Complicity in Atrocity from the Kitchen Sink: Blood in the Tap Water, Human Rights and Naked Being in a Techno-symbiotic-Man's-world?

From the kitchen sink, my work investigates complicity in atrocity manifest in the information technology hardware supply chains that underpin developmental infrastructure. Projecting into the future, it contemplates empathetic human being – naked as a newborn – asking: "What can be done to stop violations of human rights being perpetrated against others to bring home my clean water?"

Twenty-first century infrastructure relies on IT hardware: without it our drinking taps would run dry. Complex electronics are ubiquitous and intrinsic to contemporary daily life. Components have a multifarious, often nefarious, international provenance. Yet, dependency precludes boycotting them to avoid moral discomfiture concerning the life-destroying conditions under which they are produced overseas. My research concentrates on abuses of human rights arising from electronic equipment production – rooting back along the supply chain to mineral extraction globally. It investigates recent attempts at governance and the complicity of development’s beneficiaries in relation to atrocities in armed conflict; trafficking and displacement of people; slavery, forced labour, inhuman working conditions, and ecocide.

As things stand in a techno-symbiotic, masculine-supremacist world, somebody in this country remains powerless to prevent harm being done to workers labouring for their benefit in other jurisdictions. Whilst purporting to promote liberty, neo-liberal societies deprive individuals of any real option of ethical self-determination. My enquiry faces the apparent impossibility of effective resistance against collusion in these egregious, distant harms in the context of imported, or satellite, IT hardware. It involves itself with the idea of a 'life-worth-living': taking seriously the question whether a justiciable right for everyday beneficiaries not to be party to abominations against people toiling in other territories might be safeguarded alongside technological expansion. In tandem with Bruce Robbins' trope of 'The Sweatshop Sublime', my thesis embraces Alessandra Tanesini's feminist interpretation of Ludwig Wittgenstein's writings – suggesting the notions of ‘attunement’ and ‘acknowledgement’ in language and in human life – touching on the possible dissolution of exclusionary boundaries of ‘us’ and ‘them'. Perhaps, in tomorrow's world, fresh conceptions of social responsiveness and politico-legal responsibility might be born?

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