

Belsen's inmates are de-humanised in this spectacle, their dignity and appearance ravaged by detention, malnutrition and torture, and by their portrayal as foreigners. Most disturbing is that we are shown the prisoners at the end of an intentional de-humanisation process (that was perfected in the camps); that we attempt to make sense of the Holocaust in terms of Allied 'goodness' versus Nazi 'evil'; and that, in order to create this elusive dichotomy, we de-humanise the victims all over again. No real attempt is made to understand such events, or to honestly expose British complicity. It is worth noting that blunt simplification, and the accompanying provision of certainty, are the very mechanisms which fascism relies upon to grow.

The result is a false image of the Holocaust's significance, the creation of a televisual hologram which looks like the real thing but carries no substance. Like the news reports from the Gulf War and Bosnia-Herzegovina, not a single whiff of rotting flesh reaches the viewer, just the comforting realisation that we are in charge of the remote control. These tendencies pervade our analysis of both historical and contemporary events. This trend is all the more pernicious since it is couched in the reasonable, late-Enlightenment tones of a liberal tradition of democracy and toleration, and informed by a postmodern inability to take moral positions. But there is nothing postmodern about genocide, except perhaps our willingness to coin new and safer terms, such as 'ethnic cleansing'.

Like the late 1930s, the late 1990s are a time when those capable of making the distinction between fascism and democracy have a duty to expose the myths which enable fascism to grow, and revisionism to flourish. This process is difficult and not devoid of personal risk. But can Europeans really afford the alternatives?

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*Livio Hughes is engaged in postgraduate studies at CSD on the subject of genocide in Bosnia-Herzegovina.*

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## Twilight Modernity

by Chris Sparks

The growing convergence of debates around the status of modernity and the significance of both the *fin-de-siècle* and the *fin-de-millennium* constitutes a major preoccupation of today's cultural theorists. In contrast to the outbreaks of mass hysteria which greeted the last *fin-de-millennium*, today's dominant sensibility is a wearied and knowing "we've been there before". The terror of imminent apocalypse which caused first-century Christians to drop dead at midnight, 31 December 999 is replaced with a sophisticated fatigue, because the terror felt by the medieval Christians, induced by the apparent *certainty* of judgment, is replaced by fear of an *uncertain* future.

This anxiety, expressed by continuous reference to what is perceived to have ended (be it enlightenment or history), is fuelled by a concern for the fate of modernity, and an attendant failure to define adequately the present. For how are we to define this fear, a fear in and of the present, and also manage to express the anxiety involved in naming such a fearful present? Current popular terms fail to suffice. 'Post-modernity' points to a perception of the present as somehow lacking what *was*. For users of the necrophiliac term 'late modernity', modernity has passed away. Both terms show an inability, an unwillingness, to live without modernity, a need to remain in contact with it and a desire to know it, by continuously entering and exploring its warm and still recognisably composed body.

'High modernity' avoids this necrophilia, but does so by identifying the present as the fulfilment of the past. For its author, Giddens, the definitive features of modernity, far from ending, have expanded to create a global order of processes which both produce and manage 'disembeddedness' from commonly-sensed time and space. The hidden message is one of progress from the simple and

elemental to the complex and ordered whole. Its covert teleology promises some predictability for the future, obscuring present uncertainties.

As an alternative, 'twilight modernity' captures the uncertain character of the present. It provides a conceptual framework within which to explore the fears and enticements produced by uncertainty and the related delusions of what has been, what is lost, and what is coming.

As the overarching uncertainty of the present pertains to what is beyond the moment, so the overarching uncertainty of twilight pertains to what is beyond half-light. Twilight has its own character, an in-between, derived from our sense of its impermanence. In mid-twilight the clear colours of the day are hard to remember and the certainty of the oncoming darkness is held only in trust. Twilight tells us little of the before or after, an enclosed experience wherein all dimensions are obscured. Yet it is partially constructed by the stories with which we contextualise the uncertainty derived from the present half-light's obfuscations. The paradox of twilight is that the enclosure of the experience which characterises it negates the teleological presumption built into its conception as a moment of ending.

The idea of twilight carries within itself an otherness, referring to an apparent past, believed to be lost. This sense of loss is but an effect of the imposing and haunting strangeness of the present. The dominant present promotes a sensibility of profound uncertainty as to what has been and what might be coming. *Twilight* provides the conceptual means to understand and explore how, *sans credo*, we act out an 'after the light' scenario where apparent certainties have become seriously blurred in the dimming light. On encountering every moment of novelty, we perceive each as the ending of what preceded it, saying "we've been here before (of course)" but we can't quite remember how or when.

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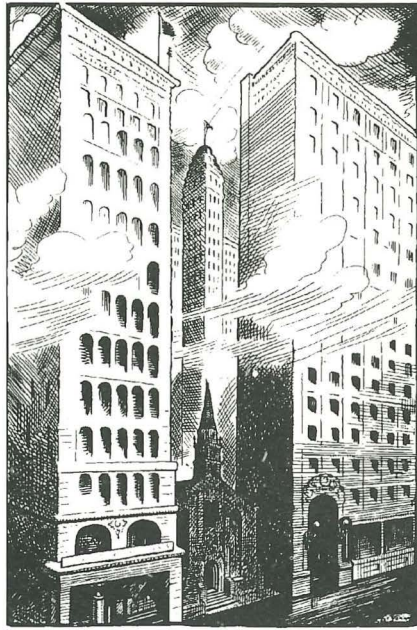
**Uncertainty and Identity:  
The Enlightenment and its Shadows**

by Chris Sparks

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(Autumn 1994)  
University of Westminster Press  
ISBN: 1-85919-031-6  
£3.50

The political philosophy of the enlightenment has been marked by a movement towards scientific rationalism, characterised by increasingly common referrals to politics as an activity aimed at producing a secure context for collective and individual identities. But the uncertainties of scientific rationalism expose the particular characteristic of modern politics as an activity beset by uncertainty and undertaken by political actors with specific regard to its uncertain condition. Presenting a specifically modern sense of uncertainty around a politicised interpretation of Freud's essay on the Uncanny, this pamphlet takes up Freud's account of the unsettling otherness produced within the familiar by the activity of seeking to secure it against threatening uncertainties. The theme is developed by paralleling enlightenment rationalism, characterised by the pursuit of epistemological certainty, with the literary exploration of the Fantastic. The Gothick novelists' use of scientific language and ideals in the construction of unnameable monsters and unintelligible events exposes the futility of the pursuit of certainty. The Gothick expresses and exposes the uncertainty within the discursive structure of scientific rationalism. It is argued that political actors cannot secure an end to uncertainty because by attempting to do so they produce and nurture many of the tendencies towards uncertainty which prevail in political societies. The author concludes that modern politics is characterised by the unsettling realisation that the quest for security is the source of uncertainty.

Available from CSD. Cheques made payable to 'University of Westminster'.



**Fear and Politics  
An International Workshop**

University of Westminster  
7-8 July 1995

CSD will host an international workshop on Fear and Politics, a subject which, with few exceptions, has been neglected for a generation in the social sciences. Among the issues to be examined are: the history of philosophical and literary reflections on fear; modes of fear peculiar to twentieth-century systems of dictatorship, totalitarianism, and parliamentary democracy; the analysis of fear within traditions of psychoanalysis and psychology; the mobilising and paralysing effects of fear upon individuals; states and fear in the post-Cold War period; the commodification of fear by the mass media; and twentieth-century forms of organised public resistance to fear.

To foster a lively and critical debate, the workshop will be limited to around twenty participants. Among the internationally-renowned contributors expected to attend are Jean Delumeau, Juan Corradi, Barry Buzan, and Chantal Mouffe.

Further information from Livio Hughes or Professor John Keane at CSD.

**Jonathan Swift  
Literature and Liberty  
An International Symposium**

University of Westminster  
9-10 June 1995

CSD will host an international symposium to commemorate the 250th anniversary of the death of Jonathan Swift (1667-1745). The symposium will reconsider the social and political legacy of his numerous works, including *Gulliver's Travels*. The event is likely to attract considerable interest and generate a published volume of an edited selection of the papers. Among the internationally-renowned speakers are: Claude Rawson, Warren Montag, and Michael Foot. Proposals of 500 words are welcome until the 31st of March 1995.

Proposals and requests for information should be sent to Martyn Oliver at CSD.

**CSD SEMINAR  
PROGRAMME**

**January**

*Dr. John Owens:* Unravelling the US mid-term elections  
*Professor Stephen Haseler:* British politics and the republican idea  
*Dr. Anna Matveeva:* Russian policy towards Chechnya  
*Keith Taylor:* Is there a political theory in *Gulliver's Travels*?

**February**

*Professor Vukašin Pavlović:* Suppressed civil society in Serbia  
*Lord Ralf Dahrendorf:* Can we have Europe and democracy, too?  
*Professor John Damis:* The Mahgreb and the EU  
*Professor Pierre Hassner:* Is territoriality losing significance?

**March**

*Workshop: the Public and Private:* Professor Modesto Saavedra, Dr. Jeremy Colwill and Chris Sparks  
*Mehdi Moslem:* The post-Khomeini state  
*Irene Brennan:* EU policy towards Russia  
*Bhiku Parekh:* Public principles in a multicultural state