REVIEWS

The erotics of deference

Julian Baggini and Jeremy Stangroom, eds, *New British Philosophy: The Interviews*, Routledge, London and New York, 2002. ix + 303 pp., £45.00 hb., £9.99 pb., 0 415 24345 9 hb., 0 415 4346 9 pb.

In 1971, Bryan Magee published a book of conversations with British philosophers under the title *Modern British Philosophy*. Originating in a series of radio broadcasts and appearing under the imprint of Secker & Warburg, it was intended as a 'lively introduction' to the philosophy of the day. The list of contributors included most of the surviving leading figures of the postwar years – Ayer, Hampshire, MacIntyre, Pears, Popper, Quinton, Ryle, (Ninian) Smart, Strawson, (Geoffrey) Warnock, Williams, Wollheim – along with someone who, already at that time, appeared as something of an exception: Alan Montefiore. The larger part of the conversations was dominated by discussions of the thought of the – then still only recently dead – 'masters' of 'the age of Russell': Russell himself, Moore, Wittgenstein and Austin. These were followed by topic-based dialogues on morals, religion, art and social theory. Logic, philosophy of science, philosophy of language and philosophy of mind – the core of the discipline then, as still, albeit to a lesser extent, now – having already been covered in the extensive treatment of the legacies of the masters. The aberrant character of Montefiore's interest in French philosophy was at once registered and concealed by the titling of his contribution as simply 'Conclusion'. (When asked if what was happening in England seems 'to even sympathetic outside observers to be mistaken', he replies gently: 'Well, not so much mistaken as perhaps superficial and pointless.')

But if Montefiore stood out for his eccentric preoccupation with foreign thinkers (marked down as literary, politicized, grouped into 'violently competing movements', and prey to the whims of fashion), he was nonetheless otherwise very much at one with the rest of the group. The cultural homogeneity of the collection is profound. All are men of a certain age (no Anscombe, no Murdoch, no Mary Warnock); nearly all cite their service in World War II, or immediately after, in the Notes on Contributors; and eleven of the thirteen (along with Magee, their interlocutor) were educated at Oxford, five at Balliol College. MacIntyre and Popper are the only exceptions. Yet in his Preface, Magee not only insisted that there was 'no prevailing orthodoxy' ('the orthodoxies of language analysis' having, supposedly, been replaced by 'a welter of reappraisal and experiment') but also maintained that there was 'an unprecedented openness to influences from outside'. Precedent, of course, is relative to what has gone before; something of which may be gauged from Magee's remark that 'parochialism is an unimportant fault when the most important events happen in one's parish'. Others might think that parochialism *is* the belief that the most important events happen in one's parish. Still, it is the perception that matters here, and the perception was (or at least, the perception was being fostered) that the philosophical wind of change was blowing.

It is blowing again – or perhaps it's the same wind still blowing, one last breath – if *New British Philosophy* is to be believed. There is, apparently, a 'new spirit of philosophy', embodied in a new generation of philosophers in Britain, located in a new 'cultural milieu'. And *New British Philosophy* is out to 'capture' and 'showcase' its 'mood'. It comprises sixteen interviews with those its editors describe as 'the heirs to the subject's aristocracy'. What has supposedly changed since the days of *Modern British Philosophy* is that there is no longer a hegemony of the 'golden triangle' of Oxford, Cambridge and London (what's this about Cambridge and London?); nor is there a set philosophical agenda (although Magee was already denying that there was one back in 1971): 'Continental, post-analytic, feminist, inter-disciplinary and applied philosophy all thrive where previously they were confined to the margins'. Now there are 'regional centres' where 'different styles of philosophy flourish'. And the heirs to the aristocrats are no longer aristocrats themselves, but 'star players'. The editors are modest in the disclaimer that they have not assembled 'a definitive premier league of philosophers', but they do reckon they at least have 'the few undoubted' (and teasingly unnamed) stars. It is all very Carnaby Street,

this imagined Blairite cultural revolution of BritPhil (at one point touted as the title for the collection). But there is some truth in it. Quite how little becomes apparent in the interviews themselves.

The list of contributors to *New British Philosophy* is more like the famous list of animals in Borges's 'certain Chinese encyclopedia' than was its predecessor. For that one should be grateful. But it is not very like it, or without some rather obvious exclusions. The geographical spread of teaching locations is certainly wider than Magee's (Oxford and London provide a mere 50 per cent of contributors), but there is no one from the 'new' universities. And while the presence of three women means that female philosophers across the whole of Britain have as many representatives as the Philosophy Department at UCL, one might be forgiven for having hoped that the editors would have tried a little harder here. It places a heavy burden on the chosen three. Especially since one of them, Christina Howells, is the only interviewee not teaching in a philosophy department, thereby perpetuating that ideological connection between women and literary method that places them closer to 'foreigners' than to their male peers in the imaginary of British philosophy – for which they can, I suppose, be grateful. Still, what a chapter expounding Sartre's existentialism of the 1940s is doing representing 'new British philosophy' is not immediately clear.

The most striking features of the conversations are, first, the extent to which so many of them (particularly in the first half of the book) continue to exhibit that narrowness of intellectual and cultural reference which was characteristic of Anglophone philosophy in the latter half of the twentieth century; and, second, the way in which, when the canvas is broadened, the editors police the discussion by repeatedly bringing it back to the issue of the credibility, or not, of the idea of an 'analytical/continental' divide. It is amazing (to me, at least) how many of the contributors conceive of their intellectual work (and their lives?) as a kind of extended continuation of their undergraduate experiences. And it is on occasion shocking how close the radical openness of what is often thought to be a philosophical attitude comes to a naivety sustained only by systematic ignorance of (or simple lack of interest in) other domains of knowledge.

In the first part of the book for example (up to and including chapter 10, after which there is a distinct change of tone and topics, although this is not registered in the book's organization), the two conversations relating to feminism stand out, as instances in which philosophical argument comes alive by being brought to bear on issues of contemporary social importance. However, they take place in isolation from the broader history of feminist theory and debate in a way that makes feminist philosophy appear, at times, self-defeatingly encased within a disciplinary prison. Miranda Fricker seems thrown by a question about what 'first wave feminism' was (the struggles for women's suffrage) – referring instead to de Beauvoir and Mary Wollstonecraft, as if the history of feminism was primarily a history of philosophical texts. Rae Langton presents the main developments of her work on pornography – contra Ronald Dworkin's liberalism, and in solidarity with Catharine MacKinnon – without reference to any of the arguments of the feminist anti-censorship movement, which, one might have thought, was a more relevant point of contestation than that particular Dworkin.

MacKinnon's callow assumption that pornography is, by definition, about heterosexual sex (while representations of gay sex can simply be reclassified as 'erotica') passes unexamined. Langton acknow-ledges that the consequences of the MacKinnon-sponsored legislation in Canada (prosecution of feminist documentaries and gay pornography) were 'the last thing MacKinnon intended', but she thinks it irrelevant to the 'very significant achievement' of the work that justified it. The lack of interest in the apparent contradiction (or, at best, the unexplained argumentative gap) seems deeply unphilosophical. Yet Langton defends it on the precise grounds of the distinctively philosophical character of her concerns. 'Philosophy' thus remains here the name for a disciplinary activity insulated from the broader forms and context of argument that alone make 'feminist philosophy' a politically relevant concern.

A different and more acute instance of the self-negating function of a certain academicism occurs in the interview with Jonathan Wolff on 'The Role of Political Philosophy'. He declares himself 'very much against the kind of lining up of oppositions that we sometimes see, particularly in political philosophy – putting some people in one camp and others in another and trying to decide which is right.' Instead, he prefers 'not to pick a firm line and to argue it against other people'. But why, then, does he do political philosophy? What exactly does he think politics is? The interviewers do not enquire.

The first and the final six chapters of the book range freely, in different ways, across topics and metaphilosophical approaches, respectively. It is in the central four chapters, however, that the residual analytical

mainstream – of whom the editors are somewhat in awe – get their say. In successive chapters on philosophy of mind (Tim Crane), analytical philosophy (Michael Martin, editor of *Mind*), logic (Timothy Williamson), and what one might call analytical metaphysics (Robin Le Poidevin), the establishment set out their stall. The interviewers argue gamely here, but they never challenge the terms of the approaches or point to connections with alternative traditions (such as Tim Crane's apparently belated discovery of the rudiments of phenomenology, for example). Rather, deference and at times (and not unrelatedly) the erotics of argument are the order of the day.

This is particularly clear in the interview with Martin, whom the editors call 'the real McCoy'. 'I want to focus on some of your work and perhaps we can see how real philosophy operates', Baggini (and/or Stangroom?) breathlessly declares, momentarily dropping the strategic front of philosophical pluralism. Martin is kind to his admirers. As befits the Wykeham Professor of Logic at Oxford, Williamson is more severe. He has a problem to deal with, through which he can demonstrate 'those advances in philosophical standards that have been made within analytical philosophy', and it concerns the use of words like 'tall' and 'thin'. There is nothing personal here, you must understand; the lesson is a general one. For 'there would be a serious loss of integrity involved in abandoning [these standards] in the way that would be required to participate in continental philosophy.' (The interviewer lets him get away with this unremarked.) The problem is that these concepts 'appear to be *vague* with respect to borderline cases'. And the Sorites paradox of incremental depletion appears to make such vagueness ineliminable. Williamson's mission (and he has accepted it) is to eliminate such vagueness without resort to the continuum of degrees of truth involved in 'fuzzy logic'.

His solution is simple (perhaps too simple): the vagueness is not in the concept, with respect to borderline cases, but only in the application. Standard conceptions of truth and falsity are in principle applicable, and hence give meaning to the terms in these instances, but we cannot tell which of them is actually appropriate in such cases. So 'vagueness is a certain kind of inescapable ignorance'. How satisfied you are with this 'solution' will probably depend upon broader issues about 'inescapable ignorance' that are not broached in the interview. Williamson is himself an interesting (if definitely non-borderline) case, because he attributes his fondness for formal logic to the fact it is something he can do 'without too much difficulty', yet which he nonetheless finds 'deeply satisfying'. There is a clue here to the deep-seated complacency and aggressive rejectionism of the analytical establishment: being so intellectually satisfied by something one finds so easy, one might well get annoyed if someone tried to take it away.

The hoary old idea that the 'continental tradition' is not interested in 'conceptual analysis, concentration on argument, the detection of inconsistency' is given one final unimpeded airing by Le Podevin. And then the deluge begins.

Simon Critchley leads the continentalist charge. However, those familiar with his writings may be, momentarily, as disorientated by his tactics as his analytical enemies. For, giving in to the temptations of the occasion, he has turned up wearing someone else's clothes. 'In my view', he asserts, 'the basic conceptual map of the continental tradition can be summarized in three terms: *critique*, *praxis* and *emancipation*. … The goal of philosophy in the continental tradition is emancipation, whether individual or social.' Heady stuff. But does he really believe it, and furthermore, is it true? Is this really 'the goal of philosophy' in the phenomenological tradition: in Husserl, Heidegger and Levinas, for example; or even for Derrida? The fact that Derrida has taken 'political positions on pedagogical reform in France and [supported] a wide variety of causes', as Critchley puts it, seems something of a non sequitur, without a connection being made to what is most distinctive about his philosophical work. Critchley's Frankfurtean turn is a welcome one, but it is not immediately clear that the rest of twentieth-century European philosophy can so easily retrospectively follow him. In any case, by the end of the interview he has changed back into own clothes: 'What I want to argue for … is a version of continental philosophy that does not embrace a "one big thing".' (There goes 'emancipation'.) 'There is no one big thing, just many small things, fascinating small things, which it is the job of phenomenology to describe.' It was just a dream, a wonderful dream.

Simon Glendinning takes on the main meta-philosophical issue underlying the volume's 'new diversity' thesis: the claim for the lack of philosophical significance of the analytical/continental divide. On this view, continental philosophy is *wholly* the projection of a self-styled analytical philosophy: the 'false personification' of the permanent possibility of sophistry. It is thus not so much that the divide is of decreasing significance, as that it never actually existed at all: 'crudely speaking, there is no continental philosophy'. The task is not reconciliation (with or without a Truth Commission), but Wittgensteinian-style therapy for the analytics. This is a strong and seductive thesis, but it has more dialectical subtlety than one might care for. For after the therapy, there will only be one tradition left: a less narrow-minded analytical one.

Stephen Mulhall talks about his version of 'Post-Analytic Philosophy'. Keith Ansell-Pearson gives a spirited exposition of his particular brand of left Nietzscheanism (now, *there* is a 'new spirit of philosophy' for the editors). But the collection gives itself away again at the close with Nigel Warburton on 'Philosophy and the Public'. It is in its conception of the public that analytical philosophy, and British philosophy more generally, reveal the full depth of the gulf that still separates them from other European traditions. To put it crudely, to communicate publicly French and German philosophers, for example, make interventions on cultural and political matters of the day, on the basis of a conception of public reason, informed by their philosophical positions; those from the British philosophical establishment write 'primers' about philosophy conceived as an academic discipline.

Warburton is brimming with *ressentiment* against those who do not consider the production of 'made simple' books to be the highest intellectual calling. Ostensibly against the stultifying pedantry and scholastic obscurity of the culture of analytical journals, for turning academia into a 'business', he sees no connection between this and his own relentless marketing of compilations of the briefest of lecture notes as books. Yet when asked if writing 'popular philosophy' is a rewarding enough activity, he interprets the question financially, laboriously pointing out that 'it increases your income, and also your ability to command better royalties and advances on subsequent books'. It would be nice to be able to take this in a Brechtian spirit, but it is not easy. Furthermore, this is a type of popularization in which what is to be communicated remains almost wholly unaffected by the exchange. It is one-way traffic.

The same informational conception of philosophical communication underlies the project of *The Philosopher's Magazine*, which Baggini and Stangroom edit. At the end of the day, their 'new British philosophy' is largely a certain disavowed position-taking within this cultural milieu. As for the much trumpeted new diversity within the discipline, with some notable exceptions, it has hardly begun to take on board the thought of the figures singled out by Montefiore over thirty years ago.

Peter Osborne

Spacey

Stuart Elden, *Mapping the Present: Heidegger, Foucault and the Project of a Spatial History*, Continuum, London and New York, 2001. 234 pp., £55.00 hb., £16.99 pb., 0 8264 5846 7 hb., 0 8264 5847 5 pb.

David Harvey, *Spaces of Capital: Towards a Critical Geography*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2001. 429 pp., £47.50 hb., £16.99 pb., 0 7486 1540 7 hb., 0 7486 1541 5 pb.

In a 1967 lecture Foucault ventured that the 'present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space'. This statement prefigures the general explosion in writings about the subject over the last two decades. This turn towards spatial questions is most often presented as a compensation for the 'modernist marginalization of space and prioritization of time'. While such a view is not uncontentious – it ignores, for example, the explicit emergence of questions of space within much early modernist art and architecture – it is clearly true that the marking out of supposedly 'postmodernist' theoretical concerns has relied a great deal upon this perceived neglect. The increasing decline in plausibility undergone by the notion of postmodernism raises a question, therefore, of how – 'post-postmodernism' – the current theoretical import of questions of space, and their relation to temporal problematics, is to be critically assessed.

One welcome result of the renewed emphasis on space has been the reconstruction of geography as an academic discipline. Nobody has played a more important role in this process than David Harvey. If nothing else, the publication of *Spaces of Capital* – collecting together essays from 1974 to the present – provides a useful overview of the recent history of theoretical debates in this area, as well as tracing Harvey's own, more particular, attempt to establish a Marxian geography. As a close reader of Marx, Harvey is always lucid and insightful, while teasing out those geographical dimensions of Marx's thought that have customarily been overlooked. Hopefully this collection will serve to make his work better known among scholars working on Marx's theory of the state and the spatio-temporal character of capitalist accumulation. Harvey's writings on what he terms the 'spatial fix' – referring to the presentation of geographical expansion in imperialism and colonialism as a solution to the 'internal contradictions' of capitalism – are particularly productive with regard to contemporary questions surrounding the processes of globalization.

The fact that this is a collection of essays, written over the course of more than twenty-five years, means (inevitably) that there is some repetition: the concepts of both the spatial fix and 'militant particularism' (derived from Raymond Williams) get several – near identical – outings. Yet part of the pleasure and interest of the book is in tracing Harvey's reworkings and reconsiderations of the problems that most concern him. Or, in some cases, not. For one of the disappointing lacunas in *Spaces of Capital* is Harvey's failure to review his own earlier usage of the term 'postmodernity', which provided him with the title of his most famous and popular book. Already in that work there was an implied need for a debunking of self-proclaimed postmodernists' claims upon spatial concerns, as constructed through a reductive and depoliticized description of modernism. However, the return to an explicit rethinking of the spatial conditions of modernity itself, which this clearly demands, is, sadly, never quite followed through here. That said, as the concept of postmodernity comes to disappear gradually from Harvey's writing, so, too, does his work seem to become more impressive. It is encouraging that the standout pieces are the most recent ones, dealing with the dialectics of particularity and universality and what he calls 'the space/place dialectic' in global capitalist development. Harvey's rethinkings, in spatial terms, of such hoary old notions as 'grassroots activism' and 'the personal is political' are bravura performances with much potential for contemporary political theory, as well as for geography and urban studies.

Stuart Elden, while echoing this reassertion of 'the importance of space to social and political theory', seeks, in *Mapping the Present*, to elaborate a more explicitly philosophical account of its conceptual implications, warning against the drift into an unreflective, 'conceptually weak' empiricism apparent in 'the many practical analyses that have dominated recent research'. Where Harvey looks to Marx and Hegel, the resources to which Elden turns are drawn from the works of Heidegger and Foucault. And it is this that forms the second rationale for the book: an elaboration of the claim that Heidegger (rather than, in unmediated fashion, Nietzsche) constituted the most important influence upon Foucault's own intellectual project. While this may not be quite the novel insight that Elden suggests it is – the links between the later Heidegger of 'The Age of the World Picture' and *The Order of Things* have long been apparent – he does succeed in providing some convincing and detailed

evidence for the connection. Moreover, the (largely discrete) readings of Heidegger and Foucault that make up the two parts of this book are, in themselves, generally reliable and valuable accounts.

Nonetheless, Elden's broader project is not without its problems. At the heart of the book is his oft-repeated demand for a theoretical move from a 'history of space' to a 'spatial history', where 'space should not be simply an object of analysis but part of the conceptual armoury we have for analysis itself'. This certainly sounds like a good idea, but it is never formulated with the clarity it requires, and one might suspect that, for Elden, it means little more than a simple *broadening* of a history of space's object of study beyond the banally empirical. Hence he states, for example, that Foucault 'shows an awareness of the way in which conceptions of space – theoretical, medical, moral and philosophical – often relate to the exercise of power over the mad'. This is fair enough, but it is hard to see, as Elden presents it here, why the tracing of these 'conceptions of space' does not still essentially amount to a history of space in a relatively conventional (if less straightforwardly empiricist) form.

In this regard, the most intriguing material in *Mapping the Present* is that dealing with Heidegger's work on the Greek understanding of the *polis* as 'the historical site, the there *in* which, *out of* which, and *for* which history happens'. Elden's reading is sophisticated and suggestive, and it provides him with a strong philosophical grounding for his concluding assertion that 'politics is inherently spatial' in a manner beyond the grasp of any simple account of the 'political economy of space'. However, the superimposing of Heidegger's conception of the 'political' upon Foucault's analyses of power does Elden's project little favour, tending as it does to reinscribe the former's thinking of the 'historical site' within what seems to us the latter's ultimately more conventional forms of historicism. At the same time, questions are raised by the work that Elden wants to do with Heidegger's conception of 'place' (*Ort*) as a means to rethinking the nature of spatial politics in general. For while Elden is clearly right to reject any simplistic 'sociological' readings of this notion, as reflecting *nothing more than* 'rural nostalgia', it is difficult to ignore the predominantly conservative (anti-modernist) uses to which the Heideggerian conception of place has been put in urbanist and architectural discourse.

One can see why he seizes so enthusiastically upon this notion: it promises to deliver the holy grail of almost all contemporary thinkers of space – a 'philosophically sound', *experiential* conception of space as 'encountered in everyday life, and lived in'. The problem lies in the way in which Elden tries to articulate this notion of experiential space (as place) through a simplistic opposition to what he lazily terms 'Cartesianism', itself structurally confused in the text with what is referred to as 'extended' 'geometric' or 'mathematical' space. The presentation of these conceptions as effectively interchangeable elides important internal differences and seems, finally, to indicate that Elden has in mind little more than a common-sense notion of coordinate space, the crucial point for him being its apparent 'measured', isotropic character. Without dwelling on the way in which this unfairly caricatures the spatial complexities of modern mathematics and geometry – the majority of which are in fact non-metric in nature – it is hard to see why these issues are distinctively spatial, given that such abstractions of measurement and linearity have as much impact upon the experience of time. Moreover, this opposition is then used to perform a rather too direct, and potentially misleading, 'mapping' of Heideggerian 'place' onto Foucauldian 'lived space', on the basis of their supposedly shared 'anti-Cartesian' character.

The naivety of this conceptual opposition between the experiential and the geometrical has other unfortunate effects, not least because the latter must itself be regarded as a particular site of experience. Indeed, surely what Heidegger is most precisely concerned with in his work on technology is capitalist modernity's tendency towards an imposition of what Lefebvre calls 'abstract space' as the *sole* condition of spatial production and experience *itself*. Despite, then, Elden's own self-assigned task of rendering Heidegger's and Foucault's concepts not only clearer but also 'more useful', the theoretical resources provided by *Mapping the Present* appear strangely ill-equipped for dealing with the specificities of the most urgent contemporary spatial problematics. In particular, there are several unanswered questions opened up by Elden's account of history as 'platial' – given its connection, in Heidegger, to conservative conceptions of belonging – and a concomitant danger of essentializing spatial experience in terms of an ahistorical notion of the truly 'lived'. The limitations of this perspective are revealed through a comparison with, for example, recent debates surrounding the idea of 'non-place' as a description of the spatial condition of the particular forms of historical experience associated with a global 'supermodernity' (as Augé calls it).

In this respect, Harvey's work appears to offer the more fertile resources for a critical account of the contemporary spaces of capital in its focus upon the

dialectic of space and place. This is exemplified by the book's final essay, 'The Art of Rent', which considers capitalism's simultaneous production of spaces of globalized homogeneity and reconfigured spaces of what have traditionally been conceived of as forms of locality, region or territory, in a manner which is alive, in a properly dialectical sense, to both the political possibilities and dangers of these new spaces and spatial relations. It is somewhere in this, perhaps, that a possible model for a 'spatial history' – demanded by Elden's book but never delivered – really lies.

Of course this actually involves forms of temporality as much as those of space, a point registered by Harvey's attention to the way in which these new spaces and spatial relations operate as nodal points for a range of competing temporalities (including those specifically associated with 'place'). Obvious though this point should be, this is nonetheless a crucial reminder of the inextricable *relations* between spatial and temporal problematics. If the political is indeed 'inherently spatial', it is inherently temporal also. One cannot be articulated without the other. The challenge is thus how to think these two inseparable conditions of the political together. One possible route that such a thinking might take is through the work of Henri Lefebvre, who casts a shadow over both of these books while rarely being engaged as such. In the case of Elden, in particular, it is surprising – given that he himself has translated and edited Lefebvre's writings – that he fails to make use of the many conceptual tools that *The Production of Space* offers, which might have served to complicate his rather static understanding of different types of space and their temporal dimensions. Preeminent amongst these would be Lefebvre's proposal for a form of 'rhythm analysis' – combining the spatial and the temporal, the bodily and the social – as the model for a spatial history where, in his words, 'here at least, "lived" and "conceived" are close'.

David Cunningham and Jon Goodbun

Philosophessing

Nancy Bauer, *Simone de Beauvoir, Philosophy and Feminism*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2001. xiv + 303 pp., £35.50 hb., £12.50 pb., 0 231 11664 0 hb., 0 231 11665 9 pb.

Although there is a vast literature on Simone de Beauvoir, there are still few philosophical readings of her writings of any substance (Karen Vintges's *Philosophy as Passion*, trans. 1996, and Debra Bergoffen's *The Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir*, 1997, stand out). Easily accepted into other disciplines and gratefully received into the hands of feminists over much of the world, de Beauvoir's work – and in particular, of course, the astonishing surprise of *The Second Sex* – has been gleefully and critically picked over by many minds, but the philosophical reception has remained muted. An honest survey of the philosophical literature on de Beauvoir would have to admit that it rarely gets beyond the level of introductory exposition and often fails to distinguish itself as being specifically philosophical at all. The field has been unable to rid itself of a founding preoccupation with two connected questions: Is de Beauvoir a philosopher? And if she is, does her work have any philosophical originality or is it wholly derivative of Sartre?

The first question, at its best, is about much more than de Beauvoir: it is about what counts as philosophy. It is also interestingly implicated in the history of the 'analytical' denigration of 'continental' philosophy, which is more than a mere quarrel in so far as it is about institutional and social power. When Mary Warnock, for example, claims that de Beauvoir is a sociologist rather than a philosopher – because de Beauvoir's work is apparently concerned with what is particular, and not the universal – her inability to accept that certain concerns and a certain approach to these concerns could be philosophical is emblematic of a more general limitation. The question is complicated, however, by the fact that de Beauvoir herself was adamant that she was *not* a philosopher. Her few early philosophical essays were, she thought, to a greater or lesser extent, failures. In her autobiography (parts of which might have been called 'Why I Wrote Such Bad Books') she reserves a special contempt for the piece that currently seems to be receiving the most attention, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*.

At the centre of the debate, however, is the question of the putative philosophical status of *The Second Sex*, a work that de Beauvoir famously described as written

from the perspective of 'existentialist ethics'. That the book has some relation to Sartrean existentialism – a position which far fewer have trouble in identifying as philosophical – is undeniable. The question of whether and to what extent the philosophical content is thus wholly indebted to Sartre has divided readers. For some, the rank existentialism of the book (attributed to de Beauvoir's slavish intellectual obedience to Sartre) is its main fault and the source of all that is objectionable in it – in particular, its apparent valorization of 'the masculine' and a model of transcendence that is revealed to mean transcendence of the body and of the feminine. At the other – wild – end of the spectrum the need to claim some philosophical originality for de Beauvoir inverts the relationship completely. It is refreshing to read Nancy Bauer, positioning her *Simone de Beauvoir, Philosophy and Feminism* within these debates, frankly rubbishing Kate and Edward Fullbrook's impressively absurd claim that de Beauvoir invented Sartrean existentialism and their attempt to show 'how all the important points from Sartre's one-thousand-page book [*Being and Nothingness*] are captured in the first sixteen pages of [de Beauvoir's] *L'Invitée*, from which they claim Sartre shamelessly stole on his leaves from the war.'

De Beauvoir's carefully selective and often mendacious autobiography (the second volume of which, in particular, is nevertheless marvellous), together with Deidre Bair's restrained biography, certainly give us reason to suspect that what was published under Sartre's name in *Les Temps modernes* and elsewhere was, on occasion, written by de Beauvoir. But these were political pieces in which it was more pressing that they be read than that intellectual ownership of them was acknowledged (if, indeed, there could even be said to be one 'intellectual owner'). There is also no doubt that Sartre benefited immensely from the fact that de Beauvoir was a devoted and brilliant reader, critic and editor of his work, and that this was a favour which he did not, or could not, return to anything like the same degree. But inflated claims about de Beauvoir's influence on Sartre and the philosophical status of her oeuvre do her a disservice and bring feminist philosophy into disrepute.

Bauer's approach to the whole topic seems clear-eyed in this respect. The main claim in her book is that de Beauvoir's philosophical originality and right to contemporary philosophical attention lie not in her having invented any systems or concepts, or even having had any significant philosophical influence thus far, but in what Bauer sees as the development, in *The Second Sex*, of a unique method of philosophical appropriation. This comprises, according to Bauer, the appropriation of insightful philosophical abstractions from Descartes, Hegel and Sartre *through* the concrete experience of sexed embodiment. In other words, de Beauvoir mediates (and thereby 'reaccents') the metaphysical concepts of, for example, being-for-the-other, through 'her ordinary experience as a woman', where what it is 'to be a woman' is never taken for granted but ceaselessly interrogated. This does not mean that these concepts then serve exclusively to elucidate that experience or provide its ontological foundation. Bauer's point is that in dragging these abstractions down to earth, bending and twisting them into new shapes, de Beauvoir transforms them. This process – the mediation of the concept through the particular 'I' – constitutes, according to Bauer, a radical transformation of philosophy itself, but one which most readers are unable to see or appreciate, mistaking (like Warnock, perhaps) the moment of particularity for an empirical psychology or sociology.

In the end, then, Bauer's claim is not quite as minimal as it first appears. For whilst it is true, she argues, that according to any traditional definition of philosophy de Beauvoir is not really a philosopher, 'the central achievement of *The Second Sex* ... is precisely [a] rethinking of what philosophy is'. Furthermore, while 'most feminists are working within certain standard conceptions of philosophy that simply lack the resources to yield a decent account of the basic meaning and significance of sexuality and sex difference, as well as of the ramifications of these basic dimensions of human life', de Beauvoir 'finds a way, via her appropriation of Hegel, to philosophize about sex difference', and appropriating Descartes' philosophical scepticism 'leads her to develop a

powerful philosophical picture of the nature of sex difference'.

Does Bauer make good these claims? In the chapter on de Beauvoir and Descartes, the former's appropriation of the latter is taken to consist in the transformation of his doubt into a scepticism regarding whether we understand the concept 'woman', and the shift of the ground of indubitability from the fact of existence (an 'existential' claim in the scholastic sense) to the fact of sexed, embodied existence (an 'existential' claim in the Sartrean sense). De Beauvoir's starting point is thus the fact of being a woman, where this means the fact of having a body that '*counts as* the body of a woman'. Furthermore, since in order to *count as* a woman there must be others that so account me, de Beauvoir transforms Descartes' solipsistic meditation into one in which the individual and the social are given at once.

As a reading of de Beauvoir through Descartes this is interesting and fairly persuasive, but it is difficult to see how it substantiates any of the claims for de Beauvoir that Bauer makes. Bauer argues, uncontentiously, that de Beauvoir begins *The Second Sex* with

> the unavoidable but perfectly *ordinary* fact of her finding and taking herself to be, in the first instance, a being whose identity is at root ... *public*. The problem, after all, with being a 'woman' is being *treated* as such by other people ... [i]n posing the question of what a woman is ... Beauvoir is asking what it means to be called a woman, to be treated like a woman, to think of yourself as a woman.

The discovery of her 'being a woman' then forms the foundation of her philosophical enquiry, a unique event in the history of philosophy, which implicitly denies the mind/body distinction and which, according to Bauer, might incline us 'to view *The Second Sex* as a truly great work'. But even if it might so incline us, this is very far from the promised 'powerful philosophical picture of the nature of sex difference'. The conclusion of the chapter is that de Beauvoir's achievement is the problematization of the unavoidable concept 'woman', which is fair enough, but it is only the beginning of a philosophical enquiry into 'the nature of sex difference'.

The case made in relation to de Beauvoir's reading of Hegel is even weaker, and highlights the fundamental problem with Bauer's general argument. Contrasting de Beauvoir's appropriation of Hegel's dialectic of lordship and bondage with those passages in Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* that also bear the clear imprint of Hegel's influence, Bauer argues that de Beauvoir is able to bring aspects of the dialectic to light in a new way. In particular, 'Beauvoir comes to be able to articulate Hegel's achievement in the master–slave dialectic ... as one of showing the human being's sense of herself in the world to be a function of her "being-for-others".' How precisely this differs from the standard reading of Hegel is not explained. De Beauvoir's conclusion – that reciprocal recognition is possible and that it entails 'the willingness and wherewithal to make oneself both subject and object in the other's eyes' – may well differ from the sado-masochistic seesaw described in *Being and Nothingness*, but it is hardly 'groundbreaking', as Bauer claims. This blindness to Hegel and the Hegelian tradition (not least, Marx) is compounded in the main argument. Describing what she repeatedly calls the central philosophical achievement of *The Second Sex* – de Beauvoir's 'unique' method of appropriation – Bauer speaks of the concrete mediation of abstract concepts in terms of a relationship between the 'ordinary' and the 'theoretical', a relationship which takes the form of 'a dialogue, or perhaps what you might even be willing to call a *dialectic*'. Most people, I suspect, will be perfectly willing to call it a dialectic, for the simple reason that that it what it is, and it was with us long before *The Second Sex*.

Ultimately, then, Bauer's claims come disturbingly close to the naive extremism of the Fullbrooks' claim. Furthermore, they are the result of some of the same kinds of assumptions about philosophy and the relation between philosophy and feminism. The hidden presumption is that in order for de Beauvoir to be interesting to philosophers she must herself be a philosopher, or her texts must be able to be demonstrated to be, in some sense, 'philosophical'. If there is to be philosophy, it is to be in the text, leaving the commentators with the tricky job of extricating and justifying it. Thus Bauer finds de Beauvoir's *The Ethics of Ambiguity* to be 'marked by a certain vagueness, an imprecision of thought that disqualifies [it], on my view, ... from serious philosophical consideration'. But this and other of de Beauvoir's texts are interesting because they can be *read* philosophically, and de Beauvoir leaves us with the task of developing a philosophy of sex difference *out of* these readings. If it is still the case that most of the philosophical work on de Beauvoir remains at an introductory or expository level, it is because it assumes that the philosophical work must have already been done in her texts, rather than taking the job on itself.

Stella Sandford

Unreachable

Wendy Brown, *Politics Out of History*, Princeton University Press, Princeton NJ and Oxford, 2001. x + 193 pp., £29.95 hb., £9.95 pb., 0 691 07084 9 hb., 0 691 07085 7 pb.

Ours, Wendy Brown intimates at several junctures in this book, are melancholic times. We are still grieving the loss of belief in progress, rights, freedom, moral truth and reason. We cannot help but be attached to these modern ideals, which we hold as irreplaceable, and at the same time we cannot bring ourselves to believe in them any longer. In this book Brown offers a diagnosis of some current political phenomena as melancholic responses to the loss of hope generated by disappointment with these ideals. She also attempts to attenuate these responses by exploring some of the political possibilities which become visible once the melancholy of the present times is acknowledged rather than denied.

Three chapters of the book are, at least partially, dedicated to a diagnosis of the effects of the loss of belief in progress, freedom and moral truth. Brown primarily discusses two phenomena which are pervasive features of recent left-of-centre liberal political discourse. The first is the moralism that characterizes recent political debates. Brown focuses her attention on academic 'political correctness', but New Labour pronouncements on an ethical foreign policy, for instance, are an even clearer manifestation of this phenomenon. The second is the importance given to the notion of political identity in recent left-wing political debates.

Some of Brown's arguments against the use of moral language in political debate are familiar. It promotes a belief that there is a sphere of human interaction where human relations can be evaluated independently of power relations, and it also encourages belief in the existence of universal values. Similarly, her arguments that identity politics lacks a genuine vision of emancipation, and that it generates divisions among groups which need to be brought together, retrace well-trodden territory. What is novel in Brown's analyses is her explanation of both phenomena as melancholic responses to a loss of belief in modern ideals.

Liberals, Brown claims, are still attached to progressive and universalist principles in politics. Similarly, Marxist leftists are attached to the ideal of total critique. Neither can properly acknowledge these attachments because they take the ideals that sustain them to have been discredited. Thus, leftists and liberals live these attachments as losses which they cannot grieve for, because they cannot fully acknowledge them. This melancholic response finds its expression in righteous political moralism.

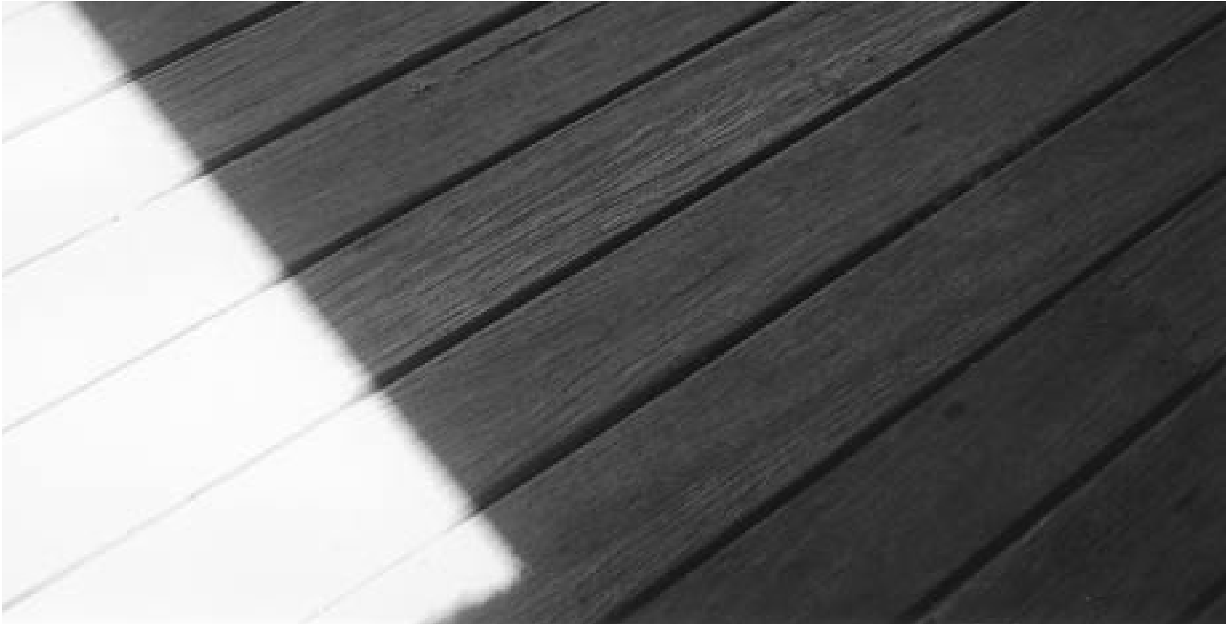
There is, without doubt, something deeply disturbing about the current uses and abuses of moral language in political debate. Often moral talk has served the sole purpose of closing down political discussion, as in the case of recent US aggression in Afghanistan. Brown, I believe, is correct to diagnose this tendency as a symptom of loss of faith in big ideals. Politicians still adopt the kind of discourse which once gave expression to a specific moral and political vision, yet they also clearly show that they have no such ideological commitments. Hence their claims about morality sound hollow; their talk of morals is an example of moralizing.

It is an unclear, however, whether it is in this case correct or helpful to see this phenomenon as an example of *melancholic* response to the loss of ideals. On the other hand, the case for interpreting the current emphasis given to the notion of political identity as an example of melancholic response is much stronger. Brown argues in this book, and has previously argued elsewhere, that many political identities are founded on an injury and require the continuation of the injury for their preservation.

The case of gay identity offers a good example for the sort of phenomenon Brown has in mind. In a society which is not homophobic it is highly unlikely that individuals would consider their inclination to have sex with people of the same gender as themselves as anything more than a rather superficial feature of their personality. However, once people are stigmatized and punished because of this inclination, it becomes impossible to consider it as superficial.

Brown argues that the injury creates the identity, and further that the preservation of the identity requires the continuation of the injurious state. Thus, for Brown identity politics is a form of political masochism since it involves a desire to be injured so that one's identity is preserved. Consequently, political identity requires an attachment to one's humiliation. It is an attachment to a loss of freedom and dignity that cannot be fully acknowledged, and therefore takes the form of a melancholic response.

What Brown has individuated here is an important feature of identity politics: its supporters must work



to bring about the conditions that spell the end of the very identity on which their politics is based. However, I find less convincing Brown's claim that the preservation of an identity founded on an injury requires a desire to repeat the injury. Rather, it seems as psychologically plausible to claim that what is involved in making one's identity a matter of politics for oneself, rather than treating it as something others attribute to oneself, is precisely one's commitment to fight against the injury, and take pride in those features of oneself for which one is vilified. In other words, Brown is right to say that these political identities cannot survive the end of the system of injustices that gave rise to them. But it does not follow that the identification caused by the injury is an identification with the injury, rather than with a resistance to it.

In the second half of the book Brown provides some suggestions about the role of the intellectual in these melancholic times. These are intended to attenuate the sense of despair and disorientation typical of the current situation. Brown's recommendations are based on two theoretical commitments: the first is to a non-teleological conception of history, the second to an opposition between theory and politics. I have no quarrel with the first, which has justly gained widespread acceptance in recent times, but I find the second rather puzzling.

Brown claims that genealogy offers an important tool for those who are concerned with politics. First, it offers the means to develop historical accounts which can do justice to the accidents and discontinuities in history. Second, it shows the present to be contingent. There is no necessity in history; things could have been very different from how they are. Third, it also denaturalizes the present, by showing that many features of it have a history. They are not a fact of nature. Brown also points out that genealogy cannot be taken to prescribe political positions. I take this claim to be importantly correct. We cannot read values off genealogical histories.

Brown, however, turns this point into a much stronger claim, for which I don't think she offers any support. She claims that explicit political values and views are a matter of contingent predilection. Brown makes this claim about Foucault, but I assume it is intended to have a general import. This is, I believe, a seriously misguided claim, since it makes debate about values impossible. And this, I presume, Brown does not want to rule out.

Predilections are utterly subjective matters. If I prefer vanilla ice cream, and you prefer strawberry, we do not disagree on anything. We have different predilections. For political debate to be anything other than a misguided shouting match, talk of political values must not be a mere expression of preference. It does not follow, of course, that political disagreements can always be settled by reason, or that every time there is a fact of the matter about who is right. Here, Brown seems to fall into the trap of believing that if we think that there is no objective truth about political matters then political values are simply an expression of subjective preference.

One might be inclined to take Brown's claim about values as predilections as a slip of the pen if it did not reappear under a different guise in some disturbing claims about the relation between politics and theory. Brown writes at length on the importance of the autonomy of theory from politics. Her arguments are sound. They lead her to suggest that the role of the

intellectual is to provide critiques, even though they may be unlivable in the current situation, and develop ideals, although they may be forever unreachable. Brown also makes a stronger claim. She writes that theory and politics, especially democratic politics, are opposed to one another. Brown, however, offers no argument of her own why democratic politics would be especially anti-theoretical. Instead, she offers a few considerations from that most unreliable thinker on these matters: Friedrich Nietzsche. Further, her claim that politics, being a matter of bids to power, is consequently anti-theory offers no reason to believe that this is especially true of democracy. Finally, it would seem that, given Brown's rejection of the ideal of objective truth, theory too is to be conceived as a power struggle on behalf of one's own ideas. Hence, it would not be so different from politics.

In conclusion, Brown's opposition between theory and politics is predicated on the reduction of politics to a power struggle to have one's subjective preferences prevail, and on the assumption that theory always aims to be something other than a mere bid to power. Brown of course acknowledges that the theorist can never hope fully to achieve independence from the limitations of her historical situation, but she seems to believe that one must aspire to such an unreachable goal. Were one tempted to believe with Brown that all modern ideals of reason, progress and truth are discredited, one would be tempted to diagnose in this book a melancholic response to an unacknowledged attachment to modern conceptions of theory.

Alessandra Tanesini

Surrealism, or what will be

Michael Richardson and Krzysztof Fijalkowski, eds, *Surrealism Against the Current: Tracts and Declarations*, Pluto Press, London, 2001. 220 pp., £45.00 hb., £14.99 pb., 0 7453 1779 0 hb., 0 7453 1778 2 pb.

One of the more bizarre – and surely one of the most tasteless – interpretations of the terrorist atrocity of 11 September appeared in *Le Monde* on 21 November 2001. An article entitled 'Surrealism and the Demoralization of the West' argued that the planes flown into the Twin Towers represented the fulfilment of the longings of the surrealists who, in the 1920s, dreamt of seeing Cossacks watering their horses in the fountains of Paris, who longed to see America's skyscrapers collapsing, and who proclaimed themselves the defeatists of Europe. One of the exhibits produced by the self-appointed prosecutor was the surrealist map of the world drawn up in 1929 (and reproduced in this volume). Abandoning all known cartographical conventions, the map gives the countries of the world surface areas proportional to their surrealist interest and importance. The United States has been squeezed out of physical existence by Mexico, Labrador and Alaska; France consists solely of Paris; Great Britain is a mere dot, dwarfed by a considerably enlarged Ireland. According to the prosecutor, 'one small country covers a vast space: Afghanistan…' QED: the surrealists are the progenitors of an anti-Westernism that surfaces in Maoist sinophilia, in Foucault's unfortunate (if temporary) enthusiasm for the Iranian Revolution, and so on. In some strange manner, French intellectuals are at least in part responsible for the destruction in New York and for the rise of the Taliban (even though, to my knowledge at least, no French intellectual armed them; that was left to a variety of governments, which should have heeded Machiavelli's advice that arming mercenaries and client armies is a dangerous tactic that often backfires).

The author of this curious exercise in postcolonial guilt-tripping ('It's all our fault!') is Jean Clair, the distinguished director of the Picasso Museum in Paris. One wonders how he interprets Picasso's dalliances with 'primitive' art, or indeed *Guernica*. A closer glance – and I do mean glance – at the offending map shows that Afghanistan is not in fact 'vast': it is much smaller than Russia, China, the Bismarck Archipelago or Papua New Guinea, which leaves one wondering what will happen when the Free Papua Movement really hits its stride.

That the surrealists called for the destruction of Western values in the 1920s is a matter of historical record. Given that the recent Great Achievements of Western Civilization at the time included the mass slaughter of the Somme and Verdun, it is scarcely surprising that they were less than enthusiastic about its eternal values and its Enlightenment mission. In their useful introduction to this valuable anthology, the editors note that it is always dangerous to define surrealism by concentrating on one moment in its history. Defining surrealism is almost as difficult as forcing the mercury back into a broken thermometer:

as the French surrealist group put it in 1947, 'Surrealism is what will be.' It has always refused to stand still. Suffice to say that a surrealist map of the world produced in, say, 1942 would have looked very different to that of 1929. New York would certainly have figured, not least because André Breton was living there in uncomfortable exile; the romantic Germany of 1929 would certainly not have done so.

Surrealism Against the Current, coming after a study of Bataille (1994) and an anthology of his surrealist writings (1994), and then the very important *Refusal of the Shadow: Surrealism and the Caribbean* (1996), establishes Richardson (and his collaborator) as perhaps surrealism's major English-language archivist and historian. The material here includes some sixty manifestoes, tracts and declarations from the 1920s to the 1960s. It is a rich treasure trove. The ultra-Bolshevism of the earliest texts, still so scandalous to a Jean Clair, may raise a rueful smile in a more cynical, and perhaps more realistic, age, but their historical significance remains undimmed. Similarly, eulogies to the anticlerical pyromania of Spanish anarchists of 1931 ('Burn Them [the churches] Down!') may look like no more than juvenile exercises in provocation. Both fictional and non-fictional accounts of clerical loyalties in pre-revolutionary Spain suggest otherwise.

As traced here, the political evolution of surrealism takes it from ultra-leftism, to anti-Stalinism and a certain sympathy for Trotsky, to staunch antifascism (and a surrealist in occupied France really was something to be) and then anticolonialism. The changes are many, but the constants are a commitment to collective and individual freedom, to a deadly serious nonconformism and an equally serious conviction that the artistic and the revolutionary are inseparable.

This volume helps to bring about a welcome shift of perspective by reminding us that surrealism did not just produce the great paintings recently on show in major crowd-pulling exhibitions in London and Paris. Breton's classic study is entitled 'Surrealism *and* Painting', not 'surrealist painting'. Historical surrealism was never just an artistic or literary school, but a marriage (and often a stormy one) between artistic avant-gardism and revolutionary politics. The blockbuster exhibitions tend, perhaps inevitably, to overlook the written word. Designed to mimic that of scientific and medical journals, the severe typography of *La Révolution surréaliste* and its successors does not make much of an exhibit behind glass. The severity of style and presentation was significant; despite its occasional interest in the occult and the esoteric, surrealism undertook a very rational exploration of irrationality. And sober severity can be truly disconcerting. Which are more subversive: Magritte's men-in-bowler-hats (or is it always the same man?), or Dalí's lurid exercises in exhibitionism?

Histories of surrealism often focus on the role of dominant or charismatic personalities such as André Breton or Antonin Artaud. Richardson and Fijalkowski stress, in contrast, the collective nature of the enterprise: the documents collected here have many signatories, but no authors. They are products of what the editors call a 'collective individualism'. This was a secret society that met in public and that anyone one could discover or join, or which could discover and recruit anyone. Surrealist groups in Paris and elsewhere habitually met in cafés to talk and drink – but *never* in the fashionable cafés of the Left Bank. It was, among other things, a mode of sociability and, despite all the quarrels and all the exchanges of insults, love and friendship were its cardinal virtues. It was also a form of internationalism, and some of the most interesting texts here are from Czechoslovakia and Romania. The 'Prague Platform' of April 1968 is perhaps the most poignant of all. For this document, the goal of surrealist activity was 'to tear language from the repressive system and to make it an instrument of desire'. A few months later, the tanks moved in.

The final part of this volume is devoted to surrealist anticolonialism, and it makes for exciting reading. In 1925, surrealists and communists were amongst the few to oppose France's intervention to help Spain put down the Riff insurrection in Morocco. Surrealists denounced the Colonial Exhibition of 1931, when 'cannibals' from New Caledonia were exhibited in a human zoo constructed in the Bois de Vincennes. In 1961, a famous manifesto defended the right to insubordination and even desertion at the height of France's colonial war in Algeria. The idea for the manifesto originated in surrealist circles, and the Communist Party ordered its loyal troops not to sign it.

Often viewed as a quintessentially French and interwar phenomenon, surrealism is demonstrated to be both international and more long-lived than one might have supposed. It is still there, promoted and practised by small groups around the world, and it still refuses to stand still. It is active in Paris, and in Leeds – where very strangely worded bookmarks can occasionally be found in innocent-looking volumes purchased in Waterstone's and Borders. If, as the French group proclaimed in a tract denouncing France's war in Indochina, surrealism is an embodiment of 'the becoming of freedom', surely we can all be – and perhaps are – surrealists. Don't dream it, be it.

David Macey