# 7

# THE PERSISTENCE OF HOPE

## Critical theory and enduring in late liberalism

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## Striving

Since the mid 1960s, immanent critique has sought to conceptualize the source and space of 'new possibilities of life' (Deleuze 1983: 101) independent of philosophical notions of transcendental consciousness. In his Vincennes lectures on Spinoza, for instance, Gilles Deleuze slowly differentiated between a mode of thought defined by its representational character (ideas) and a mode of thought that is not defined representationally (affects) (Deleuze 2007: unpaginated). Deleuze concedes that affects can have an ideational form ('there is an idea of the loved thing, to be sure, there is an idea of something hoped for') and that ideas have a chronological and logical primacy in relation to the affects ([i]n order to will, it's necessary to have an idea, however confused or indeterminate it may be, of what is willed'). But he insisted that affects like hope and love 'represent nothing, strictly nothing' (ibid.). Affects may be ultimately determined by the given system of ideas that one has, but they are not 'reducible to the ideas one has' whether one considers these ideas in their objective extrinsic reality or in their formal intrinsic reality.[1] Ideas and affects are 'two kinds of modes of thought' that differ 'in nature'. An idea represents something whereas an affect does not. An affect is not nothing, but it is also not something in the same way as an extrinsic or intrinsic idea. An affect is a force of existing (vis existendi) that is neither the realized thing (an idea), nor the accomplishment of a thing (an act, potentia agendi). This perspective on the force of existing is clearly engaging Spinoza's claim that things, finite and determinate kinds of existence, strive (conatus) to persevere in their being. For Deleuze, the perpetual variation between vis existendi and potentia agendi – between striving to persevere and any actual idea or action that emerges from this striving – provides a space of potentiality where new forms of life can emerge. But it is exactly in this onto theoretical spacing that a different, sociological question emerges: How do new

forms of social life maintain this force of existing in specific social spacings of life? How do they endure the effort it takes to strive to persevere? And how in answering these questions do new, if not ontotheoretical, then political and ethical concerns emerge?

The question of how new possibilities of life are able to maintain their force of existence in specific organizations of social space becomes especially acute in the wake of Giorgio Agamben's reflections on Deleuze's immanent philosophy and his own work on the biopolitical. In his reflections on Deleuze's *Immanence: A Life...*, Agamben calls for the development of a coherent ontology of potentiality (*dynamis*) that would upend the primacy of actuality (*energeia*). For Agamben, potentiality has a dual nature: while the actual can only be, the potential can be or not be.[2] And it is exactly within this ontological duality of the potential that new possibilities of life are sheltered. But for Agamben, not all potentialities have the same potential when it comes to the kinds and degrees of difference necessary to disturb current biopolitical formations. In the difficult last few sections of *Homo Sacer*, Agamben turns to a series of 'uncertain and nameless terrains' where life and death, *bios* and *zoē*, enter 'zones of indistinction' (Agamben 1998: 187). The American comatose patient, Karen Quinlan, exemplifies such spaces:

> Karen Quinlan's body – which wavers between life and death according to the progress of medicine and the changes in legal decisions – is a legal being as much as it is a biological being. A law that seeks to decide on life is embodied in a life that coincides with death.
>
> (Ibid.: 186)

The concept of death 'far from having become more exact, now oscillates from one pole to other with the greatest indeterminacy' (ibid.: 162). Unable to rest on a 'decisive criterion,' the line between death and life becomes pure potential. It might be or not be here or there. And it is in these maximally intensified zones of oscillation and indeterminacy that new forms of life and worlds will emerge and the 'ways and the forms of a new politics must be thought' (ibid.: 187). But rather than answering our question of how new forms of social life can survive the perpetual variation of being, Agamben's examples intensify it. How can new forms of life, let alone the political thought they might foster, persevere in such spaces? How can new social worlds endure the 'wavering of death' (ibid.: 163) that defines these spaces? Indeed, so unlikely are the possibilities of new life surviving in these spaces that, cribbing off Brian Massumi, we might describe instances of survival as moments of 'miraculization' (Massumi 1993: 25).

Attempting to address the question of the endurance, let alone the survival, of alternative forms of life in the gale force of curtailing social winds opens a set of new ethical and political questions. If the possibilities of new forms of life dwell and are sheltered within the variation between the force of existing and the power of acting within these intensified zones of being and not being, then what does immanent critique demand of those who live in these zones? This problem

becomes particularly clear if we think of potentiality as the ethical substance of immanent critique. If, as Michel Foucault defined it, ethical substance is the prime material (*matière*) of moral reflection, conduct and evaluation, then the ethical substance of immanent critique would be intensified potentiality, insofar as intensified potentiality is the material on which ethical work (*travail éthique*) is carried out. But this work is distributed across different social groups. Thus it is important to note, again following Foucault's reading of the use of pleasure among the Greeks and the practice of critique more generally, that pleasure and critique are generally available materials and practices, irrespective of the fact that only some people make use of them. But the general availability of intensified potential does not seem to be equally available in the same way. Certainly all subjects exist in the variation between *vis existendi* and *potentia agendi* and between modes of being and not being. But, the intensity of this variation and its zoning are neither uniform nor uniformly distributed. As a result, a gap seems to open between those who reflect on and evaluate ethical substance and those who are this ethical substance.

In some ways, the gap between those who reflect on and evaluate ethical substance and those who are ethical substance mirrors a much older gap in critical theory. We can think here of the ways that Louis Althusser struggled to differentiate how intellectuals and the proletariat were situated in and represented class struggle.[3] But, rather than dwell on the question of critical theory's proper stance towards the subject it posits as the engine of history, in this essay I want to examine a slightly different set of concerns. First, I should note that I am myself aligned with the general project of immanent critique to find a source of a social otherwise outside a gesture of transcendental consciousness. My alignment with immanent critique is no doubt due to a certain aesthetic and theoretical predisposition to this framework. But it also emerges out of a longstanding commitment to a set of local Indigenous Australian understandings of the immanent geontological (the being of geology) source of life and its possibilities. Second, given these commitments, I want to turn from an ontology of potentiality to a sociology of potentiality. Rather than the question of the variation of being and not being or affects and ideas in general, I want to understand this variation in specific historical contexts. But I am making a general claim; namely, that potentiality and its perpetual variations never occur in a general way, but always, as Deleuze himself noted, in specific *agencements* – arrangements of connecting concepts, materials and forces that make a common compositional unity. Finally, when I say that I am interested in the sociology of potentiality I am gesturing to specific arrangements that extend far beyond simple human sociality. The will to persevere is linked to the endurance of things, and these things might be human or might be determinate arrangements that include humans and a host of other modes of existence being composed and decomposed.

The following turns to a social seam in contemporary Australia where the variation between affect, idea and act and between potentiality and actuality are foregrounded: a digital archive project that I am working on with Indigenous friends and colleagues in northern Australia. This seam of social life is hardly as horrific as those that interested Agamben at the end of *Homo Sacer*. But it is exactly

for this reason that I turn away from zones of indistinction as witnessed in the cases of Quinlan and the Muselmann and towards zones of endurance as witnessed in the social seams of contemporary Indigenous Australia. How can we assess the possibilities of enduring striving in zones where life has yet to be absorbed into the extreme wavering of death? How do these possibilities help us to assess the hope that immanent critique places in the ethical work of intensified potentiality?

## Enduring

On 10 July 2009, I was driving along a back highway that connects the Darwin suburbs in the Northern Territory of Australia to the Palmerston suburbs, a distance of about 25 kilometres. In the small rented truck with me were several Indigenous friends and colleagues of mine, some of whom I have known since they were teens: Gigi Lewis, then 35; her partner, Rex Edmunds, then 46, and three young teenage boys in their care. We were moving some household items, including a washing machine tied down in the back of the truck, from Gigi's mother's house in Darwin to Gigi and Rex's new house in Palmerston. Rex was drinking in the backseat, relaxing after a long week of laying a water pipe in a small rural community, Bulgul, located about 300 kilometres south of Darwin. The water pipe was part of the infrastructure of an augmented reality project that we and another set of families had been working on for the previous two years, in collaboration with various Northern Territory government agencies and libraries and the local university. The idea of the project is easy enough to convey. Imagine a tourist preparing for a trip to far north Australia. While researching the area online, she discovers our website that highlights various points of interest. She then downloads a version of a GPS-activated tour into her smartphone for a fee much the same way a person downloads a song from iTunes. Now imagine this same person in a boat, floating off the shore of a pristine beach off the coast of Bulgul. She activates her GPS and video camera and holds up her smartphone. As she moves the phone around, she sees various hypertext and video options available to her — a story of the Indigenous Dreaming site where she finds herself; archival photos of traditional uses of that area; et cetera. Along with this tourist portal would be two others: one for environmentalists and one for Indigenous participants. The Indigenous members of the project would have control over all the portals, the information available through them, and its distribution. My colleagues hoped that this augmented reality project would provide a means of training themselves and their children in the new communication technologies, provide a source of income and support their belief that knowledge about places should be learned in places so as to build an obligation to places.

However, between the idea of the project and the effects we hoped the project would produce and the actual project lay a material and discursive world. And, although it should be common sense at this point, it is still necessary to note that, while the actual world stood between all of us and the idea we had of the project, the actual world does not address all of us in the same way. We are and are not the same thing in the

sense that we may be an aggregation vis-à-vis our intentions to build this augmented reality project, but we are constantly disaggregated by the world around us. Take for instance our efforts to lay the pipeline. To lay the pipeline, we decided to rent a small trench-digging machine, which meant driving into Darwin to rent it, dig the ditch the same day and then drive it back. The other option was to dig the 100-metre trench by hand through sun-baked hardened soil with crow bars and pickaxes. But to rent the trench digger we needed a credit card and the ability to pay. Of the ten adults working on the project, and their extended family, no one had a credit card or the ability to pay, so we used mine. On the long drive down to Bulgul, on one of the many dirt roads, several attachments on the trench digger flew off, which meant several of us had to drive back along the road to find them. When we finally got the trench digger off the truck, Rex learned to use it by using it. The piping was donated. We collaboratively consulted on how to attach various parts of the piping and how to bury it as we attached the parts and buried the pipe. After finishing there was a little leakage at the tap. More than we'd like to have seen, but not so much that we were willing to dig up the entire pipeline after an exhausting day.

What is at stake here then is the materiality of our idea as it encounters different *agencements*. These arrangements shape and direct actions such as our decision to move large household appliances a day after returning from Bulgul, no matter that we were all exhausted, because my truck was still available (I was leaving in a couple of days for the United States). But these arrangements are also continually and slowly decomposed by the material conditions that support and run through them. When we reached our destination, we were chagrined to discover that the lid of the washing machine had flown off. Or, maybe, we hoped, we had never put it on the truck and so we would find it at Gigi's mother's house. But when we drove back to Darwin, carefully following our tracks, there it was on the side of the road, crumpled and flattened from having been repeatedly run over in rush hour traffic. The next morning I got up from a flat at the university where I stayed when in town, and drove to their house where they were still lamenting the lid. Without it the machine would not run. How would they afford a new washing machine? Why hadn't someone tied down the washing machine more carefully and securely? 'Don't blame me', I said, guilty because I had been among those securing the washing machine to the back of the truck. 'I am blaming Rex', Gigi said, 'He was drunk'. 'Not really', said Rex, and besides, 'We are getting somewhere'. One of Gigi's daughters laughed and asked, 'Where's that?' 'We're still alive', Rex said. 'We're still trying', Gigi agreed conciliatorily.

When Gigi and Rex said that they were still alive and trying, their words foreground the differential value of the pure force of existing (*vis existendi*) across social groups. For people like their family, the phrases 'still trying', 'still going', 'still alive' are condensed statements about the miracle of persevering against the play of social forces that address them and maintaining or elaborating another mode of being in the face of those forces. So what are the summary characteristics of this play of forces? Let me just note two broad formations, neoliberalism and late liberalism, and their specific Australian expressions.

Neoliberalism is a notoriously inexact concept. Depending on who is using this term, it may be referring to: a formation of the market; an ideology about human value; or an organization of life and death and their cognates, care and abandonment. Thus on one hand, neoliberalism refers to the transformation of state politics and market relations between the postwar Bretton Woods agreement (loosely the Keynesian period) to its collapse in the 1970s. With the collapse of Bretton Woods, neoliberals argued for the privatization and deregulation of state assets, the territorial dispersion of production through subcontracting and a shift in tax policies that favoured the rich. But, as everyone from Amartya Sen to Tony Judt to Michel Foucault has noted, neoliberalism also marks a very different philosophy about the proper relationship among market, state and social values than both classical laissez-faire liberalism and Keynesian liberalism.[4] Neoliberals do not merely wish to free the economy from the Keynesian regulatory state, they wish to free the truth games of capitalism from the market itself – market value should be the general measure of all social activities and values (Judt 2009; Sen 2009).[5] Once freed, new powers of life and death emerge, breaking the older liberal duality of making life and letting die and instigating a new triangular formation of power in relation to life. Neoliberal governance makes die, makes live and lets die; indeed, making die is proposed as a form of caring for others.

By late liberalism, as distinct from the varieties and specificities of capital and state relations, I mean the shape that the liberal governance of social and cultural difference took as it responded to a series of legitimacy crises in the wake of anti-colonial and new social movements. Late liberalism is not independent of the ideological struggles between market and state relations as articulated by laissez-faire liberalism, Keynesian liberalism and neoliberalism, but neither is it purely and simply a projection of these struggles. From the 1950s onwards, and culminating in the dramatic world events of 1968, anti-colonial and new social movements transfigured the prior way in which liberalism governed alternative forms of life by putting extreme pressure on the legitimating frameworks of paternalistic civilizational uplift or moral rectitude. Activists and their theorists claimed that the Western arts of caring for the colonized and the subaltern were not rectifying human inequalities but creating and entrenching them. In short, these movements created a crisis of legitimacy for the governing. But this legitimacy crisis was, over time, turned into a crisis of culture for the governed as state after state instituted formal or informal policies of cultural recognition (or cognate policies such as multiculturalism) as a strategy for addressing the challenge of internal and external difference. Soon to care for difference was construed as making a space for culture to care for difference. And to assess care in late liberalism was to assess the capacity of culture to act as an agent of care.

We can see what is at stake in the distinction between neoliberalism and late liberalism by returning to Gigi and Rex's claim that their family was getting somewhere on the basis of nothing more than the fact that they are still alive and trying. Their statements condense a set of tacit references to shared background. For nearly two years prior to moving into their new home in Palmerston, they and the

other Indigenous members of the augmented reality project had been homeless. Prior to that they had spent their lives, as had their parents and grandparents, in a small rural Indigenous community across the Darwin harbour. They had grown up in the shadow of the land rights movement and the celebration of Indigenous cultural difference more generally. Land rights and cultural recognition in Australia was exemplary of the logic of care in late liberalism. By making a space for traditional Indigenous culture, the state argued it was making a space for this traditional culture to care for Indigenous people. But land rights legislation, and public discourse on Indigenous culture more generally, differentiated among Indigenous people on the basis of the tradition-effect – the assessment of different Indigenous people on the basis of their correspondence to a modernist anthropological understanding of the clan and its territory (Kogacioglu 2004). In caring for Indigenous people in this way, land rights placed a division into Indigenous social worlds that then internally divided Indigenous communities.

However imperfect, this way of life started to unravel in 2007. As reported in the local Darwin newspaper, on 15 March 2007, Gigi and her family, and five other families, were threatened with chainsaws and pipes, watched their cars and houses being torched and their dogs beaten to death. Four families lost rare, well-paying jobs in education, housing and water works. Why they were driven out – what caused this explosion of violence – cannot be answered, except in the most narrow sense (so-and-so hit so-and-so and then their friends got involved), without immediately being drawn into discourses of care and harm in late liberalism and neoliberalism. For instance, the newspaper did not report that Gigi's grandparents, and most of the senior and now deceased members of the community, had continually petitioned the government to recognize all community members as traditional owners irrespective of their clan affiliations in order to avoid creating internal divisions and the violence they feared would flow from them. Instead, follow-up news stories insinuated that traditional land struggles were to blame for the riot: the violence was caused by ancient clan conflicts rather than by the modern creation of clans as a way of managing the critique of colonialism. Public meetings were held, attended by the leaders of Department of Family, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs in the Northern Territory Labor government, in which the displaced people were held up as examples of the failures of land rights policies to protect Indigenous people living in communities outside their traditional country. The families driven out were promised new housing, schooling and jobs at Bulgul, a site closer to their traditional countries. Fifty people promptly moved to Bulgul and set up a tent settlement.

But then, on 21 June 2007, the then Prime Minister of Australia, John Howard, declared a 'national emergency' in relation to the abuse of children in Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory. Howard's declaration came in the wake of the *Little Children Are Sacred* report of the Northern Territory Board of Inquiry into the Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse. In the name of this national emergency, Howard's government assumed broad and unprecedented powers over Indigenous affairs in the Northern Territory, including Indigenous welfare,

education, land tenure and health. Howard's announcement came with a carrot and stick. As a carrot, Howard promised millions of dollars for Indigenous health, housing, education and employment training. As a stick, the federal government assumed control over 73 Indigenous townships through the forcible acquisition of five-year leases over townships on Aboriginal-owned land, community living areas and other designated Indigenous areas, and sent, under the cover of military police, medical personnel to conduct compulsory sexual health exams for all children under the age of 16. Indigenous people living in remote communities, or those who, like my friends, were promised housing in or nearer to their traditional country, were told to move closer to the cities where infrastructural and service delivery costs were lower, even if doing so would endanger their lives. The people who made the promises to the displaced persons confronted the budgetary consequences of these promises and suddenly became difficult to reach. In the year that followed the income of two of the six families driven off went from roughly 28,000 to 12,000 Australian dollars per year (£16,800 and £7,200, respectively) after they lost their permanent jobs and were moved onto the Community Development Employment Program (CDEP, a work and training programme within a social welfare framework, loosely called 'work for the dole').

The Intervention was widely proclaimed as part of a neoliberal ('enterprise') approach to Indigenous affairs – and the end of the failed policy of cultural recognition. Whereas in the regime of recognition, the recognition of culture was presented as the solution to care for Indigenous people, now it was claimed to be the condition of their harm. Sexual abuse was portrayed as caused by traditional culture even though the authors of the *Little Children Are Sacred* carefully argued that contemporary sexual abuse should never be thought of as caused by traditional culture (Anderson and Wild 2007). 'Business managers' with powers to control and direct all Indigenous programs and their assets, including the monitoring of all community communication and video equipment, were also sent to take control of all Commonwealth programs in Indigenous town camps and rural communities.[6] One of the first actions of these business managers was to shift Indigenous workers from the CDEP to welfare. A shift from work to welfare was necessary because the federal government wished to control the wealth and spending of Indigenous people in remote communities and town camps. For legal reasons, persons on the CDEP could not have their wages managed. Once all Indigenous people were placed on welfare, payments could be tied to school attendance and other behavioural indices; furthermore, 50 per cent of payments were given in the form of debit cards that restricted purchasing choices of Indigenous men and women to selected stores and selected items and prohibited them from purchasing alcohol and pornography. But shifting from CDEP to welfare came with a dramatic lowering of incomes. And the government announced that the CDEP would itself be slowly phased out, an event that would reduce the income of members of our augmented reality project by half again.

But it was exactly within this play of historically specific forces that our augmented reality project emerged, supporting immanent critique's claim that these

spaces of indeterminacy provide the conditions for new forms of life. Before the riot and the Intervention, I had been working with these same families and others on a digital archive whose initial content would come from material I had accumulated over the previous 25 years working with the project member parents and grandparents. The digital archive was going to be part of the Northern Territory Libraries' innovative Library Knowledge Centers. The Northern Territory Library had already established 10 Library Knowledge Centers in remote communities. We were petitioning to become the eleventh. These digital archives were anchored to a 'brick and mortar' model of the library meaning that they were located on a dedicated computer in a building on a community. But after March 2007, this computer, this building and this community were suddenly not available to the project members. And after November 2007, it was becoming clear that no other building would be built at Bulgul. But rather than emptying the space absolutely, these new formations of neoliberalism and late liberalism opened up the possibility of designing something that more tightly connected the digital archive with a local epistemology in which knowledge's end was not truth, though truth was a critical anchor of knowledge, but embodied obligation.

But before we simply start the celebration, we must ask, if this kind of potentiality is where new forms of life emerge, can the forms of life that emerge in these zones endure the material nature of these spaces of potentiality? Can our bodies or our things endure the conditions in which they must exist as they wait for the virtual to become actual? On the day we were moving the washing machine, as we paused for a red traffic light, Gigi showed me two large staph infections growing on her leg under her skin and I showed her the staph infections I had on my forehead. As I have discussed elsewhere, these sores are ubiquitous in Indigenous communities where bodies lack the resources to clearly differentiate human and certain bacterial life (Povinelli 2006a). And the inability to separate these forms of life is located within such things as the washing machine, now broken, that might not endure the way Gigi and Rex must live their lives. So Gigi and Rex's statement that they are alive and trying must be read within these material conditions of *agencement*. Rex and Gigi's insistence that they had the right to say they were getting somewhere insofar as they remained 'alive' and were still 'trying' is understandable given how they experience the world addressing them – a world in which endurance is for some written in the progressive mood. This point is only intensified when we acknowledge that Gigi and Rex are right. Right next door to them is a vast world of close and distant kin who are not enduring, who are dying on average 20 years sooner than non-Indigenous Australians, who have the disease profile of Third-World spaces within a state with widely accessible public health care.

## Decomposing

Part of the struggle Gigi and Rex face is the spiralling order of virtuality that characterizes how the state cares for them and the kinds of events that confront them. Gigi and Rex, and their kin, face an exponential form of the virtual: they

themselves and their social projects neither are nor are not; the disciplines of care that address them neither exist nor do not; and the kinds of events that decompose their lives neither occur nor do not occur. It is in these escalating conditions of virtual being, in which being and not being unfolds in a spiral structure, that the striving to endure, to persevere, must be situated.

Take for example the disciplines of care that address Indigenous people like Gigi and Rex. Even if we believe that cultural recognition indexed some significant transformation of the liberal governance of difference, we might ask how completely this change of heart was institutionalized. After all, social programs were underfunded, unfunded and sporadically funded. Certain groups had access to power-laden spaces of Indigenous bureaucracies, others did not. Different programmes enshrined cognate but incommensurate forms of 'culture' (Povinelli 2006b). These incommensurate and partial political fields of cultural recognition provided significant room for Indigenous people to manoeuvre within the manoeuvres of late liberalism (sometimes for the benefit of broad groups, sometimes to the benefit of small groups). But these incommensurate and partial fields also continually disrupted the socialities of Indigenous lives, sorting and resorting people into different kinds of piles: traditional, historical, too cultural or not cultural enough. And these techniques of sorting populations created new lines of tension within Indigenous communities. In this sense, cultural recognition never happened; not because nothing happened but because some things happened, some things did not happen and some things happened too much. And the same thing can be said about the Intervention. Intervention programmes are also underfunded, unfunded and sporadically funded. The majority of the AUS\$672 million set aside by the Strategic Indigenous Housing and Infrastructure Program for new housing has been spent on administrative costs rather than on the houses promised. And older forms of cultural recognition remain on the books, making the field of manoeuvre ever more complex and hazardous for Indigenous actors. Not surprisingly, two years after the riot, two of the families driven out of their old community had been given public housing in Darwin and Palmerston, half of the families were still homeless and two families had moved back to their original community, crowding into already overcrowded houses. Everyone struggles to maintain a position on the CDEP without being sure how long the CDEP itself will last.

If the formations of care that address people like Gigi and Rex are incommensurate, indefinite and virtual, the kinds of events that continually decompose their lives are equally difficult to pinpoint or mobilize for ethical or political projects. The *quasi-events* that saturate their worlds and social projects are kinds of events that neither happen nor not happen. As quasi-events, they are difficult to aggregate and thus apprehend, evaluate and grasp as ethical and political demands in specific markets, publics and states. This is especially so when these quasi-events are opposed to crises and catastrophes which seem to necessitate ethical reflection and political and civic engagement. The ethical and political stakes of such quasi-events face-off with spectacularly reported catastrophes like riots and sexual abuse. Not

surprisingly, then, these kinds of catastrophic events become what inform the social science of suffering and thriving, the politics of assembly and dispersal and the socially constituted senses of the extraordinary and everyday.[7]

Take for example the washing machine. As we drove past the crumpled washing machine lid, orphaned on the side of the highway, unable to endure the actualities of the human lives to which it was attached, something like an event was felt and commented upon. Gigi sighed and half-heartedly asked whether we could pull off the road, pick it up and try to repair it. One of the young adults in the car, frustrated by the tedious trips back and forth between Darwin and Palmerston, snapped at her, 'old lady, it's really busted' ('*wulgow, im butedup properly*'). Exhausted, I agreed, 'it's ruined' ('*im wedjiyirr*'), and kept driving. My daughter's partner leaned out the back window, squinted at the smashed metal and suggested we throw out the entire washing machine. But on AUS$12,000 a year (£7,300) – if they never miss a day of work on the CDEP – they could not afford a new washing machine and a used one would be no more reliable. Rex said he could figure out a way to jerry-rig the machine to run without a top. Gigi said he could jerry-rig it, but wouldn't. And later in the day, Gigi's daughter remarked that this tug of war between Gigi and Rex would go on and on and on with everyone left doing the laundry by hand (*finger finger job*).

But what form of support can this kind of event provide to Rex and Gigi? Surely the moment that the lid flew off the washing machine, a moment none of us witnessed and so cannot describe – Did it strain at its joints? Did it snap? Was it hinged to the bed of the truck in the first place? – a new kind of individuation and differentiation emerged; a *thisness* could be discerned. What once fit together no longer did. And this fitting together was not merely between lid and machine but between how we fit in the machine's world and it fit in ours. What was barely considered, lifting and lowering a lid, became a matter of exertion, mental and physical. And yet, really, this *thisness* is hardly anything. If an event, it was a very small event. The lid itself was standard size, maybe a little less than a half a metre square. It was made out of light metal. To be sure, we were lucky that it didn't hit the windscreen of the cars behind us when it flew off; the truck I was driving was rented in my name and so they would not have been liable, but even my budget strains if at a higher order of income. Moreover, nothing, except the snippets of local Indigenous English and Emiyenggal that I quoted above, would distinguish Rex and Gigi in the sea of class-based disadvantage – or from the ordinary life of things in any class location. I have had little things break in the process of moving too many times to remember. What makes class matter, of course, is the difficulty of replacing material objects, even those without explicit sentimental value. But class can ramify quite slowly, little events heap up, one after another, and yet never become anything large enough to divide being decisively – to make local headlines. Thus, as Gigi's and Rex's lives moved away from the explosion of violence to the erosion of their lives, they went from being poster children for why the Intervention was needed to just another anonymous statistic in the discursive war on the success and failure of the Intervention.

In other words, the issue of potentiality meets the problems of support and threshold. Speaking about the way that mass media reduces eventfulness, rather than the problem of eventfulness per se, Brian Massumi discusses how an event's specific content is short-circuited into an endless series of 'like' events' (Massumi 1993: 25). The weakness of the will is coextensive with the wobbly order of the everyday. Our flying lid was just the latest in a series of flying objects – for instance, just a week before, a second hand Esky lid flew off, making the Esky unusable as an Esky but functional as a bush bathtub. So why don't we tie things down? Or tie them down more securely? Why don't we – they – put more effort into our – their – striving? If the washing machine lid's adventure in flight was just the latest in a series of errant take-offs, then why didn't we double check that all the ropes were secure, the appliances turned in the right direction (so the wind ran over the washing machine in such a way that it held the lid down), the right cords with the right machines, etc? One answer is that they are not a separate thing from the world in which they live. And there is nowhere in which something like ease of coping is experienced. Everything is jerry-rigged in a landscape of hindrance. And yet all of this *everywhere* and *everything* is usually nothing. It's usually a lid. It is always someone saying, 'maybe', 'wait' or 'be patient'. Spinoza may have thought that things that do not strive to preserve in being are not things, but we might understand that in some places such things are miracles of being.

The reduction of the event by 'like events' is further reduced by the spectacular violence that envelopes Indigenous worlds such as the public narrative surrounding the release of the *Little Children Are Sacred* report. The horrific stories of rape circulated throughout the press drowned out every aspect of Indigenous life operating on a lower frequency. These lower-level frequencies could not break through the threshold of the spectre of spectacular violence. Side by side with these violent narratives, and further reducing events such as flying lids, circulated other kinds of spectacular events. As if caught in a millennial fantasy, the state and press publicized how enormous amounts of money would be channelled into remote communities in order to transform their living conditions. But the promised funds never arrived. And just months after their promise the financial markets collapsed. So, if enterprise culture (neoliberalism) was going to save us, who was going to save enterprise capital? How is a AUS$20 washing machine lid going to make headway in the wake of these shifts of national imaginaries and capital markets?

## Hoping

If immanent critique is right and it is within these spaces of intensified potentiality where nothing is nor is not and where affect, idea and act are continually disturbed, then critical theory faces a critical question. If the potentiality of new forms of life is located in the differential capture and distribution of embodied and exposed life in late liberalism, then what qualities of embodied living are we as critical theorists hoping to impose on others in the concrete spaces of neoliberalism and late liberalism?

In other words, if it is true that *to be* in these spaces radically reduces *being* and yet it is *being in* these spaces that provides the possibility of *being otherwise*, then what stance should an ethically and politically informed version of critical theory take? Should a political movement work to make these spaces less lethal and enervating? But what if it is exactly this enervating lethality that is the condition of this particular kind of world-making activity? And what about the fact that Gigi, Rex and other members of the augmented reality project may not want to be potentiality, or mere potentiality or potentiality like this? They want to strive to persist in the being they find proper to the world, but not in the mode of striving they find themselves in. In other words, they do not merely wish to strive to preserve in being; they want to modify the given order so that they can endure; they want their striving to be less exhausting.

At the beginning of this essay I proposed that when viewed from the perspective of ethical substance, a gap opened between those who hope and reflect on ethical substance and those who are ethical substance. But clearly my colleagues and I also hope and reflect. We continue to push the project no matter hostile relatives in the region, the refusal of government agencies to help lay a water pipe, the biggest financial collapse since the Great Depression and everyday obstacles of poverty and racism. As Gigi said, we were getting somewhere simply because they have a house and we have a project. Grants are still outstanding. And even if this idea does not ever get the funding it needs, the will to persist does, at least for now. They continue to get on and remain in any car or boat going anywhere.

If Gigi, Rex and their children are not terrified of falling into the vast, more intensified zone of the living dead – the spacings of wavering death – they are not ignorant of these zones or their intimate proximity to them. Since being run out of their community their income had been slashed in half. And so the used cars they can afford break down at a faster rate than they can afford to fix them. Their second-hand boats are stranded offshore without petrol. Neighbours call the police for quality of life infractions. Other relatives with nowhere to spend the night sleep in makeshift tents on nearby beaches or in overcrowded flats. And still other relatives, involved in assaults and petty thefts, must be bailed out of jail. But that my friends have hope in the mere fact that they continue to persevere in being does not mean that immanent critique can singularly focus on them and others like them. The vast shadow army of the merely dead and the living dead should terrify immanent critique – should force it, us, to confront what account we can give not merely of the space of intensified potentiality but the force of enduring in the strivings that occur there.

## Notes

1 The idea may have an objective (extrinsic) reality in so far as it represents a thing. It also has a formal (intrinsic) reality in so far as it is a thing independent of what it represents. See Deleuze (2007).
2 See Agamben (1999, 1998).

3 In an interview, Althusser noted, 'Proletarians have a "class instinct" which helps them on the way to proletarian "class positions." Intellectuals, on the contrary, have a petty-bourgeois class instinct which fiercely resists this transition.' But this instinct is the 'consciousness and practice which conform with the *objective* reality of the proletarian class struggle'. Thus, the proletariat need only be *educated*. Not so the intellectual. '[T]he class instinct of the petty bourgeoisie, and hence of intellectuals, has, on the contrary, to be *revolutionized*' (Althusser 1971: 12–13).

4 In 1944, the leaders of Allied forces met at Bretton Woods Hotel in New Hampshire to plan for a joint postwar economic policy. For a general discussion of neoliberalism, see Foucault (2008), Wallerstein (2001), Harvey (2007) and Palley (2005).

5 See also Brown (2006).

6 Under pressure from human rights activists, the federal government made the programme voluntary.

7 A point that Veena Das has also made. See Das (2006).

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# THEORY AFTER 'THEORY'

*Edited by Jane Elliott and Derek Attridge*

# CONTENTS