

ISSN: 2514-0612

Journal homepage: <http://briefencounters-journal.co.uk/BE>

---

Theodoros Chiotis's Atemporal Crossroads: A Review of *limit.less\_an assembly of the sick*

Author(s): Dylan Williams

Email: [dylanjameswilliams1993@gmail.com](mailto:dylanjameswilliams1993@gmail.com)

Source: *Brief Encounters*, Vol. 3 No. 1 (March 2019), pp. 86-91.

URL: <http://briefencounters-journal.co.uk/BE/article/view/143>

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.24134/be.v3i1.143>

---

© Dylan Williams

License (open-access): This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License 4.0, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. No warranty, express or implied, is given. Nor is any representation made that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The publisher shall not be liable for any actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

*Brief Encounters* is an open access journal that supports the dissemination of knowledge to a global readership. All articles are free to read and accessible to all with no registration required. For more information please visit our journal homepage: <http://briefencounters-journal.co.uk/BE>.

In association with



a non-tunnelled man of uncertain affiliation,  
 repeating and stuttering his way initially into  
 your field of vision  
 and gradually out of your

consideration.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the exhilaration and ‘sheer privilege’ of ‘revolutionary chanting’, enthusiasm for this activity quickly sours within this recollection; naivety slips away and the harmonising chant decays into ‘stuttering’ — an altogether more isolated and unassertive form of vocalisation. Indeed, the decision to write in English, which is not the poet’s native language, adds to this sense of alienation from clarity of expression. Intriguingly, this sense of despair creates a temporally sundered body. The bodies featured in the poem no longer anticipate a utopian future and no longer perform the revolutionary role of the activist, and consequently inhabit a ‘now’ that seems detached from any extant historical narrative. The poem declares:

all the time that was  
 previously available to us  
 has been sold off  
 and will be reclaimed  
 at a later date  
 (with additional cost  
 of course).

[...]

Still,  
 these many years  
 later in this Assembly,  
 we continue to be less.<sup>4</sup>

The eventual state suppression of the Syntagma occupation has led to the fragmentation of the subject of the revolutionary, and with it, its promised utopia. Its future has been bought up and suspended indefinitely. The body — the husk-remainder of this fallen subject — finds itself in a ‘now’ that is characterised by negation:

Questions and problems are being  
 made to scatter  
 when the Assembly

---

<sup>3</sup> Chiotis, p. 12.

<sup>4</sup> Chiotis, p. 21.



I turn to you  
 because despair has replaced  
 the whorls of my fingers  
 with the patois of cicadas.<sup>7</sup>

The somewhat shamanic repetition here resembles incantation. While enigmatic and hard to break down, there is a sense of the body being opened-up and dematerialized — of being set free. Chiotis substitutes fingerprints, a clear symbol of subjective identity, with the ‘patois of cicadas’, and consequently proffers the termination of the subject and its dissipation into the non-subjectivity of the outside. This contrasts the imperative to find a new terminology for subjectivity, and demonstrates that, for Chiotis, the deregulated fragments of the activist-subject are yet to coalesce into a new structure of identity. They merely rest, vulnerably, in a loose assembly. Here, something recalls Adrienne Rich’s short poem ‘Benjamin Revisited’, which sits as an interesting intertext for Chiotis’s text:

The angel  
 of history is  
 flown  
  
 now meet the janitor  
 down  
 in the basement, who  
 shirtless, smoking  
  
 has the job of stoking  
 the so-called past  
 into the so-called present.<sup>8</sup>

Where Benjamin’s ‘Theses on the Philosophy of History’ is a catastrophe that is given structure retrospectively, in Rich’s image, history is generated amidst the turbulence of fragments of ash.<sup>9</sup> The past must be stoked for the future to emerge. The fragments it leaves behind — the politics, affects, traumas and broken bodies — must be mixed and reconstituted into new alignments if history is to continue forwards. Chiotis locates his text in this point in time. The future(s) sought by Chiotis’s largely-leftist audience (in its original context as a performance piece at a political conference), have been largely

---

<sup>7</sup> Chiotis, pp. 19-20.

<sup>8</sup> Adrienne Rich, ‘Benjamin Revisited’, in *Tonight No Poetry Will Serve: Poems 2007-2010* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2011), p. 17.

<sup>9</sup> Walter Benjamin, ‘Theses on the Philosophy of History’, in *Illuminations*, trans. by Harry Zohn (London: Fontana, 1973), pp. 245-255.

rebuffed. A new futurity has yet to constitute itself. The fragments of the old model oscillate wildly between their two potentials — to gather and reform as a new revolutionary subjectivity, to ‘go again’, as it were, and, (on the other hand), to succumb and dissipate entirely. To give up the revolutionary mission and yield, metaphorically, to the ‘heat death of the universe / nothingness forever’.<sup>10</sup> In Rich’s terms, we are left to wonder whether these fragments *can* be re-stoked, and if the revolutionary narrative can be pushed forwards despite defeat.

All of this begs the question of the critiquing function of Chiotis’s poetics. After all, it hardly constitutes the call to arms that one would usually expect from an activist addressing his comrades. In a way, *limit.less*, rather, operates on a strangely mimetic principle — by throwing light on the brokenness of the post-crisis activist subjectivity and the starkness of the wilderness into which Chiotis and his comrades have been thrown. In closing, the poem’s narrative voice declares:

Yet I remain blind. The Assembly still escapes me.  
If you want to know more  
of the Assembly,  
you need only wait  
for your turn.<sup>11</sup>

Even as his poem draws to a close, Chiotis eschews any final synthesis. He provides no forecast for the future fate and formation of this assembly of fragments, nor any ideal towards which this assembly can strive. *limit.less* almost callously seeks to depict the historical indeterminacy into which revolutionary change has arrived. For a poem written by a left-wing activist, this is a stark crossroads. However, the recognition of defeat and rupture, of failure, is perhaps a necessary and impending moment for the political left. Perhaps it can be a departure point, too.

---

<sup>10</sup> Chiotis, p. 25.

<sup>11</sup> Chiotis, p. 25.

## Bibliography

Benjamin, Walter, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', in *Illuminations*, trans. by Harry Zohn (London: Fontana, 1973), pp. 245-255

Chiotis, Theodoros, *limit.less\_an assembly of the sick* (Canterbury: Litmus, 2017)

Rich, Adrienne, 'Benjamin Revisited', in *Tonight No Poetry Will Serve: Poems 2007-2010* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2011), p. 17.

Copyright © Dylan Williams 2019