

MY



(WWE)

Katie Schwab & Jamie George

ON COLLECTIVITY
JAMIE GEORGE

WHAT HAD BEEN “I” HAD STRANGELY AWAKENED INTO A “WE,” THE PRESENCE AND UNITED FORCE OF THE COMMON SPIRIT. I WAS A LITTLE MORE, A LITTLE LESS THAN MYSELF [IN THIS “WE”] THERE IS A FEELING OF LOFTINESS AND CALM, THERE IS ALSO THE BITTERNESS OF THE OBSCURE CONSTRAINT.¹

— Maurice Blanchot

1) The word ‘spirit’ implies not-of-this world spectres, yet also suggests paradoxically summoned-up human qualities indexed to the social. The spirit of collectivity has historically evoked contradiction. As Maurice Blanchot states; in the ‘we’, ‘there is a feeling of loftiness and calm, there is also the bitterness of the obscure constraint’. Milan Kundera also explores this contradiction in his *Dictionary of Misunderstood Words*,² setting up a lovers match as one of binaries; for and against the collective action of a parade, a demonstration:

For Sabina: from her youth on, she hated parades [...] behind communism, fascism, behind all occupation and invasion lurks

a more basic, pervasive evil and that the image of that evil was a parade of people marching by with raised fists and shouting identical syllables in unison.

For Franz: How nice it was to celebrate something, demand something, protest against something; to be out in the open, to be with others [...] He saw the marching, shouting crowd as the image of Europe and its history.

2) I remember sitting on Nelson’s Column on a spring day among thousands demonstrating against English government cuts. As I sat with a friend waiting for his siblings, we drank amongst the others there for the cause, for the spectacle,

¹ Maurice Blanchot, *The Last Man* (1957) p.2

² Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (1984) pp.95–97

for friends. The event felt outdated, a learnt response, yet it felt like something — I was reminded of a lyric; ‘as I grow, I grow collective’.³ Then we walked, and I wondered, what happened to *myself* within the collection of individuals? What part of me was lost for a while? ‘I was a little more, a little less than myself’.⁴ A ‘messy realm’⁵ of people together; a social and political aggregate.

3) As a result of the UK riots in 2011 neoliberal politicians swiftly turned collective action (right or wrong) into the actions of individuals, ‘criminals’ — dismissed as not political. Echoing Margaret Thatcher’s words in 1987, ‘they are casting their problems on society and who is society? There is no such thing! There are individual men and women’.⁶ Even more recently David Cameron has reacted against powers of collectivity by branding a

general strike as ‘futile’.⁷

4) Stadium concerts, festivals and their representations have taken over from protests as mainstream collective rites of passage, propagated by mobile phone adverts. As a type of self-surveillance a ‘futility’ of organised action is foretold in the media, and is portrayed through staged caricatured reenactments. This usurping of action is eloquently put by a review of a recent Channel 4 coming-of-age comedy/drama⁸ in which ‘the gang head off to London to take part in a student riot’ the reviewer writes ‘by the end of the episode it seemed bizarre that more sitcoms haven’t featured riots, such was the amusement drawn out of the protests’.⁹

5) I have recently been reading about monuments, which are objects that organise a colonized and controlling space, which

3 Lyric from the song *Hell is Around the Corner*, Tricky (2004)

4 Maurice Blanchot, *The Last Man* (1957), p.2

5 Taken from Evan Calder Williams’ blog: <http://socialismandorbarbarism.blogspot.com>, An open letter to those who condemn looting (Aug. 9, 2011) ‘politics is the

management of the social (i.e. the messy realm that acknowledges that there is not one person but many of them).’

6 Quote from an interview with Margaret Thatcher in *Women’s Own Magazine* (Sept. 23, 1987)

7 David Cameron speaking on ITV’s *This*

Morning (Dec. 1, 2011)

8 A reference to *Fresh Meat*, a British sitcom TV series broadcast on Channel 4 (Autumn 2011)

9 Rachel Tarley, *Fresh Meat* grew stronger with another riotous episode, in *Metro* newspaper (Oct. 19, 2011)

often approaches a representation of a 'nation'. Yet perhaps the monument is also the only 'imaginable site of collective (social) life'.¹⁰ While reading I stumbled over this sentence; 'the interest in the name "the people" lies in staging its ambiguity'.¹¹ This staging is often assigned to the demands of the 'consensus'.¹² When 'I' turns into 'we', it awakens ambiguity (a dissensus) and we should continue to consider the salient potential of fraternity.

10 Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (1974) p.113

11 Jacques Ranciere, *The People or the Multitudes?*, *Dissensus* (2010) p.85

12 Reference to Jacques Ranciere's definition of the consensus and dissensus, in

The Ethical Turn of Aesthetics and Politics, Dissensus (2010) p.188: 'Consensus is also a catchword of our time [...] it defines a mode of symbolic structuring of the community that evacuates the political core constituted it namely dissensus. A

political community is in effect a community that is structurally divided, not between divergent interest groups and opinions, but divided in relation to itself.'

Image by Jamie George



ON LONELINESS
JAMIE GEORGE

THE “I” WAS ALREADY NO MORE THAN A WHO?, A WHOLE CROWD OF WHO?S¹

— Maurice Blanchot

1) If the terms of collectivity are bound to ‘staging its ambiguity’,² a current notion of loneliness may be performing within this ambiguity. Where one may be performing a disappearance from ‘I’ to ‘who?’ But there is a paradox of the performance; to disappear one must also be there — amongst. For Maurice Blanchot, our relationship with ourselves is somewhat at odds or predatory; ‘how the word ‘I’ vibrated between her teeth, passing like a breath, a calm violence’.³

2) Loneliness could succinctly be described as the detrimental effects of isolation (be that by oneself or by an other). Loneliness itself is a type of noise around, and within and is an obstacle to the social. Yet it is distinct steps away from

the welling effects of paranoia, depression, psychosis — the mute. Loneliness seems to wash over me, yet it is easily remedied; ‘to lose myself for a while but only for a while’⁴ — loneliness implies a return.

3) It is important to separate some of the symbiotic, contributing emotions that accompany loneliness (such as loss, absence, mourning and desire), because circulating these factors is the question of proximity to others. Loneliness is much like forgetting, a primal power; if ‘forgetting is the very vigilance of memory’⁵ — then loneliness moderates belonging — the collective. For Blanchot forgetting, not memory, is the muse, and often isolation, rather than belonging, inspires. There is an abyss of song lyrics taking isolation and loneliness

1 Maurice Blanchot, *The Last Man* (1957) p.11

2 Jacque Rancière, *The People or the Multitudes?*, *Dissensus* (2010) p.85

3 Ibid, p.14

4 Friedrich Nietzsche, ‘Der Einsame’ (ca.1882) in *Gedichte und Sprüche* (1908) p.75

5 Maurice Blanchot, *Forgetful Memory*, in *The infinite Conversation* (1969) p.314

as their starting points, most potently from eras of political and cultural change.

4) Beware of the quickness of the crowd's agreement as the crowd is incapable of love.⁶

Freud states, 'civilization threatens love with substantial restriction', and the result of this restriction is guilt. *I* have felt most lonely as a result of guilt,⁷ a remote control, messaging profound isolation — a 'fear of love, [a] "social" anxiety'.⁸

5) Loneliness, solitude and its anxieties⁹ are arbiters of the collective, locked in a binary embrace: if he belongs it is despite himself and he is only alone with the presence of others 'if I was present, he would be the most alone of all men'.¹⁰

6 In reference to Charles Bukowski's poem 'The Genius of the Crowd' in *The Roominghouse Madrigals* (1966) p.31

7 Referring to Georges Bataille's text 'Guilt', in *The Bataille Reader* (1997)

p.56: 'What's called mind, philosophy and religion is founded on interferences. Guilt arises in a zone of interference'

8 Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontent* (1929) p.85

9 Referring to Georges Bataille's text 'Solitude', in *Guilty* (1988) p.61: 'What would my solitude be without this anxiety — and this anxiety without this solitude.'

10 Maurice Blanchot, *The Last Man* (1957) p.11