

Forum Kritika: Performance and Domination

## MARKING "AUSTERITY": CRITIQUE, PURPOSE AND PERFORMANCE

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### Abstract

This essay attempts to mark the current phase of capitalist neoliberalism, in order to create a space for articulation, in both senses of the word: there is a need both to articulate, as in to connect together ideas, events and their consequences, and to articulate, as in to voice the dynamics, contradictions, and injustices to which they give rise. As Shock Doctrine (Klein 2007), draped in Austerity's mantle, enters the Common European Home, articulation as voice is an attempt to shatter, not silence, but the white noise generated by the mantra, "There Is No Alternative" (TINA). "Marking 'Austerity'" sets out to articulate in some detail the features of the New Great Purpose: Austerity, with particular emphasis on its performative dimensions. The essay will then introduce key aspects of how contributors to *Forum Kritika: Performance and Domination* configure acts of performance in circumstances of domination, before turning to emerging examples of alternative economies and concepts of social organisation, in which artists and intellectuals may use performance strategies in collective acts of imagining and creating circumstances better than this.

### Keywords

Alternatives, articulation, austerity, cognitive mapping, constellation, culture, democracy, dramaturgy, municipalities, performance and power, rebel cities, refusal, renewal, TINA

### About the Author

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### **Author's Note**

The Colloquium on Performance and Domination—which was the occasion for these reflections—featured performances, performative papers, and interviews, which will be the subject of a subsequent publication. Contributors not included here whose work is part of the colloquium's transnational dialogue include Dr. Abdelfattah Abusrour, founder of the Al-Rowwad Theatre and Cultural Center, Aida Refugee Camp, Bethlehem, (alrowwad.virtualactivism.net); Colonial Bastards Theater Company (Liverpool UK); Freedom Performed Theater Company (Edge Hill University undergraduates); Hope Graduate Theater Company; The Institute for the Art and Practice of Dissent at Home ([www.twoaddthree.org](http://www.twoaddthree.org); Liverpool UK); David Oddie, INDRA Congress ([www.theindracongress.com](http://www.theindracongress.com); UK-based transnational young people's theater network); and Tuebrook Transnational ([www.tuebrooktransnational.com](http://www.tuebrooktransnational.com); Liverpool UK). Each set of contributors brought to the colloquium performance practices grounded in a commitment to acting on the world, in the world.

**PERFORMANCE IS THOROUGHLY IMPLICATED IN THE WORLD**, and as the features and dynamics of the world change, so questions as to how performance achieves efficacy are re-opened. Acts of performance create spaces for articulation, in both senses of the word: to articulate, as in to connect together ideas, events and their consequences; and to articulate, as in to voice the dynamics, contradictions, and injustices to which they give rise. Articulation as critical connection might be understood as a project of "cognitive mapping," which, as Fredric Jameson pointed out more than twenty years ago, "stands or falls with the representation of some (unrepresentable, imaginary) global social totality that was to have been mapped." Jameson identifies two thematic trends of postmodern times which tend toward such a project, both of which are in themselves incomplete, or inadequate to the task:

The autoreferentiality of much postmodernist art takes the form of a play with reproductive technology which is, to my mind, a degraded figure of the great multinational space that remains to be cognitively mapped. . . .

Conspiracy, one is tempted to say, is the poor person's cognitive mapping in the postmodern age; it is a degraded figure of the total logic of late capital, a desperate attempt to represent the latter's system, whose failure is marked by its slippage into sheer theme and content. (Jameson 356)

This essay seeks to sketch the forms of a project of articulation around the New Great Purpose: Austerity, in an attempt at cognitively mapping the dynamics of that "great multinational space" under the current phase of the neoliberal project, characterised by Michael Sandel as "the expansion of markets into spheres of life where they don't belong" (16), a development which "has drained public discourse of moral and civic energy, and contributed to the technocratic, managerial politics that afflicts many societies today" (23). In its first sense, articulation is a process of exposing relationships between ideas, events, and people, and making visible the consequences of those relationships. It is an exercise that is simultaneously forensic, cartographic, and analytical; it combines discovery and detection with organization and representation, and enables evaluation and critique. It is a task which David Lloyd refers to as bringing apparently unrelated phenomena "into constellation" (*Irish Times* 8), exposing the features of what is actually present all around us—albeit obscured from view—and the inter-relationships by which their power to influence events is put in play.

In its second sense, that of clearly voicing ideas, enabling advocacy, argument and persuasion, a project of articulation draws on more than the rational, empirical traditions deployed in cartography. This is necessary because the project here is one of purposeful intervention into what Jeffrey C. Alexander describes as "complex modern . . . societies" (216), ostensibly rationalist configurations, in which, paradoxically, "culture structures remain strong and binding. They are not subject

to scientific scrutiny and discarded if they are falsified in this way. Cultural truth is moral and aesthetic. In the world of meaning . . . symbolic realism, not social reduction, reigns supreme" (2-3). According to Alexander, cultural truths achieve greatest efficacy in *performance* events, an insight which has defined strategies for shaping perception and performances of power, ever since John F. Kennedy defeated Richard M. Nixon in broadcast debate, not by his ability to persuade in logical argument—the point at issue for radio audiences—but by the effectiveness with which he was seen to embody the heroic form of a would-be president: the primary concern of the audience watching on television. Kennedy clearly presented credible policies, but it was his seizure and command of the protagonist's role in the social drama of American leadership that was decisive; not only did he win, but in performing the role of victor, he constructed Nixon as vanquished.

It is over half a century since intellectuals of the Frankfurt School directed public attention to the constitutive shortcomings of complex modern societies: Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer wrote of a dark side of Enlightenment; Adorno further inveighed against the "administered society;" and Herbert Marcuse published *One Dimensional Man*. Into the spaces of contradiction between aspiration and practice thus exposed, official culture decanted symbolic libations, including ideas, images, and exemplary figures and performances; thus were soothed the abrasions caused by double standards in public life, underpinned, ostensibly, by a popular consensus for civility and the good life. This essay is also concerned, then, with an urgent need to consider performance in relation to how state and corporate domination presents and legitimizes itself, and vice versa; "to be able to move back and forth between theatrical and social drama enriches both sides" (Alexander 56). Accordingly, some consideration will be given, not only to how understanding performance has further strengthened what James C. Scott calls the "public transcripts" (2) of the powerful, but how artists and intellectuals might use both statistic and symbol to revive an imperative essential to both liberal and social democracies, in which, historically, "intellectuals become important . . . because of how dramatically they attack the civil deficits of their national societies and inspire its civil repair" (Alexander 5).

## **Cultivating Citizens for the Modern State: Economies of Exclusion**

Across Europe, during the final quarter of the seventeenth-century, a process of modernization of institutions and social convention took place and this was reflected, in Britain, in the defining theatrical form of the period, the *Comedy of Manners*. In keeping with the society out of which it emerged, and into which it played, this form was both flexible and dynamic. By 1700, plays had begun to use a form of language identifiable as modern English, and certain social relations which endure and shape the world of the twenty-first century began to take recognizable

forms: the coffee house and the playhouse operated as interpenetrating sites in which the informal exchange of commercially and socially useful information took place. The print periodical installed the theater critic as a cultural arbiter, and a prurient attitude to women performers laid down a template for what we now recognize as a pervasive and parasitic celebrity culture. These social forms and relationships constituted the cultural logic of the coincidence of "political centralization and enormous wealth" (Kaul 6) in late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth century London. Because of this, they created and sustained the organizing dynamics of Britain as an imperial nation, and facilitated the universalization of images of London living as the only true version of a British Way of Life:

An England-centric Great Britain was brought into being . . . with London increasingly [*sic*] its administrative, financial, scientific and cultural hub. . . . In these hundred years or more, the conglomeration of multi-lingual and distinct communities in Ireland, Wales, Scotland and England were brought within a more clearly defined *national* ambit . . . a realignment of power in which *regional distinctions became markers of a provincial, and even backward, identity as English modes of behaviour and standards of correctness became the currency of the nation.* (Kaul 4-5; emphasis added)

Thus, the domestication of the immediate "homeland" produced a cultural playbook which would be deployed globally to construct, regulate, and exploit Imperialism's Others. The enduring influence of this turn and the deep cultural structures it enabled is visible in our own time, as acts of cultural production continue to develop and disseminate "an internally differentiated system of socio-cultural, political and ethical values that maps Britain itself, showing how provincial ways of being lag behind (or occasionally contribute usefully to) the norm that is defined by elements of London-based and English life" (Kaul 26). The provincial is an infinitely elastic category that, once established, enables the recalcitrance of any group surplus or antagonistic to the interests of the metropolitan elite—whether on grounds of ethnicity, geography, gender, race, class, or poverty—to be calibrated and expressed. The operation of this social formula drove the cultural programs of the modern liberal state, and the persuasive—or, if expedient—coercive figure of the ideal citizen (cf. Lloyd and Thomas) continues to be mobilized deliberately to embed institutions of constitutional governance, custom, and practice in the affairs of politics, commerce, and social relations:

Central to both nation-formation and empire-building are the institutions of the state, institutions which range from the fiscal and administrative to the juridical and pedagogic, dedicated both to the construction of civil and military apparatuses *and of the citizens who people them.* (Kaul 18)

Alain Badiou exposes the central role played by similar symbolic idealizations in today's complex societies,

A state always generates the existence of an imaginary object that is supposed to embody an identitarian "average." For example, let us call *F* (for "French") the set of distinguishing features that authorize the state to refer all the time to the "French"—what identifies them and their particular rights, which are entirely different to those who "are not" French—as if there existed a completely identifiable "being-French" . . . The main thing is that one can make reference to this purely rhetorical "French person" *as if he or she existed*. (73-4)

*F* is a function of a set of contradictions, crystallizing "dominant parameters of the imaginary construction of the 'French person' . . . drawn from the incoherent list of the available features of *F*." But such plasticity is of immense importance, as the state's policy, and its "propaganda starts by declaring that what is normal for an empirical French person . . . is to be . . . *largely identical to the object F* . . . Any individual who deviates from this quasi-maximal identity to *F* is not 'normal.' But what is not normal is already suspect for the state and the public opinion dependent on it. . . . This subject would do well to 'integrate' as soon as possible, on pain of expulsion for a crime of identity" (76). Increasingly, what is required is not a set of statements or undertakings, but performances:

The fictional *F*, measure of normality and matrix of suspicion, or its stand-in in any state structure, is always identitarian. It must be understood that it represents the most primitive, the most fundamental product of state repression. When this point is radicalized, when one ends up requiring of each person countless "proofs" that their identity with the fictional identitarian object is maximal, or at any rate excellent, we are generally in a state embarking on the road of fascism. (76)

Curiously, what is performed as typical of a national identitarian subject is also an exemplar of the ideal actions of a desired identitarian subject. Thus, public figures perform patriotism in unctuous displays of attachment to Our Way of Life—(sentimental or belligerent versions are available, as circumstances require), "ordinariness" in passion for high profile sporting events, especially involving national teams or representative individuals, or ethnic consistency in attachment to particular foods and drinks. And one of the most remarkable dividends of Alexander's insight on cultural truth is that once mastered, the performance of "ordinariness," for instance, elides the objective circumstances of the social performer. Scions of national elites, such as George W. Bush or David Cameron are double-coded as "Dubya" and President of the United States, on one hand, and

"Dave" and Prime Minister of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, on the other. The "ordinary" soubriquet honed for the campaign trail is carefully refined while in office, with the authority of which it is further projected as a model for all those aspiring to full national identitarian subjecthood. The plain implication of these examples is that in complex societies, ostensibly grounded in reason and the rule of law, the social order is largely a function of public acceptance of a set of projected fictions.

When considering the neoliberal project, however, the focus needs to broaden to accommodate the fact that personalities and aspirations projected by protagonists in its social dramas obscure much more than chicanery and charlatanism at national level. If that was all that was involved, the mobilization of "the 'cynical reason' that so often masquerades as the common sense of modern life" (Alexander 5) would suffice. The transnational neoliberal project was undertaken in order to remake forever a world in which what Naomi Klein calls "the dream of economic equality" (451) had taken hold as the desideratum of the mass of people:

These ideas were never defeated in a great battle of ideas, nor were they voted down in elections. They were shocked out of the way at key junctures . . . defeated with overt violence . . . betrayed by "voodoo politics" . . . It is precisely because the dream of economic equality is so popular, and so difficult to defeat in a fair fight, that the shock doctrine was embraced in the first place. (Klein 451)

In Chile, in 1973, economic shock doctrine exploded onto the global stage:

Even if the coup was not a war, it was designed to feel like one—a Chilean precursor to Shock and Awe. It could scarcely have been more shocking. Unlike neighboring Argentina, which had been ruled by six military governments in the previous four decades, Chile had no experience of this kind of violence; it had enjoyed 160 years of peaceful democratic rule, the past 41 uninterrupted. Now the presidential palace was in flames, the president's shrouded body was being carried out on a stretcher, and his closest colleagues were lying face down in the street at rifle point. (Klein 92)

Shortly before General Pinochet's forces embarked on the bloody coup and subsequent reign of terror, advice was proffered by the progenitor of disaster capitalism, Professor Milton Friedman: "If this shock approach were adopted, I believe that it should be announced publicly in great detail, to take effect at a very close date. The more fully the public is informed, the more will its reactions facilitate the adjustment" (qtd. in Klein 75). There was a plan, and it was implemented across Central and Latin America, Eastern Europe, Africa, Asia, and—most

bloodily—across the Arab nations. In the early twenty-first century, the project had nowhere else to go but the Common European Home; how would it be progressed?

## Bank Warfare

As this essay is being written there is a growing sense that everyday life in the West is degrading into a "soft" version of the kinds of state coercion all too familiar to inhabitants of countries in the global East and South: Shock Doctrine for the Rest; Austerity for the West, so to speak. Accordingly, across Europe, the coup by which this has been achieved has featured not tanks, but banks. In state after European state, post-World War II aspirations to enable citizens, protect rights and difference, are being abandoned. Both Greece and Italy have had democratic government suspended, in the interests of "efficiency," "austerity" and "modernization." In Ireland, government performs obeisance to a toxic neo-colonial project of capital extraction; sovereignty prorogued means democracy hollowed out. Across the continent, the state shrivels in all save one aspect: it retains its historical monopoly of violence for possible use against its own citizens. Bank warfare has been extremely effective in cowing what neoliberal "shock doctors" see as "threat populations" incorrigibly wedded to a "dream of economic equality" institutionalized in various versions of the Welfare State. It has enabled draconian state actions that exact escalating human as well as political/ethical costs.

## Dramatizing Austerity

The New Great Purpose: Austerity has generated its own dramaturgy of economic warfare, played out in a *mise en scène* dominated by carefully calibrated images of urban westernization and conspicuous consumption from China, India, Russia, and Brazil. The more striking the image, the more it dramatizes "Old Europe's" slippage from devotion to the capitalist myth of constant progression, and populations are harangued with the truism that There is No Alternative (TINA)<sup>1</sup> to the wholesale destruction of the social contract, and the institutions which give it effect. Actual alternative models of economic and civic organization are presented as deniers of a range of "freedoms"; their democracies sneered at, lampooned (Venezuela and other South American states), or carefully ignored (Iceland and other Scandinavian states). In the Theater of Austerity, the grand institutions of collective living are re-costumed and choreographed as expressions of individualism on a grand scale: "Your (singular)—not 'Our'—National Health Service," for example, echoes the fundamentally anti-social American trope, "My—not 'Our'—tax dollars." Once installed, such cynical travesties are mobilized to justify the incremental destruction of the institutions to which they refer. In Britain, a range of actors has been assigned conjured roles as threats to the integrity of a "British Way of Life" including taxation, the public education system, the National



Health Service, and—most egregiously—human rights legislation, which brings together two demonized figures: “foreigners” in general, and the European Union. As in the construction of *F* outlined by Badiou, mutual contradictions among rhetorical elements is no impediment to public efficacy; thus, in summer 2013, the National Health Service is figured both as that which must be vigorously defended against “foreign health tourists” and as a sinister cartel sponsoring hospitals lethal to their communities, which must be placed in “special measures”; the latter a classic shock doctrine maneuver, facilitating huge transfers of public funds into the hands of corporate asset-strippers.

In the social dramas in which a would-be beleaguered national state confronts multiple adversaries, the actual state’s protective responsibilities are “downsized” and projected as a set of duties to a fictional figure: the Taxpayer (*T*).<sup>2</sup> This monad, evacuated of social, cultural, political or historical dimensionality, leads a chorus of fealty to an impossible ethno-economic homogeneity. In Britain, *T* is TINA’s consort, co-star in a long-running crisis-driven soap opera, *UK plc*, which plays out daily on news stands—in hysterical full page tabloid headlines, such as *CRISIS AS WE ALL STOP SHOPPING*,<sup>3</sup> or *PANIC AS EU RAIDS BRITONS’ SAVINGS ACCOUNTS*<sup>4</sup>—in broadcast media, and in official statements. *T* is constantly affronted by actual human diversity: variety of aspiration, ethnicity, experience, gender, history, and social class is cast as that which must be expunged; shouted down by neoliberalism’s “white noise.” For example, the British Welfare State collects National Insurance contributions to fund a variety of Social Security measures, including pensions, disability and unemployment allowances paid to qualifying persons. Over recent years, neoliberal policies have misrepresented recipients of such allowances—re-coded as “benefits” or “welfare,” to appropriate American invective to the cause—as parasites on *T*. Thus, in any given episode of *UK plc*, *T* is beset by “benefit cheats,” who have reduced *T*’s cosy, comfortable world to a post-apocalyptic desert, *Broken Britain*.

Pity *T*; rhetorical turmoil is everywhere around, but help, in the form of real solutions to false problems, is at hand in a strategy to which there is, naturally, no alternative:

Our new law will mark the end of the culture that said a life on benefits was an acceptable alternative to work. While we’ve been putting in place a sensible, modern welfare system that protects

Fig. 1: Front page of *The Sun*, on 19 February 2013, denouncing a decision by a local authority to house a large family, some of whom are unemployed, and most are dependent children



the vulnerable, our opponents have shown they are on the side of Britain's "something for nothing" culture.<sup>5</sup>

As Herbert J. Gans argued in his analysis of the emergence and deployment of the term "underclass," *The War Against the Poor* (1995), and Owen Jones *exposed in Chavs: The Demonization of the Working Class* (2010), rich and inequitable societies produce and circulate pathological fantasies which play out in relentless policy assaults on poor people. There are approximately 2.5 million people unemployed in Britain, but, in *UK plc* they are, to a person, feckless scroungers too lazy to get out of bed and earn a living. In sharp contrast, *T's* stoic, if always virtual, presence evokes a community of Right-Minded People, schooled in Tina's careworn attitude of mournful sternness. It is with *T's* quotidian sacrifices in mind that, since 2010, ministers of Her Majesty's Government have railed furiously against contemptible "chavs" conjured and demonized in the shameless trope of 'Alarm Clock Britain':

Where is the fairness, we ask, for the shift worker, leaving home in the dark hours of the early morning, who looks up at the closed blinds of their next door neighbor sleeping off a life on benefits? We speak for that worker. We speak for all those who want to work hard and get on. This is the mission of the modern Conservative Party.<sup>6</sup>

The reality is that so many people—"hard-working families"—are paid wages below the poverty line that the state actually subvents their employers' profit margins with large weekly transfers of public money: "The holes in [the] pay cheques of [nearly five million people in this country] are being plugged by in-work support to the tune of £4bn a year" (Sentamu). The crisis in Britain is one of widespread poverty caused by low pay and lack of employment, though no regular viewer of *UK plc* would ever come to that conclusion. This social drama has enabled the imposition of so-called Austerity on a public terrorized by the specter of exemplary economic punishments visited on other European populations. This, in spite of overwhelming evidence that, in Britain, it is the state's calculated diversion of public resources into private hands that has produced a crisis it purports to be managing: "fiscal consolidation measures have reduced economic growth over the past couple of years."<sup>7</sup> If this seems inexplicable, it makes perfect sense in the context of neoliberal shock doctrine: "The coalition government isn't as stupid or stubborn as it appears . . . because spending cuts are not about deficits but about rolling back the welfare state. So no amount of evidence is going to change its position on cuts."<sup>8</sup> Ha-joon Chang's analysis is both astute and precise. Britain, in his phrase, is a "nation in decline"; in the words of the General Secretary of the country's largest trade union, its people have been set by its government on "a pathway to poverty."

## Modifying Democracy

As Klein makes clear, Neoliberal Shock Doctrine is an aggressive project of behaviour modification, and its social dramas are a crucial part of a strategy of "managing expectations," diverting the public gaze as crucial institutions are effectively detached from democratic accountability, and captured by self-serving corporate elites. Thus, the real danger to European democratic governance lies not in a banking crisis, but in the civic, ethical and moral decline for which bank warfare has provided cover:

European citizens are suffering the consequences of actions and opinions of bodies such as rating agencies, which, unlike parliaments, are unaccountable. Many of our citizens in Europe regard the response to the crisis in their lives as disparate, sometimes delayed, not equal to the urgency of the task and showing insufficient solidarity with them in their threatened or actual economic circumstances. (Higgins)

One of the consequences of this turn of events may be expressed spatially as the interpellation of individuals by vertical relationships, deferring upward along an axis of descending state and corporate power. Horizontal relationships, in which borders of nation, race, gender, and politics are freely crossed are incompatible with the neoliberal project, and must be tightly policed where they cannot be eliminated altogether. It is in such horizontal relationships that free association of persons and ideas emerge, in spaces of empathy, exchange and dissent. They are the spaces of alternative performance of circumstances better than those in which Capital is fluid and people are fixed.

My initial proposal that everyday life in the West was turning toward a "soft" version of the kinds of state coercion all too familiar to inhabitants of countries in the global East and South was made with judicious regard to Jameson's warning on the seductions of conspiracy and paranoia, "the poor man's cognitive mapping." More seriously, a simplistic correlation of incremental social deterioration explicit state violence would dishonor the victims of lethal forms of disaster capitalism. I hope no sense of disrespect has been communicated, as the phases of Shock Doctrine and Austerity are clearly incommensurable in intention and effect. As to the charge of paranoia, facts now in the public domain expose the imposition of Austerity in European countries as wholly consistent with the motive and dynamics for the neoliberal project of the last four decades, which, as Klein demonstrates, since 1973, has played out in many countries. To conclude that these events did happen, and they amount to a global assault on governance, living standards and the democratic social contract, is anything but paranoid. Paranoia, however, is a characteristic feature of the now-dominant institution of contemporary life: the corporate security state itself. Even where overwhelming force and state terror was used to eliminate

actual or potential forces of resistance, Friedman's advice to Pinochet has always been adhered to; a set of "cultural truths" or tenets of common sense justifying events has been controlled, and if necessary manufactured anew: the Irish "bank bail-out," for instance, is anything but; it is a "bail-in" of resources from the EU periphery to the centre. However, a pervasive sense of crisis blurs the reality that the monies transferred to Ireland simply reverse on reaching Dublin and return to the coffers of banks in Germany, France, Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. Locally, the price levied to compensate for collapsing banks has been successfully misrepresented as a surcharge on the folly of "inefficient" public services staffed by "overpaid" state employees accumulating "generous" pensions, and transfers to greedy poor people and immigrants. As more than one commentator has observed, the Right's transnational project of reconfiguring the implosion of crony capitalism as a crisis of public institutions has been outstandingly successful.

Nowhere is the paranoia of the corporate security state more manifest than in the extraordinary extension of surveillance into every aspect of everyday life. Even in the wake of intelligence reports published by *Wikileaks*, the disclosures facilitated by Edward Snowden on US implementation of a policy of total global electronic surveillance of friend and enemy alike were truly remarkable. Equally extraordinary were the geopolitical actions that followed. In June 2013, a jet carrying an elected president, Evo Morales of Bolivia, was forced to land in Austria and submit to searches, not because Snowden was on board, but because he might have been. In denying air space to President Morales, European governments betrayed their own sovereignty and violated that of Bolivia, apparently at the behest of the orchestrators of mass violations of data protection, diplomatic convention, and—arguably—the Constitution of the United States of America.<sup>9</sup> These events led *Der Spiegel's* Jakob Augstein (2013) to conclude that "a regime is ruling in the United States today that acts in totalitarian ways when it comes to its claim to total control. Soft totalitarianism is still totalitarianism." With these events in mind, it no longer appears fanciful to suggest that perhaps China's dividend to the neoliberal project comes in the form of an idea creeping swiftly from backdrop to center stage in the dramaturgy of neoliberalism: capitalist accumulation does not need free societies; elites can amass great wealth among subject populations. In this light, European governments' perfunctory expressions of concern over illegal electronic surveillance might be constellated with an observation by Mr. Blair, former Prime Minister of Britain, and Peace Envoy to the countries of the Middle East. A military coup in Egypt prompted him to declare, "I am a strong supporter of democracy. But democratic government doesn't on its own mean effective government. Today efficacy is the challenge" (Blair).

In this context, Tina's narratives and social dramas enable a conceptual transition from welfare state to neo-feudal corporate security state: the basis of elite policy prescriptions for what will replace civil life. In searching for a figure to convey the experience of living in this historical moment, David Lloyd formulates the unhappy

prospect of a decline of the liberal democratic state from market place into prison camp, as "forensic modernity" gives way to interrogation modernity (*Irish Culture* 166-197), and the fictional dyad of criminal and detective is replaced by citizen and interrogator. Citizens still vote in this encroaching dystopia, but they are offered a choice between parties who can promise only to do them harm, as in Ireland, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Greece, and Cyprus (and previously, as documented by Naomi Klein, across Latin America, Eastern Europe and the Arab states). The state is itself protected, to extend Lloyd's analogy, by a kind of popular elaboration of Stockholm Syndrome. This has disturbing implications for the capacity of people to exercise collective wisdom, without which the foundational claim of democracy falls: how have people come to love abusive treatment, and fear a future from which abuse is missing?

This is a clear case in which the question, itself a function of the dramaturgy of Austerity, is the wrong one. People acting rationally have no investment in their own degradation; on the contrary, a majority sees the democratic state as a bulwark against corporate interests, even now. In support of this proposition, consider the strategic performances of "normality" at election time by political candidates seeking to conceal their membership of out-of-touch political elites. Alexander argues that the early twenty-first century has seen "historical shifts in the interrelation of action, institutions and culture [that must] form the backdrop for new thinking about power" (82). This is the basis of his argument that there is a pressing need to understand public life, not as a narrative, but as a series of performance events. Performativity actively constitutes what is accepted as reality, played out as a series of "social dramas that compose the public sphere" (Alexander 56). The articulation of episodes in Austerity's transnational social dramas suggests that Jameson's "great multinational space" is every bit as much a space of the primacy of cultural production and distribution, as it ever was of economic activity; the superstructure driving the base, as it were. Alexander's ethnographic notes on media coverage of candidate debates during the 2008 US Presidential Election show reason displaced by myth at every turn, and demonstrate unambiguously that whatever their policy platforms, party primary candidates and presidential election candidates are all persuaded by the analysis of former Governor of California, Jerry Brown: "How do you communicate to 38 million people? You're not sitting down talking to them. So it's gesture, symbol, the narrative, the drama. Who's the protagonist? Who's the antagonist?" It is sobering to recall that this sort of *psychomachia* enabled President G.W. Bush's supporters to denounce Senator John Kerry, not because his policy prescriptions were inappropriate or flawed, but because he "looked French."

## Better Than This: Performance as Voice

In such an environment, cultural power is real power, and the influence enjoyed by those who mediate social and political dramas is very considerable indeed. The

proliferation of mutually reinforcing print and broadcast media and its alignment with the projects of the corporate security state, is, in Jameson's phrase, a degraded residue of a vigorous Fourth Estate which aspired for robust and scrupulous husbandry of the public good. There are occasional examples of social media confounding corporate efforts to discipline and manage what is disclosed into the public domain, but evidence of the emergence of an efficacious counter-narrative to that of the corporate security state is hard to find.<sup>10</sup> Performance, however, is a widely understood, practiced, and available medium for contesting the social dramas of the state. Contributors to this Forum *Kritika* were encouraged to consider their essays as points in a further constellation: *Performance and Domination*. The range of responses testifies to the latitude afforded by the categories, "Performance" and "Domination," the problems arising from their discursive co-location, and the fact of established or encroaching domination as a present human experience. The stakes in play as the neoliberal state expands transnationally are so high as to be almost unrepresentable, to borrow Jameson's phrase, and the state's own organs of representation and interpretation labor to proof the corporate edifice against everything from rational advocacy of the common good, to performative symbols which challenge the crass separation of social actors in neoliberal dramas into "good guys" and "bad guys." It is a striking feature of the essays that they expose the contingency of performance responses, as well as their variety: whether performance interventions seek to deflect, critique, or confront a nexus of state and corporate power promulgated in print, broadcast, and social media, their strategies are negotiated on the very edge of radical compromise.

If performance contexts are already locations of domination, the wager is that reflecting on acts of performance enables conditions of domination to come into focus and be named. In essays by Brian Desmond (Republic of Ireland; Thailand), Barnaby King (Colombia) and Bill Hopkinson & Jane McNulty (Northern Ireland; England), makers of performance offer contextualized critical analyses of their own interventions in the social histories of troubled places. The deployment of performance as a weapon of civic struggle is critically documented in examples from sites of gross historical injustice and civil violence, by Ananda Breed (Rwanda), Paddy Hoey, Hopkinson & McNulty, and Sheila McCormick (Northern Ireland), and Niamh Malone (Western social dramas of Israel and Palestine). James Moran and Lionel Pilkington consider the changing problematics of the modern stage as a platform for ongoing conflict between Labour and Capital over the last hundred years—a project taken up by Tim Prentki in relation to self-proclaimed popular and interventionist practices curated under the title *Applied Theatre*. Malone's examination of the genesis and dramaturgy of Caryl Churchill's deliberately provocative *Seven Jewish Children* reveals a series of pressure points around authorship, representation of the cultural Other, and the contest for legitimacy in Western public opinion.

Prentki and Pilkington robustly expose a consistent set of problems arising from the institutionalization of performance modes typically configured as mutually opposed: the theatre of modernity and its popular others. They draw attention to the uncomfortable proposition that lurking behind the proscenium arch or in the corner of the community workshop are the imperatives of Capital. Pilkington argues that "the professional actor is a model *par excellence* of that combination of obedience and virtuosity that is demanded of all workers within today's service-oriented capitalist labor market." Prentki exposes the lethal consequences for Applied Theatre of a neoliberal funding model predicated on service delivery, producing "manipulations that, in practice, pervert its intentions and, paradoxically, turn it into an instrument of domestication." Reflecting on the predicament of theater makers in Rwanda, Breed concludes that by means of a simple reorganization of financial administration, an authoritarian "government has been able to regulate which grassroots associations are given permission to organise, and which are to be disbanded." "How," she asks, "can the arts be used to create an alternative space for expression in an otherwise tightly controlled dictatorial regime?" This is a question which exercises all contributors, and King's essay on the dilemmas of his clown alter ego, Professor Teddy Love, foregrounds the wholly compromised nature of dissenting gestures: even when performed with clear intent at subversion or refusal, Neoclowns are co-opted as "mouthpieces for corporations and states, caught in the deadening embrace of global capitalism, their playful inversions and nonsense exploited to reinscribe boundaries and social divides, under the banner of deregulation, liberalization, and democracy."

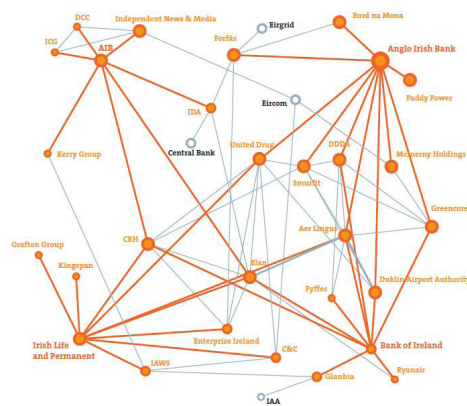
His own well-argued caveat notwithstanding, Pilkington concludes that "despite all of this, the virtuosity of an actor's body in performance remains an important location for thinking radically and analytically about social relationships in a way that opposes neoliberalism's project of economic and political totalitarianism." It is in this spirit that Desmond; Hopkinson and McNulty; and Malone return the discussion to the poetry and the poetics of the stage itself, and to questions of aesthetics, ethics and efficacy raised in three plays written to intervene in ongoing social dramas in Ireland, Britain, and Palestine. Each play—*Thailand: What's Love Got To Do With It?*, *Our Lady Of The Goldfinches*, and *Seven Jewish Children*—explicitly appropriates epic dramaturgy as a critical strategy, as if in defiance of what Hoey refers to as the "institutionally processed logic" of contemporary mass media, "the dominant arbiter of political and social interaction within the modern mediated space." Each of these plays challenges a powerful social script: "Ireland is wealthy, successful and has no need to recall its impoverished past" (*Thailand*); "The Peace Process requires that people 'move on' from the past's unanswered questions" (*Our Lady Of The Goldfinches*); "Israel's collective punishment of Palestinian people is not a subject for ethical articulation with the genocide visited on Jewish people in twentieth-century Europe" (*Seven Jewish Children*). Each essay is especially concerned with audience responses, across primary, secondary, and

tertiary levels (Hoey), and each author considers dramatic efficacy in relation to social impact. Taken together, the contributors to this Forum Kritika provide evidence of enduring depths of critical potential in dramatic art and performance practices more broadly considered. Plays such as *Heroes With Their Hands in the Air* counter the *psychomachia* of the social dramas of the state by setting out to restore the experiences and ethical perspectives of human actors to the cartography of a complex social world. Thus, these essays contribute to discussions of changing meanings of efficacy, aesthetic form, social purpose, and the negotiation of critical positions using forms inevitably compromised. And these acts of performance and critical reflection testify, above all, to a need for courage in confronting state and corporate power. That imperative directs this discussion toward future Irish social articulations in the generation of which performance strategies appear to have a role to play.

## Better Than This: Performing "Global Social Totality"

Alexander's argument that "historical shifts in the interrelation of action, institutions and culture form the backdrop for new thinking about power" (82) may also enable new thinking about performance, and its engagement with power and with public life. This time of elite coalitions is also a time of coalitions emerging from movements articulating hope and a commitment to reclaiming the world for the mass of people, the 99%, beginning with the discourse of economics—the very instrument by which mass domination is enabled. Understanding and challenging the "public transcripts" (Scott 2) of the powerful is a necessary project if collective living is to aspire realistically to a humane and progressive future. This obliges artists and intellectuals to turn attention to insights produced by critical practices in social and economic research, the better to invest creative projects with social efficacy. If European citizens have joined the global throng of those faced with "civil deficits," and even "civic death,"<sup>11</sup> then artists' historical capacity to inspire "civil repair" assumes the status of a pressing obligation. Two projects currently under way in Ireland and on the outskirts of London reveal the critical and creative potential of empirical research to counter Tina's cultural truths. *Mapping the Golden Circle*, by the Think Tank

Fig. 2: Interlocking Company Boards in the Republic of Ireland 2005-2007. The key nodes represent the boards of the banks which collapsed the economy: Anglo-Irish, AIB, Bank of Ireland and Permanent TSB. (©2009 TASC; reproduced by kind permission [www.tasc.ie])





for Action on Social Change (TASC) is a clear and timely example of the value of Lloyd's constellation strategy.

In evaluating TASC's output, it should be borne in mind that the learned attitude to the public transcripts of the powerful in neo-colonial Ireland (1922-to date) was formed in habits of silence and deference inculcated during the long colonial period. Public engagement with the strategies and projects of elites paralleled the amazement of Sean O'Casey's "Captain" Boyle contemplating the night sky from the deck of a ship on which he almost certainly never stood, during the course of a voyage he almost certainly never made:

Boyle: I often looked up at the sky an' assed meself the question—what is the stars, what is the stars? (O'Casey 88)

Thus, the articulations constellated in *Figure 2* exposing the social dimensions of elite economic power in Ireland, make an unprecedented contribution to public awareness of the systemic corruption of corporate governance in Ireland:

During the boom years 2005-2007 . . . a network of 39 people held positions in 33 of the 40 top private companies and state-owned bodies. Between them, these 39—referred to as "the Director Network"—held a total of 93 directorships. The average pay of those involved in running these companies "rose by over 40% between 2005 and 2007, while combined inflation for these two years ran at just over 9%" ("Mapping")

Even in the context of a small country, this level of interpenetration is extraordinary, and the report concludes, with diplomatic understatement,

Corporate governance is at risk when people are overextended. . . . When people know each other very well and share similar backgrounds, as many in the Director Network do, companies run the risk of "groupthink," where decisions are made that ignore alternative evidence as a result of a group's desire to reach consensus.<sup>12</sup>

When, as in the neoliberal project, the consensus is already in place before the directors convene, the Golden Circle is not so much closed as hermetically sealed to all save its own immediate interests, "trapped intellectually in a structure of thought which it appears unable to challenge, from which it seems unable, or at times even unwilling, to escape or exit" (Higgins). One of the bounties of TASC's approach to generating and disseminating economic evidence is that it exposes human action, not TINA's would-be impersonal forces, as the crucial driver of policy. This image quickly gripped the public imagination, transferring almost immediately from page to stage; when the economist David McWilliams used it

as a backdrop for a solo show on the banking crisis, *Outsiders* (Peacock Theatre, Dublin, July 2010), audiences were palpably horrified by the crystalline clarity of the constellation of corruption.

In the second project, the London Borough of Enfield, an impoverished local council undertook research to audit the real economic contribution of insurance, banking, and retail businesses to an area ravaged by the consequences of one of TINA's 1980s achievements, the destruction of Britain's manufacturing industries:

Our starting point has been to recognize the failure of the status quo. There is a wealth of cogent and basically unassailable evidence that testifies to the disastrous effects of neoliberalism on manufacturing and employment; and at the micro-level of Enfield, de-industrialization has been nothing less than a social and economic catastrophe that we experience on a daily basis. (Sitkin 147)

As a "first step in our new direction," the council members decided "not to be afraid" (Sitkin 149), took their courage in their hands, and began to map the constellations that defined actually existing Enfield, as a way of initiating "an alliance of the disenfranchised" (150) and refusing legitimacy to *UK plc's* tropes around scroungers, dependency, and barbarism. Armed with robust evidence—for example, local retail profits of £25.1 million annually; socially beneficial expenditure amounting to less than £50,000 (157)—they propose to engage corporate beneficiaries of the local economy on a number of initiatives, including implementation of a living wage, prioritizing local people in employment, and funding socially useful projects. Ultimately, the council is considering larger scale initiatives in social housing, local banking and "even commercial enterprises" (152). Tellingly, Sitkin's account of this process is subtitled, "How the London Borough of Enfield is changing the Rules of the Game,"

As local politicians, we can use our voice—and possibly our procurement criteria—to convince corporations to shoulder a fairer share of [local] financial burdens . . . Over the past thirty years it has become far too easy for hard-nosed executives to get local authorities to blink first. In this game of oligopolistic poker, we think the time has come to call their bluff. As a wise man of Chicago once said, never let a good crisis go to waste. (Sitkin 156)

The civic action undertaken in Enfield raises a larger question: as the nation state degrades into a mere node in the circulation of multinational capital, how much energy should those who refuse Austerity expend upon it? Sitkin and his colleagues commissioned advice from the Centre for Research on Socio-Cultural Change (CRESC), whose report characterised Enfield's refusal strategy as an explicit "inclination towards 'municipal mercantilism,'" drawing on "Joseph

Chamberlain's 'municipal socialism' in Birmingham more than a century earlier, as well as statements made by less ideological modern Conservatives who recognize the interest of 'economic nationalism'" (Sitkin 151). Could it be that municipalities offer platforms of refusal and renewal more hospitable to effective action than the stages occupied by national dramas calculated to instantiate a coercive account of the homogeneity of experience, practice and memory as an identitarian norm?<sup>13</sup>

Breed and McCormick show that no national history can possibly account for or include all actual individual and collective histories within its narrative boundaries, whether defined by geography, culture, or economics. As the function of such histories is the authorization of the nation or ethnic group, it follows that many human stories are effectively outlawed by their exclusion from official archives. Their essays, and others collected here, show that performance returns against that project, to authenticate and render visible the actual heterogeneity of lived experience, human cultural practices, individual and collective memories. This, in turn, prompts the question of how performance practices might engage with municipal actors to generate a Poetics of Refusal and Renewal.

Commenting on popular support for Beppe Grillo's Five Star Movement in Italian elections (2013) Dario Fo counters its misrecognition as a new phenomenon, "We had extremely democratic town councils in medieval Italy which knew the value of working together and every now and then, down the centuries, this spirit returns." Fo situates Grillo as a *giullare*, "the wise storyteller, one who knows how to use surreal fantasy, who can turn situations around, who has the right word for the right moment, who can transfix people when he speaks, even in the rain and the snow" (Kington). In other words, as Lloyd advocates, it is possible to find in forms dismissed as archaic, provincial and unsophisticated the means to expose and confront the cold cruelties of the Austerity Project (see Lloyd, *Irish Times*).

The prospect of engaging with municipalities, artists and intellectuals is daunting, inspiring, and there is no knowing where it will lead. For reasons sketched in this essay, it seems like a very necessary project, not least because of David Harvey's intuition of a "sense that the global urban network is replete with political possibilities that remain untapped by progressive movements" (116). I conclude by venturing to offer two principles which might usefully guide the project:

- Commit to articulation in both senses considered here, eschewing "solutions to immediate problems divorced from wider political contexts," in pursuit of "a profound transformation in the processing of the deep structures by which we live" (Prentki). James Moran retrieves from the writings of James Connolly a profound ethical imperative to such action:

Capitalist society, which starved and stunted our childhood, and debases and exploits our manhood, shall, at least, be compelled to take its clutches off the lives of our children and leave the rising generation

physically and mentally capable of accomplishing the glorious task of social reconstruction now awaiting it.

A century later, no less a task is before us. The actions of Enfield councilors counter "the attempt to banish notions of the good life from public life" (Sandel 22), and open up a prospect of engaging citizens in "mundane experiences of collective democracy," which Sian Lazar noted were essential to municipal anti-capitalist action in Bolivia (qtd. in Harvey 147). Their projects are a reminder, also, that decent options for collective living do not depend on the generation of vast personal wealth, and the discredited idea of its trickledown beneficence. Cash-poor societies frequently galvanize around projects essential to the common good, as in charitable relief projects for hundreds of thousands of Irish famine victims in nineteenth-century Liverpool, or the decision by a bankrupt—but not broken—Britain to establish a welfare state and a national health service, post-World War II.

- Embrace enabling tendencies in municipal histories to broaden the basis for mobilization of progressive forms of social provision:

Unless a way is found to work with the powerful, the "oppressors," and to engage them in the dialectics of experiential learning so that they too become part "of what it is to be human," no amount of research will make the slightest difference to what is done to our young people in the years ahead. (Prentki)

The most immediate dividend of the projects under way in the heartland of Austerity Ireland and Austerity Britain has been their demonstration that 'the courage to act when doubt is warranted'<sup>14</sup> generates optimism—the "notion that there's sufficient evidence that would allow us to infer that if we keep doing what we're doing, things will get better" (West)—as they demonstrate that the dynamics of overwhelming forces can be mapped, and not simply consumed as performed in Austerity's self-serving masquerades. TASC has recently published *Towards a Flourishing Society* ([www.tasc.ie](http://www.tasc.ie)), contesting "the single-minded emphasis on economic growth [that] weakens a sense of community, civic responsibility and a willingness to participate in society," and advocating for a new, civic republicanism in Ireland: "If any activity is known to be harmful to the overall well-being of human beings, or any one person or group in society, then it should be opposed and ended" (O'Ferrall 3). In concluding his essay on municipal activism in Enfield, Alan Sitkin refers ironically to 'a wise man of Chicago': Professor Milton Friedman. Thus, he demonstrates that, rhetorically, at least, he has already captured for a higher purpose a tenet that has been deployed to wreak such misery on so many. And Alexander's brilliant exposure of the neoliberal establishment's systematic co-optation of symbols and ideas in the service of cultural truths should be set alongside the power of "cultural solidarities and collective memories" (Harvey 148) to "promote

a collective sense of self, which in turn enables [individuals and groups at city level] to be effective political subjects” (Lazar, qtd. in Harvey 148). Harvey’s study of Rebel Cities emphasizes the pivotal encounter between empirical and symbolic ways of knowing, such that “the forces of culture and of a politically radical tradition can be mobilized in such a way as to animate citizen-subjects behind a radically different project of urbanization to that dominated by the class interests of developers and financiers.” The principles tentatively offered in “Marking ‘Austerity’” constellate points around which to begin to imagine a possible cartography of cultural action for a better settlement—one in which vertical relationships of domination give way to horizontal articulations of human capacities to create circumstances better than this.

## Notes

1. "She's back. She's been brought out of retirement by David Cameron. She is TINA—"There Is No Alternative"—the phrase forever associated with Mrs. Thatcher in the 1980s." (*David Cameron: We will hold firm on economy*, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-21694944>, 7 March 2013)
2. It may be significant that the exemplary figure proposed for the project of contemporary British identitarianism is a function of economic thinking, and not of other forms of nationalist mobilization. Similarly, even government publications and trade campaigns refer without irony to an entity called *UK plc*. The Irish version is *Ireland Inc.*
3. cf. Sunday Express (17 Mar. 2013)
4. cf. The Mail on Sunday (17 Mar. 2013)
5. cf. Cameron.
6. cf. "Osborne..."
7. cf. Chu and Morris.
8. cf. Chang.
9. cf. Pilger.
10. This is not to deny the real achievements of alternative sources of information and opinion, but to acknowledge the scale of the tasks that confront them. Both aspects of the current situation are surveyed in a strong collection of essays in Fisher.
11. An arresting phrase used to describe what is unfolding across Europe, and especially in Italy, by Marion Pirovano, interpreter and authorised translator of the works of Dario Fo and Franca Rame (in conversation, 2013).
12. cf. "Mapping."
13. See Harvey (115-53) for a stimulating discussion of the opportunity and necessity for new thinking about Capital, Labour and urban organization which this turn produces: "the right to the city has to be construed not as a right to that which already exists, but as a right to re-build and re-create the city as a socialist body politic in a completely different image – one that eradicates poverty and social inequality, and one that heals the wounds of disastrous environmental degradation" (Ibid. 138).
14. cf. West.

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