

***Demand communal luxury daily!***

*50 years on  
a pamphlet savouring suspensions of time,  
cracks in the pavement, utopian ruptures and  
their re-stagings*



This pamphlet accompanies a temporary assemblage of pamphlets and print-based ephemera, curated for *Stages of Utopia and Dissent*, a symposium at Loughborough University in London, 19 May 2018

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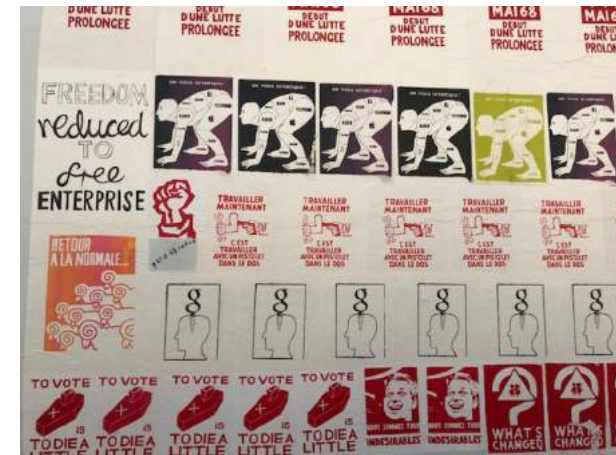
## Moments of rupture and their afterlives

‘Every revolt can be described as a suspension of historical time...the victory of the moment – be it partial or total – truly becomes, in and of itself, a just and good act for the defence of freedom, the defence of one’s class, the hegemony of one’s class.’ Furio Jesi, *The Suspension of Historical Time*, 1969

Every moment of (utopian) political rupture, resistance or revolt is a re-visiting, a re-presentation of a previous moment. Identifying the exceptionality of such moments of possibility, writing in the aftermath of the uprisings in 1968, Furio Jesi characterised these temporal ruptures as a suspension of historical time. Exceptional moments of intensity and excess, when time becomes concentrated and takes on a particular quality, where ‘everything that was happening extremely quickly seemed to be happening forever’. (1)

## IMAGES

Front cover: Graffiti/demo in Paris, May 2018, anon  
 Back Cover: Photo from online *Jacobin* magazine, March 2018  
 Page 2: OWS 2012 from Nicholas Mirzoeff’s online blog  
 Page 4: Drawing, Zoe Beloff’s *The Days of the Commune*, 2012  
 Page 10: Wall posters/graffiti on street in Brighton, May 2018.  
 Photo: GW



Gillian Whiteley, Senior Lecturer, School of the Arts, English & Drama at Loughborough University (LU), is working on a book, *Art, Politics and the Pamphleteer* (forthcoming in Bloomsbury book series [RadicalAesthetics-RadicalArt \(RaRa\)](#) and a related exhibition. Publications include ‘Welfare State International’ in J.Bull and G.Saunders (eds) *British Theatre Companies: From Fringe to Mainstream*, (2016). With members of the Politicized Practice/Anarchist and Theatre/Performance Research Group at LU, she is currently working on collaborative projects around *Art activism and Political Violence* and *Re-imagining Citizenship*.

## Immense fires of joy!

‘We will work cooperatively toward our regeneration, the birth of communal luxury, future splendors and the Universal Republic’. From the ‘Federation of Artists Manifesto’, April 1871, quoted in Kristin Ross, *Communal Luxury, The Political Imaginary of the Paris Commune*, London, 2015

In ‘Art and the People’, Communard Élisée Reclus wrote about opening up museums, liberating artworks, burning all the old barracks in ‘an immense fire of joy’.(3) Looking back to the utopian aspects of the 1871 Paris Commune, and to its sympathetic re-staging and re-enactment through a contemporary lens by the radical film-maker Peter Watkins in his film *La Commune (Paris, 1871)* (2000)(4), notions of ‘failure’ in relation to that event are simplistic and reductivist. In a further exceptional moment of resistance, between March and May 2012, Zoe Beloff re-staged Bertolt Brecht’s *The Days of the Commune* (5) in 2012 in public squares and streets of New York during Occupy Wall Street.

‘...the “true” collective is the shift that turns the heaviness and unbearableness of life into the choice of rising up, into the effort and *joy* of doing it’

Antonio Negri in G. Didi-Huberman et al, *Uprisings*, Gallimard/Jeu de Paume, 2016 (My italics).

Grasp the utopian idea that a different social reality is possible, even if its only provisional and transitory. And celebrate it, joyously. *We can* choose to live a different film everyday, another world *is* possible and, if we only look carefully and with attention, we can see it is being made and re-made every day in myriad minor acts of dissent. Inspired by the re-imagining and re-making of the social world based on mutuality and cooperation, with free education, art for all, an end to profiteering, it is rumoured that, in 1968, students chanted Long Live the Commune! In the aftermath of the ‘night of the barricades’ in May 1968, the slogan ‘Long live the Commune of 11 May’ appeared on the streets of Paris. Fifty years on, I declare, Demand Communal Luxury Daily!

## **Live a different film, re-make the world everyday**

‘We have structures to attack: a structure of power unresponsive to people’s needs: a structure of authority [...] which makes a community of scholars into a pyramid of management; a structural teaching situation which obscures the educational process. What should we do?’

R.A.Carr-Hill, ‘Being a Militant Teacher’ in *Socialist Education & the University*, *Focus 30*, May 1973

‘..how could we envisage the perfect society? ... as an infinite cinema programme where you could choose to live a different film each day...’ John Holloway, talking in Oliver Ressler’s film *What Would it Mean to Win?* 2008

Fifty years on, Howard Brenton’s melancholic comments about the failures of 1968 (highlighted in the call for the *Stages of Utopia and Dissent* symposium) *fail* to understand the complexities of ‘what it is to win’.

In February 2018 and, in support of the UCU strike action across UK universities, students occupied university senate offices and were packing out teach-outs at Sheffield, Bristol and Leicester. An audacious student declaration was staged and live-streamed on Twitter as they bedded down for the night at the University of Leicester. It demanded the impossible: sack the current Vice-Chancellor, students and staff to elect the next one, stop zero-hours contracts for staff, democratise and decolonise the curricula and so on. A couple of weeks later, the occupations had spread and, one night, a bank of screens on Twitter relayed a whole suite of student occupations, as they hooked up together to proclaim, demand and sing in solidarity.

There are resonances here with student occupations not only in Paris in 1968, but in universities and artschools across the UK (Hornsey, Essex, Guildford, Warwick et al in 1968) but also the contemporary protests at Nanterre, Lyon and elsewhere in France now, protesting against neoliberal reforms and the marketisation of education, making various demands for a truly critical and emancipatory system. In this spontaneous joyful act of rupture, historical time is, again, both in suspension and in recovery.

Yes, the Paris Commune of 1871, the événements of 1968, the Miners' strike of 1984-85, Occupy, the ZAD in Notre-Dames-des-Landes (6), the UCU action et al, have all ended in 'failure' to one degree or another (mass executions and deportations, the quoshing of demands and staff sackings, closure of industries and destruction of communities, pension cuts...) Lived experience can be exhausting but, even if we did not directly experience them, what should we take away from these moments?

The suspension of historical time was recovered over again for another generation of utopianistas.



## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> From 'The Suspension of Historical Time', in Furio Jesi's *Spartakus: The Symbolism of Revolt* (1969). Republished as a zine by Ill Will Editions at <http://ill-will-editions.tumblr.com/post/163769975759/furio-jesi-the-suspension-of-historical-time> and excerpted *Back to the Order/Revolutions On Off/Restorations* produced by Aleppo (Brussels-based Laboratory for Experiments in Performance and Politics) 2016, included in the temporary assemblage of pamphlets.

<sup>2</sup> Kristin Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives*, University of Chicago Press, 2008

<sup>3</sup> Reclus in Kristin Ross, *Communal Luxury, The Political Imaginary of the Paris Commune*, London, 2015, p. 59.

<sup>4</sup> The British film-maker Peter Watkins, well-known for other radical films of the 1960s (eg *The War Game* 1965) worked with a huge cast of non-professionals, many of them immigrants from North Africa, to produce an ambitious documentary-style re-enactment of the Commune which runs to almost six hours. It was filmed over 13 days in an abandoned factory on the outskirts of Paris. Its slow pace and improvisational approach produces an exhilarating utopian feel to the project which captures the energy of the events, seemingly as they are happening, re-working many of the debates and demands of the communards through the lens of contemporary struggles of migrant and other workers against intolerable living and working conditions.

<sup>5</sup> Bertolt Brecht's original play was a 1947 adaptation of a 1937 play, significantly entitled *The Defeat*, by the Norwegian playwright Nordahl Grieg. See Paul Mason, 'Revolutionary terror or permanent opposition: what a forgotten play can teach the modern left', *The Guardian*, 1 March 2015.

<sup>6</sup> See *The Zad and NoTAV, Territorial Struggles and the Making of a New Political Intelligence* by *Mauvaise Troupe Collective*, translated by/preface by Kristin Ross, Verso, 2018.

As Kristin Ross wrote, in her reappraisal of the events of 1968 on their fortieth anniversary, their 'afterlife' is problematic and complex but its utopian aspects persist, despite the inevitable lionising, myth-making and distortions of memory. (2) Now, fifty years on, through a series of re-visittings, re-stagings, mis-readings and re-appropriations, that exceptional moment of the suspension of historical time, is re-presenting itself through a plethora of past and current moments of rupture.

