

Difference within form

Tess Quixote

It is easy to equate the Police absolutely with the State. This is obviously so in discursive terms. It is because this is obvious that it deserves unpacking.

The uniform of the riot policeman gains mobility on the backs of said men and women, while many riot police wear such uniform in their very fibre, I wish to argue that it is the uniform and the performing of it as signifier of state 'order' that overwrites the wearer so they bear an ideology which acts itself through their surface form and evacuates, in the wearing and performing of it, any singularity or vocality the wearer may have, or indeed perform, when out of uniform.

Further, the wearer may actually be against the state for various reasons: the iniquities of the tax system and the dispersals of privileges for the few over the many are what most people bemoan in differing tones and reasons. However, it has become the trope of current social imagining that no matter what you deem unjust you, as an 'I', have no way of overcoming such injustice. The most despicable expression of such sentiment came yesterday from Nick Clegg proclaiming 'I would feel ashamed if I didn't act according to how the world is, not how I wish it to be'. Even 'politicians' (when an MP speaks thus any claim to wielding politics is voided) now imagine themselves as carriers of a fate designed for 'us' that exists outside 'us' and which 'we' must bear like impotent invertebrate martyrs; which of course some must bear more so than others- 'politicians' being custodians or stewards of such cosmic pain. It is the idea that we exist as 'I's- the extent of which being the singular family unit- that compels people to shoulder their mortgages, their council taxes and their bills so as to keep a roof over their family's head, even though they know their hard earned taxes subsidise the avarice of the few and only nominally go towards securities for their family. There is no notion of co-operative power, no notion that the many as a co-operative of 'I's can overcome the few as a corporation of the economic 'we'.

To talk to a riot policeman and have him agree that the government is not good enough, that it doesn't represent the people, that it sends the sons and daughters of the poor to die in Afghanistan and Iraq for little more reparation than a hand shake with the Queen and yet to hear him ask, but 'what can you do?' shows the extent to which the economic 'we' has over-determined the frame for action within which 'we'- the masses have been told we exist. To aspire to being a policeman, much like being a soldier, does not seem to have anything to do with agreeing with or desiring to further the essence of the interests of government, but actually rather the misplaced desire to achieve the 'right' to act for the benefit of community. The profound and tragic irony of this being of course that while the soldier or policeman may or may not act with a sense of the 'rights' of communities to be protected, and 'improved', such desire is almost completely un-represented by the government that mobilises them through the uniform that represents not community, but the wishes and interests of a government in collusion with arms manufacturers, banks and corporations who represent neo-liberal economics and neo-liberal policy as facilitator of private wealth, as a global field of production and accumulation.

Per the notion that the UfSO is exploring; the opening up of supposed absolute architectures and forms, I wish to propose that the uniform of the policeman, and especially the riot policeman is just such another 'black box' that presumes 'we' as

lived identities exist as undifferentiated 'I's within 'our-selves' as 'I's and within any social grouping as economic categories. Thus I would like to bring in a fascinating essay by Castronovo that discusses the functioning of the State in formal terms.

'Just as the sculptor liberates a pleasing shape from the amorphous, unwieldy block of stone, the citizen judiciously crafts ethical, socially utile behaviour from an undifferentiated realm of affect: "The lawless leap of joy becomes a dance, the shapeless gesture a graceful harmonious mim-ing of speech; the confused noises of perception unfold themselves, begin to obey a rhythm and weld themselves into song" Where the sculptor manipulates an exterior subject, the citizen molds an interior subject. Aesthetically trained citizens aspire to a generic identity that squelches difference by bracketing off particularist human experiences and distinctive human accents.'¹

This quote references and discusses Schiller's aesthetic project as one that hopes to resist a politics of terror via the universalising 'freedom' of perfect aesthetic form, however we can read in this the incipient note of the liberalising dream of 'universal right' and equality under law, that feels suspicion and hatred towards the un-ordered expressions, the 'lawless leap[s] of joy', that issue out of the constantly forming form of an 'individual':

'Gentle lines and polished curves erase memory of the fragments cut away from the marble, shards swept up as so much trash. The State, in turn, forgets this trampling of individuality by celebrating the afteraffects of the struggle for social order, taking pleasure in the sight of a regulated and coordinated citizenry. The State behaves as ruthlessly as the sculptor insofar as each metonymically represents the whole at the expenses of the part'²

Thus, the citizen is over-determined from outside by a project that knows full well the 'power' of form as that which carries ideology so much so that that ideology seems to become an absolute; an essence 'we' are ordered within and carry performatively. Even while 'we' feel it is outside us, 'we' accept it is indomitable, that it is greater than the sum of so many desirings against it. 'The fragments cut away' lie at the feet of the riot policeman as *uniform*, and it is these that become missiles to be thrown at the *uniform*, not the 'I' within it.

The figure of and formal nature of the riot police can be seen as the quintessence of the aesthetic-cleansing required for 'perfect' forms of citizenship as envisioned under a regime that is happy for protest to occur as long as it is mute, immobile and invisible. In brilliant and courageous contrast are the students and teachers who marched in protest yesterday; embodying and living the belief of an alternative to the hammer and chisel of the state. 'We' who deny the voice of the government, will continue to shatter the dried-out husks of citizenship they try to impose upon Us.

Bibliography:

Castronovo, Russ. 'Geo-Aesthetics: Fascism, Globalism, and Frank Norris' Project Muse; *Boundary 2* Vol. 30, Number 3, Fall 2003

¹ Russ Castronovo, 'Geo-Aesthetics: Fascism, Globalism, and Frank Norris' Project Muse; *Boundary 2* Vol. 30, Number 3, Fall 2003, pp. 167-168

² *Ibid.*, p. 167