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# **ART AND DISSENSUS**

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## **Abstract**

For a contemporary art practice, what does it mean to resist? This essay will discuss the idea of resistance in the present day using the work of Karl Marx as the key starting point. If he is foundational to the understanding of capitalism, then later philosophers such as Frederic Jameson and Jacques Ranciere have added considerably to the relevance of Marx, and added their own critical engagement with the art world. Ranciere advocates dissensus, which he sees as being counter to the conformity that liberalism and consensus bring. Political philosopher Chantal Mouffe also advocates dissensus, replacing antagonism with the idea of agonism. There is disagreement but as in sport both parties recognize the legitimacy of their opponent. This is why identity is so important to democracy, for without difference there is no real choice, and so the nature of identity and the subject become crucial factors in conceiving of a way to resist, and a way of being as an artist.

## ART AND DISSENSUS

Within any critical text that investigates the workings of society, it seems inevitable that themes of power and resistance are, at the very least, persistent undercurrents. Power has a character that's both metaphysical and immediate, and this has made the study of power a difficult one. Michel Foucault spoke of power as "a mysterious substance", it has, he states, a transformative quality, it is the medium of change, and noted that as soon as there is a power relation, the possibility of resistance arises, a lesser form of power, but not powerless.<sup>i</sup> Philosophy is key for to have a critical resistance one must also have a critical system of belief. This essay will examine the context of resistance through the work of Karl Marx and the condition of the modern subject, how philosophy can be used in the conception and making of art, and via Jacques Ranciere show how resistance can evolve into the more sophisticated ideas of dissensus and emancipation .

The principle philosophy that has underpinned much resistant art practice has been Marxism. Under the influence of Hegel's concept of totality, that is to say the belief that individuals don't actually exist in themselves but are in fact creations of the state, and that an absolute knowledge, "a vision of totality in which all the various component parts express the essence of that whole"<sup>ii</sup>, Marx developed a materialist philosophy based not on abstract concepts but real world concerns, principally economics. His view was that although society consists of much more than just economic considerations, everything in human life is determined by economics. For example whilst a priest may be acting in a way that has nothing to do with economics, Marx would argue that religion distracts the masses from injustice and asks them to focus on the after life, not their current real life, to be docile, so that they wouldn't be inclined to rise up and subvert the current order. Hence religion becomes an agent in the smooth working of capitalism.<sup>iii</sup> For Marx then, his conceptual model is called *base and superstructure*. A crass interpretation is that society has an economic base and power lies with those who have the means to make money, and that the resulting superstructure both reflects and protects the base; eg a base of private property will cause a superstructure that has property protection laws to come into being.<sup>iv</sup> Superstructure includes not just the field of capital, but also ethics, art and culture, which is one reason for Marxist theory being so crucial to later theorists such as the Frankfurt School and Frederic Jameson.<sup>v</sup>

A limitation of the base/superstructure model is that it is uni-directional, causal, and there are too many exceptions that won't fit. This is not to say that later theorists have dispensed with its deterministic aspects per se, but some, notably Antonio Gramsci and Louis Althusser, have introduced the idea of "relative autonomy".<sup>vi</sup> Althusser believed that capital is determinate "in the last instance",<sup>vii</sup> but that the superstructure has its own

specific effect and relative autonomy. For example a socialist base was imposed in many countries in the expectation that people would stop competing with each other, but the number of failed socialist states clearly shows that this hasn't worked. The base was changed but many features of the superstructure refused to follow. This is at odds with a Hegelian notion of totality, so Althusser's relative autonomy permits the original conception to operate, but also recognises that the superstructure can determine the base and in other senses the two are free of each other.<sup>viii</sup>

But within the realm of superstructure comes another key term for Marx, *ideology*.<sup>ix</sup> This term encompasses the beliefs that conceal the economic base of society and the resultant oppression that capitalism contains. The poor deserve to be poor and the rich deserve to be rich, is an example of what Marx termed false consciousness.<sup>x</sup> At the aesthetic level ideology will be mediated by two conditions. "These are (i) the conditions of production of works of art, and (ii) the existing aesthetic conventions."<sup>xi</sup> Both of these at the same time makes possible the construction of a particular work, and sets limits to the construction." The conditions of production would imply an historical account such as the political conditions of the time, attitude to gender or race, the role of the institution, if any, and existing techniques of artistic production. The artist is seen as a producer, not as a free agent apart observing society, but within a given social and historical situation, confronted by conditions of artistic production external to him/herself.<sup>xii</sup> Existing aesthetic conventions means that the artist, consciously or unconsciously uses particular codes that rework ideology in aesthetic form to comply with the rules of the time. An artworks explicit or implicit content needs to be looked past, to reveal what ideas or values have not been included within the 'text' of the work.<sup>xiii</sup> Related to this is the revival of interest in semiotics which has enabled a sociological aesthetic to be developed that can for example analyse a novels plot structure and use of language, and how that can rework ideology. In other words an artwork needs to read between the lines to the 'silences' that reveal the ideology that shapes the text. Why these concepts are important is because it gives a genealogy to cultural production, and specifically enables a more precise interpretation to be made.

Althusser also believed that ideology could be a more effective tool in repression than for example the police.<sup>xiv</sup> His concept of ideological state apparatuses, which could include such things as education and advertising, and are applied in such a way that they make people believe in a particular viewpoint. The work of Edward Bernays, who was the nephew of Sigmund Freud and brought Freud to prominence in America, set primary examples of the manipulation of public opinion.<sup>xv</sup> By the early 1930's Marxist theory and sociology was being used to research this manipulation and apply a critique to it, notably from the Frankfurt School. By the time the American sociologist C. Wright Mills wrote "The Mass Society" in 1956, it was clear that the pliability of society had become a major issue for cultural critics. Wright Mills wrote that

“... little of what we think we know of the social realities of the world have we found out first hand. Most of the ‘pictures in our heads’ we have gained from the media – even to the point where we often do not really believe what we see before us until we read about it in the paper or hear about it on the radio. The media not only give us information; they guide our very experiences.”<sup>xvi</sup>

And if our external realities are highly mediated, then

“... they have also entered into our experience of our own selves. They have provided us with new identities and new aspirations of what we should like to be, and what we should like to appear to be. They have provided in the models of conduct they hold out to us a new and larger and more flexible set of appraisals of our very selves. In terms of the modern theory of self, we may say that the media bring the reader, listener, viewer into the sight of larger higher reference groups - groups, real or imagined, up close or vicarious, are personally known or distractedly glimpsed – which are looking glasses for his self image”<sup>xvii</sup>

In Wright Mills estimation, the public, where discussion is the main form of communication and where the media broaden and animate discussion, have been replaced by the “mass society” where the media is the main form of communication and the public have become media markets.<sup>xviii</sup>

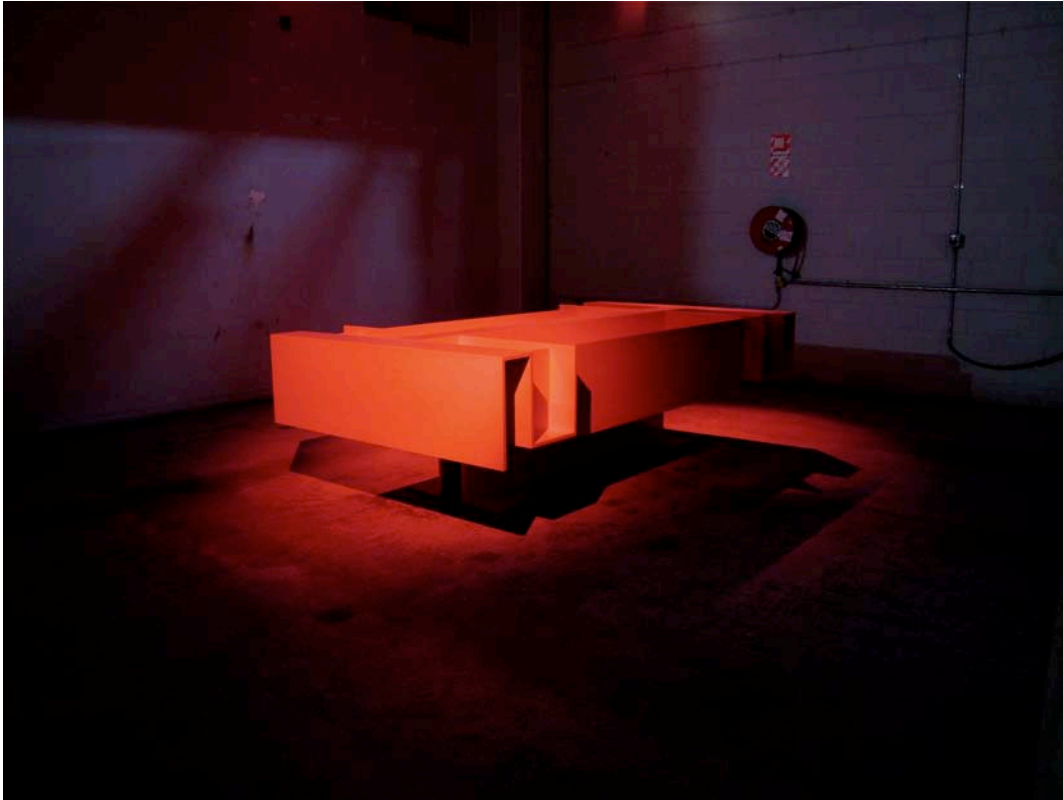
All the aforementioned occurs of course under the general heading of modernity. Representations of modernity according to Jonathan Crary, have moved between “images of loss, fragmentation, and nostalgia”, or towards a “futurist exhilaration at the jettisoning of the historical and the outmoded ...”<sup>xix</sup> Since the 1970’s these two poles have lost their meaning because of the sheer amount of “the new” and the speed with which commodities and technology become obsolete. Hence there is not the time for previous levels of familiarity to occur and no “technological novelty”<sup>xx</sup> can become emblematic of the future. If modernism is about the “obsolescence of affects” and the inexorable erosion of a stable subjective relationship to objects, the experience of a “certain groundlessness” should come as no surprise.<sup>xxi</sup> We have become used to rapidly switching between things. This perpetual process of rejection of the old and embrace of the new, this commodification, leads to a critical concept for the Marxist cultural critic Frederic Jameson, that of *reification*.<sup>xxii</sup> This is where a person, process, or abstract idea is turned into a thing. For example it is not just that a movie can become merchandising, but actual human interactions can be turned into a commodity so that love may be expressed by the buying of gifts, the gifts being the reification of the love itself. For him,

“...reification is a process that affects our cognitive relationship with the social totality. It is a disease of that mapping function where by the individual subject

projects and models his or her insertion into the collectively. The reification of late capitalism ... renders society opaque ... “xxiii

Seen in this way it is consumption, not production that is the prime motivating force within capitalist society. The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the triumph of monetarism confirmed the West’s economic superiority but also highlighted a lack of any broad social project, indeed capital had, and still has the ability to both destroy old forms and effect new ones. The 90’s saw the final dissolution of the union movement, notably Margaret Thatchers breaking of the coal miners strike, and the breakdown of many community institutions.<sup>xxiv</sup> Politically the lefts desire for social change was seen in the light of the breakdown of socialist states, and so any transformation emanating from the left could be portrayed as too radical, hence the current consensual situation of the now.<sup>xxv</sup> The old avant-gardes historically had aligned themselves with working class movements, but with no obvious collectivities existing, and the appropriation of culture by neo liberalism, that avenue of resistance was made redundant. According to JJ Charlesworth resistance, “ ... emerges because rather than politics being oriented to the greater good of human society, it is human society that is itself seen as having the problem.”<sup>xxvi</sup>

Within this context of neo liberalism, a work such as *Monument to Marx / we should have spoken more* (fig 1-2), seems to represent a double move backwards. Its linking to the premature dismissal of Marxist theory on the one hand, and the much criticised field of minimalism on the other would seem to be either provocative or futile. *Monument* is clearly engaging with minimalism and inevitably the discourse that minimalism provoked. Its form is based on an existing object, a found piece of packaging but its intent is not to invoke its own matter of factness, its objecthood<sup>xxvii</sup> to use Michael Fried’s term, but to produce a sense of its own existence as a subject. The work’s size relates to a human scale, its interior conforming to human proportions, there are unrevealed spaces within it, and the exterior is not privileged over the interior, negating any sense of “gestalt”<sup>xxviii</sup> an initial impression may give. This is a variation of Rosalind Krauss’s summation of minimalism, “to relocate the origins of a sculpture’s meaning to the outside, no longer modelling its structure on the privacy of psychological space but on the public, conventional nature of what might be called cultural space.”<sup>xxix</sup> *Monument* aims to locate meaning both within and without to emphasise the reciprocal relationship between the subject and society. If reification is where say, a person is turned into an object, then a kind of counter reification occurs where the object is invested with subjecthood. Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s theorising around the phenomenology of the objects suggests that while looking at an object such as a sculpture the viewer becomes aware of their own body because the art work shares the same space as the viewer<sup>xxx</sup>, whilst Fried’s objection to minimalism stemmed from the unease he felt beholding *literalist* work, that he detected the presence of another person, and that ultimately this led to a feeling of both alienation and domination, leading to his now famous



1. *'Monument to Marx / we should have spoken more'* 2009

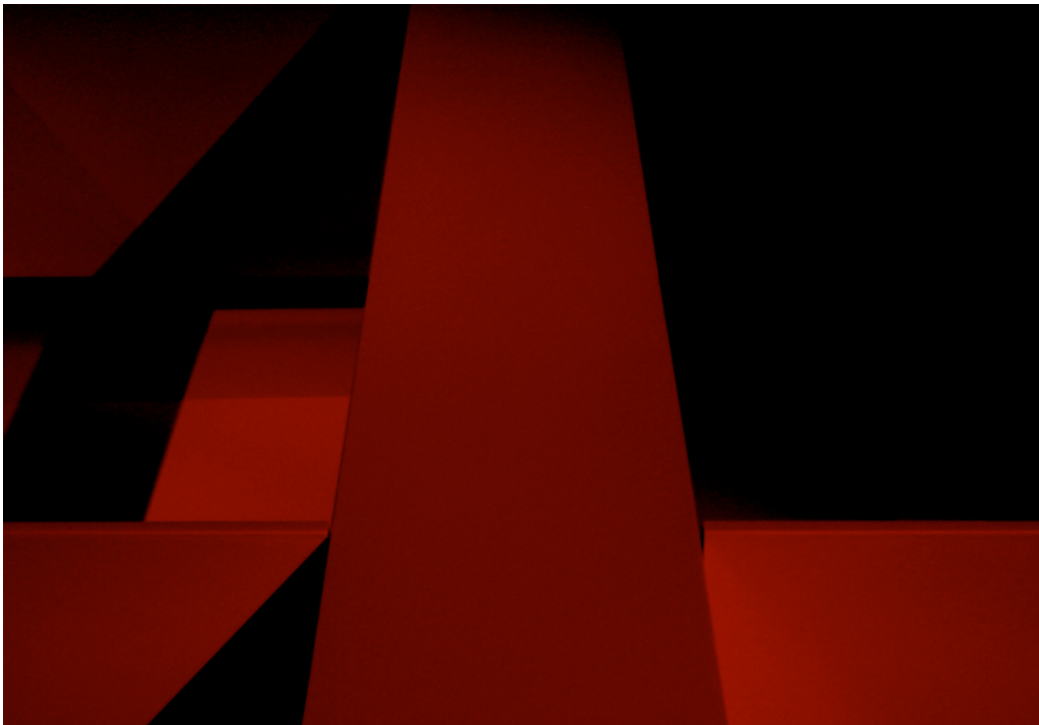
criticism of minimalism's theatricality.<sup>xxx</sup> To throw this comment into its "political" context it must be remembered that Fried's most prominent critique of minimalism, "Art and Objecthood" was written in 1967 when the west and the east seemed to represent democracy and totalitarianism respectively. If gestalt for Robert Morris represented a "unitary" experience, within his valorising of the new work in "Notes on Sculpture 1-3" one can sense an ideology.

"Unitary forms do not reduce relationships, they order them. If the predominant hieratic nature of the unitary form functions as a constant, all those particularizing relations of scale, proportion, etc., are not thereby cancelled. Rather they are bound more cohesively and indivisibly together."<sup>xxxii</sup>

Fried's critique was unique since he dealt not only with the reductive nature of minimalism but engaged with "the destabilising psychodynamic produced by the new physical relation set up between beholder and work."<sup>xxxiii</sup> Could it be that what he sensed within the work is an engulfing totalization, of being over powered by the work, and that within this critique is the influence of the Cold War with its obvious rejection of totalitarian regimes? But being over powered is now commonplace within culture, witness installation art for instance. Janet Cardiff's audio installation work for example has been criticised for "its shameless



manipulation of the viewer and for its uncritical compliance with spectacle: although the work seems to offer active participation, our experience inside it is one of powerless obedience.”<sup>xxxiv</sup> But we are still able to contemplate meaning after witnessing the work, and this critique presupposes that the audience assumes a manipulable or passive stance. Individuals have agency, it is their attitude to the work that counts. Roland Barthes suggested that when we view a movie it's okay to be “hypnotised by distance”, not simply a critical/intellectual distancing, but an ‘amorous’, fascinated distance that embraces the whole cinema situation: the theatre, the darkness, the room. The presence of other people.”<sup>xxxv</sup> This brings us back full circle, for Frederic Jameson urges us to look *through* cultural products, including art, to their mode of production, their inherent ideologies, their context, in other words in their totality.



2. ‘Monument to Marx / we should have spoken more’ (detail) 2009

Krauss drew attention to another implication that minimal sculpture carried, the “inarticulate existence of the object” where she compared the way one would get meaning from the work as comparable to getting meaning from a chair or a table.

“Given the apparent inarticulateness of a plywood cube by Robert Morris or a set of fluorescent tubes by Dan Flavin, one might extend the description of the chair or table to those sculptural objects as well and say that experience of them is a matter of repeated encounters, no single encounter seeming to reveal anything more or significantly different from any other. So that, for them as for ordinary objects,

“there is no single moment, eclipsing all others, in which they are “understood” ..... Caro would contend, with works of art there is a moment of understanding, a goal of apprehension in which all the relationships within the work participate in a moment of clarity by which the elements are fused with their meaning. It is this condition that sets art objects outside the world of duration, a condition “of existing in, indeed of secreting or constituting, a continuous and perpetual present”<sup>xxxvi</sup>

Perhaps this last comment was motivated by the “memorial” like scale and block like appearance of Morris’s Green Gallery show in 1965 or Tony Smith’s *Die* of 1962, for the function of a memorial is intimately tied to duration, to the perpetuation of memory. A perpetual presence is an appropriate characterization of “Monument “ since the relevance of Marx is persistent, indeed the use of his blend of philosophical concepts and materialist insight, such as the formulation of the notion of “class” and commodity, and methodologies such as the dialectic and love of paradox is an accepted part of cultural criticism, or more particularly “resistance” practices. The second part of the title “ we should have spoken more” is both a lament to the “loss” of some of Marx’s most profound insights within mainstream thinking, such as that we actually live in a world not of deficit, but of excess, leading to the question of who controls this excess? and a recognition conveyed in the conversational tone of the title that dialogue and exchange is still possible.

Marxist theory then has evolved considerably since its inception, from a critique of capitalism, to an ever-expanding critique of culture, society, and the individual subject. Foucault defines the word “subject” as either controlled and dependent on someone else, or “tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge”.<sup>xxxvii</sup> Cornelia Klinger believes that the focus is no longer on historical notions of class, but on the cultural constitution of the subject, for if the Enlightenment oversaw the start of the decline of religion and the birth of modernity, then this modernity fore-grounded the rational and objective, marginalizing any ‘higher’ point of view, as well as prioritising the autonomy of the subject, where humans gain agency apart from traditional hierarchies and seek their own meanings of existence. Consequently issues of identity have become an obsession for the modern subject and these issues coincide with the rise of the modern state. The point here is that states, structures and institutions are desocialised with regard to immediate social relations so that rationalisation, that which chooses the most efficient means to an end, and subjectivization, that which is about belief and meaning are largely independent of each other.<sup>xxxviii</sup> The subject’s newly acquired freedom ironically means that there is an increasing importance placed on identity and alignment, or what group or social formation to identify with. The subject, no longer having the spiritual support of the past but still requiring an ontological position took a path that led “more or less directly to the categories of nature and culture. This is the moment when identity politics is born in western thought.”<sup>xxxix</sup> But these two concepts are essentially modern ideas, they lack a base in transcendence, yet with regard to

the subject have a nostalgic meaning, as a kind of substitute for religion and other premodern structures. She observes that within nature and culture “both are designed to signify what cannot or at least cannot easily be altered, what is supposed to transcend change.”<sup>xI</sup>What this means is that nature and culture do to a large extent form the subject, but this imposition also signals a difference from society.

“As a result, the subject is more and other than the sum of social role, place, status, or function. In other words, this subject maintains an alterity towards the rules and mechanism of society, a distance from the “ways of the world,” comparable to the religious believer whose liability for the secular realm is limited by his or her obligation to the higher commandments to his or her creed. This alterity toward one (lower-level) order ensuing from an obligation to another (higher-level) order endows the subject with “inwardness” or “depth,” from which, at least potentially, resistance against the “world” may spring. As it is widely agreed that “social criticism might require social exile,” a “view from outside the walls of the city,” the quality of alterity is pivotal for the formulation of a radical opposition against reality.”<sup>xII</sup>

Culture and nature then, do not coincide seamlessly with society. The subject “set free” now asks, “Where do I belong?” The responsibility of the individual, the “how do I behave?” of this question, naturally seeks the relief/belief of the group, a community, a formation to identify with. Within this forming of a “we” is the implicit forming of a “they”, the process of inclusion implies an exclusion. Klinger points out that what is essentially a “social process gets entangled in the struggle for power within the social and political process.”<sup>xIII</sup> Identities may compete in an ontological sense on more or less equal footings, for example nation states or class identities, but when “one side claims the position of identity but repudiates the right of the other side to make the same claim”,<sup>xIIII</sup> as in the case of conflicts over ethnicity or gender, the repercussions have been devastating.

If the process of rationalisation was accompanied by subjectivisation, under globalisation it is the process of individualisation that has occurred.<sup>xIv</sup> Klinger states that the project of modernity continues since there is no obvious break such as that which defined premodern and modern as expressed in the term “revolution”, but that it is important not to mistake “old” structures for new phenomena”. She sees globalisation’s relationship to modernity as an excess and a quickening, “a new level of industrial revolution and a new stage in the evolution of capitalism.”<sup>xIv</sup> The fields of genetics/reproduction and communication inevitably mix with industrialisation and the market place, so that again,

“... the scope of human agency is considerably enlarged, requiring political and social as well as individual decision making and action. Hence the idea of an immutable realm beyond the vagaries of the societal process and immune to

historical change, as was once deemed necessary in order to serve as the base of identity building, is no longer tenable. The specifically modern construction of nature and culture as extra territorial foundations of collective and individual identities has certainly been fictitious right from the outset, but in the light of recent developments, the last glimmer of plausibility is lost. To take these developments seriously means to discern that the paths, which served as exits from the identity crisis in earlier phases in the process of modernity, are barred today. Furthermore, common definitions of life and death as well as the order of time and space are overturned in ways unheard-of ever before in human history. Previous waves of technological innovation certainly had deep and lasting effects on the realms of culture and nature (this is what the rise of the concepts of the subject and its identity politics was about), but only the recent industrial revolution breaks out in the very heartlands, threatening to overthrow the entire symbolic order of Western thought.”<sup>xlvi</sup>

Optimistically globalisation would seem to offer the ability to transgress notions of nationality, class or gender in a global, multicultural society and construct a sense of self free from the binds of nature and culture, but Klinger warns us that the subject who can escape “from all bonds of identity vanishes in the aftermath of complete dismissal.”<sup>xlvii</sup>

Apart from the usual markers used for identity construction, she also cites another ‘modern’ factor that has experienced both an excess and a quickening, the issue of consumption. The markets rhetoric of freedom of choice could be seen to represent the replacement of one dependence for another. This reification is not particularly new in itself, but what is new is that so much more belongs to the realm of consumption. Services, values, ideas, the very creation of life, the whole of society is colonised by the marketplace.

“ The repercussions are reflected in a coinage such as *consumer culture*, forcing together the two worlds of economy and culture that were to be carefully kept apart (or at least distinguished as high and low culture) under the conditions of modernity. In other words, not under the impact of production but under the impact of consumption, capitalism is identified with and as culture. For the first time in its history, capitalism does not spare culture but *becomes* culture.”<sup>xlviii</sup>

The divide between the subjective and the rational is rendered ineffectual, and so the production of meaning is commercialised. The catchcries that have accompanied globalisation, such as reflexivity, fluidity and openness are mostly the results of the late capitalist marketplace, not the birth of some new kind of enlightenment. In rich countries the new subjectivity has led to a narcissistic individualism, and a retreat into private space.

“The position of subjectivity is hardened, since identity politics applies more and more exclusively to either individual identities or to that of small communities, whereas the notion of a universal public sphere and the idea of a common good recedes into the background.”<sup>xlix</sup>

Klinger states that the neo-liberalist economy needs the subject to be in a weakened position, constantly adapting to the conditions of the free market, and believes that for the first time in Western history agency and the ability to resist have been lost.<sup>i</sup> Yet these are not problems that should be seen in an ethical light, but in a socio-political frame. The political philosopher Chantal Mouffe suggests a possible way out of this malaise. In *On the Political* (2005) she makes a direct assault on liberalism, partly quoting the German political theorist of the 1930s, Carl Schmitt.

“ The critical distrust of state and politics is easily explained by the principles of a system whereby the individual must remain *terminus a quo* and *terminus ad quem*; (the beginning and the end; my words). The methodological individualism which characterises liberal thought precludes the nature of collective identities.”<sup>li</sup>

Schmitt also believed that liberalism actually negates the arena of what Mouffe terms “the political”, that is to say, the philosophical and ontological meaning of politics. By insisting on a rational consensus as ideology, it becomes apparent “that every consensus is based on acts of exclusion” revealing that a fully inclusive rational consensus cannot exist. The construction of a ‘we’ will by implication lead to an exclusion of a ‘them’.<sup>lii</sup> This means that Schmitts conception of the essence of the political, what he termed the friend/enemy distinction cannot occur.

“Liberalism has to negate antagonism since, by bringing to the fore the inescapable moment of decision – in the strong sense of having to decide on an undecidable terrain – what antagonism reveals is the very limit of any rational consensus.”<sup>liii</sup>

In order to have this antagonism there must be groupings that have their own identities and this in turn implies the existence of difference. Difference is a relational and/or hierarchical notion, for example black and white or male and female, and so social relationships can become a source of antagonism.<sup>liv</sup>

Collective identities are not necessarily about the rational but are also concerned with desire, fears, and fantasy, what Mouffe has called *passions*.<sup>lv</sup> Arts role is central here, she states, since it aids the formation of identities and offers an outlet for the passions to express themselves. It is natural for individuals to want to become part of a crowd, “to lose themselves in a moment of fusion with the masses”.<sup>lvi</sup> Emile Durkeim, writing in 1893, believed that the division of labour in industrial societys suggested a “weakening of

collective sentiments leading to a proliferation of anomie and suicide.”<sup>lvii</sup> The passions, or to use his term *effervescence*, had under modernity become devitalised. Since effervescence is based in emotion and characterised by an ephemeral nature it needs to be recharged. The denial of the passions as a legitimate force in the formulation of society is strongly linked to the very fear of emotions. Freuds *Civilization and its Discontents* gives a view of civilization as constantly under threat from mans inherent aggression and suggests that the fostering of community and strong social bonds can act as a counter to this. In other words the passions had to be controlled. Later theorists such as Anthony Giddens have taken the view that the emotional body is engaged only when peoples reflexive attempts to engage breakdown. He views sensuality in discursive terms and from a rationalistic viewpoint, reasserting the “modernist ideal of rational control over the potential volatility of flesh,”<sup>lviii</sup> which would seem to indicate that the rational as an ideology needs to invade the realm of the private.

But rationality cannot exclude the emotions. Indeed the two are inseparable, since their can be no judgement without emotion<sup>lix</sup> and the two can intersect in unforeseen ways. “Cutter” (fig 3-5) refers to the practice, particularly amongst teenagers, of self-inflicted harm. The people involved are experiencing such levels of anxiety that by self-harming they actually free themselves from pain caused by that anxiety. Wanting a release from pain would seem to be a rational desire, but clearly the outcome in this instance is a disturbing one. In “Cutter” the spectator becomes the protagonist, the move from “watching” to “becoming” makes the work a visceral experience, not a rational one.

To harness the passions Mouffe introduces the concept of agonism.

“... politics needs to speak to people about their passions in order to mobilize them towards democratic designs. I’m trying to think of a model of the public sphere which will not be one where people leave aside all their differences in order to reach a consensus, but precisely a sphere where an agonistic confrontation takes place. For, to see that you can exercise your rights you need to be given alternatives. If you don’t have a choice, then the whole democratic process is completely meaningless.”<sup>lx</sup>

There would be a consensus on basic democratic values and procedures, and institutes would be adapted or created to allow for dissensus over how society is organised. This is not a call for revolution, but a desire to see democratic institutions as contingent. The ‘enemy’ becomes adversary, not to be eradicated but recognised as being legitimate. Having said that, not all pluralities would be permissible, those that seek to destroy basic democratic values and procedures through anti-democratic means would have no place within the agonistic framework.<sup>lxi</sup> By reasserting difference in what Ranciere terms the consensual ‘post democracy’<sup>lxii</sup> of the here and now, agonistic pluralism revives that ‘conceptual crutch’ of the past, the left/right divide, not as a mere return, but as a recognition of social divisions



3-5 'Cutter' 2008

being inherent within society.<sup>lxiii</sup> Mouffe states that most left wing parties see the democratic process as a competition of interests or on the 'dialogic mode', but her conception of the left is not exclusively about class struggle but rather that within the liberal democratic tradition there exists all the symbolic resources needed 'for a left wing project that had otherwise been completely defined by socialism'.<sup>lxiv</sup> Should the divide between left and right be nullified the implication would be that social division did not exist and "that an ensemble of voices has been silenced". Indeed Ranciere, writing in 2004, warns us that dissensus, so necessary for the proper functioning of politics and aesthetics, has all but disappeared.<sup>lxv</sup> (More on this later). If dissensus is a better way to rethink resistance, what can this mean for art? How to take that 'shift' and use it to make a contemporary practice that is not historically bound or relies on an outmoded (yet still relevant) concept of class. How to avoid merely mimicking CNN or a documentary? It would be worth now to briefly look at past attempts at resistant art to reveal some of the weak spots.

The presentational mode of political art may be appropriate when there is an "authentic political collectivity"<sup>lxvi</sup> to be represented, but, as Hal Foster states this can be easily reduced to a fetish, a futile gesture. As soon as the social practices of a particular group are presented as iconic they imply a uniformity and so become ideological, not critical.<sup>lxvii</sup> The representation of "the worker" is the most obvious example of this type of political art. But Foster makes a clear distinction between the rhetoric of political art and art with a politic, which he states is "concerned with the structural positioning of thought and the material effectivity of practice within the social totality, (and) seeks to produce a concept of the political relevant to our present."<sup>lxviii</sup> Walter Benjamin called for art to not so much speak for a new social force but to align practice with its production, for instance the Bauhaus.<sup>lxix</sup> Whilst this concept did change the field of cultural labour, taking art from the academy into the social, it also prompted, or proved several concepts around resistant art to be untrue. The idea that the denying of bourgeois conventions is the same as political critique, that productivism is free of ideology because it engages with the real, and yet doesn't account for consumption, show that any subversive tendencies within these concepts had been long dormant.<sup>lxx</sup> Foster's synopsis of the transgressive avant-garde (Dada, Surrealists, etc) is instructive in how they, despite their "anti social" demeanour, show that their own ideologies of utopia and transgression assisted the modernist programme. The face of the city has and is being remade with the "utopias" of modern architecture, an iconic symbol for capitalist development. And the transgression of modern art he states, has reconciled us to the chaos of the late-capitalist world, to the point where capital itself is more an agent of shock than the avant-garde ever was.<sup>lxxi</sup> Indeed Benjamin Buchloh implies that the public have a need for an anti-hero, and so perpetuate the idea of the avant-garde.<sup>lxxii</sup> But simultaneously now the avant-gardes shock has been effectively muted in a society where class, family, and religion no longer have the traction they once did. Previously when art and politics had a clear separation, it was supposed that there existed,



“... a trouble free passage between an artistic mode of presentation and the determination to act; that is, that we believed that the “raised consciousness” engendered by art – by the strangeness of an artistic form – would provoke political action... The deduction was unsound, but that didn’t matter so long as the explanatory schemata and the actual social movements were strong enough to anticipate its effects.”<sup>lxxiii</sup>

Foster states that now, a practice that wishes to resist must, “... see in the social formation not a “total system” but a conjunction of practices, many adversarial, where the cultural is an arena where active contestation is possible.”<sup>lxxiv</sup> In a way it is a return to Marx, to the artist being seen not as a free agent, but “formed” by specific social conditions, and using the actual structures of society as both material and canvas. But the idea of confrontation persists. For example Thomas Hirschhorn says that because he wanted to make “poor art”, the materials had to correspondingly poor to convey “poverty” (he uses cardboard, packing tape, tin foil, etc), that this works against a certain idea of richness and established values. “Quality, no ! Energy, yes !” he states.<sup>lxxv</sup>

The art world says Ranciere, “is a world in search of something, a world... that puts the status of art alongside precarious forms of freelance work rather than in the great activist tradition and that therefore is also less sensitive to the nihilism that has affected the intellectual class.”<sup>lxxvi</sup> Contemporary art is receptive to change because much of it is defined by an “erasure of boundaries (between the specificities of the arts), even the erasure of its own visibility as a distinct practice.”<sup>lxxvii</sup> Ranciere’s own philosophical practice is situated between disciplines, wanting to redistribute competencies, such as eliminating the boundary that separates the specialist from the amateur, and embracing internal paradox. If, as Mouffe has identified, dissensus is the key to change, how might this meaningfully be incorporated into an art practice? Being “between” is actually a condition of the here and now says Ranciere. We are in a particular aesthetic period that is witness to “border crossings between genres, between high and low art, art and non-art and commodity.”<sup>lxxviii</sup> But this pollination is not evidence of differences being homogenised but rather an assertion that identities can be kept within multiplicity. Hybridity then, is central to the way Ranciere contextualizes society. Jacob Torfing defines the threat of hybridisation to dissensus as, “... the attempt to make people realise that their identity is multiple in the sense of constituting an overdetermined ensemble of identification.”<sup>lxxix</sup> So if they see that they are not only Croatian, but also women, poor or European etc, their loyalties can be divided. However Ranciere believes that the fundamentals of identity can be maintained whilst the boundaries of that identity are porous. This is the area where a conceptual departure from Mouffe takes place, a shift, where a third area is created, itself contingent, and that within this site of mixing an agonistic confrontation can, if necessary, take place.

Ranciere seeks to counter the move to specialisation that resulted from the Enlightenment's "modernisation". With regard to aesthetics, for him a decisive moment occurs in the 1760s, with "the impossibility of translating into stone the "visibility" given by Virgil's poem of Laocoons suffering without rendering the statue repulsive."<sup>lxxx</sup> This he says is indicative of the autonomy of verbal art and the autonomy of the visible parting ways.

"This absence of common measurement, this registration of the disjunction between registers of expression and therefore between the arts, formulated by Lessing's *Laocoon*, is the common core of the 'modernist' theorization of the aesthetic regime in the arts – a theorization that conceives the break with the representative regime in the terms of the autonomy of art and separation between the arts."<sup>lxxxi</sup>

Ranciere points out that Hegel, as early as the 1820s, realised the loss that this separation, (or great parataxis as Ranciere terms it), would entail. The rationalisation into spheres of autonomy within the arts would lead to a "loss of their power of thinking in common, and that from the gap between their "resulted nothing but the 'entertainers' indefinitely repeated abrupt switch of subject capable of everything and anything."<sup>lxxxii</sup> But if words evoke images, and images words, we understand that the relationship is one of resemblance and equivalence. This denotes their are two distinct and separate entities. Ranciere introduces the term *sentence-image*.

"The sentence is not sayable and the image is not visible. By sentence-image I intend the combination of two functions that are to be defined aesthetically – that is, by the way in which they undo the representative relationship between text and image. The text's part in the representative schema was the conceptual linking of actions, while the image's was the supplement of presence that imparted flesh and substance to it. The sentence – image overturns this logic. The sentence – function is still that of linking. But the sentence now links in as much as what gives flesh. And this flesh or substance is, paradoxically, that of the great passivity of things without any rationale. For its part, the image has become the active, disruptive power of the leap – that of the change of regime between two sensory orders. The sentence – image is the union of these two functions."<sup>lxxxiii</sup>

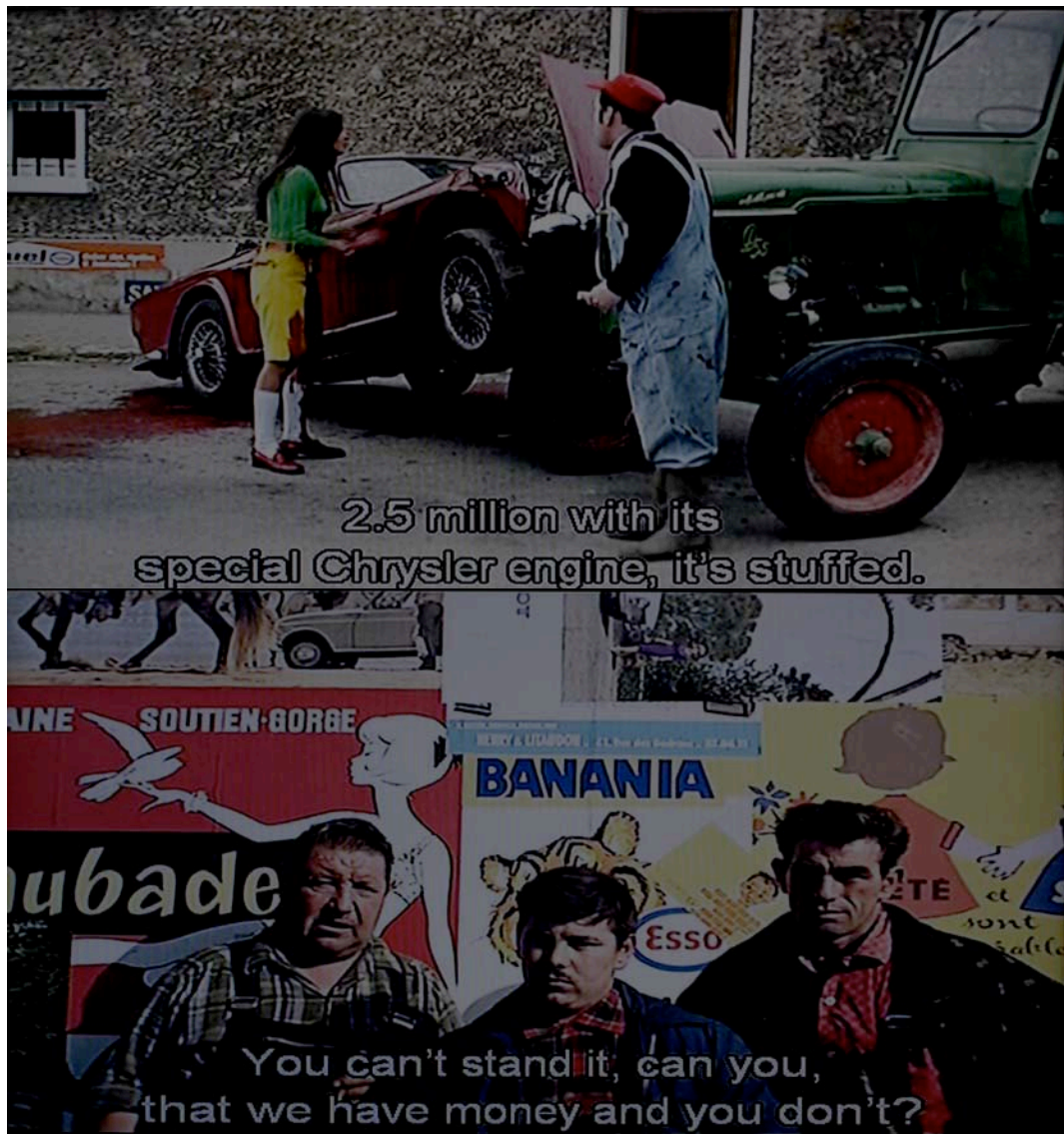
It "is the orchestration, and representation of potential chaos – that is, of multiplicity, dissimilarity, paradox and contradiction. Images, words and sounds have expressive potential when they coexist."<sup>lxxxiv</sup> The works very potential is enlarged to produce what Ranciere calls an excess, the source of arts power over reality. He has suggested that the artist, by creating forms that incorporate disorder, heterogeneous elements and inclusiveness into the work, will be better able to resist being coopted by globalisation, as

well as exercising a more subversive effect on culture. It is a vehicle to resist the forces of consensus.

Ranciere uses the films of Jean – Luc Godard as indicative of the maturation of the sentence – image. In his early movies Godard's use of montage was often constructed from "a clash of contraries",<sup>lxxxv</sup> high culture set against the world of commodity as depicted in *Two or Three Things I Know About Her* (1967) for example, and the chaotic *Weekend* (1967). This movie follows a bourgeois couple on a trip to the French countryside that becomes more violent and bizarre as the film progresses, eventually leading to rape, death, and cannibalism. The main protagonists, Roland and Carmine, as well as the rest of the characters seem to be totally reified individuals, both blind and immune to death and catastrophe. When a young woman, played by Juliet Berto is involved in a crash with a tractor that kills her male companion she is outraged over her loss of status symbols.

(fig 6-7) "Yes, he had right of way. He was young, handsome, rich, so had right of way over everyone – over the fat, over the poor, over the old!" And lamenting the loss of her car, "2.5 million with its special Chrysler engine, its stuffed!" Roland and Carmine also have a crash. From the upturned and burning car wreck a bloodied Roland emerges to hear his partners agonised screams of "My bag, my bag, my Hermes bag!"

Like a lot of Godard films *Weekend* is divided into chapters, Bertos segment being called "The Class Struggle". Apart from the shots of Berto and the tractor driver, there are jump cuts to portrait shots of herself and workers, shot in another time and place against a backdrop of advertising, but with the "current" dialogue continuing. It is a farcical scene of obvious oppositions of bourgeois and worker, the city and country, production and consumption, drama and parody, and all the characters have been dehumanised into bit players in a totally materialist world, in the Marxist sense of the word. The performers are either indifferent to each other, or have the occasional outburst of anger. Cynicism and self-interest have become manifest in a society that seems to have lost any moral or ethical points of reference. It is difficult not to think of the critique of Satre's existentialism, that ultimately it leads to nihilism. What may be normally suppressed becomes manifest at the expense of the individuals own humanity. Each segment could in fact be a self contained vignette, none more prominent than the rest, and in fact each *expressive* element within each segment seems to carry equal weight. "Traditional" story telling would have particular emphasis on particular scenes, but for Godard it is the expressive elements that have far more prominence than any narrative as such. In fact the segments could be in a different order with no significant loss of overall "meaning". In the famous coffee cup scene from *Two or Three Things* Godard ruminates on the condition of the individual under modernity. His whisper is a voice not quite fully realised, on the verge of becoming or disappearing, which enters into a post structural meta discourse. "... since I cannot escape crushing objectivity or isolating subjectivity ... since I cannot raise to the state of being, or fall into nothingness ... I must listen, I must look around more than ever. The world, my kin, my twin." Moments of



6-7 Jean-Luc Godard 'Weekend' 1967

self-awareness are constant throughout Godard's oeuvre. A girl working in a shop may start talking to the camera, explaining her employment conditions, or Juliette in *Two or Three Things* speaks of her need for products. Typically the lines are never 'performed' as in a conventional movie, they are delivered like a quote or as a train of consciousness. The subjects who speak these lines that range from materialist description, to small ambitions, to philosophical standpoints, never seem to be well 'rounded' characters themselves. They are in a state of transition, trying to grasp the ungraspable, indifferent, or resigned to fate. Often the personal becomes fused with the global. Juliette, on a job as a part-time prostitute, ruminates on the war in Vietnam. "It's strange that a person in Europe on the 17<sup>th</sup> August, 1966 can be thinking of a person in Asia. Thinking, I mean to say are not activities

like writing, running or eating. They're inside you." Occasionally the self-awareness can be hilarious. At one point in *Weekend* Roland states "This film gives me the shits!"

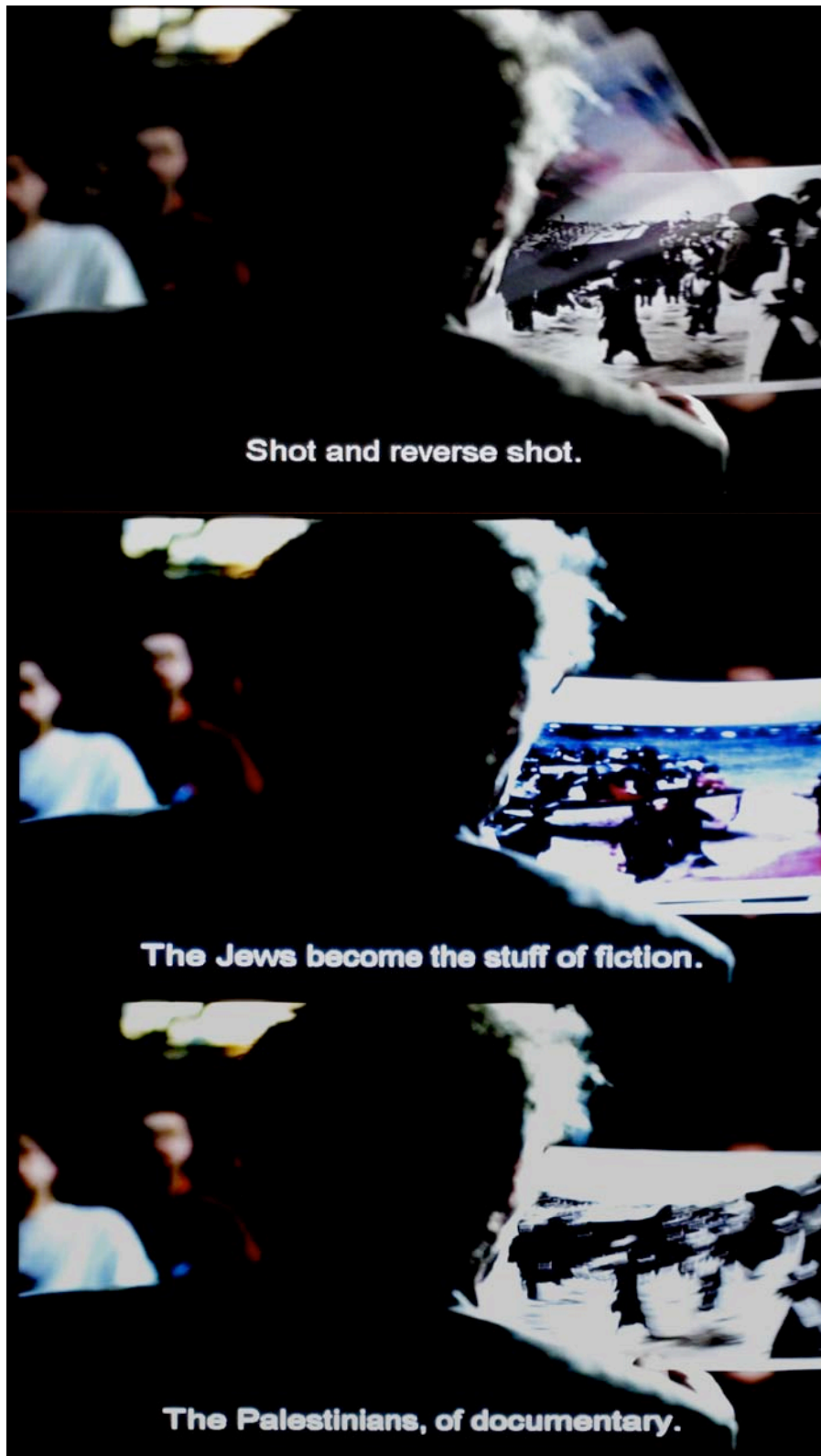
Godard critiques language itself. In *The Joy of Learning* (1969) one segment of the film focuses on a young boy and an old man in a documentary studio situation playing word association. This engagement with the semiotext of language becomes politicised later in the film when it is stated, "She notices that every word given for a letter stems from the bourgeoisie. And that the most genuine words, and their uses, are absent." The two protagonists make statements that Ranciere could have used to describe the sentence – image. "Within an image and sound, nothing is stable," and "What we need to discover are images and sounds that are free." He pinpoints Godard's "problem".

"... his practice of montage was formed in the Pop era, at a time where the blurring of boundaries between high and low; the serious and the mocking, and the practice of jumping from one subject to the other seem to counter – pose their critical power to the reign of commodities. Since then, however, commodities have teamed up with the age of mockery and subject – hopping. Linking any thing with anything whatsoever, which yesterday passed for subversive, is today increasingly homogeneous with the reign of journalistic anything contains everything and the subject – hopping of advertising."<sup>lxxxvi</sup>

But Godard's *Eloge de l'amour* (2001) shows how powerful the sentence – image can be. Ostensibly the film is about two survivors of the holocaust who are selling the rights to their story to make a film in Hollywood. Compared to his earlier work *Eloge*'s characters are more aware and self assured, yet totally cognisant of the unpredictability of life. The structure of montage remains, but the participants have acquired a wisdom born of living, and are not merely reciting knowledge.

"What makes *Eloge* a masterpiece is that the films montage (its radical look, its visual and verbal density) takes nothing away from its characters and their histories, but on the contrary heightens the expression of love between Perceval and Eglantine and that of the Bayards for each other. It also heightens the ideological stance of the film. It tells us about history and politics; it tells us a great deal about the film business and about the art of film; it tells us as much about Godards attachment to individuals, to characters, and to community as any of his *nouvelle vague* films do, or as much as any nineteenth – century realist narrative does."<sup>lxxxvii</sup>

Godard's *Notre Musique* (2004) has a scene where he plays himself giving a lecture on film that uses the Middle East conflict to demonstrate the manipulation of images, turning the Jews into the "stuff of fiction" and the Palestinians "of documentary", yet identity is tied more to what the pictures represent than what they actually show.



8-10. Jean-Luc Godard 'Notre Musique' 2004



11. Jean-Luc Godard 'Notre Musique' 2004

A group of American Indians in war damaged Sarejevo stand by the bridge at Mostar reminding us of the claims that identity can make upon the subject that Cornelia Klinger speaks of are ever present (fig 11) . The sentence – image has been elevated “above the capacity of our mind and our senses to process meaning in accustomed ways.”<sup>lxxxviii</sup> The nihilism that inhabited so many of Godard’s early films is gone, and what was a sustained attack on the material realities of the world has morphed into an engagement and negotiation with it. Godard has not mellowed, if anything his cinema is more complex and expressive, the oppositions of old have become fusions, the empirical and the metaphysical are blended.

Emancipation, says Ranciere, is to allow for the gaze of the spectator to differ from the one that was “programmed”, a rejection of the imposed message. He is explicit on this point,

‘An art is emancipated and emancipating when it renounces the authority of the imposed message, the target audience, and the univocal mode of explicating the world when, in other words, it stops *wanting* to emancipate us.’<sup>lxxxix</sup>

An example of the “imposed message” is Paul Mc Carthy and Jason Rhoades “Shit Plug” shown in 2002, consisting of glass vessels filled with the excrement of visitors to Documenta 11. Ranciere considers this work as one that falls into the sphere of consensus, despite its rhetoric about spectacle, it is itself spectacle. It falls into the trap of trying to



counter the power of the market with the power of its denunciation, using the “police logic of equivalence”.<sup>xc</sup> Work of this sort adopts a subversive, reactionary stance he states, only to declare that the market can’t be subverted and so gives up on the desire for emancipation. But Ranciere is a realist regarding the market, stating the simple truth that money is necessary to make art. Nevertheless, change is possible.

“For me, the fundamental question is to explore the possibility of play. To discover how to produce forms for the organization of spaces that thwart expectations. The main enemy of artistic creativity as well as of political creativity is consensus – that is, inscription within given roles, possibilities, competences.”<sup>xc</sup>

Ranciere’s well known talk “*The Emancipated Spectator*” delivered in 2004 expands on this ‘new equality’ in the arts. For him, the spectator is not inactive merely by virtue of sitting motionless in front of a play. On the contrary, the viewer is active, making discriminating judgements through observation, comparison, and interpretation. Here Ranciere pinpoints a weak spot of a Marxist material aesthetic, which would render the subject passive. Oppositions such as looking/acting or activity/passivity are “allegories of inequality”<sup>xcii</sup> that ‘crass’ Marxism would impose. They denote an inferior and superior position, but Ranciere suggests a reversal of roles would make a profound impression.

“The spectator is usually disparaged because he does nothing, while the performers on the stage – or the workers outside – do something with their bodies. But it is easy to turn matters around by stating that those who act, those who work with their bodies, are obviously inferior to those who are able to look – that is, those who can contemplate ideas, foresee the future, or take a global view of the world. The positions can be switched, but the structure remains the same. What counts, in fact, is only the statement of opposition between two categories; there is one population that *cannot* do what the other population does. There is *capacity* on one side and *incapacity* on the other.”<sup>xciii</sup>

The audience participate and are able to tell their own story about the one before them. They bring their own cultural codes to the stage or gallery, and how they interpret the work is unique, hence the way we interpret a work is subject to our own ideology. The mistake that the “master” makes is that he believes that there is “a knowledge, a capacity, an energy – that must be transferred to the other side, into the other’s mind and body.” This “cause and effect is the principle of stultification,” whereas “the principle of emancipation is the dissociation of cause and effect”.<sup>xciv</sup> Nicholas Bourriaud cites Michel de Certeau, who took another “opposition”, that of the producer and consumer.



“Consumers, contrary to popular belief, are in no way passive; on the contrary, they perform a set of operations that might be called *silent production*, one that is almost clandestine....viewing or analysing an artwork means knowing how to subvert it; use is a kind of micro – piracy that constitutes what might be called an act of postproduction. Starting with an imposed language (the *system* of production), each speaker constructs his or her own sentences (the *acts* of everyday life), thereby reappropriating, through a micro – tinkering process, the last word in the productive chain. What counts is what we do – whether artist or not – with the components we are allocated... every day we are allocated new methods for organising this production; remote controls, recording equipment, MP3 devices and tools for selecting, editing, recomposing. Postproduction artists are agents of this evolution, skilled workers in the task of cultural reappropriation. Art now constitutes a tool that allows us to view different versions of our own world.”<sup>xcv</sup>

Ranciere’s account of his own research tells much about the genesis of his thinking. He belongs, he says, to a generation that sat between two views. Firstly, those with “knowledge” of society’s operations had to pass on that knowledge to those who suffered under that system, so that, armed with this newfound intelligence they could overthrow or reform society and secondly, the so called learned were actually ignorant since they lacked knowledge of what exploitation and rebellion really were, and so had to become students of the ignorant workers. He, like Althusser, attempted a recontextualization of Marxism for a new revolutionary movement, and also attempted to learn from the workers what exploitation and rebellion meant. The failure of this project led Ranciere to start researching the history of the relationship between the workers and those who would come to liberate them. In a moment of epiphany, the philosopher discovered not evidence of a historical/materialist relationship that shed light on the conditions of labour and class, but “a sense of likeness or equality.” What he found was the correspondence between two workers writing in the 1830s. The subject matter of the letters consisted of a description of the daily routine of a utopian community of Saint – Simonians, a visit to the country where the worker/aesthetes enjoy “forms, lights, and shades of nature,” and a discussion in a country inn where the worker/philosophers exchange metaphysical hypotheses. These workers, fellow intellectuals in fact, had overthrown,

“ the given distribution of the sensible, which had it that those who work have no time left to stroll and look at random, that the members of a collective body have no time to be “individuals.” This is what emancipation means; the blurring of the opposition between those who act, between those who are individuals and those who are members of a collective body.”<sup>x cvi</sup>

There was no apparent gap between intellectuals and workers, or actors and spectators. Consequently Ranciere states, this means the blurring of borders between disciplines, the change to Plato's formulation that has everyone doing only one thing, "the capacity with which nature had endowed them."

" Philosophy, then, could no longer present itself as a sphere of pure thought separated from the sphere of empirical facts. Nor was it the theoretical interpretation of those facts. There were neither facts nor interpretations. There were two ways of telling stories."<sup>xcvii</sup>

And if academic disciplines are subject to this blurring, then the same has to take place within hierarchical levels of discourse. "What had to be done was a work of translation, showing how empirical stories and philosophical discourses translate each other. Producing a new knowledge meant inventing the idiomatic forms that would make translation possible."<sup>xcviii</sup> Its important to note that for Ranciere this "blurring" is a nuanced move. A mere artistic synthesis could result in "a kind of hyperactive consumerism." The hybridisation of the means of art, by which he means mass individualism made tangible by the "relentless" swapping between identities, reality or virtuality etc, also leads to the same consumerism, and "another kind of stultification, inasmuch as it effects the crossing of borders and the confusion of roles merely as a means of increasing the power of the performance without questioning its grounds." What he advocates is,

"... the transformation of the cause/effect scheme itself, at the dismissal of the set of oppositions that grounds the process of stultification. It invalidates the opposition between activity and passivity as well as the scheme of "equal transmission" and the communitarian idea of the theatre that in fact makes it an allegory of inequality. The crossing of borders and the confusion of the roles shouldn't lead to a kind of "hypertheater," turning spectatorship into activity by turning representation into presence. On the contrary, theatre should question its privileging of living presence and bring the stage back to a level of equality with the telling of a story or the writing and the reading of a book."<sup>xcix</sup>

For Ranciere, the emancipated community is a community of storytellers and translators. Emancipation is a key theme for a forthcoming work, the Mokopuna Island Project.

In 1903 Kim Lee, a Chinese Green Grocer in Newtown was diagnosed as having leprosy and sent into quarantine on Somes Island. At some stage during his internment he alone was moved to Mokopuna Island, separated from Somes by a narrow channel of water and supplied with food by flying fox and the occasional visit from the lighthouse keeper. He had no shelter and spent the rest of his days living in a small cave. The announcement of his death in the "Evening Post" makes no mention of him being moved to Mokopuna Island, and

mentions that one month prior the paper had reported that he would make a full recovery. My project will take place (weather permitting) on Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> March 2010, the 106<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death. I envisage that the audience would board one of the three 1 hour and 40 minutes East by West Ferry's Harbour Explorer sailings that, because of the route they take, would be suitable for the viewing of the work. Each passenger would be given a flyer with some kind of historical overview, perhaps the news clippings from the Evening Post that describe Kim Lee's demise, so that there is an element of the "establishment" of the time speaking to us in their own voice, and a matter of fact description of the "performers" and there "circumstances" relevant to the work. Half a mile out from Mokopuna Island the warning klaxon would sound (with no explanation from any of the crew) for about 3 seconds, half a mile being the old quarantine limit. As the ferry passes the cave where Kim Lee spent his time on the eastern side of Mokopuna Island the engines would cut, and passengers would hear laughter from one person from within the cave for about 30 seconds. No one would be visible. The ferry would then continue on its journey. The performers would be 'subjects' who are tolerated, as opposed to being equal. Tolerance implies the host body copes with something that it finds undesirable, but this does not mean equality. My tentative title for the work is "At the Bay". The allusion to Katherine Mansfield's story stems from the fact that she was 16 years old at the time of Kim Lee's death, and probably in Days Bay that summer of 1903/04, and so would have had a clear view to Mokopuna Island. As a writer whose subject seems to be about the dark undercurrents of colonialism, and also as someone who had empathy with an other, the Maori, referencing Mansfield's "*At the Bay*" seems appropriate, and helps to entangle the otherness of local Chinese history with the history of the dominant culture.

At the moment other issues are being explored to do with the politics and the making of this work. Chief among these is the idea of citizenship, rights, and the subject, clearly issues that are relevant to any group, ethnic or otherwise. Ranciere asks the nonsensical question "does a French woman belong to the category of French men?"<sup>c</sup> This allows for the identification of a space that reveals itself both as a social bias and as a relationship. The subject who occupies this space therefore lacks a caste, and becomes an outsider, a being into non-being, existing between names, statuses, and identities. They become "an anybody that has no-body". Ranciere concludes that "the logic of subjectivisation always entails an impossible identification."<sup>ci</sup> But could it be that liberal economic regimes have reidentified the subject by the appropriation and projection of the 'desirable'? Andrea Fraser writes,

"...while the 'privilege' of freedom – and instability- was once reserved for artists and intellectuals, it is now being extended to a whole range of service occupations, and beyond...artists (and some architects) have become the poster girls and boys for the joys of insecurity, flexibility, deferred economic rewards, social alienation, cultural uprooting, and geographical displacement, as if it's all just one big, sexy, lifestyle choice".<sup>cii</sup>

Freelancer, owner operator, part-timer could all be terms applicable to current procedures of disempowerment. Conceptually we are all citizens, but, for example, many self-employed people don't have the same access to the judiciary that others enjoy because of the cost involved, hence a fundamental right is, in practice, denied them. One of the performers registered the name of her business as per Government advice, but a multi-national company has, several years later started to operate within New Zealand with the same name. Because of the legal expense, she is unable to oppose this. As Klinger might say, she has been individualised. For the Mokopuna project, the performers are decontextualised, taking the recognisable subject and putting them in a place that aligns them with the outsider, humans, but not citizens. An opposition takes place, not of binaries, but made up of those who share the same ground, the performers and the audience within the local, ...the potential for discussion is presented... The work aims to attack a particular "technique", a type of power which "applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him. It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects."<sup>ciii</sup>

In so-called developed economies the zeitgeist of the here and now is one of consensus, the free-market and monetarism. Ideas such as these seem to be atomising the subject into uniformity. But these philosophies are creations of the intellect, not ideas that exist *a priori*, and as such have the capacity for change. And so Marxist theory is still relevant because of its analysis of capitalism, its methodologies and philosophical insights. Alternative ways of thinking, new philosophies that don't fall into the old trap of binary oppositions, which have thought through in a nuanced way a path out of this malaise, have much to offer contemporary art. Agonism, with its recognition of the "passions" as a primal force in the formation of identity, and the acknowledgment that disagreement is a vital part of a truly democratic society, and Ranciere's "sentence-image" with its "orchestration of potential chaos" and the power to suggest forms and ways of thinking that express the subconscious, both demonstrate how philosophy can be meaningfully used to create "an art with a politic". This dissensus then, constitutes a discussion, not a debate, across borders. Foucault has told us that any power relationship implies the possibility of resistance, that this is a force *against* something. This essay has attempted to show that resistance can evolve through dissensus, to be *for* something, to be *for* emancipation. This of course requires thought, it requires a belief, it requires a philosophy. Foucault wrote, "Maybe the task nowadays is not to discover what we are, but to refuse what we are".<sup>civ</sup> Perhaps then, the most radical act of all is to become an independent thinker.

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<sup>i</sup> Kevin Jon Heller, Power, Subjectification and Resistance in Foucault, in Substance,

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- Vol 25,  
Issue 1, 1996, p 101.
- ii Adam Roberts, *Frederic Jameson*, London: Routledge, 2000, p 24.
- iii *ibid.* p 18.
- iv *ibid.*
- v *ibid.*
- vi Janet Wolff, *The Social Production of Art*, Houndmills: Macmillan, 1981 pp 80-86.
- vii *ibid.* p 81.
- viii Roberts 2000, p 25.
- ix *ibid.* p 19.
- x *ibid.*
- xi Wolff 1981, p 61.
- xii *ibid.* p 62.
- xiii *ibid.* p 63-66.
- xiv Roberts 2000, p 20.
- xv You Tube 'The Century of the Self' BBC Documentary.
- xvi C. Wright Mills, 'The Mass Society', in Peters, John Durham and Simonson, Peter (eds), *Mass Communication and American Social Thought, Key Texts 1919-1968*, Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc, 2004, p 387.
- xvii *ibid.* pp 394-400.
- xviii *ibid.*
- xix Jonathan Crary 'Capital Effects' in *October*, 56, Spring 1991, p 123.
- xx *ibid.* p 123.
- xxi *ibid.* p 128.
- xxii Roberts 2000, p 39.
- xxiii *ibid.* p 40.
- xxiv JJ Charlesworth 'Twin Towers: The Spectacular Disappearance of Art and Politics' in *Third Text*,  
Vol 16, Issue 4, 2002, p 359.
- xxv *ibid.* p 364.
- xxvi *ibid.* p 365.
- xxvii Michael Fried, 'Art and Objecthood', in Harrison, Charles and Wood Paul (eds), *Art in Theory 1900- 2000 An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2005, p 838.
- xxviii Robert Morris, 'Notes on Sculpture 1-3', in Harrison, Charles and Wood, Paul (eds), *Art in Theory 1900- 2000 An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2005, p 829.
- xxix Rosalind E. Krauss, *Passages in Modern Sculpture*, Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1981, p 270.

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- xxx Alex Potts, *The Sculptural Imagination, Figurative, Modernist, Minimalist*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2000, p220.
- xxxi Fried, p 838-846.
- xxxii Morris, p 830.
- xxxiii Potts, p 190.
- xxxiv Claire Bishop, 'Installation Art, A Critical History', New York: Routledge, 2005, p 101.
- xxxv *ibid.*
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