

Editorial

The Political Semiosis of Populism

By Samir Gandesha

It has become almost a cliché that globalization embodies a logic in which borders of every kind are radically called into question. As was said with rare perspicuity by the current US President, after the attacks of September 11th, 2001, foreign policy has become domestic policy. In other words, by virtue of recent events, the border between the domestic and the foreign—perhaps the central binary opposition in the study of politics—has been *deconstructed*. The consequence of such a deconstruction was vividly brought home by Thomas Friedman, author of *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* (2000), who argued recently that the Bush administration ought to set aside its preoccupation with Iraq for the moment and direct more of its attention to “stop the slide of over there into over here.”

Nowhere has the border between the “foreign” and the “domestic” been posed more dramatically and directly than in the recent successes of political parties and social movements of the radical right that have been sweeping through Europe in the past twenty-four months. Indeed, it seemed last spring from my vantage point in Berlin, as if these forces, some with direct links to fascist and neo-fascist movements (which I shall call “right-populist”), were posed to fundamentally alter the ideological map of Europe.

To mention only the most notable cases: In France, Jean-Marie Le Pen not only survived challenges to his authority by his erstwhile lieutenant, Bruno Megret, who subsequently left to form the Mouvement National Republicain, but managed to win an unprecedented 17% of the first poll in the Presidential Election dealing a humiliating defeat to Socialist Prime Minister Lionel Jospin. While for the French political establishment and media, Le Pen’s victory was a crisis for the Fifth Republic, it only served to

highlight the shift of gravity already effected by Jörg Haider’s FPÖ in Austria which in 1996 won 22% in a general election and three years later 27%. In Italy, after last year’s election, media mogul Silvio Berlusconi included in his Forza Italia-led government, Gianfranco Fini and Umberto Bossi, leaders of the neo-fascist National Alliance and the xenophobic, anti-southern, anti-immigrant Lega Nord respectively. In Denmark, the Danish People’s Party now plays a pivotal role in the coalition government as does a similarly rightist party in the coalition government in Norway. After the assassination of Pim Fortuyn, his Lisjt Fortuyn Party took nearly one fifth of the seats in May’s Dutch election.

Since that time, however, there have been numerous countervailing tendencies that show that the triumph of the far-right is far from being a *fait accompli*. In Sweden, the Social Democrats have managed to hang on to power and in Britain the local elections led only to a very moderate showing for a revamped, sanitized BNP which managed to win three seats in racially-polarized Burnley. More recently, the FPÖ has entered a crisis, not unlike that of the Canadian Reform/Alliance party last summer, over the question of tax-cuts in the context of an unforeseen need to increase spending due to the floods, which, in turn, has brought about a fatal crisis in the coalition government. New elections have been called for November which do not augur well for the future of the party. In October, the LPF became so divided that the Christian Democratic Prime Minister, Jan Peter Balkenende, saw no alternative other than to dissolve the government less than one hundred days after the elections. Most remarkably, however, in the recent general election in Germany, voters resoundingly rejected the

FDP which sought to fuse an exclusionary and anti-semitic discourse with a neo-liberal agenda of dismantling the German “Sozialstaat.” Combined with the success of the Greens led by Joschka Fischer, it is possible to understand the German election as a tentative step in the direction of a more liberal conception of German identity.

Despite these recent set-backs, right-populism will, I think, continue to play a pivotal role, if in many cases from the periphery, in the future of European politics. It must therefore be treated with the utmost seriousness in considering the future of a united Europe, indeed, a European Union that, by 2004, will expand to 25 member states. Looming in the background, of course, is the possible membership of a Turkey in which the Islamist Justice and Development Party will more than likely play a commanding role.

The aim of this paper is to begin constructing a theoretical model within which it might be possible to engage in an analysis not only of the structure of right-populist discourse but, also, of its appeal. Accordingly, the first section of this paper defends the concept of populism yet suggests that, unlike most other analyses, this phenomenon must be viewed in a global frame. In the second section, I clarify the concept of globalization, which I understand as the accelerated inter-penetration of the local and the global that always already underlies modern experience. In the third section of the paper, I suggest that globalization radically intensifies the problem of “ontological security” or the basic individual and social parameters of identity. Next, I suggest that capitalizing on the accumulation and intensification of the anxiety resulting from the resulting ontological *insecurity*, right-populism, with all of its internal differences, can be understood as pursuing the same strategy: the translation of pervasive yet diffuse anxiety deepened by the effects of globalization into a determinate fear of a particular object around which various economic, political, cultural, corporeal anxieties can be said to coalesce. This object is the figure of the “stranger.” In the concluding section, I reflect on the challenge of right-populist discourse for liberal-democratic regimes.

1. Populism

While the use of the term “populism” is fairly widespread in the media (see *Die Zeit* Spring-Summer 2002 and the *New York Times* of the same period) it is necessary to provide a conceptual definition of what is one of the most used and abused concepts of politics. Populism was adopted as the name of a political party in post-Reconstruction era United States that purported to defend the interests of the farmers against those of the large combines, in particular the interests of the railways (Dubiel 2002). The term also refers to the political orientations of the Russian peasants or *narodniki* in the period

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just prior to the Russian Revolution (Kitching 1989). Populism as an ideology was the means by which the masses were incorporated into politics in a subordinate and dependent manner in the Latin American southern cone or the semi-periphery (Cf. Mouzelis 1985). The term has also been used to characterize the ideology of the Social Credit Party in British Columbia in the 1930s. More recently, the term “authoritarian populism” has been used by Stuart Hall, drawing upon the work of Ernesto Laclau, to analyze the phenomenon of Thatcherism as a way of simultaneously re-inventing or re-imagining the British nation within the wider project of transforming the British state (Laclau 1977, Hall 1988, Harrison 1995, Patten, 1999).

It is the latter approach that I believe to be particularly important and useful. The central reason for this is its formal nature. Rather than understanding populism as a specific, substantive doctrine, Hall understands it in terms of a specific ideological and political (as opposed to economic) opposition between the “people” and the “power bloc.” This opposition, moreover, cannot be understood as simply reducible to any given economic contradiction, for example, between labour and capital. The formal nature of this opposition enables us to assess the relative democratic or authoritarian nature of populism. In other words, this approach, while giving a specific account of populism as a discourse can also, at the same time, account for the very amorphousness of the concept. At the same time, its explanatory power is limited in as much as, like the Gramscian theory of hegemony upon which it based, it is confined to the specific contours of nation-popular discourses that are, more or less, articulated within the framework of a single social formation. But, as we have seen, the affinities shared by the various movements and parties actually transcend the nation-state and, in many ways, are responses to the crisis of the state (Betz and Immerfall 1998).

Moreover, despite its dependence upon a certain form of psychoanalysis—Lacanian psychoanalysis to be precise—for an understanding of how discrete, seemingly contradictory ideological elements are articulated into a coherent, potentially hegemonic constellation, this approach fails to examine the subjective pre-conditions of the success or failure of the appeal to collective identities. It can show how identities are invented within hegemonic struggles, yet cannot account for why certain identities exert greater power over the subjects to which it appeals than others. In other words, there is not enough attention paid to the inner, psychological aspects of identity. Identity is, for the most part, understood along the lines laid down by Althusser according to which subjectivity is a function of interpellation or the manner in which subjects are “hailed” by social institutions (Althusser 1971). In this account, then, populist discourses like all ideological discourse provide opportunities for individuals to recognize themselves in various kinds of ways. What this approach misses, however, is the *affective* dimension of identification.

It could be argued that the tremendous challenge of populist discourses is that, at both individual and collective levels, they represent the attempt to address in a decisive manner the pervasive crisis of identity lying at the heart of the modern experience—a crisis that has only been exacerbated by the dynamics arising out of the deepening interpenetration of the global and the local which I will simply refer to by the

unsatisfactory term “globalization.” It should also be said, however, that the specific nature of this crisis will be determined by the historical and social context in which it presents itself. As Betz and Immerfall have recently argued, “the success of the radical right is above all a reflection of the psychological strain associated with the uncertainties produced by large-scale economic and socio-structural change” (1998: 249). Yet, the authors provide neither a convincing account of the nature of these uncertainties nor of their relation to such “psychological strain.” As a way of beginning to think about how we might address the question of “psychological strain,” I shall suggest that right-populism emerges as a specific response to the undermining of ontological security within the context of globalization.

2. Globalization

If the concept of “populism” has been highly contested, then the same holds for the concept of “globalization.” It is not my intention here to add yet another voice to an already cacophonous discussion surrounding this unusually fraught concept. Nonetheless, in very general terms we can understand globalization as involving important transformations at economic, cultural and political levels:

§ Economic Level: The creation of a global economy that operates as a single entity on real or chosen time on a planetary scale (Castells 2000: 101). It is characterized by the specific contradiction between the “space of flows” and the “space of places” (Castells 2000: 409).

§ Cultural Level: The homogenization of culture, predominantly through US cultural industries, leads to a countervailing eruption of particularistic, exclusionary forms of culture (Barber 1996).

§ Political level: The undermining of the sovereignty of the nation-state from above and from below. Consequently, this has brought to the fore a representational crisis of liberal democratic institutions (Loch and Heitmeyer 2001).

Globalization can be said to involve a process of simultaneous *integration* and *fragmentation*. Yet, we need to be clear that globalization does not represent an entirely novel phenomenon but, rather, intensifies crucial tensions that were always already present within modernity itself.

There are those who view the deterritorializing logic of globalization to present unique opportunities for new forms of solidarity and the creation of new emancipatory identities. For example, in *Empire*, a book that has been called the “*The Communist Manifesto* for our time” (even though it is several times as long) Hardt and Negri argue that “far from being defeated, the revolutions of the twentieth century have each pushed forward and transformed the terms of class conflict, posing the conditions of a new political subjectivity, an insurgent multitude against imperial power” (2000: 394). It is difficult not to view the processes of globalization as presenting very real problems for a new politics. While the global economy is becoming ever more closely integrated, political institutions and identities have become subjected to a progressive fragmentation. The rise of identity politics on

the left is the most striking example of this process.

Already in the *Communist Manifesto* Marx had identified processes that were pointing beyond extant national economies, processes that were integrating territories via new communications and transportation technologies and creating new forms of solidarity that were now beginning to pose a spectral threat to the capitalist state:

Modern industry has established the world-market, for which the discovery of America has paved the way. The market has given an immense development to commerce, to navigation, to communication by land. This development has, in its turn, reacted on the extension of industry; and in the same proportion the bourgeoisie developed, increased its capital and pushed into the background every class handed down from the Middle Ages (Marx and Engels 1978: 337).

The logic of capitalism involved a constant revolutionizing of the means of production which, itself, played a profound role in what Weber was later to call the disenchantment (*Entzauberung*) of the world, stripping the feudal ties that bound individuals together organically by the “callous cash payment,” and “drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervor, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism, in the icy waters of egotistical calculation (337).” What was crucial about the constant revolutionizing of the means of production was that it had transformed being itself: “All fixed, fast-frozen relationships, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses, his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind (338).”

Yet Marx could celebrate this process in a fairly unabashed manner because he tended to view the destructive moment of modern experience as, ultimately, part and parcel of a profoundly creative dialectic. Marx believed that the process by which men and women were forced to face the “real conditions of life” would have the enlightening effect of enabling the proletariat to see more or less transparently its universal, human interest in the transcendence of the very social relations that created it. The reconciliation of creation with destruction would happen through the unfolding of history and communism would be the result. All that had melted would, so to speak, become solid once more. History was an *inherently* redemptive story.

Globalization accelerates the processes identified by Marx, without the reconciliation that would ultimately be achieved by the creation of a modern Prometheus no longer bound by national, religious or ethnic identities. Indeed, the process of the fragmentation on the left is not, strictly speaking, a recent phenomenon. If the *Manifesto* was written as the founding text of the International Working Men’s Association, some seventy years later, its successor organization, the Second Socialist International, would collapse as a result of the re-emergence of the very forms of particularism, namely nationalism, that Marx had thought were a thing of the past. What was significant

here is that—in the absence of a proletariat that constituted a solid majority of the population—social democracy now had to reframe its political discourse and appeal not to the “working class” as such but, rather, to the “people.” The nationalism that was the undoing of the Second Socialist International with the outbreak of hostilities in 1914 became increasingly institutionalized thereafter. That is to say, after the demise of the Second Socialist International and after the long period of war stretching from 1914-1945, the non-Communist left accepted the nation-state as the fundamental unit of politics. Social democracy, in other words, was forced by purely sociological and pragmatic reasons to return to a language based on the centrality of national-popular as opposed to international proletarian solidarity (Pzeworski 1986, Esping-Andersen 1985, Laclau and Mouffe 1985).

As Horkheimer and Adorno, writing during the dark years of the Second World War, recognized, history was not to be understood as the simply passage from nature to history; from barbarism to civilization, a condition of “bellum omnes contra omnium” to a condition of peace, but, rather, the two conditions inter-penetrated one another. History was *inextricable* from nature, enlightenment inextricable from mythology (Horkheimer and Adorno 1972). Indeed, Horkheimer and Adorno understood “enlightenment as mythological fear turned radical” (1972). Under conditions of a disenchanted and rationalized world, the primordial fear experienced by individuals—that of an over-powering nature—becomes the fear *produced* in and by a society that had congealed into a kind of “second nature”—contingent human practices that, because they appear to lie beyond the reach of human intervention, seem *as if* they were part of first nature. If mythology and enlightenment were bound up with one another, if there were no straightforward transition from nature to history then lying just below the surface of civilization was the threat of a profound and pervasive insecurity. This is because nature can never be fully historicized and dominated, there will always remain residues of what has remained immune from instrumental reason. These residues, according to Horkheimer and Adorno, in the important “Elements of Anti-Semitism” Chapter of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, are the objects of both utopian longing and disgust. Indeed, this provides us with our first clue as to how populist discourse can be said to operate. It constructs historical processes—ie. migration—in terms of natural processes, indeed, as natural catastrophes.

3. Security

While recognizing the inherently dynamic and unstable nature of modern experience, Marx did not view this as a problem inasmuch as he saw emergent forms of solidarity, arising from within the production process itself, which would supplant fast-antiquated traditional norms. Such emergent forms of solidarity were, moreover, underwritten by a philosophy of history still deeply indebted to Hegelian theodicy. At the most immediate level, it is possible to argue that social democratic politics put into practice precisely this progressive version of history even if it did replace Luxemburg’s “revolution” with Bernstein’s “reform.” It did so in the form of the post-war

welfare state grounded in the projection of a future based on a steady, perpetual increase in the standard of living. After the crisis of the early 1970s, such a social democratic vision becomes increasingly untenable. Is it any surprise, then, that the post-modernist skepticism towards meta-narratives takes hold in the wake of the shattering of the post-war consensus? For, at the collective level, an adherence to a progressive philosophy of history—either in liberal or Marxist form—served to provide narratives of collective and individual identity with an internal coherence. The process that Marx analyzed with such penetration, the process by which all that is solid melts into air, destabilizes and ultimately undermines the frameworks of everyday life that, as Anthony Giddens (1991) points out, serves as the basis for “ontological security.” Giddens’ account of ontological security is especially important for our purposes because it is premised on a dual relation between the globalizing processes, on the one hand, and personal identity on the other.

What does Giddens mean by the concept of “ontological security”? Ontological security consists of the coherence, continuity and dependability of the relation between the self and world or “being-in-the-world.” Such stability is grounded in the taken-for-granted patterns constitutive of every day life or what he calls the “natural attitude” (1991:36). The natural attitude establishes stability in our relations with others, the shared object world and, consequently, our self-identity, which is anchored in the foregoing subject-object and subject-subject relations. Giddens contends that while these patterns have a cognitive dimension, their real significance lies in the fact that, inasmuch as they progressively supplant relations between the nascent self and significant others, such patterns become deeply invested with *emotional* commitments. Indeed, socialization marks the transition from the relations of mutuality between infant and caregiver(s) constituted out of patterns that regularize the play of their presence and absence and establish temporal continuity and spatial stability. The natural attitude “brackets out” or holds in abeyance, the fundamental questions about ourselves, others and the object world that must simply be presupposed in order to “go on” (in the Wittgensteinian sense) in our everyday activities. To put it in Kuhnian terms, while the natural attitude is analogous to “normal science,” the posing of fundamental questions runs parallel to “revolutionary science.” Just as revolutionary science cannot sustain on-going research projects, it is, similarly, not possible to function in everyday life when one is constantly driven to pose radical questions concerning the ontological status or the nature of the objective, inter-subjective and subjective worlds. As Giddens puts it: “To be ontologically secure is to possess at the level of the unconscious and practical consciousness, ‘answers’ to fundamental questions which all human life in some way addresses” (1991: 47). While the *natural attitude* plays a crucial role, it is at the same time extremely fragile. Such fragility derives from the fact that, unlike *nature*, it does not possess solidity and objectivity, but, rather, is produced and reproduced through inter-action with others within a shared inter-subjective world. Anxiety can erupt with the slightest rent or tear in the tissue of this world, and, when this occurs, the fundamental questions pertaining to the world can no longer be bracketed by the natural attitude (Heidegger 1962:16). These questions concern:

- (i) the nature of existence
- (ii) death and finitude
- (iii) relations to others
- (iv) self-identity

As is implicit in the foregoing, a central tension inherent in modernity is, to quote Giddens, that between “globalizing influences on the one hand and personal dispositions on the other” (1991:1). In other words, a key dimension of modernity is to be understood as a set of new mechanisms of self-identity that both *shapes* and is *shaped by* modern institutions (1991:2). The self is a reflexive phenomenon, that is to say, modern individuals not only *have* a self but also are *aware* of having a self.

But what is it, precisely, to have a self? It is to be able to organize the discreet moments of our experience into a more or less coherent biography or story that unifies past, present and future. It is to be able to answer the fundamental questions of “Where have I come from?” and “Where am I going?” The modern self is characterized fundamentally by both an increase in freedom in the sense that it understands selfhood, itself, to be a project, as something that is reflexively constructed and, the self is constituted by an essential anxiety that arises out of its lack of solidity. Ontological security becomes a specific problem under conditions of modernity. Giddens argues that modernity must be understood in terms of a specific ensemble of institutions that (1) are dynamic and reflexive (i.e. they are able to react to changes in their immediate environments); (2) they under-cut traditions, customs and habits and (3) they have a global impact, that is, do not remain tied to a specific time-space nexus. As we have already suggested, globalization with its effects at the economic, cultural and political levels, reinforces all three aspects of modernity: it makes institutions yet more dynamic, further relativizes traditions, customs and habits and further severs them from a specific nexus of space and time.

All three institutional aspects of late modernity, according to Giddens, make it into what he calls a “risk culture.” By this he doesn’t mean that modernity is necessarily more dangerous than previous epochs. The idea of risk culture is that the concept of risk is inherent in the manner in which the social world is organized. Thus, the future is not simply as an open horizon on which progress “happens” in a unidirectional way, but rather, as a horizon of potential, precisely calculable risks. Here, again, we see an intertwining of freedom and anxiety. Thus, according to Giddens, “the risk climate of modernity is thus unsettling for everyone; no one escapes (1991:124).”

There is much to take exception with in Giddens’ account of “ontological security.” First, like the tradition of classical sociological theory that he has done so much to introduce to the English-speaking world, Giddens assumes a binary framework consisting of the familiar oppositions between the “traditional” and the “modern,” *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, mechanical and organic solidarity and so on. Yet as Horkheimer and Adorno have shown, there exist aspects of the modern self in Greek mythology, just as the modern, Enlightenment individual exhibits certain mythological traits. That is, when confronted with external threats, the (masculine) individual either hardens himself up against them or loses himself completely. Far from being exclusively characterized by

autonomy, in the Kantian sense, modernity contains within it darker possibility. This is the possibility of “authoritarian personality” structures, characterized by utter submissiveness towards authority, on the one hand, and aggression or dominance towards members of minority groups, on the other (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, et al 1969).

Second, as a corollary of the previous point, Giddens holds that, while obviously operating within certain constraints, the “late-modern” individual is able to create the kind of self that she wants. While Giddens recognizes religious fundamentalism as a response to the unease generated by the condition of late modernity, he rationalistically suggests that such fundamentalism is, ultimately, untenable inasmuch as its adherents would be forced to recognize such a world-view as merely one choice amongst others. What this account leaves out is the possibility of a return of atavistic forms of identity that don’t simply view tradition as one choice amongst others, but seek to negate the very reflexivity that constitutes the modern self. Such fundamentalism, in other words, seeks to do away with choice altogether.

Third, as alluded to above, the self isn’t simply a reflexive project—that is self-conscious and constantly revising its projects—but non-identical with itself. What I mean by this is simply that there are aspects of the self that resist reflexivity; such aspects of the self can never be eliminated no matter how strong what Jessica Benjamin calls the “bonds of love” established between the infant and her primary care-giver. On the contrary, as Julia Kristeva has argued, the primary care-giver (the maternal function) not only represents a source of comfort, of nourishment and protection, but also a source of anxiety that originates in the threat of being overwhelmed and the borders of the self called into question. In a patriarchal society, the “maternal function” is “abjected” that is, viewed as the negation of the self and therefore terror and disgust. (Kristeva 1982) Kristeva argues, moreover, that this excessive aspect of the psyche—the unconscious—isn’t just repressed, as in the classical Freudian account, but *projected* onto the other (see also Horkheimer and Adorno 1972: 168-208). The strangeness of the stranger is, in this sense, this overwhelming anxiety that has to do with what the self experiences as a threat to the integrity of its very boundaries. To put it another way, it is the denial of the otherness of the self (in the form of the unconscious) that transforms the other into something strange, dangerous and *potentially* fearsome.

Despite these criticisms (binary framework and the over-emphasis on reflexivity and rationality), I would suggest, nonetheless, that Giddens’ concept of “ontological security” could indeed serve as the basis of an analysis of the emergence of right-populist politics. The reason for this is that Giddens ties the question of ontological security closely with the very dynamism of modernity. Thus, as we have seen, “ontological security” forms the basis by which potential threats to the self—at its incipient as well as mature stage—are warded off and kept at bay. Now, if such security is increasingly undermined by the *acceleration* of the processes inherent in modernity, itself—dynamism, the under-cutting of routinized forms of action and constant tendency towards dis-embedding—then we can expect a corresponding rise of anxiety (see Putnam 2000). As Giddens puts it,

“Deferment in time and remoteness in space...reduce the disquiet that awareness of risk as risk might otherwise produce” (1991:130). If this is true, the exact obverse must also hold: the *acceleration* of time and *compression* of space can be said to increase such disquiet.

The very dynamism of modernity is embodied in the sociological type of the “stranger.” Georg Simmel suggests that the stranger is not simply the absolute other; he does not come from another planet. Rather, he is the individual with whom we interact, with whom we enter into specific kinds of relations. What characterizes the stranger is a kind of distanced nearness. As Simmel puts it:

The stranger is close to us insofar as we feel between him and ourselves similarities of nationality or social position, of occupation or of general human nature. He is far from us insofar as these similarities extend beyond him and us and connect us only because they connect a great many people (Simmel 1971:143).

The stranger is strange precisely because of his *familiarity*; he participates in social interactions as a member of a given society, yet at the same time represents a normative order beyond the local contexts he inhabits. In crossing geographical borders—in moving from what Friedman refers to as the “over there” to the “over here”—the stranger takes up a more distanced, objective view of normative codes and the social identities they solidify. To put it in Giddens’ terms, the stranger represents the crisis of the “natural attitude”; the very presence of the stranger serves to unsettle the taken-for-granted patterns of the every-day. Thus, the stranger represents a potential challenge to the ontological security of the self. As suggested above, anxiety and freedom need to be viewed as two sides of the same coin: anxiety arises because modern practices are radically contingent and open-ended. Otherness is the condition for the possibility of the very dynamism and freedom of the modern self (Kymlicka 1996, Parekh 2000). The image of the stranger is thus necessarily doubled: he is simultaneously an opportunity *and* a threat. While post-modern feminism and post-colonial theory and multi-cultural conceptions of citizenship view the relation to the other as an *opportunity* for the creation of new emancipatory, hybrid forms of subjectivity, right-populism views the stranger as a *threat*.

At this point, it is possible to quickly identify any number of ways in which ontological security has been further undermined by the processes of globalization by which the local is increasingly penetrated by the global—what happens “over here” has its roots in the “over there.” At the *economic level* the re-making of the global economy in the image of the Anglo-American model, de-regulates economic life and heightens competition between firms and employees creating a pervasive climate of uncertainty. At the *geo-political level* the end of the Cold War has created an increasingly unstable, multi-polar order one which, far from eliminating has only exacerbated the nuclear threat. Such threat puts in question not simply the existence of the individual but of planetary life as a whole. At the level of *urbanization*, cities play increasingly important roles as nodes in the organization of the network society, yet given the decoupling of the “space of flows” from the

“space of places” they become marked by widening socio-economic inequalities (Davis 1990). The increasingly global reach of the products of the US cultural industries, aided by the emergence of new technologies, generates a perceived threat to integrity of cultural difference and the normative orders that they represent. Fundamentally, *migration* or flows of populations across is both a cause and a consequence of all of the above. Inasmuch as it leads to a further shrinkage in the distance between spaces, globalization heightens anxieties concerning *bodily integrity*, more specifically, anxieties stemming from the transmissibility of infectious diseases. At any number of levels, then, the logic of globalization dramatically underscores the increasingly fragile nature of ontological security and, thus, individual and collective identity.

4. Sovereignty

So far, I have suggested that globalization deepens the experience of anxiety that is a key dimension of the various geo-political, economic, political, cultural, physical effects of globalization. I have also suggested that the figure of the stranger, as defined by Simmel as that individual who is *simultaneously* close at hand yet distant, becomes the concrete manifestation of globalization anxieties. That is to say, if “globalization,” as contested and unsatisfactory the concept is, signifies the interpenetration of the global and the local in an infinite set of combinations, then the figure of the stranger can be said to embody this logic in an extremely immediate way. At all the levels that I have identified above the stranger is *potentially* implicated. The stranger is a potential source of *economic* anxiety as he represents cheaper labor-power; he is the potential source of *geo-political* anxiety, i.e. terror; the stranger can be found concentrated in *urban* environments; the stranger is a source of *cultural* anxieties inasmuch as he is the source of norms incompatible with, even antithetical to, that of host community; at the level of security of the body, the stranger represents the threat of transmissible disease. It is no surprise that a central axis along which globalization anxieties are organized, as alluded to above, is that of migration. Migration is, indeed, constitutive of the stranger’s identity. As Simmel suggests, the stranger is “the man who comes today and stays tomorrow—the potential wanderer, so to speak, who although he has gone no further, has not quite got over the freedom of coming and going” (1971:143). What is especially noteworthy about this experience “of coming and going” is that it historicizes, renders contingent and ultimately disrupts the “natural attitude” (the taken for granted patterns of the everyday) and in the process represents an identity crisis at both individual and collective level. By virtue of his very difference, the stranger permits those fundamental questions—concerning existence or the nature of the good life—that are normally bracketed or held in abeyance, to be posed anew. The self’s feeling of being unable to organize its experience into a coherent narrative unifying past, present and future, correlates, according to Giddens, with the feeling of being overwhelmed.

This is not, in and of itself, enough to suggest the connection between anxiety and the politics of right-populism. The reason for this is that anxiety remains, by definition, objectless and politics requires specific objects. While certain processes, as I have just described them, can give rise to anxiety, it is constitutive of such anxiety that they are without determinate objects. Right-

wing populism, as a political discourse, doesn't passively express shifting constellations of globalization anxieties that surround the figure of the stranger, but, rather, these movements and parties must transform a diffuse often incoherent, unconscious *anxiety* into an articulated, determinate *fear* of a particular object.

In a path-breaking lecture entitled "Angst und Politik" (1986:261-91), Franz Neumann distinguishes between "real anxiety" of a concrete danger and "neurotic anxiety" that results from a "persecution complex." He argues that the transformation of the former into the latter is produced by way of identification with a strong leader or what he calls "Caeserism." While Neumann's strong reliance on the concept of neurosis as well as the fact that his central frame of reference was Nazism constitute certain limitations in his analysis, it is nonetheless possible to use his framework to identify a crucial mechanism of right-populist discourse. This is the mechanism that transforms a real, if at the same time diffuse, anxiety into fear of the stranger. In the process, identification takes place with an emphasis not so much on the leader as with the people as a whole. By transforming diffuse and multiple forms of often scarcely articulable anxiety into the fear of the stranger, right-populist discourse accomplishes two things simultaneously: first, it transforms the social stranger from a debating partner or an economic competitor into the political "enemy"; secondly, it is able simultaneously to define the identity of the "people."

The enemy, as Carl Schmitt wrote in his influential book *The Concept of the Political*, is he who represents a danger to a collectivity's "whole way of life" (1996:27). Significantly, Schmitt argues that the political as based on the fundamental, existential opposition between "friend and enemy" can be seen as running parallel to, but irreducible to the aesthetic opposition between "the beautiful and the ugly," the moral opposition between "good and the evil," and the religious opposition of "the sacred and the profane." While irreducible to these distinctions, Schmitt suggests when some or all of these oppositions line up in a particular way, they can reinforce the basic political distinction between friend and enemy.

I would suggest that the particular force of right-populist discourse lies in the manner in which these oppositions between the beautiful and the ugly, the good and the bad, the sacred and the profane and, of course, friend and foe are made to line up in a specific way. The mechanism through which the social stranger becomes transformed into the political enemy is what Kristeva calls "ab-jection." In psychoanalytic terms, ab-jection is the violent expulsion—as in vomiting—of that which within the body pushes against the border between "inner" and "outer." The abject, in other words, is the death that inhabits life in the form of the body's fluids and waste products. As Kristeva explains:

These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. My body extricates itself, as being alive, from that border. My wastes drop so that I might live, until, from loss to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls beyond the limit—*cadere*, cadaver. If dung signifies the other side of

the border, the place where I am not and which permits me to be, the corpse, the most sickening of wastes is a border that has encroached upon everything (1982:3).

Ab-jection, then, is the re-establishment of borders that have somehow been threatened by the appearance of that which should have remained hidden away but now has come out into the open. Such a re-establishment of borders comes about by way of an act of repulsion and exclusion. I would suggest that contemporary right-populism can be understood in terms of an ab-jection, an expulsion, of the stranger precisely because of the stranger's inherent ambiguity. Thus, "it is not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (1982: 4).

To summarize the argument so far, I have suggested that the economic, cultural and political processes that characterize the phenomenon of globalization should be thought of as deepening and intensifying processes that are inherent in modernity itself, namely, the dialectic through which fixed identities are unable, ultimately, to sustain themselves. The process by which "all that is solid melts into air" produces ontological insecurity or an environment of pervasive anxiety. The strategy of right-populism, despite its considerable internal differences, turns on translating such amorphous anxiety into a determinate fear of a particular object by way of a process of ab-jection. This object, I am suggesting, is the figure who is strange in his familiarity: the stranger. Obviously these reflections have been articulated at a high level of abstraction. In order for this set of theses to be fully defended they would need to be redeemed, as hypotheses, in detailed empirical terms that would engage with the subtle differences between various forms of populist discourse in their social and historical specificity.

Nonetheless, I shall try to make my thesis a little more concrete by referring to a book that caused something of a scandal in Europe. I am referring to the book written by an Italian journalist living in New York, Oriana Fallaci, entitled *The Rage and the Pride* (2001). Like recent novels by Michel Houellebecq (1998) and Martin Walser (2002), Fallaci's book in an uncanny way manifests the logic of right-populist discourse precisely in its rhetorical transformation of the *social* stranger into the *political* enemy. The actual argument of the book is of little consequence, consisting as it does of a superficial tirade against Islam as such. The central thesis is that the West is unable to recognize the danger that its civilization faces in the form of a "Reverse Crusade" from the Muslim world.

Of interest, however, is not so much the *what* as the *how*. That is to say, Fallaci's language overflows with figures of abjection: bodily fluids, wastes, ripe and foul odors, swarming vermin. Invoking her barbed interviews with Yasser Arafat from the early 1970's, Fallaci argues that the Palestinian leader, with his "smelly saliva" (2001:63, 93), "keeps his people in shit" (65). Fallaci calls Saudi Arabia "that stinky bank vault" (69). She writes derisively of the "idiots who did not smell the bad smells of a Holy War to come" (85). She claims that "the mosques of Milan and Turin and Rome simply overflow with terrorists"

(89). Muslims in Europe, "nest in the ganglia of our technology. Worse: they live in the heart of a society that hosts them without questioning their difference" (97). And, in a familiar echo of the far right's refrain, Fallaci refers to the propensity of migrant workers to "breed and multiply gloriously" (138). (In Germany, the refrain is "Kinder statt Inder"—German children instead of Indian immigrants.)

Fallaci's language of abjection reaches its crescendo, however, in her description of a demonstration of the Somali community in Italy:

An enormous tent erected by Somali Moslems...to blame the Italian government that for once hesitated to renew their passports and to accept the hordes of their relatives. Mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts, cousins, pregnant wives, and possibly the relatives of their relatives...A tent furnished like a small apartment: tables, chairs, chaise-longues, matelas to sleep and to fuck, ovens to cook and to stink up the square. *Therefore open to every show...* And, along with all this, the yellow streaks of urine that profaned the millenary marbles of the baptistery as well as its golden doors...With the yellow streaks of urine, the stench of the excrements (sic) that blocked the main entrance: the exquisite Romanic church (ninth century) that stands near the square and that the sons of Allah had transformed into a latrine like the churches of 1982 Beirut. (128-29; emphasis added).

Here we come to at least a provisional answer to the question that we posed at the outset, namely: How do we account for the particular *affective* power of right-populist discourse? The answer must lie in the mechanism of abjection. Here the Somalis are depicted as a horde that, literally, threatens to, as Fallaci puts it, "cancel our culture, our art, our science, our identity, our morals, our values, our pleasures" (84). More than that, they are depicted as literally threatening to drown the great monuments of Western civilization—a civilization that pre-dates Islamic civilization—in shit. Thus, Fallaci's language *ab-jects* the stranger; it constitutes the stranger as that which arouses immediate disgust and revulsion in individual bodies and, ultimately, in the body politic as a whole and must, as a consequence, be jettisoned. Abjection is the mechanism by which the stranger becomes the very manifestation of the ugly, the evil, the profane and, as a consequence, *that which must be violently excluded*.

If what I have been arguing is correct, then the question that must be confronted has to do with the implications of right-populist political discourse for liberal-democracy per se. In seeking to translate globalization anxieties into fear of strangers, right-populism doesn't simply represent one intervention in liberal democratic politics amongst others, that is to say, to reduce if not eliminate immigration, force the integration of immigrant communities, withdraw from the European Union, crack down on crime, etc. Rather, right-populism seeks to fundamentally redefine the nature of the relation between contestants in the game of politics. That is to say, the real challenge of right-populism lies in its attempt to re-define the nature of *the political* itself. It is important to resist the temptation—richly indulged in by the French media, for example—to situate right-populism somewhere

beyond the pale of liberal-democracy. In contrast, an insightful analysis of the problem of *fremdenfeindlichkeit* (hatred of the other) in the German case has been set forth by Christoph Menke who argues that, far from posing a challenge to liberal democracy from outside, this phenomenon constitutes liberal-democracy's own "dark zones" (2001). Because liberal-democracy insists upon its own neutrality—that it is possible, indeed necessary, to separate questions of justice or the right from those of the good—it is blind to its own implicit normative claims. And, following Foucault, Menke contends that the "normal" is inextricable from the production of the "abnormal" or what is other.

Yet, one might ask, if the liberal-democracy is an order that, always already, produces and excludes the "other," how is it possible to account for the mobilization not just within but, ultimately, against liberal-democracy by way of a strategy that seeks to turn the social stranger into a political enemy? I would argue, in contrast, that the production of the normal and the abnormal has its basis in the very foundations of democratic legitimacy: namely popular sovereignty. In a manner that has escaped analyses of the phenomenon, populism exploits the slippage in the very term in which the legitimacy of the democratic order is grounded. In contrast to the *ancien regime*, grounded in the idea of divine right, democracy is founded in the will of the *people*. Now, such a popular will can be said to embody a particular claim, that is a political will, to universality (as in the case of the French nation) or, conversely, it can be said to embody a universal claim to particularity as in the case of the Romantic revolts in the wake of Napoleonic domination of Europe. In each case, and against the liberal fiction that natural law governs political power by being translated into the forms of positive law, namely, a constitutional order, each contending claim is political through and through.

What I would suggest, then, is that the appeal to the "people" works at two levels simultaneously: it constructs a relation between "friends" and "enemies" in the service of protecting "our way of life" against those who would seek to destroy it; and, consequently, returns to the roots of liberal-democracy in popular sovereignty, in the will of the people. In other words, the potentially explosive nature of the discourse right-populism lies not simply in its mobilization of the abject, but also in its ability to exploit a crucial equivocation lying at the heart of liberal-democracy as Hannah Arendt (1973) and, more recently, Giorgio Agamben (2000) have noted. This is the equivocation between the people as the oppressed and the people as an organic entity; the part and the whole. "The people" signifies two contradictory things: (1) an integrated body politic as a whole, as in, for example, the US Constitution's language of "We the people"; and, (2) as a part of the body politic, a multiplicity of needful and excluded bodies. While historically there had always been a way of naming the semantic split, for example the Roman distinction between *plebs* and *populus*, with the French Revolution sovereignty comes to be rooted in a single entity. When sovereignty becomes so invested, the poor, the marginalized, the "wretched of the earth," become an "intolerable scandal in every sense" (2000:33). According to Agamben: "Our time

is nothing other than the methodical and implacable attempt to fill the split that divides the people by radically eliminating the people of the excluded" (33).

The real challenge of right-populism lies in the fact that it breaks with a tradition of liberal political theory based on the idea that the legitimacy of the state is simply the formalization of consensual relations that already exist in the communicative contexts of civil society. This tradition finds expression in the work of Jürgen Habermas and John Rawls and goes back to social contract theory of Locke. Against this tradition is a form of conservative political theory that emphasizes conflict and insecurity and, accordingly, grounds the legitimacy of the state, above all, in its ability to establish order and security. Representatives of this tradition, which stretches back to Thomas Hobbes, include Carl Schmitt, Samuel P. Huntington, Henry Kissinger and Hans Morgenthau (Cf. Strong in Schmitt 1996). The crucial difference between these two traditions is that while the latter recognizes the political nature of the state "all the way down," so to speak, the former rests on the fiction that power is in some way subordinate to law.

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SRB Insight

Becoming-Revolutionary

By Paul Patton

At the end of "Class Struggle and Postmodernism," Slavoj Žižek suggests that the problem for today's politico-philosophical scene is to reassert the value of political action that aims "seriously to change the existing order" (ed. Butler 2000: 127). This entails rupture with the reformist consensus shared by otherwise opposed philosophers such as Derrida, Habermas and Rorty, for whom revolutionary ideals are dangerous precursors of totalitarian politics. It implies giving up the idea that revolutionary politics are doomed to failure and reaffirming the ambition of changing "the very fundamental *structural principle* of society" (2000: 93).

Where do the writings of Deleuze and Guattari stand in relation to this liberal consensus? On the one hand, they clearly signal their dissatisfaction with Rorty's "Western democratic, popular conception of philosophy" (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 144) as cultural dinner conversation. They outline a conception of philosophy as the creation of untimely concepts that is the antithesis of Rorty's view that "Western social and political thought may have had the last conceptual revolution it needs" (Rorty 1989: 63). On the other hand, they take their distance from traditional (Leninist?) conceptions of revolutionary politics, advocating not so much the aim of revolution but the pursuit of revolutionary becomings at all levels and in all spheres of individual and social life. But is this a recipe for a reformist politics that does not extend to challenging the order of global capitalism? Or does it imply a politics oriented towards change in the "fundamental structural principle of society"? In other words, the question I want to address is: what is the force of "revolutionary" in the phrase "becoming-revolutionary"?

1. Capitalism

Deleuze and Guattari's analysis of the fundamental structural principles of capitalist society might appear to support the conclusion that they favour a reformist politics. In *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*, they develop their own account of capitalism as a unique form of economic and political capture of the social field. Whereas Marx proposed to explain the nature of society in each epoch in terms of the mode of production, Deleuze and Guattari propose to "define social formations by *machinic processes* and not by modes of production (these on the contrary depend on the processes)" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 435). The machinic process peculiar to capitalism on their account is the capture of social production and reproduction by means of an intrinsic axiomatic regulation of those processed. Previous social machines operate by means of the extrinsic

codification of social processes. Social codes determine the quality of particular flows, for example prestige as opposed to consumption goods, thereby establishing indirect relations between flows of different kinds. They also determine the manner in which, within certain limits, a surplus is drawn from the primary flows: in code-governed societies, surplus value invariably takes the form of code surplus. Finally, because they are extrinsic to the processes of production and circulation of goods, systems of codification imply the existence of forms of collective belief, judgment and evaluation on the part of the agents of these processes.

By contrast, capitalism has no need to mark bodies or to constitute a memory for its agents. Since it works by means of an axiomatic intrinsic to the social processes of production, circulation and consumption it is a profoundly cynical machine: "the capitalist is merely striking a pose when he bemoans the fact that nowadays no one believes in anything any more" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 250).

Deleuze and Guattari assert that it is "the real characteristics of axiomatics that lead us to say that capitalism and present-day politics are an axiomatic in the literal sense (1987: 461). Chief among these characteristics is the difference between an axiomatic system and a code. Whereas a code establishes a systematic correspondence directly between the elements of different signifying systems, an axiomatic system is defined by purely syntactic rules for the generation of strings of non-signifying or uninterpreted symbols. The resultant strings of symbols may be given an interpretation by the specification of a model and the assignment of significations to elements of the formal language. In these terms, capital may be supposed to function as "an axiomatic of abstract quantities" (Deleuze and Guattari 1977: 228). As a universal equivalent, money is a purely quantitative measure that is indifferent to the qualitative character of flows of different kinds. Commodity production under capitalist conditions generalises this formal equality of all social goods and relations. Factors of production appear in the balance-sheet of an enterprise simply as units of monetary value. Objects produced under non-capitalist regimes of code may also be drawn into the global market, where they are exchanged equally as items of value alongside capitalistically produced goods. To the extent that they are subsumed under the exchange relation, objects produced under the most diverse regimes of code, such as artefacts of indigenous handicraft, and products of fully automated production systems, may be "formally united" within the capitalist axiomatic.

Deleuze and Guattari speak of the capitalist axiomatic in a restricted and primarily economic

sense but also in a broader sense which includes a juridical and a political as well as a technocratic apparatus. Capital as an economic system forms an axiomatic but so does capitalist society: "The true axiomatic is that of the social machine itself, which takes the place of the old codings and organizes all the decoded flows, including the flows of scientific and technical code, for the benefit of the capitalist system and in the service of its ends" (1977: 223). There is a tension between these two dimensions of modern society, since capital itself is not in the first instance an apparatus of capture like the State but a non-territorially based axiomatic with an immense power of deterritorialization. The capitalist axiomatic generates new social forces and flows of matter and energy while at the same time repressing the very flows which are the basis of its restless and cosmopolitan energy. Deleuze comments in his interview with Negri ("Control and Becoming") that what he and Guattari found most useful in Marx was "his analysis of capitalism as an immanent system that's constantly overcoming its own limitations, and then coming up against them once more in broader form, because its fundamental limit is Capital itself" (Deleuze 1995: 171).

In this sense, capitalist society is torn between two conflicting tendencies. On the one hand, as Marx and Engels pointed out in *The Communist Manifesto*, capitalism threatens to sweep away all the values of civilised social existence and replace them with the 'cash nexus'. The circulation of capital through the differential relation between the flows of finance and the flows of personal income, along with the circulation of information through the electronic circuits of mass communication, propels the entire world towards a society in which all the signs of the past are detached from their origins and written over with new signs, and the motley representatives of the present appear as "paintings of all that has ever been believed" (1977: 34).

On the other hand, capitalism constantly approaches this limit only to displace it further ahead by reconstituting its own immanent relative limits. It is as though there were a distinction to be drawn between capital understood as a general axiomatic of decoded flows and capitalism understood as a mechanism or set of mechanisms for the maintenance of a relatively stable assemblage of the social factors required to sustain the extraction of flow surplus.

The State bears the burden of this latter function. A principal function of the State is the reterritorialization of the mutant flows generated by the dynamic of the system as a whole. The State reterritorializes those flows so as to prevent them breaking loose at the edges of the social axiomatic" (1977: 258). As a result,

Deleuze and Guattari argue, modern capitalist societies are caught between the two poles of an extreme futurism and an archaism, between a deterritorialization which, if left unchecked, might carry them towards an absolute threshold and “the Urstaat that they would like to resuscitate as an overcoding and reterritorializing unity” (1977: 260).

This function of the State points to another feature that justifies Deleuze and Guattari’s adaptation of the concept of an axiomatic system to describe capitalist society. Subject to certain overriding constraints such as consistency or the generation of surplus value, there is considerable scope for variation in the axioms which may be appropriate for a given model. The history of capitalism has involved experimentation and evolution with regard to axioms, its successive crises each provoke a response which may take the form of the addition of new axioms (the incorporation of trade unions, centralised wage fixing, social welfare etc.) or the elimination of existing axioms (the elimination of trade unions and currency controls leading to the deregulation of banking, finance and labour markets). None of these axioms is essential to the continued functioning of capital as such, any more than are the axioms of bourgeois social life. Economic activity is increased when family members dine individually at McDonalds.

The political lesson that Deleuze and Guattari draw from this analysis is that, at the macro-social level of economic and political institutions, it is always possible to modify or replace particular axioms. While the capitalist economy may constitute an axiomatic system inseparable from the fabric of modern social life, this does not mean that particular axioms cannot be removed or replaced by others. Moreover, it is important to do so since people’s conditions of life depend upon such changes. But this suggests that Deleuze and Guattari’s analysis of the structural principles of modern society can only support a reformist politics of piecemeal social change. In fact it supports more than this, but in order to see how we need to examine the ontology of processes such as becoming and deterritorialization which inform their social theory.

2. Becoming

The concept of revolution is not developed in Deleuze and Guattari’s political philosophy but the concept of becoming is elaborated in the course of Plateau 10 in *A Thousand Plateaus*. This plateau is devoted to the analysis of a variety of different kinds of becoming: becoming-animal, becoming-woman, becoming-intense, becoming-imperceptible and so on. In *Deleuze and the Political*, I suggested that becomings may be regarded as processes of increase or enhancement in the powers of one body, carried out in relation to the powers of another, but without involving appropriation of those powers (Patton 2000). One way in which bodies can increase their powers is by entering into alliances with other bodies that serve to reinforce or enhance their own powers, but these alliances can be with actual, material bodies or with the virtual, non-material bodies that inhabit the social imaginary. The processes that Deleuze and Guattari call becoming-animal and becoming-woman involve alliances of the latter kind, namely with the mythical powers and capacities attributed to animals or with the affects traditionally assigned to women. In these

terms, becoming-woman does not involve imitating real women but rather creating a molecular or micro-femininity in the subject concerned by reproducing the characteristic features, movements or affects of what passes for “the feminine” in a given society.

However, while this analysis works for becoming-animal and becoming-woman, it does not sit well with other types of becoming such as becoming-imperceptible. Whereas becoming-animal and becoming-woman are defined in terms of an alliance with an imaginary body which produces or facilitates deterritorialization, becoming-imperceptible is of a different order. This is a becoming which Deleuze and Guattari define in terms of an individual being reduced to an abstract line that can connect or conjugate with other lines thereby making “a world that can overlay the first one, like a transparency” (1987: 280). It involves a movement which is infinite and therefore imperceptible. It is a becoming in which everything changes while appearing to remain the same. In effect, becoming-imperceptible stands apart as an absolute becoming, the pure form or immanent end of all becomings. I want to suggest that this difference in kind between becoming-imperceptible and becoming-animal should be understood in terms of the conceptual relationship between becoming and deterritorialization.

The becomings which interest Deleuze and Guattari are minoritarian becomings. They define minority in opposition to majority, but insist that the difference between them is not quantitative since social minorities can be more numerous than the so-called majority. Both majority and minority involve the relationship of a group to the larger collectivity of which it is a part. Given any socially significant distinction between two groups, the majority is defined as the group which most closely approximates the standard while the minority is defined by the gap which separates its members from that standard. Majority can take many simultaneous forms within society. In so far as the subject of modern European society and political community is human, adult, masculine and predominantly white, then animals, women, children and non-whites are minorities, and becoming-animal, becoming-child, becoming-woman and becoming-coloured are potential paths of deterritorialization of the majority.

A liberal politics of difference might simply defend the right of the minorities to figure in the majority, seeking to broaden the standard so that it becomes male or female - European or non European - hetero or homosexual etc. But this relies on a conception of social minorities as outcasts but with the potential to be included among the majority. Deleuze and Guattari propose another way of conceiving of minorities, namely as the agents of process of becoming-different from the majority. Understood in this manner, minorities are collectivities of an entirely different kind endowed with the potential to threaten the very existence of a majority. Thus, to become-minoritarian is to embark upon a process of divergence from or deterritorialization of the norm, while applied to the majority itself, minoritarian-becoming involves the subjection of the standard to a process of continuous variation or deterritorialization (1987: 106). Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of becoming is thus intimately linked to the concept of the minoritarian, and through this to the processes of deterritorialization which define a given qualitative multiplicity.

3. Deterritorialization

A Thousand Plateaus is an ontology of multiplicities or assemblages which are defined by their “cutting edges of deterritorialization” (1987: 88). It is also a work of political philosophy, an ethics, not in the sense that it provides tools for the justification or critique of political institutions, but in the sense that it privileges these processes of mutation and metamorphosis. Deterritorialization is both the overriding tendency in the world that Deleuze and Guattari describe and the key to their understanding of revolutionary politics.

In Plateau 15 “Conclusion: Concrete Rules and Abstract Machines,” deterritorialization is defined with deceptive simplicity as the complex movement or process by which something escapes or departs from a given territory (1987: 508). This process always involves at least two elements, namely the territory which is being left behind or reconstituted and the deterritorializing element. A territory of any kind always includes “vectors of deterritorialization,” either because the territory itself is inhabited by dynamic movements or processes or because the assemblage which sustains it is connected to other assemblages. Marx’s account of primitive accumulation provides an example of one such vector of deterritorialization in relation to the social and economic space of feudal agriculture, namely the development of commodity markets and the manner in which this encouraged the shift to large-scale commercial production. The conjugation of the stream of displaced labour with the flow of deterritorialized money capital provided the conditions under which capitalist industry could develop.

The typology of processes of deterritorialization at the end of *A Thousand Plateaus* exposes further complexities within the concept. Firstly, deterritorialization is either relative or absolute. It is relative in so far as it concerns only movements within the actual - as opposed to the virtual - order of things. Secondly, deterritorialization is always “inseparable from correlative reterritorializations” (1987: 509). Thirdly, relative deterritorialization can take either a negative or a positive form. It is negative when the deterritorialized element is immediately subjected to forms of reterritorialization which enclose or obstruct its line of flight. Elsewhere, Deleuze and Guattari distinguish between the *connection* of deterritorialized flows, which refers to the ways in which distinct deterritorializations can interact to accelerate one another, and the *conjugation* of distinct flows which refers to the ways in which one may incorporate or “overcode” another thereby effecting a relative blockage of its movement (1987: 220). In either form, reterritorialization does not mean returning to the original territory but rather the ways in which deterritorialized elements recombine and enter into new relations in the constitution of a new assemblage or the modification of the old. It is positive when the line of flight prevails over secondary reterritorializations, even though it may still fail to connect with other deterritorialized elements or enter into a new assemblage with new forces.

By contrast, absolute deterritorialization refers to a qualitatively different type of movement which concerns the virtual as opposed to the actual order of things. This is the state in which there are only qualitative multiplicities, the state of “unformed matter on the plane of consistency” (1987: 55-6). Whereas relative

detrterritorialization takes place on the molar dimension of individual or collective life, absolute detrterritorialization takes place on the molecular plane of social existence. Absolute detrterritorialization “connects lines of flight, raises them to the power of an abstract vital line or draws a plane of consistency” (1987: 510). However, talk of absolute detrterritorialization as an event or process which takes place or happens is potentially misleading if it suggests that this is a further stage or something that comes after relative detrterritorialization. On the contrary, absolute detrterritorialization is always present and manifests itself only in and through relative detrterritorialization. For this reason, Deleuze and Guattari suggest that there is “a perpetual immanence of absolute detrterritorialization within relative detrterritorialization” (1987:56). Elsewhere, they describe absolute detrterritorialization as “the deeper movement ... identical to the earth itself” (1987: 143).

It follows that absolute detrterritorialization is expressed in both positive and negative processes of relative detrterritorialization. It is expressed in positive form when there is recombination of detrterritorialized elements or different processes of detrterritorialization in mutually supportive and productive ways. In the terms of Deleuze and Guattari’s earlier distinction, this occurs when reterritorialization involves assemblages of *connection* rather than *conjugation*. In this case, they suggest at one point, we are dealing with “revolutionary connections in opposition to the conjugations of the axiomatic” (1987: 473).

How do the different kinds of becoming relate to this distinction between absolute and relative detrterritorialization and the positive and negative forms of the latter? I suggest that becoming-imperceptible should be understood as the form of becoming in which absolute detrterritorialization attains its fullest and most positive expression. Moreover, becoming-revolutionary should be understood along similar lines, not as a becoming defined by virtual alliance with the imagined powers of political or other kinds of revolution, but as a higher form of becoming which involves the expression of absolute detrterritorialization in positive form.

4. Becoming-Revolutionary

This analysis of Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts shows that they do envisage the effective transformation of a given field or assemblage. Moreover, it enables us to appreciate the sense of ‘revolutionary’ in the phrase ‘becoming-revolutionary’. For the lesson to be drawn from the theory of detrterritorialization is

that fundamental social change happens all the time. Sometimes it occurs through the eruption of events that force a break with the past but sometimes by imperceptible changes of axioms that open up a new field of possibilities for action. A legal decision, a technological innovation or a sudden widespread but imperceptible shift of loyalties might set in train processes that do lead to “revolutionary connections.” Since absolute detrterritorialization is the immanent condition of relative detrterritorialization in both its positive and negative forms, and since there is no overriding logic to the manner in which these processes unfold, there is no telling in advance which processes of detrterritorialization will rupture the fundamental structural principles of the present social order. This is the force of Deleuze and Guattari’s assertion that societies are defined less by their contradictions than by their lines of flight or detrterritorialization. There are no guarantees of progress with regard to the outcome of a given form of detrterritorialization. Does this political philosophy entail a pessimism or nihilism about the human condition, a certain tragic note as Negri suggests? Deleuze replies that it does not and that, on the contrary, the fact that movements can always become bogged down in history or that revolutionary processes can turn out badly implies the need for a permanent “concern” or vigilance with regard to the fate of the lines of flight along which movement is possible.

Deleuze tends to invoke the idea of becoming-revolutionary in response to concerns about the historical fate of revolutions (Deleuze 1995: 173). For example in his interview with Negri he argues that the claim that revolutions always turn out badly confuses two things which ought to be considered independently of one another, namely, the historical fate of revolutions, the way they turn out historically, and the “becoming-revolutionary” of people, people’s revolutionary becoming: “It is not the same people in the two cases.” It is not the same people because the historical case concerns macropolitical or molar individuals, constituted as subjects on a given social, political and affective plane of organisation, while the case of becoming concerns individuals understood as micropolitical or molecular assemblages constituted on a plane of consistency and defined by their possibilities for transformation or lines of flight.

In other words, Deleuze distinguishes between the agents of revolution understood as a macropolitical event and the “agents” of a micropolitical process. In the one case, there is a relation to the particular historical form in which the event of revolution is actualized; in the other

case, there is a relation to the pure event of revolution which is not reducible to the particular forms of its incarnation and which guarantees the possibility of other kinds of revolution. This relation to the pure event or the concept of revolution as such allows us to imagine the possibility that new forms of positive detrterritorialization might emerge. It is on this more optimistic note the Deleuze’s *Dialogues* with Claire Parnet conclude: since outcomes are always uncertain we need not assume “the eternal impossibility of revolution.” Instead, we can assume that all kinds of mutating machines are being developed and interacting with one another, tracing a plane of consistency which has the potential to undermine the plane of organization constituted by the forms of State capture. As a result, “why not think that a new type of revolution is in the course of becoming possible?” (Deleuze and Parnet 1987: 147).

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Cathode Ray Cages

Olivier Razac, *L’Écran et le zoo: spectacle et domestication, des expositions coloniales à Loft Story*. Paris: Éditions Denoël, 2002.

By Ron Harpelle

In a zoo, we do for animals what we have done for ourselves with houses: we bring together in a small space what in the wild is spread out.... A house is a compressed territory where our basic needs can be fulfilled close by and safely. A sound zoo enclosure is the equivalent for an animal....”

Yann Martel, *Life of Pi* (2002:19)

In the *Life of Pi*, the protagonist argues that because of the protection and nurturing afforded animals in a zoo, their quality of life is better and life expectancy longer than that of their counterparts in the wild. Pi states that the “heart of the art and science of zookeeping” is getting the captives used to being observed by human beings and this calls for the need to provide a suitable living environment in order to minimize the psychological damage caused by

the loss of freedom. Accordingly, animals in custody are provided with “a lookout, a place for resting, for eating and drinking, for bathing, for grooming” and they soon adapt to the confines of their enclosure (Martel 2002: 44). Once an animal is comfortable with its new surroundings, the difficult task of reducing its “flight distance” is undertaken in order to put them on display. Knowledge of the animal, and guaran-

teeing its comfort and protection, are the tools used to diminish its flight distance. With care and consideration a zookeeper can produce “an emotionally stable, stress-free wild animal that not only stays put, but is healthy, lives a very long time, eats without fuss, behaves and socializes in natural ways and – the best sign – reproduces,” preferably in the presence of observers (Martel 2002: 19). A zoo is a controlled environment where people can safely observe wild animals and where animals are given a better life.

The art and science of zookeeping has a long history, but the modern version was pioneered in the late nineteenth century by Carl Hagenbeck, a renowned German zoologist, animal dealer and trainer. Hagenbeck collected animals in the wild, bringing them back to Europe where he conducted eugenic experiments on some of them, crossing such things as lions and tigers, and where he pioneered new ideas in animal exhibition. In 1907, Hagenbeck became the “father of the cageless zoo” for his design of the Hamburg Zoo, a revolutionary park where moated exhibits and technological innovations like the use of artificial concrete rockwork were combined with exotic looking plants to create “naturalistic simulations” (Hyson 2000: 32). In Hagenbeck’s zoo, animals roamed and socialized more freely in an environment that was designed to be “realistic” in order to make them feel at home and give the observer an idea of the animal’s natural habitat. In some cases, predators and their prey were placed in the same enclosure. Hagenbeck’s objective was to make visitors and animals alike “imagine themselves in the wild” (Hyson 2000: 32). As a result of Hagenbeck’s efforts, zoos everywhere began examining the aesthetics of their exhibits and soon the small cages that characterized animal displays prior to 1907 gave way to the modern zoos we know today.

Olivier Razac’s *L’Écran et le zoo: spectacle et domestication, des expositions coloniales à Loft Story*, begins with a look at a much less celebrated aspect of Carl Hagenbeck’s career. In 1874, Hagenbeck introduced Europe to “exotic” members of the human family, one of the most ubiquitous animal species on earth. This little known episode was an innovation in zookeeping because the event was welcomed by the people who had read descriptions penned by the adventurers who ventured to the distant reaches of the planet in lock step with European imperialism. Hagenbeck’s first exhibition of “savage” human beings took place when he placed a family of Laplanders and a few reindeer in his garden and charged people admission to observe them. The family lived in a hut in the garden, going about their daily lives under the scrutiny of anyone who could afford the price of admission. The family demonstrated such things as the construction of a sleigh and lassoing of reindeer, but in the end, the breast feeding of the baby was what patrons liked most. Just as they would for the feeding time for seals or other programmed activities at any zoo, people lined up to see a woman nursing her child. (29-30) Like the animals found in any other zoo, the intimate aspects of the daily lives of the people on display were subject to public scrutiny and his exhibition was a financial success.

Hagenbeck’s exhibition was not the first time Europeans had seen “exotic” foreigners, but it was a novel way of presenting them. During the 400 years after Christopher Columbus brought back the first human “specimens” from the Americas, Europeans saw a steady flow of con-

quered people on exhibit. However, unlike kidnapped aboriginal peoples from distant continents, or the occasional slave whose life of drudgery was diverted from the plantations of the Americas to the households of the European elite, the Laplanders were put on display in a natural setting and customers were led to believe that what they were observing was real. In Hagenbeck’s garden, the people were real, the reindeer were real and the setting was “natural.” The exposition not only helped establish Hagenbeck’s credentials as a zoologist, but it created the foundation for all subsequent displays of the human animal. In this new realm of zoological exhibition, people’s curiosity about the world around them was satiated by the absolute power afforded Europeans as the conquerors of the world and a new form of voyeurism emerged.

The first part of *L’Écran et le zoo* explores the reception in Europe of government sponsored exhibitions of colonized peoples. Razac’s discussion of exhibitions of humans in Europe in the decades that bridged the 19th and 20th centuries, much like Pi’s descriptions in Martel’s novel, focuses on the function and methodology of zookeeping. The difference is that Razac’s analysis of the zoo demonstrates how human beings were zoomorphised by the people who put them on display and by those who came to watch. Razac presents exhibition as a self-fulfilling prophesy for the observers who wanted Africans to be uncivilized and therefore incapable of ruling themselves. This is because the ethnographic exhibitions discussed in *L’Écran et le zoo* were a function of the rapid expansion of colonialism at the end of the nineteenth century which gave impetus to European government efforts to justify the “burden” of conquest. These exhibitions, that also found their way North America, became a common part of the celebrations of empire.

Conquered peoples were presented to audiences in their “natural” and obviously non-Western state. Marquees advertised the exhibition of Dahomey Warriors, Cannibals and Head Hunters at a time when European armies were fanning across Africa and venturing into the Indian Ocean and Orient in search of raw materials and secure markets for industrial goods (65). In this way conquest provided entertainment and the entertainment provided justification for further conquest. Anthropologists became the apologists for world domination and the vanquished became prizes to be put on display. Consequently, the zoological display of humans remained popular through the first decades of the twentieth century and culminated in the 1930s when the “burdens of empire” became too great and a changing world spelled the end of an era. The decline of interest in human exhibition coincided with the decline of colonialism, but people’s desire to observe the intimate lives of others continued and found expression in other forms.

Several decades after the last “ethnographic exhibition,” “reality TV” has filled the airwaves and, in the second part of *L’Écran et le zoo*, Razac examines this new form of voyeurism. In almost every country in the world people are placed in defined spaces with complete strangers and asked to go about their daily business under the watchful eye of surveillance cameras. One of the most popular reality TV programmes to hit Europe is “Loft Story,” a show allowing viewers to observe a group of young people thrown together in an apartment and simply asked to live

with one another. The variations on the theme seem endless, but Razac offers a sound analysis of why so many people around the world are attracted to this kind of programming. The author builds on his earlier discussion of the art of zookeeping and human exhibition in Europe as a means of deconstructing the mechanisms of presentation used by the makers of reality TV. Razac shows how human fascination with the exotic has translated into a billion dollar industry and a cultural phenomenon. Like the protagonist in the *Life of Pi*, Razac delves into the “needs” of the animals on display in a reality TV show and provides insights into how broadcasters, the modern zookeepers, maintain their exhibits so as to keep them popular with patrons.

One of the main points made by the author is that although zoos, and reality TV shows, are places where animals can be observed, the species on exhibit also study the observers. To see and be seen suggests that the animals on both sides of the cage act and react in accordance with their perception of how they should respond to the presence of other beings. Like Foucault’s discourse on the prison, Razac argues that a zoo enclosure or a reality TV set are one in the same in that they create a context and expectations to which animals must adjust and adapt. Animals on exhibit change their habits to conform with their new surroundings, which are a product of zookeepers’ desires to provide “naturalistic simulations” of environment and to ensure that observers can see the captives. Therefore, the act of observation automatically alters that which is being observed. Flight distance is lessened as a matter of course and everyday activities like feeding, sleeping and sex become part of the spectacle. Observers, whether looking at Laplanders in the 19th century or a group of young people in the 21st century, expect behaviour consistent with what they understand to be the truth and, as long as what they are looking for is present, they will accept everything they see as being real. The people who “volunteer” (compete for the positions advertised by television producers), to have their daily lives recorded, edited and diffused as part of a reality TV program, have an understanding of both what they want to present to the observer and what they expect people want to see. An unlikely grouping of individuals, with varied ethnicities, sexual orientations, class backgrounds, education levels and whatever else advertisers want their clients to see, are put in (sur)real situations and viewers accept what they see because they get what marketers know they are looking for.

However, “Loft Story” is only one contribution to the rapidly growing phenomenon of reality TV. Demand for the genre spread quickly and, like the offspring of Hagenbeck’s eugenic experiments with animals, were crossed with other reality programs to produce similar, but different versions of the same thing. Some are like game shows, others present physical challenges and they all invite viewer participation through the Internet. Among the more innovative is a Dutch program, set in a restaurant, that combines profit with voyeurism and the desire for fame by asking viewers to drop by, order a meal and be part of the show. *L’Écran et le zoo* prepares the reader to better appreciate this new genre of human exhibition, but Razac does not stray beyond an analysis of “Loft Story” and does not link reality TV to the documentary films that bridged the gap with the colonial exhibitions of the past.

Although the title of *L'Écran et le zoo* suggests it is a study of the evolution of and reaction to the public display of human beings from European colonial exhibitions to "Loft Story," the book is primarily an examination of the similarities between the zoo and the TV screen. In Razac's book, the story of human exhibitions ends in the 1930s with the decline of colonialism and resurfaces nearly fifty years after the debut of television. The leap forward does not detract from the book, but an important stage in the evolution of reality TV is missing. With Robert Flaherty's release of "Nanook of the North" in 1922, the documentary film became a significant medium for permitting the public access to the intimacies of other people's lives. Filmmakers like Flaherty, a native of Thunder Bay, Ontario, and the "father" of the documentary film, picked up where the colonial exhibitions left off. The film camera, directors and editors, brought viewers into the villages and homes of people living in the most isolated regions of the earth. The documentary style touted by Canada's John Grierson evolved and flourished as means of exposing "truths" about the world and, in the 70s and 80s, the cross-over to reality TV began. By the late 1980s documentary camera operators were be-

ing used to shoot dramatized "re-creations" of events for programs like "Top Cops" and other early reality TV shows. Then, with the advent of "Survivor," "Loft Story" and other recent hybrids, the current formulas for reality TV developed. These stages in the evolution of reality TV need to be understood in order to better appreciate the veracity of Razac's analysis.

L'Écran et le zoo is important precisely because it suggests new possibilities for the reading of texts like film, theatre and other entertainment that rely on the exhibition of human beings. Olivier Razac's contribution to our understanding of human exhibition is refreshing because he reminds us that we are, in a sense, on TV all the time, and, in a world that is moulded by what programming executives decide we should watch, the danger lies in not being able to distinguish between reality and the TV. Reality TV becomes real when it crosses the threshold of the television screen and becomes a part of our world. *L'Écran et le zoo* warns us that reality TV, like colonial exhibitions of the past, distorts and confirms perceptions of ourselves and the world around us. The key difference is that unlike the people put on display in Europe a century ago, today

the observers are not isolated from the subjects on reality TV because the new specimens are from somewhere down the street and they look just like us. Like Hagenbeck's cageless zoo, reality TV makes us predators and prey in the same enclosure.

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Before Reality TV

Jeffrey Ruoff, *An American Family: A Televised Life*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002.

By Gary Genosko

Before reality TV was, well, reality TV. That is, prior to the current flood of reality programming was a "creative nonfiction series," an "observational documentary," a piece of "cinema verité" adapted to the little screen: *An American Family* (1973), produced by Craig Gilbert for National Educational Television and distributed by member stations of the Public Broadcasting Service in the US. This twelve episode serial documentary study of the Loud family of Santa Barbara, California is the subject of Jeffrey Ruoff's *An American Family: A Televised Life*.

Television and film historians will no doubt contest this origin and produce evidence from Canada and the UK, as well as from the US, suggesting earlier sources. Indeed, as Ruoff points out what makes his choice seductive is the little attention, until very recently, that has been paid to the series since its broadcast in 1973 (xx), and the failure of some scholars of TV families even to mention it. Ruoff points to a further prejudice in the preference of historians of the documentary form for film over TV, and "directors over producers," hence the neglect of Gilbert (6). Prior to *An American Family*, producer Gilbert was best known for his NET projects in the late 1960s such as Margaret Mead's *New Guinea Journal*, and his Emmy award winning study of Irish novelist Christy Brown.

The conditions that led to Gilbert's writing of the proposal that would result in *An American Family* were as much personal as professional: the shifting tide of cultural affairs programming at NET prior to its becoming chronically timid; Gilbert's divorce; the influence of pop sociology of the American family in ruins (Charles Reich's *The Greening of America*) that marked American social reportage in the early 1970s. As Ruoff explains, one of the neglected dimensions of documentary work is the equivalent of casting in film and the interests that inform the search for, in this case, a family: "Gilbert was more interested in

representations of class and gender than in issues of social and ethnic identity" (17). Hence, a white, suburban family with five children, two dogs, a swimming pool, etc. fit the bill for an examination of "what happened when a family obtained the trappings of the good life" (17). The end of such success would be ruin.

Despite the socio-technical influences on Gilbert, *An American Family* simply lacked "historical context." This grounding didn't, Ruoff explains, survive the proposal stage: "Craig Gilbert did not make the series he described in his NET proposal," (22) which was full of references to the mediascape of this family's life as well as familial histories. In the end what won out was "the drama of the Louds' separation" (22). The absence of historical context ("reality") was made a topic in its own right: in the end, "Gilbert was satisfied to portray a family *not* directly connected to the issues of the day in order to claim that Americans were alienated from politics and active citizenship" (23). "Reality" was chased from the stage for the sake of the serialized drama of separation and divorce; "reality" was easier to bear when its absence could become a symptom of disenfranchisement. The absence of "reality" was, then, actually an active condition informing its representation; curiously, the absence of "reality" made the series a work of reality TV.

Ruoff quite rightly underlines that Gilbert's sense of documentary method was a hybrid, bastard form that even included the "unorthodox practice" (27) of allowing the Louds to debate the content of any episode if only to allay their fears. Among the ground rules set by Gilbert about how the filming would take place is a remark that has been taken up elsewhere, although Ruoff doesn't follow its trajectory: "The [the Louds] were to live their lives as if there were no camera present" (27). By the mid-1970s Jean Baudrillard had already exposed the paradoxes of "TV verité" that *An*

American Family ushered in. The producer, Baudrillard claimed, waxed absurd: "They [the Louds] lived as if *we* weren't there', which also meant 'they lived 'as if *you* were there' – a message to the 20 million or so viewers who followed the series. It is difficult to ascertain the truth of the Loud family: does it belong to the family or to TV?" (Baudrillard 1983: 52). Neither, it turns out, for the despotic gaze of the camera has been displaced, diffused, as the many watch the few; gone are the imperatives to submit to the controlling gaze – you are the gaze, you are the event: "we are all Louds, doomed not to invasion, to pressure, to violence and to blackmail by the media and their models, but to their induction, to infiltration, to their illegible violence" (Baudrillard 1983: 55). The truth of the Loud family is for Baudrillard indecipherable, yet post-panoptic. Some recent readers of Baudrillard, especially New Zealand-based sociologist Victoria Grace (2000:98), have remarked upon these comments and related them to Australian versions of reality programming such as *Sylvania Waters* that equally make Baudrillard's point about the implosion of the distinct poles between viewer and viewed; even the medium itself has collapsed into its messages and as a communication process the poles of sender and receiver are henceforth untenable.

In a more recent rumination on *Loft Story*, Baudrillard (2002) has emphasized that at the heart of reality TV is an uninteresting, non-original event, whose power is to generate the fascination, first, of audiences, and second, of critics. Baudrillard underlines, however, that this nullity and banality is powerful, even if it only allows for a differential viewing experience: the viewer is always slightly less idiotic than the reality TV program on the screen. The question that holds Baudrillard's attention concerns the "experimental niches" of reality TV situations – apartments, islands, and other micro-situations.

Are these enclosures, little theatres, cut-off and isolated in some manner, or do they jump their experimental status as “universal metaphors” of the osmosis, what he calls the “telemorphosis” of the world: “Nothing any longer separates the screen and the world” (Baudrillard 2002: 484). We are all extras on the next call for Idols; we are on both sides of the screen, playing our parts, ready for a sudden notoriety for no good reason. We are all Trumans! For Baudrillard reality TV announces the end of merit: there is no need to earn 15 minutes of fame.

But there were still other factors at work between the claims of the producer and the millions of viewers. The filmmakers, Alan and Susan Raymond, the proverbial “flies on the wall,” also had to live like Louds and “practically became members of the family” (29); yet the filmmaking demanded a level of social interaction and negotiation (Susan talking, Alan shooting) and technical sophistication in the search for good footage, as Ruoff put it: “the filmmakers had to maintain a difficult dual consciousness, being both involved (interacting and caring) and removed (observing and recording)” (31).

In addition to factors relating to program conception and filmmaking, editing mitigates “reality”: “...the producers discovered that watching footage shot in real time was strangely unlike real life” (40). It was, in a word, boring. But boredom was also an existing aesthetic inherited from Andy Warhol. Moreover, it was also fuzzy, as one editor David Hanser recalls the experience of viewing hours of film of Loud son Lance and then seeing him in person: “Reality began to get blurred” (42). Here is a sense of the vertigo of implosion à la Baudrillard, and a fall into a fuzzy, speculative universe. Ruoff does not work out the implications of this boredom in relation to what TV critics, for instance, point out about current reality programs such as *Big Brother*: the boring factor as legitimation and, quoting Walter Benjamin, “the threshold to great deeds,” which are in this case, usually nothing more than the flashes of love or hate: “The boredom was proof that the raw ingredients of the story were genuine” (Teitel 2000: 19).

If *Big Brother* occurs the first time as tragic dehumanization, it recurs today as farcical entertainment. Dutch TV’s syndicated *Big Brother* translates totalitarianism into a game show format that pits inhabitants of a totally surveilled house against one another in the manner of *Survivor*, without the simulated primitivism and swimwear. A souped-up Orwell tells us that exhibitionism is adventure and privacy reduces adventure; indeed, privacy limits the production of celebrity and reduces the effects of hypervisibility. Reality TV is now about “contestants” and contests, the game show life, of turning oneself into an image. As Ruoff observes: “The Louds went from being real people to being images on celluloid, figures to be watched, transcribed, occasionally discarded, and eventually edited into twelve episodes of a nonfiction television series” (37). In the process the Louds outstripped the reality of their own lives and times.

Ruoff embeds the series in a history of documentary experimentation reaching back to the films made by Robert Drew (and Associates) in the 1950s, underlining the “eliminat[ion] of overt devices of narration” (54). Ruoff is sensitive, however, to *An American Family*’s

televisuality and hybridity. He provides a remarkable array of features: Gilbert reshot scenes in order to achieve synchronous sound recording (46); he used voiceover narration as well, in conformity with television journalism; the series had a signature montage repeated with each episode, and a catchy jingle (67) that recalled television programs built around fictional families. Ruoff leaves his most acute observations of hybridity undertheorized. He discovers authentic observational techniques in the bastard form (73); yet witnesses the swerving from observational cinema (“Gilbert occasionally flaunts his omniscience in the voice-over...” [86]; voice-over has been rediscovered in documentary but is still thought of as a refuge of the incompetent, Ruoff claims 79); there are detours through home movies (80) and a studied “betweenness”: “Thus Gilbert’s style falls between the overt reflexivity of French cinema verité director Jean Rouch and the transparent observational style of Frederick Wiseman” (89). Verité production values are adapted in a quite unsystematic way to televisual practices and traditions (i.e., serial narrative form). Lance Loud was, however, untouchable in the department of reflexivity: “Lance acts like a character from an Andy Warhol film... Lance turns in one of the great camp performances in the history of television” (90). In the end Ruoff leaves us with the question: was the series a remarkable hybrid or compromise formation?

One of the great strengths of the book is Ruoff’s subtle appreciation of the sounds and speech of everyday life and the problem of their capture in observational film. Lack of directness, the ease with which a “virtual cacophony arises” (78), the pitter patter of phatic speech that maintains contact between persons, void operators regularly repeated (“You know”), the importance of providing nonverbal feedback, etc., are all accounted for. Additionally, music is deployed in a variety of ways: as an affect generator, social commentary, editorializing (84).

The popularity of *An American Family* did not translate into a coherent critical reception. Indeed, Ruoff points to a cluster of factors that made interpretation difficult: the novelty of the series itself and its mixed codes; the poverty of television criticism in general; the crass and sensational publicity; and perhaps most importantly the absence of a shared code between producers and consumers. The result was a “semiological free-for-all” (95). On the one hand, critical interpretations grasped the lack of the transparency of the real or the constructed character of the series; on the other hand, many reviewers simply didn’t account for the mediations. The Louds were in this latter case treated as friends and neighbours. Further, the “reality effect – was the belief that the Louds had lived their lives on television and that television was absorbing the real” (103). “Authorship” was attributed to the Louds (103). Family members were criticized for what they didn’t do or say (104). The gap between representation and the real collapsed. Aside from a few references to *An American Family*’s anticipation of postmodernist theories, Ruoff does not develop these insights. Instead, he continues to catalogue responses: which models did critics invoke? Everything from home movies, sitcoms, soaps, and sociology were compared to the series. Astute critics easily read how “the narrative drive of the show grated against the realism of the handheld camera” (110). By the same token, realism demanded, for some, that non-fictional narrative should not

be neatly sown up (111). Sociologists, too, deployed their methods and interests to dismiss the Louds as “untypical,” a strategy that doesn’t impress Ruoff.

One enduring image continues to circulate in the media in the age of reality TV: Lance Loud whose coming out on television made him a celebrity in the gay community, even if he didn’t come out in the series: “Lance Loud did not come out on American TV; American television came out of the closet through *An American Family*” (127). The reversal of the force that would subordinate Lance to his symbolic social role, which today is repeated constantly in media accounts of the series, is perhaps neutralized by the hallucination of this origin that permitted Lance Loud, longtime columnist for *The Advocate*, to be greeted with thanks on the streets of Los Angeles (128). Sadly, Lance Loud passed away in 2001, a victim of HCV/HIV infections, but not before PBS had hired the Raymonds to shoot his story (see Napoli 2003). PBS has erected a virtual shrine of sorts to Lance on its web site.

By the end of Ruoff’s book, readers are left with the sense that it is easier to mock than document the real; that the reputation of a “weird aberration” like Gilbert was not enhanced by *An American Family*. Ultimately, hybridity fails brilliantly, at least on television (i.e., as one wag put it, *Survivor* goes to Washington in the form of *The American Candidate*, but in so doing says nothing about practices for the sake of combinatorial possibilities of content within TV itself, Cernetig 2002). The push of documentary film into autobiography, first person, and intimate forms, seems a relief. But the seduction of the origin remains in the final sentence: “In its [*An American Family*] aftermath, the American documentary would never be the same” (137). This begs the question: would reality TV ever be the same, again?

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