



Key Words

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Obituary: Angela Kershaw (1971–2018)

Jennifer Birkett



Angela Margaret Kershaw Snape, born in Bolton in 1971, sadly passed away on 6 June 2018. She was a friend and colleague loved and admired by all who had the privilege of working with her. Just to meet her, and to be greeted by her unfailing smile, was a privilege. Her husband John remembers how, towards the end of her life, when her bed was wheeled onto a new hospital ward bay, she looked round at the other patients, smiling: ‘Hi, I’m Angela.’

Angela joined the Editorial Board of *Key Words* in 2008, and her hard work, organisational capacities and astute critical judgement played an important part in the journal’s rising fortunes. Whether it was in her contributions to the lively discussions of articles around the editorial table, her rigorous but sympathetic assessments of submissions for the postgraduate essay prize or her ready shouldering of the slog of copy-editing and proof-reading, colleagues recall how Angela’s enthusiasm, and not least, her sense of humour, made the work of Board meetings into an occasion to look forward to.

Angela began her academic career reading French at the University of Nottingham (1989–93), graduating with a First Class degree and a Swiss Embassy Prize for French. She went on to complete a taught Masters with

Distinction, writing her dissertation on the work of Simone de Beauvoir, and then decided to focus her PhD on political writing in the inter-war years, under the supervision of Rosemary Chapman. 'Fiction, Politics and Gender in 1930s France', completed in 1998, was an original analysis of the writing of gender in political fiction, combining the study of canonical male-authored texts and lesser-known female-authored texts. Her supervisor recalls a series of fascinating readings that drew on a range of critical and theoretical approaches and raised important questions about the literary representation of political commitment, sexuality and the body. She too recalls the sheer pleasure of working with Angela: 'I remember our supervisions as efficient and organised (Angela always worked hard to keep to agreed targets) but also full of fun. Angela was never precious about her work; she loved trying out new ideas and different theories to see how far they might be useful and whether they produced new and interesting readings.'

In Autumn 1995, Angela met her future husband, John Snape, who was then lecturing in Law at Nottingham Trent University. Both were singing in Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Yeomen of the Guard*. From her mother, Irene, Angela inherited a love of music, especially in the form of high-standard amateur choral music. (From her father, John, a bank manager, she inherited the administrative skills from which the Raymond Williams Society certainly benefited.) She continued to perform in Gilbert and Sullivan operas, and other musical theatre, until 2005. She also sang with Solihull Choral Society, the Birmingham Bach Choir, and the choir of her local parish church. A practising Christian, she greatly admired Benjamin Britten's work, his mixture of Left-wing sympathies and Anglican faith, and his dedication to providing relevant, high-quality music in community settings. She was also attracted to the work of William Morris, for his socialist principles and his commitment to crafts and design that could bring beauty to the objects and surroundings of everyday life. Never a member of a political party, her views and actions were nevertheless, as John says, 'all of the Left'.

Angela's academic and intellectual career was shaped by intense and principled commitment. Following posts at Leeds and at Oxford (St Anne's), and then Aston (as Lecturer and then Senior Lecturer, 2001–08), Angela joined the University of Birmingham in 2009 as a Senior Lecturer in French Studies. From 1990, the Birmingham Department of French Studies had set out on a new orientation to Cultural Studies, recontextualising its commitment to traditional literary analysis and undertaking a radical programme of internal diversification and cross-departmental collaborations. Angela's own rapidly-expanding research had found its proper working space. On her website page, she describes herself as having particular expertise in the inter-war and Second World War periods, and then goes on: 'My academic interests also encompass

comparative literature, translation studies, travel writing and gender studies.' Alert to these important new directions in literary studies, Angela approached them from her own angles, and asked her own questions. Her first book, *Forgotten Engagements: Women, Literature and the Left in 1930s France*, was the first study to look at the points of contact between inter-war writing by women and the literature of commitment. She described it as the product of 'a cross-fertilisation between political and literary and/or cultural studies which is part of a more general turn towards a contextualising approach to literary analysis and away from an exclusive focus on "textuality"'.¹ She showed how women's political writing revealed different experiences of politics from those discussed in men's committed literature, and she raised new questions about the nature and functioning of political literature. She pointed to a neglected corpus of inter-war political fiction by women, and picked out for close study five neglected women writers from over the political spectrum. Across a range of historical moments (the aftermath of the Great War, the Popular Front, the Spanish Civil War), and different class positions, her five subjects were shown exploring and challenging through their individual political engagements the options offered by their socially- and class-constructed sexualities. Citing Foucault, she emphasised that sexuality cannot be discussed outside contexts of cultural power. (And Frenchwomen, she noted, didn't get the vote until 1944.) Diverse narrative strategies of resistance to oppressive conventional female roles come into play in these texts, to challenge romantic tropes and show women seeking to exploit rather than be entrapped by the different situation of the female body. Unpicking the theme of maternity, for instance, she discussed Henriette Valet's novel *Madame 60bis* and its attack on the reduction to numbers of poor women in the maternity ward. Valet (who was married to Henri Lefebvre) is interested not in the mother-child bond but in the bond between women embodied as procreators; she 'bases her concept of politicisation on the shared somatic experience of being a child-bearing female' (228). Her account of the camaraderie of the women disrupts conventional expectations, figured in the petty bourgeois narrator, fallen on hard times among the women of the ward, who uneasily distances herself as she leaves. Here, as Angela described in entertaining detail, is all the Bakhtinian grotesque of pregnancy, the obscene comedy of the belly, and the messy and undignified carnality of the experience of giving birth. Such writing, she showed, brings out the energy and the strength in this inchoate collective, awaiting its realisation.

Angela wrote her second monograph, entitled *Before Auschwitz: Irène Némirovsky and the Literary Landscape of Inter-war France*, on the French-Russian-Jewish novelist Irène Némirovsky. Némirovsky's *Suite Française* – first published in 2004, and translated into English in 2006, to become an international sensation – had been written in Nazi-occupied France during the

Second World War. Arrested in July 1942, Némirovsky was promptly deported to Auschwitz, where she died on 17 August. For Angela, the challenge was to set aside the ideological perspectives of a post-Auschwitz reader and the charges of anti-Semitism that many critics had levelled against Némirovsky's work, in order to consider the whole of her writing, from the mid-1920s to this last, posthumously-published text, in the changing literary field of each text's production. Her methodology draws extensively on Pierre Bourdieu's sociology of literature, which she describes as considering literature not simply in terms of texts but as a social field inhabited by agents struggling for dominance, each influencing the choices of the others: author and text, and also commissioning editors, reviewers and readers. All of a piece, Angela brought to the intellectual sphere her fascination with the operations of community. Bourdieu's opposition of the literary and the commercial fields of production was the framework in which Angela explored not only Némirovsky's best-selling novels and stories but important issues of inter-war French literary production: 'the popularity and commercial success of the novel as a genre; the "crisis" of the novel and of representation more generally in the aftermath of the First World War; the politicisation of literary production; the relationship between "particular" identities (such as Jewish identity) and "French" cultural production; international cultural exchange and the presence of foreign writers and intellectuals in inter-war France; the representation and reconstruction of the French nation via imaginative literature; the re-imagining of gendered subjectivities in fiction.'²

Angela's interest in travel writing led to numerous articles and essays on inter-war journeys by French and British intellectuals to the USSR. With Martyn Cornick and Martin Hurcombe, she produced a co-authored monograph, *French Political Travel Writing in the Interwar Years: Radical Departures* (Routledge, 2017). Her own third and final monograph focused on translation, adding a new element to the fields of production studied in her first two books. Translation had become a major research and teaching interest; she was involved in popular undergraduate and postgraduate courses, as well as further articles and papers, and she organised the first, highly successful Translation Studies Research Forum for the Birmingham Modern Languages Department in 2009. Almost as soon as the new writing project began, she was diagnosed with cancer.

Translating War – Literature and Memory in France and Britain from the 1940s to the 1960s (Palgrave, 2018) studies the complex publication histories that have helped construct Western societies' 'memories' of the Second World War, and their interaction with ideas of national identity. Addressing key works of French war fiction, and their translations into English, the book moves through different phases and spaces of translation and reception: translating the French Resistance in London and New York, the war novel in post-war

Jennifer Birkett

France and Britain and the languages of Holocaust fiction. It sets out the challenges created for the translator who must find the words to bridge these very different cultural contexts, and to convey the traumatic experiences at the heart of modern history – not least, the almost unspeakable experience of the survivor.

Understanding the experience of others and writing to build bridges and to create a community for change was at the heart of Angela's life and work. It was a commitment bred in the bone, carried through in Angela's very distinctive way. In the Acknowledgements to *Forgotten Engagements*, she wrote: 'It was once suggested to me that much research is at least partly autobiographical. If this is true of the present book, then it was inspired by my grandmother, Constance Mary Kershaw (1911–2003), who never stopped defending her own [Conservative] political commitments from the 1930s into the twenty-first century. Whilst I could not agree with her politics, I always admired her commitment' (vi). Radical, determined disagreement, with respect and understanding for the other side, was Angela's way. In the words of one friend and colleague in Birmingham, hers was the calm, cool voice of reason cutting through the chaos. Angela was tough, bright, honest and joyful. We lost her far too soon, and we will always miss her.

Notes

- 1 Angela Kershaw, *Forgotten Engagements: Women, Literature and the Left in 1930s France* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), 6.
- 2 Angela Kershaw, *Before Auschwitz: Irene Némirovsky and the Literary Landscape of Inter-war France* (London: Routledge, 2009), 5.

Crisis, Which Crisis?

Robert Spencer and Christopher Vardy

Introduction

The essays compiled in this special issue of *Keywords* address the theme of crisis. But which crisis? The soberingly extensive congeries of crisis explored in these essays, including the mental health crisis, the crisis of liberal and/or neoliberal hegemony, the crisis of democracy, the migrant crisis, the crisis of consumption, the protracted crisis since 2008 of financialised capitalism, the long-drawn-out crisis of profitability that befell the capitalist mode of production around 1970 (what Robert Brenner calls ‘the long downturn’¹), plus of course the accelerating and potentially cataclysmic ecological crisis that portends the uncontrolled heating up of the Earth’s atmosphere and the mass extinction of species (including potentially our own), demonstrates that the deceptively straightforward-sounding term ‘crisis’ has, if not numerous different meanings, then certainly numerous different applications.

So what is a crisis? A crisis is a decisive moment of rupture or emergency when something, a social or economic system most obviously or perhaps an ideology or an established set of practices and assumptions, seems incapable of reproducing itself and appears consequently on the verge of being transformed into something else. But what connects the various crises mentioned above? What has brought them about? What do these crises presage? Correction? Collapse? Transformation? And what or rather whose interests are at stake when something is dubbed a crisis? These are political, but also critical and theoretical questions. What this introduction, and this special issue, tries to accomplish is to pause, to reflect and examine what is at stake when crises are announced, organised, narrativised and named.

Crises of Climate and Capital

Crises are, of course, not purely discursive; they have material origins and consequences. When a giant Ponzi scheme in the housing market began to totter in the United States in 2007, leading to a potential domino run of failing banks with bad debts across the globe and prompting governments to purchase bank liabilities with trillions in public money, people lost their homes, pensions and livelihoods and before long they also lost vital public services and rights at work when governments used state indebtedness to justify swingeing ‘austerity’ programmes. People also became angry, occupied squares, revived moribund

socialist parties or turned to resurgent anti-immigrant and even fascist parties. This particular crisis was brought about when a system (capitalism) yet again came up against its own limits, an inability to profitably absorb the vast amounts of surplus capital that were instead invested in asset value speculation and all manner of risky ‘instruments’ such as stocks, futures, derivatives and collateralised debt obligations. Similarly, when the ecosystem began to reach *its* limits, when the concentration of carbon dioxide in the Earth’s atmosphere reached 400 parts per million and average global temperatures rose to one degree above pre-industrial levels, then glaciers melted, sea levels rose, ocean acidification gathered pace, desertification accelerated, hurricanes intensified, aquifers were depleted and crops failed. These processes are intensifying; so are the number of people suffering, fleeing and perishing as a result.

Crises are never just a simple product of, or just a form of, narrative. However, analysing the ways in which crises are discursively produced is crucial, not least because the act of definition, of announcing a crisis, naming it and intimating its historical causes, is often an attempt to define the ‘commonsense’ political possibilities for solving it. In Britain, the financial crisis of 2008 was not met with a project to nationalise the too-big-to-fail banks and turn them into public utilities for allocating investment. The crisis was not defined by the previously vanquished or AWOL Left as a crisis of financialised capitalism. Against all the evidence, it was announced and defined by a resurgent Right as a crisis of confidence on the part of ‘the markets’ and the credit-rating agencies in a top-heavy British state that was spending too much, particularly on welfare.

In the same way, the ecological crisis, which nobody credible can now dispute is anthropogenic and is gathering speed, is too often defined as a crisis caused by humanity as a whole and not by particular ruling groups empowered by a particular and highly irrational way of organising production. What is crucial, again, is who names the crisis. Is this a crisis of capitalism, as John Bellamy Foster and others have argued?² Or is it a crisis caused by an undifferentiated *Homo sapiens* and their inhabitation of the Earth? The idea that we have passed from the Holocene to the new geological epoch of the Anthropocene is increasingly accepted. This – our – unfolding epoch is characterised by substantial human impact on biodiversity and ecosystems, and principally by the exponential heating up of our planet’s atmosphere. As Adam Trexler persuasively argues, the Anthropocene as concept ‘productively shifts the emphasis from individual thoughts, beliefs and choices to a human process that has occurred across distinct social groups, countries, economies, and generations: the wholesale emission of fossil fuels that began in the Victorian period and has intensified through the present day’.³ While ‘*climate change*’ and ‘*global warming*’ are easily bracketed as prognostications that might yet

be deferred [...] the *Anthropocene* names a world-historical phenomenon that has arrived’.

Yet the Anthropocene is a highly contested concept. Depending on how this ‘human process’ is theorised and historicised, it can be used to confer human agency with one hand but snatch political analysis and possibility away with the other, rightly (but far too inexactly) declaring humans to be the cause of climate change while advancing the defeatist equation that Humanity + Earth = Global Warming. Timothy Morton’s popularisation of the Anthropocene narrative in *Being Ecological*, for example, insists that there is no hope for addressing the crisis. ‘That would require being able to reverse time and return at least to 10,000 BCE, before humans set the agricultural logistics in motion that eventually gave rise to the Industrial Revolution, carbon emissions and therefore to global warming and mass extinction.’⁴ For Morton, it seems, the cultivation of cereal crops in Neolithic villages gave rise inevitably to the development of fossil fuel capitalism. This is a vision of human history denuded of all agency and contingency. Morton dismisses as naïve anthropocentrism the desire to actually *do* something about global warming. The correct response to the mass extinction of species is not to communicate facts about it or pursue a ‘global revolution to dismantle the structures that are polluting the biosphere’ (17) since these courses of action betray a faith in the possibilities of human knowledge and action that Morton’s version of ‘object-oriented ontology’ has ruled out of court.

But if the problem is simply *Homo sapiens* and not the particular and rectifiable way in which that hominid species has been organised socially and economically to view the living world as a tap (for resources) and a sink (for the disposal of waste) then the apocalypse gong might as well start sounding. In Andreas Malm’s words, uncritical ‘species thinking on climate change conduces to paralysis’.⁵ To view the crisis of global warming as a crisis caused by the species itself as an abstracted collective agent that is incapable of *not* destroying its own planet is either to throw in our lot with dubious geo-engineering palliatives such as sending giant mirrors into orbit and constructing huge ocean pumps to encourage carbon-dioxide-absorbing algae or it means surrendering to post-environmentalist resignation à la Paul Kingsnorth.⁶

This kind of Anthropocene narrative has no answer to the question of why, if an undifferentiated *anthropos* is responsible for burning fossil fuels in sufficient quantities to heat up the planet’s atmosphere, it didn’t do so before 1800. Nor can it help us to visualise and negotiate the complexities of a situation in which some humans burn more than others, half of the world’s carbon emissions being produced by the richest ten per cent while the poorest 3.5 billion make up a mere tenth.⁷ The existential crisis of global warming actually has its origins, as Malm maintains, in the capitalist mode of production in its

industrial phase (endless growth and accumulation predicated on the growing consumption of fossil fuels). The originator of this crisis is not 'humanity', which has never existed as a collective agent, but particular groups of wealthy and powerful men. Since the early nineteenth century (first in Britain and then elsewhere), these groups have found it much easier to accumulate capital by abandoning the unpredictable and cooperative technologies of water and wind power. They instituted a method of powering machinery (initially coal-fired steam power as well as natural gas and petroleum) that, if not always cheaper, was certainly more dependable and in a variety of ways more conducive to the concentration and disciplining of populations of workers.

That is not to say, of course, that before 1800 and even before the origins of European capitalism in the fifteenth century the behaviour of human beings did not have very harmful effects on the living world and the climate. But ours is the unprecedented epoch, since 1800, when average global CO² has increased from around 280 to over 400 parts per million, in which certain humans at the bidding and in the interests of an even smaller minority of humans, began, on a vastly increasing scale, to, in Malm's brilliantly defamiliarising phrase, dig up the remains of fossilised plant matter and set fire to it with the result of catastrophically heating up their own planet.⁸ To explain global warming by traits such as the command of fire is to obfuscate its origins and acquit the culprits, to use Malm's terms.⁹ It was not caused by some universal or intrinsic trait of *Homo pyrophilis*, the fire-ape, in Mark Lynas's dangerous term.¹⁰ Capitalism causes global warming. Malm shows how the recovery from the long slump of the early nineteenth century in the all-important British cotton industry required a technological restructuring facilitated by an extraneous energy source: with the aid of coal-fired steam power capital 'smashed the unions, re-established proper hierarchy, extracted more output out of fewer workers at lower cost'.¹¹ Thus the pattern of fossil capitalism was set: labour, with all its propensity to shirk and rebel, could be vanquished by machines that did neither.¹² Indeed it is now increasingly obvious that a transition beyond fossil fuels also requires a transition beyond capitalism, at least in its current iteration. A low-carbon future of solar and wind power requires large-scale planning and coordination in addition to the expropriation of the energy cartels and their assets.¹³ The transition is likely to necessitate state investment via public banks with massive lending capacity and therefore a wholesale restructuring of the financial sector. These acts are simply unimaginable under the prevailing economic system.

The ecological crisis, seen in this way, becomes perceivable and narratable as a crisis of capitalism. Malm's latest project, then, is to assert the primacy of the historical and therefore also of the political in our understandings of crisis, which is also what we want to do in this special issue. The point of

historical materialism is to shift our attention ‘from nature to history, without denying the ontological priority of the former’, in John Bellamy Foster’s words. Historical materialism focuses ‘overwhelmingly on the historical development of humanity and its alienated relation to nature, and not on nature’s own wider evolution’.¹⁴ Stressing the importance of humanity’s historical development is not the same thing as denying nature’s tremendous power or controverting human society’s dependence on nature (not least because that power is being intensified by anthropogenic climate change and that dependency made more precarious by it). To say, as Malm does, that we must focus urgently on ‘the historical development of humanity and its alienated relation to nature’ is a million miles from saying that humanity is superior to and entitled to enslave nature (for climate change and the coterminous mass extinction of non-human species makes us starkly aware that we are not) or that human society isn’t part of nature (for the ferocious blowback of higher temperatures and sea levels makes us starkly aware that it is).¹⁵

‘Nature no longer runs the Earth’, writes Mark Lynas. ‘We do.’¹⁶ Leaving aside for a moment the question of to whom that ‘we’ refers, let us predict that if the warming of the planet, caused but hardly controlled by humans, continues at current rates, then Lynas’s glib contention is about to be disproved on a planetary and even existential scale. Only by stressing the interaction or ‘metabolism’ of humanity with nature through production can we prevent this grim scenario from coming to pass. We must imagine and then organise a different, less violent and exploitative form of ‘metabolism’, that is, sustainable or renewable methods of production: in a word, decarbonisation, which, as we are claiming, is impossible without the socialisation and democratisation of economic power. This is a political task, in short, one that will be left to humans. That is because, unlike the climate, say, or black rhinos or honey bees, humans possess agency, including collective agency, which is to say, intention, and therefore the capacity to grasp and forestall the calamity of global warming that they alone have unleashed. Meteorological phenomena such as catastrophic storms possess agency only in the minimal sense that they makes things happen but not agency in the stronger sense that we must dearly hope humans, with their yet unrealised potential to imagine and envision a post-carbon social and economic system, have agency. Only humans, capable of reflection, intention and concerted political action, can seize democratic control of their societies and economies before scrapping the oil platforms and closing down the mines:

The grotesque concentration of resources for burning at the top of the human pyramid is a scourge for all living beings; an effective climate policy would be the total expropriation of the top one to ten percent. That would

eliminate up to half of all emissions in one fell blow and finance a global transition several times over. Some humans would have to induce such a measure, but they would scarcely gain more from it than the animals, whose objective interest – as subjectively mute as it might be – aligns neatly with that of the human enemies of the 1 percent. Other species, too, await our liberation.¹⁷

Humans perforce wage the political fight against anthropogenic climate change but they do so not only *for* humans.

Crisis and Conjuncture

As we have argued, it is not the case that crises are solely in the eye of the beholder. Our view is that systems reach the limits of their capacity to adapt and enter into a state of crisis. Those crises only produce radical change, however, when specific political forces win what John Clarke calls ‘the competition to name the crisis, to identify its distinctive characteristics and treat it as the ground on which to demand new ways of doing things’.¹⁸ Crises are often welcome and long overdue. Masculinity has been said for years to be in crisis, which is a good thing if that crisis produces progressive redefinitions of masculinity or, better still, a fundamental revision of the very practice of gender categorisation. But it’s obviously a less welcome development when the crisis issues in a militant reassertion of ‘toxic’ and violent masculinities that manifest in sinister online subcultures, misogynistic attacks on women’s rights, the despicable mass sexual assaults in South Asia and elsewhere. As Susan Watkins has shown, the statistics on sexual and domestic abuse tend to correlate with poverty, insecurity and male joblessness.¹⁹ So the crisis of masculinity is part of though clearly not reducible to other socio-economic crises: the long march of deindustrialisation, and neoliberal capitalism, for instance. The potential resolution of one is partly dependent on the resolution of the other, which is what we mean by saying that the various crises addressed by this special issue are interconnected. It is also what we mean by pointing up the peculiar urgency of the still unaddressed crisis that has been unfolding with extra intensity since 2008. Moreover, the particular crises of socio-cultural assumptions about, categorisations of and relations between gendered subjects is another example of why the struggle to define or name a crisis is the necessary precondition for alternative thinking and action. This crisis requires significant cultural change but fundamental social and economic transformations as well.

So the essays in this issue do more than simply point at the unfolding economic crisis of neoliberal capitalism. Does it even make sense to speak of capitalism being in crisis? When was it not? What state was it in before 2008? Stability? A state of delicate equilibrium? Marx argues that capitalism exists perpetually in a state of crisis, indeed is constituted by it, and that the original cause of all economic crises is the over-accumulation of capital, a great mass of surplus capital that is unable to realise the expected rate of profit and is therefore hoarded or used to pursue the high returns of speculation. When one views crisis as the rule not the exception one starts to appreciate the importance of what Marx has to say in the third volume of *Capital* about the 'tendency of the rate of profit to fall'. The argument is that the pressure of competition leads to investment in the means of production, the extent of which then exceeds the amount of labour power employed. 'Constant capital' grows more rapidly than 'variable capital'. The ultimate cause of all capitalist crises is then the tendency of capital to grow beyond the means of investing it. The accumulation of capital therefore makes further accumulation more difficult and periodic crises are inevitable. In short, capital does not so much encounter limits as constitute its own limit: 'The *true barrier* to capitalist production is *capital itself*.'²⁰

There is no reason to think that this process of chaotic expansion isn't limitless and that some catastrophe like a major war or ecological collapse or even a massive devaluation of capital might not kick start it anew. Perhaps Jason Moore is correct that the end of the strategy of what he calls cheap nature will make continued capital accumulation extremely difficult. Moore announces an 'epochal crisis' of capitalism, 'the breakdown of the strategies and relations that have sustained capital accumulation over the past five centuries'.²¹ He suggests that the exhaustion of the strategy of using labour-power, food, energy and raw materials as cheap and inexhaustible inputs of commodity production 'may be a fundamental barrier to capital accumulation in the twenty-first century' (13). Capitalism in nature, as Moore prefers to call it, is about to hit the buffers. But this is hardly a cause for optimism, as Moore acknowledges: 'Whether or not the exhaustion of the Cheap Nature model leads to something better, or something worse, remains to be seen' (294). Let us hope that we don't have to wait for the total degradation of the biosphere before that happens, a Pyrrhic victory if ever there was one.

So what do we do with this insight into the crisis-prone tendencies of capitalism? If capitalism has been experiencing various destructive and unstable contradictions since around 1970, then this period has hardly been one of crisis but more like a slow unfolding over an epoch of the system's inherently contradictory logic. That is, according to Marx, simply what capitalism *is*: a contradictory social and economic system. The *real* crisis was in the late 1960s

and 1970s when these contradictions became acutely visible, and to many intolerable, and therefore when it seemed possible that the Left would gain the right to name the crisis, explain it and direct it politically. Jürgen Habermas refers to these moments as legitimization crises,²² while Georg Lukács talks about the *Augenblick* or moment in which contradictions become sharpened and acute and therefore grossly apparent and susceptible to political action. Taking issue with vulgar Marxism's 'fatalistic' evolutionary philosophies of history, which assume that the gradual sharpening of capitalism's contradictions will inevitably issue in crisis and victory, Lukács talks about the 'actuality of the revolution' being the art of identifying moments of crisis and heightened possibility at which, for a 'moment', decisive political action becomes conceivable and possible.²³

We are therefore convinced that Nicos Poulantzas still provides the most succinct and enabling formulation of the predominantly political nature of the crises that confront us. The orthodox or bourgeois conception of crisis, Poulantzas argues, writing in the midst of the crucial economic and political crisis of the 1970s, is that a crisis is 'a dysfunctional moment that ruptures an otherwise harmonious functioning of the 'system'.'²⁴ This approach assumes that equilibrium can quickly be re-established, either through technocratic fixes or through some more drastic remedy. Thus British government ministers now talk about the final emergence from the 'difficult' and 'painful' necessity of austerity, though of course the difficulty and the pain of this fictional recovery is borne not by the wealthy, whose position has been maintained and even strengthened by tax cuts, quantitative easing and asset price inflation, but by the poor. Nor has anything like equilibrium been restored. The end of the crisis is not in sight; it has not been set right with technical fixes. Indeed, for most of the Earth's people, crisis is the everyday norm, which generates an epistemological challenge to conceptions of crisis as exceptional moments of intense, or intensely visible, contradiction. Vast mountains of surplus capital and household debt continue to build up, asset bubbles continue to inflate and across the globe there is a seemingly unending crisis of collapsing infrastructure, ecological degradation, inequality, indebtedness, stagnating or falling wages and living standards in addition to insecure or non-existent work. Poulantzas also observes that crises are necessary for capitalism to purge itself of bad debt and unproductive activities, to offload costs and engineer new opportunities for accumulation. Naomi Klein is among the many thinkers to have pointed out that capitalists exploit and even manufacture crises to these ends, a fact summarised by the title of Philip Mirowski's book about the continuing hegemony of neoliberal economics, *Never Let a Serious Crisis Go to Waste: How Neoliberalism Survived the Financial Meltdown*.²⁵

Poulantzas insists that an economic crisis is in one sense not really a crisis at all unless and *until* it has morphed into a crisis of hegemony. 'It should be

evident that capitalism can always (although depending on class struggles this could be *cannot*) reabsorb these crises and prolong its reproduction.²⁶ Stuart Hall advances a similar conception of crisis as constituted by a breakdown in historically-specific ‘commonsense’ ways of understanding and organising subjectivities and social relations, which leads to an open (in the double sense of being visible and in no sense predetermined) cultural and political struggle for hegemony. These ideas, and Hall’s concept of conjuncture, discussed below, inform our approach. When an economic crisis, for instance, shakes people’s faith in the reigning political and ideological settlement then the beneficiaries, Hall makes clear, are just as likely to be the political Right, who will find ways of explaining the crisis that address the fears and desires of important constituencies of opinion-formers and voters. *Policing the Crisis* vividly illustrated that racialised fears about street crime, for example, were exploited by the multifaceted political formation that emerged as Thatcherism, thus dividing some voters along vectors of race as well as class.²⁷ Conservative political forces have done this since at least the 1970s with anti-immigration, nationalist and faux anti-elitist ‘culture war’ rhetoric.

So profound political and ideological struggle is the only truly predictable outcome of moments when a system enters a period of economic crisis and its hegemony is imperilled. Burgeoning inequalities and flagrant contradictions between this reality and the ruling powers’ claim that they rule in the general interest open up a space for political forces to give the crisis an accurate name and to put together a compelling narrative that explains both its origins and the potential escape route, to exercise the ‘intellectual and moral leadership’ that Gramsci identified as the crucial element of hegemony.²⁸ ‘In brief’, according to Poulantzas, ‘all teleological concepts of crisis must be mistrusted: the end of capitalism does not depend on any crisis whatsoever but on the issue of the class struggles that manifest themselves therein’.²⁹ Hall similarly had little patience for any naïve progressive or Marxist ‘search for some philosophical guarantee that the law of history will, like Minerva’s owl, take wing at five minutes to midnight, rescuing us from the vicissitudes of the present’.³⁰ So how might we historicise, conceptualise and theorise the *specific* contours and possibilities of contemporary crisis?

Poulantzas reminds us that we are in need of a theory of crisis that distinguishes between the longer rhythms of crisis-prone and crisis-dependent capitalism and the particular and relatively brief moments at which capitalism’s contradictions are sharpened and become apparently toxic. Hall’s preferred heuristic was the idea of conjuncture, which he developed from the work of Louis Althusser. A conjuncture occurs when one relatively settled, hegemonic way of ‘defining reality’ fragments under the pressure of interlocking, inter-related crises:

A conjuncture is a period in which the contradictions and problems and antagonisms, which are always present in different domains in a society, begin to come together. They begin to accumulate, they begin to fuse, to overlap with one another. The ideological becomes part of the economic problem and vice versa [...] they fuse into a *ruptural unity*, and that's the beginning of conjuncture. The aftermath of the fusion, how that fusion develops, its challenges to the existing historical project or social order [...] *all* [...] of that arc constitutes conjuncture.³¹

The uneasy compromises of the so-called 'post-war consensus' came under just this pressure in the 1970s. The 1973 oil crisis plunged many Western economies into recession almost overnight and catalysed a global crisis of profitability: the prolonged post-war boom was over and a doomy, anxious period of 'stagflation' followed. But for Hall, the fragmentation of the social democratic settlement was simultaneously cultural, sexual and ideological too. Indeed, and crucially, Hall departed from Althusser in claiming that crisis was not always ultimately determined by economic forces 'in the final instance'.

Although highly suggestive, Hall's use of 'conjuncture' is not without its difficulties, not least because by his own admission he uses the term to describe both longer epochs such as neoliberalism³² and moments of potential rupture such as the aftermath of the financial crisis when the economic and ideological 'contradictions and problems and antagonisms' that are always present are articulated with peculiar intensity. However, as Fredric Jameson argues, '[w]e cannot not periodize'.³³ This famous double negative testifies to the vital but invidious task of separating out into discrete periods the extremely *longue durée* of historical capitalism. But Jameson also reminds us how profoundly necessary it is, both theoretically and politically, to find terms that distinguish between, in this case, the crisis-prone span of an entire mode of production, briefer eras or epochs governed by the rhythms of capitalism's contractions and lengthy distensions, as well as the much briefer 'moments' or conjunctures in which the system's future prospects, its expansion or modification or even replacement, are worked out and decided. Ernest Mandel examines the epochal spurts and slumps, the expansive and depressive waves over capitalism's history since the beginning of the nineteenth century such as the post-Second World War boom and the long depression lasting from 1873 to the 1890s.³⁴ Even longer than Mandel's waves are Giovanni Arrighi's cycles or phases of accumulation, in which, since the fifteenth century, successive hegemonic powers, namely Italian city states in alliance with the armed power of Portugal and Spain, the Netherlands, Great Britain and latterly the United States, have until now rescued the world economy from periodic contractions by initiating new phases of military and financial expansion.³⁵

We propose that the term ‘conjuncture’ be reserved for moments of crisis in these longer epochs and phases, crises such as the late 1970s and early 1980s (which Hall theorised so cogently) or for that matter the 1870s or the 1930s or our current post-2008 conjuncture when multiple economic and ideological tensions are revealed with particular vividness and in which, vitally, hegemony is unsettled to the extent that further accumulation on an altered basis and meaningful transformation become rival options. We also require a vocabulary of crisis, this vital contemporary keyword, that allows us to tell the difference between *economic* crises, which can be appropriated and named and put to use, and *political* crises or crises of *hegemony*, which constitute an opportunity for political forces to name the crisis and direct it towards a more long-lasting transformation. They unfold at different rates and according to different rhythms. In Britain, for example, the economic crisis of 2008 was exploited initially for the purpose of deepening neoliberalism by socialising the banks’ losses, slashing welfare and social protections for the poor and taxes for the wealthy, privatising and outsourcing public services, forcing workers into precarious and low-paid jobs and once more inflating debt bubbles. Only now, ten years later, is it developing into an authentic crisis of hegemony with emboldened oppositional forces up against a Right torn between the two options of upholding a failed and illegitimate status quo and extending neoliberalism still more radically after Brexit.

Crises of Democracy and Profitability

Wolfgang Streeck understands the crash of 2008 and the continued ‘disequilibrium’ of the advanced capitalist world as the latest effect of what he calls ‘the crisis of democratic capitalism’ since the late 1960s.³⁶ What became visible at that time was the incompatibility of democratic aspirations with the requirements of capital accumulation. The compromise formations of welfare capitalism in North America and Western Europe that sought to reconcile the contradictory imperatives of capital accumulation, modest redistribution and social justice became increasingly unstable. The ‘class compromise’ of the post-war period collapsed because it could not ensure profitable conditions for capital accumulation in a manner consistent with social democratic aspirations. Even in its own terms, the class compromise between capital and labour on which post-war prosperity depended increasingly did not work. By the 1970s it could not control inflation. Nor could it prevent fiscal crises or ensure full employment. It was intolerable on other grounds too, relying as it did on a sexist division of labour, on bourgeois and heteronormative models of the family, on the exclusion and exploitation of immigrants and racial minorities,

on the continued subordination of the poor world and on the painful repression entailed by wage labour and the gratifications of increasingly hegemonic mass-consumerism. Hence the myriad of radical initiatives in the First World, the feminist movement, civil rights struggles against racism and for gay liberation, environmental activism and the loosening of various conservative cultural and social strictures. These realisations and ambitions are the specifically First-World manifestations of what Jameson calls the 'global 1960s' (the period around 1955 and the mid-1970s) and Immanuel Wallerstein dubs the prospective world revolution of 1968.³⁷ '1968' was principally a rebellion, an abortive, impulsive and largely uncoordinated rebellion as well as an ultimately unsuccessful one, but a rebellion all the same and therefore an expression of deep disenchantments, against the authoritarian or bureaucratic state and against the unequal division of labour and wealth that those states upheld. From Mexico City, Buenos Aires and Montevideo to Rome, Paris, Turin, Prague and several points in between, '1968' took aim at states that had shown themselves incapable of fulfilling the political and economic aspirations of their citizens. For those demands to be met, the very existence of capitalism (and of actually existing communism) had to be called into question.

The crisis of profitability that befell the world economy at this time saw the onset of a concerted global offensive of capital against the democratic aspirations of labour. That offensive took the form, through various nationally-specific political formations such as Thatcherism or Reaganomics, of what we now call neoliberalism or what Ralph Miliband dubbed 'class war conservatism',³⁸ the largely successful effort to reduce wages and crush organised labour in the First World, to vanquish the nominally socialist Second World and to 'recolonise' the so-called Third World through structural adjustment, indebtedness and imperialist war.³⁹ Jameson's long 1960s therefore represents a moment, to use Lukács's term, or a conjuncture, to use Hall's and Althusser's, when the clashing regimes of democracy and capital entered into a state of profound and irreconcilable as well as extensively visible tension, when for a time it seemed as though a variant of the former might actually be victorious (in the shape of wage militancy, redistribution, the socialisation of capital, various kinds of personal liberation and social advancement, a democratised state, workers' control and an irreversible shift in class power⁴⁰) though as we know it was the latter that ultimately prevailed. Adding to this existential crisis for capitalism during the global 1960s were the revolutionary demands of liberation movements in the newly decolonising states of the postcolonial world, which sought to escape from their allotted role as impoverished providers of raw materials and primary commodities in the great commodity chains of the world economy by insisting on nationalising their own resources, stabilising commodity prices, cancelling debts, setting up a system of preferential tariffs,

introducing protectionist trade policies and pursuing foreign assistance as a form of reparation for European colonialism.⁴¹ This is the period when the whole structure of post-war capitalism threatened to collapse beneath the weight of the contradiction between the requirements of capital and insistent demands for democracy.

Capital won these battles against labour, though Streeck's argument is that it did so only by foisting debt and immiseration on most of the so-called developing world. In the core states capitalism retained its hegemony only by postponing the final reckoning, in Streeck's phrase 'buying time'. Governments stopped taxing the wealthy and conspired to reduce wages and thus aggregate demand. The stopgap was increased government borrowing and the expansion of risky private loan markets. After all, that is what a sub-prime loan of the kind that precipitated the financial crash of 2008 *is* – the essentially predatory extension of credit to people with little or no chance of paying the money back. These are the now unsustainable means by which 'social peace' was ensured during the neoliberal era of wage restraint and an accumulation crisis was prevented from developing into a legitimisation crisis. Most recently, governments have bought time with central bank purchases of bank liabilities. As ever, the financial crisis was blamed on too much democracy, that is, excessive public spending commitments. But 'no democratic state dared to impose on its society another economic crisis of the dimensions of the Great Depression of the 1930s'.⁴² How sustainable is this trade-off between the imperatives of accumulation and citizens' aspirations for democratic rights and socio-economic prosperity?

Streeck argues that credit-based consumerism is no longer able 'to tame legitimisation crises by generating illusions of growth' in the US and the EU.⁴³ It is not 'credit-based consumerism' that will underpin the capitalist societies of the future. Streeck is convinced that we have entered a period of permanent 'disequilibrium', of capitalism's lingering but inescapable 'decay' (35). In this model, the world's peoples must forget their aspirations for a secure income, for social equality and a habitable environment and must content themselves instead with keeping their governments' creditors happy and with helping to provide a 'stable investment environment' for a rootless plutocracy that will not invest and does not pay its taxes. Streeck argues that capitalism is dying. It has forfeited legitimacy, offering only burgeoning inequality, the irretrievable despoliation of the living world, public and private indebtedness, financial meltdowns, plus an unchecked orgy of speculation and rent-seeking, not to mention extremes of immiseration in the so-called developing world. But before it 'will go to hell', in Streeck's words, capitalism 'will for the foreseeable future hang in limbo, dead or about to die from an overdose of itself but still

very much around, as nobody will have the power to move its decaying body out of the way'.⁴⁴

Without a genuine political crisis we are left with what Andrew Gamble calls a protracted 'crisis without end'.⁴⁵ Dystopia might be the result. Its successor(s) in hegemony could make neoliberalism look like a golden age. There is every possibility that the next few decades will see what Stephen Graham has called 'a switch from the military neoliberalism of the past two decades to a full-scale fascism organized around control of fossil fuels'.⁴⁶ Giovanni Arrighi and Beverley Silver warned several years ago that the United States, which spends more on arms than the rest of the world put together, might even convert its massive foreign indebtedness into a kind of tribute payment or protection racket. 'There are no credible aggressive new powers that can provoke the breakdown of the US-centred world system, but the United States has even greater capabilities than Britain did a century ago to convert its declining hegemony into an exploitative domination'.⁴⁷ The dangers from which the US offers protection are those that it has created itself, as Arrighi and Silver note, behaving in that respect like any effective Mafioso. So it came to pass. 'I told a number of countries over the last few days', revealed the current (albeit precarious) *capo dei capi* at the UN in September 2018. 'I said, listen, you're a very rich country. We protect you. Without our protection, you would have real problems. You would have real problems. I said you should reimburse us for this protection'.⁴⁸ The Trump administration is trying to substitute rampant nationalism, trade wars, geopolitical chaos, impulsive mafia violence and barefaced elite self-interest for the system of mutual obligations that has structured the global economic order since the rapprochement with China in the 1970s (what Peter Gowan calls the 'Dollar-Wall Street Regime' that recycles surplus capital from East Asia and the oil states through US banks, corporations and government debt).⁴⁹ One response to the contours of contemporary crisis is neoliberalism's growing retreat behind border walls.

As we have argued, there is no hope to be gleaned from an evolutionary or teleological model of crisis. The final crash may come but it needn't bring about Utopia. 2008 proves that another economic crash might just invigorate capital accumulation or at least rent-seeking and wealth-hoarding and may only belatedly and with great difficulty be transformed into a genuine crisis of hegemony or political legitimacy. If it's an ecological crash then the crisis will be existential but experienced in a protracted way that challenges assumptions about the temporality and historicity of crisis. Melting ice caps and desertification are less likely to produce a synecdochic 'Lehman Brothers' moment to concentrate attention and mark a neat historical 'turning-point'. With that in mind, now more than ever we can appreciate the prescience and the political urgency of Marx and Engels's remark that the 'now hidden, now

open' fight may result in 'a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes'.⁵⁰ We need to distinguish between an economic crisis and a political crisis, and between the longer waves and rhythms of an entire mode of production of centuries' standing and particular conjunctures like our own in which that system, its tensions and contradictions as well as its vulnerabilities and possibilities are made visible and susceptible to collective political action.

The first article in this issue, by Dan Gerke, pursues precisely this question. Gerke contends that Raymond Williams's later theoretical work, particularly in *Marxism and Literature* (1977), offers not only a theory of cultural domination but a theory of cultural change as well. Williams gave conceptual form to this theory with his celebrated description of any given culture as a complex amalgam of residual, dominant and emergent elements. Gerke argues that Williams's earlier notion of a 'long' 'cultural' revolution resembles the 'war of position' described by Antonio Gramsci. Culture is a necessary field of class struggle, though cultural struggle must obviously be allied at key moments to a more direct struggle or 'war of manoeuvre' to capture and democratise political and economic power. Williams's work on the 'long' or 'cultural' revolution whereby values and practices of solidarity and democratic control are gradually acquired and honed can be allied to Gramsci's analysis in the *Prison Notebooks* of how a war of position prepares subaltern forces to assume political control of 'interregnums', those moments or conjunctures when hegemonies are unsettled and become contestable. Williams, in short, can be read as a kind of crisis theorist. What kind of cultural work, he asks, provides the conditions necessary for the working class to seize a new hegemony from the ruins of the old?

Robert Spencer's contribution looks at the global crisis of work through the lens of the Scottish novelist James Kelman's recent novels *Mo Said She Was Quirky* (2013) and especially *Dirt Road* (2016). He too is interested in the kind of cultural or aesthetic work required to name and identify a crisis, in this case the continuing and endlessly metamorphosing crisis of financialised capitalism since 2008, and to envision escape routes from it. Following David Harvey's definition of capitalist crisis as '[s]urplus capital and surplus labour exist[ing] side by side with seemingly no way to put them back together in the midst of immense human suffering and unmet needs'.⁵¹ Spencer enumerates the consequences of a world in which there are simply not enough decent jobs to go round. This is especially the case in the 'developing' world, of course, which is almost entirely dependent on credit, aid and agro-mineral exports or 'enclave industries' such as oil extraction. The crisis of work that has produced mega-cities of un-, under- or informally employed workers in the under-developed world takes the form in the over-developed world of epidemics of unemployment or else, in states like Britain and the US where trade unions and

welfare systems have been eviscerated, of what the British government refers to as the 'jobs miracle' of exploitative, low-paid, precarious, often part-time and frequently totally odious or else soul-destroyingly unnecessary work.⁵² Kelman's protagonists consciously renounce the alienating world of what the anthropologist David Graeber bluntly calls 'shit' and 'bullshit' work. They favour a vision of individual and collective freedom in which necessary work is reduced and shared out and in which there is therefore more opportunity for the currently unmet need of non-alienated 'play'. Kelman's novels narrate the crisis of work but give it a utopian spin, and in so doing help us to picture and hanker after a social and economic order in which work has been radically transformed.

Christopher Vardy then explores figurations of contemporary crisis and 'ways of seeing' climate change in Colson Whitehead's *Zone One* (2011). This 'post-apocalyptic' fiction is set in New York: 'Zone One' in lower Manhattan is one of a few human enclaves left following a devastating zombie apocalypse. The novel uses undead bodies as a metaphor for the damaging logics of repetitive, increasing consumption, and as a means of compressing and intensifying the slowly unfolding logics of climate change. Vardy's article argues that *Zone One* questions the implications of living through late capitalist forms of labour and consumption that make future life increasingly precarious, perhaps even impossible. The novel critiques any naïve fantasy that profound ecological crisis can be met with 'reconstruction' of the world as it is now while acknowledging a double-bind: that while the perpetuation of existing social-economic relations is unsustainable, even unbearable, other necessarily radical future paths remain unimaginable. *Zone One*, with its wry, reflexive invocation of post-apocalyptic tropes, is a case study in the altered, uncertain 'ways of seeing' contemporary life that the crises of climate change can produce.

Amy Rushton's "'Who's Responsible – You Fucking Are": Contesting Narratives of the Ongoing 'Mental Health Crisis in the UK' looks at how metaphors of psychological stress haunt descriptions of social and economic processes and their cultural and ideological expressions. With hand wringing over mental health rife across British political discourse over the past decade, Rushton explores the relationship between the emergence of this supposed 'crisis' of mental health and the economic 'crisis' of 2008. She points to the systematic peeling away of state support for mental health in Britain after the 1990s while examining cultural texts (including the music of the 'Manics') that make connections between levels or manifestations of 'crisis'. Our moment is only superficially indicative of a 'crisis' in national mental health; when we pay attention to the longer narrative of contemporary Britain, this current moment is, in fact, a crisis of neoliberalism's social, economic and political failure.

Conclusion

The various crises addressed by the essays in this collection are all connected. They are all political too. The grindingly protracted crisis of neoliberalism, for example, the effects of which are felt in indebtedness, inequality, precarious work, a degraded environment and an epidemic of mental health problems, is political in the final analysis. That is, only political struggle and political action will decide between rival futures: on the one hand, destitution and insecurity entrenched behind border walls amidst climate breakdown and exoduses of immiserated populations; on the other, the ‘real utopia’ of a decarbonised world economy, the defence and accommodation of migrants, plus investment in automation, a steady-state economy and the proliferation of new ways of working and organising production.⁵³ Even the existential crisis of climate change is a political crisis, obviously not in the sense that its effects are restricted to human societies but in the sense that radical collective political action is our only chance of mitigating, if not forestalling, the cascading effects of climate change. Crisis is not a synonym for emergency. The term does not necessarily refer to a turning point. Instead it names an opportunity, which may or may not be taken, though we must fervently hope and make every effort to ensure that it will. Our rapidly warming world amplifies the importance of Lukács’s insight ‘that at a *particular* point, the situation demands that a decision be taken and the day after tomorrow may be too late to make that decision’.⁵⁴

Notes

- 1 Robert Brenner, *The Economics of Global Turbulence: The Advanced Capitalist Economies from Long Boom to Long Downturn, 1945–2005* (London: Verso, 2006).
- 2 See John Bellamy Foster, *The Ecological Rift: Capitalism’s War on the Earth* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2011).
- 3 Adam Trexler, *Anthropocene Fictions: The Novel in a Time of Climate Change* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2015), 4. Unless otherwise noted, all emphasis in quotations is original.
- 4 Timothy Morton, *Being Ecological* (St Ives: Pelican, 2018), 16.
- 5 Andreas Malm, *Fossil Capital: The Rise of Steam Power and the Roots of Global Warming* (London: Verso, 2016), 272.
- 6 See Paul Kingsnorth, *Confessions of a Recovering Environmentalist* (London: Faber & Faber, 2017).
- 7 Oxfam, <https://www.oxfam.org/en/pressroom/pressreleases/2015-12-02/worlds-richest-10-produce-half-carbon-emissions-while-poorer-35> (accessed 18 March 2019).
- 8 Andreas Malm, *The Progress of This Storm: Nature and Society in a Warming World* (London: Verso, 2018), 17.
- 9 Malm, *Progress*, 266.
- 10 Mark Lynas, *The God Species: How Humans Really Can Save the Planet* (London: Fourth Estate, 2011), 29. See also Malm, *Fossil Capital*, 32.

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- 11 Malm, *Fossil Capital*, 68.
- 12 Malm, *Fossil Capital*, 199.
- 13 The political aims and approaches of fossil fuel cartels and the Trump administration are increasingly indistinguishable, as is the case with political and business elites in Middle Eastern oil states and petro-states such as Russia. This identity of interests is a measure both of the obstacles we face and of the fact that, as Naomi Klein contends, 'to avert climate chaos, we need to challenge the capitalist ideologies that have conquered the world since the 1980s'. *No is Not Enough: Defeating the New Shock Politic* (London: Allen Lane, 2017), 82.
- 14 John Bellamy Foster, *Marx's Ecology: Materialism and Nature* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000), 113–4.
- 15 See Amitav Ghosh's argument that 'the events set in motion by global warming have a more intimate connection with humans than did the climatic phenomena of the past – this is because we have all contributed in some measure, great or small, to their making. They are the mysterious work of our own hands returning to haunt us in unthinkable shapes and forms.' *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 32.
- 16 Lynas, *The God Species*, 8.
- 17 Malm, *Progress*, 177.
- 18 John Clarke, 'What Crisis is This?', in *The Neoliberal Crisis*, ed. Sally Davison and Katharine Harris (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2015), 49–59 (55).
- 19 Susan Watkins, 'Which Feminisms?', *New Left Review* 109 (2018), 5–76 (51).
- 20 Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Vol. 3, trans. David Fernbach (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981), 358.
- 21 Jason W. Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital* (London: Verso, 2015), 1.
- 22 Jürgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (London: Heinemann, 1976).
- 23 Georg Lukács, *A Defence of 'History and Class Consciousness': Tailism and the Dialectic*, trans. Esther Leslie (London: Verso, 2000).
- 24 Nicos Poulantzas, 'The Political Crisis and the Crisis of the State', in *The Poulantzas Reader: Marxism, Law and the State*, ed. James Martin (London: Verso, 2008), 294–322 (295).
- 25 Philip Mirowski, *Never Let a Serious Crisis Go to Waste: How Neoliberalism Survived the Financial Meltdown* (London: Verso, 2013); Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (London: Allen Lane, 2007).
- 26 Poulantzas, 'The Political Crisis', 296.
- 27 Stuart Hall, David Coates and Neil Barrett, *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order* (London: Macmillan, 1984).
- 28 Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1973), 57–8.
- 29 Poulantzas, 'The Political Crisis', 296.
- 30 Stuart Hall, *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left* (London and New York: Verso, 1988), 4.
- 31 James Hay, Stuart Hall and Lawrence Grossberg, 'Interview with Stuart Hall', *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 10.1 (March 2013): 10–33 (16).
- 32 Hay, Hall and Grossberg, 'Interview with Stuart Hall', 18.
- 33 Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (London: Verso, 2002), 29.
- 34 Ernst Mandel, *Long Waves of Capitalist Development: A Marxist Interpretation* (London: Verso, 1995).

- 35 Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power, and the Origins of Our Times* (London: Verso, 1994).
- 36 Wolfgang Streeck, *Buying Time: The Delayed Crisis of Democratic Capitalism* (London: Verso, 2014).
- 37 Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Decline of American Power, The US in a Chaotic World* (New York: The New Press, 2003), 111. Fredric Jameson, 'Periodizing the 60s', *Ideologies of Theory – Essays, 1971–1986*, Vol. 2: *The Syntax of History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 178–208. Jameson's essay exemplifies the use of decadal periodisation in defining a crisis or producing a period that presages a crisis.
- 38 Ralph Miliband, *Class War Conservatism and Other Essays* (London: Verso, 2015).
- 39 'Recolonisation' is John S. Saul's term for the fate of Sub-Saharan Africa after the 1970s, *Millennial Africa: Capitalism, Socialism, Democracy* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2001), 25.
- 40 A compelling account of the moment in British history when plans for workplace democratisation and the socialisation of the finance sector came up against the rearguard might of the established interests of the City, big business and the secret state is Adam Medhurst's *That Option No Longer Exists: Britain 1974–76* (London: Zed Books, 2014).
- 41 The story of the struggle for a New International Economic Order and its subsequent defeat is told most compellingly in Walden Bello, Shea Cunningham and Bill Rau, *Dark Victory: The US, Structural Adjustment, and Global Poverty* (London: Pluto Press, 1994).
- 42 Wolfgang Streeck, 'The Crises of Democratic Capitalism', *New Left Review* 71 (2011): 5–29, 20.
- 43 Streeck, *Buying Time*, 46.
- 44 Wolfgang Streeck, *How Will Capitalism End? Essays on a Failing System* (London: Verso, 2016), 36.
- 45 Andrew Gamble, *Crisis Without End: The Unravelling of Western Prosperity* (London: Palgrave, 2014).
- 46 Stephen Graham, *Cities Under Siege: The New Military Urbanism* (London: Verso, 2010), 337. Peter Frase imagines four possible futures for the world after capitalism – communism (equality with abundance), socialism (equality with scarcity), rentism (hierarchy and abundance) and exterminism (hierarchy and scarcity). Peter Frase, *Four Futures: Visions of the World After Capitalism* (London: Verso, 2016). Here, Graham is discussing and developing the ideas of Michael Klare in *Blood and Oil* (London: Penguin, 2004).
- 47 Giovanni Arrighi and Beverley J. Silver, *Chaos and Governance in the Modern World System* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 288.
- 48 Eliot Weinberger, 'Ten Typical Days in Trump's America', *London Review of Books* 40:20 (2018): 3–8 (6).
- 49 Peter Gowan, *The Global Gamble: Washington's Faustian Bid for World Dominance* (London: Verso, 1999). The best explanations of this strange symbiosis between East Asian surplus capital and American debt-fuelled speculation are Giovanni Arrighi's *Adam Smith in Beijing: Lineages of the Twenty-First Century* (London: Verso, 2007); and Leo Panitch and Sam Gindin's *The Making of Global Capitalism: The Political Economy of American Empire* (London: Verso, 2012).
- 50 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), 79.
- 51 David Harvey, *Enigma of Capital: And the Crises of Capitalism* (London: Profile, 2011), 215.
- 52 'Prime Minister Theresa May's speech to the Confederation of British Industry', <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-speech-to-cbi-19-november-2018>
- 53 Erik Olin Wright, *Envisioning Real Utopias* (London: Verso, 2010).
- 54 Lukács, *A Defence of 'History and Class Consciousness'*, 55.

The Long War of Position: Williams and Gramsci, Culture and Crisis

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As Perry Anderson has recently argued (2016),¹ Raymond Williams's essay 'Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory' (1973)² was a landmark in the process of Gramsci's becoming a leading reference among British socialists. Williams adapted Gramsci's concept of hegemony to refer to a culturally and psychologically saturated sense of what is possible, a reified 'common sense' derived from the daily experience of living in capitalist society. He developed this interpretation further in *Marxism and Literature* (1977).³ Taken together, these texts offer a theory of cultural domination and cultural change, given systematic form in Williams's triad of residual, dominant and emergent elements within a given culture. This article argues that the temporal process elaborated in Williams's triad aligns his earlier notion of a 'long revolution' with what Gramsci called a 'war of position', a strategic orientation towards culture as a necessary but not sufficient field of class struggle. Williams's theoretical work in the 1970s unpacks the temporal dimension of the Gramscian war of position, establishing the preconditions for its success by linking it explicitly to the lived experience of the working class in their cultural self-development. It is an attempt, pursued with varying degrees of success, to synthesise Gramscian revolutionary theory with the tradition of British 'empiricist' Marxism associated with himself and E.P. Thompson.⁴

Anderson's earlier *Considerations on Western Marxism* (1976) provides a useful outline of the basic Gramscian political prescription for socialists in Western Europe:

Gramsci formulated the concept of hegemony to designate the decisively greater strength and complexity of bourgeois class rule in Western Europe, which had prevented any repetition of the October Revolution in the advanced capitalist zones of the continent. This hegemonic system of power was defined by the degree of consent it obtained from the popular masses which it dominated, and a consequent reduction in the scale of coercion needed to repress them. Its mechanisms for securing this consent lay in a ramified network of cultural institutions – schools, churches, newspapers, parties, associations – inculcating passive subordination in the exploited masses, via an ensemble of ideologies woven from the historical past and transmitted by intellectual groups auxiliary to the dominant class ... The flexible and dynamic hegemony exercised by capital over labour in the West

through this stratified consensual structure, represented a far harder barrier for the socialist movement to overcome than it had encountered in Russia [...] It permitted no frontal attack by the proletariat on the Russian model. A long and difficult 'war of position' would be necessary to contend with it.⁵

The model of 'frontal attack' Anderson describes is what Gramsci, in his *Prison Notebooks*,⁶ called a 'war of manoeuvre' or insurrection. This strategy is blocked in the advanced capitalist countries for two reasons: a) the vastly greater repressive force their states can mobilise (rendering insurrection suicidal) and; b) the relative autonomy of civil society from the state itself. Civil society or 'culture' is itself a field of political contestation, 'a powerful system of fortresses and earthworks' (238), in Gramsci's phrase, which would survive the felling of the state even were that materially possible. The separation, in these lines, between the state, conceived of as a directly oppressive apparatus, and civil society, conceived of as a more diffuse cultural and ideological space, has been and remains hotly contested both in general and in the hermeneutics of Gramsci. Anderson, for example, insisted⁷ upon the presence of ideology within the state itself (the ruse of parliamentary democracy), albeit still guaranteed in the last instance only by its capacity for violence. More recently, Peter D. Thomas has emphasised Gramsci's notion of the 'integral state' as the 'dialectical unity of the moments of civil society and political society'.⁸ These are vital questions for Marxist state theory; for present purposes we need only recall that however the functions of state and civil society are divided up (or condensed) as moments in the reproduction of class society, *any* version of a Gramscian strategy requires that a dual war be waged; against a coercive machinery that springs into action when it has to, and against the reified atmosphere of the persistent cultural life of capitalist society.

The mere existence of the coercive machinery of the state (whether this is the essence of the state or merely its bloodiest appendage) means that the war of position, or, as Anderson elsewhere puts it, to 'win the masses ideologically (consensually) to the cause of socialism',⁹ is a *necessary* but not *sufficient* condition of socialist revolution. Gramsci is very clear on this point: the war of position is not a reformist but a pre-revolutionary action, a 'long ideological and political preparation [...] to awaken popular passions and enable them to be concentrated and brought simultaneously to detonation point'.¹⁰ Notice also the clear temporality here: the war of position is a 'long' process that precedes the moment of 'detonation', the war of manoeuvre in which the coercive machinery of the state is defeated. Williams's 'long revolution' has generally been read as a process of indeterminate length, even an unstated theory of modernity,¹¹ which, by virtue of its slow, evolutionary logic, cannot be immanently revolutionary. The same could be said of Gramsci's war of

position read in abstraction from the wider theory. As we shall see, Williams's long revolution is eventually joined by a 'short' one, and by this addition it acquires the symbiotic relation to the classically revolutionary 'detonation point' through which Gramsci's war of position also realises its revolutionary historical character.

The Long and the Short of Revolution

Williams, as Anthony Barnett has correctly noted, 'proposed a moral reckoning, neither refusing revolution nor denying what it means'.¹² He endorsed revolutionary violence where necessary and, most strikingly in *Modern Tragedy*,¹³ conceptualised revolution in its fullest possible terms as the working through of social disorder, fully recognising the scale of human suffering involved. Nevertheless, Williams's 'long revolution' is a different species of social phenomena to what is normally described as revolution within the Marxist tradition. In *The Long Revolution* (1961) (hereafter *TLR*), Williams describes it as a composite of the democratic, industrial and cultural revolutions, all of which are transformations with a youthful and ongoing character:

It is evident that the democratic revolution is still at a very early stage [...] the industrial revolution, in its broad sense, is also at a comparatively early stage [...] We speak of a cultural revolution [...] the aspiration to extend the active process of learning, with the skills of literacy and other advanced communication, to all people rather than to limited groups [...] Of course, this revolution is at a very early stage.¹⁴

Clearly, even nearly sixty years after Williams wrote *TLR*, the democratic, industrial and cultural revolutions are ongoing; the transformations wrought by their most obvious occasions or phases have not (or have rarely) produced self-contained revolutionary moments, but rather ignited parallel processes of radical social and economic change that continue to unfold. This observation raises a question with both historical and strategic weight: towards what end, if any, does the variegated process that Williams identified wind? For it remains the case that all three revolutions arose from, and in their continuing development have sustained and powered, the capitalist mode of production. If the long revolution excludes, as it seems to in *TLR*, a traditional revolutionary break with the old order, is it a 'gradualist' strategy (where socialism, an entirely new society, is at least the stated end goal), or 'not-even-gradualist', that is to say, a highly optimistic description of the ongoing development of capitalism in a progressively more humane direction? Neither description, it seems to me, is adequate.

Williams wrote *The Long Revolution* in a period, wedged between his youthful membership of the Communist Party and his rapprochement with Marxism in the late 1960s and 1970s, that can fairly be described as his *least* revolutionary. In this respect, Williams's trajectory mirrored that of the broader British New Left. This was the period after Khrushchev's 'secret speech' and the disastrous Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956, over which Thompson finally left the Communist Party (CP), but several years before the explosive forces of 1968 opened out new horizons for modern Marxist theory and practice in the advanced capitalist countries. *TLR*'s year of publication (1961) was the tenth of what would be thirteen years of Conservative rule in Britain, during which the successes of the 1945 Labour government in constructing the welfare state had paradoxically been so well-integrated into the functioning of British capitalism that a politics of rupture was to many, Williams included, barely thinkable. Through the mid-1960s and 1970s, however, the trajectory of Williams's political thought shifted away from any purely gradualist strategy and towards recognition of the necessity of violent insurrection in the long run, as part of an expansively defined revolutionary transformation. Why did this happen during a period of Labour rule rather than during the long Conservative quiescence of the 1950s and early 1960s? In 1961, Williams joined the Labour Party. Consider, in this light, the following passage from *TLR*, in which Williams considers his orientation towards the increasingly incorporated institutions of the labour movement:

But it is quite clear, living in the 1960s, that the point has been reached when each of these institutions is discovering that the place in existing society proposed for it, if it agrees to limit its aims, is essentially subordinate: the wide challenge has been drained out, and what is left can be absorbed within existing terms. For many reasons this has sapped the morale of the institutions, but also, fortunately, led to crisis and argument within them. The choice as it presents itself is between qualified acceptance in a subordinate capacity or the renewal of an apparently hopeless challenge [...] If I seem eccentric in continuing to look to these institutions for effective alternative patterns, while seeing all too clearly their present limitations, I can only repeat that they can go either way, and that their crisis is not yet permanently resolved. (347–8)

In 1961, then, there was still the possibility of the more or less incorporated institutions of the labour movement going the 'right way', towards genuinely 'alternative patterns'. The inability of the 1964–70 Wilson government, the first post-reconstruction government ostensibly of the working class, to in any way break the choke hold of capitalism showed Williams that without some

sort of rupture, incorporation was going to continue apace. Williams left the Labour Party in 1966, the same year in which, with *Modern Tragedy*, he ruminated on the nature of revolution as the 'working through of a deep and tragic disorder',¹⁵ incompatible with 'our interpretation of revolution as a slow and peaceful growth of consensus [which was] at best a local experience and hope, at worst a sustained false consciousness' (79). A different tone, certainly, to Williams's advocacy in *TLR* of 'a perhaps unusual revolutionary activity: open discussion, extending relationships, the practical shaping of institutions'.¹⁶ In the *May Day Manifesto* (1967), co-authored with Thompson and Stuart Hall, Williams would systematically lay out Labour's failures, rooting them in both the inexorable development of post-war capitalism and the futility of policies based on compromise with capitalist imperatives and values.

The above picture of Williams becoming more revolutionary as the 1960s wear on, while broadly accurate, requires partial qualification with the recent discovery of 'The Future of Marxism' (1961),¹⁷ a previously unknown essay Williams published in the periodical *The Twentieth Century*. There, in contrast to Williams's other published works of the early 1960s, we find a detailed and subtle accounting of the record of the communist countries, and a sense of the continuing relevance of Marxism as a revolutionary doctrine. While Williams did not deviate from the view that revolution is supremely unlikely in the capitalist West, nor from an unremitting 'New Left' critique of authoritarianism, he viewed 'Lenin's fundamental change of direction' (60), i.e. towards pursuing revolution in the non-industrialised countries, as a development that 'has in general served the cause of human liberation in a decisive way' (60). The Leninist (or Maoist) strategies were definitely not available in the West, however, and Williams described as 'ludicrous' those 'Western Communists parties imitating the habits of thought and theories of organization deriving from wholly different social situations' (61). The future of Marxism, he insisted, would involve the reciprocal interaction of different strategies, the recovery of Marxism's 'whole tradition [...] in the course of defining relations between our own socialist movements, the liberation movements of the industrially backward countries, and the developing Communist countries' (65). Even in the early 1960s, then, Williams was synthesising elements of Gramsci's war of position and war of manoeuvre, but understood as applying to *different countries*. By the next period of Labour rule in the mid-to-late 1970s, he had come to the view that revolution in any *single* society required battle to be joined on both fronts.

In 'You're a Marxist, Aren't You?' (1976),¹⁸ Williams concluded that social-democratic gradualism in the West had become a means of incorporating the forces of socialism and of preserving, updating and strengthening capitalism. Under a liberal rubric of 'freedom', he argued, the core socialist position that

‘the basic ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange determined the character of the society or at least set limits to the possibilities of such relationships’ (69) had been abandoned, the result being, in Williams’s view, that social democrats had ‘abandoned the possibility of understanding or changing the modern world’ (69). Against this, Williams reaffirmed his own allegiance to some fundamental Marxist axioms:

Now as I think through the basic position of historical materialism, the basic definition of capitalist society and its evolution, and then the need to supersede it, to go beyond capitalist society, so that a socialist society, as apart from isolated measures of a socialist tendency, demands the destruction of capitalist society, as I think through these three propositions and try to define myself in relation to them, I have no real hesitation. These are all positions from which I now see the world and in terms of which I try to order my life and activity. (72)

Williams acknowledged that ‘the destruction of capitalist society’ would usually mean violent defeat, locating his refusal to deny violence in his experience of the war: ‘By 1944 I, who had called myself a pacifist in 1938, was in Normandy [...] since that time I have never been able to say that the use of military power to defend a revolution is something that I am against’ (72–3). Recalling the earlier internationalist emphasis of ‘The Futures of Marxism’, Williams connected violent revolutionary struggles the world over to a speculative British revolutionary future: ‘When I look at the history of the Chinese, the Cuban and the Vietnamese revolutions, I feel a basic solidarity not merely with their aims but with their methods and with the ways in which they came to power. If I found myself in Britain in any comparable social and political situation, I know where my loyalties would lie’ (73). Eagleton’s assessment, in that same year, of Williams’s ‘reticent and ambiguous attitude towards insurrectionary organisation’¹⁹ may have been fair in the late 1950s and early 1960s (‘The Future of Marxism’ problematises even this), but it certainly failed to reflect the position Williams had come to.

By 1979, Williams had arrived at a fully synthetic position, incorporating the older, ‘culturalist’ emphasis into a more traditional revolutionary Marxism. In conversation with Perry Anderson in the ‘Two Roads to Change’ section of *Politics and Letters* (1979),²⁰ Williams explicitly asserted the need for a ‘short revolution’ in which state power was dismantled by force. The ‘long revolution’ remained indispensable, however, and the two forms of revolutionary activity were now presented as mutually constitutive. In the following passage, Williams clarifies his late position and its development:

An East European said to me after reading *The Long Revolution*: 'We've had our short revolution, now we begin our long revolution.' When I wrote [TLR] I was mainly conscious of the immense length of the full social transformation, which has usually been under-played, yet which should be intrinsic to all strategic socialist thinking. I have no doubt now that the short revolution, to use that phrase, has also to occur. I wouldn't at all dissent from the traditional notions of the violent capture of state power, but I would put this revolution in a more specific way: it is accomplished when the central political organs of capitalist society lose their power of predominant social reproduction – which does not have to mean that some reproduction will not continue after wards. So to make the theoretical position clear – I now believe, though I have not always believed, that the condition for the success of the long revolution in any real terms is decisively a short revolution, which I would define not so much in terms of duration as the loss by the state of its capacity for predominant reproduction of the existing social relations [...] Talking about the run-up to that situation is not a form of gradualism [...] I think the learning of the skills of popular organisation and control, over a wide range, would make the prospect of preventing the effective reproduction of the existing social relations a much more realistic possibility in Western capitalist societies. (421–2)

The anecdote about the East European, with a short revolution preceding a long one, is counter-intuitive; the cart appears to have been put before the horse. Generally, Williams's analysis suggests, the long revolution (like Gramsci's war of position) will precede and lay the foundations for the short. In return, the short revolution facilitates the fruition of the long. Focusing on the 'run-up' to that ultimate deconstruction of state power, 'learning the skills of popular organisation and control' (ingraining participatory democracy and self-determination into all spheres of life), is decidedly *not* gradualism; it is the process whereby a society becomes capable of the full range of revolutionary actions. But this preparatory work will also be vital for what comes *after* the short revolution, in the period of socialist construction, and also for the prevention of counter-revolution: 'One crucial pattern since the classical theory [of revolution] was formulated, after all, has been that form of crisis of the ordinary capitalist state which leads not to the emergence of a new popular power, but to the hardening of the state itself into an even more repressive form – into fascism. So I am always uneasy about talk of the short revolution when the problems of the run-up to it have not really been appreciated' (422). Following this, the East European anecdote appears less incongruous. The long revolution primarily names the period of preparation, but it also evokes a longer and more indeterminate process that extends through and beyond

the destruction of the capitalist state. Certainly, this is no gradualism; *it would be, however, if not for the introduction of the short revolution*, whether that looks like a traditional insurrection or some other process whereby the state is rendered unable to reproduce or guarantee capitalist social relations.

In a sense, this was only the development of themes already present in 'The Future of Marxism' and more concretely in *Modern Tragedy* (1966), where Williams had argued that social democrats and Communists each had only one-half of the revolutionary road map. The gradualists recognised the agential social power of human beings (in trade unions and movements for extending the franchise), but not the necessity of total transformation and the necessarily painful, violent and indeed tragic nature of that process. Stalinism, inverting this, proposed a revolutionary process enacted *through* rather than *by* human beings: 'the revolutionary purpose can become itself abstracted and can be set as an idea above real men [...] There is the related imposition of an idea of the revolution on the real men and women in whose name it is being made' (82). In this authoritarian schema, revolution was understood to entail suffering, but of a kind that absented the humanist commitment to subjective investment and self-direction. For Williams, revolution could only be enacted via the 'experience', 'comprehension' and 'resolution' (83) of social disorder. A properly revolutionary involvement thus proceeded through 'lived comprehension' or 'practical consciousness'; the disorder inhering in the social edifice had to be known as *objective*, as really existing, but as long as it was experienced or 'worked through' *subjectively* it could not be mistaken for a purely objective or 'ahuman' process, as in Stalinism.

What Williams was describing in *Modern Tragedy* as the proper orientation towards revolution is closely related to a perspective he developed through an Anglo-European synthesis of theoretical influences, from Eliot to Western Marxists like Lukács, Goldmann and Sartre: the perspective of *totality*.²¹ Totality was a central category for Williams. It referred both to a method of analysis and to a basic epistemological position. The analytical method it recommended read society and culture as a fully interrelated web of mutually constitutive processes; to read any part alone for its 'essential' character would do violence to the object of analysis, since any given thing can only be understood in its relatedness to a social whole (Williams's refusal of 'categorical' analysis, in particular his late rejection of the category of the 'aesthetic',²² are examples of this commitment to 'total' analysis). The epistemological standpoint to which totality corresponded is one in which reality remains objective (Williams's position is thus a form of realism) but is as far as possible integrated into subjective experience. Experience is not its own, closed-off realm akin to the Cartesian *cogito*; it is experience *of* an objective social and material world. The perspective of totality then, has as its methodological end the reconciliation

of experience (empiricism) with the kind of rationalist, structural analysis that, following Althusser, had tended to view history as a 'process without a subject'. Williams's position is closer to the Marx of the *Eighteenth Brumaire*, for whom '[m]en make their own History [...] but under circumstances [...] given and transmitted from the past'.²³ It is precisely this position that implies the strategic reconciliation of Gramsci's two 'wars'; the war of manoeuvre (violent insurrection) is the strategy proper to a structural-material analysis, in which the capacity of the state to reproduce capitalist social relations is ended by sober stock-taking of available forces and strategic weak-points, followed by the application of force. The war of position is the strategy proper to the 'culturalist' emphasis on experience, the recognition that revolutions are made by human beings and are reliant on their subjective attitudes, affects and interpretations. The strategic aim of the perspective of totality was to unify these two approaches.

Positioning the Emergent

The British New Left, writing in a period characterised by conservative political rule and progressive cultural transformation, was seeking to describe how developed capitalism and parliamentary democracy made violent insurrection an insufficient, not an inappropriate, vehicle for social transformation. As Williams recognised, Gramsci's insights were central to this project:

In seeking to define [the New Left's approach], it was possible to look again at certain important parts of the Marxist tradition, notably the work of Gramsci with his emphasis on hegemony. We could then say that the essential dominance of a particular class in society is maintained not only, although if necessary, by power, and not only, although always, by property. It is maintained also and inevitably by a lived culture: that saturation of habit, of experience, of outlook, from a very early age and continually renewed at so many stages of life, under definite pressures and within definite limits, so that what people come to think and feel is in large measure a reproduction of the deeply based social order which they may even in some respects think they oppose and indeed actually oppose.²⁴

Revolution in the West, then, meant a war on two fronts or, as Williams later put it in *Politics and Letters*, a long revolution on the terrain of culture, meaning and experience, and a short revolution against the state's capacity to reproduce the exploitative social relations of capitalism. Within the New Left in the 1960s and 1970s, debates raged as to the appropriate weight to give to

each front in the class struggle. Under the influence of Althusserian theory, thinkers such as Anderson and Eagleton²⁵ questioned, to varying degrees, the very possibility of conducting a cultural struggle given that traditional Marxist 'base and superstructure' accounts of social causation seemed to make both culture and politics subordinate to structural determinations emanating from class rule in the realm of production. The apparent omnipresence of ideology in what Althusser termed the 'Ideological State Apparatuses'²⁶ (a phrase that only heightened the theoretical problem of distinguishing the state from civil society) and the seemingly ineradicable presence in every cultural institution of the ideology of the ruling class suggested that wars of position and long revolutions would be futile prior to the destruction of the capitalist state (now conceived in the broadest terms as the effective rule of the ruling class).

Williams responded to the scepticism with which some British Marxists viewed cultural struggle by constructing a theory of hegemony that, while rooted in the Gramscian basics, incorporated a stronger dose of empiricism. The first pillar of that theory was the de-ideologisation of received interpretations of hegemony as overt consent or as the appearance in the minds of workers of some version of the articulate ideology of the ruling class. Williams emphasised instead the way the dominant order, as it is lived and experienced by individuals, comes to saturate their day-to-day expectations and unspoken axioms (a conception closer to 'commodity fetishism' in Marx, 'reification' in Lukács and, more recently, Mark Fisher's analysis of 'capitalist realism') so that a contingent social order is over-objectified to the point of appearing natural, eternal and impervious to human intervention or control. The second pillar of Williams's empiricist Gramscianism was his tripartite structuration of hegemony via the concepts *residual*, *dominant* and *emergent*.

It is the second pillar of Williams's theory that will primarily concern us going forward, but let us briefly explore the first. Hegemony, Williams argued in *Marxism and Literature*, is 'a "culture", but a culture which has also to be seen as the lived dominance and subordination of particular classes'.²⁷ 'Culture', for Williams, referred not just to the matrix of interlinked social processes that comprise a social order but also to the product of a collective, though always variegated, experience. Culture and its products (both material and ideational) embody the 'practical consciousness' of human beings encountering a concrete social order and living within it. Hegemony in its most operative sense refers to the *dominant* sector of that culture, described in 'Base and Superstructure' as that 'central system of practices, meanings and values, which we can properly call dominant and effective'.²⁸ But hegemony 'does not equate [this system] with consciousness [...] Instead it sees the relations of domination and subordination, in their forms as practical consciousness, as in effect a saturation of the whole process of living [...] to such a depth that

the pressures and limits of what can ultimately be seen as a specific economic, political and cultural system seem to most of us the pressures and limits of simple experience and common sense'.²⁹ Hegemony 'materialises' ideology, emphasising the origin of meaning in practical activity (lived experience), and the centrality of processes that naturalise and universalise the dominant social order (reification). The dominant or hegemonic culture is not the direct product of class domination (as in theories based on ideology), but is rather the product of people's *experience* of a social order that, it so happens, is in fact premised upon class domination.

Within the totality of a given culture, in Williams's schema, the dominant 'mode' is only one component part; residual and emergent elements are variously incorporated into, tolerated alongside or rejected by it. In 'Heirs of Gramsci', Anderson argues that 'Williams distinguished two types of oppositional culture, each traceable to a class, capable of escaping such incorporation: residual and emergent – that is, rooted in either a past or in what might prove a future'.³⁰ This may be overstating the case; the class link to particular elements is often tacit, with the different modes primarily paralleled by different 'social formations' or 'ways of life' (in stricter Marxist terms, modes of production). Williams initially defines the two oppositional modes as follows:

By 'residual' I mean that some experiences, meanings and values, which cannot be verified or cannot be expressed in terms of a dominant culture, are nevertheless lived and practiced on the basis of the residue – cultural as well as social – of some previous social formation [...] By 'emergent' I mean, first, that new meanings and values, new practices, new significances and experiences, are continually being created.³¹

Williams fleshes out what 'residual' might mean in practice by citing 'religious values' (40) and, 'in a culture like Britain [...] certain notions derived from a rural past' (40). It is not reading too much into Williams's analysis to cipher this as a feudal social order, but again, the structural parallelism is between that whole way of life and its surviving elements, not the latter and the delimited values or articulate ideology of a feudal aristocracy. When it comes to the *emergent* elements in a culture, however, Williams is more ready to draw an explicit class link: 'We have indeed one source [of emergent elements] to hand from the central body of Marxist theory. We have the formation of a new class, the coming to consciousness of a new class. This remains, without doubt, quite centrally important' (42). However, there are also more diffuse emergent elements that 'can be different in quality from the developing and articulate interests of a rising class. They can include, for example, alternative perceptions of others, in immediate personal relationships, or new perceptions of material

and media, in art and science, and within certain limits these new perceptions can be practiced' (44). Here we have an emergent texture of lived experience that sits outside what is sanctioned by the dominant order and beyond what is recognisable to the residual. Within this, Williams is careful to distinguish between those emergent elements that proceed from class consciousness or interest, and those that issue from a more diffuse lived experience: 'At times they can be very close [...] and on the relations between them much in political practice depends. But culturally and as a matter of theory the two can be seen as distinct' (44).

In *Marxism and Literature* (1977), Williams nuances his analysis of the emergent by distinguishing between elements that are merely new and those that may be said to presage the eventual construction of a persistent counter-hegemony, a change in the form of society. 'It is exceptionally difficult', argues Williams, 'to distinguish between those which are really elements of some new phase of the dominant culture ... and those which are substantially alternative or oppositional to it: emergent in the strict sense rather than merely novel' (123). Indeed, the word 'emergent' connotes not novelty but the early development of something more fully formed, something intimated by culture that has yet to emerge 'in full' historically. We know that by the mid-1970s, Williams accepted many of the basic propositions of historical materialism, including 'the basic definition of capitalist society and its evolution',³² the need to supersede it and construct socialism, the centrality in this of 'the fundamental resistance to capitalist state power' (74) and the agency of 'the industrial working class' (74). When Williams speaks of the *oppositional* emergent, then (as opposed to the novel or otherwise excluded/unrecognised), we should read him as describing the stirrings of an oppositional hegemony (a new dominant mode, in other words), a culture concomitant with the 'total transformation' of society, itself entailing a new mode of production and a new class structure. Williams signals the gestational nature of this proto-socialist emergent by comparing it to an utterance or sign that has not yet reached full articulation:

What matters, finally, in understanding emergent culture, as distinct from both the dominant and the residual, is that it is never only a matter of immediate practice; indeed it depends crucially on finding new forms or adaptations of form. Again and again what have to observe is in effect a *pre-emergence*, active and pressing but not yet fully articulated, rather than the evident emergence which could be more confidently named.³³

The idea of 'pre-emergence' is consistent with the notion of a war of position as a *preparatory* phase in which the seeds are planted of something that will come to fruition only with the war of manoeuvre or short revolution (as

well as ensuring the sustainability of those shorter actions). But what is it, exactly, that is emerging? The linguistic metaphor evokes Williams's long-standing emphasis, from *The Long Revolution* onward, that culture is a form of the communication of lived experience. Assuming a Marxist understanding of historical change (such as Williams had adopted by the late 1970s) the 'oppositional emergent' sector of a culture will of necessity be a form of the communication of the lived experience of the new or 'rising' class. *Full* articulation of that experience would mean articulation without the influence and distortion of the dominant sector of the culture, both in its form as the articulate ideology of the dominant class, and as a reified set of assumptions and expectations (derived from experience) within the rising class's own cultural institutions.

Now, even if the above account of 'pre-emergence' is correct, it remains to establish the conditions under which 'full emergence' could occur. Recalling that this would mean the passing from one dominant hegemony to another, it follows from both Williams's and Gramsci's analyses that this would have two major preconditions. First, it would require the attainment by the emergent culture of a certain degree of efficacy, that is, of *successful communication*. The emerging culture would need to account for the experience of the rising class to the point where it could provide a compelling image of a new social order (Anderson's 'winning the masses to the cause of socialism'). Secondly, the dominant hegemony would need to reveal its own contingency, its lack of solidity and naturalness; historically, this has perhaps only occurred during periods of economic crisis or war. The crucial point here, and on this the strategies of war of position and long revolution are premised, is that *even if the second condition has been met, the emergent culture will fail to take hold if the first condition has not*. In other words, the successful production of an emergent (or pre-emergent) culture of the rising class, rooted in its own emergent experience, is what prepares that class to seize the opportunity afforded by the failure of the dominant hegemony (what Gramsci called its 'organic crisis'). The goal of such a project is the replacement of the hegemonic culture of developed capitalism with a culture definable as the full articulation of the experience of the rising class.

Emergence in the Interregnum

To explore the relation between the two conditions of full emergence referred to above, it will be useful to read Williams's theory of emergence by the light of Gramsci's crisis theory, in particular his account of hegemonic transition or 'interregnum' in the *Prison Notebooks*. Gramsci begins these famous passages

by imagining an organic crisis in which, while the capitalist state persists, bourgeois domination at the level of culture and experience (hegemony) has broken down spontaneously due to a severe crisis:

If the ruling class has lost its consensus, i.e. is no longer 'leading' but only 'dominant', exercising coercive force only, this means precisely that the great masses have become detached from their traditional ideologies, and no longer believe what they used to believe previously, etc. The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear.³⁴

Gramsci is describing what I have called the second condition of full emergence: the severe failure of the dominant order to appear natural and eternal, much less good or justified. We can assume that conditions of severe economic crisis or war prevail. The capitalist class is now using force only to exercise control; it has lost hegemony but not power. What immediately ceases to function here is that sense of 'absolute because experienced reality'³⁵ the reified 'common sense' that Williams identified as the foundation of the dominant hegemony. The 'orderliness' of the social order (the mundane, day-to-day economic reproduction of society) has *in fact* ceased to operate, demonstrating to experience its contingent nature in a way that would not have been possible beforehand. However, a new hegemony, a new system of material reproduction and its concomitant 'common sense', cannot be conjured out of thin air. Thus, while the old is dying, 'the new cannot be born'; we are in an interregnum, a liminal space between hegemonies, the great danger of which is what Gramsci calls 'Caesarism' or authoritarian military rule.

Getting to a new, socialist hegemony will require not just the failure of the old but also what I have called, developing the latent revolutionary potential of Williams's theory, the full emergence of the rising class's culture. But a problem that attends the 'pre-emergent' under normal conditions also attends the rising class in the period of crisis: being future-oriented, the emergent culture of the rising class is in some sense speculative – it doesn't correspond to an already-existing or ready-made social formation. Moreover, the ruling class still holds the levers of the state. Consider, in this light, Gramsci's description of the real deadlock the interregnum represents:

The problem is the following: can a rift between popular masses and ruling ideologies as serious as that which emerged after the war be 'cured' by the simple exercise of force, preventing the new ideologies from imposing themselves? Will the interregnum, the crisis whose historically normal solution is blocked in this way, necessarily be resolved in favour of a

restoration of the old? Given the character of the ideologies, that can be ruled out – yet not in an absolute sense. Meanwhile physical depression will lead in the long run to a wider scepticism, and a new ‘arrangement’ will be found.³⁶

In Gramsci’s scenario, the ruling class uses force to block the ‘historically normal’ passage from one hegemony to another. However, force is neither the source nor the guarantor of ideology (this is where the Althusserian epistemology breaks down). Without the restoration of the old political-economic order, the old ideologies (based, in Williams’s theory of hegemony, on reified assumptions and expectations) will not reassert themselves and eventually, argues Gramsci, ‘a new “arrangement” will be found’. The nature of that arrangement is the contingent element in Gramsci’s account of hegemonic transition. Whether the emergent hegemony of the rising class can become dominant, I am arguing, is dependent upon the success of Williams’s long revolution (his ‘war of position’), this being the process whereby that class develops the capacity to communicate its own experience and to manifest this in meanings and values that prefigure a realistic and desirable social order. In keeping with Williams’s analysis in *Politics and Letters*, this must occur both before and after the breakdown of the dominant hegemony because the long revolution is both the preparatory phase of ‘learning the skills of popular organization and control’³⁷ and the effective capacity to replace the dominant hegemony with the emergent (in practical terms, to resist counter-revolution and begin to construct socialist institutions). The rising class cannot construct the idea of its culture in the timescale of a short revolution; it must already be envisioning, and to some extent already living (in local, subaltern forms), its culture.

What makes the difference between success and failure for the rising class? We know that an early goal of Williams’s long revolution was the extension of education, especially adult education, to equip the rising class with the tools to articulate their experience. In the 1970s and 1980s, Williams became increasingly aware that an important part of this capacity-building would be the acquisition of *abstract* knowledge, whether of structural economic relations, historical events or the interpenetration of distant institutions and local ways of life. Yet, in keeping with the perspective of totality, Williams always retained the notion that *structural/abstract knowledge must itself be incorporated into experience* to be politically valid and effective. How? We know that it cannot be achieved by any of the elite usurpations of knowledge that were Williams’s constant enemies: monopolisation by the closed circles of bourgeois academia; imputation by revolutionaries; lofty wielding by technocratic gradualists. In all of these, structural knowledge exists *outside* of the experience of the rising

class. However, even conscious learning does not fully solve the problem since, as Matthew Price discovers in *Border Country* (1964),³⁸ a vast gulf separates the bare knowing of facts (statistics in Matthew's case) and their lived comprehension.

Williams was not a philosopher and never fully articulated a solution to the epistemological challenges facing the rising class. I contend, however, that his analysis of hegemony in the 1970s suggests one. Williams's reworking of Gramscian theory clarified that the obfuscating power of capitalism is not simply a function of inequality of access to the means and powers of communication (the notion that class rule is secured by bourgeois ownership of the 'Ideological State Apparatuses' is obviously nearer the Althusserian, 'ideological' view). Hegemony also functions by producing a common sense linked to everyday immersion in a seemingly intractable social order. This means that neither direct experience *nor* abstract reason will be capable of fully stripping back the sense of basic reality that reification lends to the dominant hegemony. Williams understood that conscious learning about structural forces could help to fill the gaps left by experience (provided such knowledge-processes were not the exclusive purview of elites). He also recognised, however, that the central role of day-to-day *experience* in buttressing hegemony partially immunises the social order against the subversive effects of structural knowledge, *even where that knowledge is held by workers themselves*. After all, the fact that exploitation is real and objective is irrelevant if it is also natural and unchangeable, a basic 'fact of life'. It is this sense of inevitability, more than anything, that needs to be overcome if 'full emergence' is to occur.

This returns us to Gramsci's interregnum scenario. As I have already noted, during periods of intense crisis in which basic systems of social reproduction break down, the dominant social order *demonstrates to experience* its own fallibility, its non-commonsensual and contingent character. In the following passage, the culmination of the interregnum section, Gramsci draws out the implications this kind of process has for consciousness:

From this too one may conclude that highly favourable conditions are being created for an unprecedented expansion of historical materialism. The very poverty which at first inevitably characterises historical materialism as a theory diffused widely among the masses will help it to spread. The death of the old ideologies takes the form of scepticism with regard to all theories and general formulae; of application to the pure economic fact (earnings, etc.) and to a form of politics which is not simply realistic in fact (this is always the case) but which is cynical in its immediate manifestations [...]. But this reduction to economics and to politics means precisely a reduction of the highest superstructures to the level of those which adhere more

closely to the structure itself – in other words, the possibility and necessity of creating a new culture.³⁹

During the interregnum, then, the ‘old ideologies’ (Williams’s dominant mode) are replaced by the stark, urgent facts of economic hardship and political upheaval. This leaves a cultural void, potentially replaceable by the meanings, values and practices of the rising class. The capitalist way of life is ‘reduced’ to those undergirding elements that are most hidden under normal conditions, the class basis of society appearing for the first time in solution: exploitation, violence, the threat of poverty. Gramsci describes this as a ‘wave of materialism’ (275), a sudden willingness to account for social phenomena by their material bases. Crucially, insofar as it results in a flourishing of historical materialism among the working class, this shift in consciousness will have an *empirical* basis. It will spread not because revolutionary intellectuals have disseminated knowledge downwards, but because social reality has become *capable* of being experienced as having a material foundation.

Gramsci argues that this reduction to materiality announces not just the proliferation of historical materialism (this, of course, is an optimistic speculation), but also the ‘possibility and necessity of creating a new culture’. Here at least, Gramsci is using ‘culture’ in much the same way as Williams, to refer to a whole way of life. What is unique about the interregnum, I would argue, is that the possibility emerges of producing a culture *the objectivity of which is experienced subjectively*. The material basis of social reality is made *present* to lived experience rather than having to be inferred, imputed or otherwise reasoned into being within consciousness. Suddenly, what Williams had always insisted upon, that knowledge should be democratised/incorporated into the experience of the rising class itself, may be possible. Williams would have resisted Gramsci’s orthodox rhetoric, i.e. the idea of the ‘highest superstructures’ being reduced to ‘the level of those which adhere most closely to the structure itself’. However, we have only to replace ‘base and superstructure’ with ‘social being and consciousness’ to read Gramsci’s theory of hegemonic breakdown in a manner consonant with cultural materialism. For then what is happening in the interregnum is that a whole complex of things, from meanings and values to social institutions and cultural practices, are rendered visible in terms of their social being, their material and historical reality. Gramsci’s interregnum offers hope that a severe enough crisis of capitalism might provide the material conditions (though not necessarily the political or cultural capacity) for a) the replacement of reification with a humanist sense of contingency and b) that elusive quality of ‘total’ or integrated analysis Williams knew as the perspective of totality.

Gramsci's crisis theory explains why the long revolution was never going to be sufficient on its own, a fact Williams explicitly acknowledged in 1979. Without a crisis and/or a short revolution, the long revolution, the development of the culture of the rising class, remains in its preparatory phase or pre-emergence. Certainly, the short revolution will come to nothing if the cultural production of the rising class is not already highly advanced. Nevertheless, it requires a crisis of the dominant hegemony (triggered by a crisis in the realm of production) to create the space for the rising class to render its culture in a new, 'fully emerged' socialist hegemony. Such a position could be characterised as idealist, since it appears to assert that a certain kind of consciousness is the precondition for historical change. By reading Williams and Gramsci together, however, we see that it is in fact a *realism*; it positions the *object* of perception as the final arbiter of the sufficiency of its perception by any observer. While a particular form of consciousness, which the Marxist tradition has called class consciousness, must 'already' be present for revolution to be made, it is the social being (objective materiality) of society that determines whether that consciousness is possible in the first place. The essence of Williams's epistemology, realist and totalising, is that knowledge arises only out of those cultures the social being of which renders them graspable by experience. The political praxis it recommends is what might be termed a *revolutionary culturalism*, in which the rising class, in concert with an assault on state power, prepares for hegemony by building and realising a culture consonant with its experience and interests.

Notes

- 1 Perry Anderson, 'Heirs of Gramsci', *New Left Review* 100 (July–August 2016): 71–97.
- 2 Raymond Williams, 'Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory', *Culture and Materialism* (London: Verso, 2005), 31–49.
- 3 Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 2009).
- 4 Stuart Middleton has made useful distinctions between the different 'empiricisms' of Williams and Thompson in his essay 'The Concept of "Experience" and the Making of the English Working Class, 1924–1963', *Modern Intellectual History* 1 no. 1 (2016): 1–39. However, Middleton's negative view of the 'paradoxical' character of Williams's use of experience as being *synonymous* with culture and thus rendering both groundless (echoing Eagleton's earlier perception of Williams as portraying a 'circular, Hegelian totality'), is problematic. A realist frame, such as I employ in this essay, resolves the paradoxical nature of culture/experience by insisting that culture (including its ideational element) is, for Williams, the *product* of experience, with experience in turn the product of an objective social reality that can be understood in historical materialist terms.
- 5 Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism* (London: Verso, 1987), 79–80.
- 6 Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Geoffrey Nowell Smith and Quintin Hoare (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 2003).

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- 7 Perry Anderson, 'The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci', *New Left Review* I, no. 100 (November–December 1976): 5–78 (69).
- 8 Peter D. Thomas, *The Gramscian Moment: Philosophy, Hegemony and Marxism* (Boston, MA: Brill, 2009).
- 9 Anderson, 'Antinomies', 69.
- 10 Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, 110.
- 11 Daniel Hartley, 'On Raymond Williams: Complexity, Immanence, and the Long Revolution', *Mediations* 30, no. 1 (Fall 2016): 39–60.
- 12 Anthony Barnett, 'Foreword' (2011) to Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2013), vii–xxv.
- 13 Raymond Williams, *Modern Tragedy* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1966).
- 14 Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2013), 11.
- 15 Williams, *Modern Tragedy*, 75.
- 16 Williams, *The Long Revolution*, 404.
- 17 Raymond Williams, 'The Future of Marxism', *New Left Review*, 114 (November–December 2018): 53–65.
- 18 Raymond Williams, 'You're a Marxist Aren't You?', *Resources of Hope* (London: Verso, 1989), 65–76.
- 19 Terry Eagleton, 'Criticism and Politics: The Work of Raymond Williams', *New Left Review* I, no. 95 (January–February, 1976): 3–23 (10).
- 20 Raymond Williams, *Politics and Letters* (London: Verso, 2015).
- 21 For an extended discussion of the centrality of totality to Williams's thought, see D. Gerke, 'Raymond Williams and European Marxism: Lukács, Sartre, Gramsci' (PhD diss., Swansea University, 2018). For Williams's own reflections see Raymond Williams, 'Literature and Sociology: In Memory of Lucien Goldmann', *Culture and Materialism* (London: Verso, 2005), 11–30.
- 21 See Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (2009), 151–7.
- 23 Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, trans. Daniel de Leon, Digireads.com Publishing (2012), <https://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbin/gutbook/lookup?num=1346>.
- 24 Williams, *You're a Marxist*, 74–5.
- 25 Anderson did not consider himself an Althusserian, although his analysis of Gramsci's state theory in *Antinomies* was decidedly Althusserian in tone, and he saw fit to defend Althusser from Thompson's empiricist assault in *The Poverty of Theory* (1980). The young Eagleton was firmly Althusserian and criticised Williams from that position.
- 26 Louis Althusser, *On Ideology* (London: Verso: 2018).
- 27 Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 110.
- 28 Williams, 'Base and Superstructure', 38.
- 29 Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 108–110.
- 30 Anderson, 'Heirs of Gramsci', 2.
- 31 Williams, 'Base and Superstructure', 40–41.
- 32 Williams, *You're a Marxist*, 74.
- 33 Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 126.
- 34 Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, 275–276.
- 35 Williams, 'Base and Superstructure', 38.
- 36 Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, 276.
- 37 Williams, *Politics and Letters*, 422.
- 38 Raymond Williams, *Border Country* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2010).
- 39 Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, 276.

The Post-Work Society and James Kelman's *Dirt Road*

Robert Spencer

Perhaps the deepest theme of all of James Kelman's work is exactly that – work: its petty humiliations and deadening routines, the perils of redundancy, the stresses of irregular or precarious work, plus the inquisitions of state institutions charged with controlling and monitoring workers.¹ Yet Kelman reminds us of something that Raymond Williams also insists on, which is that the term 'work' need not just denote waged work.² *Dirt Road* (2016) evokes the pleasures and rewards of alternative conceptions of work such as the creative and cooperative nature of music-making. Play is a form of work that escapes the pervasive demands of alienated labour. The playing of a musical instrument is of course a form of work, since it requires as much skill, effort, thought and dedication as most waged work (and probably far more). It also provides much greater opportunity for cooperation and creativity. One of the purposes of this article will be to show how the playing of music, which *Dirt Road* presents as a tremendously appealing alternative to the routines and restraints of wage labour, constitutes a veritably utopian image of a post-work society or at least of a society that has drastically reduced and redistributed necessary work while freeing up opportunities for play. The novel therefore constitutes an unapologetically hopeful, albeit indirect, response to contemporary political and economic crisis because it assumes that such a society is feasible and desirable. My reading of *Dirt Road* therefore gives way to a brief discussion at the end of this article about what such a society might look like. Suffice to say, for now, that necessary work will be reduced to a minimum and shared out. Technological automation and consequent gains in productivity plus, most importantly, the empowerment of workers and economic equality (in part via the introduction of a universal basic income or citizen's dividend) will lead to a massive augmentation of free time and therefore of opportunities for creative self-expression through various forms of play.³ Alienating waged work is now obsolete: it serves a process of accumulation that is ecologically destructive and humanly impoverishing. The alternative is the socialisation of capital and the democratisation of work plus the equalisation of incomes, as well as a vast increase in the resources and time required for creative forms of collective and individual self-expression: more cooperation plus more freedom, which is what musical performance signifies in *Dirt Road*. Kelman's novel therefore fulfils one of the essential functions of contemporary cultural production: the exploration and anticipation of direly required alternatives to an increasingly crisis-afflicted class society.

If we are to grasp the urgency of the confrontation Kelman's novel stages between waged work and alternative forms of cooperative and creative work, then we also have to think of its wider political and especially social and economic contexts. Jobs are increasingly thin on the ground. Very few provide the kind of income and security that unionised workers expected or at least aspired to under welfare capitalism in the decades after the Second World War. The rumbling economic crisis since 2008 consists, in the words of David Harvey's useful synopsis of capitalist crisis, of the fact that '[s]urplus capital and surplus labour exist side by side with seemingly no way to put them back together in the midst of immense human suffering and unmet needs'.⁴ Under the current economic order there are few outlets for the profitable realisation of this colossal reservoir of surplus capital. So countless millions are condemned to joblessness and to extreme precarity and even superfluousness or else to work that is insecure, irregular, low-paid, stultifying and destructive. This is one of the major political tasks of the twenty-first century: to address the crisis of work and the resultant plight of populations rendered superfluous, doomed to mere subsistence or else condemned to slave away in pointless or destructive work.

My argument is that in *Dirt Road*, non-alienated work or play becomes a portent of a post-capitalist economic and social order. Murdo Macarthur, the sixteen-year old lad through whose perspective the events of the novel are focalised, is reluctant to repeat a year at school after the deaths from cancer of his sister and mother. He tirelessly works to make sense of his grief, of his relationship with his taciturn but patient father and of the complex semiotics of an alienating social world. *Dirt Road* also dramatises, with extraordinary vividness and imaginative sympathy, the imaginative labour of a curious and self-conscious mind encountering, knowing and navigating that world in addition, crucially, to the artistic or creative work of playing his accordion with the zydeco musicians whom he meets in Alabama as well as the Texan Conjunto band he joins at the end of the novel. So the manifold attractions of play and of non-reified social relations, both of which are opposed in the novel to waged work and to an education system substantially reconfigured by neoliberalism into a spirit-sapping preparation for waged work, are the themes of the book.

Murdo consciously rejects what he calls 'going to school, going to work. Slavery.'⁵ These themes are present too at the less obvious level of form, where free indirect narration encourages and even demands from readers some of the imaginative sympathy or solidarity with another consciousness repeatedly demonstrated by the novel's young protagonist. Play finds an echo in the act of reading itself. *Dirt Road* thus both demonstrates and invites non-reified forms of work and social relations. It is a utopian text therefore, or at least it

offers a glimpse of the ultimate goal of socialist politics. 'The emancipation of individuals, their full development, the restructuring of society, are all to be achieved through the liberation *from* work', as Andre Gorz has argued in his vital *Métamorphoses du travail*.⁶ Kelman, the chronicler par excellence of the neoliberal revolution, is now effectively answering Kate Soper's call to be 'assertively utopian', 'not only in the sense of being willing to offer blueprints and projections of other possible futures, but in the sense of seeking to form desire, and to encourage a different structure of feeling'.⁷

'play play play'

Much of his work's preoccupation with neoliberalism and its consequences is evident from the Warwick Research Collective's compelling reading of Kelman's 'transcodings of the lifeworld of the (semi-) periphery' of 'one of the most developed and powerful states of the modern world-system'.⁸ I want to focus briefly on WReC's account of Kelman because their *Combined and Uneven Development: Towards a New Theory of World Literature* is the most systematic and far-reaching current effort to think through the ways in which literary texts dramatise the perennially violent and uneven processes of capitalist modernisation brought into stark relief by the manifold crises to which this special issue responds. I am arguing that *Dirt Road's* exploration of the contemporary crisis of work involves a utopian dimension that existing Marxist accounts of Kelman's work, both WReC's and Aaron Kelly's more detailed study, both lack.⁹

WReC's ambitious task is to theorise world literature as that enormous body of texts that over the last two centuries has registered the perennially uneven and catastrophic process of capitalist modernisation. Capitalism does not smooth contradictions out, they argue, but generates them. Development or the accumulation of capital in addition to the consequent transformation of lifeworlds, ecospheres and social and economic relations all go hand in hand with under-, mal-, dependent and even de-development, with destitution, with the survival or reinforcement of pre-capitalist formations, and also with the emergence of incipiently post-capitalist forms of production and organisation. So capitalist modernisation is a global as well as a perennially contradictory and uneven phenomenon. This means that all methodical world-systems-style talk of centres and peripheries and semi-peripheries, let alone all simplifying rhetoric about ascents towards a smoothly 'globalised' or 'modernised' planet, needs to be accompanied by a vision of world capitalism as a totality with consistent features (class and state power, the extortion of surplus value, the commodification of labour and its products, colonial exploitation and so on) but

a totality that is immensely heterogeneous and unequal, variable and irregular as well as intrinsically imperfect. It also means that the aesthetic representation or dramatisation of this paradoxically systematising and differentiating process (combined *and* uneven development, in Trotsky's essential phrase) can be found and examined at all points in capitalism's world system, its peripheries as well as its centres in addition to the centres of its peripheries and the peripheries and semi-peripheries of its centres! So the Prague of Kafka, whose work registers and articulates the semi-periphery's paradoxical amalgamation of economic modes and social and cultural formations, is every bit as 'modern' as the semi-decolonised (or concertedly neo-colonised) rural Sudan of Tayeb Salih or even the surrealist NATOpolitan Iceland of Halldór Laxness. No less 'modern', for that matter, is the Glasgow of Kelman which is so derelict, so tremendously unequal and so pitilessly and violently policed by the institutions of the state precisely because it has been so thoroughly worked over by Thatcherism, neoliberalism's peculiarly bellicose and uncompromising British avatar.¹⁰

I want to add, however, that *Dirt Road* also portrays an aspect of this combustible admixture of different social and economic elements that WReC and Kelly underplay: specifically, the emergence of post-capitalist forms of social organisation. WReC correctly identify the ways in which Kelman's second novel, *The Busconductor Hines* (1984), charts 'the atomisation of social experience' and the retreat of collective forms of life in metropolitan Scotland.¹¹ Hines's detached and increasingly inarticulate and even disturbed narrative registers at the same time as it fails ultimately to comprehend or make out the connections between new forms of precarious work, the weakening of class solidarities, the destruction of trade union power and the wholesale privatisation and trashy reconstruction of the city's social housing stock. Kelly too is most interested in how Kelman's novels articulate excluded voices and experiences that work against neoliberal myths of consensus and common purpose. He dubs Kelman's 'narrative strategy' 'unfree direct discourse', since the frequent disjunctions between narrator and character show how subjects 'are not only heterogeneous and unreconciled to one another but also to themselves'. The effect of the technique is to amplify alienation, to introduce a sense of conflict and division between and within subjects but also to accentuate the absence of solidarity: 'No shared, overarching focalization is possible whereby the discourse may move freely across subject positions.'¹²

What neither Kelly nor WReC note, understandably so because their focus is on works written at the height of what William Davies has called neoliberalism's initial combative phase rather than what he dubs its terminal 'post-hegemonic' phase after 2008, is that the typically modernistic narrative style of Kelman's novels has recently been put to rather more auspicious political uses.¹³ In WReC's reading, *Hines* presents us with 'a growing textual

disorder' that is 'symptomatic of the approaching material disintegration and social and economic capitulation' and with a narrative style 'hinged to the traumatic, disorderly experience of (environ)mental collapse'. In *Mo Said She Was Quirky* (2012) and *Dirt Road*, by contrast, as well as in the stories collected in *That Was a Shiver* (2017), the digressive structures succeed in piecing together different social and economic phenomena while the no less impressionistic, modernistic and idiomatic narrative styles convey not so much trauma, shock or disturbance but something more like the recovery of self-knowledge and political insight as well as a desire to resist and transform the ravages inflicted by a socio-economic order that these spirited, eloquent protagonists are starting to name and deplore.

A sustained feat of free indirect narration, the narrative voice in *Mo Said She Was Quirky* moves continuously, often within the confines of single sentences, between a kind of disconnected, information-giving observation and a much more direct and idiomatic evocation of Helen's insightful musings on freedom, family and memory in addition to her extremely perceptive though frustrated and angry dissection of all kinds of social ills from anxiety, violence and poor housing to everyday misogyny and alienated service-sector work. Here the technique of free indirect narration becomes a sustained feat of empathy and even compassion for a character whose distinctive intelligence and aspirations for 'real freedom' cannot be accommodated by the alienating society she sketches for us. It is thus an instance or augury of the solidarity that the novel shows to have been substantially eradicated by neoliberalism from institutions and social relations. Helen works nights as a croupier in a Central London casino. The fragmented and antagonistic lifeworld that she ponders and is working cognitively to map is that of late capitalism in its neoliberal or financialised phase, casino capitalism no less. If Hines is baffled and inarticulate then the disenchanted casino croupier Helen is acutely and eloquently aware of this state of affairs. She bemoans it and is labouring impressively and very insightfully to understand it: 'Britain was a horrible country. Everything being frittered and people in need.'¹⁴ It is not possible, I would maintain, to imagine a pithier or more exact summation of an entire nation's social, economic and even moral predicament.

The angry protagonist of 'One Has One's Weans' in *That Was a Shiver* is a feverishly loquacious chronicler of despair straight out of Samuel Beckett, an intellectual and shift worker in low-rent accommodation and a dead-end job. Yet he muses angrily but very knowledgeably on the straight choice between a demeaning fight for scarce and unfulfilling work and the now potentially reviving opportunity to name and depose 'the fucking system': 'late capitalism', which is late not perhaps in the sense of mature or perfected but in the more auspicious sense of being on borrowed time.¹⁵ As ever in Kelman's work 'fuck'

and especially its adjectival form are granted all of the emphatic eloquence with which colloquial usage endows them while 'system' is transformed here from a euphemism for a mode of production that has in fact just been given its proper name ('Late capitalism') into a term that announces the successful piecing together of a social and economic world that otherwise confronted Kelman's earlier protagonists in reified and disconnected ways.

Dirt Road similarly narrates the acquisition of knowledge and the desire for escape. Its extended evocation of Murdo's intrepid inner world while he and his father visit their relatives in the American South is made possible by a crucial plot device – he has forgotten to bring his mobile phone, that insidious contrivance for the colonisation of free time. With a smartphone, of course, Murdo could not get lost or evade the fretful surveillance of his father or even think and play in a liberated and extemporaneous manner. We could no more imagine this wistful daydreamer with his head lowered over an illuminated screen, endlessly flicking and scrolling, plugged distractedly into the non-stop global infrastructure of work and consumption, than we could imagine Leopold Bloom disregarding the chance encounters and the sensory and intellectual stimulations of the modern cityscape in order to press his face against the thought-stopping distractions of an iPhone. The free indirect style of *Dirt Road*, which focalises everything through the consciousness and idiolect of its protagonist, evokes for us a mind discovering itself and its surroundings, always thoughtfully and usually sympathetically, through an invigorating panoply of new experiences. *Dirt Road* is an identifiably modernist text therefore and the appealingly ingenuous Murdo a latter-day Bloom or rather a latter-day Stephen Dedalus, though far less lugubrious and self-important.

Murdo's ostensibly uneventful phoneless sojourn at his aunt and uncle's house in Alabama is thus a partial escape from the unprecedentedly intrusive intensity of late capitalism's quest to incorporate or else despoil all moments and human activities that cannot be quantified and then monetised in some way. Murdo's experiences are not mediated by the ubiquitous smartphone and so they are not transformed into opportunities for online self-promotion. Nor does he have a device at hand that will manacle him to the routines of consumption, exploitation, destruction and waste. Murdo's stay is in fact a resumption of the essential textures, or what Jonathan Crary calls the 'indeterminations' of human life, its diurnal rhythms as well as its moments of inactivity, intimacy, dreaming and introspection.¹⁶ It even has the character of a kind of wilful technological relapse or perhaps a defiant celebration of the conspicuous lag in technological development even between Alabama and the West of Scotland. Murdo happily dusts off an old CD player to listen to the demo given to him by Sarah, the young woman he meets at a jamming session he stumbles across in a front yard in Allentown. Furthermore, he is clearly too

good-natured or ingenuous to see that in the States bus travel is a signifier of racial and class exclusion. He prefers to wash the plates by hand instead of stowing them in a wasteful and inefficient dishwasher. He wanders curiously around the sidewalk-less streets of this unfriendly suburb and is frankly baffled that the locals take their exercise by driving to and then powerwalking round an air-conditioned shopping mall. Time spent talking to his father, reading cowboy novels, lying in the garden, walking, daydreaming, grieving, wandering and wondering, thinking about and actually listening to music is slow time or vacant time that 'cannot be leveraged through an interface', in Crary's phrase, that is not imposed and that is thus not drastically impoverished by the online rigmarole of chores and distractions (46).

Mere idleness ultimately holds few attractions for Murdo, however. He spends much of the novel frustrated by the fact that he was not allowed to bring his accordion with him to America. Idleness, of course, has been one of the terms with which socialists have signalled alternatives to the destructive and monotonous routines of waged work, in Bertrand Russell's *In Praise of Idleness* and Paul Lafargue's *The Right to be Lazy*, for example.¹⁷ This is largely a rhetorical move, of course; a protest against the theological injunction to eat bread only in the sweat of thy face (to find reward only through work and suffering) and against the persistent as well as oppressive assumption that a person without waged work is therefore 'unemployed' and, as it were, shiftless. Murdo is unemployed in this sense or, in the rebarbative jargon, a NEET, a 'young person' who is not in education, employment or training. His is the generation trapped by debts, unprotected by unions, facing a lifetime of insecure work and at the mercy of what Richard Seymour calls the state's 'social sadism', its glorification of work and its demonisation of a mythical class of shirkers and welfare scroungers.¹⁸ Of course the whole regime of post-2010 Tory austerity, which as Seymour and others have argued is not a policy for controlling or reducing the national debt (which it has nearly trebled) but for enriching corporate interests and for forcing people into insecure and low-paid work, has given this puritanical ideology a new lease of life.¹⁹ An unemployed worker is now either feckless or parasitical. Murdo is neither. Intelligent and talented, he is evidently unwilling to submit himself to the masochistic but now obsolete work discipline demanded by a meaningless qualification or a bullshit job. Yet he is idle only in Russell's liberating sense of the word, that is, entirely and impressively useless for the purpose of accumulating capital. It is music and not the devil that makes work for his idle hands.

It would not be true to say that young Murdo is a vehicle for his author's political worldview. Murdo's flair for placing himself imaginatively in others' shoes is not consciously or overtly political. Nor is free indirect discourse, the distinguishing and empathy-inducing technique of Kelman's fiction. But Murdo

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is acutely sensitive to the evils of racism and police brutality and he is bracingly contemptuous of religiosity. These are all practices and ideologies that share a failure to imagine the integrity (intellectual, political, legal, bodily, etc.) of other human subjects, which is effectively what Kelman's signature narrative technique is for. His father reads incessantly, but Murdo too is a sympathetic and proficient reader in an even larger sense, not just of texts but also of expressions, situations and places. Antique shops, the American landscape and especially the basement of his uncle's house where he is sleeping, all resound, Murdo imagines, with the echoes and other traces of America's genocidal past and thus with reminders of suffering and resistance: 'Right where Murdo slept was their land, beneath this very house.'²⁰

A different world. That was America. Ye thought ye knew it from the movies but ye didnt. How the Cherokee Nation was till the white man came and stole the land. People fighting and dying. Men, women and children and the stuff they leave behind. Soldiers, cowboys and Indians, slaves. Martin Luther King and the cops just battering and killing people. Alabama and these places, and here ye were. People had their beliefs. Were any of them right? They couldnt all be right. Except they believed them. Even that stupid bird
although it wasnt stupid (91).²¹

This is the typical associative course of Murdo's inquisitive reflections, from a recollection while listening to music on an old mattress in the basement of the disarmingly human countenance of an unfamiliar bird rootling about on Uncle John's back lawn to a still sketchy but nonetheless very stark acknowledgement of his own presence at the latest phase of American history's perennial oscillation between racist state terror and political revolt. These antagonistic projects and philosophies can't all be right, Murdo realises, a realisation which necessitates a choice, a choice that Murdo ultimately though implicitly makes, I am claiming, by demonstrating his capacity for empathy, which, translated into a more political idiom, is a synonym for solidarity.

Indeed, what attracts Murdo to music is its potential to foster individual expression most effectively within the context of the social. Of course, most of Murdo's thoughts are not remotely political, as one might expect of the pensive, sometimes anguished, frequently very witty and playful and often also lustful reflections of an adolescent boy. But their common denominator is an intense curiosity about and sympathy for other human lives. 'Imagine seeing into somebody's head' (62) is Murdo's habitual thought experiment. That faculty is an implicit but not dogmatic political outlook, one that does not, of course, involve a particular partisan affiliation but all the same does

involve a principled loathing for bigotry and chauvinism, for everything that is personified for Murdo by the minatory figure of Conor, Dave Arnott's son-in-law, the religiose, cell phone-distracted, shock-jock-quoting racist at Aunt Maureen's potluck. Set against his loathing for a 'bully bossing people' is Murdo's growing sense that 'Ye meet people and they have lives, but you dont', at least not yet' (56).

Above all else Murdo 'needed to play, play play play, to practise, to practise; the fingers, just the fingers. He felt that with the guitar, he needed to just like play [...]!' (210). He mainly misses 'being able to play' (129) the accordion or rather the 'accordeon', in the old-fashioned or accentless French as well as Spanish spelling used throughout the novel. Murdo relishes opportunities for musical improvisation, which he explicitly associates with freedom (221). Improvisation 'is not just jazz' since 'ye can make a trail out of anything', the recurrent walking metaphor of the 'individual path or trail' denoting the possibility of departure from proscriptive directions and supposedly authentic traditions. 'Murdo hated that style of playing' (121) because play for him signifies something like the rejection of duty and self-abnegation, the full unfolding of one's personality through the mastery of a difficult skill and perhaps even work in Hannah Arendt's rarefied sense (as distinguished from the reproductive or biological processes of labour) of the bringing into being through skill, imagination, cooperation or performance of something that did not previously exist.²² Murdo's relish for the creative departure from deadening standards of tradition and authenticity recalls the stress in Edward Said's writings on music on what he calls the urgency and extremity of the occasion of musical performance. The singular event of the concert, recital or gig compels rapt attention from audiences while affording creative freedom to performers. Said esteems musical performance's inimitableness and ephemerality, which is to say its finite duration and never-to-be-repeated specificity in time, as well as its vagaries and permissiveness, not to mention its potential to flout expectations, transgress boundaries and provoke thought. Performers, for Said – and this is effectively what Murdo thinks about Scottish country dancing – ought to interpret scores and established forms in such a way as to open them up and elaborate them in new ways: 'Thus the performer makes a statement about the unending process of interpretation itself, which is what all performance is finally about.'²³

Ye had to play this, that and the next thing and ye could only do it in a certain way. Up to a point okay but ye needed room for yer own take. Even traditional stuff. If something was necessary ye did it. It was good when ye heard a tune ye knew and it turned into something else; it started there and ended there, but where did it go in between! That was the fun, that was exciting.²⁴

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Murdo also plays the guitar, the keyboard and the fiddle (19), instruments capable both of rhythmic accompaniment and of maintaining the melodic lead. In addition to creative autonomy, therefore, Murdo also associates music with collective effort. 'Ye would have blown them away!', says Murdo's father, disappointed that he did not play the accordion at the Highland Gathering. That belligerent figure of speech could not be less appropriate for the description of music-making, in Murdo's eyes: 'I'm no wanting to blow anybody away [...] It's only to play with them Dad not to like beat them. How can ye beat them, ye cannay beat them, it's daft saying it' (219). Instead Murdo feels the music 'connecting ye' (184), both the discrepant parts of the self (intelligence, imagination, bodily sensation) and connecting the self to other selves in performance and reception.

It is rhythm that permits, or rather enables, a player to 'take the lead' (39), as Murdo puts it when first playing in Allentown with the family of Queen Monzee-ay (spelt throughout presumably as Murdo hears it). Murdo's other favourite activities, thinking and walking, have their own rhythms, as he recognises. For example, 'walking was moving, moving to the beat' (297). Murdo walks in order to explore new locations, just as a good band maintains a rhythm not for its own sake but in order to unfold new musical possibilities of expression and interpretation.

Where did it take ye? Wherever, just wherever. Ye didnt know till there ye were, and that was that in the best kind of playing, the best kind of players. Queen Monzee-ay would be leading and you would know which way to follow, you would find it. You go that way how you think, you go that way how you think, how you think, oh jees yeah on ye go, just like whatever, whatever. Ye could shiver in that kind of playing; and hearing it in other musicians. After it ye needed a gap, not talking to people; that audience were there and however they heard it, okay, but you needed to disappear (297).

This is an extraordinarily rich and eloquent meditation on the musical relationship between structure and improvisation and therefore between community and individuality. The somatic pleasure afforded by that shiver registers the interpretative freedoms enabled by the occasion of performance for both players and audiences. Murdo's 'like' and 'whatever' certainly do not identify the aggressive uncommunicativeness of a shruggingly inarticulate teenager therefore. 'Whatever', virtually Murdo's favourite word, is not an aggressive way of closing down a conversation, which is how it is mostly employed in colloquial usage, but to the contrary an admission that, ideally, further conversations and reflections ought unrestrictedly to be opened up by musical performance. Similarly, the ubiquitous adolescent filler 'like', a

veritable signifier of linguistic incompetence or immaturity, becomes once again a conjunction or preposition that invites but does not determine further connections and illuminations. 'Whatever' names the utopian potential of music, the manifold and possibly even inexhaustible possibilities of what music is 'like' (i.e. what to players and audiences it means). Murdo's reluctance to articulate these multiple possibilities is actually 'a gap', an instance of 'not talking' and wishing 'to disappear': a frank admission, in other words, of the necessary limits to the artist's and player's capacity to predict the various creative elaborations made possible by performance.

Edward Said characterises performance as an 'extreme occasion' in his *Musical Elaborations*.²⁵ Imaginative and original performances open up or elaborate the meanings and possibilities latent in a work of art. They are therefore indirectly though profoundly political because by provoking and galvanising audiences into seeing familiar works in new ways or simply presenting feats of intelligent improvisation, these permissive and extreme or even utopian occasions are instances of creative transgression against existing practices and norms. They are images of creative individuality and freedom. But performances also show, Murdo realises, how freedom relies on the beat and expression on structure. An ensemble works through relations of 'trust'. In their brief performance at the Gathering, Murdo's skilful recovery from a mistake inspires Chas's trust. Murdo's trusty guitar then sets Chas free from the fiddle to provide backing vocals for Clara: 'Him on guitar set Chas free to give Clara what she needed. Murdo on guitar meant Clara could sing'.²⁶ So musical performance amplifies a larger truth about the relationship between individual expression and collective effort, vital for envisioning a socialist society of secure collaborative bonds *and* greater individual liberty in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.²⁷

These social bonds of trust and mutual reliance as well as the expressive creativity founded on those bonds are encapsulated by the novel's culminating performance of Murdo with Queen Monzee-ay's band at the Jay Cee Lounge. Murdo plays the accordion in the rhythm section and leads the way on one number, elated that 'he was only a part of it, just like everybody'.²⁸

She could rely on Murdo. She knew she could, she bloody knew [...]
That was the whole damn thing, she could relax and just like play, just go
wherever, wherever. Jeess, sometimes [...] it made ye angry. It made Murdo
angry. It made Murdo so so angry.

What? What did?

Something, just bloody something (301).

In the phrase 'it made ye angry' the 'ye' is Murdo's idiomatic self-referring 'ye', a reader-including second-person mode of address *and* a collective pronoun implicating everybody subjected to restrictions and expectations. So the 'bloody something' that prevents 'ye' from being able to relax and just like play and go wherever is both Murdo's current lack of freedom (the pressure exerted by his father to attend school and then work) and a whole social order's current lack of freedom given the existence of those cultural, economic and political pressures to earn bread by the sweat of thy brow. Going wherever is an intensely political prospect in *Dirt Road*, since in a myriad of figurative ways travel betokens creative freedom but also because the place from which Murdo wishes to escape or perhaps *in which* he wishes to escape is America itself. This is a society whose cultures are replete with images of personal reinvention but which is also weighted down by the ongoing history of violence and exclusion that Murdo recalls when he thinks of Birmingham, Alabama: 'that bloody bomb, that was like America, that was America, that was ha ha ha, killing and bombing and battering and just bloody horrible and he wanted away, away away away, he wanted away' (305). The bomb planted by the Ku Klux Klan during the era of the Civil Rights struggle is 'bloody' for the purposes of emphasis and disapproval but also literally. Such violence, Murdo concludes, is not 'like America': on second thoughts, it *is* America, the archetypal amnesiac and oppressive society with its multiple legacies and new incarnations of enslavement.

So what is it that Murdo is travelling from and to in the novel? In a sense this is not really a road trip at all, since to Murdo's chagrin his father has not brought his driving licence and they cannot hire a car. Their only trips are planned excursions to the mall and back, to local restaurants and to the Highland Gathering. Murdo dodges the weekend outing to the Tennessee Valley in order to take a much more exciting journey on his own by bus to Allentown to purchase an accordion and thence to Lafayette to play with Queen Monzee-ay's band at the music festival. So the blurb on the novel's dust jacket is not quite correct to state that the novel relates 'a road trip through the American South', since Murdo and his father hardly see anything of the American South and since, figuratively at least, the trip in question is along a *dirt* road, which is a recurring image from American folk or blues music of an escape or freedom from routine (in Charley Patton's 'Down the Dirt Road Blues' or Bob Dylan's 'Dirt Road Blues', for example) and more specifically of an escape from the routines imposed by a technologically advanced social world. Figuratively, the road that Murdo travels down is made of dirt not asphalt. This is because his protracted and exhilarating journey by several buses to New Orleans, where he finds an opportunity to play in the pleasurable sodality of a musical ensemble, is of a piece with the novel's wider critique of the ways in which both subjectivity and social relations are being mediated

and ruined by new technologies. The novel narrates a dirt road trip in which the self and the self's relations with other selves can be invented and possibly reinvented only if new technologies don't enchain us but permit us to play, in the widest possible sense of that word.

The sensibility and aspirations of Kelman's protagonist, as well as the social relations he nurtures, reach beyond the logics of competition and accumulation. *Dirt Road* estranges and therefore in a sense historicises that epoch of human history (our own) in which, in Crary's brilliantly defamiliarising phrase, '[h]undreds of millions of individuals precipitously began spending many hours of every day and night sitting, more or less stationary, in close proximity to flickering, light-emitting objects',²⁹ their moments of free time ruthlessly enclosed by a humanly enfeebling and ecocidal 'fucking system': 'late capitalism'. Murdo is no technophobe of course: he has forgotten his phone not abandoned it. He recalls videos of musicians he has seen on YouTube and before he embarked for the US he has researched everything from ancient navigation methods to species of spiders. But Murdo's compulsion to play rather than work, to fulfil his craving for free expression in the context of a network of social obligations, is at once an instance of and a far-reaching metaphor for a substantive alternative to late capitalism's increasing colonisation of hitherto unadministered spaces of private life, the commodification of leisure and the attempted shrinkage of our opportunities for free and creative expression. *Dirt Road* obliges us to think again about an alternative vision, one in which opportunities for free and creative expression are enormously increased.

Murdo's unhurried expeditions allow him ample time to notice who works and how: 'a black guy holding a sweeping brush',³⁰ a woman at the information desk at the airport (20), a student working part-time in a cheap hotel (21), the guy at the catfish stall in Lafayette whom Murdo imagines working '[n]ight-shifts and long hours' (315), people doing jobs such as 'mending stuff and factories, fixing electricity and plumbing; working in supermarkets and garages, cafés' (14). Murdo might be wrong about the factories, however, because everybody he meets seems to be toiling in underpaid and precarious service occupations. Just as her granddaughter Sarah is an aspiring writer as well as a frottoir player (though she works at present in a convenience store), Queen Monzee-ay represents for Murdo an image or exemplification of the possibility of creative and cooperative play, an image that enthralls him and that is set against the post-industrial anomic of the American South.

In Lafayette Murdo finds Queen Monzee-ay drinking tea on a small patio at the back of the concert venue, 'gazing over a wide empty area that looked like it had been a place for factories or warehouses but was now cleared of everything except the concrete foundations' (320). This is now a world of precarious and non-unionised service-sector work, looted pension funds and inadequate health

insurance.³¹ Uncle John has two jobs. He now works continually and travels long distances, despite being 'past retiral age' (67). The work ethic is a source of pride for Murdo's uncle, a noble image of altruism and self-sacrifice, but it is also, in a country where 'guys dont know what a union is' (174), an obstacle to family life and to other forms of more creative self-realisation. Music too requires work of course, endless hours of practice, skill, reflection and accomplishment. Moreover, waged work is among music's main themes. For instance Declan Pike, the guitarist whom Murdo meets at the Gathering and who eventually persuades Murdo's father to let him play with the Texan musicians, is a '[p]art-time musician, full-time oil worker' who writes 'songs that were real' and '[s]tories from life' (179). Murdo is mistaken for a busker while playing his accordion on a bench in Lafayette and is delighted to learn that 'he could earn money for doing it' (300). Music is work, including waged work, and music is partly about work, but it is also an instance or portent of non-alienated forms of work. From his aunt, Murdo hears the familiar and embittered complaints about those who 'dont work' but have nonetheless 'got their entitlements' (111). Murdo is not just a sort of anthropological observer of this alternately sadistic and self-mortifying work world, though his outsider's perspective does radically defamiliarise his American relatives' madcap routines of waged drudgery and wasteful consumption. Nor is he in a state of apprenticeship for that world. He is a veritable personification of the alternative.

Trying to dissuade him from joining Diego's Conjunto band at the end of the novel, Murdo's father tells him that 'it's only rich people retire son the rest of us stagger on' (357). But is there another way of ensuring your livelihood by not working or by working much less and thus of pursuing the compulsion to play? The novel obliquely forecasts that alternative by fighting shy of the grim and obsolete routines of waged work while exploring the attractions of very different forms of cooperative and creative exertion. When Murdo leaves the motel car park with accordion music playing on the stereo of Diego's borrowed 4×4, he does much more than 'stagger': he is leading the way beyond the horizons and restrictions of what Gorz calls the Right's *and* the Left's now superannuated dream of a society of workers. Music means play. In the last pages Murdo weeps with gratitude when he discovers that Queen Monzee-ay has switched the accordion he bought for \$85 in a pawnshop for a superior instrument and when he and his father remember their loved ones. Friendship for Murdo is the 'side of music I like' (364) and Declan's and Diego's friendship is what will enable Murdo to thrive in the States without his father (365). In order to mean play, therefore, music must also mean solidarity.³² This is the shape of a post-work society: far more opportunities for creative self-realisation, on the basis of relations of 'trust' in a radically collectivised and democratised economic and social order.

The Future of Work

If we are to do justice as readers to the topicality and urgency of *Dirt Road's* arousal of a craving for alternative forms of cooperative and playful work, then we ought briefly to spell out what such a project might look like. The prospect that work might be radically reduced is the subject, of course, of a great deal of cultural and political discussion in the wake of the enormous productive potentials augured by the so-called fourth industrial revolution in artificial intelligence, nanotechnology, the internet of things, 3D printing, quantum computing and so on. A variety of more or less whimsical but appealing slogans have been devised to summarise this vision: 'Feed the surfers!', 'Full Unemployment!' or simply 'Fuck work'.³³ These visions articulate what was once the most cherished goal of the labour movement, the shortening of the working day – liberation *from* work rather than liberation *in* work, the carving out of a realm of freedom from the realm of necessity, in Marx's beautiful phrase from *Capital*.³⁴ Automation will not by itself produce a post-work society of course, or at least, without radical change the post-work society that it produces will be one of mass destitution. In Britain at the moment, as Peter Fleming has argued, there is a kind of pact between capital and the state to avoid either eventuality by using draconian trade union laws and a punitive welfare system to force workers into unproductive low-paid jobs that are either totally unnecessary or easily automatable and even in some cases into jobs that once were automated.³⁵ Automation is being deliberately held back, in other words, apart from technologies of control such as the efficiency algorithms that superintend workers in Amazon's 'Fulfilment Centres'.

According to David Graeber's erudite taxonomy,³⁶ contemporary work can be divided into four categories: bullshit jobs (a form of employment that is so pointless that usually even the employee herself or himself cannot justify its existence, including most managerial work); useful jobs (essential work such as teaching or equally essential shit jobs, as Graeber calls them, such as cleaning and care work that are currently undervalued and underpaid, in inverse relation to their actual usefulness); partly bullshitised jobs (such as doctors and university lecturers, many of whose tasks are useful and even essential but many of which are entirely gratuitous); and finally bankers, hedge fund CEOs and corporate lawyers, whose work is actively harmful, whom Graeber dubs straightforward 'selfish bastards'. Ours is a society, Graeber argues, in which around half of all work that is performed is manifestly either futile or humanly and ecologically destructive. Vast numbers of employees spend large parts of their lives knowingly and unhappily performing tasks that make no constructive or meaningful difference in the world.

Supposedly super-efficient corporations cut their useful employees while supporting an ever-expanding layer of pointless functionaries. The reason for this strange state of affairs can be found in the extractive economic model of neoliberalism, particularly during its senescent or post-hegemonic phase since 2008. Late capitalism resembles a heist movie rather than a business model. The monopolies and cartels of financialised capitalism, Graeber reminds us, are concerned less with production and competition and more with capturing and sweating assets (175–92). They simply charge rents on assets that were once owned by the public or else should be owned by the public. The former category includes utilities and taxpayer-fleeing outsourcing firms. The latter includes fossil fuel cartels feasting on the common treasury of nature itself in addition to every firm whose externalities (costs not paid by the producer or factored into the market price) are shouldered by the state or by future generations. Think of the beneficiaries of various kinds of direct and indirect public subsidy such as the bailed-out banks, companies like Microsoft and Apple, whose lucrative technologies were pioneered by state investment, tax-dodging megacorporations like Amazon and Google, whose workers' low wages are topped up by their host states and platforms like Deliveroo and Uber, that are basically tax scams and devices for monopolising and then charging rent on the informal economy.

The only remaining function for economic elites, Graeber argues, is to invent ways of dividing or distracting or simply holding down workers while they gorge themselves on the rents charged on these assets. Neoliberalism, as David Harvey argues, was never anything other than a reassertion of class power; Ralph Miliband called it 'class war conservatism', Giovanni Arrighi a 'capitalist counter-offensive'.³⁷ Making money in these circumstances is a piece of cake. Firms have no need for intelligent leadership, entrepreneurial ability, risky investments in new technologies or a motivated and autonomous workforce with a long-term stake in the company. The real task is to hold the workers down for as long as possible while pocketing the loot. So owners and managers are not leaders or entrepreneurs but 'reckless opportunists', to use Aeron Davis's phrase.³⁸ The workers can simply be outsourced, changed around, mistreated and bossed about. The result is a bullied, underpaid and overworked layer of workers at the bottom and a vast as well as vastly overpaid layer of pointless bureaucrats at the top.

The socialist alternative to this dispiriting state of affairs is the democratisation of ownership and work. The result would be investment in automation, the elimination of harmful and superfluous work, the redistribution of work that democratically organised communities deem to be essential, the reduction of work time for everybody and therefore the enlargement of free time or of what Graeber, invoking Schiller on play, calls opportunities for 'the exercise

of freedom for its own sake'.³⁹ This is the post-work society that is obliquely portended by *Dirt Road*. In the world of shit and bullshit work creativity is 'a form of defiance' (135) as well as a vision of the alternative. Play is, of course, one of the central terms of philosophical aesthetics. In Kant it refers to the harmony of the imagination and the understanding in aesthetic experience. For Schiller too, the subject who plays, whether it is the subject who creates or the subject who experiences a work of art, does not gain knowledge in any conventional sense. That work of art is not necessarily mimetic but it is the occasion for experiences that are sensuous and pleasurable because they allow for this free play of faculties. For Herbert Marcuse, whose *Eros and Civilisation* (1955) is still one of the most compelling works of utopian speculation in the Marxist tradition, 'the free manifestation of potentialities'⁴⁰ in play ought not to be confined to an aesthetic realm fenced off from the routines of work. Socialism, continues Marcuse, consciously building on and extending Kant's and Schiller's ideas, would be a realm of freedom in which equality and abundance have made it more possible for individuals to pursue creative and playful activities more in keeping with their dynamic natures. In a world whose technological resources have made alienated labour, competition and accumulation redundant, the 'surplus repression' exacted by wage labour might be done away with. Men and women might satisfy their individual and collective needs without exploitation and with the minimum of toil and sacrifice. Play is therefore the form and promise of an existence in which individuals will be free to tap their own potential for sensuousness, imagination and creativity: in Schiller's words, 'man only plays when he is in the fullest sense of the word a human being, and he is only fully a human being when he plays'.⁴¹ 'Liberated from the pressure of painful purposes and performances necessitated by want', Marcuse argues, 'man will be restored into the 'freedom to be what he ought to be.' But what 'ought' to be will be freedom itself: the freedom to play'.⁴² Murdo's decision to join the Conjunto band at the end of *Dirt Road* is thus a profoundly meaningful act of refusal, a conscious decision not to surrender to the constricting and monotonous world of remunerated exertion. A puritan work ethic that connects fulfilment with suffering and self-abnegation is renounced in favour of the desire to 'play play play'.

Conclusion

What *Dirt Road* succeeds in doing is estranging the present from the perspective of a future that is substantially more attractive because it is substantially more free than the monotonous and destructive routines of the present. It

anticipates the prize to be gained at the end of our current struggles for social justice and human emancipation.

Murdo moves insouciantly along a dirt road towards play, comradeship and self-knowledge. Many of the contemporary Left's 'accelerationist' visions of the future, by contrast, show human subjects pinned back by the G-force of humanity's gathering speed towards more consumerism rather than less and towards an ever greater level of integration with technological apparatuses. But maybe a post-work society will begin to appreciate what Crary calls 'the extreme asymmetry between the individual and the inconceivable scale of "the grid"'.⁴³ Perhaps it will grow wary of the techno-optimist or post-humanist fantasy of a subject radically transmogrified and merged with technological apparatuses. It goes without saying, of course, that in the kind of post-work world I have been sketching here, both subjectivity and society will be radically transformed. The abolition of gender, the liberation of sexuality, the extirpation of racist structures and ideologies, the invention of new and maybe the revival of old ways of inhabiting the living world, will all form part of a great freeing up of identities and ways of being human. But the fight against neoliberal capitalism's efforts to overpower and manipulate human beings may well take the form not of ecstatic rhetoric about 'cyborg augmentations' and 'synthetic biology'⁴⁴ but of the defence of certain permanent or natural individual and social limitations: the rhythms and needs of the human body, the body's dependence on the living world, the diverse possibilities of happiness and self-flourishing through collaboration and various forms of play.

Play and solidarity are *Dirt Road's* key themes. They are the means by which the novel helps to sketch what Erik Olin Wright calls 'real utopias', the values and goals of a realistic yet emancipatory socialist alternative to neoliberalism in its terminal or senescent phase.⁴⁵ Murdo rejects the world of waged work in order to nurture his precocious flair for play and his developing capacity for empathy. Reading is another of the novel's images of free and creative effort. Free indirect narration, which is an achieved example of as well as (for readers) an opportunity for that sort of imaginative connection with another human consciousness, when translated into a more political idiom of solidarity, is the true achievement of Kelman's recent fiction. Solidarity with what? Our shared desire for freedom from alienating work.

Notes

- 1 I am grateful to Noelle Gallagher, Stuart MacDonald, Chris Vardy and the *Keywords* reviewers for their helpful comments on drafts of this article.
- 2 The *Keywords* entry on 'Work' regrets the narrowing of the word's meaning, under pressure of 'capitalist productive relations', from any form of 'activity and effort or achievement' to

- its 'predominant specialisation to regular paid employment'. To work, in the predominant meaning of the word, is to be a wage labourer and is thus a highly specific form of social relationship. Other forms of work and other kinds of social relationship apparently don't count. Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Fontana, 1976), 334-7.
- 3 Guy Standing prefers the term 'social dividend' to the more familiar term 'universal basic income' since it captures one of the essential justifications for a basic income, that it is a shared return on wealth accumulated from 'the commons and natural resources that belong to all'. *Basic Income: And How We Can Make It Happen* (St Ives: Pelican, 2017), 27.
 - 4 David Harvey, *Enigma of Capital: And the Crises of Capitalism* (London: Profile, 2011), 215.
 - 5 James Kelman, *Dirt Road* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2016), 293.
 - 6 Andre Gorz, *Critique of Economic Reason*, trans. Gillian Handyside and Chris Turner (London: Verso, 1989), 101 (emphasis in the original).
 - 7 Kate Soper, 'The Other Pleasures of Post-consumerism', *Soundings* 35 (2007): 31-40 (35).
 - 8 Warwick Research Collective (WReC), *Combined and Uneven Development: Towards a New Theory of World-Literature* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015), 138.
 - 9 Aaron Kelly, *James Kelman: Politics and Aesthetics* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2013).
 - 10 It is worth noting that Kelman's Glasgow, though it 'may be the geographical city on the Clyde', 'is given very little physical specification' in his work, as Cairns Craig has noted. 'Kelman's Glasgow Sentence', *The Edinburgh Companion to James Kelman*, ed. Scott Hames (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 75-85 (76). Kelman's Glasgow is not only a zoned and disconnected physical city but a patchwork of linguistic spaces and verbal territories. His work does not so much *show* the particular space of Glasgow as explore the psychological and linguistic means by which the city's spaces, the segregations it undergoes as well as the connections it affords, are experienced and understood.
 - 11 James Kelman, *The Busconductor Hines* (London: Phoenix, 1992 [1984]).
 - 12 Kelly, *James Kelman*, 88.
 - 13 William Davies, 'The New Neoliberalism', *New Left Review* 101 (2016), 121-34. Yet even Peter Boxall's account of 'Kelman's Later Novels', *You Have to be Careful in the Land of the Free*, *Translated Accounts* and Kieron Smith, *Boy*, focuses on their 'forensic examination of the forces and pressures that are exerted on the contemporary imagination as it strives to conjure a sense of personhood from the conflicting violences – national, postnational, economic – that dismember us'. Boxall notes these texts' 'delicate poetic responses to those forces', whereby 'a kind of becoming emerges'. I think we need a more precise way of identifying the emergence in Kelman's recent fiction of solidarity and creativity in response to neoliberalism's depredations. Peter Boxall, 'Kelman's Later Novels', in *The Edinburgh Companion to James Kelman*, 31-41.
 - 14 James Kelman, *Mo Said She Was Quirky* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2013), 153.
 - 15 James Kelman, *That Was a Shiver, and Other Stories* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2017), 114-5.
 - 16 Jonathan Crary, *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* (London: Verso, 2014), 31.
 - 17 Bertrand Russell, *In Praise of Idleness* (London: Routledge, 2004 [1935]); Paul Lafargue, *The Right to be Lazy* (1883), <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lafargue/1883/lazy> (accessed 1 February 2019).
 - 18 Richard Seymour, *Corbyn: The Strange Rebirth of Radical Politics* (London: Verso, 2016), 203.
 - 19 Richard Seymour, *Austerity: How We Can Fix the Crisis They Made* (London: Pluto Press, 2014), 110-50.
 - 20 Kelman, *Dirt Road*, 85.
 - 21 Contraction apostrophes omitted in the original.
 - 22 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd edn (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998 [1958]), 7.

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- 23 Edward W. Said, *Music at the Limits: Three Decades of Essays and Articles on Music* (London: Vintage, 2008), 56.
- 24 Kelman, *Dirt Road*, 203.
- 25 Edward W. Said, *Musical Elaborations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 1–34.
- 26 Kelman, *Dirt Road*, 301.
- 27 This phrase is of course Marx and Engels', *The Communist Manifesto*, trans. Samuel Moore (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), 105.
- 28 Kelman, *Dirt Road*, 336.
- 29 Crary, 24/7, 80.
- 30 Kelman, *Dirt Road*, 20.
- 31 This is a novel full of intensely resonant and therefore readable locations, such as these parking lots echoing with memories of Fordist prosperity/conformity; streets and fields inhabited by the ghosts of slavery and Civil Rights struggles; the cities of Lafayette and New Orleans, which denote the multi-ethnic past and future of American society and culture; and the Tennessee Valley, which recalls not only slavery but also the state-socialist infrastructure development and employment scheme of the New Deal. Such meaningful locations, in works by writers such as Richard Ford and Toni Cade Bambara, are the subject of Martyn Bone's *The Postsouthern Sense of Place in Contemporary Fiction* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2005).
- 32 It is also worth observing that in joining improvised ensembles with zydeco and Conjunto bands, this Scottish lad is also honouring and extending the fully global and intercultural origins of vernacular music. See Michael Denning, *Noise Uprising: The Audiopolitics of a World Musical Revolution* (London: Verso, 2015).
- 33 'Interview with Yanis Varoufakis', *The Economist*, 31 May 2016, <https://www.economist.com/briefing/2016/03/31/transcript-interview-with-yanis-varoufakis> (accessed 1 February 2019); Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams, *Inventing the Future: Postcapitalism and a World Without Work* (London: Verso, 2015), 107–27; James Livingston, 'Fuck work', <https://aeon.co/essays/what-if-jobs-are-not-the-solution-but-the-problem> (accessed 1 February 2019).
- 34 Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol 3, trans. David Fernbach (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981), 958–9.
- 35 Peter Fleming, *The Death of Homo Economicus: Work, Debt and the Myth of Endless Accumulation* (London: Pluto Press, 2017), 124–7.
- 36 David Graeber, *Bullshit Jobs: A Theory* (London: Allen Lane, 2018).
- 37 David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 19; Ralph Miliband, *Class War Conservatism and Other Essays* (London: Verso, 2015 [1983]); Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power and the Origins of Our Times* (London: Verso, 1994), 328.
- 38 Aeron Davis, *Reckless Opportunists: Elites at the End of the Establishment* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018).
- 39 Graeber, *Bullshit Jobs*, 85.
- 40 Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (London: Abacus, 1972 [1955]), 137.
- 41 Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man: In a Series of Letters*, ed. and trans. Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L.A. Willoughby (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 107.
- 42 Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 136.
- 43 Crary, 24/7, 98.
- 44 Srnicek and Williams, *Inventing the Future*, 82.
- 45 Erik Olin Wright, *Envisioning Real Utopias* (London: Verso, 2010).

‘Serious Dead Weather’: Crises of Climate and Consumption in Colson Whitehead’s *Zone One*

Christopher Vardy

Introduction

Contemporary climate change is a strange kind of crisis or concatenation of crises. It is an increasingly urgent and existential threat to the biosphere and to collective life on Earth but it is also amorphous, difficult to frame and grasp, both because of its enormity and because of its creeping, albeit accelerating, temporality. News stories flash up, briefly illuminating the contours of the crisis like lightning bolts in the midst of a storm: another devastating flood; another record-breaking drought; the United Nations warns that the world has just 12 years to ‘limit’ the catastrophe; it is revealed that humanity has wiped out 60% of animal populations since 1970; already toxic levels of plastic pollution in the seas are set to treble between 2015 and 2025, further poisoning fragile marine ecosystems.¹ These media events linger for a while like the after-effects of lightning or a glimpse of the hot sun on the retina; they overlay an experience of the day-to-day late capitalist life that drives and exacerbates climate change, perhaps enabling a different view of it. Eventually, however, this acute way of seeing fades.² The news cycle returns to more ‘immediate’ political and humanitarian crises: from the catastrophe in Syria and the wider migration crisis, to Trump and Brexit and the Eurozone (just a few of the manifold socio-economic effects of the post-2008 crisis of neoliberalism).³ What Lauren Berlant calls the state of ‘crisis ordinariness’ grinds on, as ‘across diverse geopolitical and biopolitical locations, the present moment increasingly imposes itself on consciousness as a moment in extended crisis, with one happening piling on another’.⁴

As has been explored throughout this special issue, Raymond Williams sees crises as ‘exposures of existing real relations, as distinct from the presumed and limited relations within which most political programmes are formulated’ that destabilise hegemonic ways of seeing and organising collective life.⁵ Climate change both exemplifies and tests the limits of Williams’s formulation. Nothing more starkly highlights the ‘limited relations’ and the limited historical perspectives of existing political programmes than the continued collective planetary failure to tackle anthropogenic climate change. However, the idea of a crisis ‘exposing’ ‘real relations’ presupposes that these relations are epistemologically graspable: that the manifold, imbricated, overlapping systems within which they play out can be conceptualised, even fleetingly, as a

complex totality. This is a particular challenge given the scale of the ‘planetary conjuncture’ that climate change represents, and the cascading fractures and failures of social, economic, political and eco- systems that it makes increasingly likely.⁶ Another difficulty, as Dipesh Chakrabarty cogently argues, comes from the fundamental epistemological challenge that climate change poses to existing historical frameworks such as the humanist distinction between natural and human history, and the already shaky concepts of ‘modernity’ and ‘globalisation’.⁷ Indeed, for Chakrabarty the now essential ‘cross-hatching of species history and the history of capital’ necessitates nothing less than ‘probing the limits of historical understanding’. (220) These enormous theoretical and historical questions are also existential ones. Wendy Brown, teasing out the relationship between concepts of ‘crisis’ and ‘critique’ within political philosophy, argues that ‘a critical condition is [...] a particular kind of call: an urgent call for knowledge, deliberation, judgement, and action to stave off catastrophe’.⁸ The historicity and temporality of this particular, unfolding ‘critical condition’ is qualitatively different to that of other contemporary crises: no eleventh-hour injection of liquidity can halt rising sea levels or replenish a poisoned or depleted aquifer. It is an immediate, pressing structural problem that needs to be framed simultaneously within a *longue durée*. The discursive acts of naming, framing, figuring and narrating crisis are crucial because they create the critical and political terrain on which action or transformation is conceivable.⁹ As Milton Friedman grasped so purposefully in the 1960s and 1970s, ‘[o]nly a crisis – actual or perceived – produces real change’, but the forms that change takes are never predetermined, follow no law of history and are the subject of political, ideological and discursive struggle in order to shape *what* precisely goes from being ‘politically impossible’ to ‘politically inevitable’.¹⁰ With that in mind, analysing the contested ways of seeing climate change that circulate within contemporary cultural production offers a crucial insight into the contours and contradictions of twenty-first-century social and political imaginaries.

This article explores the relationship between figurations of climate change and crisis in Colson Whitehead’s *Zone One* (2011). At first glance, this contemporary American novel might seem like a strange choice, particularly since the crisis that completely reconfigures life in *Zone One* is not climate change but viral hordes of the undead. Nevertheless, I argue that in this text the ever-flexible metaphor of the zombie compresses and intensifies the logics of climate change, which the novel describes as ‘[t]hat other, less flamboyant, more deliberate ruination altering the planet’s climate [that] had been underway for more than a hundred years [...] People got used to it’.¹¹ The zombie catastrophe and its aftermath exemplifies Berlant’s analysis of ‘crisis [...] itself [as] a heightening interpretive genre, rhetorically turning an ongoing condition

into an intensified situation in which extensive threats to survival are said to dominate the reproduction of life'.¹² The complex, unfolding 'condition' of climate change and the problems that it generates for the 'reproduction of life' are figured in *Zone One* through the 'intensified situation' of a zombie crisis. The challenge of representing anthropogenic climate change is particularly acute within the generic frameworks of literary realism. As Amitav Ghosh argues, 'these are not ordinary times: the events that mark them are not easily accommodated in the deliberately prosaic world of serious prose fiction'.¹³ Adam Trexler concurs, stating that the probabilistic 'familiarity of realist fiction is often broken down by climatic transformations' but argues that on the other hand 'apocalyptic writing', one popular generic alternative to realism, 'typically describes horrors that are unmoored from the real causes and conditions of the Anthropocene'.¹⁴ *Zone One* apocalypse hinges on a revelatory, metaphorically-frightened 'flood' that subsumes New York, a metropolis that is highly vulnerable to the conditions and effects of climate change, particularly rising sea levels (so far at twice the observed average global rate) and storm surges.¹⁵ Hurricane Irene in 2011 and Hurricane Sandy in 2012 underscored the fragility of this 'sinking city' with its increasingly 'vulnerable grid': as Ben Lerner put it, '[f]or the second time in a year, we were facing once-in-a-generation weather'.¹⁶ And following the September 2001 terrorist attacks, New York is also a site for American anxieties about the violent, disruptive reassertion of systemic global problems in which the nation is deeply enmeshed but that it would prefer to ignore or displace. In *Zone One*, Manhattan is an uncannily-deserted semi-ruin replete with critical potential: a 'gorgeous and intricate delusion [...] from crooked angles on overcast days you saw it disintegrate, were forced to consider this tenuous creature in its true nature'.¹⁷ This article will argue that *Zone One* questions the implications of living through late capitalist forms of labour and consumption that make future life increasingly precarious, perhaps even impossible. The text also critiques any naïve fantasy that profound ecological crisis can be met with 'reconstruction' of the world as it is now but acknowledges a double-bind; that while the perpetuation of existing social-economic relations is unsustainable, even unbearable, other necessarily radical future paths remain unimaginable. *Zone One*, with its wry, reflexive invocation of post-apocalyptic tropes, is a case study in the altered, uncertain 'ways of seeing' contemporary life that the crises of climate change produce.

A Discursively Flexible Apocalypse

Zone One takes place over three days, a biblically-suggestive Friday–Sunday that involves a lot of resurrection but not much hope of salvation, around a

year after a global zombie crisis of uncertain viral provenance and contested signification, which is figured in conventionally apocalyptic terms as ‘the ruination’ (40) or ‘the flood’ (65). An embryonic provisional government, nicknamed the ‘American Phoenix’, has been set up at Buffalo that aims to ‘[c]onnect the isolated camps and forts one by one, link the independent towns just now seduced to the national bosom, bid the life-giving material flow once more’ (143).¹⁸ The novel’s narrator, Mark Spitz, works in the eponymous Zone One: Lower Manhattan below Canal St, which is protected from the regular waves of ravenous living dead by a heavily defended concrete wall.¹⁹ As part of the effort to render this small foothold on the island inhabitable again, Spitz and his small team of fellow civilian ‘sweepers’ inspect each building, remove the dead and dispatch the few remaining undead. This repetitive labour is combined with an unpredictably associative narration, which often overlays and juxtaposes multiple experiences and memories from before, during and after the initial crisis within the same scene or moment. This *mise-en-abyme* memorial structure offers a critical way of seeing the now deserted and violated identikit late capitalist office and apartment buildings, and the socio-economic processes and practices they represent. Spitz is ‘a connoisseur of the found poetry in the abandoned barricade’ (134), an involuntary parser of ‘[t]he detritus that passed for identity, the particulate remains of twenty-first-century existence’ (50–51), and a survivor yoked to a gruelling project of national reconstruction that he is not convinced is worth the labour or the struggle.

Zone One has already been the subject of a range of critical and academic attention. Whitehead’s varied fiction, from *The Intuitionist* (1999) and *Apex Hides the Hurt* (2006) to the Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Underground Railroad* (2016), explores the histories and legacies of slavery and racial violence and interrogates successive generations of American national myth-making. *Zone One* is no exception. As Sarah Juliet Lauro and Roger Luckhurst both argue, the zombie, with its roots in the Haitian zombi, is an inextricably racialised figure with a long history of being used to explore and resist the ‘social death’ of slavery.²⁰ Indeed, *Zone One* figures the zombie plague as an intensification and repetition of the logics of the American nation state, figured as a ravenously homogenising enterprise: ‘no matter the hue of their skins, dark or light [...] [n]ow they were mostly mouths and fingers, fingers for extracting entrails from soft cavities’, their faces now ‘de-individuated flaps of masticated flesh, rendered anonymous’.²¹ The undead ‘could no longer manage speech yet they spoke nonetheless, saying what the city had always told its citizens, from the first settlers hundreds of years ago, to the shattered survivors of the garrison [...] I am going to eat you up’ (244). Grace Heneks, analysing this national allegory alongside the ambiguous blackness of Mark Spitz, which is only revealed late in the novel, argues both that the brittle hope offered by

the 'American Phoenix' functions as a critique of Barack Obama's campaign and presidency and that *Zone One* critiques any fantasy of America as a post-racial society through the allegory of the zombie, who Whitehead aligns with dominant, destructive forms of whiteness.²² The novel's figuration of other, interrelated crises has also been of interest to critics.²³ Lief Sorensen analyses the temporalities and narrative modes used to figure socio-economic crisis in *Zone One*, arguing that the novel 'explore[s] the unthinkable possibility of a crisis so severe that it might not have a future at all'.²⁴ However, Sorensen does not engage with the crisis of climate change, either as a context for reading the novel or exploring the ways in which it is figured, albeit sometimes obliquely, within the text. Climate change and the emerging historical framework of the Anthropocene is, however, the central focus of Kate Marshall's reading of the novel.²⁵ Marshall cogently argues that in response to the increased awareness of human-caused climate crisis, contemporary American fiction 'respond[s] to the pressures of the larger anthropocenic imagination by staging its own temporality within increasing time scales and geologies'.²⁶ Marshall persuasively teases out the ways in which *Zone One* deploys the post-human zombie and envisions what a 'global layer of human residue [...] might look like after an extinction scenario' to explore a 'different kind of historical time', 'a future point of view in which the material stratum of the human is no longer that which is the most recent' (533). Marshall highlights the ways in which the novel imagines the Anthropocene by positing its post-human end, and articulates a sense of contemporary historicity equal parts millenarian and embedded within a millennia-spanning *longue duree*. These interventions are helpful for my argument: notably her analysis of the distinctive historical perspectives on climate change that *Zone One* produces, and in her observation that the novel ironically undercuts a tokenistic, presentist environmentalism in an epoch of mass carbon emissions, illustrated by a scene in which workers incinerating zombie corpses agree that they *really should* recycle the plastic body bags because of 'the environment'.²⁷ Where this article's reading of *Zone One* departs from Marshall's analysis is in its argument that the novel compresses and intensifies the temporal logics of climate change and questions the sustainability of the late capitalist socio-economic relations that drive it *through* the metaphor of the zombie apocalypse, rather than primarily using the historical schism caused by the undead to conceptualise the *longue durée* of the Anthropocene. This article also departs from Marshall, and indeed all of the critics cited so far, in its specific focus on the political and epistemological signification of the flood, which Adam Trexler argues is 'the dominant literary strategy for locating climate change', and that overwhelms the walls of the American Phoenix at the end of the novel.²⁸

The viral zombie apocalypse is a ubiquitous trope within early-twenty-first-century cultural production. Indeed, *Zone One*, with Spitz's tired, often impatiently tick-box remembrance of desperate localism, proto-fascist communes, barbarous millenarian cults, eerily-surrounded farmhouses and roaming bandits, is knowingly indebted to this glut of undead narratives: *The Walking Dead* (2003–; 2010–), *28 Days Later* (2002), *Shaun of the Dead* (2004), *World War Z* (2006) et al.²⁹ Stephanie Boluk and Wylie Lenz persuasively argue that the contemporary zombie articulates similar fantasies and fears about capitalist modernity as the plague narrative did in early-modern cultures: 'the success of the free market can be measured by the scope of its figuratively infectious spread; that spread produces an increasingly integrated world; and that integration produces a means for the acceleration of literal infection, which in turn brings about a crisis in capitalism'.³⁰ The zombie, they argue, is often 'didactically harnessed' to offer a critique of the vulnerable, deeply-interpenetrated, hyper-consumerist systems of late capitalist life.³¹ Since 2008, for instance, the metaphor of the zombie has been deployed to critique neoliberal economics and ideology by figures including Jamie Peck and Mark Fisher.³² They argue, perhaps optimistically, that neoliberalism as an active project is now dead but lingers on in unproductive, increasingly toxic, residual-dominant forms: it 'shambles on as zombie – but as the aficionados of zombie films are well aware, it is sometimes harder to kill a zombie than a living person'.³³ The zombie is thus powerfully and polemically put to political work. Nevertheless, these reasonless consuming bodies, liminally positioned between life and death, rarely function as a straightforward unidirectional analogy for capitalism, as Boluk and Lenz note:

The zombie functions as a signifier replete with cultural contradictions. On the one hand, the zombie destroys the conditions under which capitalism can function – a feature that is often dramatically demonstrated in films through money scattered in the street. On the other hand, this polysemic zombie serves as a figure for capitalism itself. It can be read as the fulfillment of a millennial vision of capitalism as an 'end of history'. The zombie apocalypse may signal an end to human progress, but the reign of undifferentiated zombies is perpetual – and one fueled by creatures kept in a stasis of permanent desire. Yet, at the same time, the zombies embodies Marx's notion that capitalism will destroy itself from within by enacting a proletarian revolution that introduces a new, classless society.³⁴

The zombie is an overdetermined, metaphorically flexible figure. It is the human's bleakest embodiment and its inhuman opposite; it represents late capitalism's destruction and its embodiment in perpetuity; its ontologically-

ambiguous undead status is profoundly unnatural, since it connotes biological systems stretched to their absolute limit, but the terrifyingly rapid triumph of this new species over *homo sapiens* and its violent but efficient, exponential reproduction represent the apex of Darwinian evolutionary logics. Claire Colebrook argues that the 'vampiric or zombified other' too often functions as a crude 'allegory for humanity gone awry', a means of displacing violent and destructive human traits onto a monstrous figure.³⁵ Instead of engaging with the troubling ramifications of contemporary climate change, that 'humanity's end presents itself to us', Colebrook contends that cultural production imagines more palatable 'external threats to the species that are then warded off in a clear species-species agonistics' (206). However, *Zone One's* zombies persistently complicate and undermine just this sort of specious opposition.

The Undead Contemporary

Zone One frustrates any attempt to make the zombie a stable, singular symbol. As the origin of the virus is never revealed (unlike other zombie narratives, it is neither caused nor explicitly exacerbated by late capitalist socio-economic systems), the viral undead are an ambiguous, perhaps even *natural* phenomenon that the survivors are desperate to narrativise and thus to make sense of, often deploying political or moral eschatology to do just that. Spitz ironically recounts the competing theories of these manifold 'divine-retribution folks':

The human race deserved the plague, we brought it on ourselves for poisoning the planet, for the Death of God, the calculated brutalities of the global economic system, for driving primordial species to extinction: the entire collapse of values as evidenced by anything from nuclear fission to reality television to alternate side of the street parking.³⁶

Unlike contemporary climate change, *Zone One* suggests, this crisis is apparently not man-made. Ecological, Christian, Marxist, socialist or just vaguely moralistic declinist theories are all seductive but too simplistic: the *Zone One* zombie frustrates the desire for stable analogy. Indeed, they emphasise the discursive flexibility of crisis conditions. Zombies are an undoubtedly existential collective threat but are also 'the mass', discursively constituted in different ways by individual survivors as an imagined collective that they construct themselves in opposition to. Indeed, the zombies in *Zone One* ironically exemplify Williams's claim in 'Culture is Ordinary' that '[t]here are in fact no masses, but only ways of seeing people as masses'.³⁷ While machine-gunning the undead, Spitz's colleague Kaitlyn, whose obsessively, breezily

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recounted past resembles a middle-class consumerist 'bourgeois utopia',³⁸ 'aimed at the rabble who nibbled at the edge of her dream: the weak-willed smokers, deadbeat dads and welfare cheats, single moms incessantly breeding, the flouters of speed laws, and those who only had themselves to blame for their ridiculous credit-card debt' (213) Kaitlyn imagines zombies through a conservative ideological lens as a mass who refuse individualised personal responsibility. Fellow sweeper Gary, by contrast, imagines zombies as the "squares", the "suckers", and the "saps", the embodiment of middle-class consumerist conformism that he always felt excluded from:

The dead had paid their mortgages on time, and placed the well-promoted breakfast cereals on the table when the offspring leaped out of bed in their fire-resistant jammies. The dead had graduated with admirable GPAs, configured monthly contributions to worthy causes, judiciously apportioned their 401(k)s across diverse sectors according to the wisdom of their dead licensed financial advisors. (25)

The apparently safely quantified and financialised imagined futures that structure the lives of these abstracted citizens have left them unprepared for this crisis, and the novel's retrospective view of these hopeful fantasies from the vantage point of the crisis renders them tragic and/or pathetic, despite Gary's disdain. Gary and Kaitlyn might construct this radical ecological threat differently due to their different class positions, but both do so through the undead norms and imaginaries of American late capitalist social relations. Indeed, even as *Zone One* emphasises the flexibility of the zombie metaphor and ironically undercuts simplistic eschatological fantasies of what caused this crisis, it uses the zombie apocalypse as a way of critically questioning the structures of late capitalist labour and consumption, and to critique responses to crisis that emphasise unsustainable but apparently palatable socio-economic continuity rather than more radical transformation.

In *Zone One* there are two kinds of zombies. The first are the usual half-rotted, reasonless consuming-machines desperate for human flesh: the 'skels'. The second kind are much more distinctive to Whitehead's novel: the apparently harmless 'stragglers'. A small proportion of the undead, stragglers are not ceaselessly hungry but pervasively stuck: they endlessly repeat a loop of behaviour from their previous lives, rooted in one location. Crucially, they are often encountered, and are first introduced in the novel, either stuck working or stuck buying:

In the desolate consumer-electronics showroom, the up-selling floor salesman halted mid-pitch, as if psychoanalyzing a skeptical rube who was

simply, ever and always, not in the room, not in the market for purchases big-ticket or otherwise. A man bent before a mirror that perched on the glass counter of the sunglasses store, his fingers holding on the arms of invisible shades. A woman cradled a wedding dress in the dressing-room’s murk, without end a primal moment of expectation. A man lifted the hood of a copy machine. They did not move when you happened on them. They didn’t know you were there. They kept watching their movies.

One morning, Mark Spitz stumbled on some brain-wiped wretch standing at the fry station of the big hamburger chain and had to shoot him on general principles. Out of the abundance of a life, to choose fry duty. (49)

The stragglers embody a lack of choice, an absence of agency, a pathetic existence organised around the repetition of meaningless actions, seemingly without end and without purpose. The recursively consuming undead are stuck ‘watching their movies’ – passified in almost Adornian terms by an internalised outpost of the culture industry. The question that the novel poses, as so often with the liminal figure of the zombie, is how different is this radically denuded post-crisis existence to pre-crisis forms of life organised around consumption and labour? Who *chooses* ‘fry duty’ really, out of the ‘abundance’ of life, and how many are instead stuck or ‘left behind’ in insecure and low-paid labour? The novel is not always subtle in staging these questions. Spitz’s team, with their repetitive work routine of zombie clean-up, is itself likened by their Lieutenant to ‘a bunch of stragglers’ (98). Spitz, walking through an abandoned chain restaurant and remembering long-ago family outings amid uncannily similar iterations of the same décor, the same ersatz Americana, reflects that he feels like ‘a ghost’ and ‘a straggler’ and questions ‘what kind of straggler would he make? What did he love, what place had been important to him?’ (155) And the Lieutenant drunkenly imagines an eerily familiar world populated by ‘ninety-nine percent straggler’, advocating that it would be better to just let them go on with their half-life: ‘Let them sit in the cubicles, let them ride the bus all day and night and in the depot after hours. Chillin’ on the beach catching some rays. They don’t know what’s going on – they probably think it’s business as usual. Going about their day like they always did’ (157). The ‘false consciousness’ exemplified by the stragglers mirrors the everyday routine of ‘going about one’s day’ that they apparently unthinkingly reproduce: ‘To Mark Spitz, the dead were his neighbours, the people he saw every day, as he might on a subway car, the fantastic metropolitan array’ (214). The novel does not present late capitalism as causally linked to the zombie outbreak, but as its ambiguous correlative.

In his persuasive analysis of the representation of work in contemporary post-apocalyptic narratives, Theodore Martin cogently argues that *Zone One* is representative of a genre that functions 'less as a speculative vision of the future than as a rendering of the monotonous rhythms that structure the contemporary'.³⁹ Specifically they 'afford us a glimpse not of a postcapitalist future but of a contemporary moment shaped by constant yet precarious labour' (162). Spitz's team, with its repetitive labour, systematically mopping up or wiping out the last bodies and generating reports and statistics that will putatively 'deliver end dates and progress and the return to life before',⁴⁰ does not represent a future of fetishised, productive survivalist labour. Indeed, this new work is not drastically unlike his former 'bullshit job': 'He worked in Customer Relationship Management, New Media Department, of a coffee multinational. A college buddy tipped him to it: "You'll be perfect. It doesn't require any skills"' (149).⁴¹ This labour too is endless, repetitive, joyless. The stragglers are a disturbing metaphor for the ways in which capitalist logics penetrate all subjects through everyday 'routine', as Martin sees it: '[c]apitalism, of course, is what it means for time to be money. Routine, in turn, shows us what it means for capitalism to become synonymous with our time.'⁴² Martin's reading of *Zone One* is highly persuasive in its analysis of the paradox of labour in the novel, that 'survival is the compromise we are consigned to by a world in which our work means nothing to us and in which we are made to mean nothing without work' (194). However, Martin does not attend to *Zone One's* ultimate suggestion: that these paradoxes and the suggestive continuities between pre- and post-apocalypse life are *unsustainable* when confronted with eco-systems in profound crisis.

'The Dark Tsunami'

As I've argued, *Zone One* plays with eerie repetitions in order to question how fundamentally different zombies really are from late capitalist subjects. As a child, Spitz walked in on his mother giving his father a blow job; on 'The Last Night', he finds her similarly positioned in zombie form performing 'grisly ministrations' to a 'flap of his intestine' with a distinctly 'phallic aspect'.⁴³ Throughout the novel, the identikit apartments with identikit stuff that he clears corpses out of day-by-day testify to a homogenised collective organised around mass consumption who 'had all shopped at the same popular furniture emporiums the rest of the country shopped at [...] In the D-line apartment on the sixth floor he discovered the plaid ottoman he came across in the A-line apartment on the fourteenth floor, an identical distance from the flat-television. They had been a community' (58). And it is this kind of national

'community' that the American Phoenix seeks to reconstruct in enclaves across the zombified Eastern seaboard. The crisis is periodised by the government as 'the interregnum' (205) – an interruption to a hegemonic sovereign system rather than the necessary inauguration of a new era. 'Looting', formerly a necessity for survivors, is banned; the law and property rights are tentatively re-established; corporate sponsors discount or donate goods in exchange for promised future tax cuts (39): 'Pledge all your tiny cartons of children's applesauce, in all the nation's far-flung groceries and convenience stores? It was a no-brainer: they were expired anyway. The civilians out in the wild, unaware of the regulations, would be welcomed into the system in time, and they would obey' (39–40).⁴⁴ This recursive 'welcome' through coercion and regulation, the re-civilising of the American 'wild', invokes earlier colonial and capitalist history. And fantasies of American capitalist prosperity continue to structure the cultural imaginary: Gary's entrepreneurial fantasies to design and market a zombie restraint device evidence a 'reservoir of phenie optimism, a hazy vision, after all this time, of [...] insertion into the dreamscape of American prosperity' (63). Spitz is cynical about the possibility of this kind of continuity, but acknowledges that survival in the present is seemingly predicated on that model of futurity-as-restoration: 'Why else were they in Manhattan but to transport the old ways across the violent passage of the calamity to the safety of the other side? If you don't believe that, Mark Spitz asked himself, why are you here?' (48). There is, apparently, no alternative. After all, the narrative of Reconstruction, with its long American pedigree, gives a sense of historical stability: '[i]n reconstruction, you knew where you stood' (89). However, as the novel unfolds, Spitz begins to increasingly perceive 'Zone One' less as the starting point for a progressive restoration of national life and more as undead terrain, just 'expanses of formaldehyded territory' (65). Their collective labour produces little more than the 'illusion of life in the cadaver' (65). What finally, possibly even productively, shatters the illusion of the American Phoenix is the destructive resurgence of a flood that destroys any illusion of reconstruction along existing social and economic lines, and that invokes climate change as a destructive but revelatory force.

'The flood' (65) is previously used in the novel as a biblically-inflected metonym like 'the ruination' (40) to retrospectively describe the destructive peak of the crisis, now imagined to have passed. However, the use of weather, rainfall, storms and altered climate conditions to metaphorically explore the undead crisis goes beyond, and is far more significant than, that go-to apocalyptic figure. The patterns, movements and systems of the zombies are described by survivors in meteorological terms: 'The monsters were a kind of weather after all; Mark Spitz noticed that they'd started being described as such, among wanderers who had never met, in spontaneous linguistic consensus'

(178). The use of 'weather' here suggests that the destructive 'monsters' are a *natural* phenomenon with their own logics, but also that the ebbs and flows of this phenomenon are increasingly *naturalised*, integrated into the backdrop of an 'everyday' life, defined by crisis ordinariness. Spitz's obsessive, persistent trauma-fantasy that ash from the incinerated zombies falls from the clouds like rain or is integrated into the rain itself and therefore dead particulates are absorbed through his skin (63, 120, 235) reinforces the novel's imbrication of the climate with the undead crisis. The dead are integrated into the biosphere; the human body is permeable, penetrated and polluted by this doubly 'man-made' climate change. This contamination recalls Amitav Ghosh's model of the 'environmental uncanny', in which contemporary 'freakish weather events of today, despite their radically nonhuman nature' have a more 'intimate connection with humans than did the climatic phenomena of the past' because they represent the 'mysterious work of our own hands returning to haunt us in unthinkable shapes and forms'.⁴⁵ In the novel's final pages, it is revealed that far from this being a truly *post*-apocalyptic narrative, the 'flood' is an ongoing catastrophe. Zone One is protected from the undead by concrete walls, 'barricades' being 'the only metaphor left in this mess. The last one standing. Keep chaos out, order in'.⁴⁶ But this barrier is under sustained pressure from the blood and bodily material of machine-gun-pulped undead: a 'higher than normal flood of skulls' (192) due to the increasingly 'serious dead weather up there at the wall' (189): '[y]esterday's pools of blood and gore has expanded into lakes fed by the mass of leaking corpses' (240). Due to the creeping, ever-so-slowly-accelerating temporality of the flood, the imminent failure of these leaking concrete levees goes unnoticed by those stuck in the new-old routines of labour and reconstruction, unable to perceive the oncoming storm: 'a few feet away, beyond the combat lines, the Sunday-evening routines puttered as usual, inconceivably [...] After all this time in the abattoir, the survivors were completely inured to the agenda of catastrophe' (240). Eventually, a tipping-point is reached, the barrier, now a dam, is breached, and the dead 'spread in hungry rivulets' (245), a 'dark tsunami' (248) that sweeps through Zone One, causing the government propaganda to rapidly crumble, and an immanent crisis of consumption to be revealed: 'This is PR, [...] It'll be years before we're able to resettle this island. We don't even have food for the winter' (250). As the thin veneer of 'civilisation' falls apart, the novel explicitly figures this flood of the ravenous dead as an accelerated, intensified way of seeing the *longue durée* crisis of climate change: '[t]he ocean had overtaken the streets, as if the news programs' global warming simulations had finally come to pass and the computer-generated swells mounted to drown the great metropolis. Except it was not water that flooded the grid but the dead' (243). What the flood foregrounds in the novel's final pages is the double-bind that the crisis

of climate change represents: on one hand, the impossibility of fantasies of continuity in the face of profound systemic crisis; and on the other, the equally profound epistemological challenge that crises generate for imagining a future outside of hegemonic 'common sense':

He didn't know if the world was doomed or saved, but whatever the next thing was, it would not look like what came before. There were no intersections with the avenues of Buffalo's shimmering reconstructions, its boulevards did not cross their simulations and dioramas of futurity. It refused the shapes Mark Spitz conjured in his visions of reinvention in the big city. (257)

One of the strangest things about the ending of *Zone One* is its profoundly invigorating effect on Spitz, the weird exhilaration he feels as the American Phoenix is subsumed by 'the dark tsunami', the unravelling of the survival narrative's constitutive 'monotony', since '[s]taying alive is about trying to keep things the way they are'.⁴⁷ This exhilaration is far from a version of the old Marxist faith in the progressive possibility of a crisis point, with its 'sharpening of contradictions', that leads to a progressive future.⁴⁸ Instead, Spitz, alone but invigorated, fatalistically chooses, or rather embraces the displaced fact of, an uncertain future, 'walk[ing] into the sea of the dead'.⁴⁹

Theodore Martin argues that in post-apocalyptic narratives, '[t]he end of the world is usually only the beginning of the story, and the story's end, more often than not, is yet another beginning, a seed of hope, if not the full-flowering of some new form of social life'.⁵⁰ The end of *Zone One* cannot imagine any new form of social life; there is no kernel of collective possibility like that glimpsed Ben Lerner's *10:04*, in which a prospective storm surge leads to New York tentatively 'becoming one organism, constituting itself in relation to a threat viewable from space': 'what normally felt like the only possible world became one among many, its meaning everywhere up for grabs, however briefly'.⁵¹ Indeed, the only viable collective subject in *Zone One* is the undead. What the novel leaves the reader with instead is Spitz's post-apocalyptic realisation that the future always involves unimaginable, radical difference: '[t]he world wasn't ending: it had ended and now they were in the new place. They could not recognise it because they had not seen it before'.⁵² The national project, with its all-too permeable concrete barriers and attempts to 'transport the old ways across the violent passage of the calamity' (48), has missed the point: the old ways cannot persist unaltered in the face of systemic crisis. *Zone One*, with its narration of desperate inertia followed by exhilarating collapse, bleakly exemplifies Stuart Hall's argument that '[w]hen a conjuncture unrolls, there is no "going back." History shifts gears [...] You are in a new moment'.⁵³

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Hall's insight is never more apposite or more urgently needed than now, as we collectively face the creeping but accelerating unravelling of the 'planetary conjuncture' due to climate change.⁵⁴ The zombie plague in *Zone One* is not a straightforward, laboured analogy for that crisis, '[t]hat other, less flamboyant, more deliberate ruination altering the planet's climate [that] had been underway for more than a hundred years'.⁵⁵ However, it offers innovative ways of seeing it: the zombie plague intensifies and compresses the temporality of ecological and social collapse. For Spitz, this catastrophe makes that other looming, abstract catastrophe finally conceivable.⁵⁶

Now Mark Spitz understood plainly what [people] had meant by 'What kind of person would bring a child into this world' and then recited statistics about polluted water tables on the other side of the world, the asphyxiated ecosphere. The answer was, 'Only a monster would bring a child into this world'. (197–8)

Climate change and the undead are presented here as mutually illuminating crises of reproductive futurism – the material and ideological reproduction of existing social, economic and political structures and norms through the figure of the child: 'the logic within which the political itself may be thought'; 'the telos of the social order [...] the one for whom that order is held in perpetual trust'.⁵⁷ As with the novel's polysemic critique of late-capitalist labour and consumption, '[t]he plague [...] made it more literal, spelled it out in case you didn't get it before'.⁵⁸

Conclusion: The Challenge of 'the New Place'

Chakrabarty argues that the crisis of climate change 'can precipitate a sense of the present that disconnects the future from the past by putting such a future beyond the grasp of historical sensibility'.⁵⁹ Perhaps this is not surprising. After all, Fredric Jameson argues that the futures subjects and collectives can imagine represent the limits beyond which they cannot think, and that 'one of the great indispensable functions of ideological analysis [is] to show [these] contradictions in which we are ourselves imprisoned'.⁶⁰ For Jameson, the farthest futurities contemporary Western thought can imagine are 'dystopia and regression, world dictatorship and the reversion to savagery' (308). *Zone One* is a rich example of the contemporary dystopian imaginary: a way of seeing the contemporary, of rendering its contours perceivable from the vantage point of an imagined post-apocalyptic future. The novel does not posit progressive futures; nor does it retrospectively point to a historical path

not taken or a tipping-point overlooked that crudely illuminates the immediate contemporary political terrain. It is neither that consoling nor that simplistic. It does not attempt to figure the planetary scope of this conjunctural crisis. It does, however, perform critical work. *Zone One*’s mode of critique is not a restorative project in the face of ‘temporal rupture’, like those identified by Wendy Brown: ‘critique as political *krisis* promis[ing] to restore continuity by repairing or renewing the justice that gives an order the prospect of continuity, that indeed makes it continuous’.⁶¹ Instead, *Zone One* suggests that attempts to maintain capitalist and nationalist continuity in the face of systemic ecological crises such as climate change are not just inadequate or impossible, but are a constitutive part of that unfolding crisis. The planet is already changed, our biosphere is now ‘a new place’ that demands radical thought and action. Jane Bennett clearly frames this pressing political and epistemological challenge:

Michel Foucault famously said that ‘There are times in life when the question of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks, and perceive differently than one sees, is absolutely necessary’. Our time – of global warming, mounting piles of garbage and toxic waste, accelerating rates of energy and other resource consumption – seems to me to warrant eccentric, experimental thinking.⁶²

However, *Zone One* acknowledges a central paradox of contemporary climate change, and indeed the paradox that defines contemporary crisis more generally: the necessity for new forms of social, economic and political organisation, but the fact that, even in the wake of disaster, radical responses to this ‘new place’ remain seemingly impossible to conceptualise within the unparalleled complexity and interpenetrated systems of late capitalism. We remain stuck within undead orthodoxies that are ecologically unsustainable and increasingly unbearable, particularly for the world’s poorest and most vulnerable people, but that linger, occupying the terrain of the politically possible as the ‘serious dead weather’ gathers pace in ever more perceptible ways.

Notes

- 1 Damian Carrington, ‘Humanity has Wiped Out 60% of Animal Populations since 1970, Report Finds’, *Guardian*, 30 October 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/oct/30/humanity-wiped-out-animals-since-1970-major-report-finds> (accessed 19 January 2019); Jonathan Watts, ‘We Have 12 years to Limit Climate Change Catastrophe, Warns UN’, *Guardian*, 8 October 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/oct/08/global-warming-must-not-exceed-15c-warns-landmark-un-report> (accessed 19 January 2019); Josh Gabbatiss, ‘Plastic Pollution in Sea Set to Treble in a Decade, Warn Government Scientists’, *Independent*, 21 March 2018, <https://www.>

- independent.co.uk/environment/plastic-pollution-sea-increase-government-scientists-uk-oceans-a8266356.html (accessed 19 January 2019).
- 2 Here and throughout this article, I invoke and am inspired by John Berger's famous heuristic from *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin, 1972). I do this because of Berger's Marxian focus on the ideological dissonances that forms of aesthetic cultural production can foreground, and because of his faith in the democratic possibilities offered by new interpretive frames: collective ways of seeing the world that aesthetic forms can make possible, provoke or even demand.
- 3 The Syrian civil war and its cascading effect on the humanitarian crisis of mass migration has itself been linked to climate change. See Colin P. Kelley, Shahrzad Mohtadi, Mark A. Cane, Richard Seager and Yochanan Kushnir, 'Climate Change in the Fertile Crescent and implications of the recent Syrian drought', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 112, no. 11 (17 March 2015): 3241–46.
- 4 Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 7. See also 9–10 and 80–84 for Berlant's argument that the dominant critical and cultural focus on trauma as an exceptional historical event disrupting a normative 'ordinary' life elides the ways in which historical crises in fact structure and define the 'ordinary', which she sees as 'a zone of convergence of many histories, where people manage the incoherence of lives that proceed in the face of threats to the good life they imagine' (10).
- 5 Raymond Williams, *Towards 2000* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1983), 11.
- 6 Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'The Climate of History: Four Theses', *Critical Inquiry* 35, no. 2 (Winter 2009): 197–222 (199). Chakrabarty's mention of a planetary conjuncture recalls the work of Louis Althusser and, later, Stuart Hall on 'conjuncture'. The latter defines it as 'a period in which the contradictions and problems and antagonisms, which are always present in different domains in a society, begin to come together. They begin to accumulate, they begin to fuse, to overlap with one another. The ideological becomes part of the economic problem and vice versa [...] they fuse into a *ruptural unity*, and that's the beginning of conjuncture'. James Hay, Stuart Hall and Lawrence Grossberg, 'Interview with Stuart Hall', *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 10, no. 1 (March 2013): 10–33 (16). The unfolding 'planetary conjuncture' represents a hitherto unprecedented scale of interrelated systemic 'contradictions and problems and antagonisms'.
- 7 Chakrabarty, 'The Climate of History', 201–7. The challenge generated for historians by climate change thus goes far beyond the important acknowledgement that 'the mansion of modern freedoms stands on an ever-expanding base of fossil-fuel use' (208). For a recent example of a historian acknowledging the environmentally toxic foundations and legacies of the Western social-democracies, so often fetishised on the Left during the period of neoliberal hegemony, see Ian Kershaw, *Roller-Coaster: Europe, 1950–2017* (London: Allen Lane, 2018), 142–3.
- 8 Wendy Brown, *Edgeworks: Critical Essays on Knowledge and Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 7.
- 9 This crucial relationship between periodisation and critical/political analysis is illustrated by ongoing debates around the nomenclature of our current epoch and the use of the concept of the "Anthropocene". Critics contest the significance of specifically capitalist and colonial histories and processes as opposed to the actions/culpability of an undifferentiated 'anthropos'. They also explore the relationship between these determinants and increasingly widespread (if geographically uneven) human practices of production, consumption and, arguably, overpopulation that are driving anthropogenic climate change and crises in biodiversity. For a range of responses to these questions, see Chakrabarty, 'The Climate of History'; Jason W. Moore (ed.), *Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism* (San Francisco, CA: PM Press, 2016); and Andreas Malm, *Fossil*

- Capital: The Rise of Steam Power and the Roots of Global Warming* (London: Verso, 2016) and *The Progress of This Storm: Nature and Society in a Warming World* (London: Verso, 2018). For a cogent critique of the whiteness of many Anthropocene narratives, see Kathryn Yusoff, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2019). For a discussion of the ‘galvanising effect of the term Anthropocene’ within recent critical analysis of anthropogenic climate change, see Lucy Bond, Ben De Bruyn and Jessica Rapson, ‘Planetary Memory in Contemporary American Fiction’, *Textual Practice* 31, no. 5 (2017): 853–66 (856).
- 10 Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2002), xiv.
 - 11 Colson Whitehead, *Zone One* (London: Vintage, 2012), 193. Further citations from this text will be taken from this edition.
 - 12 Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 7.
 - 13 Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (Chicago, IL and London: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 26.
 - 14 Adam Trexler, *Anthropocene Fictions: The Novel in a Time of Climate Change* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2015), 118. Trexler’s acknowledgement of this double bind echoes Berlant’s own contention in *Cruel Optimism* that the genre of ‘crisis’ does not always reveal structural forces and conditions but can sometimes itself serve to ‘distort something structural and ongoing within ordinariness into something that seems shocking and exceptional’ (7).
 - 15 ‘Impacts of Climate Change in New York’, *New York Department for Environmental Conservation*, <http://www.dec.ny.gov/energy/94702.html> (accessed 19 January 2019)
 - 16 Ben Lerner, *10:04: A Novel* (New York Picador: 2015), 4; 213.
 - 17 Whitehead, *Zone One*, 6.
 - 18 This description explicitly echoes the federation and consolidation of the American colonies and commonwealths into a nascent nation state organised around the East Coast of North America in the late eighteenth century.
 - 19 The nickname of the destroyed World Trade Centre site, ‘Ground Zero’, is clearly being echoed in the more future-oriented nomenclature of ‘Zone One’, but this is only referenced fleetingly in the novel.
 - 20 Sarah Juliet Lauro, *The Transatlantic Zombie: Slavery, Rebellion, and Living Death* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2015) and Roger Luckhurst, *Zombies: A Cultural History* (London: Reaktion Books, 2015), 44–57. See also Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984). One contemporary example of the zombie figure being deployed to interrogate American race relations is *Get Out*, dir. Jordan Peele (Universal, 2017).
 - 21 Whitehead, *Zone One*, 243–4.
 - 22 Grace Heneks, ‘The American Subplot: Colson Whitehead’s Post-Racial Allegory in *Zone One*’, *The Comparatist* 42 (2018): 60–79.
 - 23 See for instance Andrew Hoberek’s argument that the novel explores the difficult necessity of developing post-humanist aesthetics, and Andrew Strombeck’s argument that the novel’s description of a post-crisis New York recalls the city’s experiences in the 1970s when fiscal crisis made New York an early testing-ground for punitive neoliberal measures: Andrew Hoberek, ‘Living with PASD’, *Contemporary Literature* 53, no. 2 (2012): 406–13; and Andrew Strombeck, ‘Zone One’s Reanimation of 1970s New York’, *Studies in American Fiction* 44, no. 2 (2017): 259–80.
 - 24 Leif Sorensen, ‘Against the Post-Apocalyptic: Narrative Closure in Colson Whitehead’s *Zone One*’, *Contemporary Literature* 55, no. 3 (2014): 559–92 (560).

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- 25 Kate Marshall, 'What Are the Novels of the Anthropocene?: American Fiction in Geological Time', *American Literary History* 27, no. 3 (2015): 523–38.
- 26 Ibid., 523–24.
- 27 Whitehead, *Zone One*, 190.
- 28 Trexler, *Anthropocene Fictions*, 24.
- 29 Highlighting *Zone One*'s knowing weariness with the tropes of the zombie genre is common within critical analyses of the novel. See in particular Marshall, 'What Are the Novels of the Anthropocene?', Hoberek, 'Living with PASD' and Strombeck, 'Zone One's Reanimation of 1970s New York'.
- 30 Stephanie Boluk and Wylie Lenz, 'Infection, Media, and Capitalism: From Early Modern Plagues to Postmodern Zombies', *The Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 10, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2010): 126–47 (127).
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 See Jamie Peck, 'Zombie Neoliberalism and the Ambidextrous State', *Theoretical Criminology* 14, no. 1 (2010): 104–10; Mark Fisher, 'How to Kill a Zombie: Strategizing the End of Neoliberalism', *Open Democracy.net*, 18 July 2013, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/mark-fisher/how-to-kill-zombie-strategizing-end-of-neoliberalism> (accessed 12 January 2019); Sarah Jaffe, 'Zombie Neoliberalism: How "There is No Alternative" Gave Us Donald Trump', *Dissent* (Fall 2017), <https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/zombie-neoliberalism-thomas-frank-listen-liberal-review> (accessed 12 January 2019).
- 33 Fisher, 'How to Kill a Zombie'.
- 34 Boluk and Lenz, 'Infection, Media, and Capitalism', 139.
- 35 Claire Colebrook, *Death of the PostHuman: Essays on Extinction, Vol. 1* (Ann Arbor, MI: Open Humanities Press, 2014), 206.
- 36 Whitehead, *Zone One*, 124–5.
- 37 Raymond Williams, *Resources of Hope: Culture, Democracy, Socialism* (London and New York: Verso, 1989), 11.
- 38 Whitehead, *Zone One*, 47.
- 39 Theodore Martin, *Contemporary Drift: Genre, Historicism and the Problem of the Present* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 162.
- 40 Whitehead, *Zone One*, 34.
- 41 David Graeber, *Bullshit Jobs: A Theory* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2018). Indeed, with online AI this labour is also itself potentially undead: 'His social-media persona probably continued to punch the clock, gossiping with the empty-air and spell-checking faux-friendly compositions, hitting Send: "Nothing cures the Just Got Exsanguinated Blues like a foam mustache, IMHO"' (151).
- 42 Martin, *Contemporary Drift*, 190.
- 43 Whitehead, *Zone One*, 70.
- 44 It's worth noting that this is necessarily a far more state- and military-backed form of capitalism than the contemporary system of semi-sovereign multinational corporations. However, it does mirror the establishment and imposition of the 'free market' through state power that Ha-Joon Chang identifies as an often ideologically glossed-over but fundamental element of the expanding capitalist system: selective protectionism and state control played a key role in capitalist development, with supposedly unregulated 'free' market forces being then imposed on colonial and postcolonial nations to the benefit of existing national and international elites. See Chang, *Economics*, 47–107.
- 45 Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (Chicago, IL and London: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 32.
- 46 Whitehead, *Zone One*, 97.
- 47 Martin, *Contemporary Drift*, 162.

- 48 Stuart Hall, *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left* (London and New York: Verso, 1988), 40.
- 49 Whitehead, *Zone One*, 259. In doing so, it questions the self-evident value of human life and survival, a question that Colebrook argues haunts the culture of the Anthropocene but is 'constantly displaced and dis-figured'. Colebrook, *Death of the PostHuman*, 206–7.
- 50 Martin, *Contemporary Drift*, 161. Similarly, Elana Gomel argues that plague narratives follow a 'pattern [that] comprises panic, dissolution of socioeconomic structures, and despair, succeeded by a makeshift return to normality once the disease has run its course'. Gomel, 'The Plague of Utopias: Pestilence and the apocalyptic Body', *Twentieth-Century Literature: A Scholarly and Critical Journal* 46, no. 4 (2000): 405–43 (408).
- 51 Lerner, *10:04*, 17, 19.
- 52 Whitehead, *Zone One*, 257–8.
- 53 Hall, *The Hard Road to Renewal*, 162.
- 54 Chakrabarty, 'The Climate of History', 199.
- 55 Whitehead, *Zone One*, 193.
- 56 Spitz's lack of insight into (and immediate proximity to) the unfolding crisis is a privileged position largely confined, for now at least, to the Global North. See for instance Martin Wolf, 'Why Climate Change Puts the Poorest Most at Risk: IMF Data Show Low-Income Nations Suffer from Events for which they Bear No Blame', *Financial Times*, 17 October 2017, <https://www.ft.com/content/f350020e-b206-11e7-a398-73d59db9e399> (accessed 1 February 2019)]. However, despite the novel's tight focus on a specific geography and national context, it is important to emphasise its critique of a specifically national response to crisis, defined by nostalgia and concrete barriers, as an anachronistic and doomed response to a truly global crisis.
- 57 Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 2; 11.
- 58 Whitehead, *Zone One*, 102.
- 59 Chakrabarty, 'The Climate of History', 197.
- 60 Fredric Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism* (London and New York: Verso, 2013), 308–9.
- 61 Brown, *Edgeworks*, 8.
- 62 Jane Bennett, 'From Nature to Matter', *Second Nature: Rethinking the Natural through Politics*, ed. Crina Archer, Laura Ephraim and Lida Maxwell (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 149–60 (160). Bennett's theory of 'vital materialism', which she explores in this chapter, is one response to the need for 'eccentric, experimental thinking.

‘Who’s Responsible – You Fucking Are’: Contesting Narratives of the Ongoing ‘Mental Health Crisis’ in the UK

Amy Rushton

Culture is ordinary.

Raymond Williams (1958)

Mental illness is very ordinary.

Barbara Taylor (2014)

In *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, Raymond Williams does not explicitly refer to mental health. However, in his entry for ‘determine’ as a keyword, Williams employs familiar metaphorical terminology to illustrate his point that ‘difficulties can *depress* us into a vague and indifferent state in which no necessary factors [...] can be admitted to exist. This in real terms is a kind of *madness*.’¹ Earlier, he notes that ‘alienation’ was ‘used from the fifteenth century to mean *the loss, withdrawal or derangement of mental faculties*, and thus *insanity*’ (3, my emphasis). It is not a coincidence that metaphors of psychological stress often haunt descriptions of societal organisations and cultural ideologies – to *feel* alienated, to *feel* depressed: structures of unhappy feeling, as it were. With hand-wringing over mental health rife across British political discourse over the past decade, this article is a timely investigation of the longer reach of the current mental health ‘crisis’. In this essay, I explore ‘crisis’ as a particular structure of feeling, one anchored to a specific political and historical moment that informs our present conjuncture. I focus on a pop cultural text from the end of the twentieth century, *The Holy Bible* by the Manic Street Preachers, an album in which it is possible to ‘locate the origins of several present crises’.² I argue that *The Holy Bible* is a musical text that attempts ‘to capture or represent the “structure of feeling” of lives lived in particular ways in particular places and times, framed by particular conditions of existence, predicated on particular meanings, values and assumptions, and oriented towards particular goals’.³ What is sobering is that the knowledge offered by *The Holy Bible* does not feel frozen in time. If anything, it becomes frighteningly apparent when revisiting the album that its warnings of historical amnesia and selectiveness are more urgent *now* than in 1994. Its direct, discomfiting expressions of distress feel vital at a moment when (certain kinds) of mental ‘illness’ are being shaped into something socially palatable. Instead, I contend that the album presents an alternative, more disruptive form of depression – one that isn’t

silent, weary, numb but loud, agitated and intensely felt. Ultimately, I argue that *The Holy Bible* is a structure of feeling that not only documents but *embodies* the ongoing political and psychological crisis of neoliberal ideology and late capitalism. The album does not offer an escape from crisis but it does expose those ‘real forces and interests’ that perpetuate a constant feeling of being-in-crisis.⁴

Chief among these crises is the rise of neoliberalism within the British political landscape. The emergence and adoption of neoliberalism in UK politics from the 1970s has ushered in decades of systematic peeling away of state support for mental health, alongside increasingly oppressive and punitive economic measures. Our current moment is only superficially indicative of a ‘crisis’ in national mental health; when we pay attention to the longer narrative of contemporary Britain, this current moment is, in fact, a crisis of neoliberalism’s social failure. In its common-use definition, neoliberalism is a political-economic theory advocating free market capitalism and the rights of the individual. Ostensibly, the central tenet of neoliberalism is what David Harvey describes as the belief that ‘human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade’.⁵ Largely – although not exclusively – emerging from the US and UK from the 1970s onwards, neoliberalism *has* been the dominant economic view of those nations which exert the greatest influence across the globe.⁶ I view neoliberalism as an element of an overarching, ongoing historical process of late capitalism. As such, neoliberalism may not be a distinct stage of capitalist accumulation or wholly definitive of late capitalism; however, it *is* undoubtedly ‘the ruling dogma of advanced capitalism at the end of the twentieth century’.⁷

Even those exponents of neoliberal policy and ideology are unlikely to directly refer to their ideas as being indicative of neoliberalism, but its effects are so pervasive that there exist recognisable commonalities throughout the world. Jeremy Gilbert identifies ‘the sheer regularity and similarity of the basic elements of ‘neoliberal’ policy the world over’, including the aforementioned focus on privatisation, entrepreneurship and competition, along with market deregulation, disinclination to taxation and restrictions on collective, labour-based organisation (11–12). The introduction of such policies did not emerge in a vacuum, and it is notable that neoliberal implementations became dominant following the series of economic ‘shocks’ in the 1970s and 1980s, including sharply rising inflations (such as the oil shocks) and an ‘about turn’ in US interest and investment policy.⁸ The impact of the shocks threatened the financial stability of even the wealthiest individuals; in order to protect the interests of economic elites, neoliberal policies sought ‘to re-establish the

conditions for capital accumulation and to restore the power of economic elites'.⁹

Ultimately serving the interest of the globe's wealthy elite, neoliberalism is no 'mere' economic theory. Neoliberalism is best understood as hegemonic ideology, as suggested by Gilbert; 'an ongoing attempt to mobilise *a particular set* of ideas and governmental practices [...] in the pursuit of *a particular set* of interests, neutralising and forestalling the emergence of political threats to *this endeavour*' – the 'particular set of interests' being the retrenchment of elite power.¹⁰ One notable area where neoliberal entrenchment has taken hold in the UK, particularly from the 1970s to the present day, is mental health services. It is in mental health policy and provision where we can see the effects of privatisation and the dismantling of the welfare state most starkly, alongside the continued emphasis on personal responsibility and individual 'initiative', as preached from Thatcher to Blair – and into the present.¹¹ Yet, ultimately, I share Mark Fisher's view that our so-called mental health 'crisis' (or 'plague' in Fisher's words) exposes capitalism's inherent dysfunction.¹² After all, if the system works and is beneficial to all, then 'how has it become acceptable that so many people, and especially so many young people, are ill?' (19).

Just an Ambulance at the Bottom of a Cliff: The Mental Health 'Crisis'

Prior to 2014, any reference to 'crisis' in relation to mental health was more commonly associated with an individual experience of a crisis point (severe anxiety attacks, grievous self-harm, suicidal thoughts and/or behaviour, complete withdrawal and so on). The turning-point from individual crisis to nationwide concern seems to originate in a 2013 statement to the BBC by Dr Martin Baggaley, the Chief Medical Director of the South London and Maudsley NHS Trust. Referring to the closure of over 1,500 mental health beds across England between 2011–13, Baggaley commented that

We are in a real crisis at the moment. I think currently the system is inefficient, unsafe [...] There seems to be a genuine increase in demand [...] That's partly explained by a reduction in beds, by resources coming out of the health system, the squeeze on social services budgets, and by the general economic situation.¹³

Baggaley's warning of crisis appeared three years into the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government. Since 2014, the phrase 'mental health crisis' has become ubiquitous in UK news coverage.¹⁴ A widely cited 2017 study commissioned by the Mental Health Foundation concludes that Britain's

'collective mental health is deteriorating', with a small percentage of respondents (13%) reporting 'high levels of positive mental health'.¹⁵ In contrast, the study states that '[n]early two-thirds of people (65%) say that they have experienced a mental health problem', rising to '7 in every 10 women, young adults aged 18–34 and people living alone'. Whilst the report does concede that 'there may be an element which reflects a greater ease at acknowledging a mental health problem', the charity acknowledges that the evidence points to 'a real and emerging problem' (ibid.). Concerns over mental health and provisions are so frequent in public discourse that the so-called mental health crisis has become a political bullet-point for the current Conservative government, sitting alongside 'Brexit', 'immigration' and 'austerity'.

In our current moment, the eradication of social stigma trumps austerity as the focus of 'tackling' the mental health crisis. In October 2018, Theresa May declared her intention to 'end the stigma that has forced too many to suffer in silence'; there needs, she argued, to be 'true parity between physical and mental health – and not just in our health systems – but in our classrooms, workplaces and communities too'.¹⁶ Such an emphasis on institutions outside of the UK health system is a common theme in May's government, arguably to further justify a lack of state intervention. So far, the efforts to destigmatise experiences of mental health issues such as (but not limited to) depression, anxiety, self-harm and suicidal behaviour has led to calls for more provisions in workplaces, schools, and universities – at a time of economic recession and mass cuts to public services, including health care. May's second-term promises included the 'prioritising' of mental health services – albeit without pledging more money, stating that 'it is always wrong for people to assume that the only answer to these issues is about funding'.¹⁷ Instead, May insists that it is 'stigma' rather than a lack of funding at the heart of problems with mental health services. In response, Clare Allen, a notable service user advocate, observes that it is 'certainly a lot more comfortable to focus on stigma than on the well-established correlation between levels of social and financial inequality and levels of mental ill health'.¹⁸

The focus on stigma distracts us from the much longer history of the 'current' crisis, a history of failed collective responsibility across successive governments – Labour, Tory and New Labour. However, it is also a crisis that has never been, and will not be, solved by throwing money at mental health services and provisions. There is good reason that the additional £2 billion of funding promised in the 2018 Budget was not met with overwhelming enthusiasm by mental health services, activists and charities. As Elizabeth Cotton explains:

The total amount spent on mental health is unknown as funding systems have undergone large-scale reform and monitoring of the thousands of private contracts issued to providers go largely unmonitored. We know that attempts to ring-fence mental health funding have failed, particularly in relation to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, and it is estimated that 'additional' NHS funding has only contributed to a 1.4% budget increase in mental health funding.¹⁹

Worryingly then, May is not entirely wrong in her insistence that it is incorrect to assume that the sole solution is funding – to a certain extent. It is the neoliberal *ideology* of rolling back state intervention and the focus on individual, rather than social, responsibility that informs and dictates mental health care provision that has led to our current moment.

In other words, since the end of the Second World War, mental health has always already been in crisis. Indeed, before it was introduced, the plan was for the NHS to exclude psychiatric services, fearing competition 'with general hospitals for funding and status within the state system'; it was then Labour Minister of Health, Aneurin Bevan, who 'was determined to end the ghettoisation of mental health care'.²⁰ The later 1959 Mental Health Act and the 1962 Hospital Plan 'presaged the rundown of the asylums and the assimilation of psychiatric care into the wider hospital system'.²¹ From the 1970s onward, mental health services underwent multiple reorganisations ordered by Conservative and Labour governments, along with deliberations over 'community care' in the face of increasing accusations and evidence of inadequate care, neglect and abuse in psychiatric institutions and wards (603).

By the time of the Thatcher era, one significant way of addressing the problem of 'failing' services was, unsurprisingly, neoliberalism *par excellence*: a massive administrative restructuring across all the health services, devolving responsibility from the State – although not entirely removed, of course – 'with emphasis on increasing the role of the independent sector in the provision of hitherto public services'.²² The government justification for the increase in privatisation was that existing services were inadequate in scope and reach, as well as a financial drain. Although this sweeping assertion of pessimism regarding public services and optimism over private initiatives was not 'uniformly accepted as fair', the language and justification for reform were soon normalised. During the time of the Thatcher and Major governments, the focus of mental health policies chiefly concerned severe mental distress, particularly any diagnosis categorised as potentially 'dangerous', and overall spending on mental health was low in comparison to physical health.²³

The arrival of New Labour in government ushered in a long period of spending on the NHS but, again, mental health expenditure was not a

priority for nearly a decade (604). Arguably, one of the most significant Labour implementations arrived in 2006: Lord Layard's Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) programme was introduced via an explicit economic rationale, emphasising how 'high levels of mild to moderate mental illness in the population were a drag on prosperity' (611). Thus we see further neoliberal entrenchment in the history of the mental health crisis: the stereotyping of mental health patients as economically burdensome. Elise Klein notes that 'neoliberalism reduces subjectivity to that of the rational, self-sufficient, economic actor', so it is therefore vital that 'individuals are able to freely conduct themselves in relation to economic efficiency and effectiveness' – meaning that any psychological conditions which prevent such efficiency and effectiveness must be addressed.²⁴ We are still living with the consequences of policies that prioritise a neoliberal preoccupation with healthy economic actors, evidenced by Theresa May's repeated claims that mental health must be tackled 'not in our hospitals, but in our classrooms, at work and in our communities'.²⁵ Stripping away funding and resources from local authorities and national health systems increases the distance between mental health issues and state responsibility.

As economic and social policy turned towards neoliberalism from the 1970s onwards, the decoupling of welfare from state responsibility and rampant individualism has arguably influenced the pathologising and treatment of mental health. From Thatcher through Blair to May, government policy and funding is entrenched in neoliberal ideology and economic rationale. As a hegemonic ideology, neoliberalism privileges the wealthy elite, thus fostering inequality and perpetuating a view of human nature as atavistic. For all its purported detachment and neutrality, it is notable how neoliberal implementation is always accompanied by long-term '[r]edistributive effects and increasing social inequality'.²⁶ To further protect and serve its interests in fostering inequality, neoliberalism 'cultivat[es] the type of individualistic, competitive, acquisitive and entrepreneurial behaviour which the liberal tradition has historically assumed to be the natural condition of civilised humanity'.²⁷ Such a view of humanity as utterly self-interested in accumulating status and capital inevitably means that neoliberalism is largely unconcerned with collective responsibility, least of all matters of structural inequality. Far from being the rational, detached and neutral discourse it purports to be, neoliberalism deliberately overlooks its long-term impact upon individuals and communities for the benefit of short-term profit and access to power. Instead, neoliberal policy is more likely to place emphasise upon individuals as wholly responsible for their wellbeing, particularly the case in mental health 'treatment' in the UK. Fisher refers to this emphasis of individual responsibility for mental distress as 'the vast *privatization of stress*' and, similarly to the denationalising of public sectors, this onus on

the individual has become the accepted 'norm'.²⁸ The focus on the individual and self-responsibility has even been absorbed into British psychiatric practice and psychological models, with the earlier scientific-rationalist approach (although problematic in itself) steadily transforming into 'moralising critiques of individual development'.²⁹ By the second half of the twentieth century, 'the emphasis was always on what the individual should do to overcome or compensate for personal inadequacies' rather than 'considering the material circumstances of people's lives'. It is this 'suppression of the social' (75) that arguably allows us to focus on individualised experiences of stigma rather than inequality.

Whether or not the mental health crisis is precipitated by increasing cultural awareness of psychological distress, there exists a very real, long and continuing demand for services and support. What makes the crisis particularly awkward for successive British governments is that such a demand is rooted in social and economic *inequality*. This point has been most powerfully articulated by advocates with first-hand, long-term experience of British psychiatric care, including Clare Allen and Barbara Taylor. Allen's argument that we need to stop 'seeing mental health as a discrete entity, and the mental health crisis as having nothing to do with government-imposed austerity', is supported by Taylor's assertion that 'poverty is a psychological catastrophe. Anyone who thinks that madness is down to defective brain chemistry needs to look harder at the overwhelming correlation between economic deprivation and mental illness'.³⁰ In 2014, the NHS published the findings of its most recent Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey, collecting 'data on the prevalence of both treated and untreated psychiatric disorder in the English adult population (aged 16 and over)'; the findings of the recent survey included comparisons with previous research, undertaken in 1993, 2000, and 2007.³¹ Between 2007 and 2014, the number of adults accessing mental health treatment for 'common mental disorders', such as depression and anxiety, had increased by 24%. In a BBC News roundup of recent data findings, Brown and Trigg report that '[w]hile 23% of NHS activity is taken up by mental illness, mental health trusts have been receiving only about 11% of funding in recent years'.³² These findings support Taylor's claim regarding the 'overwhelming correlation between economic deprivation and mental illness', with the most significant differences in experiences with mental health being clearly 'associated with household income and economic activity'; 'nearly 3 in 4 people living in the lowest household income bracket report having experienced a mental health problem, compared to 6 in 10 of the highest household income bracket'.³³ Moreover, and unsurprisingly, the 'great majority (85%) of people out of work have experienced a mental health problem compared to two thirds of people in work'. Neoliberalism is the correlation between unemployment and mental

distress, as ‘the neoliberal determination to transfer all responsibility for well-being back to the individual’ and ‘the state withdraws from welfare provision and diminishes its role in arenas such as health care, public education, and social services [...] it leaves larger and larger segments of the population exposed to impoverishment’.³⁴ Discussing the phasing out of Incapacity Benefit by the Labour government from 2008 onwards, Mark Fisher argues that this was a wilfully ignorant move: at a time of rising reports of mental distress, ‘it doesn’t seem unreasonable to infer that most of the people claiming Incapacity Benefit – and there are well in excess of two million of them – are casualties of Capital’.³⁵ Specifically, they are casualties of unemployment due to the ‘selling off’ of industries such as mining, ship building, steelworks and pottery manufacture, as well as of precarious or casual short-term employment.

Whether Tory or Labour, rolling back or delegating funds, little lasting change has been effected across British mental health services, other than the continuation of a neoliberal hegemony. It is this ideological and economic hegemony that hides behind these not-so-different policies: neoliberal interests are the ‘real relations’, the ‘real forces and interests’ that must be protected during any attempt to ‘manage’ a crisis. Williams’s arguments about crisis connect with service users and professionals pushing back against the prioritising of ‘stigma’ as a means of overlooking the deeper societal problems informing mental distress. A 2017 international study on the psychological and social impacts of inequality concluded that ‘mental health seems to be affected by the impact of inequality on the quality of our social relationships, rather than by whether countries spend more or less on health systems’.³⁶ By ‘social relationships’, Wilkinson and Pickett are not referring to a vague sense of a neighbourly or friendly relationship between people: they mean the relationship between people and the society they live in. If an individual is – and, crucially, *knows* or *feels* that they are – disenfranchised from society, then that individual is more likely to experience psychological and emotional distress. The formulation sounds obvious because it *is* obvious. The problem is that the systemic insistence on individual responsibility, cuts to state-assisted programmes and the increasing privatisation of the mental health sector have been hidden by the more palatable notion of social ‘stigma’. It is, to a certain extent, a productive straw man: there have been successful charitable campaigns publicising awareness of shared experiences and mental health support. The mainstream discourse concerning mental health conditions such as anxiety, depression, suicide, disordered eating and self-harm *is* remarkably different from even a decade ago. The ongoing success of destigmatising mental health also makes that discourse difficult to publicly criticise. Destigmatisation is a case of ‘two steps forward, one step back’: yes, it is good that we can share experiences (if we wish), knowing that someone is more likely to understand

than to cringe away. But how does removing stigma help us to make sense of how mental distress is pathologised? Or the correlation between distress and structural inequality? And why is it that some forms of mental distress are more socially acceptable, thus more readily destigmatised, than others? To publicly share these questions is to be branded a cynic; even acknowledging that the dismantling of stigma is, overall, a positive change, albeit with a few critical caveats, is too nuanced a position for public debate at this historical conjuncture.

This long historical relationship between social inequality and mental distress in the UK is reflective of Raymond Williams's understanding of crisis: in *Towards 2000*, Williams argues that crises 'are simply exposures of existing real relations, as distinct from the presumed and limited relations within which most political programmes are formulated'.³⁷ The different policies, administrative reorganisations and spending reallocations introduced since the 1970s are nothing more than thin wallpaper papering over deep, societal cracks. As Williams reminds us, 'what is called management of the crisis is never a merely neutral process of local response, adjustment and negotiation. It is typically a practical disclosure of existing real forces and interests' (11). Our current moment of discussion around mental health, then, recalls the following lament by Williams:

What kind of culture is it, when some serious analysis appears and is almost at once placed as another instalment of 'doom and gloom' [...] There are times, in the depth of the current crisis, when the image materialises of a cluttered room in which somebody is trying to think, while there is a fan-dance going on in one corner and a military band blasting away in the other. (18)

Williams was writing in 1983; I am writing in 2019. To think through this long moment of mental health crisis and post-war British society further, the latter half of this essay considers a pop-cultural text that, I argue, attempts to harness serious analysis with – if not a fan-dance and military band – then a post-punk musical sensibility and an overly informed, maniacal lyricism.

'Meantime We Shall Express our Darker Purpose':³⁸ Twentieth-Century Crisis and *The Holy Bible*

Released in 1994, *The Holy Bible* is the third album by the Manic Street Preachers (Manics for short and hereafter). Formed in South Wales at the end of the 1980s, the band were galvanised by the class warfare of the miners' strike, the

refutation of rigid ideas around gender expression and cultural aspiration and The Clash. *The Holy Bible* was their last recorded output as the original four piece of James Dean Bradfield (vocalist and lead guitarist), Richey Edwards (chief lyricist on *The Holy Bible*), Nicky Wire (bassist and lyricist), and Sean Moore (drums and percussion). In February 1995, Edwards disappeared from a London hotel and has not resurfaced to date; he was declared legally deceased in 2008. In the years following its release, *The Holy Bible*’s reputation was cemented as a cult classic: partly owing to Edwards’s disappearance (some people’s morbid fascination transforming into record sales, similar to Nirvana’s *In Utero* and Joy Division’s *Closer*), but largely due to its incongruity within the musical landscape of the time and, subsequently, the Manics’s own discography.

Looking back to *The Holy Bible*’s original release, the album is notable for how it really *doesn’t* cohere to the grand narrative of British pop culture in the 1990s. The Manics first emerged during the hedonistic ‘Second Summer of Love’ of the late 1980s and early 1990s, a musical moment characterised by Acid House (the predominantly British response to Chicago and New York house music of the 1980s) and its attendant rave scene, along with ‘baggy’ indie – essentially neo-psychedelic rock influenced by electronica and dub (typified by ‘Madchester’ bands such as The Happy Mondays and The Stone Roses). The Manics were automatically seen as outliers for the British music scene: their first releases and image were very much in the mode of British mid-1970s punk, whilst their first albums were characterised by a big, glossy US soft-metal sound in the vein of Guns ’n’ Roses and Bon Jovi. By the time of *The Holy Bible*, musical culture in the UK was evolving into a marketable brand of indie and rock: Britpop, a ‘loosely defined’ but nonetheless ‘relatively easily recognisable genre of alternative music’, commonly associated with Oasis and Blur.³⁹ Popular ‘alternative’ music in 1990s Britain is remembered as being upbeat, aspirational and, weirdly, distinctively ‘British’ (mostly embodied in superficial nostalgia for the ‘swinging London’ of the 1960s). What is now remarkable about the Britpop era is how readily the likes of Noel Gallagher (Oasis), Damon Albarn (Blur), Alan McGee (head of Creation Records, now defunct) and various music journalists ‘became increasingly acquiescent with, and deferential towards, the specific expressions of neoliberal triumphalism of the Blair years’ (53). Gone were the aspirations of rock ’n’ roll rebellion and kicking against mainstream politics. Instead, ‘the governing project of New Labour – to accommodate and extend a Thatcherite consensus under cover of centre-left rhetoric – was mirrored in the reactionary values purveyed by aspects of 1990s culture under a facade of radical alternativeness’ (52, 53).

Released during the emergence of Britpop and the decline of the Major government, *The Holy Bible* stands out as an oddity. It was a significant

departure for the Manics: whereas their two previous albums were highly produced affairs, recorded in state-of-the-art studios, this album was recorded in a small studio in the (now former) red-light district of Cardiff. The album's 'fatalism, pessimism and nihilism stood in stark contrast' to a political and pop cultural horizon notable for its insistence that 'things can only get better'.⁴⁰ In short, *The Holy Bible* is definitely not *Parklife*; released the same year, Blur's breakthrough album is an attempt to capture a (nauseatingly) ironic yet earnest 'Englishness', foregrounded by its pastiche Kinks sound, narrative lyrics with titles such as 'Bank Holiday' and 'Jubilee' and the cover art of greyhounds racing. In contrast, *The Holy Bible*'s musical palette is 'a dense, gothic rock sound [...] engaging with the experimentalism and complexity of post-punk', intellectually and emotionally overwrought lyrics accompanying songs titled 'Of Walking Abortion' and 'The Intense Humming of Evil', with cover art featuring a triptych of a very fat, near naked woman in her underwear, furiously staring down the spectator (the artwork is 'Strategy (South Face/Front Face/North Face)' by Jenny Saville).⁴¹ *Parklife* was Damon Albarn's attempt to create a 'quintessential English' album; *The Holy Bible* 'is a head-on reckoning with all the manmade atrocities and failures known to history, and on another an extraordinarily specific self-dissection by one man in particular'.⁴² For all the talk of atrocities and self-reckoning, it is important to remember that *The Holy Bible* is not an unlistenable sonic dirge: Matthew Boswell notes that 'many of the lyrics [are] underpinned by quite traditional song structures' so that each track is recognisably organised into verses and chorus.⁴³ It is the density and verboseness of the lyrics that gifts the album with its 'slightly out-of-kilter quality' as if the music struggles to contain the 'personal, social and historical dislocation expressed in the lyrics' (125).

It is the sense of personal dislocation within the lyrics that has informed one of the misconceptions about *The Holy Bible*. It is well known that Richey Edwards composed the bulk of the album's lyrics, a marked change to the 'fifty-fifty' split between himself and Wire (although the latter still contributed lyrics and essentially 'edited' his band-mate's writing during production). Due to *The Holy Bible*'s dark lyrical and musical tone – as well as his disappearance a year later – it is often assumed that Edwards' physical and emotional deterioration occurred prior to the recording of the album. In fact, the Manics have repeatedly stated that the writing and recording process of the album provided a sense of workaday stability that the band thrived upon: the sessions took place in Cardiff, where Richey lived and he drove his bandmates to and from the studio.⁴⁴ Although Edwards' alcoholism and general unhappiness was evident, it was no worse than his demeanour during other recording sessions or touring in previous years. Anyone looking to the lyrics of *The Holy Bible* for insights only into Edwards' frame-of-mind overlooks the multiple narrative

personae adopted throughout the album, as well as ignoring the overall, misanthropic outward gaze at wider social processes. In the context of the rest of the album, even a brutally direct, first-person lyric such as ‘Die in the Summertime’ (essentially a suicidal howl of a song, emphasised by Bradfield’s vocal and musical arrangement) is only one point of view within a cast of miserable characters and voices. *The Holy Bible* is an album about crisis – but its lyrics look beyond a specific individual crisis.

The readiness to ascribe *The Holy Bible*’s bleak worldview to one troubled mind is indicative of a cultural desire to reduce distress and darkness to individuals (not to mention dismissing the rest of the band: I see *The Holy Bible* as a showcase for Bradfield’s musical talent as much as Edwards’s lyricism). Individual lyrics may directly reference solipsism, often self-deprecatingly so, but the album’s gaze is fixed outward. If there is crisis in *The Holy Bible*, then it is a sense of social and historical crisis. In her cultural history of the album, Jones states that ‘the personal and political are intimately intertwined and there can be no neat separation’:

the album takes a political position on consumerism, freedom of speech, British and US imperialism, gun control and capital punishment, fascism, communism, war, genocide, white privilege, anorexia, political correctness, abortion, murder, rape, and prostitution [sex work]. The personal crises documented in ‘Faster’, ‘4st 7lb’ or ‘Yes’ appear almost as rational responses to the social and political horrors that surround them.⁴⁵

Composed, produced and released in 1994, *The Holy Bible* is a record of where the twentieth-century has left us: it mixes the seemingly contemporary (anorexia, white privilege, political correctness), with the traumas of the recent past (fascism, communism, genocide), together with longer historical phenomena (war, murder, rape, sex work). Rather than individual crisis, *The Holy Bible* strikes me as affirming Williams’s reflections on late twentieth-century culture being characterised by a ‘settled pessimism’, caused by ‘an absolute loss of the future’.⁴⁶ The Manics’s third album presents itself as a product of a culture without ‘any significant belief that [the future] can be both different and better’. *The Holy Bible* wilfully confronts its listeners with an uncomfortable truth about the end of the century: when properly attended to, the history of the twentieth century does not promise improvement and not even more of the same. As Williams suggests, the late twentieth century ushered in changes that were ‘not only confusing and bewildering; they are also profoundly unsettling’:

The ways now being offered to live with these unprecedented dangers and these increasingly harsh dislocations are having many short-term successes and effects, but they are also, in the long term, forms of further danger and dislocation. (268)

The Holy Bible then is a rational response to the social and political horrors of the twentieth century. It seemingly offers no solace or solution. Even those lyrical points of view buoyed by a psychologically untethered self-belief end in destruction, not false triumph: the anxious, self-aggrandising subject of 'Faster' who repeatedly declares 'I am stronger than Mensa, [Arthur and Henry] Miller and [Norman] Mailer' concludes by announcing '[s]o damn easy to cave in, man kills everything', before slamming abruptly to a halt. The anorexic girl of '4st 7lbs' is proud of her self-determination and deceiving those around her – 'I choose, my choice, I starve to frenzy' – but her hubris only leads to death (Bradfield's musical arrangement makes her end clear, with the song closing with a slowing, lullaby-like tempo).

So what's the point? If all the future has to offer is further danger and dislocation, then is the aim to reach for 'the higher plateau' of detachment and ambivalence as outlined in '4st 7lbs', so that we also don't mind 'the horror that surrounds' us? Situating *The Holy Bible* in its original cultural context, the mid-1990s *did* have room for anxiety and psychological distress; it was, after all, the era of Elizabeth Wurtzel's bestselling memoir *Prozac Nation* (1994). Yet, as Jones argues, 'anxiety could be expressed in the 90s, and damage acknowledged, but only if it was framed in terms of emotion and not economics'.⁴⁷ Much like our current moment, it was OK to talk about mental distress but only when focused on one's immediate experiences. *The Holy Bible* may flirt with solipsism and have the courage to *not* pretend that bad feeling or experience can be overcome; however, its 'power is derived from the tension between this confessional, solipsistic tendency [...] and the band's recognition of the systemic roots of much of this unhappiness in political neglect and economic inequality' (49). To listen to the album is not to wallow in misery: the album breathlessly races through its litany of horrors, only allowing the tempo to ease three and a half times during its 56 minutes before ending in the (relatively) upbeat 'PCP'. *The Holy Bible* is not structured to be relentlessly depressing or melancholy; if anything, the sum of its parts – lyrics, music, artwork, track listing – allow *The Holy Bible* to be read as structure of feeling that attempts to express the overwhelming experiential totality of life in the late twentieth century, with its contradictions and hypocrisies. As Heather Love suggests, Williams's generative term accounts for 'experience at the juncture of the psychic and the social', whereby 'we can understand and respond to a historical moment that is not yet fully articulated in institutions as the dominant mode of

existence’.⁴⁸ *The Holy Bible* is a weirdly prescient text: it is a structure of feeling that not only documents but *embodies* the ongoing political and psychological conditions of neoliberal ideology and late capitalism.

Considering *The Holy Bible* as a structure of feeling is a markedly different conceptual approach to the album. *The Holy Bible* is often interpreted through a Foucauldian lens, largely due to *Discipline and Punish*’s influence upon the lyrics to ‘Archives of Pain’. Indeed, ‘Archives of Pain’ often informs the critical corollary applied to the Manics’s third album (for example, Daniel Lukes and Larissa Wodtke take up the Foucauldian and Derridian metaphors of the archive, respectively, to explore the album in *Triptych*).⁴⁹ Through an archival reading, the album becomes a repository of difficult knowledges – historical, philosophical, literary. Such an archival reading risks severing the album’s creation, production and reception from its specific political and cultural contexts. Alternatively, I argue that *The Holy Bible* must be understood as a structure of feeling due to the totality of its structural composition. In other words, the album is made up of the creative and critical labour of others outside of the Manics. Its lyrical content is not reliant on ‘the interior world of the self, but from the words of other witnesses: the insight, misery and catharsis of other writers, artists and thinkers’.⁵⁰ It is a structure that invites, sometimes demands, dismantling from its listeners: the rapid fire delivery of lyrics, deciphering points of view, and frequently bombarding the listener with obscure names and phrases (released in the pre-Google era, remember). The first time I listened to *The Holy Bible* was in 1997 and it *terrified* me; I wanted to flee the room but I was too caught up in the album’s relentless march. (The opening trio of ‘Yes’, ‘Ifwhiteamericatoldthetruthforonedayitsworldwouldfallapart’ and ‘Of Walking Abortion’ is the aural equivalent of encountering the mysterious heavies in Harold Pinter’s *The Birthday Party*: you don’t know what is happening but are aware that you *have* to go along with it.) *The Holy Bible* would become an important cultural, intellectual and emotional touchstone for me. But that first experience is emblematic of the ‘me versus them’ effect of the album. Such disorientation on the part of the listener is not for obfuscation’s sake: the sense of bombardment is capturing that ‘lived experience’ of the late twentieth century. Rather than a snapshot of an alternative 1990s cultural landscape, one characterised by emotional wallowing, *The Holy Bible* can be read as a conjunctural document that historicises our present moment of crisis. Yet it also offers an important means of understanding mental distress as both a *consequence of* and *resistant to* our ongoing moment of ‘crisis’.

'Acedia's Blackest Hole': Depression as Structure of Feeling

We can see the myopic focus of the lyrics across *The Holy Bible* – 'self disgust is self obsession, honey' – as a deterioration of any hope of belonging. It is perhaps no coincidence that after *The Holy Bible*, the Manics looked back to nostalgic, 'old Labour' values of community and solidarity. Not only the explicit refutation of post-Thatcher working-class stereotypes in 'A Design for Life' ('We don't talk about love / We only want to get drunk'), but also in their plea for their community of supporters to look forward in 'Everything Must Go' ('Freed from the century / With nothing but memory / And I just hope that you can forgive us / But everything must go'). To discuss the Manics and Raymond Williams in dialogue, the more obvious examples would be the albums *Everything Must Go* (1996) and *This is My Truth Tell Me Yours* (1998). These albums, released at the height of their commercial and critical popularity, are thematically preoccupied with utopian, often nostalgic, revisitings and reconfigurations of what it means to be Welsh and working class. Yet I have chosen to focus on *The Holy Bible* not only because of its musical and lyrical expression of a twentieth-century crisis point. It may capture a moment of psychological and moral crisis expressed on an individual level but it also produces a sense of solidarity for its listeners. Audiences react with ecstatic glee, not sombre acknowledgement, when the Manics perform any track from *The Holy Bible* at gigs, even now. Yet *The Holy Bible* is a dark, often claustrophobic album with a bleak view of past, present and no sense of the future. I believe its continuing appeal, as well as its political relevancy, lies in its emotional and psychological embodiment of distress: the album treats its depressive outlook as politically meaningful.

I agree with Daniel Lukes's assessment that '*The Holy Bible* politicises pain, making it blossom into forms of self-awareness through a meticulous work of contextualization'.⁵¹ It is the depressive and depressing nature of the album that allows it to be read as a structure of feeling. As previously mentioned, metaphors of psychological stress often haunt descriptions of systemic inequality. Most obviously, depression is a term applied to severe economic downturn. Whilst Williams does not include 'depression' as a distinct entry in *Keywords*, Ann Cvetkovich *does* deliberately use the term in his spirit. For Cvetkovich, as a keyword, depression describes 'the affective dimensions of ordinary life in the present moment', not merely to articulate '*how capitalism feels*' for didactic ends but to sensorially register historical moments.⁵² Cvetkovich views depression as an 'affective register' of societal discontent 'that often keeps people silent, weary and too numb to really notice the sources of their unhappiness' (12). Depressive subjects struggle to see the reasons for their unhappiness or distress beyond themselves; messages reinforced by a

neoliberal society and bio-psychiatric model that tell us that the fault lies within us and not to look beyond ourselves:

Depression is another manifestation of forms of biopower that produce life and death not only by targeting populations for overt destruction, whether through incarceration, war, or poverty, but also more insidiously by making people feel small, worthless, hopeless. (12)

Similarly, Mark Fisher notes that ‘pathologization already forecloses any possibility of politicization’, thus furthering feelings and beliefs of ineffectiveness and alienation.⁵³ Cvetkovich and Fisher both agree that capitalism financially and politically benefits from the pathologising of mental distress, through ‘big pharma’ and as a form of biopower.⁵⁴ Yet both *also* share an understanding that conditions such as depression do exist; it is not the case that capitalism ‘invented’ depression but that depression is a rational response to a dysfunctional system:

It goes without saying that all mental illnesses are neurologically instantiated, but this says nothing about their causation. If it is true, for instance, that depression is constituted by low serotonin levels, what still needs to be explained is why particular individuals have low levels of serotonin. This requires a social and political explanation.⁵⁵

Without explanation, depression risks becoming a form of ‘slow death’, an invisible ‘form of violence that takes the form of minds and lives gradually shrinking into despair and hopelessness’ (12). But there are times when hopelessness and self-hatred morphs into a critical, outward gaze: in ‘Of Walking Abortion’, *The Holy Bible*’s near-gleeful misanthropic anthem, not only are people ‘little [...] like maggots small blind and worthless’, mankind is repeatedly inextricably linked with Valerie Solanos’s view of cis-men ‘as a walking abortion’, an undeveloped, emotionally deficient sub-species.⁵⁶ This is a depressive worldview that may be numb and weary but it is not silent; the lyrical voice of ‘Of Walking Abortion’ is cynical, snide and very clear-sighted. ‘Of Walking Abortion’ can be understood as a synecdochical viewpoint for the specific depressive outlook of *The Holy Bible*.

Whereas the depressive subject is often associated as myopic, even solipsistic, *The Holy Bible*’s depressive character is acutely aware of society’s corruption of the psyche. Such a refutation of the assumed navel-gazing, passive depressive has historical roots in a term that appears in ‘Of Walking Abortion’. The first verse states that:

Amy Rushton

Life is lead weights, pendulum died
Pure or lost, spectator or crucified
Recognised truth *acedia*'s blackest hole
Junkies, winos, whores; the nation's moral suicide.⁵⁷

There is a clear ambivalence in these opening lines: life is a struggle that inevitably ends, but it does not ultimately matter whether one is pure or guilty, a spectator or the subject of censure. Yet the line 'recognised truth *acedia*'s blackest hole' is not ambivalent – it is a statement. *Acedia* is a term located in 'early Christian conceptions of the deadly sins' but it is notoriously difficult to translate into contemporary understanding.⁵⁸ Its most common misrepresentation is 'sluggish inertia'; that is, sloth. Cvetkovich notes that '*acedia* often functions for contemporary readers as the sign of a distant, alien, or false conception of depression' (87). In actuality, *acedia* offers a different conceptualisation of depression, one 'characterized not just by lack of affect but by *intense feelings*' – such as disgust and disdain – 'that lead to a powerful urge toward movement or flight' (85). The notion of depression as active and intensely emotional is anathema to our current moment's idea of distress as passive and burdensome. In Cvetkovich's understanding, *acedia* is a rational state of being, the body and mind manifesting the knowledge that *something is wrong*. *Acedia* and *The Holy Bible* both recognise an uncomfortable truth: 'depression can be a source of strength, a survival tool, by showing you the world more clearly, as it really is'.⁵⁹ It is not our view of the world that is wrong; it is the world that is sick.

Not that the Manics are prepared for anyone to feel righteous or pious. 'Of Walking Abortion' declares that 'everyone is guilty' and accuses the listener of propagating the twentieth century's moral ambivalence: 'who's responsible – you fucking are'. The song appears to position ambivalence and disengagement as an illness, not self-hatred or intense feeling associated with depression, melancholy, anxiety, madness and so on. Better self-hatred than pity in the worldview of *The Holy Bible*: there is actually very little scope for self-pity, or any pity, in *The Holy Bible*. As well as the first-person perspectives of '4st 7lbs' and 'Faster', the sex worker who leads the listener through 'Yes' and the suicidally depressed speaker in 'Die in the Summertime' are remarkably clear-sighted and unwavering in their actions (to continue existing, wanting to die). 'Mausoleum' and 'The Intense Humming of Evil' are notable for their 'refusal to sanction the usual Holocaust pieties' which often characterise artistic responses to the Holocaust.⁶⁰ *The Holy Bible* turns depression's assumed emotional void into an incisive analytical weapon: the album strips away pity and piety in favour of directness, often uncomfortably so (the strange, pseudo-right-leaning dissections of political correctness and criminal punishment

on ‘PCP’ and ‘Archives of Pain’ have been convincingly parsed by Rhian E. Jones⁶¹). Depression in *The Holy Bible* is a form of social and political crisis made manifest in the individual, stripping back to the ‘vision that horrifies and overcomes us as teenagers, but which many of us learn in time to submerge, for survival’s sake’.⁶² There is no place for ambivalence in the album’s view of the world.

The reference to acedia in ‘Of Walking Abortion’ and the willingness to directly articulate distress elsewhere on *The Holy Bible* gestures towards depression as an appropriate affective response. How else should one react to a cultural moment characterised by rampant individualism, historical erasure and amnesia, and an exploitative system that presets itself as rational, if not invisible? And yet the album does not leave the listener morose; Lukes suggests that ‘in the midst of its shudderings there is a steely resolve, a serenity, a stoic and regimented calm that is a source of comfort and strength (197). As such, *The Holy Bible* is not ‘a work of depressive realism, but rather one of militant depression: where depression is weaponised as a shock tactic for knowledge over complacency’. *The Holy Bible* is a structure of feeling that simultaneously embodies and dramatises late-twentieth-century crisis. It does not offer an escape from crisis but it does expose those ‘real forces and interests’ that perpetuate a constant feeling of being-in-crisis.⁶³ What is sobering is that the knowledge offered by *The Holy Bible* does not feel frozen in time. If anything, it becomes frighteningly apparent when revisiting the album that its warnings of historical amnesia and selectiveness are more urgent *now* than in 1994. Its direct, discomfiting expressions of distress feel vital at a moment when mental ‘illness’ is being shaped into something socially palatable. Instead, the album presents an alternative, more disruptive form of depression – one that isn’t silent, weary, numb but loud, agitated and intensely felt.

Leaving the Twentieth Century: A Conclusion

The Holy Bible may be a structure of feeling but it isn’t a blueprint. It offers solidarity in crisis but not a solution. It is enough that the album offered – and continues to offer – an alternative narrative to a popular and political culture dominated by neoliberal interests. As Fisher suggests, ‘emancipatory politics must always destroy the appearance of a “natural order”, must reveal what is presented as necessary and inevitable to be a mere contingency’.⁶⁴ *The Holy Bible* shows that there exists in ‘popular and subcultural forms of music a capacity to reflect, reinforce or resist hegemonic ideas and to articulate a liberatory politics’.⁶⁵ Although the album anticipates our present moment of crisis, it also reminds us that an alternative was possible in the political

landscape of the 1990s. Whereas the 'later 1990s were marked by an insistence in politics and culture on the permanence of the new form of neoliberal consensus represented by New Labour', *The Holy Bible* offered *at that time* a 'radical critique' otherwise rendered 'unnecessary or implausible' by the new, political and cultural, status quo (53).

The Holy Bible is notable for its clear-eyed, albeit frightening, analysis of a mainstream social order that, since the 1970s to our present day, cares more about maintaining power than serving people. The album's musical and lyrical urgency causes the listener to snap out of complacency, to realise that you are not alone; everyone is guilty. *The Holy Bible's* drawing upon difficult knowledges of the past and present historical alerts us to how grand atrocities and everyday violence become normalised, absorbed, accepted. Whether the skewering of Holocaust piety, embodying the psyche of a sex worker or narrating the pitiless resolve of the anorexic girl or suicidal old man, *The Holy Bible* dramatises the banality of personal and political horror. *It is amazing what one becomes accustomed to*. In its socio-political context, the album registers and foreshadows the acceptance of a new social milieu, a new normal, when even the Labour Party dons Thatcher's old clothes in a 'new' mode:

It is worth recalling that what is currently called realistic was itself once 'impossible': the slew of privatizations that took place since the 1980s would have been unthinkable only a decade earlier, and the current political-economic landscape (with unions in abeyance, utilities and railways denationalized) could scarcely have been imagined in 1975. Conversely, what was once eminently possible is now deemed unrealistic.⁶⁶

And yet, an element that strikes me as vital is *The Holy Bible's* refusal to *accept*; particularly to accept resolution or recovery. Memories and knowledges can be forgotten or lost (as in 'Yes', 'This Is Yesterday', 'Mausoleum' and 'PCP') and there is no possibility of recovery or simply 'going back'. It is this refusal to accept, to look beyond the self and out into society, that makes *The Holy Bible* a peculiar resource of hope for narratives of mental distress.

One of the cruellest ironies in current mental health services is the emphasis on 'recovery'; as Taylor states, 'to "recover" does not mean to get better (which is widely assumed to be impossible in cases of severe mental illness) but to live with a chronic illness as if you do not have it'.⁶⁷ Currently, we are told to individually 'manage' mild to moderate mental distress, in terms of 'lifestyle' (being physically active, eating the 'right' diet, keeping track of medication, sleeping 'enough' and so on). It is obvious how this kind of 'recovery management' is essentially impossible for anyone with severe psychological distress or disturbance. Of course, 'reforms that encourage and

support individuals are obviously welcome’, but it is clear how recovery ‘has been “hijacked” for a policy of service cutbacks’ and only made a priority through an economic rationale: ‘Mental health care today is a fast-track system geared to getting people back on their feet, and back into work, as quickly as possible’ (251). Arguably more than any other sector of the health service, it is in mental health where neoliberal interests have been allowed to fester. But who’s responsible? We can trace the long history of the crisis back to the birth of the NHS, yet it is difficult to pinpoint a single defining moment from a litany of cutbacks, changing pathologies, privatisations and hollow efforts towards ‘destigmatisation’. What *is* clear in the long history of the UK’s mental health crisis is the consistent lack of political responsibility. So who *is* responsible for this always already crisis? To those who have been and are now in British political power, blinded by presentism and political myopia: you fucking are.

Notes

- 1 Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* ([1976] London: Fourth Estate, 2014), 62 (my emphasis).
- 2 Rhian E. Jones, ‘Unwritten Diaries: History, Politics and Experience through *The Holy Bible*’, in *Triptych: Three Studies of Manic Street Preachers’ The Holy Bible*, ed. Rhian E. Jones, Daniel Lukes and Larissa Wodtke (London: Repeater Books, 2017), 13–130, 32–3.
- 3 Neil Lazarus, *The Postcolonial Unconscious* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 79.
- 4 Raymond Williams, *Towards 2000* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1983), 11.
- 5 David Harvey, *A Brief Introduction to Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 2.
- 6 Ha-Joon Chang, *Economics: The User’s Guide* (London: Penguin Group, 2014), 69.
- 7 Jeremy Gilbert, ‘What Kind of Thing is “Neoliberalism”?’, *New Formations* 80/81 (2013), 7–22 (7).
- 8 Chang, *Economics*, 89, 92.
- 9 Harvey, *A Brief Introduction to Neoliberalism*, 19.
- 10 Gilbert, ‘What Kind of Thing is “Neoliberalism”?’, 18.
- 11 Harvey, *A Brief Introduction to Neoliberalism*, 60.
- 12 Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (London: Zero Books, 2009), 19.
- 13 Michael Buchanan, ‘England’s Mental Health Services “In Crisis”’, BBC News, 16 October 2013), <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-24537304> (accessed 12 November 2018).
- 14 Searching for the phrase ‘mental health crisis’ in UK news databases within a calendar year between 2010 and 2013 returns between multiple pages of results. Searching from 2014 onwards, multiple pages of reports are offered.
- 15 ‘In March 2017, commissioned by the Mental Health Foundation, NatCen conducted a survey amongst its panel members in England, Scotland and Wales. This aimed to understand the prevalence of self-reported mental health problems, levels of positive and negative mental health in the population, and the actions people take to deal with the stressors in their lives. 2,290 interviews were completed, with 82% online and 18% by phone’: ‘Surviving or Thriving? The State of the UK’s Mental Health’, *Mental Health*

- Foundation*, 8 May 2017, <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/surviving-or-thriving-state-uks-mental-health> (accessed 11 December 2018).
- 16 UK Government Press Release, 'PM Pledges Action on Suicide to Mark World Mental Health Day', *GOV.UK*, 9 October 2018, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-pledges-action-on-suicide-to-mark-world-mental-health-day> (accessed 12 November 2018).
- 17 Jon Stone, 'Theresa May Pledges to Tackle "Stigma" of Mental Health but Dismisses Call for Extra Funding', *The Independent*, 9 January 2017, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/theresa-may-mental-health-stigma-funding-government-nhs-a7516461.html> (accessed 12 November 2018).
- 18 Clare Allen, 'The Mental Health Crisis is Down to Government Policy, not Stigma', *Guardian*, 16 October 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/oct/16/mental-health-crisis-government-policy-not-stigma> (accessed 12 November 2018).
- 19 Elizabeth Cotton, 'The Future and Quality of Mental Health Services: The Organising Challenge Ahead', LSE British Policy and Politics Blog, 9 November 2018, <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/the-future-and-quality-of-mental-health-services/> (accessed 12 November 2018).
- 20 Barbara Taylor, *The Last Asylum: A Memoir of Madness in Our Times* (London: Penguin, 2015), 113.
- 21 John Turner, Rhodri Hayward, Katherine Angel, Bill Fulford, John Hall, Chris Millard and Mathew Thomson, 'The History of Mental Health Services in Modern England: Practitioner Memories and the Direction of Future Research', *Medical History* 59, no. 4 (2015): 599–624 (602).
- 22 Ellen Jane Hollingsworth, 'Mental Health Services in England: The 1990s', *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry* 19, nos 3–4 (1996): 309–10.
- 23 Turner et al., 'The History of Mental Health Services in Modern England', 604.
- 24 Elise Klein, *Developing Minds: Psychology, Neoliberalism and Power* (Oxford and New York: Routledge, 2017), 52–3.
- 25 Stone, 'Theresa May Pledges to Tackle "Stigma" of Mental Health'.
- 26 Harvey, *A Brief Introduction to Neoliberalism*, 15.
- 27 Gilbert, 'What Kind of Thing is "Neoliberalism"?', 9.
- 28 Fisher, *Capitalist Realism*, 19.
- 29 David Smail, *Power, Interest and Psychology: Elements of a Social Materialist Understanding of Distress* (Monmouth: PCCS Books, 2017), 10.
- 30 Taylor, *The Last Asylum*, 127.
- 31 'This survey is the fourth in a series and was conducted by NatCen Social Research, in collaboration with the University of Leicester, for NHS Digital': 'Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey: Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing, England, 2014', *NHS Digital*, 29 September 2016, <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/adult-psychiatric-morbidity-survey/adult-psychiatric-morbidity-survey-survey-of-mental-health-and-wellbeing-england-2014> (accessed 11 December 2018).
- 32 David Brown and Nick Trigg, 'Mental Health: 10 Charts on the Scale of the Problem', *BBC News*, 4 December 2018, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-41125009> (accessed 11 December 2018).
- 33 'Surviving or Thriving? The State of the UK's Mental Health', *Mental Health Foundation*, 8 May 2017, <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/surviving-or-thriving-state-uk-mental-health.pdf> (accessed 13 November 2018).
- 34 Harvey, *A Brief Introduction to Neoliberalism*, 76.
- 35 Fisher, *Capitalist Realism*, 36–7.

- 36 Richard G. Wilkinson and Kate E. Pickett, 'The Enemy Between Us: The Psychological and Social Costs of Inequality', *European Journal of Social Psychology* 47, no. 1 (2017): 11–24 (16).
- 37 Williams, *Towards 2000*, 11.
- 38 First line of substantive dialogue spoken by Lear (Shakespeare, *King Lear*, Act I, Scene I). *The Holy Bible's* final track, 'PCP', closes with a sample of Albert Finney in the 1983 film version of *The Dresser*: 'Two hundred and twenty seven Lears, and I can't remember the first line.'
- 39 Rhian E. Jones, 'Music, Politics and Identity: From Cool Britannia to Grime4Corbyn', *Soundings* 67 (2017), 50–61 (52).
- 40 Jones, 'Unwritten Diaries', 49.
- 41 Matthew Boswell, *Holocaust Impiety in Literature, Popular Music and Film* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 125.
- 42 Jones, 'Unwritten Diaries', 32. Albarn quoted in David Cavanagh, 'England's Dreaming', *Mojo Magazine* (June 1994), 66.
- 43 Boswell, *Holocaust Impiety*, 125.
- 44 Simon Price, *Everything: A Book About Manic Street Preachers* (London: Virgin Books, 1999), 120–21.
- 45 Jones, 'Unwritten Diaries', 32.
- 46 Williams, *2000*, 4.
- 47 Jones, 'Unwritten Diaries', 49.
- 48 Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2007), 12.
- 49 Daniel Lukes, 'Fragments Against the Ruin: The Books of Manic Street Preachers' *The Holy Bible*', in Jones, Lukes and Wodtke, *Triptych*, 148, 168–75; Larissa Wodtke, 'Architecture of Memory: *The Holy Bible* and the Archive', 253–347.
- 50 Daniel Lukes, 'Fragments Against the Ruin: The Books of Manic Street Preachers' *The Holy Bible*', in Jones, Lukes and Wodtke, *Triptych*, 141.
- 51 Ibid.
- 52 Ann Cvetkovich, *Depression: A Public Feeling* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2012), 11.
- 53 Fisher, *Capitalist Realism*, 21.
- 54 Ibid., 27; Cvetkovich, *Depression*, 12.
- 55 Fisher, *Capitalist Realism*, 37.
- 56 Valerie Solanas, *The SCUM Manifesto* ([1968] London: Phoenix Press, 1983), 1.
- 57 Lyrics from liner notes for *The Holy Bible*. Although the third track on the album, the lyrics to 'Of Walking Abortion' are the first to appear in the liner notes (my emphasis).
- 58 Cvetkovich, *Depression*, 85.
- 59 Lukes, 'Fragments Against the Ruin', 197.
- 60 Boswell, *Holocaust Impiety*, 129.
- 61 See Jones, 'Unwritten Diaries', 78–83, 87–92.
- 62 Lukes, 'Fragments Against the Ruin', 197.
- 63 Williams, *2000*, 11.
- 64 Fisher, *Capitalist Realism*, 17.
- 65 Jones, 'Music', 50.
- 66 Fisher, *Capitalist Realism*, 17.
- 67 Taylor, *The Last Asylum*, 251.

‘White Slaves’ as ‘Black Slaves’: Re-evaluating the Nineteenth-Century English Working-Class Autobiography in the (Con)texts of Transatlantic Abolitionism

Ryan David Furlong

Is it time we reappraised the early and mid-nineteenth-century working-class autobiography? For in a tradition where the voices of English workers since the late eighteenth century committed themselves, in pen and politics, to the reformation of England’s industrial factory system – railing against long hours, injurious conditions, violent assaults, labour alienation, meagre wages, economic precarity and even deadly machines – too often the genre has been read as relatively reliable historical accounts of nineteenth-century working-class experience. Others have found only ‘low’ polemics in the self-writing of the working class since many of these works foreground labourers’ struggles to overcome impoverishment through socio-political protest and parliamentary legislation; for instance, the ‘ten hours’ campaign of the 1830s and 1840s to reduce labour hours to a ten-hour work day. More strikingly, however, labour reform writers went far beyond written critique and political demonstration, routinely reworking antislavery discourses and slave narrative conventions, from the US and England, to plead their anti-industrial case to a post-abolition English culture. William Dodd’s *A Narrative of the Experience and Sufferings of William Dodd, A Factory Cripple, Written by Himself* (1841) stands emblematic of working-class polemicists’ widespread appropriations of this abolitionist culture to garner support for the ‘ten hours’ movement (and other causes).¹ Dodd’s *Narrative*, thus, offers us a test case to recontextualise and re-value the working-class autobiography by extending it beyond England’s class politics and generic characteristics into the discursive contexts, and hotly-debated politics, of transatlantic abolitionism in the early and mid-nineteenth-century North Atlantic world.

Critics, to be fair, have acknowledged the mutual relationships between the working-class autobiography, the slave narrative and abolitionism. Alan Richardson notes, for example: ‘The autobiographies of self-educated British writers share a number of features with the nineteenth-century slave narrative, despite the obvious differences in the range of experience.’² David Vincent alludes to both genres’ ‘many features in common’;³ while Janice Carlisle, Audrey Fisch, and Nan Hackett observe how other features in the working-class autobiography, particularly the rhetoric of ‘white slavery’ and ‘factory slaves’, culminated in the racially-inflected politics and class-oriented polemics

of the day.⁴ More recently, Cassandra Falke has invoked the slave narrative's common parallels to the working-class autobiography,⁵ and Kelly J. Mays demonstrates the close nodes between the multivalent rhetorics of 'white slavery' and English working-class poetry.⁶ Nevertheless, critics' evaluation of the working-class autobiography as a primarily historical resource and unliterary genre, lacking in complex subjectivity and aesthetic interest, has left most wary to attend to (or completely unaware of) the tradition's most essential transtextual and transatlantic implications, especially on matters of race and class.⁷

In this context, I see Raymond Williams's deconstruction of 'high'/'low' hierarchies of *culture*, especially in the British literary canon, to be a guiding principle in this essay; since, as Jon Thompson notes, '[m]uch of Raymond Williams's own work constitutes a critique of these ["high"/"low"] traditions and the systems of canonicity that underpin them'.⁸ Moreover, it is Williams's notion of *culture* as 'whole way[s] of life' – stressing the class, social, cultural, political and literary practices of popular discourse and everyday life over 'high' literary value – that I employ in evoking new possibilities for examining working-class autobiographers' (extra-)textual labour activism.⁹ In other words, what working-class autobiographies may seem to lack in traditional canonical criteria, Williams's dissolution of this 'high'/'low' divide into one cultural process opens up the possibility to look for other markers of literary significance in *both* working-class writers' lived experiences and their popular literary and rhetorical practices. Cassandra Falke has led on this front, using Derek Attridge's less technically limited definition of literature – both 'singular' in quality and 'inventive' in form – to instantiate the genre of the working-class autobiography *as literature*.¹⁰ In the light of this critical reframing, Dodd's autobiography, and many others like it, indeed constitute innovative and complex literary forms waiting to be plumbed by critics; and released from more reductionist readings, we can begin now to evaluate the genre with fresh critical eyes.

To envision, then, what might be 'singular' and 'inventive' in the working-class autobiography, I propose turning to working-class autobiographers' 'whole way[s] of life' embodied in their use of popular transatlantic abolitionist discourses and slave narrative devices, alongside their own politico-legal actions and everyday cultural practices, to advance labour reform. Here, I believe Dodd's *Narrative* serves as a representative (con)text to examine how, and why, the working-class autobiography's incorporation of antislavery tropes and the slave autobiography itself operated as a powerful rhetoric in support of nineteenth-century labour reform. As a well-read and self-educated man, Dodd encountered abolitionism in its various forms, and his *Narrative* re-appropriates these discourses to articulate the malignant factory

conditions in England's industrial North. Throughout the *Narrative*, Dodd explicitly analogises working-class labourers and himself as white 'factory slave[s]'¹¹ subjugated under inhumane 'master[s]' (192), forming a master-slave relationship within the autobiography that exposes, and impugns, England's national paradox: the manumission of black African slaves without economic 'emancipation' for white factory 'slaves'. In doing so, Dodd's reworking of abolitionist rhetoric into an autobiographical form crafts a poignant indictment of English industrialisation. Yet, it also reveals his literary craftsmanship and political savvy in appealing to the evangelical religion and humanitarianism of the abolitionist movement for his own ends of parliamentary legislation in the ten-hour work day, thereby marking an important early step in securing the Factories Act of 1847.

But, as I will also argue, Dodd's emigration to the US at the height of his *Narrative*'s popularity in the 1840s revealed his complex, often contradictory, relationship to labour reform and transatlantic abolitionism. Mays has argued that 'black slavery/white slavery' analogies used by working-class writers to compare themselves to black slaves were attempts to actualise a 'trans-racial and trans-national community'.¹² Dodd's emigration afforded him the rare opportunity to resolve the discursive tensions of 'black/white' slavery by putting into practice this 'trans-racial and trans-national' kinship. Instead, Dodd tempered his radical 'ten hours' polemics and reworked his arguments into pro-American sentiments in his *The Laboring Classes of England* (1847, 1848). Yet, Dodd's omission of black inequality under the US's 'peculiar institution' in the South, while still publicising the injustices of England's factory system with racialised appeals to 'white slavery' demonstrated his opportunistic elicitation of abolitionist support, publishing the book at the epicentre of US radical abolitionism in the antebellum period, Boston. Hence, Dodd's US-published book reveals precisely the moral inconsistencies of writing on behalf of, and granting equality to, one oppressed people by means of false equivalency to another. Far from practising a 'trans-racial' or 'trans-national' community, Dodd's *The Laboring Classes of England* does the exact opposite: promoting white-oriented arguments and US nationalism. One must not, however, reduce Dodd's corpus to racial contradictions, as his successes in procuring industrial reform (however problematic) testify to his capacity to leverage political will and discursive resources against his own economic subjugation. With this in mind, we can start to see how these 'singular' qualities and 'inventive' forms in Dodd help us, in the spirit of Williams himself, to re-imagine how other working-class autobiographies might now be read by critics within new contexts that vindicate the genre *as literature* in its own terms. To demonstrate this, we must first turn to Dodd's immersion within Britain's abolitionist milieu.

Dodd wrote at a time in England when revolutionary legislation had abolished slavery under a new abolitionist zeitgeist. Since the 1780s, public opinion had shifted from pro- to antislavery as this national ethos coalesced in the ending of the slave trade (1807), the institution of slavery (1833) and colonial apprenticeship (1838). Abolitionist vigilance endured further as the British became the world’s antislavery guardians, redirecting attention abroad to the US abolitionist movement. During the ‘interabolition period’ – the years between the British Abolition Act of 1833 and the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 – England established the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society (1839), hosted the first and second World Anti-Slavery Conventions in London (1840, 1843) and published three anti-slavery pamphlets on US slavery that circulated widely amongst English readers (1841, 1843 and 1846).¹³ Moreover, England’s working and middle classes consumed US slave narratives by the tens of thousands, attended fugitive slave lecture tours in the droves, and perused hundreds of newspaper periodicals and articles on the ‘peculiar institution’ (10–15). What was clear in this new fervour for the US antislavery scene was the power of slave narratives (and other abolitionist texts) to sustain its cultural inertia and moral force in post-abolition England.

As a consequence, working-class readers often identified themselves, and their oppressive circumstances, with tales of black plight and privation in the slave South. Audrey Fisch writes: ‘A white English working-class factory hand might have read *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845) as an uplifting story of a poor man’s struggle to overcome social barriers and adversity in the quest for selfhood.’¹⁴ John Bugg argues similarly that the intended audiences of Olaudah Equiano’s slave narrative *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* (1789), and others like it, ‘was less the London literati than the anonymous workers of the industrial north’, signalling a long-standing tradition of slave narrative readerships amongst the working classes in England’s industrial sectors.¹⁵ Unsurprisingly, working-class autobiographers often adopted transatlantic abolitionist appeals, recognising their polemical power to elicit moral outrage amongst slave narrative readers and other abolitionists in the fight for factory reform.

Dodd was no exception, as his works – *A Narrative* (1841), *The Factory System Illustrated* (1842) and *The Laboring Classes of England* (1847, 1848) – suggested his familiarity with this far-reaching abolitionist culture. From narrative structure to literary convention to overt political rhetoric, Dodd’s *Narrative* reveals an intimate knowledge of abolitionism’s sentimentalism rooted in religious argument, political liberalism and humanitarianism. Additionally, many of the slave autobiographies that circulated in England during the 1830s and 1840s closely paralleled his own work in both form and content.¹⁶ More tellingly, several antislavery speakers and former slaves had come to Dodd’s hometown

of Kendal to lecture on the evils of Southern slavery, most notably the ex-slave Moses Roper soon after publication of his *Narrative of the Adventures and Escape of Moses Roper, from American Slavery* (1837). Kendal's local newspaper, *The Westmorland Gazette*, also (re)printed reports on US slave markets, fugitive runaways, black lynchings and stories of the global slave trade. As slave narratives sold in England by the thousands, and sometimes tens of thousands, Dodd had ample opportunities to peruse them, as his voracious reading habits suggest as well.¹⁷ Dodd had absorbed much of these works and discourses on US slavery by the late 1830s, but he recognised, most importantly, the power of abolitionist appeals and slave narrative tropes to stir others into solidarity with, and action on behalf of, the 'white slaves' of England.

From the outset, Dodd's *Narrative* parallels several formal elements in the slave autobiography. First, late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century slave narratives commonly relied on emotively charged titles to testify to black oppression, often with sentimentalised and sensationalised language. Works like Charles Ball's *Slavery in the United States: A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Charles Ball* (1837) included titles pages suffused with plaintive language on the 'perils and sufferings of a fugitive slave'.¹⁸ Others, like Ashton Warner's *Negro Slavery Described By a Negro: Being The Narrative of Ashton Warner* (1831), featured antislavery texts on, in this case, the 'injured bondman's bitter woe'.¹⁹ Some of the best-selling narratives, like James William's *Narrative of James Williams, An American Slave* (1838), dramatised the slave's 'weary', 'faint' and 'sick of heart' toils, asking readers in the epigraph: 'Will you not give him [the slave] a hope for his children?'²⁰ Dodd's *Narrative* mimics this sorrowful 'experience' of slavery in its title, only re-imagined as the 'sufferings' of a working-class 'factory cripple' shackled to 'hardships', 'difficulties' and 'unsuccessful efforts'.²¹ Second, slave narratives and working-class autobiographies also shared (sub)titles that established the author's reliability with phrases like 'Written by Himself', 'Related by Herself', or 'Dictated by Themselves', (sub)titles easily identifiable to abolitionist readers and which Dodd's *Narrative* includes ('Written by Himself'). Lastly, Dodd's gratitude to his patron, Lord Ashley, a Tory parliamentarian, in the book's preface was yet another common manoeuvre used by editors in slave narratives and working-class accounts to lend credibility and veracity to their respective authors by linking them to notable white citizens. Otherwise put, Dodd's 'sufferings' inscribed in the prefatory pages of his *Narrative* asked readers to feel the working-class 'sufferings' of 'white slaves' through the black 'sufferings' of slaves represented in popular abolitionist literature.

But what evidence exists that Dodd's *Narrative* was read with abolitionist (con)texts in mind? There are several clues. Newspaper reviews at the time singled out Dodd's antislavery comparisons and emotive appeals. On 30

September 1841, the *Devizes and Wiltshire Gazette* published an article titled 'Factory Children' praising Lord Ashley in his 'good fight in defence of the infant slaves of white complexion', one of these 'poor, helpless, suffering, ill-used, and oppressed [slave] infants' being Dodd.²² *The Hull Packet* on 19 March 1841 evoked sympathy for that 'race of victims' and 'poor miserable creatures' known as the "factory cripple", like 'William Dodd'.²³ *The Times* on 4 September 1841 invoked the Biblical metaphor of Israel's slavery under Egypt in the Book of Exodus to describe England's own industrial 'oppressors' as 'Egyptian taskmasters' enslaving working-class 'Israelites in bondage', an Old Testament allusion ubiquitous in slave literature as well.²⁴ In *The Standard* on 27 May 1841 Dodd himself equated the 'atrocities', 'cruelty' and 'oppression' of the factory system with, as an example, the brutal labour conditions in 'the slave colonies of the West Indies'.²⁵ Richard Oastler, Tory radical and abolitionist, also described Dodd as a 'worn-out Factory slave'.²⁶ Evidently, many British newspapers and abolitionist sympathisers aligned themselves with Dodd's rhetoric to make a potent case for the 'ten hours' law. But, as Robert Gray points out: "The polemical use of the terms "factory slavery" or "white slavery" [...] to criticise the allegedly selective philanthropy of the liberal middle class was widespread in ten hours circles since the late 1820s."²⁷ What this evidence suggests, then, is that the moral weight of Dodd's slavery metaphors in the *Narrative* resonated strongly with many English readers steeped in such criticisms, and with the injustices committed against the British working class and US slaves drawn so closely together, Dodd's readerships could not help but sense the multivalent critiques layered within his abolitionist tenor.

In the *Narrative's* opening pages, Dodd's tragic beginnings in childhood allude to this criticism of the factory system by mirroring the slave narrative's tonal sense of childhood loss. Slave autobiographers traditionally began by recounting the absence of a parent, the lack of familial origins or childhood hardships to play on readers' emotions; so too, Dodd starts his tale with nebulous 'circumstances' as to why his parents sent him to work under the harmful 'effects of the [factory] system upon the mind, person, and condition' of his 'cripple[d]' body.²⁸ Such literary correlations existed in Dodd's tragic fall from his strong physical integrity – a 'model of my father', 'the picture of robust health and strength', 'straight in every limb' and 'manly [in] sport' (187) – into bodily deterioration. This self-characterisation as a young, able-bodied protagonist with a bright future, capable, for instance, of running nearly a mile without stopping, soon becomes a radical *peripeteia* whereby his work in the 'factories' turns him into a cripple unable to 'perform [...] running three quarters of a mile' (187). Dodd's foreshadowing here signals what will be a leitmotif throughout the *Narrative*: the fate of working-class prospects,

personal fortunes and bodily health always lies at the mercy of industrialised labour. Slave writers, oppressed under the tyrannical hand of institutional slavery, knew all too well the power of literary techniques, like reversals of fortune or narrator-prognostication, to sway sentimental readers to abolitionist politics. Dodd's *Narrative* was doing something very similar.

As well, slave narrators repeatedly identified a childhood moment that revealed their own racial subjugation; Dodd does so too by pointing to a 'circumstance' between his 'fifth and sixth year' when a factory injury stripped him of basic motor functions (187). As the *Narrative* describes the slavish pain of Dodd's working-class life, the rest of the *Narrative* proceeds to trace 'a series of uninterrupted, unmitigated [slave-like] suffering' (187), using the conventions of the slave narrative and sentimental pathos abolitionist audiences had come to expect. At times, the *Narrative* privileges the plot of Dodd's biography over his working-class polemics, although this proves to be the exception rather than the rule since the book's ultimate concern is foregrounded in the push for 'ten hours' legislation. As Florence Boos writes, '[t]he most immediate motive for working-class writing was to make an argument or support a cause' in hopes of 'proximate as well as long-term reforms'.²⁹ In this case, Dodd's 'ten hours' reform became the long-term goal as it was mediated through personal story and abolitionist reform that resonated with readers from both the middle and working classes.

To this point, a prime instance arises in Dodd's recollection of the factory system's violence towards working-class victims:

On one occasion, I remember being thrashed [by a spinner] with the billy-roller till my back, arms, and legs were covered with ridges as thick as my finger. This was more than I could bear [...] I slipped out, and stole off home [...] The spinner [...] promised not to strike me with the billy-roller any more. He kept his promise, but instead of using the roller, he used his fist.³⁰

Beyond the spinner's cruelty, the passage's abolitionist associations, obvious to nineteenth-century readers, are more veiled to modern eyes. Gray observes that the 'ten hours' movement marched with banners in which the billy roller – a symbolic weapon used 'to beat child workers' – was placed alongside slogans of 'white [factory] slavery' and 'deformed' workers with the question: 'Am I not a man and a brother?'³¹ This last phrase, as John Waller adds, originally encircled a shackled African slave on thousands of British medallions, flags, pamphlets and plates as the anti-slavery movement's most popular motto.³² As such, 'ten hours' supporters (especially Dodd) appropriated this image of the chained African slave and applied it to white factory 'slaves' beaten under the

overseer's (i.e. spinner's) 'whip' (i.e. billy-roller). In a literary chiasma, violence against child labour is not only condemned, but reframed to picture Dodd as a white 'slave' pleading for his humanity before the public. Just like black slave bodies marked by the brutality of white masters, the bodies of white 'slaves' in Dodd's *Narrative* are emaciated by harsh task-masters. In fact, Dodd's *Narrative* is best understood as a white 'slave' autobiography of physical degeneration – starting with the freedom of bodily health and ending in the 'slavery' of unjust disability – thus using his own 'crippled' body as an extended metaphor of the 'crippled' moral state in England in which black slavery is abolished while 'white slavery' is not. With the many 'factory cripples'³³ that populate the *Narrative*, it is their 'weak state of body', as Dodd terms it, that signifies the weak state of British justice (209).

Dodd's 'factory slave' and 'white slavery' rhetorics additionally materialised in appeals to the evangelicalism and humanitarianism of England's antislavery culture. Dodd's *Narrative* establishes an extended master-slave metaphor throughout the plot by describing himself as a 'factory slave!' (199) – the antithesis of a 'free man' (207) – and other workers as 'fellow slaves' (212, 201) under cruel 'masters' (213). To be sure, 'masters' and 'slaves' did not necessarily signify black slavery in early- to mid-nineteenth century England, or the US. As Mays points out, the word 'slave' was much more 'slippery and multivalent', connoting slavery under political tyranny, for example, while 'master' might instead point to a historical title.³⁴ However, Dodd makes it a point to link both the white English master to the white US slave master as well as white working-class 'slavery' to black chattel slavery. Because while Dodd's factory 'master' seeks spiritual 'worship', 'religion and piety' and 'meetings for the abolition of slavery, and the propagation of the Scriptures in foreign parts', he hypocritically 'br[oke] the sacred commands of God at home' by forcing white workers 'to be slaves'.³⁵ Dodd argues with a similar logic near the *Narrative's* end:

Is it consistent with [...] this enlightened, Christian country, which has furnished such a proof of her benevolence and charity, in granting 20 millions of money for the abolition of slavery abroad, that we, who have exerted every means in our power in the production of the wealth of the nation, and have [...] sacrificed everything valuable in life, that we, worn-out, cast-off cripples of the manufacturers, should be left to perish and die of want at home? – Forbid it Heaven. (222)

As elsewhere in the *Narrative*, the abolitionist movement's philanthropy, religious piety and humanitarianism are exposed as unjust hypocrisies in light of the working classes' immense sacrifices for England's industrial prosperity.

Moreover, Dodd places these critiques at the *Narrative's* conclusion, where his most urgent tone stands out following the accidental amputation of his right arm, bemoaning himself as 'a cripple in my limbs!', 'without a home!', 'without friends!' and 'with only 8s. in money! in a strange place' amidst the 'horrors of [...] severe winter' and an 'unthinking and unfeeling world!' (221). Such language echoed the laments of black slaves in abolitionist texts and also urged readers to sympathise with, and combat their own complicities in, the plight of the 'white slave'.

Dodd's *Narrative* buttresses his abolitionist appeals through the ideology of 'self-improvement' embedded in the slave autobiography itself. Richardson points out that many British working-class and US slave autobiographers shared a belief in 'self-improvement' through self-literacy to obtain a 'public voice'.³⁶ So, too, Dodd's *Narrative* is largely structured on just this self-reform through self-education. An evident passion for books, the art of writing and lifelong education manifests in Dodd's prose itself as one of the main ways he testifies to the power of the written word for self-definition and political transformation. When Dodd first seeks to be literate – inscribing his initials 'W.D.' on an old factory board – he expects the 'master[-]' to scold him, but instead he encourages Dodd with funds to go 'improve' himself.³⁷ As a result, Dodd's 'opportunity to burst the trammels by which [...] [he] was kept in bondage' as a 'factory slave' (198–9) arrives and immediately he turns to self-improvement: reading books (198), cultivating Christian morality (202), winning the position of secretary in a local society (203), exhibiting a hard work ethic (206) and even becoming a school teacher (213). For Dodd, educational development and personal responsibility equated to freedom from factory 'slavery.' And abolitionist readerships were well-attuned to this trope in the runaway slave's escape out of slavery and into freedom – the *sine qua non* of the slave autobiography – recapitulated in the white 'slave's' release from factory bondage. But much like the fugitive slave's anti-climactic experience of 'freedom' in a racist North, Dodd's 'freedom' becomes just as illusory as 'white slavery' renders him crippled in England without wealth, health, romance, friendship and employment.

Dodd's ultimate resolution to the *Narrative*, however, is not resignation, but with a clarion call imploring readers, out of Christian conviction, to aid factory 'slaves' in political action. For Dodd's conclusion insists on the contradiction of living in an ostensibly 'enlightened' English 'civilisation' that manumits black slaves as it perpetuates the horrors of 'white slavery' (221). Much of the *Narrative's* final remarks show Dodd faithful to this endeavour by trusting in God's salvation and encouraging other poor 'sufferers' to do likewise by 'tread[ing] [...] the rugged paths of virtue, which will [...] conduct us to the happy mansions of eternal repose' (222). Christian readers are invited to self-

identify with working-class 'sufferers' and practice virtuous behaviour so as not to tarnish the 'ten hours' movement's respectability politics. Still, even in the *Narrative's* last exhortation, antislavery readers certainly could apprehend the strong echoes of slave narrative denouements that routinely advocated pious devotion as vital to abolitionism's success in the public sphere. With political savvy and literary acumen, Dodd's *Narrative* pushes a charged message of moral failure and religious hypocrisy onto English readers, calling on them to reform industrialised 'white slavery' or remain unfaithful hypocrites.

When the *Narrative* was published in 1841, this strategically crafted message did not go unnoticed in the press. The *Narrative's* success also prompted Lord Ashley to finance Dodd's tour of the Northern and Midlands' manufacturing districts to compile evidence on the factory system's ills for *The Factory System Illustrated* (1842).³⁸ The book was an epistolary, ethnographic study of factory workers in England's industrial North and Dodd deployed abolitionist rhetoric once again, calling workers 'factory slave[s]'³⁹ labouring under white 'slavery' (231). He criticised a local writer for composing a tract on the 'comparative merits of Black and White Slavery' with only profit in mind, not moral outrage (85). Most tellingly, Dodd describes a scene in which 'forty-eight' agricultural labourers were induced to migrate to a manufacturing centre to meet the demands of town mill-owners, noting that 'all forty-eight persons, were entered upon a list [...] which list was sent to the *labour-market* (I had very nearly written *slave market*) at Manchester; and there offered to the highest bidder' (157). Dodd's aside re-imagines white labourers as black slaves led off to slave auction and, like his earlier *Narrative*, *The Factory System Illustrated*, likens these workers to black slaves within the transatlantic world. Hence, it is Dodd's mapping of these abolitionist appeals onto his reform oeuvre, and construction of a religious and political polemic to precisely suit the 'ten hours' zeitgeist in autobiographical form – in many respects, homologous to the slave narrative – that constitutes his highest literary and rhetorical accomplishment.

Indeed, Dodd's *Narrative* and *The Factory System Illustrated* circulated widely in the early and mid-1840s as both became critical texts in the debate over 'ten hours' legislation. Dodd also published truncated versions of the *Narrative* in periodicals, and his relationships with key labour reformers – John Fielden, Richard Oastler and Lord Ashley – opened up new channels of industrial reform. The real testament to Dodd's works came in the 'ten hours' debates between Lord Ashley and John Bright in the House of Commons in 1844, in which Bright attacked Ashley's endorsement of Dodd's 'wholly false' and 'grossly [...] exaggerated' testimony in *The Adventures of William Dodd the Factory Cripple* and *The Factory System*.⁴⁰ Bright's opposition to 'ten hours' legislation was based on several reasons, but his Quaker upbringing had cultivated an anti-slavery stance in which Dodd's comparisons between black slavery and

'white slavery' must have registered as entirely unfair. Bright's attacks on Dodd's works – 'wholly unworthy of credit', 'wholly false' and 'grossly and malignantly exaggerated' (341) – are best explained, at least in part, by Bright's strong aversion to the exaggerated comparisons made by working-class writers on black and white slaves. Regardless, what Ashley and Bright's parliamentary debates revealed about Dodd's works was their rhetorical power to incite public controversy and sustain political discourse around the 'ten hours' cause at the highest levels of English politics, marking an important early step in the passage of the Ten Hours Act of 1847.

As Dodd's 'white slavery' polemics and stylistics proved effective in exploiting common abolitionist appeals for working-class reform, what might be said about the ethics of this approach? Certainly other contemporary working-class (and middle-class) writers had manipulated racial arguments for economic ends. Chartist poets employed abolitionist strategies between the 1830s and 1850s, whereas Chartism proper and radical sympathisers, like Richard Oastler described working-class conditions as absolute 'slavery'.⁴¹ Christian socialists in the 1840s and 1850s discovered 'white slavery' as a potent term against industrial capitalism's 'wage-slavery'.⁴² Liberal moderates, like John C. Cobden in *The White Slaves of England* (1853), recast working-class suffering under the quasi-analogous light of black slavery, something Audrey Fisch argues had become the prevalent metaphor of working-class plight by 1850.⁴³ In other working-class autobiographies – for example, John Brown's *A Memoir of Robert Blincoe, An Orphan Boy* (1832) – labour reform was frequently situated within the discourses of black/white 'slavery':

May this exposition of crimes and sufferings inflicted upon the friendless, the orphan, the widow's son, induce honest and upright men, senators and legislators, effectually to curb the barbarous propensities of hard-hearted masters, and rescue their nation from a worse stain, than even the African Slave Trade, horrible as was that odious traffic, ever inflicted.⁴⁴

James Myles's *Chapters in the Life of a Dundee Factory Boy* (1850) urged readers to see the close analogues between English industrial labour and US slavery:

[W]hen tender children fell asleep under the prolonged infliction of 'work! work! work!' overseers roused them with the rod, or thongs of thick leather burned at the points. The lash of the slave driver was never more unsparingly used in Carolina on the unfortunate slaves than the canes and 'whangs' [beatings] of mill foreman were then used on helpless factory boys.⁴⁵

Obviously, Dodd's abolitionist appeals were problematic in more ways than one. Yet his reform-minded literature represented the imagination necessary to engender political and legal reform in England's post-abolition culture, a feat made all the more impressive coming from the hands and labours of a poor, crippled worker from the British slums.

However, for all his political and publishing successes, financial stability was never won. After 1842, his whereabouts are difficult to pinpoint. His abrupt emigration to the US in 1843 strongly suggests that his labour reforms failed to materialise quick enough. In Dodd's US-published book *The Laboring Classes of England* (1847, 1848), he corroborated this point, arguing that England's economic sins were key factors in his move to the US. In particular, Dodd had recognised in the US a democratic system open to his 'equal' status before the law and a market revolution open to greater economic opportunity; and so his flight from England was, in several ways, a repudiation of England's political economy itself.⁴⁶ This fact did not stop him, though, from publicising the atrocities of the factory system in a transatlantic context and advocating for English working-class reform using the language of 'white slavery'. Dodd's zeal to spread his reform message in the US was unmistakable (5), revising, condensing and retelling his previous *Narrative* and *The Factory System Illustrated* under the pseudonym of 'James Graham' in *The Laboring Classes of England*. Other labour reform pieces, such as the chapter 'Letter IX – History of an Orphan Boy', which recounted the working-class story of 'Charles Smith' (65), and Caroline Norton's anti-industrialisation poem 'A Voice From the Factories' (149), formed a small chorus of working-class voices in Dodd's book that explicated to US citizens the miseries of industrial economics inflicted upon British labourers.

Dodd's working-class activism in the US, however, was not limited to print. In both editions of the book, Dodd's postscript reads: 'P.S. Should any lady or gentleman feel desirous of seeing for themselves the horrors of the English factory system, as it is stamped on my person, a letter to my address, post paid, will be attended to' (12). Dodd did not merely describe the 'horrors' of industrialisation, but desired others to see the scars of the factory system indelibly marked upon his disabled body. For Dodd, physical deformity was paramount to his labour advocacy, but it served only as a *prima facie* signifier to the deeper economic, emotional, psychological and spiritual debilitations brought on by factory life. There is also in Dodd's word choice of 'stamped' a metatextual play on his disability as a written text of industrial critique, an allusion to *both* his printed polemics written against the factory system and his own mangled body as an unsettling text itself to be closely read by the public, a literary device he used with surprising frequency throughout his works. However, if we look further back into Dodd's residence in the US, he had been

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sharing his bodily sufferings long before *The Laboring Classes of England* was ever published. On 16 May 1845, the *Semi-Weekly Raleigh Register* of Raleigh, North Carolina, printed a note from the *Boston Transcript*:

Artificial Arm – A tailor by the name of William Dodd, informs the Boston Transcript, that having lost his right arm below the elbow joint, he had manufactured a very simple arm which looks quite natural, and has enabled him, since July [of 1844] last, to make with it fifty-two coats of various descriptions. He is very willing to show it to any one who has had a like misfortune.⁴⁷

This notice reveals several critical (and previously unknown) details in Dodd's biography: 1) Dodd constructed a prosthetic arm for himself; 2) he worked as a tailor; and 3) he showed his artificial arm to other disabled persons. Whether in Boston or Raleigh (possibly elsewhere?), Dodd *literally* embodied his story in the flesh to US audiences, particularly disabled persons. Just as in England, Dodd's working-class activism was revealed in his print publications and political service to others; far from the end of his reform efforts, the US offered him new ways in which to assist other working-class and disabled persons in print, education and outreach.

To be sure, Dodd's transatlantic activism was more qualified in a US context. By 1847, Dodd's push for 'ten hours' legislation was less confident, remarking as he did on the passage of the 'ten hours' bill: 'Of its success I have strong reasons to doubt.'⁴⁸ By the late 1840s, Dodd considered factory system regulation to be limited in ameliorating working-class conditions; he proposed instead tax reduction on manufactures and greater education as a panacea. But throughout the book, and in its final lines, Dodd's US nationalism is unqualified in imagining the US as *the* beacon of political equality, financial prosperity, and divine blessing:

A new and a better system [than England] has commenced in America. To the people in this country [...] the remarks contained in this book are of the utmost importance. There can be no doubt that America is destined to become the first manufacturing country in the earth. If through the good influence of the valuable institutions of this highly favored land, its inhabitants are led to choose the good and avoid the evil, as I am happy to perceive is the case in New England, the factory system, so far from being a *curse*, will be one of its greatest blessings. That such may be the case, may God [...] grant. (148)

As Dodd praised US institutions, he continued to leverage popular abolitionist rhetoric for working-class reform, explicitly finishing the book by comparing black slaves to white 'slaves' in transatlantic and global domains:

Petition after petition has been sent into the two houses of Parliament, to the prime minister, and to the Queen [on behalf of factory cripples] [...] but without effect. Had they only been *black* instead of *white*, their case would have been taken into consideration long ago. Or if they had been inhabiting any other position of the Globe, the far-famed English philanthropists would have found them out; but because they are in England itself [...] their case is unheeded. (25–6)

Dodd invoked a similar message in recounting the history of the 'ten hours' movement:

It is worth of observation, that about this time, the Parliament passed an act to abolish slavery in the English colonies, and not only the *name*, but the *essence* of slavery; for, in that act, it has taken care to provide that no negro shall work more hours in the week than 45, which is no more than 7 1-2 in a day. Now, if this act of humanity was necessary, which no one will doubt, how much more necessary the 58 hour act for the offspring of Englishmen! (138–9)

Furthermore, the affixed poem at the book's end, 'A Voice from the Factories', used the discourse of 'white slavery'/black slavery as *the* central conceit to attack the factory system (149). But whereas Dodd lauded the 'equality' of the US's political economy, his statements proved to be ironic in the light of US slavery, as equality for blacks in the South was nonexistent. Consequently, Dodd's abolitionist discourses highlighted the racial contradictions inherent in using the plight of the black slave to pursue white working-class reform by implicitly diminishing black oppression in the slave South. In the book's city of publication, Boston, Dodd's racialised 'slavery' comparisons would have made his case compelling, since the city lay at the heart of US radical abolitionism in the pre-Civil War period, but Dodd's conspicuous omission of the 'peculiar institution' in his book indicated his abolitionist rhetoric, much like other working-class writers, at the time, was only a personal means to working-class ends.

Mays has shown that English working-class poets' use of black slavery/'white slavery' analogies worked to establish a 'trans-national' and 'trans-racial' community with US slaves.⁴⁹ So even if Dodd's 'slavery' metaphors in his writings were not genuinely sympathetic to blacks, Dodd's emigration,

nevertheless, afforded him the rare opportunity to cultivate a 'transnational/transracial' kinship in person. But Dodd's failure to articulate this transnationalist or trans-racialist vision evinces the clear point that he never saw his racialised analogies as ways to promote interracial solidarity with black slaves, but only as pragmatic tools to garner support against his own exploitation. It is essential, though, we not commit racial or class eisegesis against Dodd's nineteenth-century mind. That is, Dodd embodied the racial and class contradictions of his historical horizon and his work provides a *representative* example of how early nineteenth-century working-class autobiographers navigated the complex matrices of their economic oppression. Matters along axes of difference, particularly race and class, in nineteenth-century England were complicated. At the time, quite a few British abolitionists skirted the politics of urban industrial exploitation. English Chartists, Christian socialists, liberal moderates and elite politicians, as noted earlier, would *all* employ the slippery semantics of 'slavery' and 'freedom' in addressing (or not) oppressive racialised and class-based hierarchies in British society. Other political radicals, like the Jamaican-born mulatto Robert Wedderburn, worked across the working-class and abolitionist movements to end two related slave systems under the industrial capitalist order: 'wage-slavery' and 'chattel slavery'. In Gray's historiographical review of early nineteenth-century working-class activism and abolitionist politics in England, he rightly observes the 'overlaps in support' between each of the movements and the 'common heritage of anti-slavery and radicalism in philosophical rational humanism and religious Dissent', whereas the many 'differences' in these politics of reform also created a diverse web of political alliances and enemies.⁵⁰ As such, Dodd's legacy, and that of other autobiographers, should not be necessarily defined by racial and class paradoxes alone but must include how each lived despite these contradictions of time and place. In Dodd's case, transatlantic working-class activism, of course, was his foremost concern, in word and in deed.

But in a new time and place – the 1850s US – Dodd's racial arguments would be subsumed within the nation's broader and heated pro-and antislavery debates leading up to the Civil War. After 1848, Dodd himself would disappear in the historical record, surfacing only once more in the Boston death records of 1856.⁵¹ His works would testify to his well-articulated polemics, personal stylistics, literary acumen and rhetorical deftness, even if his racial polemics proved troublesome to some nineteenth-century readers, and many contemporary ones today. His true achievement, however, lies in a lifelong pursuit of working-class activism in the US and England against a factory system that left him and others disabled in body, but not in spirit. Dodd's work is only the beginning in reading the English working-class autobiography in other transatlantic contexts. As Julia Sun-Joo Lee reminds

us, only initial investigations into the impact of African-American literature, and other antislavery cultures, on the British literary tradition have 'begun to be explored'.⁵² As other working-class autobiographies – like *A Memoir of Robert Blincoe* or *Chapters in the Life of a Dundee Factory Boy* – are explored within the contexts I point to in this essay (and others exist), I anticipate our critical appreciation of these writers' works will only grow more as new insights and novel approaches into their literary strategies, rhetorical appeals and political labours are rediscovered and re-imagined.

Part of this process entails what my essay has (implicitly) argued: a fuller sense of what literary or cultural value means in a genre like that of the nineteenth-century English working-class autobiography. Williams's many expansions to the idea of *culture* itself cannot be addressed here, but one such way remains crucial to seeing the aesthetic value and cultural importance made possible in Dodd's life and letters. That is to say, Williams imagines an open-ended, process-oriented and non-hierarchical culture of letters, open to the many *lived* realities of daily existence – as a good example, working-class reform and the genre of autobiography – and their various forms of textual signification in the ongoing processes of cultural power, class development and societal circulation. In Williams's 'Conclusion' to *Culture and Society, 1780–1950*, he puts the matter this way: 'Yet a culture is not only a body of intellectual and imaginative work; it is also and essentially a whole way of life.'⁵³ Or, likewise, he writes elsewhere: 'We use the word culture in these two senses: to mean a whole way of life – the common meanings; to mean the arts and learning – the special processes of discovery and creative effort [...] I insist on both, and on the significance of their conjunction [...] Culture is ordinary, in every society and in every mind.'⁵⁴ As acknowledged before, Williams's 'whole way[s] of life', in the case of Dodd, makes room for such ordinary things as personal experience, abolitionist rhetoric, popular literary form, slave narrative convention, the politics of reform and other day-to-day practices (and more) as *literature* of its own singularity and innovation. This takes us beyond an inherited tradition of British classics or bourgeois cultured sensibility, imagining instead other markers of real cultural significance and writerly substance in places we might not have expected, even as the more celebrated British literati proffer for us treasured and distinct merits all their own. Too long deemed a 'low' genre in contrast to a 'high' *belles lettres*, the working-class autobiography might better be seen, as Williams suggests, within a broader culture of ordinary possibilities and the totality of working-class life, something that affords us new modes of exhuming its critical value. A reevaluation of this once lowly genre within a more inclusive definition of the British (and, in some ways, US) nineteenth-century literary canon is in order if we wish to truly comprehend how, and why, the fullness of working-class experience and the cross-fertilisations of

race, class and genre mutually inflected the working-class autobiography to make it a powerful force for personal expression and political change in the early and mid-nineteenth century transatlantic world.

Notes

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- 2 Alan Richardson, *Literature, Education, and Romanticism: Reading As Social Practice, 1780–1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 233–4.
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- 4 Janice Carlisle, 'Introduction', in *Factory Lives: Four Nineteenth-Century Working-Class Autobiographies*, ed. James R. Simmons Jr (Peterborough, Ont: Broadview Press, 2007), 30–32; Audrey Fisch, *American Slaves in Victorian England: Abolitionist Politics in Popular Literature and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 50; Nan Hackett, *XIX Century British Working-Class Autobiographies: An Annotated Bibliography* (New York: AMS Press, 1985), 2–5.
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- 6 Kelly J. Mays, 'Slaves in Heaven, Laborers in Hell: Chartist Poets' Ambivalent Identification with the (Black) Slave', *Victorian Poetry* 39, no. 2 (2001): 148.
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- 12 Mays, 'Slaves in Heaven', 141.
- 13 Julia Sun-Joo Lee, *The American Slave Narrative and the Victorian Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 10–11. See also Richard Huzzey's *Freedom Burning: Anti-Slavery and Empire in Victorian Britain* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012), James Walvin's *England, Slaves and Freedom, 1776–1838* (London: Macmillan Press, 1996) and *Crossings: Africa, the Americas and the Atlantic Slave Trade* (London: Reaktion Books, 2013).
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- 16 For representative works, see James Williams, *A Narrative of Events Since the First of August, 1834, By James Williams, an Apprenticed Labourer in Jamaica, 1837* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001) and Moses Grandy, *Narrative of the Life of Moses Grandy, Late a Slave in*

- the United States of America*, 1843, cited from 'North American Slave Narratives', *Documenting the American South*, a digital archive sponsored by The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/>. All other slave narratives mentioned in the essay are cited from this online archive.
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 - 45 James Myles, *Chapters in the Life of a Dundee Factory Boy*, in Simmons Jr, *Factory Lives*, 238.
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- 51 See Ancestry.com. 'William Dodd', *Massachusetts, Death Records, 1841–1915* [database online]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2013.
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Keywords

Crisis

‘Crisis’ is first recorded in the English language in the early sixteenth century, as a borrowing from Latin (‘crisis’), though its roots lie in Ancient Greek. Derived from κρίνω (‘to pick out’, ‘choose’, ‘judge’, ‘interpret’), κρίσις had a number of related meanings, including ‘separation’, ‘decision’, ‘judgment’, ‘choice’, ‘interpretation’ (of dreams and portents), ‘verdict’ (of a court), ‘test’ (of skill) and ‘turning point of a disease’, hence ‘sudden change for better or worse’.

It was this last sense of the term that first appears in English in medical discourse: the point in the course of a disease when a significant change occurs towards recovery or death, hence, by extension, any sudden change in the progress of a disease (as in the later usage, ‘the moment of crisis’). The first recorded use of the term illustrates the etymological and medical senses together: ‘crisis sygnifyeth iudgemente, and in thys case, it is vsed for a sodayne chaunge in a disease’ (1543). The sense of judgment is also clear in two meanings that are now obsolete. ‘Crisis’ meant the process of judgment itself: ‘his Crisis so exact will with greatest scorne reiect’ (1623). And, by transfer, a sign that needs to be judged or interpreted (last recorded in the late seventeenth century). The emphasis on judgment is clear in the related development of ‘critic’ (‘one who passes judgment’, 1598) and ‘criticism’ (‘the act or process of judgment’, 1607).

The modern and now familiar use of ‘crisis’ is an extension of the earliest medical sense in English. There are, however, two related though slightly distinct meanings. First, by transfer, ‘crisis’ meaning ‘a crucial or decisive stage in the development of something’ (note the link here to decision or judgment by way of ‘decisive’). This is clearly linked to the early sense of the turning point (either way) in an illness. Second, now by figurative extension, ‘crisis’ meaning ‘a state of affairs in which a crucial change will take place’. Interestingly, the OED notes that this use is ‘now applied *esp.* to times of difficulty, insecurity, and suspense in politics or commerce’.

There are evident shifts here away from an immediate moment of difficulty towards a more general sense of ‘state of affairs’, and from physical or bodily health towards politics and economics. But the real change in the modern sense of the term is the near-elimination of the senses of ‘judgment’ and ‘change’. Implicitly, of course, any moment of sufficient difficulty will require judgments to be made and will probably lead to change. But in contemporary use, ‘crisis’ has lost these senses and has weakened to become more of a catch-

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all term meaning something like ‘a particularly bad set of circumstances’, either acute or chronic in nature. Hence its variable use in phrases as different as the specific meaning of ‘the crisis of capitalism’, and the general sense of ‘bit of a crisis on the way to work today’.

This weakening dates from the mid-late late nineteenth century: ‘crisis-mongers’ (1841); a ‘crisis-night’ (1896); ‘crisis-proof’ (1898); ‘crisis fund’ (1903); ‘crisis-minded’ (1938); ‘crisis feeling’ (1940); ‘crisis money’ (1960); and the now near-ubiquitous ‘crisis management’ (1965). It is not the weakening of the term, however, in the sense of its more general application, which is noteworthy. It is that eradication of human agency performed by the elision of notions of ‘interpretation’, ‘judgment’, and ‘choice’. This process is hardly innocent. Too often the general sense of ‘crisis’ is used to imply that circumstances are so complex and difficult that there is little we can do (‘economic crisis’ and ‘environmental crisis’ are frequently used to refer to processes that seem to be on a scale so grand as to be beyond human control). ‘Crisis’ is therefore an example of a word whose earlier history can be useful to us. This is not to say that the ‘right’ meaning of ‘crisis’ is to be found in its Greek etymological roots. But it is to say that those earlier senses involving ‘state of danger’, ‘turning point’, ‘judgment, decision, choice’, can be helpful as we analyse and take action in our critical times. In that sense, this is a lesson to be borrowed from the right, whose awareness that ‘crises are opportunities’ has been all too clear in the recent past.

Reviews

Glyn Salton-Cox, *Queer Communism and the Ministry of Love: Sexual Revolution in British Writing of the 1930s*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018. 231 pp. £75.00 hb. ISBN 978-1-4744-2331-1

In David Leavitt's *While England Sleeps* – a novel so heavily indebted to Stephen Spender's memoir *World Within World* (1951) that it had to be recalled and heavily revised – the central character, Brian Botsford, eventually realises how mistaken was his brief dalliance with the Communist movement. In events loosely based on Spender's experiences, Botsford goes to Spain during the Civil War to rescue his former lover, Edward Phelan, who has enlisted to fight for the Republic. In the novel, however, Phelan faces the death penalty passed on him for desertion by Northrop, the man who persuaded him to volunteer in the first place. But, after confronting Northrop, who argues that individuals are expendable in the larger scheme of things, Botsford fails to carry through his threat to telegraph the Home Office with details of the former's role in a young man's death: 'I supposed at some level I believed Northrop', Botsford reflects. 'I believed they mattered more than we did. Their victories, their wars. Their loves.'¹

This realisation is one that conflates Communism, heterosexuality and homophobia, and suggests that any residual investment in the self-sacrifices supposedly necessary for a better common future represents a kind of false consciousness (Botsford recounts the past from a late twentieth-century present in which he has jettisoned his pretensions to bisexuality in favour of gay authenticity). The latter sentiment persists in contemporary queer theory: in *No Future*, Lee Edelman argues that political hope is so bound up with the sentimentalised figure of the child as to represent an ideological 'reproductive futurism' that is anti-queer (even though it is not only heterosexuals who have children).²

Such perceptions of the past, and especially of the thirties, as well as attitudes towards what we must resign ourselves to calling 'temporality', are challenged in the very title of Glyn Salton-Cox's new book. Focused on the Communist movement of the period, it revises the kinds of received wisdom of the sort we find in Leavitt's novel. Salton-Cox focuses on the early work of both Christopher Isherwood and Sylvia Townsend Warner for its promise in combining Marxist commitments with sexual radicalism, before going

1 David Leavitt, *While England Sleeps* (London: Abacus, 1998), 254.

2 See Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 1–32.

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on to suggest that their later work is compromised: in Isherwood's case, by a Western humanism that is racist, and in Warner's by an internalisation of the homophobia that was becoming pervasive on the Left generally in the later 1930s. That anti-queer impulse is to be found especially in Katherine Burdekin's dystopian portrait of a triumphant Nazism, *Swastika Night* (1937), and the work of George Orwell.

That summary may seem as if the book is making rather grand claims on the basis of a few novels that surely could not plausibly provide evidence for the 'sexual revolution' of the title. However, Salton-Cox treats them as symptomatic of the shifts in the history of the Communist movement and the broader Left in the period, as Stalin overturned the initial Soviet legalisation of homosexuality during the First Five Year Plan, and it became convenient to conflate Nazism with male eroticism in order to convict Fascism of perversion for propaganda purposes. Both things, Salton-Cox argues, helped to shape the sexual conservatism of the Popular Front, whose investment in the family also influenced postwar British political dynamics. Moreover, while the persuasive close readings of a relatively small number of novels take up a good part of the book, they are consistently linked to more general trends in cultural production: for those keen to explore further the literature of the period in relation to the book's themes, it offers what appears to be a comprehensive map of the territory.

Salton-Cox is also astute in dealing with the aesthetics of these texts, and offers some illuminating accounts based on detailed research. This is especially so in relation to Isherwood, in whose work he plausibly identifies indebtedness to the antihumanist aesthetics of Soviet Modernist Sergei Tretiakov in *Goodbye to Berlin* (1939) and *The Last of Mr Norris* (1935), arguing that Isherwood's deployment of Tretiakov's techniques facilitates a subversive instrumentalisation of the body in depictions of cross-class relationships, rather than a bourgeois humanist emphasis on the transcendent potential of 'love' (44–76). Elsewhere, he suggests that Warner's (and Valentine Ackland's) queer vanguardism was indebted to the cellular structure of Communist activism (77–112).

The book even manages to offer a distinctive contribution to the persistent debates over Orwell's politics. Of course, Orwell's hostility to both Communism and homosexuality is hardly news, but Salton-Cox argues that the thing that connects the two is the reproductive futurism critiqued by Edelman (140–73). The discussion of Orwell's curiously ironic, but ultimately earnest, patriotism is especially well handled here in relation to the famous passage from Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia* in which he recounts his disenchanted return to England (155–56) – the same one, incidentally, to which Leavitt alludes in the title of his novel.

A 'coda' to *Queer Communism* offers further close readings of postwar material by Isherwood and Warner, but also by John Lehman, that evinces a resistance to postwar pressures towards respectability: a certain sexual radicalism is preserved, though only Warner remained unapologetic about her Communist – and even, discredibly, her Stalinist – past. The brief treatment of this material here in one sense offers a reasonable way of rounding off this particular project but, in its inevitably sketchy contextualisation of this writing, tends to obscure the crucial historical fact that the forces of sexual revolution in the postwar world had little to do with – and were even hostile to – the official Communist movement for obvious reasons, but with all kinds of complex consequences. Nonetheless, the argument concludes with highly pertinent arguments against a repetition of any kind of Left populism that serves to redeem the institutions of the nation-state *and* the family (189–90). This is not merely an important revisionist account of the 1930s, then; it is ultimately also an important contribution to work by figures such as Kevin Floyd and Lauren Berlant, on whom it draws, who have attempted in different ways to reconcile Marxism with queer theory.

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Emily Cuming, *Housing, Class, and Gender in Modern British Writing, 1880–2012*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016. 244 pp. £70.99 hb. ISBN 978-1-107140-18-8

A development of a former dockland site in the post-industrial North of Edinburgh, the Western Harbour apartment complex was trailed as the advance party of a new era for the city's waterfront. Consisting of ten 15-storey blocks, its prospective population of young urban professionals was symbolic of neoliberal progress, with the 'quirky' postmodern architectural style supposedly shorn of the negative associations tied up with post-WWII council housing. This was to be a Scots millennial expression of contemporary ideology: all that is solid melts into luxury flats. Yet after the 2008 crash, Western Harbour acquired a different hue: indebted lower-middle-class residents wrestled with their inflated mortgages, whilst other flats – snapped up at knockdown prices by vulture capitalists – became *de facto* social housing for the poorest end of the rental market, paid for through housing benefit. There were even rumours of 'high class' brothels run in the empties, producing a curious contemporary variant of the social mix of yore. As Emily Cuming might put it, class is 'written into the landscape' (17).

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Reflecting the continuing centrality of housing to contemporary British cultural discourse manifest in texts as divergent as John Boughton's left-social history of council housing *Municipal Dreams* (2018) and Barnabas Calder's aestheticised defence of high-rise *Raw Concrete* (2016), Cuming's *Housing, Class and Gender in Modern British Writing, 1880–2012* is a similarly relevant text. Clearly influenced by Raymond Williams's socio-etymological approach, the book is a timely cultural historical account of fictional and non-fictional narratives around the traditional home as well as the boarding and lodging house, their formal quirks and complexities, as well as of resources of hope that often inhere in such narratives. Ideological visions of the home permeate British and Irish cultural texts; in this monograph, Cuming traces a line from Victorian visions of the importance of the domestic interior to contemporary hegemonies of home in our present-day property-owning democracy, acknowledging that 'a closer look at the cultural history of rented rooms reminds us that the nuclear family living under one roof is a relatively recent historical construction (and assumption)' (74). Early on, Cuming looks at some key theorists of the primacy of the domestic – Gaston Bachelard's work, for instance, sees a sentimentalised middle-class home as an inscriber of meaning on a subject – with often long-standing psychoanalytical implications. Walter Benjamin treats the home as an ornate, encasing device upon which individuals leave traces with their physical imprints as well as their accumulated, enlivening commodities. By contrast, bell hooks's autobiographical account of an austere life growing up in a bare, concrete housing project apartment underlines how race, gender and class are all crucial factors to integrate into any cogent analysis. In a later chapter, Cuming explores how black experiences contrast with accounts of gendered, feminine, often white domesticity: 'the representation of male characters oppressively confined within rooms also serves as a reminder that the traditional image of the interior as a feminine space of entrapment is racially contingent' (109).

A core point of this text is demystification, and Cuming's close readings work to highlight the 'visual shorthand' (28) evident in clichéd narratives of the slum and other dwellings. If politics is conceived – *pace* Chantal Mouffe – as agonistic tensions and clashing narratives, then the terrain sketched out here is an ideological battleground. In her critique of 'slum narratives', Cuming highlights the attention to detail of a writer like the chronicler Henry Mayhew in contrast to the proto-tabloid style employed in the work of Hector Gavin. The former serves to add detailed nuance and context; the latter analyses the poor in a curiously bloodless manner. Voyeurism is key to the appeal of a slum narrative – of seeing into the privacy of others with lurid promise, and othering those of a distinct race or class.

Housing is also a site of escape from social origins, and of development for nascent individualist consciousness. This is analysed in a rather uplifting manner in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2004), its genteel narrative of multicultural East London hastening its gentrification as well as paving the way for a United Colors of Benetton-inspired film adaption three years later. In a more tortured manner, George Acorn's *One of the Multitude* (1912) writes of the necessity of space for the autodidact, reflecting a voice that is that of the self-hating proletarian – 'ardently I longed to purge my soul of any dross it possessed' (58) – and reproducing bourgeois class prejudices (the title itself points to contemporary 'respectable' paranoia about mass society). Mocked by Alan Sinfield in his classic *Literature and Politics in Post-War British Culture*, this tendency amongst working-class intellectuals – evident in Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* (1957), a text that is here given an 'against the grain' reading by Cuming as an unusually experimental work of prose – is also seen in Kathleen Woodward's memoir *Jipping Street* (1928), where working-class identity is sought to be whitewashed, providing a *tabula rasa* for putative reinvention (61) and social mobility. Pat O'Mara's 'slum' narrative breaks this mould to an extent, offering an emergent sense of modernist self-consciousness alongside residual attachment to his working class place of origin (69).

Homes never offer a singular meaning, and the state of flux inherent in the boarding house reinforce this – associated to an extent with atomisation, but compared intriguingly to a 'large and singularly disunited family' (78) by the aforementioned nineteenth-century chronicler Mayhew. In Dickens, the boarding house is portrayed as a scene for social advancement; in Joyce, it displays a naturalistic depiction of social decay. Familial homes provide another facet to this: Seamus Deane's *Reading in the Dark* (1996) is read fascinatingly in terms of its relationship to the Gothic, in which ghosts and spectres provide *jouissance* and escapist possibility, contrasting with the drab realities of the 'Protestant state for a Protestant people' Northern Ireland of his youth (124). The account of Windrush-generation boarding houses here is particularly relevant: Andrea Levy's novel of 2005, *Small Island*, describes the demystification of the Imperial image that affected black Jamaican migrants upon arrival in England's green, unpleasant land. '[T]he Earls Court lodging house is even a disappointment to its Jamaican tenants who are deeply familiar, through the processes of colonial education, with cultural images of the British homestead' (115), or what Cuming calls the 'deceptive semiotics of architectural form' – a charming edifice that conceals underlying turmoil. In the light of the cosmetic cladding that caused the Grenfell Tower fire, such semiotics are indeed a serious force.

A couple of criticisms can be made: the extensive close reading, whilst skilfully and diligently executed, can sometimes detract from broader

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sociopolitical and historical contexts that impinge on the book's core analysis. Accounts of plot detail can become slightly wearing, executed as they are extensively over the course of an entire text. In addition, despite the author's apparent preference for the formal complexity of modernist narratives, their stylistic shock effects are somewhat lost in the translator (and citationary) act of criticism. Whilst the author is keen to signpost the sense of play in such narratives, case studies are often permeated with extensive thematic anomie and disconnection – my personal favourite being Brian Moore's Belfast-based narrative *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne* (1956), wherein the eponymous hermetic hero lives subject to the whims and snobberies of her landlady, her desultory Catholic existence only enlivened by ultimately self-destructive whiskey consumption.

Nonetheless, the core thesis of the book rings true. A thread running through the entire book is the sense in which elements of the multifaceted, warm and semi-improvisational organisations of slums, boarding houses, private rentals and council estates that form what we call 'home' can act as a counter-hegemonic force – a history from behind, perhaps – to more rigid, bourgeois ideas of domestic correctitude. This as a general point seems crucially important at the present conjuncture, where a middle-class ideal of home ownership seems ever more unreal. 'Twas ever thus.

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Independent scholar

Terry Eagleton, *Materialism*, London: Yale University Press, 2016.
x + 176 pp. £16.99 hb. ISBN 978-0-300-21880-0

Terry Eagleton's *Materialism* is a beautifully written account of the significance of a proper understanding of the doctrine of materialism to the project of radical social change. Though the style of argument is rather beguiling at times (bathos being its characteristic trope), the text nonetheless takes the reader through difficult and complex philosophical debates in an illuminating and accessible fashion. It also features, as another reviewer has already noted, a number of funny jokes (no small achievement in a discussion of this topic).

The text begins with a survey of varieties of materialism – mechanical, vitalist, historical, cultural, speculative – ranging from Spinoza to contemporary 'new materialism' (identified as a mode of post-structuralism). Eagleton's favoured form, however, which underpins the argument throughout, is what he calls 'somatic (bodily) or anthropological materialism'. Cast against culturalism, or the fetishism of difference, Eagleton's argument is that human beings are 'mounds of material which are inherently active, creative,

communicative, relational, self-expressive, self-realising, world-transforming, and self-transcendent (which is to say historical)' (39). In other words, the analysis, based at least in part on Aristotle and Aquinas (Christianity is never far from Eagleton's concerns), proposes the very unfashionable belief that human beings are, in all their variety, naturally and universally material, embodied, rational and historical.

The core of the text is constituted by three chapters on Marx, Nietzsche, and Wittgenstein. In 'Emancipating the Senses', Eagleton reads Marx as a 'somatic materialist whose starting point is active, sensuous, practical human life' (61). It is this that lies at the heart of Marx's conception of history – the process of human self-realisation and self-reproduction dependent on the transformation of the conditions of existence. And it is materialism, in a different sense of the term, that explains the possibility of socialism, since once productive forces have arrived at a specific state, the productive surplus of labour can be shared equally. Equitable distribution was hardly the main concern of Nietzsche, the focus of 'High Spirits', yet Eagleton reads him as 'an astonishingly adventurous thinker' (101) with much in common with Marx's 'somatic idealism'. As with Marx's critique, Nietzsche's iconoclastic debunking of the self-deceptions of bourgeois idealism and morality is advanced from a historical and materialist (if not historical materialist) standpoint. And yet, as Eagleton notes, it is precisely on political morality that Marx and Nietzsche decisively differ, specifically their accounts of 'human flourishing' in which Nietzsche's postulated individualist ethics of 'life' runs up against Marx's goal of reciprocal self-realisation. The third of Eagleton's unlikely triumvirate of materialists is Wittgenstein, and 'The Rough Ground' notes an interesting parallel between Wittgenstein's style of philosophy and Marx's critique of ideology (in that both debunk metaphysics in the name of material practice). The chapter ends with a link between Gramsci's critique of everyday practice and search for an alternative form of 'common sense', with Wittgenstein's commitment to the commonality of human existence and his quest to rid us of our everyday deceptions.

The three essays of *Materialism* don't quite hold together, and it is difficult at times to discern the coherence of the overall argument other than as an exemplification of the claim in one of Eagleton's earlier works, *Sweet Violence* (2002): 'a genuine materialism, as opposed to an historicist relativism or idealism, is also attentive to those aspects of our existence which are permanent structures of our species-being' (xii). In addition, the text ends in rather an abrupt manner (there is no concluding attempt to inter-weave the different threads). But this is nonetheless a wide-ranging and often fascinating account of the political ramifications of 'somatic materialism', and one whose central claims are both unfashionable and significant.

Tony Crowley
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Chris Hopkins, *Love on the Dole: Novel, Play, Film*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2018. xii + 321 pp. £90.00 hb. ISBN 978-1-786-94114-5

Chris Hopkins's study of Walter Greenwood's influential novel and its adaptations is, we are told, 'the first book-length study of this important work' (cover blurb). It is astonishing (and a little dispiriting) that it has taken almost ninety years to give *Love on the Dole* the academic attention it deserves, but Hopkins takes the widest possible approach to his study in order to meet the needs of readers at all levels. Not only does he pitch his work as both 'a piece of original research and a useful textbook – I see no reason why these aims should be incompatible' (13), but the reader is also guided to a website holding a useful list of critical sources, a link to the Walter Greenwood Collection at the Salford University Archives and Special Collections, a biographical timeline and a fascinating history of the book covers, not only for *Love on the Dole* – including some editions published abroad and in translation – but for all of Greenwood's fiction and some theatre posters. Hopkins is (in my opinion, rightly) determined to make Greenwood more visible and accessible to researchers, tutors and students.

The book is divided into five sections: three chapters, an introduction and a conclusion. The Introduction is divided into three sections and opens with a consideration of the significance of Greenwood's most famous work, its translation into different media and its effect on other cultural productions, including a song entitled 'Love on the Dole' in a 1938 satirical pantomime and a poem of the same name by A.S. Vaughan-Thomas. In this introduction the reader learns that, despite critical work existing for both the novel and the film, only three original essays have considered the adaptation of the novel to the theatre: Hopkins will go on to address this in the second of the three chapters. The next two sections deal with the novel's responses to its context and the historical context behind the fiction. In these sections the reader is presented with discussion on the disjuncture between the inhabitants of Hanky Park and the rise of consumerism and the importance of paid holidays and leisure pursuits. The final section deals with the pressures of rising unemployment – up from 1.1 million to 2.8 million at the start of the 1930s – the conservatism of the Labour Government in dealing with unemployment and benefits, driven by its small majority, and the formation of the National Government in 1931. The introduction of the Means Test, the trigger for Greenwood's fictional representation of the Battle of Bexley Square, and its intrusion into the family and home – which 'could involve a

family having to sell alleged “luxuries” such as wireless sets and other items deemed ‘unnecessary’ (22) – is placed into the context of the Poor Law tradition. This introduction gives a solid foundation to the context on which to build the following chapters.

Chapter 1 presents a detailed analysis of the novel, taking, after its first section on the opening chapter and epigraphs, the characters as both the focus and structure of the chapter. The first section focuses on Harry Hardcastle, analysing his desire for employment that is both masculine and modern in Marlowe’s rather than the feminised and immature (signified by the knickerbocker suit) work at the pawnbrokers, and the older role models for Harry – and other young men – in the hypermasculine Ned Narkey and the ‘controlled power and knowledge’ (37) of Larry Meath. Harry’s ‘escape’ from the predominantly feminine space of the pawnbrokers into the masculinity of Marlowe’s is as much a romance as any possible escape through the happy-ever-after of marriage or, according to Larry, the necessity of apprenticeships in developing skilled labour. Larry, the focus for the following section, is presented as being as clear-eyed about the economic pressures of marriage as he is about the necessity of political change, able to ‘see through the system’ (48). This makes the lone Larry, according to Hopkins, more of a narrative tool for change than realistic evidence of class gradation. Sally Hardcastle follows, and here Hopkins gives us a consideration of perhaps the most complex character of the novel. Sally is both traditional (desiring to marry Larry) and modern (proposing marriage), a woman of independence who ‘chooses’ Sam Grundy at the end of the novel in order to improve her family’s life but is as economically trapped as his mistress as are any of the married women. The final two sections of this chapter, on the female inhabitants of Hanky Park – Mrs Bull, Mrs Jikes, Mrs Nattle and Mrs Dorbell – and the minor but important males – Sam Grundy and Ned Narkey – include discussions on the range of attitudes towards working-class life in 1930s Salford. While I understand the separation of the characters into sections of individual close readings, particularly as the book is written partly as a study guide, this structure does not allow for a deep reading of the fictional community. For instance, I would have liked to have seen some further discussion on the backward-looking and dismissive politics of the women (particularly Mrs Dorbell) and their capitalist lines of ‘business’ put into the context of Larry’s forward-looking and collective socialism.

This structure works well, though, in Chapter 2, where Hopkins provides the reader with a detailed and fascinating account of the novel’s adaptation into theatre and film. The section on the theatre adaptations fulfils Hopkins’s earlier promise to fill the gap in critical attention to the plays, and the reader is taken through the differences in the theatrical adaptations for Manchester

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and London audiences. We learn, for instance, that Larry's political speech opens both versions of the play, but that while the speech is audible to the Manchester audience, the London production script directs the speech as unclear to the audience, audible only to Sally. Similar differences in the settings separate the opening of the two versions: Larry is visible during his speech to the Manchester audience but only his muffled voice is present in the London production. Despite this regional difference, the two published editions of the playscript – the Cape and French editions – are discussed in terms of the standardising of English in the London text, which intends the playscript to be applicable to other regions: 'This has been done for the convenience of the cast, who may choose to speak in the accent of any other industrial area' (123). Not only was the play performed across Britain but also across the globe, in the USA, Australia and New Zealand. The final section of this chapter deals with the struggle to get the script through the British censors in order to adapt the novel to film. Despite the popularity of the theatre production, British film censors deemed the work 'undesireable' and 'unfilmable' (143) and thus the class-based division between theatre audiences and those in the cinema are made evident. It was only during the dark days of the Second World War that the British Board of Film Censors were told – presumably by a government source – that the film must be made. The reader is then guided through the changes in tone that present the story as one of a past that has been left behind in the movement towards a better society after British victory in the war.

Chapter 3 takes us through Greenwood's life and beyond *Love on the Dole*, the rest of his professional career after his defining novel being as much of a gap in the Greenwood criticism as the theatre adaptations. The section 'Professional Writer: 1933–1944' resists the 'stereotyped view of working-class writers as able to write only a single successful work directly from experience' (203), a stereotype lamented by the *Times Literary Supplement's* review of his 1936 novel *Standing Room Only* or 'a Laugh in Every Line'. Here the reviewer laments Greenwood being 'lured from Manchester and Salford' and eschewing the role of 'a chronicler of contemporary life' (215), claiming that the author is 'as little at home as his hero' in the world of the theatre, an astonishing statement about the co-author of the popular theatre production of *Love on the Dole*. The book is concluded with a wide-ranging discussion of the politics, critical tradition and influence of Greenwood's texts, including some consideration of Greenwood's radio work.

This book goes a long way to giving Greenwood and his famous texts the breadth of attention they deserve, but there are two aspects within the study that also deserved further consideration. First, Hopkins notes in the Introduction that the period covered by the novel (between 1924 and 1931) omits any reference to the General Strike of 1927 and, while agreeing with

Stephen Constantine that this might have been an attempt to avoid alienating middle- and 'respectable' working-class readers (16–17), he expands this to include the sense of a static society and omission that indicates the absence of a common culture across Britain. These are both interesting and important points to make when placing the text into its historical context, but I found it frustrating that this glaring omission in the novel is given only short consideration within a single paragraph. Manchester was brought to a standstill during the General Strike and Salford was the location for the site headquarters of the North West Strike Committee of the Transport and General Workers Union, so Greenwood could not have been unaware of the events, nor the inhabitants of Hanky Park unaffected by them. The conscious decision to ignore the effects of this nationwide action in a novel that deals with the struggles of precarious employment, unemployment and the Means Test really deserves more attention and critical analysis than it receives in this study.

Second, although the formalist and historicist approaches to Greenwood and his texts provides a firm foundation for the discussion of the importance and influence of the novel and its adaptational shifts, there ought to have been some consideration of the literary history and context. Some indication of where Greenwood fits into the tradition of working-class writing would have grounded the analysis of the literary text in a much more substantial way. We are informed that Greenwood's mother inherited her trade unionist father's book collection and that these books were consulted when Greenwood was writing *There Was a Time*. This raises the question: might they have been also consulted while writing *Love on the Dole*? Might his grandfather have possessed a copy of Tressell's *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*? Only Jessie Pope's expurgated version was available at this point, so is Larry Meath's trajectory of socialism, illness and death following the template set up by Pope? Pope ends Tressell's novel with the scene where Frank Owen, frightened by his bronchial bleed, considers suicide and the murder of his family; Larry Meath loses his job after chalking his Marxist teachings on Marlowe's wall in a fashion similar to that of Frank Owen teaching his colleagues economics in The Cave and similarly suffers pulmonary problems, but dies after an attack by the police. There seems to be a strong resemblance between the two characters, and as Hopkins takes a reader-focused approach to Greenwood's text, some consideration of Greenwood's potential readership of Tressell and of Pope's editing would have been particularly welcome. This might have given some further nuance to the discussion in the conclusion that Greenwood was writing for a middle-class audience, particularly Stephen Constantine's claim that the imagined middle-class reader inhibited Greenwood's socialist politics in the novel. This is precisely the readership Pope intends to attract by slicing out, reordering and condensing Tressell's novel.

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Nevertheless, no book can include everything each individual reviewer desires, and Hopkins has given us a wide-ranging critical consideration of this important text, its adaptations and its author. There is no doubt that this will be a valuable resource for researchers and students from many disciplines.

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Jasper Bernes, *The Work of Art in the Age of Deindustrialization*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017. 241 pp. £54.00 hb. ISBN 978-0-804796-41-5

Surprisingly, for a book whose title makes such explicit reference to Walter Benjamin's famous essay, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', Jasper Bernes's recent study of post-war US poetry and conceptual art avoids any reference to Benjamin at all (a cursory glance at the index confirms this absence to be total). And yet, the work carries out a silent and implicit dialogue with Benjamin's definitive theorisation of the curious interplay between the work of art (the object) and the 'work' of art (its production). Bernes makes a deft shift away from Benjamin's predominant focus on the art object to the labouring of the artistic process itself. The hypothesis is that where the Fordist era of capitalism produced things (film reels and photographic prints, for instance) the post-Fordist era is defined by its production of so-called immaterialities – affect, code, social networks, etc. In addition to commodifying the object at the end of the artistic process, then, the process itself, and the cultural values attached to the making of art, became reified in the doctrines of the corporate world. At the same time as artists were critiquing the uniformity and homogeneity of white-collar work, capitalism was seeking to make the workplace more akin to a 'creative space'. In reciprocal fashion, creative work itself became more like, well, *work*.

Where Benjamin's paradigmatic form for what I will call here the pre-war industrialised aesthetic was film, for Bernes, the deindustrialised aesthetic is best preserved in post-war American poetry. While in a strictly chronological sense this might seem counter-intuitive – since we have been told countless times that it is the image, not the word, that marks the rise of postmodernity – Bernes nevertheless makes a strong case for poetic language as a privileged site for embodying the newly dominant modes of labour that emphasised the organisation of *information* over the production of *things*. Thus, in the book's second chapter, on the early poetry of John Ashbery, Bernes makes the claim that the poet's experiments with free indirect discourse and point of view channelled the rise of administrative labour in its marking of the writer's

transition from ‘the creator of a new language *sui generis*’ to the ‘administrator of prefabricated forms’ (76).

The book begins though, appropriately enough, with Frank O’Hara’s *Lunch Poems*. Appropriate, of course, because the form of O’Hara’s poems was explicitly shaped within the temporal constraints of office work’s daily rhythms. Important also was the nature of O’Hara’s actual job, assistant curator at New York’s Museum of Modern Art, which Bernes links to the poems’ concern, mirrored in the artistic developments O’Hara was tasked with tracking, with ‘process, performance and phenomenology’ over the inert world of objects (46). This is significant, because O’Hara’s poems, most notably ‘Having a Coke With You’, focused so intently on the experiences associated with commodities, rather than commodities themselves, a shift that would eventually be incorporated into the logic of advertising.

Such a story of how the aesthetic stances of the US counter-culture were utilised in the West’s aggressive contestation of the cultural field during the Cold War is by now a familiar one. Indeed, it has become commonplace to make the accusation that the post-war New Left abandoned labour militancy in favour of a predominantly aesthetic oppositional stance towards capitalist social relations. We see this in Nancy Fraser’s claim, for instance, that feminism became preoccupied with ‘recognition’ over ‘redistribution’, and most explicitly in Eve Chiapello and Luc Boltanski’s description of this general tendency as ‘the artistic critique’ of capital, which, in their view, capital all too easily absorbed.¹

Bernes interrogates this narrative, and while he is ultimately sympathetic towards it, he is also careful to avoid the reductionism of its most simplistic formulations. That is to say, where a certain kind of revisionism of this period would claim that the artistic work was always doomed to be incorporated, in conveyor belt fashion, into a new ideological configuration of the workplace, Bernes insists upon a reading of his canon of texts as more than mere ‘prefiguration’ of the new workplace ideals, but simultaneously less than their ‘direct causation’ (90). Bernes takes this cultural moment, which in the first half of the book focuses almost exclusively on New York City from roughly 1960 to 1980, as a complex social field in which myriad dissatisfactions with the rigid, bureaucratic model of Fordist managerialism were articulated from both within and without the organisations, firms, and corporations that were the subject of critique. As Bernes is at pains to note, ‘artists and writers provided a conceptual grammar and vocabulary – a set of reference points or coordinates with respect to which these dissatisfactions could be articulated – but they

1 See Nancy Fraser, ‘From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemmas of Justice in a ‘Post-Socialist’ Age’, *New Left Review* I, no. 212 (July/August 1995): 68–93, and Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2005).

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certainly did not create them' (91). Indeed, many of the writers and artists Bernes surveys anticipate their possible recuperation by capital, and therefore adopt 'a state of vigilance against misuse or misinterpretation' (36). A chapter on the multimedia work of Bernadette Mayer, for instance, articulates her work's critical engagement with the new forms of exploitation found in the 'feminisation' of the labour-process. The emphasis on multitasking, emotional intelligence and flexibility, all forms of non-remunerated activity that were rerouted from the domestic to the workplace, is given form in the freneticism of Mayer's poetry-prose.

As *The Work of Art in the Age of Deindustrialization* progresses into its final chapters, its concern subtly shifts away from work to nonwork, and thus to automation, precarity and surplus populations – concepts at the centre of contemporary political and theoretical debate. For those familiar with Bernes's work with the journal collective *Endnotes*, and the new periodical *Commune* which he co-founded explicitly as a riposte to the social-democratic leanings of venues like *Jacobin*, these concluding chapters will cover familiar theoretical ground. Culminating in a discussion of Sean Bonney's *Letters Against the Firmament*, a collection of poems published in 2015 that articulate the experience of Job Centres and DWP sanctions under the austerity of the Conservative government, Bernes notes a recognition in these poems of how unwork, under such conditions, serves as the 'underlying form' of work itself (172). The disciplining of the unwaged becomes equally, if not more, pernicious than that of the waged.

Bernes's book leaves us with the following questions. Can we demand more satisfying forms of work, more collaborative and collective forms even, without falling into the trap of previous generations? That is to say, can we avoid asking only for a more aestheticised and well-packaged iteration of our own exploitation? In a provocative conclusion, Bernes argues that with capitalism facing a series of acute crises in the twenty-first century, work itself, and therefore also the 'work' of art, might be losing its centrality as a site of ideological and cultural struggle, such that 'the poetry of the future will have to find its reasons and its weapons beyond production' (196). Such a stance against the innate productivism (conscious or otherwise) of much thinking on the Left is certainly welcome. The challenge, it seems, would be for this poetry of the future to avoid lapsing back into forms of romanticism. Bernes's concluding suggestion that sites of reproduction and circulation become the new zones of engagement for art offers some reasons for hope.

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Catherine Clay, *Time and Tide: The Feminist and Cultural Politics of a Modern Magazine*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018. xiii + 306 pp. £80.00 hb. ISBN 978-1-474418-18-8

Early in the introduction to her impressive second book, Catherine Clay invokes Raymond Williams's 1987 lecture 'What Was Modernism'. Welding the political and aesthetic range of *Time and Tide* to Williams's sense that we must 'search out and counterpose an alternative tradition taken from the neglected works left in the wide margin of the [twentieth] century' (35), Clay makes a compelling case for reading *Time and Tide* as a 'modern feminist magazine' that re-draws our 'critical frameworks for mapping British literary culture in the interwar period' (7).

This is a nuanced, detailed study of the influential weekly review *Time and Tide* (1920–79), founded by wealthy Welsh suffragette Lady Margaret Rhondda (1883–1958) at the end of World War I. *Time and Tide* is renowned as a sixpenny weekly founded by women – the 'only female-controlled periodical of its kind' (2), as Clay points out – making it a landmark in interwar media, feminist and cultural histories. Clay's fascinating book charts the history of the review in its feminist heyday, between 1920 and 1939, when it was run by an all-female board of directors and was closely associated with the Six Point Group and an equal-rights feminist agenda (the board included at different points Rhondda, Elizabeth Robins, Helen Archdale, Winifred Cullis, Cicely Hamilton, Rebecca West, Winifred Holtby and Theodora Bosanquet). By the 1950s, Clay tells us in the Coda, female directors were outnumbered by men and the journal suffered a 'slow death', far removed from its 'feminist and liberal-left origins' (275).

Clay draws on network theory and the current emphasis in periodical studies on communities and the 'multivocality of periodical texts' (43), to extend some of the insights from her first influential book, *British Women Writers 1914–1945: Professional Work and Friendship* (Ashgate, 2006). *Time and Tide* in Clay's hands is 'one of the richest archives for exploring British feminism and women's writing between the wars' (11), and in a series of detailed case studies, she analyses the review's editorials and literary contributions in relation to key feminist interwar debates. There is a range of deeply researched chapters here on *Time and Tide* and feminist media history; on the different systems of literary value the periodical championed (its engagement with the well-trod 'Battle of the Brows'); on women's work and professionalism; on theatre and film; on women's complex responses to war, fascism and pacifism in the turbulence of the 1930s; and on a series of literary parodies of domestic fascism that drew on a New Woman comic tradition. Clay's naming of the periodical as archive is a useful way of thinking about her methodology here. The book is a complex archival project in itself – claiming many years of transatlantic research in

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special collections, personal and organisational papers – that shows the value of reading deeply across one periodical text in relation to wider contemporary print culture.

The different voices at play in *Time and Tide* are keenly felt. In line with other recent work on modern periodicals by scholars including Jason Harding, Faith Binckes, Ann Ardis and Lucy Delap (all referenced), Clay stresses the performativity that animated (and sold) the journal's pages: debates between editors and contributors, between contributors and readers, between *Time and Tide* and competitor titles (Rhondda 'faced-off' a proposal from J.C. Squire to amalgamate *Time and Tide* with the suffrage journal the *Woman's Leader*, edited by Ray Strachey, in 1921, we are told, writing to her veteran suffrage colleague Elizabeth Robins that 'I'm all for carrying on as we are. I believe we can beat Mrs Strachey every time' (21)). The competitive independence and vision of *Time and Tide* stood it well – circulation figures are uncertain, Clay points out, estimated between twelve and fifteen thousand in the 1920s – as did the deliberate policy to target women representing a wide range of political and personal interests with a programme of equalitarian feminism that asserted 'women's claim to participation in the public sphere on the basis of common humanity rather than sexual difference' (267–8).

Clay orders her material well, explaining the aesthetic and political debates the book explores in helpful clarity for the reader. At times there is too much secondary criticism crafted into the book's own sentences, but there is complex engagement here with many academic sub-fields and the book is constantly surprising in its broad range of reference. Some highlights are the chapter on radical poet Eleanor Farjeon – socialist and pacifist – who crafted a lively, humorous voice of dissent in *Time and Tide's* pages around worker's rights and leisure (what her contemporary Ethel Carnie Holdsworth called workers' 'right to play'). Farjeon's ballads and popular 'The Weekly Crowd' poems stood at odds to the editorial board's feminist approach to (middle-class) professional work as the thinking woman's duty and a series of articles published in 1926 by Rhondda (written under a pseudonym) criticising 'Women of the Leisured Classes'. Clay does not shy away from the complexities of audience and address here – that Farjeon's radical verse could be appropriated and marketed by Rhondda's editorial board to strengthen bonds with parts of *Time and Tide's* readership that was feminist and socialist in outlook – and she calls attention to the fact that Rhondda's money came from the pits (in solidarity with the industrial working class, Farjeon did not contribute to *Time and Tide's* strike issue in 1926). There is also interesting close reading in this chapter on *Time and Tide's* typography and masthead.

A key framework for the book is the concern to map *Time and Tide's* feminism in relation to broader intellectual and political shifts and particularly a stubborn

narrative of ‘failure and disappointment’ (4) that both *Time and Tide* and the broader feminist movement interwar have been caught up in. Clay notes honestly her initial disappointment when reading the journal from the mid-1930s as it became less woman-focused and sought out a wider mixed readership with, for instance, more masculine-coded advertisements. The journal’s relationship with its male contributors – which included George Bernard Shaw, St John Ervine, Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis and Edward Thompson – was wholly consistent, Clay argues, with Rhondda’s ‘conviction that collaboration between the sexes was essential for the rebuilding of society’ (141). But Rhondda was conscious of the anti-feminist world in which she operated, and this puts another spin on the journal’s practical equalitarian, rather than separatist, feminism. In a more pessimistic vein, Clay draws upon a private letter Rhondda wrote to Virginia Woolf in June 1938 where she confessed to editing the paper every week ‘taking out women’s names & references to matters especially concerning women because if I left them in it would soon kill the paper’ (242). Clay maps the debates here around women’s publishing back to the suffrage movement – from which *Time and Tide* clearly emerged but from which it consciously sought to differentiate itself – and it is not difficult to take these forward to continuing debates around the commercial and economic independence (or otherwise) of feminist publishing houses in the Women’s Liberation Movement. Rhondda’s wealth enabled her to chart her own course to some extent, but she was not part of the ‘inside gossip’ on public affairs that mattered to the general public and advertisers. She wrote in recognition to Woolf after reading the latter’s *Three Guineas*, ‘[n]o woman who tried to run a Weekly Review could remain unaware of how much she was an Outsider’ (242).

Clay’s own work has done much to redress the balance in modern periodical studies away from a critical obsession with modernist ‘little magazines’ and towards the ‘neglected works left in the wide margin of the [twentieth] century’, to go back to Williams. This book complements her recent co-edited volume (with Maria DiCenzo, Barbara Green and Fiona Hackney), *Women’s Periodicals and Print Culture in Britain, 1918–1939*, also published by EUP in 2018 – part of a multi-volume series devoted to women’s periodical culture. There is a much wider print landscape under discussion here, with short chapters on, for instance, British *Vogue*, *Good Housekeeping*, *The Picturegoer*, *Y Gymraes* and the Women’s Co-operative magazine, *Woman’s Outlook*. Both works are salutary in the attention they devote to women’s print culture and the much wider publishing landscape in the early twentieth century that we still have so much to learn about.

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Notes on Contributors

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Raymond Williams Foundation (RWF)

The RWF continues to develop and expand its important work focused on adult education, and to collaborate with the Raymond Williams Society (RWS) on key projects. The RWS is particularly thankful for its sponsorship of a reading group session on Williams's *Key Words* at the first, highly successful Raymond Williams Annual Conference on 'Cultural Production and the Redundancy of Work: Precarity, Automation, Critique', held at the Friends Meeting House, Manchester on 26–27 April 2019.

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For internet articles:

Raymond Williams Society Executive, 'About the Raymond Williams Society', Raymond Williams Society, <http://www.raymondwilliams.co.uk/> (accessed 26 March 2012).

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John Mullan, 'Rebel in a Tweed Suit', *The Observer*, 28 May 2005, Features and Reviews section, 37.

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