REALITY CONSIDERATIONS (FOR THE SAKE OF), A PARALLEL PUBLICATION

CONTENTS,

DESIGNED BY RICHARD HOUGUEZ

REALITY CONSIDERATIONS (FOR THE SAKE OF),
A PARALLEL PUBLICATION

CONTENTS,

DESIGNED BY RICHARD HOUGUEZ

Honesty to the Human
Catherine Borra

Just over 1000 words on:
A) Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance
(Robert M. Pirsig, 1974). The narrator through the
eyes of me;
B) Living in the Maniototo (Janet Frame, 1979).
Janet Frame through the eyes of herself;
C) All the Divided Selves (Luke Fowler, 2011).
R.D. Laing through the eyes of Luke Fowler.

A)
"Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance" was given to me by a friend for my 21st birthday. It came with a note on the first blank page, that told me:
"From now on, it will not be as easy. Dear C, you will soon find yourself at a cross-road: you can either choose the path that is marked by the river bed, follow the current that together with the other little boats will convince you that your passion is free and unconditioned (rivers are good at hiding their necessities) or, like a boat in a video game, you will need to look for power ups, fight against the end-of-level monster, utilise all available cues to proceed towards the ultimate Suez canal."
This went on. I remember feeling a bit daunted by this foreword, on a book about motorcycles?!, of all things, so I buried the present away till last summer.
The book is a long diary, that follows the thought-journey of the narrator while he's taking a road trip along the back roads of America, together with his young kid (who has been manifesting psychotic tendencies), and two adult friends travelling on a motorcycle along with them.

Landscape and geography are the maps to this accurate soliloquy, from which, as a reader, I obtain an initial image of the self-centred universe of a man who is nostalgic for his former visionary, genius self – that was erased by electro-stimulation therapy some years earlier.
The travel journal does exactly what it says in the title – expanding widely on the subject of motorcycle maintenance, and the approach that will allow for 'good' motorcycle maintenance – the ecology of self/work/machine that can also be usefully applied to other fields – therefore I read.
Up to here, all is good, I can endure metaphors with no problem – but what I find disturbing in parallel to this is the constant, omniscient criticism reserved for the two friends (the lack of elasticity in the narrator's judgement of them, performed solely from his point of view and own system of values), and even worse, the accessory feature of the son, a young kid on probably the worst holiday of his life, embarked on with a distant father, who he's seen "going crazy" just a few years ago, and who is now writing a book in his head as he drives into the American landscape – with the kid's own hours spent forever looking at his father's helmet and shoulders, as he holds on for the ride.
The empathy for this kid and the powerful aversion I have for all experiences that children are put through so carelessly, that will shape them and chain them as adults, the superficiality with which these developing, blossoming creatures are moulded and hurt – it makes me so angry.
In short, it was the most fastidious book I have read since Madame Bovary – the same sense of unjust, socially constructed, inevitable fragility of the human experience – so common and hopeless. The river my friend was talking about, I guess.

B)
Next suggestion is Violet Pansy Proudlock, Alice Thumb, Mavis Furness Barwell Halleton – the split incarnations of a woman writing fiction, struggling with herself as the subject and object, at the same time, of the fiction "Living in the Maniototo", by Janet Frame – herself a woman writer, herself with a past of mental health issues and misdiagnoses – schizophrenia, a broken (schizo) heart (phrenos).
Janet Frame lived in New Zealand between 1924 and 2004, was interned for years in a psychiatric institution – a candidate for lobotomy – this narrative informing and exchanging roles at times with her prolific production as an author. Being the patient, being the writer, declared first sick then sane – adapting to contradicting selves and social statuses applied by something/someone else, as always.
"No doubt, opposing the mood of the weather, I might have made soup or stew, but I was in a compliant mood – if the day says weep then why not weep?"
"Living in the Maniototo", as well as being a book about the selectiveness of perception, is a story about the selectiveness of the imagery and cues we choose to deliver about ourselves to the world – shaping our relationships with others.
My paperback copy was one of the many Frame books given to me by my aunt, chief librarian with a great knowledge of New Zealand literature, sister to three other women that have always exchanged with each other their thoughts on readings and stuff for the mind. I always felt that the purpose of passing on the bibliography of an author that can be so sad and vulnerable, was to the symbolic gesture of valuing the good?, bad?, in any case inevitable human heritage that accompanies genetic relationships.

C)
Last topic: "All Divided Selves", a feature-length film by Luke Fowler, the affectionate portrait of one of the most radical figures in European psychiatry during the past century – created by assembling existing footage of R.D. Laing's life and work in long-recovering post-war Glasgow, and fragments of film produced by the artist – landscape, associations.
Far from the objectifying treatment reserved for the subjects of documentary, this is an intimate research into someone the artist defines as an inspirational figure. Inspiration doesn't trigger rational measures necessarily, and it is interesting how such a film, though it addresses a thematic that can concern science and medical history, thus inevitably remains within the realms of contemporary art – positively, an allowing field.
I bought "The Divided Self", Laing's landmark book, after seeing the film, when I thought it could be in some way useful for writing this text. The first chapter is called "Foundations for a Science of Persons". This is the part that I find helps most:
"If it is held that to be unbiased one should be 'objective' in the sense of depersonalising the person who is the object of our study, any temptation to do this under the impression that one is thereby being scientific must be rigorously resisted. Depersonalization in a theory that is intended to be a theory of persons is as false as schizoid depersonalization of others and is no less ultimately an intentional act. Although conducted in the name of science, such reification yields a false 'knowledge'. It is just as pathetic a fallacy as the false personalization of things."
It had never occurred to me that there was such an easy and efficient linguistic stratagem, that can hold itself both as a personal precept, and as a guideline for research, writing, production in possibly all fields of knowledge: objectify the object; subjectify the subjects.

Interview with Asta Meldal Lynge
Tom Clark

Tom – I think we could begin by contextualising your work in Reality Considerations arising from the work of David Smail, where outside, external power structures form the subject rather than arising from the subject's internal desires. With this view, you can begin to see how the experience of both the type of spaces in Lobbies not only define your experience, but inform how you perform this interiority outwardly as this subject as a structural component of a larger whole … And while the video very apparently deals with this type of space as a subject matter — it also seems to disrupt the affective nature of the structure of reflection and representation as a language...

Asta – Yeah, I think there is a language in the movements of the camera - when it falls in to moments of vertiginous disorientation. I guess I'm reflecting on this with the medium itself, the camera will be gazing up these really tall buildings and all these shiny surfaces, but at the same time you have these tracking dolly shots that are really slick, in a sense speaking the same language as the lobby.

T – So, you'd say that the place of the viewer and the character almost merges the camera with the architecture?

A – Yeah, yeah, someone described it as like a weird ménage à trois between the girl, the lobby and the camera. The character is very aware of the camera, she gazes directly into it: it's like introducing the camera, or the field of experience watching a film, as a journey through a series of membranes…

T – Yeah, that idea of membrane is perhaps more appropriate: it really felt like I was implicated as a viewer both on my side and on the other side of this membrane. The double gaze of the character on the lobby is really key, in that it is also at the viewer, and at the camera as an apparatus - so there is a kind of complication between the screen and the reflection of the architecture…

A – Yeah, yeah, I think the reflected surfaces are also like a crystalline universe of images in a sense: I mean the video came out of just walking around the City of London and you were constantly clasped by your own image - the reflection of your self. Also, depending on whether it's dark or bright when you walk past the lobbies, this decides how far in you can go with your eyes, yet you're always positioned by the reflection: even though the glass is set to be transparent it actually informs you of your position outside of that space.

T – I think we should come back to that point about positioning, but I wanted to pin down the space between the sounds, you know the interaction between that and the external diagetic sound - because there's a real sense of orchestral movement or narrative by

the sound and the solid colour plains that come up – the red, yellow and blue – this feels quite at odds with the homogeneity of the architecture on screen.

A – The colours come out of the image before or after it, so with the red, the frame after it is a guy passing by a red sculpture, with the blue, he's standing in front of a blue wall, and with the flowers, yellow… And with the music as well it sort of divides it into chapters with a start, a middle and a finishing point. Also with this piano it's only there long enough that you notice it, and then you kind of forget that it's there and it surprises you again. So it's also something about being aware that the film is a film and of the affective nature of sound and image.

T – I suppose this is most noticeable with the rotating metal globe, when the sound becomes really awful and discordant especially with this process of digitization.

A – I'm thinking about when I made this film, about the colours and the sound: I thought a lot about it as a composition in time, imagining spreading out all the frames and looking at them literally and having this experience. Like with a lot of my work, having this experience of framing and filming something and putting it together and thinking Oh I've seen this image before, its this kind of stock-image experience. I think extracting the colour from an image is a point of extracting something and taking out one component: that material, that colour, that one thing that everything is made out of…

T – Maybe we could talk a bit more about positioning and what it is these sorts of spaces imply for a

neoliberal immaterial public+private, with no clear separation between the two or between work and non-work. If you look at difference between early post-modern architecture – which was very reflective, mirrored office blocks format the 80s/90s, and which very much imbued an inside and outside and cemented the power of business. Then look at this shift into these kind of cinematic, transparent spaces, as you get this move into a much more dissolved separation between work and leisure, work at home, work in the office, or the internal space of private capital and the outside of public, society or politics.

A – I mean, I hadn't thought about that at all, but yeah, it's an interesting point. So what, you mean the fact that the architecture might mirror some kind of social approach to working?

T – Maybe something not so passive: the performance of work being imposed onto the outside world. The social factory not just being a condition of the gamification of leisure, but also as defined architecturally – so the building becomes a sort of subjectivising apparatus in this destruction of the distinction between our capacity to work and need to have time for rest...

A – That's a really interesting thing, because these global, new towers of glass, they're present in their absence in a way, yet they're so there in terms of height and shininess …

T – That's a really nice way of putting it – their presence in their absence, and a pervasiveness in the way that you can see all the desks up against the

window and your eye line is filled with this view of corporate finance, and it mirrors the market's networked, global presence. The work going on may be ostensibly behind this glass but the reach of its network extends well beyond the façade. Likewise, you may be inhabiting the space amongst the architecture as a body, but it's an image or reflection of your self on this same visual schema that forms your part in this network.

A – Think about the situation with the World Trade Center, I mean that's a whole different discourse, but the gravity of the lack of those two towers, formally perhaps you can talk of some kind of underlining through evocation of absence. You've probably seen those fountains and they also have the light coming up, all together creating that ever-present void. I mean of course the twin towers are more absent – they are actually not there anymore – than an existing glass tower but you're still talking about some sort of invisibility and that is quite interesting as a concept in a society...

T – That's an interesting combination of things: bringing together this idea of the lack – in ground zero for example – and the kind of more affective lack within the late post-modern, late-capitalist architecture is something very pertinent.

A – Also, cities like New York and London are synonymous with modern life, these are places a lot of people are drawn to, and such cities are growing bigger. So perhaps by looking at the physicality of what surrounds us the film deals with a notion of progress in relation to the city. and I think that when looking at the physicality of what surrounds us when we're in the city, how does

that talk with that kind of life?

T – I mean, what is in this negotiation you're performing by making the video? Because the kind of narrative content of the video and the way that you describe how you came to make the video, comes from quite an experiential, personal kind of reaction perhaps to the space and the feeling amongst it, but then there's the choice to make use of a somewhat structuralist approach to articulate that experience. I'm really reminded of Michael Snow's machine made for filming La Région Centrale (1971)[1], a multi-jointed dolly. There's a precision to the aesthetic, sumptuous treatment – which separated it from the image glut you mentioned before. Is that a negotiation or is it just a confluence?

A – Erm, well its not a film on film, its digital, so you can always discuss how structural, how material it really is…[laughs]… but I think that the actual kind of structural influence is my method of understanding or looking at something and how this is done. I was very curious of this concept of the lobby: it's so abstract, I mean, is it an image, is it a space? You know it's functional, but you have the desk which is 50 meters over there, and there's a vase of flowers over there… So I wanted to look at the material conditions, you know, with close-ups looking at the material or texture of this abstract concept of the lobby. So I think the structuralist/materialist drive is a sort of journalism…

T – Or a way of trying to puncture through the skin of the reflection?

A – Yeah, yeah

[1] See: http://rhizome.org/editorial/2012/jun/21/robopix/

Sisyphus
Amelia Groom

Why is it that everyone remembers his punishment but no one remembers his crime?

After violating the goddess Xenia's laws of hospitality, Sisyphus seduced his niece Tyro, only for Tyro to slay the children she bore by him when she discovered that Sisyphus was planning on eventually using them to dethrone her father, Sisyphus' brother and rival. The implacable Zeus then ordered the god of death, Thanatos, to take Sisyphus to the underworld, but Sisyphus tricked Thanatos and chained him up, resulting in disaster on land because nobody could die. When Sisyphus was finally sentenced to execution, he tricked his wife by demanding that upon his death she throw his naked body in the city square to prove her love for him. He then used this as a sign of her disrespect for him, in order to be granted access to the upper world again – ostensibly in order to publicly scold her for not giving him a proper funeral, as a loving wife should.

He was a scandal!

Finally condemned to push an immense boulder up a hill, only to watch it roll straight back down, ad infinitum, Sisyphus would famously become Albert Camus's absurdist hero, whose "whole being is exerted towards accomplishing nothing", and whom we "must imagine as happy."[i] Emphasising the notion of repetition for its own sake, Camus was in fact repeating ideas expressed previously by the Japanese philosopher Kuki Shuzo. Fourteen years before the publication of Camus' Myth of Sisyphus, Kuki had given a lecture in France, where he declared that we should imagine Sisyphus, with his "firm and certain will of always beginning again," as happy. "He perpetually renews his effort. Is there suffering, is there punishment, in this act? I do not understand," said Kuki, "Sisyphus should be happy, being capable of a perpetual repetition of dissatisfaction."[ii]

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=711bZ_pLusQ

A (happy?) slinky on a treadmill. A single gesture, dispossessed of its capacity to move forward, repeated for three and a half minutes, and viewed on YouTube three and a half million times (as of October 2012). Unlike the Fordist conveyor belt that divided up time and labour into achievable units, each completion here folds back on itself. The immediately anthropomorphised slinky is propelled onwards by its own momentum, but each motion is cancelled out by the reiteration of the same. This is the paradox of the Modernist notion of 'progress': with the indefinite

postponement of closure, it demands that we strive for it but never reach it.

Moishe Postone has described what she terms the "treadmill effect"[iii] that occurs under capitalism, paradoxically, with its demand for accumulation. Because there is always more to acquire, the arrow of time loops back on itself. The treadmill makes us run in place, so step-by-step becomes step-on-top-of-step. But can self-consciously redundant gestures of self-replication also work to resist processes of objectification, commodification and accumulation? Bea Fremderman's two-minute-twelve-second video loop, Kafka Office (2012), presents us with a generic grey space of regulated and enforced productivity where nothing passes besides time itself, with the cyclical passage of day to night, on repeat. This sort of exaggerated, staged inefficacy asks if we can find a way to proceed without progressing; if we can use tautology to resist teleology.

"Meaningless work is obviously the most important and significant art form today." (Walter de Maria, 1960)

Before he was punished, Sisyphus had fought progression. He attempted to disrupt the linear transferral of the throne, he halted the human passage from life to death, and he rapaciously refused his own divinely dictated fate. As the only possible retribution his existence would be condemned to eternal redundancy, where he can never be done with what he has nevertheless already finished. Refusing to meet his

end, he was to be punished with endlessness – action without purpose, perpetually unconsummated process where achievement would be impossible since the completion of each gesture would roll back on itself to its own beginning. But perhaps this punishment only amounted to the highest reward, and purposive purposelessness is an ideal towards which we can all aspire? Kuki Shuzo in 1928: "it is the enterprise that interests us, not the goal."

[i] Camus, Albert. The Myth of Sisyphus, trans. Justin O'Brien, Penguin Books – Great Ideas, 2005
[ii] Kuki, Shuzo. "The Idea of Time and the Repossession of Time in the Orient" in Sourcebook For Modern Japanese Philosophy: Selected Documents trans. and ed. David A. Dilworth, Valdo H. Viglielmo, Agustin Jacinto Zavala, Greenwood Press, 1998
[iii] Postone, Moishe. Time, Labor, and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory, Cambridge University Press, 2003

On Filipa César's F for Fake
João Laia

The work of Filipa César has permanently questioned human behaviour patterns. The artist focuses on chronicling daily situations that are embedded in narrative layers through the use of different cinematic devices. This method allows the artist to explore the limits between fiction and documentary and enables a meaning to be brought out that was subtly present in the captured events but would have gone unnoticed. More recently her production shifted towards contexts and stories of direct political significance.

In F for Fake (2005) César reconfigures Orson Welles' 1974 homonymous last film. Mimicking Welles' structure, César employs a fast editing rhythm and blends found footage from the 1974 original piece with newly recorded imagery, while juxtaposing realistic events with fantasy and illusion. Welles' feature length re-edits footage from a television documentary about Elmyr de Hory, a famous art forger, combining it with new material. The film is a complex exploration of the cinematic medium and an inquiry about artistic practice in relation to ideas such as authenticity, originality, ownership, expertise and value. César's video mixes extracts from Welles' F for Fake with four people watching and commenting on the 1974 film. A more recent work, Four Chambered Heart (2009), also stages a similar situation; here Israeli students watch and discuss Jean Rouch's La Pyramide Humaine (1959).

The characters of César's F for Fake are introduced as experts and engage with Welles' film at an individual and social level. Each of the characters watches it alone and is later interviewed, also in isolation. The four come together during what appears to be a dinner to talk as a group about the work. Like Welles' film, F for Fake, blurs storytelling with chronicling. On the one hand there are reality-like situations, as in the interviews with the experts, to which the video's visual texture brings an illusionary reality effect. On the other hand the viewer is confronted with magic tricks and surreal situations that function as Brechtian distanciation devices, like the fleeting figure of a bearded man dressed in black that resembles the character played by Welles in his film.

In striking contrast to Welles' omnipresence in the original work, throughout F for Fake César is never to be seen. The presence of the artist is nevertheless strongly felt in the meticulous editing of the visual mosaic used to compose the video. Expanding Welles' dialogic and free-associative editing, César's powerful cut-and-paste strategies constantly underline the manipulation taking place. In addition to the fast-paced editing and the framing and reframing of the images, the use of found-footage as well as the recurrent close-ups are sediments of the artist's presence and an index of her actions. The cuckoo clock seen and heard regularly in the video emphasizes its rhythm and personifies the control imposed onto the images and characters. Similarly to Welles' magician, the cuckoo clock in F for Fake links unrelated footage together and may therefore be read as a replacement-image for César herself.

César's paradoxical invisibility adds a layer to the director's questioning of authorship and originality in relation to value and expertise. The artist's physical absence may be read as an embodiment of the diffused and naturalized control mechanisms that operate within and are made operate by contemporary neo-liberal thinking; wherein the rapid privatization of society, its disengagement from social thinking is, nevertheless, bound to collective forms of regulation and power enforcement. In this way César's paradoxical procedure expands Welles' inquiry, relating his critique of authorship in cinema and art to our economic reality, emphasizing a meaning that was subtly present in the feature-length film. The cuckoo clock would then also stand for the standardization of time, a naturalized form of control in which contemporary societies are based. In F for Fake both art forms are reframed as microcosms of a bigger social context that influences and controls individuals.

>> Morning Eleanor!
>>
>> So I was contracted along with J█ W████ by a friend, L█ B███ who
>> works for a company called V██ F████, who work with corporations to
>> facilitate team-building exercises
>>
>> Im not exactly sure what his role is, but I assume he fulfils some
>> artistic capacity for them as he was quite comfortable with the work. He's
>> also an artist of whom you may be aware
>>
>> The drawings I believe were intended as a kind of party favour, something
>> that could become keepsake for the clients to reflect on at some later
>> stage and also for their novelty. Polaroids were taken by us at the
>> beginning of the day and these were used to build the portraits/images,
>> along with a written list probided by each client of the qualities,
>> characteristics or goals that they attributed with an image of their
>> successful-selves in 2013, or F13 as they referred to it.
>>
>> Many of the goals were quite generic, some were even verbalised in the
>> exact same sequence and syntax.
>> Complete the city-to-surf; save for a house deposit (or a second one in
>> many people's case); work-life balance figured quite predominantly;
>> business acumen was also frequently cited
>>
>> Thankfully, we were just left with a pile of photographs/lists to
>> transubstantiate into portraits over the course of the day, none of the
>> clients bore witness to our activity unless it was by chance that they
>> passed our table on the way to the bathroom or something like that, in
>> which case they were utterly fascinated as is anyone by a likeness
>> regardless of its accuracy or lack thereof
>>
>> I was struck by how little cynicism i seemed to encounter, but its a
>> world that functions quite happily and apart from my own so i refrained
>> from judging. This was the first work of this kind that i'd ever undertaken
>> and i found it completely exhausting, though interesting. Exhausting in
>> that absorbing others' ambitions is a task in itself, and Interesting in
>> that i felt liberated from the luxury of procrastination. X-treme
>> Portraiture!
>>
>> I think L█ took me on because i work quite widely and i do kids
>> workshops at casula p/house from time to time so im comfortable with the
>> parameters of creativity enforced by these exercises and im relatively
>> tolerant of crowds
>>
>> As for it relating to my work...hmm, its all relative?
>>
>> Hope this is illuminating! Feel free to ask more if you feel like it
>>
>> :)
>> JD

Introduction

When I was very young, and optimism about 'science' was at its height, I used to worry that by the time I grew up there would be nothing left in the world to discover and that I would be redundant as a thinking being. Well, I needn't have worried: now that I am considerably older, it seems to me that the world I inhabit has never been so sunk in superstition and ignorance.

The ironies are unending. The idealism that led me to study psychology was partly founded on a feeling that here, at least, there were still mysteries to be unravelled. In fact, as it turns out, psychology—all unknowing—has done more to mystify the human condition than just about any other even remotely intellectual enterprise.

As I grew up in the 1950s—as callow a youth as any of that era—the post-war world was pretty grey and Spartan, but there was nevertheless (or so it seems to me now) a general belief in the possibility of improving the lot of common humanity—if not on a global scale, at least on the home front. A Labour government had come to power that, whatever its shortcomings, addressed inequality and injustice in a way that seems extraordinarily radical as against the dishonest manipulations of today's 'New Labour'. There were real jobs for people to do and an optimistic belief in the benefits of health and education for all. Much to the discomfort of some of the more affluent sections of the population (to which most of the people I knew aspired even though they didn't belong), it seemed that the snobbery and privilege so characteristic of pre-war British society were on their way out for good. Even if vestiges of it lingered here and there, it seemed that Bertie Wooster's world was dead.

But it wasn't. Though wise enough not to draw too much attention to itself, it continued more or less unabated among significant minorities of the population, and nostalgic memories of its glories festered resentfully in the psyches of those who were only too soon to mount the Thatcherist counter-revolution. And now we've got it all back with—literally—a vengeance.

The 'Twenty-First Century' which politicians and tabloids love to invoke as emblematic of progress, is culturally and economically a rewind to the between-the-wars society so many of us hoped we'd seen the back of: a world in which a greedy and self-satisfied middle class re-establishes and ostentatiously celebrates the advantages of its parasitism on those who really produce the goods.

Not that nothing has changed—the mechanics of exploitation and privilege are far less crude than they used to be, and far less apparent to even the interested onlooker. The principal locations of exploitation have been moved, through the apparatus of 'globalisation', to where most of us can't see them and don't really care about them even if we can. The mass of the population, no longer so obviously belittled and patronised by its 'betters', is pacified by the de-regulation of pleasure and stupefied by the relentless 'dumbing down' of information. The depth of perspective of even the educated class has been reduced to the span of no more than a few years, making it less and less easy to understand how and why societal change comes about.

And in all this 'psychology'—a central tool of ideological power—plays its crucial part. If people are to be diverted from criticising the material circumstances that condition their lives, they must believe those circumstances to be irrelevant, and psychology has over the past century invented and sustained a magical theology in which it seems that people may choose them*selves* and shape their future by eradicating their past. Tragedy may be averted by no more, essentially, than wishing that things might be otherwise, and reality is reduced to a set of stories that may be manipulated to result in happy endings.

The only thing that people are called upon to *do* to realise their dreams is to *consume*, and psychology has been fundamental to the creation of the perfect consumer. The latter is an individual detached from every kind of social and environmental context other than that of greedy competition for goods and services with other individuals, existing otherwise in a fantasy world where there is *in theory* no limit to the achievement of gratification.

It is precisely in establishing the theory that psychology has been so influential. One of the central problems that faces the limitless 'growth' on which capitalism depends is the restrictions placed by material circumstances on what we can achieve—restrictions, that is, that arise out of our physical environment, our physical bodies and the existence of other people. These have to be dematerialised, changed from potential barriers into sites and objects of desire, where limitless aims may be attained through acts of consumption which are, crucially, mediated by essentially *mental* processes such as wishing and deciding—and dreaming. The modern consumer is in this way a pleasure-seeking idealist, dislocated from a real world, a real body and a real society. We must believe, among other things, that the earth's resources are infinite,

that mind will triumph over matter and that there's no limit to what you can achieve if you really try. Psychology helps a lot in this enterprise.

One should be careful, however, about using the word 'psychology' too loosely, as it covers a wide range of academic and professional activities, many of which have very little in common with each other. The kind of psychology I am concerned with in this book is essentially the 'clinical' variety, which takes for its subject matter the broad field of 'mental health' and evolved from a mixture of behavioural learning theory, 'dynamic' (in particular psychoanalytic) psychologies and the so called 'humanistic' psychologies of the mid-twentieth century. It is in many respects closely similar to—and indeed for the purposes of my argument includes—other approaches to 'psychotherapy' and 'counselling' and is as concerned as they to establish *professional* credentials. 'Psychology' of this kind is no longer an intellectual discipline, a branch of philosophy or science, but seeks recognition as a protected, technical profession with established procedures for the treatment of psychological disorders. It is taught not to *students*, but to *trainees*, and it will soon be illegal for anyone to call him or herself a 'psychologist' unless officially registered as such.

As I have already suggested, the claim to objectively established validity implied in this professional stance is entirely without foundation in anything other than a carefully constructed mythology which has much in common with many other branches of 'knowledge' in the twenty-first-century world, not least the 'postmodernist' flights of many influential philosophical and cultural commentators, as well as theorists in some other branches of non-clinical psychology. I will say no more at this stage about why this should be so—I hope the reasons will become apparent as the argument progresses.

The dilemma facing me at this juncture is to find a name for what *I* am doing!

It's hard to see how I can avoid 'psychology' at least as *part* of my enterprise, as there is no doubt that that has been the discipline that has had most influence over the field to be considered. But it does have terribly misleading connotations and built-in assumptions—for example that we are concerned primarily with what goes on inside people's heads or 'psyches' (with what I shall call the world of 'ideality'). In fact we are concerned at least as much with people's worlds. Not to mention their bodies.

The terms 'therapeutic' psychology and 'psychotherapy' are also profoundly unsatisfactory, for the kind of human distress with which we are concerned has nothing to do with illness or treatment. The analogy with 'therapy' and 'treatment' has already misled us for over a century.

'Clinical' psychology is problematic because of its similarly unfortunate association with medicine, and also because clinical psychology has, as indicated, become a *technical* profession, like chiropody or dietetics, that

focuses on the pragmatics of relief rather than on any more abstract intellectual or scientific enterprise. Clinical psychology has given up any serious attempt to *explain*.

'Counselling' looks like quite a good term on the face of it, but has become ineradicably associated with the professional provision of a quite circumscribed form of psychological help, based in particular on understandings of Carl Rogers's approach to 'client-centred therapy'. Although there are brave attempts to rescue counselling from this conceptual dead-end (for example Alex Howard's work),[1] they are in my view unlikely to be successful: counsellors are too set on becoming established professionals.

In many ways sociology and anthropology might seem to offer a more appropriate home, but their focus is too broad: despite an hostility towards individual*ism*, I am still focally concerned with individual experience.

I think perhaps—under protest, so to speak—I'm stuck with 'psychology', but tacitly hedged round with all the qualifications I've mentioned.

Ultimately, our[2] concern is with human subjectivity, with the experience of being a person, and in particular with the types of suffering and pain that being a person can engender. Perhaps I should say *avoidable* pain and suffering, for otherwise our project becomes at once too grandiose and too simplistic: much suffering and pain is inevitable in a human lifetime, and may be understood and endured in many ways, many of them nothing to do with any branch of psychology.

The avoidable pain and suffering that forms the focus of our attention is not a 'mental' thing, but arises from our nature as embodied beings. But neither would it solve our problem to search for the origin and end of our suffering—as so much of psychiatry has done—simply in our biogenetic make up.[3] For we are bodies in a world: of course (and very importantly) in a physical world, but also a socially structured, material space-time in which what we do to each other has enormous importance.

The strength and integrity of the subject is determined not (as therapeutic psychology would have us believe) by efforts of individual will, but by the adequacy or otherwise of the environment (including, crucially, the public societal structures) in which it is located.

Where public structures are stable, supportive and nurturing, the spirit may blossom and flourish; where they disintegrate (where 'all that is solid melts into air')[4] the subject becomes shrivelled and reduced to its biological elements of survival. A culture adequate to the blooming of subjectivity constitutes a form of enchantment[5] born of our benign social collusion in buttressing ourselves against the harshness of our place in the universe to make it habitable in peace and civility. To destroy that enchantment is (rather like stripping the flesh from the steel skeleton of the Terminator) to reduce ourselves

to our animal nature, revealing an asocial set of ruthlessly competitive individuals. The most pitiless of these rise to the top as a kind of aggregation of oppression (a 'band of brigands')[6] while the most fragile and sensitive sink to the bottom, struggling anxiously for survival, as (needfully!) paranoid as little birds that hardly dare to snatch a crumb for fear of failing to spot the stooping hawk or the crouching cat.

That is why social Darwinism comes to the fore at times when the brigands are in charge: the focus on human 'nature'[7] as the basis for communal living, the Thatcherite repudiation of 'society' and the glorification of selfishness and competition reflect accurately enough the state of a disenchanted world.

What kind of world we want is an *ethical* choice: the attempt to establish one or another as somehow *necessarily* more desirable or right is never likely to succeed—hence, perhaps, the inevitability of the political split between Left and Right. There is no indisputably objective or technical reason why we should consider or try to alleviate the individual's experience of pain. People can and often do ignore or deny their common humanity with others, or deny, at least implicitly, that their common humanity commits them to any sympathy or compassion for those less advantaged than themselves. Indeed, such an attitude towards one's fellows can be represented as tough, uncompromising, positively heroic: the supermen versus the wimps.[8] But just as this ruthless world may be chosen—as it is chosen by the current rulers of the globalised neo-liberal market—so may it also be rejected.

This book is founded on just such a rejection. I'm siding with the wimps. We are not bound to accept that the 'real world' is one in which the 'bottom line' defines and determines right and wrong. We do not have to acquiesce in the impoverished vocabulary and banal ideological apparatus of institutional Business culture. We do not, furthermore, have to be intimidated by the more sophisticated intellectual apologists for postmodernism and the free market to be found in various academic nests like the London School of Economics. Our undertaking, in contrast, rests on a compassionate solidarity with others, and the fact that this is fundamentally and irreducibly an *ethical* choice does not mean it is in any way irrational (like many others, I have argued elsewhere[9] that reason and ethics are not—and certainly do not have to be—separable from each other).

While what founds and fuels our enquiry is a moral position, the enquiry itself must be an essentially *scientific* one. By 'science' I do not mean the rigid, dogmatic, 'positivist' orthodoxy so rightly reviled by the postmodernists. I mean rather the kind of open, inquisitive, sceptical, empirical approach that keeps itself free of dogmatism by seeking to refer back constantly to an intellectual peer group of men and women who are both *informed* and of *good will* (Habermas).[10]

In struggling to elucidate the mysteries of the world and our relations to it, science has to acknowledge that its enquiries cannot be so objective as to be completely uninfluenced by our own interests, preoccupations and biological characteristics (Habermas,[11] Polanyi).[12] At the same time, however, it strives for *evidence* that is *as far as possible* free from conceptual and empirical mistakes and ideological distortions of one kind or another (e.g. religious or political—including 'politically correct'—biases). Science is about our passionate conviction that we are placed within a universe that is not simply the result of our own imaginings, and our longing and determination to understand it. Ultimately, science is about reality, truth and freedom.

Our part is to occupy a tiny corner of this enterprise: i.e., to attempt to grasp and elucidate some of the ways in which human beings are brought to suffer avoidable distress. Much of this book is the continuation of a search I have been engaged in now for several years for a language—a set of concepts—which may offer us a better way of thinking about this field than has so far been available; a language, that is to say, that makes sense of our suffering, that may enable us to place it within a real world and perhaps even to begin to get a grip on it.

Most of the themes considered in these pages, and indeed a good deal of the text, originated in the 'Internet publication' *Power, Responsibility and Freedom* that I developed on my website over the past five years or so.[13] I undertook that project in the hope that writing on the Internet would allow both a continuous interaction with readers and the possibility of maintaining a fluid, changing text that, freed from the constraints of paper and ink, could keep pace with changes of mind as well as changes in circumstances. In the event, however, the outcome of this experiment has been fairly disappointing.

Although I have no idea how many people actually read the web pages, I do know that very few people indeed actually responded to them in the way that I had hoped—a mere handful. I suspect that reading lengthy texts on the Internet is not something many people choose to do, and downloading and printing out, apart from being somewhat tedious and expensive, does not carry the same satisfaction as handling or owning a book. Published books, moreover, however unwarrantedly, carry with them a kind of authority that is lacking in Internet texts: the very freedom of expression that is such an attractive feature of the Web is also a drawback to those who need to feel—possibly quite unconsciously—that what they are reading has at least *some* kind of official endorsement.

It only became apparent after a couple of years or so that what had seemed another advantage of Web writing—its topicality—turns all too quickly into a disadvantage, or at least a burden on the writer. The instancy and fluidity of electronic text makes it possible to refer to other publications and events within

minutes of their occurrence, and this can make for exhilarating writing—and reading. Many excellent news, current affairs and activist websites attest to this huge benefit of the Internet. But for an amateur Web-writer such as myself, material written in the heat of the moment becomes stale surprisingly quickly and unless one constantly updates the text one is left with a production far too obviously reliant on yesterday's news. Books, in contrast, are written in full awareness of the relative permanence of the printed page.

Although, then, much of the material in these pages can be traced to *Power Responsibility and Freedom*, it has been fundamentally reorganised and greatly augmented. I have removed many of the topical asides that may still be found on the website and introduced new material (especially but not only in Chapter 2) that, I hope, carries my argument further. My resorting to a more formal medium of publication does not mean, however, that I would not welcome reader response, and I can still be contacted via the website.

David Smail
Nottingham

Notes

1. Alex Howard, 1996. *Challenges to Counselling and Psychotherapy,* Macmillan.; and 2000. *Philosophy for Counselling and Psychotherapy,* Macmillan.

2. I have found it difficult to decide whether to write mainly in the first person singular or the first person plural. In many ways I prefer the latter, but in the end the apparent assumption that writer and reader form a harmonious 'we' starts to sound laboured and patronising. Always to speak of 'I', however, strays almost as far in the direction of egotism. I have therefore tried to strike some kind of balance between the two, and I hope that the reader will bear with me if I have not entirely succeeded.

3. For an excellent critique of biological psychiatry see, Terry Lynch, 2004. *Beyond Prozac.* PCCS Books.

4. This observation of Marx's is treated at length by Marshall Berman, 1983. *All That is Solid Melts into Air.* Verso.

5. The concept of enchantment is discussed by Max Weber in his *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism.* Unwin Paperbacks, 1985 (original edn 1930).

6. Expression used to telling effect by Robert Tressell in *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists.*

7. For example Steven Pincher, 2002. *The Blank Slate.* Penguin.

8. For an academic exposition of this kind of viewpoint see John Gray's *Straw Dogs: on Humans and other Animals.* 2002, Granta. At a less rarefied intellectual level, Margaret Mitchell's character Rhett Butler, in a scene towards the end of *Gone With The Wind,* puts the

case for the ruthless swashbucklers and carpetbaggers of the world with surprising eloquence: it is they (the brigands) who are the heroes of chaos and disintegration, the carriers-forward of the race, while the likes of the pale and disorientated Ashley Wilkes quietly go to the wall, lost from a world from which the 'enchantment has vanished' (1974 edn, Pan Books pp.754–7).

9. Smail, D. 1993. *The Origins of Unhappiness*. HarperCollins. This work forms half of the double volume *The Nature of Unhappiness*. Robinson, 2001.

10. Habermas, J. 1987. *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*. Polity Press.

11. Habermas, J. 1978. *Knowledge and Human Interests*. Heinemann.

12. Polanyi, M. 1958. *Personal Knowledge*. Routledge & Kegan Paul.

13. www.davidsmail.freeuk.com/

1. A person is the interaction of a body with a world (environment).

2. By 'environment' is meant, most importantly, social space-time.

3. The environment is structured by material power.

4. Power may be coercive, economic or ideological. These may be, but are not necessarily, positively correlated.

5. Ideological power is viable only to the extent that it can be rendered material through concerted action with others.

6. The person's relation to the body is mainly one of sensation.

7. The person's relation to the environment is mainly through experience (intransitive reception of power) and action (transitive exercise of power).

8. Both the experience and the exercise of power may be benign or malign.

9. Power operates at varying distances from the person, proximally and distally. It is always mediated proximally, but may well originate distally.

10a. From an objective perspective, the absolute magnitude of power is negatively related to its proximity to the person.
10b. From a subjective perspective, the relative magnitude of power is positively related to its proximity to the person.

11. Each person operates within: a) a 'power horizon', and b) a 'memory span' which limits his/her ability to identify the reasons for proximal events and actions, including his/her own.

12. Environmental influence becomes embodied (i.e., becomes a collection of biological assets and liabilities).

13. There are no such things as 'inner worlds', but personal powers acquired (embodied) over time.

14. The extent to which a person can influence present circumstances will depend on the availability to him/her of material powers and resources, including embodied personal assets.

15. Powers and resources may be economic, cultural, educational, ideological, physical.

16. The degree to which the effects of the past can be influenced will depend on the nature and extent of their embodiment, as well as on the person's access to resources.

17. A person's 'psychology' consists of the meaning systems through and with which his/her embodied experience of the environment is understood, interpreted and represented.

18. Such meaning systems may be, for example, idiosyncratic or cultural, implicit or explicit. Even such simple distinctions as these, which may be represented on two orthogonal axes as shown, can give a theoretical coherence to psychological phenomena which, if treated as entities in 'internal space,' tend simply to multiply perplexingly without any real explanation. The schema here owes a great deal to the work of Rom Harré.[14]
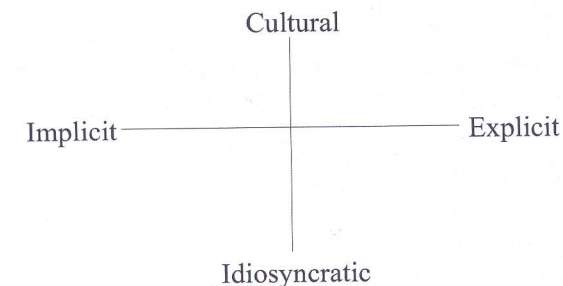
According to this schema, the character of a psychological phenomenon will be determined by its location relative to the two axes of meaning. For example a scientific production, and indeed language itself, would be found in the upper right quadrant, while some artistic productions (making explicit an idiosyncratic view) would be in the lower right quadrant; dreaming, and some forms of psychotic ideation, would be located mainly in the lower left quadrant. 'Symptoms' of distress which are commonly experienced but which people are at a loss to understand might find their place in the upper left quadrant. An example of one of these latter might be 'anorexia' (the meaning of self-starvation is almost certainly culturally determined, but remains mysteriously inarticulate; inasmuch as it becomes articulated as a demonstration—hunger strike, mortification of the flesh—it moves along to the right of the horizontal axis).

By means such as these, the curious mixed metaphors of 'dynamic'

Power, Interest and Psychology

psychology—for example, the hydraulics of 'internal' space in which 'mental contents' are pushed into and out of consciousness—may be replaced by *conceptual* distinctions. Since these give coherence to phenomena which, being purely psychological, are themselves conceptual (i.e., aspects of meaning-systems), they are to be seen as operating at a meta-level.

It is important to note that psychological phenomena are not necessarily unique or private to the individual in whom they occur (i.e., who provides a locus for them), but may be aspects of cultural 'forms' established independently of specific individuals. Another way of putting this is to point out that part of the structure of personhood is beyond the skin of the individual, located not in private but in public space. Part of 'me' are the cultural factors which give shape to me. Accordingly, if cultural forms disintegrate (as with, say, conventional ideas of male and female roles) the individual is likely to *experience* this as *personal* disintegration.

19. Psychological operations may effect change only to the extent that they directly mediate, or facilitate access to, powers and resources.

20. The concept of 'will' derives from the *experience* of transmitting power, provided such transmission is congruent with the individual's wishes.

21. Freedom is proportional to the amount of power possessed by or available to the individual.

22. A person's well-being (freedom from distress) is largely determined by current circumstances and the nature and significance of his/her embodied experience and exercise of power.

23 Clinical consultation ('therapy') operates only transiently within the person's proximal field and is therefore necessarily limited in its power to effect change.

24. Consultation consists of three main elements:
(i) provision of comfort
(ii) clarification
(iii) encouragement in the use of available powers and resources.

A Societal Perspective

Notes

1. For those not familiar with it the best introduction to Pierre Bourdieu's work is probably still his classic *Distinction*, published in English by Routledge, 1986.

2. Max Weber, 1985. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Unwin Paperbacks, p. 72.

3. Hagan, T. and Smail, D. 1997. Power-mapping I. Background and basic methodology. *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology*, 7, 257–67.

4. Hagan, T. and Smail, D. 1997. Power-mapping II. Practical application: the example of child sexual abuse. *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology*, 7, 269–84.

5. Lev Vigotsky, 1962. *Thought and Language*. MIT Press.

6. This account no doubt owes a lot to Gilbert Ryle's classic study *The Concept of Mind*. Hutchinson, 1949.

7. See for example A. Ellis and J.M. Whitely (eds), 1979. *Theoretical and Empirical Foundations of Rational-Emotive Therapy*. Brooks/Cole.

8. Much of the more recent of this work is usefully and accessibly summarised by Susan Blackmore (2001), Consciousness, *The Psychologist*, 14, 522–5. For a penetrating analysis of some of the most important issues see also John Cromby, 2004. Between constructionism and neuroscience. The societal co-constitution of embodied subjectivity. *Theory & Psychology, 14* (6), 797–821.

9. Antonio Damasio, *Descartes' Error*, Papermac, 1996. See also his *The Feeling of What Happens*. Vintage, 2000.

10. Gazzaniga, M.S. 1998. *The Mind's Past*. University of California Press, p.174.

11. See for example Peter Lomas, 1999. *Doing Good? Psychotherapy out of its Depth*. Oxford University Press.

12. The most recent edition of this book forms half of the double volume *The Nature of Unhappiness*. Robinson, 2001.

13. www.davidsmail.freeuk.com/axioms.htm

14. Harré, R. 1983. *Personal Being*. Blackwell.

Reality Considerations (for the sake of)
Eleanor Weber

… the sleeper returns to a primary state and attempts to experience in the dream that which during the day he [sic] kept under strict control for the sake of reality considerations.1

You wake up, you check your phone, you turn on your computer – maybe you take coffee or pills or cigarette or food – you go to work, you are at work, you walk there, you surf there, you are there, there you are. You see the street as a giant plasma, towering over you. In your nervous system there exists incredible adaptation to sensation – you will not perceive your own hand if the nerves are cut. But you will still learn to scroll the pad. The skyscrapers and smaller shops bulge and shrink as your eyes scan for points of reference – seeking safety (always safety) – most often clearly signed with logos we know like lovers. It's hard to get lost on the way to work. Endlessly lounging and rolling around in bed with F and G, the governors of sex and sense. You tab constantly so there is always the possibility of more, but more no longer means more. The authority is there, where you are, screened; in you to produce and be produced; you begin to see yourself as the interface you have always been. The way you're supposed to think resembles precisely the lobby of a corporate tower. Which in turn resembles precisely the interface. This is not the removal of difference, it is far simpler: the irrelevance of difference. You will be deleted. A corporate tower is a tower of corps. They fall or fly according to the logic of the screen. Zeroes and ones. Tumbling. But the falling is not such that we associate with the concept of 'down', and likewise the flying is not the synonym of 'up'. Rather, in the screen plasma street dream we must understand both falling and flying are produced by the all-encompassing, all-defining interface. Some would call

it horizontality. Equivalence. Homogeneity. Whatever. You think you fly but someone sees you fall; anyway, falling is delegitimized and flying impoverished. Touch is you scanning in and out. Checking in. Logging on. Caressing at the exclusion of all others, to produce more. Monopolisation of touch makes sense – seems smart to the screen system interface. Facial recognition is the logical progression, whereby all faces must become perfect representations of the inter-face: a fixed identity. Protected. As you swipe to enter, type to pass, glance to be scanned and buzzed and x-rayed and then pushed out the other side (which is not, in fact, other) to simply more buzzing and beeping and verification and system confirmation. And you pay to partake. Your time (which was never really yours) is sold. You buy it. The time of human becomes malleable; society functions on the myth of immortality. And the dreams you have no longer come as reminders of truth because truth is long dead and the day-work has been turned into the dream – or all of it into a nightmare sold as dream. Interfaced infinitely until the nightmare no longer resembles anything except something we've seen and touched before, so fear of the unknown can be forgotten. Fear reigns. From the inside we panic, seeking private types to explain our anxiety; as the interface won't accept system breakdown, we cannot. We hide, lie, alone. And the system produces internal safety-mechanisms for its own failure; it sustains itself by selling its failure, its inherent ruin, back to itself. Your mortal panic is no longer something of the world; it is now something only of you, your interfacing, a problem to be privately managed. A system error blip, who gives a shit. Purchase anti-virus software, proxy alias! But we all know this is a lie, really, nobody believes. Everyone's just playing along. But if all this playing is for the sake of reality considerations, what could they possibly be?

1 Anna Freud, 'The Meaning of Dreams: Introduction', Sigmund Freud: The Essentials of Psychoanalysis (ed. Anna Freud), Penguin 1986 (p. 78)

myriad thanks to everyone involved and to Iakovos Amperidis, director of 55 Sydenham Rd Marrickville NSW 2204 AU

REALITY CONSIDERATIONS (FOR THE SAKE OF)

55 SYDENHAM RD MARRICKVILLE NSW 2204 AU

9 NOVEMBER – 2 DECEMBER 2012

FILIPA CÉSAR
F FOR FAKE (2005)

BEA FREMDERMAN
KAFKA OFFICE (2012)

GEORGIA KAW
NEO CLASSY POP (2012)

ASTA MELDAL LYNGE
LOBBIES (2012)

YASMIN SMITH
TRUST ME (2012)

WITH PERFORMANCES BY:

BRIAN FUATA
PRIVILEGE (BOWLS) (17.11.2012)

MATTE ROCHFORD
VIDEOTAPE / HUMAN BEING (1.12.2012)

COUNTER-PRODUCTIVE CONVERSATION BETWEEN,
AMELIA GROOM & ELEANOR WEBER
(24.11.2012)

SATURDAY SCREENINGS OF THE DOCUMENTARY HIDDEN DEPTHS (1989), DIRECTED BY NINA BURR FOR THAMES TV AND FEATURING PSYCHOLOGIST DAVID SMAIL

CURATED BY ELEANOR IVORY WEBER

REALITY CONSIDERATIONS (FOR THE SAKE OF)

55 SYDENHAM RD MARRICKVILLE NSW 2204 AU

9 NOVEMBER – 2 DECEMBER 2012

FILIPA CÉSAR
F FOR FAKE (2005)

BEA FREMDERMAN
KAFKA OFFICE (2012)

GEORGIA KAW
NEO CLASSY POP (2012)

ASTA MELDAL LYNGE
LOBBIES (2012)

YASMIN SMITH
TRUST ME (2012)

WITH PERFORMANCES BY,

BRIAN FUATA
PRIVILEGE (BOWLS) (17.11.2012)

MATTE ROCHFORD
VIDEOTAPE / HUMAN BEING (1.12.2012)

COUNTER-PRODUCTIVE CONVERSATION BETWEEN,

AMELIA GROOM & ELEANOR WEBER
(24.11.2012)

SATURDAY SCREENINGS OF THE DOCUMENTARY HIDDEN
DEPTHS (1989), DIRECTED BY NINA BURR FOR THAMES TV
AND FEATURING PSYCHOLOGIST DAVID SMAIL

CURATED BY ELEANOR IVORY WEBER