

Geography in an age of unreason

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If reason sleeps or dreams, monsters, terrible powers of the night – ignorance, tyranny, unreason and violence will rule.

(Goya: full title for his painting *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters*)

Introduction: an unreasonable essay

We will not be driven by fear into an age of unreason, if we dig deep in our history and our doctrine, and remember that we are not descended from fearful men [*sic*] – not from me who feared to write, to speak, to associate and to defend causes that were, for the moment, unpopular. (Murrow, in Rosteck, 1994, p.132)

This is a quote from Edward R. Murrow, closing the *See It Now* television programme aired on 9th March, 1954, reporting on Senator Joseph R. McCarthy's pursuit of alleged communists rife in the US. A key episode in recent US cultural history, Murrow was responding to the seeming unreason, an irrationality born of highly-charged convictions unchecked by concern for factual detail or consistent logic, of the McCarthyite 'communist witchhunts'. Laying down a soberly argued counterposition,¹ Murrow insisted upon a dogged, 'grey' pursuit of truth, however elusive, as a bulwark against potential miscarriages of justice resulting from the naked play of, as we might call it in a more theoretical register, 'sovereign power'. This quote has been recently revisited, most obviously in the George Clooney directed film *Good Night, and Good Luck*. The contemporary context for such returns to Murrow is unmistakable: the suggestion, widely held, as I will elaborate in a moment, that the US – and, by dreadful extension – the whole world is presently walking into a new age of unreason: one indeed marked by a colossal loss of reason, of any concern for factual detail or consistent logic, particularly (but hardly exclusively) by the current White House administration.

It occurs to me, though, that many critical academics from the social sciences or arts and humanities reading this quote from Murrow, perhaps watching *Good Night and Good Bless* as in part a critical allegory of behaviour by the current Bush administration² – which, incidentally, has not been above instituting or encouraging a touch of

¹ Rosteck (1994, p.122) suggests that, "[c]onsistently, McCarthy seems wild and inappropriate by contrast with the urbane and correct Murrow." Arguably, there is here, in the documentary, a deliberate staging of reason (Murrow) facing down unreason (McCarthy).

² A parallel runs between Miller's well-known play *The Crucible*, set amidst the witchhunts afflicting seventeenth-century Salem, New England as a critical allegory of McCarthyism, and Clooney's *Good Night, and Good Luck*, set amidst the communist 'witchhunts' unleashed by McCarthyism as a critical allegory of the Bush administration's 'unreasonable' practices sanctioned by the so-called 'war on terror'. That Clooney does have current political targets in mind is clear from other recent films that he has directed: *The Constant Gardener* and *Syriana*.

McCarthyism of its own, including where academics are concerned, may feel somewhat uneasy. On the one hand, applauding Morrow's stand, enthusiastically endorsing the need for a supposedly 'mature' juridico-political constitution in which fact can be distinguished from fiction, truth from falsehood, innocence from guilt, etc.; but on the other hand, an awareness that in their own academic work they have been critiquing, relativising or otherwise deconstructing precisely the foundations upon which Morrow is able to launch his critique of McCarthy. Many of 'us', as critical academics, *have* been demonstrating the limits of reason, charting the countless 'ills' that have seemingly been done in its name the world over; challenging universalist notions of truth by insisting on its situated, partial, fragile, always contested and contestable character; even casting doubt on constructs such as justice, and closely related concepts such as human rights and citizenship, as in one way or another complicit with quite particular – Occidental, sexist, racist, ableist, adultist, heteronormative, etc. – picturings of both *the* human being and *the* social order. Arguably, one inference from what we have been doing is to sweep away the very ground upon which Morrow could say what he said: the ground that, on other occasions, we might still want to endorse as the *only* plausible protection against all manner of abuses, unstilled by detail or logic, both local (eg. the misappropriation of land and resources from a First Nation) and global (eg. the bombing of Lebanese civilians by Israeli forces). I have reservations about the terminology, but my sense is that many critical academics today end up feeling 'schizophrenic', torn between wishing to affirm what might be framed as 'Enlightenment' values of reason, truth and justice, but discerning that that such values must always be subjected to fierce critique in exposing their inner exclusions, silences and possible collusions.

I am hardly the first to identify such tensions for the critical academic, but my proposal is that we can usefully come again at the issues involved via a terrain of debate around this figure from the Morrow quote: that of an 'age of unreason'. Such a figure is frequently linked to a narrative of loss: namely, the loss of reason (often *Reason* with a capital 'R') and the rise of unreason, or, carrying much the same freight, the retreat from 'Enlightenment' and the advent of 'Counter-Enlightenment'. There is here a terrain encompassing both populist and more scholarly versions, and, what is more, the arguments involved sometimes detect a worrying complicity *between* a worldly reneging on Enlightenment reason, as it were, and an academic equivalent that, in effect, hauls up our intellectual defences against the forces of unreason and Counter-Enlightenment. It is not hard to find elements of such thinking in the literature of academic geography, most starkly perhaps in some of Peter Gould's (1999ab) later essays, although in what follows I will be speaking back to academic geography more by inference than directly.

In order to circle the issues raised, I will do the following things. First, I will quickly review this emerging discourse about an 'age of unreason', and note claims about complicity between twin descents into both worldly and intellectual irrationalism. Secondly, I will offer three stagings of the problematic of Enlightenment and unreason, each of which will – of necessity in the space available – be severely truncated, but hopefully can advance a modest line of argument designed to rework the terms of debate around this problematic (and in so doing gradually to introduce geographical possibilities into the debate). The first staging will centre on Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*; the second on two essays by Foucault, 'What is Enlightenment?' and

‘What is critique?’; and the third on a text lodged between academia and populism, Laffoley’s *Mr Bush, Angus and Me*. The first two stagings are the tip of a sustained programme of reading undertaken while at UBC; the third relates more directly to my being in Canada over the past few months, given its distinctively Canadian perspective on the current ‘age of unreason’. Thirdly, I will provide the sketch of a conclusion.

Living in a new age of unreason?

Worldly irrationalism

An oft-heard polemical charge, easy to discern from a casual trawl of internet sites, is that we currently live in ‘an age of unreason’, an era characterised by the extreme expression of ‘unreason’, a moment in history – another moment in history – marked by a neglect / abandoning of what very many people of varied origins and creeds might regard as *reason*: as reasonable and reasoned patterns of thought and conduct. Another way in which this claim is put speaks of a present moment over-saturated with emotions and passions: properties of being human often taken as *contra* to the exercise of reason.

What is very obvious is that the geoconflictual quagmire unleashed after 9/11 is what many take as *the* index of our current ‘age of unreason’. The current clash of fundamentalisms, the hopelessly misnamed ‘war on terror’, the warped logics of ‘homeland security’, etc., etc., – these are all regarded by many as manifestations of irrationality striding across the global stage. On one *antiwar* website, we hear Justin Raimondo declaring that

[T]he events of 9/11 blew a hole in the space-time continuum and transported us into a world where up is down, and nonsense is reason ...”

Will we be trapped, here, in this state of unreason for the rest of our natural lives? (Raimondo, 2002, no pagination)

Raimondo was responding to news that US aircraft flying over southern Afghanistan had been scattering US \$100 bills tucked in envelopes bearing a picture of George W. Bush; the objective being to spread the seeds of democracy to this ravaged land (which Raimondo satirised as an effort to create an Afghan ‘cargo cult’ in which George W. is a god).

Let me immediately add that there are many serious political and academic analyses that peer into the abyss to detect the deeper geopolitical and geoeconomic reasons that *have* shaped the US administration’s actions in Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere. Familiar to geographers, I think of Derek Gregory’s dissection in *The Colonial Present* (2004) or the last chapter of Matt Sparke’s *In the Space of Theory* (2005). But there is a potentially important distinction here: between understanding the reasons behind the means and the reasons behind the ends. In brief, the ends may appear to many of us as eminently *unreasonable*, the attaining of world-historical goals that appear little short of ‘madness’ driven by passionately held beliefs (the dreams of Neocons and evangelicals), but the means – the prosecution of actions whereby the ends can be realised – may be entirely rational, fiendishly logical, within their own contained bubble of what outcomes are desired. This distinction – between the rationality of means and the rationality of ends – will be revisited shortly: it is pivotal for this paper.

This paper is not meant to be first and foremost about the irrationalism of the Bush administration, but it so transparently does embody the irrationalism identified by so many as symptomatic of the ‘age of unreason’:

- When journalist Renana Brooks (2003) can identify Bush’s constant use of what she terms ‘emotional language’ as a vehicle for arrogantly sidling past matters of substance (and note an academic version of this argument in the recent work of Brian Massumi [2005]) ...
- When high-ups in this administration can laugh at the worries of the so-called ‘reality community’ (those who care about some correspondence with a world of trivial facts, like the absence of WMDs in Iraq) ...
- When this administration peddles what David Domke (2004, p.x) calls a ‘political fundamentalism’ “exhibit[ing] an antipathy toward complex conceptions of reality” ...
- When Bush asserts in his ghostwritten autobiography that “my faith frees me ... to make the decisions that others might not like” (in Alterman and Green, 2004, p.338) ...
- When such naked ‘sovereign’ ‘decisionism’ can be and indeed is played out largely unchecked by national or international censure (*à la* Giorgio Agamben’s [2005] compelling critique of the ‘state of exception’) ...
- When all of the above characterises the thoughts-and-actions of the administration at the head of what is, like it or not, the world’s political-economic hegemon; a world-historical force otherwise cast as the inheritor *par excellence* of the European ‘age of reason’ (the European Enlightenment that supposedly swept away the superstitions and barbarisms of older ages) – another point to keep in mind for later ...

Intellectual irrationalism

A further line of argument continues as follows. This age of unreason in the worldly realm of the economic, political, social, etc., is paralleled by – on some accounts, even licensed by – a sprawling unreason at the heart of intellectual life (I can only speak here of Western intellectual life). Put blandly, the claim is that everything from the bubbling up of ‘creationism’ (or ‘intelligent design’) *contra* evolution to the upsurge of identity-based cultural studies to the sway of postmodernist relativism – together with much else emanating from the academy, even the critical academy – represents a triumph of ‘irrationalism’ within the academy. And, so the critique goes, this triumph of intellectual irrationalism has entered a strange complicity with the aforementioned worldly irrationalism, so much so that – in all seriousness – weird alliances start to form between, say, Neocons, evangelicals, cultural theorists and postmodernists. I could point to many examples: there are websites chock-full of scientists complaining about the ‘triumph of unreason’ occurring as *both* the truth-claims of conventional science are threatened and the responsible translation of such claims into public policy are jettisoned (the failure worldwide, but especially in the US, to respect, let alone act upon, the conclusions of countless climate change scientists just being ‘the tip of the [melting] iceberg’). As a summary statement, Dick Taverne’s 2005 book *The March of Unreason: Science, Democracy and the New Fundamentalism* laments how ‘emotional and irrational

responses have begun to displace public belief in science' (publicity blurb).

It sounds crazy, given the often-rabid fundamentalisms of Neocons and evangelicals in contrast to the thorough-going anti- or post-foundationalism of cultural theory and postmodernism, *but* a meeting of sorts can be spied around the critique of Enlightenment truth: explicit for the latter two, implied by the former. The journalist Joshua Micah Marshall has called Bush 'the Postmodern Present', for instance, and proposed that, like "Frenchified academic postmodernists who 'deconstruct' knowledge", Bush and his supporters reject facts as nothing more than the "spin of experts blinded by their own unacknowledged biases" (Alterman and Green, 2004, p.10). In *The Vancouver Sun* a little while back, Peter McKnight wrote about how the religious right has learned – highly strategically – to mobilise postmodernism in such a fashion as to influence the policy of the Canadian Social Science and Humanities Research Council:

Indeed, at the root [here] is the postmodern ideal – the notion that the religious right's knowledge claims are as valid as the claims of science, that all truth, and all methods for arriving at truth, are equal. By learning to speak the language of postmodernism, the religious right has therefore succeeded in gaining a foothold in the academy, and in influencing funding decisions in the social sciences and humanities 'Misery acquaints a man with strange bedfellows', wrote William Shakespeare, and nowhere is the truth of that nugget more in evidence than in the unhappy marriage of the postmodern left and the premodern right, a marriage not made in heaven, but consummated by the parties' mutual commitment to the relativity of truth. (McKnight, 2006, p.C5)

I can also point to quite sustained populist versions providing a more wide-ranging socio-cultural critique of the strange complicities here. One example is a book by Frances Wheen, a British journalist, that is much better than its title – *How Mumbo-Jumbo Conquered the World* (2004) – suggests it to be; and which, tellingly, begins by charting how the intellectual retreat from Enlightenment versions of reason has fostered a vacuum into which has stepped Thatcherite 'voodoo economics', Neocon 'snake-oil economics' and (as in McKnight's commentary) a curious bedsharing by the worldly right and a new intellectual left.

But we can also detect a deeper heritage of critique *within* the social sciences and humanities that is deeply concerned about the strange complicities, the 'strange bedfellows', identified here. And I do not mean those kneejerk denunciations of overly-theoretical, jargon-ridden, politico-ethically feckless postmodern academic work with which we are all doubtless familiar (eg. in geography, the sort of Chris Hamnett [2002] 'fiddling while Rome burns' diatribe). Rather, I mean serious engagements with the long history of so-called 'Counter-Enlightenment': engagements conducted in sufficient detail to convince that the intellectual trajectories of the intellectuals involved have been ineluctably bound up with (the possibilities for) fascist (or other forms of totalitarian-authoritarian) thought-and-action. Put baldly, the aim here has been to expose the entanglings between an espousal – a sometime celebration, perhaps – of intellectual unreason and a fascination (even readiness for) a release of worldly unreason that can descend into or equate with the negative anarchy of sovereign, dictatorial, essentially 'lawless' practice.

Back in 1952 a little-known British philosopher called Hector Lawton published a book

called *The Feast of Unreason*, critically surveying ‘the retreat from reason’ occasioned by thinkers such as Pascal, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger and Sartre, as coupled to ‘the attack on science’. He accused these thinkers of ‘fantasy thinking’ as opposed to ‘reality thinking’, and declared that:

The cult of unreason so fashionable today is a highly sophisticated and articulate symptom of an endemic disease responsible for the worst catastrophes in history. What may seem a mere flicker of eccentricity ... [in the academy] reflects an ugly mood in which passion and force are deliberately preferred to reason and persuasion, in which compromise and toleration of differences are rejected as shameful weaknesses, and propaganda is substituted for truth. (Lawton, 1952, p.19)

Writing in 1952 Lawton had in mind the extreme abuses of National Socialism (while also, it might be noted, offering an apology for the atomic bomb). But it is obvious that he detected linkages between the wide-and-deep channels of intellectual unreason, entailing some of the most complicated philosophising *contra* the constructs of Enlightenment Reason, and the worldly abuses of Nazism. Such linkages, and the whole emotional horizon of ‘Auschwitz’, haunt the terms of debate concerning my paper today.

Claims about the implicatedness of Nietzschean and Heideggerian thinking with National Socialism are reasonably well-known, but less familiar – and still more unsettling for many of ‘us’ who might like to regard ourselves as critical academics – is the turn of such claims from the original German (so-called) ‘prophets of excess’ to their claimed French inheritors in the shape of Bataille, Blanchot, Derrida, Deleuze, Foucault, Lyotard and others. True, criticisms of French poststructuralism for its assaults on all forms of reason and truth, and hence on any possibilities for meaningful political future-building, *are* also familiar (and geography has both good [eg. Livingstone, 2006] and indifferent [eg. Short, 1998] versions). But there *is* still something different about so explicitly positioning Derrida, Foucault and fellow-travellers in the heritage of a Counter-Enlightenment that – so the argument goes – cannot *but* be complicit with, to put it bluntly, fascism or (in a more contemporary hue) the Neocon project for a ‘new American century’.

Prominent in advancing this line of critique, and clearly having the scholarly armature to do so, is Richard Wolin, the American cultural theorist. His 1995 book *Labyrinths: Explorations in the Critical History of Ideas* set the ball rolling, seeking to trace how “a certain German intellectual lineage that, in its prime, displayed affinities with fascism (namely, the Nietzsche-Heidegger-Carl Schmitt connection ...) ... was subsequently taken up by the French intellectuals on the post-World War II period and, as it were, made canonical” (Wolin, 1995, p.1). Wolin extended such claims in his 2004 book *The Seduction of Unreason: The Intellectual Romance with Fascism from Nietzsche to Postmodernism*, wherein he “probes the nexus between intellectuals – several of whom feature prominently in the postmodernist pantheon – and fascism” (Wolin, 2004, p.xiv). Notwithstanding what is a sophisticated analysis in both books, albeit with many tactical omissions, Wolin is prepared to offer very clear statements such as these:

According to conventional wisdom, both poststructuralism and postmodernism are movements of the political left. One of the goals of the present study is to challenge this commonplace. After all, historically, the left has been staunchly rationalist and universalist, defending democracy, egalitarianism and human rights. (Wolin, 2004, p.11)

From latter-day anti-*philosophes* like Nietzsche and Heidegger, poststructuralists have inherited a distrust of reason and democracy. The ideas they have recommended in their stead – ‘*difference*’ (Derrida), ‘transgression’ (Foucault), ‘schizophrenia’ (Deleuze and Guattari) – fail to inspire confidence. Their denunciations of reason’s inadequacies have an all-too-familiar ring: since the dawn of the Counter-Enlightenment, they have been the standard fare of European reaction. By engaging in a neo-Nietzschean assault on ‘reason’ and ‘truth’, poststructuralists’ criticisms remained pitched at a level of theoretical abstraction that lets capitalism off the hook. (Wolin, 2004, p.12)

As these quotes imply, Wolin’s is a ‘baby and bathwater’ argument. He reckons that, in dismantling the Enlightenment heritage, so these irrational intellectuals have cast away what many on the left would see as emancipatory features of the Enlightenment project – the advocacy of ‘democracy, egalitarianism and human rights’; the basis, after the 1789 Revolution, for critiquing socio-economic inequalities, those of capitalism included – that, however fragile and themselves open to academic-practical abuse, *should* remain part of the lexicon. (Again, geography has honorable if overstated versions of such claims: the recent diatribes by the Marxist geographers, David Harvey [2006] and Neil Smith [2006], in shouting down Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift [2005], merely being the most obvious).

However, Wolin goes further. His reasoning leads in effect to a reversal of what he calls “the standard postmodernist demonology”, wherein “the Enlightenment bears direct responsibility for the Gulag and Auschwitz” and any “modern totalitarianism is merely the upshot of the universalising impetus of Enlightenment reason” (Wolin, 2004, pp.312-313). Thus, in his demonology (echoing Lawton), it is rather the representatives of Counter-Enlightenment, the postmodernists and the poststructuralists included, who bear responsibility – maybe not direct, but at points this appears not too far off – for the Gulag and Auschwitz, and for allowing through the door irrational totalitarianisms of all hues (even or especially ones dressed in neoliberal clothing).

A Wolin-type account is disconcerting, and it should be attended to, but it is also flawed. Thus, notwithstanding impressive scholarship, the cumulative effect is to totalise Enlightenment as an overall ‘good’ that needs to be retained *in toto* as the only guarantor of both worldly and intellectual reason; and in so doing it is of course polarised in a too-stark binary against the projected unreason, itself congealed into a monolithic unity, of Counter-Enlightenment. Such a narrative misses that, as Wheen (2004, p.4) remarks, “there were many different Enlightenments”. This can of course mean geographically – there was a highly differentiated geography of Enlightenment, as historical geographers like David Livingstone and Charlie Withers (eg. Livingstone and Withers, 1999) have so compellingly shown – but it also means differences between the Enlightenment(s) of the *philosophes*, the scientists, the bourgeoisie, the ‘revolutionaries’ and others. One might wish to recuperate parts of this edifice for intellectual or political (or even emotional) projects in the present, yet reject others. But by the lights of a Wolin-type account you *cannot* gain a toehold to critique certain ‘bits’ of reason that accompanied the Enlightenment, while accepting the intellectual and practical import of others for, say, a progressive scholarly, political and even ethical enterprise in the present. It is to militate against the possibility of turning Enlightenment *against* Enlightenment, of mobilising

Enlightenment in one guise as an exercise demanding high standards of reasoned inquiry and debate *against* Enlightenment in another guise of rationality as an ultimately ‘empty’ defence of conventionality – in science, arts, politics, ethics, etc. – in the face of anything simplistically deemed irrational. Hence, it is precisely to miss the tenor of the account given by Adorno and Horkheimer in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, but also the careful decomposition of different modes and spaces of Enlightenment as proposed by Foucault in his Enlightenment and critique essays.

Three stagings of Enlightenment and unreason

And here I have my entry into the second main part of my paper today: in which I will trace three different stagings of the encounter between Enlightenment and unreason. Each of these stagings speaks back to issues already raised in the paper, as hopefully will be clear, but there is also a progression of sorts through the three stagings: from abstractions to concretions; from philosophy to history, even geography. As we will see, there are also elements here that illuminate what is occurring in the current ‘age of unreason’ (should we choose to continue using this attribution).

Dialectic of Enlightenment

Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (henceforth *DoE*) was composed when the two of them –representatives of the Frankfurt School of critical theory, with its fusion of Marxism, psychoanalysis and diverse other traditions – were residing in the US as exiles from Nazi Germany. The book was initially published as a limited edition in German in 1944, then as a more widely-available edition still in German in 1947 but only translated into English in 1972. It is an odd book, a fragmentary mix of materials – some versions carry the subtitle *Philosophical Fragments* – that concludes with a ragbag of ‘Notes and drafts’ (some with wholly unexpected titles such as ‘The psychology of animals’, ‘The importance of the body’ and ‘The genesis of stupidity’). Two of its longer component essays, ‘The culture industry: enlightenment as mass deception’ and ‘Elements of anti-Semitism: limits of enlightenment’, are structurally bound to the book’s central claims, but head off in other directions beyond the scope of the present paper. The guts of the book lie chiefly in its opening essay, ‘The concept of enlightenment’, buttressed by a brief but highly illuminating ‘Introduction’ and two lengthy ‘Excursuses’ wherein threads of the opening essay are elaborated through close readings of the Odysseus myth and de Sade’s *Juliette*.

The focus of the book is partially the Enlightenment as a decisive epoch in Western thought-and-action, and there are aspects of writing a narrative philosophical history alert to specificity of *the* Enlightenment, especially in its conjunction with the rise of capitalism. Additionally, though, *DoE* is concerned with ‘enlightenment’ as an ongoing process – spreading throughout the domains of philosophy, science, arts and politics – that is inherently unstable, unaccomplished and unaccomplishable. The crucial assertion is that Enlightenment is, regrettably, always doomed to descend into ‘myth’, as one part of the dialectic, and that whatever promise it holds – notably in its initial opposition to myth; in its sweeping away the cobwebs of ignorance, superstition, brutality and domination – is always destined to fade, to become perverted, hollowed out in an often macabre parody of itself. In this vision, reason as something new, shiny, hopeful, as the

gift of enlightenment, contains within it the seeds of its own decay into the unreason that it allegedly arose to replace, meaning that the rational imperative that it heralded is similarly ordained to become irrational (contaminated by myth). Adorno and Horkheimer thus write:

We believe that these fragments [ie. the contents of the book] will contribute to the health of ... theoretical understanding, insofar as we show that the prime cause of the retreat from enlightenment into mythology is not to be sought so much in the nationalist, pagan and other modern mythologies manufactured precisely in order to contrive such a reversal, but in the Enlightenment when paralysed by fear of truth. (*DoE*, pp.xiii-xvi)

More than this, the authors write about the “the indefatigable self-destructiveness of enlightenment” (*DoE*, p.xi, also p.xiii). In this (admittedly ‘bleak’ vision) E//enlightenment begets destruction; reason begets unreason; rationality begets irrationality. In short, these two states are reckoned to be dialectically related, not wholly distinct polar opposites, and so – immediately – it should be evident that taking seriously *DoE* is a challenge to the simple binaries favoured by a Wolin-type critique (and deployed in the more populist discoursing).

There are many aspects of *DoE* that I cannot expand here: the attention to the ‘disenchantment’ of the world, echoing Weber, and its objection to how Enlightenment flattens out a pre-existing landscape of ‘enchanted’ things into a quantifiable surface of interchangeable objects ‘grasped’ solely as time-space coordinates; the attention to how Enlightenment ushers in a domination of nature, both the external nature of worldly ‘resources’ and the internal nature of human ‘passions’; the attention to how Enlightenment creates pre-conditions for weakened psychological states in which different groups of people too readily follow the diktats of (mediated) totalitarian authority while stigmatising others unlike themselves who they are led to fear; etc., etc. What I do want to underline for the purposes of this paper, however, is that, despite what I have said so far, *DoE* is *not* after all a straightforward ‘dishing’ of Enlightenment – partly because of the dialectical construction mentioned a moment ago, and partly because there *are* principles of Enlightenment that Adorno and Horkheimer wish to retain for their own critical theory.

DoE acknowledges that the retreat from ‘metaphysics’ occasioned by the Enlightenment was not without merit. The questions asked by such an older, now-discredited metaphysics about the underlying properties of not just truth and reason but also moral justifications for ‘right’ and ‘wrong’, the latter being tackled in the admixings of theology, legal theory and philosophy, were inherently unproveable (and thus potentially tainted with ignorance, superstition and the will of the most powerful). Yet *DoE* also regrets this retreat from metaphysics, because it precisely left reason without any kind of *prior* intellectual, political or moral compass. And the big, deceptively simple, point at the beating heart of *DoE* is that Enlightenment unwittingly (but seemingly inevitably) clears the way for reason to descend into a pallid version of itself, wherein reason is simply the rationality – and Guzzoni (1997) talks of reason regressing *into* rationality – of *means*, of how things get done, as opposed to a reasoned consideration, a careful, responsible, weighing up or judgment, of *ends* (a judgment requiring some input that cannot but be described as ‘metaphysical’).

Horkheimer clarifies this distinction in a later lecture, included in his 1947 book *Eclipse of Reason*, when defining ‘subjective reason’ as concerned “with the adequacy of procedures [means] for purposes more or less taken-for-granted and supposedly self-explanatory. It attaches little importance to the question whether the purposes [ends] as such are reasonable” (Horkheimer, 1974, p.3). More familiar, perhaps, is his use of the phrase ‘instrumental reason’, but the descriptor of ‘subjective’ is instructive: it helps us to see why positivism, the tool of procedural, means-inflected rationality, is regarded by Adorno and Horkheimer as complicit with subjectivity (the subjective will of whoever decides upon ends). Horkheimer also speaks of ‘objective reason’, as simultaneously *more* responsive to the objects of the world *and* also connected to those ‘larger’ metaphysical questions of, eg., ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ (not that the latter can be read off from the ‘real’, for what is always required at the same time as greeting the object is serious conceptual labour of the intellect). *DoE* holds that Enlightenment embraces *both* forms of reason, but that the subjective tends to win out over the objective, with fateful consequences.

Indeed, seen through this lens, and returning to a point made earlier in relation to the Bush administration, a relentless rationality is displayed here within the means adopted to achieve what many would regard as highly irrational ends. Reason is instrumentally mobilised – subjectively bent, because deployed relative to the subjective, often emotionally-charged, assertively aggressive ‘whims’ of the authorities involved – in pursuit of goals set by arguably ‘mythological’ belief-systems (whether Neocon faith in smoothed global geoeconomies [Sparke, 2005] or right-wing Christian fundamentalism’s own version of ‘flat earthism’). Moreover, *DoE* suggests that reason in this guise can easily work *with* religion, despite the latter’s seeming irrationality as a superstitious outcrop of pre-Enlightenment. Indeed, in a passage that sends chills down my spine when I consider its echoes today in Bush’s US, Adorno and Horkheimer state that:

The paradoxical nature of faith ultimately disintegrates into a swindle, and becomes the myth of the twentieth century; and its irrationality turns it into an instrument of rational administration by the wholly enlightened [ironically meant] as they steer society towards barbarism. (*DoE*, p.20)

I cannot exaggerate how weird it has been reading many such passages in *DoE*: they so evocatively, albeit painfully, describe what strikes me as the current pass.

To reiterate, then, *DoE* is not entirely a denunciation of Enlightenment, as its authors explicitly indicate:

We are wholly convinced – and therein lies our *petitio principii* – that social freedom is inseparable from enlightened thought. ... If enlightenment does not accommodate reflection upon [its] recidivist element [as documented above], then it seals its own fate. (*DoE*, p.xiii)

The point is ... that the Enlightenment *must examine itself*, if men [*sic*] are not to be wholly betrayed. (*DoE*, p.xv)

The ... critique of enlightenment is intended to prepare the way for a positive notion of enlightenment which will release it from entanglement in blind domination. (*DoE*, p.xvi)

Enlightenment which is in possession of itself and coming to power can break the bounds of enlightenment. (*DoE*, p.208)

The book contains equipment for fashioning a sustained ‘critique’ of Enlightenment – and in effect much of this equipment (in Marxist, radical-ecological, feminism, postcolonialist, poststructuralist, etc., hands) *has* now been so mobilised, with numerous instances in contemporary human geography – *but* it also positions itself as an ‘auto-critique’, deploying Enlightenment *against* itself. There are hence things about Enlightenment that *DoE* will not renounce: the need for reason where it is objective (genuinely attuned to but not marooned in the object) rather than subjective or instrumental; the need to retain a prior conceptual movement within feats of intellectual labour, albeit paradoxically allowing such feats to be provisional, ‘fragile’ and ‘dizzying’; the need to draw positive social messages about the ‘equalising’ or ‘exchangeability’ of phenomena when thinking about democracy, rights, etc. – all as fiercely conceptualised. But in part too what *DoE* also upholds is the continuing salience of the old metaphysics, those hated by *both* the positivists and the many diverse strains of poststructuralists – or at least the salience of a ‘space’ to be occupied by something than may still be called ‘metaphysics’, if not necessarily fleshed out exactly as in previous times (for a loosely parallel claim in geography, see Rose, 2004).

‘What is Enlightenment? and ‘What is critique?’

As a second staging of the encounter between Enlightenment and unreason, I now want to consider the claims of Michel Foucault. Many of his writings bear upon this encounter, of course, but let me initially hinge my comments around his well-known ‘What is Enlightenment?’ essay, published in English in 1984. The spur for this essay was one with the same title written many years before, Immanuel Kant’s ‘*Was is Aufklärung?*’ essay of 1784 (in Loring, 1997). Foucault suggests that Kant’s essay announced a new form of self-consciousness about the contemporary moment within which ‘we’ are situated, Kant in the 1780s, Foucault in the 1980s, or whoever whenever: its question is hence about how to apprehend the current moment, the cusp of ‘modernity’, an apprehension that, paradoxically, demands attention to history, to what came before, to how ‘we’ have reached the current moment. It is to ask about the emergence of whatever are the present possibilities for thought-and-action, ones that might well be very different from those previous moments, complete with very different possibilities and closures, confronting ‘our’ forebears. What Foucault therefore does is to prepare the conceptual terrain for *resisting* the terms of debate about reason and unreason, indeed about Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment, as pressed upon ‘us’ by both popular discoursing and the Wolin-type logic mentioned earlier – terms of debate positing a kind of *timelessness*, an unchanging horizon in which we can only ever plump for one side or the other in the grand binaries set before us. As he says:

But that does not mean that one has to be ‘for’ or ‘against’ the Enlightenment. It even means precisely that one has to refuse everything that might present itself in the form of a simplistic and authoritarian alternative: you either accept the Enlightenment and remain within the tradition of its rationalism (this is considered a positive term by some and used by others, on the contrary, as a reproach); or else you criticise the Enlightenment and then try to escape from its principles of rationality (which may be seen once again as good or bad). (Foucault, 1997b, p.120)

Instead, Enlightenment is to be thoroughly historised, which also means that its versions of truth, reason, rationality, etc., are also to be historised on the basis of what Foucault (1997b, p.120) calls “a series of historical inquiries that are as precise as possible.” The issue becomes critically dissecting the empirical conditions that made possible the positing, within the Enlightenment, of what might be reasonable and enlightened thought-and-action over and against some projection of its opposites (various species of unreason and unenlightenment). It is not retrospectively to trace some ‘essential kernel of rationality’ gradually being disclosed through the *longue durée* of intellectual history; rather, it is to conduct a critical genealogy of how it was that a particular version of ‘rationality’ could arise in the circumstances of eighteenth-century Western Europe, and somehow accrue a ‘power’, an influence, allowing it to diffuse more widely, to acquire influence, to become effectual.

But Foucault is well aware that the Enlightenment was no coherent singularity: and that, in its own multiplicity and dispersion, it encompassed diverse, specific, situated rationalities, peculiar to particular domains of scientific practice, political machination, ethical conduct, etc. Thus:

We must never forget that the Enlightenment is an event, or a set of events and complex historical processes, that is located at a certain point in the development of European societies. As such, it includes elements of social transformation, types of political institution, forms of knowledge, projects of rationalisation of knowledge and practices, technological mutations that are very difficult to sum up in a word (Foucault, 1997b, p.121)

The analyses envisaged by Foucault must be ‘precise’ enough to home in on the different elements, types, forms, projects and mutations identified here; to proceed as an “historical ontology” (Foucault, 1997b, p.126; also Hacking, 2002) that is assuredly *not* ‘transcendental’ but ‘archaeological’, attentive to details and differences in the archival record, as well as ‘genealogical’, alert to the power relations soaking through the making and remaking of the diverse knowledges and practices involved. He is clear that the “goal is not that of making a metaphysics possible” (Foucault, 1997b, p.125), in the sense of somehow *refounding* the ultimate bases for judging ‘good’ from ‘bad’ – somehow putting into place a level of judgment disowned by the Enlightenment (in the narrative given by *DoE*). But he is also clear that what he has in mind is not about merely acquiescing in ‘what *is*’, for it also lights a critical charge enabling what is, and more particularly what ‘we’ have become in the heritage of a degraded Enlightenment, to be challenged – however contingently and provisionally – using the resources made available in patient archaeological-genealogical inquiry. I will circle back to this point shortly.

It must be acknowledged that *Madness and Civilization* (Foucault, 1967, 2006a), Foucault’s first major book, did carry a sense of Reason and Unreason (or Madness) – all with capitalised first letters – as binarised ‘big forces’ striding down the ages, ‘deaf’ to one another but forever locked in mortal combat (with the former progressively dominating and reducing the latter to silence). In parentheses, it can be noted that it was chiefly the wording of the original preface, together with passages about the outcrops of ‘true’ madness surfacing in the works of tortured geniuses like de Sade, Nietzsche and

Van Gogh, that betrayed this vision. Much of the text itself arguably operated in a different mode, as a more substantively-attuned ‘spatial history’ (see Philo, 2004, Chap.2; also Elden, 2001). Even so, it is easy to see that a Wolin-type account does have some purchase here, particularly given a ‘romanticised’ attraction to ‘absolute otherness’ that Foucault harboured in the early- to mid-1960s, linked with claims about homologies between some primal ‘language of madness’ and certain *avant-garde* ‘literary languages’, ones dreaming of a pure ‘outside’, associated with Blanchot, Roussel and others (esp. Foucault, 1994a, 1994b). Hence Derrida’s (1978) well-known critique of *Madness and Civilization* for rendering too-grand, too-rigid, too-transcendent the opposition between Reason and Unreason; a critique that, notwithstanding Foucault’s (1994c) initial rejection, he appeared eventually to accept – prompting both his suppression of the original preface and various auto-critiques found in later of his writings. Indeed, Foucault’s *Psychiatric Power* lectures given at the Collège de France in 1973-74, only recently translated into English (Foucault, 2006a; also Philo, 2006), explicitly proclaim a shift from the ‘exclusionary’ model prevalent in *Madness and Civilization* – Reason’s ousting of Unreason, imaginatively and materially – towards a more detailed documenting of countless ‘psychiatric scenes’ wherein both the tactics of psychiatric power were fostered and claimed truths of proto-psychiatric knowledge generated (the latter being parasitical on the former, not *vice versa*). Such a shift is entirely consonant with the spirit of ‘What is Enlightenment?’, and offers compelling suggestions for how the terms of debate around reason and unreason, and hence Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment, might be reframed. Moreover, it can also be claimed that here, in the *Psychiatric Power* lectures, Foucault is taking seriously the little instrumental rationalities of psychiatric power, enacted over and over again in myriad nineteenth-century lunatic asylums, often provincial or rural, far from the hallways of the more celebrated Parisian physicians. And put like this, we witness the outworking – in small, distributed ways – of what Adorno and Horkheimer claim was *really* taking place within the diffusion of Enlightenment, and in its ‘reduction’ to instrumental emplacements of domination over human subjects conceived as objects.

To my mind, much that Foucault argues in ‘What is Enlightenment?’ *could* be construed as conformable with what Adorno and Horkheimer argue in *DoE*. This being said, just after the quote above about the ‘blackmail’ of Enlightenment, its demanding of a *for* or *against* choice, is this remark: “we do not break free of this blackmail by introducing ‘dialectical’ nuances while seeking to determine what good or bad elements there may have been in Enlightenment” (Foucault, 1997b, p.120). This is obviously a caution about the line adopted in *DoE*, one admittedly echoed in my paper today, but such a caution should not imply that Foucault has no time for *DoE* or the Frankfurt School. Indeed, in an essay from 1978 entitled ‘What is critique?’ – often seen as a companion to ‘What is Enlightenment?’, not least because it also takes as a starting-point Kant’s 1784 questioning of Enlightenment (Foucault, 1997a, pp.32-36) – Foucault is expressly sympathetic to the Frankfurt School: to how it tackles both the broad relationships between *ratio* and *power* (Foucault, 1997a, p.41, p.44) and the specific matter of how ‘nonsense’ can become the outcome of rational inquiry and then the basis for practical acts of domination (Foucault, 1997a, pp.38-39). Foucault (1997a, p.32) is also explicit here about critique as, first and foremost:

[T]he movement by which the subject gives himself [*sic*] the right to question truth on its effects of power and question power on its discourses of truth. Well, then!: critique will be the art of voluntary insubordination, that of reflected intractability. Critique would essentially insure the desubjugation of the subject in the context of what we could call, in a word, the politics of truth.

There are many implications of such a claim, but what Foucault adds is that critique is an activity born of subjects querying the forms of ‘governmentality’ to which they are subjected, perhaps as “a political and moral attitude, a way of thinking,” querying whether it might be feasible – in this place, at this time – to be governed less or differently (esp. Foucault, 1997a, p.29). Furthermore, he speculates that:

Not to want to be governed like that means not wanting to accept these laws because they are unjust, because, by virtue of their antiquity or the more or less threatening ascendancy given them by today’s sovereign, they hide a fundamental illegitimacy. Therefore, from this perspective, confronted with government and the obedience it stipulates, critique means putting forth universal and indefeasible rights to which every government, whatever it may be, whether a monarch, a magistrate, an educator or a *pater familias*, will have to submit. In brief, if you like, we find here again the problem of natural law. (Foucault, 1997a, p.30)

This is a very rich passage, positioning critique in this regard – there *are* many others – as “basically a legal issue” (Foucault, 1997a, p.31): as a matter of resisting forms of government where ‘sovereignty’ has over-extended itself, become to many minds illegitimate, and of seeking means, if possible, *within* the horizon of ‘natural law’ that might be mobilised to counter such illegitimacy. Resonances sound with Agamben’s critical-legal-historical analyses of the ‘state of exception’, of course, but what most intrigues me is the inference that – strategically, situationally – critique can be about formulating statements of ‘universal and indefeasible rights’ to question how power, truth and subjugation might be spinning together in a given here-and-now. To me, this is precisely that ‘space’ of critical metaphysics left open in *DoE*; that opening where, for instance, Enlightenment might *work upon* Enlightenment. It is hence to allow a tentative, partial, local but strategic appropriation of certain ‘bigger’ claims that *did* emerge from the European Enlightenment, ever alert to their specificity, but deployed knowingly, self-critically, in countering otherwise unchecked ‘sovereign’ power.

Mr Bush, Angus and Me

Finally, before concluding, let me now turn to a third staging of the encounter between Enlightenment and unreason: a book published in 2005 by Steven Edwin Laffoley – an American now living in Canada, in Halifax, Nova Scotia to be precise; a sometime university professor, schoolteacher, a writer, notably as an essayist in a diversity of magazines and journals, and a contributor to CBC radio programmes (we might call him a ‘public intellectual’ of sorts) – and entitled, intriguingly, *Mr Bush, Angus and Me: Notes of an American-Canadian in the Age of Unreason*. For Laffoley, in line with much of the popular discoursing discussed previously, 9/11, or rather the US response to 9/11, is indeed what has ushered in the ‘age of unreason’ of his book’s subtitle.

For Laffoley, a previous age of unreason was the Great War, and he lodges his analysis of this ‘age’ in a particular WWI battlefield, near Verdun in France: “an ocean of mud and

metal, blood and meat” (Laffoley, 2005, p.13):

To nineteenth-century minds ... this descent into a firestorm of thick mud and flying metal was madness. Wave after wave of humans were ordered to climb the trench walls, again and again, to race out into no man’s land, to offer their bodies to the spray of machine gun bullets – human waves crashing into mud shores to dissipate and be overtaken by the next wave and then the next. (Laffoley, 2005, pp.13-14)

To an extent, he then regards the whole of the twentieth century as simply and tragically continuing this age of unreason – from the WWI trenches to Auschwitz to Vietnam to the Cambodian ‘killing fields’ – but he still thinks that something qualitatively different was let loose after 9/11. His assessment is not especially unique, echoing a host of other critical commentaries in rolling together stories about the strange complicities of corporate and evangelical fundamentalism that fuelled the US response to 9/11, and familiar too perhaps is his more personal response:

And like so many, I wept when the twin towers fell. Then stood stunned when the president took our great national resolve, and all the world’s sympathy, and lost it going to war against a country that had not attacked America. (Laffoley, 2005, p.116)

I draw attention to this quote, because it accents something that I feel is too often missed in other accounts: namely, that things could have been otherwise – that 9/11 created a ‘space’ of possibility, when the response could have been to still the hand that instinctively twitched for violent revenge, to use the opening provided by a rare moment of global compassion for the US to build wholly new networks of global unity across exactly that mix of ethnic, national and regional differences reflected in the victims of 9/11. Such, so the tenor of Laffoley’s argument tells us, would have been the response of a leadership for whom the compass of reason, of Enlightenment perhaps, had been paramount: of wisdom prepared to take ‘responsibility’ for so much more than just an Old Testament insistence on ‘eye for an eye’.

And this point, in a way, is a guiding thread of Laffoley’s book, so much so that it strikes me as not entirely misguided to suggest that his arguments play out – albeit in a very different register, with a different tone – much that Adorno and Horkheimer rehearse in *DoE*. I say this because Laffoley repeatedly contrasts the US of Bush, big business, rampant individualism *and* Christian fundamentalism with the values that supposedly engendered the US republic and constitution. As such, his is a recounting of Enlightenment lost, indeed of untold power (political, financial, technological) instrumentally deployed in the service of goals and gods – or, rather, one particular version of a Christian God – entirely forgetful of what the US *had* once taken from the European Enlightenment (less as the origins of modern science and technology, etc., more as the harbinger of a self-regulating *polis* freed from influence and mindful of law):

In its darkest hours, America has always found illumination in the rhetoric of the Enlightenment and in the reasoned thinking of the Founding Fathers.

But no more.

Today, in a renewed time of darkness, America has ignored its Enlightenment past, looking instead to the angry rhetoric of the Dark Ages and the religious violence of the Crusades. (Laffoley, 2005, p.71)

The Founding Fathers wanted their new nation to escape the narrow-minded, superstitious belief in God-annointed kings. They wanted their new nation to reflect Enlightenment thinking – rational and reasoned. In fact, many of the Founding Fathers – Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Paine, for example – were suspicious of religion and religious doctrine, hence their insistence on the separation of church and state. (Laffoley, 2005, p.73)

Some of these founding fathers – and, yes, they were men, and yes this is of a moment for a feminist critique of the polity envisaged by Enlightenment thinkers – supposed that Christian beliefs would likely evaporate in time, to become no more than fables. Laffoley notes that no mainstream US politician today would dare voice such a supposition, and the conclusion to be drawn, he continues, is that, “slowly and with a creeping certainty, America is moving backward, past the Enlightenment ideals that informed its creation, moving backwards a thousand years, to the age of the Crusades and God-anointed kings” (Laffoley, 2005, p.73). Thus dies democracy – Laffoley (2005, pp.75-77) talks of US democracy expiring over a generation from Reagan to Bush – and at the same time is born a new ‘sovereign’ power, heedless of the checks and balances deliberately implanted in the constitution of the republic, with all the dangers that so transparently attach to such supreme ‘decisionism’ – particularly if linked to fundamentalisms, religious or otherwise – (again, as Agamben has of course reminded us in his critical-legal-historical interrogation of the ‘state of exception’). Unsurprisingly, then, Laffoley (2005, p.73) proposes that “Americans would do well to return to the Enlightenment for illumination.”

But it is not only the Enlightenment that is important as a reservoir of alternative imaginings, ones still offering ‘hope’ – and Laffoley’s quest is ultimately for sources of hope in the face of rampant unreason. Indeed, for him, hope can also be found in the example, in the peoples, places and everyday lived geographies, of Canada. His book is hence also a highly personal memoir of his own experiences of becoming an American-Canadian, in the course of which he takes us through diverse experiences of being educated in Canada, teaching here, notably at a First Nations reserve school (somewhere north of Sioux Lookout in northern Ontario), and just simply passing daily life in the likes of Halifax, Nova Scotia. He is not overly ‘romantic’ about these experiences: he records problematic encounters, particularly in northern Ontario, and he charts all manner of less-than-inspiring dimensions of Canadian life (repression of a ‘race riot’ in Toronto in 1992; the right-leaning tendencies of certain Ottawa administrations from Mulroney to Harper [still a wannabe at the time of writing]; the somewhat vacuous introversion of provincial politics; etc.). Neither does he really lapse into a simplistic celebration of, say, First Nations ‘wisdom’ about the spirituality of existence, environmental stewardship or the like, as the potential basis for challenging the materialism of corporate capitalism or the individualist faiths of evangelical Christianity.

For the most part the message – the deliberately low-key, modest message – that Laffoley derives from his time in northern Canada revolves around the figure of the *coureur-de-bois*, which he suggests is central to the ‘creation myth of Canada’ (Laffoley, 2005, Notebook 4). The *coureur-de-bois*, the ‘runner of the woods’, was a person, seemingly always a man, often French, who was in effect an illegal fur trapper and trader in the early years of French expansion into Canada, but who – seeking to develop better trade

with the likes of the Huron – fostered a practical working relationship with the continent’s native peoples (learning the languages and cohabiting with them, in various senses). Thus:

These men were not idealists. Rather, they went in search of trade, not conquest; in search of adventure, not perfection. These *coureurs-de-bois* simply packed their native-made birchbark canoes with trade goods – brandy, axe heads, muskets, gunpowder, cloth, etc. – and headed out on the rivers in search of furs.

...

[T]he myth and legacy of the *coureurs-de-bois* was that they were men of hard-earned experience and practical wisdom, adaptable men who respected the cultures they came across and the geography they traversed. (Laffoley, 2005, pp.82-83)

If Canada’s creation myth was born of the *coureurs-de-bois* experience – the practical trader and intrepid explorer adapting himself to new cultures, a bleak climate and a harsh geography – then the lasting legacy of the *coureur-de-bois* was the greatest of Canadian values: tolerance. Mind, theirs was not a tolerance born of frustration and grudging acceptance, but rather a tolerance born of a deeper, hard-learned wisdom – of knowing what was fundamentally important to life and what was not. (Laffoley, 2005, p.108)

There are doubtless objections that could be raised to Laffoley’s claims here: perhaps historical ones about the accuracy of his description of the *coureurs-de-bois*, their lives, contributions, etc.; perhaps more critical ones about the role played by these men as the initial foot-soldiers of political-economic colonisation and early vectors for the socio-cultural erosion of native people’s lifeworlds.

Nonetheless, it is here – in the deceptively simple notion of everyday *tolerance*, practically based not ideologically-driven – that Laffoley finds something crucial in Canada, in Canadian life, history and myth, to mobilise against the excesses of the age of unreason. He talks about “learning the lessons of the *coureurs-de-bois*: humility before nature, culture and geography – learning tolerance” (Laffoley, 2005, p.109). As an aside, it occurs to me that in this generalisation from a quite particular ingredient of Canada’s past, one hinging precisely on contact and accommodation between a diversity of peoples set within a challenging environmental context (the ‘geography’ in the quotes above), Laffoley veers towards that understanding of Canadian historical geography – of diversity and difference, but also fragile possibilities for integration and affordance – energising both the substantive research of Cole Harris and his ethico-political visions for fostering ‘respectful relations’ within a ‘hybrid society’ (to borrow from the closing paragraph of *Making Native Space*).

But, intriguingly, Laffoley takes precisely this sensibility into his reflections on urban life in present-day Canada, seeping through countless observations, on first blush often quite banal, about different sorts of peoples – reading, chatting, walking, texting, playing music, looking after children, helping others across the road, etc., etc. – simply ‘getting by’ together, day-by-day, in a fashion that he finds much more ‘relaxed’ in Canada than is true of places he knows in the US. To be sure, we can critique his observations – maybe they are, after all, a touch romantic; maybe they overplay the contrast between Canada and the US in order to justify his own personal journey (from the US to Canada) – but it is fascinating to appreciate the central role that his descriptions hold in the overall

logic of an argument about the resources available for bringing hope, however shaky, in the face of unreason. As another aside, I wonder if there are other resonances here, perhaps to the work of David Ley and others on the practical expressions of multiculturalism and civic culture in Canadian cities.

The overall trajectory of Laffoley's argument is brought together in a brief final anecdote about 'Mr Bush, Angus and me' (the main title of his book, remember). The date was 23rd December, 2004, when Laffoley learned that, not only was George W. Bush visiting Halifax, Nova Scotia, to deliver a policy speech, his entourage was to drive along the street in front of the school where Laffoley taught. This, he thought, was an opportunity to do something, to demonstrate his hatred for the man and everything for which he stood. And so he waited on this street. And as he did so, he entered into conversation with a tall thin older man, likely a 'comfortable retiree', who was also waiting for the Bush entourage to pass by: the two exchanged names, the teacher, Steven (Laffoley), a committed Bush-hater, and the retiree, Angus, who, it turned out, had rather more positive feelings about the American president. Let me just repeat Laffoley's account of what happened next:

Three brown SUVs raced by, each with four serious looking men wearing serious looking sunglasses. Then the long, black presidential limo came into view. In the darkened window, I could see a smiling face and a waving hand. It was George W. Bush.

So, I quickly lifted my arm at the elbow, stared hard at the car, and offered the President of the United States my middle finger. And right next to me, Angus also quickly lifted his arm at the elbow. And he waved too – but with all his fingers.

I can only imagine how incongruous an image this must have seemed to the American president: an old man, dressed casually and giving a friendly wave, and standing right next to him, a relatively young man, dressed formally, grimacing and giving the finger.

When the cars, and vans, and SUVs were gone from sight, I turned to Angus and offered my hand. He took it and said he'd enjoyed our conversation. "Me too," I said. Then we parted. Angus walked slowly down the road, and I returned to my school.

As I think back on the experience now – with Mr Bush, Angus and me – I have to say it was a very Canadian moment. (Laffoley, 2005, p.143)

And so Laffoley finishes his book, right there with this anecdote. And so the reader realises that, for Laffoley, the response to the current 'age of unreason' may indeed be partly about revisiting and reviving original Enlightenment ideals. But it is *also* about mobilising a sense of everyday tolerance, the capacity for people with rather different circumstances and viewpoints (Steven and Angus maybe) to meet, talk and part equitably, perhaps even thoughtfully, in a manner where (it might be said) a form of mundane 'reason' (and 'reasoning') is present, practically enacted and socially consequential (or at least can become socially consequential if many such exchanges are allowed to accumulate and to become taken-for-granted as what Nigel Thrift [1999] might call the background 'ecology' of a place). Laffoley codes this possibility as 'Canadian': but whether or not we 'buy that' is probably less important than what we think of the broader imaginary in play, of everyday tolerance informed by the operations of mundane reason as a vital affordance for challenging the myriad excesses of unreason.

Concluding notes

This paper has skipped lightly over swathes of vexed philosophical, social-theoretical and ethico-political deliberation, but has nonetheless sought to make an intervention in debates about reason and unreason, Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment. Having laid out the basic problematic, I have then offered three stagings of what might be construed as the encounter between Enlightenment and unreason: Adorno and Horkheimer's critical dialectics; Foucault's historical ontology; and Laffoley's anecdotal reflections (the latter the author loosely aligns with 'magical realism').

From Adorno and Horkheimer, we learn that a simple counterposing of reason and unreason, or Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment, as abstract, timeless and counterposed states or forces is misleading; and that, more particularly, a genuinely critical perspective demands attention to how certain logics *within* Enlightenment (and its versions of reason) engender a subsequent descent into a 'barbarism' – worldly and intellectual, with the two thoroughly admixed – that can easily be cast as entirely 'unreasonable' in its elevation of instrumentalism over other possibilities for the exercise of reason. Such a realisation, of course, implies that no simple appeal to Enlightenment *per se* is sufficient for critical theory. Instead, there can only be a guarded, always self-circumspect, return to certain products of the European Enlightenment – the refutation of the old superstitions, religious fundamentalisms included; the belief in universal human rights, democracy and citizenship, notwithstanding how tainted such beliefs can become – but always alert to the unreason latent with reason as it potentially collapses into instrumentality.

From Foucault, we hear that Enlightenment needs to be critically-analytically decomposed still further, demanding the most rigorous of inquiries into the many specific forms of rationality attendant upon the European Enlightenment and its heritors – we might say the multiple and diverse assemblages of rationality whose cumulative weight provided the *illusion* of something that could then be called 'Enlightenment' – and traversing all manner of realms of human thought-and-action (countless sciences, disciplines, political technologies, ethical judgment-making, etc.). As Foucault demonstrates in his own work, such realms were often ones of countless practices, some deeply problematic in their 'normalising' programmes for 'the mad, the sad and the bad', that conjured up the play of what might be cast as primarily instrumental rationalities. There is little here, even in the seemingly most coherent of sciences driven by an *a priori* of fully reasoned intellectual insight, to hold up as some 'pure' expression of 'true' Enlightenment, of reason proceeding as ideally many suppose that it does or at least should. Such a realisation inevitably hollows out even more the bases for a critical-theoretical pitting of reason *against* unreason, but not completely; for even Foucault leaves open some wiggle-room for people to oppose the modalities of governmentality with which they are faced, in given times and places, and in part to do so through a strategic mobilisation of Enlightenment-type ideas about, say, the 'natural law' of human rights as a challenge to, say, the unchecked 'illegalities' of 'sovereign power'. He admits that he "do[es] not know whether it might be said today that the critical task still entails faith in Enlightenment" (Foucault, 1997b, p.133), but it is telling that he leaves open the possibility for a strategic 'use' of Enlightenment for the purposes of situated critique.

From Laffoley, we arguably find exactly this happening: namely, a strategic use of

Enlightenment, in the shape of the founding principles of the US republic, as a riposte to what he identifies, obviously also in strategic-rhetorical fashion, as the current ‘age of unreason’. His manoeuvre, it might be added, is essentially the same as Murrow’s in the opening quote, which also carries with it this appeal to history and doctrine as a defence against slipping back into some envisaged ‘age of unreason’. But what we also see in Laffoley is a development of the geographical sensibility appearing in the margins of *DoE* and then more fully in Foucault’s writings. By emphasising the historicity of Enlightenment and its dialectical transformations, Adorno and Horkheimer are hardly shaking hands with the more empirical historical geographers of Enlightenment (science and technology); but they are signposting a road away from the timelessness of other constructions to a concern for conjuncture and contingency, such a concern being itself crucial to their critical imagination. Foucault moves us much further along this road, recognising “the geography of truth” (Foucault, 2006b, p.XX) given by the spatially variable piecing together of the many knowledges in circulation across the lands of so-called Enlightenment; all as knotted together with diverse practices or rationalities-in-action; some becoming generalised and hegemonic, in part precisely through their spatial diffusion, and others becoming ‘disqualified’, perhaps stuck in particular localities, but maybe as the tools of future recalcitrance or ‘insubordination’ (within the critique of prevailing governmentality). Laffoley then moves us further still, reflecting upon the most subtle, rarely-acknowledged, often close-to-home textures of encounter, exchange and – if things work out ‘well’ – tolerance precisely constituted by the diverse patchwork of juxtaposed peoples in places. And he wonders about whether, from this humble grounding, it may also be possible to reconvene impressions of everyday mundane reason, the reasoned and reasonable comings-together across the socialities and spatialities of human difference, as a complementary resource in the struggle against the ‘evils’ of the unreasoned, the unreasonable. In this vein, then, geography in an ‘age of unreason’ maybe starts to mean something quite different again.

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