

Vive la philosophie!

Alain Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy*, translated with an introduction by Norman Madarasz, SUNY Press, New York, 1999. 181 pp., £34.75 hb., £10.95 pb., 0 7914 4219 5 hb., 0 7914 4220 9 pb.

Friedrich Schlegel's two-hundred-year-old fragment 'Nothing is more rarely the subject of philosophy than philosophy itself' shows its age. Now, its inversion seems true. Whether through recognition that philosophy's self-legitimizing critique of the unexcavated presuppositions of other disciplines threatens to prove itself wanting; or, through various concerns for philosophy's apparently imminent death (which philosophers frequently seem to ponder with the scarcely concealed enthusiasm of a new lease of afterlife), little is more commonly the subject of philosophy than philosophy itself. Yet there remain few contemporary engagements comparable to the ambitious programme developed by Alain Badiou. Assuming the guise of a kind of rationalist militancy, Badiou has sought to confront philosophy's self-doubting with a new programme for an emphatic future, albeit with a peculiarly anachronistic demeanour. In a dramatic confrontation with much contemporary French philosophy, Badiou maintains that in order for philosophy to resume its progress within the configuration of modern thought, it must oppose the dominance of postmodern or deconstructive sophistry and resume its classical concern with truth: 'The category of truth is the central category, be it under another name, of any possible philosophy.' According to Badiou, philosophy achieves its modernity through a renewed Platonism, a 'Platonism of the multiple.'

That the debut of this French drama should assume the academically incongruous but strategically impeccable form of a manifesto indicates that the Anglophone repetition of Badiou's campaign is sprung by the pent-up ignorance of an extensively elaborated oeuvre that eagerly waits under translator's orders. *Manifesto for Philosophy* was originally published in French in 1989, a year after Badiou's central work, *L'Être et l'Événement* (1988). As the first of Badiou's books to be translated into English it now functions as a trailblazing introduction to his magnum opus, a job supplemented by the rapid appearance of other works (*Deleuze: The Clamor of Being* and the forthcoming *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*)

and notable inaugural commentary (see Jean-Jacques Lecercle in *Radical Philosophy* 93).

Badiou's construction of truth in *Manifesto for Philosophy* is gnominically abbreviated from *L'Être et l'Événement*. Its principal point of departure is the positing of an ontology of pure multiplicity. As a consequence, truth must not involve any sort of unitary oneness. Avoiding this consequence is Badiou's primary task. Hence, truth is understood as immanent to the multiplicity of being of which it is the truth – that is, immanent to what Badiou describes as truth's 'situation'. Truth is not prior to its situation. There is no generalized structure according to which being could be anticipated, or indeed verified. And, as unverifiable, truth is distinguished from knowledge by Badiou. Rather, truth is a procedure that relies on an excess or supplement of its situation, which enables the immanence of the situation to be grasped. This excess or supplement is otherwise termed an 'event'. An 'event' reveals a situation in its 'generic multiplicity' – that is, in the untranscendable immanence of its multiplicity. The pivotal function of the concept of 'event' is apparent here, since it has to perform the trick of revealing immanence, without inferring transcendence in that revelation. Therefore truth is understood as a 'post-eventful' procedure in which the generic multiplicity of being is elaborated.

Badiou identifies four different types of truth procedures, which he terms 'conditions'. These are schematized as: art (or, more specifically, the poem); science (more specifically, the matheme); politics (specifically 'inventive' politics); and love (or, 'the thought of the two'). These are elaborated according to various scarcely legitimated specifications that are abbreviated from the various studies that constitute Badiou's oeuvre and that are only schematically asserted in *Manifesto for Philosophy*. Remarkably and bewilderingly, Badiou gives no justification of why there are four types of truth and no more or less. They are merely derived from his reading of Plato, thereby confirming the sense in which Badiou understands the renewal of philosophy as a 'Platonic gesture'. Despite

the classicism of this structure, Badiou defines these four conditions according to the contemporary events that constitute them. These are: for art, the poetry of Celan; for science, mathematics from Cantor to Cohen; for politics, the 'obscure events ... from about 1965 to 1980'; for love, Lacan (who Badiou claims to have provided the only modern account of love since Plato).

Despite certain compelling aspects of Badiou's accounts of the four conditions, concerns over their exogenous quadruplicity are matched by concerns over the coherence of the events that constitute them. For instance, why does the poem stand privileged among all the arts? This seems plainly an account of art developed to secure the problem of philosophy, with little interest in the contemporary condition of art outside this intention. When Badiou asserts the contemporary significance of Phidias to sculpture, it seems that he has not felt compelled to reach beyond his philosophy books to investigate this art. Indeed, Badiou makes no mention of the crisis of the differentiation of the arts, which has been constitutive for art since at least the 1960s. Similarly, Badiou's claim that Lacan is the only modern thinker of love is so absurd that one wonders if the claim is not a kind of modernist strategy of exaggeration. It is ungenerous to criticize Badiou in the absence of his elaborations of these conditions, and such criticisms may of course be amended without breaking with the basic structure. Indeed, Thierry de Duve's recent account of the transformation of aesthetics by Duchamp's generic nominalism in his *Kant after Duchamp* has structural affinities with Badiou's system. However, the crudity of Badiou's examples does little to suspend suspicions of the inherent crudity of his architectonics.

Badiou's definition of philosophy is orchestrated by his construction of truth. However, what philosophy is in itself is strictly demarcated from any of the four types of truth that nonetheless condition philosophy. According to Badiou, philosophy does not produce truths, in the way that its four conditions do. Rather, philosophy is an operation in which the fact that there are truths, and the fact that they are multiple, are defended against the denial of these facts by old and new forms of that ancient adversary of philosophy: sophistry. As such, philosophy is constituted by specifically philosophical categories, which are strictly distinguished from the truths of philosophy's conditions. 'The truth' (in the singular) is such a specifically philosophical category according to Badiou. It does not make the substantive claim that the various types of truths are reducible to one unitary category of 'truth'.

Rather, it provides a defensive function, whereby the actuality and coexistence of the multiplicity of truths is asserted against sophistry's attack on truths. Similarly, Badiou claims that 'eternity' is a specifically philosophical category, which defends truths against the sophistry of historicism.

This distinction of philosophy from its conditions is a central preoccupation of *Manifesto for Philosophy*. Badiou proposes to renew philosophy and combat its embattled predicament by clarifying and insisting on the autonomy of philosophy. Thus, his analysis of the recent history of philosophy is structured by the critique of various collapses of philosophy's autonomy into one or another of its conditions. Badiou describes this as a process of 'suturing' (stitching). The positivist attack on philosophy is understood as the result of the suturing of philosophy to science; the Marxist attack results from the suturing of philosophy to politics; and Badiou describes the various forms of post-Nietzschean aestheticism that dominate contemporary philosophy as the suturing of philosophy to art. Badiou does not identify the consequences of a suturing of philosophy to love. But, given that he identifies Lacan as both the only modern thinker of love and an anti-philosopher, we might guess that psychoanalysis is the consequence. The task for philosophy is therefore one of 'de-suturation'. Philosophy must return to itself by tearing through the sutures that tie it to its conditions.

Manifesto for Philosophy is conspicuous for its use of assertion as a form of presentation. This is likely to produce immediate aversion in those hooked on syntactic profligacy, in equal measure to the misty-eyed eroticization of a harsh new master. There is also something curiously comic in Badiou's style, as if the alter ego of his rationalism is some absurd 'stone counter' from Beckett's imaginary. However, if Beckett provides a model only unwittingly pursued by rationalist philosophers, the master who Badiou acknowledges with respect to his 'assertive style' is Althusser.

Althusser introduced his conception of the assertive style of philosophy in his lectures on 'Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists' (1967), which provided the introduction to a lecture course to which Badiou himself contributed with 'Le Concept de Modèle' (1969). Althusser's essay is pivotal in the transference of philosophy's primary determination from science to politics: in Badiou's terminology, an exchange of sutures. Althusser claims that philosophical propositions are inevitably assertive or dogmatic because they cannot be demonstrated or proved in the way that scientific propositions can. This is due

to the fact that, according to Althusser, philosophy does not have a real object, in the way that a science does. Instead, philosophy has ‘stakes’, specifically the stakes of ‘the scientific’ as opposed to ‘the ideological’, which are understood as two strictly philosophical categories. Philosophy attempts to establish a ‘correct position’ with regard to the scientific. Despite many evident differences, there is a notable parallel between Althusser’s de-substantialization of philosophy as a tangential struggle against ‘the ideological’ and for ‘the scientific’ and Badiou’s identification of the struggle of philosophy against sophistry, tangential to actual truth procedures.

An appreciation of Badiou’s assertive style does little to placate the criticisms that Badiou’s anti-historicist construction of a systematic philosophy of truth has clearly courted, rather than merely sought to outwit. However, even if we limit ourselves to an internal evaluation of the project announced in *Manifesto for Philosophy*, a curious oversight emerges. Badiou’s plea for philosophy precludes what is surely its deepest question: Why should philosophy be renewed? His claim that, *pace* his theory of truth, philosophy is possible and therefore necessary wilfully evades this question. Badiou insinuates a legitimation of philosophy through the evasion of the various ‘disasters’ that result from philosophy’s suturing to its conditions. However, the idea that these disasters could be evaded by Badiou’s insistence on philosophy’s de-saturation negatively attributes an unlikely practical efficacy to

philosophy. For example, in his description of Stalinism and Fascism as ‘disastrous’ sutures of philosophy to the political – ‘the empirical, historical destinations of disastrous philosophemes handed over to execution’ – we can deduce a legitimation of philosophy on a monumental scale. However, to legitimate philosophy through the threat of Stalinism or Fascism not only negatively attributes an absurdly inflated significance to philosophy, but presupposes rather than legitimates philosophy’s *raison d’être*. Even in his encounter with the postmodern or deconstructive sophistry of contemporary anti-philosophy, Badiou’s renewal of philosophy relies on the sophists’ resentful presupposition of the significance of philosophy to legitimate his posing a new alternative. However, doesn’t this neglect the major opponent of the possibility of philosophy? Namely, not a covertly indebted sophistry, but a mere indifference to philosophy. Isn’t it the multiple activities that exist independently and indifferently to debates construable in terms of a classic encounter between sophists and philosophers which is the contemporary opponent to philosophy’s possibility? Indeed, just as Badiou recognizes that sophistry is the unsublatable bad conscience of philosophy, isn’t it the general suspension of this conflict which threatens to close philosophy? The answers Badiou provides are to the questions of *how*, not of *why* philosophy? In this sense at least, the confrontationalism of *Manifesto for Philosophy* still preaches to the converted.

Stewart Martin

Man or fly?

Randy Thornhill and Craig Palmer, *A Natural History of Rape: Biological Bases of Sexual Coercion*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA and London, 2000. xiii + 250 pp., £19.95 hb., 0 262 20125 9.

What’s in a name? If you happen to be named Randy, when neo-Darwinism is all the rage, it seems to trigger some rather primitively repetitive thrusts in the publishing domain. Twenty years ago, Californian biologists Randy and Nancy Thornhill proposed their ‘rape-adaptation hypothesis’, conjecturing that human males will rape when their capacity to reproduce successfully is thwarted. Today (no longer writing with his old mating partner, but with the anthropologist Craig Palmer) Randy is peddling the same hypothesis again. And once again we need reminding that there are less facile ways of understanding Darwin than evolutionary psychologists supply. As Adam Phillips noted recently, before Darwin died one of his greatest admirers,

Sigmund Freud, made discerning use of his insights, knowing ‘that the past influences everything and dictates nothing’. Meanwhile, others were busy inventing Darwinian axioms to dictate everything. That we have to waste our mental energies attending to the scientific posturing of Thornhill and Palmer is testimony to the sanctimonious return of just such a *Zeitgeist*.

‘Rape is just Nature’s way’ was how the *Observer* greeted the publication of this book. The evolutionary evidence for a rape adaptation in animals is drawn from observation of the use of an organ possessed by the male members ‘of certain scorpionflies’. Other entomologists report a similar rape-facilitating appendage or ‘clamp’ in the males of a species of wa-

terstrider and the sagebrush cricket. These insects are said to engage in coercive sex, with the help of their clamp, when their capacity to reproduce successfully is thwarted. As Thornhill and Palmer know, however, the overwhelming majority of human males behave rather differently. Just as well. The capacity of a billion human males to 'reproduce successfully' is thwarted daily as women almost everywhere (despite their supposed genetic imperative for maximum reproductive advantage) are having ever fewer children, later in life, are frequently raising them independently of the biological father, and in increasing numbers choosing to remain childless. But Thornhill and Palmer have little interest in statistics drawn from the systematically recorded reproductive behaviour of millions of women and men, when deploying 'the evidentiary arguments of evolutionary biology', drawn from the behaviour of certain insects.

The turn to evolutionary and genetic determinism has familiar backers. The prominent American anthropologist Donald Symons endorses these 'new' theories. For over two decades he too has promoted the 'Darwinian truth' that the human female, just by existing, and being 'continuously copulable', triggers in every passing male the desire to pursue 'easy, anonymous, impersonal, unencumbered sex' with an 'endless succession' of them. Echoing Symons, Thornhill and Palmer predict that males have been selected 'for at least some interest in mating with almost any female'. Boom boom. Yet, outside pornographic fabulation (existing primarily to help heterosexual men masturbate, because the 'real thing' proves not so copulable at all) the human male has other problems. The sex therapy industry thrives on those many men who need assistance to accomplish any sexual performance at all. But extensive sexological evidence of men's widespread erectile problems is filtered out of the 'scientific' evidence selected to confirm the stark gender polarities promoted here.

Thornhill and Palmer reserve particular scorn for the 'politically constructed social science' which has absorbed what they describe as the pervasive, near monolithic feminist account that 'rape is a crime of violence not of sex'. From my own feminist perspective, which shares little with their paternalistic presumptions of the inevitability of female sexual vulnerability (men in prison know well that they are quite as rapeable as women, though hardly pregnable), the formula that 'Rape is about power and control, not about sex' is not so helpful. Clearly sex, power and violence can be hideously intertwined, especially in cultures where men quickly learn that sex with a 'beautiful' woman is an



assured means, indeed the most successful way, of exhibiting manhood. Sexually motivated aggression may well provide some alleviation of men's dread of their own weakness, while punishing women for its existence. However, any feminist reduction of coercive sex to men's pursuit of power over women fails to work as a rebuttal of simplistic Darwinian determinisms, which merely add that men's contests for power are the inevitable outcome of biological priming for 'reproductive advantage': behaviour encoded in genes.

Thornhill and Palmer, like other neo-Darwinians, present themselves as an embattled vanguard defending the exacting truths of science against the sentimental superstitions of cultural belief. Some rather distinguished scientists see them, instead, as servicing hubristic illusions that science can provide a unifying blueprint for understanding, and above all attempting to control, the infinite complexity of living things. This is what has annoyed other research biologists who see the complexities of their empirical labours, and the legacy of Darwin himself, mocked by such pseudo-scientific posturings (see, for example, H. Rose and S. Rose, eds, *Alas, Poor Darwin*, or Steve Jones, *The Language of Genes*). Few academics, whatever their affiliations, deny that genes and their evolutionary history play an important role in human affairs. Fundamentalist Christian creationists have little purchase

as serious competitors in the UK, while those other rivals, the putative 'postmodernists', tend to delight in the amazing complexities of the life forms Darwin himself described (rather like the palaeontologist Stephen J. Gould).

Thornhill and Palmer mislead when they characterize their critics as anti-Darwinian. Indeed, Christian creationists are probably among those who support their views, since God created Man in His (Patriarchal) Image. Evolution is not itself in question. The point is that talk of the biological origins of human existence neither explains any particular pattern of events nor predicts their future direction. No perceived universality in human practice entails a genetic origin. Even if we choose to overlook the staggering weight of evidence for variability in precisely those areas of human sexual conduct which evolutionary theorists like Thornhill and Palmer insist are universally dimorphic, it would still be the case that any such generalization may be as much an effect of men's hitherto ubiquitous economic and social advantages as an evolved adaptation operating as a cause.

It is only by the most selective airing of correlational data that current evolutionary theorists can ignore the vast historical and sexological research on the negative correspondence between shifting human sexual practices and the pursuit of reproductive ends. Talk of 'natural selection' in the arena of sexual activity is nothing more than empty speculation, with no evidence of the evolutionary history of any particular attribute. The 'notal organ' on the abdomen of certain male scorpionflies, the Thornhills concluded in their earlier observations, has the sole purpose of facilitating 'rape' or 'coercive sex' in 'wimpier' male flies who prove unable to 'nourish' female flies when they mount them. Even ignoring the entomological provocations here, we cannot avoid asking what exactly happened to this 'rape appendage' in evolutionary history. Supposedly, it migrated to become a 'mental' rape adaptation in reproductively frustrated men. In support of this hypothesis we learn that infertile women are less likely to be raped than fertile women, and suffer 'less psychological pain' from rape (despite all that is now known of the prolonged destructiveness of child sexual abuse). We are also told that evolutionary science teaches us that the way to prevent rape is to inform men of the enormous 'power of their sexual impulses', and instruct them to learn self-control. Can they be serious? This is the exact message, the unflagging message, every boy has already heard, when his masculinity is being policed by other boys in our rape-prone society.

The trouble is that the media's unabated enthusiasm for reports that gene histories determine the way we are makes it impossible merely to ignore evolutionary psychology. It has to be constantly pointed out, against James Watson and his Human Genome backers, that genes provide the 'natural history' of no human conduct. The new enthusiasm for the idea that our gene histories determine our cultural futures occurs despite, not because of, new genetic knowledge. Genes act in intricate concert with each other and their ever-changing environments. Their history over time suggests the random, contingent nature of genetic change, rather than the outcome of Natural Law. As that dandy Irish dramatist once told us, 'the one thing one really knows about human nature is that it changes'. The intrinsic uncertainties and complexities in human genetic transactions make all attempts at genetic determinism formidable, even when trying to understand and treat those rare, genetically 'simple' diseases like haemophilia. Its deployment to explain and shift symbolically charged, hugely diverse, endlessly fraught patterns of human conduct (like sexual behaviour) is merely absurd. For the sake of reclaiming science, if nothing else, the work of Thornhill and Palmer should be treated with the derision it deserves.

Lynne Segal

Not saying no

Diana Coole, *Negativity and Politics: Dionysus and Dialectics from Kant to Poststructuralism*, Routledge, London and New York, 2000. 272 pp., £60.00 hb., £16.99 pb., 0 415 03176 1 hb., 0 415 03177 X pb.

What is negativity and how does it relate to politics? Perhaps someone free from dialectics, ignorant of negativity, unconcerned with politics could provide an answer to this question. But for Diana Coole and those who read her book there is no easy solution. The negative defies simple definition. It can most obviously be seen in opposition to the positive – as criticism, negation, resistance, transgression, lack or absence. This clearly points us in the direction of politics – it is an opposition to what is, to the way things are, to the way they operate. Invoking the negative is political in the sense of challenging and destabilizing illusions of presence, perfection and permanence, illusions that in turn sustain or are sustained by structures of power.

The problem that arises throughout this book is whether this critical negativity is enough to support

a progressive politics. There is a sense in which the politics of negativity contain a strategic aspect, but in their poststructural form these strategies may go too far in undermining or rejecting all positivity and fail to offer a politics of collective life. Coole is concerned to maintain a conception of politics that relates to the domain of collective life and such things as shared institutions, practices, rules and values. The political entails relatively enduring structures and practices that may be coercive but are also empowering. Critical modern and postmodern approaches are motivated by political opposition to the positive – whether this be to knowledge, language, subjectivity, metaphysics, the mode of production, the state, the ego or binary sexual difference. But as well as negation and critique, the political must encompass the slower tempo of collective action and structural imperatives. It must, more positively, be a space of decision, action and judgement, or else it descends into aesthetics and symbolic gesture.

It is slightly surprising that this book starts with Kant, given that Kant does not have an explicit conception of the negative. But he does give us a critical philosophy that establishes the limits of reason. Critical reason might be seen as an example of negativity, a process of interrogation, of questioning rational authority and dogmatic metaphysics, introducing an element of doubt and uncertainty. The danger with beginning with Kant, however, is that while he may provide a basis for questioning the limits of reason, this is to the detriment of ontology. This, in my view, is the dominant problem with the poststructuralist philosophers discussed in this book. It is something that Coole's analysis reveals, but does not adequately confront.

This cannot be said of Hegel, for whom negativity exists in the dynamic process of becoming. However, it is claimed that there is a tension in Hegel's work between a teleological philosophy of identity and a self-generativity that emphasizes difference and alterity. There are two directions that interpretations of Hegel can take. One is to go with Marx and see the negative as material and historical so that dialectics becomes a critical method and mode of political practice. However, it is argued that the process of the becoming of reason reaches an end-point with the elimination of all non-identity. For Hegel, this is the becoming of the modern constitutional state; for Marx, negation is associated with the actions of the proletariat and culminates in the communist society. The alternative is to take the poststructuralist turn and reject dialectics as it implies the resolution of binary

oppositions and the elimination of the negative. This tradition looks to Nietzsche and places its emphasis on alterity.

The traditional Hegelian-Marxist approach sees negation as determination and takes a teleological form. Coole finds a slightly surprising alternative to this in Merleau-Ponty's work. This contains a dialectical conception of a meaningful but contingent lifeworld where social institutions are open diacritical systems. It is argued that this maintains the importance of the subject-object relation without succumbing to the kind of privileging of subject-object identity which is found in writers like Lukács. The emphasis on lifeworld is one on intersubjectivity, although, unlike Habermas, Merleau-Ponty does not ground intersubjectivity in language and communicative action, but in perception, thus avoiding any rationalist tendencies.

The Nietzschean approach to negativity is to see it as the generativity that stands in place of ontology. Coole is right to raise the question of whether or not the will to power is itself just a novel ontology, and to ask whether it too develops a metaphysical aura. She argues that the will to power is not an origin but an interpretation and becoming. Appearances are not the phenomenal manifestation of some ultimate force, but are continually mutating and reforming. Creation and destruction take place through the play of differences and the strength of different wills. There is no privileging of a certain structure or agent, no presupposition of a truth beneath appearances. All forms are contingent and potentially reversible.

In Derrida this takes the form of the workings of *différance*. In contrast to Hegel's antithesis and sublation there is inversion and subversion. Politics is not about reconciliation but the undecidability that defies identity. Emphasis is not so much on contradiction as on the multiplicity of the undecidable. This in turn undermines the drive towards totalization that Hegel advocates. And this method has recently been directed against Marx, where Derrida conjures up multiple spirits to undermine the supposed closure of Marx's ontology. For Derrida, as for Adorno, negativity is not a final principle. There is no metaphysical truth of things in themselves. Their approach is an immanent one that unleashes the creative-destructive power of negativity and non-identity. They are not attempting to show that there is some true reality underlying social forms but rather that dialectical thought traces the connections and contradictions associated with reason and society.

Coole claims that Adorno's work is political in the sense that it deconstructs for critical and emancipatory



In concluding, the book notes the problem of trying to express negativity as a philosophy while denying the possibility of its representation. While these approaches are congenial to aesthetic, ethical and philosophical interventions, we are left wondering about the political arena where collective life is negotiated. It is argued that we need some inertia and durability, some shared practices and procedures. Democracy needs to be formative and creative as well as destructive. The challenge for political theory is to rethink the basis of collective life and political association.

Coole calls for a more dialectical approach, which, she says,

reasons, directed as it is against the reified totality and its rationalism, fetishism, violence, domination and closure. It is said that Adorno dialectically sustains the possibility of an excessive and heterogeneous critical agency and subjects structures to critical analysis and transformation. Is this really so? As Coole later admits, there is a serious difficulty in translating this essentially philosophical approach into a politics of collective action. But this is surely inevitable once any notion of transforamtive agency is rejected and the burden of praxis is shifted onto the philosophical task of immanent critique.

Kristeva, like Adorno, sees that late capitalism has made direct challenges to oppressive structures almost impossible. She develops a negative politics of the subject that looks at what remains unsatisfied and repressed. The terrain of radical politics shifts to signifying practices. The avant-garde displaces the proletariat as agent of negation; its project is the renegotiation of the socio-symbolic contract. Politics moves to the psychocultural, to *jouissance* and to the politics of drugs, youth cultures, music, aesthetic practices and non-Western cultures. The women's movement is a radical part of a broad cultural transformation that challenges the Western symbolic. Politics is discursive and performative, exploring the personal, the symbolic, the semiotic. Again, the question is whether this politics of the subject and of negativity can translate into one capable of challenging the oppressive structures of capitalism.

would require us to examine the relationship between ontology and political negativity as a matter of historical mediation. She describes her position as an endorsement of dialectics, albeit informed by Nietzschean and postmodern sensitivities. This book was initially intended as a defence of the radical politics and ethics of postmodernism and poststructuralism, but during its composition it took an increasingly dialectical position. This account of the evolution of the book helps us understand its strengths and weaknesses. It is a strength of this development that we get a series of highly pertinent critiques of the limits of poststructural theory and the severe limitations of its political arguments. The weakness is that although the shortcomings of poststructuralism are revealed, an alternative is not in place. Alternatives are brilliantly glimpsed but not systematically developed. In particular, it would have been good to see more of an endorsement of ontology. Poststructuralists attack ontology for being monolithic and teleological but it does not have to be like that. Some recent work, such as the dialectical critical realism of Roy Bhaskar, is compatible with the epistemic sensitivities of poststructuralism while retaining a strong ontological commitment that nevertheless opposes itself to what is termed 'ontological monovalence' or a purely positive account of being. With such an ontology it is possible to get on with the kind of affirmative, life-enhancing politics advocated by Coole. Without it, we are trapped in the iron cage of negative politics.

Jonathan Joseph

Yes, but why?

Paul Patton, *Deleuze and the Political*, Routledge, London and New York, 2000. 176 pp., £45.00 hb., £12.99 pb., 0 41510 063 1 hb., 0 41510 064 X pb.

This is the seventh book in Routledge's 'Thinking the Political' series, aiming to introduce a wide audience to the complex relation between the political and the philosophical in recent continental thought. The burgeoning interest in Deleuze on the Anglo-American scene makes this a timely work, and Patton should be congratulated for producing one of the more accessible introductions to Deleuze's thought, admirably weaving together the early philosophical monographs with the later collaborations with Félix Guattari. The work is also made timely by the recent translation into English of Alain Badiou's *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being* (reviewed in *RP* 103), which rejects the interpretation of Deleuze as a post-1968 thinker of the emancipation of desiring flows, portraying instead an ascetic and aristocratic philosopher set on resubmitting thought to a renewed concept of the One. Patton's book does not answer Badiou's on the ontological level at which the latter is pitched, but it nonetheless restores Deleuze as a political philosopher of multiplicity, without ascribing to him the naive romantic anarchism with which he and Guattari are often associated.

The distinctiveness of Deleuze's thinking and politics, Patton argues, comes from his privileging of process over structure, and his concomitant interest in the way movement and change can and do occur. The novelty of this approach 'does not lie in its refusal of any systematic character but rather in the nature of the system which it develops'. The latter unfolds through a logic of open multiplicities, illustrated initially by Patton through Deleuze and Guattari's account of the concept as a nexus of relations to other concepts and problems, whose meaning changes with transformations of this relational web. This multiplicity, as Patton says, is defined not in terms of a principle of unity but rather by a 'line of flight' by which it mutates. The Deleuzian concept is also a 'virtual event': a problematic field actualized through the different concrete forms it takes, the latter embodying precarious solutions to the problem the concept poses. This two-tiered system of virtual concept and actualized embodiment presents two forms of mutually imbricated and reciprocally influencing multiplicity – molecular and molar levels – through which social meaning is both constituted and deconstituted.

Following from this arrangement Patton articulates a number of Deleuzian notions with both indirect

and straightforward implications for political and social theory. Against standard conceptions of power, Deleuze draws upon Nietzsche and Spinoza to present an ontology of will to power constituted by relations of heterogeneous forces. This, in turn, gives rise to reconceptualizations of desire and its relation to politics, and of freedom and its relation to identity and the self. Most importantly, it gives rise to the Deleuzian conception of 'nomadic becomings', mutations that can effect partial or total 'deterritorializations' of modes of colonization and capture which seek to contain differences within forms of territory and identity. Such deterritorializing movements are always present alongside reterritorializing ones, and their interplay defines a set of state formations or machines – territorial, despotic, and capitalist – which coexist to varying degrees within any concrete social and political setting, creating multiple levels to social and political life. Through these ideas, Patton shows, Deleuze provides the tools for a politics of difference which does not simply oppose minority groups to the



dominant majority, but instead supports a politics of 'becoming minor', built upon creative and revolutionary divergences from both the hegemonic and the marginal.

Patton carefully links these diverse theoretical points to standard questions in political theory while demonstrating how they compel political thought beyond its normal framework. Rejecting the often-heard criticism that Deleuze's Nietzschean-inspired analytic of power amounts to nothing more than relativism, he insists instead that it creates a nuanced system of judgement. He maintains that Deleuze and Guattari do not privilege nomadism for its own sake, but demand deterritorializations which are connective and productive, and hence political. And he develops from these a notion of critical freedom which extends beyond the alternatives of positive and negative liberty, towards the creative use of crisis to press oneself beyond one's established identity and its boundaries.

There are useful engagements with more standard approaches to conceptual change in the history of political thought, liberal and Marxist analyses of power and individualism, and feminist criticisms of Deleuze and Guattari on the theme of 'becoming woman'. The writing is generally clear, and the book will certainly be of value to students of more mainstream political theory interested in engaging with Deleuze. However, the concern for clarity may have been carried too far. The exposition of the text is almost exclusively descriptive – a far too common mode in Deleuze studies – and while Patton is to be commended for providing, unlike much of the literature, more than a redescription of Deleuze that uses the very jargon in need of explanation, one often has the feeling that a deeper level of explanation or argument is required. For example, when going through the logic of the actualization of problems, Patton states 'there will be as many kinds of problem as there are distinct species of matter and thought, including physical, biological and psychic problems'. Yet no account is given of how such problems are to be distinguished, let alone where the various species come from. Instead, we are simply told that '[t]he Idea of language as such, or the transcendental Problem of language, will therefore be a virtual structure which includes all of the sets of relations between signifying elements which may be actualized in particular languages' and that '[t]he Idea or transcendental Problem of society as such will therefore be a virtual set of indeterminate relations between means of production, direct and indirect producers, and consumers, while particular Ideas of society will involve an actual set of determinate social

relations'. One may wonder why these descriptions should be accepted, and why Deleuze should not be accused – as Aristotle was accused by Kant, and Kant himself by Hegel – of pulling his categories out of thin air. More to the point, one may wonder why Patton seems not to realize that his declarations are already instantiations of a virtual field, not descriptions of the virtual field itself. Given that Deleuze is so often accused of falling back to a pre-Kantian assertion of a prediscursive reality, this is an important issue to address.

The resulting portrayal of Deleuze focuses more on the images he invokes than on the arguments he makes. This does not present problems where the goal is only to introduce Deleuze's thought; and in any event, these images, as Patton notes, are not mere metaphors for Deleuze and Guattari. But it is not enough when Patton attempts to move beyond description to argument or comparison with other thinkers on subtle points, and at such moments the text becomes rather sloppy. For example, Patton tries to separate Deleuze and Guattari's micropolitics of desire from Foucault's micropolitics of power. After quoting Deleuze and Guattari's position in *A Thousand Plateaus*, where they contrast the positivity of desire with an asserted negativity and reactivity of Foucauldian power relations, Patton declares this to be an oversimplification, and proceeds to flesh out the theme of affective desire as the crucial difference. But no critical analysis is given as to why Deleuze and Guattari present Foucault in such simplified terms, and the fact that this simplification is absent from Deleuze's *Foucault* is ignored. The only real point made is the obvious one that affect is not part of Foucault's vocabulary, but no attempt is made to show that the term is not fully compatible with Foucauldian power relations once they are understood as disjunctive rather than as oppositional in the way Deleuze and Guattari have cast them.

These limitations in the presentation of Deleuze seem also to be reflected in the limitations of the politics towards which his work is seen to point. The book culminates with an interesting, but all too brief, account of how recent legal decisions on aboriginal title may effect a deterritorialization in conceptions of land, linking nomadic and sedentary European understandings in ways which challenge the idea that Australia was settled rather than conquered. This point hardly requires Deleuzian concepts. And the way it is made gives no attention to the numerous forms of reterritorializing and normalizing power undoubtedly also at work within the Australian legal framework

– forms of power of which any Deleuzian or Foucauldian ought to be keenly aware.

Santayana once remarked of Bergson that ‘He is persuasive without argument.’ The Deleuze literature often does little to prevent Deleuze from being branded similarly. Badiou misunderstands Deleuze badly on many points, but at least he presents him as making a philosophical argument and engages with that argument. It is regrettable that *Deleuze and the Political* does not take this step, for it would have added greatly to what is a positive and useful account of Deleuze’s political philosophy.

Nathan Widder

Unfinishing de Certeau

Ian Buchanan, *Michel de Certeau: Cultural Theorist*, Sage, Thousand Oaks CA, London, New Delhi, 2000. 160 pp., £50.00 hb., £16.99 pb, 0 761 95897 5 hb., 0 761 95898 3 pb.

Confronted with a notoriously varied body of writing, anyone attempting to grasp the thought of Michel de Certeau must first face the problem of how to connect work on religious history, for instance, with work on contemporary everyday life. To put it more bluntly, the problem faced is how to concoct an account of de Certeau that can accommodate his Christian convictions and his promotion of ‘everyday resistance’. The ambition of Ian Buchanan’s book is evidenced by the fact that he doesn’t avoid these issues by parcelling de Certeau’s work into disciplinary enclaves (historiography, anthropology, sociology, religious history, and so on) or historically distinct moments (pre- and post-1968, for instance). For Buchanan, avoiding the messy totality of de Certeau’s work is symptomatic of the instrumental reading he has received in Anglophone cultural studies. The fate of *The Practice of Everyday Life*, for instance, has to a large extent been to act as a reservoir for one-liners that can be slotted into pre-designed arguments about ‘power and resistance’.

Buchanan’s book seeks to rescue de Certeau from the ‘popular’ or dominant image that cultural studies has generated. For this Buchanan works to relocate de Certeau (the location of knowledge production being a crucial aspect of de Certeau’s analytic procedure) by arranging encounters between him and the likes of Jameson, Deleuze and Guattari, Greimas, Brecht and Lacan. In an effort to effect such a relocation, and to deal with the opaque totality of the work, Buchanan

speculatively constructs what he calls (after Deleuze) de Certeau’s ‘plane of immanence’. This is a kind of imagined sociality (or ‘form of life’) that implicitly saturates a body of thought, often at the level of style and taste. And it is through this that Buchanan begins to connect de Certeau’s belief in God, his involvement in Lacanian psychoanalysis and his ethnographic approach to contemporary life.

For Buchanan ‘communication’ is the animating desire in de Certeau’s thought, and the possibilities and difficulties of achieving communication within a secular society are what drive the work. In this way his Christian faith, rather than being an embarrassing *faux pas* that is best passed over in silence, or met with barely muffled giggles, is rendered part of a symptomatology in which ‘communication’ is seen as foundational. Thus, religious belief does not determine de Certeau’s theoretical inclination; both his theoretical propensity and his Christianity are symptomatic of a more fundamental orientation. De Certeau’s religious faith is seen as symptomatic of a belief in an ‘ineffable something that is resistant to the last degree’ and is ‘simply the repressed form of communication, the ideal speech situation driven inwards by the destruction of its contextual parameters (belief in God, for instance)’. At the same time, such belief, for Buchanan, is one of many indications of an insistently anti-utopian turn of mind: it is the radical transformation implied in any utopian solution that threatens to annul the possibility of the ‘ineffable something’ emerging as communication. De Certeau’s practice, both in the realm of cultural policy (he participated in a number of governmental forums) and in his writing, is thereby seen as an attempt to negotiate the almost contradictory demand to foster a non-utopian speech situation where ‘no one’s speech is suppressed by anyone else’s’.

Similarly, the insistence throughout much of de Certeau’s work to examine the way forms of knowledge are authorized (history, anthropology, and so on) is not seen in the spirit of critical dismantling, but as a way of allowing more modest (but also more inventive) modes of communication to emerge. De Certeau’s historiographic practice, for instance, seeks to uncover the operations that are necessary to present documents as history, and while this works to deflate the puffed-up authority of those who want to speak in the name of the past, its motivation is not critical *per se*. For instance, de Certeau’s 1970 book on *The Possession at Loudun* (a seventeenth-century case of demonic possession) can be treated as an example of a new mode of historical writing, combining in a

montage style 'original' documentation, contemporary accounts of the case, interwoven with de Certeau's commentary. Thus de Certeau is seen as performing a kind of Brechtian estrangement whereby the rhetorical and institutional devices that grant authority are revealed, not in order to scupper communication, but to allow for a more animated and situated presentation of the material. Books such as *The Possession at Loudun* and *The Practice of Everyday Life* can be read as 'language experiments' that work towards an articulation that is at once both complex (they allow for a polyphonic presentation) and generative (they become a training ground for generating new speech situations).

While Buchanan might be seen as performing his own useful 'estrangement' by offering us an unfamiliar version of de Certeau, the real pleasure and productivity of this book relates to Brecht's call to 'transform finished works into unfinished works'. By treating de Certeau's work as radically unfinished Buchanan's book becomes urgent and challenging in the most literal way. Here, de Certeau's work contains not the words of a master, which must in turn be mastered, but an invitation to engage in the invention of new schemas of recognition. If de Certeau is seen as an inventor who died leaving some initial diagrams and blueprints, and a host of experimental prototypes, then the job of the commentator becomes one of participation in his unfinished (and perhaps unfinishable) project.

Seen in this way, de Certeau's mobilization of terms like 'heterology' or 'strategies and tactics' or 'place and space' renders them experimental tokens for the cognitive mapping of a world that is, as yet, barely recognized. De Certeau's practice can be taken as a kind of social phenomenology that, as well as trying to describe what is already 'out there', works to participate in the inventiveness of everyday life by allowing new ways of operating and communicating to emerge. In this way the politics of de Certeau's orientation is unclear, because such a phenomenology would be the prerequisite for an emergent politics of the everyday (which due to de Certeau's death was never completed). But Buchanan's approach doesn't suspend appraisal in his willingness to flesh out the implications of de Certeau's more incipient innovations. Indeed, it becomes clear that while Buchanan is fascinated by de Certeau, his sympathies lie in directions both more utopian and more directed towards the critical mapping of the social totality.

Perhaps it should come as no surprise, then, if in the end Buchanan figures de Certeau's anti-utopianism as a deep pessimism: 'there is a kind of hopelessness

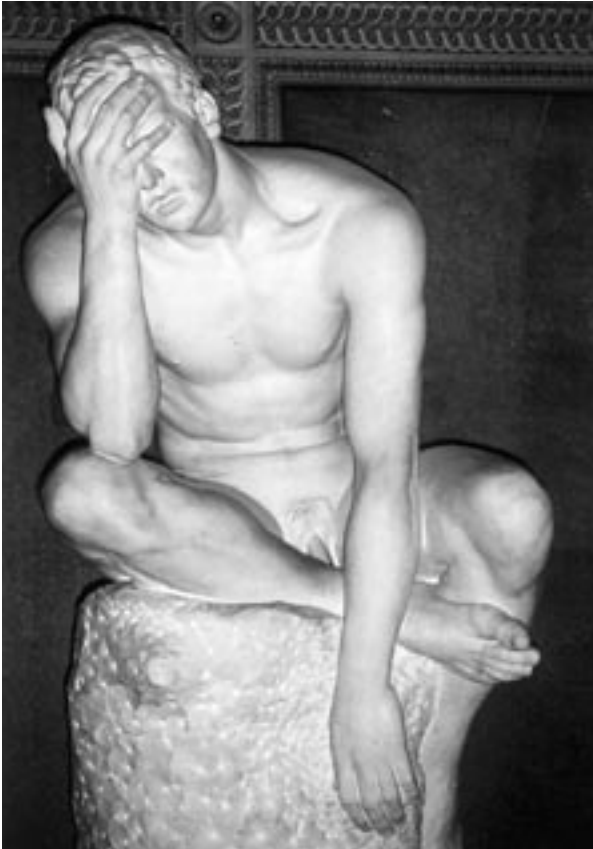
here that colours everything, even that which might on first flush have seemed romantic and charming'. Such a characterization works effectively within the book's aim 'to be a concerted intervention into the Anglo-American "reception" of de Certeau's work'. After all, Anglo-American cultural studies has continually presented de Certeau as optimistically celebrating a general tenacity and resourcefulness in the face of power. Yet the finality of Buchanan's assessment might also work to undo aspects of the nuanced account that the book establishes. For as Buchanan suggests throughout, de Certeau's own resourcefulness is to be found in his 'language experiments', his own attempts to describe and fashion 'culture in the plural'. De Certeau's practice not only seeks to recognize a subterranean world of communication (mystic speech, everyday ways of operating); it also seeks to facilitate new communicative encounters (never knowable in advance). Here surely is the inverse of hopelessness. De Certeau's heuristic, speculative attempt to relocate the everyday at the forefront of thought must be resolutely hopeful, not because it believes in the progressiveness of such a move, but because it prepares the ground for the unanticipated. And anyone who so forcefully pursues the unanticipated can only do so in the name of hope.

Ben Highmore

Fellow without a fatherland

Joseph McCarney, *Hegel on History*, London and New York, Routledge, 2000. xi + 234 pp., £35.00 hb., £8.99 pb., 0 415 11695 3 hb., 0 415 11696 1 pb.

'Sheer nonsense' and 'a lasting monument to German stupidity': Schopenhauer's resentful verdict on Hegel's work has been wholeheartedly shared by many. Seen as arrogant and often unintelligible, convinced that he had created a system which comprehended life, the universe and everything, Hegel has been portrayed as a classic example of an ivory-tower philosopher who, turning his back on his youthful radicalism, became a self-serving toady to the Prussian state. But did Hegel deserve his reputation? Not if Joseph McCarney is right. For McCarney presents Hegel's philosophy not only as rooted in everyday experience but also as a call to social and political engagement, and he believes that his discussion of Hegel's philosophy of history will make this clear. McCarney's subject is the lectures on the philosophy of history Hegel gave in Berlin in the



1820s, although he focuses on the *Introduction to the Philosophy of History* and often refers to other works. The attempt to discern a meaning in historical events taken as a whole – revealing an intelligible underlying plot, the way in which it unfolds, and the end towards which history is moving – was a central concern for many of Hegel's generation, but it was Kant's political writings that influenced him most. Kant put forward a view of history as the development of human freedom and rationality, embodied in political institutions, guided by the 'hidden plan' of nature, and – with 'reason' substituted for 'nature' – this was roughly Hegel's view as well. But Hegel's idea of freedom differed from Kant's, as did his epistemology and ontology; and because his philosophy of history can only be understood as a part of the whole, McCarney sets out first to outline the conceptual framework of Hegel's metaphysics. The book is therefore divided into two parts, with a 'bridging section' or 'interval' in between. The first part deals with the main elements of Hegel's system; the interval links this to his interpretation of world history (focusing on the historical dialectic, or 'what ... makes history go'); and the second part explores the philosophy of history itself. All the important elements of the system are clarified, analysed and related to his vision of history: newcomers to Hegel will find this a helpful guide to his work.

Understandably impatient with the common tendency to jump to conclusions about Hegel's intentions or the social and political implications of his thought, McCarney defends him against allegations of nationalism, racism and totalitarian sympathies. Hegel's remark that 'only the will which obeys the law is free', McCarney points out, should not be taken to mean that he equated freedom with unhesitating obedience to the dictates of the state. Nor should we dismiss the suggestion that only world history can judge the ruthless actions of 'world-historical individuals' as a callous declaration that 'might is right'. And McCarney not only reminds us that 'the myth of Hegel as the philosopher of German nationalism is wholly the creation of a later period', but argues that 'a firmer theoretical basis for the fundamental equality of human beings than Hegelian spirit provides can scarcely be conceived'. Hegel thought the modern state derived its strength, in part, from accommodating cultural diversity, and was 'truly innocent of racist attitudes' – making himself so unpopular by opposing the movement to deny civil rights to Jews ('the Jews', he insisted, 'are primarily *human beings*') that he was derided as 'the fellow without a fatherland'.

Yet Hegel's attitude to non-Europeans was still offensive, by our standards, and McCarney acknowledges the arrogance, the complacency, and the residue of cultural prejudice in the *Lectures*, which at times is even comical. (He gives the prize for absurdity to 'the story, retailed by Hegel, that Catholic clergy had to ring a bell at midnight to remind Paraguayan Indians of their matrimonial duties'.) Not much can be said in mitigation, although McCarney does his best – pointing out that Hegel's anthropological sources were poor, for example, and to 'the histrionic temptations of the lecture theatre'. But in the end he can only reiterate that such bigotry is 'directly at odds with the inner logic of Hegel's thought', and leave us pondering the relationship between the thinker and his work, and between Hegel's time and our own: 'What could then be said without exciting special comment by an eminent professor lecturing in a major European university would surely now have the character of hotel bar rantings. It may be possible to see in these circumstances a modest Hegelian message about the progress of spirit.'

On this idea of progress, and the irreversibility of historical events, McCarney argues that 'Hegel is not grappling ... with phantoms created by his own style of thinking', but simply offering a means of conceptualizing an apparently inescapable feature of human experience – the fact that 'Newton could

not have come before Kepler or after Einstein', for example. But is this progress, rather than merely difference? And what about Hegel's suggestion that world history as a whole can be understood as the progress of the consciousness of freedom? McCarney explores this by considering more recent events from a Hegelian perspective: the collapse of oppressive Communist regimes and of apartheid could be taken as evidence in support of Hegel's view, he points out, yet the genocidal horrors of the twentieth century present a real barrier to its acceptance. McCarney's discussion of how Hegel might have responded to twentieth-century events and defended his argument that 'world history has been rational in its course' obstructs, once again, the standard simplistic objections, yet his own conclusion is unpersuasive. 'The vulnerability of the philosophy of history to being empirically confounded', he argues, 'is the price to be paid for its explanatory potential.' But surely Hegel's vision is an interpretation rather than an explanation – a paradigm or world-view, perhaps invulnerable to empirical refutation?

Kierkegaard was thinking of Hegel when he wrote that, 'In relation to their systems most systematizers are like a man who builds an enormous castle but lives in a shack nearby', and McCarney suggests that the philosophy of history provides a defence against this 'brilliantly unfair charge' by supplying the key

to understanding 'how his system can be inhabited'. But it is perhaps when he considers the *Philosophy of Right* that he best undermines the claim that Hegel was building castles in the air. There Hegel notoriously declared that 'What is rational is actual [*wirklich*]; and what is actual is rational.' This is often taken as symptomatic of a deep-seated conservatism in his thought leaving no room for revolution in social and political institutions. Although McCarney finds Hegel's own rebuttals of this charge 'not wholly convincing' – and describes his attitude to poverty and inequality as 'one of unwonted resignation' – he nevertheless argues that Hegel's work not only allows for engagement but perhaps even impels it. Hegel called his undertaking 'a theodicy, a justification of God', but suggested that our response to the suffering and evil of existence should be based not on the consoling thought of an afterlife but on the power of philosophy to *reconcile* us to evil by demonstrating the rationality and necessity of the course of history. However, this cannot be taken as an excuse for fatalistic apathy, since the reconciliation of spirit and the existing world is itself a dynamic activity, and therefore an ongoing task for us all. As McCarney sums it up: 'to be truly at home in the world, to possess the freedom that lies in the disappearance of estrangement, is ... to be engaged in trying to change it.'

Jane Chamberlain

Gulf war over

Samuel C. Wheeler III, *Deconstruction as Analytic Philosophy*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2000. 312 pp., £35.00 hb., £12.95 pb., 0 8047 3752 5 hb., 0 8047 3753 3 pb.

In his introduction to this collection of essays, the author recounts how he once presented Derrida with a copy of Saul Kripke's *Naming and Necessity*, a text that Wheeler describes as 'nearly transparent'. Derrida remarked that he had already tried to read this landmark of analytic philosophy but had not been able to understand 'what was going on'. In contrast, reports Wheeler, Derrida remarked that he found Heidegger very clear. This gives rise to Wheeler's first attempt at grappling with the difference between analytic and continental philosophy: 'you are an analytic philosopher if you think Kripke writes clearly; you are a continental philosopher if you think Heidegger writes clearly'. While this is just as good as many more wordy attempts to pin down this most elusive distinction, one cannot help but wonder where the vast number of philosophers who find neither Kripke nor Heidegger 'nearly transparent' could be said to reside on the

philosophical map. Indeed, this is one of the reasons that an increasing number of philosophers sidestep the analytic/continental divide altogether. Nonetheless, the anecdote serves a useful purpose in reminding us of the gulf that exists between the variety of academic labourers who share the title and self-description, 'philosopher'. That this collection helps us to understand all the more clearly the nature of that gulf is sufficient justification for its existence in an already overcrowded marketplace.

As the title suggests, though, Wheeler is interested in showing us that in many respects the gulf is not as great as we think, largely because the nature of the analytic/continental divide is so often misunderstood. Wheeler recognizes, however, that to argue this case convincingly one cannot simply place analytic and continental philosophy side by side. One must construct the bridge between these two modes of phil-

osophy with care if either camp is to be tempted to stray to the other side. In this respect Wheeler chooses his points of departure well. On the analytic side the focus is on Davidson, with large doses of Quine, while on the continental side Derrida is the main representative, although de Man also figures throughout the text. Furthermore, the Derrida texts that Wheeler draws upon are those that we may now call 'classic Derrida', *Of Grammatology*, *Speech and Phenomena* and 'Limited Inc.' These are 'texts ... written before the consequences of his deconstructive arguments for philosophical methodology itself had affected his own practice' and that avoid Derrida's more recent statements on ethics and politics. The bridge that Wheeler thinks can be built between deconstruction and analytic philosophy, therefore, is buttressed by shared concerns about the nature of language, writing, intentionality, iterability and so on.

Despite having narrowed down the focus of the comparison, Wheeler knows that there is still a lot of work to be done. Indeed, as the 'as' in the title makes clear, it is not enough simply to *show* certain similarities between Derrida and Davidson, as if laying them out on the examination table for all to see, these similarities must be *forged* within the essays that make up this collection. But the nature of this process demands a prior decision regarding the audience. To his credit, Wheeler puts this up front in the opening line of the book: '*Deconstruction as Analytic Philosophy* primarily addresses analytic philosophers'. It is primarily analytic philosophers that he is trying to tempt into walking over his bridge to the continental side (not with the hope of enticing them to stay, but rather with the aim of encouraging them at least to take a peek at the continent they so often deride). The potential cost of this strategy is that there will be many philosophers more conversant with Heidegger than with Kripke who will still find that they do not know 'what is going on' in this text.

What is it that links Derrida and Davidson? According to Wheeler, they are both critical of the idea of a 'magic language' (Wheeler's terminology). A 'magic language' would be one which enabled us to 'know what we mean' without fear of sliding into an abyss of competing and conflicting interpretations. This shared starting point gives rise to other similarities: both philosophers deny that context can help decide between competing interpretations and both refuse to philosophize from 'the given' such that questions of realism and idealism, for example, are deemed redundant. This account of the similarities between Derrida and Davidson clears the way for an accurate

account of where they still disagree. Wheeler admits that it has taken him a long time to figure out exactly what separates Derrida and Davidson and, indeed, that 'none of the chapters in this book makes this difference clear'. Nonetheless, he uses the introduction to present the difference with admirable clarity. Derrida, for Wheeler, takes interpretive indeterminacy to indicate that notions of truth and truth conditions are not always applicable to our understanding of life and language. Davidson, while sharing Derrida's concern with the idea of a 'magic language', remains committed to the idea that truth conditions apply to all utterances even though such conditions are in principle indeterminable. In short, Derrida takes indeterminacy to imply that truth supervenes on being; while Davidson assumes that truth is absolutely central and basic to the possibility of thought, and indeterminacy merely implies that there are, in principle, unknowable truths.

Once this hairline crack has been pointed out, however, it is tempting to argue that Wheeler's bridge between analytic and continental philosophy is always likely to collapse. Most of those from an analytic background will never dally for too long with the idea that truth is not central to philosophy, while most of those of a more continental hue will remain forever suspicious of Davidson's attempt to retain the primacy of truth in philosophical investigations, despite his rigorous advocacy of interpretive indeterminacy. That said, Wheeler's best response to such scepticism can be found in the carefully argued individual essays that make up this collection. While two-thirds have been published previously, the collection as a whole makes a convincing case for using analytic and continental philosophers together in tackling such shared themes as intentionality, rhetoric, metaphor and truth. By example, Wheeler has made the case for bringing deconstruction and analytic philosophy to bear on a number of key issues and this may be enough to set aside, for the moment at least, the deeper theoretical rifts that still pervade more generalized discussions of these two philosophical camps. Perhaps another thing that deconstruction and analytic philosophy share is that doing philosophy is always more rewarding than chattering about it. If that is the case, then this book sets an excellent example, one that could be used to inspire teachers of philosophy to construct courses that blend analytic and continental philosophers together around themes rather than set them up against each other in bloody but pointless battles.

Iain MacKenzie

Barebacking Lacan

Tim Dean, *Beyond Sexuality*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2000. 304 pp., £29.00 hb., £11.50 pb., 0 226 13934 4 hb., 0 226 13935 2 pb.

Ever since the translation in the mid-1980s of Luce Irigaray's accusations of phallocracy addressed to *mes-sieurs les psychanalystes* of the Lacanian establishment, and the publication of Monique Wittig's slightly later claim that we should not be surprised that Lacan discovered his unconscious structures since he was the one who put them there in the first place, Lacanian psychoanalysis has had a rough go of it in feminist and anti-homophobic circles in the Anglo-American world. With few exceptions, feminists and queer theorists have criticized Lacan's return to Freud for upholding phallocratic and heterosexist assumptions embedded in his allegedly static and structuralist concept of a symbolic order that attributes greater levels of privilege to heterosexual men. Most recently, Judith Butler has attacked the idea of the Real – certainly the most distinctive and consequential of Lacan's difficult concepts – as the means by which Lacanian psychoanalysis fails to move beyond a residual heterosexism.

It is against this backdrop of ambivalence and suspicion that Tim Dean's *Beyond Sexuality* valiantly attempts to make an intervention in the reception of Lacan by claiming his work for queer theory, and by untangling Lacan's concept of sexuality from its confused representation in the work of American post-structuralist critics, including most significantly Lee Edelman and Judith Butler herself. Indeed, *Beyond Sexuality* acquires monumental significance when one considers that it is the first sustained attempt to articulate a self-consciously Lacanian anti-heterosexist theory of sexuality, and to outline a Lacanian methodology for the analysis of queer cultural problematics, most importantly, in the case of Dean's book, the arena of safer-sex education in the age of HIV and AIDS.

It becomes clear early on that Dean knows he is working against the grain of contemporary queer theory. That he succeeds to a large extent in his effort to explain how a Lacanian approach to sexuality avoids the shortcomings of the competing approaches is no small accomplishment. Central to Dean's argument is his contention that Lacan's concept of the *objet petit a* – the object-cause of desire, as Lacan defines it – implies that desire is not only impersonal, in the sense of not directed toward the other *qua* person, but also 'ungendered' or, in other words, indifferent to the object's biological sex. In this way Dean underlines the

agency of unconscious fantasy in human sexuality, and it is precisely this dimension which is glossed over, in his view, in the poststructuralist approach. The coda of Dean's consideration consists in a suggestive rereading of Freud's *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* that advances excrement, rather than the phallus, as the prototypical human object of desire. In Dean's view, such a contention brings to the fore not only the radical polymorphousness of the body's erotogenicity, but also the radical contingency and indeterminacy of desire's object itself. If, as Dean writes, 'the phallus is less a figure for the penis than, more fundamentally, a figure for the turd', then Lacanian psychoanalysis presents a de-heterosexualized and anti-normative view of human desire that resists both the aggressive, conformity-seeking ambitions of the imaginary, and the ordering, differentiating workings of the symbolic.

It is certainly possible to argue against Dean's position on the phallus that he makes precisely the same culturalist assumption – namely, that the phallus features a privileged relation to biological men – with which he reproaches his adversaries. However, Dean makes the most headway in his argument against Lacan's detractors when he tries to recuperate for queer theory Lacan's concept of the Real from what Dean calls the 'rhetoricalist' assumptions informing the work of Judith Butler and Lee Edelman. It is precisely the impossibility of conceptualizing the Real through the apparatus of 'rhetoric, discourse, culture, history, and social relations', Dean suggests, that makes Lacan's work so crucial for anti-homophobic theory. The consequence of the rhetoricalist critics' inability to appreciate the negativity of the unconscious is that 'they treat subjectivity and sexuality as if these dimensions of psychic life were a function of one's self-image'. In consequence, critics such as Butler and Edelman tend to advance a voluntarist idea of sexuality that erroneously makes sexual orientation a function of the 'self', thereby producing what Dean calls a 'paranoid, highly defensive binarity typical of the imaginary structure'.

Dean's arguments against Butler and Edelman are pointed and persuasive, if somewhat repetitive and lacking in conceptual precision. *Beyond Sexuality* is at its most memorable, in my view, in its more practical mode, when it applies its commitment to a psychoanalytic methodology to the difficulties encountered by safer-sex educators, who have repeatedly discovered that the dissemination of knowledge about the means of HIV transmission fails to produce the changes in sexual behaviours that one might ordinarily expect. Ingeniously, Dean proposes that the dynamics

of unconscious sexual fantasy at work in male homosexual subcultures suggest that an 'intolerance – not of the Other but of one's own excess jouissance [in the Other] – represents the greatest impediment to AIDS prevention, since unsafe sex involves trying to access through the sexual other (that is, your partner) something he does not have'.

Since, for Lacan, every subject is constitutively split from enjoyment, what we seek through sexual activity is precisely the enjoyment we lack, in other words an impossible satisfaction which is inaccessible to us, and which we therefore apprehend in the Other. This premiss leads Dean to attack AIDS theorists, such as Douglas Crimp, who defend an 'ideology of promiscuity' which renders gay men even more vulnerable to unconscious fantasies that subsume the pursuit of sexual pleasure under a relentless, super-egoic command to enjoy. Because, as Dean argues, the subject's relation to sexual enjoyment is necessarily mediated by the Other, gay men are inclined to develop fantasy scenarios in which prophylactic devices become disposable impediments to a greater, attainable satisfaction. Unsafe erotic practices are unconsciously invested with the promise of an impossible ecstasy, and predictably disastrous consequences ensue. Dean's chapters on AIDS are among the best currently available, and should go a long way towards convincing safer-sex educators of the indispensability of a psychoanalytic approach.

However, the book is not always as helpful as its analysis of AIDS discourse might suggest. The fundamental problem with Dean's argument, in my view, lies in the overly aesthetic account of sublimation with which it concludes. For Dean, psychoanalysis implies not only that any form of sexual activity (in so far as it necessarily carries a non-genital component) partakes of sublimation, but also that 'aesthetic experience can have an effect on human subjects similar to that of sex'. Dean advances aesthetic creation as a kind of compensation for what Lacan calls the nonexistence of the sexual relation. Lacan's position implies for Dean that there is no homosexual relation either. Consequently, 'the leather queen's admiration of bodies at the gym' and 'the opera queen's passion for arias' might work to decrease the effects fantasies of impossible jouissance introduce into the lives of gay men. Some will find these cliché examples of gay sublimation problematic. What disturbs me more, however, is the manner in which Dean's heroic extrication of queer sexualities from the logic of identity politics fails to insert the queer subject more decisively into the universal social sphere of properly *political* antagonisms.

Ultimately, *Beyond Sexuality* fails to make the move promised by its title. If, as Dean correctly contends, sexuality does not fulfil its promise of disclosing subjective truth, then the idea of sexuality as an arena of politicization becomes itself problematic, and sexuality as a category of analysis begins to appear as an obfuscating, superstructural red herring which works to deflect our attention away from other, more concretely socioeconomic, forms of social stratification that introduce political antagonisms into the queer 'community' itself. And at this point it becomes possible to wonder if the Lacanian queer might exit the analytic chamber, with his insights on HIV and safer-sex education intact, and proceed not to the gym or opera house, but to South Africa, or gay Harlem, where a somewhat different form of sublimation might begin.

James Penney

Taking cats seriously

Chris Philo and Chris Wilbert, eds, *Animal Spaces, Beastly Places: New Geographies of Human–Animal Relations*, Routledge, London and New York, 2000. xv + 311 pp. £60.00 hb., £19.99 pb., 0 415 19846 1 hb., 0 415 19847 X pb.

What happens when the academic gaze, usually focused (implicitly or explicitly) upon humans, turns instead to animals? Answers to this question are currently being offered in a range of disciplines such as history, the history of art, cultural studies: disciplines not usually associated with human–animal relations. With subjects as varied as dog theft in nineteenth-century London, modernist zoo architecture and its implications for human housing crises, debates surrounding the proposed reintroduction of wolves into upstate New York, and the representation of foxes in hunting debates, *Animal Spaces, Beastly Places* goes some way towards showing how the animal question might be answered in geographical research. As such this wide-ranging collection is a welcome addition to the growing body of writing on the study of animals within the humanities. It raises questions about the nature of research on human–animal relations that open up exciting possibilities for future work.

In their introduction Chris Philo and Chris Wilbert make a number of important points, and their first and most obvious one is not the less important for its obviousness: 'Humans are always, and have always been, enmeshed in social relations with animals to the extent that the latter, the animals, are undoubtedly

constitutive of human societies in all sorts of ways.’ Older geographical work on animals – ‘zoogeography’ – concentrated on ‘mapping the distribution of animals’ and as such, Philo and Wilbert argue, ‘tended to regard animals as “natural” objects to be studied in isolation from their human neighbours’. A new geography of animals, however, recognizes the social and cultural aspects of human–animal relations, and the distinction in the title between animal spaces and beastly places highlights the difference between these two ways of seeing: an animal space is a “place” which a particular animal ... can be said to possess in human classification or orderings of the world’; a beastly place, on the other hand, is where animals ‘often end up evading the places to which humans seek to allot them’. By emphasizing this distinction between human classification and animal life, this collection challenges older work on animals and asks: is it possible to think about animal agency, or is such active participation within culture only the domain of the human?

Taking up ideas from actor network theory that propose that ‘agency is conceived of not as some innate or static thing which an organism always possesses, but rather in a relational sense which sees agency as emerging as an effect generated and performed in configurations of different materials’, Philo and



Wilbert highlight how this might affect analyses of human–animal relations: ‘This means’, they write, ‘that anything can potentially have the power to act, whether human or non-human.’ No longer merely the object of analysis, animals can (and should) be regarded as agents in their own right, playing a part in the ways in which human social lives are organized. There can be no ‘pure “human” society’, so prevalent and significant are animals, and, as such, there should be no pure human geography. The possibilities for other disciplines – history particularly – are significant. Rather than merely objects of the human gaze, animals can be interpreted as agents within culture.

The ideas of animal agency and a refusal to think in terms of a purity of species in social analysis is taken up most clearly here in Huw Griffiths, Ingrid Poulter and David Sibley’s chapter ‘Feral Cats in the City’. The authors argue that we can trace in the representation and experience of feral cats ‘a commentary on attitudes to nature and civilization.’ By analysing a variety of feral cat colonies in Hull the authors propose that, more than merely offering a way of thinking about the city, human relations with the feral cats reveal hidden ideas about urban society. In the face of feral cats it becomes clear that ‘[t]he realisation of an ordered city, like removing bodily odour or staying young, is an impossible project.’ The cats are active participants in the culture of the city; they affect its meaning, and the idea of a ‘pure’ human society is shown to be a limited one. Human society is neither pure in terms of the boundaries it attempts to erect (cats are both pet and feral, and as such undermine the classification of animal spaces), nor pure in terms of the species to be analysed. The new geography can never be humanist; it must, in some way, include all actors (human, animal, machine) in its analysis.

But all interpretations of animals are ultimately interpretations of human representations of animals, whether they are in the form of welfare organizations’ reports, architectural plans, the minutes of discussion groups, or novels (all of which are used in this collection). As such, while actor network theory may offer a way of understanding animal agency, it remains very difficult to think about animals as subjects. Ultimately, our inability to comprehend animals as animals – rather than as representations – limits our capacity to include them as subjects. And this is where what is perhaps the most interesting of Philo and Wilbert’s suggestions has resonance:

It is important that animal geographers exercise their imaginations in trying to glimpse something

of these beastly places as lived by such animals themselves, in part to gain a better sense of the implications that follow for wild animals when humans turn up and start altering the configurations of their world.

Where biological science has previously been the academic domain for the study of animals, the introduction of animals into geography should not necessitate a 'scientification' of geography – there is only so much that can be done with statistics, after all. Rather, the opposite might need to happen: we may need to move further away from, not closer to, the empirical heartland of zoogeography. Attempting to imagine a world that is not our own, that is beyond our language and understanding, asks us to think beyond the human, and this emphasis on the non-human has important

ethical implications. Suddenly we (humans) are not the only beings worthy of consideration; suddenly our perspective – our humanism – is shown to be limited in its scope. When studying animals we need not only to read *about* but to attempt to read *as* animals. The danger, however, will always be that we fall into a kind of anthropomorphism – just think of *Bambi* – but as Philo and Wilbert note, sometimes such imaginings are not necessarily the worst that can happen. Without them all we are left with is anthropocentrism, a vision that means that '[h]umans are effectively sealed off from the rest of creation'. The refusal to accept such sealing off is one of the most powerful aspects of this collection.

Erica Fudge

Intensity degree zero

Andrea Rehberg and Rachel Jones, eds, *The Matter of Critique: Readings in Kant's Philosophy*, Clinamen Press, Manchester, 2000. 234 pp., £14.99 pb., 1 903083 11 7.

The *Matter of Critique* comprises twelve short essays collected together to provide an overview of contemporary 'continental' work on Kant for the English-language reader. The essays explore a variety of themes and concepts in Kant's philosophy through the influence of a range of thinkers including Derrida, Deleuze, Heidegger, Irigaray, Nietzsche and Lyotard. Most of the pieces deal with Kant's thoughts on matter and his concept of critique as they appear in the *Critique of Pure Reason* and *Critique of Judgement*. None discusses Kant's ethical writings – a field already occupied by many English-language commentators – and only two engage substantially with other Kantian texts. Perhaps coincidentally, these present two of the most interesting arguments in the volume. In 'Life and Aesthetic Pleasure', Howard Caygill recovers the centrality of the 'feeling of life' for Kant's theory of aesthetic reflective judgement and highlights the dynamic and corporeal tension it introduces into Kant's representational model of consciousness. In 'Kant after Geophilosophy', Ian Hamilton Grant elaborates the 'geophilosophical' sublimity of nature through a Deleuze-influenced reading of the 'Critique of Teleological Judgement' and other Kantian texts.

All of the contributions present technically oriented analyses of Kant's texts. Unfortunately, not all of them

are focused sufficiently to cope well with the difficulty of doing so in brief. This shows most noticeably in the variable degrees of care with which Kant's theory of the sublime is assigned a range of different theoretical functions throughout the volume. The sublime often features as a tool with which to read passages from the *First Critique*. Whilst this is not a problem in itself, it can produce readings that neglect the sublime's interdependent moments.

A case in point is Michael Bowles's essay, 'Kant and the Provocation of Matter'. Bowles attempts to radicalize the relationship between matter and the synthesis of sensations as discussed by Kant in the 'Anticipations of Perception'. He claims that matter is encountered as an intrusive and ineluctable force, the radical externality of which provokes a crisis for consciousness that, through reference to death, functions as the spark motivating every new act of synthesis and marking each moment of understanding. The 'Anticipations' is a section of the *First Critique* that many commentators either skip over or condemn, mainly as an outmoded defence of eighteenth-century scientific principles, or as containing contradictions between the empirical and transcendental use of its terms. Bowles's strategy is to allow Kant the 'inconsistencies' that encourage such readings, and read them as indicating



the role he ascribes to matter and the judgement of the sublime.

In the 'Anticipations', Kant presents the rules governing the use of the category of quality, making a principle out of the schematized concept of the sensibly real, in which reality figures as the content given in sensation in opposition to form. Sensations always occur with a particular degree of intensity, which Kant takes to mean they are structured by an *a priori* comparison to their own negation (the diminution of the feeling of intensity to a zero degree). Matter, in this description, functions as an unknowable substrate that the synthesis of sensations registers as the reality of empirical objects. Emphasizing the passive tendencies in Kant's description of synthesis – that it 'only occurs because it meets something' – Bowles moves from the claim that matter is a 'fixed point' from which determinate cognition 'takes its bearings', to the claim that 'we can see that the degree zero of intensity implied in the generation of a sensation would be death. If synthesis is annihilated time ceases and life is no more.' His argument turns on the identification of matter and the moment of negation accompanying each sensation.

For Kant, the zero-degree intensity of a sensation is a marker of the infinite possible number of diminutions that defines the quality of each perception. (For

instance, the sensation of water being warm entails an *a priori* measure in opposition to all the other possible degrees of warmth; for Kant, even those that cannot be felt.) This comparison is what allows Kant to claim that we can expect to make appropriate distinctions between the particular contents of different sensations. Kant's emphasis on the flow of sensations and the way we register the reality of change is an attempt to ground the claim that space and time are always contentful through the transcendental implication that the forms of experience have, not one content of form, but rather many different contents, distinguishable as real, empirical and objective. Although Bowles's description of matter as an intrusive force is compelling, and his characterization of its radical externality as the threat of death is gripping, it is not clear how he gets 'close enough' to matter to allow that its radical exteriority can have a content. At points it seems as if the death threatened is an extra layer of content that belongs to matter itself and it is difficult to see how this can be without it ceasing to be unknowable.

This is an objection that relates directly to the problems in the 'Anticipations', seized upon by other Kant commentators. Rather than address such issues, Bowles makes an appeal to the 'Analytic of the Sublime' in search of a model of non-determinative synthesis with which to justify his account of matter. There he finds Kant's inconsistencies in the *First Critique* repeated, consistently. Drastically truncating Kant's analysis of sublime experience, he claims it as an exemplary instance of the provocation of matter in that both the sublime and his model of synthesis are 'born of failure'. It is noticeable that this emphasis on the contra-purposive moment of the sublime experience comes at the expense of its opposite moment, that of purposiveness, thus robbing the sublime judgement of its characteristic movement, or the oscillation between its moments, that gives it structure and produces the feeling of negative pleasure. In Bowles's reference to the sublime, the stress on a fixed moment of negation presents its own threat to the very structure of the sublime as a judgement and by implication to the understanding, but perhaps not in the way intended.

If the book is more modest than its editors claim, this does not detract from its best moments. Some of the essays are genuinely illuminating and add to the field; others are best read as gestures towards something that will, hopefully, be worked out in more detail elsewhere.

Andrew Fisher

Ouch!

David Macey, *The Penguin Dictionary of Critical Theory*, Penguin, London, 2000. 490 pp., £20.00 hb., 0 14 29321 3.

Malcolm Bradbury thinks it is 'splendidly done'. David Lodge says it is a 'reference book I will want to have on my own shelves'. The dustwrap is shiny, an aluminium green-blue-grey, and the hardcover is maroon-brown. They are all here: Aimé Césaire, Gottlob Frege, Clifford Geertz, *Radical Philosophy* ('a remarkable achievement'), Marshall McLuhan, Kate Millett, Tel Quel, Tzvetan Todorov, Virginia Woolf. It has entries for 'death of man', 'facticity' and 'family romance', opportunities to expound Foucault and Nietzsche, Heidegger, Marthe Robert. There are entries for *cinéma vérité*, contradiction, gaze, hyper-text, phallus, queer, the *SCUM Manifesto*, speciesism. None of these things is uninteresting. Why, then, does a dictionary like this make the spirit shrivel and the brain ache? Why does it bring on an immediate horror of the intellect, the sort of feeling induced in undergraduates by the prospect of starting an essay, a need to go out and get outrageously drunk, or do drugs?

It's not that it's inaccurate. True, it spells Internationale Situationniste without a double 'n'. Macey's use of the term 'situationism' flies in the face of the edicts of Guy Debord, but that's a recuperator's privilege. Macey's prose is dry and concise. He occasionally alights on facts that could be used further to develop an insight: 'The expression *le regard* is used by both SARTRE and LACAN, but a certain confusion has arisen in English as the translator of Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* (1943a) has opted to translate it as "the look", whilst Lacan's various translators render it as "the gaze".' Although it is standard dictionary practice, it is slightly odd to see certain names and concepts capitalized. It implies that the capitalized terms will knit together into a logical system, fixed points in a starscape worth mastering. I use the *Penguin Dictionary of Music*; it's a useful reference work, but academic music is a technical field with a specific jargon. Is that all 'critical theory' is?

This dictionary is built on a tectonic flaw: the struggle between critical theory's attempt to be critical and its current professionalization as a science of mystification, where hapless academics are forced to teach last year's fads as if the intellectual bonbons

of some poststructuralist bestseller were significant contributions to the sum of human knowledge. Macey cannot help registering this uneasy situation, but he cannot address it, because that would undermine the status of the exercise.

The schizophrenic state of current notions of critical theory is revealed by Macey's defining the field in two different ways. In the preface, he begins with the familiar injunction 'go and do some theory', and mentions the names Louis Althusser, Paul de Man and Homi Bhabha. Theory was a reaction against the common sense and empiricism of prewar literary criticism, an attempt to desecrate the hidden politics of educated assumptions. Such an account of critical theory treats philosophy as a sociological phenomenon. However, in the entry for 'critical theory' itself, Macey – after a proviso that it can be used loosely – defines it as the Frankfurt School project of using Marx and Freud to expose capitalism for what it is. This is a qualitative definition of critical theory devoid of qualms about positive manifestations (qualms which, given the current state of academia, would make any prospective Frankfurter abandon the project in despair).

In his writings elsewhere, Macey is sceptical about the 'romanticism' of revolutionary attempts to supersede Kantian divisions between theory and practice, or art and life (see his review of Raoul Vaneigem's *A Cavalier History of Surrealism*, RP 104). Because it fails to admit the driving determinations of its own project, critical theory as conceived by this *Dictionary* must be eclectic, sceptical and condescending towards its texts. Behind the expertise lies a conservatism that knows that all claims to break with the word and embrace the deed are false – because words are all that impinge here. All revolutions fail, all avant-gardes will be recuperated, so just don't try: social reality appears as an untouchable sphere.

In fact, the social world we inhabit is being made and altered and destroyed by people all the time. The pity is that students who seek to master critical theory via this kind of spectacle of thought (where one observes thinkers thinking, but never has to think independently – at first hand – oneself, a medical display of unlikely, outlandish, aborted options) will end up thoroughly demoralized. Despite its shiny cover, *The Penguin Dictionary of Critical Thought* is deathly dull. It lacks the glimmer of productive allure: better to read one dialogue by Plato than seek to graduate in this assembly of intellectual contradictions.

Ben Watson