

RETHINKING MARXISM

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The aim of RETHINKING MARXISM is to stimulate interest in and debate over the explanatory power and social consequences of Marxian economic, cultural, and social analysis. To that end, we publish studies that seek to discuss, elaborate and/or extend Marxian theory. Our concerns include theoretical and philosophical (methodological and epistemological) matters as well as more concrete empirical analyses—all work that leads to the further development of distinctively Marxian discourses. We encourage contributions from people in many disciplines and from a wide range of perspectives. We are also interested in expanding the diversity of styles for producing and presenting Marxian discourses.

One distinguishing aim of this journal is to ensure that class is an important part, but not the exclusive focus, of Marxism. We are therefore interested in the complex intersection of class with economic, political, psychological, and all other social processes. Equally important is the task of exploring the philosophical positions that shape Marxian analyses.

We are interested in promoting Marxian approaches to social theory because we believe that they can and should play an important role in developing strategies for radical social change in particular, for an end to class exploitation and the various forms of political, cultural, and psychological oppression (including oppression on the basis of race, gender, and sexual orientation). We especially welcome research that explores these and related issues from

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RETHINKING MARXISM

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Editors' Introduction

In this issue

we continue the publication of the noteworthy papers delivered in the plenary sessions of the Rethinking Marxism 2006 conference.

Yahya Madra and Stephen Healy organized the session on "rethinking communism," held on Saturday evening, with the participation of Susan Buck-Morss, Stephen Cullenberg, Kojin Karatani, and hundreds of audience members. The session was not only inspired by the long line of essays on the topic of communism published over the years in RM (which are listed on the conference section of the RM web site); it also reflected the recent "remarkable revival of interest in communism, both at practical and theoretical levels." Thus, the goal of this particular plenary session was to stage an encounter between, on one hand, concrete developments—in both the South and the North—that can be seen as containing "fragments of communism" and, on the other hand, the renewed theoretical concern—philosophical but also political, economic, sociological, psychoanalytical, and artistic—in the "signifier 'communism'."

Buck-Morss (in a slightly revised version of her actual talk) sets out to convince Marxists that sovereign right is an important, "perhaps the most important," issue for both Marxist theory and the development of a global left politics in the world today. She begins her "critical theory of the present" by locating the problem of sovereign right, which she defines as the "power to name the enemy," in a series of recent problems: the attacks of 9/11—in al-Qaida's post-national concept of sovereignty (which, she observes, is shared by both multinational corporations and antiglobalization activists) and the U.S. response to its national sovereign power being defied; the history of really existing communism—where there was a clear distinction between sovereign power (the Communist Party) and state power (the Soviet state), a difference which is occluded by Max Weber's definition of sovereignty as the exclusive property of the nation state; and the current globalization debate—in which both Marxists and theorists of international political economy, in locating a gap between state boundaries and global economic power, fail to identify an alternative source of sovereign legitimacy. Buck-Morss turns to Carl Schmitt's writings, especially his treatment of *nomos*, as a way of moving beyond the idea that the state wields power and makes laws, to see the state as a sovereign state, which is power, which embodies the Law that makes laws legal. Her view is that the operation of sovereignty within the current global order is founded on forgetting its nomic origins: of sovereign territorial nation states in the pre-Westphalian sanctioning of European civilizational superiority, and of the separation of economy from political power in the eighteenth-century treatises of political economy. Buck-Morss argues that Marx also treated the

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economy as a separate force and was therefore blind to the “priority of the political over the economy.” In her rethinking, the current discrepancy between the political order of the nation state and the global economic order involves a crumbling of *nomos* from within, which can only be redressed by imagining and intervening to create a new form of sovereignty, one that “articulates principles of democracy on a global level.”

If in the current state of emergency the sovereignty of the nation state is being called into question, it still serves to create national identities—and a class of people who are stateless. They live outside their place of birth. They migrate from one country to another. They work, pay taxes, hold credit cards, and marry. They often live illegally and are subject to human rights abuses. They are alternately enlisted as a necessary work force and threatened with barriers to entry. But they are not entirely anonymous, especially when they are subjected to sovereign state power and laws. In fact, the interdisciplinary art team of Lin + Lam (Lana Lin and H. Lan Thao Lam) discovered that even the unrecognized state of Taiwan has a mug-shot archive of photographs of those who are forced to apply for official state recognition—for residency cards, work permits, and so on. Their multimedia piece serves to document the existence of such stateless persons and thus allow us to rethink the violent operations of sovereign power that render these people both invisible, as faceless entities caught within the bureaucratic machinery through which that power is exercised, and visible, when they are discussed and debated in terms of the anonymous identities into which they have been categorized.

Anyone who has a passing acquaintance with Louis Althusser's life will know that he was a manic-depressive who killed his wife. And while that episode, together with the publication of his autobiography, generated considerable commentary (only some of which rose above the mean-spirited, facile attempts to make the link between his psychological disorder and his contributions to the rethinking of Marxian theory), Roland Boer sets out to explore another dimension of Althusser's life and work, which he believes has been met with “embarrassed silence”: his early Catholicism and theological texts. Boer focuses his attention on four key texts (written between 1946 and 1951) in which he finds evidence of Althusser's “increasingly despairing efforts” to forge an alliance between progressive Catholicism and Marxism. In Boer's view, while Althusser did eventually join the French Communist Party and break from the Church, there are both formal elements of and specific examples from his theological writings that reappear in some of Althusser's Marxian texts. For example, Boer notes that references to the Church play a central role in Althusser's discussion of ideological state apparatuses (in that schooling comes to occupy the position in mid-twentieth-century bourgeois society akin to the influence of the Church in medieval society) and in his critique of idealism (in counterposing materialist science and idealist religion as warring parties within the theoretical class struggle of philosophy). But beyond these references, Boer argues that theological thought is even more decisive for Althusser, especially in his theory of ideology: the narrative of the interpellation section of the famous essay “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation)” passes through—in Boer's view, it seeks its “breakthrough and depth” in—the Christian form of ideology, which allows him to consider all forms of ideology as both universal and eternal. It is this “Catholic

blind spot” that, in Boer's account, can help to explain Althusser's universalist interpretation of Marxism.

Religion also occupies a central position in Creston Davis's reexamination of the Marxist conception of revolution and his attempt to produce a model that unites materialism and idealism (and avoids the pitfalls often attributed to each). For Davis, a theological notion of revelation, as embodied in the revolutionary figure of Charles Peguy's Joan of Arc, can serve to open “new ways of thinking and enacting a politics of difference in the world.” He begins by distinguishing revolution—defined as a violent act within the social world that confirms the truth of a better world which class conflict serves to mask—and revelation—a form of knowledge that is manifest from outside the social world, by a divine force. In order to salvage the transcendent power of religion for revolutionary ends, Davis needs both to distance his approach from that in which religion is captured by a lust for worldly power (his example is George W. Bush) and to challenge the static, oppositional relationship between revolution/materialism and revelation/idealism. In order to accomplish the latter, he establishes a theological structure that incorporates, at one and the same time, the mystery of life that “gives birth to a design for truth and the enactment of justice and liberation in the world” and a “robust materialist politics.” Davis draws his example of the revolutionary/revelatory intertwining of idealism and materialism from Peguy's drama, *The Mystery of the Charity of Joan of Arc*. For Davis, Joan is able to avoid both proletarian false consciousness and bourgeois acceptance in order to bring about a revolt, a willingness to act that “cannot be disjoined from revelation.” Davis's concern, however, is that appeals to divine revelation can produce unchecked violence, a totalitarian danger that needs to be neutralized by “drawing on an ontological liberating power that cannot be owned or possessed by anyone nor used to justify violence in the name of ideology.”

Baruch de Spinoza's work has served as an important source for rethinking and extending Marxist philosophy, especially in relation to Louis Althusser's writings, as has been well documented in the pages of *RM* (see, for examples, the essays by Montag [2/3 and 10/3], Surin [7/2], Goldstein [16/3], Fourtounis [17/1], and Sharp [17/4]). Here, Jason Read finds in Pierre Macherey's “turn to Spinoza” a solution to what Read considers to be the pitfalls in Althusser's concept of theoretical practice, and thus a way of formulating a properly materialist understanding of philosophy for Marxism. Althusser originally invented the idea of theoretical practice not in order to glorify theoretical work but to challenge the autonomy of thinking and to investigate “the work that thinking does, its limitations and effects.” In Read's view, Althusser's notion suffered from two problems: theoreticism (the claim to have unconditioned knowledge of the conditions of all knowledge) and determinism (the reduction of thought to politics, to the class struggle). What he finds in Macherey's reading of Spinoza is a conception of theoretical practice that avoids these pitfalls and yet succeeds in conceptualizing the material effectivity, the productive dimension, of thought. The key to formulating a connection between production and ideas is causality—specifically, that ideas are determined by other ideas that they, in turn, affect and determine. Ideas and things are conceived to have not a parallel connection but the same connection, which is a necessary causal

relation. This common order doesn't make thought and matter identical but it is what allows Spinoza (as interpreted by Macherey) to speak of thought as a kind of production, "as something which produces knowledge from given concepts and experiences." As Read puts it, thinking is overdetermined by both the causality of logic and ideas and by the causality of affects and experiences. It is this complex causality that accounts for the differences and connections between knowledge and superstition, truth and error, and so on. It is also key, argues Read, to understanding the effectivity of thought, the manner in which it transforms its conditions—not by virtue of its being true but in terms of its causal connections with other ideas. In other words, Spinoza conceives knowledge to be *in* this world, and to be engaged in a constant struggle, a never-ending practice, to extend its power within a community that reinforces it. Spinoza's materialism, like Marx's, is thus not a description of the ultimate nature of reality (for example, of matter over ideas) but, instead, a recognition that philosophy is one particular practice, with determinate limits and effects, situated by other practices. Such a materialist philosophical practice does not seek true principles through purity and distance from the world; it is rather an operation, "acting within determinate conditions in order to become autonomous, to produce effects of freedom" and thereby to transform the world.

The relationship between politics and philosophy is also the main theme of the interview with Jean-Luc Nancy that we publish here for the first time in English. We want to thank both our friends at the Paris-based journal *Vacarme* for graciously giving us permission to include the interview in the pages of *RM* and Jason Smith for, once again, producing an elegant translation of a difficult text. *Vacarme*, now in its tenth year of publication, developed out of a set of political and philosophical preoccupations that, while not the same as those that initially inspired *RM*, share a concern that traditional ways of posing theoretical and political questions no longer apply and that new forms of thought—new concepts, new imaginaries, new ways of understanding the pasts of Marxism and of charting its futures—are required. During the course of the interview with Nancy, two editors of the journal, Mathieu Potte-Bronville and Stanley Grelet, describe the "dysfunctional state of things" in which they found (and continue to find) themselves and how they think Nancy's work represents a response to these circumstances. They mention, in particular, the problems associated with the political status of philosophy, the absence of collective work, the link between philosophy and community, the "irruption of the communist exigency" in the events surrounding the first Gulf War, and the difficulty of forming political commitments in a world transformed by globalization.

Nancy, for his part, expresses a belief that we are living through a "shift in history," comparable to the transition from antiquity to the modern world, which can be experienced as a loss but also as a beginning. What is lost is a certain vision of the political as the realization of an essence (which involved both the expansion of the state and a vision of the withering away of the state), a "death of God" that requires us to redefine the relationship between the political and democracy, the idea of secularization, and so on. Nancy seeks to distance himself from the

idea that "everything is political" and to criticize one of his own formulations, the idea that community, being-in-common, is coextensive with the political. He also believes it is necessary to take up once again the issue of Capital, confirming its worldwide expansion as envisioned by Marx but also its "unhinged" and "anxious" state in the form of neoliberalism. Continuing with his discussion of Marx, and linking it to his understanding of communism, Nancy focuses on two issues: First, Marx's notion of the social production of human beings corresponds to an ontology of being-in-common, and thus an idea of communism as not opposed to or superimposed on the individual but as constitutive of the individual. Second, exploitation involves the confiscation of the absolute value created by human beings, their dignity, which is masked as commodity value. So, communism does not involve the overcoming of alienation to return to a given human nature—value and humanity "such as they are in themselves"—but the production and creation of that which is "absolutely human." In order to move in this direction, Nancy argues that it is not sufficient to put the economy in question in the name of the ethical or political but to follow up on Marx's "deepest inspiration" and to renew the ontological question of the economic itself. Finally, Nancy discusses the new senses of the world created by globalization (in reality, "as old as capitalism itself") including a Westernization of the world (which he sees as both a moment of uncontested domination by the West and an "unsettling disidentification" of the West), a combination of expansion and shrinking (which, for him, means that what is in the world is all that now exists), and technological transformations (which enable both new possibilities of control and new forms of resistance). Thus, we are confronted by the "naked obviousness of bare existence" that brings with it new ideas and "plenty of tasks for thought." And, for Nancy, there is nothing apolitical in the intellectual work that takes up these questions.

For Marxists, one of the important intellectual tasks is to identify and make sense of the new "ontological realities for labor" in their broadest context. Richard McIntyre and Michael Hillard set out to do just that in their *Remarx* essay, focusing their Marxist approach to industrial relations on rethinking the working class in terms of changes in the labor process and the links between households and capitalist workplaces. What they want to avoid are attempts to "go back to the future," which they identify with the work of such authors as Beverly Silver and Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri. Their own approach involves taking reproduction seriously and, as a consequence, decentering the labor process as the only site of resistance to capitalism. In their view, both capitalist enterprises and households are social sites where work is done and surplus labor is produced, appropriated, and distributed, in other words, where class processes exist. However, the two sites are constituted in different ways—economically, culturally, and politically—and therefore the struggles that take place within them, and the ways such struggles affect one another, are crucial to understanding from a class perspective the changing nature of labor since 1980. McIntyre and Hillard note, for example, there has been recent blurring of home and work and that the industrialization of family time has created tensions that have been displaced onto such social enemies as gay marriage and illegal immigrants. Even more, the "economic turbulence and ideological

shifts" of the past thirty years, which led to a lowering of the value of labor power, have also created new tensions within already fragile households, sending them into crisis. And while the disintegration of household class structures has imposed enormous costs on people, McIntyre and Hillard believe that new political opportunities (which traditional scholars in industrial relations and labor studies refuse to recognize or analyze) are being opened up. Their view is that making the link between the crisis in households and the effects of increased exploitation in capitalist enterprises can provide "the basis for a new socialist politics in the United States."

A pair of book reviews completes this issue. In the first, Enda Brophy examines two recent volumes edited by Timothy Murphy on autonomist Marxism: a collection of Antonio Negri's writings from the 1970s and, with Abdul-Karim Mustapha, a set of essays that deal with Negri's older writings and show how his insights can be applied in the current conjuncture. Brophy finds the reading of the five essays by Negri himself to be, at this distance, "an invariably demanding and productive experience." Demanding, because they refer to a world that has long passed on; productive, because they provide insight into the movement of Italian autonomist Marxism and the role that Negri himself played in giving voice to and in shaping that movement. She also notes that the collection is enhanced by a glossary of key terms and by translations that are clear and create consistency across texts. For Brophy, the Murphy and Mustapha volume is a "useful companion" in that some of the authors succeed in contextualizing Negri's texts (such as their reception inside and outside Italy) and the autonomist movement (including the numerous splits) while others show how the ideas of autonomist Marxism can be utilized today (for example, in relation to the refusal of work and in conjunction with indigenous struggles). While Brophy notes both limits to Negri's thought at the time and gaps in the latter collection, she does recommend both volumes (as well as Murphy's translation of Negri's *Subversive Spinoza*) to those who want a "deepened engagement with the thought of Antonio Negri and the broader tradition from which he emerges."

Robert Pollin's *Contours of Descent* is the object of the second review. Asatar Bair notes that he uses Pollin's book as a text in his introductory macroeconomics course and that Pollin manages to demolish—in an "evenhanded and reasonable" manner—conservative arguments about the ideal economy of the 1990s. Pollin structures his critique of unregulated market capitalism around the ideas of three central figures: Karl Marx, John Maynard Keynes, and Karl Polanyi. Bair's view is that, while Pollin is on "solid ground" in summarizing the key arguments of Keynes (concerning the role of uncertainty and finance) and Polanyi (on the unfairness of outcomes produced by disembedded markets), he "falters" when it comes to Marx. Bair's concern is that the "Marx problem" is confined to workers having less power than employers in bargaining for wages and that other important dimensions of Marx's critique of capitalism—exploitation, the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, dialectical materialism, and so on—are simply overlooked. Thus, Bair recommends the volume as a "solid liberal critique" of the excesses of neoliberal capitalism but he suggests that readers look elsewhere for a perspective that "could perhaps revitalize popular movements across the globe."

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The Editors

This is Not Me

Lin + Lam

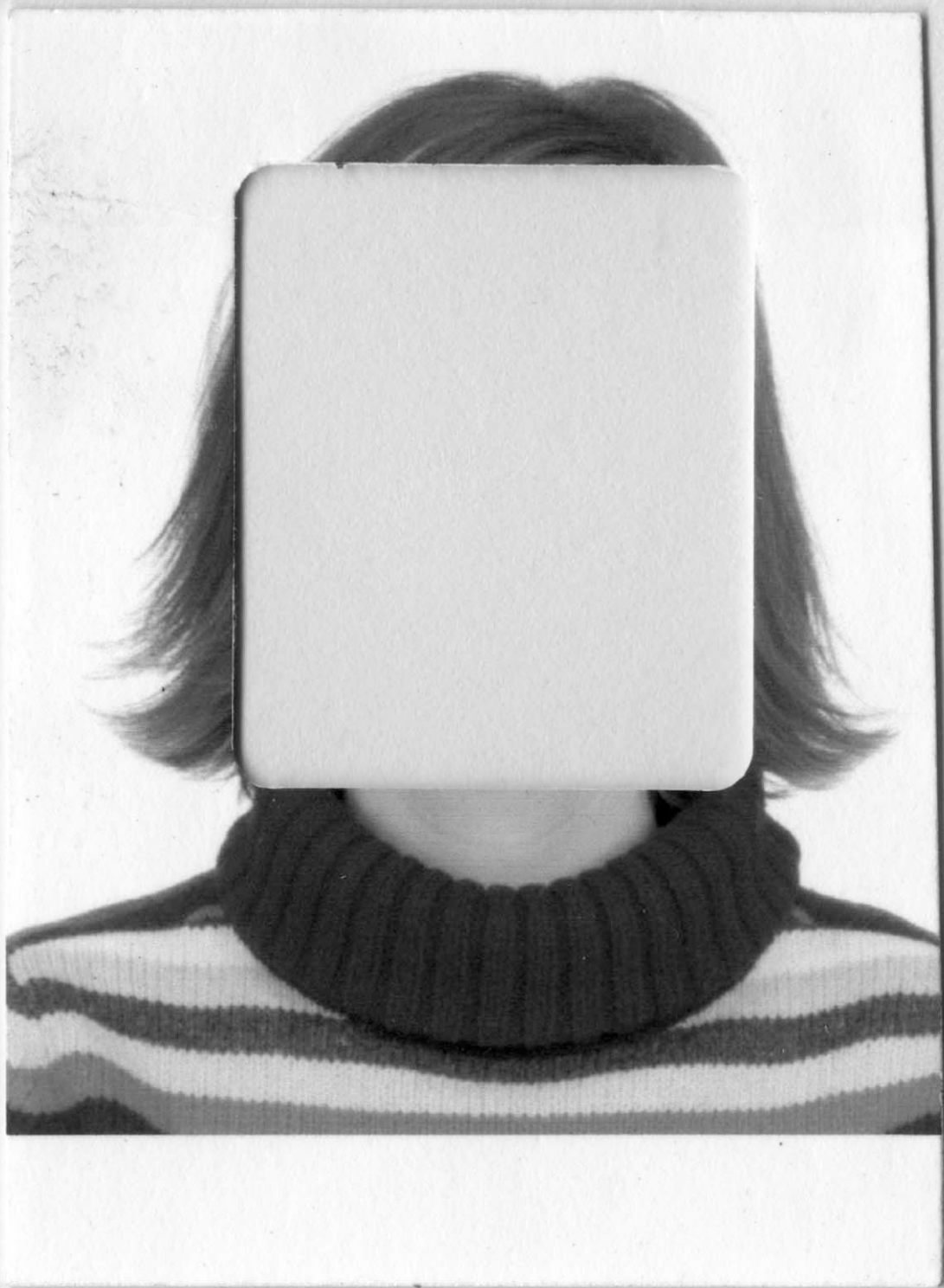
According to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, a “stateless person” is someone who is not considered a national by any State under the operation of its law. The Webopedia Computer Dictionary defines “stateless” as “having no information about what occurred previously.”¹ A stateless server, such as the World Wide Web, treats each request as an independent transaction without requiring any context or memory. Unlike its digital homonym, the stateless person embodies cultural memory and inhabits a political terrain. While in 1948 Hannah Arendt observed that the internment camp was the only “country” for the stateless,² today the Internet houses and tracks the statistics of the world’s “migrant stock.”³

Portrait photography functions doubly as honorific and repressive. Alphonse Bertillon’s systemization of criminal identification in the 1880s can be seen as a precursor to the eventual uses of the headshot.⁴ Like the mug shot, the passport was developed as a means of security and surveillance, a tether to the state. The need for the modern passport arose in tandem with the First World War, its redrawing of borders, creation of stateless masses, and anxiety around nationality. Hence, photographic forms of identification have been invested with the power to provide safe passage to some while sentencing others to detention.

The photographs reproduced here are discarded refuse from applications for official documents issued by the Taiwan Police Department: Alien Resident Certificates, Work Permits, Identity Cards, and so forth. These remnants bring to mind the people among us who are caught between visibility and invisibility as a collectivity of “nonidentities.” At once sad and comic, the faceless cutouts testify to the violence that severs individuals into anonymous categories such as “undocumented,” “alien,” “refugee.”

These ID photo leftovers were collected in a nation that is not internationally recognized, a state that is de facto stateless. They are presented here in the condition they were found.

191 million people,
approx. 3% of the
world's population,
live outside their
place of birth.
Roughly one of
every thirty-five
persons in the world
is a migrant.⁵



Immigration-receiving countries behave as though they were not parties to the process of immigration.

But in fact they are partners.⁶



July 2005
Estimated amount that illegal
immigrants pay into the US
Social Security system
each year: \$6,400,000,000.⁷

Dec. 2006
Number of Americans and
Britons who now work in the
IT industry in India: 30,000.⁸

Feb. 2007
Bank of America offers a new
credit card to those without a
Social Security number,
largely illegal immigrants.⁹







July 2003

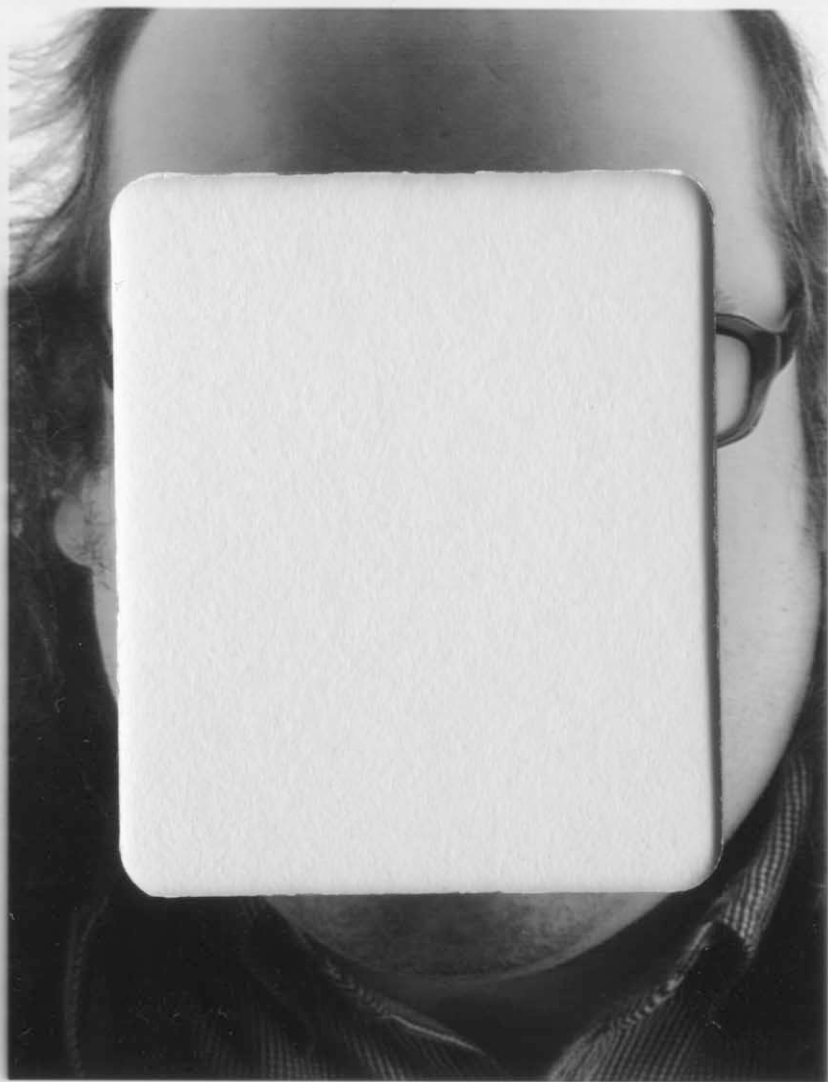
Israel passes "temporary" law barring Palestinians who marry Israelis from gaining citizenship.¹⁰

May 2005

Spain gives 700,000 illegal immigrants amnesty.¹¹

Oct. 2005

Amnesty International reports human rights abuses against migrants attempting to cross the border into Spain.¹²



PHOTOMATE 寫

June 2000
Number of immigrants
Japan would require to
maintain its present workforce
through the year 2050:
30,450,000.¹³

Sept. 2006
Boeing Company is awarded
\$67 million Congressional
contract to build
6000-mile "virtual fence,"
consisting of sensors,
cameras and drones along
Canada-US-Mexico
borders.¹⁴



I have a name
without a title
Patient in a country
Where people are
enraged . . .¹⁵



¹ Webopedia Computer Dictionary, s.v. "stateless," <http://www.webopedia.com/TERM/S/stateless.html> (accessed 1 April 2007).

² Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1948), 248.

³ The United Nations Population Database, <http://esa.un.org/migration>.

⁴ Allan Sekula, "The Body and the Archive," in *The Contest of Meaning*, ed. Richard Bolton, 345-54 (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1989).

⁵ United Nations Population Division, "World Migrant Stock: The 2005 Revision," <http://esa.un.org/migration> (accessed 1 April 2007).

⁶ Saskia Sassen, *Guests and Aliens* (New York: The New Press, 1999), 1.

⁷ *Harper's Magazine*, Harper's Index/Immigration, <http://www.harpers.org/Immigration.html#20050309xuntamipnntw> (accessed 1 April 2007).

⁸ *Harper's Magazine*, Harper's Index/December 2006, <http://www.harpers.org/Harpersindex2006-12.html> (accessed 1 April 2007).

⁹ E. Scott Reckard, David Streitfeld, and Adrian G. Uribarri, "Banking on Illegal Immigrants," *Los Angeles Times*, 14 February 2007, http://www.latimes.com/business/la-fi-credit14feb14,0,1490047_story?coll=la-home-headlines (accessed 1 April 2007).

¹⁰ Wikipedia, s.v. "Citizenship and Entry into Israel Law," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Citizenship_and_Entry_into_Israel_Law (accessed 1 April 2007).

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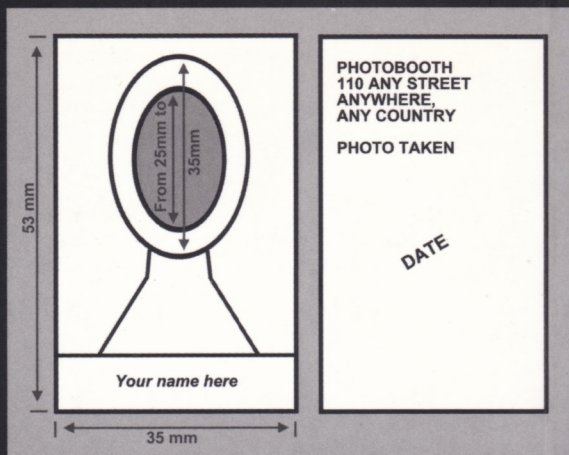
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