

Speaking out of the Blue? September 11th as Hate Speech

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I

In the first few hours, there was a sharp intake of global breath, followed by a genuinely stunned silence. An eerie hiatus ensued: time ceased to be measured by seconds and minutes, but rather - if it existed at all - by the loops of footage showing the impact of the second plane, the one which removed all chance that this might have been a terrible accident, and then of the towers collapsing into the plumes of their own darkly billowing dust. For perhaps an hour or even two, no one knew what to say. It was as if the explosions had sucked the oxygen from the atmosphere, leaving even seasoned media pundits to gasp and splutter as inarticulately as the rest of us. They, like us, were reduced to a pair of mesmerised eyes. An immensely pregnant silence had, for once, subdued the contemporary media cacophony.

It didn't last very long.

The events of the morning of 9/11 were, pretty much by the *afternoon* of 9/11, already inscribed into a polished and formulaic presentation which was to remain firmly in place in the months to come¹. Initially jolted from their professionalism by sheer astonishment, news teams around the world quickly recovered: by evening they were consulting hastily gathered experts on the Middle East; playing and replaying statements from the Whitehouse; showing elaborate graphics demonstrating the trajectory of the planes; compiling timetables illustrating the day's dreadful itinerary; conjecturing solemnly, or righteously, about reprisals; but most of all they were showing over and over again, under the legend 'America under attack!', those unforgettable images that had hypnotized the world (or at least that portion with television sets).

It is now possible to say with some certainty that, as if making up for their initial paralysis, the talking heads, newsmongers, media pundits, writers, intellectuals, and disseminators of discourse in general, have gone into maximum overdrive ever since. They have been busy inscribing that awful day into an ever wider and ever more complex, but no less slick, system of presentation. In the subsequent months, then, the events of 9/11 have been buried under a veritable avalanche of verbiage, and it is now rather difficult to remember that strange, eerie silence which first greeted the sight of New York's skyline being dramatically altered. Televised debates, newspaper supplements, radio documentaries, personal testaments, academic conferences, artworks, books, posters, pamphlets, and, of course, journals like this one, have all proliferated in the apparently unending fall-out of 9/11.

This is hardly surprising.

This was the first event of a truly global reach since the forces of globalization made themselves so widely felt, and was moreover symptomatic of those forces. An occurrence of such magnitude was always destined to receive unprecedented coverage, yet the nature of the act was itself clearly intended to court such hyper-saturation. The twenty minute window between the first and second planes (just enough time for camera crews to arrive and set up their equipment) may provide some indication of this intention. What is difficult to doubt, however, is that at the core of the terrorist's strategy was the attainment of an unprecedented order of *visibility*. After all, transforming passenger planes into lethal bombs by piledriving them into the most potent symbols of corporate and political America was always going to be a surpassingly cinematic act, one that would create its own instant international audience.

Yet, far from aiming to create an awed silence by dint of its most particular brand of special effects, the terrorist's act could be said to be an attempt - and this would already be for many an outrageous claim - to *force a discourse*. The violent takeover of passenger flights could be interpreted as an obscene way of demanding, as it were, air time: of transmitting not paying travelers, but an insistent voice across vast ideological spaces to a previously indifferent and unheeding audience. This act of transportation was carried out not by the planes themselves, but by the very circuits of media technology which recorded and then disseminated their destruction, and which, in part, the trans-lated voice simultaneously utilized and furiously denied.

A message, then, *was* being sent, and some sort of reply was no doubt anticipated.

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And yet the meta-message that this *was* a message, has been received neither loudly nor clearly.

In fact, it has been in the interests of US state-controlled propaganda and its apologists to deny that 9/11 possessed, or possesses, any *communicative* content whatsoever. Bush's by now familiar rhetoric of 'irrationalism' and 'pure evil' for example, is only one of the many ways in which the acts of 9/11 have been deemed gratuitous, insane, and ultimately inexplicable. The theological currency of 'pure evil' in particular, implies a malevolence so thoroughgoing as to require no motivation beyond a wanton appetite for random violence. It seems obvious that this rhetoric has been deployed, and continues to be deployed, in order that the true status of the terrorist acts as confrontational

acts of communication (irrespective of their absolutely abhorrent mode of expression) might be downplayed, or even deleted altogether. And yet those acts were in an important sense discursive, in some way part of a chain of signifiers. In fact, one might go so far as to describe the terrorist acts of September 11th as speech acts, specifically, as performative acts of *hate speech*. Hate speech is a legal term in (significantly) American, rather than UK, English, denoting speech which is intimidating or abusive, and encourages animosity, discrimination and violence. Implicit in the concept of hate speech is the notion of speech as potentially violent or injurious, a notion which can be emphasised with reference to Austinian speech act theory. As is well known, Austin's 'illocutionary' speech act institutes its own authority in the moment of its utterance, and, to be felicitous, requires that three criteria be met: the securing of uptake, the taking of an effect, and invitation to a response². What marks the acts of 9/11 as unique is that each of these criteria were inextricably tied up with the media.

For just this reason, it is perhaps important to remain for the moment with the ideological mechanisms of the *denial* of the communicative dimension to 9/11. Thus, the specific form of 'madness' imputed to that day's protagonists was that of the *unprovoked act*, that is, the act which seems to come from nowhere, without precedent or cause. Such an act is deemed irrational because it does not partake of the laws of cause and effect by which *socialized* behaviour is regulated. This is a very convenient argument, since it is easier to justify military retaliation against an *unwarranted* attack (and the frequent comparisons to Pearl Harbour underline this)³. Exactly what constitutes provocation is obviously the thorny legal, historical, and indeed philosophical issue here, since establishing *this* establishes in turn just whose justice is being sought. While it should be noted that a provoked act is not by that score a *justified* act, grounds for provocation do provide the circumstantial context of acts of violence, any assessment of which must at least take such grounds into account. If one accepts the argument that the events of 9/11 can be thought of as hate speech, then this notion of an unprovoked attack by madmen would constitute an affirmation of the element of hatred, but, crucially, it would also constitute a concomitant negation of the element of speech (since 'rational' speech requires a previous phrase to link onto, and prior even to this, a set of preestablished conventions).

However, it is a sad and yet demonstrable fact that certain dominant ideologies in the US since 9/11 have deliberately conflated explanation with justification, contextualisation, with support for fanaticism or even terrorism. It is this conflation which has led some Americans - ordinary people as well as state-officials - who are understandably tense and suspicious in the wake of a national tragedy, to discern the claim (I will not call it an 'argument') that 'America deserved it' within what are simply causal explanations. While no 'causal explanation' is ever in fact 'simple', the strength of the reaction to *all* intimations of some prior act which could be interpreted as *provoking* the unforgivable carnage of 9/11, remains astonishing and worthy of analysis. Again, what is being preserved and exaggerated in the 'you deserved it' reception of contextualisations of 9/11, is the dimension of hatred intrinsic to that speech act. Certainly, in the first few months this contributed to a feeling in the US of inexplicable victimization, of hatred coming from every direction, of a kind of panoptical paranoia. 'They hate us, but we cannot understand why. There is no reason to hate us. They must be mad. Then we better be on our guard against these unpredictable lunatics!!'

Within this thinking, it is possible to sense that, although the American national psyche *has* been injured, in a strange way it nonetheless keeps opening its wounds in order to maintain a certain vigilance in the face of the hatred it has felt directed at its very heart. Although, as I will suggest in the next section, one should not have too rapid recourse to theory when considering such emotive issues, Judith Butler⁴ has nonetheless written very astutely of a similar phenomenon with regard to hate speech:

[T]he state produces hate speech, and by this I do not mean that the state is accountable for the various slurs, epithets, and forms of invective that currently circulate throughout the population. I mean only that the category cannot exist without the state's ratification, and this power of the state's judicial language to establish and maintain the domain of what will be publicly speakable suggests that the state plays much more than a limiting function in such decisions; in fact, the state actively produces the domain of publicly acceptable speech, demarcating the line between the domains of the speakable and unspeakable (Butler: 1997, p.77).

In the case of 9/11, it would seem that the media, much more than any visible organ of the state, has been responsible for circumscribing the domain of the speakable in the Foucauldian way Butler points out, for deciding whether the terrorist's performative will prove felicitous. For example, those brave critics within US boarders who speak of the causes of 9/11, of the preexisting speech conventions which made that particularly violent mode of hate speech possible, are branded as anti-patriotic. Ironically, such critics are effectively silenced under the banner of freedom of speech!

These preexisting conventions of speech are nothing less than history itself, and the denial of history is ultimately the denial of time. For obvious reasons then, it is preferable for the US and its hastily formed 'coalition against Terror' that - despite its temporal marking as a monolithic date - 9/11 should be seen in fact as a kind of *moment out of time*: radically singular; an event with a horizon only of futurity; an origin uncontaminated by the vagaries of *causality*. The only 'explanation' countenanced in some corners of US media has been that narcissistic argument by which America's bruised psyche is soothed with the balm of a vicious jealousy imputed to their attackers. This argument was prefigured by Bush's own rhetoric when he described the 'evil-doers' responsible as fanatical lunatics motivated by a blind hatred of the *successes* of American society. Bush's point might be reduced to its syllogistic kernel: they are poor, we are rich; therefore they are merely green-eyed before the spectacle of our overwhelming dominance. The pomposity of such an 'explanation' beggars belief, especially among those who, amazing to recount, have no desire whatsoever to live as westerners do, who believe they are already rich, in their own culture and history. Even those among us who admire the dynamism and creativity of much of American life feel ourselves bristling against this *reductio ad absurdum*, particularly when it underpins that strict choice: "You're either with us, or against us".

It is not difficult to sense world-views - if not quite, on Huntington's thesis, civilizations⁵ - clashing head on in this idea of an Arabic, or Islamic, jealousy before America's glitz and glamour. The arrogance behind such a notion denotes the inability of a particularly inward-looking culture to represent to itself its antithesis in terms that are not its own. For example, the fact that the hijackers died along with their victims proved - so the westernized, secularized argument went - that the hijackers cared not a hoot for the

consequences of their actions, and thus that the atrocity they committed was not a message in want of a reply, was not a speech act, but something reckless and crazy. Thus, in the aftermath of 9/11, we have witnessed the perilous interface between epistemological opposites: a postmodern sense of temporality on the one hand, with all its flux, immediacy, and ephemerality, and on the other a theological sense of eternity, in which is promised a greater justice for the righteous than can ever be found on earth. That is to say, no true capitalist will ever be persuaded that someone's net worth could be invested with a view to being realised in an entirely *metaphysical* return, or that an individual could *really* sacrifice themselves to a collective ideal not rooted in brittle patriotism, or even, in any simple way, in nationalism.

That is not logical.

It simply does not *compute*.

Like the computer-guided planes themselves then, the terrorist's gesture of destruction came completely *out of the blue*.

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To the extent that 9/11 has been represented, in certain quarters, as an event which came out of the blue, mainstream American opinion has betrayed its own insularity by choosing to believe in the illusion of an act without contextualising precedents, and, therefore, an act without the right to claim a subsequent *discursive* linkage (we know that al-Qaeda and the Taliban certainly met with an overwhelming military reply, but this was figured on the more restricted model of action/re-action). While all speech acts must cite preexisting conventions in order to signify, this act, we are told, was more like an inarticulate roar of pure aggression. Its monstrosity was related, directly and inexorably, to its meaninglessness. This thing 'just happened', without rhyme or reason. There was no significant history leading up to it, hence no bullying tactics employed in US foreign policy, no flagrant disregard for international law, no Nicaragua, no Cuba, no Vietnam or Cambodia or Indonesia, no sanctions against Iraq, and, of course, no support for Israel. 9/11 happened out of time. Indeed, it was more even than the dawn of a new era in Globalization: it was an updated big-bang before which time, as we now know it, simply did not exist.

If instances of unethical US behaviour *are* granted some kind of vague, sketchy reality in official comments (and this is surprisingly rare), it is claimed that there are nonetheless no grounds whatsoever for equating them with 9/11 along some line of causation. This is because *unofficial* lines of causation are, for the US and many of its allies, embarrassingly elliptical, and must be obscured: thus, it is not *really* the case that Osama Bin Laden (remember him?) is a Frankenstein turned against his CIA creators following the fall of communist Russia. Moreover, and curving, perhaps lethally, in the other direction, the US and the UK have not *really* increased the quantities of military hardware they are selling to aggressive nations (for example, the UK did not *really* double its arms sales to Israel in July of this year). And the hijackers on 9/11 did not *really* have a broader aim beyond terrifying a nation: the planes, in other words, came completely out of the clear, blue, autumnal sky. However, the shade of the blue from which those unlikely bombs appeared must not be matched with that in America's national flag.

And yet, is it *really* possible to imagine a mode of terrorism which is not, even in its performative violence, also a mode of citational communication with an in-built reliance on preexisting discourses and conventions, on, in short, history? One could simplify this question: is it possible to imagine a mode of terrorism with no agenda? From ETA to the IRA, from the PLO to the November 17 group, all terrorists resort to violent tactics in order to raise awareness of a cause in which they believe so passionately that they are willing to sacrifice themselves to, not even its furtherment, but simply its heightened prominence in the public imaginary. In most cases, strategies of terror are deployed because it is perceived that the conventional mechanisms of representative politics are incapable of relaying the terrorist's agenda, usually because the apparatuses of such representative politics lie in the hands of those against whom the terrorists set themselves. None of this is to condone terrorist violence by implying that car-bombs or anthrax-laden letters are only another means of 'voting', particularly as the vast majority of terrorist groups openly reject the democratic option altogether.

In some senses, one cannot blame the terrorist organisations for being suspicious: it is precisely under the banner of 'democracy' that insurgent factions in other countries have been heavily funded by the US government in their efforts to overthrow 'backward' or 'rogue' regimes, all under the neo-liberal pretext of establishing the universal good of majority self-rule. Only recently, Bush has been calling, in bone-chillingly clinical terms, for a 'regime change' in Iraq, yet one suspects that bubbling beneath his professed concern for 'democracy' is the more urgent factor of oil, and the West's unquenchable appetite for it⁶. While there are undoubtedly excellent reasons why democratization *should* be pursued, it is surely no coincidence that one of its convenient byproducts is the opening up of further sources of cheap labour power, more Export Processing Zones in which to build yet more sweatshops where children will manufacture Nike trainers they will never wear. Perhaps these are some of the causes of the al-Qaeda terrorist's hatred for the West in general, and for America specifically? Or perhaps globalization in its fullest sense is not their target, but the more regional and immediate animosity generated by the Israeli occupation of Palestine? And yet the disastrously clumsy division of the Middle East after the second world war, the consequences of which continue to be marked in blood to this day, cannot ultimately be separated from the colonial forces which both enforced those divisions, and laid the groundwork for out-and-out globalization. Whatever the causes, however (and there are doubtless many), you can bet that they are neither irrational nor entirely ungrounded.

Figuring 9/11 as an act of hate speech, while on one level a grotesque reduction, on another serves to honour the violence of that day while at the same time retaining its communicative undercurrent. It is also to foreground what might be called a discursive disproportionality intrinsic to terrorism, which produces the following logic: your voice is louder than mine no matter how much I shout, so I have to slap you in the face to make you stop long enough to hear my concerns. However, it is a mistake to become too hypnotised by the resonance of the metaphor of the voice, which, in this context, betrays a thoroughly liberal faith in debate which is antithetical to terrorism (terrorists are, per definition, unimpressed by talk, seeking instead real, radical change). The belief in the therapeutic value of 'talking things through', of a kind of 'talking cure', and in democracy as a kind of relaying of the majority's voice, are all symptoms of the liberalism which, as economic *neo*-liberalism, welds the forces of democratization perhaps irrevocably to those

of globalization. Ultimately, the terrorist is hostile to representation even in its most general sense, since this is only a form of time-consuming mediation. Terrorists are too impatient to wait for promises of change, or debate about change, or negotiations about the criteria for a democratic framework of change: like irascible children, they generally want change now, and will continue - from the point of view of the parental authorities which would control them - to throw tantrums until that state of affairs is brought about.

However, the voice metaphor is not indispensable, insofar as a performative need not be vocal, but can be a gesture, an image, a script, an act of any kind that produces an effect. To the extent that the possibility of communication is written into the performance even of hate speech, such a description of 9/11 is surely nearer the mark than the reactionary position which interprets terrorist acts as *no more than acts*, as violent conduct with little or no meaning, as, once again, events 'out of the blue'. Terrorist acts then are not adequately described as attempts at dialogue, since it is precisely this that has broken down, yet they can be thought of as performatives in the Austinian sense to the extent that issuing an order like 'shut the door' does not invite debate about the semantics of the phrase or the mechanics of shutting doors, but aspires to being taken up by the act of shutting the door.

While it has never been fully clear what the attacks of 9/11 were demanding, and while it is *not* the case that whatever these demands were, they should simply be acceded to, it *is* true that recognising the attacks *as* demands - rather than irrational, meaningless cries of jealousy - might usefully complicate the monolithic stand-off between 'Islam' and 'Western democracy' which certain sectors of the US media continues to proffer in the guise a genuine 'situation analysis'.

II

Despite the mainstream refusal of terrorism as a mode of communication, it is obvious - as my preceding remarks concerning the avalanche of media coverage suggest - that the terrorists of 9/11 have in fact been hugely successful in sparking off a worldwide debate. It is in the form of these vibrant debates that the grim invitation of the hate speech constitutive of 9/11 has been responded to, that uptake has been secured, that an effect has undeniably been taken. While this is only too apparent in the media generally, it is also the case on the intellectual Left, whose essential task has become *the refutation-by-re-historicization of the 'out of the blue' logic*.

For anyone with either a faith in, or nostalgia for, the intellectual Left, it is clear that thinkers of the stature of Noam Chomsky and Edward Said have been as frantically busy producing counter-discourses contextualising 9/11 in its full politico-historical and theological complexity, as have more conservative channels in fetishising, specularising, and reifying the very same (and simultaneously, the completely opposite) event. These thinkers have attempted to pour history back into the mold of (primarily, though of course not exclusively, American) public opinion, in order that the pieties of reactionary nationalisms, regionalisms, and racisms, might be softened, rendered more flexible, more inter-national in outlook. Specifically, such thinkers have rendered the historicity of 9/11

in order that the previous provocations which led to (but in no way justified) the hate speech of that event be included in considerations of the meaning of its speech act.

History can of course be no monolithic entity here, no panacea for these deep-seated and culturally ingrained ills. Indeed, if anything, 9/11 illustrates the very fragility of the ‘historical’ event in general, the way in which that silence of which I spoke at the outset becomes almost instantaneously swamped in an agonistics of competing representations, a clamour of voices, and thus, swallowed into the play of power which is the production of its meaning.

This is of course a *political* agon.

Arch conservatives have always loved to rile against the petulant excesses of ‘Lefties’, just as much as self-designated ‘radicals’ have liked nothing better than the easy frisson of shaking their anti-authoritarian fists at the establishment. And yet, post 9/11, this is now far more than mere spirited soap-box invective. Both, or rather, *all* sides are engaged in a semantic battle over the contested signifier of 9/11, a signifier whose totemic power has become as towering, and perhaps as labyrinthine, as had been the WTC itself, and which already stands as the latter’s monument and living memorial. In many ways - and this is an uncomfortable thing to admit - 9/11 rescued the so-called ‘warless’ generations in the opulent west from the vagueness of their anxieties, offering itself as a ‘cause’ to which all previously uncathected militancy could be attached. Needless to say, it has been a privilege of that western opulence that the would-be activist has had to *search out* his or her politicization, instead of having it foisted upon them by authoritarian oppression or colonial subjugation. The malaise of postmodernism is decidedly circumscribed in socio-economic and geographic terms, little more than the intellectualised nephew of that exhausting ennui felt by the aristocrats and dandies of previous ages. But *now*, now we have a cause to rally around, and one that *came to us* - even if only, for most of us, via our television sets. However, while feeling suitably guilty at the incongruity between our physical distance and our emotional zeal, it is important to identify the rallying itself as something positive. Surely it is preferable to a complacent indifference?

This cathexis of militancy around the 9/11 signifier has been felt within the corridors of universities, traditionally bastions of - again, a rather privileged - youthful political ardour. A noteworthy result of this has been the fact that academics, too, have begun to have pretensions to that previously archaic sounding epithet, the ‘intellectual’ (as noun, not adjective). Pejoratively associated, even among left-leaning circles, with outmoded Marxisms for perhaps forty years, this term was unearthed, dusted off, polished up, and honoured with something of a renaissance after 9/11, like a veteran general brought out of retirement for one more battle. The committed intellectual is, in the Sartrean tradition, someone who provides much needed clear thinking during dark times, so that ‘lay’ persons may better perceive their current predicament ... a service which certainly became indispensable after the attacks on America and their aftermath, when those plumes of dust, memorably visible from outer space, seemed to obscure everything. The perfectly somber pronouncements about the definitive ‘end of irony’ which followed the attacks eloquently testified to this tonal shift, which, it should be underlined, was felt far, far beyond the confines of academia: “We can only speak seriously from now on”, spokespersons from many walks of life solemnly declared. Some of us, who find the tarbaby of irony much harder to free ourselves from, have not stopped waiting for the punch-line to this astonishing statement.

And yet, it would be absolutely right to suppose that the stakes *have* been considerably raised. Those on the Left must in fact appropriate Bush's repeated warnings, and prepare themselves for a long campaign: for this will be a battle exactly as protracted as that against 'Terror', because it is verso to its recto. Peremptorily dipping our toe in the treacherous waters of theory once again, Judith Butler may have something to offer us in this area, too: she argues that hate speech, in its dimension of name-calling, is not simply disempowering, but also strangely enabling. She suggests that if name calling is similar in structure to Althusserian interpellation, or hailing, then a subject-position (albeit a negatively coded and repressed one) *is* constituted in the moment of the calling of the name, and is thus the condition of possibility for the addressee of hate speech to become an addressor, and, thus, to *speak back*. Hence, the media's monolithic construction of 9/11 is also a naming, and it names, as (and *with*) pure hatred, that which critics and intellectuals can then reinscribe, re-describe, and re-name. While, again, one cannot rest here on the laurels of what is little more than an analogy with a basically unrelated theory, criticism nonetheless *should* trace every complacent assertion (including those of criticism itself) like an ever-attendant shadow. This has never been more true than in our current situation, in which the 'media blitz' is both more blinding and more deafening than ever.

There are some who have forgotten that ensuring such critical space is a fundamental tenet of the very democracy which is supposedly under attack, and which bombs have been dropped and bullets fired in order to protect (even while - and this is proof positive that irony is flourishing - no ordinary citizen has yet *voted* for these bombs or these bullets).

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But, we may ask, should it be the *intellectuals* reminding us of this? Is that still their role, if ever it was? What *is* an intellectual today? Has a Sartre or a Foucault stepped forward to articulate the significance of this enormous event for contemporary generations?

To be sure, every intellectual worth his or her tenure has felt the need to contribute their own slant to the '9/11 question'. Some of them were almost as rapid in their responses as the news teams⁷. Slavo Zizek and Saskia Sassen were the first out of the starter's blocks, respectively welcoming us 'to the Desert of the Real', and announcing again the dissolution of the nation-state under globalization ... and this before even twenty four hours had passed! Four days of late-night scribbling later, and Edward Said was swimming against the tide of media opinion by arguing (rightly I think) that 'Islam and the West are inadequate banners'. Meanwhile, Robert Kurtz was drawing what were, for some, discomfiting parallels between the practices of global capitalism and terrorism itself. Perhaps because he had already been such a persistent thorn in the side of America's complacent self-image, Naom Chomsky had to wait until the 17th of September before being able to put his views across via a radio station in Belgrade. On the same day, Susan Sontag, in the New Yorker, sagely argued against our 'being stupid together'. In fact, there were so many thinkers responding so quickly that they can only be rapidly listed. Before the end of September, the following prominent academics, intellectuals, and writers had all made public commentaries on the meaning of 9/11: Gorgio Agamben, Immanuel Wallerstein, Terry Eagleton, Frederic Jameson, Tariq Ali, Richard Rorty, Hal Foster,

Jacqueline Rose, and Arundhati Roy. In October, these luminaries were quickly succeeded by Salman Rushdie, Francis Fukuyama, Joseph Stiglitz, Jürgen Habermas, Stanley Fish, Paul Virilio, Faisal Bodi, Umberto Eco, and Günter Grass. If this reads like a roll-call of the leading intellectuals, writers, and thinkers of our times, that's because it is exactly that.

Once again, and for the same reasons, this is hardly surprising.

What might be surprising, however, is the extent to which many of these committed intellectuals have had rather too rapid recourse to their own previous paradigms in order to understand the events of 9/11.

The most obvious and, to this reader at least, repellent example of this was the 'I told you so' tone of Francis Fukuyama's assertion, made precisely one month after the New York and Washington attacks, that 'The West has Won'. There he argued that we are still at the end of history, and that western democracy is increasingly the only viable political choice today, and that "I believe that in the end I remain right". Again, in line with his faith in economic liberalism, he speculates that "[p]erhaps the hatred is born out of a resentment of western success and Muslim failure". In Fukuyama's hands, 9/11 seems but grist to the mill of the argument for which he is famous, now over a decade old. One cannot help but feel that this shows scant respect for those who died in Washington and New York.

But Fukuyama is far from alone in being guilty of a certain argumentative assimilation. Edward Said, not surprisingly, sees the burden of the cause of 9/11 resting with the Israeli occupation of Palestine, and the offense it continues to inflict on the whole Arab world; Antonio Negri sees 9/11 as only the most dramatic proof of the arrival of 'Empire'; Jean Baudrillard sees it as the suicidal act of an America narcissistically in love with the hyper-real image of its own death; Salman Rushdie, still beneath the shadow of an albeit unofficial fatwa, argues, again not surprisingly, that it *is* all about Islam; agreeing with Rushdie, Faisal Bodi explains that 'Of course it's a War on Islam'; Aijaz Ahmad sees in it a 'Re-Mapping of the Globe'; Richard Rorty sees it as an urgent call for the spread of the universal rights of political liberalism etc. etc. etc.. Doubly ironically then in this putative era of the post-ironic, the appropriation of 9/11 into old theoretical paradigms conforms rather neatly with Marx's concept of ideology, in which, irrespective of good intentions, even the most seemingly abstract discourses, such as economics or philosophy, end up perpetuating specific social (or regional, national, cultural, *theoretical*) interests. The reified plane of intellectual discourse is not, as it sometimes lapses into thinking, above these interests, as Althusser's warning that 'we are never more inside ideology than when we think we are outside it' eloquently reminds us⁸.

All this begs an opposite question to that of the singularity ascribed to 9/11 by what I have been calling the 'out of the blue' logic (by which I mean the idea of an act without contextualising precedents): it begs the question of just what 9/11 'is' if it can be appropriated to so many *pre-existing* theoretical positions. Do these appropriations not indicate that 9/11 came out of the blue only, with its processing through rigidified Leftist ideologies, to enter back into it again? This touches on the philosophical problem articulated by Lyotard as the 'eventhood of the event'. How do we know the event? How is it captured cognitively? Is it not only named *as* an event after it has already been assimilated into some mode of representation? What does this mean for the writing not only of history, but of that history of the present which is the contemporary international news? And does not justice - albeit a less than *infinite* justice - consist in the attempt to adapt the general to the particular with as little reductive violence as possible, and if so,

how can we do justice to the event of 9/11? How can we let that original silence resonate further, louder, and for longer? Moreover, is this even desirable? Is this a ‘just’ way to respond?

Given these complex and indeed interminable philosophical questions, we would do well to take seriously Seyla Benhabib’s assertion, in speaking of an *Unholy Politics*, that “to ‘think the new’ in politics is the vocation of the intellectual”. By this Benhabib does not mean to ‘think up’ the new, to think newness for the sake of newness (which would map too readily onto the market demands of an intellectual capitalism). Rather, I take Benhabib to be calling for thinking, in all its painstaking slowness and uncertainty, as the most appropriate response to an event which, in its ‘eventhood’, explodes our previous paradigms of understanding, and which, as such, is truly ‘new’. Thinking the new is just what 9/11, as a performative of almost majestic violence, demanded of us, of everybody.

However, while Benhabib may be partially right that “this is a task at which luminaries like Susan Sontag, Fred Jameson, Slavoj Zizek [...] have failed us”, I would nonetheless argue that the new is never *utterly* new, never *absolutely* original, and that to believe that it is results in a strange collapsing of the difference between George Bush’s rhetoric of ‘pure evil’, and Jean Baudrillard’s of the ‘pure event’. Thus, no matter whether the ‘light’ of insight comes from the political right or left, the event itself becomes thoroughly eclipsed. In contrast, ‘thinking the new’ is also, indelibly and incessantly, to think its irruption into and from the ‘old’.

One should also sound a warning here, one which may douse the clamorous enthusiasm of the newly self-appointed intellectual who thinks that with this title comes an immediate and unmediated dialogue with the world in-itself, a chance, finally, to breach the Ivory Tower. For, as ever, there is a debilitating lag inscribed into this necessary process of ‘thinking the new’, which, as Hegel observed of philosophy long ago, ensures that the Owl of Minerva always arrives too late. The thinking which thinks the new may be old by the time it is properly thought through. Part of the intellectual’s responsibility is not to be a journalist who reacts instantly to events in the mode of reportage. But this comes at the cost of a certain immediacy which is conventionally considered the temporality proper to politics, so that intellectuals may feel themselves to be lumbering hopelessly, and redundantly, behind the pace. Yet that is the place to gain perspective. Such a cost underlines the gap between discourse and action, which the performative - and this is the source of its violence - attempts to bridge.

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Having expressed these caveats about the problematic relationship between theory and that which it would apprehend, I would again like to appeal, this time in brief conclusion, to Judith Butler, since she offers us a way of both articulating and maintaining that vital, resonant silence with which I opened, and which I expressed a desire to keep open(ing). This silence arises from the same gap between discourse and action indicated above.

In her rewarding book, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*, Butler illustrates the way in which it is frequently useful for a sovereign power to present the performance of hate speech as itself exhaustively sovereign, as, therefore, a weapon used with criminal intent, in order that this presentation might justify *state intervention*. The

naive model of language here is of a full transparency bolstered by an unproblematic intentionality: what is said is what is meant, and what is meant is what is said. The act of hate speech - so goes the official description - is one which turns these mainstays of everyday communication into weapons. By figuring the scenario of the speaker of hate and the 'victim' of that hate as a clash between sovereign powers, all the exceptions of, as it were, war may be cited to excuse heavy-handed behaviour: the state may thus intervene with punitive measures, just as America and its coalition were entitled to bomb Afghanistan. The civilian dead were only the unfortunate 'collateral damage' of Bush's intervention, since force had to be met with greater force. Hate speech had to be met with an authoritative performative of greater power.

Indeed, it could be argued that, in now *preempting* Saddam Hussein's use of 'weapons of mass destruction' in order to justify war with Iraq, Bush is currently taking this juridical performative logic to its outer limits, since he no longer seems to require even the initial 'illegal' performance itself: an imputed, or even a merely suspected and largely uncorroborated, 'intention' is now quite sufficient to rubber-stamp full military 'state intervention'. What is signaled in this gesture toward an international Thought Police is a regulation of time even more absurd than the denial of history, in that now what is being brought into the jurisdiction of US sovereignty is nothing less than the future itself. Of course, the idea of Hussein building up an arsenal of nuclear weapons is certainly disquieting enough, if *proved*, to warrant preventative action, and perhaps very few would express dismay at the deposing of Hussein himself, who is on no account simply the innocent victim of a US slur campaign. However, this is not the same as saying that any nation or power has the right to depose another just because it doesn't care for its policies. Iraq, after all, has had so-called 'weapons of mass destruction' for over twenty years now, and so we may suspect that the timing of this latest intervention is especially significant. Under 'exceptional circumstances', an old enemy is being targeted for new reasons.

The state sanctioned version of the performative as the projection of a sovereign - and, in the case of hate speech, criminal - subject, is in direct opposition to the performative as elucidated in Jacques Derrida's seminal essay 'Signature, Event, Context'⁹. There, Derrida argued convincingly that performatives obey a logic of *iterability*, of repetition with difference, and are thus both constrained by the necessity of citing *preexisting* conventions of signification, and yet enabled precisely by their ability to wrest themselves away from those contexts. This immediately qualifies the power of the performative while at the same time exposing the condition of possibility of whatever power it does possess. Butler, too, senses the irony of the juridical version of the performative, since Law itself is the prime example of a discourse that would pretend to institute authority in the moment of utterance (the vocalization of the verdict for example), but which is in reality explicitly predicated upon a logic of the prior context (legal precedent). As a general rule then, we can say that those with an investment in the preservation and perpetuation of a sovereign authority present the performative as direct, powerful, and efficient - since this is how it would hope to have its own Laws received -, and this would include the performance of hate speech which it deems illegal, and which consolidates its right to intervene. In contrast, anti-authoritarian theorisations of the performative underline its innate fragility, both in terms of the past conventions upon which it relies, and the contingency of the future in which it would hope to secure uptake etc.

However, what is more important for our purposes is that Butler radicalizes even Derrida's position on performatives. She points out that, within hate speech, the need to make a threat only makes sense if the threat is itself threatened by its own non-fulfilment, in the same way that a promise only needs to be made in order to allay the *constitutive* fear that what is promised might not come about at all. Neither the threat nor the promise can know if what they threaten or promise *will* come to pass, since if this knowledge were available, it would not be necessary to make the threat or promise in the first place. Butler argues that this lack of fit between the performative and its success (since the performative must *wait* to see if it is to be felicitous) is a gap in which not only is the sovereign subject fractured - and, by implication, the sovereignty of interventionist authorities - but also in which the critical, the ethical, and indeed, the democratic, find their conditions of possibility.

The disjunction between utterance and meaning is the condition of possibility for revising the performative [...] The citationality of the performative produces the possibility for agency and expropriation at the same time. The political advantages to be derived from insisting on such a juncture are starkly different from those supposedly gained by following Habermas' notion of consensus. For if one always risks meaning something other than what one thinks one utters, then one is, as it were, vulnerable in a specifically linguistic sense to a social life of language that exceeds the purview of the subject who speaks. This risk and vulnerability are proper to democratic process in the sense that one cannot know in advance the meaning that the other will assign to one's utterance (Butler: 1997, p.87).

In order to counter the 'out of the blue logic' then, and in order continue to be 'intellectuals' of whatever hue, it may therefore be useful to consider that brief and so rapidly swamped silence which shocked the world on the morning of 9/11 as symptomatic of Butler's 'disjunction between utterance and meaning'. It was the gap in which what had happened still resisted its assimilation to meaning, still resonated in hallucinatory detail yet refused to be contained in any cage of representation. Simultaneously however, this disjunction can be thought of as the 'condition of possibility for revising the performative' construction of the de-historicised, hermetically sealed version of events which followed the 'actual' event.

But, as Butler intimates, this induces a 'risk and a vulnerability' which is, nonetheless, 'proper to the democratic process': even theory, despite the at times complacent recourse to older paradigms, 'cannot know in advance' the meaning that will be assigned to its proclamations. In ways as yet unarticulated, this might be to think of an ethical democracy which would *hear* the terrorist acts of 9/11 as acts of communication which, though in no way justified, are not without rational content, not without history, not without cause.

Notes

1. And is still in place. The (at the time of writing) imminent anniversary of 9/11 is to be marked by 'wall-to-wall coverage' by the US media, television in particular. NBC will show the 'Concert

for America' to be held at Washington's Kennedy Centre, while PBS is airing 'Heroes of Ground Zero: New York's Bravest'. ABC is opting to reconstruct that fateful morning minute by minute.

2. See Austin, J. L., *How to Do things with Words*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976, pp.116-117.

3. This is at the root of the *bellum justum* to which Hardt and Negri presciently referred in their recent book 'Empire'.

4. Butler, Judith, *Excitable Speech: The Politics of the Performative*, London: Routledge, 1997.

5. See Huntington, Samuel, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, New York: Simon and Shuster, 1996.

6. Bush's indifference to environmental issues, as evidenced by his assumption that he can simply buy his way out of the Kyoto agreement, is related to this American thirst for oil (and further compounded by Bush's own background in industry). At the time of writing, the World Summit on Sustainable Development which is about to be held in Johannesburg, and which is the follow up to the 1992 'Earth Summit' in Rio, is set to be attended by no less than 65,000 delegates, with 106 heads of state from 174 countries among them. It will be the biggest conference the world has ever seen. Bush, however, will not be attending. [update: not only did Bush not attend, but America refused to give more funding to research into renewable sources of energy].

7. The following summary of initial responses by intellectuals can be found listed in convenient chronological order, at <http://crittheory.ucdavis.edu/911.htm>

8. See 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)' in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971.

9. See Derrida, Jacques, *Limited Inc*, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1997.