

## WILLIAM ROWE

### From commodity to apocalypse: some notes

etc., and if you place two things together, something else appears. Reverdy calls it the image, the third thing that wasn't there before. But isn't this how you find the value of a commodity? Place one beside another and you'll find the value: John Locke's law. Isn't that happening all the time in any juxtaposition unless it specifically throws off the law of exchangeability? Try that out with Reverdy's poems: don't they leave you with a comforting feeling of continuity? Like you can carry on. 'Scarcely a minute / And I've come back / Having grasped nothing of all that passed / A point / The larger sky / And at the last moment / The lantern going by / The footstep overheard'. The poem, which is called 'Memory', having started by getting rid of the meaning of series, ends with the phrase 'A world full of hope'. These are beautiful poems, some of the most beautiful I've read, but 'lacking in strength, Beauty hates the Understanding for asking of her what it cannot do' (Hegel, *Phenomenology*, paragraph 32).

What can 'provide a superior attraction' is the void (Mallarmé). To summon the void: 'madly detach' things. Say Cubism: no continuous homogeneous space, only intersecting planes that break up the object. Understanding breaks things up. But there are two Cubisms, or two ways of responding to it: either the intersecting objects are antagonistic to each other or they become reconciled. Test that out on Gertrude Stein's *Tender Buttons* and you'll find more reconciliation than antagonism.

'Madly detach things' but the sutures that operate in global capitalism pass calmly over those abysses. The massive production

of virtual realities is too fast. Poetry had been able to resist commodification by invoking the sensual richness of the thing and thereby the free subject, existing on a 'raft of all the senses' (Bunting), unbound, making the senses into 'theoreticians' (Marx), poetry its own ground (Hölderlin). But for Rimbaud, all that became impossible. The Third Republic, in order to cover over the abyss which the Paris Commune had shown to the bourgeoisie, invented the hyper-real. Rimbaud's *Illuminations*: blast holes in the hyper-real, with pain, by freeing the image from bourgeois order. The bourgeois order still in place.

Rilke, often considered to be a reactionary poet, seeks in the *Duino Elegies* to rescue the thing from capitalist production. Recuperate the presence of things by memory of a pre-capitalist order, as in Heidegger? There is that in the *Elegies*, as there is in a whole swathe of late nineteenth and twentieth-century poetry. But there's something else too: to recuperate the thing in its presence, it's necessary to pass through the land of the 'Laments', who exist in the domain of death, where silence and sound have changed places, the regime of the senses overturned. The power that traverses this zone is the death drive, which unbinds the pathways of libidinal energy and suspends the symbolic order, the laws of appearance.

This is the process that current legitimization of fascist violence seeks to invoke and conscript, but precisely to reverse it and rescue the inherited order of class domination while the ruling class regroup. Let people express themselves listen to Katie Hopkins, Nigel Farage etc.

So how to *suspend* the symbolic order?

Parallel lines don't exist simultaneously in space, they come *after* each other (Vallejo). The time-swarm, pre-ontological. But swarming time doesn't itself constitute a form of hope. You can look at the Brownian movement as particles of milk swarm about in a cereal spoon and think about how they show the unceasing movement of molecules but you'd have to be a Stalinist to believe that that gives a reason for hope. The regime of appearance is constituted by sovereignty over space, i.e. myth (Laclau) and police (Benjamin's law-making violence). The regime of appearance is the site of political and poetic struggle. How to accede to divine violence and not fall back into the State?

But what's the use of all this in a situation of defeat? Just want to be right, do you? Saved by knowledge? Read Sean Bonney's *Lamentations* (on his blog). 'Say those rats have names say you know those names. You do not know those names. Say black powder say a lot of things. And then, a fascist victory, say that. And then. Say it seemed like a door was opened like just for a second and we hurtled through that door or was it things hurtled toward us I don't know and. Say it was just a cloud of powdered blood. Say you know their names and then suffer from beneath those names and live and tunnel inside those names and. Ask what becomes of the motherfucking broken hearted'. Something before and after naming has scythed through the language and that's the place to start.

Or, contrastingly, Keston Sutherland's *Odes*: confidence in naming against an acknowledged crisis of comparison as such, in other words, crisis of value, and so of poetic structure. Or better, confidence in the work of predication, of saying what is, and in love which is the stated pivot of

the poet's relation with the world, the difference he makes. But – and here's the major lack – fulfillment of love without communism falls back into faith in a language which is past.

Then read Verity Spott's *Gideon* (forthcoming from Barque) where there's a tremendous unleashing of expression which doesn't depend on linguistic confidence but gets its energy from allowing the political real to break down the walls of the poem, via a death list and a hex on enemies. The hex, as opposed to confidence in naming, breaks out of bourgeois law but is not yet the law of the heart, the universal that embraces all humanity. The hex is the extreme form of the concept without pain. The book moves through the hex to how the un-rigidified body, present as dis-organised affect in convulsed, non-'logical' rhythms and syntax, might relate to the communist body, the eschaton penetrated by love, love by the floppy, trembling body, the whole of the apocalyptic by the tremble.

Jennifer Cooke's 'Apocalypse Dreams' (forthcoming in *Cordite*) suspend our current limits, the boundaries of the social body and of thought. The catastrophe has already happened, this is the political real. And it's not presented as cause for fear or other instrument of political action but as event that has passed through us and we hadn't noticed. This wrecked cosmos has come so softly beneath your defenses, closer than thought.