RIOTS: CROWDS, BODIES, TEMPORALITIES, UTOPIAS

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Whenever I happen to be in a city of any size, I marvel that riots do not break out every day: massacres, unspeakable carnage, a doomsday chaos. How can so many human beings coexist in a space so confined without destroying each other, without hating each other *to death*?

(E.M. Cioran: *History and Utopia*, 80)

If I am to lead a good life, it will be a life lived with others, a life that is no life without those others; I will not lose this I that I am; whoever I am will be transformed by my connections with others, since my dependency on another, and my dependability, are necessary in order to live and to live well.

(Judith Butler: *Notes Toward a Performative Politics of Assembly*, 218)

Crowds

Even a cursory glance at the past ten years of global history is enough to illustrate the fact that human crowds in their different manifestations are connected to urgent questions of politics, power and temporality. The performative and political potentials of crowds and public assemblies are at the core of much contemporary theorizing. Alain Badiou (2012), Judith Butler (2015), Jodi Dean (2016) and Joshua Clover (2016), to name only a few recent contributions, set out to re-evaluate the progressive and transformative political potentials of public assemblies and mass action. They do so by clearly distinguishing themselves from older social and cultural theories about crowds and mass protest. Dean and Clover in particular challenge the negative judgements of masses that are characteristic of late-19th- and early-20th-century theories on mass psychology found in Gustave Le Bon, Sigmund Freud and others. Le Bon popularized a notion of the masses as inherently barbaric and destructive, an antithesis to the emerging middle-class notion of cultivated individualism. If these early theorists of the crowd grant the masses a political potential at all, this can only be found in the negative imagery of either the angry mob of the French Revolution or, in later post-1945 theories of crowd psychology, in the spectacle of the fascist crowd. Butler, Dean and Clover (and, to a certain extent, Barbara Ehrenreich [2007]), however, argue for crowd formation as a potentially progressive

force. This prevalent idea of the tension between the crowd as destructive mob and the crowd as the politically progressive enactment of the will of the people is on the one hand a continuation of the dichotomy of the civilized individual and the uncivilized masses that emerged during the cultural developments of late 19th-century bourgeois-capitalist societies described by Raymond Williams in *Culture and Society* (2017: 413).[1] On the other hand, this tension is reflective of our ongoing contemporary struggle with these very same ideas.

A number of crowd phenomena of the past ten years clearly illustrate this. The public assemblies on Tahrir Square which signify the political events of the Arab Spring 2011 are representative of a collective body becoming a political force of change; likewise, the crowds during the Occupy movement 2011-2012 can be seen as individuals assembling as a crowd demanding social change. The so-called refugee crisis since 2015, which culminated in unprecedented numbers of people migrating to Europe, however, has caused ambiguous interpretations. Though interpreted as a collective body across the political spectrum, the conclusions drawn from this interpretation are highly contradictory. For the right, the dehumanizing image of a mass flow of people was interpreted as a threat to "their" Western way of life and political and economic stability. Ironically, this fear mobilized another crowd phenomenon: the PEGIDA[2] mass demonstrations across several major German cities and similar right-wing public demonstrations across Europe. The meaning-making associated with these two crowd phenomena throws into sharp relief the political and interpretative challenges of crowd phenomena. On the one hand, the refugees coming to Europe are perceived as a seemingly homogeneous group of people who, from this outside perception, form a crowd, an influx of people. On the other hand, another group (the right-wing PEGIDA) forms itself, claiming "we are the people" – "a self-naming practice that sought precisely to exclude Muslim immigrants from the operative idea of the nation" (Butler 2015: 3).

Butler and Dean in particular address the interpretative ambivalences of recent crowd phenomena and how they function as politically significant events. Both are concerned with the question of what it means when a mass of bodies assemble to form a new collective body. Thus, strikingly, a plurality of bodies turns into one singular body. A question which is related to this and which I will focus on in this essay is the question of (political) temporality and the future. Here, Badiou and Clover's writings on riots are significant since both focus on the temporality and historicity of recent riots. Badiou identifies different patterns of riots which directly relate to their temporalities: the

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[1] Cf. also Ehrenreich 2007: 14-15 for a historical perspective on the emergence of the culture of the "self" at the turn of the century.

[2] PEGIDA was founded in 2014 in Dresden; the acronym stands for "Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes" ("Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the Occident"). The group's slogan "Wir sind das Volk" ("We are the people"), which Butler comments on in her book, has become their infamous trademark.

immediate riot, the latent riot and the historical riot. Consequently, Badiou sees a "rebirth of history" in the riots of the early 2010s, be it the uprisings of the Arab Spring or the 2011 English Riots (2012: 5). As the subtitle of the English translation of Badiou's book indicates, he is concerned with the *Times of Riots and Uprisings*. Riots thus can be characterized in terms of their specific temporalities – an idea I will come back to in more detail later. Similar to Badiou, Clover speaks of a "new era of uprisings" and argues that riot and strike alternate as dominant forms of public collective protest throughout history (2016: 9-11). In the light of the recent theorizing of crowds, I want to ask, what relationship does the moment of assembly, the temporality of crowd formation, have for the present as well as for the future?

I have chosen the introductory quotes by E.M. Cioran and Judith Butler to illustrate the double bind inherent in the political and cultural thinking about crowds which must come to terms with the ambivalences and contradictions of the mass vs. the individual. Cioran's "marveling" at the fact that riots do not happen on a regular basis purely because of the fact of urban cohabitation forms the opening of his essay on the mechanism of utopian writing. There is, of course, a profound irony resulting from engaging with a literary genre whose aim it is to prefigure a better future for humanity, an improvement on the troubles and suffering of the present, and "marvelling" at the perceived sheer impossibility of human togetherness. For the pessimist Cioran, the riot, spontaneous eruption of collective violence, is the expected outcome of human collectivity and society. In this thinking, human togetherness, human collectivity, can never have a progressive outcome. The best thing that the author of *A Brief History of Decay* expects from this situation is a compromise between human beings which will always be at the expense of the individual and their desires. The essential human fear of being touched with which Elias Canetti begins his book *Crowds and Power* (1984: 15) seems to be at the core of Cioran's surprise about human community. For Butler, however, togetherness is integral to individual flourishing. While for Cioran, "dependency on another" would be a compromise, maybe even a weakness, for Butler, it is the precondition for an individual's life lived well in the ethical sense. While the juxtaposition of these two thinkers might not seem to be particularly productive or intuitive at first sight, I will show how this juxtaposition is thinking the materiality and temporality of crowds.

Bodies

Whose body is the body in and of the crowd? To whom does the individual body belong as soon as the fear of being touched "changes into its opposite", as soon as a "dense crowd" forms "in which body is pressed to body" (Canetti 1984: 16)? This question is linked to notions of individuality and personhood emerging in modernity, and it is also linked to the question of what or who the crowd or the mob is. This question of the identity of the

crowd has occupied the authorities even during what Clover calls the "Golden Age of Riot", i.e. the 18th to mid-19th centuries (2016: 49). It was a matter of state authorities to determine, as it were, the 'identity' of a protesting or riotous crowd both in terms of personhood and in terms of time. The Riot Act 1714, for instance, passed under King George by the Parliament of Great Britain, was used to declare any group of more than twelve people which "unlawfully" and "riotously" assembled and refused to disperse within one hour after the public reading of the Act a rioting crowd (Riot Act 1714 par. I). The authorities could react to uprisings with a variety of measures, not least suppressing and dispersing the crowd with physical force, sentencing rioters to prison or death, and executing them.

As historical research shows[3], authorities had to be careful in their response to public protests and uprisings since many of them were food riots (or "rebellions of the belly") aimed at stabilizing market prizes (cf. Thompson 1971), and the public was therefore mostly sympathetic to the "respectable grievances" of the crowd (Ellis 1980: 332). The execution of rioters could therefore demonstrate the power of crown and parliament: "the body of the condemned", to allude to Foucault's observations about the early modern spectacle of public executions (1995: 3), belongs to the crown and the judiciary. The body that agitated in the moment of riotous eruption, and thereby the very notion of (collective) aggression itself, is punished.[4] However, rather than functioning as a deterrent, the public punishment of rioters could also have a different effect if the public was sympathetic to the rioters and their cause. Often, food riots were reactions to increasing prizes for food, and it could be more sensible to meet the rioters' demands by lowering prizes for corn rather than alienate the public by severely punishing the agitators. A prime example for this ambivalent attitude towards public protest are the 1740 Guildhall Riots in Newcastle upon Tyne. As Joyce Ellis concludes, "[u]sing troops to put down civil disorder was both necessary and effective, but it was bitterly opposed by a large and influential section of the nation. This opposition, combined with the fact that the Riot Act had confused the legal position, meant that the civil and military authorities had to tread a very delicate path when using force to restore order." (1980: 338)

This "delicate path" is indicative of the ambivalent status of the rioter's body: does the rioting crowd as a collective body, as an assemblage, represent the public or is it indeed considered separate from it, as abject? Contemporary authorities may have different ways to deal with riots and uprisings, but it can clearly be seen in more recent uprisings that these ambiguities have not vanished. The protesting or rioting crowd still needs careful interpretation. Depending on one's point of view and agenda, riots can either be condemned as "criminality pure and simple" (former Prime Minister David Cameron on

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[3] Cf. in particular the "histories from below" by early Marxist historians such as George Rudé (1956, 2005), Eric Hobsbawm (2014) and E.P. Thompson (1971).
[4] Cf. Foucault: "acts of aggression are punished, so also, through them, is aggressivity" (1995: 17).

the 2011 English Riots; cf. Cameron 2011) or interpreted as "the language of the unheard" (Martin Luther King, qtd. in Clover 2016: 184). One can find these ambiguities in the reaction to the London Riots 2011 which began as a protest against racist police violence and turned into something more complex, involving copycat riots in other cities across England and looting. That the rioters and looters were indeed considered as separate from the general public, as abject, is epitomized in the self-organized cleaning operation during the aftermath when citizens took to the streets with brooms, wearing self-made t-shirts with an infamous slogan declaring "LOOTERS ARE SCUM" (cf. fig. 7.1 in Tyler 2013: 181). Imogen Tyler points out that the 2011 rioters, largely young lower-working-class people, were rendered socially abject in a performance of a public "disgust consensus" (Tyler 2013: 24; 170) which made them "revolting subjects" in the double sense: they were engaging in a revolt, but they were also revolting (i.e. disgusting)[5] to the 'decent' and ordinary citizenry which constituted itself as a self precisely in this doubly revolting moment (cf. Tyler 2013: 1-19, 179-206).[6]

So, when we ask whose body is the body in and of the crowd, we ask questions about embodiment. The rioting bodies in the crowd might embody the general public – the 'people' – or it might be abjectly detached from this very public. In this case, the rioters coded as abject are *at the same time* part of the general public (in that they are inevitably part of society, even if an undesirable one) and apart from it. What the rioters are said to embody is, of course, a matter of hegemonic interpretation. But it also means treading a "very delicate path", as Joyce Ellis noted about the punishment of the Guildhall rioters. To a degree, what is true about these riots from almost 300 years ago, still holds true today. This can be seen in the repeated pattern of reactions towards contemporary rioters. Media and political commentators usually will go out of their way to distinguish between rightful and peaceful protest[7], which is sometimes lauded, and those sections of the protest which do not remain peaceful but violently target property or people, which is almost always reflexively condemned.

This pattern could be witnessed after the 2011 English Riots, and it could also be witnessed throughout the spring of 2020 during the Black Lives Matter protests in the US. As writer and activist Kimberly Jones has emphasized in an impassioned impromptu speech, the recording of which went viral after it was featured on the *Tonight Show with John Oliver* on June 7 2020, three groups of people could be identified during the protests: the protesters, the rioters and the looters. Jones made an economic and historical argument to explain why African-American protesters would loot and destroy businesses,

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[5] On crowds and elitist attitudes of disgust towards them, see also Ehrenreich 2007: 190.
[6] I have written in more detail about race, class and the semantics of social abjection in the English Riots in Schmitt 2018a: 44-50 and Schmitt 2018b.
[7] As Armin Nassehi has pointed out, whenever a public protest happens in a peaceful manner, media will be quick to emphasize their nonviolent nature almost as if surprised (2020: 111).

beginning with the systematic deportation and exploitation of Africans for building white American wealth and continuing to the present in which, still, "the game is fixed" to the disadvantage of African-Americans: "So when they say, 'why do you burn down the community? Why do you burn down your own neighborhood?' It's not ours. We don't own anything. […]. […] the social contract is broken. And if the social contract is broken, why the fuck do I give a shit about burning the fucking Football Hall of Fame, about burning a fucking Target? You broke the contract when you killed us in the streets and didn't give a fuck. You broke the contract when for 400 years, we played your game and built your wealth." (Jones 2020).

Jones' argument resonates with the idea of the moral economy of the crowd established by E.P. Thompson in his seminal article on crowd behaviour in the 18th century. Thompson argued that most food riots were not so much frenzied, directionless "rebellions of the belly", but highly focussed and ordered mass events with the aim to keep market dynamics in check when sudden and unjustified price rises occurred (1971: 77, 94).[8] The agent of this moral economy was the crowd: "It was the crowd which most actively resisted changes in marketing practice and the crowd which ensured that those who sought to break old market customs and culture encountered real and effective intimidation or retribution" (Randall and Charlesworth 2000: 4). What was unique and innovative for Thompson's historical re-evaluation of public protest was his insistence that the protesting and rioting crowd was usually not a violent, deviant minority, but represented "the value system of an entire plebeian society" (Randall and Charlesworth 2000: 4) – the crowd thus *embodied* the will of the community. Consequently, the group dynamics of public protest generally tended to sweep up other members of the community which initially might have resisted taking part in the protest: "The rioting crowd were generally keen to involve as many as possible in the process of asserting common 'rights' and customary practice" (Randall and Charlesworth 2000: 5).

A similar moral economy might be argued to be underlying recent protests. David Harvie and Keir Milburn have made this claim for the cases of looting during the 2011 English Riots: "the riots revealed aspects of the previously obscured moral economy of the urban poor" (2013: 566). While they acknowledge the historical differences between the riots analyzed by Thompson and the events of 2011, Harvie and Milburn argue that "just as eighteenth-century bread rioters were acting in defense of 'customary entitlements' and demonstrating historical agency in a period of social transition, so too were the rioters of August 2011" (2013: 560). While drawing direct historical parallels is a practice that arguably comes with a number of methodical problems and pitfalls, I argue that in the case of public protests and riots, it is of utmost importance to retrace the similarities throughout history precisely because of the enigmatic nature of riots as events

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[8] For a summary and re-evaluation of Thompson's argument, cf. Randall and Charlesworth 2000.

that urge us to decode their meaning. As Jodi Dean argues, emerging protesting crowds always compel to ask the question, "[w]hat do crowds want?" (2016: 116). Dean observes that "the crowd manifests the desire of the people, but without telling us what it's for, telling us instead that it can never be one thing, never one and never a thing, that until it is dispersed it will remain beyond satisfaction" (Dean 2016: 117).

Crowds thus embody a desire for a future yet to be named. This desire manifests in the bodies of the crowd in a performative act of assembly which "delivers a bodily demand for a more livable set of economic, social, and political conditions no longer afflicted by induced forms of precarity" (Butler 2015: 11). But in order to identify the desire of the (rioting) crowd, historical parallels and continuities need to be taken into consideration. "It is hard, perhaps impossible", Joshua Clover writes, "to establish what a riot is without periodization" (2016: 43). Kimberly Jones demonstrated the importance of historicization when she identified the 2020 protests on the spot as a culmination of a history of 400 years of racist exploitation. The bodies protesting, rioting and looting and merging into a crowd in 2020 were bodies of and in their time, but in the very moment of assembly, they became reiterations – echoes – of the bodies that preceded them. In other words, in this moment, they embodied the history of bodies like them – bodies which then and now, in the words of Judith Butler, were among the most precarious and vulnerable. It is this "embodied character of plural human action" (Butler 205: 48) which makes this precariousness evident.

The precarious and vulnerable body which merges with others like it needs to overcome isolation, a kind of being trapped or imprisoned within itself and its own precariousness. Both Butler and Dean argue that individuals are ultimately, as it were, trapped and confined within their own individuality and subjectivity[9] – and hence, one could argue, in their own individual bodies, sealed off from the environment and other bodies by the fear of being touched: "The individual form is not under threat. It is the threat" (Dean 2016: 57). The individual alone is virtually impotent when it comes to overcoming its precarity and working towards a more egalitarian society, and it is primarily through concerted collective action that freedom from what Mark Fisher has called "psychic privatization" (2014: 222) can be gained. Butler and Dean's arguments take their cue from Michel Foucault's conceptualisations of biopolitics and disciplinarity and argue that, ultimately, the individual as the primary category of agency and subjectivity is the effect of disciplinary efforts to limit the political power of collectivities and to hold the individual captive within itself. Once a crowd assembles in public, this confinement is overcome.[10] A link can be made between the 18th-century food rioters who

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[9] In a further step, Armin Nassehi's remarks on protest movements and Andreas Reckwitz' theory of the society of singularities can be connected to this aspect (cf. Nassehi 2020: 45).

[10] The narratological study of literary texts, interestingly, can offer some significant insight in illuminating the tension between individual and collective embodiment in the crowd. As Monika Fludernik has shown,

encourage or even force their fellow citizens to take part in the protest and have them swept up in the assemblage of the crowd and more contemporary protests which on the one hand face the challenge in that they

> require an extra effort of overcoming isolation, leaving home or work, remaining outside, and merging with crowds of strangers. People must self-consciously assemble themselves in settings not determined by capital and the state. It doesn't just happen. The surprise of their collectivity pushes against the expectations of disconnected consumption (Dean 2016: 22).

Temporalities

In John Akomfrah's *Handsworth Songs* (1987), an experimental documentary film about the race riots in 1980s Britain, one of the narrators mentions a TV reporter interviewing a local woman and inquiring if she has any stories to tell. "There are no stories in the riots", she tells them, "only the ghosts of other stories." As Mark Fisher wrote after a screening of *Handsworth Songs* shortly after the 2011 English Riots, the film "seems eerily (un)timely. The continuities between the 80s and now impose themselves on the contemporary viewer with a breathtaking force" (2014: 221). Fisher's observations about the eerie (un)timeliness of these images of past riots and the eyewitness' statement about the riots containing the ghosts of stories point to the hauntological character of riots which links the aspect of crowd embodiment to the unique relationship that riots have with temporality.

My earlier comments on Kimberly Jones' speech about the history of oppression embodied in the 2020 riots can be related to this. The embodiment at work in the 2020 (and other) riots works like an opening up of the present moment to the past – through the riot, the present is haunted by history. However, as Fisher has emphasized throughout his writings on hauntology, appropriated from Jacques Derrida's initial use of the concept in *Spectres of Marx*, haunting does not simply limit itself to eerie echoes from the past. Rather, the truly discomforting aspect is that the present can likewise be haunted by the future. "Broken time", Fisher argues, is broken not only because the past cannot be left behind – it is broken because the present is also filled with "traces of futures which had never arrived but which once seemed inevitable" (2019: xvii). Likewise, the riot opens a window onto the future. Armin Nassehi and Jodi Dean have both commented on the relationship of protest movements with futurity. Nassehi speaks of the tragic element inherent in all protest because it can never achieve what it lays claim to and demands in

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riot scenes in British novels such as George Eliot's Felix Holt, The Radical, can provide important insight into how crowds are culturally imagined in plural narration (cf. Fludernik 2017). For a discussion of Fludernik's ideas, see also Madeline Becker's article in this issue.

its performance of negation (cf. 2020: 82) and in its tendency to focus on "eschatological aims" ("eschatologische Belange", cf. 2020: 105). While this might hold true for the protest movements that Nassehi focuses on[11], one could argue that this does not necessarily apply to the protests reflecting a moral economy mentioned earlier. Nevertheless, Nassehi's observations offer an important perspective on the temporality of mass protest and riots in that they are characterised by a particular relationship to the future.

The force of negation at the center of protest (and this is something that Nassehi and Dean share in their observations) is directed against the present state of things and inevitably offers the possibility of change and progress[12] (cf. Nassehi 2020: 21). Protest negotiates between "different presents" ("unterschiedliche Gegenwarten") which protest tries to negotiate or come to terms with (Nassehi 2020: 114). Thus, when protest turns violent, the violence works as a "Zeitverkürzung", a speeding up and contraction of time which tries to shorten the duration between the negation of the present and the solutions of the future to the problems being protested. Protesting crowds, especially if they turn violent, thus generate their own temporality. They do this, among others, by forcing society to react to the riotous event. Here, Nassehi's observations can again be linked to Dean who describes the "presence of a crowd" as "a positive expression of negation": "the crowd prefigures a collective, egalitarian possibility – but "prefigures" in a completely literal way: 'prior to figuration.' The crowd by itself, unnamed, doesn't represent an alternative; it cuts out an opening by breaking through the limits bounding permitted experience. It mis-assembles what is present and threatens what is not yet there" (2016: 124).[13] Similar observations on the temporality of riots and their relationship with the future can be found in a number of recent texts, from Uri Gordon's[14] argument about the riot's "prefigurative politics" (2018) to Dylan Taylor's notion of the riot as a "politics of becoming" (2019: 84) to Morgan Adamson's analysis of filmic images of the 1965 Watts Riots in Guy Debord's film *La societé du spectacle* as "untimely" images that "potentiate a different kind of time that goes against the grain of the present" (2018: 19).

These remarks suggest the interpretation of crowd protests and riots as utopian events. When I describe riots as "utopian", however, I do not want to sweepingly label all riotous events as potentially initiating radical (and sustained) progressive change. Rather, I consider riots as moments which – precisely because of their fleeting, evasive nature – challenge (and more often than not defy) political and historical interpretations and, to

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[11] Nassehi particularly looks at Fridays for Future and the racist anti-Islam protest of the PEGIDA movement in Germany.

[12] What progress means, of course depends on the political and ideological perspective of the protesters.

[13] Dean's emphatic understanding of crowd assemblies as generally opening the present towards the future possibility of an egalitarian society, however, ignores the fact that not all protesting crowds have an egalitarian society in mind. In that respect, Nassehi's observations on the right-wing PEGIDA movement provide more nuance.

[14] On Uri Gordon's approach to understanding riots, see also Alexander Kurunczi's contribution in this issue.

borrow Reinhart Koselleck's terminology, open up a new "horizon of expectation" that momentarily breaks with the horizon of expectation which is drawn out of the "space of experience" (cf. Koselleck 2005: 262). The riot, then, is not based or derived from the space of experience, but, because of its often sudden and fleeting nature, challenges the space of experience because it is unprecedented. Thus, when I claim that riots are "utopian", my use of the word is more based on Fredric Jameson's reading of Jürgen Habermas in which he develops the notion of "future as *disruption (Beunruhigung)* of the present, and as a radical and systemic break with even that predicted and colonized future which is simply a prolongation of our capitalist present" (2005: 228; italics in orig.). In that sense, connecting Jameson and Koselleck, the "predicted and colonized future" would be the result of the space of experience, and it is this future to which the riot offers a disruptive alternative. Riots are therefore "untimely" events in that they trouble our conceptions of temporality and teleological progress. They also disrupt notions of time and space. Protests create a spatio-temporal hybrid, a utopian moment that is (and at the same time is *not*) part of the present and the world but puts time on hold. Here, the utopian moment unfolds in the true sense of the word, namely as an *ou-topos*, a non-place.[15] The protesting and rioting crowd embodies an alternative and thus opens a space of possibility. In that way, such crowd events make visible the fact that future itself is untimely in that it is always a potentiality that is not to be found as a definitive point in time, but something that is always already with us. Through the disruption of spatio-temporal order, the desire of the rioting crowd pulls the future into existence. In that respect, riots can in Marc Augé's terms be interpreted as "events which give a content to the future by occurring (2014: 1). This also makes riots "untimely" events in the sense of Wendy Brown's conception of critique and crisis (2009: 5-8).

In her discussion of political time, Brown employs the concepts of "crisis" and "critique" based on their mutual etymological origin in the Greek word *krisis*, which means a turning point which can either lead to a better or a worse development of an illness (cf. Brown 2009: 5). What Brown[16] is particularly interested in is a mode of critique which is "untimely" – a critique which is perceived as being out of joint, or out of touch with the present matter at hand. The time seemingly is not right for this particular critique – it is a critique voiced at the wrong occasion – and yet, it is particularly this critique which generates new and important meanings: "Critique's relation to crisis thus turns us toward the problem of political time, a time that is like no other time and incessantly morphs in meaning from tempo to temporality to periodicity to world condition, each sense implicated in every other." (Brown 2009: 8) Crisis, for Brown, unsettles stable notions of time – it is a "rupture of temporal continuity": "[w]hen a polity is in crisis, the times are

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[15] John Storey comments on the potential double meaning of utopia as "ou-topos" and "eu-topos" and suggests to retitle Thomas More's eponymous text as "The Happy Place That Exists Nowhere" (2019: 18).
[16] See also my elaboration on Brown's idea of critique in Schmitt 2018c: 196.

unhinged, running off course; time itself lacks its capacity to contain us and conjoin us." (2009: 7-8)

At first, this political time in crisis seems to be a permanent, futureless present, with the course of time and history halted. It becomes an "unbroken time" –

> the time of eternity, death's time. [...]. This quality of closure, this entrapment in an unbearable present, is a significant part of what makes our times dark today, what makes us unsure that it is just the times rather than the world that is darkening – indeed, what makes time and world collapse into one, because time, for all its speed, appears to have stopped going forward or taking us anywhere. (Brown 2009: 11)

Crisis thus confronts with its "collapse of a sense of historical movement in the present" which "betokens the loss of future possibility." (Brown 2009: 11) However, this disruption of time does not necessarily need to imply pure destructivity. In the context of riots, if they are understood as the expression or culmination of a period of crisis, disruptive negation can also produce potential for the future. As Uri Gordon has suggested, riots constitute "prefigurative" events (2018). Gordon draws on Gerrard Winstanley and the Diggers as well as Reinhart Koselleck's theories, among others, to come to terms with the ubiquitous notion of prefigurative politics in political and especially activist discourses. Prefiguration, Gordon argues, "is a *recursive* temporal framing in which events at one time are interpreted as a *figure* pointing to its *fulfilment* in later events, with the figure cast in the model of the fulfilment" (Gordon 2018: 525; italics in orig.). This sense of prefiguration, not surprisingly, in many ways adheres to the teleological ideas of a Christian worldview. Such appropriations of Christian teleology can be found in the social and theological activism of Gerrard Winstanley and the Diggers (Gordon 2018: 525-526).[17]

Central to this understanding of prefiguration is the assumption that something in the present is already manifest as a potential fulfilment of a situation in the future. In Gordon's interpretation, Winstanley's thinking is linked to Koselleck's "process of reassurance" (Gordon 2018: 526). However, for our political present, and Gordon primarily has radical left-wing activism in mind here, he detects a withdrawal from the idea of the future: "expectations of transformation must be projected into a future shaped by runaway climate change, energy depletion, ecosystem collapse, inequality, deprivation and conflict" (Gordon 2018: 532). Consequently, "this absence of revolutionary promise and the awareness of converging planetary crises have together cast transformative politics into a crisis" (Gordon 2018: 532-533). What Gordon calls the "affective space attached to disposition towards the future" (2018: 533) and what I, using Raymond Williams' terminology, would call a structure of feeling towards the future. And this structure of feeling is marked by crisis. Time itself, or the political and even revolutionary sense of

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[17] On the Diggers as radical utopians, cf. Storey 2019: 42-57.

temporal framing is unsettled by the realisation that prefiguration does not add up. As a consequence, the affective attachment to these concepts of time is undermined and time itself seems to be in crisis. What do you fight for when you can't measure the success of all your efforts and struggles on a temporal scale? This is where the riot as an eruptive and disruptive event comes in. The riot, as it were, happens outside time and generates its own sense of time. As Gordon concludes, "visions for the future are themselves things of the present" (2018: 532). However, one could go further by claiming that, through riots and protests, visions of the future happen in the present – it is the result of the bodies in the crowd interacting. Futures (in the plural sense) emerge in this interaction and unfold their potential in the wider society.

Utopias

If riots contain the ghosts of the past as well as those of the future, and if they are to be considered as utopian events that disrupt the present and open it up to possibilities, then the best mode for a theorization of the riot might be the mode of science fiction. When I speak of science fiction as a mode, I do so in order to avoid conventional literary theories of genre. I am here following the theorizations of science fiction by Raymond Williams.[18] In his materialist approach, Williams described science fiction as a "mode of authentic shift" that manifests in "a crisis of exposure which produces a crisis of possibility; a reworking, in imagination, of *all* forms and conditions" (2005: 209).

What this could mean for a theorization of riots and crowds is demonstrated in Williams' own science fiction/crime novel *The Volunteers.* The novel condenses many of Williams' political and artistic concerns, from his analysis of mass society to historical materialism and futurology. Published in 1978 and set in the then near future of the 1980s in a quasi-devolved Wales, the novel is narrated by a Lewis Redfern, journalist and former radical activist who investigates the attempted assassination of a politician during a riot. Inspecting the site of the riot, the Welsh Folk Museum, Redfern muses about the convergence of past, present and future in this place. He contemplates the selective, ordered version of history that the museum offers: "The people are implied, by the shapes of their tools and their furniture, but are essentially absent, not only physically but in the version that is given of them: polished shells of their lives" (Williams 2011: 31). Consequently, the riots that take place in front of the museum are the eruption of a present-day politics of "the people". The manufactured, material, static and cleaned-up version of Folk history clashes with the history-in-the-making of the People.

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[18] More recently, Dietmar Dath has proposed to think of science fiction as a mode – or a "thinking machine" ("Denkmaschine") – that thinks the future – an approach that allows him to speak in the same breath about fictional narratives such as *Star Trek* and Karl Marx's *Capital* (2019: 811-815).

It is this riotous eruption that opens up a window onto the past, present and future of the Welsh community within Britain, not least because Redfern feels compelled to consider the history of modern Wales as effectively the outcome of riotous uprisings such as the Merthyr Riots 1831. The rioters of Merthyr were punished harshly, culminating in the execution of the miner Dic Penderyn – a history that clashes with the 'clean' version of history in the museum: "In the tidied farms, among the casks and the presses, you could forget this history, on an ordinary day. But today was not ordinary. Today made these other connections: the connections to Pontyrhiw. What had started there had come back to this folk museum, not as an exhibit but as an action, bursting in on its peaceful and arranged order" (Williams 2011: 33).

The fictitious riot in the Wales of the near future echoes the real-life struggles of the Welsh population in the 19th-century Merthyr riots. In fact, the riot depicted in the novel accomplishes more than the museum which functions as the backdrop for the rioting: it opens up the (diegetic) present (which is a potential future for the extradiegetic intended readership in the 1970s) for a re-negotiation of a community's politics via its submerged history of conflict. The riot therefore also can be read as a performative challenge of the version of history represented in the museum as a "common culture" (Williams 2017: 435) of the Welsh national community. If, as Williams writes in his conclusion to *Culture and Society*, riots and strikes are "symptoms of a basic failure of communication" (2017: 413) which become a new language of the people (seen as "the mob" or "the masses" by the authorities) to provide answers for the open questions of a compromised democracy and minority rule – the political language of the "masses" rendered as a "mob" –, then the language of the riot in *The Volunteers* is that of a Welsh community which feels it is not yet fully and properly devolved. It is a communicative gesture which lets the past communicate with the present to anticipate a possible political future through a "rupture of temporal continuity" (Brown 2009: 7).

What Williams demonstrates with the mode of science fiction, then, is that the riot, in its disruptive temporality, forces us to re-think what it means to live in community with others. To come back to the introductory epigraphs by Cioran and Butler: maybe Cioran, in starting his scathing critique of the utopian imagination with his own wonder at the more or less peaceful togetherness of humans, misses the real utopia right in front of him – for, as Marc Augé has argued, "[t]he future, even when it concerns the individual, always has a social dimension: it depends on others" and is therefore an expression of "the essential solidarity between the individual and society" (2014: 2-3). Thus, the protesting crowd, if stripped off all the abject semantics of the 'mob' – and this again leads to Butler's outline of "the good life" – constitutes and embodies a demand for solidarity.

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