

Whatever happened to analytical Marxism?

G.A. Cohen, *If You're an Egalitarian, How Come You're So Rich?*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA and London, 2000. xii + 233 pp., £30.95 hb., 0 674 00152 2.

This is a strange and disappointing book. The jokey and populist title is misleading. In fact the book contains the Gifford Lectures which Cohen gave in 1996, but these lack the substance and coherence one expects from such lectures. Indeed, these lectures are a disparate miscellany, some autobiographical some philosophical, which do not hang together as a whole. They need to be read 'symptomatically' as the Althusserians used to say, for what they omit as much as for what they contain.

There is one particularly glaring omission. Whatever happened to analytical Marxism? Not so long ago, Cohen was the leading figure of a movement with that name which promised to bring the self-proclaimed standards of clarity and rigour of analytical philosophy to Marxism. Following the publication of his *Karl Marx's Theory of History* (1978) – the most important work to emerge from this movement – a group of like-minded thinkers rapidly formed. Apart from Cohen, prominent members included Jon Elster, John Roemer and Erik Olin Wright. They were known as the 'September group' because they met annually in that month, alternatively as the 'non-bullshit Marxism group'. All talk of 'dialectic', together with the other mystical trappings of Hegelian metaphysics, was to be banished. Marxism was going to be 'rationally reconstructed'.

Soon a stream of books, articles and even a small secondary literature started to appear. But just as quickly as it grew that stream seems to have dried up. If this book is anything to go by, even the memory of it has now been suppressed. Like one of those photographs of old Bolsheviks from which a purged figure has been airbrushed out, this book has a great gap at the centre where some account of analytical Marxism ought to be, and, disposed awkwardly around it, are the components which went towards its formation. Even that, however, is enough to make clear what an impossible project analytical Marxism set for itself.

The book comprises two quite disparate and irreconcilable parts. The first begins with an autobiographical account of Cohen's communist and secular Jewish upbringing in Montreal and goes on to give an account of the 'traditional' Marxist philosophy

that Cohen absorbed in the process. The second part switches to the analytical philosophy which Cohen imbibed when he went to college, first to McGill in Montreal then to Oxford. But autobiography is left behind here; the second part is devoted to a purely philosophical discussion of Rawls's theory of justice. There is a tenuous attempt to link these two parts under the heading of equality. Marxism, claims Cohen, foresees the advent of an equal society as the inevitable outcome of the march of history; Rawls sees it as a political task; whereas Cohen himself maintains that it will come about only if individuals are committed to equality in their personal lives and create an egalitarian moral 'ethos'. However, attention to this theme is uneven. The first part barely focuses on it at all. Rather, it contains an excellent account of 'traditional' Marxism stressing the Hegelian, dialectical theory of history which underlies it – precisely the aspect of Marxism rejected by analytical Marxism.

Cohen starts from the way in which Marxism, in Engels's phrase, regards itself as a 'scientific' as opposed to a 'utopian' form of socialism. He shows how this distinction is based on a Hegelian dialectical theory of history. For Marxism is first and foremost a historical and economic theory which aims to understand the workings of the present, capitalist world, rather than to lay down how things ought to be in some ideal future. According to this theory, capitalism is only a particular and limited stage of historical development. The full working out of the conflicts within it will lead ultimately to its downfall and give rise to a new historical stage: socialism. Socialism is thus born out of the processes of capitalism. Socialist political activity should not be regarded as a form of social engineering which tries to impose goals on society from the outside; it functions rather like a midwife helping with the birth of the new social order.

Cohen calls this the 'obstetric motif' in Marxism – an ugly phrase for what in Marx is a powerful and poetic metaphor. Cohen's use of language is so awkward that it is not clear whether this ugliness is deliberate. In any case, as Cohen well shows, this motif is rooted deeply in Hegel's philosophy. It is an

integral part of Hegel's dialectical method (though Cohen is shy of that term), where it is applied to logical processes of thought as well as to social and historical developments. It also runs right through Marx's work. It is present even in the canonical 'Preface' to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* of 1859, which Cohen claims to be explicating in *Karl Marx's Theory of History*, where Marx asserts: 'no social order ever perishes before all the productive forces for which there is room in it have developed; and new, higher relations of production never appear before the material conditions of their existence have matured in the womb of the old society itself'.

In these chapters Cohen gives an excellent brief summary of these themes in classical Marxism and of their Hegelian origins, making central to Marxism precisely what its analytical offshoot tried to remove. If this is Marxism, then what hope is there for an analytically 'reconstructed' version? This would not be so much a non-bullshit Marxism as a non-Marxist Marxism, a self-defeating project if ever there was one. Small wonder that it has not prospered.

One cannot help but feel that Cohen could have written a very good account of the dialectical themes in Hegel and Marx had he so wished, but this is not his purpose here. These themes are described, it seems, only to be rejected. It would be misleading to say that they are criticized; they are simply discarded with only the briefest of dismissive asides.

Thus the Hegelian view that a new social order appears only when the conditions for its emergence are ripe is described as 'wonderfully convenient' and 'incredibly optimistic'. These are superficial and inadequate criticisms. The Hegelian doctrine may perhaps better be regarded as a tautology: the emergence of a new order *ipso facto* demonstrates that the conditions for it were present. Nor is that necessarily an objection to it. On the contrary, this doctrine can be seen as laying out the conceptual framework for the Hegelian historical approach rather than specifying a substantial theory of historical progress. Or perhaps it should be acknowledged that the Hegelian approach is often ambiguous between these two versions. In any case, if the Hegelian approach is to be taken seriously – and Cohen presumably believes that it should be, since he devotes half a book to it – then it requires a good deal more discussion than it receives here.

Similar remarks apply to the other ways in which Cohen dismisses the historical approach of Marxism. It is politically damaging, he says, because it leads socialists to think that they can avoid 'hard political

choices'. This is an old accusation, but none the more valid for that. A considerable discussion of it already exists, to which Cohen's asides add nothing. For example, Sartre's 1948 play *Les mains sales* (recently revived in London) is all about this issue. Cohen also charges traditional Marxism with 'criminal inattention' to 'the problems of socialist design', as though it believed that socialism would spring forth fully formed at the appointed hour. Again this is a familiar but questionable charge, reiterated in the briefest and laziest of terms here. There were many things wrong with actually existing socialism but absence of planning was not one of them.

In short, the Hegelian historical approach needs to be discussed and assessed, but Cohen does not do that. On the other hand, he does provide a well-argued critique of the classical Marxist view that the proletariat will emerge as the agent of revolutionary historical change to overthrow capitalism and build socialism. This is one of the best chapters in the book, even if it is reprinted from another source. However, it does not fully address the issues raised by the dialectical theory of history, since the idea of the revolutionary proletariat is only one aspect of this, even if a fundamental one in Marxism. For the rest, however, the theory is simply discarded with barely a comment.

At this point the lecture audience was treated (or should that be 'subjected'?) to a session of community singing. The reader is let off with a brief explanatory paragraph and can move on to the next chapter. This marks a radical break. The second part of the book is completely different in theme, style and content. According to Rawls, Cohen explains, a just society is governed by two main principles of justice. One of these is the 'difference principle', according to which an unequal distribution of goods is just only if it is necessary to benefit the least well off members of the society. Rawls uses this principle to justify unequal incentives. The argument is familiar. The 'most talented' members of society will produce more only if they are given incentives and the extra production can be used to benefit the worst off.

Rawls's theory involves a sharp distinction between the public and private spheres. For he maintains that principles of justice should be applied only to the 'basic structure' of society – that is, its legal structure. Issues of justice do not concern how people behave in their private lives. Cohen questions this. Even on Rawls's own views, he argues, the principles of justice should apply not only to legislative matters but also in private life. A just society requires not only just

rules but also what Cohen calls an 'ethos' of justice that governs individual behaviour.

This point is well enough made, though in rather a laboured fashion. Material which forms the basis for a single already published article is stretched out over a couple of chapters. And the scope of Cohen's argument is exceedingly limited. He makes no attempt to develop or explore the notion of a moral 'ethos', nor to consider what social conditions would contribute to its growth or inhibit its development. Marx, of course, had much to say about this. He did not regard the absence of an egalitarian ethos as unconnected with the domination of egoistic interests in the law and the economy. But Cohen makes no attempt to think through what Marxism has to contribute on this issue.

The fact that Cohen made his name as a Marxist, albeit of the 'analytical' variety, has vanished from view.

Indeed, Marxism *tout court* has now disappeared from Cohen's philosophical repertoire, if this book is any guide, for it figures here only as a part of Cohen's past, included it seems as an act of filial piety. It would be a pity if this indeed proves to be the trajectory of Cohen's thought. No matter how problematic it was, the project of 'rationally reconstructing' Marxism undoubtedly made a distinctive and original contribution to contemporary philosophy. On the evidence of this book, there a long way to go before the footnotes to Rawls which Cohen is currently writing will result in work of similar importance.

Sean Sayers

Bridges over troubled Walter

Lutz Koepnick, *Walter Benjamin and the Aesthetics of Power*, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln and London, 1999. 312 pp., £34.00 hb., 0 8032 2744 2.

Esther Leslie, *Walter Benjamin: Overpowering Conformism*, Pluto Press, London and Sterling VA, 2000. xiv + 298 pp., £14.99 pb., 0 7453 1568 2.

Now that we have Benjamin, what do we do with him? Do we add him to the roster of intellectual history? Use him as a resource for theoretical plundering? Discover in him the partial prefiguration of contemporary concerns? Or does his life stand as a model of the intellectual? All of these Benjamins have been done and continue to be done. But rarely has Benjamin been approached in a manner which draws upon his work; to engage with a moment of the past as an illumination and critique of the present. Refreshingly, both these books set out to place Benjamin in a critical relationship to the present, although in different ways and with different degrees of success.

Lutz Koepnick's *Walter Benjamin and the Aesthetics of Power*, at first sight, sets a reading of Benjamin against areas of contemporary theory. The central aim is to develop a critical model of fascism – particularly Nazism – with which to counter the vision of fascism as part of modernity, even as the apotheosis of its metaphysics, suggested by critics such as Lacoue-Labarthe, on the one hand, and in a different manner by the historicists of the *Historikerstreit*, on the other. In order to identify the 'synchronic and diachronic uniqueness of fascist terror and fascist modernism' so as to resist its normalization, Koepnick turns to Benjamin. The three main sections of

the book address what Koepnick sees as the three stages of Benjamin's development of the 'aestheticization thesis', based upon readings of *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' and the *Arcades Project*, respectively. Overall, he asks Benjamin to provide him with a means of distinguishing fascism from modernity per se, arguing that in Benjamin's view 'fascism constitutes a historically specific and singular regime of political representation and experience'. Benjamin is cast as arguing that fascism 'mobilizes technological and economic rationalization against the normative substance of political modernity, against post-Enlightenment values of political justice, equality, freedom and democracy'. The obvious question arises of how far this normative substance was any such thing in twentieth-century Germany before World War II, but, as this passage suggests, it is Koepnick's aim to enlist Benjamin's aestheticization thesis for a liberal democratic critique of fascism and, just possibly, of the present. The trouble is that Koepnick is, by and large, too faithful to Benjamin for this enlistment to be easy; it ends up as rather more of a press-ganging, with the struggle still visible.

A clear example can be found in Chapters 5–7. These link Benjamin's account of phantasmagoria in



the *Arcades Project* with an account of the fascist aestheticization of politics derived from the Mechanical Reproduction essay. This is done in order to argue that, alongside the political spectacle, Nazism enlisted everyday consumption and private pleasure-seeking; the alienating fragmentation of commodity fetishism aiding the homogenization of the political. Here the political dimension itself becomes a market item. Using this conception, a well-argued critique of a vulgarized version of aestheticized politics which takes fascism as style is mounted, with the Hayward Gallery 'Art and Power' exhibition of 1996 as an example. But Koepnick cannot accept what he recognizes as the implications of this version of the aestheticization thesis: 'What, one might ask from today's perspective, is so singular about this nexus of politics, commodity production, and mass consumption in fascism?' A good question, but one that for Koepnick has already been answered. Following Detlev Peuckert, he argues that 'this barbarism [fascism] was not one normal outcome of modernization per se, but rather the unique result from a strategic prioritization of technological, social and economic over political, legal and moral modernity.' Here two incompatible accounts of modernity are yoked together; Benjamin's analyses of experience in modernity are asked to work alongside and support

a somewhat Habermasian account of fascism as a very particular premature conclusion of an unfinished project of modernity. Koepnick needs to unify the two, but does not succeed in this book, instead tending to fall back on an equation of Benjamin's revolutionary demands with individual autonomy, self-determination and rational exchange. Quite how this sits with Adorno's judgement that 'In all his phases, Benjamin conceived the downfall of the subject and the salvation of man as inseparable' is unclear.

Benjamin's 'solutions' to the aestheticization of politics and the commodity realm of modernity are given short shrift by Koepnick. On some occasions, Benjamin's arguments are rather dismissively excused, on the grounds that they were a response to a particular moment. At other times, Benjamin's position is represented as being disconnected from political action and leading to an apocalyptic passivism. This latter is advanced via a reading of the ninth of the 'Theses on the Philosophy of History'. But such a reading is sustainable only if the thesis is taken out of its dialectical relations to the others. Given those relations, it is clear that the Angel of History is not an allegory of the historian. For Koepnick, Benjamin's attempt to forge a critical power of the image out of modern experience in order to combat fascism's manipulation

of images and modes of looking fails, as Koepnick finds 'that none of his dialectical thought-images and critical interventions could ever suffice to obliterate this hellish universe'. This image of a failed, utopian Benjamin is all too common, as Esther Leslie points out, in those who wish to discard Benjamin's Marxism. Such seems to be the case here. Certainly Marx is not Koepnick's strong point, as, in one of his very few mentions, Koepnick appears to argue that, for Marx, the phantasmagorias of commodity fetishism 'merely denote ... the results of collective blindness'. This is in stark contrast to Leslie's clear perception that Marx's commodity fetishism and Benjamin's phantasmagoria both have the 'origin of their convincing illusioning ... not in subjective errors of perception ... but in the phenomenal form of reality presented' – which is to say, in experience.

An indication of the contrast between Koepnick's and Leslie's books can be found in their handling of Benjamin's essay 'Theories of German Fascism'. Given Koepnick's acknowledgement that sustained analyses of fascism are not frequent in Benjamin's work, one might think that the essay would merit more attention than the brief mentions it receives. In these, the issue of technology and ownership is acknowledged but thoroughly subordinated to the aestheticization of war. Benjamin is even admonished for having failed to consider the spiritual missions that fascism assigned to non-war technologies, as if the autobahns weren't built by Workers' Battalions. Leslie, on the other hand, points firmly to Benjamin's insistence on the frustration of technological possibilities by the relations of production as making war necessary. Moreover, beneath the heroic semblance of those who espouse the aestheticization of war lie the features of the fascist class warrior. Leslie rightly connects this argument with those made in an earlier form in *One Way Street* about the ownership and direction of technology under the bourgeoisie. In failing to address this link, Koepnick's attempt to use Benjamin to hold fascism separate from a more general modernity falters badly.

Overall, Koepnick's book is frustrating because it combines interesting and well-made arguments with peculiar errors and omissions; thoughtful criticisms sit next to under-thought judgements. It seems at times as if the book is at war against itself, with its conclusions attempting to undo the direction of the arguments.

Leslie's *Walter Benjamin: Overpowering Conformism* is one of a series of introductions, rather strangely billed as being about the key thinkers of the postwar era. Although it certainly fulfils the requirements of an

introduction in terms of clarity and overview, the book offers far more than might be anticipated from something in this genre. Its focus is on technology, or rather on *Technik*, a term which signifies both technology and technique, thus involving both the means and relations of production. Benjamin's use of the term *Technik*, instead of *Technologie*, thus includes the organization, use and direction of technology. The dual and inter-related senses of *Technik* are explored in a series of readings in and across Benjamin's writings, forming what Leslie calls a 'coherent project'. Beginning with *One Way Street*, and moving chronologically onwards, Leslie produces accounts which possess subtlety and clarity. The chronology does not mean that work prior to 1923 is left unaddressed. Indeed, the range of Benjamin material utilized, which includes letters, notes, multiple published and unpublished versions of texts, produces a strong sense of the interrelations and shifts in Benjamin's criticism. For example, *Berliner Chronik*, not usually considered in the context of Benjamin's theories of *Technik*, is given a rich and nuanced reading, emphasizing a 'multi-storeyed view of history' in which Berlin is seen through a child's eyes, rather than simply as a child. The aim is to find a hope in the past for the adult critic, but a past in which the misdirection of technology is already manifest.

This book's Benjamin is a materialist one, although never simply so. Part of Leslie's concern is to trace a transition from a materialism to a historical materialism, and she does not follow the old demarcation lines of mysticism/Marxism in Benjamin's work. At times, though, resemblance can be stretched too far; for instance in the links drawn between the 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', the 'Theses on Feuerbach', and Lenin's 1917 theses; or in the 'affinity' of Benjamin and Trotsky. The problems of the Romantic Benjamin also do not appear in any detail. It was not just the surrealists who had difficulties in bringing together the energies of intoxication and the constructive, disciplined direction of revolution, but Benjamin's insistence on the action-generating moment in his later work is not really addressed. Although Leslie is certainly right that theology 'is the moment of outstripping the given', the transportation of theological categories into a historical materialism remained rather more fraught than she acknowledges. The extensive historical detail assembled in the book is woven together with Benjamin's texts in a manner which convincingly exhibits the historical moment in the very fabric of those texts. The shifting political situations and cultural politics in and against which Benjamin locates his tasks emerge as vital for an understanding of the works. In a prop-

erly Benjaminian fashion, each work is read like a 'little world', and the world can be found in the work. Rather than producing a 'Benjamin and his time' style of biography, Leslie finds history in Benjamin. She gives a highly critical account of the tradition and present of Benjamin Studies. This is a context where the insistence on Benjamin's coherent project and historical *Aktualität* is clearly of importance. It has been suggested that those who want cultural theory without philosophy should stop reading Benjamin; perhaps the same is true for those who want philosophy without social and political history. The import of the work goes much further than the Benjamin branch of academic industry, however. To recover a thoroughly historical Benjamin is to find that his work cannot be wholly subsumed into the conformisms of the present. Leslie's goal is to find hope in the past and an accusation of the present.

Giles Peaker

Keep thinking

Alexander García Düttmann, *Between Cultures: Tensions in the Struggle for Recognition*, trans. Kenneth B. Woodgate, Verso, London and New York, 2000. x + 245 pp., £40.00 hb., £13.00 pb., 1 85984 755 2 hb., 1 85984 273 9 pb.

Between Cultures performs a conceptual rescue mission. Its author sets out to recover a fundamentally *disruptive* concept of recognition from its habitual association with integration, accommodation and coordination, while avoiding recourse to a facile affirmation of the merely 'unrecognizable' or purely incommensurable as such. García Düttmann lays claim to a genuinely *creative* process of recognition. This is the great virtue of this densely written, smoothly translated and thoroughly challenging book: in a time of a generalized 'restoration' or reaction, it tackles what we might call the philosophy of resignation ('realistic' liberalism, bland multiculturalism, chastened pragmatism, consensual discourse ethics...) on its own chosen ground – the 'politics of recognition'. It achieves this while resisting, up to a point, the lures of an ultimately meta-philosophical intuition of pure difference or otherness, whether it be called desire, hybridity, the Real, the irreconcilable, the divine.

On García Düttmann's account, recognition [*Anerkennung*] is not simply the passive confirmation of an already constituted yet hitherto unacknowledged identity. Recognition cannot be reduced to re-cogniz-

ing [*Erkenntnis*], to recognition *as* (as Catalan, as queer, as a philosopher). Any demand for recognition implies that the demander is not fully self-identical. Recognition both 'establishes and confirms' the identity of those it acknowledges. It both constitutes and authenticates the recognized, in a dual process whose divergent aspects can never coincide. The notion of a 'complete' or successful recognition is a contradiction in terms: a self-sufficient being – one that fully coincides with itself, or with others' perception of it – is anything but a speaking being.

The process of recognizing is thus an acknowledgement of non-identity in Adorno's sense. Both subject and object of recognition, along with recognition itself, are always a 'not-one', split by a fundamental 'between'. This between is essentially *cultural*, as García Düttmann's title suggests, because it stems from our apparently 'other-than-natural' lack of self-identity (our distance from the passively in-itself); from the fundamentally relational nature of cultural identities (their derivation from forms of cross-cultural struggle); and from culturally valorized forms of insight and discernment (from the co-implication of 'culture' and privileged forms of 'cultivation'). In terms reminiscent of Homi Bhabha's analysis of the interstitial enunciation of cultural differences – a curious omission from *Between Cultures*' deliberately slight bibliography – García Düttmann argues that cultural identities are never self-sufficient or transparently 'recognizable', but always caught up in the reiterated negotiations of *recognizing*: 'culture is never simply itself', 'culture always means between cultures', and every 'in-between withdraws from attempts to objectify it'.

This resistance to objectification best defines the overarching purpose of this otherwise eclectic book, and aligns it with that complex current of broadly 'anti-identitarian' (anti-classifying, anti-normalizing, anti-coordinating) philosophical thought variously at work in Heidegger, Sartre, Adorno, Foucault and Derrida. The guiding imperative can be summed up in a few words: avoid solidification, avoid fixed identities, 'stay in the gap of an in-between, keep creating new connections and forging new contexts'. Or more simply: keep *thinking*! The urgency of the imperative derives from a difficulty well known to those who have tried, in the aftermath of deconstruction's methodological heyday, to theorize the status of ambiguously marginal 'subject positions' (a difficulty whose ramifications are demonstrated to great effect by García Düttmann's sustained consideration of the once militant slogan '*we're queer, we're here, so get fuckin' used to it*', in a chapter first translated in *RP* 81). More than

merely one 'sexual preference' among others, a queer position presents itself here as *essentially* disruptive. How can such a position demand recognition from that which it disrupts, without simultaneously losing the basis of its own distinctive character? Is a permanent provocation possible, any more than permanent revolution or permanent subversion? How to avoid, after Auschwitz, after AIDS, the apparently irresistible forces of reformist accommodation and politically correct pacification?

An important part of any answer to these questions depends on an engagement with those thinkers who have sought to reduce the dynamics of recognition to 'the political instances which unify, normalize, and discipline': Taylor, Habermas and Honneth. These 'dogmatic' thinkers, García Düttmann argues, channel disruption through integrating procedures or coordinate differences within consensual horizons. They 'turn recognition into a result, a stabilized relationship' or 'reciprocity.' By contrast, 'the task of an active politics of recognition which does not objectify culture ... consists in bringing about conditions for an existence or a life capable of exposing the being-not-one of recognition as such' – that is, the being of the 'between', a being 'without presupposition'. García Düttmann saves his most withering critique for discourse ethics, dismissed as indifferent to the distinction of truth from illusion and condemned as a reduplication, in allegedly 'post-metaphysical' and post-monological form, of those metaphysical attributes of clarity, transparency and self-affirmation traditionally associated with the constituent subject. Against the condescending politics of 'recognition *as*', García Düttmann's recognizing aims at 'rebellion and revolt', seeks out what remains blank or illegible, operates in the medium of radical uncertainty, and endures the trauma (the 'testimony') of the 'extreme' as such, the 'extreme limit' of its time.

It is at this point, no doubt, that the sceptical reader will begin to ask a couple of fairly predictable questions. Habermasians will mutter the words 'performative contradiction' when they relate the reiterated demand for a 'recognition [that] must shatter and transform the system' to García Düttmann's stinging disdain for any merely liberal or republican conception of politics. García Düttmann is too accomplished a performer to be concerned on this score. Nevertheless, it is hard to see what kind of political system could sustain an *endless* multiplicity of such demands, other than one whose own strictly political criteria of recognition are precisely indifferent to all 'recognizable' differences – that is, one firmly geared toward

the abstractions of citizenship in something like the republican sense. For his part, Taylor might well retort that what the Québécois with whom he is engaging in his essay (and who go 'unacknowledged' in García Düttmann's critique) are actually demanding is not recognition in García Düttmann's sense at all, but rather institutional guarantees of cultural preservation. Habermas's own likely rejoinder is no less predictable: García Düttmann's hostility to any 'synthesizing idea of an ultimate horizon of interpretations', his affirmation of the 'essential openness and multiplicity of horizons', is coherent only if he himself reduces the notion of 'ultimate horizon' to the static object of a recognition. (Let's not forget what a horizon *is*, after all: a horizon is not an objective structure of the world or universe, but a limit specific to a particular perception or reflection, however 'universal' or abstract.) How is it possible to conceive of multiplicity without some gesture of univocal or *unambiguous* inclusion – be it the multiplication of ever larger 'belongings' or sets, as with Badiou, or the articulation of an ultimate 'plane of immanence' or consistency, as with Deleuze – a gesture other than pure reiteration, and 'within' which this multiplicity is conceivable *as* a multiplicity? How can unlimited multiplicity be affirmed from across the confines of effectively independent horizons or effectively incommensurable 'language games'?

García Düttmann is certainly aware of the problem; indeed he foregrounds it. He mirrors his analysis of differential 'reiteration' in the performative structure and general organization of his own writing, which is as abruptly elliptical as it is consistent, as approximate as it is prescriptive, as episodic as it is 'repetitive' or insistent. However, whether this essentially rhetorical solution stands up, whether there can be a coherent conceptualization of unqualified difference that does not affirm, immediately and by the same token, its radically all-inclusive immanence or 'universality', are questions more Deleuzian readers, at least, may be likely to answer in the negative.

At the same time, it is not clear if the refusal of this reduction is *universally* progressive. García Düttmann privileges those individuals who, because they 'make no claim to an achieved recognition', can respond to prejudice or dismissal by 'simply inventing a different war machine'. But what sorts of strategic difference are obscured by the adverb 'simply'? As Marxist critics of postmodern and postcolonial theory have long maintained, an emphasis on contingency and 'radical indeterminacy' is uncomfortably close to the material medium of contemporary domination itself (financial mobility, economic flexibility, ceaseless com-

mercial innovation). It may well be that what such domination finds most uncomfortable to 'recognize' is not the assertion of unpredictable difference and cultural indeterminacy so much as the prescription of flatly in-different, rigorously inclusive principles: the axiomatic though situation-specific assertion of universal rights and equalities.

Finally, for a work so firmly oriented towards the *limit* of its performance, it is disappointing that García Düttmann does not confront two questions at the opposite thematic limits of this uncompromisingly conceptual study. On the one hand, he avoids the limits of physical embodiment and sensual perception – that is, the limits imposed by the non-conceptual mechanics of the senses in, for instance, the recog-

nition of a familiar visual pattern, sound or smell (a question that might lead him to engage with Proust or Merleau-Ponty, if not cognitive science). On the other hand, he does not acknowledge the interruption of that 'discontinuous continuity' of deconstructive discourse promised by strictly axiomatic forms of thought (a question that might lead him to deepen his engagement with Agamben or Badiou). Perhaps García Düttmann would be right to reject such interruption: the point is that he does not seem to recognize its possibility. In what sense is *any* kind of 'recognition' at work in the demonstration of mathematical proofs, for instance, or indeed in the prescription of universal rights or equalities as such?

Peter Hallward

The fact that it is mine

Ross Poole, *Nation and Identity*, Routledge, London and New York, 1999. 224 pp., £45.00 hb., £14.99 pb., ISBN 0 415 12622 3 hb., 0 415 12623 pb.

Thoughtful, provocative and unpredictable, Ross Poole makes his case for nationalism without relying on the well-worn distinction between a bad ethnic and a good civic version. He stoutly contests the generally unquestioned role of imagination in Benedict Anderson's 'imagined communities' formula. And he criticizes liberalism's negative freedom, which holds us back from proper national loyalty, in the name of a republican ideal of citizen participation that he later admits will no longer work under harried modern conditions. Salvaging this ideal today, he concedes, would mean settling for a merely 'mimetic' relation to the state rather than an active participatory one. Instead of lapsing into nostalgia, Poole wants moral philosophy to rise and sing to the difficulties of its historical moment.

In this Hegelian mode, Poole stakes his argument on the verdict of history. Like Hegel, he sometimes leaves us in doubt as to whether the history referred to is collective, individual, or both.

If we are to accept the judgement of the past 200 years of world history – and Hegel could hardly object to the choice of tribunal – then it is not rational identification of the individual with the political structure but national identity which has provided the moral resources for modern citizenship.

Poole's own appeal to the tribunal of history does not move from 'is' to 'ought' by offering positive examples of such citizenship, nations that have supposedly

behaved so as to deserve our loyalty. Instead, he adduces a generic tale of individual development. From infancy, the self develops in a state of dependence on the 'moral resources' of others, and this dependence incurs a moral obligation that for Poole is both overriding and always already national:

we begin to acquire our national identity literally on our mother's knee. We discover our nation – as we discover ourselves – in the bedtime stories we are told, the songs which put us to sleep, the games we play as children.... [M]y nation – like my family – has a particular claim on me, not merely because it is different from others, nor because it can from some vantage point be judged to be superior to others. Its claim lies in the fact that it is mine.

The analogy between the nation and the family, neither of them chosen yet both peremptory in their demands on us, each possessed by us and therefore (though the logic here is fuzzy) rightfully possessing us, is the core of Poole's argument. It is also a source of trouble. The analogy suspends discussion of their conflicting demands (*Antigone* does not figure) while also suggesting that nations are as indisputably real as families. The liberal self is not a person, for Poole, but the nation most assuredly *is* a person: nations take the pronoun 'who' rather than 'which', and each is warmly welcomed as an individual with 'its own story to tell'. However intermittent, this naturalizing rhetoric does



less than justice to the messiness of modern history (much of it a history of empires rather than nations) or of the modern family. ‘We come to feel’, he writes, ‘that our national identity is as natural and inescapable as our gender.’ If so, many will think, then so much the worse for both. But Poole is not having that conversation. Using the family to naturalize the nation, he takes for granted that gender itself is natural, and happily so. For his purposes, there are no queer or feminist critics of the family. There are no unhappy, feuding families. Indeed, there is almost no conflict of any kind. What the nation demands of us is ‘sacrifice’, not killing. It guarantees social welfare rather than making war. Bismarck, who did both, is missing from the index. Nationalism to Poole is a matter of positive ties; it is rarely if ever a matter of shared hostility to an ‘alien other’ either outside or inside the border. The hypothesis that alterity and conflict might be constitutive of nationalism is not even presented for refutation. As a result, Poole’s nationalism seems cheery, sanitized, inoffensive.

But there is perhaps a good reason why Poole is less concerned with the identity of the nation in space (which would involve antagonism) than with its identity in time, which shifts the terms from geopolitics to psychology. Just as the healthy individual must accept his or her continuity with past actions, a past self, the argument goes, so must we all behave as citizens. We must acknowledge that we are ‘morally accountable for actions performed by others, especially when these may have taken place before we were even born’. In the current Australian context, this is an argument on behalf of Aboriginal rights. As Poole explains in a crucial chapter, years of large-scale immigration have threatened to erode the sense of shared national responsibility for the violent seizure of the

land and the continued mistreatment of Aborigines. When Poole confronts immigrants with what looks like an old-fashioned assimilationism, then, he is in fact mobilizing not national pride but national shame – though Australians can be proud of the uses (like the welfare state) to which they have put their shame.

Those better acquainted with the Australian situation will have more to say about the feasibility of achieving a sense of national belonging that would encompass older colonial settlers, Aborigines, and so-called

NESBIANS, or non-English-speaking-background migrants. But in general terms (if one can generalize at all), it remains possible that Hegel was right: that such things as welfare and a sane racial policy stand a better chance if the identification demanded of citizens is not with their nation but with their state. For all its sins, the state seems easier to control than national emotion, and it offers more direct channels to those transnational agencies that, as Poole concedes, will be called upon increasingly to deal with so-called globalization.

Having grounded his case for nationalism on history, Poole is both consistent and courageous in declaring that history has now turned against nationalism. In a tantalizingly brief conclusion, he attempts accordingly to come to terms with cosmopolitanism. ‘If cultural diversity is the necessary outcome of globalization, then cosmopolitanism is the virtue of this necessity.’ He distinguishes between *moral* cosmopolitanism, which is acceptable because it doesn’t rule out ‘special preferences’, and *legal* cosmopolitanism, or the idea of a world state, which is a bad idea because it opposes such preferences. His aspirations accompany a third form of cosmopolitanism, perhaps not fully emergent, which would involve learning to live and work amidst a bewildering diversity of responsibilities and commitments rather than accepting the ‘austere universalism’ that sees attachments as impediments. My best wishes go with him, and with it. History has not rendered a positive verdict as yet on cosmopolitanism, which remains weak in presentable institutions and for the moment must rely more on ‘ought’ than on ‘is’.

Bruce Robbins

Which way now?

Kimberly Hutchings, *International Political Theory: Rethinking Ethics in a Global Era*, Sage, London, 1999. xvi + 208 pp., £15.99 pb., 0 7619 5516 X pb.

Molly Cochran, *Normative Theory in International Relations: A Pragmatic Approach*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999. xx + 295 pp., £37.50 hb., £13.95 pb., 0 521 63050 9 hb., 0 521 63965 4 pb.

If all theory is normative, as both Kimberly Hutchings and Molly Cochran acknowledge, then what is normative theory? And what is normative theory in International Relations? These are important questions at the end of a decade of wars and civil wars, massacres and bombings, interventions and sanctions. And yet, it is widely asserted that within International Relations attempts to answer them have reached an impasse. Both Hutchings and Cochran set out to analyse the reasons for this impasse and accept the challenge to suggest a way out. Consequently, we should be able to tell, at the end of these two books, what normative theory in International Relations can or should be.

Both authors order the theories with which they engage in 'debates'. Hutchings begins with the debate between Realists – the *Realpolitik* approach – and Idealists – the liberal approach – and is joined by Cochran in the analysis of the cosmopolitanism/communitarianism debate followed by the discussion of various critical responses to traditional approaches. There is, they argue, a common problem to the seemingly opposed positions which is responsible for the impasse. They share, as Hutchings formulates it, an ontological conception of nature and reason as distinct and mutually exclusive realms from which politics and morality are derived. Realists and Idealists disagree only about the realm – nature or reason – from which moral principles properly have to be derived. Consequently, the dilemma both approaches face is to bring moral principles and politics together, each derived in abstraction from the other. This undertaking is bound to fail in light of the fact that the underlying concepts are formulated in opposition to each other to begin with. In each case normative theory is reduced to the shrunken form of applied ethics – moral principles unsuccessfully imposed on politics.

Both Hutchings and Cochran argue that this pattern repeats itself in the cosmopolitan/communitarian debate since cosmopolitans depend unreflectively on ontological assumptions – about reason, the individual, the state, the world – which cannot in fact be grounded. Meanwhile communitarians like Michael Walzer use both arguments based on nature as well as arguments based on reason – without, however, overcoming the

distinction. In Cochran's words, all these authors derive a 'non-contingent ethics' (Hutchings's applied ethics) from weak, contingent, foundations.

Hutchings maintains that this problem is not overcome either in international society, or in Marxist, postmodernist, or feminist approaches; while Cochran further adds poststructuralist and neopragmatist approaches to this list. Marxist approaches, for instance, although radically different in their ontological assumptions, reproduce these contradictions on the epistemological and prescriptive levels when they hold that all claims are historically contingent while at the same time maintaining that some are objectively true. Both Hutchings and Cochran argue that postmodernism and poststructuralism, albeit accepting the impossibility of ontological as well as epistemological truth-claims, nevertheless reproduce the traditional vocabulary, only now in inverted commas. They derive from it a non-contingent ethics which claims universal validity for the questioning of all boundaries and claims to sovereignty – thus presenting their own theoretical practice as universally valid and politically correct ethics.

Whilst largely sharing a diagnosis of the impasse in normative international theory, Cochran and Hutchings differ radically in their solutions to the problem. For Cochran, American pragmatism based on a radical critique of epistemology as such appears a promising candidate to cut through that Gordian knot. She replaces Rorty's emphasis on the private/public divide with Dewey's assumption that individuals fulfil themselves in constant interaction with the community; and she replaces Dewey's emphasis on methodology with Rorty's insistence on language, metaphor, aesthetics and irony. By thus leaving epistemological debates behind and concentrating on ironic redescrptions of the world and creative inventions of new traditions and identities – always mindful of their fallibility – Cochran believes that we can overcome the earlier impasse of normative theory. This pragmatic ethics would liberate feminism, for instance, from wasting time on the attempt to develop a feminist theory of oppression, on endless debates about the proper concept of 'woman', and the proper way to present women's

experiences. Instead, pragmatic feminists could simply invent new languages, traditions, identities.

This solution, however, falls squarely into what Hutchings calls applied ethics – only now without the attempt to ground it. While Cochran may be quite right in pointing out that ethics needs to be created, not discovered, it remains unclear how socially constructed individuals can create or invent new and critical traditions without any systematic attempt to understand or explain the system in which they have become themselves in the first place. Hutchings's solution, therefore, attempts to do just that. The impossibility of grounding our ontological and epistemological assumptions deprives us of external categories by which to judge our theories and our ethics, but not of the possibility to produce an immanent critique along the lines of a Hegelian phenomenology. Normative theory can provide a systematic investigation of the norms and values embodied in political institutions, social practices and theoretical reflections in a particular historical period. In this sense, normative theory is a practice of self-understanding and the validity of such normative theorizing will be entirely determined by the number of people who can recognize themselves in such a theory. In addition, normative theory needs to engage in Foucauldian genealogical investigations of our regimes of truth in order to denaturalize

the present by uncovering alternatives which have been suppressed and which may provide a basis for critique.

Hence, where Cochran has given up theory, in the sense of any systematic investigation of the world we live in, and opted for applied ethics, Hutchings has defined the task of a proper normative theory – phenomenological adequacy and genealogical honesty – and given up ethics. For although Foucauldian genealogical honesty may provide some grounds for judgement, these grounds are always only immanent. And the validity bestowed upon a theory through the recognition and identification of readers is one of accurate description or reflection. It does not necessarily produce transcendence and even less so a certainty that any form of transcendence will be morally 'progressive'.

What, then, finally, is normative theory? For Cochran it is applied ethics based on imagination and the 'manipulation of sentiments'; for Hutchings it is a phenomenological and genealogical analysis of ethico-political life. The two books themselves, however, do not provide an imaginative ethics or a phenomenological and genealogical analysis but rather an epistemological critique of the practice of epistemology and an abstract theoretical critique of the practice of abstract theorizing. And for this reason we never learn what normative theory in *International Relations* is. The answer to that question would, as



Hutchings clearly states, require an alternative analysis of the norms and values embedded in the political institutions and social practices constitutive of international relations. Without this, we are left to speculate about the ethico-political system which reproduces *ad infinitum* the separation of morality and politics, theory and practice.

Beate Jahn

As an idealist

Ken Hirschkop, *Mikhail Bakhtin: An Aesthetic for Democracy*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999. xx + 332 pp., £45.00 hb., £14.99 pb., 0 19 815961 7 hb., 0 19 815960 9 pb.

Bakhtin studies have come a long way in the last decade. Holistic exposition and application dominated Bakhtin's reception in the West up to the beginning of the 1990s, but now the inconsistencies and gaps in the work of the Russian theorist have moved centre stage. Similarly, the exaggerated claims to Bakhtin's originality have been shown to rest on a lack of awareness of Bakhtin's own intellectual sources. As a result, Bakhtin has become an interesting starting point for investigations into problems of cultural theory rather than a source of new categories that can be applied regardless of their philosophical heritage. In this book, Ken Hirschkop builds upon recent advances in Bakhtin studies to provide the most informed critical study of Bakhtin's work to date. He draws on the extensive research that has been carried out both in Russia and in the West, and examines this research and Bakhtin's own work through a far more philosophically astute lens than has been used hitherto.

Hirschkop provides a useful window onto the Russian-language research for English speakers, carefully documenting the different strands and evaluating past research in the light of recent findings. In the process, the myths about Bakhtin's biography are documented and exposed, some of the intellectual sources of his ideas are laid bare, and a much more historically credible and philosophically interesting figure emerges. In my opinion, it is the central part on Bakhtin 'myths and history' that is the strongest feature of the book. It is a masterful distillation of a very varied and widely scattered collection of materials. The details are well contextualized and their relevance is made clear, as the author seeks to assess the relevance of Bakhtin today and to build on his partial insights.

The aim of the book is to assess Bakhtin's interwoven philosophical and historical argument as a contribution to the 'definition of the democratic project'. In this enterprise the presence of Habermas looms large, with Bakhtin being read as a philosopher of the 'unfinished project of modernity', working towards a democratic culture from within the sphere of aesthetics, which Habermas eschewed. Hirschkop can certainly find good grounds for linking Habermas and Bakhtin: both attempt to develop a neo-Kantian meta-ethics, drawing upon some of the same philosophical ancestors, and both seek to defend the Enlightenment project, radicalized according to the development of communicative (dialogic) over instrumental (monologic) reason. Both Bakhtin and Habermas are shown to gain from this meeting of agendas. Bakhtin avoids Habermas's excessive rationalism through his concentration on aesthetics, drawing upon Hermann Cohen's 'aesthetics of pure feeling' and Max Scheler's intersubjective phenomenology. Habermas provides insight into one of Bakhtin's own blind spots: the institutional analysis retained, in a heavily revised form, from Marxism. Thus, where Bakhtin conflates two senses of 'responsibility' (general answerability for one's deeds and the capacity to act in an ethical fashion), Habermas's institutional critique provides a framework for distinguishing between them.

There are many advantages to the argument that emerges from the meeting of the two thinkers, but the extent to which one can accept the argument as a whole depends upon whether one is prepared to accept the neo-Kantian principles that Hirschkop seems to share with his protagonists. This bears particularly heavily on the notion of democracy that motivates the study. Society is treated solely as an 'ethical reality' with normative structures granted a questionably large degree of autonomy from the social conditions of specific modes of political rule. Hirschkop here participates in the reduction of agency to the interaction of juridical persons that is required by the neo-Kantian philosophy that informs the work of both Bakhtin and Habermas. At no stage are the jurisprudential roots of Bakhtin's ethics – which governs his distinction between monologism and dialogism – subjected to scrutiny. Instead, while Bakhtin's rejection of legal formalism is bolstered, the notion that jurisprudence is the 'mathematics' of ethics, the *dia-logic* of the human sciences, remains unchallenged. Bakhtin's suspension of all questions of causality on human action rests on this very feature, as does his reduction of the structural capacities for action to forms of intersubjective interaction (dialogic relations). Similarly, Bakhtin's

effacement of the referential capacity of discourse in his analysis of relations between discourses, which is based on the same bifurcation of the monological natural and dialogical human sciences, also appears to be taken at face value rather than interrogated.

Hirschkop echoes Habermas's charge that Marxism has not developed a theory of democracy (though classical Marxists were never indifferent to modes of political rule) but proceeds to treat democracy exclusively as a form of intersubjectivity. Marxism is charged with treating democracy as merely a transitional stage on the way to socialism, but the example of Lenin's pronouncements during the Russian Revolution, which Hirschkop adduces, takes no account of the extreme conditions in which they were made. The isolation of forms of intersubjectivity from the social conditions in which they are embedded restates the inadequately embodied conception of human agency which both Bakhtin and Habermas share. The neo-Kantian notion that the world is not given but is conceived forgets that whether or not the structures of the natural world are recognized they still impose inescapable limits on human activity, and the biological needs of human beings continue to influence human behaviour causally. These considerations cannot simply be 'bracketed out'. Democracy inevitably involves questions of the control of the extra-discursive necessities of human life, and a purely anti-naturalistic approach will inevitably prove to be inadequate in such circumstances. While Marxism may indeed need to work to develop a more adequate anthropology, and the ethical dimension of this is certainly crucial, this needs to grow out of and remain in constant contact with socio-economic analysis. The first move of neo-Kantianism is to sever these features and Hirschkop goes too far along the same path.

One other problem is the tendency to view Bakhtin as a rather more consistent thinker than he actually was. In trying to incorporate elements of *Lebensphilosophie* (from Simmel, Dilthey, Misch), neo-Hegelianism and Marxism (Lukács, Bukharin), phenomenology (Shpet, Scheler) and Brentanian language theory (Marty, Bühler) into a neo-Kantian framework, Bakhtin arrived at some awkward and contradictory formulations. These are given less attention than they deserve, even though some of Bakhtin's most interesting and instructive theorizing results from them.

Nevertheless, the political subtext of Bakhtin's argument does emerge through a meeting with the Habermasian agenda. Bakhtin's concentration on the ethical significance of modes of discursive interaction and his flawed attempts to integrate questions of

style and narrative are shown to rest upon concerns of a political nature, even if Bakhtin does all he can to avoid this conclusion. The 'apolitical populism' which many more conservative critics have valued in Bakhtin's work turns out to have been possible only by avoiding some of the most important implications of the problems he addresses, and ultimately by mystifying crucial features. As an idealist, Bakhtin is repeatedly led to confuse institutional and formal questions, and he seeks the solutions to political problems in the cultural realm. The result is what Hirschkop perceptively terms Bakhtin's almost pathological tendency to rework and recast the same argument in different forms throughout his career: in the absence of an adequate social theory, Bakhtin was compelled to grope for answers in neighbouring domains. In bringing out these features, Hirschkop has made a significant contribution to our understanding of an important and influential thinker.

Craig Brandist

Revolt into style

Raoul Vaneigem, *A Cavalier History of Surrealism*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith, AK Press, Edinburgh, 2000. 130 pp., £7.95 pb., 1 873176 94 5.

This is something of an oddity. Commissioned in 1970 for a planned series of books for high-school students, it was written in great haste by an author who admits that it was not particularly dear to his heart. The projected series was abandoned and the manuscript languished in a drawer until, more or less by accident, it was published in 1977. The book appeared under the pseudonym 'Jules-François Dupuis' – he being the concierge of the building in which Lautréamont died in 1870 and a witness to the poet's death certificate. The author is in fact Raoul Vaneigem, who, at seventy-six and still active, must be one of the last survivors of the Situationist International. Together with Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*, his *Revolution of Everyday Life* (1967) is the great classic of situationism, the most conspiratorial of all the left-wing movements of the 1960s. Like the surrealist group led by André Breton, the SI was a tightly knit group of politically motivated men (and the odd woman) convinced that artistic and political revolution went hand in hand. Like its surrealist forebear, it had all the comradesly atmosphere of a basket of crabs: it devoured comrades and expelled former comrades. Vaneigem argues here that expulsions and the breaking off of relations are

the only weapons available to an intellectual group. And when the last expulsion has been pronounced, presumably the only solution is, as the surrealists speculated in the 1920s, suicide.

There are many better histories of surrealism than this, the real interest of Vaneigem's polemic being the light it sheds on situationism's difficult relationship with an ancestor it loathed with a rare affection. There are many definitions of surrealism itself. Breton's programmatic slogans spoke of a pure psychic automatism that would reveal the workings of the psyche; of the abolition or transcendence of all contradictions; of a new beauty that would be convulsive, or would not exist; and of the 'basic surrealist action' of going into the streets with a revolver and opening fire at random (no one did so). The movement he led is perhaps best viewed as an attempt to condense Marx's 'Change the world' with Rimbaud's 'Change life.' The twin slogans are also the inspiration behind situationism's ambition to disrupt what it calls the spectacle, to break with the alienation in which all that remains of a precapitalist unitary society is an ideological organization in which the attempts of individuals to act upon the world are reflected, corrupted and transformed into their opposite – into the autonomous life of the non-lived. The goal of the radical aesthetic from the Romantics onwards has always been to abolish culture as a separate sphere and to return it to 'life', just as Dada, an embodiment of the consciousness of the crumbling of ideology, sought to destroy ideology in the name of authentic life.

Surrealism was, for its cavalier historian, a failure. Unable to sustain the negativity of Dada, those who wanted to restore art to life turned direct experience into one more art-value on the market. They could not prevail over the reality of art being pressed into the service of a spectacular society founded on the commodity system. This is a society that can turn today's revolt into tomorrow's official culture, in which rebellion meets the insatiable demand for the new. Changing the world proved to be an impossible task. A distinctly uneasy flirtation with the French Communist Party left Breton sadly disillusioned, and transformed Aragon, once his closest associate, into the apologetic bard of Stalinism. Rimbaud famously remarked that life was 'elsewhere'; so too was the revolution.

That surrealism was coopted into the service of the society of the spectacle is not in doubt. The shocking images have become familiar. The famous photograph of Péret insulting a priest now looks trite. It was once possible to shock by writing poems about the parricidal Violette Nozière; a bad portrait of Myra

Hindley hangs in the Royal Academy in an exhibition called 'Sensation' in collaboration with an advertising agency. Perhaps it all began when Salvador Dalí began to decorate shop windows in New York, and was dubbed 'Avida Dollars' by an outraged Breton. Breton too contributed to the commodification of surrealism. He was a dealer, buying cheap from his surrealist friends and selling dear to rich collectors, and trading profitably in African and Oceanic art. Vaneigem omits to mention that Breton was not a rich man; even surrealists have to live, authentically or otherwise. Oddly, Vaneigem does not fully explore the economics of the avant-garde: the production of expensive limited editions (to which James Joyce was no stranger), the small runs of illustrated books printed solely for wealthy collectors. A cynic might add that there is a healthy demand for early situationist ephemera too.

Vaneigem does not really offer an alternative to surrealism's political failure. Counterfactual speculation as to what might have happened if the Spanish revolution had triumphed over both the Stalinists and the fascists will not usher in any new age. Jibes about Trotsky being the butcher of Kronstadt will offend the faithful of the Socialist Workers' Party (which may be no bad thing), but is anyone else still listening? The implicit argument is that situationism still offers an alternative. That the Pompidou Centre could host a retrospective exhibition on the Situationist International in 1989 suggests otherwise: it too has become caught up in the spectacle. Three years later, the same institution mounted a huge and successful exhibition devoted to André Breton. Even Debord's suicide became a minor media event (see *Radical Philosophy* 71). Once again, revolt has been turned into mere style. Whilst this schematic history of surrealism offers no real way out, it does raise the issue of whether avant-gardism can continue, of whether there is an alternative to the society of the spectacle. Is the silence of a Beckett all that is left?

Vaneigem is surely quite right to argue that no 'revolution in everyday life' can succeed without a coherent and global negative critique. But can a late romanticism shored up with references to Marx supply that critique? In the current playground craze for Pokémon – a so-called card-trading game – there is no distinction whatsoever between the product and the advertisement, no possible escape from the stranglehold of Nintendo's vertical integration of a market aimed solely at the exploitation of children. How do we/they rebel against that?

David Macey

Dasein in the dark

Giorgio Agamben, *The Man Without Content*, trans. Georgia Albert, Stanford University Press, Stanford CA, 1999. 130 pp., £25.00 hb., £8.95 pb., 0 804 73553 0 hb., 0 804 73554 9 pb.

Featuring prominently in Heidegger's *The Origin of the Work of Art*, the idea that there is an intrinsic link between aesthetics and nihilism has haunted a number of recent thinkers about art. In his fascinating essay *The Man Without Content*, Giorgio Agamben explores this thesis by looking at how modern aesthetics, or rather the attitudes and approaches to art it involves, has obscured what he calls 'the original structure of the work of art'.

Much of the book is about reinterpreting the history of aesthetic theory since Kant. Locating the birth of modern aesthetics roughly in the middle of the seventeenth century, Agamben argues that the conception of art then underwent a drastic reshaping. From having been bound up, as Hegel takes for granted in his *Lectures on Aesthetics*, with the specific character of a society's collective belief system and practices, art now started to be viewed in terms of its autonomy, thus reflecting its bourgeois connoisseurs' ideal of absolute freedom. The author agrees with Hegel that the autonomization of art implied a massive loss of 'spiritual significance', yet he rejects the view that this loss should be interpreted as entailing the death of art. What Hegel realized was rather that from now on art is condemned to exist in a state of perpetual self-transcendence. Art, as in much romanticist and modernist theory, becomes the pure potentiality of negation.

Moreover, art's loss of substantial content is reflected in the schism, characteristic of modern aesthetics, between artist and spectator, or genius and taste. On the one hand, the artist experiences a radical tearing or split between his own free subjectivity and the 'immense repository of materials that [he] can evoke or reject at will'. Drawing on Hegel's critique of romanticism, Agamben accordingly (thereby explaining the book's title) defines the modern artist as 'a self-annihilating nothing'. Having no artistic content presented to him as valid, the desperate painter, musician or poet, as in Balzac's portrait of Frenhofer in *The Unknown Masterpiece*, finds himself caught up in a logic of infinite reflection, and hence in nihilism. On the other hand, art's achievement of autonomy gives rise to the disinterested spectator – that is, to an engagement with the work purely with a view to aesthetic enjoyment. Aesthetic art calls for a non-cognitive response in the

sense of taste: *x* is beautiful in so far as it pleases one's senses. Echoing Heidegger's condemnation of aesthetics, Agamben thus broadly defines aesthetics as any consideration of art which comprehends it in terms of the state of feeling aroused by the beautiful. Yet, with the victory of *Erlebnis* over *Erfahrung*, the subject only succeeds in enjoying itself and its vital powers and not the work: the work, from which the spectator is radically alienated, has stopped working: 'It seems ... that every time aesthetic judgment attempts to determine what the beautiful is, it holds in its hands not the beautiful but its shadow, as though its true object were not so much what art is but what it is not: not art but non-art.'

Agamben's thesis, then, comes down to this: art's formal autonomy, its diremptive disconnection from any origin outside the scope of a disenchanting modern subjectivity, has, under the conditions of modernity, been fatefully conjoined with an almost total loss of cognitive ability. In order, therefore, to break out of the endless and empty movement of self-reflection, and thus regain a sense of art's (cognitive) claim on us (i.e. to transcend the horizon of nihilism within which art has been implicated), the condition of aesthetic autonomy has to be superseded. Now, since the early modern diremption of art categorically implied the separation of genius, and thus *poiesis*, from taste, it follows for Agamben that any candidate for a non-autonomy-based conception of art must satisfy the condition of uniting *poiein*, in the sense of bringing something into being or presence, with the experience of art.

While accepting Hannah Arendt's claim that in the Western tradition the distinction between *poiesis*, praxis and work de facto has been progressively obscured, Agamben thinks the work of art must be grounded in what he calls the original event of *poiesis* – that is, in an original temporal dimension in which 'the poetic status of man on earth finds its proper meaning'. Both praxis and work, rather than being coextensive with *poiesis*, are to be seen as philosophically derived from this foundational conception of man's poetic existence. The key concept in this regard is rhythm: a more authentic temporal dimension, constitutive both of the world and art, rhythm, like Heidegger's *Seyn*, has the power of production into presence. 'To look at a work of art ... means to be hurled out into a more original time: it means ecstasy in the epochal opening of rhythm, which gives and holds back.'

As it stands, this account is potentially tendentious on several fronts. For one thing, Agamben's ontology

of rhythm seems worryingly uninformed by any actually existing works of art. By that I do not simply mean that he ought to have undertaken an analysis of some exemplary art-work. The problem is rather that given his nihilism thesis, *no* such work can exist: its very existence would completely contradict his view that art has vanished in the night of reflection. Indeed, Agamben's essay is ambiguous, between claiming that no works of art (in the ontological sense) are available to us, and that we have forgotten what a work of art *is*. If the latter is the claim, then the burden of his argument, which now starts to look deeply conservative, seems to hinge on the transmissibility of the tradition. By going, in a Heideggerian spirit, back to the presumed ground of art, perhaps it would be possible to retrieve its meaning. In the final chapter, however, Agamben appeals to Walter Benjamin's 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' in order precisely to deny the possibility of genuine transmission, thus withdrawing, it seems, the condition under which his own argument could be rendered coherent. Interestingly, the chapter ends with the proposal that art itself, regardless of its historical status, might offer a way of transcending the continuum of linear time. How far this takes us into theology remains unclear. After all, since works of art by definition have emancipated themselves from myth, art alone would apparently not be enough to create the conditions for a non-alienated historicity. But what would be? Wisely, Agamben offers no answer.

Espen Hammer

Wretched places

Alphonso Lingis, *Dangerous Emotions*, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 2000. 195 pp., £28.50 hb., £10.50 pb., 0 520 21629 6 hb., 0 520 22559 7 pb.

Alphonso Lingis is a singular figure among American and British continental philosophers because he belongs to no recognized school and has no obvious intellectual master. Instead, he has created his own 'phenomenology of intensity' by bringing together the work of Merleau-Ponty and Levinas (both of whom he has translated) with that of Deleuze and Guattari. *Dangerous Emotions* is the latest example of this unlikely synthesis and provides a phenomenological analysis of the emotions, particularly libidinal emotions, as states of intensity. It also demonstrates the insistence of Lingis's recent work that philosophy must *travel* to feel the intensive forces at work in the world. His controversial contention is that it is only in the 'wretched places' (the favelas of Rio, the bordellos

of Marrakesh, the slums of Calcutta) that we come into contact with the 'strong emotions'. What makes *Dangerous Emotions* a dangerous book is that it is both a poem to a free and non-teleological libido and the projection of that libido on to the wretched places of the world. Lingis forces us to consider whether philosophy really can travel outside of itself without simply projecting its own outside.

A precedent for this 'travel-philosophy' can be found in the ethnology of savages, barbarians and nomads practised by Deleuze and Guattari. In fact, *Dangerous Emotions* loses a great deal of its strangeness if we consider it as a phenomenological translation of Deleuze and Guattari's *Thousand Plateaux*. Not only does Lingis admit to borrowing concepts such as the despot; it is possible to find other notions like 'becoming-animal' playing a more concealed role in his book. Even the arrangement of the book's chapters seems to follow the model of a series of relatively discrete 'plateaux'. What is different is the thickness of the phenomenological description, and it could be that Lingis actually owes more to the original model that Deleuze and Guattari drew on. This was Gregory Bateson's description of Balinese emotional life as a cumulative movement of states (or plateaux) of intensity. This accumulation of intensity can be seen in the way each chapter of *Dangerous Emotions* steps up to the next in an intensification of the book's argument.

It is actually relatively simple to extract the thesis of this frustrating book from the description that surrounds it. The emotions are analysed as the result of the living organism assimilating 'free and non-teleological' energies from the environment (trade winds, volcanoes, ice floes, etc.). As it absorbs these environmental energies the organism then produces an *excess* over what it requires to adjust to the environment, and this excess must be expended. (So far this will be familiar to readers of Georges Bataille's *The Accursed Share*, and it is strange that this is not listed in the small number of references given by Lingis.) It is this excess and its expenditure that is experienced by the subject as 'its' emotional states. However, because this expenditure is the result of environmental forces the emotions *cannot* be understood as interior subjective states. Not only do the emotions come from the world but because these intensities demand expenditure they also force the subject back into the world, beginning the whole process of assimilation again.

From this cycle of absorption and expenditure Lingis tries to create an 'ethics' of expenditure. The living organism is constituted through its being open to the environment because it must draw its energies from the world. However, it can draw these energies either from the forces that 'hold walls together and

closed' or from the forces that are free and non-teleological. This Nietzschean dualism of reactive and active forces is then mapped on to the world, with the reactive forces identified with the 'grim androids' of corporate America and the active forces identified with the rebels who live in the wretched places. Lingis even enlists the Hollywood film *Point Break* as an example and in doing so further glamorizes its surfer anti-hero Boddhi, who, at the climax of the film, suicidally surfs into a storm rather than give himself up to the FBI. The multiplicity of the libido is actually crushed by this 'ethics' that claims to celebrate multiple intensities. Intensities are forced into the correct singular response to the singular imperative of the environment that can only be experienced in a singular wretched place.

While I don't doubt the sincerity of Lingis's identification with the wretched of the earth, which is admirable as philosophy often accommodates itself to the neo-liberal world order, his philosophical ethics is dangerously close to an inverse moralism. By identifying free and non-teleological *desires* with certain places, with certain acts, and even with certain people, those desires are limited and controlled rather than being released. Despite his many debts to Bataille, some acknowledged and others not, Lingis lacks what Jean-Luc Nancy called Bataille's 'sobriety'. It may be that to be carried away by the dangerous emotions is not really to respond to them in all their dangerousness.

Benjamin Noys

Rethinking what?

Mark J. Smith, *Rethinking State Theory*, Routledge, London and New York, 2000. xiv + 281 pp., £60.00 hb., 0 415 20892 0.

This book does not do many of the things one might expect of it. It is not a book about 'the state'; it does not offer a theory of the state; and it does not even cover the range of state theories that have been offered in the past. It claims to offer a 'metatheory' – defined as an exploration of the principles and assumptions behind theories of the state – but this in fact turns out to be two things: first, a lengthy examination of the work of three main theorists, Robert Dahl, Friedrich Hayek and Bob Jessop; and second, an attempt to find out what, if anything, these writers have to say to critical realism. As such its claim to offer a 'critical exegesis of state theory' seems a little overstated: it is

a critical exegesis of the three writers in question in order to advance the critical realist project.

Smith's choice of theorists is in part based on his attempt to read state theories in terms of their epistemological and ontological claims and assumptions. Thus Dahl, Hayek and Jessop are understood less through the usual and, for Smith, rather restricting categories of 'neo-pluralist', 'neo-liberal' and 'neo-Marxist', and more through the ways in which their work is shot through with understated and sometimes unstated philosophical assumptions. It is on this basis, claims Smith, that the relationship between these three writers can be reassessed, and used as the basis for rethinking state theory: 'I want to encourage social scientists working on the state to explore the insights which can be identified through sensitive and careful cross-fertilization.'

On the one hand, this provides interesting insights into the work of the three writers in question. Hayek, for example, is placed less in the tradition of neo-liberal rational choice theory, and more in the tradition of phenomenology as developed by Alfred Schütz. The outcome is that Hayek's account of the self-generating order is seen less as part of the intellectual foundation of the neo-liberal policies of the 1980s and more as the basis of a phenomenologically informed transformative praxis.

On the other hand, the exploration of such intellectual cross-fertilization leads to some rather bizarre conclusions, the most obvious of which concerns the relationship between Hayek and Jessop. We are told that 'Jessop's account of the relationship between autopoietic and allopoietic qualities of social systems has strong affinities with Hayek's account of the institutional products of catallactic relations.' The affinities in question emerge through a comparison of the realist assumptions in the work of both writers. But this radically underplays the distinct *lack* of political affinity. However restricting or misleading the usual labels 'neo-liberal' and 'neo-Marxist' might be, they can presumably still be of use – assuming, that is, that the words 'liberal' and 'Marxist' still have some meaning. Smith's highlighting of the epistemological and ontological cross-fertilization of these writers comes at the rather high price of losing sight of their political commitments.

This book does provide some useful insights into the work of Dahl, Hayek and Jessop. But it is hard to know which is more offputting: its attempt to encourage social science yet further down the critical realist road, or its ridiculous price.

Mark Neocleous