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A TERRORIST IMAGINES THE KING'S DEATH IN A SOCIALLY SUSTAINABLE UTOPIA

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The state has at times sought to control and police radical forms of social imagining. One point where imagination and the laws of the state coincide is in definitions of treason. Treason has sometimes, historically, been defined as a criminal imagining, an imagining of the death of the king. Criminalising a radical social imagination leads to the arbitrary use of power by the state and to further social friction. Sustainable societies, on the other hand, committed to the ideas of justice, equity and freedom must necessarily focus on mechanisms for the mediation of difference. Here dissent, difference and opposition are opportunities for change and improvement within sites of power. When the state imagines itself to be threatened, historically, dissent and difference become problems to be criminalised and solved by law enforcement. How the social can be imagined in a time of terror is the subject of this paper.

Social sustainability is utopian

Utopias are often expressed as narratives or cultural artefacts describing a desired future. Here I have borrowed from a definition of a 'sustainable society' found in a key study of social sustainability by the Western Australian Council of Social Services.[1] According to the WACOSS study, social sustainability is an 'aspirational and visionary' process of identifying what is valuable and precious in human relationships and communities, and ensuring that the processes and resources that support these communities are accessible to all.[2] There is a clear relationship here between constructions of a sustainable society and the older notion of utopia.

Social sustainability discourse addresses itself to a perceived lack of equity, community and opportunity both presently and in the future.[3] In this discourse

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* Postdoctoral Research Fellow, Hawke Research Institute. This paper is based on a seminar 'A terrorist imagines the king's death: treason, utopias, imagination and social sustainability', presented at the Hawke Research Institute, University of South Australia, Magill, 13 September 2005.

1 L Barron and E Gauntlett, *Housing and sustainable communities indicators report: stage 1 report – model of social sustainability*, WACOSS, 2002, http://wacoss.org.au/images/assets/SP_Sustainability/HSCIP%20Stage%201%20Report.pdf

2 Ibid, p xii.

3 Ibid.

abuse, poverty, violence and alienation are the problems that policy solutions address. The WACOSS study is consistent with social sustainability research and practice defined elsewhere.[4] Sustainable societies:

- provide equitable opportunities and outcomes for all their members
- promote and encourage diversity
- provide processes, systems and structures that promote interconnectedness
- foster a good quality of life for all members
- provide democratic processes and open and accountable governance structures.[5]

The WACOSS study constructs its definitions of social sustainability from a review of the relevant literature and, importantly, also through a consultative process with local residents who were asked to develop their vision for the kind of community they would want to live in. This kind of work continues on from the social indicators movement of the 1980s and 90s. Current social sustainability research practice is consultative but also dependent on visions of future social life and developing processes for arriving at that future point. Constructing or imagining models of a desired social world has antecedents in the utopian imagination. I want to spend some time now sketching some of the qualities of the utopian imagination and examine what it has to offer to the field of social sustainability.

On the one hand utopias can be described as forms of ideological delusions, 'totalising' images of consensus, unity and common purpose.[6] On the other hand utopias can be 'optimistic illusions' that have a largely beneficial effect on those who participate in them. Their implausibility suggests ideas for change that might not normally be considered.[7] Utopias offer hope; indeed they are the place, the *topos,* of hope. Utopias provide 'glimpses, sparks, fragments of hybrid, in-between spaces'.[8] These in-between spaces concern themselves with both the best and worst

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4 For a further discussion of trends in social sustainability research see Stephen McKenzie, *Social sustainability: towards some definitions*, Hawke Research Institute Working Paper Series No 27, Hawke Research Institute, Magill, SA, 2004, http://www.hawkecentre.unisa.edu.au/institute/working.htm

5 Barron and Gauntlett, 2002, p viii.

6 S Bourke and T Meppem, 'Privileged narratives and fictions of consent in environmental discourse', *Local Environment*, vol 5, no 3, 2000, p 299.

7 D Halpin 2003, 'Hope, utopianism and educational renewal', *Encyclopaedia of Informal Education*, 2003, www.infed.org/biblio/hope.htm

8 Peter Bishop, 'Pedagogies of hope: education, utopian imagination and the corporatising university' in Peter Willis and Pam Carden (ed), *Lifelong learning and the democratic imagination: revisioning justice, freedom and community*, Post Pressed, Flaxton, Queensland, 2004, p 39.

forms of human communities and are constituted by ideological conflicts,[9] and as such are fertile ground for cultural studies research. Walter Benjamin argues, for example, that utopian desires are imbedded in the artefacts of consumer culture, right from their inception and design.[10] Consumer goods and services are not simply signs of ideological delusion but also signs of genuine popular utopian aspirations.[11] A similar point is made by Ernst Bloch in his *The principle of hope*, who sees in cultural artefacts a semi-autonomous hope for a better life that cannot simply be collapsed into the ideological (or repressive) aspect of that artefact.[12]

The utopian imagination brings hope and destruction

In imagining utopias there is a certain desire or need to destroy what has gone before, to radically rupture the continuity between past, present and future. This notion of a radical break with the present has manifested itself in a variety of aesthetic practices, particularly, in the West, of romanticism and modernism. Utopias may inevitably involve destruction. 'The aim of all utopias, to a greater or lesser extent, is to eliminate real people.'[13] For some this might be the elimination of all forms of crime, and all criminals; for some it might be the elimination of private property (as in Thomas More's *Utopia*[14]). The elimination of irrationality, immorality and private property are typical criteria for utopian social systems. The seeming impossibility of this ever occurring lends to utopias their essential quality of being located nowhere except in the imagination.

Utopias are never where they are realised, and when they are apparently realised there is a residue of feeling that what was desired is somehow still absent. Likewise, as utopias exist somewhere in the future they can never be fully present; they cannot be where they are.[15] There are feelings attached to the realisation of utopias, the failure of utopias to realise desires, and the ambiguous relationship

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9 J Reis, 'The genre of utopia and the mode of utopianism', *Cadernos de Literatura Comparada*, no 6/7: *Utopias*, 2002, pp 9–30, http://www.letras.up.pt/upi/ilc/Reis6.pdf

10 Angela McRobbie, 'The place of Walter Bejamin' in Simon During (ed), *The cultural studies reader*, Routledge, London and New York, 1993, p 90.

11 An interesting aside is that Benjamin compared the prevalence of the signs of consumerism, its monumentality of scale, with the enchanted forest of children's fairly tales.

12 Ernst Bloch, *The principle of hope*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass, 1995 [1938–1947].

13 J Carey (ed), *The Faber book of utopias*, London, Faber, 1999, p xii.

14 Thomas More, *Utopia*, 1516.

15 Ernst Bloch and Theodor Adorno, 'Something's missing: a discussion between Ernst Bloch and Theodor W Adorno on the contradictions of utopian longing' in Ernst Bloch, *The utopian function of art and literature: selected essays* (trans Jack Zipes and Frank Mecklenburg), MIT Press, London and Cambridge, Mass, 1988 [1964], pp 1–17.

between utopian desire and its ruination. These feelings, or the affective charge associated with the utopian imagination, can be understood in terms of what Bloch called 'a melancholy of fulfilment'.[16] I would suggest that, just as there is a melancholy attached to the utopian imagination, there is also a melancholy attached to any positive social imagining, and hence the social imagining that constitutes the work of social sustainability. Likewise it is not simply in the realisation of utopias that a melancholy is present but also in the process itself. Failure and the affect associated with it is always already present in the processes and products of the utopian imagination. In the realm of utopian representation the affect of failure manifests in an aesthetics of failure. It is an aesthetics of failure that interestingly enough is positioned as the antithesis of the modernist avant guard. Early twentieth century Italian futurism, for example, opposed

> the exotic fascination produced by remoteness in space, the picturesque, the imprecise, rusticity, wild solitude, multicolored disorder, twilight shadows, corrosion, weariness, the soiled traces of the years, the crumbling ruins, mould, the taste of decay, pessimism, suicide, the aesthetics of failure, the adoration of death.[17]

This, I would suggest, is an apt description of the affective and aesthetic world that haunts modernity, the utopian imagination and the idea of social sustainability.

The idea that utopias are constituted in relation to failure, destruction and waste is taken up by Peter Kraftl, who in his paper 'Ruining utopia' argues that utopias become generators of knowledge when they are problematic or uncanny.[18] He discusses this idea using the example of an uncanny architecture, which constructs an ambiguous tension between the home as a place of desired comfort and the home as a site of ruin and haunting. When the 'unhomely' appears in the home an experience of the uncanny is the result; a sense of uncertainty about the stability of what was previously stable and certain and, in this case, creating an opening to a different knowledge about architecture itself. It follows that for utopian representations to be able to offer anything to knowledge about sustainable societies then there must be a play between utopian and non-utopian elements that destabilises certainty about their differences. It is at this point that apprehension (or enchantment) is aroused and the feeling of a need to know more.

The point that can be made here is that, for utopian representations to serve a function in contributing to knowledge, to suggest that knowledge is possible (that hope and knowledge are combined), then they need to be structured in a way that

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16 Ibid, p 2.

17 FT Marinetti, *Geometric and mechanical splendor and the numerical sensibility*, 1914, http://www.ubu.com/papers/marinetti01.html

18 Peter Kraftl, 'Ruining utopia', *Skandalon*, vol 1, no 1, 2005, http://www.uwo.ca/theory/skandalon/skandalon/pdf_files/sk_art_1_5.pdf

allows for interplay, an ambiguity, between differences; between presence and absence, hope and failure, value and waste. I would argue, in support of this point, that certain exhibits from the *Utopia Station* exhibition (Venice Biennial, 2003) indicate that working with an aesthetics of failure is important when representing, or discussing, the idea of utopia. The work of artists such as Tacita Dean, Gustav Metzger and John Bock featured in *Utopia Station* are those that productively utilise an aesthetics of failure when representing the idea of utopia.[19]

Ruination and destruction are not only present in the necessary failure of the utopian imagination but also in the way that it is necessarily founded on an antipathy towards other social systems, or systems of exchange. In Thomas More's *Utopia*, for example, the basis of social life is the absence of private property and money; indeed these are spoken of in the text as the root or primary cause of injustice and social inequality, and indeed no society can be just and equitable when it has private property. This is the radical position that *Utopia* takes up in regards to what we might now call social sustainability: that it can only be achieved when private property is eliminated. In More's *Utopia* what is conventionally regarded as a sign of wealth (gold) is a sign of degradation (gold is used to bind slaves) and waste (gold is used for chamber pots). What allows this value reversal is an entirely different system of exchange. In *Utopia* wealth is not simply stripped of its conventional meaning, but rather this meaning is turned upside down in an abject usage of it. Utopians 'shit on gold'. When Utopians turn gold to shit they are enacting, in its most pure form, a revolution against commodity exchange. We could argue that social sustainability can only occur when the social is not founded on a system of commodity exchange. This is the radical proposal that is not likely to emerge from a consensus-based community consultation process. Rather that process is looking at how social sustainability can operate within a system of private accumulation of wealth and property. From the perspective of *Utopia*, such a proposal is doomed; any solutions to the problems of inequity and injustice will be destroyed by the power of private accumulation.

The necessary articulation or representation of social and economic destruction, failure and waste in the social imagination becomes problematic in times of political crisis. Indeed there are historic examples in the West that suggest that the state will at various times attempt to position itself as the only legitimate site of the social imagination. In times of political crisis, the dual nature of the social imagination, as a site of anxiety and hope, makes it a target for state control. An example of this can be found in the treason laws and the crime of imagining the king's death.

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19 *Utopia Station,* Venice Biennial, 2003, http://www.e-flux.com/projects/utopia/

Imagining the king's death

A significant change was made to English treason law in 1352 when Edward III made it a crime to 'imagine' the death of the king.[20] When treason trials were based around the accused having 'imagined' the king's death, and where there was apparently no material evidence to prove guilt, the strategy of the prosecution was to establish a contradiction between the seemingly unimpeachable exterior of the accused and the inward self. The establishment of an estrangement between inward and outer self established a space where treason could be imagined. In Cunningham's words, 'What a trial set out to prove it also presupposed and produced: the self-estrangement of the accused.'[21] Where there was no distance between inner and outer self, treason would seem improbable. The probability of treason was high when it could be proven that the inner self was hidden from the outside world. The implication is that the inner self is hidden because there is something too terrible to expose to the world. This line of reasoning was evident in the 1603 trial of Walter Raleigh, whose wit and mastery of rhetoric were offered as evidence of a desire to conceal the truth, and hence as evidence of the probability of a secret, treasonous inner self.[22] Likewise in the treason trial of Thomas More in 1535 it was the 'silence' of More that was offered as proof of an inner malice towards the king.[23] The dissembler, or the self-alienated subject, produced signs of their own fragmentation in speech and writing. Plain speech and plain writing were signs of an integration between inner and outer self and hence of the absence of a treasonous intent, or of the possibility of a treasonous imagination. 'The true citizen of England was the loyal, integrated subject, whose imaginings were understood to issue directly in "honest" and observable actions', Cunningham observed.[24] It follows that any difficulty in reading or understanding the actions, the speech or the writing of another can be interpreted as a sign of the other's split, secretive and dissembling self. Once interpreted in this way, the other then becomes a space or zone where treasonous ideas are likely, or probable, to fester. The imagination here becomes a means through which an apparatus of reading can be deployed whereby the other's differences become signs of criminal intent. Imagining treason, established as a criminal offence, established the legal value of selfhood that was plainly spoken and integrated while criminalising difference and ambiguity.

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20 K Cunningham, *Imaginary betrayals: subjectivity and the discourses of treason in early modern England*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2002, p 7.
21 Ibid, p 11.
22 Ibid.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid, p 10.

Modern treason, as it was called in the late eighteenth century, referred to a treason aimed not at the body of the king, but at the whole constitution.[25] Indeed modern treason, or at least the English version of it, can be seen as a direct response to the revolution in France in 1789 and the anxieties it created within the late eighteenth-century English ruling classes. In the 1790s reform societies planned to hold a convention to discuss parliamentary reforms, which included universal male suffrage. The government of the day read this as a major challenge to its privilege, and, argues Barrell, sought to stymie the reform movement through a modern interpretation of the treason laws.[26] A strategy developed by the Crown prosecution against members of a reform society was to develop or imagine a series of actions that led to the death of the king, or to the overthrowing of the constitution, from somewhat benign beginnings. The logic was that the ideas about changing the constitution could lead to the people becoming unreasonable in their demands for change, which could lead to the government becoming forceful in its opposition to change, which in turn could lead to conflagration, which would end in the death of the king. The same logic would allow a minor act of disrespect to become the cause of the death of the king, a point taken up by many satirists at the time.[27] The irony was in fact that the prosecution had to imagine the death of the king in order to save him, and indeed the defence for the reformers argued that the imagined scenarios belonged instead to the Crown, and it was they in fact, in their attempt to prove the guilt of the reformers, who were committing treason by imagining the king's death. The point here is that once the death of the king has been imagined, once that scenario is in the public realm, the question is who is the author of the imagining. Treason becomes a contest over authorship and about the power to ascribe authorship. The 1794 trials against the reformers led ultimately to the acquittal of the accused. The evidence against them was ultimately too flimsy. One response to the acquittals was a dramatic increase in the number of members of the reform movement.[28]

A significant criticism levelled against the government by pamphleteers at this time, and an argument that formed part of the defence, was that imagining the death of the king allowed for or encouraged an arbitrary use of power by the government. Imagining could be interpreted in a way whereby the most benign idea could lead to the death of the king. The figurative interpretation of the idea of imagining opened a space for the government potentially to accuse anyone of the act of treason.[29] As Jeremy Bentham put it at the time:

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25 J Barrell, *Imagining the king's death: figurative treason, fantasies of regicide, 1793–1796*, Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York, 2000, p 129.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid, pp 412–13.

28 Ibid, p 551.

29 Ibid, p 418.

> If to imagine the death of the king be treason, then am I traitor – I, who am imagining it in the sole view and purpose of contributing to the prevention of it. Judges, jury, counsel, audience, all who contribute to it, or are present at the trial of a traitor of the description in question, will be traitors.[30]

Both Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Godwin suggested that imagining the king's death had implications for the prosecution of speculative writings that proposed alterative forms of social organisation and government. Coleridge, for example, argued that if an author asserts that a republic is the most perfect form of government, then he is also arguing for the abolition of the monarchy, and as such is acting in a treasonous way.[31] Another way of saying this is that utopian literature is treasonous when it positively describes a social and political structure that has no king.

The contemporary imagination

There are some recent examples that indicate that the imagination has once again become a site where hope and fear is being played out, and where the sustainability of the state is thought of in terms of the imagination. Early this year, in the United States, a high school student was charged with threatening terrorism.[32] The charge was laid after police read a story that the boy had written. The story was given to police by the boy's grandparents after having found and read it. The boy claimed that it was a story written for his English class. He described it as a story about a high school overrun by zombies. Police on the other hand read it as a plan to attack the student's school and a threat under the terrorism laws of the state of Kentucky.

Within a climate of fear the line between a work of the imagination and a terrorist attack has become blurred. It is difficult for those in power reading this story to differentiate between a plan for a terrorist assault and the written representation of such an attack. We might like to recall that during the Cold War the US produced many alien and zombie attack movies that are generally understood as representations of US fears of the Soviet Union and of nuclear destruction. One of the functions of imaginative work is that it speaks to social anxieties, acknowledges that they exist, and assists in their analysis and debate. In other words imaginative representations of social fears can be productive as well as dangerous, necessary and criminal.

The imagination is used to conjure utopian or dystopian scenarios, which in times of crisis can be seen as criminal acts. It could be argued however that dystopian

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30 Ibid, p 584.
31 Ibid, p 588.
32 P Williams, 'Grim fairy tales', *The Nation*, 9 March 2005, http://www.thenation.com/doc/20050328/williams

scenarios might be criminal only when they are not legitimated by the state and when their authors' position with respect to the state is ambiguous or marginal. If we recall the treason trials of the late eighteenth century we witnessed a dispute about who had the right to imagine the death of the king. Those agents of the state who were prosecuting treason, the imagined treason, were themselves having to imagine the death of the king. This was not an illegal act because they imagined the king's death in order to save the king. Those who were being prosecuted, on the other hand, were committing an illegal act because their aim was, apparently, to kill the king. We can see a similar differentiation being made at the present. The 9/11 Commission, set up to analyse the events leading up to the attacks of 11 September 2001 and America's failure to stop them, commented that 'the most important failure was one of imagination'.[33] This is a failure of the various arms of the US state to imagine a terrorist attack occurring in the way that it did. In other words, the failure of the US state to imagine the death of the king. Commenting on this notion, Richard Forno wrote that the state was suffering a lack of 'protective imagination':

> protective imagination is not quickly built, funded, or enacted. It takes years to inculcate such a mindset brought about by outside the box, unconventional, and daring thinking from folks with expertise and years of firsthand knowledge in areas far beyond security or law enforcement and who are encouraged to think freely and have their analyses seriously considered in the halls of Washington. Such a radical way of thinking and planning is necessary to deal with an equally radical adversary, yet we remain entrenched in conventional wisdom and responses.[34]

This call for a radical form of state imagination can in some ways be understood as a call to imagine like a terrorist. The necessity here is identical to the necessity of the state in the late eighteenth century in England to imagine the king's death in order to save him. The only difference between the terrorist imagination and that of the state is that they are located in different sites of power. The state, not the terrorists, has the legitimate monopoly on the use of force. The state, not the terrorists, is changed with sustaining society. Indeed, to save society, one must imagine its destruction, but this can only be done by agents of the state. A similar call is made by Stephen Gale of the US Centre on Terrorism, Counterterrorism, and Homeland Security, who claims that

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33 National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, *The 9/11 Commission report: final report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States*, 2004, http://www.9-11commission.gov/report/911Report_Exec.htm

34 Richard Forno, *Comment: we still lack protective imagination*, 2005, http://www.infowarrior.org/articles/2005-01.html

> A lot of imagining will be needed in order to win the war on terror and America and Americans will be best served not by becoming a nation of paranoids, but by supporting professional imagining efforts.[35]

'Let the professionals do the imagining' is not just a word of advice to the wise but also a command of the state when it enacts laws to sustain itself in times of social and political anxiety. It seems that in times of crisis the state not only claims to hold the monopoly on the legitimate use of violence, but also a monopoly on the legitimate use of the social imagination.

Sacrifice, sustainability and the human bomber

We may, for a moment, like to practice some protective imagining, to imagine what kind of society the human bomber is trying to bring about through terror, what kind of society the human bomber is trying to sustain. As an introduction we might like, along with Ivan Strenski,[36] to see the human bomber as someone who wants to sustain non-commodified social bonds between members of a community through the act of sacrifice. To understand this idea we need to talk a little about Mauss's theory of a gift economy.

A gift can be anything. A gift given confirms a social bond between people. Gifts must appear to be freely given but are in general obligated acts. The giving of gifts also requires that there be reciprocation of a gift, a favour, a commitment. These are the common understanding of the gift. In Marcel Mauss's seminal *The gift*[37] a whole system of social life is sketched that is based on gift exchange as opposed to commodity exchange. It is described both as an archaic, pre-commodity form of social life, yet one that also has a moral appeal and power within the contemporary scene.

Members of a gift community are bound together in the obligatory circulation of meaningful objects. According to Mauss members of a gift community are obligated in three ways: to give, to receive and to repay. It is this obligation towards another, the obligation to return without diminishing social relationships, that is key to understanding the gift. Gift exchange binds objects and subjects in a symbolic and reciprocal relationship that de-limits their movements according to social and ethical codes. Commodification, on the other hand, alienates objects and

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35 Stephen Gale, *Terrorism 2005: overcoming the failure of imagination*, Foreign Policy Research Institute, 2005 http://www.fpri.org/enotes/20050816.americawar.gale.failureofimagination.html

36 Ivan Strenski, 'Sacrifice, gift and the social logic of Muslim "human bombers"', *Terrorism and Political Violence,* vol 15, no 3, 2003, pp 1–34.

37 Marcel Mauss, *The gift: forms and functions of exchange in archaic societies* (trans I Cunnison), Cohen and West, London, 1970 [1925].

subjects and facilitates their flow in space and time free of tradition. On the one hand, commodification facilitates freedom of the object and subject, but also leads to the destruction of the social and the ethical. The gift, on the other hand, facilitates social bonds through non-commodified exchange.[38]

In gift theory there is an importance accorded to waste and destruction. Waste is a way of asserting power and of amassing debtors who are obligated to the one who destroys. Waste typically involves the destruction of wealth, where, for example, clothing, cooking utensils and housing are burned or broken. Mauss refers to these as potlatch ceremonies or special forms of the gift, which involve competitive giving, receiving and repaying between members of groups who are obligated to each other. The waste of the potlatch is special in the way it converts material things into power and status, through obliging the 'receiver' to replicate an impossible squandering of wealth. The one who gives the potlatch gains credit over the subjects of the potlatch, who become debtors to the one who gives. Through extravagant expenditure the one who gives assumes the power of creditor over his subjects.

Mauss continues in the note on the potlatch that there is another major motif: sacrifice. Mauss discusses sacrifice in terms of a contract with the gods that requires gift giving (sacrifice) in return for what the gods have already given and may give in the future. Sacrifice is about the inalienability of objects and people, that is the need for objects and people to return to their origin, and here we are talking about the gods as the origin point for all things and all forms of life. What the person who sacrifices themselves does is give their life for another, so that the other may go on living. In sacrifice is the affirmation of life and of hope. Sacrifice is also a gift that affirms social bonds, that hails others to act in a social way (to give, to repay and to receive). Giving death, receiving death, reciprocating death: these are the obligations of the human bomber.[39] To keep a society going there must be a circulation of gifts, a gift economy, whereby death is transformed by sacrifice, where the gift of death is received as an obligation to reciprocate, to give death, to become holy, to die for society.

The human bomber is a gift given to his or her community, which in turn is obligated to receive the gift. Secondly, the surviving members need to reciprocate. This is an obligation that, if not enacted, breaks the bonds of a community or of relationships. The non-reciprocation of gifts makes community impossible, at least a community that is bound together by forces exerted other than those of

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38 For a discussion of the relationship between a gift economy and a knowledge economy see Jane Kenway, Elizabeth Bullen and Simon Robb, 'The knowledge economy, the techno-preneur and the problematic future of the university', *Policy Futures in Education, Special Issue on University Futures*, vol 2, no 2, 2004, pp 330–49.

39 Strenski, 2003.

commodity exchange. How does one return the gift of the human bomber? By acknowledging the value of their sacrifice, by giving up part of oneself to that thing that the human bomber has sacrificed his life for. The obligations of the gift enforce a sense of community. It is this insight that allows us to make the perverse observation that human bombers in New York and Iraq are community builders. The sacrifice of the bomber tests his or her community. It is a challenge; it challenges all implicated to declare whether they will reciprocate and thus continue the social network, or if they will refuse, thus placing themselves outside of that community.

The ruined utopia

Sustainable societies are dependent on a utopian imagination that entails the visualisation and representation of hope and desire. Likewise sustainable societies need to acknowledge and negotiate with the failure, waste and melancholy that is equally present in the utopian imagination. Sustainable societies also need to acknowledge the existence of non-commodified social bonds as a basis of social life. Suppressing the waste and failure of the social imagination, marginalising communities of gift exchange, is the act of a paranoid state.

The idea that failure and waste, the presence of these things, is consistent with the state's war on terror is not only resisted ferociously by the state but also by those agents of the state within the media. It is the reluctance of the media, in particular mainstream western media, to accept the inevitable presence of waste and failure in the war on terror that suggest that it is fearful of imagining the death of the king. To imagine another social order in times of crisis is not the only way to bring about social destruction. It is also inevitable when the waste and failure of the social imagination is secreted away by the king and his messengers. When the king and his messengers survey the social scene for signs of an illegal imagination, for a dissembling interiority, for a lack of plain speech, they will inevitably see themselves.

There is a suppression of failure and waste in the social imagination of the state that wages war on terror. There is an inability to imagine the social in a comprehensive way, in a way that allows for ambiguity, enchantment, sacrifice and destruction. The protective imagination of the state, the one that should be left to professionals, is already here in the artistic work of those who are grappling with both the desire for a better world and the failure of that desire, those who are working both with the melancholy of utopian desire and with its enchantment. There is a danger in the social imagination that refuses to look at the disaster and ruin that are its necessary companions. Likewise there is an obvious danger in the social imagination that seeks to transmute disaster and ruin into an ideal social condition, that seeks to arrive at a desired social condition by asserting a nostalgic, totalising power over the meaning of death. Between sacrifice and treason are the

apparently modest proposals of a social sustainability that neither idealises nor attempts to annihilate these extreme affiliations.

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