake of an epigraph. Both have sense and reference,[27] though De Selby's reference is of a special kind, called Hilbertian reference,i.e. it is indeterminate in the sense of not given,i.e.,'not controlled (entirely) by features of the term, so it is still to a particular object, although the particular object remains to be nominated,i.e., in logical terms, is arbitrary.'[28] As to what this means, I am far from sure, but believe that it is up to us to nominate the object of reference by identification of or with a real person (or several). De Selby's vivacity is at least partly our responsibility. It is a kind of non-accurate reference and this suits my purpose well because fictional objects gain real ontological status along with real objects; under the aegis of an equal standing we could set up a temporary reunion, if philosophy will be (as it means to be) magnanimous.

To close this blackthorn brolly with an erotic parallel or filial perpendicular, let's say if philosophy is the love of truth then fiction is the love of stories, true or false...

?

'Plato's fictions', from Frank Kermode, The Sense of an Ending (1967), p.41.

1 Werke, ed. G.Colli and M. Montinari, Vol. VIII^3 (1972), 14 (148) p.124. Spring1888.

2 The Dalkey Archive, by Flann O'Brien (1968), p. 15.

3 Werke, op. cit. Vol V^2 (1973), 12 (62) p. 485. Autumn 1881. On this see Spurs, Nietzsche's Styles, Jacques Derrida (1979), pp. 123-143. for enlargement.

4 Appendix to Country Album, in The Third Policeman, Flann O'Brien (1988),p. 151.

5 A cross between an umbrella and a parasol, smaller, more brightly coloured than an umbrella, but plainer than a parasol, without external trimming, for use in all emergencies.

6 Waiting for Godot, Samuel Beckett, Complete Dramatic Works (1986), pp. 40-42.

7 Physics, Book 1, 191b1-10. Pooh Bah is the Chancellor of the Exchequer (who advises thift) and Secretary to Ko Ko (advising spending) in The Mikado by Gilbert and Sullivan.

8 J.J. Brucker, Historia Critica Philosophiae a Mundi incunabilis ad nostram usque aetatem deducta, 5 vols (Leipzig,1742-4), abridged and trans. William Enfield, The History of Philosophy, 2 vols (London, 1791),I,21; II,319, 512.

9 Philosophical Tales, Jonathan Ree (1987), p. 83, and for previous note, p.141.

10 On Not Deconstructing the Difference between Literature and Philosophy, Philosophy and Literature, April 1989, p. 25; by Martin Warner.

11 Bluspels and Flalansferes, C.S.Lewis in The Importance of Language (1969)p. 38, where use of this warning is the sign'that we have acquired the tutorial shuffle'.

12 Dictionary of Modern Critical Terms, 'Fiction', pp.95-96, (1987), entry by Victor and Lorna Sage. Revised and edited by Roger Fowler.

13 Ontological Relativity, W.V. Quine (1969), p.29.

14 C.S. Lewis, op. cit. p.49. 15 cf. Poetics 1447b9-11 for ancient urban mime & below.

16 The Poetics of Prose, Tzvetan Todorov (1977), p.233.

17 Frank Kermode, op. cit., pp. 44-45.

18 Michael J. Toolan, Narrative, A Critical Linguistic Introduction (1988) p.7, & 4-5.

19 Poetics, 1455b25-30.

20 Elementary Logic, Benson Mates (1965),p.9.

21 Stanley Rosen, Nihilism (1969), p. 46, 51. 'Struo is related to 'sterno'.

22 Toolan, op.cit. p.265, also David Birch, Language, Literature and Critical Practice (1989), Saussure, Jonathan Culler (1976)., Glossary of Linguistic Terminology Mario Pei (1966)

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25 Liddell and Scott, Greek Lexicon (1888). Also F.E. Peters, Greek Philosophical Terms, A Historical Lexicon (1967), pp. 110-112, 120-121. G.M. Edwards, English-Greek Lexicon (1914).

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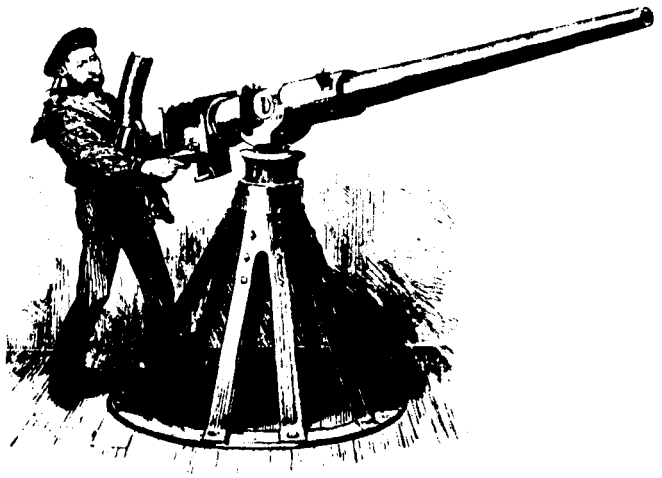
28'Fictions', Hartley Slater, British Journal of Aesthetics, vol 27 (1987),pp.145-155. Also 'Talking about Something', B.A.(sic) Slater, Analysis,23.3 Jan1963,pp, 49-53.

° For charity also, I should add.



The Conference of Socialist Economists

The Conference of Socialist Economists - or CSE - is not particularly for economists. It was set up over 20 years ago to promote open theoretical discussion amongst socialists. It publishes Capital and Class three times a year, holds and annual conference in July (usually in Sheffield) and organises a number of national discussion groups on topics like Money, the Stae, Housing, Law, etc. The CSE is not related to any particular organisation, and its members include members of all the major left parties and groups, as well as people who are not affiliated to any group.

At a local level, the CSE aims to develop debates by drawing into theoretical discussion as many people as possible. In Edinburgh, we have in the past organised introductions to Marxist theory, Capital Reading Groups, discussions of the State and what it means to work for it, and we have been involved in the Plessey occupation in Bathgate and have worked with shop stewards from Timex in Dundee. At the moment we meet monthly to discuss work being done by members, and there are a number of small discussion groups either in existence or just starting up.

Building and Housing Research Group contact: Brian McGrail on 031-449-5111 ext. 4631.

Capital & Class and Common Sense Reading Group contact: Werner Bonefeld on 031-228-1669. (Meets every last Sunday in the month.)

Grundrisse/T.Negri Reading Group contact: D. Kerr on 031-449-5111 ext. 4635.

People interested in a **Capital** reading group or a discussion group on **Socialism/Ecology** please contact: M. Creighton on 031-661-7785.

People interested in joining CSE at a national level and subscribing to Capital and Class please contact: Conference of Socialist Economists, 25 Horsell Road, London N5.

Harry Cleaver

Competition? Or Cooperation?

"Competition," and especially "international competitiveness" have emerged as universal buzzwords over the last few years. The multinationalization of production and the rapid expansion of international trade have been interpreted as signs of growing interdependence and are commonly interpreted as accentuations of "competition" among producers and merchants within the global economy --a growing competition that calls for radical changes in industrial and economic policy. But what is the nature of this "competition" which is constantly evoked to justify all sorts of industrial reorganizations and policy shifts? The term has been around so long, and has become so commonplace as to be taken for granted. Yet, it has become a euphemism for realities which need to be brought into the open, not hidden away behind a word that means more than it seems.

Historically, there has been a *de facto* consensus about the meaning of "competition" which has embraced the whole political spetrum. Competition has always been seen on the Left as in the Center and on the Right as that relation between firms that fuels capitalist development. For the Center and the Right competition has been celebrated since the time of Adam Smith as the natural dynamic of the economic freedom they associate with individual initiative and entrepreneurship --and thus as a fundamental paradigm for all social relations. Competition is the core of the "invisible hand" of the market which guarantees maximized social welfare through an ascethically pleasing automatic mechanism. Failures in this mechanism, such as monopoly, can be dealt with by governmental regulation.

For the Left, that automatic mechanism has also been seen as central to capitalist growth but has been condemned as wasteful and anarchic because it also produces crisis and recesssion. Thus the complaint of the socially destructive "anarchy" of captialism and the call for planning and the regulation of investment. Unfortunately, both of these points of view obfuscate the real social meaning of competition by focusing all their attention on the actions of business, whether in its corporate or individual guise, and by leaving out of account the hidden relationships between capital and labor that lurk beneath the surface of interfirm relations.

For at the heart of the competition between firms lies other, deeper antagonisms which need to be terminated rather than regulated: that between capital and labor and that among workers which is promulgated by capital to achieve and maintain its control over them all. In mainstream bourgeois economics, competition has always meant, first and foremost, price competition.

In neoclassical microeconomics where the theory has been most rigorously worked out, price competition depends on relative costs. The firm which can lower its costs below the industry average can undersell its competitors and expand both profits and market share. But what is the key to lowering costs? Control over labor. Not just in the straightforward sense that a cut in wages or benefits can lower average and marginal cost, but in more complicated ways as well. Changes in work rules or the introduction of new production technologies which raise productivity and reduce costs also require control over labor to achieve these changes. The capitalist with the best control achieves the biggest cost reductions and undersells the competition. And how do capitalists seek such control over labor? They divide and conquer by creating structures of production and payment hierarchies, buttressed by educational tracking as well as age, racial, gender or nationality differences that pit worker against worker, preventing them from struggling together against their common exploitation.

Besides classic price competition, which assumes identical products and has often been rendered secondary, more common is product differentiation through which firms compete by offering, and intensively advertizing, marginally different products. Successful innovation and sales efforts can expand a firm's share of the more or less well defined market increasing revenue and profits. And how do capitalists achieve such innovation and creative market manipulation? Once again, they can do this only through control over their labor force. Divide and conquer is still the name of the game, pitting worker against worker is still the key. Workers are trained as engineers or designers, paid well and treated as creative thinkers. They do not compete with production line workers but with each other, whether the competitors are proposing model design changes or new advertising gimics. Here again, the firm which is able to get the most work and cooperation out of its labor force wins the competitive battle. Behind success in intercorporate competition lies success in manipulating workers.

In both these cases, classic in economic theory, it becomes obvious that "competition" is merely the form through which the class struggle between labor and capital is organized. If we move from competitive markets to oligopolistic or monopolistic ones, or from the single product firm to the conglomerate or multinational corporation the dynamic is essentially the same, only the form changes. If we move from the shop floor to the wider society,

into the schools where they encarcerate our kids, onto the "playing" fields where the name of the game is winning at any price, into the streets where its supposed to be dog eat dog to survive or into our homes where we have to overcome our own competitive mindsets to achieve any real bonding, we discover that the ideologs are right -- competition is a social paradigm through which we are divided and all too often conquered.

Nor is this just a peculiar characteristic of "Western" captialist society. Indeed, as Lenin well knew when he called for the organization of "socialist competition" in Russia, as Stalin understood when he hailed Stakonovism as the perfect form of socialist labor, and as Mao knew as he sought to manage "contradictions among the people," the dynamic we are discussing is by no means limited to Western capitalist economies but can be found in so-called socialist economies as well. As Margaret Thatcher, Mikail Gorbachev or Deng Chow Ping will testify, the continued existence of "uncompetitive" firms occurs only when the workers have the power to prevent their dissolution. Privatization in Britain and peristroika in China and the USSR have all been aimed at just such "uncompetitive" and "inefficient" bastions of workers' power.

Today it is easy to see why the spokespersons and policy makers of Western capitalist and Eastern socialist states seek to obfuscate these matters by hiding their attacks on their working classes behind the veil of "competition." In the United States, a decade of economists and businessmen crying "international competitiveness," to justify wage cuts, industrial reorganization, union busting, deregulation, and more work has been teaching American workers what competition is all about. In Western Europe, the forthcoming final unification of the Common Market in 1992 is teaching Northern European workers the true meaning of competition as they observe their corporate bosses drooling over the coming opportunities to pit cheaper, longer working Southern European labor against them.

The Left needs to take to heart, in its theory and its politics, the lesson American and European workers are learning the hard way: "competition" is at the heart of capitalism only in the sense that the control over workers constitutes the essence of the antagonistic capitalist-labor relation that constitutes this kind of society. Successful competition today means increased divisions among workers. It means heightened sexism, racism, and jingoistic nationalism. It means more prisons for workers who won't compete and concentration camps for refugees and undocumented multinational workers. It means fear and hatred of those with AIDS and of those who might have AIDS. It means longer school years, more bullshit courses and intensified discipline in the name of higher productivity and competing with the Japanese.

The Left must work to demystify the discourse of "competition" and "international competitiveness" and to point out the obvious: the only way for American and European workers to beat the divide and conquer strategy rationalized by these euphemisms is for them to provide support for their weaker, less well paid, longer working counterparts both at home and in Southern Europe, East Asia and the Third World. European workers see the danger of runaway shops and free labor mobility very clearly and are sensibly beginning to talk about minimum standards on wages, work rules and other working conditions throughout the Common Market. In one of his few lucid moments, George Meany once said the only way to beat runaway shops was to force the creation of a global minimum wage. True then, true now, at least in essense. For years, a thread of this insight has run through the work of the International Labor Organization which has repeatedly and futilely discussed international labor standards. The only way such standards will ever be enacted is for workers to force their governments to agree to it. The only way they will ever be able to do that on a large enough scale for such standards to be effective will be to organize internationally.

In better times, when accumulation rolls along and international competition is less intense, the need for such international organization is less obvious and appears as less urgent and more abstract. But today, with heighthened competition at the heart of current capitalist strategy for global restructuring, capital itself is teaching workers what they have to do. We need only articulate the lesson in organizational terms.

If we understand the current long term structural crisis of the system as a product of an international cycle of worker/student/peasant/women's struggles that began in the late 1960s and ruptured accumulation, then we can recognize that capital's competitive strategy was forced to be global as well as national and industrial. The problem now is that capital has achieved a degree of planned coherence in its counterattack that has outstripped the organizational capacity of that cycle of struggle to which it was the response.

However, the situation is still in flux, the crisis persists because capital has not yet achieved the degree of restructuring of productive and reproductive relations necessary to launch a new wave of accumulation. No definitive

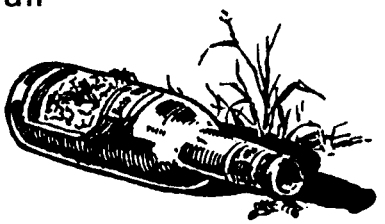
new organization of production has been generalized. Reagan's "social agenda" collapsed and the crises of the schools, of the family, of sexual/gender relations all remain chronic and unable to provide a dependable basis for accumulation. Globally no reliable new international division of labor power has been achieved. From Central America and Southern Africa through the Mediterranean Basin and Eastern Europe to Asia the instability, rather than the manageability, of class relations rules. In retrospect we can see that the major successes of Amerian imperialism in the Post-WWII period involved the temporary stabilization of a few pools of brutalized cheap labor --in countries such as Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, and Brazil-- which has helped make possible what real accumulation does go on today. (We must not consider the kind of redistributive, speculative financial games Reaganomics has fostered as real accumulation.) But even these workhouses of capitalist stability are today being torn by labor unrest and challenges to the existing order.

In these circumstances, we have an opportunity not only to articulate the organizational imperatives to deal with capitalist strategies of competition but also to counterpose alternative visions. Against capital's slogan of *competition*, we can respond with that of *cooperation* --in production, in overcoming capital's destruction of the environment, in international relations, in learning, in building better human relations. Today alternatives in each of these areas are no longer abstractions. Along with continuing debate about the quality of work, industrial workers in Europe have been able to keep the issue of work reduction on the negotiating agenda. Greens across the world have already forced capital, albeit in its own, distorted way, to cooperate internationally on issues of ozone depletion and, little by little, ocean pollution and deforestation. Despite Reagan and Ollie North's best efforts, joint resistance and cooperation between people in the United States and those in Central America has brought a virtual halt to US military intervention in Nicaragua and slowed it elsewhere. Across the world in recent years, students have once again taken to the streets and occupied buildings successfully challenging the state --from China, to Paris, to Madrid, to Mexico City to Howard University and the whole anti-apartheit movement in the US. Against the corporate exploitation of black labor in South Africa, students have built scholarship funds to build non-competitive human ties. Despite the Right Wing terror campaign to force women back into the bedroom, and gays out of it, the struggle for women's rights (especially for abortion) and the struggle against the state tolerated AIDS epidemic has solidified new forms of cooperation and preserved our terrain to explore new, non-competitive forms of personal relationships.

In short, to build on our experiences of struggles against being pitted against each other and of elaborating our own projects of collective self-valorization, we need first to recognize those experiences for what they have have been, second to see their relevance to the current stage of the crisis and third to work on finding new organizational mechanisms for developing them. I assume that those directly involved in the various struggles are doing just that. The broader problem, as always, requires a fourth step: to make connections across struggles --especially internationally-- that can mutually reinforce them and speed the circulation of their power from one to another. Rather than giving in to demands for "increased competitiveness," we should begin to discuss how this can be done.

"The claim that the rational is actual is contradicted precisely by an irrational actuality, which everywhere is the contrary of what it asserts and asserts the contrary of what it is." Marx, **Critique of Hegel's 'Philosophy of Right'**

Reflections on the Nature of Bureaucracy & 'The Iran-Contra Affair'



B.T. ROBERT MAHONEY

ABERRATION OR OBFUSCATION OF THE ABERRATION?

When the covert operations which came to be known under the sedate but appropriately theatrical title *The Iran-Contra Affair* were revealed approximately three years ago, there was an immediate and cross-spectrum rush within the United States political hierarchy to catagorize the entire operation as then ex-senator, John Tower put it, an "**aberration**...of the system."[1]

This catagorization or judgement more or less preceded the imminent deluge of information about the operations and actions of the so called *principals* who co-ordinated them. In other words, the preliminary investigators and analysts, both public and private, made a prior judgement in order to establish the premise or standard according to which the operational details could be fitted into a logical, coherent and effective whole as they spilled forth - a whole that could even transform incompleteness, illogic and mystery into palatable forms of understanding, in a word, could make these acceptable. And with what brilliant effect it was achieved! In fact, *The Iran-Contra Affair* so far stands as testimony to the adaptability of the American system's ideological capabilities, and that men **can**, at least in the short term, occasionally learn from their history; for where the covert operations in particular may have failed, *The Iran-Contra Affair* in general has been a success. Nay, not just **a** success, for it shed the limits and deficiencies of particularity in the last American presidential election, when George Bush was swept up from the shady world of international arms dealing, drug trafficking, and embezzlement (pardon, "diversion" of public funds) to the luminescent world of the White House, on a wave of "law and order" sentiment uninvestigated, untainted, and worse, relatively unmolested by the opposition for his part in the operations; when the salvage operation proved capable of not just saving one president, but of producing another; when failure was transformed, before the eyes of

[1] 27 February 1987, John Tower, News Conference Publicly Releasing **The Tower Commission Report**.

the world, into *success* period. Voila! *The Iran-Contra Affair* was truely successful, however, because in the transformation of failure into success, it quite simply saved the system from comprehension of the contradiction, and hence, the irrationality of its own existence. In short, it saved itself from itself by the transmogrification of secrecy revealed, into the true aberration concealed. What should have been confirmation of the system's normal functioning was turned into an exception from that functioning, and thus, confirmation only of that system's appearance.

How was this accomplished?

Among other things, by saving the American Presidency and Administration, which was essential since two major failures of executive power within the last four administrations begins to indicate not causes born of accident and mere individual corruption, but reasons born of necessity and systematic defect -an ***aberrant system,*** rather than an ***aberration of the system.*** Thus, in order to avoid such risk, it was necessary this time around to not only save the office, but to save the man who occupied the office as well.

What saved him?

President Reagan, and the Administration were saved by nothing other than that essential activity of both American public and private life, and of which the executive branch is the highest evolutionary form - administration, or rather "management."

All of the constituent branches of the political state from a properly "outraged" Congress, to an appropriately "critical" media and a "concerned" yet benign American public -whomsoever they may be- managed *The Iran-Contra Affair* (whether with explicit intent or not), so that a self-critical appearance was maintained, and so also the belief in the general health of the democratic process in America. No doubt, the process was seriously breached for a moment by the "**publicization**" of "covert operations" as many indignant congressional leaders bemoaned; however, the efflux of ideology quickly filled any gaps and healed over the serious wounds that may have been inflicted upon the presidency and the administrative process as a whole, so that shortly after the public interrogation of the principals by the joint Congressional Committee investigating the affair, yet before that committee was able to return with its report and judgement, and long before the legal proceedings against the principals even commenced, America had satisfied itself with regard to President Reagan, that the affair was resolved with the re-imposition of "proper management discipline," and consoled itself with regard to the Administration, that the crisis was passed, because the U.S. was under "new management." Hence, it was not so much that **the** Administration was saved, but that administration itself was preserved, which was why when the special presidential investigatory body, The Tower Commission released the report on its preliminary investigation and conclusions, they were able to establish the principle that would guide and shape **all** subsequent investigations and judgements:

> "Those who expect from us a radical prescription for wholesale change may be disappointed...Our review

validates the current NSC system."[2]

As if it could have done anything else!

So just what did all of this amount to? A cover-up.

Of course, when *The Iran-Contra Affair* first broke there were haunting visions and cries of "Watergate!," and, indeed, sections of the media made a shortlived attempt to capitalize on America's fashionably guilty political conscience by dubbing the affair "Irangate." But even these fell into line when it became evident that conscience was to have no place in this spectacle, that the American mainstream meant business not politics, having no intention of a second public failure of executive power. Thus with merely the first, but by no means definitive phase of the investigation into the affair to rely upon, the Chief Washington Correspondent of *The New York Times* felt certain enough to conclude:

> "Iran-Contra is **not** Watergate, and it seems highly unlikely, as this is written, that it will force Ronald Reagan from office."[3]

And despite the joint Congressional Committee's later conclusion, based upon its own definitive investigation, that President Reagan had indeed lied to the American public at every turn during the disclosure of the operations, and was fully responsible for the actions of his subordinates[4] the security of his tenure had already become one of those provisional definitives, as it were, which are so fundamental in the lives of all essentially administrative entities. All catchy analogies therefore were discarded.

Certainly, the cover-up of *The Iran-Contra Affair* may have been different in kind from that of Watergate, but it was essentially the same in so far as both represent the natural inclination of a closed organization to preserve that quality which makes it what it is, namely secrecy. However, we should just briefly note what made the two distinct. First, both cover-ups differ to the degree that the cover-up of *The Iran-Contra Affair* proved successful in its immediate goals, whereas Watergate failed in its, viz. saving the president. Second, the reason for

[2] Tower Commission, **The Tower Commission Report**, John Tower, Chairman, (New York: Random House, Inc., 1987), p. 3-4.

[3] R.W. Apple Jr., Introduction to the **New York Times** special publication of the full text of **The Tower Commission Report** cited above.

[4] Congress, U.S. House of Reps. Select Committee to Investigate Covert Arms Transactions with Iran, U.S. Senate Select Committee On Secret Military Assistance to Iran and the Nicaraguan Opposition, **Report of the Congressional Committees Investigating the Iran-Contra Affair w/ Supplamental, Minority & Additional Views**, Lee H. Hamilton, Chairman, House Select Committee & Daniel K. Inouye, Chairman, Senate Select Committee, 100th Congress, 1st Session, H. Rept. No. 100-433, S. Rept. No. 100-216, pp. 21-22.

the success of *The Iran-Contra Affair,* as opposed to Watergate's failure, has to do with the fact that the former was carried out in full view of all, whereas the latter attempted to be as closed and private as the operations themselves. The cover-up of *The Iran-Contra Affair* was a far more complex phenomenon, in which all played a necessary and proper role. Rather than merely a few individuals attempting to conceal their illicit activities, *The Iran-Contra Affair* cover-up was a public cover-up, the attempt to conceal not just illicit activities, but the illicit***ness*** of activity in general. The arguement can therefore be supported that *The Iran-Contra Affair* has worked wholly to the ideological advantage of the system, and not simply because it *did,* but because it *had to.* Why? Because either it provides proof of an "open society" and thus the strength of the American public-political spirit which cannot seem to tolerate covert operations within its own limits, or all members of the system which produces such operations are implicated, and thus share the guilt, not just in the particular wrongs, but universal culpability -recognition of which is precisely what ideology works to prevent.

How then was this cover-up effected?

It was effected by means of a cleansing, a public purgation of "flaws," as it were, (much the same as Watergate, but at its later stage). From the political standpoint, however, -as already indicated with reference to The Tower Commission's judgement- these flaws were not ***constitutive flaws,*** meaning defects inherent in the stucture of the system. Instead, they were viewed as particular and therefore contingent, or ***accidental flaws.*** As Marx pointed out in 1844:

> In so far as the state admits the existence of social abuses [including the general abuse of power within state institutions, which is simply a more or less indirect form of social abuse],[5] it seeks their origin either in natural laws that no human power can control or in the private sector which is independent of it **or** in the inadequacy of the administration that depends on the state... In short, all states look for the causes in accidental or intended faults of administration, and therefore seek the remedy for its evils in administrative measures. Why? Simply because the administration is the organizing activity of the state.[6]

And this is pecisely how the explanations, conclusions and judgements of *The Iran-Contra Affair* organized themselves. The Congress -the apex of pure universality, pure politics and thus the political system itself- believed and would have the world believe that the Administration's debacle was the consequence of a "flawed process,"

[5]Author's insertion.

[6] Karl Marx, "Critical Remarks on the Article: 'The King of Prussia and Social Reform'," in **Karl Marx Selected Writings**, ed. David McLellan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 124.

just as President Reagan -the apex of executive power- believed, and tried to make the world believe that it was a "mistake." From this standpoint, these mistakes and flaws took the form of over-ambitious, under-political bureaucrats, meaning bureaucrats without the proper respect for "formality," i.e. the rules of procedure, the essence of bureaucratic life from all political points of view. In the words of John Tower and his bygone commission, the Administration was lead into "sin" because the performance of the "principal" bureaucrats was "informal," thus "casual," therefore "irresponsible," consequently resulting in an "unsatisfactory operation," and so, in all "probability" "wrong."[7] In short, the Administration was lead into *sin* through no fault of its own, but rather through the fault of a few bad administrat***ors***. (Of course, from the point of view of these administrators, their actions were nothing of the sort, i.e. their fault. Rather they were inevitable given the restrictions imposed upon them and the external circumstances in which they found themselves, yet for which they could not be held responsible; circumstances they were merely responsible for effectively coping with and manipulating to satisfactory ends, but ends which turned out unsatisfactorily only because of the intrusion of forces beyond their control.) And indeed these principals were finally purged simply because they demonstrated too great a desire to get something done and too little concern for appearing to be something other than what they were, or as working in a world other than the one in which they really existed, a world, that for the moment, we may merely say is a reflection, often shadowy, but in the end quite accurate of the one in which we all live and work.

What is this world? In order to discover this, we must determine whence the charge of "***informality***," and why it is such a mortal ***sin*** in that world.

THE FORMAL WORLD OF POLITICS & THE FORMAL INFORMAL WORLD OF BUREAUCRACY

Politics, of course, is formal. This means that it is simply the explicit form given the rules and norms governing the activity of society, the *recognition* of the organization of society's life in general. Politics then may simply be described as the *formal expression* of the relations constituting society and the tendencies within those relations compelling society forward, its reason for living, as it were. It is the abstract idea society has of what its life *'is'* on the one hand, and where that life is going, or rather where that life *'ought to be'* on the other. In more conventional terms, this duality appears as the difference between **law** and **policy**. Politics therefore is just the manifestation of society's morality, in short, the visible psychology, or as Marx put it, the "consciousness" of the real state.[8]

Since politics is what society thinks it *should* or *'ought to be'*, society is

[7] Tower Commission, **Tower Report**, Part IV, pp. 63-79.

[8] K. Marx, **Critique of Hegel's 'Philosophy of Right'**, ed. Joseph O'Malley (London: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 46.

judged to be what is in itself incomplete, thus establishing politics as something apart from society, as an ideal state not yet reached or attained by the real state, namely, society. Society after all is merely what exists at the moment, that is, it is what *'is'*, making it ipso facto inferior to what *'ought to be'*, which owes its superiority to the fact that it is untainted by determinate being, by reality, in other words, that it *'is'-not*. The political state then, as society's aim, its reason or purpose for pressing forward, lies somewhere above and beyond society, i.e. in the future as its ultimate reality, an ultimate reality which the state that really exists must *become*. But in order for this real state to be brought to where it *'ought to be'*, namely, the level of the political state, the political state must be constituted as a real practical power in itself. Otherwise, this aim of society, its general interest, would remain nothing more than an abstract generality, and, thus, **nothing**, which cannot, as it were, effect **something**.

So society, according to political reason, must be compelled forward. Politics therefore must enter into society, which is not an abstract generality, but rather is something, a practical entity constituted by living beings with particular interests – these particular interests being the very interests which constituted the general interest of society ***as*** politics now made into the particular interest of politics' practical manifestation, viz. government.[9] In philosophical terms, the *'ought to be'* must become an *'is'* in order to compel that *'is'* to become what it *'ought to be'*, or, the universal must become particular in order to make the particular become universal. Herein lies the germ of the state's irrational existence, the contradiction which drives it to act irrationally; for as Hegel often pointed out in his criticism of Kant's moral philosophy, what is superior, viz. the *'ought'*, cannot be realized if it owes the quality that makes it superior to the fact that it is the opposite of the condition which *ought not be*, viz. the *'is'*. Why? Because in making itself an *'is'* the *'ought'* would need to destroy itself thus negating what is superior and, thereby, committing an immoral act. It was precisely this abstract idea that Marx picked up on in laying bare the state's real contradictory nature, for if politics is necessarily something apart from society, meaning the state society has yet to become, then the political state exists only by reason of its differentiation from society as the state society *'is'-not*. This necessitates the formal distinction between the **public**, which is just the general interest shared by all individuals (even if that interest is simply defined as the right of all to pursue their own individual interests, in short, to be egoists), and the **private**, which is just the individual's own particular interests apart from any other considerations. Society is thus deemed the realm of the private, and politics its logical opposite, that is, the **public political state**. Hence, the contradiction that is the state's existence is begotten. The political state must at once remain apart from society as its logical opposite, as something different and of a higher order than society, while at the same time entering into society, which really exists, so that it too may have real existence. The public therefore must immerse itself in the private. It must enter into an inferior state, i.e. a state of sheer determinate being, from its superior

[9]Marx, **Critique**, p 45.

standpoint of abstract being.

Consequently, government is based on a fundamental conflict between its public political role as the embodiement of society's morality, and the conditions in which it must fulfill its role as the guardian of society's interest, i.e. the ensuring of everyone's individual particular interests. In classical political terminology, government is founded upon just this conflict between general and individual interest.

How does the political state manage this conflict?

It does so by means of a second formal distinction, or rather a self-sundering. A further separation is made within abstract being into determinate abstract being and the purely abstract. Politics divides into executive power on the one side, and legislative and judiciary power on the other. The managing of determinate being, or rather the organization of real life ***for*** the political state is charged to the executive, administrative government -bureaucracy-, so that the political state in general may get about the business of organizing the life of society, and thus transforming that real life into 'true life'; for as Marx pointed out in his notes on bureaucracy, what is imaginary counts as essential in the eyes of the political state, and what is real, i.e. "real knowledge," "real life," "appears as devoid of content,...as dead."[10]

Bureaucracy, on Marx, is the political state become a real particular being, a private individual with a real particular interest of its own - a 'real' life of its own. Although as the reflection of civil society and thus a constituent part of the political state in general, bureaucracy is indeed formal as both Marx and Hegel established, as the political state made private, meaning practically real, bureaucracy is informal. So bureaucracy is just this then, the informal side of what they termed "state-formalism."[11] Bureaucracy therefore is a **formal informality**. Thus the conflict which is the essence of the political state's existence becomes irreconcilable from its own point of view. Why? Because the resolution of this conflict, as Marx duely noted, would require either the abolition of the private -what the political state depends upon for both its reason ***to be*** and its ***being*** period, in short, what it is determined from-, or the abolition of itself; both of which would amount to nothing short of the political state's suicide.[12]

Because the political state cannot comprehend a resolution to this conflict short of doing away with itself, it compensates for the contradiction by steeping its own informalism in the appearence of formality. Just as it must organize the life of society, namely, real informality as opposed to formal or political informality, according to standards acceptable to its superior sensibilities and vision, so too must it make its own informality acceptable to itself. Politics therefore maintains for its public side the illusion of 'universal vision' and 'general

[10]Marx, **Critique**, p. 47.

[11]Marx, **Critique**, p. 46.

[12]Marx, "Critical Remarks," p. 125.

interest', while charging its private side with the formalization of particularity or determinate being, in short, of reality. In other words, bureaucracy is charged with the ***politicization*** of private life, both its own private life and private life in general. The entire structure of government itself, in fact, the structure of the state as a whole, meaning the relationship between society with all of its varying levels of relationships and the political state with its is premised on this division of universal and particular responsibility. The government is simply a physical scale or hierarchy of universality, a hierarchy with public at the top and private at the bottom. It is the difference between tasks of a more general abstract nature and those of a more particular concrete nature. In the language of common sense, it is the division between ends and means. Those at the top determine the ends, meaning theirs is the ***will*** and those at the bottom must see to the means of making those ends determinate, meaning theirs is the work of realizing the ***will***.

This division of political labour in the government is reflected in the mutual anatagonism between the legislature and the executive. The members of the legislature display an attitude of pretentious righteousness towards the *bureaucrat* whereas, the members of the executive maintain a cynical contempt for such pretension, since these *representatives of virtue* in the legislature, as it were, enjoy the luxury of righteousness **only** because they can send their henchman, the bureaucrat to do their bidding for them, and therefore need not prove or dirty themselves. The bureaucrat knows full well that politics shorn of bureaucracy becomes nothing more than a vacuous abstraction, the self-important show of politicians that cannot be supported without the machinery of bureaucracy humming in the background. This is precisely why the legislature must keep the bureaucracy in check by maintaining for itself the dubious power of the purse,[13] and furthermore, why it will brook absolutely no intrusion upon either the bureaucracy's assigned powers, or particularly its power over the bureaucracy, even, or rather, especially by the bureaucracy itself. Notice that it was the Enterprise scheme, set up by the principals in *The Iran-Contra Affair* in order to conduct covert operations independently of legislative power, which scandalized politicians more than any of the other apparent breaches of policy or law:

[13]Of course, it might be objected here that the assumption of such a mundane power by the pure political state, i.e. the legislature is too obvious a contradiction even for the most sublime of powers to maintain itself within. Money and the political state, however, possess a common essence in so far as money, as the abstraction of **all** value is as such value free and so shares with the political state, as we shall see further on, the fundamental quality (that is not really qualitative) which constitutes the two as the 'truth' of the world, viz. neutrality and thus purity. Whereas bureaucracy is, as we have said above, ***formal informality***, money is the real state's most complete pretension to formality after the political state has been established as something separate from it, thus making bureaucracy and money twin reflections - formality, on the one hand, continually degenerating back into informality in the form of the bureaucracy, and informality ascending once again to formality in the form of money, on the other. In the political state therefore money may simply be thought of as **informal formality**. And, as is made plain in the next passage cited from the congressional report, **appropriation** by the legislature is the final consecration needed in order to realize the 'true' essence of this informal formality and thus bring it into union with the properly political state. For the bureaucracy then to use money prior to this sacrament is the worst sacrilege.

> The concept of an off-the-shelf covert company to conduct operations with *funds not appropriated by Congress* is contradictory to the Constitution. The decision to use the Enterprise to fight a war with unappropriated funds was a decision to combine the power of the purse and the power of the sword in one branch of government.
>
> Referring to the concept of having *independently financed entities* conduct covert actions to avoid Congressional review, Secretary Schultz said: "This is not sharing power, this is not in line with what was agreed to in Philadelphia. This is a piece of *junk* and it ought to be treated that way."[14]

It should not be thought, however, that this antagonism is confined strictly to the relation between the legislature and bureaucracy. It is also reproduced within the executive itself, between the upper and lower echelons, and thus in all organizations of society for which bureaucracy, as Marx tells us, serves as the more or less ideal and complete model of organization, i.e. the corporation in particular, and we might add, all organizations whose purpose is to function within the limits set by capitalist society, since it is in fact this society and its modes of organization which are presupposed by the bureaucracy.[15]

So the bureaucracy in order to fulfill its task of formalizing reality and thereby suppressing these anatagonisms receives into itself all the 'real' pleasures and pains of a vital society, and translates these into its own crystaline grammar of statistic and regulation - the liturgy of administration. Its life is simply the perfection of the quantification of society's life, for the quantitative system represents the quintessence of pure formalism. The quantitative process is the essence, the very soul of bureaucracy, which is why its life seems infinite and, therefore, superior, whereas the life it is contrasted against, the real life of flesh and blood it stands over seems something utterly finite, and, therefore, something poor, something inferior. This latter's life ends in death and decay, whereas the former is the perpetual laying down of one something, only to be superceded by somethingelse, and so on forever. But this life, as it were, this condition of eternal ***somethingelseness***, or rather mere endless extensivity is not actually infinite. It is merely indefinite.[16] Bureaucracy's life therefore is actually as finite as the life it perceives in society. Where this latter, however, despite its finitude and indefiniteness, i.e. the ceaseless cycle of death and regeneration, contains the potential for actual infinity, viz. self-determination, the former is simply the unending tedium of meaningless repetition to either a smaller or larger degree; and this it must ***be*** so long as it continues ***to***

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[14]Congress, **Report of the Committees**, p. 413.

[15] Marx, **Critique**, p. 45.

[16]G.F. Hegel, **Logic: Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences**, trans. William Wallace (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 1:138.

be, for its life is an unfulfilled aspiration, -a forever *'ought'* but never truly *'is'*- which may be summed up 1,2,3,...

As existence for which quality is a simple matter of 'more or less', bureaucracy then is the utter indifference to quality; for, as already indicated, "towards whatever side the determination of magnitude be altered, *the thing still remains what it is.*"[17] Bureaucracy's indifference to quality, however, is not a mere ***exclusion*** of it, for, as we have also seen above, bureaucracy, in order to fulfill its function, must exist, and existence necessarily implies quality. Bureaucracy's indifference to quality, therefore, becomes bureaucracy's quality as **bureacratic indifference**, which is nothing less than an ***antagonism*** to quality. Thus are form and content sundered, and form, as Marx notes, becomes an end unto itself for which content serves only as a means. "[T]he bureaucracy is merely the formalism of a content which lies outside the bureaucracy itself."[18] Real life, therefore, is transformed into 'true' bureaucratic life as an indefinite series of "**processes**" devoid of principles save one, the proliferation of more processes, so that bureaucracy and thus the political state in general may partake of society's vitality as well. In short then, bureaucracy is simply politics ***affecting*** or simulating 'real' life. It is idealized life, or rather life become ideology. Consequently, bureaucratic life, as Marx points out, must appear circumscribed on all sides by rules of conduct, and unquestioning individual dedication to specific tasks and the hierarchy of authority,[19] which *The Iran-Contra Affair* drummed into the heads of the American public as "proper procedure" and "accountability" - accountability being the most perfect example of the division of form and content represented by the bureaucracy, which cleaves the process of decision in half so that responsibility and the assumption of consequences pertaining to that responsibility are two quite different and separate matters. Furthermore, the obsessive compulsion to indifferently 'process', or rather formalize vital life processes into bureaucratic procedure produces an inversion peculiar to bureaucracy in general and the particular mentality of those who constitute it. It is the inversion of the simple and the complex which makes bureaucrats at all levels seemingly incapable of processing sophisticated phenomena without first reducing them to the simplest single dimensional units, while simultaneously expanding the most trivial information into essentialities and the simplest tasks into feats of Gordian complexity.

This proliferation of purely formal or bureaucratic process is simply politic's attempt to deny its own necessary informality. It is, in short, a ***public self-denial*** It is part of the self that is denied while the activity of furthering that self in its entirety is carried on by the denied part in secret, or rather in private. Formal procedure as such then is merely the ***politicization*** of egoistic self interest in the form of the bureaucracy, the **civil** of civil society, as it were, made civil*ized*, and, therefore, properly political; for as Marx says, "the political state which stands over

[17]Hegel, **Logic**, 1:146.

[18]Marx, **Critique**, p. 45.

[19]Marx, **Critique**, p. 47.

against [civil society] can tolerate it only if it has a form suitable to the standards of the state."[20]

The charge of "informality" as it begins to unfold then, is a political charge; a charge made by the formal public side of "state formalism" against the informal side of its own existence; a charge made from the point of view of appearence against the very fact of existence. On the one hand, however, such a charge merely confirms the existence of one part of the political state by the other. The politicians who accuse the bureaucrat of informality, simply recognize him as nothing more nor less than what he truly is, namely, the executive of the practical activity of the state, and as inhabiting the world appropriate to his function - the private and thus 'informal' world. It is the state's affirmation of the practical limits of its politics and the reason for its existence as a material power, empirical proof of its political will. The charge of informality therefore is quite simply a self-affirmation.

On the other hand, such an affirmation is also a self-indictment, which is precisely what politicians seek to cover up by their accusation against the bureaucrat in the first place. It reveals the political state's pretension to universality, the lie of general interest as justification for its particular interest; a revelation that it is as immersed in the dirty activity of society as any other private individual or corporation. It provides proof of the state's schizophrenic existence, proof of its necessary irrationality, and proof always contains the germ of comprehension on the part of both itself and those upon whom it exists. One should not think, however, that this schizophrenia is neatly divided within the structure of the state, i.e. with politicians on one side and bureaucrats on the other, public there, private here. It impairs all within the political state to more or less varying degrees, and all within the real state, in so far as 'real' represents a purely formal, i.e. political, distinction; meaning those who claim to exist apart from politics, i.e. in the 'real world' merely prove themselves as circumscribed and therefore impaired by politics as those who acquiesce willingly. As an example of how this schizophrenia affects individuals, we need merely refer to any number of the many statements made during *The Iran-Contra Affair*, but let us briefly refer to just one. Wittness how the then Assistant Secratary of State on Inter-American Affairs, Eliot Abrams' testimony ocillated between pure egoistic self-interest on the one hand, and apparently selfless unquestioning dedication to the organization on the other, in the same statement as to why he initially lied to Congress:

> "I could have been more forthcoming, but I frankly was not going to be the first person to step up and do that ... So long as others who knew the details, as much as I, who knew more than I were keeping their silence on this, I was going to keep my silence ... [TRANSITION] ... I was a member of the administration team. I wasn't going to break ranks with the team ... My frame of mind was to

[20] Marx **Critque**, p. 119.

protect, was to be a member of the team."[21]

So long as it was safest to be a member of the team then, they all kept their mouths shut. Once the team, however, could not provide adequate protection, as it were, all those "team" members sang like birds, falling over themselves to point the finger at each other before then apologizing to Congress[22] for their original silence.

The guilt represented by such apologies is endemic to the political state. It is symptomatic of the division upon which the political state is constituted, and therefore must also be properly managed and supressed where possible by positing yet another division, a division between the system and those who constitute it. As a result, events like *The Iran-Contra Affair* have to be condemned, but more importantly, defined as aberrations of the system and the fault of **individuals** who dispense with "formal process," which, of course, causes them to stray from the 'true path', to operate 'outside' the sphere of legitimacy. All conflicts therefore must be seen as occurring between individuals and the system when they pose a threat to the existence of the system:

> "Lt. Col. North and *his* operation functioned largely *outside* the orbit of the U.S. government."[23]

Such explanations are of critical importance for preserving the system because they deflect the point of view of totality. Instead of comprehending something as part of a process with a definite logic at work, it is seen as a separate isolated act cut off from the procession of events, something apart from the norm, viz. an **accident**, or the individual manifestation of accident, a **mistake**:

> "There are reasons why it happened but no excuses. *It was a mistake.*"[24]

When internal problems arise within the system therefore, they are understood neither as internal, nor as necessary problems. In the word used above, they are not seen as constitutive, meaning contradictions in the system's own constitution which manifest themselves in its ordinary functioning. Consequently, we may indeed gain a complete apprehension of an event in so far as we possess a fairly complete itemized description of its essential elements without at all

[21] Congress, **Report of the Committees**, p. 147.

[22] Congress, **Report of the Committees**, p. 147 & 149.

[23] Tower, **Tower Report**, p. 74.

[24] 4 March 1987, President Reagan, Address to the Nation on the Iran Arms Controversy.

comprehending the real nature of the event. This was perhaps one of the most distinguishing features of *The Iran-Contra Affair*, in which every new revelation seemed to make a clear understanding of the event less and less of a possibility. Short of it being the outcome of individual caprice, "abuse of power" and a "mismanagement of complex political goals," the reason for the event remains a mystery about which there can only be the most varied speculations either of the vulgar popular kind, i.e. that 'they're all a bunch of crooks anyway', or the equally vulgar, yet *informed* analytic kind, i.e. that 'the whole affair was simply the unfortunate result of a confusion of complex *geostrategies* and assorted inexpedient human passions in their execution'. It simply remains an isolated event, incomprehensible as a part of anything larger than itself (except perhaps as a lesson in expedience for future individuals as the Tower Commission expressly hoped that its report would provide[25]) eventually telling us all the dirty details about itself, but very little about the system that produced it. Hence the system remains essentially fixed and intact. Like any fact of life, as it were, it may, of course, be susceptible to superficial manipulation, but it is basically immutable and therefore unquestioned by reasonable men. Once again:

> "Those who expect from us a *radical* prescription for wholesale change may be disappointed...Our review *validates* the current NSC system."[26]

Of course it *validates* the current system. It must. There is no need for radicalism when the truth is already believed to be in hand, only development, or more properly, refinement, and at times, catharsis; but not of the laws in themselves, for as Marx reminds, such laws are not made by the political state, they are merely discovered.[27] Rather it is refinement and catharsis of the knowledge and thus the administration of those laws based on that knowledge. The laws of truth, of which the system purports to be an embodiement, are after all in themselves 'neutral', just like those of all 'scientifically' based systems:

> "[T]he system has been utilized by *different* Presidents in *very different* ways, in accordance with their individual work habits and *philosophical predilections*...It must be left flexible to be *moulded* by the President into the *form* most useful to him."[28]

[25]Tower, **Tower Report**, p. 4: "We believe that this record and analysis can **warn** future Presidents, members of the National Security Council, and National Security Advisors of the potential pitfalls they face even when they are operating with what they consider the best motives. We would hope that this record would be carefully read and its lessons fully absorbed by all aspirants to senior positions in the National Security Council system."

[26]Tower, **Tower Report**, p. 3 & 4.

[27]Marx, **Critique**, p. 58.

[28]Tower, **Tower Report**, p. 4.

The system at root then is *formless* matter, what is most real in the universe, namely, substance, truth; and, of course, if this system has any *predilection* of its own it is towards purity. Since it is the true, it cannot, as it were, tolerate pollution from something like the private which seems to contradict its truth and therfore must not itself be true. What is not true, and therefore not the system, eventhough it may accidentally arise within the confines of the system must then be an aberration, a place where administration of that system momentarily broke down and a "vacuum" appeared,[29] not because of the system itself, but rather because of the inadequacy of the knowledge of the laws which that system embodies.

As a result, the system is not to be condemned, but rather commended, i.e. "validated." That aberrations like *The Iran-Contra Affair* -serious as they may seem at the time and in themselves- come to the surface, are revealed and, subsequently, jettisoned by the public political spirit seems to provide testimony to the overall health and truth of a system that will not tolerate a diseased part which endangers the life of the whole. It provides proof of legitimacy:

> "It is the conclusion of these Committees that the Iran-Contra Affair resulted from *the failure of individuals* to observe the law, **not** *from deficiencies in existing law or in our system of governance.* This is an important lesson to be learned from these investigations because *it points to the fundamental soundness of our constitutional process.*"[30]

In order to accomplish this, however, politics has to take a further step towards revealing itself for what it is, but what it is not supposed to be. Politics is supposed to be open, all inclusive and public, yet in order to guard against being discovered as its opposite, viz. the closed, exclusive private world of society, it must expressly establish itself as just such a closed, exclusive and private world. It rationalizes this general privatization by judging everything within as true and good and everything without as false and bad. We begin to see then that the charge of informality had to be aimed at individuals who could then be formally purged so that the political state, the system, would not reveal itself as the true aberration of rational process, as opposed to *The Iran-Contra Affair* which merely appeared as an aberration of true process. To do this, the system would, will and did go so far as to imply its contradictory nature, but then must immediately distance itself from any actual manifestations of that nature, which brings us to the essential and most acute problem of the political state's informal activity - **covert operations**.

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[29]Tower, **Tower Report**, p. 71.

[30]Congress, **Report of the Committees**, p. 423.

COVERT OPERATIONS & THE SPIRIT OF SECRECY

Administration is the formal expression of bureaucracy's nature, and **covert operations** are real essence of administrative activity. To be covert, of course, such operations must be secret, and to be secret, activity must be conducted in private; meaning the realm of such activity must be closed, restricted and exclusive, as opposed to the public realm, which is supposedly open, unrestricted and inclusive. Secrecy then may simply be thought of as the fundamental quality of all covert activity. Thus covert operations are the concrete instances, the empirical proof of bureaucracy's necessary existence as what Marx quite properly regarded as *the* private 'Corporation'.[31] They are *how* the bureaucracy creates and maintains its own life as well as the life of all the other constituent branches of the political state, eventhough, as we have already seen, these branches tend to consider themselves as something different from and better than the bureaucracy. However, as we have also seen above, in so far as the political state is forced to recognize the necessary existence of bureaucracy, it must also admit to the necessity and therefore occurrence of covert activity, thereby alluding once more to its own contradictory nature:

> "Out of *necessity*, covert activities *are conducted*, and nearly all are approved and monitored, in *secret*"[32]

And what determines this necessity? The political state knows full well that:

> "Frequently to be *effective*...action must necessarily be covert."[33]

Bureaucracy must exist, and to exist, as has already been shown, it must do so in the private realm, the realm of effectiveness. Therefore, the rule of its world both within and without must be secrecy, and the political state will cunningly retract all other principles in order to preserve it.[34] Its activity is secret activity, because it must be "effective activity;" meaning then, that in order to be effective, bureaucrats must

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[31] Marx, **Critique**, p. 46.

[32] Congress, **Report of the Committees**, p. 383

[33] Tower, **Tower Report**, p. 15

[34] This was perfectly demonstrated last January when the two most important charges against Oliver North, viz. conspiracy and theft had to be dropped because information to be used in his defence was deemed to sensitive to declassify. Once again the system turned 'The Iran-Contra Affair' to its ideological advantage by seeming to make a decision in favour of the individual's right to a fair and open trial, thus maintaining a liberal and egalitarian appearence, rather than out of egoistic self-interest. In fact, the decision was nothing more than an assertion of the rule of secrecy and thus egoistic self-interest over and against the principle of Right. The details of this arguement however will have to be left for another time and place.

everywhere enter into collusion with and against other bureaucrats, departments, private individuals and corporations. The political state recognizes this need also:

> "Private parties [as well as "foriegn countries"[35]]can be of considerable use to the Government in both types of ventures [viz. diplomatic missions and covert actions] and their use should be permitted."[36]

But the political state will only countenance such collusion so long as "each and every department, agency, or entity of the...Government authorized to fund or otherwise participate in any way in any covert action and whether any third party, including any foriegn country, will be used in carrying out or providing funds for the covert action" be revealed to the embodiement of the public principle, that is, the legislature first.[37] In short, the political state demands that the essentially secret reveal and justify itself to the essentially public, while still maintaining itself as effective and therefore secret. This, of course, is a contradiction, as the bureaucrat is painfully aware, threatening the very possibility of covert activity and thus of any proper, that is, effective activity whatsoever. Consequently, the relationships and activity of the bureaucrat must not only be characterized by the normal, as it were, anonymity and deceipt demanded by their primary function, which is to act in secret, but also by self-deceipt, due to what are, from the bureaucrats standpoint, the political state's untenable requirements. Bureaucratic self-deceipt, however, is nothing more than the political state's own predisposition for self-denial permeating its constituent parts, a predisposition which reached its *reductio ad absurdum* during *The Iran-Contra Affair:*

> Deputy Director Gates [(CIA)] told the Senate Intelligence Committee: "Agency people...from the Director on down, *actively shunned information.* We didn't want to know how the Contras were being funded... *we actively discouraged people from telling us things.*"...When Gates first heard Charles Allen's suspicions that a diversion of funds had taken place, his "first reaction was to tell Mr. Allen that I didn't want to hear any more about it."
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> Thus, when witnesses appeared before the Intelligence Committees, they could deflect inquiries because thay had consciously chosen to avoid knowledge. This turned upside down the CIA's mission to collect all

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[35]Congress, **Report of the Committees**, p.424.

[36]Congress, **Report of the Committees**, p.425.

[37]Congress, **Report of the Committees**, p. 424.

intelligence relevant to national security.[38]

When it comes to explicitly admitting to the existence of covert activity, however, the political state will only admit to the need for covert activity as such, meaning in general, and then it will do so only as a consequence of real life, not its so called life. It will not, whenever possible, admit to particular activities, viz. **operations**. From the superior standpoint of pure politics, such activity is an evil only made necessary by the corrupt spirit of society, but because of its necessary dependence upon that spirit it is never quite secure in its position, and thus by virtue of this necessity must always appear reluctant:

> "Covert activities place a great strain on the process of decision in a *free society*."[39]

The implication here being, of course, that such activity would just as soon be done without were it a possibility, which it is not, since such a possibility is premised on the non-existence of the division which provides for the political state's existence, so that to *do without* covert activity, it would not be necessary to *do with* the political state. What the political state suspects, as is evident from all the energy spent on attempting to rationalize and thus reconcile the co-existence of free society and covert activity, but always fails to comprehend for its own reason, namely, survival, is that where there are and must be covert activities there cannot be ***free society***. Instead, the arguement put forth by the political state is that in an 'open and free society', so long as covert activity is neceesary, meaning so long as there are external forces, i.e. both other political states and the real state, as well as internal imperfections, i.e. individuals corrupted by the forces of the real state, which are hostile to the very notion of an open society and which undermine the stability of that society, such activity should be covert according to 'reasonable limits'. **Reasonable secrecy**, according to its rationale, **is** compatible with open and free society. This form of secrecy is simply the formalization of the subjection of the secret to the public, encountered above, in the form of "acountability:"

> "Covert operations are compatible with democratic government if they are conducted in an accountable manner and in accordance with the law."[40]

Or the negative rendering of the same notion:

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[38]Congress, **Report of the Committees**, p. 381-82.

[39]Tower, **Tower Report**, p. 15.

[40]Congress, **Report of the Committees**, p. 383.

"Excessive secrecy...is profoundly *anti*-democratic..."[41]

Why?

Simply because:

> "The very premise of democracy is that 'we the people' are entitled to make our own choices on fundamental policies. But freedom of choice is illusory if policies are kept, not only from the public, but from its elected representatives."[42]

Now aside from this being nothing other than a substitution of freedom with its illusory other, viz. free choice (which is nothing more than the illusion of activity) in order that real activity, i.e. decision may be maintained as the private affair of representatives and executives, so reasonable secrecy is just such an illusory substitute. How so? There is, of course, no such thing as a purely covert activity since no action can be limited exclusively to one individual and sustain itself as an action. It is a practical impossibility, (although as we shall see further on it is not necessarily seen as so). Nor is it possible to reduce the 'covertness' of an action to a level whereby its effect on the principle of the political state as open and free society is so negligible as to be of no consequence and likewise sustain it as an action. It must be remembered that the criteria for activity, on the political state's own reasoning, is effectiveness, and so long as certain effects are considered necessary, an action must be as necessarily covert as it needs be effective. To demand that such activity adhere to standards completely contrary to its nature then, is to demand that such actions not be effective. It is to demand that they be ineffective from the start, thus rendering covert activity and the organizations whose activity is founded upon the performance of this activity a superfluity and therefore absolutely ***unnecessary***. As we have already seen, however, the political state can never go this far in its reasoning, and therefore must always stop short its deduction and remind itself:

> "Organized and structured secret intelligence activities are one of the realities of the world we live in, *and this is not likely to change*."[43]

As the idealization of reality, reality must of course be preseved as it is, for this turns out to be exactly what ideality is, viz. the preservation of

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[41] Congress, **Report of the Committees**, p. 423.

[42] Congress, **Report of the Committees**, p. 17.

[43] Congress, **Report of the Committees**, p. 384.

what *'is'* as it is. If it were to change the political state would either have to cease to exist, or it would have to repudiate once and for all the real state, and in so doing foresake the reality of its existence - a choice of death or sublimation, and thus not a rational choice as far as it itself is concerned. The political state therefore is realistic, that is, realistic ideality. Thus it satisfies itself with the simple understanding that "disclosure of even the existence of the [covert operation] could threaten its *effectiveness* and risk *embarrassment* to the Government."[44] Why? Just because their disclosure reveals just how much an allegedly free and therefore open society necessarily relies upon secret, closed activity to maintain itself as free; how much the public depends on the private, the superior on the inferior, the rational on the irrational, and not vice versa. In other words, such disclosure makes explicit the political state's, here implicit, recognition of its own deficiency and thus finitude.

This is why the political state will admit to covert activity in general, but not to particular covert operations. Covert activity in itself is abstract. It is not real, and therefore can be admitted without real immediate danger. Covert operations, on the other hand, are the unreal become real both literally and figuratively. They are the concrete instances of covert activity, real proof of the contradiction of the political state's irrational existence, and thus more than a potential "embarrassment." They are a danger, a real threat. Each covert operation constitutes a practical negation of the freedom which the political state claims as its essence and reason for being, so that each covert operation is itself an instance of, and the sum of these instances an index to freedom's non-existence, or the existence of unfreedom, and therefore the superfluity of the political state. Arguements for **reasonable secrecy** therefore come down to nothing more than arguements of degree, i.e. 'how much freedom is exchanged for effect', which neither changes the nature of the covert operation one iota, nor the fact of the political state's fundamental dependence upon it. **Reasonable secrecy** then means nothing less than society's existence as ***reasonably unfree***. Consequently, as instances of this unfreedom, covert operations are simply an appeal for the political state's non-existence, its abolition as something that is unnecessary.

Of course, the covert operation is designed with a failsafe to protect against just this danger, for the political state, as we shall see below, does have its necessary function. As any good operative knows: 'This operation *does **not*** exist. It *will **not*** exist'. This is the pure essence of covert activity, viz. perfect secrecy, which has been formalized within the political state in general as "**deniability**." Formally, and therefore politically speaking, only the effect of the operation exists, so that in the political state *qua* political state the miracle of **spontaneous generation**, viz. something from nothing, is a common occurrence. For the politician, as indicated above, there is no question of means. However, because the political state claims as its basis the secular or scientific laws of nature, as also seen above, rather than the divine spirit, (the authority of which it has usurped through the covert operation) this

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[44]Tower, **Tower Report**, p. 15.

miracle must have the appearence of secularity as well, for deniability must always be "plausible" whether it be in the realm of the politician or the bureaucrat; meaning the politician's activity must possess an element of the mundane no matter how illusory, just as the bureaucrat's must possess that element of mystery. His activity then must also appear to be work, but work nonetheless worthy of the public political spirit. The hard work of the politician is therefore confined strictly to the deliberation of ends, of "policy" and **not** operations. He is a man concerned with results, which for him, once the hard work of deliberation is complete, are a simple matter of ***willing***. Anything else, i.e. means, real work, that is, the operative side of willing, lies outside politics' proper, or more accurately proper politics' orbit; and should anything else enter this orbit, it is necessarily seen as an invasion or pollution of the **pure public** by the **corrupt private** - which because of its ***fallenness*** and the inherent obduracy of the fallen, as it were, has not yet been fully politicized - impairing proper willing and spoiling good ends:

> "The NSC staff was created to give the President *policy* advice on major national security and foriegn policy issues. Here, however, it was used to gather intelligence and *conduct covert operations*. This departure from its *proper functions* contributed to *policy failure*."[45]

Hence, criticisms like those of President Reagan's "hands off management style" by both the Congress and the media during *The Iran-Contra Affair* were, in fact, vindication rather than censure of his performance as the individual embodiement of the public political state as well as the individual representation of will in the bureaucracy.[46] Likewise, Poindexter's and North's invidious characterization of the "Congress as meddlers" interfering in the execution of the President's foriegn policy[47] was nothing more than a re-affirmation of the political division of labour, and both their own and the Congress's formal positions within that hierarchy of *proper functions*. Due to this distiguishing of proper functions, i.e. between those of policy and those of execution, whenever a covert operation is exposed to the light of day, as it were, politics must be indignant, politicians outraged and scandalized, bureaucracy violated and bureaucrats betrayed. For the political state exposure of a covert operation reveals for all the mystery

[45]Congress, **Report of the Committees**, p. 17.

[46]This is why depictions of Reagan as "incompetent" seemed to produce the inverse of the expected effect, i.e. ensuring rather than undermining his position in office the more intensely they were pressed. Whereas, Nixon's so called, administrative competence, i.e. his reputation for not only being a man who got things done, but who also did them himself when necessary seemed only to exacerbate his sinister public image, and hasten his demise. Nixon's willingness to become directly involved in the execution of policy conflicted with the function of the office as the apex of the administrative process, so that his competence, as it were, was in fact incompetence given the conditions of his formal position. Reagan's incompetence, on the other hand, proved to be a competence vindicated by his survival in office to its formal conclusion.

[47]Congress, **Report of the Committees**, p. 387.

of its miraculous power - the machinery behind the curtain that makes all ***willing*** a possibility, as opposed to the formal appearence, in which ***willing*** makes all things possible. Politics, as the universal interest, is revealed as a particular interest competeing among other particular interests, all of which would just as soon usurp the political state's appearence of universality for themselves, as the political state does the substance of their particularity for itself. Politics then, in its utter dependence on the private, its real secret life as private, is revealed as a sham. The sham of what? The sham of hypocrisy.[48]

The political state's principle, what it claims to live for becomes a farce inasmuch as it is revealed that the prerequisite for that life is the exact opposite condition of its existence. Once again we see that political determination is subject to what is external to the political state, viz. the activity of the real state, meaning therefore that one can only be as political as he is really effective; in other words, he is only as political as he is powerful in the real, i.e. private state, or as those with the most private power will allow. Thus the political state is not internally determined, meaning it is neither self-determined, nor therefore capable of offering self-determination. Hence it is not truly universal, but rather its existence as something separate from what determines it is an obstacle to real universality. The political state defends against public and thus self-realization of its hypocrisy, however, by enhancing the policy/operations division just encountered, and thus the antinomy of society and state. In order to maintain its universal appearence, the political state attempts to increase its separation or rather "distance" itself from both the activity of the bureaucracy and the whole private sphere in general when it is exposed:

> "...[W]hen they [the NSC principals] sit as members of the Council they sit **not** as cabinet secretaries or department heads but as advisors to the President. They are there not simply to advance or defend the *particular* positions of the departments or agencies they head but to give their best advice to the President. Their job - and their challenge - is to see the issue from this perspective [i.e. the President's universal perspective], and **not** from the *narrower interests of their respective bureaucracies.*"[49]

Thus it turns against all particularity, directing its righteous fury against anything divergent, individual or private as mean, egoistic and as a corruption of the public political spirit to the extent that it is itself implicated in the failed activities. Indeed, it was just this private egoism and corruption which politics blamed for its failure in *The Iran-Contra*

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[48] 'Sham of hypocrisy' is of course a tautology. The use of this tautology, however, is not accidental; for the political state's existence is just such a tautology, just as it is the favourite idiom of politicians, i.e. "Crime is crime is crime", etc. The introduction of tautology here is also an anticipation of the legislature's role in the political state as the lie which must lie in order to prevent the political state being discovered as a lie.

[49] Tower, **Tower Report**, p. 89.

Affair.

> "*He*[North] relied on a number of *private* intremediaries, businessmen and financial brokers, *private* operators and Iranians *hostile* to the U.S. Some of these were *individuals* with *questionable* credentials and potentially large *personal financial interest* in the transactions."[50]

This is simply the affirmation and recreation of an inferior realm of **otherness**, in which citizens in their capacity as private individuals are equated with "hostile" foriegn elements, a hostility which expresses the essential antagonism between the public and the private. It is not therefore a matter of "some individuals," but of ***all;*** for the nature of the private in general is to be motivated by personal interest, otherwise it would not be private. Consequently the private is always questionable in the eyes of the political state! The question then must be why is the private incapable of conducting an essentially private activity like the covert operation?

The answer given in *The Iran-Contra Affair* was:

> "...[T]he use of Mr. Secord's *private* network in the Iran initiative ***linked*** those operators with the resupply of the Contra's, *threatening exposure* of both operations *if either became public* -- The result was an *unprofessional operation*"[51]

But why should a private network, regardless of who it belongs to if we assume that all private activity is fundamentally motivated by self-interest, be a threat to operations which depend on not becoming "public" in order to be brought to a successful conclusion? After all it should be the public realm which poses the threat, not the vital privacy of the network conducting the operations.

Is the real problem here that the private is so base it will just as soon deal with **terrorists,** i.e. the Iranians, as it will with **freedom fighters,** i.e. the Contra's, failing to recognize any real difference between the two save possession and need? Is the private so bereft of conscience that it cannot make the obvious distinction between good and evil?

Of course it is! Why? Because politics forgets that **it** is that conscience. Reason only exists in the light of the public political state and not, as we saw, in the grey realm of society in which, to the degree it has not yet been politicized, all rational laws are suspended, and contingency

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[50]Tower, **Tower Report**, p. 72.

[51] Tower, **Tower Report**, p. 73

and accidence hold sway:

> "Policies that are *known* can be subjected to *the test of reason* and mistakes can be corrected after consultation with Congress and deliberation within the executive branch. Policies that are secret become the private preserve of the few, *mistakes are inevitably perpetuated*, and the public loses control over the Government. That is what happened in the Iran-Contra Affair."[52]

Notice, however, that politics does not condemn its private side as evil for dealing with those whom it considers evil and thus *linking* good and evil together under the same banner, only "unprofessional" and "mistake[n]." This is because it was not so much that the law was "risked," as then NSC Advisor, Admiral J. Poindexter put it, or even that it was ultimately broken, but that it was risked and broken to an unsuccessful end, meaning there were no results satisfactory to the political state's will:

> "...[B]y turning to private citizens, the NSC staff jeopardized its own objectives. Sensitive negotiations were conducted by parties with little experience in diplomacy, and financial interest of their own The diplomatic aspect of the mission *failed*..
>
> Covert operations of this Government should only be directed and conducted by the trained *professional* services that are accountable to the President and the Congress. *Such operations should never be delegated, as they were here, to private citizens in order to evade governmental restrictions.*"[53]

And:

> "The U.S. hand was repeatedly tipped and *unskillfully* played The arrangements *failed to guarantee* that the U.S. obtained its hostages in exchange for the arms. Repeatedly, Lt Col North permitted arms to be delivered without the release of a single captive."[54]

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[52]Congress, **Report of the Committees**, p. 16.

[53] Congress,**Report of the Committees**, p. 16.

[54]Tower, **Tower Report**, p. 73.

The political state therefore uses private catagories in order to supposedly pass a political judgement, catagories meant to shame for lack of competence rather than condemn as guilty. Why? Because a decisive judgement of guilt would, as we have already seen, rebound upon itself with fatal consequences. On the other hand, however, the bureaucracy must also not be allowed to endanger the political state's general existence by accidentally *exposing* the contradictory nature of that existence through a lack of discernment. Therefore, the legislature reprimands the bureaucracy, yet it does so as a superior not on its own ground, but rather on the ground of the bureaucracy itself. This, of course, is perfectly consonant, though only tacitly, with the legislature's role since it is the passive side of will in the political state, or more accurately, the embodiement of the absolute precondition of active willing (represented by the executive), viz. knowledge. Hence, the conclusion is that the private simply does not possess the same fine sense of distinction that the properly political state does, thereby, acquitting the private while at the same time justifying the division between the private and itself, and thus its superior role. It was not wrong to deal then, only to deal inappropriately:

> "Few in the U.S. government doubted Iran's strategic importance. For this reason, some...were convinced that efforts should be made to open potential channels to Iran. Arms transfers ultimately appeared to achieve both the release of the hostages and a strategic opening to Iran."[55]
>
> "The Board [of the Tower Commission] believes that a strategic opening to Iran may have been in the national interest *but* the United States never should have been a party to the arms transfers. As arms-for-hostages trades, they could not help but create an incentive for further hostage-taking...The arms-for-hostages trades rewarded a regime that clearly supported terrorism and hostage taking."[56]

Likewise Congress's judgement:

> "It was *not a mistake* for the President to seek an opening to Iran. Nor was it an error for the President to seek the release of kidnapped American citizens. What was wrong...was *the way* in which the Administration tried to achieve these objectives."
>
> "There is no evidence that North *ever saw or understood* that gouging the Iranians on behalf of the Contras was at cross purposes with gaining freedom for

[55]Tower, **Tower Report**, p. 19.

[56]Tower, **Tower Report**, p. 65.

> the hostages. Arms-for-hostages and profits-for-Contra-support were conflicting goals that could not be reconciled."[57]

So it is proper that all should be dealt with, but only in accordance with their formal definitions, their roles within the political state's schema, and here lies the inversion of the public and the private, and the necessary function of the legislature in the process of administration. The private state deals *generally* with all, whereas the public state, although it too deals with all, only deals with all according to each's particular role, i.e. separately. The properly political state would never be so artless as to risk linking freedom and price, freedom fighters and terrorists under the same contract, because, as what Marx called, "the sanctioned, legal lie of the constitutional states, the lie that the state is the people's interest or the people the interest of the state,"[58] it naturally knows that the art of secrecy depends upon subtlety; that the concealment of the truth depends less upon the mere concealment of something, than it does upon the revelation of something, viz. half-truth. This revelation of something, something appallingly distorted, but something nonetheless present is secrecy's highest, most developed form, viz. **public secrecy**; and this public secrecy is precisely the constitution and thus the function of the political state in general and the legislature in particular. *The legislature is nothing more than the* ***plausibility*** *of the executive's* ***deniability****, viz., that it is* ***not*** *simply 'a party standing over against another party', i.e. the other individuals and organizations of civil society.*[59] Thus it was not that "deniability replaced accountability"[60] in *The Iran-Contra Affair,* as the Congress lamented, for *accountability and deniability necessarily presuppose one another.* Rather, it was that the executive, as is the executive's chronic tendency, created a situation of **implausible deniability** threatening the political state's legitimacy and thereby its very existence. The political state in general, but especially in its particular determinations as executive and legislature must never forget the ancient maxim for success, for in forgetting this maxim it forgets itself as the mature rationalization of this maxim, and hence, simply forgets itself:

> 'O divine art of subtlety [legislation] *and* secrecy [execution]!' In the world of Administration, through you alone do all things become possible, and through you alone is Nothing made actual.[61]

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[57]Congress, **Report of the Committees**, pp. 270-80.

[58]Marx, **Critique**, p. 65.

[59]Marx, **Critique**, p. 67.

[60] Congress, **Report of the Committees**, p. 16.

[61]Tzu, Sun, **The Art of War**, trans. Lionel Giles, ed. James Clavell (Delecorte Press, New York, 1983) p. 26. The original quotation reads: "O divine art of subtlety and secrecy! Through you we learn to be invisible, through you inaudible, and hence we can hold the enemy's fate in our hands."

We Need Solidarity

Not Charter 88

Les Levidow and Martin Walker

In the wake of intensifying public debate over civil liberties, this statement aims to reorientate campaigning efforts towards the experience and struggles of those whose rights are being systematically violated by the British State. Since the 1970s entire categories of people have been labelled as "criminal suspects" and persecuted as supposed threats to national security, public order, or even the individual rights of others.

In this way, the official rogues gallery has been expanded: young black people become labelled "suspect muggers", Irish Republicans become "terrorist suspects", militant trade unionists become "irresponsible wreckers", strikers become "terrorists without bullets or bombs", and so on. Eventually, the catch-all "enemy within" encompasses those who resist oppression, whether it is the exploitation of labour or British rule over Ireland.

Those who struggle for social justice are cast as public enemies by the entire political system; the mass media, the legislature, the judiciary, the police and prison establishment. Extraordinary repressive measures have become the norm; special powers are used in the most ordinary situations. For all those actually prosecuted, many more are made fearful of taking political action. Exemplary sentences and punishments act as "long sharp shocks" to deter others.

In this climate of creeping criminalisation, violations of civil liberties are officially acknowledged, while being justified as necessary for the common good. Severe penal statutes, apparently for use against a minority who commit violent crime, are said to "protect" the law abiding majority. This protection, however, hangs like a sword over anyone who dares challenge the imperatives of capitalist rule.

Effective actions are necessary to confront this criminalisation process, and clear arguments are needed to refute the official justifications. Needed most of all is solidarity amongst, and with, all those who have no alternative but to organise demands for justice, and better strategies for limiting the State's repression. Individual rights can only be guaranteed by collective power organised as a defence against the

State.

In the face of such difficult challenges, Charter 88 fails to contribute anything meaningful; it indulges in illusion mongering which is worse than useless. It has nothing to say about such special laws as the so-called Prevention of Terrorism Act, the so-called Public Order Act, the Police and Criminal Evidence Act, (or the para-legal "shoot to kill" policies). It offers no challenge to the arguments used to justify such legal chicanery or the repression which such policies entail. Much less does it offer solidarity with the targets of these strategies. Indeed, Charter 88 could easily be signed by the people who drafted these laws, or those who use them to persecute the political opposition.

Within its narrowly individualistic notion of civil liberties, Charter 88 ignores the State's targeting of groups for criminalisation. By its silence, the document dissociates itself from those forces which have done the most to defend civil liberties, both in the past and the present. It ignores the 1381 Peasants' Revolt, the Levellers, the Chartists, and the anti-fascists of the 1930s, as well as todays' many committed grass-roots struggles. Turning its back on all these, Charter 88 bases its legitimacy on the State, to which it looks to guarantee our civil liberties. Indeed, the document's identification with the State coincides with the nationalist myths it promotes about the Glorious Revolution and World War II.

As a consequence of the 1688 Glorious Revolution, we are told, "Britain was spared the rigours of dictatorship". Yet we are conveniently not reminded that the new democracy applied only to a tiny minority who exploited the population at home and abroad, as well as persecuting Catholics. By extending Charter 88 as somehow extending the "positive side" of 1688, the document cannot avoid associations with British rule over Ireland. Opponents of that rule rightly saw last year's tercentenary celebrations as an affront to the labour movement and a calculated insult to the Irish community in Britain's cities.

Charter 88 likewise promotes historical myths in claiming that in May 1940, "Britain defied the fascist domination of Europe", as if Britain's declaration of war was a "democratic achievement". In reality, through the 1930s the British State repressed anti-fascists, aided Franco in Spain, collaborated with fascist Germany and Italy while it was thought that Hitler would turn on Russia, and then entered the war only upon realising that the Axis powers threatened its own Empire. This was no "anti-fascist" war except in left rhetoric; Britain interned anti-fascist Italians and Germans, with scant protest, as part of its national-chauvinist approach for ensuring continued capitalist rule in Europe after the war.

For Charter 88, the problem appears simple; apparently, we have for too long, been "dependent upon the benevolence of our rulers" for our civil liberties. These liberties are now being curtailed by a process which is "only in part deliberate" and can therefore be corrected by reason. Charter 88 proposes a new constitutional settlement. Finding the State deficient in its supposed duty as well-spring and

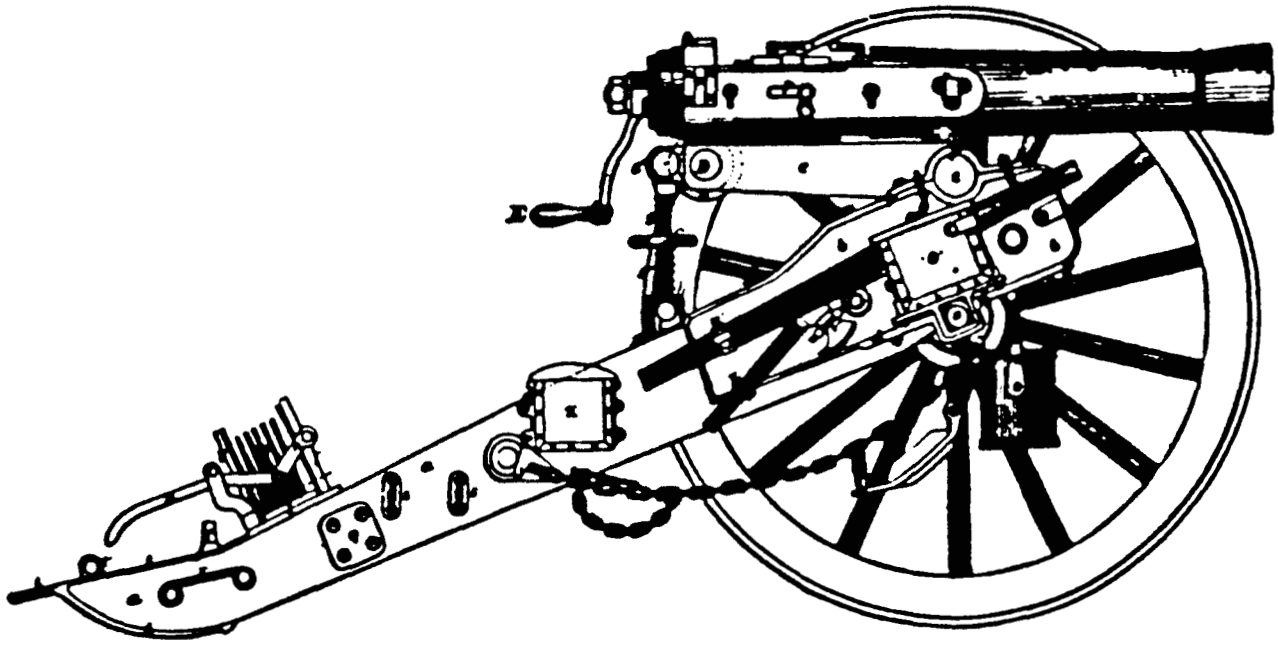
custodian of liberty, the Charter proposes a **Bill of Rights** by which it is hoped to secure individual civil liberties.

In saying all this, the Charter ignores the outcome of previous calls for legal reform, The Royal Commission on Criminal Procedure, for example, was supposed to extend our liberties but actually resulted in further codifying repressive measures and encouraged the legal system to apply existing measures in more repressive ways. Why should we expect anything better from constitutional reform under the present balance of forces? Charter 88's arguments contribute nothing towards building the stronger, active solidarity which is needed to turn the tide against the State: demonstrations, occupations, strikes, uprisings, amongst other activities. Charter 88 avoids discussion of such unpleasant realities by avoiding any taint of association with the social groups that have so far borne the greatest risks in struggles for civil liberties. Meanwhile the document arrogantly announces itself as our saviour; it would "make real the freedoms we once took for granted", and "for the first time take them for ourselves". This claim perfectly summarizes the document's dual illusion: its disavowal of history, a history of violent struggles fought to wrest freedoms from the State, and its disavowal of present reality, where signitures on a petition will somehow disuade the State from reinforcing capitalist rule.

In this society, while the State claims to protect civil rights, in practice it can truly guarantee only those of private property - the right to own, buy and sell. The current regime in particular has systematically invoked individual rights to attack the social rights of collective struggle. Charter 88 accomodates this political shift by proposing unity on the basis of individual rights alone, while leaving social rights for later consideration. It is no surprise, then, that Charter 88 diverts attention from the terrains where collective protest is being criminalised. The document represents the vain wish of the professional middle class to protect itself from similar attack, as individual citizens, while keeping their distance from those social groups already attacked.

Nevertheless, new alliances are being forged amongst those who have borne the brunt of repression. Black people picket police stations to demand justice for those brutalised by State-licenced muggers; black and Irish people organise joint rallies against commonly used show trials. This movement is attempting to redefine democracy in terms of mass, collective action to take power away from the State. Protesting the economic oppression which underlies systematic legal injustice, the movement puts human needs before property rights and profit.

In these times there is no middle ground. Those who want to defend civil liberties have chosen sides: either sustain illusions in the State, or help strengthen resistance to it by contributing time and resources to the many community struggles for social justice which are already underway. Most important, as special laws and legal strategies are deployed to criminalise political opposition, we need collective rebellion to make them unenforceable. This is what it would mean for us to "take back freedom for ourselves" - and surely not for the first time.



The Politics of Debt

John Holloway

*This paper was presented to the CSE Scotland conference on **The State, the Poll Tax and Class Struggle** held on 27th January 1990. It is very much the product of discussions within the CSE Edinburgh group.*

1 . This conference started with an argument in a pub. The argument was about the long-term political implications of the anti-poll tax campaign. The details of the argument don't matter, but it made clear to us that we needed some sort of forum to talk about the wider issues involved in the campaign against the poll tax.

Those of us who are involved in the campaign go frequently to anti-poll tax meetings, but inevitably most of the time is taken up with questions of practical organisation and with learning about the details of debt collection procedures. That is not such a negative experience: on the contrary, the overwhelming feeling coming out of the anti-poll tax campaign is a sense of our own power, as the threats of the authorities become more and more ridiculous, as we see the helplessness of thirty-odd sheriff's officers in the face of over 100,000 non-payers in Lothian

alone. But we have little opportunity to reflect on the implications of all this, on how it fits into broader political issues, on what will happen to the anti-poll tax movement after the poll tax itself is gone. The main aim of the conference is to provide a forum for discussing these issues.

Another way of putting that point is to say that we want to reflect theoretically on the anti-poll tax campaign and the power which is expressed through that campaign. To reflect theoretically on our power is to relate it to the society in which we live, a nasty, oppressive society, a capitalist society, a society dominated by capital and those who control it, a society in which opposition so often seems hopeless, a society in which the stifling conformism of the political parties seems to smother all hope, all dreams. So often it seems that we have to struggle, that it is something that we cannot avoid if we are not to lapse into vegetable-like resignation, but that our struggle is just an endless uphill process, in which the odds are so heavily stacked against us. The anti-poll tax campaign gives us a sense of our own power, but we need to broaden that out, to understand our power in society as a whole, to understand the necessity and the possibility of transforming society as a whole.

That is where Marxism comes in. Marxism is a theory not of capitalist oppression, but of the contradictions of that oppression. We don't need a theory to tell us that we are oppressed, that we live in an oppressive society: that is obvious. The point of Marxist theory is to understand that there can be a way forward, that the system of oppression is unstable, that it is full of contradictions. Those contradictions are not external to us, they are not an external 'economic' framework within which our struggles take place, they are not objective laws of capitalist development that exist independently of ourselves. The instability of capitalism is nothing but the expression of our power, albeit an expression which we often do not recognise as such. Marxism, in other words, is the theory of working class power, a theory to help us recognise and increase our power.

2. What does this mean in relation to the poll tax? In this session I want to focus on just one issue: the sheriffs' officers and debt collection. A year ago probaly none of us even knew what a poinding was, but in the last few months we have all become experts in debt collection, in poindings and warrant sales, in wage arrestments and bank arrestments. We have carried out mock poindings at the premises of sheriffs' officers and we are probably looking forward to the day when the sheriffs' officers

are foolish enough to try to carry out a warrant sale for non-payment of the poll-tax. And we know quite well, from our own experience and from what people say to us, that the issue is not just the poll tax: that sort of action against sheriffs' officers gets a lot of support because people link it with their own experience of debt and the general hatred of the sheriff officers and, more generally, with a history of oppression and resistance to that oppression. Probably nearly all of us here are substantially in debt. In 1986, apparently, the average family owed £1,500 in consumer credit alone (leaving mortgages out of account) and spent 60% of its income in repaying debt and interest, and that figure has certainly grown since then. The number of people defaulting on their debts is rising all the time, and well over two million people are taken to court each year for non-payment of debts in Britain.

But why is this happening at this time and why should our struggle against the poll tax take the peculiar form of resistance against the enforcement of debt? If debt plays an important part in the lives of most of us (in the form of mortgages, bank overdrafts, credit cards), it is because credit and debt play a central part in the reproduction of modern capitalism as a whole.

Credit has always been important for capitalism, particularly in times of crisis. As capitals experience difficulty in realising their profits, they turn to banks to borrow money to tide them over difficult times. Similarly, those who find that investment in production is no longer giving them an acceptable profit, seek to realise profit by lending their money to productive capitalists at a certain rate of interest.

In modern capitalism, however, credit plays a much more central role. Modern capitalism (by which I mean post-war capitalism, often referred to as 'late capitalism') is built upon the (reluctant) recognition of the power of labour. The fear of revolt during the 1930s and the realisation (especially during the War) of the power of the trade unions led capital to the conclusion that the only way of securing a stable expansion of capitalism after the war was through recognising the power of labour and turning it to capital's advantage. Starting with the introduction of Roosevelt's New Deal in 1933, capital was forced to recognise that the only way of containing social discontent was by reorganising its domination over society. This was done, on the one hand, by drawing the trade union bureaucracies more closely into the state and, on the other, by committing the state to a policy of full

employment through demand management. In terms of economic theory, these policies were justified by the work of Keynes, which is why they are often referred to as Keynesian. The important point is that they were based on an enormous expansion of credit. When profits threatened to fall, full employment was maintained by expanding credit, by lending both to companies directly and to consumers so that the market for capitalist commodities was maintained. The Keynesian solution to the instability of capitalism was to contain social pressures by expanding credit: the management of credit was to provide the basis for an even and harmonious development of capitalism. Neither credit nor deficit budgeting by the state was new, but Keynesianism raised them to a principle of capitalist rule, anchoring credit at the core of capitalist reproduction.

For a while, all went relatively smoothly. But credit is always a gamble on the future. From capital's point of view, the use of credit commits in advance a share of profits not yet created, a share of the surplus value not yet produced by the workers. If the credit can be used to increase the capitalist's profits, to increase the surplus value produced by the workers, then the gamble comes off. If not, then the debt makes the capitalist's position more and more difficult. The key to it all is how effectively capital can exploit labour, and how effectively labour can resist exploitation by capital.

By the late 1960s and early 1970s, capital was gambling and losing. Debt was expanding, but at the same time, the costs of exploiting labour were rising (because workers were demanding more and more and because of technological change), so profits were falling. This is what Marx refers to as the tendency of the rate of profit to fall: as capitalism develops and more advanced technology is introduced, there is a rise in the investment required to exploit workers, so that although the rate of exploitation may rise, the rate of profit tends to fall. And as profits fell, two things happened: on the one hand, one part of capital borrowed more money to make up for its falling profits, and, on the other, another part of capital decided it was safer to lend money rather than risk it in productive investment, where profits were so unsure. Capital was gambling and losing, and the more it lost, the more it gambled. This is often referred to as the over-accumulation of capital: the rising costs of exploiting the working class meant that there was too much capital in the world, more capital than could make a reasonable profit from the exploitation of labour. When that happens, capital starts running all over the place, trying to find a profit wherever it can.

The matter came to a head in the mid-1970s, not only in Britain, but throughout the world: profits fell sharply, there were lots of bankruptcies, unemployment went shooting up, and governments everywhere (conservative and social-democratic) said that they could no longer follow Keynesian policies, they could no longer maintain full employment, they could no longer give so many concessions to the trade unions, they could no longer spend so much on welfare. In this country, the abandonment of Keynesianism was formally announced by James Callaghan in a speech to the Labour Party Conference in 1976.

The new philosophy of state action was monetarism, first introduced here under the Callaghan government, but more fully identified with Thatcher. Credit expansion was to be replaced by the shopkeeper's philosophy: you pay for what you buy. The attack on local government, and particularly the poll tax, have been justified in terms of this philosophy: the market rules, you must pay for the services you consume.

Cutting back on credit meant trying to undo the whole way in which things had been done since the war: pushing the trade unions out of the state, cutting back on social welfare expenditure, cutting back on local government, making the whole state more and more repressive, more and more an apparatus of bureaucratic control.

But something has obviously gone wrong with the shopkeeper's philosophy of monetarism. If you go into a big shop, then ten years ago you might have been expected to pay in cash, but now they always ask you, 'cash or credit?', and there is probably no shop on Princes Street that doesn't tell you that it can give you at least £500 instant credit. How does that fit in with monetarism?

Monetarism as an economic policy was dropped very quickly, by Thatcher, by Reagan and by all the major governments. To really cut back on credit the way they said would lead to such a massive destruction of capital that it would cause such a wave of revolt throughout the world that the very existence of capital would be threatened. Monetarism as a policy of state austerity and as an abrasive class strategy against labour has been retained, but at the same time there has been a massive expansion of credit throughout the 1980s.

In other words, the crisis of the overaccumulation of capital has not been solved, because that was not possible in the face of the power of labour. The power of the working class expresses itself in the prolongation of the crisis of capital. There is still an overaccumulation of capital: more capital than can make a reasonable rate of profit. This expresses itself in the more and more frenzied flow of capital around the world in pursuit of a profitable outlet: that is why you get the much talked-of rise of the City and the financial markets throughout the world: it is not a sign of the strength of capitalism, but an expression of the weakness of capitalist production.

During the late 1970s and the early 1980s, after the introduction of more restrictive policies in the more industrialised capitalist countries, a lot of the capital flowed in the form of loans to Latin American and Asian countries. After the Mexican government declared in 1982 that it would be unable to pay its debts, those countries ceased to be seen as a safe outlet. With the relaxation of monetary policies throughout the world, loan capital flowed back to the more industrialised countries where it has tried to solve its problems of overaccumulation partly thorugh a massive expansion of consumer credit. The fact that debt has become so much a part of our lives is an expression of the continuing crisis of capital.

Monetarism, far from being the simple shopkeeper's philosophy, has developed two faces: the unregulated expansion of credit on the one hand and the abrasive attack against the working class on the other. The two sides are closely interconnected. On the one hand, the more the state cuts back on welfare spending, on housing, health and social security, the more we are forced into debt in order to maintain a tolerable standard of living. On the other hand, the more its whole existence is based on credit, the more capital needs to push through changes in working practices, changes in technology and reductions in state expenditure in order to increase their profits, which is the only way of keeping up with their increasing debts.

What is the conclusion from all this? Firstly, it is clear that the struggle against the poll tax is not a single issue, but just one aspect of the general struggle against capital and the more and more repressive development of capitalism. We all know that: probably we all got involved in the poll tax campaign not because of the particular issue, but because we see it as an important channel for our anger, for struggle against oppression. And yet we often slip into talking of it as though it were a single issue, a single case of blatant injustice. That seems to me to be both wrong and dishonest. The poll tax is a particularly important aspect of class struggle at the

moment, because for once, the government has made a massive mistake: most of the anti-working class measures introduced over the last ten years have been introduced in such a way as to divide the working class. This time, it has been done in such a way that it unites the working class, and provides us with a battle that we really cannot lose.

The fact that our struggle against the poll tax has taken the form it has, namely, increasingly a struggle against debt enforcement, is not by chance. In 1990, debt is central to the way we live because it is central to the way that capitalism survives, and central to the way that capital maintains its domination over us. It is the respect and enforcement of debt that holds capitalism together at the moment. Normally, debt is something that individualises and weakens us: although we are probably all in debt, few of us would want to talk about it, and we would be ashamed not to be able to pay our debts. But with the poll tax, it's different, it's a debt we're proud of, a debt we even boast about, and a debt we are determined not to pay. That is surely one place where the revolutionary potential of the poll tax campaign can be seen: by trying to politicise not just our poll tax debt, but the question of debt in general, by showing that there is a unity between our experience of debt and the international debt crisis and its effects in Latin American and indeed Eastern European coutries, and that there is a unity between struggles over debt and struggles over production. 'Can't pay, Won't pay' is a slogan that can be applied to a lot of things besides the poll tax. Perhaps we should think of the Poll Tax campaign not simply as a campaign against a specific tax, but as the first step of a 'Can't pay, Won't pay' campaign that should be developed into other areas.

WOMEN WHO MAKE THE CHIPS

Les Levidow

'Chips with everything': Originally coined by Arthur Wesker to entitle his play in the 1960s, the phrase was taken up again in the late 1970s by promoters of a grander spectacle, the Information Technology Revolution. In this new era, potentially all human endeavours were to be computerized by using devices containing ever-cheaper integrated circuits etched onto tiny silicon chips. Time magazine has been giving away free calculator-watches in that spirit of media hype around chips as cheap, fun toys.

The chips certainly do come cheap to the Western and Japanese manufacturers who incorporate them into industrial equipment or mass-produced consumer items. Although the heralds of the electronic paradise dub them 'labour-saving devices', many users are discovering the ways in which the clerical and industrial applications increase drudgery rather than reduce it. That effect is even more true for those who make the chips. Doing the most labour-intensive jobs in the microelectronics industry, these chip makers are prime targets for each firm's attempts to minimize its labour costs in a highly competitive market. As a result, they bear a great human cost that remains hidden to all who use microelectronic devices.

Even in affluent Silicon Valley, California, the chip makers form the lower part of a two-tier labour force. They are mostly Hispanic or Asian women, many of them 'illegal' (or 'undocumented') immigrants who live in constant fear of being sacked or even deported. They work for the same firms as highly-paid computer professionals but might just as well be living in a different world (Hayes 1987, 1989).

HEART AND SOUL

On a global scale, most chips are made by workers who do live in a different world: Southeast Asian countries, whose governments impose severe restrictions on workers' right to organize, while imposing few health & safety requirements on the Western multinationals who run the plants there, most of them US-based. Each government actively courts these firms by offering special 'competitive advantages' in Export Processing Zones(EPZs). Such is the logic of 'export-oriented industrialization', by which each Third World country will supposedly prosper by finding its niche in the international division of labour.

Yet the resulting investment uses no local products and generates little extra employment beyond the chip makers themselves. It leaves behind only polluted environments and damaged workers. In the USA or Japan, microcircuits are photochemically 'printed' on silicon wafers; with other materials, these are then flown in to each EPZ for slicing into tiny chips and bonding to circuit boards, which are then incorporated into microelectronic devices for export.

In Penang island, one of Malaysia's states, there is one such

place conveniently located near the Bayan Lepas airport. On the main road just outside, numerous microelectronics firms -- each protected by high security fences -- occupy both sides of a veritable 'Silicon Highway'. With no trace of irony, a National Semiconductor building bears the slogan, 'Heart, Soul and Microelectronics'. That slogan aptly expresses the diligent performance demanded by such firms, which offer little compensation for rapidly exhausting the heart, soul and body of their workforce.

A similar message comes even from the government. As Malaysia's Deputy Prime Minister said in 1978, 'Workers must uphold their dignity and not cause problems that would scare away foreign investors. They should instead be more productive so that government efforts to attract investors would be successful.' In this way, politicians try to win support for their efforts towards creating a 'better investment climate'.

Immigrants of the EPZ

Like their counterparts in Silicon Valley, Penang's chip makers are immigrants, too. Roughly three-quarters are Malay women who were brought up with traditional Islamic values in other parts of the country, then recruited from their villages to Penang's Export Processing Zone (EPZ). There such a woman gets her first experience of factory work, of Western dress and cosmetics available in the shops, and of independence from her village elders. Her parents usually resent that independence, at the same time as appreciating the daughter's much-needed contribution to the family income, often amounting to one-third of her factory wages.

Despite local unemployment, the firms have the least skilled work done by these immigrant women rather than by Penang's unemployed men. Local people, especially Chinese, are employed mainly as skilled labour and managers. In contrast to the Malays, they would be less willing to do the unskilled work under such unpleasant conditions at such low wages, at least not without protest. And Malay men remain unwilling to do such work, once it has been defined as 'female'.

Electronics firms claim that they prefer to employ women because they are naturally better suited to the routinized work of the electronics assembly line: nimble fingers, acute eyesight, greater patience. During Britain's Industrial Revolution, factory owners gave similar explanations for why they replaced well-paid, skilled male workers with women and children. In the case of the 'microelectronics revolution' in Malaysia, the employers' real reasons are as transparent as they were in nineteenth-century Britain. As Intel's personnel officer has admitted, 'We hire girls because they have less energy, are more disciplined and are easier to control.'

Malays, especially those from rural areas, are seen as 'happy-go-lucky' people accustomed to living simply, if only because the fertile land yields plentiful fruits and vegetables in return for little work. Although real-life Malays don't fit such a simple stereotype, they certainly have had little to prepare them for the rigours of working for a Western

multinational, especially the new health hazards involved -- including dizziness, headaches, worsening eyesight as well as respiratory diseases. These hazards may not be unique to the microelectronics industry but they are more easily imposed upon workers unfamiliar with the chemicals and conditions that cause the hazards, especially where governments oppose any legal safeguards that would damage the 'climate' for foreign investment.

Overt mass protests have been rare in Penang's EPZ. In 1980 workers at numerous electronics firms struck for higher wages; after returning to work, they received a much smaller wage increase than they had been promised. Demonstrations occurred with the closure of three microelectronics firms in 1985, when all 1500 workers from one plant took to the streets, though without winning anything. The firms have averted much potential protest by learning how to manipulate both the women's traditional submissiveness and their new-found consumerism. As an extra safety measure, the government set up the EPZs with restrictions on trade unionism; in 1970 it also exempted firms there from the law protecting women from night-shift work.

Long-term workers' organization has been made more difficult by the legal restriction preventing the electrical workers' union from organizing electronics workers. Trade-union organizers face the sort of anti-union measures that typify Southeast Asian EPZs. They must also beware a peculiarly Malaysian one, as 'religious police' keep on the lookout for any Muslim people committing the Islamic sin of khalwat -- 'association' (close proximity in private) between a man and woman -- a sin for which, under Shariat law, a court will impose the penalty of a fine or jail; for zina, adultery, the penalty is whipping.

DOWN SILICON HIGHWAY

The predicament of these microelectronics workers first became widely known in the West through Rachel Grossman's now-classic 1978 expose, based on a ten-week trip around Southeast Asia. Although more recent publications have elaborated on her argument, they have provided little update on her findings. The rest of this essay, based on a brief trip to Penang in 1986, will emphasize what has changed there since her report. The fact that both I and my interpreter were both men, however, certainly affected the responses that I received to my questions and limited what the women were willing to tell me.

In my interview with a group of microelectronics workers in Penang, the translation back and forth between English and Malay was done by Bala, a staff member at Sahabat Alam Malaysia (SAM, or Friends of the Earth Malaysia). For many years Bala has worked behind the scenes to help microelectronics workers to organize themselves and demand what few rights they have under Malaysian employment law. In a country where the trade unions have made little effort to help empower these workers, the need has been filled by SAM, which defines its 'environmental' brief to include all health and safety hazards, as well as those forms of modern 'development' which threaten the livelihood of peasants, fishermen, forest dwellers, etc.

The interview took place at one of the many shared houses rented by women microelectronics workers; this house was being used as well for classes in cooking, dressmaking, etc. While we were speaking with some workers there, others were cutting cloth on the floor and then putting the pieces together with sewing machines. The walls were adorned with posters, in the Malay language, warning the women about health & safety problems and telling them their employment rights.

Blinded by bonding

All three women had held 'bonding' jobs, among others; that is, they had been soldering hair-thin wires onto each microchip and its lead frame while peering through a microscope. Despite their traditional Islamic upbringing, two of these three women -- Rachel and Jane -- were wearing modern, colourful dress and cosmetics, and had flamboyantly permed hair. Their replies were often cryptic and accompanied by giggling, even when about the most serious matters.

Rachel had been a bonding operator for ten years since age 17 at AMD, Advanced Micro Devices. As a student she had needed glasses, but even if she hadn't, 'after one year or so our eyesight becomes blurred, so we have to get glasses'. In her case, she has had to get stronger and stronger ones. At Intel, Jane had complained about the difficulty of bonding work and eventually got herself transferred to the packaging section -- and so avoided having to get glasses. Many women, less fortunate or insistent than her, have allowed the bonding work to ruin their eyes and then found themselves made redundant.

Like Rachel, Aziz too was wearing glasses, but her clothing was simple, entirely black and white, with a hairscarf much like a chador. While most of Penang's immigrant workers have taken up Western-style dress, encouraged by their new employers, recently there has been a return to traditional Islamic dress, encouraged by religious and political leaders. As I was to realize, Aziz's conservative dress did not indicate her more recent arrival from rural Malaysia, nor did it symbolize a return to Islamic fundamentalism. Rather, it seemed part of a cultural resistance to the microelectronics firms' psychological control over their women workers; her comments were far more articulate, serious, and critical of the industry.

Aziz had to get glasses seven years after she had started doing bonding work at age 20 at National Semiconductors. At that point she became one of the few workers to complain that she couldn't go on working with the microscope. 'For seven years I had to put up with those conditions before being transferred to another section. And I had to pay for the glasses myself.'

Hysteria

In the 1970s these factories were renowned for outbreaks of mass 'hysteria' (called by its English name), in which women would mysteriously start weeping, shouting, writhing or fainting. It might begin with one woman seeing a 'spirit' (hantu) while peering through the microscope. Then the 'hysteria' would spread to dozens more women. Some would scream that they hated being

there and wanted to go back to their mother; many believed they were possessed by spirits.

As women first arrived in Penang from a relaxed village life, Bala said, they initially couldn't meet the firms' production quotas and couldn't stand the pressure; moreover, they weren't allowed to leave the assembly line when they wanted breaks. Although they were working on the same line, they were unable to protest openly. Reaching her limits of endurance, one of them would break into the 'hysteria', then others would join in.

As Bala explained, nowadays the hysteria happens only a few times a year because most of the women are able to meet the quotas: they've become 'good workers'. Originally the women were working all week long and were even asked to come in to work on their rest days, while nowadays they are on short working weeks, only three or four days per week, so they have more time to rest. Management benefits twice: it pays the workers only for the three days and gets more production for that pay. Moreover, the workers are able to release their tension through the consultative committees set up by management. As one American manager once said so touchingly, 'If people believe management cares, there are no problems. Hysteria doesn't happen.'

When I asked the three women about the hysteria, and whether they believed in possession by spirits, they replied with mock groaning and then burst out laughing. Apparently by now these women were far enough removed from the hysteria for it to be a laughing matter. Yet the change since the 1970s seemed less about improved working conditions than about the women's acculturation to the factory's work discipline.

Jane thought that at Intel the hysteria had occurred for lack of proper food, and because lack of adequate cooling had allowed the equipment to over-heat the air, which of course was full of chemicals. 'People go in and come out on an empty stomach. Sometimes they feel like vomiting.' On one recent occasion there, a worker on the line fainted and fell down, apparently because of the heat. 'The die attachment department must be kept hot for the production process, so the management reduces the air conditioning there.' So the heat is not simply a by-product but an essential condition of production, to which the workers must adapt themselves.

According to Aziz, at National Semiconductors the hysteria still happens a few times per year: 'The workers' health is affected right from the beginning. There are psychological effects because the section demands that each worker meets a fixed quota. If a worker can't meet it, she goes to work with an in-built fear. People can't stand it, they scream, fall down, then get taken to the nurse.' Aziz continued her account: 'The hysteria was frequent in the early days but not anymore because now the workers are used to the working conditions. It usually happens in the afternoon because they have been travelling in hot, humid weather, then go into the air-conditioned factory, then into warm parts or the canteen, and back and forth. But people still don't understand the exact cause.'

Apparently most of the workers now affected come from the same

dormitory or hostel. 'If one worker gets the hysteria, it can spread to the others, so they can believe that it comes from the house. But it really comes from their working conditions', she said.

From Rachel's experience at AMD, the hysteria happens only a few times per year and at most to two or three people at a time. Yet the psychological strain now seems to be transferring from work to home. As she described one episode, 'A friend of mine, living in a company-provided dormitory, dreamt that a friend came to visit her. In the dream she tells her friend not to disturb her. She wakes up, discovers the friend is not there, then screams and faints. The next day another friend had the same dream. The next day the hostel supervisor brought in the bomoh [village spiritual healer].'

On one level the dream might be understood as an Islamic villager's reaction to the fast pace and enforced social isolation of assembly-line work. Is it peculiar to an Eastern culture, though? As distant as all this may seem from Western psychiatric problems, on reflection the story could parallel the way that tensions from our work invade our most private selves, and even construct our nightmares. When we fail to deal with those tensions collectively, we too bring them home to haunt us.

Anthropologist Aihwa Ong (1987) found much evidence to warrant interpreting the spirit possession as a moral protest. Spirit invasions of factory toilets and prayer rooms suggest the distress of moral violation, by virtue of village women being subjected both to factory discipline and to the sexual attentions of male supervisors, particularly non-Islamic ones. As the women are often reminded that their 'honour' is at stake, it is understandable that resistance to factory conditions would take the form of spirit possession -- sometimes by the datuk, the male ancestor.

Beauty contests

In the 1970s many microelectronics firms invited cosmetics vendors to sell their wares during the lunch break on the women's pay day. They encouraged a competitive ethos around Western fashion, just as they did around productivity targets. The firms also held 'beauty contests', whose winners would get all-expenses-paid holidays, sometimes even to the USA. 'I will try my best to take part in this contest hoping to bring back joy and glory to the No.1 company', as one 'beauty queen' was quoted in National Semiconductor's employee newspaper.

When I asked about these contests, the women laughed, as they're not held anymore. The last was in 1983, on the tenth anniversary of the establishment of AMD in Penang. At National Semiconductors the last one was held in 1980; since then, there have been only competitions for singing pop music.

Why the change? Perhaps because many workers rebelled against the contests? No, because the Malaysian government asked the firms to stop, as part of its promotion of Islamic morality -- one of the few examples that seems to have benefited women.

What had the workers thought of these contests? Like many of the Malay women, these three felt that it downgraded oneself to participate. As Aziz explained, 'It is the traditional Malay culture. We have been brought up not to expose our beauty to others. Of course, we don't all follow this tradition. Of every ten women, perhaps three didn't like the beauty contests, while the other seven took part.'

When she stated that the Chinese women liked the contests far more, I asked why: 'Because of the reward they expected to get by winning. Unlike the Malays, they want to earn more, to win prizes and promotion.' Did the firm really use the beauty contests to decide promotions? At this point Rachel interjected: No, at AMD, 'bonder bonder'. All three women laughed, and Bala had to explain her quip: 'If you're a bonder, you'll always be a bonder.' I found Rachel's comment ironic, given that Chinese people often look down upon Malays for showing little interest in competition and success. Here a Malay was ridiculing the inflated expectations of the competitive Chinese.

Durhaka

In addition to encouraging a competitive ethos, both within and between plants, the microelectronics firms' management have attempted to manipulate durhaka, the traditional Malay injunction against women's disobedience to authority, especially to that of older males. How smoothly is this deference transferred from communal village life to a modern factory? Even apart from durhaka, fear of being sacked has certainly deterred potential protest. Yet the women's vulnerability arises as well from an individual and collective deference that is cleverly structured by the firm.

As Rachel described durhaka, 'one should not disobey the elders or disagree with them' -- though Aziz hastened to add a novel escape clause, 'except when there is something bad done to us'. All three women agreed that disobedience is against God's teaching but denied its relevance to their factory situation. They insisted that durhaka applied only to the family and so didn't stop them from complaining about their working conditions.

Yet these complaints are always made to a committee, elected by the workers but set up by management. They rarely protest directly to the managers, whose replies tend to put the women back onto the defensive. As Rachel recounted, 'When there's no work for us to do and we are pushed around, we are given such answers that we cannot fight back -- such as, that there are no materials available. By moving around, you can learn more jobs. Sometimes in the same day.'

Sometimes don't they get so angry that they want to complain directly to the manager? Replied Jane, 'Yes, but we wouldn't succeed. And we wouldn't want to create problems and be out of our jobs. Sometimes we are very vocal about it and want to fight with them. But after hearing their explanation, we are convinced by them. Sometimes we believe it is our fault.' For example, where the equipment is supposedly designed for the workers to make defectless products and to check them, 'if you come out with defects in spite of that, then you have to accept the punishment

for careless work'. Such 'carelessness' should come as little surprise, given that their work is so boring that they tend to doze off, especially on the night shift, and even while standing up.

At National Semiconductors, says Aziz, some of the microscope work has been replaced by machines, with the result that the machine can do four workers' jobs at the same time. 'Because of the automation, we look through a VDU at eight different machines, checking the integrated circuits. Sometimes we still get defective products with the automated process; usually the workers are not blamed, though the technicians may be questioned.'

Home away from home?

When women leave their village to work in Penang's EPZ, at first the only shared aspiration is to earn a living and send money back home to help support their family. Most of the women soon find financial and cultural independence an incentive to make the most of their new life in Penang, as something more than a temporary detour from their village life. The term kampung, originally meaning 'village', has come to describe a type of house run differently than the company-sponsored one.

As Rachel explained, 'I chose the kampung house because at the company-provided house we would have to fill in forms saying when we are going out and coming back. The restrictions are very inconvenient, so I left the company house. The kampung house is the best, because the couple who run it are like mother and father to us, like adopted parents. About three quarters of the women live in the kampung house and the rest live in the company-provided one.'

As compared to Penang, she considers life better in her old village, in the northern state of Kedah. As the only woman to have left the place, she once made a return visit and told the others not to leave too, because 'village life is better'. She explained, 'Urban life isn't bad, but your parents will suffer in their old age. And you'll end up on the night shift.' They why doesn't she return? 'I have adapted myself to the urban life.'

Aziz, who clearly had not adapted herself as much, gave a more positive portrayal of the rural alternative: 'In my village the women are more active, industrious, work on the farm and in the paddy fields.' She didn't see herself as choosing Penang over the village: 'I didn't make that kind of choice. I came here because there was work here. If the factory closes, then I'll go back to my village. There won't be any problem.' Having resisted Western consumerism, she apparently has little to lose but her income as such, while Rachel or Jane have a whole new identify to lose.

Redundancies

For the microelectronics firms, a key attraction of Southeast Asian EPZs is their minimal workers' rights that permit the firms to reduce their workforce with little compensation in return. The firm may consider mass redundancies necessary because many of the women have lost their optimum eyesight after a few years

of microscope work, or because the international market has a reduced demand for chips.

In recent years AMD has had a 'voluntary' redundancy offer, taken up by hundreds of workers. Says Rachel, 'I myself won't accept it, but others may. If the offer is good, they take the money.' Apparently a 'good' offer means twenty days' pay for every year of service, if they've worked for five years or more. Why do they accept such low compensation? Says Aziz, 'Now the market situation is very bad, and we are forced to go on a reduced working week, so it can seem better to take the redundancy offer instead of working only three days per week.'

Even Aziz, the most suspicious of the three women, believed that the workers could count on the basic payment as in past years. Yet, as Bala later explained, already organizations like his have had to take microelectronics firms to court to force them to pay the amount provided by law, plus three months' ex gratia payment. And for some time now, the firms have been openly complaining that they can't afford redundancies because the statutory payment is too high. They propose to reduce it, as well as to abolish the requirements for 1+1/2 time rate for overtime and for wage increases in the first three years. Taking pity on the downtrodden multinationals, the government has agreed with their arguments, though the necessary statutory change has been delayed by divisions within the Malay-dominated ruling party, UMNO.

Why, then, did Aziz believe that the government will protect the workers? Along with UMNO's officially non-sectarian approach, the party claims to protect Malays from the ambitious Chinese, such as through its ethnic quota system for state employment and university entrance. Says Bala, 'The term durhaka could be applied to the present Prime Minister. Ordinary Malay people say that the government will do good for the people.' Belief in this protection makes the workers even less inclined to take the risk of organizing to save their jobs.

When redundancies do come, many of the women return to their villages or get married, but those who refuse such options don't easily find alternative jobs, apart from working in bars or as prostitutes. Why don't they go back home instead? Bala paraphrased a typical answer that they give: 'I am ashamed to go back home. Before I was able to send home money, now I'm not able. Before, when I went back to the village, I was so well dressed. Now if I go back, I have nothing to show for myself. The village people will look down upon me.' Having learned to associate independence and social status with Western clothes and cosmetics, they dread facing the material and symbolic loss involved in returning to their 'poor' village life.

And that is not the only way in which their independence from Malay tradition has become a new form of dependence and even control. While many of them choose to wear jeans and high-heeled shoes, at National Semiconductors they were actually told to wear a certain kind of miniskirt, that they had to wear it. So they did wear it, except for the fundamentalist Muslim women, many of whom quit their jobs in disgust. Says Bala, 'There is a lot of sexual harassment, with supervisors using their authority to demand the girls go out with them. When a woman applies to go on

leave, often it's not granted, and then the supervisor uses threats and blackmail with her. Things have improved a bit because of some pressure, especially protests from the Muslim fundamentalists.'

Workers' education

In the face of such obstacles, how can outsiders help strengthen the workers' hand? In the education programmes set up by SAM(FoE), seminars deal with health and safety, basic needs, leadership and workers' rights. They also take up economics, politics and current issues. Although SAM co-operates with local trade unions, Bala feels that they 'aim at training only the up-and-coming official leaders'. He says,'SAM aims to train grassroots people to make demands and to provide a potential leadership of their own.'

How does SAM try to build up the necessary self-confidence? Bala describes a typical frustrating episode: The first session will be arranged through informal contacts, who pass the word very secretly to people whom they trust and who will come. Many do come to the first session, where we give an introduction about their basic needs in the factory. They ask questions, recommend what we should do, and agree to bring more people the next week. But the next week not a single one will turn up. Why? Perhaps because we are men. Also, someone who attends these group discussions will leak the information that so-and-so was leading a group discussion and that certain workers were there. The management then warn the workers that they must not attend such discussions or else they will be dismissed immediately.

In response to the firms' obstruction, SAM decided to open up a resource centre near the workers' dormitory. By the mid-1980s there were three such centres -- one by the Malaysian Trade Union Congress, one by the electrical workers union, and the Young Workers' Centre headed by a university lecturer. However, when the centres opened, the electronics employers federation gave instructions that no workers must be permitted to attend them; if found there, they would be dismissed.

To enforce that rule, Bala said, the firms brought in a top-ranking officer to live in a house by one centre, to stay there and watch. He needn't watch all day because the workers can't come during working hours anyway. Outside of working hours he or someone else will be there watching. So most workers are too frightened to visit the place.

Had the women thought of forming a trade union in the factory? Said Aziz, 'I have always thought of it, but until now I thought I couldn't do anything. There is no support from my friends because they are afraid of losing their jobs if found out.' These are just some of the obstacles that SAM faces, simply in getting the most interested workers to attend meetings in their 'free' time.

Despite the obstacles, the centres have had sufficient success to attract repression. Their activists were among those detained without trial in late 1987, when the government invoked the Internal Security Act (a legacy of British counter-insurgency) to

arrest dozens of key political figures as supposed threats to 'national security' and/or 'racial harmony'. If we substitute the term 'investment climate', we have a clearer view of the government's motives.

STYLISH FREEDOM

The government has also attempted to portray the microelectronics firms (particularly the Japanese ones) as respecting traditional values, amidst public concern about a supposed moral threat to female purity. In Penang's EPZ, dominated by US-owned firms, the women workers have acquired factory-specific nicknames such as micro-syaitan (Microsystems 'micro-devils'). They are more generally dubbed Minah lektrik ('hot stuff'), whose several connotations include the lure of the bright city lights. Academics have attributed the moral threat to rural-urban migration, Western culture and economic freedom for women seen as 'less religious' or having 'loose morals'. Newspapers have even spread scandal stories about the factory women servicing soldiers and tourists. Such stories displace the real problem of prostitution, which arises not from the women's new economic independence but from its loss when their failing eyesight or ill health results in being made redundant.

A more general displacement of the women's problems is described by Aihwa Ong (1987): 'Greater public control came to be exerted over their "leisure" time (which in actuality was very limited), while simultaneously diverting attention from the harsh realities of their "working" time.' This control includes guidance and surveillance by Islamic fundamentalist groups which denounce consumer culture; yet they divert attention from the women's grievances by supporting some firms' claims to respect traditional Malay values. Many factory women accept Islamic guidance, to defend themselves from suspicion of immoral behaviour.

Many other women resist such control. They assert their independence through dress styles and sosial, evening socializing between men and women. That exploration has gone furthest around the Bayan Lepas EPZ, which also has the distinction of being located in a somewhat urbanized and multicultural island; Malaysia's other EPZs are mostly located in the mainland's rural areas, more imbued with Malay rural traditions.

What does this new way of life mean for Malay women in Penang's EPZ? Their first experience of wage labour frees them from their village elders' authority, which is then replaced by an economic and even psychological dependence upon the firm, often to the extent of accepting blame for their failure to adapt to degrading working conditions. The women are free to enjoy Western goods and fashion, yet the consumption and even the styles are structured by advertising and the electronics firms themselves, sometimes to the extent of being made a job requirement.

Although the women have a nominal 'sexual freedom', it can becomes an availability for their managers, who directly or indirectly manipulate their sexuality. Moral sanctions discourage liasons between Malay women and non-Malay supervisors, partly as a way of protesting unequal treatment of workers.

However, Islamic law doesn't reliably protect the women from sexual harassment at work. At the same time, perhaps the Islamic revival itself, especially its personal austerity, can be understood as a response to a new, more subtle kind of Western imperialism: one that colonizes the mind with stylish images of 'freedom', images that mask the economic and sexual vulnerability of the new female 'consumer'.

Although the chip makers live and work together in close proximity, their presence doesn't comprise even the beginnings of a new urban working class (unlike, for example, in Britain's Industrial Revolution). As part of the global assembly line, their work is closely linked with that of others in a similar predicament throughout SE Asia and beyond, yet the firms are protected from potential solidarity by the weapons of company blackmail, multiple sourcing and easy capital mobility. Obliging governments provide competitive bargains in cheap, flexible labour -- obviously preferable to investing in more highly automated equipment that would tie down a firm to a particular place. Having profited from this manipulation, the firms easily get rid of 'redundant' workers -- sent away to get married, to return to their villages, or to become prostitutes. Such is the price paid for cheap chips.

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INSTITUTES OF METAPHYSIC

J F Ferrier

The following, an excerpt from the work of the above title (Blackwood 1854 pp. 481-6) reports Ferrier's critique of the Scots "common sense" philosopher Thomas Reid (see also Ferrier's Lectures and Philosophical Remains, 1866 Vol. II.) Ferrier, Professor of Philosophy at St Andrews from 1845 until his death in 1864, is now largely a forgotten philosopher. His interest lies in an attempted fusion of Scottish common sense principles and the self-reflective view of consciousness to be found in German Idealism. For further discussion see Deorge Davie The Democratic Intellect (E.U.P.) Part 4 and Arthur Thomson Ferrier of St Andrews (Scottish Academic Press).

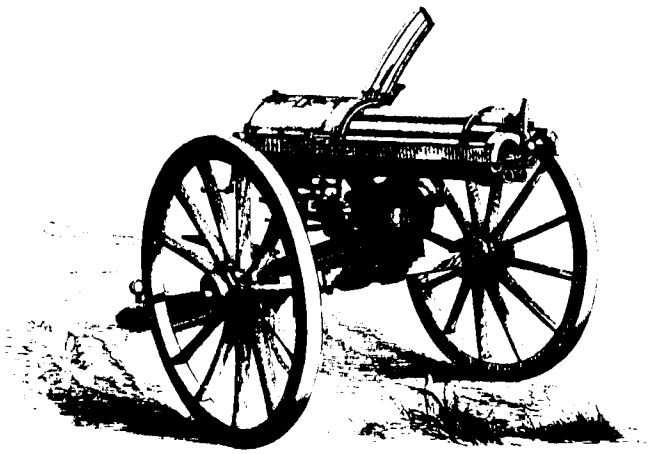
16. Reid mistook entirely the scope of the Berkeleian speculations. He actually supposed Berkeley to have been a representationist, and that the only difference between him and the ordinary disciples of this school, was, that while *they* admitted the existence of matter, *he* denied it, and was what is vulgarly termed an idealist. Berkeley is supposed by Reid to have agreed with the representationists in holding that mere ideas or perceptions were the immediate objects of the mind; but to have differed from them in throwing overboard the occult material realities which these ideas were supposed to represent. This interpretation of Berkeleianism is altogether erroneous. Instead of exploding the material reality, Berkeley, as has been said, brought it face to face with the mind, by showing that it was a *part*, although never the *whole*, of the object of our cognition; and this, it is submitted, is the only tenable or intelligible ground on which the doctrine of intuitive perception can be placed. This position, however, was totally misconceived by Dr Reid; and hence he has done very gross, although unintentional, injustice to the philosophical opinions of his predecessor.

17. In regard to Dr Reid's own doctrine of intuitive perception and his supposed refutation of representationism, it must not be disguised that both of them are complete failures. His ultimate object was to vindicate the absolute existence of the material universe, which, having been rendered problematical by the Cartesian speculations, had been denied on much better grounds by the dialectic of Berkeley—these grounds being, that we could only know it *cum alio*, and therefore could neither conceive nor believe in it *per se*. To accomplish this end, Reid set on foot a doctrine of intuitive perception, in which he endeavoured to show that material realities stand face to face with the mind, *without anything more* standing there along with them. This at least must be understood to have been his implied, if not his express, position; for what kind of logic would there be in the argument—material things are known to exist, *not* by themselves, but only in connection with something else, *therefore* they exist by themselves, or out of connection with everything else. Unless,

then, we are to charge Dr Reid with this monstrous *non-sequitur*, we must suppose him to have held that we apprehend material things without apprehending anything else at the same time. If that position could be made good, it would at once establish both the independent existence of matter, and a doctrine of intuitive perception. But the position is one which runs counter to every law of human knowledge, both contingent and necessary. Whenever we know material things, we are cognisant of our own senses (sight or touch, &c.) as well: it thus runs counter to the contingent laws. Again, whenever we know material things, we know ourselves as well: it thus runs counter to the necessary laws. This doctrine of intuitive perception, therefore, is a theory which sets at defiance every law of intelligence, and which consequently fails to overtake either of the aims which its author had in view.

18. But Dr Reid, honest man, must not be dealt with too severely. With vastly good intentions, and very excellent abilities for everything except philosophy, he had no speculative genius whatever —positively an anti-speculative turn of mind, which, with a mixture of shrewdness and *naïveté* altogether incomparable, he was pleased to term "common sense;" thereby proposing as arbiter in the controversies in which he was engaged, an authority which the learned could not well decline, and which the vulgar would very readily defer to. There was good policy in this appeal. The standard of the exact reason did not quite suit him, neither was he willing to be immortalised as the advocate of mere vulgar prejudices; so that he caught adroitly at this middle term, whereby he was enabled, when reason failed him, to take shelter under popular opinion; and when popular opinion went against him, to appeal to the higher evidence of reason. Without renouncing scientific precision when it could be attained, he made friends of the mammon of unphilosophy. What chance had a writer like David Hume, with only one string to *his* bow, against a man who thus avowed his determination to avail himself, as occasion might require, of the plausibilities of uncritical thinking, and of the refinements of logical reflection? This amphibious method, however, had its disadvantages. At home in the submarine abysses of popular opinion, Dr Reid, in the higher regions of philosophy, was as helpless as a whale in a field of clover. He was out of his proper element. He blamed the atmosphere: the fault lay in his own lungs. Through the gills of ordinary thinking he expected to transpire the pure ether of speculation, and it nearly choked him. His fate ought to be a warning to all men, that in philosophy we cannot serve two mistresses. Our ordinary moods, our habitual opinions, our natural prejudices, are not compatible with the verdicts of our speculative reason.

19. The truth is, that Dr Reid mistook, or rather reversed, the vocation of philosophy. He supposed that the business of this discipline was, not to correct, but to confirm the contradictory inadvertencies of natural thinking. Accordingly, the main tendency of his labours was to organise the irrational, and to make error systematic. But even in this attempt he has only partially succeeded. His opinions are even more confused than they are fallacious, more incoherent than they are erroneous; and no amount of expositorial ingenuity has ever succeeded in conferring on his doctrines even the lowest degree of scientific intelligibility. His claim to take rank *par excellence*, as *the* champion of common sense, is preposterous, if by common sense anything more be meant than vulgar opinion. When the cause of philosophy is fairly and fully pled at the bar of *genuine* common sense, it is conceived that a decision will be given by that tribunal in favour of the necessary truths of reason, and not in favour of the antagonist verdicts of the popular and unreflective understanding which Dr Reid took under his protection. Oh, Catholic Reason of mankind, surely thou art not the real, but only the reputed, mother of this anti-philosophical philosophy: *thy* children, I take it, are rather Plato's Demigods and Spinoza's Titans.



Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson The Assault on Truth: Freud's Suppression of the Seduction Theory. Farrar, Strausss and Giroux. 1984.

Back in the 1960's, under the impact of radical politics and of texts such as Marcuse's Eros and Civilization, Freud was celebrated because he took fantasy seriously. In the more cautious 1980's just this cause for celebration becomes a reason for blame. Jeffrey Masson's The Assault on Truth urges that it was in consequence of a 'failure of courage' (and a desire to exculpate his close friend Wilhelm Fliess in the matter of a bungled operation) that Freud abandoned his early 'seduction theory' according to which real events of sexual abuse in childhood underlay the adult hysterias with which he had to deal. In 1897 Freud writes to Fliess to the effect that reports of childhood sexual abuse proffered to him by his (mainly female) patients are to be construed as adult fantasy rather than as childhood fact, as he had believed before. According to Masson this alteration of perspective was no good thing: it betrayed Freud's patients and impoverished psychoanalysis from the start. The alternative view, that of standard histories of psychoanalytic theory and practice, has it that upon this very shift depended the explorations of infantile sexuality, the Oedipus complex and so forth which made possible the emergence of psychoanlaysis per se.

The whole matter is contentious not least because of the scholarly politicking of Freud's inheritors, documented (as regards the "Masson case") with more than a little journalistic glee by Janet Malcolm in her In the Freud Archives of 1984. The more serious context of the debate is of course the question of child-abuse and incest itself, one amongst many of the topics which feminism first brought into public view. And of course feminists have not commonly presented themselves as friends towards Freud. Thus for example Sarah Nelson, in her pioneering Incest: Fact and Myth

published in 1981, finds cause for complaint in the circumstance that Freud 'replaced the notion of actual trauma with the idea that...memories represented a failure to set aside incestuous fantasies and wishes'. As it were, Masson offers to supply the documentation from Freud's published and unpublished writings which supports this feminist anti-Freud case. Women told Freud things which he refused to accept literally: what justification for this disbelief can there be?

In the event, Masson's own documentation can be used to show that matters are no so straightforward. Masson does not deny that Freud thought he had good reason for abandoning the seduction theory, and indeed amongst his reasons there are arguments not lightly to be dismissed. For example in 1896 (i.e. already prior to his abandonment of the seduction theory) Freud writes that 'We invariably find that a memory is repressed which has only become a trauma by deferred action' (Masson p 89): in other words the brute fact of abuse becomes traumatic only by being internalised within some psychic scheme. This, to be sure, is far from implying that remembered abuse is unreal abuse, but it is to indicate an interest in the "fantasy" whose geography psychoanalysis will set out to map. Also in 1896 Freud writes that 'One only succeeds in awakening the psychical trace of a precocious sexual event under the most energetic pressure...' (Masson p 91): this is more dramatic, because it implies that one problem concerning the seduction theory is a paucity of evidence. Instead of a fully rounded-out memory the analyst discovers only a 'psychical trace', which can be interpreted in various ways. In his 1897 letter to Fliess (referred to above) Freud returns to the same theme: one reason for abandoning the seduction theory, he says, is that 'the secret of childhood experiences is not disclosed even in the most confused delirium'; the root cause of this is that 'there are no indications of reality in the unconscious' (Masson p 108-9). In other words there is a lack of the sort of clear evidence upon which the seduction theory must depend. This is not of course to deny that sexual abuse of (especially female) children is real; and Freud himself is explicit in his Three Essays on Sexuality that he enters no such denial for his part (Masson p 123).

What then does Freud's abandonment of the seduction theory entail? In 1916 Freud writes that 'up to the present we have not succeeded in pointing to any difference in the consequences, whether fantasy or reality has had the greater share in these events of childhood' (Masson p 133). In other words there need be no difference, because reality and fantasy stand in the same homologous relation to one another as do a section of countryside and its map. Masson, concerned to rubbish Freud's preoccupation with fantasy, argues as though a map must be incomplete unless it includes not just print-and-paper but some real portion of soil, or stone. That such an argument involves a category-mistake is evident. Arguably a better guide than Masson to Freud's achievement is Juliet Mitchell, who in her Psychoanalysis and Feminism set out to rehabilitate Freud for feminists by arguing that the geography of power relations in the nuclear family which can be read off from Freud's writings is unsurpassed. To express the same point differently: quite compatibly with his preoccupation with fantasy, and indeed in those cases where abuse has not in fact taken place just because of this preoccupation, Freud is able to depict the nuclear family as a "hotbed of incest" no less powerfully than does Foucault (History of Sexuality Vol. 1). Quite often in understanding (and opposing) reality it transpires that fantasy is the key.

In this connection a further fragment of context is relevant: a topic

of contention in the psychoanalytic movement has been the relative emphasis which should be given to "object relations" - i.e. relations with others - as against structures and patterns internal to the psyche itself. Masson, operating in the American empiricist tradition (however heretically), opts for object relations; but perhaps the whole debate on this score is needless. If fantasy indeed maps reality (social reality) then arguably it is the dialectical and balanced view of a psychoanalyst interviewed by Janet Malcolm which should have the last word. Subject and object, Leonard Shengold told Malcolm, are what psychoanalysis considers: to take one in abstraction from the other is to falsify what Freud meant. Construed in this light the argument of the present review is as follows: pace Masson, and with Freud, precisely fantasy is the mediation of subject to object which any psychology wishing to retain purchase on social issues needs.

So much having been said, one further comment on Masson is in order. Generally his reading of Freud's early texts is elegant, and fair. But at one place (pp 124-30) he offers a somewhat labyrinthine argument purporting to show that Freud had never read a certain work by Havelock Ellis which the Three Essays cites. The point of this argument is that Ellis's case studies do not include material showing that persons sexually abused as children can be psychologically healthy as adults, although Freud appears to cite him to this effect. Predominantly Ellis offers only what Masson terms 'rather pathetic and sad accounts, primarily by men, of their struggles with masturbation, of their shame at having had sexual thoughts early in life, and of adolescent explorations' (Masson p 126). How could Freud have found reason to confirm his abandonment of the seduction theory in material such as this? How, therefore, could he have read Ellis's book?

To these questions there seems to be a thoroughly straightforward answer which makes Masson's hypothesis of Freud not having read Ellis unnecessary. The 'rather sad and pathetic' reports supplied by Ellis conform exactly to Freud's depiction of childhood in the nuclear family, as such. Freud's intense respect for children - see especially his 1908 essay 'On the Sexual Theories of Children' - stemmed from the perception that it was not far short of a miracle that they ventured to survive the misery of a condition wherein total dependency, powerlessness and ignorance (frequently fostered by adults) were the rules. In other words Freud's citation of Ellis is apt precisely because of - as reported by Masson - Ellis's content. Childhood itself is a pit of despair, Freud seems to be saying, and no seduction theory is specifically needful to account for the horrors in virtue of which childhood struggles all to often blast later life.

Would-be monthly.
2p.
(or exchange)

The Bug

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London S.W.1

"I don't just *happen* to be free and easy."

* * *

People 'read' books and 'look at' television. We don't say: 'I'm going to watch a book tonight'. Of course, most television programmes are not *made* for reading anyway; the point is to have a rest.

* * *

International errorism. Shocking acts of mistakenness. Cock-up as weapon. The terrible threat of nationalist innacuracy.

* * *

Trying to be human is one way of being human.

* * *

The problem with anything is that sooner or later it's irrelevant.

* * *

Are you interested in the possibility of modifying your opinion? (Useful to ask before starting an argument.)

* * *

(Overheard:)
– Was it a foreign film you saw?
– No, American.

* * *

The abuse of a thing is no argument against the use of it. To do exactly the opposite is a form of imitation. No answer is still an answer. We're almost water, anyway.

* * *

In conversation, walking down the street, avoiding a pile of dog shit, appearing not to notice, looking at it all the same.

* * *

Being an atheist doesn't prevent you getting killed in a religious war.

* * *

The matter has been hushed up – that is to say, everyone's talking about it.

* * *

"I have now reigned about fifty years in victory or peace, beloved by my subjects, dreaded by my enemies, and respected by my allies. Riches and honours, power and pleasure, have waited on my call, nor does any earthly blessing appear to have been wanting to my felicity. In this situation I have diligently numbered the days of pure and genuine happiness which have fallen to my lot: they amount to fourteen."
(Abd-Er-Rahman III of Spain, *c.*960)

* * *

Clear thinking often leads to doing nothing.

* * *

Walking through a first world city, the sheer amount of involuntary reading that gets done. Fortunately, most people see the point of keeping fairly calm.

* * *

'Do you know what I mean?' often means 'I don't know what I mean'.

* * *

City reference library, summer afternoon, quiet. Huge man in heavy overcoat finally outstares also odd-looking man opposite. Huge man then leans forward, breathing heavily, eyes bulging, and says: *"It's not how you live, it's the way you live."* Other man nods sagely in agreement, for a long time, more and more slowly.

* * *

The lower down you are in a hierarchy, the more your absence is noted. The less they pay you, the more they demand your punctuality.

* * *

* * *

Individuals who meet a lot of different people of all kinds and reckon they have sound knowledge of the general public's view of current issues and topical affairs – these individuals are just exposed to a lot more bluffing, hearsay, guesswork, prejudice, rumour and exaggeration than anyone else. *Very few people know what they're talking about.* An obvious fact, easily verifiable from everyday first-hand experience, but not widely credited.

* * *

"I'm fed up with seeing through people; it's so easy, and it gets you nowhere."

* * *

230 words on a Baked Bean label.
To live better, think more about death.

* * *

People agree with what they like, more than they like what they agree with. (Worth half a minute.)

A man knocked down in the street by a car was in two minds about going to hospital. Someone said: 'Call an ambivalence!'

* * *

Very few people have said it all, and four of them are hamburgers.

* * *

A cliché of fact: In a year the UK govt spends about £3½ million on anti-smoking propaganda. Last year it got £4000 million in tobacco revenue. (Well, it's a fine thing to keep an open mind, but not so open that your brain falls out.)

* * *

The story of a man who was sick of himself because there were so many like him. He heard his voice everywhere. In all the shops there was his food, his clothes, his soap, his magazines . . . he was catered for perfectly. He appeared on every type of television programme. He was always on the radio. Nothing tired or bored him, he had something to say on every subject. He attended public meetings, he spoke from platforms, he subscribed to good causes, he wrote to the papers . . .

It sickened him to see himself everywhere he went, to talk and agree with himself, to buy and sell himself endlessly.

* * *

Alcohol makes the world go round.

* * *

The visit of a foreign head of state. Traffic all round Victoria is diverted, fouled up, jammed. Fumes poisoning everyone. Weapons of death and destruction fired in 'salute' in the parks. I'm not mad, I just live here.

Overheard in an office: "I'm too happy to work."

* * *

Not enough people have enough room. Demolition. Epic details. Several lifetimes just to wake up. Each to their own. Not an official hobby. Tomorrow, that's all.

* * *

Sometimes easier to join a fight you know you can never win, than take on the responsibility of possibly winning.

* * *

One sentence is no less presumptuous than a novel, it's just forgotten sooner.

* * *

"I think that man's making a meal of my mouth." (Third visit to dentist.)

* * *

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HE'S BAD

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