



4-2013

Exploring Security: Discussions with Jane Guyer, Stuart Elden, Russ Castronovo, and Michael Hardt

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.13023/disclosure.22.11>

Follow this and additional works at: <https://uknowledge.uky.edu/disclosure>



Part of the [Arts and Humanities Commons](#)

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 4.0 License](#).



Recommended Citation

(2013) "Exploring Security: Discussions with Jane Guyer, Stuart Elden, Russ Castronovo, and Michael Hardt," *disClosure: A Journal of Social Theory*. Vol. 22 , Article 11.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.13023/disclosure.22.11>

Available at: <https://uknowledge.uky.edu/disclosure/vol22/iss1/11>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Social Theory at UKnowledge. It has been accepted for inclusion in *disClosure: A Journal of Social Theory* by an authorized editor of UKnowledge. For more information, please contact UKnowledge@lsv.uky.edu.

Exploring Security: Discussions with Jane Guyer, Stuart Elden, Russ Castronovo, and Michael Hardt

Jane Guyer

Jane Guyer is the George Armstrong Kelly Professor and Department Chair of Anthropology at Johns Hopkins University. Her research is devoted to economic transformations in West Africa, particularly the productive economy, the division of labor and the management of money. Theoretically she focuses on the interface between formal and informal economies, and particularly the instabilities that interface gives rise.

Interviewers: Mary Beth Schmid and Tom Loder

DC: Since this is a security journal, we should look more at that. You said that you started within the past decade to look more at American questions, I think, about economic behavior. Maybe you could speak about how an American view of livelihood security and insecurity contrasts with a Nigerian or African view and what parallels or what we could learn from one another.

JG: I think that there certainly will be. One of the reasons that I started to even think about our situation, coming from Africa and having thought about the instabilities of Africa especially during the period under structural adjustment, and having collected a huge amount of newspaper articles that were commentaries on the economy in Nigeria and structural adjustment and military rule when life was very unstable. Then you have a great deal of attention to people trying to find landmarks, points of reference: Where are we in all of this as currency devalues and the price of this goes up and the availability of something disappears and so on. It was having been attentive to *that* that made me attentive to the change of rhetoric in our own public life that started in the last ten years. I started to read the newspaper with the eye of the anthropologist. What are people supposed to understand by that? Those kinds of questions. It is less that I thought that there was something specific about Africa that I thought we could learn from, which we can't always, but rather the sensibility of having tried to understand the kinds of instabilities with which ordinary people in Africa lived in that period that made me very aware suddenly of our own concepts being not so self-evident, not so transparent, not so graspable. Even not so coherent, not internally coherent with each other: How is that supposed to add up with this one? How are they supposed to exist within the same frame of reference? This is how I did this paper on the near future that came straight out of my African notion that people are living day to day, week to week, month to month, year to year. But if all of our writing is about the distant future, the markets reaching equilibrium or clearing or the markets solving everything, what is supposed to go into that space? And this had come up in the Nigerian newspaper analyses. It was really that attentiveness to instability, in coherence that I began to think that there was at least a sensibility that needed to be applied to our own situation in the last ten years as this financial world has driven us in certain particular directions. And certainly, the livelihood question: How do you get from A to B? One day to the next? In some parts of our own economy there are people that I know at the bottom of the scale where getting your children to school on time when you have to get to work and you don't have a car is difficult. You have to get a taxi and the taxi has to drop off several other people so that he can make money on the trip; he isn't taking individual people. Everybody is trying to put that into a

budget that doesn't include enough money to pay for the cab. You have an impasse situation. I wrote a little paper on this. Where you just can't get to it. You get your children to school late, they get some kind of a black mark, you get a black mark as a bad mother, you end up somewhere in the welfare system as not being responsible and so on and so forth. Those kinds of incoherencies in life we can't fit together. I think that we are seeing that in this country.

DC: How do you see economic security relating to food security? It seems to me that there has been a somewhat incoherent situation since 2008. Was it an economic crisis and /or a food crisis? Additionally, how do you understand the implications of fuel as tied into this context and these social questions?

JG: Bringing together the so-called essentials of life, food, shelter, medical care and transport is part of that. You can't get medical care without getting in some kind of bus or on a motorcycle and going somewhere. So, the consonance of those prices and people's livability is really very important. In Nigeria, I work in an area where people still produce a lot of their own food. They are commercial farmers, but they also produce for themselves and their own families. The food crisis doesn't hit them as hunger in that particular area. We have to think about in particular configurations of these crises: Where does the pressure come on the food system? Is it in the regularity of access? Do people go without? In the cities in Nigeria, they had this saying that you only eat twice a day or twice one day and once the next. They had a rhythmic kind of little saying about that. There is the regularity of eating. There is the sharing of eating: Who gets to eat first if there is not enough to eat? Who gets to eat most? How is that conceptualized, justified, made acceptable as a micro-ethical resolution? Is it the people who are working hard who need the most food? Is it the children who are growing? I think that the food security issue raises its profile differently in different contexts. The price issue and the availability issue raise itself in this country with respect to people eating very cheap, prepared food. If you don't have a kitchen or you have a kitchen with two burners or you don't have pots and pans or whatever it is, then you are in that market no matter what. Saving all the coupons and doing all the cut-rate things that all applies to a very particular band of food.

Stuart Elden

Professor Elden teaches in the Department of Geography, Durham University, UK. His research is at the intersection of politics, philosophy and geography. In 2011 he was given the Royal Geographical Society Murchison Award for his contribution to political geography.

Interviewers: Malene Herschend Jacobsen and Lee Bullock

DC: Regarding the War on Terror, the question has been asked – how do we wage war on a feeling...terror? There's a rhetorical dimension in that formation. And you point to this in *Terror and Territory* as well, in how the concepts terrorist, enemy combatant, legitimate and illegitimate states, and so on, have been encoded in legal and policy declarations. Does this rhetoric translate geographically, even if in just a broader kind of cultural imagination?

SE: I think that a number of people have said how do you declare war on—you called it a feeling, or an affect is another way that people have thought about these ideas and things. In a sense, I was less interested in that as a critique of what was happening, because there have been declarations of war in that sort of sense about other things that are sort of fairly intangible as say, the War on Poverty or the War on Drugs. It's not a war in an obvious opponent, but it's a war on something that structures or changes the way that relations in a society are working.

I try to work through what terror might mean, how terror gets labeled. And so you find things like the U.S. State Department list of terrorist organizations. Almost all of those are self-determination movements. Now, are they legitimate or illegitimate self-determination is almost a separate question. These groups are all ones that are seeking control of territory that is currently controlled by a recognized state. Now, that may groups like the Basque separatists in northern Spain, or it may be movements in China, or it may be in Chechnya in Russia or so on. But they're all seeking control of a political space, an area of territory that they're trying to take away. So what's the relation between the terror and the territory?

And there's an etymological relation between those terms, but I think much more interestingly, there's always a relation between those kinds of questions. So, I try to make the argument that not only is the challenge to territorial situations something that is increasingly seen as terrorism, but that territory in itself is shot through with those kinds of relations of power, that the idea of drawing a line is already a kind of a violent inclusion/exclusion, policing it, controlling it, maintaining it, preventing it from being challenged. These are all using various mechanisms of power, which could easily be understood as terror.

So it was to try to think through those relations, not simply in the etymological sense that terror and territory share a similar root, as people sometimes suggest, but to work that through in a more practical register. And so in a sense, I was more interested in that way of thinking rather than simply saying, the War on Terror, what does it mean? It's so vague as to include everything. So it was trying to work those through in a more practical register, I suppose.

DC: We've talked about how territory is often imagined as a bounded space and the state is imagined through its boundaries and through its borders. You've argued instead that we shouldn't think of it as flat, but think of it as more three-dimensional. What work has been instructive in this regard?

SE: In terms of the three-dimension, it would be the people I was mentioning before, particularly Peter Sloterdijk's work that was useful in thinking that kind of question. On territory itself, it's a concept where there is actually relatively little that takes it as a difficult concept. There's loads of literature on particular territorial disputes, particular territorial arrangements, the history of the territory of a particular country, why the borders of this state here, why the states of the U.S. are the shape that they are. There's that kind of work. There's a lot of work on that, but on taking territory as a concept, and saying that's a problematic concept, there's actually relatively little work.

And so it was taking people who had done work on related spatial categories, such as Edward Casey's work on place, or some of the work on landscape like that of Denis Cosgrove, or the work that's on space—Henri Lefebvre's book, *The Production of Space*, for example. Could you do something in a similar vein to that kind of work, with the concept of territory? And that you maybe take some of the ideas, and the ways that they've approached those questions, to think through the question of territory.

So people like Lefebvre are important. Foucault too, though a lot of what Foucault says about territory is, I think, misleading. But the kind of approach that Foucault has to the historic investigation of conceptions was very helpful for me in this work. And then a more traditional history of political thought approach, people like Quentin Skinner, which is doing much more work around concepts like the state and sovereignty and political thought more generally. But the kind of approach they were taking, I found really useful for thinking through territory.

Russ Castronovo

Dr. Castronovo teaches and researches American literature at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. His current project, *Propaganda 1776*, examines how the formation of popular consent and public opinion in early America relied on the robust dissemination of rumor, forgery, and invective.

Interviewers: Lee Bullock and Christina Williams

DC: Our theme for this issue is security. Let's talk about this for a moment.

RC: I think the conversation we've been having is all about security. Can I send you an email and know that it's going to be secure, or – imagine this table as the landscape – is my communication to you going to spread across the flatness of this table with nothing to check its flow? It's all about controlling and keeping information running in prescribed channels and what happens when the banks of a river swell and information suddenly leaps its banks and spreads across the flat geographical expanse that is what we can think of as the terrain the political. Everything we've been saying is about how to keep information secure. How to keep messages docile so that they don't reproduce themselves.

DC: So then, it becomes a question of whose information and about what.

RC: Yes, but again, one of the things I do want to resist is that the "whose" information implies proprietorship. And if we start asking about "what," we miss the political aspect of communication. The political is not so much about the content; it's about the fact that the message circulates itself and that's what becomes political. The content sure can be embarrassing to a regime. Wikileaks can make Hillary Clinton look bad; it can make Tony Blair look like he's petulant. All these things that happened are important, but I think what is also important and what we don't recognize enough is the fact that those things circulate is in itself political – apart from the message itself. And that's what's insecure. Once we begin to focus on the message, then we begin to do that depth thing. What's potentially more troubling is the fact that there's a type of flow and dispersal and evenness that can beset

communication, then communications themselves become insecure. Not so much the fact that you can hack my emails, as has happened to Sarah Palin's emails. People wanted to find a kind of smoking gun or conspiracy. Her emails turned out to more or less banal; instead what's more important is that private emails of a government official can circulate apart from what they say. The fact of circulation is the meaning. You know one of the things I sometimes like to say is that it's not the medium – the network is the message.

DC: I'm trying to contextualize this in terms of what Brian Massumi calls the future birth of the affective fact...or the idea that some event is always on the horizon such that is always already happening. What happens to the circulation of information within that kind of a mindset. How does that information circulate in a structure of fear or a state of perpetual anxiety?

RC: Propaganda, as we know, historically has always made the most of that—that fear and anxiety. This is one of the danger points. For instance, Joseph Goebbels in his diaries from 1932-33 writes about the campaign to overtake the German state, and he is everywhere impressed with speed. Printing pamphlets one after another, radio addresses delivered and broadcast quickly—it's always about speed. And so the problem becomes that these media don't necessarily allow time for reflection. They appeal to that type of future oriented fear and don't allow for moments of deliberation (which, you will remember, I maligned that type of deliberative process). One of the things about propaganda that interests me in the colonial era as well is that it ebbs and flows—how people and organizations such as the Boston Committee of Correspondents or the Sons of Liberty are controlling the rate at which information moves. So that sometimes they want to slow communication down to allow a message to resonate and sometimes they want to speed it up because American dissidents in the eighteenth century want to stoke popular passions. Here's where fear enters the picture: Paine was exploiting the fear that the future of America fears looks like the past of India. And not just Paine—other unnamed propagandists or people like Benjamin Rush or John Dickinson who are all writing at this time under names like Rusticus and Americanus Junius or under pseudonyms alluding to the English Civil War like Hampden share this concern of a temporal conjunction between America and British India. . These propagandists are always spelling the future threat of the East India Company, and what they worry is that the East India Company is going in the future to reduce America to a state of vassalage similar to what has beset British India. So I guess what I would say – to just put it in a nutshell – is that fear of the future is so crucial, in the ways you have identified, and it depends upon retrospective examinations of the past and particular uses of that past, which is why literary historians and other “antiquarians” have such a critical and important role to play in public discourse of humanities.

Michael Hardt

Dr. Hardt is Professor of Literature and Italian Studies at Duke University and Professor of Political Literature at the European Graduate School. He studies globalization, political and cultural theory, and modern Italian literature. His co-publications with Antonio Negri include *Empire*, *Multitude*, and *Commonwealth*.

Interviewers: Jason Grant and Vanessa Marquez

VM: Alright. Okay, so, um, I guess, we've been reading parts of *Commonwealth* and *The Multitude* in this Security seminar. So, how does security fit into this idea you've been elaborating with the multitude?

MH: Mhm. Let me think of the right way to go. Okay, in some ways security has been used as a general framework for understanding contemporary issues of control. That security has been the legitimation of a generalized submission to forms of surveillance and domination. What do I mean by that? I mean something I think quite obvious. That the reasons we accept the contemporary security regime involving not only surveillance and information gathering in specialized institutional locations, but also in a much broader social field. What I mean by that is that if you start with a notion that, say similar to Foucault's thinking in *Discipline and Punish*, in which surveillance and the corresponding production of subjectivity is related to specific institutional sites, so that in the prison, there's one form of discipline and subjectivity, and one kind of very intense surveillance. In the hospital, there's another one; in the barracks, there's a third; in the school, there's another. All of these, both the forms of surveillance and the mechanisms of discipline, and the production of subjectivities are tied to its institutional space. One way of characterizing the contemporary security regime is a generalization of those logics, so that they're no longer confined to specific spaces. I think the examples of that are very easy and common. I mean, in the sense that one instead, of a panoptic architecture only of the prison, we have security cameras, more or less, in every classroom. I don't see one right here but certainly in all kinds of stores, in many countries. I think in Britain more than in the U.S. almost every street in urban areas has a security camera, so that there's a generalized surveillance. It's true, also about, I mean you can think of a number of other ways in which we are, even outside specific instances, outside of the airport check-ins, or when you apply for a job, or something but even just every time you use your credit card, or every time you visit a webpage your data is being recorded and being surveilled. I would put those things together and think of those as the way, or at least one way, that a concept of security, or security regime is becoming generalized.

So, okay, all that was just preface. You said, what does that have to do with the multitude, or what does that have to do, like, ... you know many times I too get tired of using concepts we've developed even if I think they're good. But anyway, rather than the multitude, let's just say, what does that have to do with any project of not only liberation but political action. I think that it's a clear objective that one would have to not refuse interactions with technologies but rather, find mechanisms that we can take control of in our interaction with them.

Okay, that's one task, but maybe before that, I think even before we can propose mechanisms for autonomy with regard to those elements of the security regime, by which I mean surveillance, information gathering, the materials of control. Before we can even think about an autonomy of them, I think we have to find ways in a much more basic way that we can combat fear. I guess this is a very abstract proposition but, I guess, I'm working from the assumption that we accept all of these mechanisms of the security regime because of fear. You can say in part, but maybe this is the minor aspect fear of the ruling powers, like, why do I submit to that at the airport? Or, when a cop stops me, why do you submit to that? You submit to that because you're afraid of the police, you're afraid of being put in prison, you're afraid of the ruling powers. But, I think the more active fear, the more essential one here, is a

fear of abstract, unknown threats that you assume those ruling powers are protecting you from. All of this seemed so much more pressing during the Bush presidency but, it hasn't, in fact, declined very much since the end of the Bush presidency. The constant, I'm referring there to a constant public elaboration of threats, of terrorist threats, of unknown threats. It's hard not to think of that Rumsfeld line, "there are known unknowns and unknown unknowns." I mean, it was his way of imposing the necessity of a security regime because once the fear is located in unknown unknowns then it's so easily generalizable. Yeah, so I think that one, even before the question—this is where I was going a minute ago—which was that, even before addressing the question of how we can actually take control of these social mechanisms of information, one has to find a way first to combat that fear. It's not immediately clear how to do that.