

## Tourniquet

J.M. Bernstein, *Adorno: Disenchantment and Ethics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001. xviii + 466 pp., £50.00 hb., £16.99 pb., 0 521 62230 1 hb., 0 521 00309 1 pb.

The ethical dimension of Adorno's work is elusive and gestural, but it is an ineliminable part of his philosophy. Jay Bernstein attempts to do justice to what he terms the 'ethical intensity' of Adorno's writing by reconstructing the ethical content and premisses of his philosophical output. However, this book is not only a mining of the ethical resources of Adorno's philosophy; it also attempts to situate it within contemporary ethical debates, to 'press Adorno's thought into a form that enables its fuller appreciation and ideally its further extension and elaboration'. It is in this attempt that both the difficulty and the ambition of Bernstein's book lie.

Bernstein proceeds from a reading of *Minima Moralia* via a discussion of Adorno's critique of Enlightenment reason to an analysis of the ethical consequences of his critique of epistemology. Finally, there is a consideration of metaphysical experience, the categorical imperative issuing from Auschwitz, and an attempt to delineate an ethics around 'fugitive experience'. Most immediately challenging is Bernstein's reliance on a context of contemporary Anglo-American ethical philosophy as the arena in which to situate Adorno's relation to ethics. For this forces Bernstein to construct ethical positions from Adorno's work which are in contradiction to its immanently negative theoretical force.

Bernstein's thesis is that Adorno's critical theory does not rely upon immanent critique alone, but is based upon a substantive commitment to what he terms a 'naturalized anthropomorphism' and a 'priority of the object', a commitment which entails an ethics of what Bernstein calls 'material inference'. Anthropomorphic nature is intimately related to the modelling of subject upon object, although why this is termed anthropomorphic – which connotes a projective rather than receptive identification – is puzzling. Adorno's term is, of course, 'mimesis'. Although Bernstein acknowledges Adorno's account in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* of both the disenchanting nature of reason and the paroxysmal character of mimesis, his constant references to anthropomorphism suggest a Rousseau-type

'state of nature' which has been perverted through Enlightenment reason. Anthropomorphic nature becomes something that historically existed and was then perverted through identity thinking and instrumental reason. Bernstein criticizes Adorno's idea of natural history for its gestural and repetitious quality, yet without referring to the early essay on 'The Idea of Natural History'. What he appears to be criticizing is thus his own version of Adorno rather than Adorno's own more nuanced position. Adorno is not referring to an idea of anthropomorphic nature that needs to be recovered, but to the idea of nature necessary for the very thinking of history, and vice versa. He is alluding to a dialectical interplay that constructs ideas of both history and nature, rather than narrating a linear story about the destruction of a certain way of relating to the natural world.

It is true that there are elements in Adorno out of which recourse to an original state of nature could be constructed, but this ignores his continued disavowal of such a project. At times, Bernstein acknowledges this, but he nonetheless constructs an ethics based on just such a recuperation of a supposed innocent time.

This becomes clear when we consider the ethics of 'material inference'. Bernstein gives a concise account of what he means by material inference, which is worth quoting in full:

Adorno's account of ethical life gives to it a broad naturalistic backdrop: valuing belongs to life; the valuing of the living is nondetachable from their sense of themselves as injurable; the perception of animal others as injurable and compassion as a natural response to injury are basic experiences of others as of worth – the perception and the feeling, which is also a perception, are the experience of aura and its attribution; the sustaining of animistic aura requires practices, structures of material inference, that acknowledge the independence (separateness) and dependence (connectedness) of each individual in relation to its significant others ... What these and kindred bits of theoretical knowledge can provide is rational confidence that the possibility of the ethical is natural...

This naturalistic ethics does not strike a chord as Adorno's ethics, even if such a thing exists. The account is a nostalgic one of a state of society in which certain situations (the oft-repeated example is bleeding badly) naturally infer a material response (applying a tourniquet). These relations are understood to have become detached in modernity due to the decay of auratic experience.

There are several problems with such an account. First, it relies on an ahistorical notion of ethical practice, which is not argued for and has no coherence. How do we know that the material inference is the natural response, rather than some Hobbesian one? It is, of course, an old argument, and Bernstein does not bother with it; he simply states his case. Yet Adorno did not appear to show any interest in such an idea, agreeing with Hegel that the whole context of argument is fantastical.

Second, the notion of animistic aura is puzzling. It seems to relate to valuing an individual as a person in their own right. But why this demands the experience of aura is not clear. Bernstein relates Adorno's writing about experience to the destruction of aura, and identifies aura as intimately related to the dignity of the individual, and to a paradigm case of the 'eyes of another returning our gaze'. This 'experience of auratic individuality' is related to the cognitive mode of apprehension that he terms 'anthropomorphic projection'. This is a broadly Benjaminian account: Adorno is seen to differ only in his refusal to countenance a recuperation of experience through a Proustian moment of *mémoire involuntaire*. Adorno's fragmentary texts become an index of the fragmentation of experience itself, an expression of a process which cannot be narrated. However, as Bernstein acknowledges, such an account itself presumes an ability that it maintains is lost.

Bernstein conflates Adorno's and Benjamin's accounts of the decay of experience in modernity and he selects Adornian texts which recapitulate Benjamin, rather than those that diverge. Adorno's critique of Benjamin's notion of aura concerns its undialectical, ahistorical nature: aura becomes fetishized even in its destruction as something timeless and unrelated to its instantiation in history. Bernstein's reliance upon notions of anthropomorphism, material inference, and

what he calls 'the complex concept' has a tendency to reify what are properly dialectical and historical processes. It is noteworthy that there are only two references to Marx in the book – one in a footnote.

In his discussion of Adorno's critique of epistemology and its ethical implications, Bernstein distinguishes between two forms of conceptuality: the simple and the complex concept. The simple concept is the concept of predicative thought, subsuming intuitions under concepts to form judgements. The complex concept is also predicative, but it does not completely subsume the material axis of the concept, the moment of sensuous particularity. Experience is the crucial intermediary between the two axes of the complex concept. Experience always escapes the grasp of conceptual abstraction, as conceptual abstraction cannot accurately contain the 'saturated density' of experience. The ethical implications of this critique lie in a responsiveness to materiality and non-identity, which elicits the very modes of ethical response – reflection, dependence, demand, responsiveness. This is a suggestive argument, outlining how a basis for ethical response is figured in certain forms of thought,



but the leap to material inference – the idea that the awareness of suffering and ability to respond *necessarily* translates into action – remains obscure.

The final two chapters, which grapple with the categorical imperative that issues from Auschwitz and the idea of metaphysical experience, are by far the best in the book. Bernstein identifies Adorno's aim as a recuperation of metaphysics as a mode of human transcendence, but a transcendence that must remain 'concrete and immanent'.

The possibility of metaphysical experience is central to Adorno's later thought. Auschwitz appears

as the culmination of the destruction of experience, a destruction which reaches its apotheosis through the destruction of the experience of death, or the eradication of a differentiation between the living and the dead, which takes place in the camps. The possibility of experience becomes metaphysical because, due to its extirpation from everyday life, it must transcend its immanent context. A rescue of metaphysics as experience is necessary in response to the demand for a meaning that will transcend the culmination of reason in Auschwitz. Yet, characteristically for Adorno, the demand for transcendence is compromised as the demand to eke meaning from the death camps is a betrayal of the ungraspable magnitude of the Holocaust. Furthermore, that Auschwitz occurred in Germany, in a culture which made philosophical claims for transcendent metaphysical meaning, itself compromises attempts at transcendence.

Bernstein locates Adorno's insistence upon the question of the possibility of metaphysical experience as a response to nihilism. It is a response transfigured by a situation which is desperate – the result of a process which has extirpated the possibility of transcendence – but since consciousness is, by its very nature, transcendent, the recovery of metaphysical experience is in a sense the recovery of consciousness itself. Bernstein makes the further claim that since 'in thinking metaphysical experience Adorno is thinking what would answer the problem of nihilism, then metaphysical experience inscribes the space of the ethical'. This seems a far more fruitful approach to Adorno's ethics than all that has gone before.

The historical possibility of metaphysical experience lies at the limits of intelligibility. For metaphysical experience to be possible, it must be something that can take place, yet the catastrophe represented by Auschwitz is precisely what cannot be experienced. In response to this problematic, Bernstein argues, Adorno sketches two lines of thought. The first is that what we say about transcendence traces its semblance, rather than its actuality; hence the importance of aesthetics for metaphysics. The second is that the promise figured in metaphysical experience can be located not only in the artwork but in aspects of social experience as well. Bernstein outlines what he terms 'fugitive experience', giving examples ranging from simple responses of happiness to large-scale humanitarian heroics (the Danish rescue of the Jews in the Second World War). He seeks out fugitive ethical experiences that escape the context of total immanence in a sense analogous to the escape from identity thinking offered by aesthetic modernism. He terms this 'ethical modernism': 'Only an unconditional ethical modernism can secure a secular ethics without depending on premodern ideas of community.'

This is a frustrating end to the book, because the idea of material inference (outlined at great length and returned to in the final pages) seems to rely on precisely such a premodern idea of community, while the idea of ethical modernism promises a new departure. Just as this very long book gets started, it ends.

**Alastair Morgan**

## Soft sell

Simon Critchley, *Continental Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2001. 149 pp., £5.99 pb., 0 19 285359 7.

Defining 'continental philosophy' has become an important yet sensitive issue in academia. The futures of departmental funding, postgraduate courses, careers even, are bound up with the way in which philosophers working on and with post-Kantian European philosophy define and present their work. Simon Critchley's *Continental Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction* appears in a series in which each volume is designed to function as 'a stimulating and accessible way into a new subject'. No doubt the Oxford imprint will give it a certain authority in some quarters and so Critchley has been given a valuable opportunity to present to a wide audience a programmatic account of what 'con-

tinental philosophy' is. Given the publisher, the series, and the modest price, it is perhaps not too dramatic to say that what Critchley offers the wider philosophical community here may have a significant influence on future developments. The stakes are high.

What we are offered – as Critchley acknowledges – is very much a personal essay, in which three main themes dominate. The first is a genealogical account of the division between 'analytic' and 'continental' philosophy. This division is traced back well before the end of the nineteenth century – thus extending the story told by Dummett in his *Origins of Analytical Philosophy* – to the early reception of Kant's phil-



osophy. The origin of this division is characterized in terms of two different ways of reading Kant, focusing either on the First or the Third Critique. Focusing on the First Critique prioritizes epistemology, while focusing on the Third places the relationship between theory and practice centre stage. It is in the aftermath of Kant, then, that the history of philosophy begins to bifurcate into ‘analytic’ and ‘continental’.

It is within the context of post-Kantian philosophy in the first half of the nineteenth century that the phrase ‘continental philosophy’ is first used, appearing in John Stuart Mill’s pair of essays devoted to Bentham and Coleridge. According to Mill, Bentham’s methodology is dominated by the question ‘is it true?’ while Coleridge’s is dominated by the question ‘what is the meaning of it?’ Here the conflict is first crystallized: Bentham stands as champion of philosophy as epistemology modelled on scientific method (‘analytic’), while Coleridge conceives philosophy as literary and existential (‘continental’). Similar conflicts are mentioned – between T.H. Huxley and Matthew Arnold, C.P. Snow and F.R. Leavis – and in each case it is emphasized that these are conflicts internal to British intellectual culture. In particular, Critchley claims that Mill’s phrase ‘continental philosophy’ does not designate philosophy ‘over there’ but rather one type of philosophy ‘over here’. Critchley thus attempts

to show the historical contingency of this conflict – this clash of two cultures; the literary-humanistic versus the scientific – and, following Mill, calls for its dissolution. Perhaps unexpectedly, then, in this introduction to ‘continental philosophy’ it is John Stuart Mill who emerges as the hero. But in the spirit of bipartisan camaraderie, Mill’s liberalism is joined by Hegelian synthesis as another way to think about the reconciliation of these two traditions of thought.

The second theme is the apparent conflict between science and phenomenology – exemplified by the philosophical confrontation between Carnap and Heidegger – and again Critchley is keen to dissolve the conflict, proposing a middle path in the form of a science-friendly phenomenology combined with a science aware of its pre-theoretical foundations. His claim is that by showing that ‘continental’ philosophy – which here and in a number of places is simply equated with phenomenology – is not necessarily ‘anti-science’, it will be possible to make the first step towards a reconciliation with ‘analytic’ philosophy. However, the way in which this polarity is presented appears to leave no room for the possibility that there may already be continental philosophers with an independent serious interest in science (the names Georges Canguilhem and Michel Serres immediately come to mind).

The third theme focuses upon the nature of the relationship between knowledge and wisdom. Scientific analytic philosophy is concerned only with knowledge, while existentially aware continental philosophy, sensitive to questions concerning nihilism and praxis, focuses on wisdom. Of course, Critchley immediately rejects such a caricature and demands that all philosophy – ‘continental’ or otherwise – should address itself to closing the gap between knowledge and wisdom. This rupture within philosophy is, according to Critchley, very much a modern phenomenon and he suggests that it may be productive to return to antiquity in order to examine how ancient philosophers understood this relationship. In particular, he suggests that what is needed is an examination of how Aristotle understood the relationship between *epistémé* and *phronesis*, theoretical knowledge and practical wisdom. Yet the fundamental philosophical questions for Critchley appear to be the Socratic ‘how should I live?’ and the Heideggerian ‘why is there something rather than nothing?’, both of which are questions of meaning and value (the domain of wisdom) rather than questions of knowledge (now the domain of science). There is, then, an implicit suggestion that, while ‘analytic’ philosophy



is happy to play the role of underlabourer to science (to borrow a phrase from Locke), ‘continental’ philosophy is the true heir to the ancient philosophical tradition beginning with Socrates. The extent to which these two concerns – meta-science and *Lebensphilosophie* – can or should be united is not made clear and this residual opposition between the two traditions at times undercuts the stated desire for reunification.

Critchley’s book is a stimulating read. It recounts a number of entertaining anecdotes *en route*, such as the improbable encounter between A.J. Ayer and Georges Bataille. It rightly emphasizes the scholarly importance of questions of translation and historical contextualization, and demands the need for clarity of expression in place of poorly written mimicry. It also emphasizes the way in which literature can be relevant to philosophical debates and illustrates how one might use such material, drawing upon works by Dostoevsky and Turgenev. It is a genuinely thought-provoking book about the nature and function of philosophy – even if some of those thoughts may come in the form of objections – and as such it is highly recommendable.

However, what it is *not* is a programmatic account of the central traditions within what is generally labelled ‘continental philosophy’. Although they are mentioned in passing, Critical Theory, structuralism, and poststructuralism are very much sidelined in favour of Critchley’s own brand of science-friendly phenomenology (what he calls ‘an unthrilling but compelling version of phenomenology’). Moreover, the focus upon the conflict between analytic and continental philosophy from Bentham and Coleridge to Carnap and Heidegger often tends to present continental philosophy negatively and reactively. To be sure, the very phrase ‘continental philosophy’ was coined and is still used in order to draw a contrast with other philosophical traditions, but perhaps it is time to offer a more positive account.

It should also be noted that Critchley’s Heideggerian search for the originary meaning of the phrase ‘continental philosophy’ in Mill’s essays (instead of accepting meaning from its current usage) runs the risk of implicitly equating the content of what is *now* called ‘continental philosophy’ with the doctrines of Mill’s ‘continental philosophers’. These are of course those idealistic, conservative, religious, reactionary even, Germanic philosophers who inspired Coleridge. The inclusion of the ‘Oldest System Programme of German Idealism’ in the Appendix adds to this risk and it is unclear why this text has been selected as a worthy representative of ‘continental’ thought in general.

In Critchley’s book we do not meet continental philosophy on its own terms. Rather, following Mill (and more recently Rorty), we are offered a liberal cry for toleration between departmental colleagues in the hope that academic philosophers from different traditions will stop ignoring each other and start talking again in the corridor. One comes away with a good feeling for the nature of conflicts between academic philosophers (‘a mini-pathology of the contemporary philosophical scene’, as he puts it), but not with a feeling for the diversity and philosophical impact of those schools of thought that – regardless of the historical origins of the term – are widely called ‘continental’. The book does not tell the sceptical ‘analytic’ philosopher or the prospective student why continental philosophy is philosophically rigorous or relevant. So although this book is well worth reading, a valuable opportunity to state the philosophical and academic case for ‘continental philosophy’ has been lost.

John Sellars

## Zombieland

Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization*, Sage, London, 2001. xx + 214 pp., £50.00 hb., £17.99 pb., 0 7619 6111 9 hb., 0 7619 6112 7 pb.

Jane Lewis, *The End of Marriage? Individualism and Intimate Relations*, Edward Elgar, London, 2001. vii + 227 pp., £49.95 hb., 1 84064 287 4.

Mocking the spirit of our times, which compels us to seek only individual solutions for the most universal problems, Woody Allen suggests a course in ethics: ‘The categorical imperative, and six ways to make it work for you.’ Sociologists say it less colourfully. Helping to shape their idiom and outlook, the thoughts of the German partnership of Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim are brought together in their latest text, *Individualization* – with not one but three prefaces flagging its significance. In today’s world, the Becks argue, we are all driven throughout our lives to work at *becoming* individuals.

This compulsory individualization is the product of global shifts and instabilities in the spheres of job markets, family life, and the practices and policies open to nation-states, which ensure that people are no longer born into, or can ever securely achieve, fixed identity as social beings. We have all become ‘nomads’, as endemic job insecurities, the decline of public authority, the removal of welfare, shifting gender patterns, and

the overriding stress on intimacy and self-expression leave us attached only to 'zombie' categories – 'class', 'family', 'gender', 'ethnicity', 'nation' – devoid of any secure normative moorings. In what is here called the 'second modernity', the world constantly threatens to undo any sense a person may gain of leading a 'life of one's own'. Detached from fixed belonging, life-stories must be forged through far more transitory, fragile, complex and contradictory attachments. With Anthony Giddens their leading spokesman, some sociologists welcome these new forms of individualization, suggesting they allow both men and women equally to forge self-reflexive, democratic identities through the shifting groupings and elective affinities everyone is now free to seek out, help maintain or choose to leave. But are we?

Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim, more in tune with Zygmunt Bauman, emphasize the frustrations, anxieties and hatreds that this search for secure moorings presents to fearful, solitary individuals – 50 per cent of whom, in cities like London or Munich, live alone. In social contexts of 'hyper individualism', their vision is predominantly dystopic. The harder it becomes to forge any coherent sense of ourselves as individuals, the more we are held personally accountable for all that befalls us: society now forces us to seek 'biographical solutions to systemic contradictions'. Despite much clunky and inharmonious linguistic innovation, involving notions of 'place-polygamy' (individuals constantly in motion), 'de-routinization', 'detraditionalization', and the 'outsourcing' and 'insourcing' of domestic, welfare or employment activities from one site or sector to another, the Becks provide a powerful account of a 'disorganized capitalism' which systematically destroys old social attachments without offering any new ones. They write not just of greater complexity but of the normalization of chaos: the 'disembedding' of familiar patterns of life without any 're-embedding'.

Ulrich Beck has long criticized Marxist sociology for its nostalgic belief in the existence of relatively stable structures, such as class. The global dynamism of contemporary capitalism, he argues, while still generating – indeed deepening – structures of inequality worldwide, dissolves the stability of social classes, trade-union power or even 'common cause', as power is wielded not so much through exploitation as through practices of exclusion (viz. 'Brazilianization', another Beckian term). The individualization and diversification of lifestyles means that every battle we face, we face alone, as public life and popular communication return us always to private lives – whether as winners or

losers, celebrities or sinners. With private life treated as public concern, and vice versa, the Becks challenge their readers to 'reinvent the political'; though they offer no signposts to guide us. The argument is often compelling, if rarely free from its own contradictions, exaggerations and other flaws.

There are so many ways in which this 'second modernity' partakes of the first – most especially in its determination that everything has changed, even as most of the old structures and regimes of inequality persist, so remarkably robust. Overworked, overtired, excluded and lonely many of us may well be, but various tracks from the past are all too visible. It is not just that there are still nation-states (however successfully US corporate capital and military might manipulates them), that workers are still exploited, not simply unemployed and excluded (however skilfully global trading agreements dictate the rise and fall of national industries), that trade unions exist (if less sturdily), that professional bodies administer (usually less creatively, as state-imposed market mimicry dictates more bureaucratic agendas); countless other civic institutions, from PTAs to church groups, sexual subcultures and workplace friendships, are not quite as dead as some sociologists suggest. Nor are they, just as surely, the engines of individual choice and freedom Giddens and other blithe optimists, singing from their governments' songsheets, declare. And just how nomadic are those 80 per cent of Americans who apparently do not even possess a passport?

We see the past all too clearly when we scrutinize one of the Becks' central 'zombie' categories: the family. There, we learn, 'there is no given set of obligations and opportunities, no way of organizing everyday work, the relationship between men and women, and between parents and children, which can be copied'. Yet, just as those old Marxist categories of class and exploitation have proved extremely sturdy (with somewhat less upward class mobility today than yesterday), so, too, the Becks have to agree, gendered shake-ups inside families flow but sluggishly, as 'working' women continue to service both children and husbands. The family is, for sure, a breeding ground for women's 'insecurity, anxiety and disappointment'. But how new is that? Disavowal as well as contradiction animates the Becks' account of the 'zombie' domain.

Back in the mundane world of social policy, in an aptly more familiar vernacular, Jane Lewis addresses the question of individualism and intimate relations in *The End of Marriage?* Her concise overview depicts a century of steadily rising fears and anxieties accom-

panying shifting family patterns as patriarchal precedents give way to notions of companionate marriage, after which the male breadwinner meets his nemesis with women's ineluctable entry into the labour market. We learn that the pace of family change in Britain has been dramatic over the last two decades: the numbers marrying halved, divorce trebled, children born outside wedlock quadrupled. But the meanings and effects of such change, Lewis argues, remain unclear. Like Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, Lewis wants to see more attention paid to cultural matters. However, in contrast to the Becks, her text is so unadorned, each sentence meticulously weighted with references, thematic repetition and empirical detail, that it is hard to find any strong cultural patterns.

It is still women's lot to shoulder the major burden of caring, but there is more negotiation in families; women are expected to engage in paid work, but to quite what degree is unclear. Lewis steers a judicious course between those who decry the excessive self-indulgence and social decay attending family breakdown and women's pursuit of personal goals, and those who detect the possibilities for greater harmony between men and women, and between domestic lives and career choices. Her basic tenet is that, while we are all much freer now to choose how we wish to organize our paid and unpaid lives, or to decide whether to marry, cohabit or raise families, we are *not* necessarily becoming more selfish; 'the changes do not amount to the individualistic hell of the pessimists or to the new egalitarian, democratic commitment of the optimists'. There is a clear disjuncture between ideas of sharing and any actual gender equality in relation to domestic (or paid) work, with more resistance from married men than from those cohabiting. Nevertheless, both sexes, in whatever domestic arrangements, remain committed to caring for children.

In place of the normalization of chaos, Lewis offers a calmer perspective on the ways in which tradition and change coexist in families today. With better family policies, she argues, the state could do much more to improve family life and turn around the recent trebling of the number of children who live in poverty. For that, it would need to assist parental negotiations by providing better childcare and encouraging shorter working hours. Media pundits have been bidding an apocalyptic farewell to the family for a very long time, outflanking feminists hoping for its paternalistic demise or optimists already saluting new gender equalities. However, I fear that Lewis's own style of analysis, which offers sophistication through minute and repetitive qualification, rather than any hint of theoretical

speculation or conceptual innovation, is likely to have only limited impact on this debate. The reinvention of politics will require the conjoining of her neutral, nuanced tones with the bolder brushstrokes the Becks offer – kicking back into more responsible life the categories they prematurely consign to zombieland.

**Lynne Segal**

## In action

Hubert L. Dreyfus, *On the Internet*, Routledge, London, 2001. ix + 127 pp., £7.99 pb., 0 415 22807 7.

B.K. Ridley, *On Science*, Routledge, London, 2001. x + 225 pp., £7.99 pb., 0 415 24980 5.

Slavoj Žižek, *On Belief*, Routledge, London, 2001. 170 pp., £7.99 pb., 0 415 25532 5.

In an interview for Hessian radio with Hellmut Becker, Adorno argued that if autonomy is to be realized 'the few people who are in favour of [autonomy] must work energetically to make education an education for contradiction and resistance'. Philosophers, naive idealists removed from the concussions of concrete existence, may lack the tactical acumen to realize or preserve the possibility of such a goal. While Adorno 'can imagine a music teacher ... analysing hit songs and showing why these hits are incomparably worse than a movement of Mozart or Beethoven quartet', a resistance or deafness to institutional authority might be the spark we seek to fan. Formulated in abstract terms, the relationship between philosophy qua academic discipline and everyday life leaves philosophers close to espousing a trickle-down theory of critical thought. Less than fruitful would be the attempt to assess what mental market share philosophy commands.

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Thus reads the mission statement of the series in which these three books appear. Each serves as an intervention in a given field.

Ridley is concerned about a widespread belief in the ability of science to produce a Theory of Everything – 'scientism'. There are two main strands to his project. First he highlights the limits of science: a particularly

strong chapter focuses on the competing interpretations of the collapse of the wave function in quantum mechanics and shows how these interpretations tend towards metaphysics. A second dimension insists on the existence of forces outside of physics and biochemistry: the Two Cultures debate is reconfigured through an insistence that what was once understood as magic is experienced today as the creative and imaginative experience of words and music in art – here science must yield to the humanities.

Dreyfus assesses the revolutionary potential offered to research and education by the new Internet technologies. The key arguments are developed from Kierkegaard and Merleau-Ponty. Insisting on subjectivity as embodied, he produces a critique of virtual learning – it will only produce competence not mastery. With a diminution of involvement in the physical world comes a loss of meaning: the mass of information available on the Internet levels everything into ‘opinion’, generating an inertia that precludes commitment.

Zižek’s book is more wide-ranging, covering

Books aimed at the lay market tend to adopt one of the following models: the introductory undergraduate lecture course (101 Introduction to...); the monograph and biography of a philosopher; the primer for informed opinion. In what way do these works remain philosophical? It is insufficient to gesture towards the institutions or canon which mark authors as ‘philosophers’ and topics as ‘philosophical’. If a philosopher is someone who thinks about life, then Charles Handy (‘management consultant and philosopher’) is as entitled to the tag as anyone. And if we follow Zižek’s call for a ‘massive onslaught’ on New Age obscurantism (see his *The Fragile Absolute*, 2000), then we should be aware that Frankl and Gurdjieff are the philosophers most lauded on the self-help shelves of our local bookshop. What form distinguishes these books from either popular philosophy books or philosophical interventions in public debates?

Whereas self-help books present themselves as self-sufficient, philosophical inter-ventions, embracing

their source in a critical tradition, should not only maintain an insistence on argument but also construct themselves reflectively, pointing beyond themselves to other texts. Dreyfus invokes Kierkegaard to highlight the disappearance of meaning produced by the rise of *kibitzers* – those who maintain opinions without either first-hand experience or responsibility. But his book itself may be absorbed into chatter, if the reader is left with the impression that Dreyfus has exhausted the debate. Indeed there is



Western receptions of Eastern thought, digital Gnosticism, postmodern sophists, Cultural Studies, Marx, and Third Way politics. The chief concern is the possibility of repeating today the Leninist initiation of a politics of ‘truth’.

All three books produce arguments that are absent from mainstream media treatments of the subjects. But the urgency of these interventions requires us to evaluate the editorial tactics displayed, not just the cogency and coherence of the works themselves. Taken together they reveal a variety of assumptions about the public and its reception of philosophy.

no suggestion from within *On the Internet* of the debates around Dreyfus’s model of wisdom acquisition, used to criticize the potential of distance learning. Similarly Ridley sketches Searle’s famous thought experiment (where a human being carries out manually the sequences instantiated in a computer translation program) and states: ‘The gap between semantics and syntax, so graphically illustrated by the Chinese room, is enough to destroy the claim of strong AI.’ That this is not the case could be demonstrated by turning to Hofstadter’s response in *The Mind’s Eye* (Penguin, 1982).



Autonomy would be better served by recognizing the existence of disputes and aspiring to produce 'starting points'. It is therefore disappointing that none of these books contains a bibliography (even better would be suggestions for further reading). With all respect to Žižek and the reading public, a brief glossary or guide to key ideas in Lacanian theory would have in no way detracted from the text. It is not incidental that I found *On Belief* to be the most stimulating work and the one whose density and breadth of ideas made one suspicious: it had not been written with the series blurb to mind (Žižek notes that it develops and 'prolongs' the analyses of *The Fragile Absolute*). This suspicion extends to the rigour with which the series has been treated by its editors. A chunk of text from page 26 of *On Belief*, 150 words in length, is repeated on page 52: the two references to Leibniz given in the index point to the same repeated passage.

The editorial discipline required to produce effective interventions may be more strenuous than that for academic publishing (will unit sales be the only indicator of success?). This is a fight for headspace, or 'mind share', as the new jargon has it. The School of Economic Science advertises philosophy courses on Tube posters. November saw the American franchise release *Chicken Soup for the Teenage Soul*. Geri Halliwell's favourite word was at one time 'existentialism', though that was before M. Scott Peck's *The Road Less Travelled* was handed to her by George Michael – she is now enrolled on the Alpha course. For all its merits, *On Belief* might have functioned as a brilliant intervention against New Ageism if the passages on the Dalai Lama, Western Buddhism as fetish and cyber-Gnosticism were isolated from the other arguments. What is certain is that this book is going to be shelved under 'Philosophy', or, if we're lucky, under 'Philosophy and Religion', and that the boring title and price are hardly going to produce impulse purchases. Can we also debate the publishing ethics of dissemblance? Ben Watson's joys of philosophy – 'logical rigour, conceptual shock, bracing scepticism' (RP 102) – might be heightened by a little mis-selling. As this book sat on my desk at work, my boss picked it up, looked it over for a couple of seconds and pronounced it too difficult for her. How many Buddhists or Taoists will become apostates from having read Žižek?

The above question relegates to a daydream our secret hope – the philosopher as *deus ex machina*. Nor

can satisfaction be had if our truths settle, unappreciated, awaiting a future readership. In the awareness that our scholarly pleasures are the preserved pains of past violence done to ourselves, we may even need to question the adequacy of the critical mode for the task at hand. Following Brecht, perhaps we should insist on the importance of fun, as he writes on Shaw:

His literary activities have in no sense cut him off from life ... the effect of this inimitable cheerfulness and infectious good mood is quite exceptional. Shaw is truly able to give the impression that his mental and physical well-being increases with every sentence he writes.

Is the suspicion not well founded that philosophers (perhaps with the exception of Žižek) have had little understanding of such moods? In competing within a market of easy answers, pushing the virtue of difficulty or austerity seems a gamble – though one would first have to be concerned about winning. Adorno continued in his interview with Becker: 'one can spoil [films] for young people.... I would very strongly advocate an educational policy of "turning off".' The value of the lie, if such it is, that philosophy can be life-enhancing, may rest in the lie's opposition to atrophied happiness. The attraction of spoiling must be tempered by the thought that it is not that philosophy has not been brought to the public before, but that they have seen it and are dissatisfied. Philosophers all appear alike – or, more specifically, like Roger Scruton: Let me tell you what you should want. No thanks. How will such spoiling be distinguished from the spoiling that removes yoga classes from the church hall for fear of paganism?

With the publishing success of *The Little Book of Calm* and its ilk, it is perhaps the rebranded and repackaged pamphlet to which we need to turn. Pocket-sized (to fit on the bookshop counter) and priced at under £4, the ICON *Postmodern Encounters* series features critical interventions (*Kuhn and the Science Wars*, for example) but because of its format it is the more concrete response to the scandal of public philosophy. THINKING IN ACTION is more ambitious, has the bigger names and the better books, but it lacks the urgency of intervention. The 'fighting materialist', no angel, faced with the struggle for the pre-teen soul, needs new weapons, of which philosophical Pokemon cards may be only the first.

**Andrew McGettigan**

# Panoramic

Jacques Bidet and Eustache Kouvélakis, eds, *Dictionnaire Marx contemporain*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 2001. 589 pp., €26.51, 2 13052 082 0.

In 1977, only a few short years before the notoriously brutal end of his public life, Louis Althusser came 'at last' to recognize the ongoing crisis of Marxism. At the same time he realized that to engage with this crisis properly would require a range of knowledge and expertise broad enough to incorporate contemporary questions relating to economics, political organization, the role of the state, the future of the socialist bloc, and so on. 'Such knowledge I do not possess', he confessed. 'Like Marx in 1852, it's time to "begin with the beginning", but it is now very late, given my age, solitude and fatigue.'

Twenty-four years on, Jacques Bidet and Eustache Kouvélakis have made good on a version of Althusser's promise, and where the French master found himself old, tired and alone, they have composed a volume remarkable for its novelty, its vigour, and its inclusiveness. Indeed the publication of this substantial and immensely useful volume is itself one of the most encouraging indications of the very trend it sets out to analyse – the recent multiplication of otherwise eclectic intellectual projects which all derive some minimal common inspiration through reference to Marx.

The title may mislead. This book is not an updated version of something like Tom Bottomore's *Dictionary of Marxist Thought*. Instead it offers an exceptionally inclusive panorama of the political and analytical ways in which reference to Marx is today both relevant and inventive. For its French readers the most unusual feature of this book is likely to be its resolutely international orientation, and in particular its relative deference to recent theoretical developments in Britain and the United States. The targets of polemic here are more frequently Rawls or Habermas than Ferry or Renaut, for instance; and since neither Fredric Jameson nor Raymond Williams has yet been translated into French, it is remarkable to discover a work of this kind in which they figure at least as, if not more, prominently than do Althusser, Balibar and Bourdieu. Indeed, the guiding principles of this collection have much more in common with the priorities of cultural studies as first conceived by Williams and Stuart Hall than with anything resembling the structural Marxism so memorably condemned by E.P. Thompson. As in contemporary cultural studies, these priorities range widely enough to set the familiar triad of gender, race

and class alongside questions relating to globalization, urbanization, information technology, ecology, liberation theology, and so on. For many of its intended readers this dictionary is likely to provide a first encounter with topics like British analytical Marxism, the various Brenner debates, Ellen Wood's version of political Marxism, the legacy of the American 'Radical Political Economists', postcolonial criticism, and the variants of world-systems theory proposed by Amin, Wallerstein and Frank. Other topics covered include the later work of Lukács, the regulationist school inspired by Aglietta and Boyer, Italian *operaismo*, Kôzo Uno's ultra-theoretical version of scientific socialism, and the variously reactionary forms of contemporary Chinese nationalism.

A second characteristic feature of the book is its explicitly (but not exclusively) *searching* approach to the contemporary historical moment, an approach that floats somewhere between a postmodern recognition of heterogeneous 'small narratives' and a more familiar insistence upon the essential consistency of a single historical process driven by an ever more integrated system of exploitation. The tentative conclusions offered by the volume are shaped less by the experience of recent defeat (the defeat of actually existing Marxisms) than by the diffusion of the increasingly obvious social, cultural and environmental costs of neo-liberalism – costs the prevailing order may be eventually unable to contain. It is in anticipation of this apparently irreversible development, suggested as much by mobilizations in Chiapas or Brazil as by protests in Paris (December 1995) or Seattle (December 1999), that Kouvélakis and Bidet foresee the future renewal of Marxism.

These twin features go some way to explaining the intriguing distribution of praise and blame accorded to the various figures under consideration. Jean-Jacques Lecercle offers a glowing article on Raymond Williams and applauds his 'historical semantics' as the most promising basis for rethinking the relation between the individual and the collective, or superstructure and base. Kouvélakis offers an elegant and appreciative summary of Jameson's *The Political Unconscious*, admiring his contribution to the renewal of dialectical Marxism and the 'irreversible' effect of his critique of postmodernism, albeit with reservations

concerning his 'continuist' if not pre-Hegelian notion of historical time. The continental authors who have made the most significant impact upon recent Anglo-American cultural studies are treated with comparable enthusiasm: thanks to its dynamic and effectively all-inclusive conception of 'desiring production,' Jon Beasley-Murray interprets the work of Deleuze and Guattari as a radicalization of historical materialism; while Robert Nigro suggests that Foucault's work is marked from start to finish by a 'confrontation with Marx'. Jean-Marie Vincent praises (again after Jameson) Adorno's preoccupation with the deadening abstractions of capitalist exchange, and, perhaps more surprisingly, Pierre Macherey offers a mainly appreciative summary of Derrida's now well-known reading of an admittedly 'dematerialized' Marx.

By contrast, a number of equally significant and perhaps more directly Marx-related projects are subjected to trenchant critique. In a penetrating article which draws as much on the canonical works of the 1960s as upon his letters and various posthumous publications, François Matheron emphasizes the essentially inconsistent if not flatly self-contradictory development of Althusser's work, the ways in which the famous 'purity' of its principal concepts (of theoretical practice, structural causality, overdetermination, ISAs) are contaminated with their conceptual opposites. With a similar lightness of touch Gérard Raulet charts the recent evolution of the Frankfurt School from 'neo-Marxism' to 'post-Marxism', and concludes with a scathing dismissal of both the liberal-legalistic turn in Habermas's latest work and Honneth's attempt to incorporate Foucault in an expanded version of the dialectic of enlightenment. Bidet himself consigns Bourdieu's project to a valuable but merely 'regional programme', the analysis of social relations, in comparison with the global or general pretensions of Marxism proper, where the theory of society is part of a larger analysis of the relation between history and economics. Maria Turchetto disparages the 'consolatory' if not 'hallucinatory' quality of Negri's later work, and a caustic note from Callinicos regarding the recent 'intellectual suicide' of Roy Bhaskar (in the form of his recent conversion to Eastern spirituality) completes an otherwise even-handed survey of critical realism.

There is space to touch on only two of the several more troubling questions that might be asked of this resolutely optimistic project. The first concerns the status of a Marxist economics. The *Dictionnaire* doesn't dodge the issue. In addition to Michel Husson's mainly scornful review of the French regulationist economists and Bidet's somewhat more respectful interrogation of Uno's equation of capitalism and the market form, Gérard Duménil and Dominique Lévy demonstrate the 'pertinence of Marxist tools of analysis' via an explanation of neo-liberalism in terms which compare it to the managerial revolution which took place at the beginning of the twentieth century. The pertinence of the distinction between centre and periphery in the world-systems theories surveyed by Herrera speaks for itself. Tony Andreani then goes on to pose the obvious question directly: is the pursuit of socialism compatible with the persistence of private property and market mechanisms, given the latter's necessarily anti-egalitarian and anti-democratic effect? After comparing variously self-managing or worker-owned (*autogestionnaire*) economic models to the sort of capitalism-mimicking state socialisms recently



proposed by Roemer and Bardhan, Andreani himself sketches an appealing model which seeks to maximize the remuneration of labour (rather than capital) via the democratization of economic decisions and in particular through the centralized and public provision of credit. What is still missing, unsurprisingly, is any account of how such a model might be imposed and maintained in the face of the capital flight it would immediately provoke, short of recourse to just the sort of massive coercive power associated with the various 'state capitalisms' Andreani rejects. As a rule, the *Dictionnaire* everywhere assumes a close association of politics and economics; it may well be, however, that the lasting renewal of an emancipatory politics (a politics which actively *persists* in the withering away of the state) might on the contrary require its subtraction, to use Badiou's phrase, from the socio-economic domain altogether.

The second question follows from the first and concerns the perfectly explicit lack of any shared certainty regarding one of the oldest controversies in the field: the relation of theory and practice. The various prescriptions formulated by Bidet and Tosel, for instance, take the form of essentially moral imperatives (against exploitation and 'inhumanity', in favour of a 'global democratic government' and the unlimited freedom of migration, etc.), without providing any concrete description of the political instrument which is to secure these objectives and make them stick. The book's emphasis on democratic diversity and political complexity points it at least occasionally in the direction of a neo-revisionism, broadly in keeping with Bernstein's insistence that democracy is 'at the same time means and end', that 'the final aim is nothing, the movement is everything'. This tendency sits as uneasily with the more classical positions of Woods and Callinicos (who continue to link Marxist analysis directly to the militant and eventually revolutionary mobilization of the working class) as it does with perhaps the most unambiguously positive article in the book: Rémy Herrera's effusive celebration of the achievements of Cuba's revolution, of its long and honourable record of international intervention and of its still enviable position in the various league tables of human development and social justice.

Kouvélakis himself deftly distinguishes the *Dictionnaire*'s 'neo-Marxism' from the alleged passivity and resignation of Laclau's post-Marxism precisely by interpreting the latter as nothing more than a 'poor man's Bernsteinism'. Given his firm rejection of classical Marxist-Leninism and the 'international

communist movement', however, the question of just what exactly distinguishes his (and Tosel's, and Bidet's) emancipatory project from alternative celebrations of anti-systemic movements, including Laclau's radical democratic project, remains a little difficult to pin down. The difficulty is compounded by the lack of any focused discussion of the role of political violence (to say nothing of political terror) or any detailed treatment of ongoing insurgencies, for instance in the new de facto states of the former Soviet Union, or in Latin America or the Middle East. According to Tosel, what remains irreducibly Marxist about neo-Marxism is (a) the effort to produce a politically effective understanding of how global capitalism works, based on an analysis of its exploitation of labour, and (b) the persistence of some concretely historical rather than merely utopian project to 'eliminate' such exploitation and with it 'alienation, domination, subjection'. It is precisely the term 'eliminate' which remains more than a little fuzzy here.

In the end it's those most fundamental of Marxist concepts which remain comparatively underdeveloped in this project: class and class struggle. Despite the frequency of references to struggle throughout the volume, certain basic issues – the degree to which class struggle determines the general course of history, the degree to which the economic dimension of class determines its political dimension – are never considered in any theoretical or historical detail. On the whole, most of the contributors are content to refer to undeniably sensational indications of the growing gap between rich and poor before leaving the reader to presume that this inequality confirms the essential implications of Marx's polarization hypothesis. The question is too important for it not to be addressed directly.

As things stand, such uncertainties are certainly a small price to pay for so inspiring and engaging an effort to renew Marx's emancipatory project. The intellectual moment inhabited by the *Dictionnaire* is indeed one that has more in common with that of Marx himself than of those who were later to lay competing claims to his legacy. This is a moment of invention in the proper sense: it offers more to those willing to take the risks of conceptual innovation and political experimentation than to those who would seek to re-establish a consensus which today could only be either outdated or premature.

**Peter Hallward**



# For pleasure and enlightenment

Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2001. ix + 534 pp., £29.95 hb., 0 300 08886 8.

Although the scope of this book is narrower than the title suggests, anyone interested in the history and politics of cultural education will find it invaluable. Jonathan Rose has consulted social surveys, Mass Observation archives, records of libraries and adult education organizations, oral histories, and the autobiographical memoirs of working-class men and women from England, Scotland and Wales. (It is regrettable that Yale have not seen fit to equip the book with a bibliography.) From these he has distilled an unprecedentedly intimate history 'from below', to complement existing studies of the adult education movement and the reading public in England and Britain.

Rose's story begins in the eighteenth century, but his main focus is on the period from 1900 to 1945 and on the manual and clerical workers who acquired literacy and a love of books through the schooling which working-class people began to enjoy after 1870. Although they had little chance of higher education, these successors of an older autodidact tradition made much of newly available opportunities for cultural self-development. They bought volumes in J.M. Dent's Everyman's Library (Henry George, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Aphra Behn were among authors reprinted). A little later, they might listen to broadcast orchestral music: dismissing sneers at Reithian 'elitism', Rose shows that 'BBC classical programming ... was lavishly praised in the memoirs ... of working people'. Some of them attended Workers' Educational Association and university extension classes and summer schools, and here there is an organic connection between cultural history and ascendant social democracy: fourteen members of the 1945 Labour Cabinet, including the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer, had taught or held office in the WEA, and scores of Labour activists, councillors and MPs had been WEA students.

Rose gives an account of some non-canonical texts, pleasures and encounters – Frank Richards's school stories; Marxist education in the Welsh valleys; silent films in Whitechapel cinemas. However, more-or-less canonical fiction and poetry predominate in his subjects' engagement with learned culture. There are few substantial references to philosophers (after Aristotle and Plato, Marcus Aurelius gets most men-

tions); scientific and natural-historical learning figure only intermittently. This one-sidedness, reflecting the characteristic English notion of humane learning, is probably exacerbated by the central place given to written memoirs: amateur archaeologists or geologists were no doubt less likely than book-lovers to reminisce in prose about their pursuits. 'Cultural life' would be a more apt phrase than 'intellectual life' for the book's title, and then only if we accept the Arnoldian notion that 'culture' is a matter quite especially of literature.

The evidence Rose has assembled supports the conclusion reached by Frank Goss (an activist in the Social Democratic Federation, born in 1896), who wrote of the decades after the 1870 Education Act that 'future history may record this period ... as the age of reading for pleasure and enlightenment'. Looking back, Goss recalls,

These new literates discovered a world of infinite scope and depth beyond their dreams, a world where, previously, talking had been the only medium of exchanging ideas. My father ... enjoyed [reading] purely from the mental excitement he gained in the assimilation of knowledge, perhaps sometimes confused ... but always broadening his outlook and deepening his personality.

The double emphasis is characteristic. Books were experienced both as a 'world' apart from everyday life, and as a medium through which everyday life could be reassessed. For Rose, such testimony refutes the view that 'the working-class pursuit of education [was] a capitulation to bourgeois cultural hegemony': that view, he argues, simply misrecognizes the impact of learning, which because it awoke intellectual excitement also awoke radical desire. He sets out to show – with variable success – that even when specific strains of reactionary ideology (individualist, patriarchal, imperialist, elitist) were inscribed in texts, they were not necessarily transmitted to readers, who could rework their meanings in more progressive terms.

Overall, the evidence indeed shows that when working-class readers laid claim to cultural pleasure, this was bound up with their determination to make new demands on the world in general. One can acknowledge this, and reject the notion that bourgeois literature must have poisoned proletarian minds,

while remaining unconvinced by Rose's argument that reading great books amounts to radical political education. 'Canonical literature tended to ignite insurrections in the minds of the workers, exactly as *Culture and Anarchy* predicted', he writes at the outset. (Arnold is generally taken to have 'predicted', or hoped, that the opposite would happen.) In fact, few readers describe their reading in terms of any 'insurrection'. Rose's memoirists read more diffusely and hedonistically, and with less political intention, than the members of the London Corresponding Society: the parallel between their titles only highlights the differences between the world of Rose's book and that of E.P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class*. Here, we are dealing as much with the dissipation as with the making of working-class consciousness. The period Rose focuses on sees, alongside bitter class struggle, incipient social-democratic accommodation between classes. In this, as well as in the internal differentiation of the wage-earning population (which comes to include an ever-growing proportion of clerical workers), cultural self-improvement, self-ascribed cultural difference, and social mobility all play their part.

'In 1910, on the floor of the Malton Mutual Improvement Society, chemist's apprentice Philip Inman called for the abolition of the House of Lords. Thirty-six years later he was sitting in it.' Rose's evidence greatly illuminates that process, for many of his memoirists travel substantial social distances. However, he is reluctant to consider its implications: there is no adequate reflection on the ways in which those he quotes must often have been untypical of their peers, and no analytic discussion of the relation between the cultural, political and economic aspects of social democracy. Rose says little about the transformed world after 1945, where autodidacts become less common but where there are still plenty of 'British working classes' (many of them born outside Britain); here too his silence seems to express not just nostalgia for a simpler cultural dispensation, but a reluctance to offer an overall assessment of social democracy's achievements and limits.

The book's argumentative project is in general thinly worked out. Its invective against an oddly assorted batch of antagonists, from literary modernists to deconstructionists, via advocates and practitioners of 1960s-style permissiveness, is conducted mainly in the form of ill-tempered asides. Rose cites Richard Hoggart approvingly, and echoes John Carey's one-dimensional populist attack on literary modernism; but he makes just two passing references to Raymond

Williams, whose work can hardly be neglected in any proper assessment of the questions involved. A proper assessment, one comes to feel, is what Rose has decided to evade. This book does much to protect autodidacts, adult education students, and the culture they loved from the condescension of academic posterity. It ought to prompt critics, teachers and historians to re-examine their preconceptions about the nature and workings of cultural hegemony. If it does, that will be thanks to Rose's evidence, but no thanks to the polemical uses he has made of it.

**Martin Ryle**

## A seventh letter

John McCumber, *Time in the Ditch: American Philosophy and the McCarthy Era*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston IL, 2001. xxiii + 213 pp. £25.50 hb., 0 8101 1809 2.

My department has recently done away with its course on 'American Philosophy', as academic life in the USA strives to achieve the institutionalized levels of multiculturalism achieved by, say, Canada. Our department is likely to establish a course on 'Asian Philosophy' sooner than revive the 'American Philosophy' course. The self-image of American philosophy was a concern in the days when Stanley Cavell wrote a piece called 'Existentialism and Analytical Philosophy' (1964; reprinted in his 1984 collection *Themes out of School*). That essay begins with the word 'hopeless'. Not that Cavell was hopeless about philosophy's future, but he worried – and still does – about those who turn philosophy into a profession at the expense of whatever philosophical activity might be *outside* the academy, as if only philosophers with university credentials are rightly philosophers, the only ones capable of *doing* philosophy, emphasizing philosophy as a technique, rather than as, say, a way of life.

Cavell marked out the rhetorical issue of audience for the two kinds of philosophy that he addressed. 'For any of the philosophers who could be called analytical, popular discussion would be irrelevant.... For the analyst, philosophy has become a profession, its problems technical; a nonprofessional audience is of no more relevance to him than it is to the scientist.' On this model, philosophy is meant for insiders, and what defines insiders has little – officially, at least – to do with nationality, or whatever 'American-ness' is when used in the phrase 'American Philosophy', but

rather with maintaining a certain kind of discourse (Cavell talked about imprisoning oneself inside such a language) that tends towards, to some extent, obviating differences between nations, cultures, races. Some upscale philosophers might call it normativity. In his essay, Cavell attempted to understand the rift between what we would now call the analytic and continental traditions of philosophy, a rift that persists in most philosophy departments in North America.

Unlike Cavell, John McCumber wants to provide the reader with part of the rift's aetiology.

There is, in fact, a good deal of evidence that American philosophy in the 1940s and 1950s confronted a political movement that threatened its future in important ways. The record suggests that philosophers did not exactly win their battle against that movement, which is usually called McCarthyism. And there is also evidence suggesting that American philosophy largely remains, even today, what Joe McCarthy's academic henchmen would have wanted it to be.

The paradox in this claim is that the mainly apolitical world of Anglo-American philosophy resulted from a distinct, and highly visible, political moment in American history. McCumber has some evidence for this, though not enough for an unequivocal or overwhelming case. For instance, he can point to some statements made by officers of the American Philosophy Association (APA), to hiring patterns, to the imposition of loyalty oaths, and to Herbert Phillips,

who was fired from the philosophy department at the University of Washington, along with two other professors, in January 1950. 'Phillips's sole offense was membership in the Communist Party.'

While sections of McCumber's book read like a revenge tragedy written by someone who is no longer invited to the party (McCumber, former associate professor of philosophy at Northwestern University, is now Chair of a department of German), he has a capacity for the comic.

Could it be that open reflection on the history and prospects for American philosophy would bring something unpleasant to light? Some dark family secret that those in the know are afraid to mention and that those not in the know are afraid to see? Something like little Bertie's strange resemblance to the milkman or Grandpa's year at the Betty Ford Clinic?

Still, this cartoonish moment is atypical of McCumber's prose, as are a couple of slippages into recitations of instances of the disciplinary gates landing on his toes. Failure to get your talk advertised at a meeting of the APA isn't quite in the same league as Socrates being offered hemlock by an ungrateful public. But such histrionics ought not to deflect readers from McCumber's larger project of drawing attention to analytical philosophy's political heritage in the USA.

According to McCumber, who seems overly sanguine about his capacity to distinguish the political



from the philosophical, 'The reasonable ... step would be to admit that *some*, at least, of contemporary philosophy's origins may not be philosophical at all but rather lie in the politics and culture of the historical period in which current American philosophy took shape.' Later, McCumber points out that philosophy as politics is not restricted to 'contemporary philosophy's origins'.

Anyone who thinks that the McCarthy era is over and done with, that the purges are merely a matter of history, and that American philosophy has returned to a path of normal and healthy intellectual development is invited to contemplate the fact that eleven years after the 1987 breakthrough anthology *Feminism as Critique* none of its contributors was still in a philosophy department.

The dominance of analytical philosophy has come at the expense of continental philosophy: 'hiring records show that most American philosophy departments remain unwilling to allocate significant representation to continental philosophy'. In short, in North America departments of philosophy dominated by analytical philosophy have not shown themselves to be sanctuaries of tolerance.

The strength of McCumber's analysis lies in his ability to demonstrate that the return of the repressed means something to philosophy as well: philosophy has not been able to purify itself of a heritage as old as Plato's *Seventh Letter*, in which Plato explains what keeps philosophy haunted by politics. Many analytical philosophers rejoiced during the hand wringing that took place on the continental side of the divide over Martin Heidegger's *Rectoratsrede*, and some still want to dismiss the continental tradition by linking the whole enterprise to scandal, with Hitler and National Socialism serving as the nouns about which no one need think. The reaction to those nouns has been programmed. McCumber turns the tables on the analytical philosophers by pointing to a scandal on that side of the divide, and he counts on an equally thoughtless set of reactions to nouns like communism and McCarthyism. So that when McCumber talks about Herbert Phillips, he wants no truck with communism, nor with what Phillips found right about communism. Is it still possible to think about communism? The end of the book relegates the attempted purging of communists to one of the 'weaknesses' of the analytic tradition that awaits full acknowledgment.

For some analytical philosophers, the scandal on the other side, the stain on Heidegger's hands, is not as significant as his intolerable prose. Simon Blackburn's recent *New Republic* review of a translation of

some of Heidegger's work can serve as an example here.

Analytical philosophy is sometimes contrasted unfavorably with 'Continental' philosophy, because of its supposed lack of political and moral weight. If this charge was ever just, it has long ceased to be so.... What I think is true is that analytical philosophy is profoundly mistrustful of sustaining myths, including the primal story. We resist the pipes of Pan, because we care about truth. And intelligibility is a precondition of truth. If you cannot tell whether a string of words says anything, you cannot tell whether it says anything true.

Blackburn has already imprisoned himself inside a certain kind of language. It's unclear whether McCumber's book wants to set him free, or to make him squirm inside his cell.

**Bruce Krajewski**

## With added reference

Howard Feather, *Intersubjectivity and Contemporary Social Theory: The Everyday as Critique*, Ashgate, Aldershot, Brookfield, Singapore and Sydney, 2000. 176 pp., £39.99 hb., 1 85972 281 4.

*Intersubjectivity* is a wide-ranging discussion of communicative rationality which draws in Gadamer, Gramsci, Habermas, Jameson, Ricoeur and Rorty as well as theorists of the 'everyday'. The argument of this densely written book is that conventionalist accounts of meaning are mistaken. Whilst this might seem no big deal if one identifies conventionalism solely with Neurath's protocol statements or even with Davidson and Rorty, the purview here is much broader. The emphasis on semantic primacy of classification systems in post-structuralist semiotics and the privileging of elitist interpretations of popular culture in the work of the Frankfurt School suggests the literal or conventionalist approach to communication. The line pursued is one which in Frege's dictum might serve 'to break the power of words', at least in theoretical work.

The argument links this aim to conceptions of the everyday in a variety of phenomenological views. It is claimed that communication always relies on an unspoken undertow of routinized meanings which, as Dummett has argued (following Frege), constitutes the



'Context Principle' underlying communication. This realm of indexical meaning inevitably intervenes in or disrupts the flow of conventional sense sedimented in linguistic utterances. Hence Frege's point that what an utterance picks out as its object, its reference, is decided not by the language itself, but by the context in which the utterance is made.

Feather looks at the implications of this for the metaphoricity of language. Even the most putatively literal statement contains a 'visible' part which reflects an invisible whole (context) *qua* synecdoche. Whilst this can be seen as undermining some well-worn positivistic views about language as a reflection of reality, the writer could arguably have capitalized on this more strongly by employing it against the postmodern claims to have entered a new phase of allegorical communication, a world of virtual meanings, simulacra, hyperreality, Jameson's loss-of-referent-in-an-era-of-global-capital, and so on. Clearly, the dismissal of the idea of literal reference does two things: it points out that the postmoderns are not saying anything radically new here and, perhaps most important, it offers a powerful challenge to their claims that loss of 'literal reality' takes us to a reality without reference.

The book takes up the issue of the tension between conventional meanings and the sense of a context in looking at the role of ideology in discursive practices. It is argued that ideology functions to displace people's meanings by conventional ones and hence that, to the extent it is successful in doing so, dialogue is rendered as sense without reference. However, given an everyday hermeneutics, people can 'read between the lines' and achieve a fragmentary or purely metaphorical understanding of events. Rowbotham's and Friedan's references to women's responses and resistance to oppression in pre-feminist days of the postwar period are used to illustrate this point. Given the author's desire to make an intervention in favour of a pre-discursive but emancipatory everyday rationality, more could have been made of Rowbotham's material on this point. The whole debate about women's isolation in the new urban postwar settlement and the cultural displacement of gender politics, which, as Elizabeth Wilson has argued, reappears in the guise of 'problems of urban life', fits this mode of analysis (sense without reference).

How the everyday comes to function as emancipatory critique is an ongoing concern of the discussion. Feather looks at this through the Schutzian reading of Weber's rationalization thesis where, instead of a reified division of labour, Schutz's open-horizonal approach leads to appropriation of the objectified con-

sequences of rationalization within a dynamic field of everyday practices which determine their actual meaning over and against the bureaucratic conception. Hence new objectifications are assimilated to the constructs of common-sense understanding and constitute a demystification in so far as the process undoes the commodified appearance of things as 'the new'. Schutz does not, however, address the problem of *power* to impose bureaucratic meanings by displacing the actuality of sense into some sedimented but potent substitute. This point is overlooked whilst the author ranges over accounts of demystification in theories of the everyday.

Merleau-Ponty's *Gestalt* or figure-ground idea provides another tack through which the familiarization-defamiliarization tropes operate – that is, the figure-ground reversal brings to light the unspoken assumptions or 'context' supporting the figure. Feather looks at the employment of this as *détournement* strategy in graffiti. Lefebvre's interruption of everydayness as a process of intersecting temporalizations is yet another approach in this *concretion* of the everyday. The question of how we get from interruption to emancipatory critique is, however, glossed; Osborne's treatment in *The Politics of Time* of the everyday as a structural feature of social formations may offer a way forward here, as the author briefly acknowledges.

In Dummett's reading of Frege, which theoretically informs much of what is going on here, the everyday-as-context is clearly present as the ontological basis of reference, which appears as an emergent property of sense. The indexicality of our practices in everyday situations generates an interruption, producing a break with the everyday in the process of recognition or objectification of those practices. Again, more emphasis on the emergence of reference/identities from social struggles – rather than, say, hegemonic taxonomies – could have been used to highlight the significance of the argument here.

The author seems to anticipate the charges of idealism which might flow from a reliance on an ontology of meaning to do the work of materializing a world of objective structures and practices, and this problem is tackled in a key chapter on 'discursive realism'. The position taken is the Spinozist one that the (material) world has a dual aspect character: it is at once extended in space but every such extension is also structured ideationally. Hence it is not the case that the physical world is reflected in ideas but rather that *these twin features* are what constitute sense. That is, the performativity of utterances in bringing about a state of affairs is just as much an aspect of sense

as the thought embodied in the performance. In sum, the performed discursivity of social practices is what constitutes their sense, and of course there is no way that this intentionality can be separated from the more 'material' aspects of practices without these ceasing to be practices.

The book goes on to stress that this notion of the self-referentiality of practices is not the circular one found in Butler et al., where the (illocutionary) performative utterance brings about that which it *literally* intends. Some social constructionist views of performances as self-fulfilling fail to make the distinction between sense and reference and collapse reference into the literal. Consequently, the power of discourse seems unbreakable. By contrast, Feather, via Frege/Dummett, offers a more decentred idea of reference, which does not rely on agents' levels of understanding and intentions. These may provide the coordinates for identifying a topic, but the topic itself is produced in a living context. Hence the ontological flatness of postmodern representationalist accounts of meaning and objectification is rejected in favour of an intersubjectivity prior to and decentring of particular discourses.

The concern with the fixity of meaning in terms in semiotics and elsewhere which renders it as conventional usage, moves the discussion to Derrida's *usure* – his treatment of the literal/conventional construction of meaning as linguistic fetishism. This promises a more sociological critique of inter-subjective tropes. It is argued that although Derrida's de-fetishizing insights about language working behind our backs are taken as grist to the mill, the master himself becomes prey to linguistic fetishism as he falls back into a representationalist notion of meaning where sense is always already sutured to context. 'Play' requires the *fixing* of meaning in terms in order to secure its dissimulative character.

The notion of fetishized social relations as sutured is a potentially productive one and it would have been nice to see it employed against some of the central ideas in current debates. To be fair, Feather does tackle Jameson's version of Baudrillard's 'loss of the referent', but a positive project is needed if the discussion is to have a more immediately engaged quality. Nevertheless, the book interrupts the routines of dogmatic slumber and – *contra* Kant's strictures on shorter books being longer – the sense of distraction provided by the short dense sections is just what the doctor ordered.

**Serge McGuinness**

## Photography/ Philosophy/ Technology

University of Brighton  
26/27 April 2002

If photography now exists within an expanded field of image production and distribution, increasingly mediated by and interdependent with other media such as the internet and video, the fundamental issue becomes how do we define the 'photographic'? What relationship does photography have to particular technological apparatuses? How useful is it today to hold onto photography as a distinctive category? If photographs are exceeded by the notion of the photographic, what are the key concepts that hold the latter in place? When is a photograph not a photograph? What philosophical issues are raised by recent technological developments that challenge our understanding of photography's essence and its limits?

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# Talking the walk

Mark Cowling and Paul Reynolds, eds, *Marxism, the Millennium and Beyond*, Palgrave, Basingstoke, 2000. 336 pp., £47.50 hb., 0 33380 166 0.

Adapt or join the dinosaurs. Since the Communist explosion of 1989, this question has become acute for Marxism as a political force: will it remain on the endangered species list or join the ranks of the extinct – no less fascinating for that, but no longer part of the contemporary political imagination? This volume of thoughtful and thought-provoking essays suggests that scholars of Marxism show few signs of having caught the ‘endist’ virus. These authors are continuing to transgress Marxist orthodoxy by articulating its values, explanations and insights with other intellectual and political traditions. Nevertheless, the absence of discussion of strategic issues is indicative of a current lack of political purpose.

Alan Carling considers four core socialist values – self-realization, community, democracy and equality – seeking to clarify precisely how they should be understood, given that other ideologies also subscribe to them. Moving down a distinctly liberal route, his preferred value is personal autonomy with the resources to accompany it, allowing individual goals to be self-chosen. However, he does not assess the limits of autonomy, which is crucial when we ask where the resources are going to come from.

Lawrence Wilde shows how, contrary to Carling, Erich Fromm grounds values on a perfectionist notion of human essence of Aristotelian lineage. He hopes to demonstrate the relevance of Fromm’s critique of capitalism with its ‘affluent alienation’ reducing autonomy to consumer choice. In a more developed treatment, Wilde might have dealt with the sticky problem of how we reconcile the ontological and historical sides of Fromm’s position.

Kelvin Knight discusses MacIntyre’s anti-modernist advocacy of a practice-based ‘ethical post-Marxism’ of small-scale communities. MacIntyre has argued that, having rejected the individualist standpoint of civil society, Marx succumbed to rationalist instrumental-

ism and positivism. Knight suggests that, to avoid a nostalgic longing, we need to think about how MacIntyre’s goods of ‘excellence’ and ‘effectiveness’ can be rebalanced through a mix of forms of direct and representative democracy.

Jonathan Hughes develops an eco-friendly Marxism. He rebuts accusations that the logic of the (rephrased) productive-forces version of Marxism championed by G.A. Cohen leads to environmental disasters. But, in valuing human freedom above planetary considerations, would Marxists be overly troubled by the thought of destroying the planet, if there were the physical and technological resources to lead a more self-realizing life elsewhere?

Mark Cowling performs another kind of synthesis in articulating socialism with feminism. Basing his position on Walaby’s ‘structures of patriarchy’ approach, he arrives at classical Marxism’s call for greater female participation in the workforce, backed up by publicly financed childcare.

Simon Tormey examines Agnes Heller’s ‘post-Marxism’, suggesting that it is the quest for personal autonomy that is the underlying theme in her work. Hillel Ticktin remains undisturbed by the theoretical and political developments of the past fifty (or perhaps eighty-five) years.

Laclau and Mouffe are the flagbearers of post-Marxism in the Anglophone world. But where do they leave radical politics? Paul Reynolds expresses an understandable frustration with their answers, which in effect ‘talk’, without ‘walking’, the political.

In their different ways, all the essays amply demonstrate the power of Marxism as ‘critique’ and its capacity to be combined with other traditions. But the rich and powerful will only start to worry when academics with Marxist inclinations feel the need to discuss strategy.

**Jules Townshend**

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