



# CLASSICAL REALISM MEETS CRITICAL THEORY

CRISES, MODERNITY, AND THE RETURN OF HUMANITY

## **What is Political Realism? Exploring a Research Framework**

Newcastle University  
Great North Museum  
1-2 June 2013

### **Workshop Programme**

#### **Day 1**

Saturday, 1 June 2013

9.15 – 9.30 Arrival  
9.30 – 10.00 Welcome and Introduction - Hartmut Behr

#### **Session One**

Chair: Hartmut Behr

10.00– 11.30 Richard Ned Lebow (Kings College London) - “Classical Realism and the Question of Order”

11.30-11.45 Tea/Coffee Break

11.45-13.15 Richard Beardsworth (Florida International University) - “The Idea of the Statesman in Political Realism”

13.15-14.00 Lunch

#### **Session Two**

Chair: Michael Williams

14.00-15.30 Felix Roesch (Coventry University) - “Unlearning in International Relations: Maruyama, Morgenthau, and Modernity”

15.30-17.00 Lene Hansen (University of Copenhagen) - “In Search of a Feminist Classical Realism: Rebecca West on Power, War, and Sacrifice in the 1930s and 40s”

## Day 2

Sunday, 2 June 2013

9.15 – 9.30 Arrival

### Session One

Chair: Richard Ned Lebow

9.30-11.00 Timothy W. Luke (Virginia Tech) - "What is Political Realism? Understandings of Agency, Temporality and Spatiality in "Classical" Realism"

11.00-12.30 Kamila Stullerova (Aberystwyth University) - "Scepticism and Realist Epistemology"

12.30-13.00 Lunch

### Session Two

Chair: Richard Beardsworth

13.00-14.30 Sean Molloy (University of Kent) - "The Machiavellian Ethics of Carr's 'The Twenty Years' Crisis' "

14.30-16.00 Vibeke Schou Tjalve (Danish Institute of International Studies) - "Under the Pale Light of the Humanist Moon"? Realism, Secularism and International Politics in the Global Age

16.00-17.00 Michael C. Williams (University of Ottawa) - Concluding Remarks and Further Strategising

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#### Supporting Institutions:



*What is Political Realism? Exploring a Research Framework  
1-2 June 2013 Great North Museum Newcastle upon Tyne, UK*

In the social sciences, the term “realism” raises as many ideas and associations as it is elusive when enquiring into its history. It has been used by many, with a plethora of variations such as classical, structural, offensive etc., is and has been associated with a series of authors, sometimes more by means of intellectual appropriation than by respective authors themselves, as well as it has been used as a label for authors who have never used the term themselves. In order to gain some clarity about the term and concept of “realism”, the workshop intends to pursue the questions of what is political realism and how it can be used as, or elaborated into, a research framework, particularly for engaging questions of/on crises and modernity. These discussions take place before the background of a recent revival of “realism” and (re)appreciation of classical “realist” thinkers in the disciplines of International Relations, Political Science, and Philosophy.

### **Abstracts**

#### **"In Search of a Feminist Classical Realism: Rebecca West on Power, War, and Sacrifice in the 1930s and 40s"**

Lene Hansen, University of Copenhagen

To the extent that IR scholars have heard about Rebecca West, it is most likely through the claim that her 1941 travelogue "Black Lamb and Grey Falcon" made Western politicians and journalists adopt a pro-Serbian, anti-interventionist stance on the Bosnian War. That claim however is problematic: Rebecca West romanticized Yugoslavia in general, not the Serbs, and she was staunchly anti-Communist making her an unlikely supporter of Milosevic and his Bosnian allies in the 1990s. Perhaps more importantly in terms of IR, the analytical and political simplicity attributed to West might have cautioned IR scholars against a deeper engagement with her work. My turn to Rebecca West within the "Classical Realism Meets Critical Theory" network is based on my suggestion that although "Black Lamb and Grey Falcon" is not a conventional academic text, it shares a series of thematic concerns with key works of the 1930s, most prominently Carr's "The Twenty Years' Crisis". A consideration of "Black Lamb and Grey Falcon" is particularly apt for a discussion of the relationship between political realism and gender in IR. This relationship has so far been devoted little attention from either feminists or scholars working on the realist tradition. This absence is linked to theoretical assumptions within feminist IR as well as realist work, and my goal is to discuss these assumptions as well as the possibility of a gendered political realism through an analysis of West's vision of international politics, a vision that explicitly connected gender to concepts such as power, war, sacrifice and heroism.

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## **“Under the Pale Light of the Humanist Moon”? Realism, Secularism and International Politics in the Global Age**

Vibeke Schou Tjalve, Danish Institute of International Studies

Does such a thing as a common ‘framework for analysis’ flow from the works of Classical Realism? If so, what does its purpose and politics like? And, most importantly: should we – *can* we – adopt it for the conduct and critique of international politics today? In the growing literary on how and if to revive the Classical Realist agenda, a response to those questions seem increasingly to fall in two categories. Both insist on Classical Realism as a profoundly normative and distinctly modern political project, intent on restraining the violent forces of political ideology in a world ‘from which the Gods have departed’. And both agree on that project as one shaped by defining theorists of secularism in the periods transatlantic intellectual exchange: Nietzsche, Weber and Schmitt; Dewey, Adorno and Lippmann. It is on the instruments of restraint adopted, and hence on the political commitments ultimately made, that the emerging literature part ways. One part takes realism to the right, approaching it as a deliberate attempt to insulate international politics from the emotive irrationalism of modern mass politics, by ‘saving’ the practice of statecraft for the cooler heads of the wise and the few. Another takes realism to the left, attaching it to the ethics of critical theory and to its commitment to deconstructive, deliberative or agonistic democracy. This paper draws on the rich and rewarding points of both these sets of literature, yet argues that the realist stance on secularism and religion must be rethought and readdressed. Only thus may we a) acknowledge the distinctiveness of Classical Realism and avoid simply subsuming it under contemporary theoretical banners, b) recognize why that distinctiveness makes the appropriation of Classical Realism in the twenty first century context a difficult and ambiguous one c) appreciate why features of global politics today may require of us, that even so, we try.

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## **Unlearning in International Relations. Maruyama, Morgenthau, and Modernity**

Felix Rösch, Coventry University

Realism developed globally as a worldview in the mid-twentieth century, as similar concerns about modernity spanned different intellectual styles and academic cultures. Encapsulated in this realist worldview is a world postulate that promotes a global public sphere in the form of a world community. Currently, this world postulate is reconsidered, as some scholars attempt to reconcile realism with cosmopolitanism in order to demonstrate the intellectual strength of realism. This paper is contributing to this current discourse by elaborating on the epistemological and methodological underpinnings of this realist worldview, as it is argued – by drawing on a concept from Joshua Reynolds – that realists pursued unlearning in International Relations. In discussing the works of Maruyama Masao and Hans Morgenthau, it is demonstrated that unlearning is realism’s ambition to criticize and move beyond the episteme of modernity because realists refer to ancient, pre-modern thought in order to re-establish the human being as a willful actor in the world political order and as a creator of life-worlds.

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## **Scepticism and Realist Epistemology**

Kamila Stullerova, Aberystwyth University

The underlying aspiration for this paper is to think about realism – the realism that has been recovered by re-visiting the work of Morgenthau, Niebuhr and other mid-century thinkers – as a fruitful theoretical position that goes beyond interpreting canonical texts. The paper's overarching argument is that realism can provide for such a position, but that our conventional understanding of what IR theory is must be shifted. This effort benefits from examining realism through the lens of the tradition of political theory, in particular the sceptical political thought. Because political theory does not ordinarily operate in the categories of ontology/epistemology, it allows us to appreciate the complexity of the process through which realist theorising tames its scepticism by creating space for politics and the knowledge produced by political practice to mitigate for the limitations of philosophical knowledge. Transposing this back to IR theory categories of ontology/epistemology, it becomes obvious that realism is an epistemologically-centred theory that unceasingly revises its ontology and normative commitments, which it actually cannot set apart. As a result, realism cannot separate explanation from ethics, both of which it constantly qualifies. Its only 'given' is that the process of knowledge-formation, which necessitates input from each and every subject of politics, must not abate. This gives it an imperative to 'speak to' politics. All this crucially differentiates realism from the two IR theories closest to it, the ontologically-centred scientific realism (Wight, 2012) and Critical IR (Levine, 2013) which, unlike realism, keeps the process of epistemological self-correction exclusively in the realm of philosophy.

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## **"What is Political Realism? Understandings of Agency, Temporality and Spatiality in "Classical" Realism"**

Timothy W. Luke, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

To answer the question "what is classical realism," this study begins exploring the conceptual exceptionalism embedded in "the classical" thematics grounding classical realism by asking "how is it understood?" To establish working baseline conditions for some consistent, constant, and continuous normality in human political behavior, many realist analyses dip into the media ecologies of print to construct epistemographies of originary political wisdom tied to theoretical claims about agency, temporality, and spatiality. As a research framework, then, many call upon Western mythographies of "ancient, classical and early modern political theory," which print-driven scholarship and study have valorized as crucial stores of evidence. Because Thucydides, Plato, Aristotle, Polybius, Machiavelli, Hobbes etc., or non-Western thinkers (Sun Tzu, Kautilya, Han Fei, etc.), develop certain constructs to assess human action, time, and space, the premises for creating realist analysis of political order that are tied to the processes of basic human nature, ancient state formation, anarchic regional politics, and perpetual war detailed in these canonical writings. On the one hand, Western figures of authority are used to set

out terms of analysis, which appear to erase context, arrest temporality, and homogenize space by pointing all analysis back to "classic" events, thinkers, and struggles, especially since many non-Western accounts do not circulate widely in scholarly or policy-making circles. Yet, on the other hand, such understandings still tend to serve as basic interpretative frames for understanding international relations today. Is this a credible, or even an acceptable mode of analysis, and how does it still affect the conduct of realist analysis as a workable research framework, given today's changing media ecologies, levels of literacy, and political forces?

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### **The Idea of the Statesman in Political Realism**

Richard Beardsworth, Florida International University

The object of critical theory is freedom or the immanent critique of freedom in the name of singularity. The object of political realism is feasible political change within structures of power. Where and how can these two schools of thinking meet? This paper suggests that *one* meeting-place lies in the reinvention of the realist idea of the statesman (stateswoman). For political realism, the statesman thinks and acts within the element of international politics: that is, in Hans Morgenthau's well-known terms, in 'an environment of interest defined as power'. Statesmanship defends, accordingly, national security and national sovereignty *qua* a response to anarchic insecurity. Under conditions of interdependence—where specific needs of a people are determined by events beyond the territory of the state—this idea of the statesman is neither functional nor responsible. Interweaving critical, republican and realist literature, the paper argues that the political duty of the statesman lies in the choice of delegating power either upwards or downwards so that the specific issue threatening the polity can be addressed. A people's freedom from (the threat of) domination is defined, in part, through this choice.

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